

---

## REVIEWS

---

Eduard HERNSHEIM, *South Sea Merchant*, edited and translated by Peter Sack and Dymphna Clark. Boroko: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1983. Pp. xi, 230, maps, illustrations, index. K7.00.

*Reviewed by Doug Munro, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba, Queensland*

Eduard HERNSHEIM (1841-1917) was no ordinary South Sea trader. In the words of his biographer, he was "notable as one of the few speculative traders in any period of the Pacific whose commercial adventure paid off as he hoped when he first ventured there" (S. Firth, "Captain HERNSHEIM: Pacific Venturer, Merchant Prince," p. 115, in *More Pacific Islands Portraits*, Canberra, 1978). He was also unusual among traders in that he penned his memoirs. *South Sea Merchant* brings together a variety of HERNSHEIM's writings concerning his trading days. First is his *Lebenserinnerungen* (Reminiscences), which he wrote after returning to Germany in 1892 to live off the profits of his enterprises. This is followed by extracts from his extant Diaries which, the editors explain, were chosen to illuminate his personality and to "illustrate the routine of the island trade in the 1880s." The final section contains the English translation of three HERNSHEIM pamphlets on German colonization in Melanesia.

With this compilation of HERNSHEIM's writings now in print, a valuable selection has become readily available to a wider audience. Unlike some memoirs, HERNSHEIM's are revealing of the man himself. From an early age he showed himself to be independently minded and possessed

of a sense of adventure and that spark of initiative that held him in good stead in later life. Whereas many traders cherished the illusion of sturdy self-reliance, this was more in the realm of reality in Hearnheim's case. With this "resolute manner," as he called it, went a sound business sense that had much to do with his eventual success. The other valuable feature of his *Reminiscences* and *Diaries* concerns the quality of the information it contains on numerous aspects of Pacific trading both afloat and ashore. Hearnheim was active in one marginal trading area (Micronesia, including the Gilbert Islands) and a major trading area (the Bismarck Archipelago). He saw many sides of the business and writes both from the perspective of a seafaring trader in the throes of establishing a far-flung trading network and that of a more settled head-station proprietor.

Thus we get brief, though pertinent, glimpses of a range of locales and situations that contribute quite significantly to our sketchy knowledge of nineteenth-century Pacific trade. In a field where sources are often thin on the ground, it is impossible to ignore Hearnheim's writings, if only to provide that telling anecdote or quote to clinch the point being made. The issues touched on by Hearnheim include the problems of ill-health, the vagaries of copra prices, the encouragement of smoking schools among New Guineans to stimulate a barter trade, the need to use cheap native crews on trading vessels, the difficulties of establishing trading stations in remote places, the financial risks inherent in the changeover from sail to steam, and the politics of German annexation as it affected trading interests. There is little ethnographic comment, which indicates a certain cast of mind. By contrast, the frustrations of being a South Sea trader, largely dependent on others at every turn, emerge repeatedly, and the editors are right to point out that the *Diaries* in particular served as a "safety valve," with Hearnheim in the heat of the moment making judgments and comments about rivals, associates, and employees alike that often did less than justice to either party (p. vii). The *Reminiscences* are more restrained, having been written in affluent retirement, but not the three pamphlets attacking the New Guinea Company as a dangerous rival and the costly fiasco it was.

So far so good. Hearnheim's writings are a worthy addition to the meager corpus of published traders' accounts and we can be grateful to Sack and Clark for making this selection available. But the overall value of *South Sea Merchant* is seriously impaired by the lack of editorial guidance provided by Sack and Clark. One can only feel regret that this side of the project was largely sidestepped. The point to be made here is that the Hearnheim manuscripts do not stand by themselves because

Hernsheim takes too much for granted in his *Reminiscences* and leaves too much unexplained in his *Diaries*. The background to episodes and incidents is often passed over in silence by Hernsheim, while individuals come and go without being introduced. Editorial guidance in the form of explanatory footnotes is especially needed but largely lacking. Overall, there are about two footnotes to every seven pages of text. The majority are cross-references to other parts of the book; the remainder explain or elaborate upon a point made in the text, most often by referring the reader to other sources.

