According to Christopher Balme, colonial discourse analysis is preoccupied with the written and iconographic archive at the expense of the performative. Nowhere does this bias toward the textual have more distorting effect than in the study of Pacific cross-cultural encounter, which has involved, from its advent in the European landfalls of the late 18th century, the theatricalisation of contact through the representational medium of the body. Two and a half centuries later, argues Balme, the Pacific continues to be more closely associated with performance than any other region in the world. *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounter in the South Seas* sees Balme, an authority on postcolonial theatre, expand his usual field of reference—contemporary dramaturgy—to include forms of transnational cultural production—such as scenes of first contact, missionary interventions in indigenous religious practices, and the transformation of traditional modes of performance through the structures of cultural nationalism and international tourism—that are normally the preserve of anthropological, ethnographic and sociological analysis.

Balme lays out the theoretical underpinnings of his argument in the short, lucid introduction that prefaces eight case-study analyses. Here he defines theatricality “primarily as a perceptual category” (p.3) engaged by social actors attempting to delimit authentic from inauthentic forms of behaviour. “Theatrical apprehension” is a “framing strategy” (p.5) whereby certain actions are recognised as performances by their viewer the better to cordon off other actions from the same charge. This epistemological distinction between pretended and real actions and responses is placed under extreme tension in the reciprocal performances required by Pacific encounters where agents of indigenous and alien cultures frequently demonstrated their difference by way of dumbshow and mimicry. “The history of cross-cultural contact in the Pacific,” writes Balme, “is thus framed in an ineluctable and ultimately irresolvable tension between the search for, and experience of, traditional authenticity and its experience and representation within the perceptual frame of theatricality” (p.6). This point is best demonstrated in his chapter-length discussion of early European observation of Polynesian sexuality, which is registered simultaneously as the real mark of cultural difference and an enacted performance put on for the benefit of the visitors, most disturbingly in public. Of doubtful sincerity, this overt theatricalisation of sexuality, which quickly becomes cognate with the European experience of the Pacific, troubles the empiricist premises that otherwise underwrite the enlightenment’s expansionist project and the nascent forms of ethnography it engaged.
Exported back to the metropolitan stage, subsequent Pacific performances continue to destabilise the distinction between authentic and inauthentic, sincere and insincere, categorical distinctions on which 18th century discourses of sensibility depend, not least to support emergent understandings of the public sphere as a locus of rational thought and action. In one of the most interesting chapters in the book, Balme recounts how the staging of narratives set in the South Seas transformed numerous 18th century European stage-genres such as opera and pantomime by bringing into play new technologies of stagecraft in the service of anthropological realism. Although the melodramatic scenarios were stock-in-trade, the drive for representational fidelity demanded *mise-en-scènes* of extraordinary formal complexity that took their inspiration from the published accounts of Cook’s voyages. In the pantomime *Omai, or a Trip around the World*, “autochthonous performance forms (songs, dances, costumes) culminating in a spectacular procession of newly discovered Pacific peoples are replicated on stage in a quasi-ethnographic manner within the unlikely dramaturgical framework of a harlequinade” (p.57). Similarly, an English version of *La Mort du Captaine Cook*, which puts forward a completely fictional account of Cook’s fatal involvement in a jealous romantic triangle, uses elaborate costumes, props and scenic effects in an attempt to re-enact in detail ceremonial encounters first recorded in the documents of the third voyage.

Operating within a comparative framework that encourages the broad stroke, Balme goes on to trace the mutual imbrication of discourses of authenticity and exoticist modes of spectacle across two centuries of Pacific performance. Compressing the 19th century into two chapters, he argues that the anti-theatrical prejudice of European missionaries, which frequently targeted indigenous performance forms, precipitates the re-emergence of “*performance as metonymy of culture*” (p.97) during periods of accelerated cultural change. The examples he gives are Hawaiian *hula* and Māori *haka*, whose 19th century performance histories reveal the revaluation of putatively traditional forms in “a complex dynamic of cultural borrowings and redefinitions that incorporate historical exigencies, aesthetic innovation and cultural identity formation” (p.121). Balme, however, is less interested in the strategic adaptation of indigenous performance forms for purposes of cultural survival and political resistance than in their dual aestheticisation and commercialisation in cross-cultural situations that are formally colonial, such as the three-day carnival of Māori performance culture staged for the British royal tour party in Rotorua in 1901, the mass-entertainments provided by Samoan troupes to paying audiences in German zoological parks, and the choreographed incorporation of indigenous song, dance and costume into political celebrations of colonial rule in the Pacific outposts of empire. In his analysis of the 1910 tenth anniversary celebrations of the German annexation of Western Samoa, in which “the colonial administration made extensive use of local performance culture for political ends” (p.123), Balme stops short of making any explicit connection to the Third Reich’s subsequent spectacular deployment of synchronised bodily performance in support of folklorist activations of pure culture, although this seems a compelling extension of his argument. If “the relationship between colonialism and theatricality is marked by a high degree of complementarity” might not “the performative genre of colonial ceremony” (p.123) as it developed in the Pacific be
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a precursor to the mass-cultural displays of fascism in both formal dramaturgy and ideological appeals to tradition?

