Atlantic historians have a habit of characterising the study of the Pacific Ocean as belated, a field that took shape after *Annales*-based Mediterranean scholarship, and after Braudel-inspired analysis of the Atlantic world. Yet this historiographical sequence is inaccurate and usually signals historians’ own belated reading in, around and about the Pacific. On one measure, the Pacific was historicised within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century geopolitics by Japanese, German, and Anglophone scholars alike.¹ Latin American histories of the Pacific were also available in the early twentieth century, some in translation and taken up by North American scholars.² On another measure, from the 1920s the Pacific emerged as central to the professionalisation of history departments within the region itself. Ralph S. Kuykendall published extensively on Hawai‘i and the Pacific North West, for example, from his base in Manoa.³ And New Zealand-based John Beaglehole wrote *Exploration of the Pacific* (1934) which detailed Spanish, Dutch, French, and British expeditions, from Magellan’s to Cook’s circumnavigations.⁴ Beaglehole’s book was reviewed at the time (ironically by a Hawaiian-based antiquarian) as

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comprehensive in its 400-plus pages, but insufficiently interested in the Polynesian perspective. This is as we might expect, but such histories are not to be sidelined. In the same way that we read early *Annales* historical geographies as both period pieces and still-useful secondary scholarship, many of the Pacific geographical histories of the 1920s and 1930s repay close reading. Thus, to understand Pacific oceanic history as a latecomer, or as derivative of the *Annales* school, is to fail to understand that the *Annales* tradition was part of a much wider historical geography, inclusive of oceans. In short, the Pacific Ocean was being historicised as part of the same early twentieth-century geographical trend as Braudel’s Mediterranean.

Yet there was a tenor to Pacific scholarship that was quite particular. Early historical geography and maritime history intersected with an adjacent burgeoning field: the anthropology of Oceania. The cultural analyses of Malinowski and Mead in the South Pacific and of Boas and Hunt in the North Pacific were just then revolutionising anthropology itself, methodologically speaking. Their inquiries built on earlier studies in which ethnography met history, featuring the celebrated Polynesian canoe journeys from Samoa and Tonga to Hawai’i, Rapanui and Aotearoa/New Zealand. For example, Alfred Cort Haddon’s ‘the cultural history of the Pacific’ (1924), leading to his *Canoes of Oceania* (1936–38), must surely be seen as early Pacific history-writing, part of a scholarly tradition that rendered these oceanic journeys almost canonical. Or, to take another example, the work of Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck), beginning in the late 1930s, who in his own words recounted history ‘from the evidence in Polynesian myths regarding the creation of man and of islands, and in legends and traditions of the great seafaring ancestors and their voyages’. In such work, the anthropology of Oceania was history because Polynesian genealogies ordered and systematised the past, and because the transfer of culture and language over large ocean

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9 Te Rangi Hiroa [Peter Buck], *Vikings of the sunrise* (New York, 1938), preface; Te Rangi Hiroa, *The evolution of Maori clothing* (New Plymouth, NZ, 1926); Peter Buck, *Anthropology and religion* (New Haven, CT, 1939).
Map 2.1 The Pacific Ocean
spaces implied transfer of culture over changing times, over generations. And historical work based on thousands of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts of maritime expeditions was often anthropologically oriented because the sources themselves were: more than anything else they detailed relations between European outsiders and Pacific people across the ocean.

This early scholarly corpus tuned Pacific history-writing in a particular key, deeply inflected by geography on the one hand and anthropology on the other. It is no coincidence that so many of the great historians of Oceania were (and perhaps still are) trained and practised in adjacent disciplines: in the 1960s, art historian Bernard Smith, in the 1970s, geographer O. H. K. Spate, in the 1980s, ethnohistorian Greg Dening, and from 1990s onwards, any number of distinguished anthropologists trained in these schools, and their work still makes up a large part of the field. Historical work on Oceania is hardly belated, then, and we can scarcely see this rich tradition as anything but the core of wider Pacific history that includes the continental rim. Far from being a follow-on, Pacific historiography should be considered an original model for the historicising of oceans.

