

# Nature's Expressions: Thinking Race on the US South Seas Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)

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February 2025

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

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I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

## Acknowledgments:

I set out on the voyage of this thesis research with another destination in mind – a different century, archive and topic – and with no concept of the obstacles I would encounter on the way. For forgiving this and many other tired nautical metaphors my first thanks are to Maria Nugent. Maria's immense patience has been the least of her many contributions to this thesis and my thinking in turn. Further thanks for supervisory guidance go to Bronwen Douglas, Ann McGrath, Patricia O'Brien, and Martin Thomas whose collective skill and varied perspectives enriched my thinking, and I hope that finds some reflection in these pages.

The initiation and progression of this research was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship, and I am grateful for the funding that enabled this work. Further support was provided through funds from the Australian Research Council and the Australian National University in the form of a linkage grant to the Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific (CBAP) Project led by Matthew Spriggs. Additional funding from the Georg August University of Göttingen allowed me to participate in the Spirit Summer School Workshop held there in 2017. My intellectual development over the course of this research was fostered by the conferences, workshops, and reading/writing groups that I attended over the last few years, particularly the attendees of my pre-submission seminar at the ANU, the previously mentioned Spirit Summer School (thanks to Dominik Huenniger, James Delbourgo, Vanessa Smith and Bernhard Schär for their facilitation), as well as the ANU History Postgraduate Reading/Writing Group (with thanks to Tom Griffiths), the New Perspectives on Exploration Workshop (thanks again to Martin Thomas and additionally to Michael Robinson), Australian Historical Association Conference, the New Earth Histories Conference 2019 (thanks to Alison Bashford, Emily Kern, Jarrod Hore and Adam Bobbette), Western Sydney Writers Group (thanks to Imran Ahmed), History of Ocean Science, Technology and Medicine Working Group (thanks to Daniella McCahey), Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific Conference, and finally to Eugenia Flynn for writing sessions during red-zone lockdown.

Further thanks to the museum, archival and administrative staff underpinned every footnote in this thesis. Their work spanned many institutions but included the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau at the ANU, the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, the Harvard University Archives, the Smithsonian Institute, the Library of the American Philosophical Society, the State Library of New South Wales and the Massachusetts Historical Society. I'd also like to thank my thesis examiners for their constructive feedback and kind words: Michael Robinson, Shino Konishi and Bruce Buchan.

Sincere thanks to my academic friends and colleagues of the Coombs corridors and beyond, particularly my cohort. Special mentions go in no particular order to Daniel May, Nicholas Hoare, Shauna Bostock-Smith, Emily Gallagher, Thomas Lalevée, Carolyn Strange, John Sutton, Sarah Qidwai, Amy Way, Jarrod Hore, Rhianne Greaves, Eleanor Foster, Catherine Fischer, Shannyn Palmer, Michelle Staff, Jess Urwin, Josh Black, Tess Gardner, Colin Milner, Benjamin Huf, Annemarie McLaren, Alex Roginski, Kelly Frame, Tasnim Sammak, Tristen Jones, Ingrid Ahlgren and Hillary Howes. Further to my colleagues at UNSW, particularly Dominic Fitzsimmons, Madeleine Wilson, Tracey-Lee Downey, Myvanwy Hudson, James Bedford and Rishaad Abdullah. Then to my friends Muhamod Tissini, Imran Ahmed, Fayez Moussa, Abdul-Hadi Shah-Idil, Ahmed Yusuf, Nasser alKhateeb, Yaseen Hussain and Aamer Rahman, who I could trust to tell me when I stopped making sense. Finally, to Kate Dronoff, for her view of the Rockies and of me, both saw it through.

Immense gratitude to my family, who have supported me throughout this journey: Rafi Alam, who beat me to the punch, Azadul Alam and Afroza Alam, who provided all manner of sustenance on the way, to Oishee Alam, for all her encouragement, support and inspiration, to Lally and Amshu, who were never more than a call away, and to Mum and Dad, who taught me to read and write, and teach me still.

And to my two boys, Owaisi and Iliyan, who heard my keyboard's chatter before they could talk, and who found their way – a little unjustly, but not unrealistically – into the conclusion. They will always be my home and heart. BismiLlah before, and alhamduliLlah after.

## Abstract:

Dr Charles Pickering (1805-1878) departed the Americas in 1838 a naturalist but returned a race scientist. His years abroad on the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition (1838-1842) were transformative. The Expedition's passage through Oceania was characterised by a rapid but ultimately uneven shifts in the Pickering's thinking about humanity's relationship to the environment, and the nature of human difference. His primary contribution to the Expedition's lengthy list of publications, titled *The Races of Man and their Geographical Distribution*, was described by one contemporary as "unstratified as a dumpling and heterogeneous as a low-priced sausage" and the incoherence of this work has vexed readers since. After his return from the Pacific, in the face of mixed responses, he became a fixture on the stage of mid-nineteenth century Atlantic science, influencing thinkers like Charles Darwin and facilitating the growth of scientific societies and disciplines in the United States. Despite this, his life and work has been largely passed over in favour of studies of his more assertive, less inconsistent, colleagues in the Expedition's scientific corps. This study illustrates the ways that Pickering's travels and interactions aboard the Expedition led to his ultimately incoherent inventions of race, showing how race thinking both propelled and subverted his sometimes-brilliant scientific work. It is a history of thinking, rather than thought: a survey of Pickering's situated, transitory and contingent moments of clarity, and it reveals both the utility and complications of race science for one of its public proponents. In recent years the US Exploring Expedition has been the topic of a growing body of research, and this thesis adds a novel perspective to those histories, while also contributing to broader studies of antebellum science, histories of race and its interface with environment, and encounters with self, objects, and others in the Pacific.

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One touch of nature makes the whole world kin  
– Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, act 3, scene 3.

# Introduction: The Marks of Travel

I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no  
face – Michel Foucault

As a historical figure, Dr Charles Pickering (1805-1878) possesses qualities that should have endeared him to historians. Firstly, he writes well, in clear prose that only occasionally veers to the dramatic or obtuse. Secondly, he *writes* well, his journals composed in elegant cursive easily deciphered even through the haze of a fading microfilm. His youth in antebellum New England saw a tumultuous entry into the academy, a story that appeals to a bygone age of university drama, while speaking to the origins of the institutional home of the historical discipline. His time aboard the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition left his journal brimming with direct observations of vast tracts of the mid-nineteenth century world at a time of pivotal change. Finally, his moral orientation and intellectual labour resonates with the academic of today; his anti-colonial sentiment and deep perspective of global of human-driven environmental change seem designed to provide the kind of quotes that set conference goer's heads nodding in recognition. Yet, despite all of Charles Pickering's virtues as a historical subject, this thesis is the first sustained examination of the man and his thinking.

To consider the reasons for Pickering's relative obscurity leads directly to the subject of this thesis. To date, when the doctor is mentioned, it is in one of two contexts. The first is his part in the story of an expedition to the Pacific that, like him, has been insufficiently studied despite its contributions to science and national identity in the United States. The second context is as a representative of the excesses or absurdities of nineteenth-century race science, specifically the polygenicist strain of thinking that configured each race it invented as a separate species with a separate origin.<sup>1</sup> However, Charles Pickering does not fit neatly into either narrative. In the story of the Expedition his work is hard to credit when it is compared to the geological and linguistic contributions of his contemporaries on the voyage. Furthermore, as an example of polygenism he is difficult to place, with one edition of his book *Races of Man* introduced by the words: "the black man, red man, and the white man, are links in one great chain of relationship, and alike children which have descended from one common parent."<sup>2</sup> These incoherencies are a potential explanation for Pickering's neglect in the historical record, and they form a focus of my research.

In 1838, Pickering joined the scientific corps of the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition and his time aboard appears to have been pivotal in his life's trajectory.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> As Burton and Ghoshal point out, the terms "race science" and "scientific racism" have differing meanings despite their at times interchangeable use in scholarship. I follow their decision to use the former term to "depict a series of inquiries and debates that, in their time, were based upon widely accepted scientific methodologies and theoretical frameworks and expressed in recognized scientific venues", as opposed to the latter term which was part of an effort to cast racial ideas as pseudoscientific: Elise K. Burton and Sayori Ghoshal, "The history of science through the prism of race," *BJHS Themes* (2024): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bjt.2024.23>.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Pickering, *The Races of Man and their Geographical Distribution*, 2 ed. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1854), lxxii.

<sup>3</sup> Some historians refer to the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition as the "Ex. Ex.", this abbreviation was not used by Pickering or his scientific colleagues and I avoid it. To indicate that I am making a reference to this specific voyage I capitalise "Expedition."

botanist Asa Gray, one of many scientific notables who admired Pickering, describes this pivot in the posthumous publication of the latter's magnum opus, titled *The Chronological History of Plants*.<sup>4</sup> In the formal instructions given to the Expedition's commander Pickering is listed as a "naturalist" however Gray notes that "although retaining ichthyology, [he] particularly turned his attention, during the nearly four years' voyage of circumnavigation, to anthropology."<sup>5</sup> After this shift "all his remaining life was assiduously devoted" to this new "predilection," particularly the "geographical distribution of animals and plants" as evidence of the "operations, movements, and diffusion of the races of man."<sup>6</sup> To understand the development of his "predilection" – an interest in the relationship between racial type and global ecological shifts – I closely examined the journals he produced while aboard the Expedition, journals that provide insights into the role that the Expedition's moments, places and experiences played in his often conflicted thinking about human difference, race, environment and history.

My examination of Pickering's thinking offers two important insights. The first is that while race was initially a matter of curiosity for the naturalist, over the course of the voyage its importance to his thinking increased exponentially. The second observation is that the movement of the Expedition was both intellectually productive and disruptive, for it continuously unseated previously useful understandings of race and type. He wrestled with race as much as he relied upon it to understand the Expedition's tumult, and this struggle is what ultimately resulted in the incoherence that frustrated both his contemporaries and historians since. His return to the United States in 1842 did not mean that he reached coherence, instead that homecoming was the end of those factors that propelled his struggles with race. The factors in question are explored in more depth through the coming chapters.

The rest of this introduction provides an orientation to the Expedition, its histories, its thinking, and mine.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Pickering, *The Chronological History of Plants: Man's Record of His Own Existence Illustrated Through Their Names, Uses and Companionship* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1879), xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 Vol 5*, 5 vols., vol. 5 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), xxix; Asa Gray, Bibliographic Notice in Pickering, *History of Plants*, xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, xiv.

## Histories of the United States Souths Seas Exploring Expedition

Picture a hollow globe, as though drilled along its axis, down, down, ever down from the North Pole, all the way down, making a verdant world until a tunnel emerges amidst the snow of the Antarctic. This image, delightful, almost Vernian, is where most histories of the United States Exploring Expedition begin.<sup>7</sup> The hypothesis that the earth is hollow, with “holes at the Poles,” was the passion of John Cleves Symmes Jr., and his advocacy for testing the idea fell on the right ears. The quest for “Symmes’ hole” is credited with spawning the United States’ Exploring Expedition, at launch the most costly scientific endeavour in the history of the still young republic.<sup>8</sup> The image of an ocean precipice leading to a new world captures well the tipping point metaphors that find expression throughout most historical writing about the Expedition. Its departure in 1838 can easily symbolise, variously or simultaneously, a capstone to the age of sail, the beginning of professional science in the United States, or the starter gun to the republic’s Pacific Empire.

For the antebellum United States, it was a precipitous endeavour.<sup>9</sup> Its ambition, budget and drama were all on a scale almost mismatched to a new republic in the midst of an economic downturn. However it was that mismatch – the ambition and potential glory of exploration – that quickly became the driving impetus of the Expedition’s organisation.<sup>10</sup> By Symmes’ death in 1829, commemorated by a grave topped with a hollow sphere, both his theory and the quest to confirm it had already been jettisoned.<sup>11</sup> In the place of an expedition seeking holes at the Poles was an Expedition whose form is almost archetypal in its themes of science, espionage, and national glory.<sup>12</sup>

The Expedition was to be the United States’ answer to Cook and La Perouse, a voyage of exploration comprised of six ships, sent to the Pacific to further “the empire of science and commerce.”<sup>13</sup> Its flagship, the sloop of war *Vincennes*, displaced 700t, nearly double that of

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<sup>7</sup> Jules Verne’s, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* was written several decades after the Expedition’s return: Jules Verne, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, trans. William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). The two most influential books on the Exploring Expedition to date are excellent examples of the trend: Nathaniel Philbrick, *Sea of Glory: The Epic South Seas Expedition 1838-1842* (London: Harper Collins, 2004); William Stanton, *The Great United States Exploring Expedition 1838-1842* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> While it is commonplace for “American” to be used to refer to a citizen of the United States, this is something I try to avoid for clarity’s sake; Thierry Devos and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “American = White?,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88, no. 3 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.447>.

<sup>10</sup> John P. Harrison, “Science and Politics: Origins and Objectives of Mid-Nineteenth Century Government Expeditions to Latin America,” *The Hispanic American historical review* 35, no. 2 (1955): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-35.2.175>.

<sup>11</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> There are many American comparisons, before and after, but it was far from a peculiarly American mode: Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 Vol 1, 5 vols.*, vol. 1 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), xxvii.

Cook's *Endeavour*.<sup>14</sup> Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, who was appointed its commander in the lead up to its departure, was commanded to sail in Cook's wake, exploring and mapping the islands of the South Seas to the benefit of American sealers, whalers and China traders. To do so was to allow competition with contemporary European expeditions like that of Dumont d'Urville, who the Expedition would pass in the fog in Antarctica. That this project was even considered, so large its cost, is a testament to the prestige associated with such endeavours.

The Expedition's productions after its return to the United States in 1842 were extensive, yet its Commander, Charles Wilkes, felt that the public praise given to the Expedition was not proportionate to its successes.<sup>15</sup> Much of the historical work since has to a large extent sought to rectify this perceived deficit. The two histories that have defined historical writing about the Wilkes expedition; William Stanton's *the Great United States Exploring Expedition* published in the seventies, and Nathaniel Philbrick's *Sea of Glory* from 2004, are both narrative accounts of the voyage that seek to establish or reestablish its importance to the story of the United States.<sup>16</sup> Stanton and Philbrick's monographs are sweeping in scope, representing extensive and encyclopaedic research. Most subsequent histories, including this thesis, have drawn on their labour. At the same time the nationalist emphasis upon the Expedition's redemption has left such histories open to the critique that their focus on redemption leaves space for more critical scholarship.

Three major publications have worked to broaden the scope of academic analysis of the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition. Barry Allen Joyce's *Shaping of American Ethnography* continued the aforementioned nationalist tradition of emphasising the Expedition's importance by arguing that its scientific corps and publications fill a gap in the history of the development of anthropology.<sup>17</sup> However Joyce's account largely steers clear of the sometimes-triumphal tones of Stanton and Philbrick, instead arguing that the Expedition failed to escape the frames of reference – in terms of human difference and type – that were the norm in the United States. This element of criticality enriches his analysis, though it means that his writing primarily emphasises American sources, and rarely converses with the scholarship of exploration, science and technology studies or histories of the Pacific. This limitation is less

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<sup>14</sup> David B. Tyler, *The Wilkes Expedition, the First United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Michael A. Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 75.

<sup>16</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*; Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*.

<sup>17</sup> Barry Allen Joyce, *The Shaping of American Ethnography, the Wilkes Exploring Expedition 1838-1842* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

true of Ann Fabian's *The Skull Collectors* and Michael Verney's recent *A Great and Rising Nation*.<sup>18</sup>

While the national orientation of books like *Sea of Glory* limits their capacity to stray beyond storytelling, the more theoretical emphasis of Verney and Fabian lends their writing a more analytical tone and a broader scope. Neither work are therefore pure histories of the Expedition. *The Skull Collectors'* discussion of the Expedition's scientific corps, and particularly her examination of the work of Charles Pickering, stems from research into the collections of another contemporary race scientist: Samuel George Morton.<sup>19</sup> Fabian's writing borrows much of the macabre from her subject, and she lingers upon the ghoulish element of the Expedition's collection, offering a counterpoint to writing that has sometimes elided the brutality and anatomical nature of such scientific work. Both *Shaping of American Ethnography* and *Skull Collectors* are necessarily selective in their engagement with the history of the Expedition as a whole, but they are the two published works that offer the most extensive discussion of the Expedition's scientific work and Charles Pickering by extension.

Verney's *Great and Rising Nation* is by far the least nationally oriented of Expedition histories. Rather than arguing for the exceptional nature of Wilkes' voyage, Verney does well to place the Expedition within global trends of empire and nation-building.<sup>20</sup> *Great and Rising Nation* even goes so far to argue, I think correctly, that Wilkes overstated the Expedition's contemporary and ongoing obscurity.<sup>21</sup> By placing the Expedition in an international or trans-imperial context Verney responds to an ongoing push to leave national history behind, yet this broadening scope at times passes over important specificities.<sup>22</sup> *Great and Rising Nation* dedicates two chapters to the Expedition and considers at length the relationship between the Expedition's publications and race.<sup>23</sup> Despite this emphasis, Pickering is mentioned once, described merely as the curator of the National Institution, and his work is entirely absent from the book's list of citations.<sup>24</sup>

These monographs show something of the difficulty of writing histories of the Expedition given the scale of its archives. The Expedition had a crew of more than 300 men – some of whom published their journals – and every officer and member of the scientific corps

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<sup>18</sup> Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*.

<sup>19</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*.

<sup>20</sup> Continuing a thrust of analysis that arguably began with Harrison, "Science and Politics."; Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*, 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*, 76-77.

<sup>22</sup> Michelle Burnham, "Trade, Time, and the Calculus of Risk in Early Pacific Travel Writing," *Early American Literature* 46, no. 3 (2011): 425.

<sup>23</sup> Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*.

<sup>24</sup> Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*, 99.

was required to keep a journal of the voyage. This volume of written material adds to thousands of objects that were collected by the Expedition before being scattered to museums around the world. Thankfully, the Expedition-focussed monographs have been complimented by several more focussed histories of varied use. The work of the scientific corps, particularly the geologist James Dwight Dana, has offered one especially fruitful avenue of research.<sup>25</sup> Encounters between the crew of the Expedition and the peoples of the Pacific, in particular the kidnapping of the Fijian Ro Vaidovi, have provided another point of focus.<sup>26</sup> When combined with politically oriented and regional histories, these works mean that publications about the Exploring Expedition are extensive, although arguably less so than those written about the European explorers it was intended to exceed.<sup>27</sup>

The urge to compare the Expedition with similar journeys is a consistent theme in the literature, both as a way of arguing for its importance and as a tool for understanding its nature.<sup>28</sup> The drama of muffled, claustrophobic Antarctic voyages, Wilkes' descending lash, bloody punitive expeditions and violent storms frames the Expedition in the theatrical. The human drama of expeditions in general incites a sensational style of account. As Thomas writes

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Leah Aronowsky, "On Drawing Dead Fish," *Environmental History* 21, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emw005>; Alistair Sponsel, "Pacific Islands and the Problem of Theorizing: The U.S. Exploring Expedition from Fieldwork to Publication," in *Soundings and Crossings: Doing Science at Sea, 1800-1970*, ed. Katharine Rozwadowski Anderson, Helen M (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2016); Robert H. Dott, "James Dwight Dana's Old Tectonics – Global Contraction Under Divine Direction," *American Journal of Science* 297 (March, 1997); Peter J. Heaney, "Time's arrow in the trees of life and minerals," *American Mineralogist* 101, no. 5 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.2138/am-2016-5419>; David Iglar, "On Coral Reefs, Volcanoes, Gods, and Patriotic Geology; Or, James Dwight Dana Assembles the Pacific Basin," *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.79123>; David R. Stoddart, "'This Coral Episode', Darwin Dana, and the Coral Reefs of the Pacific," in *Darwin's Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific*, ed. Roy M MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Julie R. Newell, "James Dwight Dana and the Emergence of Professional Geology in the United States," *American Journal of Science* 297 (1997); Michael Mackert, "Horatio Hale and the Great U.S. Exploring Expedition," *Anthropological Linguistics* 31, no. 1 (1994), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30028272>; Tom Belton, "The Dawn of the 'Chaotic Account': Horatio Hale's Australia Notebook and the Development of Anthropologists' Field Notes," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25549541>; Barbara Isaac and Gwyneira Isaac, "Uncovering the Demographics of Collecting: A Case-Study of the US Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)," *Journal of the History of Collections* 28, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhv027>.

<sup>26</sup> Antony Adler, "The Capture and Curation of the Cannibal 'Vendovi': Reality and Representation of a Pacific Frontier," *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2014.914623>; Stéphanie Leclerc-Caffarel, "Exchange Relations Between Fijians and Euro-Americans (1774-1854), with Reference to Museum Collections" (PhD Diss. University of East Anglia, Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, 2013); Paul Lyons, "Lines of Fear: Fear, Perception, and the 'Seen' of Cannibalism in Charles Wilkes's Narrative and Herman Melville's Typee," in *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism in the Pacific*, ed. Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn (New York, Annandale and Dunedin: Routledge, Pluto Press and University of Otago Press, 2001); Paul Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the US Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Ian C. Jackson, "Exploration as Science: Charles Wilkes and the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-42: A controversial leader who mapped the oceans in new detail and extended the bounds of American science," *American Scientist* 73, no. 5 (1985), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27853398>.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, "Exploration as Science," 450-53; Frances B. Barkan, *The Wilkes Expedition, Puget Sound and Oregon County* (Washington: Washington State Capitol Museum, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> In one of the first pages of this thesis I couldn't help but measure the Vincennes against Cook's *Endeavour*, and I'm far from the first to follow that urge Tyler, *The Wilkes Expedition, the First United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)*.

of the genre, “we find that the spectacle of ‘man versus nature’ is heightened, sometimes to the point of absurdity.”<sup>29</sup> This spectacle implies that there is no coincidence to the literary orientation of large parts of the historiography of exploration.<sup>30</sup> Storytelling can act to pull together and cohere spilling masses of archival material into something manageable, even if it has the capacity to lead away from analysis. The hierarchical nature of voyages provides an obvious protagonist for storytelling in the form of a ship’s captain, and this has given exploration histories a trend towards particularisation, as Dane Kennedy puts it: “biography has been its leading genre and hagiography its main mode of representation.”<sup>31</sup>

After returning to the United States the Expedition was mired in scandal. Its conclusion came amidst a flurry of court-martials, mostly centred upon Wilkes, and this courtroom drama arguably reinforced an existing biographic impulse in the writing of histories of expeditions.<sup>32</sup> Just as Stanton and Philbrick sought to redeem the Expedition as a national triumph, so historians like Jackson have sought to redeem Wilkes.<sup>33</sup> The commander, whose paranoia and discipline lead to his reprimand after the Expedition’s return, cuts a controversial and domineering figure, lent readily to hagiography.<sup>34</sup> The knowledge of Wilkes impending fall from grace has led much of the literature to be pervaded with a sense of impending doom. It also leads to characterisations of the Expedition as “the ultimate nightmare”, as Stoddart describes: “it began with years of controversy, was executed through four years of malice, ineptitude and frustration, and ended with decades of animosity and recrimination.”<sup>35</sup> Framing a history around a single individual, even one as scholarly as Charles Pickering, offers the threat of easily slipping into this dramatic mode.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Thomas, “What is an Expedition?,” in *Expedition into Empire: Exploratory Journeys and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Martin Thomas (London: Routledge, 2015), 13.

<sup>30</sup> For example: Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680-1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980); Ross Gibson, *26 Views of the Starburst World* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2012); Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 150.

<sup>32</sup> John Frazier Henry, “The Midshipman’s Revenge: Or, the Case of the Missing Islands,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1982), <http://www.jstor.org/wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/stable/40490718>.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson, “Exploration as Science.”

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Henderson, *The Hidden Coasts, a Biography of Admiral Charles Wilkes* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953); William Bixby, *The Forgotten Voyage of Charles Wilkes* (New York: David McKay Company, 1966).

<sup>35</sup> Stoddart, “‘This Coral Episode’, Darwin Dana, and the Coral Reefs of the Pacific,” 24.

<sup>36</sup> Particularly when the Expedition was so embroiled in narrative that it was written as fiction before it was written as non-fiction:

John Tresch, “The Compositor’s Reversal: Typography, Science, and Creation in Poe’s Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,” *History and Theory* 57, no. 4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12083>.

## Charles Pickering, a biography?

The Expedition journals of Charles Pickering (1805-1878) show the marks of travel, and of transformation. His writing – elegant and precise – loops its way occasionally around a drop of spilled ink or strides to obscurity in a curling page edge, product of long smothered damp. This or that tear could show the jolts of passage or the fingers of a clumsy historian, but the marks of travel that are most frequent have an authorship without question. Above, below and through the text, in Pickering's hand, are pencil marks and margin notes, the legacy of his working and reworking the voyage and its implications. These marginalia are the artefacts of his thinking: physical, contingent, contradictory, and often, like their Expeditionary context, tempestuous. This is a study of that thinking. In turn it is a history of the creation, negotiation, and emergence of race, not merely in one mind, but beyond: in the many spaces and contexts of the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition (1838-1842).

I situate this thesis as a history of thinking rather than a biography, despite the ongoing difficulty of escaping that mode of narration. It is possible that this decision stems from a fear that this thesis might be viewed as “not truly historical (that is, not sufficiently analytical).”<sup>37</sup> To choose a single mind and a single Expedition as a topic of historical enquiry invites an accusation of ‘short-termism’ or at least a comparison to ‘microhistory.’<sup>38</sup> The last two decades have seen a popular turn towards the *longue durée*, with ‘Deep Time,’ ‘Big History’ and ‘World History’ leading a collective historical zooming out on the past.<sup>39</sup> As a widening of scale, a broadening of historical horizons comes as a response to an opposing trend described by advocates as the “telescoping of historical time.”<sup>40</sup> The thrust of this rejoinder has seen the writing of histories of oceans, worlds or chunks “of time so voluminous” that change becomes almost imperceptible.<sup>41</sup> Such histories are fascinating and ambitious yet they held a pendulum's potential: to swing focus back to the interface between those vast scopes of time and an individual mind.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001): 132, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2674921>.

<sup>38</sup> Short-termism is a phrase used by: Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9.

Microhistory's representative text remains: Carlo Ginzberg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> A perfect example of this call is: Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, “History and the Telescoping of Time: A Disciplinary Forum: Introduction,” *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-2010-018>.

<sup>41</sup> Ann McGrath, “Deep Histories in Time, or Crossing the Great Divide?,” in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, ed. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>42</sup> One advocate for world history asked rhetorically “why would a general reader want to know, for example, about the life of a single nun,” rhetoric a little overplayed if you've ever shopped or worked in the biography section of any

Charles Pickering, a New Englander, academic factotum, and stagehand at the backdrop of Nineteenth Century Atlantic science, is one vehicle to approach the multi-faceted interface between histories' scales of inquiry. He was chosen for this purpose as a matter of process, or perhaps accident, after I set out to write a much wider history of dissonance and encounters in the Pacific. The opening sentence of his *Chronological History of Plants* reads: "in the distribution of species over the Globe, the order of nature has been obscured through the interference of man."<sup>43</sup> Pickering was *concerned* by scale in both senses of the word, and his work from the Expedition until his death aimed to create "some plan of arrangement" with which to manage it.<sup>44</sup> Complicating his struggles with scale was, I believe, a persistent conflict between his anti-colonial convictions and his participation in an Expedition that sought to spread the very corrosive influence that he condemned. Pickering's dissonance around his place in colonial institutions and his struggles with the scale of history were captivating not least because they were familiar to me.<sup>45</sup>

Described by one historian as a man of "unrecognized genius," Charles Pickering has many traits that make him enticing as a historical subject.<sup>46</sup> He is often mentioned in passing as an important part of the intellectual lineage of – particularly North American – archaeology and anthropology, and the influence of his writing can be found in places as far afield as the visual representation of "Australian Aboriginality" in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> It was not just his thinking about human difference that gained "considerable attention" amongst antebellum scientists; his biogeographic work was highly regarded by contemporaries even before his departure aboard the Exploring Expedition.<sup>48</sup> Pickering also has the potential to cut a heroic figure, for, even as a "man of his own age and country" he could be judged by the "shallow standard of guilt of the twentieth century" and still "come off well."<sup>49</sup> Under pressure by members of Congress for the "equanimity" of his book *Races of Man*, the naturalist held his ground against both public

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bookstore: Alan Karras and Laura J Mitchell, "Introduction: Writing World Histories for our Times," in *Encounters Old and New in World History: Essays Inspired by Jerry H. Bentley*, ed. Alan Karras and Laura J. Mitchell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Writing History/Writing about Yourself: What's the Difference," in *Clio's Lives: Biographies and Autobiographies of Historians*, ed. Doug Munro and John G. Reid (Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Constance Bordwell, "Delay and Wreck of the Peacock: an Episode in the Wilkes Expedition," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (1991): 122.

<sup>47</sup> Terry A. Barnhart, *American Antiquities: Revisiting the Origins of American Archaeology* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 255; Joyce, *American Ethnography*; Sean P. Harvey, "Ideas of Race in Early America," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (2016), 26; B. Ricardo Brown, *Until Darwin, Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race* (London: Routledge, 2010), 101.

<sup>48</sup> S. Charles Kendeigh, "History and Evolution of Various Concepts of Plant and Animal Communities in North America," *Ecology* 35, no. 2 (1954): 154, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1931112>; "Nuttall's Ornithology," *New England Farmer, and Horticultural Journal* 10, no. 27 (1832): 212. Before his expulsion from Harvard University he is mentioned as advising naturalists many years his senior: Clark A. Elliot, *Thaddeus William Harris (1795-1856) Nature, Science and Society in the Life of an American Naturalist* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 346.

opinion and his scientific colleagues to put “racists in their place.”<sup>50</sup> Despite offering a heroic character for a biography and an influential figure for intellectual history, there are few publications that give him more than a paragraph.<sup>51</sup>

A possible explanation for Pickering’s relative absence from the annals of history is the way the dissonance in his writing makes it difficult to place him coherently within the debates of his time. As Walls says of the role that *Races of Man* played in disputes about the origins of human difference: “Pickering’s answers gave aid and comfort to no one.”<sup>52</sup> Oliver Wendall Holmes, looking for a stance on the nature of race found Pickering’s work “unstratified as a dumpling and heterogeneous as a low-priced sausage.”<sup>53</sup> Historians appear to have found similar difficulties. Pickering’s *Races of Man* was published with essentially the same positions that he arrived to during the Expedition, and extensive parts of it are full transcriptions of his Expedition journals. As ‘thought’ *Races of Man* is difficult to understand, however as ‘thinking’ it makes sense. This distinction is implicit in the transformative nature of the Expedition he joined.

On 20 February 1838, “Charles Pickering M.D. and James D. Dana, members of the Yale Natural History Society” read a talk to society members, later published in the *American Journal of Science*, titled “Description of a Crustaceous Animal.”<sup>54</sup> The animal in question carries the Linnean classification *Caligus* but is known by the more apt “fish lice” on the docks where Pickering and Dana collected their specimen. *Caligus* lived upon the Atlantic Cod that flooded into the fish markets of New York, and the two naturalists, at that point awaiting the Expedition’s departure, argued that their lice constituted a distinct species to the European version of the same: a *Caligus Americanus*. Their chosen name did not stick, but the effort to distinguish the lice as *Americanus*, in a meeting between scientific collecting and global commerce, spoken to one of the early academic societies of the United States, captures a snapshot of Pickering on the eve of the Expedition’s departure: a naturalist, not a race scientist, oriented towards the Atlantic world.

He returned from the Expedition a different man. His first publication after its homecoming, titled *The Races of Man*, shows a shift: in style, content and circumstance. It is a

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<sup>50</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 347.

<sup>51</sup> The three discussions of Pickering that reach chapter length are: Joyce, *American Ethnography*; Fabian, *Skull Collectors*; William Scates Frances, “Watercolour of Fijian Man, Painted by Charles Pickering,” in *Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania*, ed. Hilary Howes, Tristen Jones, and Matthew Spriggs (Canberra, ACT: ANU Press, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 189.

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Wendall Holmes quoted in: Scott H. Podolsky, “Oliver Wendell Holmes, Racism, and Remembrance,” *Bulletin of the history of medicine* 96, no. 4 (2022): 497, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2022.0048>.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Pickering and James Dwight Dana, “Description of a Crustaceous Animal, Belonging to the genus *Caligus* - *C. Americanus*,” *The American Journal of Science and Arts* XXXIV, no. 2 (1838).

work of race science, orientated as much to the United States' West as the Atlantic, and consumed by questions of human origins, physical variety, and ecological change. This metamorphosis is told through the marks of travel in his journal. The passage of the Expedition was also Pickering's passage from naturalist to race scientist. So, why did race come to dominate? What was it about the Expedition that produced that shift? How comprehensive was his reorientation? Was it complete and dramatic? Partial and contested? How, and why, did Charles Pickering think race? These are the guiding questions of this thesis, and they cannot be answered without thinking through thinking itself. To answer these guiding questions I have written a history of thinking: a cognitive history of race.<sup>55</sup>

## Thinking thinking

Arguably the most iconic representation of thinking is Rodin's "the Thinker." The statue, now as much a cliché as an icon, evokes movement even for its stillness. It points towards a subtle distinction between "thinking" and "thought," a difference that I choose to magnify. Thinking is a thing of procedure and process: it is temporal in quality, contingent in nature and active in form. Thought, by contrast, is a thing produced: it is static in quality, independent in nature and inert in form. The marks of travel on Pickering's journal speak of thinking, rather than thought; his transformations reflect a distributed and interactive process rather than a static product or scholarly lineage.<sup>56</sup> Conceptualising thinking in this way has helped me understand the coherence and incoherence of his journals, and it forms a theoretical underpinning that accompanied this thesis through its course. In turn this understanding of thinking also became an integral part of my methods, affecting not only how I understood the thinking of my subject, but correspondingly my own. In this section I elaborate the range of ways that this works in practice and some of the scholarship that inspired it.

Thinking is temporal in quality, by which I mean it is something that occurs across time. The study of thinking is necessarily the study of many moments. It is therefore an examination of process and procedure. In the course of my reading, I have paid close attention to subtle and profound shifts over time. Rather than seeking to characterise Pickering's thought as a product I have looked for trends in its process: those slight and dramatic shifts through the passage of the

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<sup>55</sup> "Cognitive history" is a term I first encountered in: Evelyn B. Tribble and Nicholas Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: religion, education, and memory in early modern England* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> For a brief account of the history of ideas as lineage see: Anthony Pagden, "The Rise and Decline of Intellectual History," *Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15615324.1996.10432159>. and for discussion of some of the flaws in this, particularly the 'influence model' see: Markku Hyrkkänen, "All History is, More or Less, Intellectual History: R. G. Collingwood's Contribution to the Theory and Methodology of Intellectual History," *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 2 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496970902722932>.

voyage, and their related consistencies. Looking for such shifts is, I think, a way to observe what Edwin Hutchins calls “cognition in the wild.”<sup>57</sup> Movement found its way to the core in this study of process, with space and time both implicated.

Thinking is contingent in nature, by which I mean that it is not merely a product of the brain. The marks of travel on Pickering’s journal point towards the hypothesis that the “mind is a leaky organ, forever escaping its natural confines and mingling shamelessly with body and with world.”<sup>58</sup> Thinking is situational, operating only marginally in the skull, with the mind a thing of environment – social, physical – and spaces as headspaces. His journal is, by this understanding, an artefact of thinking, an exogram or “external memory imprint.”<sup>59</sup> The implication of this is that his journal, rather than an expression of thought, is a record of thinking itself as a process, with his paper, ink or pencil an integral part of his cognitive environment.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the extended nature of mind means that to some extent my use of the pronoun “he” is misleading, for thinking is only partially constrained by personhood, leading the apparent protagonist to fade into the background. In reading each journal I therefore met a vehicle by which I approached his thinking and paid close attention to the way it was situated within specific cognitive environments.

Thinking is active in form, by which I mean that it seeks and resists coherence and thus stasis. If it is temporal and contingent, then a description of thinking cannot take either consistency or coherence as a given. For this reason, I have actively resisted the urge to impose coherence upon Pickering’s thinking. I have not operated upon the assumption that his journals or his published writing reflect a consistent or coherent world view, and while at times it may take a consistent or coherent form, this is not something that I have expected nor found across the breadth of his writing. The mind’s dynamism finds its expression in the varied and often contradictory ways that he understands even some of the more fundamental parts of his writing, race being arguably the most important and yet simultaneously rarely lucid. By paying close attention to this dynamism, I have sought to avoid an “intellectual history” that emphasised a “mapping [of] ideas in such a way as to reduce living, breathing human beings to producers of arguments.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), xiv.

<sup>58</sup> Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>59</sup> Edwin Hutchins, “Cognitive Ecology,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2, no. 4 (October 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2010.01089.x>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25164051>.

<sup>60</sup> For further elaboration on the idea of textual evidence as a source of thinking see: Michael Bintley, “Borders, Burials and the Extended Mind in Early Medieval England: *Genesis A* and Apple Down,” *Open Library of Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.9024>.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah C. Dunstan, “Women’s International Thought in the Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Academy: Autobiographical Reflection, Oral History and Scholarly Habitus,” *Gender & History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 488, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12521>.

My efforts to understand this dynamism have been aided by reference to several approaches to thinking, namely: cognitive science, psychohistory, the history of encounters and science and technology studies.

## Expressions of History

My persistent use of the first person in this introduction and elsewhere reflects my appreciation of Greg Denning's call to "be wary of the history that claims to be separate from the circumstances of its telling."<sup>62</sup> He believed that history – learning it, teaching it, writing it – requires a bit of cognitive dissonance.<sup>63</sup> Cognitive dissonance – a feeling of discomfort experienced when two opposed cognitions are held simultaneously – is an important element of my understanding of motivation and rationalisation, both in terms of myself and in terms of historical subjects.<sup>64</sup> Dissonance is a propellant, like a hand hurriedly snatched away from an open flame, its unease, even suffering, animates the making of meaning. In this thesis, I take Denning's point as a general imperative and recognise not only the role of cognitive dissonance in the work of historians, but in the historian's subject as well. Cognitive dissonance theory offers a way of understanding the interface between the individual and others, between the mental efforts of science and the entanglements of Expedition, between novel experiences and old ideas.

Novelty, conflict, suffering, navigation, action – these constitutive elements describe cognitive dissonance and expeditions both. Expeditions were central to what Liebersohn describes as "the formation of ideas through special movement."<sup>65</sup> "More than travel," expeditions, according to Thomas, "shaped our world," affecting not only *what* is known, but *how* we know it.<sup>66</sup> As Imperial projects they not only produced scientific tools for colonialism, but also ways to "discipline via rhetorical and narrative means" the "unpredictable and disordered experience" of Empire.<sup>67</sup> "Shoot! Classify! Name! Describe!" one characterisation of expeditionary activities formed a cognitive defence against the experiential and existential "terrors which smudged the cartographic grid."<sup>68</sup> The link between the themes of cognitive

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<sup>62</sup> Greg Denning, *The Death of William Gooch: a History's Anthropology* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>63</sup> This is something referred to in his work but also something he'd tell his students, according to: Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and their Craft* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2016), 116..

<sup>64</sup> The theory was first articulated by Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Evanston: Row Peterson, 1959).. It was further elaborated by: Eliot Aronson, "The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance: A Current Perspective," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1969). For a succinct summary of some of the objections to the theory see: Ziva Kunda, "Can Dissonance Theory do it All?," *Psychological Inquiry* 3, no. 4 (1992). For a popular summary of the theory's resurgence see: Carol Tavis and Eliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made [But Not by Me]: Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions and Hurtful Acts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Harry Liebersohn, *The Traveller's World: Europe to the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>66</sup> Bronwen Douglas, "Expeditions, Encounters, and the Praxis of Seaborne Ethnography," in *Expedition into Empire: Exploratory Journeys and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Martin Thomas (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Geiger, *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the US Imperial Imagination* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>68</sup> Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680-1840* 10.

dissonance and the themes of expedition are not accidental. The productive capacity of expeditions is a direct result of the propellant nature of cognitive dissonance.

Moving through space, interfacing between expectancies and discoveries, fed travellers on a steady diet of new cognitions and subsequent dissonance to manage. Such a “dramatic overthrow of the structure of meaning” is something not confined to expeditionary travel.<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Lamb describes a similar phenomenon in the advent of scurvy or the black plague amongst a populace. The social disruption of such diseases was something heightened by the affliction of scurvy or plague itself: the very physical effects that such debilitations had not only upon the body but on the brain. However, those kind of dramatic overthrows from the normal, confusions of cause and effect, time and space, are present in the experience of most sea voyages. Just as scurvy created *je ne sais quoi*, a feeling that defies rationalisation, there was no shortage of similarly unmooring experiences on the ships of the squadron. Pacific travel was full of mind-altering phenomena; heatstroke, scurvy, rum, the blinding glare of iceberg and sleep deprivation’s blur. The “prickly heat” which torments Orwell’s colonial subjects in *Burmese Days*; denying rest, making its victims irritable, irrational, was just one of many such factors. Rashes, biting insects, extreme weather, all made up the kind of debilitation which echoed, if inexactly, scurvy’s toll, a “grab bag” of enigmatic ills” that disrupted both coherence and rationalisation.<sup>70</sup>

The disruption and suffering of an expedition, and its correlated cognitive upheaval propelled meaning-making as a response. From filling the boredom of a “watery waste” which “upheld no moving or living thing” to interpreting the “curious feeling” of listening for “sounds carrying death with them,” travellers’ writing and thinking sought to regulate, justify, and calm the turmoil of their experiences.<sup>71</sup> The “overthrow of the structure of meaning” was thus a revolution, a regime change. There is a shift, through suffering and other propelling factors, of the cognitions which govern the brain of the one stricken. Yet like so many regime changes; institutions persist. A traveller’s interpretations and rationalisations fade in and out of coherence with the movement through space and time. Voyages, as Lamb argues, were of two ongoing discoveries: map and self, and both were inevitably be drawn and redrawn with familiar lines.

