ENCOUNTERING THE PACIFIC IN THE AGE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Pacific Ocean was the setting for the last great chapter in the convergence of humankind from across the globe. Driven by Enlightenment ideals, Europeans sought to extend control to all quarters of the earth through the spread of beliefs, the promotion of trade and the acquisition of new knowledge. This book surveys the consequent encounters between European expansionism and the peoples of the Pacific.

John Gascoigne weaves together the stories of British, French, Spanish, Dutch and Russian voyages throughout the Pacific region. In a lively and lucid style, he brings to life the idealism, adventures and frustrations of a colourful cast of historical figures. Drawing upon a range of fields, including the history of exploration, science and religion, he depicts the episodes that helped define the Enlightenment and its limitations, and explores the complexities of the relationships between European and Pacific peoples.

Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment is divided into three periods: European contact with the Pacific until the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763; the epic age of discovery from 1763 until the French Revolution in 1789; and the period from 1789 until the beginning of the Napoleonic Empire in 1804. Each part features a detailed chronology and is constructed around the central themes of exploration and encounter, wealth, belief and knowledge.

Richly illustrated with historical images and maps, this seminal work provides new perspectives on the significance of European contact with the Pacific in the Enlightenment.

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To Kate, Robert and Catherine, companions on the journey

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Preface

The vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean was the setting for the culmination of the two great tides of human history: the slow outward surge of humanity occupying most of the habitable globe and the much faster returning wave which reconnected the eddies and currents of the human race to create a single world community. The first great tide began with the emergence of *homo sapiens* in Africa (probably some 200 000 years ago) and continued with the diaspora of humanity out of Africa and across the globe. About 80 000 to 60 000 years ago humans made their way to the Eurasian landmass and from there to parts of Australasia, thence to the Americas and finally to the watery remoteness of the easternmost Pacific islands. Much of the Pacific was, then, the last and furthest shore reached by this outward surge of humanity.

The Pacific, occupying some one-third of the earth, was also to be one of the last places reached by the contrary tide of human history: the movement of peoples across the world which brought with it the convergence of humanity after its great divergence. Not until the late eighteenth century was the Pacific fully (if still imperfectly) integrated into the maps which were determining the ever-quickening traffic of material goods, people and ideas around the globe. The central theme of this book is this phenomenon: the way the Pacific and its peoples were drawn into the greater human web in the course of the eighteenth century. The two processes – the outward peopling of the Pacific as part of the general diaspora of humankind and the process whereby the Pacific was drawn into the larger all-encompassing web – frame the dynamics of the subject; it is, however, the latter shorter (but much more documentable) process which forms the burden of the work.

An area as vast as the Pacific had meaning only for those voyagers and visitors who could view the globe with the detachment that came from a return to another part of the world. For those who inhabited the Pacific's diverse shores and multitudinous islands the great ocean could only be understood and made useful at a much more local level. The idea of the Pacific came with

that second great tide of humankind which brought with it the convergence of different peoples and the need to move about the world over distances at an unprecedented scale and pace. It was principally the Europeans who, as they became ever more preoccupied with restless movement, felt the need to render the earth into a comprehensible form which would make possible travel to its remotest corners. Such a view of the world was the work of centuries, but it was the charting of the Pacific which brought this long endeavour to its fruition. The idea of the Pacific was, then, largely a European construct which merged into a single entity the enormously heterogeneous peoples, places and cultures lapped by the waters of that great ocean.[1]

When Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer in the service of the Spanish crown, coined the term 'the Pacific Ocean' on his pioneering voyage of circumnavigation (1519–21), it referred particularly to those areas of the globe not yet known to the large-scale civilisations which occupied the Eurasian landmass. Though it was found that the Pacific included the shores of China and Japan, these were much less *terrae incognitae* than the possible new lands in the watery expanse to the west of the Americas. It was this ocean with its many islands and possible landmasses that was the subject of the speculations and myths that the terms 'The Pacific' or 'The South Sea' were to conjure up. In the northern hemisphere, the area of the Pacific which excited greatest curiosity was the area least surveyed by the Spanish conquerors of the Americas, the Pacific Northwest. As the map of the earth began to be more nearly completed, questions about the shape and extent of the northern extremities of the Americas and what, if any, demarcation existed between it and Eurasia became more urgent. The beguiling possibility of a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific across North America – the Northwest Passage – also focussed attention on this part of the globe.