**Pacific Chronologies**

Oceans and sea-crossings figure centrally both in Polynesian histories and in the deep history of the region. Indeed what is likely *homo sapiens*’ first major sea-crossing took place from the landmass called Sunda, starting at least 50,000 years ago, into Sahul, the landmass that then linked present-day New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania. About 8,000 years ago, sea levels rose separating New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania from each other, creating different kinds of isolation in the three islands. The rising and falling of seas, the joining and separating of water and land, are sometimes taken to be key events in this region’s human as well as natural history. It is but one of the ways in which Pacific historiography foregrounds not just geographical but geological and oceanographic phenomena. And yet the ancient migration that accounts for Australian Aboriginal people’s past is often separated out – historiographically speaking – from the much more recent Pacific migrations of the so-called ‘Austronesians’ from present-day Taiwan to Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, beginning perhaps 6,000 years

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10 ‘It is now my view that the great rising of the seas . . . is the most important event in the human history of Australia’: Geoffrey Blainey, *The story of Australia’s people: The rise and fall of ancient Australia* (Melbourne, 2015), p. x.
ago. The Polynesian descendants of ‘Lapita’ societies explored waters and islands along winds to the south-east, migrating to Tonga and Samoa and eventually to the distant points of Rapa Nui (3–400 CE) and, in a different direction, Aotearoa/New Zealand (perhaps 1300 CE). The vast Polynesian voyages in double-hulled canoes have, for generations now, sat at the heart of the Pacific’s oceanic and maritime history. It is known that the long journeys diminished and then ceased around 1300 and it was only several centuries later that the Spanish and Portuguese would begin to explore and trade in the Pacific Ocean. It was not they, but the French and British – another century on again – whose journeying facilitated re-connections between Polynesians and, so far as we know, new connections between Aboriginal people and Māori.

Claims about connection and reconnection over the island Pacific are made through genealogical, linguistic, archaeological and increasingly genetic evidence. The ‘Austronesian’ designation is primarily linguistic, while the related ‘Lapita’ culture is archaeological, based on distinctive pottery found from Near to Remote Oceania. Connections have long been tracked and debated through Islanders’ genealogies and origin stories as well. In such studies, genealogies are sometimes treated as evidence – as a kind of primary source – and sometimes as history, a secondary source, a systematic ordering of the past through generational re/counting. Te Rangi Hiroa detailed histories of Hawaiki, the place of origin over the seas, for example. Oral accounts were told and retold within Polynesian societies as history, and, when first presented in written translation, were unequivocally presented as history, as in John White’s multi-volume Ancient history of the Maori (1887–91). In the Pacific region, then, we find pioneering methodological work on how oral accounts, memory and conventional text-based sources have been, and can be, productively aligned. This tantalising mix of genres, along with diverse approaches to

14 John White, The ancient history of the Maori, his mythology and traditions (Wellington, NZ, 1887–91).
the past, has made Pacific history a rich domain for thinking through just what history is. It is unsurprising that when the *Journal of Pacific History* was established (1966), its opening articles dealt with the periodisation of history on the one hand, and historical method on the other.\(^\text{16}\)

Inquiry into human migration over the Pacific Ocean has challenged – perhaps even confounded – conventional world history chronologies. Privileging a ‘first agricultural revolution’ from hunter-gathering to cultivation around 10,000 BCE, and written language as requisite for ‘civilisation’, implies that oral-based societies and hunter-gathering economies were unchanging, and had either a lesser history, or even no history. Yet the so-called prehistory of Australian Aboriginal people is both at least a 50,000-year history and a modern one of connection with Macassan fishers across the Torres Strait to the north (from c. 1500 CE), and with British and French expeditions along the Pacific Ocean coast (from c. 1770 CE). And the so-called ancient history of Polynesians included settlement of New Zealand from a relatively recent 1300 CE. Indeed White’s ‘ancient’ history was based on contemporary evidence from the 1860s and 1870s.\(^\text{17}\) When the Pacific region is the reference point, then, ‘prehistory’ as conventionally defined has both a comparatively recent past, as well as a remote one. Thus ‘deep history’, ‘prehistory’ and ‘ancient’ history are drawn forward and folded into modern history in the Pacific, producing unconventional questions and problems.\(^\text{18}\)

**Pacific Geographies**

Between its long temporality and its massive geography, the Pacific has attracted historians interested in large scales, and the possibility of synthetic histories organised regionally and geographically rather than nationally or politically. As geographer Donald Freeman states in one such study, the scope of the Pacific is formidable. It is also, of late, fashionable.\(^\text{19}\) One of the tasks facing Pacific historians is to recognise and navigate the many orientations of human activity in the region’s seascapes and landscapes. The plural cartographies of the Pacific, including its suite of names – *Tē moana nui a Kiwa* (the great ocean of Kiwa), *Océanie, Mar del Sur, El Oceano Pacifico*, the Great Ocean, *Stille Ocean*,


\[\text{17} \quad \text{White, *The ancient history of the Maori.*}\]

\[\text{18} \quad \text{Jesse Jennings, ed., *The prehistory of Polynesia* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).}\]

the South Sea – signal multiple vantage points, each with an accompanying epistemology. Indeed the Pacific is so big that the four cardinal directions that historical actors and their historians have used to locate their business – like navigators – can be as confusing as they are useful. The American-oriented ‘Pacific North West’, for example, is in fact the Pacific North East, if we orient by the ocean’s centre (let’s say Hawai’i). Many a student has tried in vain to reconcile the Southwest Pacific with the Pacific North West. Likewise, Balboa’s mar del sur stretched for its great navigator, James Cook, from icebergs in the far Arctic north to icebergs in the Antarctic circle at 67 degrees south. And yet such confusions in orientation in effect signal something much more meaningful: the literally different orientations, standpoints and ontologies of Pacific knowledge. There are as many axes across the Pacific as there are degrees in the compass or celestial markers. Six are particularly recognisable, and serve here to fix us in what is a very large historiographical ocean.

