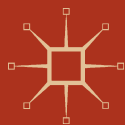




# *Pacific Histories*

## *Ocean, Land, People*

Edited by DAVID ARMITAGE  
& ALISON BASHFORD



What is the place of the Pacific Ocean in world history? How might we rethink world history from a Pacific perspective?

This is the first comprehensive volume to bring together the histories of the Pacific Islands, the Pacific Rim and the Pacific Ocean. A distinguished international team of historians provides a multidimensional account of the Pacific, its inhabitants and the lands within and around it – from the first human migrations to the present.

The book covers the Pacific from Russia to Antarctica and from Southeast Asia to Central America, with focused attention on the peoples of Oceania. It introduces the Pacific's multiple pasts, before examining major themes in Pacific history: the connections created by the environment, migration and the economy; religious, legal and scientific ways of knowing; and the identities expressed in ideas and practices of race, gender and politics.

This is essential reading for anyone wishing to explore the Pacific and its place within global history.

Introduction by David Armitage and Alison Bashford. Essays by: Damon Salesa, Joyce E. Chaplin, Nicholas Thomas, Akira Iriye, Ryan Tucker Jones, Adam McKeown, Kaoru Sugihara, Bronwen Douglas, Lisa Ford, Sujit Sivasundaram, James Belich, Patricia O'Brien and Robert Aldrich. Afterword by Matt K. Matsuda.

David Armitage is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History at Harvard University.

Alison Bashford is the Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History at the University of Cambridge.

*Other books by the editors*

David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*  
(2013)

Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life  
on Earth* (2014)

# Pacific Histories

Ocean, Land, People

*Edited by*

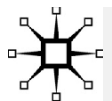
DAVID ARMITAGE

*and*

ALISON BASHFORD

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Afterword © Matt K. Matsuda 2014.

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David Armitage, Cambridge, MA  
Alison Bashford, Sydney



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# Introduction: The Pacific and its Histories

David Armitage and Alison Bashford

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*Oceania is humanity, rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire  
deeper still. Oceania is us.*

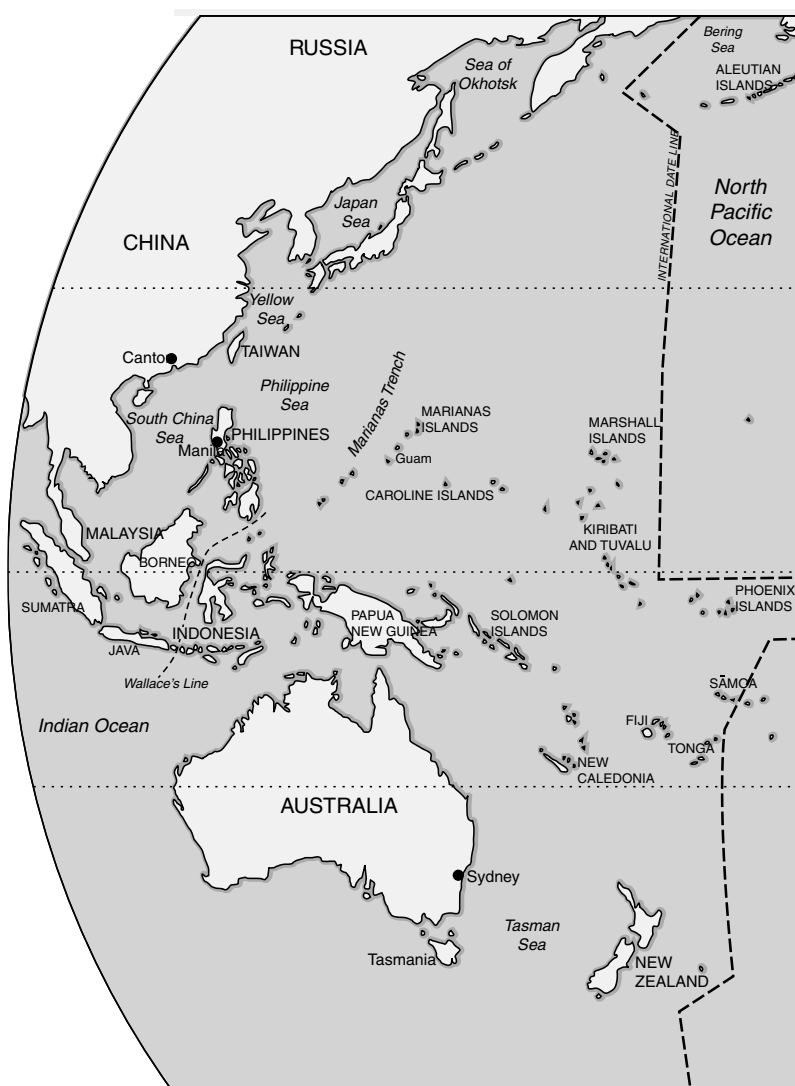
Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands' (1993)

*... this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about;  
makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth.*