Balme’s concern is not the wider political deployment of culture, however, but the evolving history of performance genres in cross-cultural contexts. In disciplinary and methodological terms, he is most at home when discussing Pacific-themed dramas on the mainstream American stage from 1912 to the early 1960s (specifically Richard Walton Tully’s Hawaiian drama Bird of Paradise, the stage adaptation of Somerset Maugham’s Rain, and Rodgers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific) and contemporary post-colonial theatre. He is sometimes out of his depth, however, when discussing pop- or mass-cultural forms and their citation within performances staged at the Mormon-run Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai’i, a living museum of performance and material culture founded in 1963 where the spectacle of cross-cultural encounter, though still vested in performing bodies—conveniently supplied by the students of the adjacent Brigham Young University who offset their tuition fees by working in the seven Polynesian villages included in the 42-acre site—is augmented by IMAX cinema and other mediatisations unimaginable to the original participants in Pacific cross-cultural exchange. Dramatically delivered from the top of a coconut tree, “A plane! A plane!” may well be “an ironical spoof of the familiar Hollywood scene whereby the approach of European ships is first signalled by natives perched atop coconut trees”, but to say that “the ironical twist of course is the reference to a plane, the main vehicle of tourist transportation, which is easily identifiable without the vantage point of a coconut tree” (p.183) is to miss the reference to the catch phrase of the diminutive white-suited Tattoo (Herve Villechaize) in Fantasy Island, a long-running television series premised on the Pacific’s capacity to engage simultaneously emotional realism and elaborately staged pretence. Minimally, the native call Balme mishears is a spoof of a spoof.

I do not wish to suggest that anyone is smarter for being more thoroughly steeped in American popular culture of the late 1970s but I do think that Balme, who has not lived in the Pacific since his childhood, is sometimes caught out by his distance from the performance culture he is describing. In his discussion of the frequently scatological humour of The Naked Samoans, a comedy act founded by two members of the theatre group Pacific Underground, something like cultural exoticism creeps back into his analysis, as does the familiar overvaluation of traditional forms over their mass-cultural counterparts. No doubt The Naked Samoans’ verbal and physical satire does recall the indigenous performance form of faleaitu but it also owes much to the American television cartoon South Park, which provided the model for Bro’town, their subsequent and highly successful venture into animated television comedy. Likewise, Balme’s laudatory account of the “radical artistic vision” (p.213) of the transnational Mau ensemble can seem like a return to avant-gardism. Celebrating a global trend toward the incorporation of indigenous cultural forms within a postcolonial theatre practice whose mark of success remains the European festival circuit, Balme effectively directs us toward his previous book, Decolonising the Stage: Theatrical Syncreticism and Post-Colonial Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). There are, I think, more exciting applications of Balme’s compelling thesis. It lends itself, for instance, to the analysis of more recent Pacific performances—such as Tūhoe activist
Tame Iti’s ceremonial shooting of the New Zealand flag in the context of Waitangi Tribunal land rights hearings on tribal ground—that make theatrical interventions in a democratic public sphere that prefers to think of its representational mechanisms as authentic not pretend.


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*Island Ministers* is like no other work yet published: an encyclopaedic yet readable island-group-by-island-group narrative of Christian church development in the Pacific from the late 18th century to the end of the 19th. Raeburn Lange’s compendious book is therefore likely to serve as a valuable reference source and teaching tool for many years to come. In retrospect it is a project that was long overdue, but it probably also needed the particular combination of experience and commitment that Lange brings to the task. He readily acknowledges such important predecessors as John Garrett and Charles Forman (e.g., p.36) but none of them ever produced a systematic survey of this geographic range. Inevitably, on many topics he has had to depend on secondary sources, but he also draws on an impressive battery of primary sources as well. Sixty pages of endnotes and 32 pages of references attest to the author’s scholarship.

