
REVIEW

Nicholas Thomas et al., eds. *Artefacts of Encounter: Cook's Voyages, Colonial Collecting, and Museum Histories*. Nicholas Thomas, Julie Adams, Billie Lythberg, Maia Nuku, and Amiria Salmond, eds. Photographs by Gwil Owen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press in association with the University of Otago Press, 2017. Pp. 348. ISBN 978-0824859350. US\$68.00 hardcover. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography.

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ARTEFACTS OF ENCOUNTER IS A LAVISHLY ILLUSTRATED COMPILATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS, captions, and essays relating to museum pieces whose provenance can be traced to one of Captain James Cook's three Pacific voyages between 1768 and 1779. In the past, intensive study of such artifacts was largely limited to anthropologists, who pursued comparative studies of indigenous technologies and styles. Contributors to the book have embraced a broader approach, interpreting collections in a cross-disciplinary way informed by art history, science, histories of travel, anthropology, and the indigenous knowledge of Pacific Islanders. The publication grew out of two closely related research projects, "Artefacts of Encounter" and "Pacific Presences," at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) at the University of Cambridge. Team members, often accompanied by islander artists and coresearchers, visited many museums in Great Britain and elsewhere, but the book focuses mainly on the "exceptionally rich" and "previously underreported" (12) MAA collections.

Indigenous artifacts can elucidate many aspects of social relations, religious beliefs, the aesthetics of artistic production and appreciation, and the

dynamics of exchange. This is especially true when artifacts and their contexts are considered through the perspectives of individuals with roots in the cultures and historical traditions being studied; on the MAA projects, indigenous informants worked closely with scholars of European descent. An introduction to the book by Julie Adams and Nicholas Thomas explains that the projects were inspired by the idea that art and artifacts “are made up of materialized human intentions” and “want activation” (20). An essay by Amiria Salmond and Thomas describes the collections in general terms and summarizes how they were accumulated. “Relating to, and through, Polynesian Collections,” by Billie Lythberg, Maia Nuku, and Salmond, explores links between historical Pacific artifacts and how they are presently perceived. Departing from the book’s main focus on the acquisition and meaning of indigenous objects, Simon Schaffer’s essay, “Artificial Curiosities and Travelling Instruments,” speculates about the role played by scientific instruments on Pacific expeditions: “[I]nstruments are understood as mediators between users and the world; and [they establish] knowledge communities, in which instruments mediate between people, between their different users. They are themselves . . . artefacts of encounter” (56).

The book is well provided with color photographs of artifacts, accompanied by commentaries situating each object in its historical and ethnographic context. Artifacts with Cook-voyage provenance include materials acquired from many places around the Pacific Rim, but the book deals mainly with acquisitions from the Pacific Islands. Thoughtful viewpoints are advanced on such topics as tattooing devices from Tahiti (96–97); Tongan fly whisks and headrests (148–59); elaborately carved Melanesian clubs (160–63); and sundry artifacts from the Sandwich Islands (Hawai‘i), ranging from feather helmets to fishhooks, which the English found to be “superior” to their own (178–85). Feather-god images, ornaments, sculptures, cloaks, weapons, fish-skin drums, and other artifacts are loaded with “unique historical as well as artistic significance” (17) when their acquisition can be traced to a particular cross-cultural encounter or even to a specific date and location.

The book is best read in conjunction with Cook’s *Journals*, available in several editions. Cook was an insightful observer but had little formal education, having been at sea from a very early age. The following characteristic excerpts (see the Penguin Classics edition of the *Journals*, pp. 265, 309, and 343, respectively) preserve his idiosyncratic punctuation and spelling:

New Zealand (April 7–9, 1773): When we took leave of them the Chief presented me with a piece of Cloth and some other trifles and immediately after expressed a desire for one of our Boat Cloaks, I took the hint and ordered one to be made for him of red Baize as soon as I

came on board. . . . I presented the Chief with the Cloak with which he seemed well pleased and took his Patta-pattou from his girdle and gave it to me. . . .

Tonga (October 8, 1773): [A]t this time a Canoe conducted by four Men came along side with one of those drums already mentioned on which one man kept continually beating thinking no doubt that we should be charm'd with his musick. I gave them a piece of Cloth and a Nail for their Drum. . . .

The Marquesas (April 9, 1774): Towards Noon a chief of some consequence, attended by a great number of people, came down to us, I made him a present of Nails and Several other Articles and in return he gave me some of his ornaments, after these Mutual exchanges a good under Standing Seemed to be settled between us and them so that we got by exchanges as much fruit as Loaded two boats. . . .

How did Pacific Islanders understand the inquisitive strangers who appeared on their horizons and landed on their beaches with iron nails and hatchets, much-coveted red feathers, and other strategically chosen objects to exchange for fresh fruit, pigs, baskets of fish, and indigenous artifacts? Although it is possible to draw some inferences about islander attitudes from historical texts (e.g., ship's logs, diaries, and reports) and artwork produced by Europeans (such as William Hodges), the artifacts gathered during early voyages of exploration are the only primary evidence from the islanders' side of such cross-cultural encounters. Extant artifacts open windows on indigenous orientations and adjustments to change, suggesting insights (and raising questions for further investigation) about what native populations may have wanted to achieve from their contact with explorers.