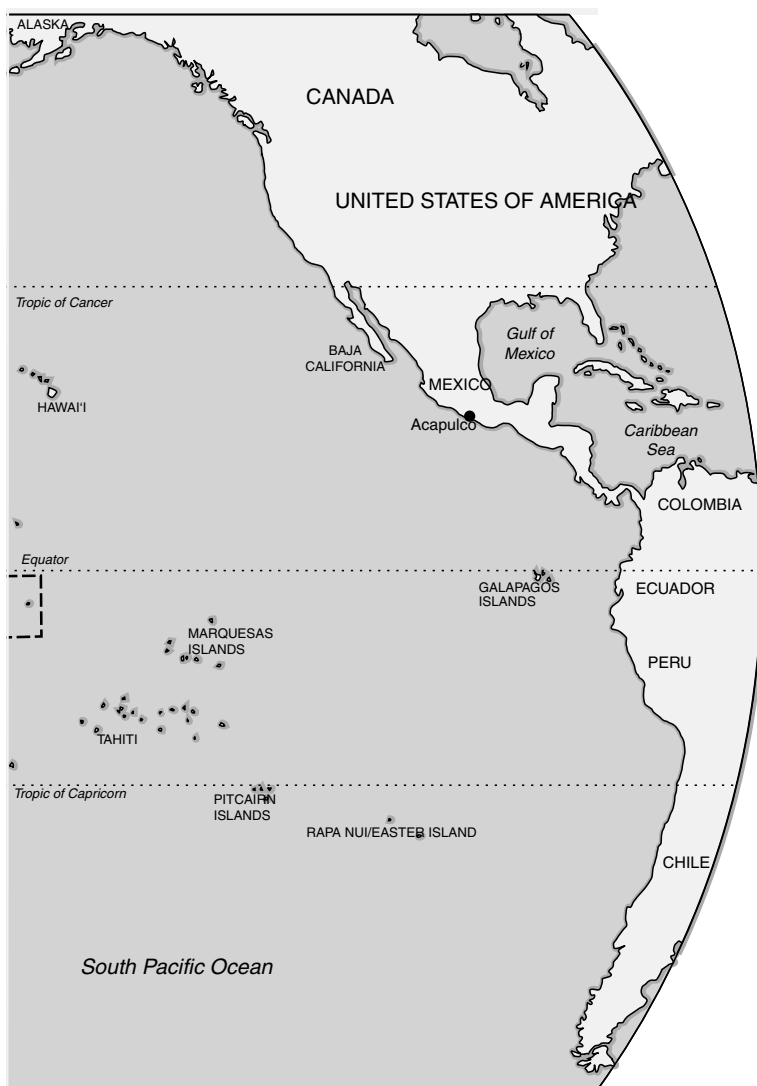
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

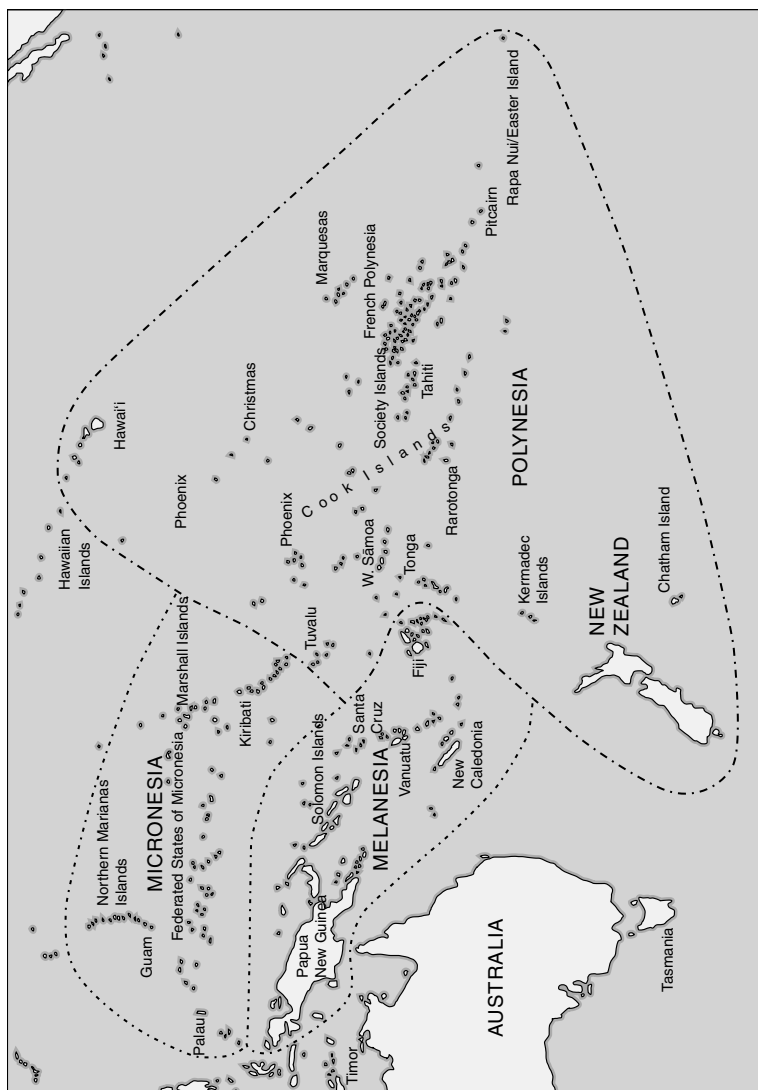
The Pacific Ocean is often thought of as a centre. For its inhabitants – like the Tongan-Fijian intellectual Epeli Hau'ofa – it was cultural, physical and political home.<sup>1</sup> For those imagining the Pacific from without – such as the American novelist Herman Melville – this heart-shaped ocean was the very heart of earth itself. For the Islander, the Pacific was the centre of *his* world; for the American, it was the centre of *the* world. What, then, is the history of this ocean that is so often perceived as a fulcrum? If it is a pivot around which various worlds turn, what is its place in world history?

Pacific History entails the past of 'a water hemisphere' in itself.<sup>2</sup> More than any similar oceanic region the Pacific has a fundamental physical unity. It is a geological entity, comprising the globe's largest basin, created by tectonic movements that in turn generate circum-Pacific zones of volcanic and seismic activity collectively known as the 'Ring of Fire'.<sup>3</sup> These underlying physical features form linkages, both destructive and productive, that have joined the destinies of peoples in the lands around and within the Ocean. Earthquakes in this fragile region whip up the hemisphere-spanning tsunamis that lend the Pacific basin an intermittent catastrophic unity. As Ryan Jones notes in this volume, 'Tsunamis are a useful example and metaphor for the environmental history of the Pacific Ocean,



Map 1 The Pacific world





Map 2 Oceania

pointing as they do to the connective force that the ocean itself has projected on humans over long distances'. The same seismic forces that produce these surging waves of energy also gave rise to the precious minerals that sparked the gold rushes around the Ocean's rim in the mid-nineteenth century. The Pacific also has distinct hydrographic and climatic patterns that make it 'a uniquely coherent oceanic space', as warm water and cool air circulate across it in the system known as the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which also has climatic effects in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, as well as in Africa: an apt metaphor for the Pacific as integrated but connected to the world.<sup>4</sup>

Unified and coherent though the Pacific basin is, its history remains undeniably divided in complex ways. Great lines cross and bisect it. The Equator divides it cartographically in one direction. The International Date Line snakes across it in another, more arbitrary manner, much like the line drawn between the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) more than five centuries ago. The Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn define the characters of land, sea and people; in bio-geographical terms, even Wallace's Line, running through the middle of Indonesia, delineates the ecological and faunal barrier between Asia and Australia, marking the border between the ancient continents of Sunda (what is now Southeast Asia and Indonesia) and Sahul (the once-joined lands of New Guinea and Australia).