Lange’s focus, as the title suggests, is on the lives and achievements of an array of Pacific Island church leaders. He is also concerned with the institutional matrices they entered by birth or conversion and which they then often helped to establish, strengthen and spread around the region—the local churches, whose history “as indigenous social institutions has been obscured by the mission superstructures that dominated them for so long” (p.9).

There are lacunae, some of them understandable. Lange’s attention to, and understanding of, the Protestant dispensations in the Pacific push the Roman Catholic presence somewhat to the background. His chronological starting point, for example, excludes consideration of the early Spanish Catholic missions, as he himself notes. This limitation may be due partly to his own background as a teacher at Pacific Theological College and as a researcher on Māori and Cook Island Protestant missions, but it may also stem from the greater diversity of leadership roles and styles in the history of Protestantism, which lend themselves more readily to an analysis in terms of indigenous agency. To that end, Lange provides a lucid outline of the structures and ambiguities of Protestant religious specialisation with its gradations from pastoral duties and teaching to ordained ministry.

Each substantive chapter covers an individual island group. They range in length from 3 pages (in the case of Tokelau) to some 30 pages (e.g., New Zealand). This disparity reflects the size of the society and the concomitant amount of available
historical material on which the accounts are based—but also perhaps Lange’s control of that literature (he is especially well known for his previous publications on New Zealand, some of which are incorporated into this summary). On the one hand, sometimes the allocation of space seems arbitrary—why should Vanuatu get over 30 pages and the Solomon Islands only 8? True, Christianity was not deeply embedded in many parts of the Solomons before Lange’s cut-off date of 1900, but the brevity of treatment still seems disproportionate. On the other hand, he does address in some detail New Caledonia, an island group often underemphasised in the Anglophone historiography of Pacific religion (Bronwen Douglas’s work notwithstanding).

As Lange acknowledges (p.11), the organisation of chapters corresponds roughly but deliberately to the chronological sequence of the diffusion of Christianity, with the first substantive chapter being on French Polynesia and the last on New Guinea. It therefore also corresponds, though even more roughly, to a spatial movement from east to west. The decision to arrange the text in this way makes practical sense though it does create some tension between the bounded histories of the island groups and the more fluid dynamics of individual biographies whereby many Pacific Island Christians famously carried the word to islands in which they were not native. Joeli Bulu, for example, surfaces in the chapters on both Tonga and Fiji; the Samoan evangelist Amosa figures in both Niue and Vanuatu; Maka from the Cooks crops up in both the Loyalty Islands and Tokelau; Hezekiah Ae’a and Berita Kaaikaula feature in both Hawai‘i and the Marshall Islands; while Auna and his wife Naomi, and James Kekela and his wife Naomi, all travel from Huahine in the Leeward Islands to Hawai‘i and back again. For me, the most problematic issue arising from the organising framework is not the repetition of certain names and details (which was inescapable under the circumstances) but the questions it generates concerning the presumption of indigeneity in the forms of “leadership” under investigation.

I have other analytical questions and doubts as well. For example, like many anthropologists, I am not convinced by the catch-all term “primal religion” (pp. 25, 26, 28) or its application to the societies discussed here. Pre-Christian Pacific cosmologies and political ideologies were as diverse and complex as those that succeeded them. In order to contextualise the rise of Christianity and its characteristic sets of practitioners, each chapter looks briefly at pre-Christian religious specialists, categorised mostly as “shamans” and “priests”, while broader comparative questions of the relationship between such “traditional” religious leaders and those who emerged from the missionary dispensations are canvassed in the opening and closing chapters. But arguably the existing non-religious political leadership roles and systems were of just as much importance in understanding how and why certain people from certain families decided to become Christian pastors, teachers, ministers and catechists (or had their careers facilitated or blocked by those wielding what an outside observer might see as temporal power). An exploration of these processes might have usefully shed light on local distinctions between sacred and secular which do not always correspond to the distinctions assumed by Christianity.