First, for Pacific Islanders, the ocean stretches from Hawai’i in the north to New Zealand in the south, Micronesian Palau and Guam in the west to Polynesian Rapanui in the east. For a Polynesian navigator such as Tupaia, the celebrated Rai’iatean who accompanied Cook on his first journey, the Pacific Ocean circled concentrically out from his central island home. Latterly, this was figured as ‘the Polynesian triangle’. Second, there is an historical and historiographical west–east axis across the middle of the ocean, from Acapulco to Manila. The so-called Manila or Spanish galleons sailed several times a year between 1565 and 1815, exchanging silver mined in Mexico for silk, porcelain and spices traded by Chinese merchants in the Philippines. The oceans and coastal economies of the world became meaningfully linked less with the Magellan–Elcano first circumnavigation (1519–22), than with this Spanish–Chinese trade. Manila was a critical entrepôt of the early modern world.

And yet, remarkably, the Spanish galleons missed or avoided all the islands that Tupaia later mapped. These were connected in a third Pacific axis when eighteenth-century European mariners – whalers, British and French naval expeditions, commercial shipping companies – linked maritime South East Asia (the Netherlands East Indies and the Malay world), the coasts of New Holland and New Zealand with the South Pacific islands and coastal South America. We can see this vast South Pacific axis in Cook’s ‘Chart of the Great South Sea or Pacifick Ocean’.

20 James K. Barnett and David L. Nicandri, eds., Arctic ambitions: Captain Cook and the Northwest Passage (Seattle, WA, 2015).
22 www.captcook-ne.co.uk/ccne/exhibits/10001/index.htm (accessed 31 March 2017)
In the process of navigating this domain, Cook became aware of the cultural polity at the centre of the South Sea: ‘how shall we account for this nation spreading itself so far over this Vast ocean?’.

He perceived, and was awed by, a vast Polynesian geography and history, even as his own navigations facilitated a reconnection between the islands that became Oceania.

Océanie was first designated in 1812 and endures as a geopolitical and scholarly region. But it took some time to settle on mental maps, as on charts. Oceania often included Australia, New Guinea and Tasmania, as well as Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, a geopolitical definition still deployed by the United Nations. In the nineteenth century, regionally based geographers (also writing histories) included some Antarctic waters and islands as well, as did Hobart-based Alexander Ireland in *The geography and history of Oceania abridged, or, A concise account of Australasia, Malaysia, Polynesia, and Antarctica* (1863). And curiously, in other nineteenth-century maps, what came to be called Near and Remote Oceania was charted as Lesser and Greater Australia, while the continent retained the antique ‘New Holland’.

Fourth, there is a North Pacific history and geography, reaching from East Asia northwards in an arc that takes in Kamchatka, the Bering Strait, the Aleutian islands, Alaska and the so-called Pacific Northwest in British Columbia. This is a coastal Pacific that extended to, and historically linked, Baja California, Alta California and the native societies in what formed the northern reach of New Spain. In this quarter of the Pacific, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, British and latterly American mariners battled for access to and influence over native traders of furs in particular. Multiple scientific expeditions were launched, in the manner of the earlier South Pacific journeys. Ryan Tucker Jones has re-oriented a familiar British and French historiography on natural history and scientific investigation to Russia and the North Pacific. And David Igler’s study *The Great Ocean* (2013) details how a North Pacific rim, as well as a cross-Pacific Canton–Hawai’i–America route flourished, partly from whaling and fishing, largely from trade in furs, and latterly transporting

goldseekers to and from California. His work has provided a much-needed integration of coastal North and South America into Pacific history. 27

