The Text in Its Context:
An Introduction

I suppose that every one of us hopes secretly for immortality; to leave, I mean a name behind him which will live forever in this world, whatever he may be doing, himself, in the next.
A. A. Milne, quoted in Ann Thwaite, *A. A. Milne*, 486

An academic discipline always has a life of its own in which the defining moments are not always obvious at the time. A particular conference may have especial salience. An individual may be strategically placed and possess sufficient force of character to assume the mantle of impresario. Typically, however, the signposts of an academic discipline—at any rate, in the humanities and social sciences—are the more important monographs and journal articles. These are the markers that indicate what has happened and what might be the future directions. We hear that a book is a classic or that a text is seminal. But the word *classic* has been so overused that it is almost meaningless. The same might be said for *seminal*. Do these words connote that the text in question is still read, or that it sold many copies, or that it was one of a kind, or of admitted excellence, or any combination of these things? It is all too indeterminate. Perhaps the term *foundational* carries more meaning. Foundational texts are those that made an impact at the time of publication, or soon afterward, in contrast to the so-called classic, which attains that status in the fullness of time. Foundational texts may not have been best-sellers—not many academic books are. They often now have a dated air about them and are, we suspect, often dismissed as having passed their “use by” date. Yet they had a pivotal role in the development of the subdiscipline. They were the building blocks and stepping...
stones to greater things. The texts we have included in this volume fit that definition.

Pacific Islands historiography has its origins in the early twentieth century, if not before, with studies of a geopolitical nature that often incorporated the Pacific Rim and Australasia. There was also, for example, Hohman’s *The American Whaler* (1928), Kuykendall’s first volume of *The Hawaiian Kingdom* (1938), Bradley’s *The American Frontier in Hawaii* (1942), Furnas’s general history, *Anatomy of Paradise* (1948), and Derrick’s *History of Fiji* (1950). As well, there were the stout volumes on nineteenth-century imperial history that dominated the scholarly historiography. So it cannot be said that Pacific Islands historiography was a clean slate when J. W. (Jim) Davidson went to Canberra in 1950 as foundation professor of Pacific history at the Australian National University (ANU). What Davidson did was to inspire a new approach to the history of the region and, in the process, to develop Pacific history into a recognized specialization in its own right. He played a seminal role in the evolution of the new subdiscipline. Paralleling concurrent developments in African and Southeast Asian historiography, the new Pacific historiography displaced imperial history as the dominant paradigm and focused instead on “culture contacts,” “multicultural situations,” and “indigenous initiatives.” A whole generation of doctoral dissertations emerged and several of these, in their published form, are considered in the present volume.

The Canberra department was the intellectual Mecca for prospective Pacific historians who journeyed forth to ANU and, three years later, armed with a doctorate and an island-oriented theology, branched out to preach their new gospel in different parts of the world. They were the new missionaries, confident about themselves and convinced of their doctrine. They were in the vanguard of a different order of things, building alternative interpretative structures on the ruins of the discredited Fatal Impact view of cultural encounters in the Pacific. The new theology was reinforced by the *Journal of Pacific History*, founded in 1966 under the joint-editorship of Davidson and H. E. (Harry) Maude. This flagship served multiple purposes, as these things always do, in providing a publication outlet, a symbol of identity, a badge of respectability, and, most important of all, a vehicle with which to influence the research agenda.

In the fifty years since Davidson delivered his inaugural lecture, proclaiming the new orthodoxy, the field has grown in expected and unex-
pected ways. The founding generation has either passed away or retired. As Kerry Howe remarked in 1992, those “days of cosy homogeneity, indeed hegemony, of the ANU school of island-centred culture contact studies are long gone.” To switch the metaphor, there are other ships of state, under different navigators, following different stars, flying their distinctive flags, and each plying its own trade. A new generation of able seamen are at the helm. Many were not born when the field was founded but they are, or will be, at the various helms, manning the rigging, charting divergent routes, and negotiating reefs and inlets that were overlooked or discarded by Canberra. There are now several epicenters; there is no one dominant approach and rival journals, such as The Contemporary Pacific, have contributed to this diversity. In place of a unified approach, there were other “lines of descent” and each with their own “reproductive programmes.” The ways in which historical scholarship relating to the Pacific are framed, and the tone and terms of historical debate and enterprise, have also been fundamentally altered by new cultural and intellectual developments. Much new research is seen through the prisms of postmodernism, Cultural Studies, literary criticism, and history of consciousness. Historical experience, moreover, is presented in a variety of ways, through film, drama, museum displays, and music. This is particularly noticeable in the work of Islander scholars who have sought to combine indigenous ways of recalling the past—through chants, genealogy, and oral traditions—with the practices of Western scholarship. Archives-based research is seen simply as one among a number of ways of knowing the past. Canberra is still important as a center of postgraduate research but, ironically, the teaching of Pacific Islands history to undergraduates is now a practically abandoned field in Australia. A new Zeitgeist is abroad, and the center has been truly decentered.