Readers familiar with the research and scholarship behind specific chapters in surveys of this kind are usually tempted to catch the author out on minor points of fact or interpretation. Since I have more specialist knowledge of Tuvalu than any of the
other places dealt with, I subjected that chapter to particular scrutiny. It passed with flying colours. Yes, the mid-19th century population figures are more controversial than Lange perhaps realises but the only actual mistake I found was the misspelling of Kalaaki Laupepa’s name as Kaaliki (p.366, note 27). If the strike rate of other pedantic reviewers is as low as mine, Raeburn Lange can feel confident in the reliability of his text and proud of the meticulousness with which he put it together. This is the kind of book that deserves to run to future editions and, if it does, any minor errors can be corrected when the opportunity arises.

STEADMAN, David W.: Extinction and Biogeography of Tropical Pacific Birds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xiv + 594 pp., appendix, bib., figs, index, maps, photos, tables. Price: US$110.00, £69.50 (cloth); US$45.00, £28.50 (paper).

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Extinction and Biogeography of Tropical Pacific Birds is the long-awaited synthesis of two decades of research on Pacific avifauna by David Steadman. One of a handful of Pacific avian palaeontologists, Steadman has probably looked at more fossil bird bones from a larger geographic region than any other scientist. Of particular interest for anthropologists, much of the evidence on which the ideas of this book rest is drawn from archaeological sites. Moreover, the text is accessible and engaging, even for a non-specialist.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I begins with an up-to-date overview of Pacific natural and cultural history. Chapters 1 and 2 outline the physical geography of the region, long-term processes, and major biogeographic patterns. Chapter 3 briefly reviews the region’s culture history, but with apologies to the archaeological community since biologists are Steadman’s target audience. A small number of case studies are used to illustrate the range of contexts from which ancient avian specimens are frequently derived. Chapter 4 might be categorised as methods, with attention to some key issues that are relevant to both palaeontology and archaeology, including taphonomic processes, identification issues, and the potentials and limitations of radiocarbon dating.

Part II is a region-by-region assessment of past and present avifaunal patterns. Much of this material is presented in clear and easily accessible tables, accompanied by commentaries that attempt to explain patterns of distribution and diversity, as well as anomalies. In addition to descriptions of the fossil avifauna of the four main regions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and East and West Polynesia, Steadman reviews some other remarkable faunal discoveries, mainly from West Polynesia. These include a giant frog (*Platymantis* sp.), terrestrial crocodiles (*Mekosuchus* spp.), endemic iguanas (*Brachylophus* spp. and *Lapitiguana impensa*) and the Pacific boa (*Candoia bibronii*), all relatively new finds which may not be widely known to anthropologists.

Part III centres on the key avifaunal groups that dominant the palaeontological and archaeological assemblages. Megapodes, rails, pigeons and doves, parrots, and
seabirds stand out as having been particularly important in traditional Pacific societies, sought after not only for food, but also for their feathers, which were used in rituals, as body ornamentation and as status symbols, and for their bones which were fashioned into flutes, tattoo needles, awls and other utilitarian objects. While Steadman’s focus is on the geographic distribution of these avian groups, his discussions of their feeding and reproductive behaviours, and related vulnerabilities, will be of use to archaeologists interested in understanding the patterns of avian loss, and the ways these characteristics shaped and interfaced with human hunting practices.

While Steadman might easily have brought this book to a close at the end of Part III, and considered it a job well done, Part IV takes on the daunting task of re-appraising several cornerstones of modern biogeographic theory in light of the avifaunal finds reviewed herein. This final set of chapters will undoubtedly be the most controversial for biologists; historically important models of faunal attenuation, equilibrium and species-area relationships are challenged. While debate seems likely to follow, it is incontrovertible that Steadman, along with his palaeontological and archaeological colleagues, has demonstrated that modern Pacific avifauna are dramatically different from their pre-human counterparts. Human hunting, introduced pests and competitors (four-legged to microbial), and habitat alteration have all contributed to the loss of indigenous Pacific birds. Steadman’s research shows conclusively that a large number of species became extinct or were locally extirpated, often taxa that were flightless and/or of limited geographic distribution (i.e., endemics). In some cases, species ranges also have been reduced by human activities.

The general thrust of Steadman’s argument is that many biogeographic and community ecology models were developed prior to this modern understanding. His discussion highlights the potential confrontations between elegant conceptual frameworks and empirical reality, between the search for patterning with explanatory potential versus the importance of variation. His arguments are thought-provoking and will encourage the reader to consider the balance between realism, generality and precision in model construction.