This work signals a fifth major geographical/historiographical orientation – the so-called Pacific rim, a construction often found in difficult scholarly and political relationship with the islands. The largest ocean on the planet also produces the longest coastline, and this geography has offered another, more recent way of comprehending the Pacific. 28 It is used often by scholars analysing US–East Asia geopolitical relations, including the Pacific War, and the increasingly linked economies of China, Hong Kong, Japan and the United States. 29 Another version includes coastal North America and South America into a ‘pan-Pacific’ history. This recognises that the geopolitical ‘rim’ was reinvented in the politico-cultural sphere. Any number of associations and non-government organisations were regionally organised on this geography, from the Pan Pacific Science Congresses (from 1920) to the Institute of Pacific Relations (from 1925) to the Pan Pacific Women’s Association (from 1928). 30 Not incidentally, the first meetings and centre of organisational gravity for each of these pan-Pacific entities was Hawai‘i. This had little to do with its Polynesian history, except in an antiquarian and later touristic sense, and much to do with its newer status as an apparent east–west crossroads, but one firmly under US sovereignty. The mythology of early twentieth-century Hawai‘i as a model multi-ethnic community was safely propounded only because it was US territory.

Finally, historians have comprehended the Pacific on a vertical axis, that is, oceanographically and meteorologically, from the depth of the sea-bed to its tumultuous surface to the trade winds above. Humans and their material culture end up under the sea and maritime archaeology has become a key adjacent discipline for all oceanic histories. Sea mammals and fish in the Great Ocean have both sustained humans and become a valuable resource for extraction, and

historians have analysed aquatic life – tuna, sharks, corals, whales, sea lions, dugong, turtles – as economic history, ecological history and as the history of science.\(^\text{31}\) Recently, signalling a broader interest in ‘undersea’ history, the Pacific has been historicised from an alternative ‘below’.\(^\text{32}\) The phenomenon of a single Pacific basin below the waves has often offered a geological unity that reassures historians trying to systematise a dizzying cultural and political diversity on and above the waves.\(^\text{33}\) But this vast watery space has other divisions that impact on humans and non-humans alike, over time: the North Pacific current, the Pacific South Equatorial Current, the Peru cold-water current. The climatological and meteorological phenomenon of El Niño has become a manner of marking temporal, even historical, periods in the Pacific region.\(^\text{34}\) The environmental determinism so common in 1930s historical geography may be returning, in a fashion, in a new climate-aware historiography.

**Maritime, Imperial and Postcolonial Histories**

Pacific history has engendered some of the world’s most significant maritime history: studies of vessels, technologies, methods of navigation and maritime cultures.\(^\text{35}\) Indigenous craft and navigation methods have fascinated maritime historians much as they did eighteenth-century European visitors.\(^\text{36}\) The double-hulled canoe, techniques for dead reckoning, observations of westerly wind shifts in between prevailing trade winds and celestial navigation all continue as Pacific maritime knowledge, and are the subject of histories, documentaries and museum exhibits alike. And while there are some notable studies of steam technology in the

Pacific,\textsuperscript{37} it is the ‘age of sail’ that steals attention in popular, museological and maritime archaeological investigations of the Pacific, the telling and retelling of the stories that the remote geography of the Pacific engendered: HMS \textit{Bounty}’s mutiny; La Pérouse’s South Sea expedition that simply vanished; New England whalers far from home in the Pacific, and Polynesian whalers far from home on Nantucket; beachcombers and European captives living well or ill with indigenous island and coastal communities. Both the Polynesian and European journeys have inspired re-enactment – also a form of history – as well as historical analysis of the genre of re-enactment itself, as a realist technology latterly turned affective.\textsuperscript{38}

Pacific history has opened up a massive historiography on the comparative history of imperialism; of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, British, German, American and Japanese intrusions into the islands and along the rim. How maritime empires became territorial empires – pastoral and plantation economies – over the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries has yielded a rich historiography on law, treaties and land-taking from the coasts inwards. This insular and coastal geography of colonialism was quite different to the inland river and lake-oriented settlement in North America, for example. The Pacific is also a strange space of enduring, unfamiliar and remnant imperialism: Spain’s failed venture to colonise the Solomon Islands;\textsuperscript{39} France’s last colonies (New Caledonia, the Marquesas);\textsuperscript{40} New Zealand and Australia’s imperial ambitions (Nauru, New Guinea, Samoa, Antarctica);\textsuperscript{41} a self-evident, though constantly questioned, American Pacific empire (Hawai‘i, Guam, Samoa, the Philippines); Russian designs on the North Pacific, its fish and furs; and bizarre international redistributions of sovereignty and experimental modes of rule after World War I (the German Pacific colonies turned Japanese, Australian and New Zealand mandates). A single island – Guam, for instance – distils the history and effects of successive Spanish, American and Japanese imperialism. Benedict Anderson

