

Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

edited by

Geraldine Heng

University of Texas at Austin

Susan Noakes

University of Minnesota Twin Cities

OCEANIA, 800–1800CE

*A Millennium of Interactions in a Sea
of Islands*

James L. Flexner

University of Sydney



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-82328-9 — Oceania, 800-1800CE
James L. Flexner
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108823289
DOI: 10.1017/9781108913782

© James L. Flexner 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-82328-9 Paperback
ISSN 2632-3427 (online)
ISSN 2632-3419 (print)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Oceania, 800–1800CE

A Millennium of Interactions in a Sea of Islands

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

DOI: 10.1017/9781108913782
First published online: October 2021

James L. Flexner
University of Sydney

Author for correspondence: James L. Flexner, James.flexner@sydney.edu.au

Abstract: Over a span of 1,000 years beginning around 800CE, the people of the Pacific Islands undertook a remarkable period of voyaging, political evolution, and cross-cultural interactions. Polynesian navigators encountered previously uninhabited lands, as well as already inhabited islands and the coast of the Americas. Island societies saw epic sagas of political competition and intrigue, documented through oral traditions and the monuments and artefacts recovered through archaeology. European entry into the region added a new episode of interaction with strange people from over the horizon. These histories provide an important cross-cultural perspective for the concept of ‘the Middle Ages’ from outside of the usual Old World focus.

Keywords: Oceania, Global Middle Ages, cross-cultural interaction, Pacific history, Pacific archaeology

© James L. Flexner 2021

ISBNs: 9781108823289 (PB), 9781108913782 (OC)
ISSNs: 2632-3427 (online), 2632-3419 (print)

Contents

1 Oceania's Island World: Geographic and Conceptual Background	1
2 Timeless Backwater, or Written Out of History?	4
3 Encountering New Environments: The Ends of Polynesia	10
4 Navigating Inhabited Lands: The Americas and the Polynesian Outliers	19
5 Political Epics in Island Societies	23
6 Oceania Encounters Europe	34
7 From a Millennium of Contacts to Islander Futures	46
References	50