

First Encounters: The Early Pacific and European Narratives of Abel Tasman's 1642 Voyage.
By Rüdiger Mack.
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This book offers a comprehensive overview of the sources, including a major new resource, that are currently available on the expedition in 1642-1643 by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman to the Pacific, in particular Tasmania, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, New Britain and New Guinea. It includes a complete chapter from a hitherto unknown book by Nicolaes Witsen, a Dutch statesman, collector and scholar, entitled *Noord en Oost Tartarye* ('North and East Tartary'). This book was published in Dutch in 1705, and appears to contain a new source of Tasman's voyages. Tartary was a geographical term used for what was believed to be the largest land area on the globe, located between the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains in the west and the Pacific coast in the east, supposedly including the population of China, Korea, Japan and America. Witsen's book includes an 'Account of the population of America', which has been added in its entirety to the book by Mack, both in the original, old Dutch and a translation of it in English. It is an important new source on Tasman's voyages because it contains fragments from the journal that was kept by Francois Jacobsz. Visscher, the pilot-major and first mate of the *Heemskerck*, Tasman's main ship. Although the original journal of Visscher has been lost, details from his account are preserved in Witsen's book. For that reason, Mack appends the entire chapter in two languages, even though large passages of the chapter have no relevance to Tasman's voyage.

Tasman himself was neither an intellectual nor a good writer, so not much is known about his adventures in the South Seas. He was not an exponent of the Enlightenment, such as James Cook, who had a much wider interest in the peoples and societies that he encountered on his trips. Tasman was instead a simple employee of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; or VOC), and the main goal of his voyage was to discover and explore new commercial opportunities. The original of his scanty notes has been lost, but an edited journal of his trip that was compiled from various journals kept by officers on his ships is available in the State Archives of the Netherlands. The VOC did not publish it since it was considered to contain commercially sensitive information for competitors. The first published account of the voyage did not appear until 1671, when Arnoldus Montanus published the journal of the expedition's surgeon, Henrik Haelbos, 28 years after their return. That same year an English translation of Haelbos' account was published and two years later also a German edition.

Against this background, the German historian Rüdiger Mack and his publisher present this book as offering a 'new and different view' on Tasman's voyage, with 'new and often surprising interpretations', and with 'new insights on first contacts', but it is doubtful whether these claims are also substantiated in the book. Mack devoted apparently 25 years of his life to investigate numerous details around the exploration, and he deserves praise for his effort to compile a book that includes information about virtually every source available, their history and whereabouts. Mack even traces the first references to Tasman's voyage in publications in other European countries. In addition, a chapter is included on how Montanus got hold of the account by Haelbos before he published it, which is presented as a 'highlight of the research' for this book (p. 98). The final chapter contains a meticulous reconstruction of the provenance of six supposed portraits of Tasman. Although Mack demonstrates compellingly why some of these portraits are definitely not of Tasman, only circumstantial evidence is provided to support the

suggestion which portrait most likely depicts Tasman. Although Mack does make a qualification regarding his conclusion about the portrait, a range of interpretations of other details in this book that are presented more firmly are often equally questionable.

In chapter four, for example, Mack offers a rather uncritical account of the oral history of contacts between the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga with Tasman and his crew. In this context, he mentions the author of a book on Māori place names, G.G.M. Mitchell, who recorded in 1948 that in 1938 someone had recounted a story told to him by his uncle in 1902, who at the time was told ‘by an old Māori ... that several generations earlier his ancestors had seen a large sailing ship passing up the coast’ (p. 47). He also discusses a story told by an old chief to a European settler in 1839 about an ancestor then seven generations ago, so probably living in the first half of the seventeenth century. It would be wrong to dismiss such stories out of hand, but presenting them without any qualms is, of course, also problematic. The credibility of Mack’s interpretations must also be taken with a grain of salt since his account of Māori oral sources is not properly referenced either. Indeed, many suggestions are highly speculative, which is also evident in the detailed comparison between Tasman’s account and the chapter in Witsen’s book that is partly based on Visscher’s observations.

Three chapters focus on Witsen’s book, including one on the references to places visited in the Pacific and one on the illustrations of Tasman’s voyage. Witsen’s book is interesting as it adds a new perspective to the seventeenth century literature that used to focus predominantly on commercial opportunities, geographical aspects of the region or the religious views of the area’s inhabitants. Mack describes the perspective of Witsen as ‘anthropological’ (p. 100), although it needs to be added that it is more physical anthropology than social or cultural anthropology. Regarding their origin, he speculated that they might have migrated from Asia, which could be the first suggestion of this kind. His observations focused otherwise mainly on physical characteristics of the people encountered during the voyages as well as their clothes and other external aspects of their way of life. Furthermore, the book is an interesting resource about contemporaneous European representations of Pacific peoples who were seen by Witsen (and Visscher) as ‘very evil and cruel black naked people with curly hair’ and as ‘wild beasts’, who are ‘prone to theft’ (pp. 285-307).

Mack also offers a meticulous comparison between Tasman’s observations and those made by Visscher as included in Witsen’s book. On page 153 he admits that the basic facts of the voyage are not significantly different in both accounts, but many details in Witsen’s book are not included in Tasman’s journal or in a slightly different way. Mack is to be admired for his patience and dedication to make this painstaking comparison, e.g. of the time when some illustrations were made which he infers from the position of the sun and how the shadow spreads. It is also interesting that he notes differences in opinion between Tasman and Visscher regarding the insularity of New Zealand and the existence of a strait between New Guinea and Australia (p. 146). In several other instances, Mack’s interpretations of the new information in Witsen’s book appears a little over-enthusiastic. It would have been advisable to check his interpretations with native speakers of Dutch or, in other cases, with people who are more knowledgeable about Māori culture.

He reflects, for example, on the different descriptions of the Māori as *groff van stamme en gebeente* by Tasman and as *grof van gebaerte* by Witsen (p. 127). Mack translates Tasman’s phrase as ‘rough in voice and bones’, which he finds odd in contrast with Witsen’s description that he translates as ‘making rough gestures’, which he considers plausible. As a corollary, he suggests that the person who copied Tasman’s notes in the official journal made a mistake by

writing ‘gebeente’ instead of ‘gebaerte’. In my view, however, this is a perfect example of *hineininterpretieren* or reading a certain meaning into a phrase since the expression ‘groff van gebeente’ is not necessarily strange at all, referring to the sturdy physique of Polynesians upon which many Europeans commented at the time. Likewise, Mack is convinced that the Māori performed a *haka* when they first met Europeans, but the only evidence he provides for this view is that Visscher recorded that, in combination with ‘making rough gestures’, they had a *wreed gezicht*, or, in his translation ‘an aggressive or evil face’, although a ‘brutal face’ would be a better translation. Knowing that Māori might roll their eyes and protrude their tongue (*pūkana*) while quivering or shaking their hands (*wiri*) to emphasize passion during cultural performances of sorts, it is really unfounded to claim with any certainty that they performed a *haka* (pp. 127, 168).

In sum, Mack is to be commended for his years of meticulous work to compile this book containing all available sources on the voyage by Tasman during which he also sailed along the coast of New Zealand and met with a Māori community on the South Island. At the same time, I would conclude that it does not offer new insights that might change our perspective on that first encounter between Māori and Europeans, in spite of the fact that it includes a whole chapter in Dutch and English from a hitherto unknown book that contains numerous references to the journal of Tasman’s chief mate Francois Visscher. The basic facts are, however, very similar in both accounts, as the author himself admits, so the claims on the cover that this book offers a ‘new and different view’ on Tasman’s voyage is unsubstantiated. The book does contain a number of new details, but no game changers.