

Frederick W. Beechey. *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Bering's Straits*. 2 vols. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968. Pp. 924, maps. \$50.75. (First published in London in 1831).

Barry M. Gough, ed. *To the Pacific and Arctic with Beechey. The Journal of Lieutenant George Peard of H.M.S. Blossom 1825-28*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973. Pp. x, 272, maps, plates. £11.00 (US \$32.50).

On 19 May 1825 the *H.M.S. Blossom*, captained by Frederick W. Beechey with First Lieutenant George Peard aboard, sailed from the British naval base at Spithead for a three year cruise in the Pacific Ocean. The British Admiralty had great hopes for the voyage: it instructed Beechey to help in the search for a Northwest Passage and to correct faulty hydrographic surveys of the Pacific. The *Blossom's* voyage was also designed to indicate to the expansion-minded nations of Russia and the United States that Great Britain would protect its interests in the Pacific Northwest.

The journals kept by Beechey and Peard chronicle the successes and failures of the *Blossom's* voyage. Most aggravating of the failures was the inability to breach the Northwest Passage--delays due to ice and to missed rendezvous with the land expedition led by Sir John Franklin in the Bering Strait frustrated this aspect of the *Blossom's* mission. The hydrographic surveys, however, proved to be quite successful: extensive revisions of older surveys were made and numerous new charts plotted, all of which aided the British Navy in subsequent years. When the *Blossom* returned to England, several informative volumes on the natural history of the Pacific islands were published; these were later used to good advantage by the American scientists who sailed under Charles Wilkes on the United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842). Whether the presence of the *H.M.S. Blossom* had any effect on Russian or US expansion is unknown; indeed, it may be that these two nations took no notice of the *Blossom's* activities. Nonetheless, for the maritime historian, these journals provide insight into Great Britain's imperial ambitions and reveal the numerous problems that plagued nineteenth century exploration.

The *Blossom's* official duties, however, are not the only facet of these journals. In any memoir, some of the author's personality will manifest itself in the kinds of activities he describes, the language and imagery he uses, and, if he is visiting a different culture, his perceptions of those differences. Thus one of the most intriguing aspects of these journals is the reactions of Beechey and Peard to the same event. One such shared experience was the performance of Polynesian dances that they viewed in Tahiti and Hawaii.

Peard was shocked by what he perceived to be the dancers' lasciviousness. Although he did not close his eyes, his moral superiority was aroused by the "disgusting, the revolting gestures of both men and women." On another occasion, Peard faithfully described the female dancers' costumes (or lack of them), noting that the women "could not be said to dance and their postures were indecent in the extreme." (pp. 121 and 188)

Commodore Beechey had a few complaints about the performances, but they were not in the same vein as Peard's. In contrast to his prudish First Lieutenant, Beechey was irritated by the false modesty of the dancers' costumes: "the dance . . . was spoiled by a mistaken refinement, which prevented [the dancers] from appearing, as formerly, with no other dress than a covering to the hips . . ." A purist, the Commodore felt that the "frilly chemises" now worn, "far from taking away the appearance of indecency . . . at once gave the performance a stamp of indelicacy." (II, 107)

As these two different orientations might suggest, the two British naval officers differed greatly in their reaction to the work of the British and American missionaries in the Pacific. Peard was favorable to their efforts: for instance, he applauded the Sandwich Island Mission's attempts to combat the Hawaiians' "inordinate love of Spirituous liquors." He also approved of the missionaries' attempts to restrain "the wantonness" of the Hawaiian women, but he doubted that these efforts would be successful. (p. 191)

Beechey, on the other hand, challenged the American missionaries on those very points, claiming that these religious enthusiasts were interfering with Hawaiian culture. Further, he wrote that the mission had succeeded too well in spiritual matters: because of scriptural laws and the demands of education on the Hawaiians' time, they were no longer reliable workers. Commodore Beechey was not entirely consistent in his charges of cultural interference. He noted with pride, for example, that the Hawaiian King "was fully aware of the superiority of the Europeans." This perception colored Beechey's assessment of Honolulu, which he described as a "European colony;" he thereby implicitly ignored Hawaiian sovereignty as did so many Europeans and Americans who sailed around Cape Horn. (II, 91 and 104)

As these incidents suggest, neither Peard nor Beechey are particularly endearing men--evidence of their personal biases and prejudices, their culture's ambitions and ethnocentricity, are scattered throughout the texts. But one need not like these men to learn from them: the books will be invaluable to historians and anthropologists of the Pacific who focus on the interaction between the European and indigenous island cultures. The

republication of these volumes, then, provides the reader with more than just a dry record of a scientific expedition.

Despite the overall excellence of these journals, I have a few complaints. First, the prices of these works are prohibitive. This is particularly true of the Beechey volumes, and with the recent cut-backs in university budgets, even many libraries may not be able to afford to purchase the journal; of course, there is little one can do about inflated costs, but the problem is irritating nevertheless. A more scholarly complaint involves the lack of an editorial introduction and/or an index to Beechey's narrative. This omission makes it difficult for the reader to locate important aspects of the *Blossom's* voyage and to identify properly the various people who figure in the journal. Fortunately, this deficit is offset by Barry M. Gough's excellent introduction to George Peard's journal. Gough provides detailed background to the *Blossom's* voyage, supplies a coherent and convincing summary of its goals, and gives biographical sketches of Peard and Beechey and others. In short, he places the voyage in historical perspective. Anyone wishing to examine the *Blossom's* activities should start by reading Gough's comments.

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