Ponam, but the Carriers do not fully explain why. This, however, is a relatively minor flaw in an important work.

KAREN BRISON
Washington University

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Robert Aldrich has performed a considerable service by providing students and historians with a work of synthesis on the French Pacific territories, from their occupation in the early nineteenth century until the eve of considerable political change after the 1940s. It is hard to think of any work in French or English that summarizes quite so well this long phase of French imperialism and colonization among the marginal possessions of a European power whose interests lay elsewhere. Explaining this phenomenon of French incursion into an “Anglo-Saxon” sphere is almost as difficult as accounting for the continuation of a “French presence” long after the period of decolonization.

The book contains little that is new in the way of argument about imperial expansion in a somewhat sketchy first chapter dealing with the chronology of French annexations and protection in the three main groups—East Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). There is a more solid account of the background factors in three chapters on the French navy, French missions, and French economic interests, so far as these can be adduced from old and some new materials on trading houses, shipping firms, and banks. Lack of any trade or financial series precludes a serious analysis of the scale and proportion of French metropolitan commercial exchanges and investment at any phase of the period covered by the book. On the other hand, there are some excellent insights into the importance of operations conducted by the Banque de l’Indochine et Suez from the work of Yasua Gondjo, and good use has been made of Anne-Gabrielle Thompson’s study of John Higginson. The gap that still exists in our knowledge of the influence and profitability of Le Nickel, however, cannot yet be filled. More might have been made of the financial role of French administrations in the economies of the three territories. Government, after all, was the largest of the few investors, over the longest period, and had a considerable place in creating a market for imports, employing labor, and securing the limited amount of infrastructure and urbanization that developed around the main ports and capitals. The chapter on settlers and officials plays down this official (and metropolitan) action over a century of taxation, budgets, and capital expenditure.

Chapter six on “The French and the Islanders” is a brave attempt to cover the most difficult theme of all, namely the results of cultural change, miscegenation, education, and a century of accommodation among island societies. Perhaps more space should have been allowed to analyze the elements of resistance and syncretism.
listed, including a fuller account of indigenous churches that have taken the place of older authority structures in eastern Polynesia.

The most original material deriving from the author's own research is in two chapters on France's relations with Australia and New Zealand, and the work of the Comité de l'Océanie française as a pressure group. The latter was not particularly effective in the interwar period. If anything, politics in both New Caledonia and French Polynesia, which had been quite lively in the late nineteenth century, suffered a setback after 1900 and did not really recover until the period of the Loi cadre reforms. But Aldrich is right to emphasize, as few others have done, the place of the British dominions both as rivals in Pacific influence and as complementary markets for the very limited economic production and consumption possible in areas of formal French control. That theme of regional, rather than metropolitan-periphery, development, is not sufficiently addressed by the French writers on empire whose works are thoughtfully assessed at the end of the book.

There are still some gaps in the assessment of the French contribution to administrative and social change in the conclusion. The place of the French legal system, both in personal and commercial law and in droit administratif deserves a mention, if only because several generations of Pacific Islanders live under this system, which has fundamentally influenced their land tenure, contract law, and civil rights. Secondly, despite the careful attention paid to metropolitan factors in accounting for the "French presence," we still have no reasoned explanation of the ways in which decision making in Paris in the days of the Ministry for the Navy and the later Colonial Ministry framed the administration and dominated the politics of France's island possessions. Given the continuation of that "presence" in the most formal ways, consideration has to be given to the mechanisms that overrode, rather than worked through, local legislative and representative systems, whether dominated by settlers in New Caledonia or by Euro-Polynesians in Tahiti. Budgetary centralization and the political subordination of the local executive may in the end have been the biggest single difference between the French islands and the British in the Pacific.

COLIN NEWBURY
Linacre College, Oxford

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With similar concision, but less originality and polish, one can say that Ian Campbell's History of the Pacific Islands examines the region "from the earliest times to the present day." And all this in fewer than 240 pages. As Campbell states in his preface: "this book is the first since 1951 to present a synoptic history of the region as a whole."