Patrick Vinton Kirch with Mark D. McCoy. *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks, The Archaeology of Ancient Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2023. 528 pp., US $47.99. ISBN: 9780824894498.
Reviewed by Timothy M. Rieth.

Synthesizing the archaeological record of the Hawaiian Islands is no mean feat, even for scholars like Kirch and McCoy, who have previously authored multiple volumes, including (for Kirch) the original 1985 edition of *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks*. The authors took on a significant challenge with the revised edition of *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks*, as the amount of archaeological research conducted in Hawai'i over the past 40 years has been substantial. As Kirch and McCoy note, most of these more recent investigations were completed by cultural resource management (CRM) firms in compliance with state and national historic preservation laws. This ever-growing body of research includes thousands of site descriptions and radiocarbon determinations, data for tens of thousands of artifacts and faunal remains, and emerging archaeological syntheses of highly developed but historically significant regions such as Waikīkī and Honolulu Ahupua'a on O'ahu Island. A critical and comprehensive synthesis of this body of work would be an impressive accomplishment that could advance archaeological research in Hawai'i for years to come. Unfortunately, the authors rely on the results from a limited number of primarily university- and museum-based research programs and miss the opportunity to incorporate the impressive amount of newer data that is necessary to advance an understanding of Hawai'i's past. As such, the updated *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks* does not have the same impact as the original.

With a prologue, epilogue, and 19 chapters, Kirch and McCoy summarize the history and practice of archaeology in Hawai'i (Chapters 1 and 3), describe the physical environment of the Hawaiian Islands (Chapter 2), contextualize the Polynesian colonization of Hawai'i (Chapter 4), provide their culture historical framework for Hawai'i (Chapter 5), detail the findings from six important archaeological sites (Kuli'ou'ou Rockshelter and Bellows Dune, O'ahu Island; Pu'u Ali'i and Wai'ahukini Rockshelter, Hawai'i Island; Nu'alolo Rockshelter, Kaua'i Island; and Hālawa Dune, Molokai Island) (Chapter 6), discuss inferences about various aspects of Hawai'i's past (Chapters 7–13), and end with six chapters briefly and selectively summarizing

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the archaeology of the main islands as well as Nihoa and Mokumanamana (Chapters 14–19). The authors' writing is approachable and engaging, and Kirch's depth of knowledge is on display, particularly as a student of—and participant in—the history of archaeology in Hawai'i and Oceania. My critique focuses on Kirch and McCoy's selection of archaeological data and the presentation and interpretation of those data.

The descriptive chapters primarily rely on a handful of academic research programs, many of which are over 50 years old (e.g., Mākaha and Anahulu Valleys, O'ahu Island; Lapakahi, 'Anaeho'omalu, and Kalāhuipua'a, Hawai'i Island). These are seminal studies and, coupled with Kirch and colleagues' more recent multi-year programs at Kahikinui (Maui Island), Kohala (Hawai'i Island), and Hālawa Valley (Moloka'i Island), provide substantial datasets. However, reliance on a handful of case studies—no matter how well designed, executed, and presented—is qualitatively different than a "big data" analysis that synthesizes and evaluates all available information for a region or research topic. A broader canvassing of the literature reveals, for example, large spatial datasets (e.g., Lebo et al. 2011; Rechtman et al. 2001) that allow for new landscape analyses; improved zooarchaeological methods (e.g., Filimoehala 2019; Rogers and Weisler 2024), which have enabled more detailed explanations of past subsistence; and an expanded suite of radiocarbon determinations and new statistical methods that allow for refined chronological modeling (e.g., Dye 2015; Weisler et al. 2023; see also Bickler et al. 2025). The use of models such as ideal distribution and those derived from foraging theory and niche construction to interrogate these datasets has demonstrated their potential to become central to archaeological explanations of Hawaiian history (e.g., Morrison and Rieth 2016; Quintus et al. 2023; Rogers and Weisler 2022).

