

Pacific Images: Views from Captain Cook's Third Voyage.* Eleanor C. Nordyke and James A. Mattison, Jr. Second Edition. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. 228 pp.

Reviewed by Roderick Ewins

As is pointed out in the introductory section of this book, the 61 engravings made from the drawings of the artist John Webber on James Cook's third voyage, first published as an *Atlas* accompanying the three volumes of Cook's journals in 1784, "were the first visual records of the Pacific for the Western world" (p. xi). It is unsurprising that both words and images have been mined by countless scholars ever since, providing as they do a record of some of the earliest contacts between the peoples of Europe and Oceania, and documenting customs and a material world whose trajectory of change was forever skewed in different directions by that contact, and was never to appear quite the same again.

Given that amount of attention, perhaps most notably in Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith's seminal four-volume *magnum opus* published in 1987 (twelve years before the first edition of the present work), we might be forgiven for having misgivings about whether yet another book on the topic had much fresh information to offer to us. We need not have worried. For a start, a work like Joppien and Smith (1987) is unashamedly aimed at scholars. Its very completeness and dense analysis (not to mention its cost) all militate against its use by the general readers to whom Eleanor C. Nordyke directs her book (p. xvii). Further, by limiting the imagery surveyed to that made on the third voyage (though drawing on the journals of all three voyages to provide commentary and contextualization), Nordyke reduces the extraordinary volume of information to a more "bite-sized" amount.

The originality of the scholarship displayed here lies in the meticulous matching of each image with, on the facing page, original text that relates exactly to the event, scene, person or place depicted. The engraved images are presented in the sequence in which the original drawings and paintings were made, so that the book becomes in one sense a travelogue, and allows us to take a "virtual journey" along with the voyagers. The drawings and the journals are filled with the immediacy and urgency of the experiences as they were being lived and responded to by those intrepid men in their cockleshell vessels. The result, though certainly painstaking scholarship, avoids the voice of the scholar being interposed between the originals and the reader. Here we have only the thoughts, impressions, anticipations, disappointments, and wonderment of the actors themselves, in their own pictures and words.

This approach reveals very clearly that, with all due respect to Sir Joseph Banks' view that the engravings were "ornaments of the work" (p. xv), they were, in fact, *always* the artists' description in pictures of the same events and experiences that the other officers described with words, and never intended as appendages or ornaments. Each account is greatly enriched and heightened by the other, a fine early application of Allan Paivio's principle of "dual coding" whereby images and words reinforce one another cognitively, though they are assimilated

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independently of one another (cf. Paivio 1986:159-161). In Cook's own words, "Artists were engaged, who, by their drawings might illustrate what could only be imperfectly described" (p. xxviii), and "supplying the unavoidable imperfections of written accounts, by enabling us to preserve, and to bring home, such drawings of the most memorable scenes of our transactions, as could only be executed by a professed and skilful artist" (p. xxiv). That stratagem and the ensuing publications, as Nordyke observes, "marked a new era in the field of visual education" (p. xxviii).

It is hard to fault the design of this splendidly-produced volume, every part of which—typeface, paper stock, layout, and images—is handsome, clear, and well-structured. The presence of both vertical portraits and horizontal scenes in the original engravings caused the designer to opt for an almost-square format, which optimizes the size and quality possible for the reproductions, still retaining a generous margin of space around them. The hard cover is striking, with a very famous image of a Hawaiian wearing a helmet on the front, and a scene on the back, both printed on a buff ground. Gold titling is used on the black book-cloth that encases the spine and extends onto front and back. The one great disappointment is the dustcover. In a dark but dull pink, with even duller yellow title, it is visually unappealing rather than enticing—one of the two prime functions of a dustcover. If it were possible for the publisher to have a new dustcover designed that immediately attracts the eye and does justice to the exemplary contents, I would strongly recommend doing so. This one will remain on my copy solely for its second function, to protect the excellent cover from soiling.