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Lamb, *Scurvy: the Disease of Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 29.

<sup>70</sup> Dane Kennedy discusses tropical neurasthenia as a “socially constructed disease”, though that description is arguably true of all disease: Dane Kennedy, “Diagnosing the Colonial Dilemma: Tropical Neurasthenia and the Alienated Briton,” in *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World*, ed. Dane Kennedy and Durba Ghosh (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006), 157-65.

<sup>71</sup> And as Eddy argues the act of writing was often consciously taught as a process of ordering the mind; William Reynolds, *The Private Journal of William Reynolds, United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842* (London: Penguin, 2004), 45 and 241; Matthew Daniel Eddy, “The Nature of Notebooks: How Enlightenment Schoolchildren Transformed the Tabula Rasa,” *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.239>.

The preceding description of the turmoil of a voyage, and the quotations within it, show that cognitive dissonance is not new to historians, regardless of whether it has been named as such. Sound psychology, when concerned with description over manipulation, often ends up stating the obvious.<sup>72</sup> My use of cognitive dissonance theory in this thesis therefore does not profess to be the discovery of a historical trend long concealed. Instead I use the theory to bridge gaps and justify stances that cohere with theorising about thinking that I have found to be both generally persuasive and supported through experimentation. For example, one of the central assertions of cognitive dissonance theory is that *Homo sapiens* are “rationalising, but not rational” and when I took this maxim on board, I found that it rendered certain historical trends more understandable than they once were.<sup>73</sup> Historians always hold assumptions about the way ideas are formed, and the motivations of historical actors. To inform my own assumptions I have found that both psychology and cognitive science, as disciplines concerned with cognition and motivation, has something to offer.

This is not a novel assertion, as the genre of “psychohistory” illustrates.<sup>74</sup> Freud’s assertion that psychology must “take control of biography” has a legacy within historical biography starting with Freud himself.<sup>75</sup> However, as Runyan describes in his introduction to *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*; “there is a substantial gap between abstract promise and actual performance” when it comes to the benefits of psychology for understanding history.<sup>76</sup> This, I would argue, is partly due to a preoccupation with Freud and psychoanalysis, which produces interesting but flawed cultural histories alongside popular, interesting, but flawed historical biographies.<sup>77</sup> Freudian psychoanalysis, long fallen out of favour in psychology, has an appealing combination of ambition and metaphor which lends itself to history but often buckles under the past’s strain, not to mention causing any psychologists reading it to scoff.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> A historical undercurrent, as Brekke describes it: Torkel Brekke, “The Religious Motivations of Early Buddhists,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 4 (December, 1999), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1466273>

<sup>73</sup> C. Daniel Batson, “Rational Processing or Rationalization?: The Effect of Disconfirming Information on a Stated Religious Belief,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32, no. 1 (1975): 176.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Psychohistory’ as a discipline appears occasionally, with a highpoint in the 1970s and a varied following since. For an example of the kind of history that resulted see: Peter C. Hoffer, “Psychohistory and Empirical Group Affiliation: Extraction of Personality Traits from Historical Manuscripts,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9, no. 1 (Summer, 1978), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/203673>

<sup>75</sup> P. G. Aaron and R. G. Clouse, “Freud’s psychohistory of Leonardo de Vinci: A matter of being right or left,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13, no. 1 (1982), <https://doi.org/10.2307/203833>.

<sup>76</sup> William McKinley Runyan, “A Historical and Conceptual Background to Psychohistory,” in *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, ed. William McKinley Runyan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>77</sup> A prime example of the former being the quintessential and oft derided: Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 2010). And of the latter: Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Brace and Company, 1921). For a recent discussion of psychoanalysis and historical theory see: Michael Roper, “Psychoanalysis and the Making of History,” in *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory*, ed. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (London: Sage, 2013). And for critiques see: Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>78</sup> Another monumental area of psychoanalysis’s influence is the Frankfurt school of critical theory, which utilises Freud, Marx and Lacan in what some call “Freudo-Marxism.” For more on critical theory and psychoanalysis see: Slavoj Žižek and Christopher Hanlon, “Psychoanalysis and the Post-Political: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek,” *New literary history* 32, no. 1 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2001.0004>. Another, related field of influence is the

My observations of those past attempts led me to adopt an approach more oriented to the inductive than the deductive.

Psychohistory's failed promise illustrates why this thesis, despite its emphasis upon an individual, is not a biography. This is not backseat psychoanalysis, and I am not attempting to reach into the past to pluck Pickering from his chair and place him onto a psychologist's couch. While it is tempting to view psychology as being "about individuals", as John Sutton notes, this a false dichotomy for "memory and mind are social from the start."<sup>79</sup> Social psychology, and particularly cognitive dissonance theory, lends itself to a less individually oriented history because it rejects that dichotomy. This refutation is the reason that historical works using dissonance have reversed that polarity; focussing upon groups rather than individuals.<sup>80</sup> I see the mind as a "biosocial organ permeated by history" and my work zooms in on the liminal space between both frames of investigation – dissonance, Pickering and the Expedition are inextricable.<sup>81</sup>

I was initially attracted to the theory of cognitive dissonance through asking the question "was Hernan Cortez a liar." My readings in the "New Conquest School" of history in the Americas made me curious about how conquistadors managed the tension between the miraculous stories they told and the mundane reality.<sup>82</sup> Cognitive dissonance worked as a tool to understand this tension, but I found that claiming that I observed dissonance, thinking, required justification. What avenues of access could I claim I had to the mind of someone long dead? Thankfully a number of approaches to both history and the mind already existed to inform such an approach, approaches that claim that "the mind can spread beyond brain and

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work of brilliant postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon, particularly: Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks* (New York: New York, Grove Press, 1967). A good summary of Fanon, psychoanalysis and Freud's position in the fringes of psychology is: Ross Truscott and Derek Hook, "Lessons from the Postcolony: Frantz Fanon, Psychoanalysis and a Psychology of Political Critique," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology*, ed. C. Kinnvall, T. Capelos, and P. Nesbitt-Larking (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> John Sutton, "Ten Questions for Cognitive History ... small groups and autobiographical memory," from the "Psychology, Biography and History Workshop" held at the Australian National University, 18 November, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Some examples include the ultimately frustrated work of R.P. Carroll, "Ancient Israelite Prophecy and Dissonance Theory," *Numen* 24, no. 2 (1977), <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852777X00039>; Hugh Jackson, "The Resurrection Belief of the Earliest Church: A Response to the Failure of Prophecy?," *The Journal of Religion* 55, no. 4 (1975), <https://doi.org/10.1086/486450>; and the considered and effective Brekke, "The Religious Motivations of Early Buddhists."; also: F. Kenneth Berrien, "Shelter Owners: Dissonance in the Arms Race" *Social Problems* 11, no. 1 (Summer, 1963), <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1963.11.1.03a00110>; James A. Geschwender, "Explorations in the Theory of Social Movements and Revolutions," *Social Forces* 47, no. 2 (December, 1968), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2575142>; Alexander Laban Hilton, "Agents of Death: Explaining the Cambodian Genocide in Terms of Psychosocial Dissonance," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 2 (December, 1996), <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1996.98.4.02a00110>; Paul J. Hiniker, "The Cultural Revolution Revisited: Dissonance Reduction or Power Maximisation," *The China Quarterly* 94 (June, 1983), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000016507>.

<sup>81</sup> Sutton, "Ten Questions."

<sup>82</sup> Matthew Restall, "The New Conquest History," *History Compass* 10, no. 2 (2012).

body into the social and physical world” and thus be observed.<sup>83</sup> The products of the Expedition, from journals to specimens, are the historical remnants of its cognitive ecology, bridges between minds not just then but now.<sup>84</sup> Journals in particular provide particularly rich records of that ecology. Paul Carter describes the notebooks of William Dawes as “records of the auditory environment” but they are also records of physical space and in turn headspaces.<sup>85</sup> They are the legacy of efforts “to translate the disruptive and destructive ‘noise’ of imperial expansion into a continuation of quiet and orderly progress.”<sup>86</sup> This process of translation, dissonance management, was part of “the volatile interplay of ideology, prejudice, personality, precedent, experience, and Indigenous agency” which pervades histories of Pacific colonisation and its precursors, and it is something that left a paper trail.<sup>87</sup>

The journal of Charles Pickering, written as a member of the scientific corps of United States Exploring Expedition, is an example of this volatile interplay. Pickering’s writing, which extends beyond both his journal and the expedition itself, therefore forms the basis for this thesis. It provides an opportunity for contributions to scholarship of exploration, expeditions, the Pacific, cognitive history, nineteenth century science and race. Travellers, “particularly naturalists” provide a good middle ground between “metropolitan”, Empire or globally oriented histories and “overseas encounters” in the form of Island centred approaches.<sup>88</sup> My work – which doesn’t have the sweeping world history approach of some historians, nor the sensitivity and focus required for more engaged readings of Indigenous agency – occupies this middle ground.

While the history of science and encounters does not always directly reference trends in cognitive science, the two fields often augment each other when brought into conversation. Sutton’s “cognitive history” was informed by Andy Clark’s work on cognitive ecology and “natural born cyborgs”, which was in turn informed by Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, and both those theorists of the interplay between objects and people have found a place in Science and Technology Studies, and the history of science more generally.<sup>89</sup> In this respect I often found

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<sup>83</sup> John Sutton and Nicholas Keene, “Cognitive History and Material Culture,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David R. M. Gaimster, Tara Hamling, and Catherine Richardson (London/ New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>84</sup> For more explanation of the concept of cognitive ecology see: Tribble and Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: religion, education, and memory in early modern England*.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Carter, “Repetitions at Night: Mimicry, Noise and Context,” in *Exchanges : cross-cultural encounters in Australia and the Pacific*, ed. Ross Gibson (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1996), 62.

<sup>86</sup> Carter, “Mimicry, Noise and Context,” 64.

<sup>87</sup> Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages and Encounters in Oceania, 1511-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 165.

<sup>88</sup> Liebersohn, *The Traveller’s World*.

<sup>89</sup> See: Andy Clark, *The Experience Machine: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality* (Great Britain: Allen Lane, 2023); Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies Inc.* 14, no. 3 (1988), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>.

that works of cognitive science did not overturn but instead added impetus to approaches towards history that I already appreciated. Many of cognitive scientist Andy Clark's findings about approaches to observation in his most recent book, *The Experience Machine* cohere well with the work of a historian like Paul Carter.<sup>90</sup> Similarly the attention that such a theoretical outlook pays to specificity – of place, of time, of frames of reference, of object – echoes trends in the history of encounters and exploration.<sup>91</sup> With that foundation, or perhaps caveat, established, I will return to some of the historiographical work that provoked and informed my thinking.

Paul Lyons, in his *American Pacificism: Oceania in the US Imagination* criticises many of his contemporaries for writing that makes Oceania a “mirror for Americanists, a meditation on self rather than a window into cultural exchange and the bound-together entanglements of colonial relation.”<sup>92</sup> This critique extends to evaluation of the historical writing about the Exploring Expedition, particularly Nathaniel Philbrick's.<sup>93</sup> The confrontation between Lyons and Philbrick is representative of how much writing of the Exploring Expedition is divorced from the conversations within the historiography of Pacific encounters. This is true of most sustained examinations, which are constrained by age or focus from taking such conversations into account.<sup>94</sup> Historians of the Expedition do not come out well from the encounter.

The focus of this thesis potentially opens itself up to a similar critique. It could well be taken as following the thoroughly and justifiably critiqued mode of exploration history written as a “heroic drama in which the explorer is the principal, sometimes exclusive, protagonist and narrator.”<sup>95</sup> As much as Pickering draws long conclusions from short encounters, his writing rarely dwells upon some more obvious of his Pacific entanglements. He makes little mention of the multiplicity of Islands peoples who made up a significant portion of the unnamed parts of the crew, particularly after the Expedition replaced a large part of its number in Hawaii.<sup>96</sup> Unmentioned they loom large, and it would be easy to liken those substrata of the crew to their

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> For example: Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook was Here* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2009).

<sup>92</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 208.

<sup>93</sup> Lyons, "Lines of Fright: Fear, Perception, and the 'Seen' of Cannibalism in Charles Wilkes's Narrative and Herman Melville's Typee."

<sup>94</sup> Most exceptions are those points where histories of other areas stray into discussion of the Expedition, for example: Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 242-46.

<sup>95</sup> Tiffany Shellam et al., "Brokering in colonial exploration: Biographies, geographies and histories," in *Brokers and Boundaries: Colonial Exploration in Indigenous Territory*, ed. Tiffany Shellam et al. (Acton: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2016), 1.

<sup>96</sup> Tuati, also known as John Sac, son of a Scottish whaler and a Ngāpuhi woman being a prime example: Vincent O'Malley, *Haerenga: Early Māori Journeys Across the Globe* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2015), 42.

presence in Pickering's subconscious. Bronwen Douglas' theory of "signs and countersigns," while not founded upon psychology as such, harks back to my point that "sound psychology often finds itself stating the obvious." The idea of cognitive ecology, the biosocial mind, means that the presence of Indigenous agency mimics his "subconscious" and therefore enters his thought by necessity. It is an asymmetrical entrance, mediated by processes of dissonance management, existing within webs of rationalisation and the brain's constant reconstituting of memory but it is nonetheless, as she puts it "dialogic".<sup>97</sup>

While I try to address Lyons' critique, I cannot claim to be completely free of holding a mirror, for they have their uses.<sup>98</sup> My exploration of Charles Pickering's thinking notices the way that his encounters acted to disrupt the schema that accompanied his departure from the United States. At the same time, these schemata were often remarkably resilient. The increasing resilience of race in the face of rebuke was capable of fraying 'entanglement' and corralling 'cultural change.' The landscapes of New South Wales, of Brazil and even of the United States, were not neutral, and neither was nature's order. These were colonial spaces, and so Pickering's environmental history was consciously also a racial history. His racial history, in turn, was environmental. Race's solidity in his thinking was something nurtured or disrupted by the spaces, headspaces, that he travelled through, and the structure of this thesis follows that spatial and temporal orientation.

Chapter one, 'The Highest Ground' provides more of an orientation to Charles Pickering's life and context than this introduction. In this chapter I argue that race's absence in Pickering's writing, even in his encounters with black slaves and plantation owners in Brazil, points towards a discomfort brought about not by slavery – which was something he knew well and objected to – but rather to his meetings with those in Brazil's hierarchy who had achieved high station beyond his racial expectations. Slavery's wretchedness came as no surprise, but the education and social attainment of black people appears to have shocked him. This shock in turn brought to the fore an existing dissonance between his grandfather's mode of Christian universalism and a rising tide of hierarchical thinking amongst his scientific colleagues. In Brazil he found a place as thoroughly raced as the United States, but with enough difference to invoke cognitive dissonance.

The second chapter, titled 'Captain Vanderford's Rule' follows the arrival of the Expedition at the Rio Negro, the river marking the border between Mapuche land and settler-

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<sup>97</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3; Douglas, "Expeditions, Encounters, and the Praxis of Seaborne Ethnography," 109.

<sup>98</sup> Or, to shift metaphors, it is hard to escape the jaws of the psychohistorical ouroboros that is the feedback loop between my dissonance and my dissonant subject, or the way that his journal is a cognitive artefact in the same way as my transcription of it.

colonial Argentina, and then the squadron's charting of a number of islands in the Tuamotu Archipelago. This examination shows the shifts in Pickering's thinking about civilisation and humanity's relationship with the natural environment that accompanied travel. At the Island of Reao he found that even those Islanders he met – viewed as the most basic examples of savagery by others in the crew – had brought about a profound change in the ecology of the Pacific. This realisation, driven in part by the dissonance brought on by the discovery, ultimately led to a fascination with the intersection of race and the environment that would define the rest of his career.

'Civilisation and its Dissonance,' the thesis' third chapter, meets the Expedition as it slipped into Sydney Harbour under the cover of darkness. Here I show the intellectual productivity of the colony of New South Wales for Pickering's dissonance management, and how he used its relative stability to quell the mental turmoil brought on by the preceding months of travel. It is here that race's conquest of Pickering's thinking had its greatest victory, and after Sydney, it was never far from his understanding.

With race becoming at that moment so central to Pickering's worldview, 'Whitewater' looks at the arrival of the greater part of the scientific corps in Aotearoa, specifically the Bay of Islands. This chapter shows his struggle to fit the Ngāpuhi he met within the category of 'Polynesian' and in turn the dissonance that racial categories produced. 'New Zealander' – as a national rather than racial descriptor – emerged as a way to come to terms with the difference between the consensus of his immediate network, his experiences in Tahiti and Samoa, and the ongoing tension in the Bay of Islands, only 6 weeks after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi.

My second last chapter, 'A New Species of Civilisation', focuses on the three months the Expedition spent in Fiji. This period was defined by a growing tension across the archipelago that culminated in a massacre on the Island of Malolo, during which the crew killed at least two hundred Fijians. This massacre remains largely without narration in Pickering's writing, and forms part of an exception to Pickering's generally non-hierarchical conceptualisation of race. This chapter in turn shows the efforts he took to reconcile his Christian universalism, his concept of savagery, the crew's cannibal paranoia and the violence he was adjacent to.

The final chapter, 'Terminus' illustrates that Pickering's return to the United States meant his thinking lost most of its impetus. I take this opportunity to explore the varied interpretations of his book *Races of Man*, both by contemporaries and historians, and its fraught relationship with the American School of polygenism, well represented amongst his colleagues and friends.

In Charles Pickering's thinking, race appears first as artifice, then as armature.<sup>99</sup> I described it earlier as a transformation, but that's perhaps too linear. The space that race took in his thinking, the work that it did, pulsated. As he moved from place to place, as time progressed, certainty and clarity fluctuated. The coming pages echo those fluctuations.

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<sup>99</sup> For some of the scholarship that inspires the endpoint of this framing see: Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009); Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017); Alana Lentin, *Why Race Still Matters* (London: Wiley, 2020).

To give some grounding to space and time the following table provides a rough chart of the Expedition's movements with notes on Pickering's departures.

| Year        | Month | Location/Event                                                                                                                    |
|-------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1838</b> | Aug   | Expedition departs from Hampton Roads, Virginia                                                                                   |
|             | Sep   | Arrival at Madeira Islands                                                                                                        |
|             | Oct   | Porto Praya, Cape Verde                                                                                                           |
|             | Nov   | Rio de Janeiro, Brazil                                                                                                            |
| <b>1839</b> | Jan   | Río Negro, Argentina                                                                                                              |
|             | Feb   | Straits of LeMaire, Orange Harbor                                                                                                 |
|             | Mar   | South Shetland group, Return to Orange Harbor                                                                                     |
|             | Apr   | Departure from Orange Harbor to Valparaíso. <i>Sea Gull</i> lost at sea off Cape Horn                                             |
|             | May   | Arrival at Valparaíso                                                                                                             |
|             | Jun   | Callao, Peru                                                                                                                      |
|             | Aug   | Tuamotu Group                                                                                                                     |
|             | Sep   | Departure from Tuamotu to Samoa                                                                                                   |
|             | Nov   | Travel to Sydney                                                                                                                  |
|             | Dec   | Expedition departs Sydney, Pickering remains, travels to Newcastle and the Hunter Valley.                                         |
| <b>1840</b> | Jan   | Antarctic coast sighted by Expedition                                                                                             |
|             | Feb   | Expedition departs Antarctic. Pickering leaves Sydney 8 February for the Bay of Islands. Pickering travels to the Bay of Islands. |
|             | Mar   | Expedition arrives Bay of Islands                                                                                                 |
|             | Apr   | Departure from Bay of Islands, Tonga                                                                                              |
|             | May   | Fiji. Pickering on Ovalau then Rewa on Viti Levu. Trial and captivity of Ro Veidovi. Expedition engaged in surveying              |
|             | Jun   | Fiji. Pickering on the <i>Peacock</i> surveying the surrounds of Vanua Levu                                                       |
|             | Jul   | Fiji. The so-called "cannibal feast"                                                                                              |
|             | Aug   | Massacre at Malolo. Departure from Fiji                                                                                           |
|             | Sep   | Arrival at Hawaiian Islands                                                                                                       |
| <b>1841</b> | Apr   | Departure from Honolulu, Columbia River                                                                                           |
|             | Jun   | Puget Sound survey                                                                                                                |

| Year | Month | Location/Event                                         |
|------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|      | July  | <i>Peacock</i> lost at the mouth of the Columbia River |
|      | Aug   | Departure from Cape Disappointment                     |
|      | Dec   | Surveys in Hawaiian Islands                            |
| 1842 | Apr   | Return to the United States                            |
|      | Jun   | Expedition returns to New York                         |

# Chapter One: The Highest Ground

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately  
– Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

On Saturday, 18 August 1838, the United States Exploring Expedition departed Norfolk, Virginia with the ebb tide. The Expedition's commander, Charles Wilkes noted in his narrative: "the day was beautiful, the sea smooth, the wind light."<sup>1</sup> Midshipman William Reynolds met the same scene with anticipation: "Farewell home! Welcome the stirring scenes of strange lands."<sup>2</sup> Dr Charles Pickering's journal of the Expedition says nothing at all about the departure from the United States. Instead, his journal begins: "On learning that we were to touch at Madeira I was by no means sorry to have an opportunity of seeing a little European vegetation."<sup>3</sup> It's an anticlimactic start to the record of the most significant event of his life to that point or after, but it's also an apt illustration of his focus. Maybe there was enough continuity – between gathering sea mites on the New York docks to botanical observations at Madeira – that perhaps no great statement of farewell needed recording. Further, while Wilkes and Reynolds performed the significance of the Expedition's departure for an intended readership, Charles Pickering's journal was primarily a workspace, and as his work in Madeira began, the journal began with it.

## Taking to the woods

My "pursuits... [in Madeira] led me, as you may suppose, to abandon 'society' and take to the woods" Pickering recounted to his cousin Mary Orne Pickering in one of a number of letters dispatched over the course of the Expedition.<sup>4</sup> It wasn't the first time he'd "take to the woods", and it wasn't the last. In 1838 he was 32 years of age and already a "wanderer," physically and mentally accustomed to travel. His relationship with natural science and adventure began in his youth. His childhood was defined by "boyish excursions" spent "exploring the hills, woods, streams, lakes and morass" though he was then "yet too young to be trusted with fire-arms" and thus denied what he terms "ornithological pursuits."<sup>5</sup> A glimpse of Pickering as a child comes from another Mary, Mary Peabody who wrote of him in 1813. "Charley," then a year younger than her, was "delicate and refined," a "blue-eyed and fair haired ideal," immersed in the collecting of shells.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that the idea that his "early rambles" led to "the cultivation of [his interest in] animal and vegetable life" may be exaggerated in retrospect, but it is still easy to

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838,1839,1840,1841,1842 Vol 2*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Pickering, Charles Pickering Journal, Madeira-Peru, 1838-1841, N-706, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. Visit to Madeira, 17th September.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering, 22 November 1838, Timothy Pickering Papers, Reel 67, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>5</sup> E.B. Wilson, "Memorial of John Clark Lee," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1878), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Sophia Amelia Hawthorne, Sophia Amelia Hawthorne to Mary Tyler Mann, 17 October, 1859, 1859, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

draw a line between the “barefoot freedom” of his childhood and the expeditionary activities that continued as he aged.<sup>7</sup>

At age 14 he began his studies at Harvard College, and those youthful interests meant he was well equipped to take advantage of an educational institution that increasingly valued both the discipline of natural history and the hiking and camping activities that accompanied it.<sup>8</sup> Between 1810 and 1850 Harvard changed “less in size than in composition,” shifting the broad membership of its student cohort to an elite subset of the local elite.<sup>9</sup> His 1819 class of around 70 students was about average for the period, but the last names of his fellows were far from average. Pickering’s name was one amongst a rollcall of many of New England’s prominent families.<sup>10</sup> These young men were sent to Harvard at rising expense for an “experience” at the University that would contribute to the “cultivation and hauteur” that would define the “Brahmin upper class” of Boston in the coming years.<sup>11</sup> In 1819, this experience entailed a range of restrictions on student conduct, many of them established in the 1600s, which included a ban on drinking, rules for manners inside and outside classes and even a uniform.<sup>12</sup> One avenue for escaping those rules was hiking, another was rioting.<sup>13</sup>

“Oct. 29 [1820], Sunday eve, the class have a severe battle in Commons Hall with the fresh, and warring demolished doors and windows and destroyed all the crockery” records an account of the Harvard Class of 1819-1823.<sup>14</sup> This “Student Rebellion of 1823” was sparked by a crackdown on student drinking and culminated in a swathe of suspensions, a fist fight in the midst of the Chapel and arson in Harvard Yard.<sup>15</sup> What the *Boston Statesmen* described as “a very serious rebellion” meant that almost the entire class was refused graduation.<sup>16</sup> Charles Pickering was amongst those left without a qualification despite the fact that his uncle, John Pickering, served as an overseer at the time.<sup>17</sup> Most of his class were eventually conferred a

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson, “Memorial,” 40.

<sup>8</sup> William A. Koelsch, “Antebellum Harvard Students and the Recreational Exploration of the New England Landscape,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 8, no. 4 (1982).

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Story, “Harvard Students, the Boston Elite and the New England Preparatory System, 1800-1876,” *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1975), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/367846>.

<sup>10</sup> The most prominent of these being the ill-fated John Adams II, grandson of a previous President, and son of another yet to come. Harvard University, *Officers and Students of the University in Cambridge, October 1821* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, Hilliard and Metcalf, 1821), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Story, “Harvard Students, 1800-1876,” 281.

<sup>12</sup> Harvard University, *Laws of Harvard College* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, Hilliard and Metcalf, 1814); John Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: History of American Colleges and Universities* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.

<sup>13</sup> Colleges in the antebellum period were often a site of violence: David F. Allmendinger Jr., *Paupers and scholars: the transformation of student life in nineteenth century New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Pickering Dodge, Brief Account of the Class of 1819-1823, Box 10, 026-A-2, Harvard University, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>15</sup> Dodge, Brief Account.

<sup>16</sup> *Higher Education in Transition: History of American Colleges and Universities*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Harvard University, *Harvard Officers and Students*.

degree, and the incident ultimately did not stop him from returning to study as a physician.<sup>18</sup> If the conflict during that time disrupted his learning, is not evidenced in the esteem he quickly acquired after leaving Harvard, and the connections and thinking he came across there would continue to define his trajectory.

It is thus fitting that the first piece of natural history material attributed to Charles Pickering is held at Harvard's Houghton Library.<sup>19</sup> It is a notebook, its first pages occupied by lists of fish gathered on the Exploring Expedition with notations indicating they were for the information of another naturalist, and the back section made up of minute and lifelike drawings of various insects.<sup>20</sup> These drawings, sometimes arranged on the page as though in a box of curiosities, at other times presented as if the caterpillars and dragonflies had just wandered onto the paper, were drawn in Salem and while hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.<sup>21</sup> Some pages preserve watermarks: J. Hall, 1816 and J. Whatman Turkey Mill, 1820, and these are signs of the wealth that often underpinned a naturalist's work. Each mark shows the source of the sheets as one of a few prestigious British paper mills that produced quality stationery to be shipped across the Atlantic and sold at a high price in the United States.<sup>22</sup> This notebook is an artefact of ongoing collaboration, its first half ordering the specimens collected by the Expedition for another naturalist, the second a product of a scientific excursion with friends from the class of 1823.

At 19 he climbed peaks in the White Mountains alongside William Oakes, who was part of his Harvard cohort.<sup>23</sup> Such mountaineering adventures would become a feature of a Harvard education over the coming decades.<sup>24</sup> Oakes was one of several naturalists – including Pickering – who were tutored by William Dandridge Peck, who is described as “the first American to make a formal contribution to systematic zoology” and alongside his predecessor worked to bring European methods and ideas of botany and science to the United States.<sup>25</sup> Peck's lecture notes

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<sup>18</sup> No Author, *Some Account of the Medical School in Boston, and of the Massachusetts General Hospital* (Boston, Mass.: Phelps and Farnham, 1824), 16.

<sup>19</sup> At least as far as I have found.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Pickering, *Coleoptera of the US Exploring Expedition 1844-1847*, 52M-156, MS AM 1290, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>21</sup> This is indicated by attribution on their back pages, given how few drawings remain with Pickering's authorship, were they not each signed “CP” their providence would be in doubt.

<sup>22</sup> R.H. Clapperton, *The Paper-making Machine: its Invention, Evolution and Development* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967), 302-04; Peter Bower, “The White Art: the Importance of Interpretation in the Analysis of Paper,” in *Looking at Paper: Evidence and Interpretation, Symposium Proceedings Toronto 1999*, ed. John Slavin (Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 2001), 12.

<sup>23</sup> He returned to the White Mountains three years later: Charles Mason Hovey, *Magazine of Horticulture, Botany and All Useful Discoveries and Improvements in Rural Affairs*, vol. 7 (Boston, Mass.: Hovey and Company, 1841); Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>24</sup> An example of this lineage is with Roland B Dixon, Harvard's first professor of anthropology: “History,” 2003, <https://www.harvardtravellersclub.org/history.html>.

<sup>25</sup>

Arthur Stanley Pease, “Notes on the Botanical Exploration of the White Mountains,” *Appalachia*, no. XIV (1917); Frederick Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains* (Boston

offer an ordering of the world, from worms to *mammalia*, and include humanity, and particularly human history, in the latter category.<sup>26</sup> His lectures and tutelage offered Pickering and his fellow students introductions to Carolus Linnaeus and other important European thinkers, notable amongst them being the early racist thinker Johannes Blumenbach.<sup>27</sup> In support of these lectures Peck employed visual aids, including a number of large plates inspired by Blumenbach's work: images of skulls matching his racial categories with the addition of a "cranial angle," an invention of Dutch physician Petrus Camper.<sup>28</sup> These plates were displayed in Harvard's Philosophy Chamber, "a veritable workshop for the production and dissemination of knowledge" at once a "laboratory, lecture hall, and convening space."<sup>29</sup>

Pickering's first years of lectures at Harvard would have been delivered in the Philosophy Chamber, with multiple fields of knowledge – chemistry, geology, biology, philology, history and so on – all presented as part of a holistic picture. In this respect the Philosophy Chamber was not just a teaching space, it was a headspace: by situating the materials from many different scientific pursuits in a single hall, they were brought into proximity and interaction with each other as a matter of course. Yet his time in the Philosophy Chamber was brief, for in 1820 the hall was refitted with bookshelves and its holdings were dispersed and compartmentalised.<sup>30</sup> This compartmentalisation reflected both the burgeoning collections at Harvard and also a process of specialisation and professionalization that accompanied efforts to order those specimens.<sup>31</sup> The Philosophy Chamber's disruption is a compelling image of specialising knowledge and a changing scientific society in the United States, with Pickering coming of age at the tipping point. However, after leaving Harvard, he "took to the woods," and the landscapes he encountered were far less amenable to easy categorisation as even so eclectic a collection as the Philosophy Chamber.

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New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 36; Jeanette E. Graustein, *Natural History at Harvard College, 1788-1842* (Cambridge Mass.: Cambridge Historical Society, 1961), 75.

<sup>26</sup> These lecture notes are a fascinating and invaluable source: William Dandridge Peck, Lecture Notes, Box 12, Papers of William Dandridge Peck, 1775-1937, HUG 1677, Harvard University, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>27</sup> One section of his lectures contains an intellectual history of biological sciences, starting with the Old Testament: Peck, Lecture Notes; William Dandridge Peck, Mammalia Plates 1-6, Box 15, Papers of William Dandridge Peck, 1775-1937, HUG 1677, Harvard University, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>28</sup> Peck, Mammalia Plates 1-6; Harvey, "Ideas of Race," 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ethan W. Lasser, "Introduction," in *The Philosophy Chamber: Art and Science in Harvard's Teaching Cabinet 1766-1820*, ed. Ethan W. Lasser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), XVII.

<sup>30</sup> Lasser, "Introduction," XVIII.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon McOuat, "The Origins of 'Natural Kinds': Keeping 'Essentialism' at Bay in the Age of Reform," *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 2 (2009): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496970902981694>.

## The New York Clique

The other “scientifics” of the South Seas Exploring Expedition represented both scientific specialisation and collaboration. They were all young men, James Dwight Dana for example was only twenty-five years old, and generally ambitious.<sup>32</sup> The Exploring Expedition offered an opportunity for new fields of study and proof of the validity of novel methods. At the same time, it offered an opportunity for excitement, an escape from the social strictures that had incited riot at Harvard. Riding across the island he recounts: “the scenery [in Madeira] was bolder and more magnificent than any I had previously seen, interesting plants were met with at every step and the trees and shrubs projecting from the high natural precipices, promised a long respite from the changing hand of man.”<sup>33</sup> The sense of wonder expressed is that of adventurer and naturalist both, and shows us clearly why he, when offered a position upon the voyage by Jeremiah Reynolds, jumped at the chance.<sup>34</sup> Reynolds, who championed the cause of exploration in Congress and was the driving force behind the Exploring Expedition, was a member of what has been referred to as the “New York Clique” of science in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

The clique in question included Pickering, Reynolds, Asa Gray, Titian Peale and James Dwight Dana.<sup>36</sup> They were described by a contemporary as “the most intriguing, presumptuous, cross grained animals that were ever herded together.”<sup>37</sup> Gray, a talented botanist, and Reynolds, more journalist than scientist, eventually bowed out of the Expedition but were to remain an important part of its story. Peale, a naturalist like Pickering and Dana, a geologist, were to accompany him to the Pacific. Their age was part of a trend, for the expedition was youthful, from the scientific corps to the officers. The low pay and controversy which surrounded the Exploring Expedition’s beginnings meant that more experienced sailors and scientists opted out of an otherwise good opportunity. The state backing of the Expedition meant that the members of the corps didn’t require the patronage which had defined the work of many other naturalists in the preceding decades.<sup>38</sup> The clique was not just drawn together through shared age, for they came together through the intellectual societies that proliferated in the United States in the lead up to the Expedition’s creation.

Born after the revolution and emerging from scholarly institutions like Harvard, the men of the squadron lend themselves readily to the image of a vibrant fledgling nation, and

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<sup>32</sup> This “new school” is the focus of: Joyce, *American Ethnography*.

<sup>33</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>34</sup> No relation to Midshipman William Reynolds, mentioned in the introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Aubrey Starke, “Poe’s Friend Reynolds,” *American Literature* 11, no. 2 (1939): 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2920640>.

<sup>36</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> George Ord in Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Liebersohn, *The Traveller’s World*, 77.

historians like Philbrick have certainly emphasised this.<sup>39</sup> In the lead up to the Expedition's departure, Charles Pickering resigned from one such society, the American Philosophical Society (APS), and justified the dramatic move through an appeal to nationalistic sentiment. Out of a "regard for the infant cause of science in our country," not to mention a sense of self-respect, Pickering declined a further association with the society, lamenting in his resignation its neglect of the "objects of the institution."<sup>40</sup> The New York Clique defined itself and its science in contrast to the "aristocrats" at the APS who they viewed as amateurs and dilettantes - "Professors" - whose scientific work began without formal training and continued haphazardly from their drawing rooms.<sup>41</sup> Membership of the Scientific Corps of the Exploring Expedition therefore represented not just an opportunity for scientific endeavour and adventure, it was an effort to establish authority within the institutions of a growing scientific profession as well as the authority of that profession itself.<sup>42</sup>

In the context of disciplinary identity and institutional squabbles, Joyce argues that the corps, particularly Pickering and Hale, represented a "microcosm of the debates of that era in America."<sup>43</sup> Such an interpretation bears fruit in the way that nationalist thinking - either in the justification for scientific work and in the framing of experiences - operates in their writing.<sup>44</sup> Yet Pickering's writing on his first landfall and beyond draws our attention simultaneously to the transnational nature of his scientific endeavours. Of Madeira, Pickering writes "a year's residence would be required to do justice to this Island, and it is to be hoped that some European Naturalist will take advantages of this field, in the same way as Messrs. [Philip Barker-] Webb and [Sabin] Berthelot are now making known in the Canaries."<sup>45</sup> Webb and Berthelot were, respectively, English and French naturalists who had worked together in the Canary Islands a decade before the squadron's arrival.<sup>46</sup> While institutional disputes often meant men like Pickering invoked the national - not least in appeals to the state like those that had funded

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<sup>39</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to the President and Members of the American Philosophical Society, 12 September 1837, 11d, APS Archives, American Philosophical Society, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>41</sup> This antagonism is explored in: Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 58; Sally Kohlestedt, "A Step Towards Scientific Self-Identity in the United States: The Failure of the National Institute, 1844," *Isis* 62, no. 3 (1971): 339-62. Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>42</sup> A decent account of this process can be found in: Samuel Haber, *The Quest for Authority and Honor in the American Professions, 1700-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For more on the academic professions see: Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks, and the British Academic World, 1850-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> David Igler argues that this was a facet of Dana's thinking after the expedition, his writing with Pickering before the Expedition shows it was also at play prior: Igler, "Patriotic Geology."

<sup>45</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>46</sup> Frans A. Stafleu and Richard S. Cowan, *Taxonomic Literature: a Selective Guide to Botanical Publications and Collections with Dates, Commentaries and Types*, vol. 2 (Boston, Mass.: W. Junk Publishers, 1988), 118.

the Expedition in the first place – the collaborative nature of scientific work stymied the persistence of a nationalist frame.

“Our party consisted of Messrs. Drayton, Couthoy, Brackenridge and myself, each with a guide; and we were soon joined by three officers from the vessels ... bringing a barometer and other instruments” Pickering tells of the first hike after the Expedition docked at Funchal.<sup>47</sup> The source of these instruments was London, Wilkes had travelled across the Atlantic in the years preceding the Expedition to procure them.<sup>48</sup> William Brackenridge, “had long given in the crags of his own Scotland,” in comparison to the raggedness of the landscape on Madeira while “Mr. Couthoy felt disposed to yield the passes of Asia Minor”.<sup>49</sup> The “bearded and exuberant” Couthoy, travelled widely as a merchant mariner. Brackenridge had found his way to Expedition through winding paths from Scotland.<sup>50</sup> The small snapshots Pickering paints of the expedition’s first “stirring scenes of strange lands” highlights both its global connections and their role in interpreting his experiences. The island of Madeira itself, which had long been part of transatlantic and trans-imperial networks of trade and taste production, was fertile ground for such thinking.<sup>51</sup>

## The Projecting Shards

Charles Pickering’s thinking in Madeira, as he and both crew and scientifics made their way into the mountains, operated in many registers. His mountain climbing – an activity that often-attained pride of place in his journals – was narrated both as a masculine adventure and as a scientific endeavour.<sup>52</sup> He had “ascended the Granite mountains of New Hampshire” and “climbed the steepest part of the White Mountains” but in Madeira he found in retrospect that the peaks of the White Mountains were “quite tame” and “the Alleghenies, the mere undulations of a plain.”<sup>53</sup> This kind of writing, which “transposes pioneering journeys from a mundane to an almost divine level, instilling a higher purpose and legitimacy” acted both to justify the immense effort expended to reach such heights while simultaneously ascribing a legitimacy to the

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<sup>47</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>48</sup> List of Instruments Procured by Lieutenant Wilkes for the Exploring Expedition, Record Group IIc 1835-1844, MSL-3 1837, American Philosophical Society, APS Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>49</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>50</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> While confined in scope to an earlier period, a good sense of this can be found in:

David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Robinson points out the distinction between these two modes of narration: Michael Robinson, “Manliness and Exploration: the Discovery of the North Pole,” *Osiris* 30, no. 1 (2015): 99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/682968>.

<sup>53</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

artefacts – altitude readings, specimens – that difficult journeys produced.<sup>54</sup> While the experience of place, “the cold, the dampness and dryness,” getting lost, feeling vulnerable, offers to make history “messy and complicated,” Charles Pickering’s mountaineering illustrates the way that such apparently disorientating experiences compelled “effort justification:” both the valuing of and creating of meaning regarding, exploration itself.<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Herzig argues that the ideal of science was defined in the mid-century United States as a “certain refinement of mind,” “genteel” and “emphasising mental and spiritual discipline, not physical endurance.”<sup>56</sup> The importance of practical experience tied to the vigour of mountaineering that is such a central part of the New York Clique’s assertions of legitimacy offer a complication to this picture.

Having reached the pinnacle of Santa Anna he wrote that its altitude was “ascertained by our Naval Gentlemen to be about 1000 feet above the sea.”<sup>57</sup> Readings of altitude and temperature were both a function of the surveying that was so integral to the Expedition’s justification and an important method employed by the followers of Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>58</sup> Humboldt, a European who arrived in Philadelphia in 1804 and travelled widely throughout the Americas, had a substantial influence on geographic thinking in the United States from the early Nineteenth Century.<sup>59</sup> Louis Agassiz, a colleague of Pickering’s in Philadelphia, and his uncle John Pickering, were both personally acquainted with the travelling naturalist.<sup>60</sup> Charles William Peale, the father of one of the Expedition’s draughtsmen, sat Humboldt for a portrait and Aaron Sachs argues that J.N. Reynolds – so influential in the push for the Expedition – was a “philosopher of Humboldtian Exploration.”<sup>61</sup> These connections mean that the Humboldtian influence on Charles Pickering went beyond his affect upon popular culture and into Pickering’s personal circle.

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Thomas and Richard Eves, *Bad Colonists: The South Sea Letters of Vernon Lee Walker and Louis Becke* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>55</sup> K.R. Howe, “Tales from Several Coves,” in *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories*, ed. Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 51. Effort justification was theorised by Aronson and Mills as a logical result of cognitive dissonance theory; Eliot Aronson and Judson Mills, “The Effect of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 59, no. 2 (1959).

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca M. Herzig, *Suffering for Science: Reason and Sacrifice in Modern America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>57</sup> Pickering, “Madeira,” *Journal*.