What characterizes the editorial footnotes is that they are too few in number and too inconsistently applied to be useful, and that the bibliographic ones refer readers solely to published accounts. Contemporary manuscript accounts--whether emanating from fellow traders, planters, missionaries, naval officers, colonial officials, or travelers--have been completely ignored. This is a remarkable omission and the more so since Dr. Sack is ideally placed to consult this material: he holds a tenured research position at the Australian National University, and so has every opportunity to consult this material on microfilm at the National Library of Australia on the other side of Lake Burley Griffin. It is to be regretted that Sack and Clark show no interest or even awareness of the very material whose use would have made *South Sea Merchant* a worthwhile editorial effort and a more valuable published source as distinct from a deciphering and translation exercise. In its present form the book may be likened to raw material rather than a processed product. It is not good enough for the editors to suggest that explanatory footnoting represents "persistent shows of petty scholarship" (p. vii); in reality Sack and Clark just don't know how to find their way among documentary records.

A few examples will suffice to show the type of editorial assistance that might have been provided. Hernsheim describes the business interests of Adolph Capelle, one of his commercial rivals in Micronesia. It is a brief and largely unrevealing account (p. 32) and nothing as full as the one provided in the diary of J. L. Young (entry for 8 July 1876), which is available on Pacific Manuscript Bureau microfilm (PMB 21). It would have been useful as well as enlivening to Hernsheim's sober prose had Sack and Clark specified the "lapses" attributed to Hernsheim's agent on Kosrae by the resident American missionaries (p. 66). According to the missionaries, the man was "a drunkard, a liar, a thief and sodomite--practicing all these vices had opportunity offered" (Pease and Whitney to Clark, 20 March 1880, ABCFM Papers, National Library of Australia microfilm G4128).

On the same page a Captain Kustel is mentioned by HERNSHEIM simply as "the owner of a small schooner." Sack and Clark provide no further details so Kustel remains one of the many faceless, anonymous figures that pass through *South Sea Merchant*. It is not that there is nothing to be found on this Captain Kustel. The Shipping Intelligence Columns of the *Samoa Times*, 1879-1881, reveal that Kustel was a speculative trader of the old school and that he owned four vessels--the schooners *Pearl*, *Undine*, and *Pannonia*, and the brigantine *Sheet Anchor*. His vessels brought cargoes of timber and provisions from San Francisco and Puget Sound to Apia and Levuka and serviced a network of trading stations in the Caroline Islands. Kustel finally entered the employ of Wightman Bros. in the Gilbert Islands and his opposition to the declaration of a British protectorate in 1892 led to his expulsion from the group (see CO 225/41/24910 and subsequent dispatches).

The final example of lack of editorial guidance concerns the merging of the DHPG with Robertson & HERNSHEIM to form a consolidated German trading monopoly over Micronesia. I, for one, never realized until reading *South Sea Merchant* that personality clashes between those involved complicated the amalgamation of the two firms into the Jaluit-Gesellschaft (p. 106). But again the details provided by HERNSHEIM are sketchy. This is an obvious case where Sack and Clark might have elaborated in an editorial footnote, at least referring readers to the relevant material in the Reichskolonialamt Records (available on microfilm in the National Library of Australia) and preferably adding further details from this source.

In view of the amount of editorial commentary left out, it is sometimes surprising to see what has been included. Sack and Clark may not provide additional information on Adolph Capelle yet they inform readers that Paul Heyse, whom HERNSHEIM mentions in passing, won the Nobel prize for literature in 1911 (p. 7); and while they pass over the formation of the Jaluit-Gesellschaft in silence they note that Helist and Hora, whom HERNSHEIM alludes to fleetingly, were legendary chiefs who led the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England (p. 103). If nothing else these and other such inclusions (see p. 38) reveal a quaintly Eurocentric sense of editorial priorities.

In short the sparing application of editorial guidance reveals a lack of familiarity with HERNSHEIM's Pacific milieu on the editors' part. Where bibliographic detail is provided, it is confined to published sources. Thus the only reference to German warship activity noted by Sack and Clark is the retrospective published account of the 1878 cruise of the *Ariadne* (p. 48). The official accounts of all the other German warships

mentioned by Hensheim, although in the Reichskolonialamt Records, are never noted by Sack and Clark. Nor do the editors appear to be acquainted with the various contemporary published accounts concerning Micronesia.

I put down *South Sea Merchant* with mixed feelings. There was certainly a sense of gratitude to Sack and Clark for their initiative in bringing out this selection of Hensheim's writings. But the predominant feeling was one of disappointment that the necessary editorial work had been largely left undone.