Some high-status objects offered to Cook and his men, for example, may have been intended "to integrate the British into carefully woven networks of sociability" (62). Hand-twined cloaks, plaited mats, headdresses composed of interwoven human hair, etc., reveal things about the technology and aesthetics of indigenous crafts as well as "alternate ways of being" (55). Some artifacts traded to the English or bestowed as gifts seem to have been of special significance for the people who made them, imbued with ancestral potency "critical [for] managing and negotiating the complex flux of relationships both within and beyond island-based kinship networks" (54). Tongan *ngatu* (layered bark cloth), for instance, was said to make time visible "while keeping the political

world anchored in kinship” (48). For many islanders, the objects collected by Cook and others possessed great spiritual power as “generators of relationships, encapsulat[ions] of time, and manipulators of space: the very stuff of life itself” (55). The English, on the other hand, regarded Pacific artifacts as collectible curiosities, tangible evidence of the worlds they had visited, “discovered,” or claimed for King George. Some expected to advance geographic and ethnographic knowledge; others hoped merely to turn a profit at the conclusion of the voyage.

Antiquities and exotic rarities had been of interest to intellectually curious individuals in Europe for centuries, but it was in the wake of Cook’s voyages that “ethnographic collecting gained momentum and became a dedicated pursuit” (11). Objects were acquired and sold by dealers, assembled in collections, illustrated in publications, and publicly displayed. On voyages of exploration as well as in centers of European thought, “collectors and scientists were thinking anthropologically in new ways,” struggling to understand “the singular problems of human variety that the voyage observations raised . . .” (18).

Cook was a complicated personality who cared (in his own way) about the welfare of Pacific Islanders but had them fired upon with musket balls and cannon shot when he anticipated danger, when essential tools were stolen, or when he was otherwise rankled by double-dealing or disrespect. The well-intentioned restrictions he placed on his men were often impossible to enforce. Sailors took advantage of casual attitudes toward sex and slipped away to consort with Polynesian women, leaving behind a legacy of venereal disease in places not previously affected. On some occasions, crew members deserted to conceal themselves with native women to whom they had formed an attachment—Cook had them forcibly returned by threatening retaliations on the whole native community. At times, the captain had to forbid his crew from trading away important items of nautical gear for indigenous objects they hoped to sell after returning to England.

Several illustrated essays explain the work of twenty-first-century indigenous artists in the context of Pacific cultures. John Pule’s meditation, “The Splendid Land,” describes his strikingly black Oceanic paintings as an attempt to speak out about exploration and violence in Pacific history and disparate worlds “in various stages of change” (124). Nick Thomas’s commentary on the photography of Mark Adams calls attention to “the contradictory energies of empire that . . . dispossess and marginalize native peoples” while providing them with opportunities “to create and showcase their culture . . . in museum environments . . .” (69). A principal goal of the MAA projects was to allow Pacific Islanders, by studying artifacts preserved in the museum, to acquire the craftsmanship and absorb the indigenous knowledge “manifested” (44) in them. Islanders involved with the projects typically looked at the museum’s collections not “as fragments

of a world long past,” but rather as “vectors of still-active ancestral agency” and “even as living ancestors” (44).

A foundational eighteenth-century inventory is reproduced in facsimile and transcription as an appendix (320–25): “Weapons, Utensils and Manufactures of various kinds collected by Cap’n Cook of His Maj. Ship the Endeavor in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, & 1771, in the new-discovered South Sea Islands & New Zealand, (the inhabitants of which were totally unacquainted with the use of Metals, & had never had intercourse with any European Nation)—and given to Trinity College by Ld. Sandwich Oct 1771.” Entries include catalog numbers, short descriptive notes, and geographical provenance (e.g., the following entry for an implement from Tahiti: “No. 31, Tools with which they make black marks on their bodies, Otaheite”). Maps showing the routes taken by Cook and a glossary of unfamiliar words would have been a welcome convenience for many readers—the book’s one defect is that they have not been included. Fortunately, most of the indigenous terms used are clearly defined in captions or commentaries, and maps of Cook’s itineraries appear in easily obtained editions of his journals.

This visually appealing volume will be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of anyone with a special interest in Pacific history and culture; and it is destined to be of particular significance to islanders as a record of their ancestors’ activities and a guide for perpetuating and/or restoring cultural traditions. “We hope,” contributors suggest, “that the research we document here regarding works of the ancestors . . . will be valuable today for their creators’ descendants . . .” (12). The book should likewise serve the worthwhile purpose of introducing those less acquainted with the subject to the beauty and intrigue of Pacific art and artifacts.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Cook, James. *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, ed. J.C. Beaglehole, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Published for the Hakluyt Society at Cambridge University Press, 1955–74). This impressively thorough, but hard to find, set comprises the complete journals with detailed notes.
- Cook, James. *The Journals*, ed. Philip Edwards (London: Penguin Classics, 2003). This one-volume edition consists of essential selections from the Hakluyt Society edition with introductory material, notes, maps, a glossary, and succinct summaries of omitted passages.
- Hodges, William. *William Hodges, 1744–1797: The Art of Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Hodges was a talented artist, who accompanied Cook’s second voyage to the South Pacific. His carefully detailed paintings are a valuable ethnographic and historical record.

- Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift* (Chicago: HAU Books, 2016). This anthropological essay, translated from French (first published in 1924), is a classic treatment of the “form and sense of exchange” among indigenous groups, with particular emphasis on Oceania.
- Salmond, Anne. *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook’s Encounters in the South Seas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
- Thomas, Nicholas. *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).