Finally, Chapter 21 on conservation biology is of relevance to anyone interested in preserving the region’s unique remaining birdlife. The on-going process of extinction, which started in prehistory, has accelerated since European contact. There is a wealth of evidence to show that the most successful conservation programmes are those built around the needs and perspectives of the local communities within which they are situated. Anthropologists and other social scientists can assist in developing culturally appropriate strategies for species appreciation and maintenance. Steadman’s book itself is a clear demonstration of what can be achieved through active interdisciplinary partnerships. Further, it reflects the growing awareness on the part of the scientific community generally that social scientists have a crucial role to play both in understanding the long-term histories of the world’s biota and in shaping successful futures for them.
This volume consists of 16 independent articles, broadly linked by questions about what kinds of words have been borrowed by Pacific languages from other (Pacific and non-Pacific) languages with which they have been in contact. When languages have borrowed lexical items extensively at some point in their history, this creates puzzles for both historical linguists and sociolinguists. Both research interests are represented by articles in this book.

Many of the authors have decades of experience in reconstructing historical relationships between the languages of the Pacific, so several contributions focus on the problems that borrowing poses for historical linguistics. The first problem is that borrowing may perturb the systematic sound correspondences that are essential to the methods used to reconstruct hypothesised, earlier ancestor forms for words (proto-forms). The comparative method relies on identifying shared innovations or retentions reflected in (usually) the phonological shape of semantically equivalent words (the comparative method can also be used on syntax). Borrowing can complicate the comparative method. First, extensive borrowing between languages A and B might suggest A and B are more closely related (or split from an earlier proto-language later) than they in fact are. Second, extensive borrowing by language B from language C might lead an observer to think they are more closely related than they are, masking a more recent shared history between language B and A.

Articles by Biggs and Milner (reprints, with some editing of the latter) are intimately concerned with reconstruction problems. Biggs considers the unusual sound correspondences found in Rotuman; Milner argues that even earlier contact-induced change may be the source of reconstructed “doublets” (two routes of development in one language for a single proto-form). Milner draws on data from a wide range of languages (Samoan, Fijian, some Melanesian languages, and touching on Madagscan). Schütz’s article (also reprinted with some editing) addresses constraints on borrowing into Fijian. It is not a study in reconstruction, but like Biggs and Milner, it is primarily concerned with providing a formal linguistic perspective on borrowing. The data for Schütz’s paper are (as he observes in a footnote) now rather dated, “I have not had access to new data [since c.1978]” (p.289). He proposes a ranked set of constraints for adaptation of loans into Fijian (p.266-67); most of this lengthy article exemplifies the operation of these constraints and tries to account for exceptions. Schütz notes that familiarity with English influences how borrowed words are adapted to Fijian phonotactics, so an update of his data would be timely. Linguists would like to know, for example, if the ranking of constraints has been stable or if some have acquired greater importance over the years—contact linguistics generally observes a correlation between degree and quality.
of social interaction and the impact of contact-induced change on a linguistic system.

Such sociohistorical perspectives on language contact come to the fore in a number of other papers. Clark distinguishes “unnecessary” and “necessary” borrowing (roughly, words for which a group does and does not already have indigenous vocabulary). This is picked up in a number of the other contributions to the volume. Clark’s paper (a reprint with minor editing), considers borrowing in Ifira-Mele (Efate, Vanuatu). His distinction between what speakers “need” and do not need is useful to Harlow’s discussion of contact-induced change at all levels of linguistic structure in New Zealand Māori, and also to the principles guiding Māori language planning. Tent examines lexical borrowings into Fijian English also with this distinction in mind. It also provides a motif for Sperlich’s discussion of borrowing into Niuean and frames the rather eschatological perspective he takes on borrowing. Sperlich views synchronic borrowing patterns as a threat to the linguistic vitality of Niuean; by contrast, Crowley argues that it is a natural process in living languages, and possibly even a necessary condition for maintaining language vitality.

Early’s paper draws on the un/necessary borrowing distinction more creatively. It examines the widespread use of a periprastic verb construction in the languages of Epi (Vanuatu). This involves use of a “dummy” verb—on Epi, the copula, pe/be—followed by an uninflected verb stem to express simple declarative events. (This is similar to English dummy do or give, e.g., Do me a painting of a man with a hat, cf. ‘Paint me a man with a hat’; Give the pot a stir, cf. ‘Stir the pot’.) Crucially, the Epi construction seems to be required when the main verb is borrowed (and is optional with vernacular verbs). Early carefully considers how much has been borrowed (words, or structures), and concludes that the unusual, but widespread use of these structures on Epi speaks at the very least to areal borrowing among languages indigenous to the island.