<sup>58</sup> Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: a European Explorer and His American Disciples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>59</sup> Kent Mathewson, “Alexander von Humboldt’s Image and Influence in North American Geography, 1804-2004,” *Geographical Review* 96, no. 3 (2006); Laura Dassow Walls, “‘Hero of Knowledge, be Our Tribute Thine’: Alexander von Humboldt in Victorian America,” *Northeastern Naturalist* 8, Special Issue (2001); Kim Tolley, “Learning from nature: Alexander von Humboldt’s influence on young women’s geography and natural history education in nineteenth-century America,” *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 1-2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2019.1630448>.

<sup>60</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: a Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 98; Sean P. Harvey, *Native Tongues: Colonialism and Race from Encounter to the Reservation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 175.

<sup>61</sup> Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, 3; 21.

Alexander von Humboldt has been credited with being the “the first ecologist,” because of the way that his thinking imagined the natural world as an immense and complex chain of cause and effects: best understood through a holistic science of the natural world.<sup>62</sup> This way of seeing the environment has been cast as an important influence on Charles Darwin, who idolised Humboldt and lauded his practical approach to scientific investigation: expeditions.<sup>63</sup> Yet as Alistair Sponsel points out, in Darwin’s scientific work there were other factors pushing him to “think and behave in ways that have retrospectively been dubbed Humboldtian.”<sup>64</sup> The same is true of Charles Pickering, who, while he has clearly read Humboldt, does not credit him as a significant influence. The Philosophical Chamber that opened Pickering’s education in natural history with holism as a starting point is one example of the kind of factors that pushed him towards holism. The web of interconnected scientific societies that he entered after leaving Harvard is another.

While the New York Clique differentiated itself from the “Professors” through an emphasis on professional skills over dilettantism, the similarity between the career path of Charles Pickering and one of his predecessors shows that this differentiation was often overstated. At Harvard Pickering learned Natural History from William Dandridge Peck, but the origins of that discipline in the College were with Peck’s predecessor, Benjamin Waterhouse. Waterhouse started one of the first, if not the first, courses in Natural History in the United States.<sup>65</sup> Born 9 years after Pickering’s grandfather and inhabiting the same social circle, Waterhouse pursued medicine as a way to support his interest in natural history, the same path that Pickering followed after him. Funded by their work as physicians, both men operated in a world of gentlemanly scientific societies, societies which were often broad in scope and incestuous in membership.

One such society was the APS, from which Pickering resigned, another, the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSA), shows the breadth of intellectual interests that scientific careers, indistinguishable from scientific networking, often encouraged.<sup>66</sup> The MSA, which was founded by Colonel Timothy Pickering, awarded Waterhouse a gold medal for his promotion of natural history and directly linked the various sciences to the exploitation of land charted by recent scientific expeditions. The wealth that

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<sup>62</sup> Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Iain McCalman, *Darwin's Armada* (Victoria: Penguin Australia, 2009), 42.

<sup>64</sup> Alistair Sponsel, *Darwin's Evolving Identity: Adventure, Ambition and the Sin of Speculation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Sponsel, *Darwin's Evolving Identity: Adventure, Ambition and the Sin of Speculation*, 34-35.

<sup>65</sup> Graustein, *Natural History at Harvard*, 70.

<sup>66</sup> The connection between agriculture and natural history was not a new one, and it preconfigures some of Pickering’s observations about environmental history, see: Minakshi Menon, “Transferrable Surveys: Natural History from the Hebrides to South India,” *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 38, no. 1 (2018): 148, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jshs.2018.0238>.

fuelled such societies eventually allowed for paid positions in professional science and Charles Pickering was able to abandon medicine in favour of the Academy of Natural Sciences, where he was employed after relocating to Philadelphia in the mid-1820s. Yet even the apparent shift away from medicine was partial, for he occasionally acted as a ship's doctor and the themes of physiology that came from his medical education continued into his approach to race.<sup>67</sup> Even before his departure from the United States his cognitive ecology propelled Pickering and his colleagues to think in ways contrary to the narratives of specialisation that they adopted as a manoeuvre for distinction and as efforts to create coherence.

The heady thinking of Pickering's mountaineering is best expressed in his description of a fellow naturalist's botany: "for this we were chiefly indebted to our companion, Mr. Brackenridge, without whose keen eye, varied knowledge ... energy and endurance, our collections would have been but slender."<sup>68</sup> Fieldwork, and mountaineering specifically, was articulated as a "moral as well as scientific pursuit," a thing of energy and endurance, as much as intellect.<sup>69</sup> His journal oscillates from observations like "to the lover of the *picturesque* I would definitely recommend our route through the island" to long and detailed cataloguing of the plant species he encountered along the way. Madeira was to be measured both by "the Botanist" and against the "glowing descriptions of travellers."<sup>70</sup> The conventions of mountaineering clubs, elite student societies, natural history associations and military units all find their expression in Pickering's negotiation of Madeira's heights, and in the process the many different fields of study associated with them acted to degrade specialist conventions or aspirations.<sup>71</sup>

The process of collecting itself was both confined and enabled by local conditions and particularly local guides. "We were so hurried by our guides that we could not gather half we saw" he writes.<sup>72</sup> The collecting party he spent a significant time with in Madeira was himself, "Messrs Drayton, Couthouy, Brackenridge ... with each a guide."<sup>73</sup> Pickering's writing is often contemptuous of these facilitators, who "did not permit [the party] to remain" in places where they desired, and who represented a destructive force to the "arborescent heath" by gathering

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<sup>67</sup> Though I'd argue that it does not dominate to the extent of some of his contemporaries, see: Suman Seth, *Difference and Disease: Medicine, Race and the Eighteenth Century British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>69</sup> Diarmid A. Finnegan, *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 45.

<sup>70</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>71</sup> While he was not a member of any formal mountaineering club, it is arguable that his excursions to the White Mountains with Harvard classmates adopted that familiar form and it is no coincidence that the Appalachian Mountain Club – part scientific society part hiking group, with its own journal – was founded by his nephew: Koelsch, "Antebellum Harvard Students," 363; Charles E. Fay, "The Appalachian Mountain Club," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 35, no. 2 (1910): 177-84.

<sup>72</sup> September 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> September 17<sup>th</sup>.

“large bundles of [fern] on their heads.”<sup>74</sup> He admitted a begrudging respect for Madeiran mountaineering at the same time, “to hear the road to Funchal pronounced bad by a Madeiran, was not calculated to excite pleasant anticipations.”<sup>75</sup> In later journal entries his descriptions of the peoples he encountered are expansive, but in this first entry his journal offers a single paragraph. In this note he describes them as belonging to “the ~~Old Arabian Stock, like ourselves,~~” returning later to strike out that racial delineation, and offers that they are “an industrious, civil, sober people,” despite their “degraded condition.”<sup>76</sup>

## The Industry of the Inhabitants

The Madeirans offered two points of surprise for Charles Pickering. The first was in their physical form, which, contrary to his expectations, had “a diversity in form and features.”<sup>77</sup> The second was their industry, particularly in cultivating the land, which at once vexed and interested him. The Madeirans had sheared the heights of heath, diverted streams to make “artificial marshes” and scattered grapes in “great profusion in every direction.”<sup>78</sup> To escape their alterations he sought those places granted a “respite from the changing hand of man.”<sup>79</sup> Such places were a “rare treat for the botanist” and offered not only an experience of novelty, but also a claim to it.<sup>80</sup> The work of Alexander von Humboldt makes great emphasis upon the “physiognomy of nature” and subsequently on the relationship between botany and topography, and Pickering’s emphasis upon Madeira’s heights and interest in “primordial” plants could be taken to reflect this.<sup>81</sup> At the same time his writing often shows that the search for heights was also a quest for the picturesque and the “interesting.” “Two species of *Sempervivum*<sup>82</sup> were often seen projecting from the base rock above us – a novel botanical feature for an American – indeed from such situations we gathered a variety of interesting plants” he recounts.<sup>83</sup> Enquiring of a Padre who gave them lodging he was “told that only three strangers had passed through in four months.”<sup>84</sup> After acquiring in Funchal a series of engravings of Madeira he notes “there was not one among them taken from any point that would have been selected by our party.”<sup>85</sup> With pride he notes that at least some of the “treacherous rocks ... must long have

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<sup>74</sup> September 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> September 19<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> September 22<sup>nd</sup>, September 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> September 17<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> September 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Dettelbach, “‘The Face of Nature’: Precise Measurement, Mapping and Sensibility in the Work of Alexander von Humboldt,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 30, no. 4 (1999): 490.

<sup>82</sup> A type of succulent.

<sup>83</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>84</sup> September 19<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> September 19<sup>th</sup>.

remained untrodden, even by a Madeiran.”<sup>86</sup> The industry and facilitations of the Madeirans pose a persistent challenge both to the grandeur of his mountaineering and his access to the primordial environments it was meant to have him reach.

His, admittedly limited, accounts of the Madeirans reflect the dissonance brought about when his grudging respect met thwarted adventuring aspirations. This dissonance is particularly evident in his letters with his cousin Mary Orne Pickering. While he framed his experience as a valiant effort in the name of natural history, she pointed out “that one great advantage in seeing the world is certainly gained by making one so well satisfied and happy at home.”<sup>87</sup> His response is in curious contrast to the drama of his mountaineering accounts, for he describes Madeira as “too much like paradise in many respects, too secluded, like living in a ship anchored in harbour, with small opportunity of knowing what folks are doing on shore. It may be, to be sure, in happy ignorance.”<sup>88</sup> The “happy ignorance” of the Madeirans is possibly part of the “degraded condition” that he mentions in his journal. Madeira is a place “where there are no wars or rumours of wars, no rising or falling of Real Estate, no Banks, no Slaves and no Abolitionists, no rail roads or even wheat carriages and where shocking accidents very seldom happen!”<sup>89</sup> That this is offered as such a contrast to life in the United States shows just how tumultuous the Pickering family history had been until that point.

Charles Pickering was raised by his grandfather, Colonel Timothy Pickering, a man whose life was defined by elections, wars and rumours of wars, rising or falling real estate, slaves and abolitionists. Colonel Pickering, leading a militia made up mostly of fellow churchmen, was in command at what his son describes, perhaps too grandly, as “the first resistance in the American Revolution ... to a body of British Troops.”<sup>90</sup> Having been elected Colonel of the militia in Salem, his career as an officer in the revolutionary army propelled him into politics, and it was politics which would define much of the rest of his life. He served variously as the United States’ Secretary of State, Postmaster General and Secretary of War, and was a negotiator with the Haudenosaunee. Even as he engaged in land speculation and settlement he was constantly writing. The index alone of his correspondences and published material runs close to 600 pages.<sup>91</sup> This prolificacy was accompanied with a love for reading, and in letters to his sons at Harvard, he offers reading lists alongside advice. These reading lists

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<sup>86</sup> September 19<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering, 22 November 1838, USS Vincennes, Timothy Pickering Papers, Reel 67, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>88</sup> Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering 22 November.

<sup>89</sup> Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering 22 November.

<sup>90</sup> In reference to “Leslie’s Retreat”, where a collection of Salem militia men were involved in a stand-off with British troops, which they backed down from, Timothy Pickering, “Letter to John Pickering,” in *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, ed. Charles Upham and Octavius Pickering (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1873), 68.

<sup>91</sup> Massachusetts Historical Society, *Historical Index to the Pickering Papers* (Boston, Mass.: MHS, 1896).

include, importantly, books on natural history, and we can assume he offered similar advice to his grandson. As previously mentioned, Colonel Pickering was embedded in the societies and networks through which ideas and scientific approaches spread through the post-revolutionary United States. Harvard was full to the brim with Pickerings, including his uncle, his father, his grandfather and many of his cousins. The Pickering household provided a haven for learning while fulfilling an ideal of agrarian civilisation that Colonel Pickering championed.

An image of this model comes in a letter to the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. On approaching the Pickering estate the author found “this worthy tough much abused citizen,” by which he means Colonel Pickering, “not superintending a set of ill-fed and worse-clad slaves; not amusing himself with cock-fighting, horse-racing, or hunting for popularity at a tavern or grog-shop” but instead, “like another Cincinnatus, guiding the plough; while two of his sons were assisting him in his rural labours.”<sup>92</sup> This description was carefully cut out and kept by the Colonel and it almost sounds like it was penned by his own hand.<sup>93</sup> As an image of civic virtue, it is perhaps imagined, definitely desired and deployed rhetorically. It is an ideal, as Timothy Pickering puts it, of “tranquillity.” There is, as Charles Pickering’s writing indicates, a dissonance around this assertion of peace found on the frontier. Colonel Pickering’s life in the late Eighteenth Century, as a speculator and settler, was far from tranquil. There was little tranquil about his flight from a mob of enraged settlers after he went against their interests, or in his later kidnapping and imprisonment by the same.<sup>94</sup>

Colonel Pickering’s agrarian ideal, produced by “the changing hand of man” found its reflection in Madeira’s “near paradise.” It was an endpoint to the colonial process, whereby, at least in Charles Pickering’s apprehensions, the hazards of nature and people were quelled by the plough. The object of the Expedition, per its description, had a similar aim: “extend the empire of commerce and science” and by doing so “diminish the hazards of the ocean, and point out to future navigators a course by which they may avoid dangers and find safety.”<sup>95</sup> According to Philbrick, “America’s first frontier was not the West; it was the sea”, and the Exploring Expedition was to be a naval equivalent of the United States’ terrestrial expansion.<sup>96</sup> Charles Pickering’s perception of the industry of Madeira – at once vexing and impressive – illustrates an ongoing dissonance around the mission of the Expedition and his own experience of it. The

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<sup>92</sup> New York Commercial Advocate, “Letter,” in *The Port Folio*, ed. Oliver Oldschool (Philadelphia, PA: B. Maxwell, 1802), 359.

<sup>93</sup> Given this was an anonymous letter describing the visit of an unnamed “southern gentleman” this is not outside the bounds of possibility.

<sup>94</sup> For a full description of this event, and some of the political tumult in which Colonel Pickering was involved, see: Paul B. Moyer, *Wild Yankees: the Struggle for Independence Along Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary Frontier* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, xxviii-xxix..

<sup>96</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, xvi..

industrious hand of man provided insights into the future and past of the entire globe, and Pickering's presence on the squadron propelled him constantly to contemplate both.

## Susquehanna, Pennsylvania

### The Brow of the Hill

A place for contemplating the same, the past and the present, lays beneath the earth of a place now well within its borders. Tim Pickering's remains were "deposited on the brow of the hill" overlooking the Susquehanna River, Pennsylvania. Stones were placed atop the grave "so that Charles, when grown up ... may find the spot where his father's body was laid."<sup>97</sup> Tim Pickering was Charles Pickering's father.<sup>98</sup> The hill is a picturesque place, a cemetery now, overlooking the town of Starrucca, which is notable only for the "Viaduct Inn" and the structure it's named after.<sup>99</sup> With a population of only two hundred, even today the uncharitable could describe it as it was described then - "wilderness" - a "backwoods."<sup>100</sup> Upon the death of Tim Pickering, one of his eight boys, Colonel Pickering wrote: "Alas! That this portion of the earth should hold the remains of such an excellent son."<sup>101</sup>

Tim Pickering had traded one frontier for another, as his father put it, trading the "golden prospects of the sea, with its peculiar dangers and precarious advantages" for the "tranquillity" and "moderate profits" of the land.<sup>102</sup> He'd left Harvard to take to the sea, joining the navy and taking up a post as midshipman on the frigate *Philadelphia*. Colonel Pickering, then secretary of war, wrote to his son as the *Philadelphia* was to depart for the West Indies advising him to "let no examples nor ridicule, which profane and weak men dread more than an 'offence to Heaven,' draw you from the pursuit of virtue." To do so was to preserve health and virtue, not to mention an "approving conscience," and involved above all things letting "courage be displayed against the enemies of your country, not in the most absurd as well as vicious practice

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<sup>97</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Henry Pickering," 119.

<sup>98</sup> Timothy Pickering, son of Colonel Timothy Pickering, son of Timothy Pickering, was known to some as "Tim", and I will use that name through the rest of this chapter to avoid confusion.

<sup>99</sup> The Starrucca Viaduct was opened in 1848, 43 years after Pickering's birth.

<sup>100</sup> Census data as of 2010: "Starrucca Borough, Pennsylvania," last modified February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009, [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk); Pickering, "Letter to George and Octavius," 32.

<sup>101</sup> Pickering, "Letter to William," 113.

<sup>102</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Mr. Hodgdon," 17.

of duelling.”<sup>103</sup> His father’s request; that he abstain from duelling and control his temper, as well as his brother’s description of his abiding “anger” and “disgust” at the strictures of the academy, paint a picture of Tim Pickering as a tempestuous young man.<sup>104</sup> Unlike Charles Pickering, Tim Pickering had no love for scholarship. His brother John, whose work at Harvard would have him take a lead in choosing the composition of the Expedition’s scientific corps, tells of Tim Pickering’s “strong repugnance” for study. He railed against the “shackles” of University life, which is what led him, curiously, to the navy, a place apparently without the “hard study” which vexed him.<sup>105</sup>

Like his son after him, Tim Pickering found plenty of excitement on the sea, as the *USS Philadelphia* saw action when it reached the West Indies; skirmishes in the Quasi War with France. He returned from that frontier in 1801. Seeing that the war was unlikely to escalate and apparently tiring of naval life, Tim resigned his post and set out for land his father had purchased in Starucca. Colonel Pickering was overjoyed with the anticipation that his son would live out his days “ploughing earth rather than sea.”<sup>106</sup> This move to Starucca was birthed from what Moyer describes as an alliance of “settler speculators”, the same alliance which had caused his father so much trouble.<sup>107</sup> He was the settler to his father’s speculation, and the alliance was what Colonel Pickering’s agrarian ideal embodied: a transition from wild backwoods to settled tranquillity.

No day without a line.

When Charles Pickering describes the inhabitants of Madeira as “an industrious, civil, sober people” yet burdened by a degraded condition” he is perhaps less speaking about their agrarian life than its seclusion.<sup>108</sup> He reports to her that “you may judge of the seclusion of the little villages ... that only four strangers had passed through in four months.”<sup>109</sup> It is ignorance of the outside world, as much as a settled agrarian state that he finds pitiable. As Karen Ordahl Kupperman says, “American history was ... international before it was national,” and Colonel Pickering’s agrarian ideal is by its nature orientated as much towards the transnational –

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<sup>103</sup> Timothy Pickering, “Letter to Timothy Pickering,” in *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, ed. Charles Upham and Octavius Pickering (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1873), 328-29.

<sup>104</sup> He writes in one letter to his father “I find fault with the questions”, which were given to him to examine, and “I do not think the government would trust the students with arms, though I should like them much”, Timothy Pickering, Letters from Timothy Pickering to his brother and father, 1797-1798, HUD 798.2, Colonial North American Project at Harvard University, Harvard University Archives.

<sup>105</sup> John Pickering, “Letter to Colonel Timothy Pickering,” in *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, ed. Charles Upham and Octavius Pickering (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1873), 323.

<sup>106</sup> Pickering, “Letter to Henry Pickering,” 119; Pickering, “Letter to Henry Pickering.”

<sup>107</sup> Moyer, *Wild Yankees: the Struggle for Independence Along Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary Frontier*, 77.

<sup>108</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>109</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

particularly the learning of Europe – as the national.<sup>110</sup> Ignorance and settlement were, as the Colonel characterised them, mutually exclusive states. Charles Pickering and his grandfather both understood the virtues of “civilisation” as a combination of lifestyle and knowledge. Education was, as the Colonel put it a “bright haven of individual enjoyment, domestic pleasures, public usefulness and fair renown.”<sup>111</sup> Settled life was the “goal of every rational man” and the inverse was true, settlement created rational men.<sup>112</sup>

The Colonel wrote “rational man” in a flowing and artful hand. His cursive could almost link with Charles Pickering’s without interruption. One of his mottos, as he told his young sons, was “nulla dies, sine linea”; “no day without a line.”<sup>113</sup> To John, his son, he remonstrated: “you are in the habit of writing fast, and are in danger of writing illegibly, especially proper names, for which there is no clew to find the letters composing them.”<sup>114</sup> It is something which, to a historian’s delight, Charles Pickering could never be accused of. Yet the same cannot be said of Tim Pickering, indeed there is a stark contrast, for he was, as the Colonel describes him, “wont to speak little and write less.”<sup>115</sup>

Yet Charles’ studiousness was not solely a product of his grandfather, indeed the Colonel was right in a sense when he linked Tim’s settlement with education. Within a year of Tim’s move to the property at Starucca, he was raising bees and seeking a “friend of the opposite sex”, something which the Colonel “did not expect”.<sup>116</sup> This desire to find a companion bore fruit, and Tim was married to Lurena Cole in 1804.<sup>117</sup> All descriptions of Charles’ mother underline how distinct her character was from her husband. She was learned and scholarly, with a passionate interest in the affairs of state. As the sister-in-law of one of Tim’s hired hands her marriage into the Pickering dynasty was a social coup. Lurena’s studiousness was a good fit for her new social position, and as much was likely expected from the Pickering family, her husband aside.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “International at Creation: Early Modern American History,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 122.

<sup>111</sup> Pickering, “Letter to George and Octavius,” 98.

<sup>112</sup> Pickering, “Letter to Mr. Hodgdon,” 30. Pickering, “Letter to William,” 19.

<sup>113</sup> Pickering, “Letter to George and Octavius,” 102.

<sup>114</sup> Pickering, “Letter to William,” 78.

<sup>115</sup> Pickering, “Letter to William,” 14.

<sup>116</sup> Pickering, “Letter to Mr. Hodgdon,” 33.

<sup>117</sup> According to some, this marriage was initially a disappointment to the Colonel, for she was not of the same social circle as him, but this changed with time. Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County* (Philadelphia, PA: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1873), 95.

<sup>118</sup> Lurena’s sister, Elizabeth, was the mother of Emma Hale, who was the first wife of Joseph Smith Jr., founder of Mormonism. This connection means that, because of the Mormon penchant for family history, there is a fair amount of detail available on the family’s past: The Joseph Smith and Emma Hale Smith Historical Society, “Isaac and Elizabeth Hale in their Endless Mountain Home” last modified: 29th July, 2015.

From Fiji, Charles wrote “mother’s letter has come to hand,” and Lurena and her son kept up correspondence throughout the voyage.<sup>119</sup> She had travelled herself at an early age, and was part of the United States’ march to the West. Lurena Cole was the daughter of a tavern owner from Meetinghouse Hill, Connecticut.<sup>120</sup> Her father, Zebulon, was one of a group of Methodist settlers whose small village would become Burlington.<sup>121</sup> At the age of eight, alongside her mother, cousin, sister and their husbands, she had rode the two hundred miles to Susquehanna County, where eventually she would meet Tim Pickering. So, in 1805, Charles was brought squalling into the world, son of a wanderer and a settler, born on the edges of the United States. As the Colonel described their situation, there was “nothing more suitable.”<sup>122</sup> That this description came in a letter is important, because Charles Pickering’s world was a lettered world, and agrarian tranquillity was a lettered ideal. The dissonance between his annoyance towards Madeiran stymying of his adventuring science and their fulfilment of one of his ideals found its management in turn in a lettered form.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Life in tropical climates.

“We have been cruising after shoals of rocks with which it pleased the map makers to besprinkle the Atlantic” Charles Pickering wrote of the first three months of the expedition.<sup>123</sup> After leaving Madeira the squadron’s cruising led eventually to Rio de Janeiro where he landed with a head “full of ... tall slender palms” and “soil pouring out spontaneously all that is required by the necessities of man.”<sup>124</sup> It was his “first visit to a tropical country” and he expresses some disappointment that: “these things do exist, but the visitor soon learns that they require looking for, and in general with no ordinary degree of diligence.”<sup>125</sup> Having seen no “fruit of any description” he could “not help being amused” thinking of his “preconceptions as to life in tropical climates.” He had expressed surprise at the industry of the Madeirans, and in Rio continued that trend. “We had imagined that industry was an article almost unnecessary, that the inhabitants were surrounded by every delicacy” he notes, a misconception that reinforced a

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<sup>119</sup> Timothy Pickering, “Timothy Pickering to Rufus King,” in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, ed. Charles R. King (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894).

<sup>120</sup> Barbara Jean Mathews, *The Descendants of Governor Thomas Welles of Connecticut and his Wife Alice Tomes*, vol. 2A (Wethersfield, CT: Welles Family Association, 2015), 236.

<sup>121</sup> Epaphroditus Peck, *Burlington, Connecticut: Historical Address at the Centennial Celebration* (Bristol, CT: Bristol Press, 1906), 4.

<sup>122</sup> Pickering, “Letter to William,” 19.

<sup>123</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>124</sup> This passage is in quotation marks, and clearly an invocation of someone upon whom Charles had based his idea of the tropics. The source of the quotation is not clear. Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>125</sup> Pickering, “Rio”, *Journal*.

narrative that said “these countries were not further advanced was rather from the excess of luxury or the pretended ‘enervating influence of the climate.’”<sup>126</sup> The state of labour in Brazil came as a sharp rebuke, and this rebuke had implications not just for his perception of the “hand of man” but also for racial thinking that increasingly began to dominate his writing.

“Travel has the capacity to dislodge the certainty of the self, confronting European travellers with often unexpected visions” and Pickering states this dissonance clearly: “I was ... unprepared to find the stigma of luxury reflected back upon my own countrymen, even upon those undergoing the reputed privations of our frontiers.”<sup>127</sup> While in Madeira his response to cognitive dissonance regarding his definition of civilisation was to introduce a new cognition – namely: civilisation is not just agrarian settlement it is also global intellectual exchange – in Rio rather than work to maintain a critically undermined proposition he jettisoned it. Confronted with the nature of work in Rio de Janeiro he was unable to maintain a conviction about the role of climate in civilizational development. Such convictions were an important justification for networks of labour and empire, and his abandoning of this cognition had wide-reaching consequences.<sup>128</sup>

The expedition was stranded in Rio for many weeks, during which the naturalist devoted much of his time to hiking in the surrounding hills. As the Squadron’s boats were being repaired, Pickering was going to efforts to find the highest point in the Organ Mountains (Serra dos Órgãos). A large part of his journal is taken up with an account of this endeavour, and its frustrations: “I determined to make a serious attempt for the summit, and by persevering finally reached it... the trees were all stunted and gnarled ... I climbed the stoutest one to get a prospect, and soon found I was not on the highest ground of the Organ Mountains!”<sup>129</sup> This effort is another illustration of how linked adventure and botany were for Charles Pickering: “I descended and hastily cut my initials on the north side of the trunk (one of the *sapotea*?)”<sup>130</sup> In Rio, as in Madeira, the Exploring Expedition fulfilled a growing fashionable ideal of genteel travel as a combination of: “the naturalist’s passion for collecting natural species, the gentleman’s culture of robust hiking, and the ambition of journeying to ever farther ‘unknown’ tropical, mountain and extreme zones of the globe.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Pickering, “Rio”, *Journal*.

<sup>127</sup> Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World,” in *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, ed. Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7-8; Charles Pickering, *The Races of Man and their Geographical Distribution* (Boston, Mass.: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1848), 228.

<sup>128</sup> Roslyn Jolly, “Piracy, Slavery and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson’s Pacific Fiction,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, no. 1 (2007): 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40347129>.

<sup>129</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>130</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>131</sup> Liebersohn, *The Traveller’s World*, 13.

Yet even at this early stage the Expedition's conflict was far an image of gentility. Charles Wilkes was, as Philbrick describes it, having a "nervous breakdown" and tensions were high.<sup>132</sup> A hint of this appears in Pickering's journal, though only in passing, and indicates how often such tensions altered his plans. When proposing a journey into the interior, he writes, "a hundred obstacles were suggested by foolish or designing individuals, persons at least who ought to have known better." He responds to these suggestions with contempt, for if he had had listened to a tenth of the idle tales which were uttered: "the least to be done was, to load one mule with copper money and a second with the wherewithal to prevent actual starvation."<sup>133</sup> This passage, which leaves us to guess at the culprits, speaks to some of the interpersonal conflict that defined much of the voyage. However the rest of his account at Rio shows the converse as well. Pickering speaks often of his "friends", named and unnamed.<sup>134</sup> Both Brackenridge and Couthouy, who had travelled with him on the *Vincennes*, feature in his adventures. His scientific collaborations were also friendships, as this account from a botanical expedition in the Organ Mountains shows: "Mr B ... was full of enterprise, though evidently somewhat 'green' in mountain climbing. I followed [him up the ravine], though against my better judgement, but I was not disposed to back out of any 'lark' of that description."<sup>135</sup>

It was in Rio that Pickering began to get to know Horatio Hale, who was stationed on the *Peacock* and not until then available for conversation. Hale was 10 years younger than Pickering, a talented linguist who had made a name for himself as a student at Harvard and was to write the Expedition's "Ethnography and Philology."<sup>136</sup> He spent much of his time in Rio collecting vocabulary from slaves in the city, building dictionaries: "depots in the imperial imagination."<sup>137</sup> Pickering sat in on these sessions, as he describes in *Races of Man*: "at Rio Janeiro ... I enjoyed the advantage of being present during many of Mr. Hale's examinations, and of thus learning the precise place of origin of the different individuals."<sup>138</sup> However his journal leaves these sessions unmentioned, indeed he spends no time in these early days discussing either slavery or racial type in Brazil. Instead slavery is simply assumed; "this morning, taking a Negro for a guide" he writes, and, "the boats used for navigating this bay ... are rowed by four blacks who stand and throw their weight on the oars."<sup>139</sup> The boats, in these early accounts, are given more focus than those who rowed them.

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<sup>132</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 78-82.

<sup>133</sup> Pickering, "Rio", *Journal*.

<sup>134</sup> The latter possibly unnamed because they were travelling with him without permission from Wilkes. There is a particular passage where his efforts not to name them are unobtrusive, Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>135</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>136</sup> Horatio Hale, *Ethnography and Philology* (Philadelphia, PA: C. Sherman, 1846).

<sup>137</sup> Carter, "Mimicry, Noise and Context," 64.

<sup>138</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 200.

<sup>139</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

This is curious. In retrospect - with *Races of Man* and his protracted musings on the subject later in the journal in mind - it is easy to imagine his world as eternally viewed through raced lenses. However in Rio, race is less an object of study, though far from absent. Stopping, exhausted, at an inn after a climb he writes "we were hospitably received by a respectable Mulatto woman, who did us the honour to say on taking leave that the 'Americans were boas gentes.'" Riding into a "place of fashionable resort for the inhabitants of Rio" he observes "there are a great many Negroes, and everything about the Establishment is in the most perfect order." This in sharp contrast to, for example, Wilkes, whose section of the *Narrative* dedicated to Rio focuses at length not just on the institution of slavery: "The great and distinctive characteristic of Rio may be said to be its slaves and slavery. This evil continually presents itself to the observer, and he cannot, if he would divert from the many sights which keep it before his mind"<sup>140</sup> but also the character of the slaves: "the look and bearing of the Mina blacks are excessive of intelligence and dignity, and they betray little of the levity usually ascribed to the Negro race."<sup>141</sup> Pickering echoes this observation later, in *Races of Man* stating "many negroes were slaves, but ... others held places of honour and trust under the government."<sup>142</sup> This difference from the United States is not explored in his journal until later.<sup>143</sup> This demands explanation given that his involvement in Hale's language collecting, a process often almost intimate, would seem a natural topic of focus and thus writing.<sup>144</sup>

Horatio Hale drew often in his writing on the work of both John Pickering (Charles Pickering's uncle) and Peter Stephen Du Ponceau.<sup>145</sup> Both men understood language as the core of culture, and so to study one was to study the other. Over the course of the voyage, Pickering would integrate many of Hale's insights into his own work, even if the two men often disagreed on certain specifics. This extends to his description of West Africa in *Races of Man*, which relied heavily on Hale's observations in Rio. As previously mentioned, Pickering mentioned in a letter from Madeira "Slaves and ...Abolitionists" underlining how present issues of slavery and abolition were, not just for life in the United States in this period, but for Pickering himself.<sup>146</sup> A civilised man did not preside over "a set of ill-fed and worse-clad slaves," and it is noteworthy that his silence around slavery in Brazil included the kind of condemnation that could be expected from a New Englander of his class and background. As Paul Carter says of another text:

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<sup>140</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 52.

<sup>141</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 55.

<sup>142</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 183.

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion of the reaction of others, like Wilkes, to slavery in Brazil see: Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 30.

<sup>144</sup> Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, *Words Between Us - He Kōrero: First Māori and Pākehā Conversations on Paper* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), 11.

<sup>145</sup> Sean P. Harvey, "'Must not their Languages be Savages and Barbarous Like Them?' Philology, Indian Removal, and Race Science," *Journal of the Early Republic* 30, no. 4 (2010): 527; Mackert, "Horatio Hale and the Great U.S. Exploring Expedition," 10.

<sup>146</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

there is “significant ambiguity attached to the largely unfilled-in spaces in those pages: do they signify silence? Or do they signify the liveliness of a dialogue that refused to settle down and die?”<sup>147</sup> While there are few blank pages in Pickering’s journal - he followed the Colonel’s motto, and indeed that of Linnaeus; “no day without a line” - an account of Rio taken up by adventures, “two young friends ... eager for a spree,” is its own sort of unfilled-in space.<sup>148</sup>

Pickering’s journal is otherwise weighty, pages and meaning both. Maria Nugent describes the way that, in their journals, mariners: “sometimes found themselves lost for words, or made contradictory statements, or crossed out what they had written ... their writing is a testament to their struggle to make sense.”<sup>149</sup> Pickering’s prose, in the later stages of the expedition, certainly bears the marks of the latter; pockmarked with revisions and annotations, crisscrossed with amending lines. Maybe his journal’s silences in Rio is a sign of the former; he was lost for words, at least for the moment. If so, why? What was the nature of a dialogue that caused such silence? What do we know of Charles Pickering’s opinion of slavery? A good place to start is, again, with his grandfather.

### Fear of man bringeth the snare.

Colonel Pickering, on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1785, wrote to Rufus King regarding a recent act of congress: “I observe no provision is made for ministers of the Gospel, nor even for schools and academies ... tho’ after the admission of slavery, it was right to say nothing of Christianity.”<sup>150</sup> He continues: “I should indeed have objected to the period proposed, for the exclusion of slavery, for the admission of it for a day or an hour ought to have been forbidden.”<sup>151</sup> Such words, while part of the heated debates about federalism in the early republic, sum up the abolitionist trend in Colonel Pickering’s thought. As John Pickering describes it: “the tenor of my father’s life was directed by his opinion of *the equal rights of all mankind*.”<sup>152</sup> The Colonel, we are told, “used often to repeat the words of Solomon – ‘the fear of man bringeth the snare’” and the Christian sentiment of humanity’s fundamental equality is a foundational assumption of Timothy Pickering’s thought.

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<sup>147</sup> Carter, “Mimicry, Noise and Context,” 70.

<sup>148</sup> Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, “A Portable World: The Notebooks of European Travellers (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries),” *Intellectual History Review* 20, no. 3 (2010): 380, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2010.492617>; Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>149</sup> Nugent, *Captain Cook was Here*, 7.

<sup>150</sup> Pickering, “to King,” 45.

<sup>151</sup> Pickering, “to King,” 45.

<sup>152</sup> John Pickering, “Introduction,” in *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, ed. Charles Upham and Octavius Pickering (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1873), 5.

Lurena Pickering, Charles Pickering's mother, shared this sentiment, particularly regarding "the treatment of the Indians."<sup>153</sup> Lurena and Timothy Pickering were a primary vector through which Charles contracted the ideals of the "great awakening."<sup>154</sup> Lurena, from a family of Methodists and Mormons, had a lineage which embodied the Protestant religious upsurge which characterised the period. Colonel Timothy Pickering on the other hand was a Unitarian, and, as the hagiographic *Life of Timothy Pickering* puts it his "doctrinal points prevented his forming a particular connection with any church."<sup>155</sup> Writing to Thomas Jefferson, with whom upon politics he "did not agree," Colonel Pickering lauded the Christian faith, hoping to pull Jefferson back from what he viewed as a possible impending apostasy.<sup>156</sup> While Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* has been the subject to extensive scholarship as a work of race science, it is not surprising that his work is absent in both citation and, arguably, influence.<sup>157</sup> Charles Pickering's mother and grandfather, while coming from relatively different evangelical backgrounds, were in consonance on the issue of human unity and therefore in line with the thinking of anti-slavery advocates like Benjamin Rush.<sup>158</sup> As Kenny notes: "it was from the evangelical revival that the loudest claims for what we now call racial equality came."<sup>159</sup>

Colonel Pickering was an evangelist for the fundamental unity of humanity and monogenism, even as race science began to find root within the justificatory systems of the United States. That Christian ideal was enmeshed with his ideas of agrarian perfection. Just as he believed strongly in the universality of Christianity, so he believed in the capacity of all humans to attain the "tranquillity" of his estate in Salem. The solution to slavery, and to the ongoing conflict with the American Indians, something he had a part in, was "civilisation". Civilisation in the previously described settled, educated, agrarian form. He writes; "[the Indian] must be fastened to the soil, and the labours and arts of husbandry must take the place of the wild habits of savage life."<sup>160</sup> As a champion of that ideal, he sent what can only be described as missionaries of agriculture to the Haudenosaunee, and pushed for it continually in congress.<sup>161</sup> The previously mentioned agricultural societies, of which Charles Pickering was a part, were

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<sup>153</sup> Harrison Ellery and Charles Pickering Bowditch, *The Pickering Genealogy, being an account of the first three generations of the Pickering Family of Salem, Mass.* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Son, 1897), 263.

<sup>154</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 13.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Upham and Octavius Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering Vol 2*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1873), 283.

<sup>156</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Thomas Jefferson, 12 February 1821," 326.

<sup>157</sup> Bruno Carvalho, "Writing Race in Two Americas: Blackness, Science, and Circulation of Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century Luso-Brazilian World and the United States," *The Eighteenth Century* 57, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2016.0020>.

<sup>158</sup> Colonel Pickering corresponded with Rush extensively, not just about slavery but also regarding the "mental disturbance" of his son William: Timothy Pickering, Letter to Benjamin Rush (July 5), 1807, Duke University Libraries.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper and the Ruptured World* (Victoria: Scribe, 2010), 75.

<sup>160</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Colonel Pickering," 87.

<sup>161</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Colonel Pickering," 87.

integral to this mission, as was Harvard, which officially converted to Unitarianism in the year of Pickering's birth.<sup>162</sup>

The question of slavery, like the question of conflict with the American Indians, was also a practical one. As much as he saw slavery through the moral lens of fellow abolitionists, he also viewed it as part of an impending disaster.<sup>163</sup> Slavery represented a danger to the republic, so alongside an evolution from backwoods to settlement was an imperative towards a shift from plantations to stately farmhouses.<sup>164</sup> One notable manifestation of this conviction was his advocacy on behalf of Dominguan independence after the Haitian Revolution.<sup>165</sup> In this he was directly opposed to Jefferson, though the two "thought and acted in concert on the question of the Indian."<sup>166</sup> Sourced predominantly from the coastal North of the United States, while the officers and scientifics of the Exploring Expedition may have differed in their opinions of the solution to, or merits of, slavery, they could universally condemn its Brazilian manifestation, and did so.

If Harvard's Unitarian universalism and its associated abolitionism was an influence on Pickering's thought, so too were the racial ideas he encountered there. "No race theory, no systematic attempts to define race, existed in America until after the American Revolution," its spread in the wake of the revolution came from Europe, via the same intellectual and transnational networks that were so important to Pickering's work and – at least at the time – his definition of civilisation.<sup>167</sup> Race was a scientific novelty that took root in Pickering's generation, far more than that of his father or grandfather. The scientific corps as a whole looked across the Atlantic constantly for inspiration. Throughout his journal Pickering seeks conversation with European thinkers, and his reading ranged from Charles Alexandre Lesueur to Mathew Flinders, Alexander Von Humboldt to James Cook. Pickering, like all of his contemporaries, encountered an international world of scholarship long before he stepped beyond the borders of the United States. As Morgan describes it: "in many ways, the encounter

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<sup>162</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 13.

<sup>163</sup> Gerard H. Clarfield, *Timothy Pickering and the American Republic* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 264.

<sup>164</sup> A sentiment shared by many of his contemporaries, though the conclusions they drew from it differed, see: Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2013).

<sup>165</sup> Asaf Almog, "Guilty of a Skin not Coloured like Our Own: Timothy Pickering on Slavery and Race, and the Complicated Legacy of New England High Federalism" (MA (Master of Arts) University of Virginia, 2016).

<sup>166</sup> Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6.

<sup>167</sup> Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), viii.

had already taken place in parlours and reading rooms on English [more properly European] soil.”<sup>168</sup>

“Travel literature ... was crucial to the formation of a specifically Western discourse on human societies, one increasingly organised around a vision of natural and historical diversity but also tied inextricably to universalist assumptions and aspirations” and Charles Pickering received the latter and the former as two conflicting inheritances.<sup>169</sup> The meeting was not, as the “working out” of his later writing shows, free of dissonance. The Christian universalism of his abolitionist milieu and the enlightenment categorising imperatives of his New York Clique found themselves in a mess amidst the specimens of his cabin, and they were only one part of what Douglas terms “the volatile interplay” through which racist types precipitated.<sup>170</sup> Pickering’s ongoing struggle for cognitive consistency was heightened by his presence in spaces where he was forced to constantly manage the dissonance produced by new cognitions, with the miles covered by the Expedition bringing with them geographically bounded problems, with solutions that only sometimes survived further movement.

For this reason, it is best to understand Charles Pickering’s thinking in global terms, and in mobile terms, instead of merely an easy metaphor for antebellum New England – as Paul Lyons puts it, “a mirror for Americanists” - something as widely travelled as the Expedition he joined.<sup>171</sup> In some ways, those who like, Peale and Hale, who had spent time outside of the United States, faced less of a transition in the novelty of exploration than their European contemporaries. While Pickering’s early wanderings led him into, as he put it, “Indian Country”, Darwin’s wanderings could only lead him so far as the coast of England.<sup>172</sup> The Pickering farm in Wenham often received delegations from the Oneida so from an early age Charles was to encounter the “racial difference” he would later categorise. Yet as the “silence” of his time in Rio illustrates, there was still much novelty, with its corresponding dissonance, to the experiences of the Exploring Expedition. Rio’s geography and its people offered him two points of conflict. Abolitionist depictions of slavery represented it as utterly without merit, but alongside the horror of slave ships Pickering met many former slaves who had achieved high status in Brazilian society. In Brazil he had expected to find the indolence associated with tropical climates, instead he found those same wretched working conditions condemned by his

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<sup>168</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, “Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology 1500-1700,” in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 56-57.