For centuries called by Europeans the 'South Sea' – *mar del sur* – the Pacific (as Europeans were the first to term it) reaches from the Arctic to the Antarctic, and straddles the 180th meridian, or what came to be seen as the eastern and western hemispheres.<sup>5</sup> Within its bounds are the three 'nesias' – Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia – which together make up 'Oceania' (now sometimes subdivided into 'Near Oceania' and 'Remote Oceania'), an originally racialised set of European designations that the peoples of the region themselves have adopted.<sup>6</sup> More than any other ocean, the Pacific is thus a region where worlds meet and pulse together, much as Melville imagined it in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Pacific invites extreme assessments. In the early 1920s, the German writer on geopolitics Karl Haushofer saw the Ocean, much like Melville, as alive, constantly criss-crossed by the agents of competing polities and empires: 'It is ... in its gigantic triangular shape absolutely the largest unified living space on earth'.<sup>7</sup> Yet in exactly the same years, the novelist D. H. Lawrence looked out at the Ocean from Southern California and saw only emptiness, 'the



void Pacific'. No one would now write of the region as the 'earth's empty quarter', and such appellations were always nonsensical to those living on and in the great ocean.<sup>8</sup> Both assessments, however, were a response to the Pacific's hemispheric scale. This Ocean suggests a whole globe in a way that other oceans do not.

In the past generation, historians have tried with accumulating energy and success to construct accounts of the human past that fully encompass its mobility, hybridity and interconnectedness across geographies and politics. Those efforts go under various names, including international history, transnational history, global history and world history.<sup>9</sup> They now strive to encompass the histories of overlapping worlds, often those centred on seas and oceans. The Mediterranean came first, figured as a cradle of civilisations and as an environmental unity, if not a cultural one.<sup>10</sup> The Indian Ocean has been analysed as a conduit of commerce, migration and religious syncretism.<sup>11</sup> Atlantic history, also, has linked and transformed understandings of littoral Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean and Africa.<sup>12</sup> These novel histories – some with ancient lineages – have been collectively termed 'the new thalassology': that is, the turn towards the waters of the world, the dwellers on their shores and islands, and the modes of interaction across maritime spaces.<sup>13</sup>

All along, the Pacific has been historicised too, although its scholars have generally stood to one side of this new thalassology, and so have sometimes been perceived as absent altogether. On this view, the Pacific is a relative latecomer to these new oceanic approaches to supranational history: 'Despite its size, the Pacific has received only scant historical attention when compared to the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans'.<sup>14</sup> As a result, one global historian has remarked, 'there has not yet emerged an organized scholarly community focused on Pacific history' comparable to the one working on Atlantic history; another argues that '[t]he Spanish American and Pacific Ocean worlds remain, for many historians, part of separate historiographies', outside the mainstream of global history.<sup>15</sup> The historical importance of the Pacific, it seems, has not been matched by its place in contemporary historiography. Despite its economic, demographic and strategic centrality in the present, the Pacific and its historians have not been prominent in the various recent attempts to expand our sense of the past beyond the histories of nations and states. This suggests we need new models and new narratives for writing the history of the Pacific. As Akira Iriye argues later in this volume, Pacific history can be a leading model for transnational history more generally, as

well as means to reconstruct historical memory across a once-conflicted region.<sup>16</sup>

The changing history of the Pacific has evidently not kept pace with the Pacific's shifting place within history itself. Those who identify themselves most squarely as Pacific historians – island historians of Oceania – protest that decades of scholarship and myriad professional journals and centres devoted to Pacific history are overlooked. Yet even they admit that the Pacific remains historiographically underrepresented: 'somewhere along the way, the dialogue between studies of the Pacific and studies of humanity [has] broken down', so that the Pacific has become historically invisible amid surveys focused on other world regions: 'outside of its bounds... [the Pacific] is little known, marginalized, disavowed or excised'.<sup>17</sup>

On another view, however, the long tradition of Pacific island histories might better be seen as an original model, if a generally unacknowledged one, for the new thalassology itself. Historians of Oceania have long linked continents, islands, seas and peoples as standard fare: the nation-state never figured as the central driver for explaining the past of this region of the world. This necessarily troubles a 'northern hemisphere' self-conception as the point of origin for successful transnational history. We might even figure this – to cut the world, the oceans and communities of historians another way – as an historiographic north/south divide. But such a divide has also troubled and limited Pacific history itself. It is a line that has produced hemispherically separate traditions. How does the North Pacific relate to the South? How does the sea of islands relate to the Pacific Rim or to conceptions of an Asia-Pacific? Or the history of Oceania to the history of the Ocean writ large? These questions are still very much alive.<sup>18</sup> By bringing them all within the same frame, this book marks a step-change towards the creation of integrated and dialogic pan-Pacific histories.

Perceptions about, and assessments of, the absence or presence of Pacific historiography seem to be dependent, unsurprisingly, on whether that history-writing is viewed from the Pacific itself, or from other parts of the globe. There is a cartographical analogy to be made about this geography and the perspectives it affords. The whole Pacific has been made hard to grasp by maps centred on the Atlantic, and ordered around the Greenwich Meridian. Yet those educated from bases in the Pacific have, as often as not, viewed differently configured maps of the world, which centre on the Pacific Ocean, which represent it as a whole, and which split other oceans down arbitrary longitudes. It is clear that world

history has been envisaged far more often from the perspective of the 'standard' map, with the Atlantic Ocean intact, than from the 'deviant' map that ensures the integrity of the Pacific and the visibility of its rim. This volume seeks to adjust this imbalance of perspectives.



