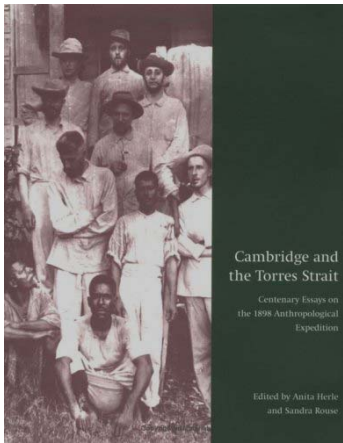


Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition edited by Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 252, £35.00, hardback, ISBN 0 521 58461 2.



As the title makes clear this a collection of essays published to mark the centenary of ‘The Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits’ in 1898. This expedition has become regarded as one of the founding events of anthropology as a distinct discipline and its leader, Alfred Cort Haddon, and some of the expedition members such as W.H.R. Rivers and Charles Seligman influential exponents of the discipline.

There are nine chapters, the first being introductory and by the editors and the others making up four pairs dealing with various themes of the Expedition, namely: the ethnographic and institutional background (chapters by Beckett and Rouse); the visual legacy and issues of representation (Herle and Edwards); the psychological studies (Richards and Kuklick); and current ethnological concerns related to the Expedition’s work (Shnukal and Urry).

Jeremy Beckett usefully places the expedition in the context of colonial contact and the role of the missionaries in both helping and hindering the project’s aims. On occasions the missionaries appeared to fear that their good work would be undone by the anthropologists’ reviving ceremonies from the past while others were intrigued to see ‘folklore’ in action. An apparent omission in this chapter is the lack of consideration of the contacts across the strait with New Guinea in the north and Cape York Aborigines in the south, both long before Europeans arrived on the scene in the early sixteenth century. Certainly, the Expedition noted such contacts in physical and material characteristics, as Beckett notes, and the Mer (Murray) Islanders are regarded as explaining many of their traditions and ideas as having arrived from overseas, but the longer history of contact and communication that might have relevance here is missed. What is not missed here, or in the previous chapter, however, is the significant role that the Expedition records of Mer played in support of the Mabo case.

Sandra Rouse provides an account of Haddon’s trials and tribulations in gaining funding for the Expedition and a post for himself in Anthropology at Cambridge. With influential supporters, including Frazer and Huxley, he was, of course, successful in both aims and Rouse considers the influence of the Expedition in directing the development of anthropology as a discipline based on fieldwork and the almost evangelistic zest of Haddon to find jobs for his students in universities around the world, including Radcliffe-Brown, first in Cape Town and then Sydney. Perhaps spreading the

word of anthropology was somehow influenced by the close contacts he had with missionaries in the Torres Strait, although Rouse does not propose this.

Haddon's history as a collector is the focus of a chapter and small appendix by Anita Herle. She shows how the objects collected were a reflection of the 'salvage anthropology' Haddon practised which often meant that these would need to be commissioned as many types were no longer in circulation by the time the Expedition arrived. Rouse also briefly considers how the collection in Cambridge is an important resource for contemporary islanders. In a dense and fascinating chapter Elizabeth Edwards shows what can be revealed about the Expedition through the study of the photographic record and the various uses to which it was put. She finds that the photographs can be characterised by both their import as scientific record and also very much part of the salvage paradigm that attempts to verify a past in the present which is already past.

The first of the two chapters regarding the psychological studies of the Expedition, by Graham Richards, finds that their work fell at a time when Victorian views of 'race' were failing and new Modernist principles were being adopted. As such the psychological research, although applying up-to-date methods, is found to have a certain ambiguity and has had very little impact on psychology as a discipline when compared to the impact of the Expedition on the development of anthropology. The second chapter, by Henrika Kuklick, provides a more general account but also highlights the ambiguous nature of the research that was 'transitional' rather than formative.

Anna Schnukal assesses the importance of Sidney Ray's linguistic work in the Torres Strait and finds that no serious scholar of linguistics in the region can begin their research without reference to it, although the methods and analyses are rather dated by today's standards. In the final chapter, James Urry places the Expedition in its intellectual context over the period until the final volume was published in 1935. It outlines in absorbing details the attempts of the various expedition members to make sense of the complexity and diversity of the region of study. It also shows how detailed ethnography emerged as the principal aim of their students and how, by 1935, one of these, Bronislaw Malinowski, had outshone the achievements of Haddon et al.

This volume constitutes a superb history of the Expedition and the foundations of anthropology in Britain and Oceania. It is edited and presented admirably as one would expect from the press that also contracted to publish the expedition volumes over 100 years ago.

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