

**THE ANCIENT HAWAIIAN HOUSE.
MEMOIRS OF THE BERNICE PAUHI
BISHOP MUSEUM OF
POLYNESIAN ETHNOLOGY AND
NATURAL HISTORY. VOLUME II,
NUMBER 3, PP. 1-194 [185-378]**

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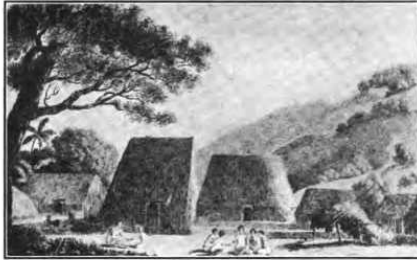
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BY WILLIAM T. BRIGHAM, A.M., Sc.D. (Columbia).



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THE ANCIENT HAWAIIAN HOUSE.

Housebuilding of the old Hawaiians: with a description of the articles used in housekeeping. By WILLIAM T. BRIGHAM, SC. D. (COLUMBIA), *Director of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum.*

IN pursuance of my intention to describe, so far as known to me, the life, manners and customs of the ancient Hawaiians, I have described the feather ornaments, stone implements, and mat and basket work, and now come to the dwellings of the early inhabitants of the Hawaiian Group: and in considering this exceeding important matter of aboriginal life I propose to glance briefly at the primitive habitations of some of the other Polynesian groups and of their neighbors of the Papuan and mixed races. While this course will take us from Rapanui in the East of the Pacific Ocean to New Guinea in the West, I will limit my descriptions (where they are not limited by my ignorance of the subject) and illustrations as much as possible to the material which seems in some degree to illuminate the main subject of *Hawaiian* housebuilding.

To the empty dwelling I have found it convenient to add the usual furniture and utensils which are a necessary part of housekeeping, and although "pots and kettles" are absent, Polynesians having neither metal nor earthen ware, we shall find the better class of Hawaiians were provided with many articles of necessity, even of luxury and elegance, although it will be seen that the common people, the *makaainana*, had little furniture for comfort, and only the merest necessities for housekeeping.

Illustrations have been drawn from the early voyages and, where fashions have not changed by the coming of white settlers, from my large collection of photographs of existing dwellings from nearly every part of the Pacific that the photographer has invaded.

PRIMITIVE architecture may be studied in the Pacific region (where the indigenous architecture has always remained primitive), from the habitations of the troglodytes, where man's hand has hardly modified the natural cavities of the rock formation, through the exceeding simple bark lean-to of the Australian, the cyclopean structures of the Metalanin in the Carolines, the imbedded stone cells of Rapanui, the columned halls of Tiuiian in the Marianes, the trilitheon of Tonga, the elaborately carved *whare*

of New Zealand, and the ephemeral houses of sticks and grass, plain as possible in the Hawaiian group, picturesque in parts of Micronesia and fantastic in New Guinea.

The temptation is strong to explore and study more fully the curious stone remains found in many places in the Pacific from Rapanui in the southeast to Tinian in the northwest, and although the evidence that these were the work of the ancestors of the races at present found in the great ocean seems preponderant, they need claim only a passing glance here for they, together with the stone temples of Hawaii, belong to religious or monumental constructions, and we are to limit this excursus to those materials that may be explanatory of the origin or affinity of the Hawaiian dwelling.

In Central America we find wonderful structures of stone buried in forests almost as dense as the veil which shrouds their origin or uses, but we recognize that the houses of the people who built and used these temples, palaces, monasteries or charnel houses, and who must have dwelt in the neighborhood, were constructed of more perishable material and have left no record. In Egypt the same is true; the houses of the gods and of the dead are of durable masonry and material, syenite, limestone, alabaster, while the houses of the people, even the palaces of the Pharaohs were flimsily constructed of wood and have perished save in the pictured stories on the walls of the tombs. The American record in the wonderful painted books which doubtless would have given much light on Maya domestic architecture was mostly destroyed by the fanatic priests who swarmed in the invading armies,—deadly foes to knowledge,—may their souls repent the evil they did! Everywhere the same thing is true of domestic architecture in primitive times and in lands with a mild climate; if the people did not dwell in tents they certainly had houses of not much greater durability.

In the Pacific we still have "samples" of the houses which probably have not changed much from the earliest times, but the lumber and building methods of the foreigner are rapidly driving out even these samples from those groups most open to outside influence. On the Hawaiian Islands forty years ago grass houses were very common outside the larger towns, and even in Honolulu they were found on some of the principal streets. In this town in 1837 they were almost universal as seen in a view of Honolulu drawn by the late Edward Bailey from the foot of Punchbowl Hill and engraved at Lahainaluna under the instruction of Judge Lorin Andrews (Fig. 1). Today we have had to gather into the Bishop Museum an ancient house frame, and the tourist may make the usual circuit of the group and never see an example of a genuine Hawaiian house, although in several places Japanese have built grass houses resembling the native work externally.

