

Captain Henry Byam Martin, *The Polynesian Journal*, Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1981. Pp. 200, illustrations.

The competition for place in the Pacific led Great Britain and France in the 1830s and 1840s into excursions for dominance in New Zealand, the Marquesas, Tahiti and Hawaii. In rapid succession Great Britain annexed New Zealand in 1840, France established a protectorate over the Marquesas and Tahiti in 1842, and both contended over the status (independence or French protectorate) of the Leeward Islands of the Societies for the next few years. During the same period, the Hawaiian Kingdom was under cession to Great Britain for several months in 1843.

Sometimes the expansionist imperative was advanced by naval officers acting beyond the intentions of their governments. Such was the case in Hawaii when the British government reversed the actions of Lord George Paulet. Other naval officers interpreted their general instructions in accord with their government's objectives. So did Admiral Abel Du Petit-Thouars in the Marquesas and Tahiti. The French cabinet confirmed the protectorates. Moreover, the British government accepted the fact.

In Tahiti, however, Queen Pomare, many of the chiefs, and the mass of the people, resisted the new relationship. They were supported by Europeans and Americans in the islands, and by many of the commanders of British warships that stopped there during the period. By 1844 chiefs and warriors were established in camps in inaccessible valleys in the center of the island. Queen Pomare removed to the Leeward Islands and persisted in appealing to the British to help restore Tahitian sovereignty. In Pape'ete, Captain Armand-Joseph Bruat began the process of establishing the administrative organization of the new French dependency. He was also compelled to consider the continuing diplomatic and military problems of reluctant and resisting foreigners and indigenous peoples. French control was finally solidified by the end of 1846 when the French were led by a Tahitian to a path whereby they could penetrate the native defences and force the surrender of the chiefs. By February of 1847 Pomare had returned to Tahiti and had accepted the protectorate.

Many scholarly studies have examined the period in terms of international rivalry in the Pacific and of European diplomacy. The internal history of French Polynesia has been discussed in detail in Colin Newbury's excellent work, *Tahiti Nui* (1980). For the scholar and student of these small Pacific principalities, a comprehensive study is still dependent upon these works.

Yet how impoverished Hawaiian and Pacific history would be without the private journals and artistic renditions of people who were there. The characterization of people, the observations of culture, the attitudes of the writer, the comments on European political policies, the details about

Polynesian societies, all these rich fragments have increased our understanding.

The present publication by the Peabody Museum of Salem of the Polynesian excerpt of Captain Henry Byam Martin, R.N., accompanied by twenty-one color reproductions of his paintings and many black and white copies of his drawings and sketches, is of this genre. It is a beautifully designed and executed volume and a superb addition to a Hawaiian and Pacific library.

Martin, in command of HMS *Grampus*, was sent to Tahiti by way of Honolulu in the summer of 1846. At the Hawaiian Islands he met Sir George Seymour for further instructions. Two weeks later he left for Tahiti where he remained until the summer of 1847. Thus, he was in the islands during the crucial period of the end of the native war and the acceptance of the protectorate.

What role did Martin play? His instructions appear to have been to protect Great Britain's interests and those of her nationals, to be conciliatory to Governor Bruat and to convince the Tahitians that Great Britain would not support their cause against the French. Perhaps he was also instructed to persuade Pomare to accept the French protectorate. His position was important but not essential to a resolution of the current issues. Thus, while Martin was a participant he was also an observer and an emissary of peace and friendliness rather than an activist enforcing policy.

Could it be, then, that he was the perfect observer, the objective, unprejudiced narrator? Hardly! Captain Martin was an example of the man confident of his and his culture's preeminence. His opinion of indigenous peoples and their cultures was filtered through his assumption of the superiority of the British upper class. Polynesian clothes, food, behavior, dance, and customs he considered barbaric and gross. His portraiture of Hawaiian and Tahitian leaders was done as caricature to point out their savage or comic appearance. For the seeker of glowing positive descriptions of Polynesian societies Martin's journal is not the depository.

Yet paradoxically Martin achieved a certain objectivity just because of the narrowness of his vision. For if he was critical of indigenous peoples, he was also captious about the French, English and Americans who did not meet his standards of class and culture. He found missionaries, merchants and bureaucrats lacking in grace and integrity. Few were gentle people to him.

The reader, then, is able to absorb the text and search the illustrations for information to use as part of a broad examination of Hawaii and the Pacific. With this in mind the work has much to offer. The most important material can be found in the illustrations. Clothes, tattoos, houses,

canoes, places, all add to the collection of ethnographic material identifying cultural change and continuity.

Second, as a contemporary recorder, Martin through his descriptions and his drawings delineated the moment and its events, the place and its vitality. His report of his tours framed the specific places in that time. The Tahitians in canoes, the woman with "murder" tattooed across her face and the Tahitians puffing on their pipes, pictured a lively culture. His sketch of a woman dancing had her moving across the paper in vibrant action.

Third, the imperialist point of view of the author presaged the ultimate political disposition of Pacific groups. His view of the area was in terms of spheres of influence, dominance and control by Britain, France or the United States. In casual comments he seemed to exemplify the attitude which would result in the policies which would eventually engulf the islands.

Finally, Martin's impressions and factual entries added one more source to the history of the time. From him we learn the name of the Tahitian who led the French against his people. His characterization of Pomare, however limited by his prejudices, was at least immediate and authentic.

Martin was no romantic, falling on the thorns of life and bleeding over the fate of a culture and its people. Rarely was he caught by the beauty of his surroundings, according to the journal entries. But look again at the village scenes where distance diluted personality. Here Martin was able to render great detail of place. Look particularly at the panoramic views of Pape'ete, Borabora and Mo'orea. There emerges from these scenes a sense of peace, haunting beauty, quiet charm and exotic beings. Perhaps Martin's edition was made possible after a collection of over one hundred of his paintings and drawings of Polynesia was found in a family home in England. His journal was located in the British Library. A selection of the art and an excerpt from the journal were put together effectively by Edward Dodd. Other than a couple of omissions, the notes are adequate and placed unobtrusively at the end of the work. Perhaps it would have been helpful if Martin's instructions had been included, and more interesting if the collection of paintings and drawings had been described more fully in the introduction. But no matter. The work is a fine publication.

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