The book is organised by author in alphabetical order. This is traditional, but here it is a bit unfortunate. Geraghty’s article provides a superb introduction to the study of language contact, borrowing, and historical linguistics, and by most rights ought to be the first article a reader sees. These qualities are masked by the somewhat dry title (“Borrowed plants in Fiji and Polynesian…”). I highly recommend this article, especially to non-linguists, for its clear explanation of linguistic issues in the study of language contact. It is also a delightful read for the case studies Geraghty has chosen and some droll asides tucked into the text.

The quality and quantity of social contact required as a prerequisite for borrowing is dealt with (implicitly or explicitly) in contributions by Mosel, on borrowings into Samoan. Mosel addresses nativisation of borrowings within the important frame of the difference made between high (T) and low (K) language in Samoan. Geraghty and Tent provocatively argue that a small number of Dutch words were borrowed in the 17th century, following no more than a fortnight’s contact with Dutch speakers. Langdon argues for extensive contact-induced social and linguistic change in Futuna (and beyond) after the stranding of a small number of Southeast Asians there. Mugler examines borrowing across the range of languages in use on Fiji. Lynch argues for the importance of speaker attitudes in constraining borrowing between languages.

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Jo Anne Van Tilburg has contextualised the work of Katherine Routledge in a biographical, historical and archaeological account that weaves together the results of extensive archival research with the author’s own knowledge of the archaeology of Rapa Nui (Easter Island). The result is a thorough examination of an extraordinary and unique woman, which also informs the reader about the greater significance of Katherine’s 16-month stay on Rapa Nui in a manner that is both intimate and far-reaching.

From Routledge’s Quaker upbringing in Victorian England to her ambitious journey to Oxford University, Van Tilburg introduces what seems like an endless cast of characters in the discussion of the triumphs and hardships of Routledge’s childhood, adolescence and entry into adulthood. From her eccentric spinster aunts and her schizophrenic brother Harold, to her favourite sibling Wilson and her close university friend Lyle, the reader is introduced first-hand to the people and places that influenced the woman who Katherine Routledge was to become.

Routledge’s personality is the overarching emphasis in this biographical account, and Van Tilburg seems to have captured the essence of this woman, describing in great detail how Katherine’s personality shaped her actions. As the reader travels with Routledge and her companionate husband William Scoresby Routledge from Africa to Easter Island to Mangareva, it is clear that she has a knack for being a “keen and often quite penetrating observer” (p.58). It is obvious that she was able to relate to people in a unique and powerful way, and this certainly shaped her ability to acquire personal accounts and valuable ethnographic data. As Van Tilburg notes, “Her gift of storytelling, her ability to accommodate superstition, her obsessive attention to detail, and her sense that history and myth are compatible all made her the perfect person for the job she took on—the right person in the right place at the right time” (p. 183). Her more scientific approach to ethnographic data collection ensured that the stories she collected were authentic and accurate, and she spent many sleepless nights, especially on Rapa Nui, reviewing her copious notes and planning her next tasks.

The chapters describing the Mana Expedition to Rapa Nui are infused with Van Tilburg’s own knowledge of the island, resulting in a vivid picture of Routledge’s time there, enhanced by contemporary knowledge about the island from more recent archaeological studies. The places and people that Routledge encountered are described in great detail, and the historical context is expertly woven into the narrative. The new cast of characters who Routledge met on the island were, in fact, important historical figures including Juan Tepano, who would later become a key informant for Father Sebastian Englert, Angata, a Rapanui spiritual practitioner, and Percy Edmunds, the manager of the Williamson Balfour Station on Rapa Nui. She was able to forge relationships with Europeans on the island as well as with islanders who had strong political influence at the time and great cultural knowledge. She worked to gather as much data as she could in the form of maps, drawings, descriptions and stories in her attempt to solve the
“mysteries” of Easter Island. The fact that Van Tilburg has actively collected the same sorts of data in order to answer similar questions over the last 25 years undoubtedly augments her descriptions of Routledge’s work. Speaking as a practiced specialist, she is able to infuse her own knowledge and experiences into Routledge’s, which results in an enhanced discussion of this very significant expedition to the island.

