

Some Comments on "Hawaiian Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future"

Yosihiko H. Sinoto
B. P. Bishop Museum

At the 10th Annual Meeting of the Society for Hawaiian Archaeology held on April 11, 1997 in Kaua'i, Patrick V. Kirch gave a keynote address entitled "Hawaiian Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future." Based on my 43 years of involvement in Hawaiian and Pacific archaeology, I would like to comment on some of the points Pat made, especially those regarding Bishop Museum.

In the central section entitled "The Present: Hawaiian Archaeology at the End of the Twentieth Century," Pat stated that "the practice of archaeology in Hawai'i *nei* has taken on an organizational structure which, I fear, is . . . *kapakahi* . . . referring to the dominance of CRM or contract archaeology, and its corollary, the demise of research archaeology."

A comparative discussion of past and recent activities of the University of Hawai'i, Bishop Museum, and State Historic Preservation Division was presented along with perceived institutional decline in research oriented archaeology at the Museum and the University. I agree with much of what Pat had to say.

I have been with the Bishop Museum during the administrations of four different directors and one acting director and was Chairman of the Department of Anthropology from 1970 to 1989. During that period, it was a constant struggle with the administration to gain support. Without administrative understanding and support for departmental objectives, implementation was an uphill battle. We somehow survived the yearly budget crises to fund several long-range programs of research in Hawai'i, as well as other areas of the Pacific. However, such struggles have unfortunately culminated in recent years with the demise of social science funding and an initiative on the part of the Museum administration to do away with the "non-revenue generating" research component of the Museum. I'm afraid

that our once great institution, like many others, has gone the way of private hospitals converting to HMOs where the financial bottom line, needed to support a top heavy organization, is the primary concern.

Regarding my departmental initiative, Pat stated that "Yosi Sinoto would point out the economic necessity of tapping into the free-flowing contract funding supply." This was certainly true, but I must emphasize here that in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were no other organizations or individuals in Hawai'i able to undertake such contract archaeological projects. It was naturally the Museum's responsibility to cope with such demands. I was confident that we could undertake contract archaeology as well as research projects at the same time.

One thing we realized then was that contract archaeology was a business and it had to be undertaken within that concept. At the same time, there were substantial benefits to be gained from contract archaeology that could be used to operate the department and support the research staff. I will not go into the details here. However, the Museum's administration took a long time to realize the benefits. I think that they still do not fully appreciate the potential benefits of a well-managed contract archaeology program. I believe this has hampered development of the department's research programs, and also those of the Museum in general.

When I returned from the field in 1987, I found out that the Applied Research Group (ARG), a contract department, was established by the new administration using staff members from the Anthropology Department. Thus, the operational aspects of the contract program, as well as the benefits, were taken away from the Anthropology Department. Over the next several years, ARG was successful in generating a large flow of operating revenues. The administration saw ARG as a "cash cow" and demanded more revenues. This eventually led to the dismissal of the department head and contracts manager in a dispute over rate increases proposed by the administration in 1991.

That incident marked the beginning of the end for ARG, which was later placed back into the Anthropology Department under the direction of a staff

that had no concept of contract administration, much less the necessary familiarity with local business culture and contacts. Other than the H-3 contract and a few other continuing projects, there were no more substantial, new contract projects that were procured by the Museum. At the same time, many of the experienced and able staff archaeologists had been fired or left the museum.

Unfortunately, the last staff archaeologist with nearly 20 years of experience in Hawai'i and Polynesia left the Museum in the summer of 1997.

Besides myself, although I had been transferred to the Natural Science Department until this fiscal year, there are no experienced archaeologists specializing in Hawai'i and Polynesia left at the Museum. Thus, there are no archaeologists who can bring in grant money to do research in Hawai'i. Also there is no replacement in sight for the senior archaeologist's position which has been vacant since last year.

The Museum administration's concept of what makes a great institution appears to be good collections in good storage facilities with space to house "canned" traveling exhibits from elsewhere. Currently, the human factors of experience, knowledge, and sense of institutional history in staff members are being totally discounted. Institutions like the Bishop Museum need continuity of tradition and acquiring of knowledge by experienced researchers for longevity. The current director has made his views known in the public media when he stated that archaeologists don't need regional experience to be able to do a good job.

I believe it will take at least 20 years with a supportive administration to restore Bishop Museum's reputation of academic excellence, a reputation built up over nearly a century and ruined in less than a decade. The termination, under the guise of centralizing all publication activities, of universally well-received scholarly publications, formerly published by the Anthropology Department, including the *Pacific Anthropological Records* (39 volumes published between 1968–1989), *Departmental Report Series* (45 reports published between 1970–1987), and other monographs, as well as the demise of the Bishop Museum Press, are distressing signs of institutional decline. Slick coffee table books authored and pub-

lished by outside sources have largely replaced the venerable *Bulletins* and *Occasional Papers*.

With the absence of contracts and lack of researchers, I wonder if the Department of Anthropology will be dissolved in favor of a collections management department following the completion of the H-3 contract in the near future. As Pat stated, "until there is a fundamental change in the Museum's leadership," I doubt that we will see a return to the mission envisioned by William T. Brigham, its first director; "the discovery and preservation of knowledge about Hawaiian culture," in a manner accountable to Charles Reed Bishop's will.

Every once in a while, we all need a little push to reflect on the past, present, and future of our profession. Pat Kirch, being intimately familiar with the archaeology scene in Hawaii, yet distant enough to make broad assessments, is the right person to give us that nudge. I hope that his views remind all of us to strive to meet our professional obligations and improve our interaction with each other, as well as to enhance the dissemination of knowledge to the interested public, especially the Native Hawaiian people.