Robert Langdon, *The Lost Caravel Re-explored.* Canberra: Brolga Press, 1988. Pp. x, 229, illustrations, bibliography, index. US$35.00 hardcover. US$25.00 paperback.

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The origins, evolution, and dispersals of the various peoples of the earth remain among the most fascinating puzzles that a scholar or sleuth can

face. Whether we are talking about the ancient origins of the North American Indian, the progresses of the lost tribes of Israel, or the unique developments of the Australian aborginal peoples, despite considerable advances in scholarship we are still grasping at straws. As a young high school lad I became enchanted with Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon Tiki* (then in first edition) and the possibilities of American origins of South Pacific peoples; as a history professor I remain equally enchanted with works such as Nigel Davies's *Voyagers to the New World.* We need the likes of Heyerdahl, Davies, and Langdon to ask the questions, to get us thinking, to probe beneath our skins of complacent empiricism (which is another legacy of the same eighteenth century on which Langdon dwells so much for his evidence).

Providing satisfactory and convincing explanations is an altogether different matter than posing these questions. Langdon postulates--indeed re-postulates, because he really has not changed his views from the first edition of this work, *The Lost Caravel,* published in 1975, and here expanded--that many Polynesian peoples including the Maoris owe their origin to or are products of sexual unions between Spanish castaways of the Spanish caravel *San Lesmes,* which disappeared in the eastern South Pacific in 1526, and prehistoric native persons living throughout this vast waste of islands and waters stretching from Easter Island to the Tasman Sea. I am not convinced that mixed-blood unions could have so reshaped island populations as different as Easter Islanders, Tongans, and Maoris--to list but three--in the ten generations between the wreck of the caravel and the voyages of Samuel Wallis, John Byron, James Cook, and a number of other European navigators including Roggeveen, Bougainville, and La Perouse. I should have thought that would have taken millennia or more,

Langdon's premise that "most schools and universities, especially in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, still teach the doctrine that the myriad islands of the Pacific *were* virtually sealed off from outside influences until the era of Captain Cook" (p. vii) may be true, But tell this not in Portugal, Spain, and Holland, and vouch it not among the scholars of ancient Chinese voyages or among the natives of Hawaii or Fiji. If Cook's voyages "opened" the Pacific to the European world, it is still true that the Pacific was already known to the Pacific peoples of that era. As we who teach North American and comparative Commonwealth native studies are wont to remind our students: "Columbus may have discovered America, but the natives knew it was there all along,"

Langdon's book is a rapid ramble through a host of subthemes. A few of these that attracted my attention are: the French recovery of the four

cannon of Amanu (1929-1969); the early Spanish history of trans-Pacific voyaging (of which "the lost caravel" constitutes one chapter); the European discoveries of some paler-skinned Pacific peoples (which comprises a fairly hefty portion of this work); and, last, the attempted analysis of the origins of the Maoris (and a critique of Andrew Sharp's thesis that Pacific Islanders had limits of effective navigability). Whatever the merits of Sharp's hypothesis, can we be expected to believe that "the men of the *San Lesmes* . . . had ultimately been responsible for the creation of what is now called the Maori language . . . and within New Zealand their own language or languages had died with them, leaving but the merest trace" (p. 257)? It puzzles this reader that Langdon can speak with such authority in an area of research where the evidence is so scanty, so fragile. "Trying to explain the inexplicable in Polynesia," writes Langdon in his penultimate paragraph, "has been something of an industry for many years." Surely it will be so in the future, and it is not possible for one book--no matter how convincing--to reshape the received to the extent that its revelations will dramatically alter the totality of scholarship. That aside, Langdon's argument that present-day Polynesians are really part European will find little credence among those who take more seriously anthropological and ethnological studies or who recount their true native origins by the ancient validation of the oral tradition. And they will take more comfort in the revelations of cross-cultural studies of the order of K. Howe's and Greg Dening's that endeavor to see Pacific history and Pacific peoples from the other side of the beach and sustain the argument that despite fatal impacts of one sort or another, native societies and languages remain where previously they were thought to have been changed beyond recognition or obliterated altogether. And one more thing: Tonga lies northeast, not northwest, of New Zealand.