

*The South Pacific*. Ron Crocombe. University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2001. 790pp., illus., appendices, bibliog, index. ISBN 982-02-0154-3 cased. USP price \$45.00. Elsewhere \$60.00.

This useful compendium, written in its entirety by one of the region's leading scholars, has had a dynamic publication history. First released in 1973 by ANU Press and Reed Education with a mere 130 pages and titled *The New South Pacific*, it was revised in 1978. That edition was expanded and reissued in 1983 (by Longmans and The University of the South Pacific) as *The South Pacific: an introduction*. There were further revisions (chiefly updating) in 1987 and 1989. The 2001 edition has been rewritten and greatly expanded, with new chapters on environment, education, health, information, and the future of the region. It is a most ambitious work, of the kind very few contemporary scholars of Oceania have the experience and accumulated knowledge to attempt with comfort. Crocombe is certainly one of them, now an 'elder statesman' of Oceanic studies whose expertise has been strengthening over half a century.

The writing is clear and engaging, reflecting the author's passionate dedication to his subject. As the work of a scholar who is so confidently at home in the islands, it is a most reader-friendly volume throughout. The organisation is excellent, with topics attractively arranged for ready access. The text begins with a section titled 'Parameters', which includes lengthy discussions of environment, human populations, and health. Then comes 'Patterns' with its chapters on language, society, and culture: as one would expect from Crocombe, these are among the strongest in the volume. Art, music, beliefs, education, and information are reviewed under the heading of 'Perceptions'. 'Property' covers the issues of land and marine tenure, economic production ('from village subsistence to global markets'), commerce, and the restructuring of economies.

'Power' is in some respects the most timely section of this edition, with its lengthy chapters on corruption ('stemming the rot'), governance ('the nature and quality of national cohesion'), coercion (on the military

and police), regionalism, and globalism. I liked the author's pithy caution on the now fashionable term 'governance'. Such 'slick catchwords', he suggests, become ritualistic: 'Whoever uses the term ... first to describe what he/she considers best, has played a trump card ... Like "sustainability", it is now required utterance in any discussion on government' (542). The final section, 'Prospects', ruminates on 'widening choices in the 21st Century', touching briefly on such issues as human migrations, threats to social order, tourism, conserving languages, changing identities, religion and ethics, threats to the natural environment, the future of island economies.

The volume includes a very detailed index and a 40-page bibliography. Appendices include 'basic information' on most 'nations and territories of Oceania', and a list of journals (in which the present journal is incorrectly listed as *Pacific Studies*, USP, Suva). The list of websites is, however, all too brief and it is a greater pity that a comprehensive list of films and videos has not been included, as this would be of immense value to teachers and general readers not already well-versed in general knowledge of the entire Pacific region.

No reviewer is competent to assess comprehensively the value of a work of this kind. But it is clear that, as often, and perhaps inevitably, in such volumes, the coverage is uneven. The discussions vary widely in their usefulness as introductions to their topics. Some issues are treated in considerable depth (e.g. society, tenures, corruption) others far too cursorily (among them some very important issues such as the impacts of mass media and IT, and 'urbanisation', which is given only one page of its own). The decline of turtles is given as much space as human population growth trends—just half a page each! Understandably after his many decades of study and experience, Crocombe has something to say on almost every conceivable topic, and cannot avoid spreading his brush too thinly over too much. A more careful consideration to prioritising topics in terms of space could improve the volume.

While *The South Pacific* will these days probably be of rather limited use to most academic specialists, general readers—including teachers, students, journalists, the wide variety of professionals working in the South Pacific, and the more serious-minded tourist—will still find it invaluable. Of course, it must now compete on the library shelves with

the recently published *The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia* (University of Hawaii Press, 2000) edited by Lal and Fortune and marshalling the expertise of more than 200 scholars. But Crocombe is to be congratulated for continuing to maintain the liveliness and relevance of his formidable project on one of the world's most diverse regions.

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Robert Norton  
Macquarie University  
Sydney

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