

Noel Rutherford, ed. *Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. 297, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$36.00.

In spite of all the work of Pacific historians since the 1960s, there are still few published histories of islands or island groups. This is because these historians, while generally claiming to be "island oriented," have tended to concentrate on certain themes, institutions, and aspects of island history. Fortunately, the Tongan Islands can now claim to be among the exceptions to this generalization. *Friendly Islands* is an excellent complement to two recent studies: Sione Lātūkefu's *Church and State in Tonga* and Rutherford's own *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*. Together these three books provide as good an introduction to the study of any one Pacific island as one is likely to get for a long time yet.

Nevertheless, it is still symptomatic of the state of Pacific islands history that no one practitioner has felt confident enough to write a history of Tonga by himself or herself. Hence, *Friendly Islands* consists of thirteen essays or chapters, each written by an acknowledged authority, arranged in rough chronological order from prehistoric times to the present day. Rutherford has taken pains to avoid organizing a straight "European" history. For example, the book begins with a Tongan creation myth, and Jens Poulsen's excellent survey of Tongan archaeology is balanced by some Tongan views of their prehistory as handed down in oral tradition. But such neat juxtaposition is not possible for most of the remaining chapters. So enter the academic experts who give fine examples of their scholarship but, at the same time, illustrate the extent to which modern Pacific history is still very much topic oriented. In this case, the span of Tongan history since the seventeenth century is, for the most part, compartmentalized, basically according to the changing nature of European presence in Tonga. After the prehistory chapters, there is one on European explorers (Robert Langdon), one on early European visitors (Niel Gunson), two on missionaries (Sione Lātūkefu and Hugh Laracy), another on Tupou I and Shirley Baker (Rutherford) and so on.

Given the nature of current research on Tonga, it would be difficult to write a respectable history of these islands in any very different way. Nevertheless, this topic approach can have its limitations. The various, highly specialized interests of academics can lead to "tunnel vision" which encourages an (unconscious) ethnocentrism--in approach if not in actual content--and becomes an obstacle to a more synthetic view of the history of an island. This is not to suggest that these authors have just concentrated on various European initiatives, indeed most have bent over backwards to place their characters firmly in a Tongan milieu. And in any

case, each author was presumably writing to a fairly circumscribed editorial brief. But the underlying philosophical difficulties remain. For example, was it necessary to have two quite separate chapters--one on the Wesleyans, another on the Catholics--for the missionary section?

In another way too, this book illustrates a feature of modern Pacific islands history: namely, that it has its main interest in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, an interest which is (to its credit) unashamedly Romantic, dealing with whalers and whores, coconuts and kings, Bibles and booze. The twentieth century Pacific has not attracted many historians, and somehow *Friendly Islands* loses momentum in the years after 1900 (and little more than one-third of the book is devoted to them).

On the whole, Rutherford's attempt to collate the results of recent research on Tonga must be applauded. The book brings together a wide range of material in a scholarly though very readable way. Those teaching Pacific history to undergraduates will find this book extremely useful. If only there were similar studies of Tahiti, Fiji, Samoa, and almost all of the other islands and island groups in the Pacific.

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