\textsuperscript{37} Frances Steel, \textit{Oceania under steam: Sea transport and the cultures of colonialism, c.1870–1914} (Manchester, 2011).
\textsuperscript{38} Ben Finney, \textit{Voyages of rediscovery} (Berkeley, CA, 1994); Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering, eds., \textit{Historical reenactment: From realism to the affective turn} (Basingstoke, 2010).
\textsuperscript{41} Catharine Coleborne and Katie Pickles, eds., \textit{New Zealand’s empire} (Manchester, 2015).
described a not dissimilar experience in the Philippines as ‘historical vertigo’.42

‘First contact’ between indigenous people and Europeans is a particularly strong theme in Pacific history, from sixteenth-century Spanish–Chamorro relations through the very late contact between New Guinea highlanders and Australian goldseekers in 1930. The ‘contact’ theme in Pacific history has recently extended beyond close analysis of initial mis/understandings, exchange and violence on beaches and ships between visitors and locals, to an interest in communication between indigenous Pacific peoples themselves, some from faraway islands and coasts, whose language and culture was often, but not always, familiar. The cosmopolitanism of Pacific maritime sojourners has become an analytic counterweight to earlier and enduring celebrations of Europeans’ global voyaging.43

Many, if not most Pacific histories written since the 1990s have been postcolonial revisions of eighteenth-century encounters. This has defined scholarship on Cook, for example, not least in a major debate between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere about Cook’s significance to Hawai’ians.44 Other historians have tracked indigenous memory and oral histories about Cook, over two centuries.45 The reinterpretation of conventional imperial histories to foreground and understand implications and viewpoints from an indigenous perspective extends to previous generations of historians as well, in part because the discipline of Pacific History was being institutionalised in the context of postwar decolonisation. The inaugural professor of the world’s first department of Pacific History, at the Australian National University, was Cambridge-trained Jim Davidson. Appointed in 1950 he was an active participant in regional decolonisation, advising Samoan chiefs on independence, drafting constitutions for the Cook Islands, Nauru and New Guinea. His Cambridge PhD might have been the classic ‘European penetration of the South Pacific, 1779–1842’, but by 1967 his book Samoa ma Samoa detailed ‘the emergence of the independent state of Western Samoa’.46

43 Thomas, Islanders; Nancy Shoemaker, Native American whalers and the world: Indigenous encounters and the contingency of race (Durham, NC, 2015); Kate Fullagar, The savage visit: New world peoples and popular imperial culture in Britain, 1710–1795 (Berkeley, CA, 2012).
44 See Gananath Obeyesekere, The apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific (Princeton, NJ, 1992); Marshall Sahlins, How ‘Natives’ think: About Captain Cook, for example (Chicago, IL, 1995).
45 Anne Salmond, The trial of the cannibal dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas (New Haven, CT, 2003); Maria Nugent, Captain Cook was here (Cambridge, 2009).
46 J.W. Davidson, Samoa ma Samoa: The emergence of the independent state of Western Samoa (Melbourne, 1967).
Not colonisation but decolonisation was the important history to be told. Just as there is has been a ‘contact’ thematic in Pacific historiography, so there is particular indigenous history of decolonisation as Tracey Banivanua Mar argued, and of political decolonisation that never happened, or is yet to unfold.

**Economy and Ecology**

Economic historians have drawn China – in particular Guangzhao – into Pacific historiography, tracking the significance of ‘Canton’ trade, the word romanised and then internationalised from an original Portuguese transliteration of Guangdong. The Spanish seizure of Manila from Malay rajahs in 1571 established a 500-year history of Pacific-based intercontinental trade – comparable, that is, to the periodisation of the Atlantic world. Long the world’s largest market, any number of ports, colonising expeditions, trade routes, island industries and shipping lines linked the oceanic region with Canton. Some economic historians argue that this Chinese–Spanish commerce became ‘the prime impetus behind the birth of global trade’. Certainly it created a template for Pacific-oriented wealth creation over the following centuries. Marine commodities like bêche-de-mer from Fiji, pearlshells from the Torres Strait, furs from seals and otters in the north Pacific, all circuited through and gained their value because of, Cantonese markets.

Another set of commodities was produced and extracted from insular and coastal land. The sandalwood trade was especially significant over the nineteenth century connecting islands where it was grown and processed (Fiji, the New Hebrides, New Caledonia and Hawai‘i) and Pacific

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rim ports where it was traded, Sydney, Manila, Valparaiso and Canton, the major end market. Settler colonial societies created entirely new markets from the late eighteenth century. Salted pork, for example, was exported from New Zealand and Tahiti to feed the growing population of British and Irish in southeast Australia, from the late eighteenth century. The extraction and production as well as trade of these commodities involved increasingly complex negotiations between Europeans – both those who lived on the islands and intermittent traders – and locals. The authority of some monarchical dynasties, such as the Pomare in Tahiti and the Kamehameha in Hawai‘i, was entrenched by the growing importance of such trade and through successful negotiations through much of the nineteenth century. More recently mining – especially guano mining on islands along the Peruvian coast and phosphate mining on islands throughout Oceania – connected the Pacific to world economies. Great profits ensued, some as controversially extracted from islanders as effectively as the phosphate itself, as in the case of Nauru. In the end, Pacific Islanders may have negotiated more successfully within the economic context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maritime imperialism than twentieth-century globalisation.

