
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Photographing Papua: representation, colonial encounters and imaging in the public domain by Max Quanchi

Review by: CAROL E. MAYER

Source: *The Journal of Pacific History*, JUNE 2011, Vol. 46, No. 1 (JUNE 2011), pp. 139-140

.Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41343786>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Pacific History*

JSTOR

Sorensen who had ensnared MacLean in his South Sea Commercial Company scam. I knew too a little of the mythologised Maclean in the guise of Wolf Larsen. But the South Pacific adventure occupied less than two of Maclean's 35 years as a sailor, and I knew nothing of his other 33 years. Or of his formative years growing up as a Cape Breton Gael on Canada's east coast. Or his role in the pelagic sealing industry on Canada's west coast. Most of the book is devoted to those 33 years, and especially Maclean's role in the sealing industry. Some might think that that would make MacGillivray's book of minor interest to Pacific (which in the main means South Pacific) historians.

But they would be mistaken. Without the other contexts — the Cape Breton background and the pelagic sealing industry — we cannot really appreciate the significance of MacLean's comparatively short time in the South Pacific. In reading Chapter 8 on the South Pacific Expedition, I found that I was able to pause and reflect. This was because I already knew something about its places and people. But as I read, I realised how much I did not know — not just about the context, but also the detail. Much of the detail had been garnered from other researchers, such as Hugh Laracy (on Sorensen). But it was re-woven into a new narrative, with a different focus and purpose. And it was done seamlessly. In this chapter, at least, I learnt things I *needed* to know.

The final chapter, 'The Legend of Alex Maclean', is different from the others. The biography proper ends with Chapter 13 ('The Final Years: Vancouver, 1909–14'). Chapter 14 reviews the process of MacLean becoming legend, under the headings of: 'Folk Legend Process', 'Mariners and Legends', 'Popular Legends', 'Legendary Attributes', 'Legends', 'Wit and Style', 'Viewing Alex MacLean', 'Fortuitous Timing and the Media', 'Relative Views', 'Independence and Social Bandits', 'Breaking the Surface', 'Images of Seals and Sealers', 'Nationality and Remembering' and 'MacLean and His Times'. Here MacGillivray addresses different reader expectations — perhaps a different readership. It might have been better to confine MacLean as social bandit to this last chapter, and allowed the rest of the book to be — as MacGillivray claims it is (p. 258) — unabashedly a biography. Either way, it is an illuminating chapter, and whether we take Chapter 13 as the end point of the story (of MacLean the man) or Chapter 14 (of MacLean the legend), the reader learns much about Captain Alex MacLean and his contemporary construction in newspapers, fiction and memory, as well as his evolution into a legendary figure. This is what Don MacGillivray promised — and ultimately delivers.

RON ADAMS
La Trobe University
r.adams@latrobe.edu.au
© 2011 Ron Adams

Photographing Papua: representation, colonial encounters and imaging in the public domain. By Max Quanchi. 'Pacific Focus Series'. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. xx+369 pp., illus (83 b&w photographs), endnotes, bibliog., index. ISBN 978-1-8471-8288-3. £39.99stg, US\$59.99.

This book, a compilation of Max Quanchi's previously published articles and more recent research, serves as a comprehensive study of photography taken in Papua during the late-19th and early-20th century. Quanchi is well known and respected for his meticulous work in this area of study, so it is not surprising to find more than 100 pages devoted to referencing his sources. Quanchi begins the book with a useful disentangling of the terms Papua and New Guinea. He also introduces the reader to the idea fundamental to his work; that late-19th and early-20th century photography in the area known as Papua was the product of the convergence of three phenomena: new technology (the camera), new science (anthropology) and the arrival of an entourage of Europeans (missionaries, traders, government officials, travellers).

Quanchi's theoretical underpinnings are dispersed in origin, and he admits to assembling his analysis from a range of academic methodologies and approaches. It can certainly be argued that, historically, anthropology as a discipline played little attention to the value of photography as an analytical tool. It was the narrative that persisted as the keystone of anthropological discourse especially during the first three-quarters of the 20th century. Meanwhile, photography in the hands

of the 'entourage of Europeans' produced, as Quanchi so well illustrates, a mediated narrative, primarily one of 'European predilection, hegemony and colonial attitude'.

Quanchi's dense packing of his research is organised into three sections: the first offers an introduction to history and photography in the Pacific, the contributions of various disciplines to analysis and meanings of early photographs and an account of the work of photographers in the field; the second 'Images, Intentions and Meanings' introduces the genre of imagery which Quanchi organises into what he calls the 'Papuan Gallery'; and the third section 'Images and Dissemination' examines how photographs found their way into the public domain via albums, missionary photographs, illustrated books, newspapers and magazines.

The unpacking of these three sections proved to be a tricky task. There is some repetition and a consistent propensity to quote sources within the body of the text. This makes for difficult reading as the thread of a thought or a thesis is constantly interrupted by a litany of references. Although this situates the book soundly in the academy, which is a good thing, it may prove to be less appealing to a wider audience — and that is a pity because there is no doubt early photography is a subject growing in popularity.

Quanchi argues that photographers were consciously making history, framing and posing their subjects in readiness for a publication or public presentation. There was nothing spontaneous about early photography and a series of mediated images were legitimised as the authentic historical record — Quanchi refers to these as the 'Papuan Gallery'. At the centre of this gallery can be found the noble and ignoble images of Papuan men and women under the title *Belles & Dandies*. These images touted as 'artifacts of the frontier experience and evidence for scientific analysis of indigenous peoples' revealed much about the voyeuristic interests of the photographers. The Gallery was completed with photographs of feats of technology (tree houses, villages, bridges) and cultural activities (sago making, pottery) which could be understood, in a comparative sense, by Europeans. This particular grouping of images he argues created a universal imperative.

In the third section of the book, Quanchi's contribution to the study and history of early photography is clearly demonstrated by his extensive research on the dissemination of photographs via albums, books, newspapers and magazines. Documenting this vast and largely ignored resource provided Quanchi with an opportunity to revisit previous assumptions constructed, as they were, by the limitations of what was publicly available. It is the mining of these normally ignored collections that is the strength of this book. Quanchi argues for this mix of documentary, contrived, casual captures and postcards, with no particular distinction made between them, to be viewed as candidates for the historical record, with the caveat they are approached with caution. One is left with the question of whether he will be successful in challenging those ideas of authenticity that patrol the borders of the existing, narrative based, historical record. There is certainly a move towards levelling the playing field and recognising that photographs and narratives, together or in opposition, serve as valid evidence or data for those who study representation, colonialism, cross-cultural encounters and the early days of illustrated media. In all, an excellent book that offers countless opportunities for further research.

CAROL E. MAYER
University of British Columbia
mayer@interchange.ubc.ca
© 2011 Carol E. Mayer

Gunnar Landtman in Papua: 1910 to 1912. By David Lawrence with assistance from Pirjo Varjola. Canberra, ANU E Press, 2010. xiv+212 pp., 55 B&W photos, 26 colour illus., maps, 'Bibliography of Writings on the Kiwai by Gunnar Landtman', references, index. Print version ISBN 978-1-921-66612-4 (pbk), A\$34.95. On-line version ISBN 978-1-921-66613-1 (pdf), http://epress.anu.edu.au/GL_PNG/pdf/whole_book.pdf

This an interesting and rich exposition of an important early European ethnologist, Gunnar Landtman, whose fieldwork and collection of artefacts, photographs and recordings from among the Kiwai of the Papuan gulf between 1910 and 1912 is the basis of this book. David Lawrence,