

Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence, edited by Margaret Jolly, Serge Tchekézo, and Darrell Tryon. Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-921536-28-1, xix + 344 pages, maps, tables, notes, indexes. A\$39.95.

Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence—the first output of a collaboration between scholars at the Australian National University and the Centre of Research and Documentation on Oceania (CREDO)—represents an important attempt to rethink encounter narratives in the Pacific. Eschewing the term “first contact,” the editors and authors stress the necessity of decentering traditional accounts of initial meetings between European explorers and Pacific Islanders and instead advocate taking a critical look at a wide variety of meetings that resulted in confrontation and transformation on both sides of the encounter. Armed with Greg Denning’s pivotal conception of the “beach” as a site of encounter, the authors explore this diversity of meetings throughout a range of locales and moments in time. As Margaret Jolly and Serge Tchekézo outline in their useful introduction, the essays in this volume seek to engage with indigenous as well as European perceptions of encounter by utilizing linguistic, literary, cultural, oral, and ethnohistorical approaches and frameworks. The result is a collection that offers new and provocative insights into the ways in which we understand the complexities of these “meetings of meaning, of bodies and minds” (1).

Aside from the aforementioned

helpful introduction, the collection includes ten essays that range in geographical focus from Tonga to Vanuatu to Papua New Guinea and Australia. Some, such as Jolly’s, attempt to get at the nuances of meetings between Europeans and Pacific Islanders by critically reexamining well-known explorer journals and artistic imaginings. In particular, Jolly looks at the explorations of Vanuatu by Quirós, Bougainville, and Cook in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and highlights the profound shift in the ways these Europeans related to and imagined the other. Similarly, in her essay on the scientific voyage of d’Entrecasteaux at the end of the eighteenth-century, Bronwen Douglas peels apart layers of European writing to analyze the ways in which the actions and bodies of Pacific Islanders penetrated writings and artistic efforts of European explorers in the form of “countersigns.” Despite being cloaked in the ethnocentric nature of European writing, these countersigns can be identified through careful historical analysis; Douglas convincingly maintains that these “indigenous countersigns . . . remain key building blocks for the construction of modern ethnohistorical narratives” (193).

The collection also attempts to address both sides of Denning’s beach by looking at Pacific Islander sources and narratives. In particular, Pascale Bonnemère and Pierre Lemonnier heavily utilize the oral testimonies of the Ankave-Anga people in the Eastern Highland region of Papua New Guinea to examine their understanding of encounters with Australian and European outsiders. By tracing

Ankave memory of contact with these outsiders, the authors explore the ways that “first contacts” with Australian patrols have both been folded into local histories and also have informed the Ankave-Anga relationship to modernity, especially in terms of the utilization of the police in intertribal and local affairs. Employing a similar focus on indigenous experiences of encounter, Darrell Tryon in his essay uses linguistic evidence to dissect meetings and encounters between Pacific Islanders both before and after European contact, arguing that linguistic interaction has occurred to such an extent in some areas that “it is sometimes difficult to determine whether one is dealing with an Austronesian or a Papuan language” (43). Tryon also looks at the development of pidgin languages in places like Tahiti, Nauru, and areas of Melanesia and examines the incorporation of European languages into the linguistic repertoire of Pacific Islanders. As Tryon demonstrates, encounters can be profitably explored through an analysis of the constantly shifting grammar and vocabularies in and among different Pacific Islands.

Fiction also provides a useful site in which to explore encounters, as Chris Ballard demonstrates in his discussion of fictionalized accounts of exploration into the interior of Papua New Guinea from 1725 through 1876. Ballard argues for the value of these fictional narratives, asserting that—unlike factual accounts by explorers—such narratives are “unencumbered by the requirement to report” while at the same time “reflecting a series of preconceptions and assumptions

about difference” (222). Isabelle Merle uses similar strategies in analyzing the work of Watkin Trench, who authored one of the founding narratives of early settlement of Australia by Europeans. Merle highlights the ambivalence located in Trench’s work, both in terms of form and style as well as in his description of Aboriginal society. Reflecting on his avoidance of scenes of colonial violence in his texts, Merle suggests that while Trench was interested in presenting a useful narrative of early colonial events, he was even more invested in popular authorship; this understanding of Trench as an author can help to reshape how scholars evaluate his narratives of encounter.

As in many of the essays in this volume, the works by Tcherkézoff, Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon, and Mark S Mosko argue for more multilayered analyses of well-known examples of encounter in the Pacific. Tcherkézoff calls for a reconsideration of the ways in which Polynesian women experienced early meetings with European explorers, arguing that the offering of young Islander women to Europeans was steeped in meaning very different than the “Western myth of Polynesian sexual freedom” (147). Douaire-Marsaudon looks at beachcombers and sailors as mediators of religion, technology, and culture in Tonga, particularly through the medium of writing. Mosko critically reexamines Mekeo and Roro experiences of early colonial encounters in Papua New Guinea; these meetings were defined by firearms-driven violence that was seen by the Mekeo and Roro as mystical and moral in nature.

The impact of these encounters, Mosko argues, was a radical change in Mekeo and Roro society that was “anything but an easy transition from chiefly to colonial hierarchy” (285).

Though the approach put forth by the essays in this volume is valuable, the collection as a whole is not without some problematic points. For example, there is a heavy focus on Polynesia and Melanesia, with little attention given to the Islands and Islanders that make up Micronesia. Further, aside from the work of Mosko and Bonnemère and Lemonnier, the essays tend to shy away from the violent nature of many of the encounters described. Though the focus of the volume is very much on the multivalent nature of encounter, the brutality of those interactions should continue to be recognized and evaluated.

As a whole, however, this thoughtful collection incorporates a wide range of valuable scholarship. The fresh takes offered on oft-examined sources and the commitment to a more nuanced understanding of “encounter” make this volume an important contribution to the ongoing critical discussion of the ways in which we can evaluate interactions among groups of Pacific Islanders, and between Pacific Islanders and the myriad Europeans who visited or stayed on those Islanders’ shores.

ERIN COZENS

University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

* * *

Moving Images: John Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula since 1914, by Haidy Geismar and Anita Herle. Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, in association with University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009. ISBN 978-1-86333-319-1, xii + 308 pages, 240 dual-tone photographs, maps, index. Cloth, A\$89.95.

This fine book is an important contribution to both the history of anthropology and the history of Vanuatu. John Layard’s fieldwork, primarily on Atchin and Vao in Northeast Malakula in 1914 and 1915, was contemporaneous with Bronislaw Malinowski’s first trip to New Guinea, but Layard has not been accorded the same status as a “founding father” of British social anthropology in the conventional genealogies of the discipline. Paradoxically perhaps, Layard has been more positively remembered in those “small islands” where he lived for barely nine months than in academic annals. This book both reveals and transforms his Janus face in these twin genealogies.

The authors articulate these histories through the medium of Layard’s photographs. Using a cumbersome early camera he produced about 450 images. He deposited the glass plate negatives with and donated selected copy prints to the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The fragile materiality of these photographs is consummately evoked from the first image: the back of Tawas, paddling his canoe laden with fresh food and water and John Layard, perched precariously behind the frame of his large camera and tripod. The