One obvious reason for the Pacific's relative lack of integration is the difficulty of comprehending its immensity. Its scale and scope challenge history and they challenge historians. The Pacific is the world's largest natural feature. It covers roughly 165 million square kilometers (63 million square miles), occupying an area twice the size of the Atlantic Ocean and greater than all the world's land surfaces taken together. At its extremes, it extends from the Arctic to the Antarctic and from Southeast Asia to Central America. Five continents abut and encircle the Pacific – Antarctica, Asia, Australasia, North America and South America – and more than 25,000 islands punctuate it, making it unique among the world's oceans in being a sea of islands. Yet its outer boundaries are unclear. Where does the Pacific begin and end? What marks the boundary between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, or between the Pacific and the Atlantic? Does it include Indonesia or the Philippines? Is it not simply part of one, arbitrarily divided, world ocean?<sup>19</sup> The range of climatic regions along its shores also defies easy assimilation. Even its profundity beggars the imagination, as it descends more deeply than any other ocean, to more than 11,000 meters in the Challenger Deep off the coast of Guam.

The huge reach of Pacific geography means that the region's past and present are characterised by great diversity, both human and environmental. It has been difficult, perhaps impossible, to encompass the range of its environments and the variety of its inhabitants – human and non-human, long-settled and more recently arrived – within a single historical frame. The inhabitants of the Pacific now speak about one-third of the world's languages, English, Chinese and Spanish most prominent among them. The expansive spectrum of human communities within and around the Pacific – among them, the Islanders of Oceania, the settler societies of Siberia, the Americas and Australasia, and the long-established polities of East Asia – has proven almost impossible to survey synoptically. Surely a single history of the Pacific, written from a supramundane vantage point, could only be artificial: as the ethnographic historian Greg Dening ironically put it, 'The Pacific is ... a hard place to identify with – so much ocean, too many islands'.<sup>20</sup> As a result, historical writing on the Pacific has been kaleidoscopic, if also somewhat episodic: 'the

“Pacific” has been historically reimagined many times’, Matt Matsuda has noted: ‘from an ancient Polynesian and early modern Magellanic space of transit, to an Enlightenment theater of sensual paradise, to a strategic grid of labor movements and military “island-hopping,” to a capitalist basin’.<sup>21</sup> These multiple visions of the Pacific have not settled into a distinct narrative or defining historical trajectory within the telling of world history.

Atlantic history, to take the most obvious comparison, does possess such a narrative, a story of discovery, migration and settlement, of indigenous dispossession, of the proliferation of unfreedom (through the Atlantic slave trade and the creation of plantation societies) and the securing of freedom (in movements for political independence and the emancipation of the enslaved), that runs from the late fifteenth century to the late nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Pacific parallels with these Atlantic episodes are bound to be inexact and misleading. The greatest navigations of the Pacific were those of the Polynesians – ‘the most extensive nation upon earth’, in James Cook’s admiring words – not those of the Europeans, who bumbled their way through the Ocean, missing almost all its islands except Guam until the last third of the eighteenth century, as Joyce Chaplin shows in her chapter.<sup>23</sup> J. R. McNeill also sees a distinction: ‘There was no great and sudden “Magellanic exchange” across the Pacific, let alone one involving the islands’ after 1521, comparable to the Columbian exchange of biota across the Atlantic after 1492.<sup>24</sup> The Pacific labour trade was violent and disruptive, to be sure, but its scale was not comparable to that of the Atlantic slave trade, much of the migration was voluntary, servitude was not heritable and there was no concerted movement for emancipation to remedy its iniquities as there was in the Atlantic world.<sup>25</sup> (The Pacific, like the Atlantic, was nonetheless a forcing-house for modern conceptions of race, as James Belich shows in his chapter.)<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the processes of decolonisation and independence in the Pacific were comparatively rapid yet remain incomplete even now, as the region retains some of the world’s last vestiges of formal empire in French Polynesia and in Pitcairn Island, for example.<sup>27</sup> For all these reasons, ‘Pacific history does not represent an obvious rival paradigm to Atlantic history’, in part because there is as yet no integrated field of ‘Pacific World’ history to stand alongside the histories of other oceanic ‘worlds’.<sup>28</sup> It may be comparable in producing multicoloured Pacifics – brown, black, white and yellow – like the variegated black, white, green and red Atlantics.<sup>29</sup> These are among the histories of multiple ‘translocal’ and contested Pacific worlds, sometimes overlapping and often intersecting but always plural.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the histories of the Atlantic and the Pacific were connected: the American War of Independence spurred the great 'swing to the East' and the colonisation of the Australian continent and then New Zealand; with the abolition of slavery, other kinds of unfree labour emerged in the nineteenth century, convict and indentured. And the postcolonial literacy of much Pacific historiography stands as one model for Atlantic history's less thorough investigation of indigenous questions: indeed major thinkers from and about Oceania could well have been integrated into Atlantic history decades ago, as they might also be better known to postcolonial theorists more generally.<sup>31</sup>

If the Pacific has been 'usually treated more as a zone of fragmentation than of interaction', in Adam McKeown's words, that is in part because Pacific history itself – including in that term all those who would identify themselves as working on the Pacific, insular and littoral, south and north, east and west – has been diverse and divided.<sup>32</sup> Histories of the Pacific have been constructed variously by geographers and anthropologists, geologists and oceanographers, literary scholars and art historians, as well as by those who identify themselves professionally as historians of one kind or another. Their framings of the Pacific are so different, and their points of reference so divergent, that they have not always been in dialogue with one another, even as each group of scholars and thinkers has produced its own distinguished understanding of the Pacific. Accordingly, when Lisa Ford describes the legal histories of the Pacific as 'many and disconnected', she could be referring to other potential histories of the region.<sup>33</sup>

This fragmentation may be a leading reason why, until the last decade, there have been few works of synthesis that draw upon all these various strands of history-writing. From an outsider's perspective this is what Damon Salesa calls the 'nearly universal absence of such a large presence'.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, a recent series of pan-Pacific surveys produced in quick succession from Japan, France, the USA and Britain suggests that some of the barriers between various Pacific histories are already breaking down.<sup>35</sup> They have also been accompanied by histories of sub-oceanic regions within the Pacific: the native seas of Oceania, the north Pacific and the increasingly American-inflected eastern Pacific, for example.<sup>36</sup> This activity is creating a holistic field of 'Pacific History', on the analogy of other oceanic histories. The fruits of the various Pacific historiographies that have developed over the past half-century and more are turning into something else; something much larger. And they in turn often depended upon sources created hundreds of years before that.