The boards and plans of the foreigner result in a cheaper, more convenient, and more durable house than those of the olden style, so the latter are passing and it seems

desirable to make a record of their existence and nature, and at the same time compare them with other dwellings in our region. No limitation can be made to the strictly Polynesian tribes, for there is more difference between the Maori and Hawaiian houses, both Polynesian, than between the Hawaiian and the New Caledonian, the latter the work of a very different race. It will then be desirable, if not needful, to present to the readers of this essay types of the principal forms of dwelling houses of the Pacific islanders before entering upon the structure, uses and situation of the Hawaiian houses.

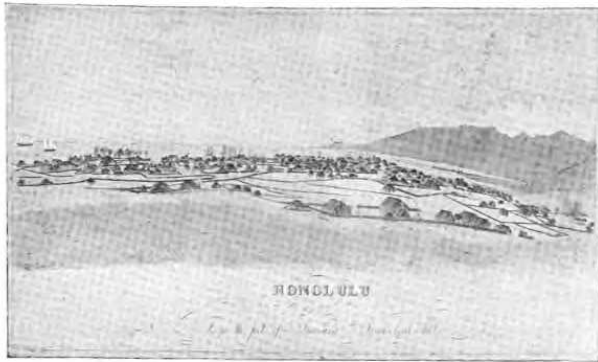


FIG. 1. VIEW OF HONOLULU IN 1837.

Even where the material is the same, sticks and thatch, the ground plan varies between island groups while on each group one form is predominant if not exclusive. Thus on Hawaii, Fiji, Tahiti, New Zealand and New Guinea a rectangular plan prevailed, on Samoa and Tonga the ellipse and in New Caledonia the circle were preferred. The Hawaiians certainly built temples with a circular ground plan, but so far as can be learned never a dwelling house. Single habitations were more common in the East, communal in the West of the Pacific region, yet in Hawaii the hospitality of the people made their private home almost a caravansary. In some groups, as in Hawaii, an establishment of a chief or well-to-do man consisted of several detached houses each for an especial use; in others there were houses (or cages) for girls of marriageable

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age; in others guest houses; and common to many groups were the lodging houses for unmarried males.

The material for a study of the oldest habitations of the Pacific immigrants must be gathered from the accounts, sometimes excellent, of the old voyagers and in these we shall find little change through the century these voyages practically cover, for the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers have not given sufficiently definite descriptions of the houses of the people they discovered. As the good descriptions of houses are scattered through accounts of voyages not always accessible, it seems well to transcribe them here with such illustrations as the authors have given us. In some cases, as in the accounts of the Marquesan houses it would seem possible to reconstruct the homes of the fine natives who have long since disappeared from the beautiful valleys where they once thronged to their cannibal feasts.

In the voyage of the *Duff*,¹ the first missionary expedition to the Pacific from England, are given detailed accounts of the houses in Tahiti, Tonga and the Marquesas which will be here reproduced from that very interesting volume. On page 131 we find this account of a Marquesan house on the island of Santa Cristina (Tahuata):

To convey an idea of what this and all their best built houses are like, it is only necessary to imagine one of our own of one story high with a high peaked roof; cut it lengthwise exactly down the middle, you would then have two of their houses, only built of different materials. That we now occupied was twenty-five feet long and six wide, ten feet high in the back part, and but four in front; at the corners four short stakes are driven into the earth, on which are laid horizontal pieces, and from these last to the ground are bamboos neatly arranged in perpendicular order, about half an inch distant from each other; and without them long blinds made with leaves are hung, which make the inside very close and warm; the door is about the middle on the low side. They do not use the leaves of the wharra [*Pandanus*] tree here for roofing, as at Otaheite, but common broad leaves which they lay as thick as to keep the water out; but the greater part of their houses are miserable hovels. The inside furniture consisted of a large floor mat from end to end, several large calabashes, some fishing tackle, and a few spears; at one end the chief kept his ornaments which he showed to us.

A generation later the Marquesans were visited by a more observant missionary whose account of the houses, while showing that the style remained the same, leaves little to be desired. The Rev. C. S. Stewart, well known on these islands, wrote as follows:

The houses—though of very different sizes, from twenty to one hundred feet in length, from eight to sixteen in height, and from ten to fourteen and sixteen in breadth—are all of one shape and style, and vary materially in their form and construction from those of the Sandwich Islanders.

Here the roofs, instead of descending to eaves on both sides of the ridgepole, have rafters in front only, while the back of the house descends perpendicularly, or in very slight inclination, from the peak to the ground—giving to the exterior the appearance of an ordinary hut cut lengthwise in two. They are universally erected, so far as I have observed, on a platform of rough, but in many

¹ A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean, performed in the years 1796-1798 in the Ship *Duff* commanded by Captain James Wilson. Compiled from Journals of the Officers and the Missionaries; and illustrated with Maps, Charts, and Views drawn by Mr. William Wilson and engraved by the most eminent Artists, etc. London, 1799.