

E. M. Webster, *The Moon Man: A Biography of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay*. Carleton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1984. Pp. xxv, 421, illustrations, maps, index. \$33.00.

Reviewed by Patricia Polansky, Russian Bibliographer, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii

Of all the numerous publications in Russian, and the lesser number in English, written about Nikolai Nikolaevich Miklouho-Maclay, this is unreservedly the best biography now in print. Elsie Webster has done an excellent job in bringing the "white Papuan" to life. In particular, this is a believable and realistic portrayal of a man who is mostly overglorified in the Soviet Union and largely unknown in the West. The author writes very well, unraveling a complex life and presenting his scientific contributions within the context of the times.

Physically the book is well presented, The illustrations are carefully chosen, and those reprinted from Maclay's *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works] look much better than in the Soviet edition. The maps are

a great asset, making clear where events are taking place. The nineteen chapters have insightful titles that provide a good framework as Maclay's life unfolds. A note on sources, a conversion table, notes on spelling and dates, and an index enrich the work. The notes are quite good, but would be more useful if note references had been included in the text. The reader tends to be unaware of the notes, or has to hunt to find the correct reference. The bibliography is well organized, but suffers from the widely used practice of citing Russian works in that language with the English translation in parentheses.

The foreword, by the eminent scholar O. H. K. Spate, alerts us to biography of Maclay "in all his generosity and his vanity, his littleness and his greatness." Maclay was a complex person, craving solitude for most of his life and yet undertaking more projects than most people would attempt in two lifetimes. A particularly favored motto was "he who risks nothing gains nothing." For most of his life Maclay was in quest of money to clear constant debts. Several friends, patrons, and his family in Russia helped, although very inconsistently. Another concern of Maclay's was to establish a series of scientific research stations throughout Europe and later the Pacific. In fact, only one, in Australia, ever became a reality. Maclay's greatest fame during his lifetime was not in Russia but in Australia.

Maclay's travels included Germany, France, England, Spain, Portugal, the Canary Islands, Italy, Morocco, Egypt, New Guinea, Mangareva, the Malay peninsula, Siam, Hong Kong, the China coast, Singapore, Java, Palau, Yap, the Philippines, the Admiralty Islands, the Solomon Islands, the Trobriand Islands, New Caledonia, New Hebrides, the Loyalty Islands, and Australia. He worked constantly throughout his short life, except when absolutely incapacitated from malarial fevers. His scientific interests began with biological and zoological studies of sponges and evolved eventually to anthropological observations of the various native groups he visited. He even taught himself the new skill of photography. He was influenced by various teachers and scientific thinkers of his day, and was acquainted with many Russian philosophers and writers, including Herzen, Turgenev, and Tolstoy.

Perhaps Maclay's greatest contribution resulted from two stays in New Guinea. He is considered rather unique and a model in his patience and noninterference with the native peoples. He considered his primary task one of observation, not judgment. Despite his efforts to learn the language, there is a gap in his understanding of the Papuans and many of their customs. The one great political wish of his later life

was the so-called Maclay Coast Scheme. Maclay wanted to establish a protectorate for his Papuans, a colony under Russian protection and himself as head. However, his lack of understanding of the real political situation in the larger world (France, England, Germany, Russia) prevented him from seeing this accomplished.

In the epilogue Webster points out very clearly the contradictions in Maclay's scientific life. For such a hard worker, he left behind little of lasting significance. He is nonetheless still a hero in the Soviet Union. For those interested in anthropology and in the history of New Guinea's Papuans and other Pacific islanders, Maclay is a very important person with whom to become acquainted. He was the first European to describe certain Pacific peoples. An earlier biography by B. N. Putilov (Moscow: Progress, 1982) was translated into English, but it is nowhere near the comprehensive, insightful, and realistic portrayal found in Webster's work.