These areas of the Pacific which were the subject of so much European scrutiny are the particular concern of this book. The chronological focus on the age of the Enlightenment reflects the way in which ties of travel, exchange and settlement became more durable from the late eighteenth century – the period when the Pacific came to be integrated into the maps of the world.[2] Indeed, it was only then that the very term 'Pacific' was firmly established as the accepted name for a region of the earth so vast and uncertain that it had often been given vaguer and more expansive names, such as the Great Ocean or, more commonly, the South Sea.[3] In 1712 this '*South Sea,* otherwise call'd

1 Winks, 'Getting to know the *beau savage*'
2 Skelton, 'Map compilation'
3 Gulliver, 'Finding the Pacific world', p. 85

the *Pacifick Sea'* was defined with telling vagueness by Edward Cooke in his account of a privateering voyage from 1708 to 1711 (under the command of Woodes Rogers with William Dampier as pilot) as being 'that vast Ocean which lies on the *West* of *America*, and between it and *Asia*, *East* and *West*, and extending from *California* [ie the west coast of America] in the *North*, to the *Terra Australis Incognita* in the *South*'.[4]

The definition of something called 'the Pacific' was, then, an artefact produced by the growing convergence of humanity. From a point of maximal dispersion and differentiation, all the human race has been drawn more and more into a pervasive web which makes all of us, to some degree, dependent on each other. Dispersal maximises variety while convergence tends to promote homogeneity, even though human cultures can prove remarkably resilient in maintaining difference and separate identities.[5] The forces which prompted humanity to disperse were the quest for new territories and, with them, greater resources, as well as the desire to escape foes. Once dispersion had reached its limits these forces also prompted convergence as people sought dominance over the territories and lands of others – often in order to combat more effectively their enemies at home.

The impulses which drove Europeans around the globe have been pithily summarised as God, Gold and Glory. The first of this aspirational triad reflected the strong commitment to religious proselytising characteristic of the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Islam at different points of their long shared histories. Though empires differ in the extent to which they have promoted specific doctrinal systems, the dissemination of some form of common belief has been one of their recurrent features. Unless the subject population was eliminated (which did happen on occasions, principally through the devastating impact of introduced diseases), eventually the exercise of power had to be made routine – one cannot be for ever resting on bayonets or other weapons. Empires need some sort of ideological glue, whether it be the cult of the emperor or a more all-embracing, unifying ethos – usually expressed in religious language – which could sanctify the new connections between conquerors and conquered.

The search for Gold could take different forms, though the literal quest for precious metals remained a ready source of outward migration around the globe from the time of the Spanish Conquistadors to nineteenth-century gold-rushes on either sides of the Pacific. But gold could also take the form of a search for wealth in other forms usually as the outcome of trade but

4 Cooke, *Voyage to the South Sea*, p. 35 5 Wesseling, 'Reflections', pp. 3–4

also through the promotion of profitable crops such as the spices of the East Indies.

Glory provided the perennial motive force for empires as one group basked in the prestige of its dominance over others. It could, however, take another less aggressive form: the acquisition of prestige from acquiring new knowledge – an aspect of expansion which became more important in European-based empires with the emergence of the Scientific Revolution from the time of the publication of Copernicus' account of the heliocentric universe in 1543. Such knowledge could, of course, be a path to greater wealth or more effective domination but it was also valued for its own sake – particularly as science became more and more a dominant cultural force.

The outward vectors of human expansion and hence convergence can, then, be summarised as: the quest for empire along with the promotion of systems of belief, the desire for greater wealth and (particularly in the centuries since Copernicus) the quest for greater knowledge. Hence empire, belief, wealth and knowledge form the scaffolding of the chapters of this book and its attempt to understand the ways in which the Pacific, the last major area both of human divergence and convergence, was increasingly drawn within the human web.