<sup>169</sup> John-Pau Rubiés, *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2007), 5.

<sup>170</sup> Douglas, *Voyages and Encounters*, 165.

<sup>171</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 208.

<sup>172</sup> McCalman, *Darwin's Armada*, 21.

colleagues. One dissonance he managed with silence, the other led to him abandoning an important idea. Both of these efforts would have an ongoing legacy in his thinking about race.

### The botanist's steps.

In January 1807, Colonel Pickering's image of agrarian paradise was shattered. Tim Pickering was suddenly incapacitated, by his wife's telling by a falling tree as he cleared the land to ready the way for civilisation. Tim Pickering's doctors believed it to be throat cancer, a gaping hole suddenly opening in flesh.<sup>173</sup> Writing from his sickbed he described his plight: "I consider my case to be desperate ... I beseech you, my dear father, not to be grieved on my account".<sup>174</sup> Colonel Pickering, though ill, set out on a fourteen-day ride through a flooded landscape to be by his son's side. Within four days of his arrival, Charles Pickering's father passed away, leaving the Colonel with "only the melancholy consolation of a last farewell". That consolation must have meant but little to Lurena Pickering, who having birthed a second son, was left widowed with two young children. Lurena Pickering, whose wit and education had her in the Colonel's favour, opted to move with her son Charles to the household of his grandparents, though she had little choice otherwise. Her grief goes quite unmentioned, and two days after Tim Pickering was buried, she set out with her sons and her father-in-law by coach for his estate in Wenham.

So Charles Pickering, too young for the journey to sit in his memory, found himself travelling from the Pennsylvania backwoods and into the world of his grandfather. He would likely later return, climbing that hill overlooking the Susquehanna. The climb up to his father's backwoods grave may have set him in good stead for later climbs, he writes: "the highest ground" is where "the Botanist naturally directs his steps."<sup>175</sup> From these parts of his past we can glimpse the geography, of Charles Pickering's mind; the collection of shifting worldviews and stories about self and place that accompanied him upon the Expedition as much as his bag of books. In this chapter I have described some of the family history that led Charles Pickering to the United States Exploring Expedition. Many of the threads of this chapter are picked up elsewhere: I explore the implications of Pickering's relationship with his guides further in Chapter Four, and the tensions in racial thinking as they relate to abolitionism is explored further in Chapter Six. There are a number of things of note in Pickering's thinking from this period. The first is the growing importance of race thinking to his management of dissonance around societal development. The second is his ongoing attention to the relationship between

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<sup>173</sup> This odd discrepancy is noted in Ellery and Bowditch, *Genealogy*, 262.

<sup>174</sup> Pickering, "Letter to Colonel Timothy Pickering," 113.

<sup>175</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

humans and the natural environment, a relationship that he is constantly faced with through the nature of the Expedition's movement. Finally, and related to both, is the ongoing importance of history in his apprehension of landscape, race and travel.

## Chapter Two: Captain Vanderford's Rule

C

olumbus from his after-  
deck watched heights he hoped for  
rocks he dreamed. Rise solid from my simple water.

- Kamau Braithwaite, 'Colombe'

# Río Negro

## River Mouth

Uncertainty infected the Expedition as it sailed its way south from Brazil. Charles Pickering notes, with no small note of irritation, that the squadron's path was "a state secret of the Commander's, -or often a matter of uncertainty even with him-."<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity about the company's destination lasted right up to the point where they began to approach the mouth of the Río Negro, the sighting of which excited a buzz amidst the crew and: "before the whispers grew loud" their ships were at anchor.<sup>2</sup> The Río Negro marked an often bloody boundary between "Patagonia," Mapuche land, and Argentina, and Wilkes had been commanded to survey the river for its potential as a port.<sup>3</sup> It was a place where ambiguity brought unease, and the whispers announcing their destination soon turned to the potential of an attack by native peoples from the Western side of the river. These rumours were not silenced as Wilkes searched the shore for signs of pilots headed to facilitate the crew's entry to the river mouth. None came.

Instead, they were greeted by sight of foreboding. Pickering recounts "Captain Wilkes by means of his glass pointed out to me the horizontal stratification of the rocks in the precipitous bluff. Two ostriches were also observed to come down to the beach, and a party of horsemen on a sand-hill on the opposite bank of the river."<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps telling that the former, as much as the latter, was an object of Pickering's attention. Wilkes was more circumspect: "the only appearances of inhabitants which we could see with our telescopes were a few horsemen suspiciously reconnoitring us from the flagstaff on the top of the hill."<sup>5</sup> With no pilots available, and only an old chart of the river's entrance, he commanded the schooner *Sea Gull* to attempt to enter the river, with orders to make for the pilot's house, which could be seen a few kilometres up from its mouth.

The *Sea Gull*, like its accompanying schooner, *Flying Fish*, was of a type common in the Pacific, low slung vessels which combined speed and manoeuvrability, even in the shallow water of atolls. Pickering, evidently eager to make the most of an opportunity for making his

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering, at Sea, 16 February 1839, Timothy Pickering Papers, Reel 67, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> John T. Altmire, "The Mapuche of Puelmapu, an awakening nation in a changing state, geographies of community, belonging, and nationhood for the Mapuche in Argentina" (MA diss., Central European University, 2019), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 95.

way ashore, transferred from the *Vincennes* to the *Gull*, along with “Messrs. Dana, Peale, Holms, Hale, Drayton, Fox, Couthouy and Brackenridge,” most of whom were of the scientific corps.<sup>6</sup> For all its manoeuvrability, the *Sea Gull* was soon in trouble as it “attempted the middle channel” of the river. “After a good deal of difficulty and some danger” it “succeeded in getting through – but not before signals of distress were made.”<sup>7</sup> Crossing the sandbar, “thumping heavily,” the crew fired rockets, indicating to the squadron that it needed aid.

The sight of a rocket arching into the twilight reached the *Vincennes* as night descended and the ship’s whispers quickly concluded that the *Gull* was under attack. Reynolds was amongst them: “we understood the natives were attacking them. The ship was in commotion, and we soon had five boats full of men and cutlasses pulling stoutly towards the shore.”<sup>8</sup> They “shot out of the darkness” towards the *Sea Gull*.<sup>9</sup> Aboard the *Flying Fish*, having watched the *Gull* successfully enter the river, Wilkes met the detachment from the *Vincennes* “exerting themselves to their fullest strength at the oars, to be in time to take part in the expected fray.” They “appeared greatly disappointed when it proved a false alarm.” He describes this dramatic incident as simply an “amusing occurrence,” but confesses that the mood of the Expedition was “impressed with an idea of the hostility of those on shore.” The disappointment at a denied opportunity for battle is an illustration of both the martial character of the Expedition – this Expedition, like that of Lewis and Clark before it, came from within the military institutions of the United States – as well as the space the Expedition provided for the pursuit of masculine adventure outside of formally declared warfare. An eagerness for martial valour fit with the manly ideals of the antebellum United States, ideals pursued even at the expense of prudence.<sup>10</sup> Wilkes’ impression of their disappointment may have been overblown however. Reynolds for his part thought “it was lucky we were called back, for the night was dark, and no one of us knew the way through the breakers.”<sup>11</sup>

This eagerness is important to note because it was a persistent feature of the Expedition from even this early stage, and arguably played an important role in the violence that would characterise later encounters. The quest for manliness was, to Wilkes at least, a hazard, almost leading five boats to wreck, but also offering to derail diplomatic efforts or even inspire mutiny. The imperatives of the Expedition, to not only ease the path of commerce but also to exemplify the martial powers of the United States, echo two competing definitions of manhood. The

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<sup>6</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>7</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Myra C. Glenn, “Forging Manhood and Nationhood Together: American Sailors’ Accounts of their Exploits, Sufferings, and Resistance in the Antebellum United States,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 8, no. 1 (2007): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664650601178932>.

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 22.

“restrained” versus “martial” ideals competed both for models of masculinity and also for the justification of national borders. The former offered a Christian and commercial mission, the latter armed conquest.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Gull* made its way towards the pilot house in the gloom. The crew, including the “scientifics,” formed a party to land, “armed to the teeth” after a voice had called at them from the riverbank in English.<sup>13</sup> Clutching a bowie-knife pistol -a menacing looking hybrid of knife and pistol- Pickering came ashore with the rest, but no one awaited the party on the bank.<sup>14</sup> Instead they saw the pilot house, a “low barn-like building,” lit from the inside, and approached to find it deserted.<sup>15</sup> On this first of many contested landings, the Expedition had walked into a potential ambush, as they discovered “that armed men were concealed” all around them in the dark.<sup>16</sup> Standing lit by the glow from inside the pilot house, Pickering later observed that their welcome party “might have picked us off without much difficulty.”<sup>17</sup>

Instead they were hailed by the pilots, who invited them inside, evidently relieved to hear conversation in English rather than French. The arrival of the Expedition to the mouth of the Río Negro had “excited some alarm in the country,” as it was mistaken for a French squadron which was blockading Buenos Aires.<sup>18</sup> The “populace were in arms to resist the expected invasion” and at that moment had been ordered to prepare to “fire the country.”<sup>19</sup> The impression that they were part of a raid was not helped by the firing of rockets and sound of cannons which marked the distress of the *Sea Gull* and the surveying of the coastline respectively. The Expedition approached many new places while heralded by the sound of cannons, a fact which Wilkes acknowledged was at times cause for “alarm” on shore.<sup>20</sup>

Having nearly run aground, and narrowly escaped an ambush, Pickering notes: “various plants were collected in the dark, [giving] promise of a fine harvest on the morrow.”

This last line illustrates the multiple octaves of Pickering’s experience. The “distress,” “difficulty and danger” of armed night-time landings and river navigation are intermingled with plant

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<sup>12</sup> Myra C. Glenn, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89.

<sup>13</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>14</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 276.

<sup>15</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>17</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>18</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 22; Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 96.

collecting and observations of the geology of the bluff atop which potentially hostile parties of horsemen stood. His experience of this new country was zoological, political, sensory, imaginative, collaborative, like the river mouth; a mix of eddies and currents through which he navigated, with space for only a little pressure upon the rudder. Just as Wilkes loaned Pickering his eyes through which to see both strata and horsemen, the scientist's experience was also borrowed, or at least shared.

In the moonlight, scientists and crew are indistinguishable from each other, "armed to the teeth" and equally "impressed with an idea of the hostility of those on shore." The neat division between naval and scientific corps was something which Wilkes worked hard to maintain and his autobiography notes that around this time he made an effort to ensure that there was a clear "line between the officers and the Scientific corps." But this line was frequently and naturally transgressed.<sup>21</sup> The fact of physical proximity meant that the crew and scientifics were part of the same ecosystem. Members of the expedition relied heavily upon each other for cues to action, as well as ways of understanding what was occurring, and what had passed, and this is no clearer than in moments of chaos. The Expedition thus had its own cognitive properties – it thought – with crew and scientifics operating like synapses, through which thought flashed and action was produced, about which thought continued and so more action, and so on.

It is no coincidence that sailor, anthropologist, and cognitive scientist Edwin Hutchins found that the setting of a naval vessel was perfect for exploring the cognitive properties of groups.<sup>22</sup> Observing such a ship he found that "the computational power and expertise was spread across a heterogenous assembly of brains, bodies, artefacts, and other external structures," with the "cognitive properties of the group" distinct from any individual within it.<sup>23</sup> The image of Wilkes yelling at the *Vincennes* launches as they barrelled towards him across the water shows how often the Expedition amplifies the complexity of this operation. Hutchins' description of a ship is something like a brain made of brains - and wood, and iron, and flesh – with navigation and movement a process of distributed cognition proceeding without system level knowledge held by any of the individual brains involved, including that of its captain. The nature of the Expedition (not one ship but many, and with countless reconfigurations of crew, hierarchy and material) can be conceived similarly, but with far less consistency or coherence.

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Autobiography of Rear Admiral Charles Wilkes U.S. Navy 1798-1877* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1978), 404.

<sup>22</sup> Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, *Being There*, 77.; Hutchins, "Cognitive Ecology," 709.

## “Gente Bellicosé”

The morning after their narrow escape, Charles Pickering set out with William Brackenridge to pursue the promised botanical harvest. The two scientists were by this point firm friends and had cemented their relationship climbing in the hills around Rio de Janeiro. “During the time of our stay, the naturalists ranged the country,” Wilkes asserts in his *Narrative*, and Pickering was by far the most inclined towards such ranging.<sup>24</sup> Having quizzed the pilots the night before, the crew now knew the circumstances surrounding their close call, and were undoubtedly still wary as they walked off along the Northern bank of the river.

Their first encounter was with the “gauchos” who had been dispatched to meet the Expedition. These Argentinian horsemen clearly made an impression upon the officers and scientifics as numerous accounts mention them at length. Their horsemanship “excited both ... admiration and astonishment,” though Wilkes found them a bit “uncouth.”<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, with usual style, exclaims: “oh! But they were wild and picturesque in appearance as they coursed along the dark beach or dashed across the uplands, horse and rider in clear relief against the sky.”<sup>26</sup> Pickering leaned more towards astonishment than admiration as a band of them “turned by and accosted” the two wandering scientists.<sup>27</sup>

“Making a shewy appearance” the gauchos, led by a “respectable looking man, past middle age” questioned Pickering and Brackenridge, but neither party could make much sense out of the other. Pickering however caught one phrase - “gente bellicosé” - uttered in response to “provocations which we took no pains to conceal.”<sup>28</sup> What he means by “provocations” isn’t exactly clear but the description of the two naturalists as gente bellicosé; “war-like men” illustrates well the way they must have appeared. The martial trappings of the Expedition were appealing to the scientifics, with Dana and Pickering both very attached to their Navy issued arsenal.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to argue that Pickering’s recognition of that phrase in particular was coincidental, as it casts the meeting as not just a chance encounter with an interesting foreign lifestyle, but as part of the masculine contest previously mentioned. Wilkes’ mingled disdain for the “uncouth” gaúcho, as opposed to Reynolds’ infatuation, mimic two differing approaches to a manly ideal.

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<sup>24</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 96.

<sup>25</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 102.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>28</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>29</sup> Though not so attached that both men could avoid having their weapons stolen, Dana’s in the Philippines and Pickering’s in the Pacific North-West: Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 5*, 5, 359; 199.

Yet those Argentinian horsemen were more than a clear vessel into which these differing masculine aspirations were poured. As Pickering's recognition of the impression that the Expedition offered of "gente bellicosé", "war-like men", shows, this meeting placed "different histories of masculinity into dialogue with each other".<sup>30</sup> The "shewy appearance" of the horsemen was itself an aspect of a "quintessentially masculine" identity, something that was a fraught part of a nationalist project with borders marked by the river along which the two groups met.<sup>31</sup> In so far as the crew of the Expedition made a martial display, their "provocations" unconcealed, the gaúcho performance of horsemanship shared the same category. The easing of tension in the wake of the averted fight of the preceding evening was in this sense a collaboration, for each group offered space for the other to perform a restorative masculinity. In both cases artefacts played an important role, not only the arms carried by both groups but also clothing; what Pickering describes as the gaúcho's "fantastic dress".

The gaúcho figuratively as well as literally inhabited the borderland marked by the Rio Negro, for their "genesis as a social group" was "intrinsically related with the local Indian population", with the resulting "marked Indian cultural inheritance."<sup>32</sup> As Ondina Fachel Leal puts it, a gaúcho was "the pioneer of a frontier land who fought the Indian at the same time as he mixed with him."<sup>33</sup> Charles Darwin's first impression of what he called "wild gaucho cavalry" was of people both "savage and picturesque" and a year on he spoke of those "white Gaucho savages" who were destined to replace the "copper coloured Indians" on the Rio Negro.<sup>34</sup> Darwin's identification of the gaúcho walks at pace with the descriptions by Reynolds and Wilkes both. This similarity in adjectives – picturesque, wild, fantastic, savage – is part of a locating of the gaúcho in a place between civilisation and savagery, and it is echoed by contemporary Argentine literary writings on the topic.<sup>35</sup> Often the gaúchos' liminality is inextricable from their racial ambiguity, "banditti-like", "of a mixed race, between Negro, Indian and Spaniard".<sup>36</sup> For Domingo Sarmiento they are "laid low by the infusion of 'savage' blood".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ulrike Strasser and Heidi Tinsman, "It's a Man's World? World History Meets the History of Masculinity, in Latin American Studies, for Instance," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 1 (March, 2010), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20752926>.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Goebel, *Argentina's Partisan Past: Nationalism and the Politics of History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 37.

<sup>32</sup> Ondina Fachel Leal, "The Gauchos: Male Culture and Identity in the Pampas" (PhD Diss., UC Berkeley, 1989), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Leal, "The Gauchos," 26.

<sup>34</sup> This first encounter was in roughly the same region on the Rio Negro, in September 1832: Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99, 169-70.

<sup>35</sup> Dennis K. Olson, "Cowboys and Gauchos: Contrasting Views in the Frontier Literature of Argentina and the United States" (MA Diss., University of Colorado, 2012), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, 169.

<sup>37</sup> Paraphrased by: Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of the Modern State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020), 109.

The echoing of language across accounts can possibly be attributed to the influence of the writing of Francis Bond Head, whose *Rough notes taken during some rapid journeys across the pampas and among the Andes* was “far and away the most popular” of Patagonian travel narratives amongst English readers, with a first American edition published in Boston in 1828.<sup>38</sup> Head’s sketch of the Patagonian landscape includes the “wild and picturesque outline of the Gaucho on the horizon” as a human flourish to a barren scene, and Reynolds’ description of a “wild and picturesque” gaúcho “rider in clear relief against the sky” is close enough to *Rough Notes* to border on plagiarism.<sup>39</sup> Lavishing praise on the independence of the life of the gaúcho, Head’s writing inspired Reynolds’ and Darwin both, with the latter invoking *Rough Notes* many times as he travelled through the region.<sup>40</sup> Yet as Darwin’s invocation of “white Gaucho savages” attests not all readers mimicked Head’s admiration. In characterising the gaúcho as “savages” Darwin repeats the judgement of Walter Scott, who took *Rough Notes* as a description of “a sort of Christian savages called Gauchos, whose principal furniture is the skulls of dead horses ... and whose chief amusement is to ride wild horses to death.”<sup>41</sup>

*Rough Notes* was written, according to Keighren and Withers, to be “sketchy, romantic, and thrilling”.<sup>42</sup> Its title is apt, and it is arguable that Head’s rough style was another element of its appeal, both to Reynolds’ and the general public, as a model of travel writing that encouraged one reviewer to feel as though they were “*bodily* accompanying the author”.<sup>43</sup> This appeal was not just an aesthetic preference, it was one of utility. The “*bodily*” nature of *Rough Notes* not only provided a sense of “ownership, entitlement and familiarity” to the reader at home in London, it facilitated a sort of accompaniment for the traveller as well.<sup>44</sup> In the Pampas gaúchos were ubiquitous, not just on the horizon but, by the road, in small houses and gathering salt on the flats. In the time spent in their presence, it is likely that only a very small portion was spent lingering on the horizon, looking “wild and picturesque”. Head’s writing offers a distillation of the travel experience, which is then narrated again, preserving a moment of encounter or vision before its complication.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Patagonia, what is then conserved is an account of

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<sup>38</sup> David T. Haberly, “Francis Bond Head and Domingo Sarmiento: A Note on the Sources of *Facundo*,” *MLN* 120, no. 2 (2005): 288, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3251701>.

<sup>39</sup> Francis B. Head, *Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes*, 4 ed. (London: John Murray, 1846), 133.

<sup>40</sup> Darwin, *Charles Darwin’s Beagle Diary*, 459.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott: Life of Napoleon Buonaparte with a Preliminary View of the French Revolution*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Co., 1835), 286.

<sup>42</sup> Innes M. Keighren and Charles W.J. Withers, “Questions of Inscription and Epistemology in British Travellers’ Accounts of Early Nineteenth-Century South America,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 6 (November, 2011): 1337.

<sup>43</sup> “Critical Notices,” *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 1 January 1827, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> This provides an interesting contrast to the “character sketch” described by Wheeler: Roxann Wheeler, “Racial Legacies: The Speaking Countenance and the Character Sketch in the Novel,” in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

emptiness, where rather than dwelling *within* the environment, the most representative image of the gaúcho is at its horizon.<sup>46</sup>

Head's observation of both gaúcho and Mapuche culture were in a sense written from horseback, where his "speed and motion" created "a temporal stasis, in which the 'wild' animals, humans, and terrains encountered" were "styled as noble monuments to the nature of Argentina."<sup>47</sup> Reynolds, who spent very little time "on the ground" beside the Rio Negro, easily adopted this formulation and repeated it. Unlike Darwin and Head, Charles Pickering travelled through the Pampa on foot, and this gives his account a markedly different temporal modulation. While Head and Darwin rode the banks of the Rio Negro at speed and in company, Pickering's account records slow, laborious travel on foot. This means his account - of landscape and gaúchos both - conveys less a sense of ownership, and more diminution. If Head's travel through the Pampas is "breathless", Pickering's is by contrast suffocating.<sup>48</sup>

Considering the relationship between the gaúcho and the environment, as well as their racial ambiguity, it is important that Charles Pickering neglects to diagnose the race of these horsemen. In *Races of Man* he places them in the section on "the White or Arabian race" as almost an afterthought.<sup>49</sup> This relative silence points not just to the subdued role that race played in his early accounts but also his efforts to manage a confluence of dissonant inputs about the Pampas and the people that lived there. The ambiguity of the gaúcho was also the ambiguity of the "frontier" itself.

## Black River

Both Joseph Clark and Charles Erskine note that the Rio Negro provided opportunities for the collection of "curiosities" and particularly the hunting of game.<sup>50</sup> Peale, "a capital hunts man" set out to shoot a pampas deer to bring back to the boats.<sup>51</sup> The Río Negro, "black river," reminded Pickering of the Nile: green and wide. The road he walked from the pilot house

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<sup>46</sup> Luke Gibbs, "Great Britain and Latin America: The Romantics and the Informal Empire" (PhD Diss. University of Missouri-Columbia, 2013), 37.

<sup>47</sup> Eva-Lynn Jagoe Jagoe, "Pace and the Pampas in Argentine Travel Narratives," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 81, no. 3 (2004): 364.

<sup>48</sup> Jagoe, "Pace and the Pampas," 362.

<sup>49</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 229.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Erskine, *Twenty Years Before the Mast – With the More Thrilling Scenes and Incidents While Circumnavigating the Globe Under the Command of the Late Admiral Charles Wilkes 1838-1842* (Philadelphia, PA: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1896), 41; Joseph G. Clark, *Lights and Shadows of a Sailor's Life: as Exemplified in Fifteen Years' Experience, Including the More Thrilling Events of the U.S. Exploring Expedition and Reminiscences of an Eventful Life on the 'Mountain Wave'* (Boston, Mass.: J. Putnam, 1847), 35.

<sup>51</sup> Wilkes, *Autobiography*, 404.

followed the river on its Northern bank, the Argentinian side, with frequent rising bluffs overlooking the river. These bluffs, which Wilkes noted from the first, are stratified and layered with fossils, long dead records of past life which only add to the plain's sterility, the sparse vegetation being low lying shrubs and windswept grasses. The final complement to the barren scene was the ruins of a number of "fine Estancias" - destroyed a decade earlier in warfare across the river.<sup>52</sup> Yet the apparent desolation was for the scientific corps verdant with possibility – a region they believed unstudied and thus ripe for a naturalist's harvest.

They were mistaken. Both the surveying mission of the Expedition and the first botanist's foraging had been pre-empted several years before by none other than the crew of the HMS *Beagle*. Charles Darwin described those bluffs as "El Dorado to a Geologist" and the inhospitable landscape as "telling a stranger not to enter." Like Pickering, he listened to tales of Mapuche horsemen charging with their long lances tipped with Rhea feathers, and like Pickering he'd sat off the river entrance waiting in vain for a pilot (though in his case no explanation is offered as to why).<sup>53</sup> This connection would not be made until later, and may have retrospectively thrilled the geologist James Dana, who would begin to use Darwin's thought after encountering it on the Expedition's arrival in Sydney.<sup>54</sup>

Following Darwin's path along the Río Negro, Pickering and Brackenridge came to one of the ruined buildings he'd noted five years preceding. "About 4 miles from the pilot's house [we], came to a deserted cabin, with the walls of stone and a thatched roof, containing among the rubbish a wooden piece of ordnance,"<sup>55</sup> Pickering narrates. There he found "a cast-iron stove plate was lying near" in the bluff behind a "small cave," "wearing very much the appearance of being intended for a place of concealment in days of Indian warfare."<sup>56</sup> This find immediately put him in mind of "the marvellous story of the 'ancient troglodytes dwelling in caves, along the upper Nile,'" concluding that, while the thought "may seem ridiculous," the Río Negro "was not

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<sup>52</sup> Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, 150-65.

<sup>54</sup> As Iglar notes, there is a discrepancy around his claim to have discovered Darwin's thought in a newspaper in Sydney, when no such article has been found, see: David Iglar, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 164. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

<sup>55</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>56</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

so very unlike the Nile as might be imagined.”<sup>57</sup> At this point, Pickering was yet to see the Nile, but the imagery lends his account an air of the fantastic.<sup>58</sup>

While Brackenridge continued along the river’s course Pickering, “observing a house some distance above”, left his friend and made to examine them. He stumbled across a salt mine and a “group of gauchos”, who received him “politely” and offered him a drink. Drinking their *aqua mirabilis*, an aromatic cocktail of herbs and alcohol, he fielded a range of questions in Castellano, which from what he “knew of Latin and Italian” he did his best to answer. Their primary concern was the meaning of the firing the night before, and his efforts to explain that its purpose was surveying were met mostly with incredulity. However, the topic soon shifted and when the horsemen understood that he was from the United States they “seemed disposed to enter into politics” with the observation that he was one of those who “would suffer no king.” Hampered by the language barrier, they asked his reasons for gathering herbs, and Pickering notes that he was “not a little surprised” to hear one of the senior members of their party observe that he was “on a voyage of circumnavigation for Historia Natural.” His attempts to answer further questioning were stymied by translation difficulties and he departed.

Instead of returning to chase Brackenridge down the road, he headed off into the pampa, climbing up and beyond the bluffs surrounding the river and out into the plains beyond. Since departing the pilot-house, the only drink he’d had was a glass of *aqua mirabilis*, the hydrating qualities of which are dubious, and the heat soon began to take its toll. He recounts: “I soon experienced an effect which has been often mentioned in travelling over the ‘steppes’ viz., the difficulty in judging of size and distance.”<sup>59</sup> This is partly a product of the flat expanse beyond the river valley, but was also probably exacerbated by the alcohol and heat. He’d neglected to take bearings and was “burdened with woollens” and the heat soon became “excessively oppressive.”<sup>60</sup> Pickering was making for the coast, hoping to reach the beach near the pilot house, but walking for hours he did not reach it and saw no dwellings. In desperation, with the hour growing late, he “fell in with several herds of cattle” and followed them until he reached a path which led back to the cave and ruin beside the river. It was by this time around 9pm and

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<sup>57</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru. He acknowledges that the comparison “might seem ridiculous” but also mentions a conversation with one of the pilots wherein he asked about the presence of giants on the Pampas. This fabulous imagining echoes a similar interest in Australia, see: Shino Konishi, “Inhabited by a race of formidable giants’: French Explorers, Aborigines, and the Endurance of the Fantastic in the Great South Land, 1803,” *Australian Humanities Review* 44 (2008), <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/10440/638?mode=simple>.

<sup>58</sup> The reference to “troglodytes” invokes Herodotus: John Michael Archer, *Old Worlds: Egypt, Southwest Asia, India and Russia in Early Modern English Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 164; Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 21-22. Herodotus is referenced by Pickering as an authority even in the last publication before his death: Charles Pickering, “On Photographs of Tasmanians at the Centennial Exposition,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 28 (1876): 170.

<sup>59</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>60</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

the drink of brackish water from the river was “most delicious.”<sup>61</sup> He slept that night amidst the ruins, swarmed by fleas.<sup>62</sup>

### Crumbling between the fingers.

The Expedition’s journey down the Río Negro has been little touched upon by historians. Pickering’s account of it at first glance bears little of note. There are no markers of rationalisation, few tantalising political statements, rare mentions of race, and for all the danger and drama of that day and night, it passes by quickly in the tale of an Expedition full of drama and danger. There is a stark transition from the empiricist nature of the preceding pages – long lists of plant species and meteorological notes – to an account of travel that places such emphasis on sensory experience. The clothing of the gauchos make a “shewy appearance” in the distance, red and white.<sup>63</sup> The riverbank crumbles between his fingers, and the water “fresh to the very mouth,” occasionally “brackish.”<sup>64</sup>

Pickering at times speaks in third person of the landscape. “The traveller finds himself on a perfect plain, unwooded, without the slightest elevation to serve as a landmark, and where the sun goes down as on the ocean” and “a stranger might very well travel up and down the river without suspecting its true character.”<sup>65</sup> This seems partly a mimicry of a common style, but alongside the sensory quality of the account, it calls attention to his disorientation, even isolation, while “ranging” the pampa.<sup>66</sup> As a memory prompt his writing recalls moments: thinking, perceiving, acting, all bound up with the sun’s glare and the flash of distant lances. As he writes: “for some time after I had landed I could scarcely persuade myself that I was still in America, so strange was the appearance of things around me.”<sup>67</sup> Walking along the Río Negro, he seems to have for the first time experienced some of the unmooring which characterised so many similar voyages.

Yet for all the disorientation of his walk along the river, Pickering is never without frames of reference, even in peculiar places and sometimes coming in peculiar forms. Coming across the deserted cabin he found “a cast-iron stove plate ... lying near, bearing the stamp of

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<sup>61</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>62</sup> For more on insects, disorientation and exploration see: Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 89-91.

<sup>63</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>64</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>65</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>66</sup> Keighren and Withers, “Questions of Inscription and Epistemology in British Travellers’ Accounts of Early Nineteenth-Century South America,” 560-73.

<sup>67</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

some one's, 'Patent, New York.'" <sup>68</sup> The cave he describes as "wearing very much the appearance of being intended for a place of concealment in days of Indian warfare" causing him to confess that "it may seem ridiculous, but I was here reminded of the marvellous story of the 'ancient troglodytes dwelling in caves, along the upper Nile.'" <sup>69</sup> With so many threads reaching back to familiarity, "unmooring" perhaps becomes an inaccurate metaphor - if nothing else the anchor finds purchase frequently at ocean's bottom. The remnants of past travel, be it physical - an abandoned stove from his home country - or analogical - a traveller's tale recounted by Aristotle - meant Pickering, like his colleagues, was never wholly unmoored.

This is further shown in his interactions. The group of men and women at the salt camp "understood that [the Expedition were] 'Americans of the North'" remarking that they "would 'suffer no king ... no crown'" as he conversed using what he "knew of Latin and Italian." <sup>70</sup> The ability to fit communication in Castellano (which he did not speak) within an existing web of language had its corollary in the way concepts were transferred and understood in the same conversation. His explanation of collecting as "for medicines" was a "standard answer" at home, but "the Eldest of the party observed" that the Expedition was "on a voyage of circumnavigation for Historia Natural!" <sup>71</sup> Just as Pickering retrieved meaning from conversations in Castellano via analogy, so the naturalist himself fitted into the understanding of those he met, bringing travel to each meeting.

His conversations were however not simply a transfer of information, as the phrase "a woman of respectable appearance, but with a tinge of the African" shows. His phrasing echoes an earlier line in his journal, from a similar situation: "we were hospitably received by a respectable Mulatto woman." <sup>72</sup> While Pickering does not discuss the race of the others in the salt camp it is a woman with the "tinge of the African" - almost a caveat to respectability - that he finds particularly notable. In these early journals, race makes only rare appearance, yet it seems to emerge at those moments where Pickering's webs of familiarity are tweaked by contradiction. In the world from which Pickering came "African" and "respectable" were cast in stark opposition but both on the Rio Negro and in Rio de Janeiro he encountered a system where "a mixed race majority sometimes became part of the ruling elite" and thus a place "where racial classifications and relationships had to be more fluid and relative." <sup>73</sup> While the scaffolding of his past experiences - Aristotle and Yankee cookware - offered familiarity in

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<sup>68</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>69</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>70</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>71</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>72</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>73</sup> Carvalho, "Writing Race in Two Americas: Blackness, Science, and Circulation of Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century Luso-Brazilian World and the United States," 313.

strange places, some of his scaffolding did quite the opposite. The raced lens through which he understood the world at times offered little clarity, and the dissonance that created left testimony in these reoccurring phrases.<sup>74</sup>

To return to the dilemma emerging in Chapter One, far from being lost for words amidst Brazil's slave trade, Pickering found the familiar. Raised upon abolitionist literature's descriptions of slavery's horror, he felt little dissonance seeing it before him and thus expressed scant surprise. Joyce argues that the Expedition, made up of "Yankees weaned upon minstrel shows" and raised upon a myth of the happy slave, found themselves confronted by stinking slave ships and wretched slaves in Rio.<sup>75</sup> This led those, like Wilkes, to express their disgust at slavery's realities. Pickering, to the contrary, dwells upon points of departure from an abolitionist narrative of slave societies - those respectable, powerful and well-spoken who nonetheless bear a "tinge of the African." In his *Races of Man*, the heart of which is a strong abolitionist stance, he reflects upon this: "many negroes were slaves, but ... others held places of honour and trust under the government."<sup>76</sup> As Colvocoresses puts it: "their colour operates less to their prejudice than with us."<sup>77</sup> Yet this dissonance never fully severs his understanding of race's relationship to character. This is an ongoing theme.

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<sup>74</sup> "Yet whereas the imprint of encounters was often all but effaced in universal racial systems, the regional classificatory efforts of travellers and residents were always threatened by the mismatch of theory and praxis;" Bronwen Douglas, "Terra Australis to Oceania: Racial Geography in the 'Fifth Part of the World'," *Journal of Pacific History* 45, no. 2 (2010): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2010.501696>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20836257>.

<sup>75</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*.

<sup>76</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*.

<sup>77</sup> George Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition* (New York: Cornish, 1852), 81.

# Tuamotu Archipelago

## Islands like a Fleet at Anchor

The island of Reao, known to Pickering as Clermont-Tonnerre, appeared “something like a fleet at anchor, the trees rising and disappearing with the swell.”<sup>78</sup> The Expedition, having departed Callao a month before, reached the Tuamotu Archipelago on 13 August 1839. Reao is a long atoll, with no entrance to its lagoon, a factor that even today makes it a rare destination for tourists and pleasure liners. As the *Vincennes* approached Pickering recalls: “two Indians were seen on the beach but made no motions and exhibited no intentions of coming off to us.”<sup>79</sup> After such a long time at sea, and with their first island stop in sight, the scientifics were eager to get ashore as soon as possible. When the *Vincennes* dispatched boats around noon, Pickering was first among them.

The two boats beat a course to the atoll, the surf rearing around them. With no way to make it to calm waters within, they faced a “rocky shore,” with orders not to land but to swim. One of the scientifics, Couthouy, and a midshipman, Blunt, threw caution to the wind and dove overboard, reaching the shore safely. Pickering made after them, wrapping himself in a life-preserver and plunging into the surf. He picked an indent, “gully,” in the shoreline and was dashed against it, scrabbling sorely over the coral and up onto the beach. Another of the crew followed, “Mr. Case” with “John Sack (the New Zealander), and profiting by the instructions of the latter, came up very handsomely.” Where Pickering picked a gully, Case chose a ridge “and planting himself on his feet as soon as he was able to touch bottom, waited till the swell sent him forwards in that position.”<sup>80</sup> John Sac, “the New Zealander,” was also known as “Tuati.” His mother was a woman of the Ngāpuhi iwi, from the Bay of Islands, and his father was a Scottish whaler. As a bilingual sailor he was invaluable to the Expedition as a translator and intermediary, but as the above shows he also brought practical skills (though it’s possible he simply opted to do the opposite of the wounded and bedraggled Pickering).

They spent two hours on Reao that first day but, apparently by local design, made no contact with the people of the Island. The evening before, Wilkes reports having seen “five men and two women” watching the party collect specimens from the tree line, however they avoided all attempts at engagement. When the crew returned the following day, an entirely different

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<sup>78</sup> It was named as such by the French mariner Louis Duperrey, who first visited the island in 1823, Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*: 37; Doug Munro and Keith S Chambers, “Duperrey and the Discovery of Nanumaga in 1824: an Episode in Pacific Exploration,” *The Great Circle* 11, no. 2 (1989), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41562638>.

<sup>79</sup> Pickering, *Journal, Madeira-Peru*.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Pickering, *Charles Pickering Journal*, 13 August 1839 - 4 May 1840, 1838-1841, N-706, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

situation awaited. The boats despatched from the *Vincennes* met a mirror sea, so calm that they could almost land directly on the ragged shore. There were three boats, one led by Wilkes, accompanied by the translator Tuati, with Pickering on another. The latter writes: “we found the Natives, men and boys, collected to oppose our landing, to the number of 18, half a dozen of them armed with the long pointed lances of cocoa nut wood, usual in this ocean, but we saw no other weapons.”<sup>81</sup> Wilkes, perhaps exaggerating for effect, adds to this number “many more in the bushes, probably in all about one hundred.”<sup>82</sup>

According to Pickering’s account, from the start it was clear that “they did not want war but thought it very reasonable that we should keep off the shore” something evident from their “motioning us to be off and pointing their lances towards us.”<sup>83</sup> Wilkes, however, with the strong desire to “enter into communication”, drew on Tuati to translate. The only reply forthcoming was, he said, “go to your own land, this land belongs to us, and we don’t want anything to do with you.” Wilkes thought such “scruples” could be overcome and ordered his men to begin to throw presents to them, rather than swim ashore through the surf. They were “very glad to get the presents thrown on shore and wanted more,” and one man from amongst the group brought out a bread fruit and threw it to them in reply. This detail is absent from many of the accounts, scholarly and contemporary, of the encounter, which soon soured further.<sup>84</sup>

Tuati continued to plead them ashore, but was continually rebuffed, even as “trinkets” continued to shower onto the beach.<sup>85</sup> Wilkes gave permission for Pickering’s boat to land, and it separated from the others, only to be followed by the Islanders, “so that there were some to oppose each boat.” Despite this, three from his boat dove into the surf. As Pickering recounts:

A midshipman first reached the shore and running up the rocks the Natives here all took to flight – almost immediately a man came running down from the other party, who appeared to be the chief, with a lance and the lad was forced to retreat – he would have attacked him after he had taken to the water, but another who had reached the ground at the same time held him back. All three now returned to the boat, and it was evident that we had lost ground by this movement.

The restraint applied to the “chief” is another thing omitted from Wilkes account, but it is certain that the failed advance escalated the stand-off further. As Couthouy jumped from Wilkes’

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<sup>81</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>82</sup> Pickering puts the whole population of the island at around 100, and mentions that the glimpses caught of those in the bushes were “probably women.” Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 312.

<sup>83</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>84</sup> It is absent from Wilkes’ *Narrative*, Erskine’s *Before the Mast* and Colvocoresses *Four Years*, as well as being unmentioned in Philbrick’s *Sea of Glory* and Joyce’s *Shaping of American Ethnography*.

<sup>85</sup> Wilkes would in his *Narrative* blame Tuati for the Expedition’s failure to win favour. Tuati was “truly a savage” and “provoked” the “chief” of the Islanders in their conversation. For a full write up of Wilkes’ account see: Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 44-47.

boat, gifts in hand, he too was repelled and the crowd on the beach “began throwing coral, numbers of which struck the men in my (Wilkes’) boat,” though Pickering notes this was mostly “the boys” and “hardly in earnest.”

Finding that it was “impossible to do anything with them” and with Wilkes clearly getting frustrated, one of the mariners fired a blank cartridge above the heads of those on the shore. It had little effect and so, as Pickering puts it, “a little ‘mustard seed’ was administered to their legs.” This is a particularly euphemistic way of saying that the crew opened fire upon the shore with “mustard seed shot” - very small lead pellets designed for shooting specimens from amidst the trees. They peppered the crowd, first with one gun, and then several more after as the Islanders began to retreat. The man previously identified as the “chief” was: “a powerful fellow, ... ‘pluck’ to the last, and continued ordering us off by his gestures and motions, standing on brink, after the others had desisted. He stood his ground after one discharge, but a second staggered him, and then he returned to the wood with the rest.”

This small victory only earned the Expedition a short amount of time specimen collecting in the dusk, but grew to a great victory with the telling. Reynolds, who was not present, was, by a few days later, discussing the way “those *rascals* gave to our people in the boat the gratifying information that if they *would* come ashore, they would certainly be made a meal of.”<sup>86</sup> Pickering’s version of the encounter downplays the threat, while Wilkes exaggerates it. The former is also one of the few who notes the tension amongst the Islanders, almost a mirror to the same amidst the Expedition. The members of the scientific corps were involved as both aggressors and peace makers - Couthouy attempting to sooth tension and Peale volunteering his marksmanship for the barrage against the Islanders. In all of it, Pickering was not an active party, at least as far as available accounts indicate.

This first and tempestuous encounter in the South Seas, though dramatic, was not a revelation. It was Pickering’s first time in any proximity to peoples of the Pacific Islands, beyond a number who made up the crew.<sup>87</sup> Observing them from a rocking boat, held back by hurled coral and Wilkes’ orders, Pickering fit them still within Blumenbach’s racial schema:

The Natives appeared to me of precisely the same colour as our North American Indian, and a reddish coppery tint was very evident in their complexion – possibly they may have been a shade darker, but certainly nothing to do with the ‘New Caledonian or Asiatic Negro.’