Amid all the change, there have been obvious gains but at the cost of a diminishing sense of an intellectual past and the contribution of forbearers. There is but a hazy notion of how the specialization developed—what it developed out of and what it progressively transformed into—and the historians who made it happen. This loss of corporate memory is partly a consequence of the present-mindedness that has been encouraged by more recent developments. As Kerry Howe has pointed out, Pacific Islands history during the Davidson era was “not really informed by the Pacific Islands present,” despite Davidson’s own interest and involvement in contemporary island affairs. The Fiji coups of
1987 sharply and suddenly shifted the center of gravity from the nineteenth into the twentieth century as more and more practitioners took a serious interest in contemporary events and issues. The establishment of the influential journal *The Contemporary Pacific* was a direct response to this impulse, and its second issue was devoted to the coups. Worthy and welcome in some respects, such developments meant that scholarly inquiry was sometimes insufficiently informed by the Pacific Islands past. While the study of Pacific history was no longer hemmed in by a narrow disciplinary focus, the countervailing and broadening tendencies led not only to diffuseness but, in the case of the more postmodern analyses, to an emphasis on an authorial presence,8 and this “focus on a personalised present, especially for the growing numbers of Pacific Islands researchers, leads inevitably to a reaching back into a recent rather than a remote past.”9

A concurrent development during the 1980s was the unified approach of the Canberra department being displaced by a number of “self-reproducing clans, each with its own training grounds and theoretical interests. No longer is there a single line of descent . . . Nor is it easy any more to define ‘mainstream’ concerns. The notion of history has broadened: we face what one literary theorist has called a ‘meltdown’ of disciplinary approaches.”10 Confirmation of these developments, if not already evident, was unambiguously on display at the 1995 Pacific History Association (PHA) at Hilo, notably in its being split down the middle between an old guard of traditionalists and a new wave of postmodernists and/or Islanders. It was really two conferences with a fairly pronounced ethnic/generational divide. More so than previous PHA gatherings, the Hilo conference was strongly present-centered and multidisciplinary to the extent that the actual discipline of history was sometimes hard to find.11 The event confirmed what Peter Hempenstall had said a few years earlier about the “series of conversations . . . going on, but not always meeting, in the crowded room of Pacific history.”12

There is nothing out of the ordinary in this state of affairs: the fractured academy of Pacific historiography simply reflects what is going on worldwide. The universal scenario is that growth leads to specialization, specialization to fragmentation, and fragmentation to the clannishness, separatism, and autarky that have become part and parcel of the historical profession and of academic life itself. In 1988, it was noted that the American historical profession had lost its cohesion: “as a broad community of discourse, as a community of scholars united by common
aims, common standards and common purposes, the discipline of history has ceased to exist."\textsuperscript{13}

There has been another development relevant to the changing nature of Pacific historiography. As well as the subdiscipline becoming increasingly diversified, fragmented, and present-minded, its literature has grown to unmanageable proportions. As elsewhere, such has been the exponential growth of the written output that keeping up with one’s reading has become well nigh impossible. In these circumstances, the older texts tend to fall by the wayside, being seen as out of date, outmoded, and out of touch with the reigning concerns of our branch of the historical discipline. Of course, historical research involves the revision of received opinion, the overturning of orthodoxy, and a questioning of cozy past assumptions. Older texts are there to be displaced and their authors forgotten. For all these reasons, Pacific historians are beginning to lose sight of, or even to deny, the history of the development of their own specialization. It is made more acute when there are no \textit{aides memoire} comparable to, say, Rob Pascoe’s guided tour through Australian historiography or Peter Parish’s small treatise on the historians of North American slavery and the histories they write, much less Meier and Rudwick’s larger exercise on the same topic, or John Kenyon’s study of the English historical profession since the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{14}

There are no volumes of essays on individual Pacific historians as one routinely finds in other branches of the historical profession.\textsuperscript{15} There is a small and interesting corpus of autobiographical writings by Pacific historians.\textsuperscript{16} This contributes to, but is by no means a substitute for, a systematic knowledge of the origins and development of the subdiscipline and its practitioners.