An unexpected element in this second edition is the inclusion, as accompaniments to the introductory remarks, of nearly forty color reproductions of postage stamps from all over the world, most commemorating the Cook voyages in some way, some providing a context of other contemporaneous events. They provide quiet testimony, if it were needed, to the abiding fascination and mythic status of Cook and his achievements, which if the number of publications and scholarly papers is anything to go by, are growing rather than diminishing with time.

Nordyke's restraint in restricting her own writing to the Preface and the Introduction, gives us a seemingly unmediated opportunity to experience in the 21st century something, perhaps, of the excitement that the original publication must have generated in its audience back in 1784, when the sometimes almost breathless accounts and wonderful engraved images spoke to readers of a world almost beyond imagining. That said, there is ample careful contextualization provided by the author in the Introduction, to inform any general reader not very familiar with Cook's voyages, about the reasons they were undertaken, the principle actors both on the ships and back in England, and the social and political situation in Britain, Europe, and beyond that had a bearing on everything.

Nordyke also provides some information on the artist Webber, though here I feel her "hands off" approach might have been relaxed a little—I would have actually have liked to have seen a somewhat stronger defense of his achievements. After all, they were sufficient to inspire the author to produce this book, indeed in the words of a Webber biographer she cites, "rarely had the drawings of one man influenced the world to such a degree" (Schweizer 1982, cited on p. xxvi). While most writers to date are happy to applaud the quality of his landscapes, they are often less generous about his humans, something I believe is unwarranted. I reject J. C.

Beaglehole's (1967) blanket assertion that "Portraits and the figures were not his long suit." (p. xxv). It is true that the large group scenes provide justification for Beaglehole's (1967) criticism of the length of body and leg and mannered depiction (with the "natives" resembling so many Greek marbles of gods clad in togas rather than husky Polynesians wearing tapa). But given that he was a classically-trained artist, steeped in European conventions but confronted by people the like of whom neither he nor many other Westerners had ever seen, his efforts were good. It is only the semi-nude figures that recall art-school drawings from the cast-room (remember that life drawing from nudes was most unusual in the British schools in which he was trained, and style was favored over naturalism). Also, as the author points out (p. xxvii), the engravers who had to transmute the drawings onto copper plates were even further inhibited, since they did not have firsthand knowledge of their subjects, and may well have believed they were "correcting" the drawings by making the subjects fit the current European fashion better. When the figures are clothed, as in the case of the Cook portrait (p. xx), the ship's crew (e.g. p. 96), or the people of Norton Sound, Alaska (p. 98) and Kamchatka, Russia (p. 154), the problems are greatly reduced, and the figures appear as natural as re-engraved drawings usually were. As to the portraits, while he sometimes "Europeanizes" their features (e.g. Hawaiian man in helmet p. 122), he far more commonly very successfully depicts ethnic types and features that would have been totally beyond his experience or training. To cite just a couple of examples, the man from Tasmania (p. 6) and the men and women of Alaska, are convincing not only as ethnic types but as living individuals that their families would recognize instantly. Most portrait artists of any era would be proud to be able to claim that.

The author's short description of the process of copper-plate engravings is useful. So is the short history of the actual publication process that had to be gone through to bring the engravings to the public. There is much confusion about such things in many books that touch on the pictures of previous centuries, and it is a pleasure to read some accurate information clearly transmitted.

I take nothing from the awesome scholarship of Joppien and Smith (1987), or of other earlier or more recent works (such as Nicholas Thomas' (2003) lively account of Cook's "extraordinary" voyages), when I applaud the unusual and significant achievement of this book. It complements those other works by providing personal access to the entire *Atlas* of engravings, marrying them to the accounts of the mariners. I believe it is not only intellectually well within the reach of its target general readership, but also offers much to scholars of Pacific history and ethnology, apart from anything else in just the simple pleasure to be gained by immersion in the "dual codes" of images and words.

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