

Francis X. Hezel, S. J., *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885.* Pacific Islands Monograph Series No. 1. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983. Pp. 365, maps, bibliography. \$25.00.

An early European observer once likened the island groups of Micronesia to "a handful of chick-peas flung on a table." In addition to its de-

scriptive power, the analogy made a statement about the area's significance that survived the centuries and carried over into contemporary scholarly research. As tiny specks in a two-million-square-mile expanse of ocean, the islands received little more than a footnote in historians' attempts to tell the story of Western nations' involvement in the Pacific. Among academic communities, only anthropologists found the islands to be of particular interest. While Australian scholars in the 1950s began to write the histories of the islands around them, Micronesia remained a virtual backwater in terms of historical scholarship. Francis X. Hezel, S. J., of the Micronesian Seminar on Truk, has changed that. In writing a history of two of the major Micronesian island groups, the Carolines and the Marshalls, Hezel has filled a major gap in the study of Pacific islands history.

A frequent contributor to scholarly journals, Hezel, in writing this book, expanded on his initial interest in the early contact history of the area. His work took him to all the major research collections from Sydney to Salem. Assistance from a network of colleagues in such places as London, Zürich, Berlin, and Madrid complemented his own prodigious efforts. In 1979 came the forerunner of the present work, *Foreign Ships in Micronesia*, an annotated compendium of ships' contacts with the Caroline and Marshall Islands from 1521 to 1885. The publication of *The First Taint of Civilization* thus marks the culmination of more than ten years of intensive historical investigation.

Hezel focuses on the Europeans and Americans who found their way into Micronesian waters. Magellan's sighting of Guam on March 6, 1521 begins the story. Other Spanish explorers followed, all in search of a Pacific trade route to the fabled, Portuguese-controlled Spice Islands. This early Spanish activity in the Pacific, and Portugal's efforts to thwart it, led to numerous sightings and at least one period of prolonged contact between Europeans and islanders. The Spanish search for *Terra Australis incognita* in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries added more Micronesian islands to the crude, already overcrowded navigation maps.

Other actors entered. The establishment of a British penal colony in Australia and the development of the China trade brought British and American interests into the Pacific. By the end of the eighteenth century three different trade routes intersected Micronesia. The increase in shipping traffic led to the rediscovery of many islands in the Carolines and Marshalls. French and Russian naval expeditions conducted between 1815 and 1840 refined the early Pacific maps and fixed the islands in place. The Carolines and Marshalls were now "known."

The descriptions of d'Urville, von Kotzebue, Duperry, Lütke, and others revealed island cultures on the threshold of change. The tools, clothing, plants, animals, weapons, and other items left by the ships sowed the seeds of that change. After experiencing a less than hospitable reception at Woleai, Lütke, in 1827, wrote: "One could say that the more contact natives have with civilized men, the more corrupt they become." By this measure, argues Hezel, the worst was yet to come.

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Caroline and Marshall Islands experienced the increased visits of American whale-ships, the creation of beachcomber communities, and the arrival of formal trading companies. Violence, social disruption, and disease resulted as Euro-Americans sought to assert their interests against increasingly suspicious, sometimes hostile island worlds. Hezel believes the West offered the solution to the problems it created in the islands. American Protestant missionaries converted many of the islanders to Christianity, protected them against greedy traders and rowdy seamen, offered vaccines against epidemic diseases, and opened schools. British and American men-of-war also promoted stability, first checking the abuses caused by their fellow nationals in the islands and later protecting trading interests against chiefly machinations and local warfare.

Despite the heavy emphasis on Euro-American activities, glimpses of Micronesian islanders do come through. Fr. Juan Cantova, the Jesuit missionary who spearheaded the second major attempt to convert the "Palaos" islands in the 1720s, asked an enraged group of islanders on Ulithi what he had done to incur their anger. "You have come to change our customs," the assembled throng cried out as they prepared to strike him down. Hezel convincingly depicts the Palauans, over a one-hundred-year period, successfully luring foreigners into the complex web of local political rivalries. Similarly adept, by the 1840s Kosraeans evidenced a marked capacity to handle their own trade negotiations with visiting ships. Faced with this assertiveness, the resident whites left the island in 1844, thus bringing a quick end to the beachcombers' days on the island. Finally, the role of Ponapean native teachers, more than any other single factor, accounted for the spread of Christianity west from Ponape to the Mortlocks and the Truk Lagoon.

While the overall contribution of this book to the study of Pacific islands history is indisputable, a number of reservations do arise over certain aspects of the work. The author shows a strong inclination throughout to accept without qualification Western observers' accounts and interpretations of island societies. Given the ethnocentric biases, the limited period of exposure, and the linguistic and cultural barriers involved in

these accounts, the picture of the Caroline and Marshall islanders that emerges is, at best, fuzzy and incomplete. The rich cultural contexts against which islanders framed their responses to Western intrusion are left largely unexamined. The exact nature of change brought to the islands by the West also needs more careful scrutiny. While Hezel is certainly correct in describing the substantial impact the West had on these island cultures, Micronesians themselves played a greater role than mere acculturation and survival. Recent work by some anthropologists suggests the creative incorporation of Western material goods and institutions into resilient, flexible, and very different cultural systems. Finally, later unrest on Ponape and in the Western Carolines hurts the author's assertions that colonialism was an "acquired taste" and that, by 1885, the white man's law ruled supreme.

There is also a flaw in the book's physical format. The book's extensive bibliography attests to Hezel's thoroughness as a scholar, but the system of footnoting, devised by his working editor, is awkward, confusing, and sometimes inconsistent. In the end, however, the merits of this very important, pioneering work shine through. The author has taken a wealth of complex, often disparate material and woven it into a coherent, intelligible, and extremely well-written history of the Caroline and Marshall Islands. The book is required reading for anyone with an interest in the Pacific islands; its publication also heralds a very promising start for the Pacific Islands Monograph Series, a joint effort of the University of Hawaii Press and the Pacific Islands Studies Program at the University of Hawaii.

David Hanlon
University of Hawaii