

ful, and superbly written book that makes the complex historical, political, and intellectual contexts of research trends in Micronesia accessible and understandable to any intelligent reader. Because the usefulness of anthropology is a constant theme, the inclusion of non-anthropologists Hezel and King is crucial, since they explain utility; that is, anthropological research is useful when it directly addresses the concerns of its clients and useless when it does not. That none of the other authors dealing with the same theme refer to these two chapters is, therefore, puzzling. While the coverage of the literature is broad, it is not complete (eg. Kiste and Nero credit Jack Fischer with one article on Micronesian folklore when he actually produced a book and five articles), yet most of the major work is not only covered, but thoughtfully so. This is a major, unique, and useful contribution to the understanding of regional ethnography in general and of Micronesia in particular. Kudos.

MICHAEL D LIEBER
University of Illinois at Chicago

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The Pacific Islands: Environment and Society, edited by Moshe Rapaport. Honolulu: Bess Press, 1999. ISBN 1-57306-083-6, cloth; 1-57306-042-9, paper; vi + 442 pages, maps, photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, index, and Island Gazetteer. Cloth, US\$49.95; paper, US\$39.95.

Humboldt tried to write, in several volumes, about the entire cosmos, but since the late nineteenth century geographers have learned to be more circumspect and have confined their

efforts to single regions. However, there comes a time when even the classic regions of nineteenth-century geography can no longer be covered properly by a single author, and the Pacific Islands may now have entered this stage. Half a century ago even a vast and populous region like India could be tackled with panache by a polymath scholar like Oskar Spate, but in the Pacific we have rather few examples of equivalent ambition. Harold Brookfield achieved something close to a classic regional text in his book *Melanesia: A Geographical Interpretation of an Island World* (1971), but it is hard to think of more recent examples that encompass even part of the Pacific Islands in all their modern diversity. Even books that seem to promise a holistic overview turn out to be relatively specialized. For example, Matthew Spriggs' fine book *The Island Melanesians* (1997) covers a large area but lingers for so long on its prehistory that the last five hundred years are covered in a gallop, while Paul Sillitoe's *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Melanesia* (1998) does an excellent job in reviewing the ethnography of rural New Guinea but seldom strays far from that island or from the anthropological literature.

As a result we lack overviews. The scholarly focus has shifted to the microscale where the challenge of making broader generalizations and regional comparisons can be avoided, and where no attempt at a holistic analysis is expected. For this reason alone—for its regional scope and holistic ambitions—Moshe Rapaport's edited volume *Pacific Islands: Environment and Society* is to be welcomed.

An increasingly literate and sophisticated readership resides in or near the Pacific Islands, visits the region, or merely studies it in universities, and these people will continue to ask the same questions about the islands that fascinated their equivalents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: when, how, and why did these far-flung scraps of land, large and small, evolve into their present-day diverse patterns of environment, society, and culture? This book promises to provide this readership with many of the answers, in one volume, and in far richer detail than alternative sources of information, including Internet websites. If more books like this one existed then we might perhaps see fewer of those science-fiction best-sellers that seek to locate the origins of Pacific cultures in lost civilizations, places beyond real time and space. Can works of solid regional scholarship displace these alternative, New Age and hidden-racist tracts, which have in common a refusal to allow Pacific Islanders a fair and autonomous share of world history and world geography?

To a remarkable extent this book manages to fulfill its potential, largely because of skillful and rigorous editorial control. So many so-called edited books turn out to be merely vehicles for allowing established academics to ride their latest hobbyhorses (my own proposed chapter for this book, which completely failed to meet the terms of reference the editor set out, was rightly rejected by him on these grounds). Editorial indulgence results in books full of interesting but idiosyncratic contributions, tortuously linked by desperate editorial sleight of

hand. In contrast the topics chosen by Moshe Rapaport span a full and interesting if not quite comprehensive range. The book is subdivided into six sections (physical environment, living environment, history, culture, population, economy). Is anything missing? The Pacific as seen from the outside, as a geopolitical space for American, Japanese, French, or Russian ambitions in the twenty-first century, is an issue hinted at but not really confronted, for example in the two chapters closest to this theme (Wesley-Smith on power and politics, Geoffrey Bertram on island economies). From a Melanesian perspective the most serious omission is any serious treatment of the logging industry, which is progressively eating away at New Guinea and Solomons rainforests, and which now dominates the political economy of those two countries. Logging is a topic squeezed into half a page in the otherwise admirable chapter on agriculture by Bill Clarke, Harley Manner, and Randy Thaman. I was surprised and delighted to find chapters on Pacific Islands art (by Deborah Waite) and literature (by Selina Tusitala Marsh), but to be complete should there not be something on music? And what of the nongovernment organizations (other than the churches), which now play such an active role in rural affairs, at least in Melanesia?

Setting aside these minor quibbles, it is difficult to see any major gaps, or any significant repetition. There are altogether 33 chapters written by a total of 45 different scholars, 18 resident in the United States (12 in Hawai'i) and the remainder living in Australia (8), New Zealand (7), Fiji

(4), Canada (2), France (2), and the Cook Islands, Guam, and United Kingdom (1 in each). Regional balance is a feature not just of the authors but also of their writings. Most authors concern themselves with the island states within their modern political boundaries, or use the “traditional” (but still apparently useful) divisions between Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia, modified in some contexts to Austronesian and Non-Austronesian. The boundaries of the Pacific Islands are broadened in some chapters to include New Zealand, which is logical considering its large and diverse Polynesian population. Australia, however, is an island too far for this book, even though Aboriginal Australians were within “Melanesia” as it was originally conceived by French geographers back in the 1830s, and Torres Strait Islanders in particular might feel they have been unjustly excluded. Papua New Guinea is the subject of much attention, but Irian Jaya is seldom mentioned, perhaps in part because, in its increasing state of Indonesian absorption, it has become statistically invisible. The book is well illustrated with photos, maps, and diagrams, mostly very apposite, although one could not help noticing that the Tuamotus and the Cook Islands are rather generously represented, a reflection perhaps of the editor’s own photo album.

The authors that Rapaport has assembled are almost without exception recognized and even preeminent figures within their fields, but as any theatre manager knows, having a distinguished cast of players does not by itself turn *The Mousetrap* into *Hamlet*. Even the most prestigious profes-

sors (perhaps particularly those) need to be disciplined by an editor to write something that is not merely brilliant but which also conforms to some wider concept. Here, remarkably, each chapter is not merely Pacific-wide in scope but also consciously adopts a comparative perspective. As a result, to cite just three examples, we have masterly overviews by Andrew Pawley on language, Ron Crocombe on tenure, and Geoffrey Bertram on economy, which update but also extend these authors’ own previous, groundbreaking contributions to Pacific scholarship. Alison Kay on biogeography, John Barker on religion, and John Connell and John Lea on urban dilemmas are also chapters that I felt went well beyond the conventional understandings. Terence Wesley-Smith bravely confronts the nature of power in postcolonial Pacific Island governments, using not only the insights of political science but also showing some elements of continuity with the previous institutions of big-men or chiefs. These are all papers that any serious student of the Pacific will wish to read, reviewing landmarks in the literature up until 1997, and constituting excellent springboards for further reading both within and beyond this volume. The book is a contribution to the academic literature yet it is almost jargon-free. It confronts most of the ongoing debates in history, development geography, cultural studies, and environment within the Pacific setting, and it deserves a wide readership.

TIM BAYLISS-SMITH
Cambridge University

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