It is well to put these comments into perspective, because the disregard for intellectual ancestors and their works is widespread throughout the historical profession. When writing his biography of G. M. Trevelyan in the 1980s, David Cannadine gave a seminar at Cambridge University based on an earlier version of his second chapter to the eventual book. The majority of graduate students present had never read any of Trevelyan’s books, and yet “Trevelyan was the most famous, the most honoured and the most influential and widely read historian during the second half of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{17} Such is the extent and depth of “posterity’s disdain.”\textsuperscript{18}

Paradoxically, at the very time Pacific historians are likewise losing sight of their own past, they have become more willing to reflect on the
nature of their discipline and their individual positions within it. More so than the earlier generations, they have become conscious—perhaps self-conscious—of the problematic nature and purpose of the construction of knowledge, the cultural and political contexts in which that knowledge is produced, and the uses to which it is put. And they have become much more alert to their own roles as researchers, their obligations and responsibilities. New lines of inquiry have been developed, theoretical debates chewed over, and fresh directions of research charted. It is part and parcel of the current state of present-mindedness. It is high time to take a backward glance that will, incidentally, make the current preoccupations of practitioners more intelligible.

The primary concern of *Texts and Contexts* is not with the authors, but with the texts and the various contexts that surround them. To concentrate on the text rather than the author is not unusual, whether within or beyond the discipline of history. In any case, it is impossible to separate the author from the text itself. Each contributor was asked to examine a particular text—in some cases, complementary texts—in the context of its/their inception, production, and intellectual influence on a particular field of research. The contributors were not asked to write to a set formula but to work within certain broad parameters. They were asked to assess the significance of a particular text and explain why it was important or influential. Beyond that, they were free to shape their contribution as they saw fit. Was the text under scrutiny an expression of its time and historiographic fashion or did it break new conceptual ground? To what extent did the text bear the personal stamp of the author? And why has the text either faded away or lived on? How has the field itself moved on, and what has been the text’s imprint on that journey? *Texts and Contexts*, then, is intended as a scholarly guide to the development of a branch of the discipline of history—to demonstrate the importance and seminal influence of individual texts in that process and, not least, to reconnect historians of the Pacific Islands to the history and historiography of their specialization.

The texts selected here tend to be older ones, but age in itself did not guarantee selection. Had that been the case, we would have automatically included Scholefield’s *The Pacific: Its Past and Future* (1919),
Ryden’s *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa* (1933), Masterman’s *The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa* (1934), and Ellison’s *Opening and Penetration of Foreign Interests in Samoa to 1880* (1936), not to mention Brookes’s *International Rivalry in the Pacific Islands* (1941) and Ward’s *British Policy in the South Pacific* (1948). Nor did sales figures enter our calculations. Quite simply, foundational texts are the books that were once (and in some cases still are) influential in defining the parameters of particular aspects of the sub-discipline of Pacific history, revising and revisionist in their own times and sometimes beyond. So, for example, Douglas Oliver’s *The Pacific Islands* (1951) was an influential and enduring general text that introduced two generations of scholars to Pacific history. Peter Corris’s *Port, Passage, Plantation* (1973) altered our understanding of the labor trade in the Pacific. Dorothy Shineberg’s *They Came for Sandalwood* (1967) broke ground in presenting events from a Melanesian point of view and in redirectioning subsequent research. The same, more or less, can be said of the other texts included here. The common denominator is that the texts said something new or differently and influentially at the time and cast a new beam of light on their subject matter that illuminated the path of later explorers.

*Texts and Contexts* seeks to do more. It seeks to impart a sense of what it took in those days to produce history when the technology was limited to the fountain pen and the manual typewriter, when the manuscript sources were only beginning to be made more widely available on microfilm through the Australian Joint Copying Project, and when a significant proportion of the documentation had yet to be located and retrieved by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau. The conditions under which our predecessors worked were rudimentary and even primitive by today’s standards, and a better appreciation of their books will emerge when such constraints are taken into account. To read the older texts, and to have concrete details about their authors, is to appreciate their abilities, admire their commitment to their craft, and wonder if we could have done as well in those days when the props we take for granted (photocopying, word processors, and the Internet) were undreamed of.