Commercial exchange, extraction economies and invasion ecologies went hand-in-hand in the Pacific. There have been many costs. But one of the dividends has been a thriving tradition of Pacific ecological history. The Pacific is perhaps the major oceanic region in which ecological history, and environmental history more generally, has been thoroughly applied, from Alfred Crosby’s focus on New Zealand in *Ecological Imperialism* onwards. The history of inter- and intra-species battles and exterminations, the concepts of resilience, invasion devastation or opportunistic flourishing, have each been thoroughly developed within Pacific-based history of science. In part this has been because the vastness of the ocean created island and coastal populations of non-human organisms if not entirely isolated, then certainly separated for many generations. In some instances, this isolation has been significant in evolutionary terms; the Wallace line, for example, marks the separation of Tasmania, Australia and New Guinea from Asia. And for humans, notwithstanding the historical and historiographical focus on connection across waters, distance and isolation have shaped history: contact with Europeans usually meant the devastating introduction of multiple unfamiliar microorganisms. These raised levels of infertility, morbidity and mortality, and introduced plant and animal species that changed seascapes and

landscapes in some instances very quickly. In the Pacific region, invasion ecology has long offered a rich conceptual, metaphorical as well as substantive mode through which to develop a demonstrably linked environmental and colonial history.  

Traffic: Slavery, Labour, Migration

Traffic in humans was always part of economic history and often part of maritime history. It has a long Pacific past. In both navy and merchant voyages, European mariners regularly captured adults and children from islands and coasts, but men and women characteristically held different value and had different experiences of captivity: as hostages on the one hand and, typically, as unwilling sexual labourers on the other. Sexual commerce was not an incidental but a problematically quotidian aspect of maritime, imperial and local cultures. Women were often enough objects of exchange between men, with little or no freedom of their own. As such the Pacific traffic in women must be seen as part of a maritime history of forced labour.

While the forced movement of people for slave-based plantation economies defines Atlantic history, there is a less definitive but nonetheless significant history of coerced labour that unfolded in the Pacific. Historians have recently uncovered the extent to which an African diaspora extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific: any number of freed and escaped slaves from the Caribbean and North America ended up in Pacific ports, not infrequently re-entering a shadow network of forced labour via penal systems. Other, more systematic if not official systems of slaving emerged in the Pacific world in nineteenth-century sequence to, and resulting from, the abolition of the slave trade in the Atlantic world. Many of the new South American republics banned slave labour in the early nineteenth century, for example, leaving a huge labour demand for the mid-nineteenth-century guano industry. China was one trans-Pacific source of contract labour. Easter Island was another, more coerced

55 Igler, The Great Ocean, ch. 3; Margaret Jolly, Serge Tcherkézoff and Darrell Tryon, eds., Oceanic encounters: exchange, desire, violence (Canberra, 2009).
source. Around one thousand Rapanui and perhaps another thousand Micronesians were forced into mining labour in Peru. Unscrupulous captains of this trade were occasionally brought before French and British courts, and trial records, as well as Rapanui oral histories taken in the 1970s, confirm the coercion of the traders still remembered as ‘Peruvian slavers’. For Rapanui, this trade all but fatally compounded the pre-existing population decline from infectious diseases.

For most polities in the Pacific, the legitimate – that is, governmental – response to abolition of slavery was authorisation of indentured or contracted labour systems, linking the Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds. Indian indenture to the Caribbean and across the Indian Ocean from the 1830s extended to Fiji in the 1870s. And from the 1860s opportunistic captains began moving Melanesian men and some women to sugar plantations in Queensland, a trade that British and colonial governments soon began to regulate. Over these decades and into the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Japanese and Chinese were indentured to work in Hawai‘i.