Pacific history itself has multiple histories that are gradually coalescing in the early twenty-first century.



Three institutional genealogies of Pacific history can illustrate the diversity and fertility of the field, but also its disaggregation, in recent decades. Each emerged from a different position within the Pacific – from its northeastern edge at the University of California, from its southwestern corner at the Australian National University and from close to its centre at the University of Hawai‘i – and at distinct moments, in the 1930s, the 1950s and the 1960s. These three species of Pacific History have each flourished independently, the first as a national history in Pacific context, the second as transnational and largely post-colonial historiography and the third as a trading zone between histories, Pacific and otherwise. They emerged successively and competitively, not with one another but ranged against other national historiographies. Each therefore models Pacific history as a key intellectual space where national certainties have long been questioned, and where connections between imperial and world history were early integrated.

In 1932, the University of California Press published the first issue of the *Pacific Historical Review*. A quarterly for the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association, the journal opened tellingly with the Western historian Dan E. Clark’s address, ‘Manifest Destiny and the Pacific’. He announced that the journal would be ‘devoted to the history of the entire basin of the Pacific’, but there was not much ‘basin’ in that first issue, it was all ‘rim’: articles dealt with Australasia, with Sino-Japanese relations and with links between California and Japan.<sup>37</sup> Over time, the *Pacific Historical Review* came to double as a publishing outlet for West Coast historians on any topic, and for historians of the American West and of the Pacific basin. Even today it remains defined by its original manifest destiny tradition: as the masthead puts it, the journal’s remit is ‘devoted to the history of American expansion to the Pacific and beyond, to the post-frontier developments of the twentieth-century American West, and to the interconnections between American overseas expansion and the recent West’.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this, its recent content in fact has a greater reach, incorporating significant transnational studies. Nonetheless, this self-definition is an honest declaration of a US-oriented ‘Pacific’, and of a particular kind of northern-hemisphere Pacific-oriented US history. The Californian coast links the long history of continental

expansion with the extension of a 'frontier' into the Pacific Ocean; the annexation of Hawai'i; the mid-twentieth century geopolitical encounter with Japan; and the later-twentieth-century economic encounter with China. This approach marks the leading edge of a movement to transform one of the most inward-looking of national historiographies into one oriented towards the Pacific, a trend that has produced many distinguished manifestoes, monographs and surveys in recent years as American history has begun to take a Pacific turn.<sup>39</sup>

An alternative vision of the Pacific, as a vibrant region that was vast and expanding not fragmented and virtually empty, informed the second genealogy of Pacific history. This emerged more than a generation later in Canberra at the Australian National University during the era of decolonisation. This was a place where the independence of Pacific island states was high on political agendas and, accordingly, this particular Pacific historiography was steeped in emerging postcolonial politics with the ambition to produce an 'island-centred' history. (It was no coincidence that this strain of Pacific history emerged at the same time as African history, or that many early Pacific historians had been trained as Africanists.)<sup>40</sup> The historian Jim Davidson, for example, was simultaneously foundation professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University, author of *Samoa mo Samoa* [*Sāmoa for the Sāmoans*] (1967) and advisor in the drafting of constitutions for the newly independent Cook Islands, Nauru, Micronesia and Papua New Guinea. Under his watch, the *Journal of Pacific History* commenced publication in 1966, announcing Australia, at the far southwest of the Ocean, as a major centre for Pacific scholarship.<sup>41</sup> From that corner of the Ocean, Pacific history was also conceptualised through different disciplinary prisms. At the Australian National University, the art historian Bernard Smith composed his *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960);<sup>42</sup> the geographer Oskar Spate wrote his magisterial three-volume history of the Pacific (1979–88);<sup>43</sup> and the former ANU student Greg Denning, then teaching at Melbourne, revised his Harvard doctoral dissertation as *Islands and Beaches* (1980), one of a generation of anthropologically-inclined histories and historically-inclined anthropologies of the Pacific from this period.<sup>44</sup>

The *Pacific Historical Review* (1932– ) created a forum from the north Pacific for the north Pacific; with the *Journal of Pacific History* (1966– ), there emerged one for the history of the South Pacific and the Islands. The US-based journal's intellectual provenance was diplomatic history; the Australia-based journal was rather more

anthropological and ethnohistorical, implicitly and sometimes explicitly postcolonial. In between, a third centre for Anglophone scholarship was founded that served to connect the west coast of the USA and the east coast of Australia. At the University of Hawai'i, Pacific history thrived, shaped both by local Indigenous and Polynesian studies, and by a tradition of world history-writing. The University of Hawai'i Press has hosted an important *Pacific Islands Monograph Series* since 1983, fostering significant studies of Hawai'i, its region and its indigenous and US history.<sup>45</sup> This has itself exemplified the reach of Pacific identity amongst scholars, functioning as an important publishing outlet for Australian, New Zealand and Islander historians, for example – writing from thousands of miles away but nonetheless writing from and about Pacific history. This intellectual and publishing hub represents an epistemological as well as a geographical centre for Pacific history, combining Indigenous scholarship with work on East Asia and North Asia (including significant studies on Korea) and Oceania. It is from monographic work such as this that synthetic histories of the Pacific might be constructed in a 'collective effort to develop Pacific history as a key example of how transnational history may be studied in a regional framework'.<sup>46</sup>

As these genealogies suggest, Pacific historiography possesses an idiosyncratic geography that distinguishes it from other oceanic and transnational histories. It is a geography of history-writing that neatly inverts the standard evaluation of edge and centre: in the Pacific, and in Pacific history, the islands are at the centre while the edge comprises the more economically and political powerful 'rim'. For this reason, the 'centre' in the Pacific – that sea of islands – can be simultaneously indigenous and postcolonial.<sup>47</sup> But the postcolonial history of the Pacific, drawing equally on the epistemological and political perspectives of both indigenous peoples and incomers, can now be written from imperial records and in imperial centres.<sup>48</sup> This work has dovetailed with recent scholarship on the history of settler colonialism, a literature whose critical perspective has become almost orthodox in many Pacific-centred communities of historians and has strongly shaped some national histories.<sup>49</sup> This has made the Pacific a vital site for the development and practice – even the normalisation – of postcolonial history more broadly.