The title of the book suggests that it is a biographical account of a woman’s life and her expedition to Easter Island. This work is, however, much more than that; it is an expertly synthesised tale of not only the life and work of Katherine Routledge, but also of the far-reaching effects of her efforts, especially on the work of Van Tilburg and other archaeologists who have studied the island. Although this book is not typically academic, it informs us about a key issue in the study of ethnographic accounts and historical literature in general. That issue is context, and as one archaeologist once told me, “context is everything”. This book is proof that, like the stratigraphic layers of an archaeological excavation, the personal background and motives of an ethnographer like Katherine Routledge are important to the understanding of the ethnography that he or she compiled. Van Tilburg has provided an extensive account that is highly appropriate for describing the life and work of this very remarkable woman.


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In Remote Possibilities: Hoa Hakananai’a and HMS Topaze on Rapa Nui, Jo Anne Van Tilburg builds on her extensive research on monolithic sculpture on Rapa Nui (Easter Island). Namely, she provides a detailed account of moai (statue) symbolism that is contextualised within a cultural and historical framework. The title suggests that this publication is about the statue Hoa Hakananai’a, the ‘hidden or stolen friend’, that was removed from Rapa Nui by crew members of HMS Topaze in 1868, but the book actually discusses much more than this single statue. While Hoa Hakananai’a figures prominently in this book, the contextualisation of this statue within a more general Rapa Nui social and ideological framework is the overarching focus of the publication.

Van Tilburg begins with a brief account of Hoa Hakananai’a as a museum object at the British Museum, then shifts her focus to providing a cultural and historical background to the carving of this and other moai on Rapa Nui. This discussion forms the bulk of the publication, and rightly so. The contextualisation of this museum object into the natural and cultural environment from which it was removed is vital to understanding the symbolic significance of the design attributes and iconography displayed on the statue. Van Tilburg does an excellent job of synthesising the archaeological and ethnographic record from which scholars have interpreted Rapa Nui prehistory and art objects, including moai and other rock art. Her discussion of the tangata manu (birdman) religion, whose practices were centred at Orongo, where Hoa
Hakananai’a was taken from, is detailed and provides an exceptional framework for the analysis of the carved motifs on the back of the statue and other design attributes.

In her discussion of the events leading to the removal of Hoa Hakananai’a from the island, Van Tilburg provides an in depth history of interaction between the Rapanui people and Europeans from the 18th century onwards. The local events preceding the arrival of HMS Topaze, as well as the visit of this ship to the island in 1868, are described in great detail based on historical and ethnographic records. It is obvious that Van Tilburg has done a great deal of research in reconstructing these events, and the narrative that she provides is thorough and well-informed.

Returning to a discussion of Hoa Hakananai’a, Van Tilburg examines the contextual and stylistic significance of the statue, and goes on to discuss other museum objects, including 15 other moai, with related iconography to show the persistence of related themes in ritual objects and sculpture on Rapa Nui. Throughout the publication, the text is enhanced by drawings by Cristián Arévalo Pakarati. His detailed depictions of moai and other art objects offer exceptional renderings of significant iconographic components that are oftentimes obscured or difficult to decipher in photographs. Historical maps and drawings also augment the publication, making observations that are presented in the text easy to understand and visualise.

Publications often build on the previous research of their authors, and this book is no exception. This work is largely a synthesis of two earlier publications by Van Tilburg—her 1992 publication entitled *HMS Topaze on Easter Island: Hoa Hakananai’a and Five Other Museum Sculptures in Archaeological Context* (British Museum Department of Ethnography Occasional Paper 73) and her 2004 work, *Hoa Hakananai’a*, which was part of the “British Museum Objects in Focus” series (London: The British Museum). *Remote Possibilities: Hoa Hakananai’a and HMS Topaze on Rapa Nui* is essentially an extended version of the latter, which draws from the former (as well as other publications by Van Tilburg and her more recent work on the Easter Island Statue Project). In doing so, Van Tilburg presents a more detailed analysis of the complex stylistic significance of Rapa Nui sculpture, especially moai. This book is an aesthetically pleasing account that provides significant insights into the Rapa Nui social and ideological structure, and how art objects like Hoa Hakananai’a symbolised this complex ideological system.