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Australia and the Pacific: A History

By Ian Hoskins

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Reviewed by Nigel Page,

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Ian Hoskins' *Australia and the Pacific: A History* is a revealing and sweeping narrative that delves into the rich and complex history of Australia and its interactions with the Pacific region. The book covers a vast timespan, from the geological shifts that shaped the continents to the arrival of the first Australians and the subsequent colonisation and exploration efforts, and its relative decline in the imagination—and the attention—of Australia.

One of the strengths of this book is its comprehensive approach to the subject matter. Hoskins provides a panoramic survey of Australia's interactions with the Pacific, shedding light on the historical events, cultural exchanges and diplomatic relationships that have shaped the region.

Hoskins' writing style is highly readable and engaging, making the book accessible to both academic readers and general enthusiasts of history. However, some criticisms can be raised regarding the book. One criticism is that the title may imply an equal focus on both Australia and the Pacific, but the book primarily centres on first Britain's, and then Australia's, efforts to control, influence and benefit from the region. Readers expecting a more balanced exploration of the Pacific may be disappointed. Indeed, there is little if any real indication that the Pacific has had much more than a passing economic impact on Australia. Hoskins makes clear that Pacific leaders have long used outside alliances and force to

prosecute political self-interests, but the Pacific's importance has faded—at least until China's recent attentions.

Additionally, some readers may find that the book lacks a critical examination of Australia's colonial history and its impact on the Indigenous populations of the Pacific. The book does not delve deeply enough into the consequences and legacies of these actions as the lens remains fairly Australia-centric. The South Sea Islander relationship, and the degree and extent of force in securing indentured labour, is superficially addressed. It was interesting to learn that the Pacific was itself something of a barely administered frontier—just six Royal Navy vessels were available to police the western Pacific for the decades during the early period of 'blackbirding', and the descriptions of the prosecutions and law changes attempting to control the worst excesses of this period did provide some useful context. However, the end of this book tended to read more like 'box-ticking' of the main points, with some of the early passion seeming to have ebbed by the final chapters.

Despite these criticisms, *Australia and the Pacific: A History* remains a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the historical dynamics between Australia and the Pacific region. The book provides an overview of the subject, offering insights into the cultural, political and economic interactions that have shaped the region over time. Its detail and range certainly offers enough to make the journey worthwhile.