If the Pacific Ocean is a terraqueous hemisphere unto itself, and thus suggestive of a global Earth, how has this translated into the temporal



axis of world history, its periodisation? A vast range of temporalities and great depth of time accompany the Pacific's geographical scale and environmental variety, and in ways that productively challenge received historical divisions. The first human migrations into the Pacific sprang from Southeast Asia over 50,000 years ago into the Australian continent via New Guinea. Diverse Aboriginal societies have lived along the Pacific edge of that continent as a continuous culture from then until now. The connection from deep time to modernity, the alternative cosmologies, and the sustained non-agricultural economies of these Pacific Ocean-dwellers reveal the partiality and particularity of the history of humanity and of 'civilisation' that privilege agricultural revolutions, whether Neolithic or modern. Efforts to fit this particular Pacific history into a world history told through agricultural or industrial 'breakthroughs' are confounded. So are distinctions between 'prehistory' and 'history'.

Other migrations of 'Austronesian' speakers from present-day Taiwan, successively occupied Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia as far east as Rapa Nui (Easter Island). This migration was sustained until the middle of last millennium, when the great Polynesian navigator-farmers ceased their voyages, at much the same time as China's great exploratory fleets – which had reached the coast of Africa in the early fifteenth century – retreated. The Polynesian migrants likely found South America (where the bones of their chickens have been identified),<sup>50</sup> and their descendants inhabit the islands and continents of the Pacific to this day. 'Indigenous time', then, as one chapter is titled, signals a different periodisation altogether, even different temporalities. The Pacific in indigenous time covers millennia but defies any narrative of 'prehistory to modernity'; it stands independently of other currents in world history, but is also part of it and needs to be accounted for.

Recent indigenous and postcolonial studies of Pacific history lie over and respond to extensive earlier analyses of European exploration and colonisation emerging from conventional traditions of imperial history. This presents challenges for historians attempting to relate what Bronwen Douglas here calls 'the highly uneven chronologies of evangelism, colonialism and decolonisation in this vast, disparate region' since the sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Early modern European maritime journeys into the Pacific coincided – more or less – with Spanish, Portuguese and British colonisation of the Americas. But the outcome and impact was altogether more minimal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Spanish established a galleon route between South America and China, with

a main port in Manila and a stopping-point in Guam. Otherwise, the mariners who journeyed – typically with great difficulty – across the Pacific, did so and left it alone. By and large, the Pacific as a ‘new world’ from the European perspective was a late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> It coincided with European modernity, emerging out of the Enlightenment. The Pacific in the ‘age of Empires’ coincided with ‘the birth of the modern world’.<sup>53</sup>

James Cook’s three Pacific journeys (1768–71, 1772–5, 1776–9) have attracted vast scholarly inquiry and exemplify this new European vision of the Pacific as an Enlightenment project and space, as well as the hemispheric scale of the Ocean. Commissioned originally to observe from Tahiti the transit of Venus across the Sun, Cook was also charged in his first journey to search for and, if possible, chart the mysterious southern continent, Terra Australis. In the process he circumnavigated the New Zealand islands and the Pacific coastline of Australia. His second journey travelled much further south, into the Antarctic Circle. His third journey ranged from the southwest Pacific, via Hawai’i to the far northeast, along the North American coastlines and the Bering Strait, in search of a northwest passage. These explorations have rightly become the focus of extensive scholarship on eighteenth-century sciences, maritime and navigational history.<sup>54</sup> Richly detailed readings of encounter between the British and Indigenous people across the Pacific have emerged;<sup>55</sup> accounts of Indigenous men who travelled on European ships – most notably the Polynesian navigator Tupai’a who travelled with Cook and drew charts of islands to several thousand miles’ circumference; and studies of Indigenous people who returned to Britain.<sup>56</sup> Some scholars focused on the violence of encounters – their immediate human and natural damage;<sup>57</sup> others stress expediency and exchange, especially when using the tools of gender history that, as Patricia O’Brien notes, began ‘transforming Pacific history from the 1970s’.<sup>58</sup> Some treat the famous voyagers; others examine the more enduring Islander engagement with the lesser-known ‘beachcombers’, the traders, and slightly later the missionaries.<sup>59</sup> From these analyses of Pacific encounters emerged one of the most distinctive and influential strains of Pacific history – the history of the beach as the meeting place of cultures and selves, later extended to include encounters on ships and other liminal spaces.<sup>60</sup>

Similar patterns of cross-cultural analysis have been pursued for all of the extraordinary eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century European voyages: the navigators and explorers whose personal names are now place-names across the Ocean’s islands and

coastlines: Bougainville, La Pérouse, Vancouver. Slightly later, the one Pacific voyage that perhaps rivals Cook's for fame – that of the *Beagle* (1831–6) – was germinal for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Arguably, the idea was born in the Pacific Islands, 'Darwin's laboratory' as a generation of historians of science have dubbed it. However, as Sujit Sivasundaram argues, the idea of the Pacific as 'laboratory' may drain the Ocean of agency and life and overestimate the capacities of incomers at the expense of indigenous knowledges. Europeans and Pacific Islanders both possessed cosmologies that oriented their sense of the world and its origins: out of these emerged hybrid forms of knowledge, such as Darwin's theory of the formation of coral reefs, which echoed indigenous conceptions of cosmogenesis.<sup>61</sup> Recognition of, research on, and integration into other knowledges and cosmologies is expected, if not always successfully or fully implemented. This awareness of other epistemologies is most clear perhaps in histories of Pacific politics on the one hand, and of maritime journeying and navigation on the other.<sup>62</sup> The result of this awareness is an unsettling of conventional teleologies of political and scientific progress and a determination among Pacific historians not to follow narratives of world history derived from other spaces and alternative traditions.

