

Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific: An Environmental History. By Don Garden. ABC-Clio, Santa Barbara, 2005. 398 pp. + xvii. NZ price: \$121.00. ISBN 1-57607-868-X.

CHALLENGED TO DRAW TOGETHER THE VARIOUS STRANDS of Australasian and Pacific environmental history, Don Garden has produced an impressive work in ABC-Clio's series 'Nature and Human Societies'. The book is well written and researched, and like Thomas Dunlap's *Nature and the English Diaspora* is a comparative work that touches on the parallels between the environmental history of this region rather than a fully trans-national history in the vein of Ian Tyrrell's *True Gardens of the Gods*. Unlike those books, Garden aims his at an undergraduate and popular audience. Reflecting this, it includes a bibliographical essay, A–Z reference section, timeline and, what I think is particularly useful, a documentary section. I would certainly use this as a course text, my only qualm would be its price.

The books' seven chapters approach, in a chronological fashion, the emergence of the landmasses and subsequent peopling of the area we call the Pacific. Three perspectives shape this book. In the first, Garden has taken a bold stance, arguing that 'caution and wisdom . . . should be among the main lessons learned from environmental history' (p.201). By seeking to highlight the often destructive human impact on environments and the lessons that should be learned, Garden challenges people who ignore such messages and by implication the views of some other environmental historians, such as John Mackenzie who, while accepting that destruction took place, take issue with a preponderance of such 'apocalyptic' narratives.¹

If some find this first perspective controversial, few scholars would take issue with the second. Garden contends that the exchange of organisms created hybrid landscapes through the replacement of indigenous species with exotic ones. Thirdly, he draws on Tim Flannery's notion of 'future eaters' to argue that people encountering new lands overused resources and subsequently suffered a 'satiation slump' in which resources and sometimes ecosystems collapsed. Societies then either adapted through more sustainable practices or declined further.

The first chapter describes the emergence of the Australian landmass and the fascinating debate surrounding Australian Aboriginal attitudes and environmental impacts. It contains a particularly useful discussion of both changing notions of Aboriginal inhabitation and contested interpretations of evidence about Aboriginal — as opposed to natural — environmental change, particularly that concerning the decrease of megafauna.

Chapter two succinctly describes the principal island types (continental, high volcanic islands, atolls and makatea atolls) in the Pacific Ocean based on their geology, tectonic activity and resource-base. Garden then expertly summarizes debates about the complex interpretations of the timing of, and motives for, Pacific migration, in addition to discussing the environmental impact of humans. He notes that inhabitants of larger islands with more abundant resources generally fared better than those on smaller islands, although his case study of Mangaia and Tikopia demonstrates that contrasting environmental outcomes could result from contrasting human management of even scarce resources.

The third chapter returns to Australia, looking at its European invasion from early exploration of the area to 1900. Garden again manages to succinctly summarize what is a large and growing field. As he argues elsewhere, some of the most profound ways in which Europeans changed the environment came through their acclimatization of plants and animals and reduction and extinction of others. This chapter also includes a welcome discussion of the environmental footprint of towns, an urban orientation frequently missing in environmental history.

Chapter four follows chronologically from the previous, arguing that the period to 1945 witnessed an intensification of existing trends of development, population growth

and environmental impact, while after 1945 more widespread economic and social benefits, and environmental impacts (for example, the mining boom and expansion of manufacturing) took place. This chapter is wide ranging, discussing, for example, how fears about Australia's 'empty north' motivated settlement policy in this area; problems of salinization and water scarcity; the emergence of environmentalism and 'battles' against hydro-electric projects and wood chipping. In this chapter, Garden offers a frank and critical approach of much environmental policy.

Chapter five travels across the Tasman to engage with the rest of the Pacific. It ranges widely, arguing that three phases characterize experiences in the Pacific: cultural disruption (and often resource exploitation); colonization from roughly the mid-nineteenth century to 1945 (often accompanied by monocultural plantations, agriculture and large-scale acclimatization); and post-war independence (tourism and intensified environmental problems, the latter sometimes tempered by declining population). Garden characterizes New Zealand as having one of the most 'highly modified' (p.164) environments of the Pacific, sharing with Australia and the Pacific islands many similar trends.

Chapter six focuses on contemporary concerns: global warming; hybrid landscape creation; soil degradation; sustainability; and environmentalism. Again the reading is quite depressing, but a brighter note is struck with examples of recent local, state and international environmental action. If the previous chapters dealt with generalities, the final zooms in with case studies (Rapa Nui, Hawai'i and Queensland), each of which explores in greater detail many of the themes of the book.

I wish to make two minor points relating to Garden's argument. At one stage, he observes that: 'The colonial project — to master, develop, and prosper — overwhelmed the faint cry of' conservationists in the nineteenth century' (p.91) yet he contradicts this, arguing that conservation in this period was largely 'anthropocentric and utilitarian' (p.92). In my view, conservation, through its control and management of resources, actually formed part of the colonial project — rather than any radical critique of it as Garden seems to imply in the first instance. Criticism of development per se only gained traction from the 1970s. Secondly, I found Garden's use of the arguments of Lynn White, that 'Christianity was the most environmentally harmful of the major religions' (p.67) to be simplistic and outdated. Since White put forward his thesis several scholars have rebutted his findings, suggesting instead that multiple interpretations of Christianity existed in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Zealand.²

Overall, though, this is an excellent book that adds significantly to the field, principally by summarizing what have largely been disparate national environmental histories. Indeed, a particular strength of this book is its author's ability to express complex ideas in an engaging and very clear manner. I am sure that Garden will stimulate students and academics alike with this book, possibly encouraging them to pursue the trans-national aspects of environmental exchange he introduces.

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NOTES

1 John MacKenzie, 'Empire and the Ecological Apocalypse: The Historiography of the Imperial Environment', in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, eds, *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, Edinburgh, 1997, pp. 215–28.

2 Lynn White, Junior, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), pp.1203–7; James Beattie and John Stenhouse, 'Empire, Environment and Religion: God and Nature in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *Environment and History* (forthcoming); Beattie and Stenhouse, 'God and the Natural World in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', in John Stenhouse, ed., assisted by Antony Wood, *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives of New Zealand History*, Adelaide, 2005, pp.180–203.