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<sup>86</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 86.

<sup>87</sup> Initially this number was relatively small, and Pickering barely mentions them, however as the Expedition jettisoned crew throughout the Pacific, their numbers steadily increased.

He continues to use the term “Indian” to describe them though he acknowledges that he “was not near enough to get a very distinct view of their features.” Their arrival at Reao was however not without its revelations, though they were less about the trade of projectiles across the surf and more about coconut trees and an old sailor.

## Captain Vanderford’s Rule

“Captain” Vanderford would have stood out amidst the youthful crew of the *Vincennes* – middle aged and treated by many on the ship as South Seas royalty - Vanderford had a long history in the Pacific. A trader from Salem, he was responsible for founding the United States monopoly on the trade of bêche-de-mer in Fiji. Having been shipwrecked there he forged relationships with a number of powerful figures amongst the Islands, including the venerable Ratu Tanoa Visawaqa, and was employed by the Expedition as trading master and interpreter. At some point, likely as the trees of Reao came into focus on the horizon, he observed to Pickering a rule: “wherever you find a cocoa palm you will find an Indian.”

This rule, likely learned through experience (his or others) came as a revelation and Pickering quotes it word for word. The naturalist was primed to take Vanderford seriously, not just because his rule proved reliable but also because men like him had been configured in the emerging mass media of the United States as inclined towards the same kind of scientific observations as Pickering himself.<sup>88</sup> His rule is clearly an important part of the genesis of what would become a lifelong obsession, culminating in his final work – *Chronological History of Plants: Man’s Record of His Own Existence Illustrated Through Their Names, Uses and Companionship*. It also had a clear influence upon his understanding of the relationship between human and geography, race and civilisation. While the Expedition’s invasion of Reao, like its “Indian” inhabitants, fit within an existing schema of relationships, Vanderford’s rule was something new.

## A Place of Revelations?

The Expedition’s arrival at Reao, their first landfall in the South Seas, was an exclamation point. For Wilkes it drove home the difficulties of reconciling the Expedition’s various goals – peaceful

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<sup>88</sup> Felix Luttge, “Whaling Intelligence: News, Facts and US-American Exploration in the Pacific,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 52, no. 3 (2019): 432-34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087419000177>.

coexistence and scientific work. For Dana it was the first atoll in a chain that would end in a new understanding of island formation and, decades later and in the mind of others, to the theory of plate tectonics. For Pickering it was a departure from previous assumptions about the relationship between people and place. While Vanderford's rule was novel, and I describe it above as a "revelation," its results require different terms of description. "Revelation" is the language of sudden divine disclosure - an angel's gift in human language - whole and utterly novel. Pickering's discovery was perhaps more of a metamorphosis, with all the biology and hidden chrysalid changes that invokes.

In Rio Pickering found himself "unprepared to find the stigma of luxury reflected back upon [his] countrymen," referring to the expectation that tropical environments made "industry as an article almost unnecessary" and therefore their inhabitants inclined towards idleness.<sup>89</sup> He describes in evocative terms his expectations of the land around Rio de Janeiro:

I had landed with my head full of the tall slender palms peering amongst the forest trees, dense impenetrable woods barring out the progress of cultivation, or where a narrow clearing is made with infinite trouble, the soil pouring out almost spontaneously all that is required by the necessities of man. I expected to find the trees everywhere interfaced with woody vines, the old trunks and branches buried as it were under parasitic vegetables and the undergrowth woven into an impervious mass of foliage, and the whole teeming with animal life - an immense variety of the most splendid insects, clouds of butterflies, the hairs of the sun, the gem like hummingbirds, darting about every flowering tree, other birds of brilliant plumage or singular form to be met with at every step, each moving in its appropriate sphere, the tanagers, the parrots, the toucans ... etc. etc. - troops of monkeys passing from tree to tree and among others the araguato, uttering at night its perfect note, the sloth also finding a refuge amongst tangled branches while about the roots otherwise tenanted by dangerous reptiles, creep the uncouth anteater and mailed armadillo etc. etc., these things do exist, but the visitor soon learns that they require looking for, and in general with no ordinary degree of diligence.<sup>90</sup>

The disappointment of his thwarted expectation is palpable, and he remarks ruefully: "I had hoped at least ... to have got clear of European weeds." As Vanessa Smith puts it:

"disappointment bounces between actors," though here an actor is climate and nature itself.<sup>91</sup>

His indignation at introduced weeds would find purchase in Patagonia too. "For some time after I had landed I could scarcely persuade myself that I was still in America, so strange was the appearance of things around me," Pickering observes. He attributes this disbelief to "introduced plants" and found it to be a common impression amongst his peers.<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>89</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 228; Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>90</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>91</sup> Vanessa Smith, Comments delivered at Göttingen Spirit Summer School, 27 July 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

conclusion: “it is sufficient for civilised man to set himself down anywhere for a certain set of plants to spring up around him.” The invocation of “civilised man” is something which would largely be abandoned, along with its opposite, “savage” by Pickering over the course of the voyage.<sup>93</sup> This we can partly attribute to the realisation that the relationship between the distribution of plants and animals was not the province of one corner of humanity alone.

“While previous naturalists had studied discrete localities and populations around the ocean, Dana was the first to grapple systematically with the forces shaping the Pacific as a whole,” argues David Igler in *The Great Ocean*.<sup>94</sup> Igler argues that Dana’s approach “could only have resulted from his prolonged encounter with the Pacific’s islands, volcanoes and continental landmasses.”<sup>95</sup> This is a persuasive point but it is important to note that Dana did not grapple alone. In his masterful *Corals and Coral Islands*, Dana writes:

most agreeable are the memories of events, scenes and labours, connected with the cruise: - of companions in travel, both naval and scientific; of the living things of the sea, gathered each morning by the ship’s side and made the study of the day, foul weather or fair; of coral islands with their groves, and beautiful life, above and within the waters.<sup>96</sup>

Pickering and Dana were part of what Aaron Sachs terms “the Humboldtian Current” – the American disciples of Prussian naturalist, geographer and explorer Alexander Von Humboldt.<sup>97</sup> The genesis of the expedition itself owed immensely to Humboldt, as Symmes and Jeremiah Reynolds were both devotees.<sup>98</sup> Humboldt “thought ecologically” and his influence is clear in both Pickering and Dana’s approach to their respective fields.<sup>99</sup> As much as Dana’s thought was a product of his physical movement through the Pacific, it was, like Pickering’s undoubtedly influenced by the collaborative scientific environment of the corps – the diversity of expertise encouraged all of the scientifics to think both collectively and holistically.

Pickering’s magnum opus, published posthumously, is titled: *The Chronological History of Plants: Man’s Record of His Own Existence*. The idea of a reciprocal and transformative relationship between plants and humans was its underpinning, and its chrysalis appears to lie with Vanderford’s rule, dashed tropical expectations, Humboldtian currents and the discomfort of luxury reflected back upon him by Brazilian slaves.

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<sup>93</sup> I established this trend through use of the text analysis software “Antconc.”

<sup>94</sup> Igler, “Patriotic Geology,” 158.

<sup>95</sup> Igler, “Patriotic Geology,” 158.

<sup>96</sup> James Dwight Dana, *Corals and Coral Islands* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1875), viii.

<sup>97</sup> Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, 20-21.

<sup>98</sup> Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*.

Pickering was observing the Anthropocene, and it complicated his understanding not just of botany and zoology, but race in turn. The United States was a nation divided by the Mason Dixon line - a place where race and geography were already married.<sup>100</sup> Pacific racial geographies were “shifting” in earnest around Pickering, as the French, Dutch and English drew them out.<sup>101</sup> Seven years previously, Dumont D’Urville, who the Expedition would pass by in Antarctic fog, had coined an influential cartographic division of the Pacific along racial grounds.<sup>102</sup> However even as D’Urville found a “natural” relationship between certain people and certain places, Pickering was finding the opposite. Even before he had entered the waters of the Pacific, he’d been forced to reappraise his understanding of the relationship between climate and lifestyle. As Vanderford leaned on a bulkhead and dispensed an old hand’s wisdom, as the skies above islands were full with swaying coconut palms and empty of birds, that reappraisal came to a head.

## Coasting near the shore

As the Expedition moved on to its next destination, Serle Island, Pakarua, it continued the work of surveying in earnest. Mapmaking was the primary objective of the Expedition, according to its commander, and the “bug collecting” of the scientific corps was low on the list of other priorities. Horatio Hale had not participated in the encounter on Reao, along with Reynolds -whose version of events would have been valuable- when they missed the boats’ departure to the island. Instead they were forced to watch from the deck of the *Vincennes* through telescopes. In Pickering’s journal there is a pervasive sense of frustrated ambition, something he shared with the crew. “I can now understand how it is that men may go to sea all their lives without after all seeing much of the world” he writes, being only given “leave to visit the shore for a few hours at a time.”<sup>103</sup>

A midshipman, Alden, and the aforementioned Captain Vanderford, were often sent to the islands alone for “surveying,” as the scientifics stayed on deck. Pickering was therefore left with no choice but to recount their narratives second hand, with no direct experience of the islands outside a telescope. He recounts these narratives in detail, gleaning as much information as possible from the men lucky enough to go ashore. They are thorough accounts, and, as with

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<sup>100</sup> Christine Macdonald, “Judging Jurisdictions: Geography and Race in Slave Law and literature of the 1830s,” *American Literature* 71, no. 4 (1999): 624-55.

<sup>101</sup> Douglas, “Racial Geography,” 179-210.

<sup>102</sup> Douglas, “Racial Geography,” 203.

<sup>103</sup> Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering 16 February.

much of his writing, include extensive recounting of incidents related to him by others. One such account is as follows:

Mr. Alden was despatched in the boat to coast near the shore, on survey duty, and did not return on board til near sun down. He had fallen in with a party of natives and succeeded in inducing them to come out to him. They first sent away their lances, and a person who subsequently came along with one was turned back by them. Mr. A found them exceedingly friendly, though disposed to help themselves to whatever they fancied, but could not persuade them to get into the boat. One of them stole his note-book and was swimming off with it, but brought it back on seeing the anxiety of the owner.<sup>104</sup>

The plans to follow Alden to the Island were, as Pickering puts it, “decimated” by a night-time collision between the *Porpoise* and the *Vincennes*, which led to a futile day long chase. Both Wilkes’ priorities and the mismanagement of the Expedition would thwart Pickering’s desires again and again.

Denied access to land, the scientifics did their best to gather what specimens they could. They dragged nets behind the *Vincennes*, as it tacked around the islands, pulling haul after haul up on deck and examining the gleaming, flopping contents. Pickering describes the capture off Serle Island of “a beautiful fish”, “bright orange, with inky black markings,” and his writing relishes in its details.<sup>105</sup> It was here that the draughtsmen, Drayton and Agate, were in their element, for, as Pickering laments, the colour of many of their catches did not last through preservation. Reynolds describes the scene:

the Scientifics cut up and dissect and overhaul, and use magnifying power the better to see, and make drawings and paintings, and search their books, and write down learned descriptions, and invent unpronounceable terms, and tell *us* all about the mysteries of organisation etc. etc. and they have dead and living lizards, and fish floating in alcohol, and shark jaws, and stuffed turtles, and vertebrata and animalculæ frisking in jars of salt water, and old shells, and many other equally interesting pieces of furniture hanging around their beds and around their state rooms – such sweet looking objects as doubtless glad scientific eyes to behold.<sup>106</sup>

The *Vincennes* was already heavy with their collections, and the presence of so much, often smelly, organic matter on board did nothing to further Wilkes’ favour towards further collecting.

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<sup>104</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>105</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>106</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 13.

The Scientifics had another chance to add to their collections on the next island the Expedition visited. Honden Island, Puka-Puka, lent further strength to Vanderford's rule. As the boat approached the island, Pickering was already noting the absence of coconut palms and now added a second rule to the first. As he put it: "the immense quantities of birds, especially of Frigate-Pelicans soaring high above it, was a much more evident sign (than a lack of coconut palms) of the want of inhabitants."<sup>107</sup> The rule also led to a new conclusion: "the absence of the cocoa palm is a fact tending to show that this plant is not indigenous to these islands, but has been brought by the natives from the Westwards."<sup>108</sup> This conclusion would come to gain more importance later.

Intent on securing an opportunity to collect specimens upon the island, Pickering joined one of the surveying boats, with Case, Vanderford and Tuati. As they approached the shore Case shot birds from the air, and Pickering fished as best he could, for their boat was trailed by dozens of sharks. Setting ashore, Tuati "turned three turtles on the beach" while Pickering made for the "woods." However, after ten minutes amidst the trees a signal sounded for their return. Emerging on the beach Pickering observed that the *Vincennes* had gone an opposite direction to that which, he claimed, they expected, leaving a little more time on the Island, yet as he notes in frustration, "[they were allowed] no longer stay than before."

This frustration would deepen the following day. After breakfast Pickering set out "with Reynolds, Couthouy and Brackenridge" intending to land for a longer time than the preceding day.<sup>109</sup> Surrounded by sharks and with the surf high, a landing seemed unwise and they opted instead to fish but had little luck. Pickering's writing drips with resentment as he describes seeing the *Vincennes* unexpectedly going behind the point: "had we been aware of any such intent we should not have lost this day."<sup>110</sup> They chased after the *Vincennes*, but facing a headwind and strong swell it was "a hard pull" and they made "headway very slowly." Finally, they reached the *Vincennes*, having wasted the day, only to discover that Wilkes himself had landed in the time since and taken specimens of his own.

Despite his obvious frustration with this incident, Pickering's bile never reaches that of his companion on the boat, Reynolds, who describes the same incident very differently:

I did not get ashore at this Paradise though I should have liked it above all things. The Skipper has been showing his teeth, manifesting his spite on every occasion that offers, a mighty dirty way of proceeding. He would not let us land, neither did he afford the

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<sup>107</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>108</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>109</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>110</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

scientifics an opportunity for a research that would have afforded a rare collection of curious things.<sup>111</sup>

The two men differ in their description of the reason for their failure to make landfall - Reynolds is characteristically caustic in the blame he levels at Wilkes while Pickering puts it down to a range of factors, and steers clear of accusing the Captain directly. Yet it nonetheless illustrates the level of tension that existed on the *Vincennes* at this early stage. The conversation on their boat, watching the ship rounding the heads, and then chasing it into a headwind, must have leaned more towards Reynolds' style of expression than Pickering's.

## Zeal in the cause of Natural Science

At some point around this time, Couthouy was confronted by Wilkes as he exited his cabin. Wilkes asserted loudly that he "would not have the whole ship lumbered up with coral" and "did not care a damn for what had been previously done."<sup>112</sup> Peale, denied access to the Island of Raraka, asks in frustration: "what was a Scientific Corps sent for?"<sup>113</sup> As Wilkes realised the conflict between the Expedition's rules of engagement with those they met and its scientific objectives, he was already well aware of a conflict between different elements of those scientific objectives themselves. The "ship as an instrument" for surveying and the "ship as a laboratory" can be understood as competing imperatives.<sup>114</sup>

However, "explorers are *individuals* while *expeditions* are collectives."<sup>115</sup> While Couthouy's response to Wilkes's barked prohibition was "of course there was no reply to this," the blurred lines between Scientifics and crew complicates that picture. Reynolds recounts.

We shot away, however, at the little things in the nests. Our zeal in the cause of Natural Science, and our curiosity in regard to the Phenomena of web footed birds breeding in high trees completely quieted any compunction we might otherwise have felt in dealing such slaughter "among the innocents."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 88.

<sup>112</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 121.

<sup>113</sup> Titian Ramsay Peale, *Titian Ramsay Peale, 1799-1885, and his Journals of the Wilkes Expedition*, ed. Jessie Poesch (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society Memoirs, 1961), 133-34.

<sup>114</sup> Antony Adler, "The Ship as Laboratory: Making Space for Field Science at Sea," *Journal of the History of Biology* 47, no. 3 (Fall, 2014): 333-62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10739-013-9367-7>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24122291>.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas, "What is an Expedition?," 13.

<sup>116</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 49.

Peale, at Raraka, says that while “no naturalists were permitted to land,” nonetheless “the men collected a few shells differing from those on the other islands we have visited.”<sup>117</sup> Wilkes’ understanding that the work of the Scientifics was secondary to the work of surveying was undercut by the “zeal in the cause of Natural Science” felt by those amidst the crew. In the case of Reynolds it was directly mobilised against the Commodore who, he says “would not let us land, neither did he afford the scientifics an opportunity for research that would have afforded a rare collection of curious things.”<sup>118</sup>

Beyond a bludgeon to beat Wilkes with, the enthusiasm amidst the crew went beyond a “zeal” for natural science. Indeed, the work of collection often mingled with other desires. While Tuati “flipped turtles” on the beach for the Scientifics to examine, those same turtles were as like to end up in pots on the ship as in the clutches of the scientists. At the beginning of the Expedition Wilkes had ordered that any private collections should be offered to the scientific corps first, but Millar points out that this rule was “routinely flouted.”<sup>119</sup> On catching a shark, Reynolds describes the “degree of savage satisfaction that sailors enjoy” in its capture, having hauled the shark on deck they tortured it “with all the means their ingenuity” could muster.<sup>120</sup> “They jest and talk to the victim as if *he* possessed understanding” we are told, and this is cast as a kind of ritual of collective retribution, making the shark “become food in its turn.” The Scientifics, dragging their haul from the sea and dissecting it on deck, were party to similar activities to the crew, sharing the same skills, in the same efforts, if sometimes with different motivations.

While Pickering embarked upon the expedition with the expressed purpose of leaving the confines of the naturalist’s armchair, the reality of the Expedition meant that his ideal of work unimpeded by intermediaries was not to eventuate. As Vanderford’s rule shows, even his looking upon the islands was mediated by others. Reynolds writes about the Tuamotu Archipelago: “at first sight they resembled a squadron of vessels underweigh.”<sup>121</sup> Wilkes also observes: “at first sight the island appeared much like a fleet of vessels at anchor”,<sup>122</sup> Pickering, finally; “The end of the island, at first appearing something like a fleet at anchor.”<sup>123</sup> This shared

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<sup>117</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 133-34.

<sup>118</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 88.

<sup>119</sup> Sarah Louise Millar, “Science at Sea: voyages of exploration and the making of marine knowledge, 1837-1843” (PhD Dissertation The University of Edinburgh, 2017), 138.

<sup>120</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 95.

<sup>121</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 90.

<sup>122</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 311.

<sup>123</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

phrasing, shared imagery, is not coincidental, nor is it solely a product of naval frames of reference, it speaks to the social distribution of experience and memory across the *Vincennes*.<sup>124</sup>

## No actual violence

As the Expedition left Puka-Puka, the “barometer began to fall rapidly” and they were blown with “violence” to the islands of Tepoto and Napuka, called by Wilkes: Otoohee and Wytoohee, or “the Disappointment Islands.”<sup>125</sup> The Expedition approached Napuka at speed on the morning of the 24 August 1839. The island, larger than its twin, forms an oval shaped atoll, and is well covered in pandanas and coconut trees. Around 10am a group of 9 canoes rowed out to the squadron, who were preparing to survey the island.

The crew could hear singing from onshore and the men in the canoes serenaded the boats, to their passengers’ delight. “They were very gay and talkative,” Colvocoresses writes “and every few minutes would entertain us with a song.”<sup>126</sup> “We very much admired their canoes” he continues, and the “we” seems warranted, for most of Pickering’s account of this encounter focuses on their description: “this morning several canoes came about the ship, some large enough to contain 3 natives and others only two.”<sup>127</sup> As the canoes came alongside the *Peacock* and *Vincennes*, ropes were passed down and gifts were thrown, however the Islanders could not be “induced” to board, and both Wilkes and Pickering seem deflated by this. Neither offer an explanation for the reluctance to board, and it finds explanation with Reynolds, who says: “the ship being underweigh, they could not trust themselves on her decks, for fear they would be carried away.”<sup>128</sup>

While at Reao Pickering was confident in his interpretation of the Islanders’ message – they wanted the Expedition to leave – there is bewilderment in the arrival at Napuka. He describes “singing” and “dancing” on shore but does not offer an interpretation of either. Colvocoresses describes the singing as “made up for the occasion” containing allusions to the Expedition’s “coming amongst them.”<sup>129</sup> Wilkes alternatively understood the “monotonous song or chant” as a sign of “gratitude” for gifts offered by the crew.<sup>130</sup> Both men are altogether more willing to offer their interpretation of an encounter they clearly struggle to understand, while

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<sup>124</sup> George Colvocoresses, who was stationed on the *Peacock* rather than *Vincennes* describes Reao as “a forest growing in the middle of the ocean.” Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 62.

<sup>125</sup> The former names garnered by Vanderford from his conversations with Islanders there, the latter from John Byron, who visited them in 1765.

<sup>126</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 55.

<sup>127</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>128</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 66.

<sup>130</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 319.

Pickering is mute. He is again a “passenger,” like at Reao, taking little active role in the interactions but also no interpretation, at least in his account of events.

Pickering’s uncertainty continued after the canoes departed, and a launch was dispatched from the *Vincennes* to “ascertain the disposition of the natives” onshore - something evidently required despite Wilkes’ impression of their gratitude. When it returned, the report was “unfavourable.” Lieutenant Case, in charge of the approach to the island explained that landing was “impracticable” though trade was successfully negotiated. Pickering’s bafflement is contagious, for these events raise many questions. Case offers no explanation for the refused landing, despite Vanderford’s ability to speak with and understand the people of Napuka. Pickering takes the unwillingness of the Islanders to trade food as a sure sign of recalcitrance: “the natives were very glad to get the pieces of cloth that were thrown them; but they ‘had no cocoa nuts’ (though we saw plenty of the trees).” However Wilkes offers an explanation for this – “they (the coconuts) were tabooed.”<sup>131</sup>

It is possible that the events on Reao had left a lasting impression on the crew of the *Vincennes* in particular. Pickering and Wilkes both observe that “no actual violence” occurred at Case’s attempted landing, clearly implying its potential. Pickering’s discomfort is implied when he offers an account of the objects exchanged: “a bone pointed at each end was also brought off, which might have been human, though it felt heavy; for we are at a loss to say what other animal could have afforded one so large.” No such disquiet is evidenced in Colvocoresses’s account, for he only knew of the encounter on Reao second hand. The impression the *Vincennes* gives is of a mirrored unease, and Pickering notes that “among the articles brought off was a bit of a silk-handkerchief, which shewed that they had had communication with vessels previously.”<sup>132</sup>

Concluding that further attempts at landing would be futile, the squadron departed and began a survey of the Island, which continued until the following afternoon. Having completed surveying, Wilkes recounts that he saw “the natives who had refused to allow us to land... waving green boughs, which was a general sign of good will.”<sup>133</sup> He thus dispatched three launches to make a landing. Couthouy, Reynolds and Pickering were in the same launch, and the latter recalls that: “natives were seen occasionally on the beach, some holding up green branches, others dancing with their spears overhead.”<sup>134</sup> Approaching the place of Case’s attempted landing they: “found the old “chief” reclining under his pandanas tree, who looked as

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<sup>131</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 319.

<sup>132</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>133</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 320.

<sup>134</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

though he might have been grandfather to the whole island, with gray hair and a long white beard.”<sup>135</sup>

Pickering describes the scene “as we approached he arose and preceded along the beach, make various motions and grimaces which we could not comprehend.” As much as Wilkes desired that the presentation of green boughs constituted an excuse to land, when his launch joined the others it was clear that no such permission was forthcoming. Tuati was commanded to announce that Wilkes was “the big chief” but this was met primarily with mirth.<sup>136</sup> Couthouy again took the lead, swimming ashore to distribute gifts, but he was, as Wilkes describes it, led “back very gently to the water.”<sup>137</sup> Pickering, offshore in the launch thought they “seemed friendly”, “rubbing noses etc.” but the Islanders were adamant in forbidding a landing.<sup>138</sup> As they gently returned Couthouy back to the water, the Islanders made a “soothing noise” as though they were trying to “propitiate the feelings of some beast of whom they are suspicious.”<sup>139</sup> The encounter was, as Pickering put it, “on the whole ... much more agreeable one than at Clermont-Tonnere (Reao),” which is perhaps to state the obvious. Despite this as Couthouy was rubbing noses, Brackenridge stood at the stern “ready with a brace of Pistols to shoot down the first Savage that might offer violence.”<sup>140</sup>

As at Reao, Couthouy had taken the lead in diving into the surf and approaching for trade, and, as at Reao, Pickering observed from the boat, apparently taking no active part in the landing. The figure of Brackenridge wielding a brace of pistols takes the place of Peale - who at Reao used his skills as a marksman to vicious effect but was on the *Peacock* when the crew attempted to land on Napuka. While Wilkes had offered strict instructions for conduct during encounters, instructions he himself was prone to breach, the landing at Reao offered instructions of its own.

Our friends were very unwilling we should advance

On 26 August Brackenridge, Couthouy, Drayton and Pickering were transferred to the *Flying Fish* to attempt a landing on the smaller island of Tepoto.<sup>141</sup> As they approached an abnormally placid shore and made to set down, “the natives to the number of eight or ten pushed back the

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<sup>135</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>136</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 126.

<sup>137</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>138</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>139</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 120.

<sup>140</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 120.

<sup>141</sup> This transfer was dramatic, with Wilkes flying into a rage, almost causing a collision between the *Vincennes* and the *Flying Fish*, this is mentioned by neither Wilkes nor Pickering. See: Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 126-28.

boat.”<sup>142</sup> At Reao, Napuka and now Tepoto, the members of the expedition struggled to interpret the rules of encounter. At times a landing went uncontested as long as those who came ashore did so by swimming through the surf, and not attempting to pull their boats onto the land. At others, as in the case of the landing at Napuka, one group would be let ashore while another would be rebuffed.

The frustrations of the scientifics were exacerbated by the fact that it was often officers and crew, unaccompanied by the scientific corps, who were successful in making a landing. At Napuka - as Wilkes announced his status as “big chief” and Brackenridge stood at the bow, pistols in hand - Lieutenant William Hudson, who commanded the *Peacock*, successfully landed on the island. As Pickering describes it “we found boats from the *Porpoise* and *Peacock* ashore, and the officers and men mixed in with the natives, some a considerable distance from the beach.”<sup>143</sup> This second group, who were ordered by Wilkes to put off despite their success, were “invited to their huts” and “treated with the milk of the fresh cocoanut” before their hurried departure.<sup>144</sup> Joyce points out that: “no one seemed to consider that the Islanders might have decried the ‘arrant thievery’ of the collecting naturalists” as a possible explanation for the disparity.<sup>145</sup>

The primary tactic adopted by the – by now quite frustrated – crew was incremental and insistent advances up the beach. Yet “as often as this was attempted” they were returned.<sup>146</sup> Over the course of an hour they “were enabled to extend” their advance to “perhaps 100 feet each way” of the landing point along the beach, but could not reach the “woods” they so desired.<sup>147</sup> Stymied, they returned to the boats after what Pickering calls “many hearty adieus” and Couthouy resentfully: “[having] to rub the greasy noses of the whole tribe.”<sup>148</sup> “It was real laughable,” Brackenridge writes, “to see some of our people who endeavoured by dint of stratagem to pass the natives – how they were packed by two or three stout Indians and led like lambs back to the surf.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>143</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>144</sup> This account appears in Colvocoresses, as well as being referred to in the *Narrative*. Colvocoresses has the scientifics as its protagonists, despite this incident not appearing in their account, and the *Narrative* describing it (probably more accurately) as a welcome for officers of the *Porpoise* and *Peacock*. Quote from Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 66; Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 321-23.

<sup>145</sup> Though, given that such collecting was also the practice of the crew it is difficult to use this to explain the disparity: Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 51.

<sup>146</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>147</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>148</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 120.

<sup>149</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 120.

Reappraising their approach, the scientifics returned to their launch and set off from the shore, making their way around the small island to a point where the surf was heavier. Landing there unopposed, the botanist Brackenridge:

ran to the thicket, in order to lose no time in making collections, and was employed in gathering specimens, when two stout natives ran up, and made him understand, by very intelligible signs, that he must return to the boat; he pretended not to understand them, and endeavoured to proceed, but they went before him, and crossed their clubs, determined that he would go no farther. This caused him to laugh, in which the two natives joined. Finding there was no alternative, he took an oblique direction towards the boat, hoping by this means to enlarge his collection, which he succeeded in doing, while the natives ... shouldered him out of the bush, and then towards the boat.<sup>150</sup>

Brackenridge's humour at his position is carried through in his account of the event, and it wasn't the first time that laughter had passed between the people of the Islands and the Expedition. When the crew of the *Peacock* were invited to the huts on Napuka, they enquired about the absence of women, to which the reply was laughter: "they gave us to understand that they had penetrated our motive for visiting their island- 'that as we inhabited an island without any women, we wanted to have some.'"<sup>151</sup>

This last quote is one of the only places where conversation, which considering the presence of two translators and a philologist, we can assume was occurring, is recorded. The traces of such conversations are scant. One of the only places where they remain, aside from a couple of quotes contained in the *Narrative*, are in the publication of Horatio Hale's *Ethnology and Philology*.<sup>152</sup> Hale writes that: "all that is given concerning the languages of Fakaafu and Paumotu group rests on the authority of the writer."<sup>153</sup> Access to his account of the events of the Expedition are limited by the disappearance of his journal and field notes, and his observations regarding the Tuamotu Archipelago are brief: "the natives of the Paumotu Group are remarkable for their ferocious temper and addiction to war" he writes.<sup>154</sup> The vocabulary of *Ethnography and Philology* bears the marks of a tempestuous encounter:

*Ari'i*, a chief, noble

*E homai te wahi komo noku*, bring here some water for me

*Ko wai*, who? *E aha*, what?

*E hoki koe ka hipa*, truly you are dead; *kaore mota kua hipa*, not indeed dead

*Ka haere mai*, come here! *Tatou ka tamaki*, let us fight, or, we will fight

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<sup>150</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 324.

<sup>151</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 322.

<sup>152</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*.

<sup>153</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 230.

<sup>154</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 17.

*Enua*, earth, land, country  
*Vahine*, woman, female  
*Ho'i*, to return  
*Eiā*, to steal  
*Karioi*, to sing and dance  
*Rawe*, to take, to take away  
*Matu*, to run off, to flee  
*Papa*, foreign, foreigner (applied to the whites)  
*Tamaki*, to quarrel with, oppose, to fight, - war<sup>155</sup>

In contrast to this appraisal and its linguistic legacy, Wilkes comes to the conclusion that “they live in peace” and Pickering concurs: “from the number of old men among them one may naturally suppose that their wars cannot be very bloody.”<sup>156</sup>

## Such fair opportunities for inspection

Hale’s vocabulary, so concerned with words of authority and violence, and echoing his appraisal of the Tuamotans as addicted to war, recalls Paul Carter’s description of “dictionaries as depots of the imperial imagination.”<sup>157</sup> The yelled challenge of the men of Napuka assailing the launches across roaring surf, Tuati’s “animated” provocations reverberating out from amidst the officers, a cacophony of blank shot met with derision, and then the finality of mustard seed and “dignified” retreat - all “unruly noise” in desperate need of order, translation.<sup>158</sup> Hale’s listed vocabulary echoes the methodical notebooks of his Linnaean colleagues, and was the primary collection gathered from Napuka, Reao and Tepoto.<sup>159</sup> For all their stratagems and eagerness, Couthouy remarked that the scientifics had succeeded in collecting no more than “a cigar-box.”<sup>160</sup>

The islands of Napuka and Tepoto were named the “Disappointment Islands” by John Byron who reached them aboard the *Dolphin* around seventy-five years earlier. They were thus named because the ocean surf prevented his landing, and the Expedition had a similar

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<sup>155</sup> These phrases appear alongside translations of the words for times of day, numbers and trade goods. Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 237-331.

<sup>156</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 323; Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>157</sup> Carter, “Mimicry, Noise and Context,” 64.

<sup>158</sup> Carter, “Mimicry, Noise and Context,” 19.

<sup>159</sup> Floris Solleveld, “Language as a Specimen,” *Ber Wiss* 46, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1002/bewi.202200039>.

<sup>160</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 120.

experience. Yet despite the disappointment which characterised those August days in 1839, the scientifics made what observations they could. Denied a landing by the surf they bobbed amidst sharks and collected what fish and coral they could. Denied a landing by the people of the islands, they collected words, and made specimens of those they rubbed noses, or wrestled, with.

The physicality of the people of the archipelago was comprehensible in a space where uncertainty abounded, and all of the accounts dwell upon it, though not necessarily with much coherence. "They were a good sized people, with lively, interesting countenances," writes Colvocoresses.<sup>161</sup> "These natives are peculiar, and appeared totally distinct" asserts Wilkes, "having strong wiry beards and mustaches, and a different physiognomy."<sup>162</sup> Pickering proclaims: "after such fair opportunities of inspection, there was no longer any ambiguity about ~~determining~~ the origins of these people."<sup>163</sup> It was clear to him that "they have nothing to do with any of the American tribes, but belong to the genuine Malay Race" and contrary to Wilkes assertions of their difference they: "but for the colour might pass for Europeans."<sup>164</sup> Yet despite these obvious disagreements, "more than one of" the scientifics "was struck with the idea of what 'an admirable personification of old Neptune the old chief made', as he lay floundering in the water."<sup>165</sup>

Wilkes' assertion of the geniality of the Islanders is dissonant with his multiple failures to force a landing, and their one ignoble success. However the assertion offered an "out" from the accusation, common after Reao, that Wilkes had failed to impress upon the Islanders the power of the United States.<sup>166</sup> Stuck between his officer's fear and ire, the scientific corps desire to force a landing, and orders that discouraged the use of force, an image of placid, comical, Islanders cast his critics as subject to the same lack of fortitude of which he was accused.

Hale's *Philology* was partly based upon dictionaries gathered by missionaries whose proselytising required the cataloguing of Polynesian languages. The vocabularies reflect this, containing such useful phrases as "*e ho atu I te utu kia Hiha*, to give tribute to Caesar."<sup>167</sup> Hale, a devout Christian, saw the need for much improvement amidst the Polynesians, but particularly the Tuamotans, who on the whole were yet to receive the Bible's instruction. Despite possibly

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<sup>161</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 66.

<sup>162</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 319.

<sup>163</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>164</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>165</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>166</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 124.

<sup>167</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 243.

being one of those stationed on the *Peacock* to have been invited in for coconut water at Napuka, and certainly being one surrounded by those who understood the Tuamotans as on the whole friendly, Hale chose an image of a heathen warrior race in his ethnographic reflections on the archipelago.

Pickering's perception, in contrast to the two preceding, eschews character judgements entirely. Instead what fascinates him is the discovery that the "Indians" seen from the deck are to his mind anything but a warrior race. Frustrated and denied access to the Island's harvest, he found "fair opportunities for inspection" in the Expedition's multiple contested landings. His account, as well as offering only rare character judgements on the Islanders he met, is generally aloof. He remains "passenger" in these records, even at points where he was certainly otherwise. As Brackenridge was herded, chuckling, from the tree-line, Pickering suspected that the scientifics were "evidently wearing out [their] welcome."<sup>168</sup> They "therefore returned to the boat, with some accessions to our collection and were put about the *Vincennes* a little after sun down."<sup>169</sup> The fact that this return was forced, and that he stumbled, cut by coral, losing his trademark spectacles, back into the surf and aboard the boat, remains unmentioned.<sup>170</sup>

## Not long from Tahiti

"As we approached ... we discovered the 'Tahitian Flag!'" remarks Pickering of the Expedition's arrival at Raraka, where the "people we found civilised in comparison with the natives previously seen."<sup>171</sup> "Not long from Tahiti" the Expedition found itself on, if not familiar, then at least more stable, ground.<sup>172</sup> Since their departure from Callao the tensions amidst the ship had climbed steadily. Disputes between Wilkes and the scientific corps were only one part of the at times vicious atmosphere of the squadron. Off Tepoto the *Vincennes* had very nearly rammed the *Flying Fish* as Wilkes flew into a rage on board, screaming at its commander to heave to. Yet this drama, far from being definitive of it, was only one part of the Expedition's thought processes.

This chapter has illustrated some of the ways that the United States Exploring Expedition operated as an ecosystem - combining its dissonant and often conflicted imperatives

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<sup>168</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>169</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>170</sup> This is mentioned by Reynolds: Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 87.

<sup>171</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>172</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

to *think* and create knowledge. The contested landing on the Río Negro and Pickering's subsequent wanderings demonstrate the way that, even alone, the naturalist was enmeshed within the ecosystem of the Expedition. The Squadron's arrival at the Tuamotu Archipelago shows clearly its contingent and transient ecology – material, the social and intellectual. In this, Pickering is merely one part, yet so enmeshed he nonetheless remains partially distinct from the whole, forming dissonant and distinct ideas, feeding into and feeding off that environment.

# Chapter Three: Civilisation and its Dissonance

Solitude is necessary for writing, but isolation is anathema.

– Wisława Szymborska

Imagine the formation of the city as an organism - first a few small structures, perhaps by a river, perhaps atop a hill. Trails, unplanned, reaching between them, down to the water, between the buildings. Time passes, the city, pathways, buildings, space, become more solid, layering and plaiting like the threads of a rope. The city spasms, pulses, with fire and disease, war and trade, expansion and collapse, but the road down to the water remains, people step in footprints long vanished. This is how I envision the mind, not just as a product of one life, but of time's deep ruts, many lives making many paths, from which, stepping back, a city can be seen.<sup>1</sup> A visitor there, who knew enough, or deduced enough, could, looking at it in their time, see the city's beginnings, ruins as foundations.

Yet this is a leaky metaphor. A mind, many minds, make up the city, inhabit it as it inhabits them, leaking, bleeding, into each other. To make an unforgiveable pun: the city's spaces are headspaces. This chapter describes one such headspace – the United States Exploring Expedition's arrival in Sydney in late 1839 and the role of the Colony in Charles Pickering's understanding of his experiences up to that point. Time in Sydney offered relief, not just from the drudgery of naval travel, but from the burden of thought constrained within the confines of the Expedition. It offered the cognitive resources of a large, diverse and wealthy city with literate, English speaking intellectuals with whom Pickering could converse. He deployed these resources to a singular end: coming to terms with the preceding months amidst the islands of the South Sea.

One way to understand this interface between man and city is Bruno Latour's idea of "centres of calculation." A centre of calculation is a place which possesses: "an ability to calculate."<sup>2</sup> There information is gathered from disparate locations and combined in novel ways, offering influence to those who control it – accumulation leading to influence and thus veracity. Depots of information, in a readily manipulatable form, exert a gravitational pull through which people, like Pickering, find themselves dragged. Calculation is thus, per Latour, less a factor in establishing veracity than accumulation. The comparison between Latour's "actor-network theory" and Clark's "ecology of mind" are obvious.<sup>3</sup> Both theories emphasise the relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Freud imagined the mind as Rome, and I've drawn inspiration from him here, though to a very different end: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Penguin, 1962), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed at length in: Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. This definition from: Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 34.

<sup>3</sup> The work of both Latour and Hutchins have a similar approach to the practical application of their ideas, for an example compare: Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 24-80; Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*.

between technology and mind, and Latour and Clark share an interest in networked thinking.<sup>4</sup> Yet there are differences between the two approaches.

The distinction between Latour and Clark, from two theorists of extended mind, is as follows: “results do not come to be regarded as veridical because they are widely accepted,” rather, “they come to be widely accepted because in the context of an appropriate distributed cognitive system, their apparent veracity can be made evident to anyone with the capacity to understand the workings of the system.”<sup>5</sup> The distributed cognitive system of Sydney and its surrounds thus offers veracity through the capacity of that system to distil its findings. The influence of a “centre of calculation” is like gravity - while the influence of a distributed cognitive system is akin to that of an elevator versus twenty flights of stairs. The appeal of an elevator is its capacity to replace the effort of climbing - repetitive movement, strain on muscles, musculature, heart and lungs, with the simple movement of a button press. The work is still being done, but it is being done by burnt coal, smelted steel, centuries of metallurgy and the angles of gears and pulleys.

This variance is not a major one, and an elevator’s capacity - “400-1125 kg, 5-15 passengers” – could just as easily be described in terms of accumulation. But, to stretch the metaphor to the point where its cables shudder, in either case it is important to ask where its passengers are headed. Our passenger in this chapter, Charles Pickering, arrives at race. So I’ll look at that arrival - as the United States Exploring Expedition finds itself in New South Wales.

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I am not the first to mark the similarity, for some elaboration of the difference between Latour’s ideas and the extended mind hypothesis see: Ronald N. Giere and Barton Moffat, “Distributed Cognition: Where the Cognitive and Social Merge,” *Social Studies of Science* 33, no. 2 (2003): 301-10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183080>.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Being There*, 180.

<sup>5</sup> Giere and Moffat, “Distributed Cognition,” 305.

## New South Wales

### The town in the distance almost a terrestrial paradise

The USS *Vincennes* slipped into Port Jackson on the night of the 29 November 1839. It dropped anchor “in the midst of shipping,” across from a sleeping Sydney, tallow and oil streetlamps glittering across the water.<sup>6</sup> Captain Charles Wilkes records, with no small mirth, the dawn astonishment of “the good people of Sydney” at the discovery of an armed squadron in the cove, and his sentiment is mirrored by *The Australian* in a blistering chastisement of the colony’s pilots.<sup>7</sup> Yet the Captain’s self-proclaimed pluck rings less clearly than the sense of relief that pervaded the squadron on its arrival in New South Wales. “Beef steaks and fresh bread and butter and milk - oh!”<sup>8</sup> The transition from “savage to civilised life,” as Pickering puts it, was “visibly felt, as well as seen,” with some portion at least of that feeling being indigestion.<sup>9</sup>

“The town in the distance seemed almost a terrestrial paradise” as the crew and scientific corps rode their exuberance ashore.<sup>10</sup> Sydney’s substance, “society,” wafted around them with the welcome of home cooking, a reprieve from the *Vincennes*’ uncertainty, tedious familiarity and salted pork. More than a half a century since the First Fleet’s arrival, by 1839 Sydney had a type of solidity Pickering had been denied since the departure from Valparaiso. He describes its buildings with a relish akin to Reynolds’ beef steaks – they had “meat.”<sup>11</sup> The latter, along with others amongst the officers, soon had themselves an “uproarious time,” they felt they deserved it, “why not,” after all that had happened over the last few months of “hard work and deprivation.”<sup>12</sup>

Sydney certainly offered ample opportunity for merriment. Wilkes had proclaimed that “no grog is allowed” for long periods on ship and the crew were engaged in surveying duties on shifts of eleven hours at a time.<sup>13</sup> The *Vincennes*, when reporters from *The Colonist* were invited aboard, offered a model of sobriety. “Temperance as a principle is laid down” the paper

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 160.