Keith Sinclair, that irrepressible New Zealander, decided at an early age to be a writer and embarked on serious historical research during his spells of leave from the navy in war-torn London. He completed his degree after the war, but he was different from most of his fellow students in that he was there to study what absorbed him rather than merely
to acquire a degree. Becoming a lecturer in history at Auckland University College, he spent summer months in Wellington as “a full-time researcher” to write The Origins of the Maori Wars (1957).  

Ken Gillion and Peter Corris, who were markedly different in personality and temperament, worked diligently through an impressive array of sources for their books on labor migration. Kerry Howe spent all his spare time over a six-year period researching and writing his general history of the precolonial Pacific, Where the Waves Fall (1984). Gavin Souter wrote his remarkable The Last Unknown (1963) between journalism assignments. And Oskar Spate retooled himself for his great retirement project, The Pacific since Magellan (1979, 1983, 1988), in three volumes. The essays in this volume enhance our appreciation that our predecessors worked under conditions that we would find intolerable.

History is a cumulative enterprise that ought to teach humility. No one methodology or theory holds the key to the riddle that is history. Older perspectives can still be useful, and today’s historical work will, in time, be displaced by others, even derided as the misguided expressions of a bygone era. Cannadine’s words are salutary:

Every generation, scholars have risen proclaiming that they have found a new key which unlocks the essence of the past in a way that no previous historical approach has ever done. Our own generation is no exception to this rule—and it will probably be no exception to this fate. For these claims have never stood the test of time. Twenty years from now, scholars will probably be concerned with something very different, and they will look with bemused amazement that our generation could believe so confidently that unravelling the “meaning” of the past was the historian’s crucial and essential task.

Seen in this sobering light, the foundation texts take on a different meaning. They are transitions in a never-ending cycle of reinterpretations and new understandings that stretch into the future rather than solidifying at the present. Or to modify Jim Davidson’s famous waves analogy, just as waves break upon the coral-tinged shores of the South Pacific, each one overtaken by the next before its energy is quite spent, so too will Pacific Islands historiography continue to be marked by successive and merging strands of interpretation and dominant discourse. Greg Dening, whose own work is assessed here, concurs: “historians live with the certainty that someone will do the historiography of the history we write.”
Still, it sometimes takes an effort to appreciate that the authors of our foundational texts worked in a world that thought and acted differently from the one in which we live today. If the text has a context, so does the author. On that very theme the Australian historian Geoffrey Bolton has said: “To ignore or berate the public figures of a hundred years ago because they were insensitive to issues that we now consider important is to invite similar derision from the scholars and readers of a hundred years hence.”24 Similarly, we cannot with justice rebuke a previous generation of historians for being moved by, or reacting against, the political and intellectual climate of which they were part and for not, in consequence, being able to anticipate the intellectual fashions or moral imperatives of a future generation. Rather, we should give recognition to their achievements and build on their work, as has the Native Hawaiian scholar Jonathan K. Osorio (in this volume) with respect to Kuykendall’s resolutely “old-fashioned” The Hawaiian Kingdom:

I don’t know a single historian of the Hawaiian Islands who has not depended on the painstaking and detailed study of government documents, foreign exchanges and letters that Kuykendall collected, organised and incorporated into his massive three volume chronicles between 1938 and 1967. I also cannot think of a single one of us who would depend on his histories as definitive nor as dependable interpretations of culture, or even believable explanations of change. Yet we should admire the task to which he committed himself.

In that spirit we offer Texts and Contexts as a marker of special moments in the growth and development of Pacific Islands historiography as a gauge of its varied journeys and transformations over the last half century or so.

Thirty-six separate volumes, published between 1938 and 1992, by thirty different authors, are considered in this book.25 Sixteen of the authors are still with us, which indicates the relative youthfulness of Pacific history as a specialization. The relatively small number of deceased authors, however, might relate more to the general longevity of Pacific specialists; two of the extant authors are in their nineties (H. E. Maude and
Douglas L. Oliver). By sad coincidence, Dorothy Shineberg passed away the same day this book was accepted for publication.

Apart from Ta‘unga, who was a nineteenth-century missionary (and an accidental anthropologist), the authors all trained to be academics—although two (Peter Corris and Gavan Daws) left the academy to become professional writers. Three authors were born in the nineteenth century (Ta‘unga, Ralph S. Kuykendall, and W. P. Morrell). The majority of the authors were born in the 1920s and 1930s with a heavy cluster in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For the most part we preferred contributors who are “period pieces” (i.e., of much the same generation as the book or books they write about) and who know (or knew) author or authors concerned. To write about a book in the context of its times is more readily (but not invariably) achieved by someone of similar vintage, and to have personally known the author(s) is likely to provide insights otherwise not available.