The authors rely on culture historical periods for segmenting history (The Foundation Period, AD 1000–1200; The Late Voyaging Period, AD 1200–1400; The Expansion Period, AD 1400–1600; and The Archaic States Period, AD 1600–1795). These essentialist categories, even for heuristic purposes, tend to emphasize only a few aspects of the archaeological record while ignoring the multitude of characteristics of the record that have unique chronologies and implications for understanding the dynamism of Hawaiian history. Alternative methods for understanding and expressing long-term trends, such as Dye's (2016) materialist approach for quantifying the timing of pondfield and *heiau* construction and the use of branch coral as religious offerings, are overlooked. Again here, the data-rich CRM literature could be systematically reviewed for information to establish the spatial and temporal parameters for aspects of the record, which can be incorporated into theory-based models.

Readers would benefit from more discussion of how the authors reached their conclusions regarding the specific processes and histories they argue account for the broad and significant changes in social organization and cultural complexity in Hawai'i (e.g., surplus agricultural production driving elite social control, conflict, territorial expansion, and, ultimately, the development of a presumed archaic state). Leading the reader through the investigative process, rather than providing declarative statements in tidy narratives, would offer a more realistic picture of the challenges and messiness of archaeological research. It would also allow the authors to be explicit about what is known from the archaeological record and, importantly, highlight what remains unknown yet knowable. As one example, how did subsistence practices—agriculture, husbandry, marine resource harvesting, and foraging—change over eight centuries from a small founding population to hundreds of thousands spread across all

main islands? Explaining changes to food production also allows one to examine the development of territoriality and changes to social organization. These are key topics of research for the authors, but ones that are fixed to surplus agricultural production, taxation, and top-down elite control.

Perhaps as a telling statement that can explain Kirch and McCoy's limited engagement with the CRM literature, they present a binary between academic archaeology, which is described as necessary for advancement of research, and CRM archaeology, which is characterized as too fixated on profit to do much beyond the bare minimum for legal compliance (see, for example, pp. 24, 425, 426). This binary was well captured in Flannery's Born-Again Philosopher, as described in his famous *Golden Marshalltown* publication (Flannery 1982). Such a presumed division is unfortunate and untrue, as it fails to acknowledge the substantive and methodological contributions of CRM as well as the bond between academic institutions and the CRM industry. The application of paleoenvironmental studies (e.g., Athens 2000), Bayesian chronological modeling (e.g., Athens et al. 2014), and wood charcoal identification (e.g., Allen and Murakami 1999) are some of the more prominent advancements fostered by CRM. Numerous CRM firms have provided detailed localized histories for places like Kalaeloa, Kailua, Kaka'ako, Mōkapu, and Waikīkī, O'ahu, often working in close consultation with Native Hawaiian community members to shape excavation strategies, site interpretations, and mitigation efforts (e.g., Robins et al. 2022; Sroat et al. 2023). Kirch and McCoy, as tenured academics, are an increasingly rare breed, and the students they educate that become archaeologists are almost assuredly going to find careers in CRM. While there are systemic challenges to improving CRM, this is also true of academic work. The burden is on academia to improve the practice of professional archaeology by educating its students as critical thinkers with practical and contemporary skill sets. The prospects of archaeology in Hawai'i will rely on this.

Kirch and McCoy's contributions to archaeological research in Hawai'i, including this book, are significant, even if their interpretations do not represent a consensus view. Science is a cumulative endeavor and by no means a linear one, with analytical challenges, cul-de-sacs, and reversals ultimately aiding in mapping out what is possible to explain. Thus, it is with great hope that future archaeologists will write an updated synthesis of archaeological research in Hawai'i, including localized (*'ili* and *ahupua'a*) histories. I hazard a guess that the result will be significantly different than our current state of knowledge and will identify new avenues for research.

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Timothy M. Rieth
International Archaeological Research Institute, Inc.