<sup>7</sup> “Vigilance of the Pilots,” *The Australian* 3 December 1839.

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Pickering, *Charles Pickering Journal*, 26 November 1839 - 6 April 1840, 1838-1841, N-706, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>10</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>11</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 Vol 4*, 5 vols., vol. 4 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 527.

reported a few days later, and “not an oath was to be heard” amidst, the implication was, normally oath-prone sailors.<sup>14</sup> The same papers are littered with examples of Australian drunkenness. Walking the streets of Sydney a visiting sailor could be greeted by sights like “a waterman” falling from the gunwale of his boat, “while dozing in liquor” narrowly escaping drowning, or, and to their horror, “a drunken woman with a jug containing rum in her hand ... staggering about the street.”<sup>15</sup> Said woman, when told by a constable to “not spill the liquor,” “pelted him with stones, and smashed the jug over his nose.”<sup>16</sup>

Officers and crew alike often spoke of such displays with disdain. Wilkes argued that the above newspaper reports corroborated his impression that the “open practice of the vice of drunkenness” was a plague upon the city caused by convict origins.<sup>17</sup> Charles Erskine concurred, proclaiming that he had “never been in a place where there existed such a low state of society, and where so much drunkenness was to be seen.”<sup>18</sup> Yet as Reynolds’ salivating mention of “filled decanters” and good conversation shows, such judgement did not necessarily imply that the crew failed to avail themselves of Sydney’s multifaceted hospitality.<sup>19</sup> Wilkes lists the “facilities for the indulgence in vice” with disdain, including “the ‘Jolly Sailors’” amongst their number.<sup>20</sup> Erskine, with fond recollection, mentions the same institution: “one day a boat’s crew of us dropped in” and engaged in the raucous singing of national anthems “in true-blue style.”<sup>21</sup>

The steady stream of desertions that had plagued the Expedition showed how much *The Colonist’s* impression of the *Vincennes’s* “general comfort and happiness” was a show.<sup>22</sup> The *Sydney Herald* reported that only a few days after the squadron’s arrival, Thomas Parker “twenty eight years of age, five feet eight and a half inches high” with a “light complexion, blue eyes, dark hair, roman nose” deserted the *Vincennes*.<sup>23</sup> He was followed ten days later by five men from the *Flying Fish* who made off with one of its boats.<sup>24</sup> Despite rewards posted in the papers and help from the colony’s police, they, like many others, were neither captured nor returned to the squadron. Sydney’s bustling harbour offered ample openings to the would-be deserter.

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<sup>14</sup> “The American Squadron,” *The Colonist* 11 December 1839, 2.

<sup>15</sup> “Accident,” *The Australian* 14 December 1839, 2.

<sup>16</sup> “Caution to Constables,” *The Australian* 14 December 1839, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative II*, 164.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Erskine, *Twenty Years Before the Mast – with the more thrilling scenes and incidents while circumnavigating the globe under the command of the late admiral Charles Wilkes 1838-1842*, (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1896), 96.

<sup>19</sup> William Stanton, *The Great United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 144-145.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 96.

<sup>22</sup> “The American Squadron,” 2.

<sup>23</sup> “Six Pounds Reward,” *The Sydney Herald* 13 December 1839, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 148.

Yet as much as Wilkes strove to return errant sailors to the clutches of the Expedition, Sydney provided him an opportunity to be rid, if only temporarily, the Scientific corps which had so vexed him in the preceding months. In Samoa his differences with Joseph Couthouy had festered to the point where he imagined the man at the core of a malicious cabal arrayed against him. While the *Vincennes* could not operate without such members of that cabal as William Reynolds – they would be dealt with later – he had little difficulty justifying a request that the scientifics remain when the Expedition made its departure for Antarctica on Boxing Day 1839.

For their part there seems to have been little objection.

## The pleasures of intellectual communication

As officers and sailors alike took advantage of Sydney's opportunities for carousing Charles Pickering's shore leave was of a more sober type. Though surrounded on the *Vincennes* with other "scientifics," months at sea had denied the naturalist, as he puts it, "society."<sup>25</sup> Sydney was then as now growing rapidly and those who were gone but a few years on return could "scarce recognise the place."<sup>26</sup> This rapid growth, fed by a litany of ships' arrivals and departures reported in its internationally connected papers, made Pickering remark that Sydney was "superior to any" city in the United States of "equal size."<sup>27</sup> Solid though its buildings were - "new" and "generally in better taste" – the city had fluidity, and that extended to its intellectual life.<sup>28</sup> The squadron's sneaky entry into Port Jackson meant that the "pleasures of intellectual communication ... long foregone" could be resumed with gusto, and within a few hours of landing Pickering was at the door of a fellow naturalist.

The door in question may have been responsible for his favourable impression of architecture in Sydney, for it belonged to a house widely regarded as "the finest ... in the colony."<sup>29</sup> Beneath the plaster canopies of Elizabeth Bay House, Charles Pickering met Alexander Macleay. Macleay, who he describes as "so long well known for the services he has rendered the Natural Sciences," was for twenty-seven years the secretary of the Linnean Society of London.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>26</sup> By 1841 the census found a population of 131 000 people, almost double the number from 1836, which was itself double that of 1828: W.D. Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australasia: A Demographic History, 1788-1988* (Canberra: ANU Printing, 1994), 37; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>27</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>28</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>29</sup> George Macleay, Letter to William, W S Macleay Papers, A4303, Mitchell Library.

<sup>30</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840; Julian Holland, "Alexander and William Sharp Macleay," in *Mr Macleay's Celebrated Cabinet*, ed. Peter Stanbury and Julian Holland (Sydney: The Macleay Museum, 1988), 10-18.

During those years his collection - glass cases, stuffed parrots, pinned butterflies, detached beaks and desiccated beetles, piled up like a dragon's hoard. When, at 58, Macleay left England in 1825, this assemblage was "without parallel" in the country of his birth, and certainly had no peer in New South Wales.<sup>31</sup> For Alexander Macleay natural history maintained its hobbyish air. Like many hobbies it was a money sink – with collecting reliant upon morbid funereal auctions and trade as much as work with a net and rifle – it was a commercial and scientific venture both. Born into a wealthy family and with a steady income from his business ventures, he was initially well set up to maintain the hobby. The same was not true of Thomas Marsham; Macleay's predecessor as secretary, cofounder of the Society, and part-time embezzler. Forced to resign as treasurer after his siphoning of the Society's funds came to light, Marsham sold his collection. Macleay's name was on many of the auction slips.<sup>32</sup>

In Macleay's era, natural history collecting, with its cabinets and mounting piles of yellowed specimen tags, Latin in cursive, was an activity of commerce and science, but it was also a labour of Empire. His insect cases, often bought and sold with the description "chiefly foreign," relied upon the tentacles of British naval power for content.<sup>33</sup> When he was offered the post as Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, acceptance was, at least in part, propelled by the opportunity to tap that stream at its source. Stepping into a position of authority in the colony second only to the Governor offered resources in aid of Macleay's collecting that he could never have obtained in London. Elizabeth Bay House, more properly a mansion, formed a grand stage for this collection – not just cabinets but gardens and a library, all specimens cut, bound, pinned and arrayed in a vision of genteel splendour.<sup>34</sup> It was a costly vision, and like Marsham, he found himself beset by financial difficulties.<sup>35</sup> His eldest son, William Sharp Macleay, was a lifeline.

William reached Sydney only eight months before the Expedition to a land gasping from drought - "russet," yet "beautiful beyond measure to the eye of a naturalist."<sup>36</sup> He had such an eye, perhaps even more than his father, in addition to a well-established reputation in science, well before he boarded a ship for the colony.<sup>37</sup> Indeed it was William, above Alexander, who Pickering came to visit. "He was surprised to see me but gave me a most cordial reception," Pickering writes.<sup>38</sup> The two had "become acquainted at Philadelphia" almost a decade earlier.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Holland, "Alexander and William Sharp Macleay," 19.

<sup>32</sup> Holland, "Alexander and William Sharp Macleay," 18.

<sup>33</sup> Holland, "Alexander and William Sharp Macleay," 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Australians: a Historical Library, Australians 1838*, ed. Alan Atkinson and Marian Avelin (New South Wales: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987), 332.

<sup>35</sup> A letter of Pickering's from 1833 shows clearly just how costly this "hobby" was: Charles Pickering, Charles Pickering and John Torrey Correspondence (1833-1836), 1833, Biodiversity Heritage Library.

<sup>36</sup> William Sharp Macleay, Letter to Frederick William Hope, 1 July 1839, Hope Library, Oxford.

<sup>37</sup> "Macleay, William Sharp (1792–1865)," Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macleay-william-sharp-2415/text3201>.

<sup>38</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>39</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

A record of this meeting can be found in one of William Macleay's tracts on entomology: "in June 1830" while "in company with Dr Pickering and Mr. Titian Peale" he'd walked along the Delaware in a search for a species of beetles "never found except flying... over the sand which ... lines the banks of that noble river."<sup>40</sup>

Pickering was not the first scientific traveller to arrive at the Macleay's door, nor would he be the last. John Gould, who Pickering would seek out in the Hunter Valley, preceded him, while ornithologist and artist William Swainson, botanist James Dalton Hooker, biologist Thomas Henry Huxley and many others would follow.<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Bay House was the locus of William and his father's work – with "plenty of people willing to collect anything and everything for cash" on their behalf.<sup>42</sup> The Macleays and their collection drew naturalists like *Lepidoptera* to a flame - it acted as a sort of naturalist's caravansary – a hub where the visiting scientist could get his botanical or zoological bearings, a lead on possible contacts, letters from London's scientific organisations and a pleasant view across the bay. As Charles Pickering put it: "assistance in our various pursuits."<sup>43</sup>

That afternoon he was accompanied by at least one of his scientific colleagues: Peale, always sociable, knew William, and went away from their meeting with a case of butterflies for the Expedition. Dana also soon fell into their company. <sup>44</sup> Yet the Macleay's assistance went beyond their scientific connections, and it was likely through them that Pickering met Alfred Ward Stephens and William McGarvie.

But a slight portion of the land is adapted for agricultural purposes

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<sup>40</sup> William Sharp Macleay, *Illustrations of the Annulosa of South Africa; being a portion of the objects of natural history chiefly collected during an expedition into the interior of South Africa, under the direction of Dr. Andrew Smith, in the years 1834, 1835 and 1836 fitted out by 'the Cape of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa'* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1838), 17.

<sup>41</sup> J.F.M Clark, "Macleay, William Sharp (1792-1865)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Robyn Stacey and Ashley Hay, *Museum: the Macleays, Their Collections and the Search for Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>43</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Mozley, "James Dwight Dana in New South Wales, 1839-1840," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 97, no. 1-6 (1963-1964): 186.

Stephens and McGarvie were journalists come settlers. Both men had served as editors for *The Sydney Herald* which was run on a printing press they imported in 1831.<sup>45</sup> While McGarvie quit soon after, Stephens operated as the guiding force of the paper for close to a decade. This gave him a “strong influence on colonial affairs” before he stepped down in 1839 to become a director of the Hunter River Navigation Co.<sup>46</sup> This move was motivated by an investment he had acquired from John Bingle, rebellious magistrate and settler, in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales.<sup>47</sup> The name of that property was Puen Buen.

Only a few days in New South Wales, Charles Pickering was eager to leave the confines of Port Jackson. He and Dana had managed to secure a boat from the *Vincennes* to land opposite the town for drawing and collecting, but with the Squadron destined to remain in port and the crew otherwise occupied, when Stephens offered “a general invitation... to his estate” both men jumped at the chance.”<sup>48</sup> The two naturalists boarded a steamship bound North. Steam technology, still in relative infancy, drove their boat across rough open sea between Sydney and Newcastle, and Pickering found it “remarkable that they should hitherto have escaped without incident” given the treachery of the journey. Just as trains would feed expansion in the American West, steamboats up the Hunter River meant that settlement on what was once a frontier proceeded with increasing rapidity.<sup>49</sup>

The growth of steam would also mean the growth of Newcastle, but when Pickering reached the town on 3 December 1839 it was “a small village, say of 100 houses.”<sup>50</sup> The coal cut from that town’s mines fed the furnaces of the steamboats that fed the colony.<sup>51</sup> The Hunter Valley was a centre for agriculture - farming produce which flowed down the New England Highway or bobbed along the coast into Port Jackson’s open mouths. John Bingle, who proclaimed himself a “pioneer” of agricultural settlement was, by then, beginning to write memoirs.<sup>52</sup> Alfred Ward Stephens, like many members of what Pickering described as an

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<sup>45</sup> Frederick Stokes was the third partner in the founding of the *Herald*: “McGarvie, William (1810–1841),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcgarvie-william-2400/text3171>.

<sup>46</sup> “Stephens, Alfred Ward (1804–1852),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stephens-alfred-ward-2695/text3777>.

<sup>47</sup> W. Allan Wood, *Dawn in the Valley: The Story of Settlement in the Hunter River Valley to 1833* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1972), 236; “Bingle, John (1796–1882),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bingle-john-1780/text2001>.

<sup>48</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>49</sup> Wood, *Dawn in the Valley*, 256; Tanya Evans, *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins in Colonial New South Wales* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>50</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>51</sup> Pickering found a place in future Australian mining and expansion endeavours, see: Sarah Comyn, “A vast field in itself: Acclimatisation, Phrenology and Salvage Ethnography in the Goldfields Mechanics’ Institutes,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 23, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2022.0002>.

<sup>52</sup> John Bingle, *Reminiscences of By-Gone Days Squatting, 1870*, Handstitched manuscript notebook, A130/2, State Library of New South Wales.

“aristocracy ... as exclusive ... as you will find ... perhaps anywhere,” saw the acquisition of land in regions like the Hunter as a sure bet for financial stability.<sup>53</sup>

“The scenery here even reminded me of North America” Pickering recalls of the Hunter, and Stephens’ situation was not all that dissimilar from the property upon which he was born, on a wide river’s bend, or the banks of the Philadelphia, where he and William Macleay hunted beetles.<sup>54</sup> “Saw here some natives,” he writes of Newcastle, so landscape déjà vu may have even extended to recollections of American Indians in his grandfather’s courtyard. This simulacrum of the United States came as a surprise, “considering the general reputation of the Country.” As in Patagonia, flashes of recognition haunted Pickering’s travels.

Newcastle, described by Judith Wright as a “second-sentence hell,” was the gateway to the Hunter Valley. Beyond the “depths of forest” edging the coast lay plains, kept open by Wonnarua and Geawegal people who fed the valley’s alluvial soils with beds of ash.<sup>55</sup> The Aboriginal population of the Hunter Valley was, according to one account, down to single digits by the 1840s yet the plains remained, now close cropped by thousands of sheep.<sup>56</sup> The preceding decades had been characterised as being in a “state of warfare,” ongoing conflict between Aboriginal groups and white settlers moving into the Valley in ever greater numbers.<sup>57</sup> By the mid-1830s this warfare had ceased and the tendrils of colonial control in the region were increasingly solid.

“Our party proved too numerous for the arrangements which had been made, and it was necessary to divide,” Pickering writes of his arrival at Green Hills.<sup>58</sup> The numbers he accompanied is important to note – he mentions other men, a Captain Kennedy for one, with the implication that they travelled in quite a group. These were men who, despite the dangers of a road stalked by bushrangers long after they departed, considered the Hunter Valley a viable prospect for business. This was in spite of the economic downturn that accompanied drought and forced settlers to boil down cattle and sheep to sell as tallow.<sup>59</sup>

Pickering and Dana rode with McGarvie through Maitland and on to Patrick’s Plains, where they stayed the night. The next day they combined riding and steamship travel to Aberdeen via Muswellbrook, the latter boasting a newly founded barracks for the Mounted

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<sup>53</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>54</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>55</sup> Judith Wright, *The Cry for the Dead* (Perth: Curtin, 2004), 31.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Blyton, Deidre Heitmeyer, and John Maynard, *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley* (Muswellbrook: Hunter Valley Printing, 2004), 27.

<sup>57</sup> Blyton, Heitmeyer, and Maynard, *Wannin Thanbarran*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>59</sup> Inc. Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Historical Society, *From Muscle Brook to Muswellbrook: A Brief Chronological History* (Muswellbrook: Hunter Valley Printing Company, 1991), 8.

Police and the former the foundations of a new steam mill.<sup>60</sup> They arrived in Puen Buen the next day, 5 December 1839, and though “worn out” from the travel they immediately began “collecting.”<sup>61</sup> The estate at Puen Buen was large and well equipped for guests. When it was run by John Bingle it had housed not just his family and, the convict labour upon which it operated, but also a police constable and even a makeshift courthouse.<sup>62</sup>

“Birds were more numerous here than we had yet seen them, especially the Parrot Tribe, whose rapid flight among the tree tops reminded me of that of our wild pigeon” Pickering recalls of the arrival at Puen Buen.<sup>63</sup> He had been unimpressed by their first meeting with the Kookaburra, that “bird so absurdly termed the ‘Laughing Jackass’” whose laughter “though loud and harsh” was not “so remarkable as is sometimes presented.”<sup>64</sup> While other naturalists had been struck by the novelty of Australian wildlife, he seems unfazed, fitting them, like the river, into the familiar. As much of note as the “Laughing Jackass” was “sandwiches” – left in quotation marks conveying an almost equal novelty.<sup>65</sup> Such rations, consumed on the road, were one of many technologies that made comfort more easily transportable.

Birds form the focus of Pickering’s descriptions of Australian wildlife, and his lack of wonderment at Australian fauna has perhaps as much to do with the changing natural environment of the Hunter Valley as ease in application of a North American schema. The kangaroo is notable by its absence, an absence indicative of the effects of the preceding decades of agriculture in the Hunter.<sup>66</sup> This is a connection he makes later - “it is singular that [Aboriginal people] ... find most fault with, we understand, the destruction of the kangaroo, and as the white man has done this, think they have some claim occasionally on the ‘white man’s kangaroo’ (a sheep or bullock).”<sup>67</sup> Climbing the ridges above Puen Buen, Pickering was presented with a vista altered irrevocably by mere decades of white settlement.

This formed an easy continuity with his preceding experiences – from the movement of coconuts throughout the Pacific to deforestation in Brazil, humanity’s effect upon the environment were ubiquitous. In Australia “but a slight portion of the land is adapted for agricultural purposes,” he notes, and the Hunter Valley showed that those who could make such changes – did.<sup>68</sup> As he understood it, a lack of Aboriginal agriculture in Australia was by no

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<sup>60</sup> Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Historical Society, *Brief History*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>62</sup> Wood, *Dawn in the Valley*, 237.

<sup>63</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>64</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>65</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>66</sup> His journals contain no descriptions of the kangaroo and given that he describes even brief meetings with other Australian fauna (for example a small lizard) it is possible that he did not see one in person.

<sup>67</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>68</sup> Pickering’s conceptualisation of Aboriginal peoples as disinclined to cultivation and alteration of the environment is problematised by a historical conversation too broad to address here, see: M. S. Fletcher, T. Hall, and A. N.

means due to a lack of capacity, rather it was because, he says, “their continent does not possess naturally a single excellent plant of the slightest importance.”<sup>69</sup>

## Columbus and his consequences

If the agriculture of the Hunter Valley confirmed for Pickering the interrelationship between humanity and environment – a trend which so fascinated him that it would form the topic of his magnum opus, *Chronological History of Plants: Man’s Record of His Own Existence* – it also created a sense of the specificity of the European, white, relationship to the same.<sup>70</sup> While the white race had previously been mostly confined to Europe, Columbus’s “discovery and its consequences” had “provided a remarkable change in its destinies.”<sup>71</sup> This change of destinies meant that “at the present moment” it was near impossible to “find a point of the Globe that can be reached by a vessel, where a white is not to be found.”<sup>72</sup>

And wherever a white was to be found, “the Negro are alas to be met with,” having been “scattered... through the agency of the whites.”<sup>73</sup> The white race, as Pickering remarks in a margin, being “by no means distinguished beyond other races for its industry, and or powers of endurance” owed this change in fortunes to an aptitude at plunder.<sup>74</sup> Though the Hunter and “immense regions of the Globe” were “rendered habitable” by the horse, sheep, bullock, it was not the white race who “conquered” those wild beasts.<sup>75</sup> The domestication of animals was one of many thefts - a clear example of his assertion that the white race had “never attained civilisation by its own means.”<sup>76</sup> While coconut trees in the South Seas showed the capacity of humanity to change nature, the Hunter Valley illustrated the effects of this capacity combined with the larcenous quality of the white race – a “remarkable change in destinies” for all those they met, and he met.

## The face of the globe

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Alexandra, “The loss of an indigenous constructed landscape following British invasion of Australia: An insight into the deep human imprint on the Australian landscape,” *Ambio* 50, no. 1 (Jan 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-020-01339-3>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/32378038>. Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth : How Aborigines made Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>70</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*.

<sup>71</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>72</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>73</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>74</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>75</sup> For they lacked “the patience and gentleness.” Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>76</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

It is important to note the scale of these observations – his mention of Columbus is only a glimpse of the scope brought into his narrative. While now spread across the globe, the white race had its origins not in the “frosty Caucasus” as Blumenbach would tell it, but in the tropics.<sup>77</sup> “Man,” he says, “is essentially tropical in his constitutions” and “the moderns seem to have lost sight of the motto ‘Africa mater gentium’ [Africa is the mother of all peoples].”<sup>78</sup> This assertion, prescient as it is, is interesting beyond its probable accuracy. As Kirsty Douglas asserts: “a landscape is an expanse of countryside (in time) used as a vehicle for representations” and Pickering’s conclusion shows just how far that vehicle could travel.<sup>79</sup>

Pickering did not ride alone, and his reflections bear the mark of his travelling companion – James Dwight Dana. Dana was, to use Bernard C. Shär’s phrase, a fellow “time traveller.”<sup>80</sup> Shär argues that scientists operating after Darwin found that: “travelling through space” was akin to “travelling through time” for “the theory of evolution is not only a theory about the development of life in time. It is also a theory about the historical distribution of life in geographical space.”<sup>81</sup> This assertion clearly applies to the objects of Shär’s study, men who “felt they were studying living versions of plants, animals and peoples which had survived in a kind of frozen time-sphere from the earliest of times.”<sup>82</sup> It also applies to Dana and Pickering, whose interest in both time and geographic distribution had them thinking in terms of what historians would now fashionably call “deep time.”

Part of this thinking relates to Dana’s “irrepressible instinct for generalisation,” a description which could equally be applied to Charles Pickering.<sup>83</sup> It was an instinct fostered by the multiple roles he was pushed into by the Expedition’s demands. Combining studies of zoophytes and geology he formed a “holistic” idea of island formation that would be used extensively by Darwin.<sup>84</sup> In Australia Dana set out to gratify “the curiosity that so strange a land may well excite” and his investigations there drew on a diverse set of skills, both scientific and

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Robinson, *The Lost White Tribe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 78; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>78</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>79</sup> Kirsty Douglas, “Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Landscape, Heritage and the uses of the Deep Past in Australia 1830-2003” (PhD Diss. Australian National University, 2004), 2.

<sup>80</sup> Bernhard C. Shär, “Earth Scientists as Time Travelers and Agents of Colonial Conquest. Swiss Naturalists in the Dutch East Indies,” *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 40, Special Issue: Climate and Beyond. The Production of Knowledge about the Earth as a Signpost of Social Change, no. 2 (2015): 77, <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.40.2015.2.67-80>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24583164>.

<sup>81</sup> Shär, “Earth Scientists as Time Travelers and Agents of Colonial Conquest. Swiss Naturalists in the Dutch East Indies,” 77; Shär, “Earth Scientists as Time Travelers and Agents of Colonial Conquest. Swiss Naturalists in the Dutch East Indies,” 69.

<sup>82</sup> Shär, “Earth Scientists as Time Travelers and Agents of Colonial Conquest. Swiss Naturalists in the Dutch East Indies,” 77.

<sup>83</sup> Dott, “James Dwight Dana’s Old Tectonics – Global Contraction Under Divine Direction,” 287.

<sup>84</sup> For more on this see Chapter 2, also: Igler, “Patriotic Geology,” 23-49.

practical.<sup>85</sup> This diversity, which saw him described as the “foremost American geologist of his time,” bore the legacy of the Expedition’s cognitive ecology.<sup>86</sup>

“Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> – walked with Mr. Dana to the top of the ridge West of the house,” begins one entry in Pickering’s journal.<sup>87</sup> Having climbed the ridge they descended into a deep ravine, more lush with vegetation than the surrounding landscape, where the two men gathered “interesting plants.”<sup>88</sup> The rock of the ravine “a conglomerate with sea washed pebbles (much intersected with basalt)” and it formed “natural excavations” – caves which, Pickering observes, “must form exceedingly convenient retreats for sheep in wet weather.”<sup>89</sup> In that ravine, Dana and Pickering combined different activities – botanical collection, geological observation, hiking and agriculture. The two scientists shared knowledge and skills across multiple disciplines, relying on each other with the landscape for thought.

They collected fossils shovelled to the surface in pursuit of the coal that powered paddle steamers up and down the coast.<sup>90</sup> They used a station built with convict labour as a base for botanical forays. They examined collections in the prime real estate of Elizabeth Bay, in houses built on an Aboriginal settlement displaced a short time before.<sup>91</sup> The geological strata that would spark Dana’s hugely influential work on minerology were handy shelters for the “white man’s kangaroo.” Pickering’s reflections cannot be extricated from their relationship to that colonial landscape. His time travel - thinking on human origins and race, was tied up in a changed and changing landscape, tied up with the work of his geologist colleague and their settler guides, tied up even with the bubbling vats of tallow, rendering sheep’s fat to London lamplight, the splash of a steamboat’s wake on river’s edge.

This landscape was thus more than a vehicle for representation, it was part of the cyborg that was Charles Pickering. An exogram writ large – an artefact of cognition, transformed and transforming.<sup>92</sup> In his introduction to *Chronological History of Plants* he begins: “in the distribution of species over the Globe, the order of nature has been obscured through the interference of man.”<sup>93</sup> This statement of primordality shows clearly his conception of travel as time travel. It continues: “he has transported animals and plants to countries where they were previously unknown; extirpating the forest and cultivating the soil, until at length the face of the

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<sup>85</sup> James Dwight Dana, *Geology*, vol. 10, United States Exploring Expedition during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 under the command of Charles Wilkes, (Philadelphia, PA: Dwight G. Putnam, 1849), 458.

<sup>86</sup> Tom Spencer, “James Dwight Dana (1813-1895),” in *Encyclopedia of Modern Coral Reefs*, ed. David Hopley (AA Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 298.

<sup>87</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>88</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>89</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>90</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>91</sup> Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 527.

<sup>92</sup> Hutchins, “Cognitive Ecology,” 705-15.

<sup>93</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, 1.

globe itself is changed.”<sup>94</sup> In New South Wales, as before, Charles Pickering looked upon that changed face, and changed in turn.

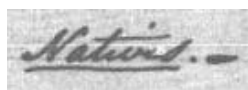
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<sup>94</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, 1.

## Club-House

Still recovering from his illness, Charles Pickering took up residence at the Australian Club on his return to Sydney. The Club was another Macleay connection, with Alexander one of its founding members and president at the time.<sup>95</sup> Luxuriously appointed, it was to commerce what the Macleay's residence was to science. Sitting on its shaded verandas, looking between buildings to the botanical gardens and the bay beyond, Pickering would have heard news of commercial adventures throughout the British Empire, "surrounded by friends" his "situation in every respect... as comfortable as home."<sup>96</sup>

It was here that Pickering wrote his first real treatise on race. He was "confined almost entirely" to his room in the club house from 26 December 1839 to 8 February 1840 and used some of his time "filling up" his journal.<sup>97</sup> This writing, punctuated by "visits to the Museum," Botanical Garden and to Mr. McLeay's [sic] residence," began following the same formula as previous entries. This formula was systematic – an account first of geography, then inhabitants, then botany, or some arrangement thereof. Yet in Sydney he seems to have run away with himself.



, it begins.<sup>98</sup>

"In my walk about the streets I kept a sharp look out for a native, and at last came upon one suddenly, so that my earnest gaze attracted his attention. We both however kept on."<sup>99</sup> This encounter, likely within hours of his arrival in Sydney, was "sufficient to dispel all ambiguity" and offer the clarity that "these people have nothing to do with any of the African Tribes."<sup>100</sup> His realisation bounds onto the page like a hound after a hare, but it bears the marks of weeks, months, lifetimes of thought. Other realisations follow. Ensconced as thoroughly in the club as he was on the *Vincennes*, Pickering wrote what reads like the first draft of *The Races of Man*, beginning his narration with an awkward and brief meeting with an Aboriginal man walking along a dusty Sydney road.

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<sup>95</sup> *Australians: a Historical Library, Australians 1838*, 236-37.

<sup>96</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>97</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>98</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>99</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>100</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

“Having now had an opportunity of personally inspecting each of the five races of mankind, which even at the present day falls to the lot of but a few naturalists” he writes, “I feel pretty well assured there are only five.”<sup>101</sup> This “inspection” had been an activity, but not preoccupation, of the year previous, but his discussion of race takes on a marked change from this point on. Whereas before it was confined to margins, fleeting mentions, by 1840 race spreads across his journals like spilled ink, blotting out the language of “civilised” and “savage” as it goes.<sup>102</sup>

His writing -looping, precise, almost feverish- bears the marks of innumerate revisions. It exemplifies “writing as thinking.”<sup>103</sup> Thinking in time and place, in that city, with those “gentlemen,” propelled by a dissonance whose tremors almost ripple from the page.

Despite the assertion that “few naturalists” had opportunities to observe such diversity, any person walking from Fort Macquarie, where Wilkes set up his observation equipment, along Circular Quay, up Pitt or George streets, would have been surrounded by it.<sup>104</sup> “It was a curious, but not uncommon sight” Charles Erskine recalls, aghast, “to see a big, burly, thick-lipped Negro, black as coal, walking on the street arm and arm, with a beautiful English lady.”<sup>105</sup> “Sheika Briarham, a lascar, was charged before Capt. Innes, at the police office on Thursday” for drunkenness, *The Australian* reports with the relish it usually adopted when mentioning inebriation.<sup>106</sup> “Briarham” upon being informed that “next time he comes here we will send him to gaol,” responded “‘Salaam g cum amalikaam’ or something like it and retired.”<sup>107</sup> As Pickering recounts - “the differences in race is familiarly known in New South Wales, though writers at a distance still continue to dispute about it.”<sup>108</sup>

“The singular weapon, the ‘Boomerang’ is entirely unique, and its performance a long time doubted by ‘The Professors’” he chides.<sup>109</sup> This rebuke, reminiscent of the abrupt departure from the American Philosophical Society, is an appeal to his authority as a hands-on observer.

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<sup>101</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>102</sup> A comparison of a journal transcription confirms this, with incidences of the word “race” increasing dramatically with time, while “savage” and “civilised” decrease steadily.

<sup>103</sup> David McCulloch, “Interview with NEH chairman Bruce Cole” in *Humanities*, 23:4 (2002).

<sup>104</sup> The presence of Aboriginal people in the colony is discussed at length in: Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*. Chinese migration to Australia was to grow in the 1840s after the end of transportation, but by this point it had already begun: Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Golden Scissors: the Story of Sydney's Chinese* (Ultimo: Halstead Press, 2007).

<sup>105</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 97.

<sup>106</sup> “Sheika Briarham” is probably a misspelling of “Sheikh Ibrahim,” the former being an honorific and sometimes name, the latter a common name. “Sheikha” is the feminine version of “Sheikh.” “Inherent Urbanity,” *The Australian* 14 December 1839, 2.

<sup>107</sup> “Asalaamu alaykum:” “peace be upon you,” a Muslim greeting: “Inherent Urbanity,” 2.

<sup>108</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>109</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

Yet it is accompanied with an acknowledgement that so many of his observations are not his own. This is sometimes stated directly: “their languages, which I understand from Mr. Hale,” “no resident has any difficulty in distinguishing an Australian from a Negro, and the ready reply is ‘that they have hair not wool’” and at other times simply implied: “children placed at school with whites, have shown intellectual powers fully equal.”<sup>110</sup> The latter observation is sourced from accounts of Missionary activities, specifically a mission at Wellington Valley, and another at Lake Macquarie.<sup>111</sup> In but a few pages he mentions Labillardière, Mitchell, Cook, Flinders, Pèron and Lesueur, sometimes in support and sometimes in refutation.<sup>112</sup>

His influences go from broad appeals to the shared knowledge of the colony to citations of specific naturalists. Harry Liebersohn points out that naturalist’s “conceptions took shape not at any one point on the globe, but at multiple nodes,” and the Australian Club is a perfect example of one such node.<sup>113</sup> Reclining there, he had accesses to “various notices,” particularly the many newspapers published in Sydney, including one founded by his friend, Alfred Ward Stephens.<sup>114</sup> These papers bore extensive commentary upon both issues specific to Sydney but also the Empire at large. *The Australian*, for example, ran a series of articles titled “Important Information relative to New Zealand,” something that Pickering, who was bound there next, would have relished.<sup>115</sup>

## Such a bloodless conquest

What stands out from these papers, however, is the dissonance so apparent in the copy of *The Australian* released two days after the Squadron departed Sydney. This edition has a number of articles which would have interested Pickering, first among them being “a portion of a ‘report upon the Aborigines’ ... by G.F. Moore, Esq.”<sup>116</sup> The “G.F.” in question is George Fletcher, an Irish

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<sup>110</sup> His underline. Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>111</sup> This is not mentioned by Pickering but is implied by Hale in a section from his notebook published in: Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 108. The mission at Wellington Valley was run by the “Church Missionary Society:” Hilary M. Carey and David A. Roberts, “The Wellington Valley Project. Letters and Journals relating to the Church Missionary Society Mission to Wellington Valley, NSW, 1830-45. A Critical Electronic Edition,” (2002).

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/the-wellington-valley-project>. while mission at Lake Macquarie was run by the LMS: Anna Johnston, *The Paper War: Morality, Print Culture, and Power in Colonial New South Wales* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Press, 2011), 18.

<sup>112</sup> Labillardière – a naturalist who accompanied Bruni d’Entrecasteaux in search of La Pérouse and published an account of that voyage. Thomas Mitchell – surveyor of New South Wales, published an account of his journey beyond the Blue Mountains. James Cook, Mathew Flinders, both barely needing introduction. Pèron and Lesueur - French naturalists on the voyage of Nicolas Baudin, the latter an artist.

<sup>113</sup> Liebersohn, *The Traveller’s World*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>115</sup> “Important Information,” *The Australian* 10 December 1839, 2.

<sup>116</sup> “We Were Present,” *The Australian* 28 December 1839, 2.

lawyer who ended up working as commissioner of works, roads and bridges in Western Australia.<sup>117</sup> Moore fed many accounts to reporters during his time in the West, accounts “often filled with presumptions about native behaviour.”<sup>118</sup> This account was no exception and *The Australian* published it for it “forcibly depicts the native character.”<sup>119</sup>

Moore’s description paints Aboriginal peoples as “shrewd and intelligent,” aloofly “contemplating the drudgery of the man who despises them.”<sup>120</sup> The intent of the article is only partly ethnographic description: it is primarily an argument for white benevolence. “Some reparation must be made,” Moore writes, “their lands have been sold without reference to their [Aboriginal peoples’] existence” and so “should not some expense be incurred for their advancement in civilisation?”<sup>121</sup> As sentiment it echoes that of Charles Pickering’s grandfather, and Moore was secretary of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society founded at the Swan River settlement.<sup>122</sup> Like Timothy Pickering, Moore was a settler on land, “sold without reference,” yet he asks “by whom should the burden” of this civilising mission “be borne?”<sup>123</sup> The answer, he concludes, was “the British nation, which has acquired so vast a territory by such a bloodless conquest, and upon such easy terms.”<sup>124</sup>

The invocation of a “bloodless conquest” finds place between two articles, one from Western Australia, the other the Murray River. The former describes a punitive response to the spearing of a white man, wherein “six parties headed by as many gentlemen,” “spread among the neighbouring tribes a wholesome terror.”<sup>125</sup> The latter recounts an ongoing conflict between drovers and Aboriginal people, with the first’s efforts to force their way up the Murray River resisted - leading to the death of one white man and the shooting of an unspecified number of Aboriginal people.<sup>126</sup> Pickering would not have to look far for similar accounts, the same paper, a day before his return from the Hunter: “it appears that the dreadful punishment of the blacks by the settlers is an affair of so old a standing” as to make reports of it difficult to verify.<sup>127</sup>

The contradictions between these two descriptions of colonial invasion is glaring, and they are repeated in Pickering’s writing. “These poor creatures are getting rapidly exterminated

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<sup>117</sup> “Moore, George Fletcher (1798–1886),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moore-george-fletcher-2474/text3321>.

<sup>118</sup> Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George’s Sound*, 165.

<sup>119</sup> “Important Information.”

<sup>120</sup> “We Were Present.”

<sup>121</sup> “We Were Present.”

<sup>122</sup> Chate, “Moore, George Fletcher (1798–1886).”

<sup>123</sup> “We Were Present.”

<sup>124</sup> It could be taken that by “bloodless” he means “for the British” but in listing the crimes against them, killing goes unmentioned: “We Were Present.”

<sup>125</sup> “We Learn that the Aborigines,” *The Australian* 28 December 1839, 2.

<sup>126</sup> “The Natives on the Murray,” *The Australian* 28 December 1839, 2.

<sup>127</sup> “Mr. Gisborne,” *The Australian* 17 December 1839, 3.

by the whites," he says, "it is true they may have sometimes committed a murder, but in general they are far more sinned against than sinning," but alternatively "the native offered no resistance to the new comers."<sup>128</sup> "If he has been sometimes troublesome, his wrong has been greater, aye! even in this age of the world, than is recorded in the past."<sup>129</sup> In the margins of his journal he asserts that Aboriginal peoples are "not known to reap or to sow" however "in practices and pursuits has displayed the most singular ingenuity" while "the white man placed in the same circumstances, could hardly have maintained his existence."<sup>130</sup> Moore echoes: "what a singular race of beings! ... able to obtain a ready livelihood where a civilised being might be starved."<sup>131</sup>

Overall, Moore's high opinion of Aboriginal people, and low opinion of white settlers like himself, never reaches Charles Pickering's intensity. In another margin note Pickering reflects: "one feature in its character can hardly fail to strike those who read much of other races... [the white race] has always been a race of plunderers."<sup>132</sup> Contemptuously: "though claiming to have attained a higher degree of civilisation, this race has never erected works so gigantic or enduring as either of the two first mentioned."<sup>133</sup> In Australia, he says, "Britain resolved to let loose her hell hounds, to found a centre of dishumanising[sic] principles" for generally "it has always been fond of destruction."<sup>134</sup> "The prints we usually see, of [Aboriginal] people, are for the most part caricatures," he concludes, "rather calculated to deceive."<sup>135</sup>

"We marked one individual," he offers, "a perfect model of symmetry, strength of activity and whose head might be compared with some of the busts of the Grecian philosophers."<sup>136</sup> The invocation of Grecian features is from the "noble savage" playbook, and such comparisons were made by Cook and Banks before him.<sup>137</sup> It is a technique of condemnation invoking a "paradigm of fallenness" - Christian civilisation's straying from pure beginnings.<sup>138</sup> Pickering holds up the claims of "higher civilisation" and points to contradictions, not just in claims about self, but in claims about others. The work of caricature seems to sum up all those strains at once and amount to a bitter indictment of the race to which Pickering viewed himself a part.

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<sup>128</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>129</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>130</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>131</sup> "We Were Present."

<sup>132</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>133</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>134</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>135</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>136</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>137</sup> Though with reference to the Tahitians: Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2 ed. (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1984), 42. An edited version of Cook's account applied the same theme to Aboriginal people, "draping these figures with classical allusions:" Nugent, *Captain Cook was Here*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> Gerald Gillespie, "In Search of the Noble Savage: Some Romantic Cases," *Neohelicon* 29, no. 1 (September, 2002): 89; Gillespie, "In Search of the Noble Savage: Some Romantic Cases."

Writing of Pickering's condemnation, Joyce speculates about the extent to which it applied to his countrymen.<sup>139</sup> In a letter to Mary, penned a few months later, there is a clear answer: "our Government of People are in a fair way to receive a lesson" for "the ancient curse seems to stick to man in all ages; 'they that smite by the sword, shall perish by the sword.'" <sup>140</sup> The question which demands asking therefore is not "how much such judgements applied to his countrymen" but rather what portion of it rested upon him. The aforementioned line describing Britain's "hell hounds" was effaced later by a line of his pen, along with "there is there now a seat of arts and intelligence, too short all that philanthropy looked for." <sup>141</sup> How did Pickering deal with the contradictions of a settler colony, built on a far from bloodless conquest, yet filled with friends? Furthermore what were the implications for an expedition of both "arts and intelligence" but increasingly reliant upon "the sword?"