Successive gold discoveries in California, the Australian colonies and then Otago in New Zealand created further demand for mobility, from which passenger lines derived great profit in the 1850s and 1860s, crossing from China and Hong Kong to San Francisco, via Hawai‘i, and south-west to Sydney, Melbourne and Dunedin. In the last half of the nineteenth century, then, Pacific waters were constantly criss-crossed with vessels transporting contracted and free labourers, and migrants, to and fro. It became a busy ocean, increasingly so under steam. It also became a regulated ocean in this period, precisely because so much labour was indentured and observed in the shadow of the slave trade: captains and port-based agents were kept to minimum standards, at least on paper. All of this maritime movement of labourers also made Pacific coasts and ports key sites for a strident race-based nationalism. Coalescing around labour questions, the aspirational ‘whiteness’ of Pacific Rim polities – Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US – was defined by

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58 Finney, ‘The other one-third of the globe’, 289.
anti-Chinese, anti-Indian and anti-Japanese politics. A combination of proliferating maritime quarantine regulations and anti-Chinese labour/immigration laws made the Pacific the ocean in which border control shifted from intermittent emergency measures to quotidian and eventually normalised practice. And this all played out in maritime sites and as maritime matters: customs, quarantine, inspections, deportations, refusals and provisional entries were increasingly the routine business of Pacific ports.

Overlying this ‘global colour line’ by which so much of the Pacific was legally if not actually segregated, is a later twentieth-century diaspora. If Fiji is one site of an extended Indian diaspora, Australia, New Zealand and the United States are now home, or second home, to Fijian, Tongan, Samoan and Chamorro communities. Some of this out-migration has been voluntary, towards larger economies. Some has been unexpected and unwanted. There is a history of relocation and resettlement in the Pacific that is peculiarly oceanic, or more specifically, insular. Mining made some island homes literally unliveable: Ocean Island (Banaba), for example, where eighty years of phosphate mining (1900–79) stripped the island bare. Many Banabans relocated first to Fiji, and thence across the Pacific rim. Other relocations are occurring now, or are imminent, as an effect of rising sea levels.

**Ways of Knowing**

Pacific historiography is marked by a cross-cultural epistemology, different ways of knowing culture, nature and history. Cosmologies clashed and converged. Christianity has been massively important in the Pacific context, the counter-reformation Spanish Catholic world extending to the Philippines, in early proselytising conflict with Islam, and eventually creating what remains one of the largest Catholic polities in the world.

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Christian denominations and nationalities folded into one another over successive eras – French and Catholic, British and Protestant, German and Lutheran. In the process, ways of knowing, ways of believing and ways of speaking were shaped and resisted in relation to one another, as Vicente Rafael showed in *Contracting Colonialism*. Religion was often politics. The London Missionary Society worked from an original Tahitian base, where the conversion of Pomare II in 1812 manifested as the earliest Christian kingdom in the Pacific and represented an alliance-politics of sorts that has been analysed as Polynesian imperialism. Two centuries later, Christianity is the island Pacific’s ‘traditional’ religion, making the region significant for the new study of global Christianities.

Christian mission in the South Pacific coincided with, and often grafted onto, late Enlightenment scientific mission. Sometimes figured historiographically as a ‘laboratory’, the Pacific was rather more a ‘field’ for natural historians. And given the remarkable biogeography that awaited them, it is little wonder that early natural historians, like the historians of science that later studied them, returned again and again to the Pacific. Bio-prospecting as much as navigation and charting was an explicit element of many, perhaps most, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century expeditions. Islanders’ knowledge was sought, sometimes demanded and sometimes exchanged; how to grow and process New Zealand ‘flax’, for example, momentarily an enticing prospect as a hemp substitute for sails and ropes. Commercial interests jockeyed with purer ambitions to gather good specimens, and millions of botanical, zoological and geological items returned to European and American collections, still displayed and stored in the Muséum national d’histoire naturelle and Jardin des Plantes in Paris, the Kew Botanical Gardens or the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. Because the Pacific was the Enlightenment’s ‘new world’, modern ways of knowing the natural world – systems of

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knowledge as well as units of knowledge – were built very much from these collections.\(^{71}\)

In the same way, but with more serious implications, the Pacific has long been a site for the production of knowledge about human sameness and difference, and has drawn a great deal of scholarly interest in writing and revising histories of ethnography. Much was specifically ‘seaborne ethnography’, as Bronwen Douglas has argued.\(^{72}\) A great deal of knowledge about human difference in Oceania – the invention of ‘race’ – rested on ideas about sex and gender.\(^{73}\) And reproduction across ‘race’ has engaged historians of Pacific societies in large part because it engaged governments and lawmakers so strongly in past centuries.\(^{74}\)