The history of the Pacific resists such extraneous narratives, drawn from the histories of distant oceans and regions, but that is not to say that there have not been – or could not be – global histories structured around processes and experiences that began in the Pacific Ocean. For example, the Pacific was a primal site of early globalisation, as the trans-Pacific silver trade linked continents and economies for the first time into an intercontinental, even global, system of exchange. It was after all a Spanish–China connection that originally put Europeans into the Pacific, travelling westwards from Acapulco to Canton via the port of Manila in the Philippines. After 1571, the Spanish galleons crossed and returned for centuries, part of a Canton-driven economy that drew in the Dutch, the Portuguese and the English as well.<sup>63</sup> And that economy also functioned outside European economies altogether: a *bêche-de-mer* trade linked Aboriginal people in the north of Australia, fishers from islands in the present-day Indonesian archipelago, and Chinese in Canton, arguably from the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>64</sup>

The significance of Chinese markets, tastes, demands and commodities has endured, analysed by generations of economic historians of the Pacific. In the process, these histories have affirmed the idea of an economically-linked 'Pacific Rim' whose roots lie in

sixteenth-century Spanish visions of the Ocean, even if the term itself would not emerge until the late nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> This was to some extent a 'just-so' story of how the world became economically globalised, projected back onto earlier periods. But it is nonetheless clear that early modern economies already functioned across vast maritime as well as continental spaces. Between galleons and caravans the world was being encircled as part of the processes historians now call 'archaic' and 'proto-globalisation'.<sup>66</sup>

Economic histories look for, and often find, connections, exchange and unities where other kinds of history tend to see irreducible difference. Two chapters, by Adam McKeown and Kaoru Sugihara, focus on mobility, flows and exchanges across the Pacific, of people, goods and capital. McKeown argues that the middle of the nineteenth century was 'the apex of Pacific integration' up to that point.<sup>67</sup> This means that Melville's vision of the Pacific as the heart of earth, the fulcrum of world history, was fleeting even at the time he pronounced it in 1851. Major commercial flows were peaking, among them the trans-Pacific trade with China, the export of sandalwood from the Pacific Islands and the global whaling industry that inspired *Moby-Dick* itself. The California gold rush of the 1840s and the Australian gold rushes that began in the year that Melville's novel first appeared accelerated migration around the rimlands of the Pacific. They also helped inspire Karl Marx to study political economy at the British Museum in order to understand 'the new stage of development which [bourgeois] society seemed to have entered with the discovery of gold in California and Australia': *Das Kapital* was one result of these prompts from the Pacific.<sup>68</sup>

The decades on either side of 1850 witnessed an unprecedented boom in mobility linking Asia, the Americas and Australasia via multiple island ports: the white folk who moved in this period even imagined themselves as 'Pacific Man'.<sup>69</sup> Yet this upsurge would be short-lived. By the end of the nineteenth century, a downturn in the global economy coincided with the greater penetration of states and empires – European, American and Asian – into the Pacific. States were more directly controlling the movement of peoples and empires carved out ever greater, and ever more competitive, spheres of influence. Their actions pushed Pacific integration into reverse and disengaged it from broader currents of what would later be called 'globalisation'. Nicholas Thomas reminds us that the transformations of the nineteenth century were like a tattoo, 'at once permanent and skin deep. What we don't know is whether "skin

deep” means merely superficial, or in fact profound.<sup>70</sup> The economic prominence of the Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century proved to be temporary. In the long run, its centrality would return.

If we fast-forward to our own time, in the early twenty-first century, the Pacific seems by many measures to be once again ‘the tide-beating heart of earth’, while it never stopped being ‘our sea of islands’ to its inhabitants. One-third of the world’s population inhabits its islands and the continents around its shores. The region produces roughly 60 per cent of global GDP and nearly 50 per cent of world trade crosses the ocean – that is, three times the amount now trafficked across the Atlantic.<sup>71</sup> The demographic and economic rise of China in the last generation – although a reversion to historical patterns of power and prosperity – has also redirected the focus of global geopolitics back to the Pacific.

Discourses of the Pacific Rim privileged East Asia and its economies – Japan, China, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore – but saw them as connected to North America in the main, as well as to Australasia, and to some extent to South American economies, although the latter with nowhere near the same clarity as in the early modern period.<sup>72</sup> As historian Bruce Cumings noted in 1998, the late twentieth-century talk of a ‘Pacific Rim’ was oriented to the future rather more than to the past. He linked the idea to its earlier use in a tradition of Manifest Destiny, dubbing the Pacific Rim the ‘Anglo-Saxon Lake’, a twist on Spate’s ‘Spanish Lake’. More than a decade later, however, the ‘capitalist archipelago’ that formed an Anglo-Saxon Lake with Japan at the conceptual centre looks far more like a prescient coda: one with China, and an entirely new kind of Chinese diaspora at its heart: no longer an Anglo-Saxon Lake at all but in some eyes an incipient Chinese Lake.<sup>73</sup>

In retrospect, the 1980s appears as a highly politicised era for historians of the Pacific. Alongside and linked to the ‘Pacific Rim’ idea, an ‘Asia-Pacific’ region was under diplomatic, economic, as well as intellectual construction, not least as an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a Canberra-initiated venture. At the same time, in another hemisphere, and for entirely different reasons, the Paris-based Institut du Pacifique declared the Pacific the new centre of the world (*nouveau centre du monde*).<sup>74</sup> The history of French engagement with the Pacific in particular is tortured and notorious, controversy that only continues with the exhibition of Oceanic art and artefacts at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris.<sup>75</sup> France had been testing nuclear weapons in the new centre of the world for several decades.<sup>76</sup> In response the (South) Pacific

announced itself to be, if not free of France, then at least nuclear-free: the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga declared a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. New Zealand, in particular, set itself up in the international public sphere as the guardian of Pacific peace, against the nuclear-interested Goliaths, the USA and France. French nuclear testing, along with Soviet whaling, would spur the creation of Greenpeace, making the modern environmental movement a lasting – if unintended – consequence of this moment in global consciousness of the Pacific.<sup>77</sup>