## Lack of religious feeling

While Pickering and Moore lauded the intelligence of Aboriginal peoples, Horatio Hale matched them with disdain. Hale's impression of Aboriginal character was of "in plain terms, an almost brutal stupidity."<sup>142</sup> This conviction appears to stem in part from missionary accounts, who recounted to Hale tales of "childish imbecility" and, coincidentally, a "lack of religious feeling."<sup>143</sup> Yet as Foster argues the philologist also used such descriptions to "shroud his reliance" upon Aboriginal people who were reluctant to act as guides.<sup>144</sup> Pickering's invocation of impending biblical justice in his letter to Mary show clearly where the two men diverged. Hale's account is one of ignorant savagery, a race so debased that stupidity and avarice cuts them off from even beginning to understand the gospel. Pickering's, conversely, is of a race denied civilisation and perhaps the gospel, by the "perpetual infamy" of whites.<sup>145</sup>

On 1 December 1839, the Missionary Brig *Camden* arrived in Port Jackson, on the heels of the squadron. It bore with it news of the deaths of two missionaries – James Harris and John Williams. Tasked with carrying out missionary work with "fervent zeal" and a "thorough knowledge of native character" they were killed on the island of Erromango, in what is now

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<sup>139</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 78.

<sup>140</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering, 8 August 1840, Timothy Pickering Papers, Reel 67, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>141</sup> Gillespie, "In Search of the Noble Savage: Some Romantic Cases," 89.

<sup>142</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 108.

<sup>143</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 108-10.

<sup>144</sup> Eleanor Foster, "Objects in Circulation: Encounters, Exchanges, and Engagements with Aboriginal Material Culture in the Hunter Valley, 1826-1839 (Unpublished Honours Thesis)" (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 2021), 107.

<sup>145</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

Vanuatu, while gathering shells.<sup>146</sup> The Squadron had met Williams while at Upolu, and his death is recorded by many of the accounts from the Expedition. Williams' "thorough knowledge" was apparently insufficient to judge the mood in Vanuatu, and Wilkes records his sadness at the missionary's stubborn assertion that the propagation of the gospel was more effective when unaccompanied by firearms.

News of missionary deaths were an important matter for discussion at the meeting of the London Missionary Society, held in Sydney, late December 1839. This meeting was attended by Alexander Macleay and almost certainly James Dwight Dana. Dana, some years prior to his joining the Expedition, had been bit by evangelical zeal, and took advantage of his time in Sydney to discuss the Word with a new batch of coreligionists. Yet their discussions were not confined to eschatology and exegesis. On 16 December the Reverend W.B. Clarke wrote: "I wish I could meet with Mr. Dana" and his wish came true the following day.<sup>147</sup> Clarke was a geologist as well as a reverend, and the two became fast friends and later correspondents. Their exchange of letters would shape Australian geology, and have a great influence on the work of Charles Darwin.<sup>148</sup>

Their friendship was in part cemented by their travels together in New South Wales, for after Pickering and Dana returned from the Hunter Valley, the latter spent part of the following months with Clarke - visiting the Illawarra, returning to the Hunter and even providing a geological description of the Kiama Blowhole. This work included attendance at a gathering of Aboriginal peoples from across New South Wales where they found themselves, as Clarke describes it "among at least one hundred native savages in a state of perfect nudity and looking most unearthly."<sup>149</sup> Clarke and Dana, scientists, religious men and settler colonials, shared many qualities, and their friendship reflects a common thread of interrelationships in both the United States and Australia.

These threads were thickly bound together, and they find expression in Pickering's writing as much as Hale's. The London Missionary Society, an integral part of a wave of "benevolent" programs targeting Aboriginal peoples, including, amongst others, the Aborigines' Protection Society, was a primary source of Pickering's understanding of the character and "race" of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>150</sup> Those understandings in turn were partly shaped by the contribution of the targets of those same missionary societies – converts who simultaneously

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<sup>146</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 164.

<sup>147</sup> William B. Clarke in Mozley, "James Dwight Dana in New South Wales, 1839-1840," 186.

<sup>148</sup> Julian Holland, "Diminishing Circles: W.S. Macleay in Sydney, 1839-1865," *Historical Records of Australian Science* 11, no. 2 (December, 1996): 130.

<sup>149</sup> W.B. Clarke in Mozley, "James Dwight Dana in New South Wales, 1839-1840," 187.

<sup>150</sup> Kenny, *Nathanael Pepper*, 297.

acted as a confirmation of the work of missionaries but also as representatives of their own humanity. When the LMS met in Sydney that December, the same meeting which announced the death of two missionaries at the hands of South Sea Islanders, hosted a “native of one of the Samoa Islands.”<sup>151</sup>

This man, who goes unnamed, spoke through a translator. His speech, summarised by *The Sydney Herald*, is at times apparently directed at sectarian squabbles present in Sydney at the time. Wilkes refers to this fight in the *Narrative*: “all the religious sects of the British Islands have their representatives here” and, he reports, they “appear to be in continual war with those of the others.”<sup>152</sup> “When I go back to my native land, I will carry the glad tidings of what I have seen and heard,” the translator repeated to an attentive crowd, “for if I see the cause of God prosper here, I am sure it will prosper in my native island, but if it is otherwise here, it will be otherwise there. If the spring of the water is fresh, the whole is fresh, but if the spring be bitter, the whole is bitter.”<sup>153</sup> The assertion that the success of missionary activities in Samoa depended upon the coherence and fortitude of the society’s supporters in Sydney may have been a product of translation, or not.

The same is true of another important part of the speech, delivered when the “Chief” who was slated to speak fell ill.<sup>154</sup> “What gives me additional satisfaction is that in Samoa only the Chiefs speak, the common people are not allowed” he apparently testified, “yet here I am exalted among you.”<sup>155</sup> This proclamation of equality is important. The meeting was chaired by Alexander Macleay, and attended by, amongst others, Captain Hudson of the Expedition. The latter two men were active agents in the expansion of British and American Empire in the Pacific and Australia. This unnamed man’s invocation of equality, which is a clear endorsement of the Christian doctrine of *ab uno sanguine* – of one blood, could easily be understood as a rebuke to those same men, intended by its speaker, or inferred by its listeners.<sup>156</sup>

Rebuke or not, it evokes the capacity of Indigenous peoples as citizens and subjects, and this is something conjured by Captain Hudson at that same meeting. Hudson reported to those who doubted the success of missionary work in Samoa that in schools he had “examined the children in arithmetic, and found they perfectly understood what they were about, while their writing was decidedly better than that of children of the same age amongst ourselves.”<sup>157</sup> This is a mirror of Pickering’s words, drawing on another missionary account, that Aboriginal “children

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<sup>151</sup> “London Missionary Society,” *The Sydney Herald* 23 December 1839, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative* Vol 2, 2, 164..

<sup>153</sup> “London Missionary Society.”

<sup>154</sup> “We Were Present,” 2.

<sup>155</sup> “London Missionary Society,” 2.

<sup>156</sup> Kenny, *Nathanael Pepper*, 75.

<sup>157</sup> “London Missionary Society.”

placed at school with whites, have shown intellectually powers fully equal.”<sup>158</sup> It is no coincidence that the school, a place where citizens are made, was the focal point of assertions of Aboriginal and Islander humanity.<sup>159</sup>

Sectarian squabbles were not the only form of religious conflict in nineteenth-century Sydney. Missionaries on the edges of expanding colonial territory were often in conflict with settlers, whose attacks upon Aboriginal peoples were a clear impediment to missionary efforts.<sup>160</sup> Pickering’s argument that Aboriginal peoples were fully capable of attaining civilisation, and by implication Christianity, was shared with missionaries like Lancelot Threlkeld of the London Missionary Society, who was at that time engaged in a “paper war” about both the Empire more generally and the future of the Lake Macquarie Mission specifically.<sup>161</sup> It was an argument with implications both for the running of the colony and the funding of missions, which were worthless if Hale’s assertions of a race immune to the Word was correct.<sup>162</sup> Pickering and Hale both drew on missionary accounts in their understandings of race, and they reflected the differences between missionaries in doing so – subject to a mess of allegiances, to white settlers, unsaved natives and to God.

This feedback loop between missionary interests, ideas about race, and scientific treatises was far from unique to Charles Pickering. As Helen Gardner shows, British theorist James Cowles Pritchard drew on missionary accounts in his work, and missionaries in turn used his writing to support their own claims of the “psychic unity of man.”<sup>163</sup> Pritchard was almost equal to Pickering in his condemnation of European corruption. “Wherever Europeans have settled,” he writes, “their arrival has been the harbinger of extermination.”<sup>164</sup> Pritchard spent most of his life in the British Isles and thus never acquired the travelling credentials of Pickering, but nonetheless the two shared a concern for historical accounts of race - alongside the missionary connection and a disdain for white corruption.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> His underline. Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>159</sup> They were also a prime location for moral reform: David Turley, “Religion and Approaches to Reform: Boston Unitarians versus Evangelicals in the Context of the 1820s and 1830s,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 2 (2009): 187-209.

<sup>160</sup> Helen Gardner, “The Faculty of Faith: Evangelical missionaries, social anthropologists, and the claim for human unity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” in *Helen Gardner, “The Faculty of Faith: Evangelical missionaries, Social Anthropologists, and the Claim for Human Unity in the 19th Century,” in Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race, 1750-1940, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2008), 263.*; Kenny, *Nathanael Pepper*, 20.; John Ferry, “The Faculty of Faith: Evangelical missionaries, social anthropologists, and the claim for human unity in the 19th Century,” *Aboriginal History* 3, no. 1 (1979).

<sup>161</sup> Johnston, *The Paper War: Morality, Print Culture, and Power in Colonial New South Wales*; Gardner, “Faculty of Faith,” 264.

<sup>162</sup> Gardner, “Faculty of Faith,” 264.

<sup>163</sup> Gardner, “Faculty of Faith,” 265.

<sup>164</sup> James Cowles Pritchard, “On the Extinction of Human Races,” *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* 28 (1839-1840): 169.

<sup>165</sup> Hannah Franziska Augstein, “Linguistics and Politics in the Early 19th Century: James Cowles Prichard’s Moral Philology,” *History of European Ideas* 23, no. 1 (1997): 1-18, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-6599\(97\)00004-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-6599(97)00004-1).

Pritchard's privileging of missionary accounts arguably had as much to do with their presumed veracity as his own religious outlook.<sup>166</sup> The work of missionaries relied upon what Burton and Burton call "missionary ethnology," preferable to "that of 'naturalists because the latter made only brief visits and never learned the native language."<sup>167</sup> Pritchard actively advocated the use of missionaries as sources, and in turn supported missionary endeavours. It would be too far to call Pickering an advocate of the missionary cause, and in this the two differ. Pickering's support for missionaries was comparatively restrained and situational – often confined to the ease they afforded him throughout the Expedition. "Not long out of Tahiti" and coming across a mission led by a "friendly...native missionary" he reflected upon the increase in safety that came with an island's conversion to Christianity, concluding: "had the missionaries done nothing more among these islands, they would deserve the thanks of the civilised world."<sup>168</sup>

Pritchard is unmentioned in *The Races of Man*.<sup>169</sup> The two came to a similar place through different paths. Pritchard's race science is that of a devout philologist working on defending the language of a book written by members of what his contemporaries would have understood as those lower on the racial ladder. Pritchard was writing from an "armchair," though he cannot fairly be described as removed from encounters with those races he discussed, for his sources were not the fleeting observations of naturalists passing through but the systematic and engaged thoughts of missionaries living amidst those they wrote about. Pickering on the other hand combines the two – the sustained impressions of missionaries with his own, often very fleeting, observations.

## A crowd of disorderly persons

"Fifty-three drunkards were confined on Christmas night to the watch-house, and twenty three on Boxing night" writes *The Australian*.<sup>170</sup> As the Squadron prepared to depart, the constables raided "a lodging house for seamen" on Gloucester Street owned by a man name Galton. They were searching for crew who had absconded from the Expedition, but as Inspector Fitzpatrick entered the house the candle was blown out. Thrown into darkness a brawl erupted. No deserters were found, but Galton was "ultimately taken to the watch-house."<sup>171</sup> Christmas was a

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<sup>166</sup> John W. Burton and Orsolya Arva Burton, "Some Reflections on Anthropology's Missionary Positions," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 1 (March, 2007): 210.

<sup>167</sup> Burton and Burton, "Reflections," 210.

<sup>168</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>169</sup> Though he is referenced in John Hall's introduction to the English edition of *The Races of Man*: Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, xxiii

<sup>170</sup> "Drunkards," *The Australian* 28 December 1839, 3.

<sup>171</sup> "We Shall Conclude," *The Australian* 28 December 1839, 3.

busy day for the constables. In the Rocks, “on the waste ground between Argyle and George” a crowd gathered in defence of a drunk bound to join the crowd at the watch house.<sup>172</sup> The constable was thrown to the ground and “mistreated” in the performance of his duty before reinforcements arrived in force and “succeeded in dispersing the crowd.”<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile, “on the road between Parramatta and Windsor” a gentleman by the name of Mr. Cave was ambushed by bushrangers. He was far from the first, for only two days before the same had occurred to another man, who was “tied by the ruffians to a tree.”<sup>174</sup>

As much as Pickering was presented with accounts of Aboriginal humanity, he had no shortage of reports of crimes in this “centre of dishumanising principles.”<sup>175</sup> “Bushrangers” he observes, are “far more troubling... than the natives.”<sup>176</sup> Yet as the above account of riot indicates, it was not only banditry that made Sydney such a place of infamy. Walking the streets of the colony, Pickering was continually reminded of the system of transportation, for convicts, even “unfettered” were nonetheless “easily distinguished by their dress.”<sup>177</sup> “The natural consequence” of the convict system, he understood, was “the developing and fostering of a sort of ‘public opinion’ in direct disorganisation of society.”<sup>178</sup> Convicts were “branded with infamy” before being placed in a position “not unlike that of the slaves in our Southern States.”<sup>179</sup> The danger of this “numerous and very distinct class” posed a similar threat to slavery as described by his grandfather – an institution not just immoral but equally damnable for its impracticality.<sup>180</sup>

“On Friday,” the day before the Expedition arrived in harbour, “the following unhappy men underwent the final punishment of the law” records the *Australasian Chronicle* of 3 December 1839.<sup>181</sup> “Formerly criminals were hanged in their blue and yellow and grey shop clothing,” which, *the Australian* writes, “was shocking to public decency,” happily, “they are now executed” in pleasant and “clean white dresses.”<sup>182</sup> Pickering responds almost directly to this report - “the frequency of executions too is shocking to an American.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> “Riot,” *The Australian* 31 December 1839, 2.

<sup>173</sup> “Riot,” 2.

<sup>174</sup> “We Learn,” *The Australian* 31 December 1839, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>176</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>177</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>178</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>179</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>180</sup> He was not alone in this, see: Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832*.

<sup>181</sup> “Local,” *Australasian Chronicle* 3 December 1839, 4.

<sup>182</sup> “The Gaol,” *The Australian* 3 December 1839, 2.

<sup>183</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

Convicts, their bodies marked by convict garb as clearly as melanin, showed the contingency of white civilizational success.<sup>184</sup> While, as the life of Colonel Timothy Pickering shows, white settlers in the United States had ample capacity for inter-racial conflict, the image of white degradation alongside black dignity was not something Charles Pickering would have seen before his departure from Virginia. Just as in Rio he had seen black people in positions of power, in Sydney he saw whites cast down. Aboriginal peoples, though often described in passive terms by Pickering, had been party to the disciplining of unruly whites in the territories he visited.<sup>185</sup> In his writing he laments the inability to access “wild natives,” reflecting a common impression that “real Aborigines” were only found far from “civilisation,” the implication that civilising so needed had already occurred.<sup>186</sup> While his intellectual inheritance told Pickering that all humans shared the same capacity for civilizational attainment, and conversely, degradation, his time in Australia and Brazil showed as much in clear terms.

## A very simple exposition of the case

### Why race?

Why, considering the overwhelming case made by Pickering for the comparable capacities of humanity’s different geographical branches, did race remain in his work? It is a question that demands answer, for as vigorous as his contestation of the idea is, clearer is its endorsement. In Sydney race suddenly looms like a shadow at dusk, and from there, from “Natives,” it became the main content of his legacy. Understanding race’s prominence is about more than looking at the logics of his work; it is about understanding its utility for Charles Pickering’s perception of self. The “work” in his journal represents the management of multiple strains of often conflicting understandings – of human difference, colonialism and salvation – strains whose skirmishes were driven not so much by intellectual curiosity but by Pickering’s shifting positionality.

This navigation is uneasy, partial and ongoing. “Let me only say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land,” those things so central to Pickering’s sense of self – Christianity, science, civilisation, his “port,” became “that

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<sup>184</sup> This is discussed by: Penny Russell, *Savage or Civilised?: Manners in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 50-51.

<sup>185</sup> Mark Dunn, “Aboriginal Guides in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales,” in *Brokers and Boundaries: Colonial Exploration in Indigenous Territory*, ed. Tiffany Shellam et al. (Acton: ANU Press and Aboriginal History inc., 2016), 65.

<sup>186</sup> Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, 319.

ship's direst jeopardy."<sup>187</sup> Propelled at them by the Expedition's gusts they became a jagged and treacherous coast of antediluvian contradictions.

Yet he was not alone in riding that lee shore. In Sydney he found a rich source of dissonance management, a place where "race was familiarly known" and deployed to a range of ends. The Australian Club was where Pickering could "dissipate reasoning" within the already existent cognitive environment of the colony.<sup>188</sup> This dissipation nonetheless required extensive individual problem solving on his part, and introduced more than enough dissonance of its own. Sitting on that balcony, working out his own contradictions, he found himself within a far larger schema. "As the cell geneticist Francois Jacob (1977) put it: 'simple objects are more dependent on (physical) constraints than on history. As complexity increases, history plays the greater part'" and these contradictions, like their ongoing management, reflected exactly that.<sup>189</sup>

In those few months, as the year turned over and more buildings rose from amidst Sydney's summer dust, Charles Pickering became a part of that city and its tendrils. He stood atop scaffolding, built on ruins, and laid down boards of his own. He concluded his early writings on race with the following: "there has been so much mystification on the matter ... so many contradictory statements, that the above will I think be found a very simple exposition of the case." It was anything but. He goes on: "the historian, who does not in general much regard the doings of the Naturalist, would do well to become acquainted with these facts, else he may never be aware how partially his pages speak, how large a blank yet remains to be filled" Next to this conclusion is one final contradiction, written in at a later point: "see further at Feejee islands."

To end we return to Latour and Clark, and the questions raised at the start of this chapter. Was Pickering's adoption of race the product of refinement – the cognitive ecology of Sydney, the Expedition and even the British Empire, acting as one of the city's distilleries – condensing human difference to a form so rich in explanatory power he could not but let it go to his head? Or was it accumulation – race as one of Latour's "propositions" offered up through consensus produced by the gathering of information like foam at the centre of a whirlpool? Both are persuasive explanations, yet I'd argue that neither offers a complete picture. Dissonance – the maintenance of self, writ large in a centre of calculation, fills in some of that blank that

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<sup>187</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (London: Everyman's Library, 1991), 126.

<sup>188</sup> Clark, *Being There*, 180.

<sup>189</sup> Clark, *Being There*, 89.

remains to be filled. "Civilisation," yes - as cognitive ecology or actor-network - but also discontent.

## Chapter Four: Whitewater

Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind when  
it has once seized on it like a lichen on the rock.

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

## Aotearoa/New Zealand

The Bay of Islands, bit from the beak of Aotearoa/New Zealand's North Island, is a place of hills, sea, and little between. Its deep coves welcome anchorage while its heights make it defensible: invitation and denial together. Life there is lived amphibiously. In 1840 the town of Kororāreka, now known as Russell, embodied that quality: almost more boats than houses. Charles Pickering arrived there on 25 February 1840, after a "boisterous" passage across the Tasman Sea and landed on its "lively" beach – watercraft, people and produce, lashed by rain – eyeing the few wooden houses, single church and raucous public house, with scepticism.

Kororāreka was, according to Pickering, "the principle European village in New Zealand," but the designation "European" belies its littoral nature.<sup>1</sup> As waka and whaleboats on the shore, the steep roof of Christ's Church sat alongside a Māori pā ("a considerable number of native huts, surrounded by a stockade").<sup>2</sup> Its inhabitants operated between summit and sea, and likewise the town operated on mixed registers: Ngāpuhi and Pākehā. Even as the French, British and Americans jostled for influence over Kororāreka, so Ngāti Manu and Ngāi Tāwake, different hapū of the Ngāpuhi iwi, had only recently settled a contest over the same.<sup>3</sup>

Which is not to say that none had ambitions to make Pickering's description bear true. The town was bulging with Pākehā land speculators, whose claims in New Zealand reached 10 million acres by 1840, mostly purchased in the preceding three years.<sup>4</sup> Confusions about sovereignty abounded, and the clamour for more certainty, at least amongst those invested in it, echoed around the Bay and reverberated from the Sydney press to the halls of British power. The scientific found Kororāreka a place of transition, but also a place in transition, he could not have arrived at a more momentous time.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Stevens writing on maritime culture offers good reflections on this idea: Michael J. Stevens, "'The Ocean is our Only Highway and Means of Communication': Maritime Culture in Colonial Southern New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 12 (2011): 155-70.

<sup>2</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840; Angela Middleton, *Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori, 1814 to 1845* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014), 163.

<sup>3</sup> Middleton, *Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori, 1814 to 1845*, 162-63.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Lee, *The Bay of Islands* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1983), 12-13.

Perhaps that is not entirely true, for symbolism's sake they could have reached the Bay of Islands a few weeks earlier, as Pākehā and Māori gathered in a marquee at Waitangi.<sup>5</sup> It was there that, as Pickering describes it, "the Chiefs of the surrounding districts" were assembled and "induced to sign a Treaty by which they ended the Sovereignty of said districts."<sup>6</sup> This was the first of several signings of the several Treaties of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and its meaning was contested even then. One of its goals was to settle the question of sovereignty with finality. As the Expedition's scientifics wandered the Bay of Islands from 24 February until 6 April 1840, they met many of those involved in the drafting and signing of the Treaty. Their notes preserve a record of science within the politics of that Tasman world, a place not so distant from their own as the many miles from Norfolk, Virginia might indicate.

This proximity is no better exemplified by John Sac/Tuati's presence aboard the Expedition, who during that first signing of the Treaty was on the *Vincennes* off Antarctica. Tuati's Ngāpuhi roots made him one of many Māori who found work on European and American whaling vessels.<sup>7</sup> As the Squadron travelled through Tahiti and Samoa, Pickering remarked "there seems to be now few islands in these seas in which you will not find ... a New Zealander."<sup>8</sup> The pilot who aided Pickering's departure from Sydney had "selected New Zealanders for the crew of his open boat" and he mentions this to argue that Māori possess a "wandering disposition," a race whose "march has been truly 'upon the waves.'"<sup>9</sup> Despite the Bay of Islands' distance from the main thoroughfares of trade with China and the Indian ocean, its produce and peoples built those roads as much as flowed along them; Māori sailors raising sails weaved from Bay of Islands flax.<sup>10</sup> They were an integral part of what Epeli Hau'ofa terms the "large world" of the "sea of islands" that made up Oceania.<sup>11</sup>

Men like Tuati's father were the lifeblood of the "Empire of Science and Commerce" that brought Wilkes to the Pacific, and the streets, inn, shore, brothels, and occasionally the church, of Kororāreka were often frequented by sailors with origins in the United States. As a historian from the middle of last century puts it; they came to trade "firearms, rum, tobacco and venereal

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<sup>5</sup> While it is claimed that an officer from the Expedition attended the Treaty, there is no evidence of this, with the only reference for the claim found in the diary of Reverend Richard Taylor, who asserts that it was a "1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant" but the location of all can be accounted for. It would be surprising for such a witness to go unmentioned by members of the Expedition or met by the Scientifics while they travelled through the area. Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832*.

<sup>6</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>7</sup> David A. Chappell, *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships* (London: Routledge, 2016), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>9</sup> A good accompaniment to this commentary is: Kate Fullagar, "Voyagers from the Hawai'i diaspora," in *The Routledge Companion to Global Indigenous History*, ed. Ann McGrath and Lynette Russell (London: Routledge, 2021); Pickering, *Races of Man*, 80, 51.

<sup>10</sup> A.D. Couper, *Sailors and Traders: A Maritime History of the Pacific Peoples* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, ed. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa (Suva: Beake House, 1993), 6-8.

disease.”<sup>12</sup> To many of Pickering’s contemporaries – with some historians in concurrence – the Bay of Islands before 1840 was home to “every sort of commercial chicanery, land jobbing and general lawlessness” a place made up of “bloody troglodytic island colonies.”<sup>13</sup> In this, the extension of substantive British sovereignty that the Treaty of Waitangi represented, at least to its Pākehā proponents, came with the object of moral reform for white settlers as much as a claim upon all Māori land.

Pickering, reading the Sydney newspapers, came primed with these sentiments, which are aptly summarised by the pamphlets of John Dunmore Lang, quoted and endorsed by the *Australian* in December 1839.<sup>14</sup> According to Lang the European population of New Zealand “with a few honourable exceptions” consisted of “the variant refuse of civilised society” whose depredations required “liberal, enlightened, and Christian government” as their cure.<sup>15</sup> An editorial in the *Colonist* concurred – unsurprisingly given the paper was started by Lang – arguing that “much harm has already been sustained by the poor natives” through contact “with the vilest of our race” and this justified English intervention in favour of the “rapid advancement” of Māori people towards “civilisation.”<sup>16</sup> Lang’s judgements upon Europeans in New Zealand extended to missionaries who he describes as not only failing in their civilising mission but actively facilitating its inverse.<sup>17</sup>

John Dunmore Lang was an outspoken advocate for moral reform in the colonies, moral reform for the Church and convicts alike.<sup>18</sup> To this end he utilised his connections and frequent travels back to Britain to push for the migration of Scots, with strong religious conviction and hardy character, to the colonies. He encouraged thousands to make the passage to Australia, amongst them William McGarvie, who accompanied Charles Pickering in his trip to the Hunter.<sup>19</sup> Moral reform, racial understandings and colonial expansion found symbiosis in Lang’s writing, and in this he was not alone. James Belich argues that there was at this time a rising crescendo of similar accounts, which pushed a “fatal impact” narrative of Māori society.<sup>20</sup> The result of this

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Wasserman, “The First United States Consul in New Zealand,” *Pacific Historical Review* 18, no. 3 (1949): 365.

<sup>13</sup> Lee, *The Bay of Islands*, 11. Robert Hughes quoted in Richard Wolfe, *Hell-hole of the Pacific* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 25.

<sup>14</sup> “Dr Lang,” *The Australian* 31 December 1839, 2.

<sup>15</sup> “We Learn,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> “New Zealand Colonization,” *The Colonist* 28 December 1839, 2; D.W.A. Baker, *Lang, John Dunmore (1799–1878)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography, (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University).

<sup>17</sup> John Dunmore Lang, New Zealand in 1839, Four Letters to the Right Hon. Earl Durham, New Zealand Electronic Text Collection, The Pamphlet Collection of Sir Robert Stout: Volume 29, Victoria University of Wellington Library.

<sup>18</sup> Baker, *Lang*.

<sup>19</sup> Lang appointed William McGarvie’s brother, John McGarvie, as a minister in New South Wales: Baker, *Lang*. See Chapter Three.

<sup>20</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: a History of the New Zealanders: From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane, 1996), 187.

narrative was the coding of British colonisation of New Zealand as a “humanitarian intervention.”<sup>21</sup>

This coding was a contested process, with the Church Missionary Society, metropole pamphleteers and colonial advocates far from acting in concert.<sup>22</sup> But -as a concert- its discordant notes beat a marching rhythm. Charles Pickering reached Kororāreka as that song still echoed, yet his description of the town bears none of its notes. While Lang may have delighted in the sober religiosity of Dana or Wilkes’ thunderous condemnation of Sydney’s drinking establishments, Pickering would likely not have returned Lang’s appreciation.<sup>23</sup> Not short on disdain for British conduct in New South Wales, when it came to Kororāreka and its littoral inhabitants, the naturalist was mute. The closest Charles Pickering gets to moral outrage at this “hell-hole of the Pacific” is a complaint about its “extravagant prices.”<sup>24</sup>

## Difficulty of finding accommodation

“There is one Public House which was crowded, and such was the difficulty of finding accommodation that we observed in Various places” Pickering writes of his first day ashore in the Bay of Islands.<sup>25</sup> It is an apparently mundane observation, and echoes an earlier arrival, in New South Wales: “another national trait of difference between this people and our own soon became obvious, viz. the miserable state of public conveyances and general want of accommodations for travellers.”<sup>26</sup> This lack, combined with inclement weather, was clearly a constant source of frustration for the naturalist, and it meant he was forced to rely upon the hospitality of strangers.

Pickering “remained at Mr. Clendon’s for the night” after failing to secure accommodation in Kororāreka.<sup>27</sup> James Reddy Clendon, middle son of an English trading family, cut his teeth trading in Calcutta, before making his way East, first to Sydney and then to the Bay of Islands, where he eventually became the US Consul.<sup>28</sup> The position was a lucrative one – for it made him the first port of call for the American ships calling in at Kororāreka for trade – and by

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<sup>21</sup> Tony Ballantyne, “Humanitarian Narratives: Knowledge and the Politics of Mission and Empire,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 24, no. 2-3 (2011): 262, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187489411x581058>.

<sup>22</sup> Ballantyne, “Humanitarian Narratives: Knowledge and the Politics of Mission and Empire.”

<sup>23</sup> In 1840, Lang travelled to Massachusetts, and abounded with commendation for the Protestantism of its population; Baker, *Lang*.

<sup>24</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>25</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>26</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>27</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Gawith, *Dangerous Waters: the Enterprising Life of the Good Merchant James Reddy Clendon in Early New Zealand* (Auckland: Resource Books, 2013), 14-20.

1840 Clendon had done very well for himself, owning a large estate as well as a house in town.<sup>29</sup> His appointment as US Consul came only a few years after he'd signed a petition – as a loyal British subject – to the King calling for the Crown's intervention, in the name of stability, in the Bay of Islands.<sup>30</sup>

As a servant of the interests of the United States in New Zealand he was unreliable at best, malicious at worse, and this reflected the ad hoc nature of such appointments at this juncture. US Consul in the Pacific was a position often held by men with divided loyalties, it perhaps being a competition between Clendon and J. Antoine Moerenhaut – who became Consul in Tahiti after fighting for Napoleon, acting as secretary to the Dutch consulate at Valparaiso, speaking little English and generally serving the interests of himself, and the French, above all – for title of most conflicted.<sup>31</sup> As Peale remarked: “to the consul we were indebted for little or no hospitality, which is not remarkable as he is *not* an American but an Englishman, master of a vessel, married to a former servant maid of Lady Sir Francis Forbes.”<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless Clendon provided, if not a haven, then at least a stopping point for the Scientifics, who often stayed in his “neat veranda cottage” with its “view over the sea.”<sup>33</sup>

The US Consul, like the MacLeays in Sydney, provided Pickering with a network of connections to aid travel through Aotearoa. He provided introductions to various men of importance, from James Busby, upon whose lawn the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, to Charles de Thierry, agitator for a French colony in New Zealand and self-proclaimed King of Naku Hiva.<sup>34</sup> Such men, and occasionally their wives, were integral to Pickering's work, as well as providing shelter -and tea- their experience and observations extended his mind's eye beyond the confines of their wind-shut doors.

In Sydney Pickering's networks were aristocratic, religious, established men who dabbled in science and politics with equal, if at times hobbyish, vigour. This reflected his “in” through the Macleays, as well as the nature of colonial settlement in New South Wales. In both the Hunter Valley and New Zealand's North Island he arrived at different stages of a changing of the guard. “Mr. B[usby] was about leaving the island since the appointment of a Governor,”

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<sup>29</sup> Jack Lee, “Clendon, James Reddy,” in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> W. Patrick Strauss, “Pioneer American Diplomats in Polynesia, 1820-1840,” *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (1962): 27.

<sup>31</sup> Pickering met Moerenhaut, albeit briefly, in Tahiti; Pickering, *Journal*, August 1839- May 1840; Strauss, “Pioneer American Diplomats in Polynesia, 1820-1840,” 23.

<sup>32</sup> Emphasis his; Peale, *Journals*, 166..

<sup>33</sup> Felton Mathew, quoted in Strauss, “Pioneer American Diplomats in Polynesia, 1820-1840,” 27.

<sup>34</sup>

Pickering writes, and the former's role as a tenuous extension of British colonial authority bears similarities to the magistrate John Bingle, upon whose departing heels Pickering arrived in the Hunter Valley.<sup>35</sup> The solidifying of Empire represented by the Treaty of Waitangi meant that de Thierry and Clendon would both accompany Busby in a fall from prominence.<sup>36</sup> Crossing the Tasman Sea was in this sense a voyage in time as well as space.

When John Dunmore Lang visited James Busby in 1839 he got the impression that Busby bore "no employment ... but that of standing sentinel upon the British Ensign."<sup>37</sup> Lang was not too far wrong, in reality if not the man's intent, for in his time as British resident Busby had been largely ineffectual in the goals of his appointment. His "principal and most important duty" was to "conciliate the good-will of the Native chiefs" towards the maintenance of British interests.<sup>38</sup> It was a task for which he was ill-equipped, with little material support from the Empire and not the charisma to make up for that lack. Like Clendon he was a "stop-gap appointment;" the Bay of Islands being too far, its commercial offerings too minimal, to justify a better nomination.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless Busby's designs for "conciliation" were nothing if not ambitious. In 1835 he set about drafting "He Whakaputanga;" a "Declaration of Independence" for the "United Tribes of New Zealand."<sup>40</sup> The aim of this document, at least from Busby's end, was to establish a tribal confederacy as a protectorate of Great Britain, for the British were already "used to dealing with confederations of indigenous polities."<sup>41</sup> It received support from the Governor of New South Wales and the Colonial Office, with the caveat that the protection afforded to Māori would not contradict that given to British subjects and interests.<sup>42</sup>

The project was ultimately unsuccessful, but its suggestion was important. It is arguable that Busby's proposal – a document conveying independence upon the Māori in New Zealand – described a reality which already existed. While worries about the deprivations of rogue mariners upon the defenceless Māori populace were often expressed in terms of concern for

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<sup>35</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

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<sup>37</sup> "Busby, James (1801-1871," Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Bourke, Sir Richard Bourke, K.C.B., to James Busby, Esq., British Resident, New Zealand, New Zealand Electronic Text Collection, An Epitome of Official Documents Relative to Native Affairs and Land Purchases in the North Island of New Zealand, Te Pūhikotuhi o Aotearoa, Victoria University of Wellington.

<sup>39</sup> Trevor Williams, "James Stephen and British Intervention in New Zealand, 1838-1840," *The Journal of Modern History* 13, no. 1 (1941): 22.

<sup>40</sup> P.G. McHugh, "'A Pretty Gov[ernment]!' The 'Confederation of United Tribes' and Britain's quest for Imperial Order in the New Zealand Islands during the 1830s," in *Legal Pluralism and Empires. 1500-1850*, ed. Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 244.

<sup>41</sup> Examples including the Maratha Confederation in the Indian Subcontinent and the Iroquois and Creek in North America: McHugh, "Imperial Order," 238.

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Macleay was at this time Alexander Macleay, Colonial Secretary (NSW) to Busby, 12 February 1836, Colonial Office 209, New Zealand Original Correspondence 1830-1922, File 2, National Library Australia; McHugh, "Imperial Order," 245.

their welfare, some petitions to government cited the paradoxical threat of Māori retaliation as justification for British intercession.<sup>43</sup> British intervention was required to stem the excesses of whites upon the defenceless Māori populace lest they defend themselves, a circular logic that drove the wheels of Imperial expansion.

While Lang, writing in London or Sydney, could represent the relationship between Māori and Pākehā as host and parasite, the realities in the Bay of Islands were more complex. Missionaries in the early years were “virtually prisoners of their Māori patrons” and common local anxieties about Māori capriciousness illustrate clearly the sense amongst Pākehā that their presence was subject to Māori forbearance.<sup>44</sup> The sum of this is that differing characterisations of Māori character and its Pākehā counterpart were defined by proximity. The *Colonist* in Sydney could well lament the plight of the “poor natives,” but denied the Tasman’s remove and speaking fireside with James Busby, Pickering echoes no such language of Māori passivity.

It was not just the accounts of Busby’s guard that aided this conviction; Charles Pickering did not have to look far to see white men subject to Māori whims. Within a week of his arrival all he required was a mirror. “Owing to the various disappointments and delays experienced at Sydney” the scientific corps arrived too late to the Bay of Islands to “think of undertaking any distant journey.”<sup>45</sup> Pickering, aware that the *Vincennes* was projected to arrive within a month, “proposed a troop overland to Hokianga” in order to make what he could of the little time they had.<sup>46</sup> His proposal was baulked at by Clendon and other “friends acquainted with the country” who told him that it was “out of the question.”<sup>47</sup> After much dispute he settled on a more restrained route and set out on his own. The trip out from Busby’s hotel was reliant on two things; Clendon’s settler connections and Māori guides.

“We were so hurried by our guides we could not gather half of what we saw,” Pickering remarks with frustration.<sup>48</sup> It is a statement made on the second page of his journal, of his first day on Madeira, and it is the first of many such lines. In Brazil, Chile, Tahiti, Samoa and now New Zealand, he found his botanical work constrained as much as aided by guides – only rarely European – and they formed a source of joy and frustration both. The routes he took, speed at

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<sup>43</sup> McHugh, “Imperial Order,” 238.

<sup>44</sup> Angela Middleton, “Missionization in New Zealand and Australia: A Comparison,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 14, Special Issue: Aboriginal Missions in Australasia, no. 1 (March 2010): 184, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41719782>.

<sup>45</sup> The delay in question was in part caused by damage to their ship’s chronometer in a rough sea, forcing a return to Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, 370.; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>46</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>47</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>48</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

which he travelled them and the interactions along the way were all as much defined by his guides as his own preference.<sup>49</sup>

Pickering's guides were both objects of study and aids to it. They formed the bedrock of his understandings of the character of those "races" he sought to describe, and their knowledge of plants, animals and geography, as well as more ethnographic concerns, were far more valuable to him than a strong back to carry supplies. While in Madeira his guides' pace was faster than his liking, in general slow going was the norm, which in addition to its frustrations led him to spend time observing their habits and comparing them – with his own, and with previous guides – feeding in to a growing fascination with race.

### A little exploratory tour

On 20 September 1839, months before his arrival in the Bay of Islands, Pickering landed on a beach in Tahiti "with the intention of making a little exploratory tour."<sup>50</sup> He took with him a young Tahitian man whose name he lists "Pow" and who had accompanied him on a previous trek across the island. Walking along the coast and then cutting inland through a valley, Pickering recalls: "I showed Pow the objects I was in search of, made him remark the fructification of the ferns etc. and was deriving considerable assistance from his collections."<sup>51</sup> This however did not last, for "coming across some bunches of Fahees (fe'i bananas) his ancient habits returned to him, and he soon had them tied at the two ends of a pole, resting on his shoulder."<sup>52</sup>

Finding his companion disinclined towards further botanical exploits, Pickering decided that he was "desirous of taking a look from the tops of the ridge."<sup>53</sup> In this too he was unsatisfied, for whenever he "pointed to the tops of the ridge on either hand" Pow would "shake his head."<sup>54</sup> "Convinced the ascent was practicable," the naturalist chose to wait until Pow was ahead of him before he "stole a march on him," turning aside and climbing the fern-tangled ridge as his guide walked on oblivious.<sup>55</sup> Pickering quickly learned that the climb was more difficult than he'd expected, remarking ruefully that Pow's emphatic head shakes were "not far wrong" and leaving the Tahitian to come "tearing on" to his rescue.<sup>56</sup> Normally the first to the summit,

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<sup>49</sup> In this he was not alone, see: Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia*, 194.

<sup>50</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>51</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>52</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>53</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>54</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>55</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>56</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

Pickering found himself bested, as Pow beat a path to the top of the ridge, arriving well ahead of him.

This “little exploratory tour” is recounted with amusement and a spirit of almost playful competition. Pickering does not record if Pow’s pursuit of him up the ridge was accompanied with laughter or exasperation, and the fact that his *fe’i* were abandoned for the rescue indicate at least that it was an inconvenience. Reciprocal amusement or otherwise, Pickering’s botanical work involved making fun, both with and of, his guides. Yet while the former mode of jest denotes equal standing, the latter less so, and Pickering’s comment regarding Pow’s “ancient habits” bears similarly mixed notes of both appreciation and superiority; a few days later he harked back to that incident by remarking that “something of the ‘Native’ failing” grew upon his party, causing them to descend a ridgeline to a grove of *fe’i* to rest.<sup>57</sup>

The overwhelming tenor of these observations is one of surprise; at the extent of Islander skill and his contingency upon it. The day before his jaunt with Pow he remarked “we were ourselves witness to the intimate acquaintance which every one seemed to possess of the plants and other productions of their island.”<sup>58</sup> This was an intimacy he claimed as his profession – naming, classifying, collecting, were the naturalist’s job after all – and finding that the Tahitians “were much more particular in the names they gave to different parts of the human frame than we ourselves” seems to have come as a shock.<sup>59</sup> This surprise finds expression in his refutation of it; on 13 September, two days ashore, he uses the word “savage” to describe his guides, yet by 20 October he answers himself; “these people are not savages.”<sup>60</sup>

His use of the title “savage” recalls Barry Alan Joyce’s argument that the Expedition’s scientifics used “savagery” and “civilisation” as their primary organising schema, yet in Tahiti and Samoa Pickering came up against that schema’s limitations, and as I have elaborated in the preceding chapter, largely abandoned it.<sup>61</sup> On 18 September 1839, Pickering visited that “mound of coral on the sea-shore, the same described by Cook in his first voyage,” he also visited the Edenic notes adopted by Cook in his description of the Tahitians; “on the whole, taking these people and their institutions ... I am satisfied there is less to corrupt the heart, than in our ‘civilised communities,’” and in Tonga, more literally; “their only article of clothing was an apron or girdle ... [which] forms a graceful dress on a well-shaped man or woman – and perhaps are the identical ‘fig leaves’ worn of old by Adam and Eve!”<sup>62</sup> However, given his experiences in

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<sup>57</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>58</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>59</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>60</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>61</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

Brazil his explanation is not one of plenty and indolence, but rather ingenuity, a theme he would revisit in Australia.