Authors/Editors, in Chronological Order

Ta‘unga, ca. 1818–89
Ralph S. Kuykendall, 1885–1963
W. P. Morrell, 1899–1986
Andrew Sharp, 1905–74
H. E. Maude, 1906–
O.H.K. Spate, 1911–2000
Douglas L. Oliver, 1913–
J. W. Davidson, 1915–73
Bernard Smith, 1916–
David Lewis, 1917–2002
Norma McArthur, 1921–84
Peter Lawrence, 1922–89
Keith Sinclair, 1922–93
Peter Worsley, 1924–
R. P. Gilson, 1925–62
Francis West, 1927–
Dorothy Shineberg, 1927–2004
K. L. Gillion, 1929–92
R. G. Crocombe, 1929–
Gavin Souter, 1929–
Marjorie Crocombe, 1930–
Niel Gunson, 1930–
Marshall D. Sahlins, 1930–
Greg Dening, 1931–
Gavan Daws, 1933–
Alan Ward, 1935–
Francis X. Hezel, 1939–
Deryck Scarr, 1939–
Peter Corris, 1942–
K. R. Howe, 1947–

We did consult with colleagues and have substantial correspondence to prove that there was a fairly broad area of agreement on choice of texts according to our criteria. There had to be a broad coverage of themes, but we made no attempt to have a representative sampling of island groups. There are two texts on Samoa and none on Tonga for reasons
that relate to our definition of what constitutes a foundational text. The 1960s are most heavily represented, the very time when Pacific Islands historiography was on a production curve.

The final choice of texts is ours—with three qualifications. In two instances a text that we considered foundational got left out because we could not find a contributor. We were also constrained by publishing realities from having more chapters (e.g., on Papua New Guinea and New Zealand) and allowing the contributors a more generous word length. Third, we decided against a chapter on J.C. Beaglehole’s edition of *The Journals of Captain Cook* because we were not sure that the various constraints would permit adequate discussion of such a monumental work. Otherwise the choice—and the responsibility—is ours. That said, we don’t intend to spend the rest of our lives justifying the inclusions and omissions.

*Brij V. Lal, Canberra
Doug Munro, Wellington*

**Texts: Publication Chronology**

1930s
†Ralph Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1, 1938

1950s
Douglas L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, 1951
†Ralph Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 2, 1952
†Andrew Sharp, *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific*, 1957
†Keith Sinclair, *The Origins of the Maori Wars*, 1957
Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, 1957

1960s
†W. P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands*, 1960
Bernard Smith, *European Vision in the South Pacific*, 1960
†K. L. Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants*, 1962
Gavin Souter, *The Last Unknown*, 1963
†Andrew Sharp, *Ancient Voyagers in Polynesia*, 1963
†Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*, 1964
†J. W. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 1967
†Ralph Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 3, 1967
†Norma McArthur, *Island Populations of the Pacific*, 1967
Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire*, 1967
† Dorothy Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 1967
† Ta’unga, *The Works of Ta’unga*, 1967
Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 1968
H. E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 1968
Francis West, *Hubert Murray*, 1968

1970s
† R. P. Gilson, *Samoa, 1830 to 1900*, 1970
† David Lewis, *We, the Navigators*, 1972
Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 1973
† O.H.K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake*, 1979

1980s
Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches*, 1980
Francis X. Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization*, 1983
† O.H.K. Spate, *Monopolists and Freebooters*, 1983
K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, 1984
† O.H.K. Spate, *Paradise, Lost and Found*, 1988

1990s
Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific*, 1992
† deceased

Notes


16. Especially in Lal and Munro’s edited collections *Pacific Islands History*, and *Reflections on Pacific Historiography*, respectively, as well as Brij V. Lal, ed., *Pacific


20. Little wonder that Davidson, when setting out a research agenda and a methodology on behalf of the new specialism of Pacific Islands history, was reacting against the dominance—and, as he saw it, the limitations—of conventional imperial history.


24. Geoffrey Bolton, Edmund Barton: The One Man for the Job (Sydney, 2000), x.

25. To be precise, the thirty authors include the two editors of The Works of Ta’unga (Ron and Marjorie Crocombe).