
REVIEWS

Helen Delpar, ed., *The Discoverers: An Encyclopedia of Explorers and Exploration*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980. Pp. viii, 471, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

For once the flier rather understates: there are nearer 300 than 200 illustrations, and the "200 articles" are about 275. Some fifty of these deal with major regions or themes such as the exploration of the oceans or of space. As signs of the times, these include "Africa: Contribution of Non-Europeans" and "Women in Travel and Exploration;" both are rather hard put to it to round up enough notables, though they do introduce some engaging personalities--Jeanne Baret, who sailed with Bougainville, is in, but not Isabel Barreto, the first known woman to cross the Pacific both ways, and that in the sixteenth century. But not a nice lady.

The book is well produced: good typography with very few misprints indeed, and a binding which seems stout enough for a volume of this size. By and large, the text is remarkably readable. Bibliographies are brief but sound, except that one wonders why the only reference for Dezhnev is to Golder, whose account is a demolition job, now itself demolished by R. H. Fisher. The maps, however, are too few, too commonplace in design, and too limited in scope. The index is good.

As for the pictures, most are lively and some aesthetically pleasing; but their sources are not given and it is not made clear, as in a reference work it should be, that many are the work of artists far more anxious to be picturesque than accurate. Properly explained, this could be a bonus, throwing light on the changing European images of exotic places or events; but with no explanation at all, the high incidence of anachronism could confuse the earnest but uninitiated student. Thus we find La Salle (1643-87) apparently in Napoleonic Hussar kit, looking like Conan Doyle's Brigadier Gerard; Cortés and Columbus each shown in three distinct costumes, two of each set being fancy dress; an authentic portrait, austere and spare, of Henry of Portugal, and another depicting him as a jovial soldier of fortune of about two centuries later on; and as climax an Indian village in Mississippi properly bastioned and defending itself with 30 cannon--in 1541! But one can forgive even Columbus's wildly unstable shipping for the sake of St Brendan's delightful whale (or is he an Orc?), serving at once as dry dock and chapel.

Turning to content, there are very reasonable allocations of space to the continents and the chronological surveys, and to such major topics as the Northeast and Northwest Passages, or Muslim and Norse exploration. But there is an odd imbalance in the personal entries, which show a heavy Muscovite bias. Altogether thirty-seven out of the 224 or so individually entered names are those of Russians or men in Russian service; of the forty-six Polar explorers listed, twenty-three worked only in Russian waters from Okhotsk to Alaska. Fraser, Mackenzie, Vancouver, and Shelekhov have separate entries, yet in "Northwestern America," which extends as far south as the Columbia, room is found only for the last-named, an unscrupulous company promoter whose " 'discoveries' (he was to be called the Russian Columbus) were minimal."

The reviewer is no Russophobe, and has warm memories of a month with the geographers of Moscow's Lomonosov University. But about half of those on the Russian list added little to geographical knowledge, and some seem less important than even the minimal Shelekhov--Basargin, for instance, simply charted parts of the Caspian in 1819-31, hardly epoch-making work. The inclusion of such obscurely illustrious people would not matter were it not for those crowded out: such names (to cite only non-Pacific explorers) as Bouvet, Foxe, Garcés, Garcia, James, Jenkinson, Kerguelen, Kingsley (Mary), Kino, Pinto (Serpa, not Fernão Mendes!), Pond, Raleigh. But, though both are well discussed in "Natural History Exploration," the most spectacular omissions are those of Banks, for fifty years the presiding genius of travellers in many parts, and the greatest of all scientific travellers--Humboldt.

On the all-important matter of accuracy, there can be little serious complaint. Every specialist will, of course, find a number of places where emphasis or expression might be queried, but most of these are minor, and there seem very few definite errors of fact. Unluckily, some relate to the Pacific.

The main Pacific article runs to nine pages, which is fair enough, and Australia with about the same space perhaps gets rather more than its share; more might have been said of *Terra Australis* and Polynesia--though "Maritime Exploration" does have a well-phrased tribute to the "exemplary maritime enterprise that went unchallenged in the Pacific until Magellan. . . ." But it is really astonishing that there is no separate treatment of such men as Freycinet, Loaysa, Saavedra, Mendaña, Quiros, Torres, Le Maire, Roggeveen, while (not to cite any more Russians) Beechey and Belcher have this honor.

The general article on the Pacific is disappointing. As an outline of the process by which the lineaments of the great Ocean were placed on

the charts, it is clear and reasonably balanced--but marred by some curious errors. Magellan may have sighted Caroline Island, but not "an island in the Carolines;" Tasman did not land in New Zealand; the references to Dampier's books are inaccurate; Byron's instructions seem completely misunderstood; neither Wallis nor Cartaret had chronometers.

However, with some tidying-up this could be made into a very satisfactory article, and the balance is to some extent redressed by the articles on individual Pacific explorers. Drake and Dumont d'Urville seem treated generously in comparison with say Bougainville, who has only marginally more space than Daniel Boone; Barry Gough on Cook has an adequate map and gives a very good account but, although one sees what is meant, surely Europe did not have to wait for Cook to prove that "long-distance voyaging by sea was practical and could be healthy." Bouvet, for instance, sailed from France to the sub-Antarctic and back nonstop, and lost one cabin-boy, washed overboard. One could wish that Magellan had received some of the space allotted to his immediate predecessor the legendary Prince Madoc; what we have is little more than a bare outline of his exploit with no discussion of the significance of this greatest of all single voyages. Tasman has only half a page, a clear account except that it is pointless to refer to "a place of the same name" as Straten Landt unless one indicates where that place is; the more so as there is no article on Le Maire, though he is of course in the index. Considering the relegation to the general Pacific article of the great sixteenth-century Spaniards, it is a welcome surprise that one of them makes it to a separate entry--Urdaleta. The rear is brought up by Vancouver and Wilkes; in both cases, space limitations lead perforce to rather too much simplification.

Of course there is no such thing as a perfect book, least of all a book of reference, and no reference can satisfy all its potential users. Pacific historians may well feel that their field--and it is hardly a small one!--does not receive its due in this book; nevertheless, despite the imperfections noted, *The Discoverers* as a whole is at once instructive and delightful reading. As prices go nowadays, the volume is remarkably inexpensive; certainly for school and college libraries; but even for the home, such a compendium of information, with many lively sidelights on the quirks of personality and social history, would be a good buy.

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