These themes are considered in relation to three major chronological periods: contact with the Pacific (chiefly by Europeans) in the period up to the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–63); in the period from 1763 until the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, the 'classic age' of European Pacific voyaging; and finally in the period from 1789 to the end of the interlinked Pacific voyages which followed in the wake of James Cook (1728–1779). The last of these were the rival voyages of the French Nicolas Baudin (1800–4) and the English Matthew Flinders (1801–3), which were concerned with charting unknown areas of the landmass of the continent which Flinders dubbed 'Australia' and which had earlier been identified by Dutch explorers as New Holland. Thereafter the titanic struggle produced by the renewed Napoleonic wars following the end of the short-lived Treaty of Amiens from March 1802 to May 1803 pre-empted any further Pacific voyaging. The return of the Baudin expedition in 1804, the same year in which Napoleon had himself crowned Emperor – thus bringing to an end many of the ideals which had prompted the Revolution and exacerbating the scale of war – makes a convenient ending point for the concerns of this book, if not for the fuller story of the Pacific's increasing integration into a global network over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the root of all these forces prompting European engagement in the Pacific (and elsewhere) lay the quest for empire, in the sense of control over new territories. Empires could come in many different shapes and sizes – some much more formalised than others. At base, empires were about control over particular parts of the globe and, along with the obvious military methods of securing dominance, there were other routes to achieving such goals. Securing trade or mastery of systems of knowledge (such as maps and classification of local resources) also could bring dominance. Such 'imperial webs' (as Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton term them) enabled one group of people to exercise control over others through patterns of trade, migration and, in more formalised empires, through military control bringing with it some form of sovereignty.

The analogy of the web emphasises that both sides, the rulers and the ruled, were ineluctably linked through mobility and exchange, though it was in the nature of empires that the rulers benefited more from such arrangements. Webs, too, are fragile and empires – particularly when they have to be sustained over long distances and over diverse peoples – could dissolve if the forces of divergence outweighed those of convergence.[6] Such fluctuating imperial fortunes were evident around the globe, including in the indigenous Pacific seaborne empires, or thessalocracies, of Tonga and the Micronesian islands of Yap. The exercise of Western imperial power in the Pacific has varied in its forms in part because only some areas of the Pacific had sufficient resources to prompt the formation of formalised empires there. Pacific rim lands were incorporated into larger European empires by the Spanish on the western coasts of both Americas – though with increasing competition from the Russians and the British in the Pacific Northwest in the late eighteenth century. Following the formation of the convict settlement at Botany Bay in 1788, the full extent of the Australian continent was eventually incorporated into the British Empire.

Linking Pacific islands to formal empires largely came in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the trappings of empire brought kudos within the system of competing European states. This was, however, built on earlier forms of imperial expansion which took the characteristic forms of the search for the promotion of belief, the quest for wealth and the promotion of new forms of knowledge – the central themes of this book. Since empires seek new territories and new resources, exploration is closely intertwined with imperial expansion[7] and also contact between different peoples and cultures,

6 Ballantyne and Burton, *Bodies in contact*, p. 3
7 Stafford, 'Scientific exploration and empire', p. 318

the introductory chapters of the three chronological sections of this book are therefore termed 'Empire, Exploration and Encounter'.

The approach adopted in this work, with its emphasis on human divergence and convergence, owes a manifest debt to the recent work of world historians, notably David Northrup, Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Philip Curtin,[8] while the concept of the human web has been formulated most influentially by J. R. and William McNeill.[9] World history itself has, however, a long and illustrious history and the central importance of the increasing encounters between different peoples around the globe was something on which the Enlightenment reflected.[10] Voltaire, in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) (translated soon afterwards into English, with the telling title *An essay on universal history*), underlined the significance of such human convergence when he dilated on the momentous significance for world history of Columbus's discovery of America. This he regarded as 'the most important event that ever happened on our globe, one moiety of which had been hitherto strangers to the other'. Such an interaction had brought about a 'new creation', which made other chapters of human history appear as mere 'trifles'.[11] Rather vaguely Voltaire was even aware that there were new areas of the globe yet to be fully explored by Europe in the area which he called 'the Austral Regions'. The Pacific had a place in his worldview – even if it was yet to be fully realised.[12]