It is often claimed that the Pacific was a place in which Europeans thoroughly ‘naturalised’ and, later in the nineteenth century, ‘biologised’ indigenous people. Certainly a peculiar European view of the world invented ‘savage’ societies in the Pacific. Yet this was, at least originally, more a signifier of hunter-gathering economies, than a biological signifier of fixed race difference. Analysis of the ‘biologising’ of Pacific people can be overstated, and serves to misrepresent the cultural inquiry that governed most eighteenth-century accounts. These could be, and were, as dismissive, violent and hierarchical as the crudest post-Darwinian biological anthropology, and yet most European ways of knowing Pacific culture involved inquiry into politico-legal systems, cultures of birth and death, relations between men and women, linguistic variety, modes of thought about spiritual realms, kinship and history. The Pacific has been a site for the development of physical anthropology as well as comparative anatomy – even Te Rangi Hiroa proudly recounted his measurement of ‘424 heads of full-blooded Maoris’.\(^{75}\) Yet such ways of knowing human difference belong to an historical period – and rather a shorter period than is usually claimed. Indeed, even as Te Rangi Hiroa wrote, other anthropologists and biologists were engaged in studies that were to undo the very idea of ‘race’, theoretically. Scientific investigations of mixed-race Pacific populations – almost despite their own ambitions and


\(^{75}\) Te Rangi Hiroa, *Vikings of the sunrise*, p. 16.
intentions—ended up challenging the viability of contemporary racial theories.⁷⁶

**Pacific Centuries**

If, in scholarly terms, the Atlantic world is both a region and a period (c. 1500–1800), the Pacific world also has a temporal dimension. ‘The Pacific century’ was used in the late twentieth century as a forecasting signifier—the twenty-first century was going to be the Pacific century, in the light of rising Japanese and later Thai, Malaysian, Korean and Chinese economies. But by that century’s end—1999—international relations scholars were already asking: ‘whatever happened to the Pacific Century?’⁷⁷ To some extent the idea of a Pacific century became outmoded because it was linked so specifically to Japan. Yet it prompted economic historians to rethink the Pacific, and to nominate any number of previous ‘Pacific centuries’: not one, but at least five centuries, as Dennis O. Flynn, Lionel Frost and A. J. H. Latham indicated in their edited collection on the Pacific rim since the sixteenth century.⁷⁸

In retrospect, however, the twentieth century might still best qualify as the Pacific century. If China dominated economically, and in the long view, Japan dominated Pacific history geopolitically in the twentieth century. That century began with a complete rearrangement of the region, as Japan asserted itself over Russia, and then allied itself with Britain and France in World War I, the Japanese Imperial Navy taking Germany’s Micronesian colonies. And yet the end of the war signalled a marked shift in international relations across the Pacific, as Japanese governments pressed hard against the race-based immigration laws that so many Pacific rim countries continued to implement. Indeed the flurry of ‘pan-Pacific’ associations in the period was a precise response to Japanese dissatisfaction turned foreign policy. It is with good reason that the relatively new field of ‘international relations’ focused on the Pacific region. It was the Pacific War that globalised the second ‘world’ war, and historians are increasingly dating it not from 1939 to 1945, but from 1937 at the Japanese

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invasion of China to September 1945, at the surrender of Japan, the strange seaborne ritual on USS Missouri. It was a war fought through and in the Pacific. Islands were conquered (Guam), divided (Samoa) and bombed (Hawaii). All of the ocean, land and people that had become part of the Japanese Empire, having been part of the Spanish, American, British and Australian empires, after the war had to decolonise again from their liberators and administrators.

The Cold War played out in the Pacific as well, not least with nuclear testing. The Marshall Islands was the so-called Pacific Proving Ground for early US testing, the apparent emptiness of the Pacific later inviting the French to experiment on Pacific atolls. The Pacific has also been a site of major anti-nuclear politics, both unofficial and, in the case of New Zealand, official. The mid-1980s Lange government declared New Zealand and its waters a ‘nuclear free zone’, banning nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships. The sinking of the Greenpeace protest vessel, the Rainbow Warrior, by French intelligence agents in 1985, entrenched a Pacific-based political stand-off.

The Rainbow Warrior sinking was an unlikely maritime affair in a jet-fuelled age. And yet, as with all oceans, containerisation has maintained – indeed increased – Pacific ocean traffic. The infrastructure of globalisation remains, in very large part maritime, as historians of global capitalism have shown. And the great volume of containerised cargo now transported across the ocean is the latest Pacific chapter for ‘world-systems’ theorists, always inclined to think historically. It is this traffic, criss-crossing old Polynesian, galleon, whaling and naval routes, that daily connects the Pacific to world history as well as the world ocean.

**Further Reading**

There are now multiple general histories of the Pacific Ocean that treat the islands and rim, the North and the South together. Key single-authored books include Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific worlds: A history of seas, peoples, and cultures* (Cambridge, 2012); Donald B. Freeman, *The Pacific* (London, 2010). David Armitage and Alison Bashford have edited *Pacific histories: Ocean, land, people* (Basingstoke, 2014). On the islands, a vast amount of information is gathered in Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune, *The Pacific islands: An encyclopedia* (Honolulu, HI, 2000) and interpretations

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