

Edwin N. Ferdon, *Early Tahiti As The Explorers Saw It, 1767-1797*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1981. Pp. 371. Illustrations, bibliography. \$24.95.

It is important that students of political and social change in the Pacific or elsewhere have accurate synchronic "base-line" studies of indigenous communities on the eve of the momentous upheavals that marked their "discovery" by the outside world. Reconstructions have to be judged on their own merits, and there are intrinsic difficulties in assembling the partial evidence left by explorers. Those difficulties are not really discussed in this text, so one must assume that a total working model has been aimed at, whatever the sources used.

The incompleteness of those sources has to be noted, therefore. An analysis of the evidence for reconstructing Tahitian society which omits any reference to the journal of James Morrison, or the documentation edited by Teuira Henry, starts with a severe disadvantage which is compounded by a strange absence of the archaeological contribution of Jose Garanger (and others) whose work has appeared in the *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* and elsewhere.

Despite the omissions, the author has written a text solidly based on primary published sources and divided it into sections dealing with political organization, religion, daily life, material exchanges, ritual, agricultural and marine production, warfare and a brief section on the results of European importations of artifacts, crops and livestock. The organization of the material is similar to Douglas Oliver's *Ancient Tahitian Society*, without the richness of the documentation and the commentary. Many students will doubtless take refuge in the shorter text.

On the whole, they will find an honest job of condensation, particularly in those areas of material culture where observations were many and the evidence abundant. There is also a salutary section on limits to Tahitian navigational techniques and knowledge (derived from "waif voyagers" p. 248) which is certain to raise eyebrows and should provide a stimulating topic for postgraduate essays and seminars.

Where the evidence is thin or controversial, however, as in the section on political and kinship terminology, no guidelines are offered to warn readers of the difficulties of "reconstructing" a society for which elementary anthropological kinship data are lacking and whose tribal and territorial divisions are far from clear (pp. 28-30). One result of the lack of familiarity with primary sources is the erroneous definition of an *'iataoi* (p. 34) limited to the districts of the Tairapu Peninsula. The topographical map on page twenty-nine offers no assistance to the student confronted with the tricky problem of tribal and district nomenclature, or even the location of the *marae* described from the voyagers and Kenneth Emory's *Stone Remains in the Society Islands*, and no explanation is forthcoming in the rest of the text. There is a good bibliography, however, for other island groups, especially Easter Island sites.

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