A few decades later, Abbé Guillaume Raynal in *A philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (1770) (written with the help of Diderot and others)[13] made similar points. After his celebrated opening about the momentous importance for 'mankind in general' of 'the discovery of the new world, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope', he adverted to what amounted to the theme of convergence. As a consequence of such encounters, he urged, 'a general intercourse of opinions, laws and customs, diseases and remedies, virtues and vices, was established throughout the world'. The main means by

8 Northrup, 'Globalisation and the Great Convergence'; Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders;* Curtin, *The world and the West*
9 McNeill and McNeill, *The human web*
10 On the revival of universal history in our own times see Christian, 'The return to universal history'
11 Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, III, p. 321
12 His ruminations on this subject in the *Essai* were even included in a collection of 18th-century manuscripts on the theme of the 'Mers Australes', linked to prompting increasing French participation in Pacific exploration. BN, NAF 9437, p. 61 (ATL, micro MS 358–9)
13 Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 421–3

which he saw such convergence taking place was through the effects of commerce and navigation, which he described as creating 'a communication of flying bridges, as it were, that re-unite one continent with another'.[14] When Adam Smith in his *Wealth of nations* (1776) echoed Raynal's comments about the importance of the discovery of the New World and the passage to the East Indies, he also took up the convergence theme, arguing that the consequences of these epochal developments were likely to be for the greater good of humankind: 'By uniting, in some measure, the most distant parts of the world, by enabling them to relieve one another's wants, to increase one another's enjoyments, and to encourage one another's industry, their general tendency would seem to be beneficial'.[15]

Even at the beginning of the eighteenth century – before the pace of foreign trade and exploration gathered greater momentum – the more perceptive could see how more and more the world was becoming one. An introduction to *A collection of voyages and travels* published in 1704 – a tract doubtfully attributed to John Locke[16] – remarked on how travellers had now 'visited all other countries, though never so remote, which they have found well peopled, and most of them rich and delightful'. Even the Pacific regions were coming into view, since such travellers 'to demonstrate the antipodes, have pointed them out to us'. Not only trade had benefited but also knowledge since 'geography and hydrography have received some perfection', while 'Astronomy has received the addition of many constellations never seen before. Natural and moral history is embellished with the most beneficial increase of some many thousands of plants it had never before received'. The consequence, then, was that 'the empire of Europe is now extended to the utmost bounds of the earth'.[17]

Major figures linked to the Enlightenment were, then, increasingly reflecting on the way in which parts of the world were more and more being linked together, bringing increasing contact with different human communities. In the above tract, empire was seen as the wellspring which impelled travellers

14 Raynal, *A philosophical and political history* …, pp. 1, 473
15 Adam Smith, *An inquiry*…, IV, vii, 3, p. 271
16 E.S. De Beer attributes it to the Oxford tutor and author of a geographical tract, Edward Wells. http://www.libraries.psu.edu/tas/locke/bib/choo.html (accessed 19 July 2011). Locke, a voracious reader of travellers' accounts, may not have written the introduction, but he was associated with the work published by Awnsham and John Churchill. Awnsham wrote to Locke that he considered himself 'particularly oblig'd for your assistance about my collection of voyages'. Marshall and Williams, *The great map*, p. 48
17 Locke, *The works*, IX, pp. 506–7

around the globe and which held together the global bounds thus created. Empire brought with it greater trade (and hence wealth), but also provided greater knowledge, valuable for its sake but also another potential source of wealth. It is such forces that drove the encompassing of the globe to include the Pacific, the subject of this book. Long inhabited by different branches of the human community, the Pacific became a watery highway bringing others from afar, the result being a human chemistry which is still in train.

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Abbreviations

Add.	Additional MS
AJCP	Australian Joint Copying Project
AN	Archives nationales
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
BCA	British Columbia Archives
BCE	before the Common Era (dates)
BL	British Library
BN	Bibliothèque nationale de France
BP	before the present (dates)
CE	Common Era (dates)
HRNSW	*Historical Records of New South Wales*
mf	microfilm
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
ML	Mitchell Library, Sydney
NAF	Nouvelles acquistions françaises (MSS)
TNA	The National Archives, UK (formerly Public Record Office [PRO])