It was also in the 1980s, with the economic ascent of Japan and the increasing economic vibrancy of the region, that pundits began to predict the advent of a new ‘Pacific Century’ – a future for the global economy centred particularly on the so-called Asia-Pacific and usually omitting Oceania. Any historian of the region can recall that the twenty-first century was not the first to be heralded as a ‘Pacific’ century. The same language of geopolitics had been common a hundred years before, beginning in Japan with Inagaki Manjirō’s pronouncement in 1892 that the coming century would be the ‘Pacific Age’ (*Taihei-yō jidai*), in succession to the nineteenth century’s Atlantic Age.<sup>78</sup> ‘The fact is,’ a German commentator writing from Hong Kong agreed in 1895, ‘*the fulcrum of the World’s balance of power has shifted from the West to the East, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific*’.<sup>79</sup> It proved to be Japan that did most to shape a geopolitical Pacific over the first half of the twentieth century. Many in the English-speaking world claimed that Japan’s defeat of Russia, and its rapid industrialisation and growing economy, signalled the rise of the ‘Pacific Age’. ‘The Pacific is the ocean of the future’, proclaimed Australian journalist Frank Fox in 1912. Such predictions would be repeated throughout the twentieth century: in the internationalism of what is so often called the ‘interwar’ period (when Japan and China were in fact already at war), and in the Pacific War that created a truly ‘world’ war, as much as in the last third of the century.<sup>80</sup> ‘The history of mankind is now entering the Pacific era’, the Russian socialist Gregory Bienstock wrote in 1937: ‘that is to say, it is within the Pacific region that the great historical events of the next hundred years will take place.’<sup>81</sup> Four years later, the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani also saw the world passing into an emergent Pacific period, after its Mediterranean and Atlantic eras.<sup>82</sup>

The idea of the Pacific Century returned in the late 1960s and more continuously from the mid-1980s.<sup>83</sup> Japan’s economic ascent in the decades after military defeat seemed to commentators around the world to have fulfilled such prophecies of a Pacific Century,

albeit in unpredictable ways. Only with the stagnation of the Japanese economy in the late 1990s did this millennialist talk of a Pacific Century temporarily abate. When the US administration of President Barack Obama executed its so-called 'pivot' to the Pacific in 2011, such language returned once again in a new guise. 'The Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics', wrote then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in November 2011, before heralding the advent of a new 'Pacific Century'. And President Obama echoed her sense of destiny when he told the Australian Parliament in the same month, 'Here we see the future'.<sup>84</sup> In light of these earlier visions, contemporary prophets like Clinton and Obama who foresee a new Pacific Century would do well to remember that the Pacific has had as many futures as it has pasts, not all of them reassuring or comfortable. As Robert Aldrich concludes his chapter, the 'fragmented rather than united hemisphere' revealed by the study of Pacific politics offers 'a corrective to simplistic ideas about the construction of a "new centre of the world" anchored in the US, China or another fulcrum'.<sup>85</sup>



The Pacific clearly has a great future, but formed from what kind of past? To answer this question, *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* brings together, for the first time within a single volume, the full range of historians who study the Pacific, its peoples and the lands within and around it. Like Hau'ofa and Melville, they come from very different geographical positions, some from within and around the Pacific itself, others from further afield. The authors have not been asked to conform to any single vision of Pacific history nor have they converged on any agreed conception of their subject and its boundaries. Instead, they have offered their own perspectives on Pacific history, each chosen to capture most illuminatingly the subject at hand.

One division of labour does define their efforts. Four were asked to cover, between them, the whole sweep of human history in the Pacific. These opening essays periodise the Pacific from the first migrations to the future of the region as it looks from our own era. The remaining chapters survey various aspects of Pacific history across large swathes of time and space considered through major themes clustered into broad categories: 'Connections' (on the environment, migration and the economy), 'Knowledges' (on religion, law and science) and 'Identities' (on race, gender and politics). Each author of these thematic chapters was asked to answer – explicitly or implicitly – the questions,

‘What light does a specifically *Pacific* perspective shed on this theme? And what light does *this* topic shed on Pacific history more broadly?’

The product, we hope, is a uniquely catholic collection that offers something greater than the sum of its individual parts. Taken together, the chapters comprise a set of mutually reinforcing Pacific histories, collected and plural, which reflect the diversity of the region and the multiplicity of approaches to it. The volume covers the whole Ocean, its northern and southern, western and eastern hemispheres, wherever possible. Several chapters focus on Oceania – those by Salesa, Thomas, Douglas and O’Brien in particular. These islands lie within Pacific history more definitively and exclusively than the littoral locations, which always have continental histories too: Japan is part of the Pacific, but it is also part of East Asia; Canton, as so many chapters here show, was the great Pacific port, but it was also always part of continental Chinese dynamics; and so on, for Russia, Chile, Canada, California and more. In this sense, Oceania is not equivalent to other Pacific sub-regions that are also explored in this book – the Asia-Pacific, the South-West Pacific, Australasia, the North-West, the China Sea; it has, we might say, a solely Pacific history. Other chapters, however, span the hemispheres, taking in the North and South, the islands and the littoral Pacific, to trace dynamically what Matt Matsuda calls ‘an overlapping set of actors, transits and shifting boundaries’.<sup>86</sup>

The aim of *Pacific Histories* has been to interrogate, but not artificially to integrate, the histories of the insular Pacific and the littoral Pacific – the coasts of the Americas and the Asian and Australasian continents – and to show the shifts in their relations over time and space. Many of the chapters also relate the histories of islands and rimlands to the pasts of the Pacific conceived in terms of environmental history and the history of exploration and travel across the Ocean over the last forty millennia. In this sense, the volume maps a four-dimensional Pacific – insular and littoral, oceanic and maritime – and does so with an eye to the present but in the perspective of the *longue durée*. The outcome, all the contributors hope and expect, should be the reincorporation of the Pacific into the writing, and the re-writing, of world history today.

## Notes

1. Epeli Hau’ofa, ‘Our Sea of Islands’ (1993), in Hau’ofa, *We are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu, 2008), pp. 27–40.



2. Donald B. Freeman, *The Pacific* (London, 2010), p. 9.
3. Freeman, *The Pacific*, pp. 8–35.
4. Ryan Tucker Jones, ‘The Environment’, ch. 6 in this volume, p. 121; Henry F. Diaz and Vera Markgraf, eds., *El Niño: Historical and Paleoclimatic Aspects of the Southern Oscillation* (Cambridge, 1992).
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