“Here was a people extremely eager to learn, and ready at all times to adopt anything new” he writes in Samoa, then recounts a report that the “native are intelligent and really well-informed men, can read, write etc. [and] these have often expressed surprise at the ignorance of sailors.”<sup>63</sup> The latter account came to him through a missionary stationed in Samoa, and presages similar observations from missionaries in Australia, with possibly shared motivations, yet it blends seamlessly into the rest of his writing, confirmed by the eagerness of a Māori missionary in Samoa to secure from him a pencil to write with, or of “people of all kinds derived from various islands in the Pacific” to travel, many having “visited [his] country” and able to “call the names of our principal cities.”<sup>64</sup> This portrayal of character was not, not yet anyway, attached to race.

Pickering’s descriptions of his guides, crowded with delight, indignation, frustration and humour, not to mention ample exclamation marks, are, as James Delbourgo puts it, “not remote or disembodied acts of classification but artefacts, both utilitarian and aesthetic, of the social experience of travel.”<sup>65</sup> Delbourgo is describing works of natural history themselves, but the description as much fits the ongoing relationship between Pickering’s thought and his record of it. As travel-guides the work of James Cook and Georg Forster were at best horribly out of date, Pickering notes; “it is difficult to reconcile the present state of the island with the accounts given by Cook and its early visitors.”<sup>66</sup> In contrast, Pickering’s immediate cognitive ecology: the interface of memory, journal, language and ongoing collaborations, formed the most intimate of guides – amended, reappraised, reiterated – to classification and travel both.

Here “artefact” is almost too static a descriptor, conjuring shards of pottery and dented shields, objects inert, even aloof, so to clarify, delineation is necessary.<sup>67</sup> There is the artefact of Pickering’s journal, an object created and imbued with historical significance, a proof for the historian, legacy of past moments and thoughts. There is the artefact as I engage with it; physical remnants, microfilm and sections lathed through transcription onto my computer screen, part of my own cognitive ecology.<sup>68</sup> Finally, there is the artefact in use; the journal in its

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<sup>63</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>64</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>65</sup> James Delbourgo, *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>66</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>67</sup> Though even such static objects have life, and provocation, still in them, see: Nugent, *Captain Cook was Here*, 44.

<sup>68</sup> And further as it comes to you, “artefacts all the way down.”

context, impossible to extricate from its interface with Pickering's mind and surroundings. As Pickering rested by a swollen stream a young Tahitian "shot down the rapids in sport, and afforded a fine sight; buried in the foam for some distance, and landed in safety below."<sup>69</sup> Thinking of this latter artefact white water should be seen; a swirling and spluttering passage amidst time's flotsam and jetsam, the naturalist "buried in the foam."

## Tibby's Hotel

Pickering's account of Tahiti and Samoa, which preceded the work done in Sydney, bears only fleeting references to race. Race was then less armature more artifice, with sparse and inconsistent application. On 10 November 1839 he wrapped up the account of Samoa with "only one circumstance to remark upon, which is a rather singular one."<sup>70</sup> He had heard, from a source who said as much in confidence, that a crocodile lived in one of the streams at Upolu, known to have been there "at least 50 years" and "fed at times by garbage left in its way, by the natives."<sup>71</sup> This in turn led him to imply, with ample caveats, that the animal was transported there by "these old Egyptians," a remnant of Egyptian reverence for the carnivore.<sup>72</sup>

It is a peculiar diversion, though in line with his interest in humanity's transportation of flora and fauna. Yet it illustrates that, while he was yet to engage in the extensive theorising of the Australia Club, he was attempting to fit his pre-existing understanding of race to that relationship between people and nature. It also shows that he was trying to reconcile his findings with a racial schema that viewed the peoples of the Pacific as a singular race – "Malay," which was one with the "Egyptians." Prior to his departure from the United States he "had not yet learned to distinguish the race from the Mongolian," and that phrase – "learned" – is important to note.<sup>73</sup> Lawrence Hirschfeld describes the study of racial concepts as "epidemiology," if so, then Dr Pickering's symptoms were maturing.<sup>74</sup>

In Sydney, Pickering concluded that his Egyptian, Malay race included all of those he called "Polynesian." His encounters in the Tuamotu archipelago, Tahiti and Samoa were thus raced in retrospect. Race followed behind him, but it also went ahead, and attached itself to the

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<sup>69</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>70</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>71</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>72</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>73</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 13.

Māori he was about to meet. “The Natives of New Zealand are well known to belong to the same race with the Polynesians” he asserts after his first week there, though most of his time there had been spent with Clendon and his ilk. It was a week blighted with bad weather, a storm thundering in from the North-West, wrecking ships and demolishing the embankment at Paihia.<sup>75</sup>

In the face of this weather, the scientifics had “very good success in botanising,” by the tactic of brief forays from shelter.<sup>76</sup> With eyes flicking from ground to treetops searching for the dual threats of “falling branches, masses of parasitic plants etc.” they would range from their settler base into the surrounding valleys.<sup>77</sup> This was an activity made necessary by the specifics of the weather, and made possible through the small size of the settlements at Kororāreka and Paihia, whereby the “woods” were never far off.<sup>78</sup> One of Joseph Drayton’s striking images of a fish draws attention to this with a note reading: “Bay of Islands, fresh water near Mr. Tibby’s.”<sup>79</sup>

“Tibby’s Hotel,” as it was called by William Colenso, took in “respectable boarders” after it was let to Tibby by the Reverend Charles Baker.<sup>80</sup> Baker was a missionary with CMS and had been in New Zealand since 1828. Based at Kerikeri and then Paihia, missionary stations around the Bay of Islands, he played the dual role of missionary and settler-speculator, purchasing 6230 acres of land between his arrival and 1839.<sup>81</sup> His knowledge of Te Reo Māori, which was applied to the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi alongside many missionary texts, allowed him to act as a guide for scientific visitors like Charles Darwin, who he met when the *Beagle* visited in 1835.<sup>82</sup> Tibby adopted a similar role, as host-guide of the “hotel,” and the scientific corps of the Expedition were amongst a long list of “gentlemen” boarders; including race theorist Ernst Dieffenbach and naturalist and Colonial Secretary Alexander Sinclair.

This scientific outpost was the foundation for the production of knowledge through a range of avenues and on a wide range of subjects. The language skills and Māori connections of its hosts, forged through missionary endeavour, were a practical aid to travel but also a source of ethnographic knowledge. They acted as a vector for the transmission of Māori knowledge of landscape and history to those visitors and colonial administrators who stayed there. “These gentlemen, from their long residence, and many opportunities,” Pickering recounts, “are

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<sup>75</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>76</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>77</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>78</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Drayton, Drawings of Galaxia, Field Notes Project, SIA RU007186, Biodiversity Heritage Library.

<sup>80</sup> Middleton, *Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori, 1814 to 1845*.

<sup>81</sup> Ernst Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand with Contributions to the Geography, Geology, Botany and Natural History of the Country*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1843), 168.

<sup>82</sup> Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, 383.

possessed of much information concerning these islands and their former state.”<sup>83</sup> This information included “various superstitious tales [formerly] current among the natives” which, he points out “might form a volume of equal interest with the ‘Irish Legends.’”<sup>84</sup>

“Missionaries to Māori peoples learned something about the Māori worldview to transmit their message” but living in Māori ecosystems, literal and cognitive, was as much a vector as the need to speak the gospel in comprehensible terms.<sup>85</sup> This was, as Angela Middleton puts it, a “landscape charged with the potentiality of *mana*, *tapu*, and *utu*,” Māori modes of thinking that created an exogram of the landscape, thought carving into the earth like *kō* and *timo*.<sup>86</sup> In this sense, when on 4 March 1840 Pickering remarked that “the ‘taboo’ [*tapu*] seems to be the principal law of the land” he hit on an important point, and that the sentence ends with “they have names for all natural productions, which are universally known” shows how that law made its way into his own work.<sup>87</sup>

At the same time the changes wrought to that landscape through the arrival of increasing numbers of Pākehā were equally apparent. “Some of my fellow passengers who had come over for agricultural purposes were very much disappointed in the appearance of things” Pickering writes of the deck of the brig *Victoria*, “and [they] pronounced it a ‘country of hills without valleys.’”<sup>88</sup> Reaching Waimate he “was somewhat surprised to find here a dam and mill in operation ... and which together with the cleared lands, cultivated fields, fence etc. was the work of the missionaries.”<sup>89</sup> Yet the example of Pākehā cultivation, at this point anyway, pales in its effects when compared to the adoption of the potato for which “Māori appear to hold the world record for rapid adoption... outside the Americas.”<sup>90</sup>

The presence of the potato is noted by Pickering on numerous occasions, both with regards to the importance of its cultivation for Māori populations and as something habitually encountered.<sup>91</sup> “On reaching the flat, I was detained by the hospitality of a Native whom I met previously and who now offered potatoes and corn,” together, like Pickering, of American

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<sup>83</sup> He said this regarding missionaries in Tahiti but the point is a general one: Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>84</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Maxwell and Evan Roberts, “The Whangaroa Incident, 16 July 1824 A European-Māori Encounter and Its Many Incarnations,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 1 (2014): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2013.869845>.

<sup>86</sup> Angela Middleton, “Māori and European Landscapes at Te Puna, Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 1805-1850,” *Archaeology in Oceania* 38, no. 2 (July, 2003): 121.; Māori agricultural tools.

<sup>87</sup> Pickering, Journal, August 1839- May 1840.

<sup>88</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>89</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>90</sup> John Fitzpatrick, “The Columbian Exchange and the Two Colonizations of Aotearoa New Zealand,” *Food, Culture & Society* 10, no. 2 (2015): 213, <https://doi.org/10.2752/155280107x211421>.

<sup>91</sup> Pickering, “March 4<sup>th</sup>.”

origin.<sup>92</sup> “It seems to be generally concluded that the Native population has materially diminished in this vicinity of the Bay of Islands” he notes, drawing on an account of numbers by Methodist missionary Richard Davis. The explanation for this purported decline was “poverty of feed etc.” but, Pickering responds “one element seems to be lost sight of ... the number of individuals on board merchant vessels or scattered abroad by them through the countless islands of the Pacific.”<sup>93</sup> His experience of the landscape of the Bay of Islands, his work as a naturalist and in turn his reflections upon race are all infused by the Columbian exchange, with the movement of populations, ideas, flora and fauna forming more solution than composite.<sup>94</sup>

### Notwithstanding their ferocious character

Darwin, some time after returning from a voyage that included a sermon by Charles Baker, “moved out of his house ... pursued by treasure chests of data that ceaselessly arrived from the *Beagle*.”<sup>95</sup> In Rio de Janeiro the Expedition had sent back approximately 50 000 specimens, a volume to bury those treasure chests from the *Beagle*, or even sink the boat itself. “In the botanist’s notes which threaten to submerge her” there is the threat that “the world can return to confusion” at any point.<sup>96</sup> Tibby’s Hotel, sodden with a myriad of historical currents, presented Pickering with a sea of data that threatened to drown him once again, and on departure from that outpost and its confines, his spluttering and flailing becomes evident.

On 3 March 1840 Pickering landed at the house of James Busby, the marks from the treaty pavilion likely still upon the ground. Heading with his two Ngāpuhi guides towards Waimate “the land became more gently undulating but still exceedingly barren, the soil a stiff clay, and the growth chiefly a species of fern (*pteris esculenta*).”<sup>97</sup> They came upon a village on the banks of the Waitangi River, where they were met by “the inhabitants, to the number of about 20,” the men all armed with muskets.<sup>98</sup> “We were at a loss to discover the object of this” arsenal, he notes, but puts it down to Māori “partiality for the weapon.”<sup>99</sup> The presence of muskets amongst that party, as well as in the hands of those they met along the road, was

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<sup>92</sup> Pickering, “March 10<sup>th</sup>.”

<sup>93</sup> Pickering, “March 4<sup>th</sup>.”

<sup>94</sup> The phrase refers to an increasingly globalised ecosystem in the wake of European exploration: Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1972).

<sup>95</sup> Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 39.

<sup>97</sup> Commonly known as “bracken,” this plant had formed an important “carbohydrate support” for Māori in regions where growing kumara was difficult: Fitzpatrick, “Two Colonizations,” 219.; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>98</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>99</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

perplexing enough to be of note, but it also carries with it the implications of a threat noted earlier that day; growing resentment around the Treaty of Waitangi amongst those Ngāpuhi who understood the treaty's terms differently to that of the Governor.<sup>100</sup>

After arriving at the Mill at Waimate, "pointed out with an air of exultation" by one of his guides, he stayed the night with Davis, the Methodist missionary, clearly taking the opportunity to quiz him on a range of subjects, not least the way forward.<sup>101</sup> The next day was frustration. On the road he met Charles de Thierry, travelling on business to Kororāreka, at whose house he had hoped to stay the night. "The difficulties of the way began to increase materially" after that point, with the road merging into the river.<sup>102</sup> Pickering's guides apparently insisted on carrying him across the waterway "according to the usual method" which he "suffered" for a time before proceeding on foot.<sup>103</sup> Four miles out of Hokianga and his guides began to voice "protests" at continuing any further, and he found himself "forced to stop ... at Toorou's; a chief as we afterwards learned of rather doubtful character."<sup>104</sup>

He follows the above line with a new paragraph.

*The Natives* it begins "are well known to belong to the same race with the Polynesians; yet are usually represented with a peculiar cast of features ... as if this were characteristic."<sup>105</sup> This sentence is a refutation of particularity - an endorsement of the validity of the "Polynesian" racial schema - yet tension between particularity and generalisation is the tone of the following pages, which set out Pickering's thought on the race of the "New Zealanders." Part of the reason for this resides in the preceding paragraph; the figure of a "Chief of doubtful character" frames Pickering's discussion of race both in his journal and, later, in *The Races of Man*.<sup>106</sup>

This figure, a man he names "Tourou" and accuses of offering aid to Pākehā travellers on the way to Hokianga with the intent of extorting them on the way out, embodies for Pickering the dissonance between his expectations of Polynesian type and his experiences in New Zealand. New Zealand was an "uncanny valley," where the faces he recognised, painted with

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<sup>100</sup> To say this was an issue resolved in Pickering's lifetime would be lying, within three years the tension would lead to violence, which in turn led to war; James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2015), 21; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>101</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840; Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>102</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>103</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>104</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>105</sup> Pickering, Journal, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>106</sup> He echoes his journal in the publication, writing "on the route to Hokianga, lived a chief of bad character;" Pickering, *Races of Man*, 21.

race, were familiar yet different enough to cause discomfort.<sup>107</sup> As Douglas describes it: “the regional classificatory efforts of travellers and residents were always threatened by the mismatch of theory and praxis,” this mismatch was a feedback loop, reification followed by dissipation, dissonance and reification again.<sup>108</sup>

Pickering’s description of Māori character is one of capriciousness and violence. On a number of occasions, in the space of a few pages, he uses the phrase “notwithstanding their ferocious character.”<sup>109</sup> He adds to this indictment that, in comparison to the Tahitians, their way of cooking is “much more slovenly,” something which extends to their “persons and habits.”<sup>110</sup> In general, he sums up, “there seems to be one very general National failing, viz. extreme covetousness; and they are apt not to be very scrupulous in adhering to their bargains.”<sup>111</sup> While his description of the Tahitian and Samoan character glowed, of the “New Zealander” there is little expressed save disdain.

“We do not wonder therefore that Forster should have given the preference to the Tahitians,” Pickering continues, and in turn demands a comparison between the two writers.<sup>112</sup> George Forster visited Tahiti almost seventy years prior to Pickering, accompanying James Cook on his second voyage.<sup>113</sup> His account, titled *A Voyage Around the World* was influential, enough so that it was still being cited by Pickering so long after, but it was also an important part of an earlier debate about race. Whereas in Pickering’s time race had become relatively widespread, particularly in scientific circles, the same was not true of the late eighteenth century, and Forster used his experience as a foundation to refute it.<sup>114</sup>

Yet as Pickering’s citation indicates, this legacy was perhaps more ambivalent than could be assumed. While Forster apparently refuted race in a war of letters with Emanuel Kant, his observations about the character of Pacific peoples bore sufficient evaluation of their merits – beauty, civilisation and so on – to feed into the work of writers who took race as a given. While the experiences of Forster in Tahiti and elsewhere inclined him to view Kant’s racist ideas as lacking empirical grounding, they were eventually an aid to Pickering’s navigation of his own confused experiences. Forster, by “rejecting” race but stating preference for certain groupings

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<sup>107</sup> “Uncanny Valley” is a phrase coined by Masahiro Mori to describe a sudden negative association that arises when an object appears close enough to being human; Masahiro Mori, “The Uncanny Valley,” *Energy* 7 (1970).

<sup>108</sup> Douglas, “Racial Geography,” 207.

<sup>109</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>110</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>111</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>112</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>113</sup> Chunjie Zhang, “Georg Forster in Tahiti: Enlightenment, Sentiment and the Intrusion of the South Seas,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>114</sup> Sally Hatch Gray, “Kant’s Race Theory, Forster’s Counter, and the Metaphysics of Color,” *The Eighteenth Century* 53, no. 4 (2012): 393-412.

within the category “Polynesian,” provided Pickering with a way to – not reject race in entirety – maintain that category in the face of contradictory feelings about character.

The conclusion is an uneasy combination of racial type with subracial, national, particularity. While generally the concept of “nation” is absent from Pickering’s writing, when expressing dislike for his Māori hosts it is brought to bear, and its presence is jarring. Whereas his musings in Sydney make little connection between race and character – save traits like curiosity and intelligence – in New Zealand character is pulled suddenly to the fore. This generalisation about character, seemingly inconsistent with his understanding of race in general, persists even despite refutations in his own experience. As he writes later: “from other natives, I experienced some disinterested and delicately-tendered acts of kindness that, considering the general character of New Zealanders, were quite unexpected.”<sup>115</sup>

Why not race?

It is an important question. Ethnographer Ernst Dieffenbach, for example, had little issue imagining the Māori as racially distinct and even Peale viewed them as both different, and inferior to, “the Polynesians (sic).”<sup>116</sup> If race is not taken as a given, there is nothing about the Māori that presumes membership to a “Polynesian” race any more or less coherently than the other configurations of races that Pickering began or ended with. Yet despite his view that their character and civilizational attainment differed from his “friends” in Tahiti and Samoa – meaning that he had to deploy “nation” as an explanation alongside environment – he did not fall back upon race’s explanatory power. In doing so he bucked what Douglas describes as a “rhetorical sequence recurrent in first-hand Oceanic voyager texts,” in which relief at “approved or unthreatening indigenous conduct” inspired positive accounts of both character and appearance.<sup>117</sup>

There are a number of possible reasons for this choice, and it was perhaps their combined weight that confined him. The first is that phrase, echoing writing from the Australia Club, that the Māori were “well known to belong to the same race with the Polynesians.”<sup>118</sup> The collective explanatory power of popular sentiment, at least amidst the class he spent time with,

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<sup>115</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 82.

<sup>116</sup> Indeed Dieffenbach believed the Māori to be of two different races; Dieffenbach, *Travels*, 2, 2-4; Peale, *Journals*, 82.

<sup>117</sup> Bronwen Douglas, “Voyages, Encounters, and Agency in Oceania: Captain Cook and Indigenous People,” *History Compass* 6, no. 3 (2008): 720, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542>.

<sup>118</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 – April 1840.

had its appeals.<sup>119</sup> This sentiment, as Dieffenbach and Peale indicate, was far from universal, yet his impression of its presence remained.

Popular sentiment lent impetus to convictions he already held about the category to which the Māori belonged. He had already formed that conviction by Sydney, and to depart from it would have complicated several already established assumptions. Horatio Hale, delayed in New South Wales, only arrived in New Zealand on 2 March.<sup>120</sup> Hale's study of language, brief as it was, would cement the connection between the Māori and the rest of the Pacific, but even before he could update Pickering as much was apparent. "We learned from the missionaries a remarkable tradition concerning the introduction of the sweet potato," Pickering writes, "that 'it was brought by a canoe of a different construction from their own, composed of pieces of wood sewed together.'" Having "seen precisely [that] mode of construction at the Samoa Islands" he eagerly fit the Māori into that narrative of Pacific migration that was such a part of his understanding of the South Seas.

This narrative of migration was tied both to his ossifying concept of race but also to older understandings of human difference including, but far from limited to, that of Georg Forster. Forster "imagined a general continuum between the most refined Islanders in the tropics and the more debased peoples of temperate and frigid latitudes."<sup>121</sup> As Pickering had noted earlier, and this was a growing conviction; "man is essentially tropical in his constitutions."<sup>122</sup> His resounding impression of equatorial regions' fecundity found its way persistently into his thought about race, and in this sense any understanding of the Māori as distinct would have required a modification to that principle. This modification would have been necessary because he conceptualised, to varying degrees, the equator as a sort of sphere of creation, and were the Māori distinct from his established categories he would be forced to explain their distinguishing origin story.

Nicholas Thomas argues that the utility of climate for thinkers of Forster's era, influenced most resoundingly by Montesquieu, was that it was "conceptually flexible."<sup>123</sup> The elasticity of climate's definition rendered it buoyant. Pickering shows that the same was true of race, but he

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<sup>119</sup> Though popular opinion never formed anything like a compulsion for he often took pride in going against it, as discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>120</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 167.

<sup>121</sup> Nicholas Thomas, "Forsters' accounts of New Zealand Sociality," in *Voyages and Beaches: Pacific Encounters 1759-1840*, ed. Alex Calder, Jonathan Lamb, and Bridget Orr (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 143.

<sup>122</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas, "Forsters' accounts of New Zealand Sociality," 143; Margaret Watkins, "Slaves among Us': The Climate and Character of Eighteenth-Century Philosophical Discussions of Slavery," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 1 (2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12393>; Philip W. Walsh, "Jefferson's Vacant Lands and Bolívar's Desierto: Two applications of Montesquieu's Thought to the Americas," *Confluencia* 21, no. 1 (Fall, 2005): 43.

also shows that these particular life preservers often threatened to deflate, with a plunge again into confusion. The experience of travel was, as he would later remark in a letter to Samuel Morton, “proof of the old saying, that ‘there are more things under heaven than are dreamt in our philosophy.’”<sup>124</sup> The “old saying,” a paraphrasing from *Hamlet*, is as much a rebuke to Morton as a consolation to Pickering and it imparts a final lesson; the very uncertainty that constantly leaves the latter scrabbling in turn finds itself used as a foundation.

Pickering’s race thinking regarding the Māori was the negotiation of a maelstrom of different factors. Crossing the Tasman he was forced to reconcile the humanitarian colonialism of Lang with the contradictions offered, not just of the settlers of the Bay of Islands but his own experience with Māori guides and more generally the “Polynesian” type that he had previously constructed. He was simultaneously buffeted by Hale’s philology and his own environmental history of the peopling of the Pacific, both of which barred him from splintering the Māori from the “Egyptian” racial niche. Yet none of this caused him to relinquish his grip on race science itself. The disease, having overwhelmed his defences in Sydney, clung to his mind like lichen on a rock.

## Departure

On the morning of 5 March Pickering awoke for a morning service, which was officiated by Toorou, his participation in Christian ritual a matter of surprise to those “who were acquainted with his character.”<sup>125</sup> Pickering mentions Toorou’s character on multiple occasions; it was the spark to the discussion of race above, and his irritation at the man is palpable. “Toorou was well paid and much pleased with his guest; that nothing would suit but that he must carry him over the water himself” we are told in a wry switch to the third person.<sup>126</sup> That third person remove conveys a fair amount of the helplessness that seems to have characterised Pickering’s place in this encounter; the indignity of his extortion compounded by not one but several counts of manhandling as “it was necessary to cross the river repeatedly.”<sup>127</sup>

The next few days followed the tempo of those preceding; river crossings and frustration, excursions to the woods, and a retracing of steps from de Thierry’s farm, staying again with both Toorou and Davis before arriving in Paihia on 7 March. Peale’s description of

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<sup>124</sup> Pickering, “Introduction.”

<sup>125</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>126</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

<sup>127</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, November 1839 - April 1840.

their time in New Zealand gives a sense of the mood of the scientifics, they had “gathered all the plants, shot all the birds, caught all of the fish, and got heartily sick of the natives.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Peale quoted in: Peale, *Journals*, 82.

## Chapter Five: A New Species of Civilisation

Upon the coral shingle they leap  
And rush the smoking jungle. Round  
Their legs the salt-curles break and seep,  
Crumbling soon the mold of foot-prints.  
Streaks of red, shell-studded,  
Blot in sand, in waves are washed mute.

- Hubert Creekmore, from *It's Me, Oh Lord, Standing with a  
Gun*

## Fiji

Charles Wilkes was late. The Expedition arrived in Fiji on 5 May 1840, almost a full year behind the schedule dictated by the Navy Department.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of this were more than a matter of the Commander's reputation; as the cruise dragged on, the contracts that maintained the crew and marines threatened to expire, potentially leaving Wilkes with ships, but no one to sail them.<sup>2</sup> The looming threat of expiring contracts – something no doubt on Wilkes' mind given the desertions in Sydney – was not the only time constraint that faced the Expedition. The loss of the *Relief* had previously had minimal effect on the squadron's activities but it now threatened to leave Wilkes with ships and crew but no food.<sup>3</sup> The Expedition's commander had sent the store-ship home from Callao, finding her both too slow and too expensive for his purposes, but in Fiji the lack of a dedicated store meant that the squadron was faced with ever diminishing rations.<sup>4</sup> The clock was ticking and Wilkes was behind time.

"Given the 'geographical' nature of" of a surveying expedition, it is easy to "overlook the importance of time and timing that animated exploration."<sup>5</sup> Yet even the *Vincennes'* arrival into the Fijian archipelago speaks of haste. "Just at dawn we made an island, and at the same time a large sandbank, about half a mile from us; had darkness continued half an hour longer, we should have been wrecked upon the latter," Wilkes records in his *Narrative*.<sup>6</sup> This near wreck did not temper the commander's enthusiasm, and despite finding an island "30 miles out of the position aligned by former navigators," he "came to the determination of running into the (Fijian) group, feeling assured we should *thus save much time*."<sup>7</sup> These lines are an apt introduction to the combination of haste, danger and misinformation that would characterise the Expedition's almost one hundred days in "the Feejees."

Charles Pickering introduces the archipelago: "they consist of two principle and a great number of smaller isles; of which it would not perhaps be difficult to make up the number of 300, which is usually assigned."<sup>8</sup> The many islands of Fiji offered a decided challenge to European navigators, and their geography alone meant that the islands had been "in general

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838,1839,1840,1841,1842 Vol 3*, 5 vols., vol. 3 (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 189.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 231.

<sup>4</sup> Philbrick also notes that sending the *Relief* home allowed Wilkes to be rid of some of those officers he found troublesome: Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis mine; Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Pickering, Charles Pickering Journal, 4 May 1840 - 28 November 1841, 1838-1841, N-706, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

avoided by Mariners.”<sup>9</sup> The challenge of charting these many islands, not to mention their attached reefs, was the Expedition’s primary objective, with particular attention paid to the “selection of a safe harbour ... in every respect adapted to the reception of vessels of the United States engaged in the whale-fishery, and the general commerce of the seas.”<sup>10</sup> Wilkes had secured a rough chart of the islands in Tonga and it was as much an obituary as a map, “garnished here and there with notices such as ‘Brig *Eliza* lost,’ ‘American brig lost,’ etc. etc.”<sup>11</sup> In Tonga he also enlisted the skills of a pilot, Tom Granby, for aid in navigating Fiji’s doubtful waters.<sup>12</sup>

With the *Relief* sent back to the United States and the *Seagull* lost off Cape Horn, the squadron numbered four ships; two-sloops of war, a gun-brig and a cutter. The two sloops were impressive vessels, large and bristling with cannons, but they were ill-suited to surveying work, particularly given the time restraints at hand. Wilkes therefore opted to scatter the Expedition, employing the squadron’s launches, whaleboats and gigs in the task of criss-crossing between the islands of the archipelago.<sup>13</sup> Each small craft was prepared in advance for this “boat-work,” loaded with provisions and delicate surveying equipment, as well as weaponry. The latter heightened the squadron’s already martial bearing; “you cannot move about the decks without stumbling over some arrangement of aspect most ominous,” Reynolds wrote, as the crew draped boarding nets and brought an arsenal within arm’s reach.<sup>14</sup>

The crew prepared not just for battle but for their own deaths, and they wrote out their wills.<sup>15</sup> Wilkes underlined these preparations with a strict set of orders for surveying parties, including the command that the crew “avoid any disputes with them (Fijians), and never be off your guard or free from suspicion; they are in no case to be trusted.”<sup>16</sup> The Scientifics were not immune from similar precautions, and Brackenridge armed himself with a brace of pistols, for he held all Fijians in the “light of savage barbarians,” not to be dealt with without force of arms.<sup>17</sup> The Expedition’s instructions, written several years before, foreshadow these sentiments; they informed Wilkes that “treachery is one of the invariable characteristics of savages and barbarians.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>10</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, xxv.

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 143.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 139.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 194.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Brackenridge quoted in: Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, xxviii.

These instructions, which Wilkes had already found himself up against in his dealings with Indigenous peoples in the Tuamotu Archipelago, offered a range of contradictory advice. The request that he “avoid risking the officers and men unnecessarily on shore at the mercy of the natives” for “very many of the fatal disasters which have befallen preceding navigators, have arisen from too great a reliance on savage professions of friendship” came up against an impending reliance upon Fijians for both food and safety.<sup>19</sup> Even before their first landfall in Fiji, Wilkes’ plan entailed stretching the squadron thinly amid the islands, a task whose logistics would have been difficult at the best of times. Their timing, again, was off; this was not the best of times.

## Levuka

Pickering notes in his journal, “my own townsmen have been the chief visitors [to Fiji] for the purpose of procuring ‘biche-la-mar’ [bêche-de-mer], with some turtleshell and sandalwood for the Canton market.”<sup>20</sup> He continues, “vessels from Salem have been ... coming here for 31 years ... but the business was entirely overdone, and only one now remains, with some doubt of its return.”<sup>21</sup> As the Expedition made its way from Tonga, they “communicated with the American whaler, named Tobacco Plant. She had been out two years, and during that time had captured only seven whales.”<sup>22</sup> The years since Cook’s visit had entailed a dramatic ecological change in the Fijian archipelago, driven by men like Benjamin Vanderford, who traded muskets and whales’ teeth for commodities for trade with China and reported to the scientifics that many sections of the islands were once “in a much more flourishing condition.”<sup>23</sup>

This ecological change had, by the time the Expedition reached the islands in 1840, been accompanied by a dramatic political shift, driven by the sudden influx of wealth and arms. This trade birthed the town of Levuka, on the island of Ovalau, where most of the few former American and European residents of the archipelago resided; acting as subjects, intermediaries, technical advisors, translators and soldiers for prominent Fijians. Yet the trade that these *kaivalagi*<sup>24</sup> relied upon had almost dried up, as Pickering put it; “sustenance cannot now be obtained of a Feejee voyage.”<sup>25</sup> The supply of wealth and arms was threatening collapse, and the effects of that scarcity were already being felt. The United States Exploring Expedition – a potent

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<sup>19</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 2*, 2, xxviii

<sup>20</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>21</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>22</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>24</sup> The Fijian word for “foreigner” or most commonly “white person” is rendered by most of the crew as *papalangi* but by Hale, the philologist, as *vavalangi*.

<sup>25</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

military force in its own right – entered that ecosystem with the offer of trade deals, muskets and intervention, and the stir it caused on arrival in Levuka is therefore entirely understandable.<sup>26</sup>

“The appearance of sailors in the rigging was greeted by a shout from the shore,” writes Pickering of that stir.<sup>27</sup> George Colvocoresses offers the same but with more emphasis; “it is no exaggeration to say, that for the next fifteen minutes it was impossible to hear our own voices, so loud and deafening were their shouts of admiration” and Charles Erskine adds disdain to the account; “the wondering natives screeched like so many hyenas and performed such antics that we could hardly believe they belonged to the human race.”<sup>28</sup> As the *Vincennes* and *Peacock* anchored off Levuka, they were approached by a group of canoes, as well as a small cutter.<sup>29</sup> One of the canoes bore the Tui Levuka, Ratu Vosakotoira upon a raised platform, who Wilkes identified as the “chief of Levuka town” while the cutter was the property of David Whippy, who was “the principal man amongst the whites.”<sup>30</sup>

The latter had jumped ship from a bêche-de-mer trader to the islands in 1822 and had since then acquired status within Fijian society through his proximity to the formidable Ratu Tānoa and his acquisition of the title of Mata ki Bau; emissary of the Island of Bau.<sup>31</sup> Ratu Tānoa had earned the name Visawaqa which meant “literally ‘canoe-burner’ but probably figuratively ... something like ‘excessive killer’” in inter-Island warfare earlier in the century.<sup>32</sup> He was the Vunivalu, “God of War” of Bau, a small island off the coast of the archipelago’s largest island: Viti Levu. Bau, and by extension Ratu Tānoa, had profited immensely from trade in the islands and this made its Vunivalu one of the most powerful men in Fiji.<sup>33</sup> Whippy was the Vunivalu’s representative, and the Expedition’s arrival was unlikely to make him forget his pre-existing allegiance.

Some of the crew recognised this reality and viewed the kaivalagi of Levuka as Fijian subjects, supporting the assertion that local “Europeans did not begin to act as independent agents in Fijian policy until after 1850.”<sup>34</sup> Reynolds for example referred to them as “white men

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<sup>26</sup> The Journal of Thomas Williams offers evidence of this, stating that “Captain W[ilkes] purchased 40 casks of oil at one musket per cask”: Thomas Williams, *The Journal of Thomas Williams*, 1-2 vols., ed. G.C. Henderson (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1931).

<sup>27</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>28</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 135; Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 145.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 47.

<sup>30</sup> People of Levuka, *Levuka: Living Heritage* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and Levuka Historical and Cultural Society, 2001), 73; Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies*, 249,60.

<sup>33</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 132.

<sup>34</sup> David Routledge, *Matanitu: the Struggle for Power in Early Fiji* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, in association with the Fiji Centre Extension Services, University of the South Pacific, 1985), 37-38.

living under his [the Tui Levuka's] protection."<sup>35</sup> Despite this, such men were often keen to place emphasis upon their independence from, or disdain for, their Fijian patrons when speaking with the Expedition's crew. Whippy described himself and his fellows as "much feared and respected by the natives."<sup>36</sup> Whatever their self-perception, in the first half of the nineteenth century "the degree of intimacy that traders and beachcombers reached with their Fijian partners was unrivalled" and their testimonies were valued – if potentially delivered with self interest – by men like Pickering, who often indicates their voices in his journal through the presence of uncited quotation marks.<sup>37</sup> Levuka, like Kororāreka, was a "beach community," built as a vector for networks that reached from Fiji to London, Sydney and New York, and functioning through the close ties fostered by Fijian and Euro-American alike.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the crews descriptions of the white Levukan's subservience come with disdain, but there is little of the moral judgement voiced by Wilkes and his ilk at Kororāreka. Despite the prevalence of polygamy amongst these men, Wilkes in his *Narrative* felt the need to "bear testimony" to their "general deportment and good conduct."<sup>39</sup> This perhaps had a lot to do with the sobriety of the community there, which, unlike its Bay of Islands counterpart (or indeed the same town in a few decades) was largely free of alcohol.<sup>40</sup> The kaivalagi, Whippy first amongst them, were of the wrong class – deserters and opportunists – but they were invaluable to the Expedition as interpreters and guides, and their sobriety seems to have made the Captain forget their other qualities.<sup>41</sup>

This sobriety, the location of Ovalau at the rough centre of the Islands, Levuka's vassalage to the powerful polity of Bau and the presence of a ready source of translators and pilots made Levuka not only an ideal first stop but also a logical base for the squadron. Choosing a hill some distance from the beach, Wilkes commanded that the Expedition's observatory be constructed overlooking the town.<sup>42</sup> The observatory "consisted of several portable houses, built in New York" and "these, with six tents, made quite a village."<sup>43</sup> This pop-up settlement, including attached garden, acted not only as a place for astronomical observations but also as a mobile statement of the power and ingenuity of the United States, showcasing the technical

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<sup>35</sup> Reynolds, *Journal*, 144.

<sup>36</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years*, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Leclerc-Caffarel, "Exchange Relations," 142.

<sup>38</sup> Caroline Ralston, *Grass Huts and Warehouses: Pacific Beach Communities of the Nineteenth Century* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), 47.

<sup>39</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 48.

<sup>40</sup> David V. Burley, "Toward the Historical Archaeology of Levuka, a South Pacific Port of Call," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 7, no. 4 (2003): 245, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20853035>.

<sup>41</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 148.

<sup>43</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 148.

expertise of its construction and its observation equipment.<sup>44</sup> Charles Erskine assures readers that it “greatly astonished the natives.”<sup>45</sup>

Erskine indicates that the construction of pop-up settlements was standard practice upon reaching any “prominent place.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to establishing the observatory on the hill, and selecting translators and pilots from among the inhabitants of Levuka, Wilkes sought to use the altitude of the island of Ovalau to get his bearings, and issued orders that “a large party from each ship” accompany him in a climb to the highest peak on the island, which he identifies as “Andulong.”<sup>47</sup> The Captain makes much of this excursion, stressing its dangers.<sup>48</sup> The peril of the climb was not just topographical – “precipices of several hundreds of feet on either side of us – but also the danger of the island’s populace. “I saw our native guides each pull a leaf when they came to a spot, and throw it down ... if not performed they have a notion they will soon be killed themselves” for breaching the expectations of the people of the interior, whom Pickering terms “mountaineers.”<sup>49</sup> Wilkes gets this interpretation of the danger of failing to observe ritual from David Whippy and accompanied it with the note that “the inhabitants of these mountains have the character among the cannibal population of the coast, of being very savage!”<sup>50</sup>

The Captain only obliquely mentions the use of guides in his dramatic representation of the mountain ascent, and to Pickering the climb is written as entirely unremarkable (perhaps paling in comparison to his jaunts in the Andes). Reynolds provides a detail that Wilkes elides: it was not just guides that accompanied Wilkes to the peak: “the chief [presumably the Tui Levuka who had met the squadron’s arrival] accompanied them for protection and (brought) many of his people to carry the instruments” etc.<sup>51</sup> This is a notable omission, particularly when paired with an unnecessary mention of the island’s “cannibal population.” The captain’s description of the Tui Levuka in his *Narrative* similarly downplays the relationship between the two men, noting that Wilkes offered gifts of “two whale’s teeth, and two fathoms of red cotton cloth, as is customary” – a not insubstantial gift – ensuring that the Fijian “was desirous of doing every thing for me.”<sup>52</sup> This exchange, he assures the reader meant that “any ground [he] wished to occupy was at the service of the countrymen of [the Tui Levuka’s] friend Whippy.”

Wilkes is careful to note that he was not “at the mercy” of the Fijians, at least aboard ship, and this was not simply a performance for the *Narrative*. Within hours of their arrival in

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<sup>44</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 184-85.

<sup>45</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 148.

<sup>47</sup> Known now as Nadelaiovalau. Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 50.

<sup>48</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 147.

<sup>52</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 50.

Levuka, Wilkes says that he “directed the chief, Tui Levuka, to send a message immediately to Ambau [Bau], to inform King Tanoa” of the Expedition’s arrival.<sup>53</sup> The message of this summons was essentially an assertion of his own authority over the Tui Levuka, and it was also aimed at extending that authority to Ratu Tānoa; “in case he obeyed, it would be considered that he acknowledged me as his superior.”<sup>54</sup> This manoeuvre, which Wilkes describes as an “experiment,” was judged worth trying because it “might be beneficial in case of any difficulty occurring during our stay.”<sup>55</sup> If he considered that such assertions of authority could themselves create “difficulty,” he does not say.

## Foreshadowing

Wilkes’s mention of “cannibalism,” and his allusions to potential difficulties captures something of the mood of the Expedition.<sup>56</sup> Eleven days after the Squadron’s arrival in Fiji, midshipman William Reynolds wrote in his journal: “well, we are among the Feegees, and have not been killed, nor eaten, nor wrecked *yet*.”<sup>57</sup> It’s a wry statement that could easily be taken as an expression of light-hearted humour.<sup>58</sup> If it is a joke then the punchline “*yet*”, comes from an ambiguity that offers as much dread as mirth. *Yet*, with the tension of a future unknown, is something historians are denied because we’ve heard the joke with a punchline formed from hindsight and so authors reply to Reynolds’ jest with passages like “four months later, no one would be laughing.”<sup>59</sup> The 98 days that the Expedition spent surveying the Fijian Islands are therefore almost necessarily pregnant with foreshadowing. The tension of coming wrecks, killing and, maybe, eating form a stage.

It is not, however, just historians who build stages from foreshadowing. Reynolds’ journal employs a similar technique. He notes that the Fijians appearance was of “mingled hideousness and ferocity” matching a character he had “since [writing that line] fatally experienced.”<sup>60</sup> This quality they had “earned for themselves;” among the Americans of the Expedition, Fijians’ reputation went before them.<sup>61</sup> Charles Erskine’s description of the Islands

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<sup>53</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 49.

<sup>56</sup> Any reference to cannibalism, and it is rare that writing about Fiji will not contain one, demands reference to the heated scholarly debate about the topic e.g.: Gananath Obeyesekere and W. Arens, “Cannibalism Reconsidered: Responses to Marshall Sahlins,” *Anthropology Today* 19, no. 5 (2003), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3695301>; Marshall Sahlins, “Artificially Maintained Controversies: Global Warming and Fijian Cannibalism,” *Anthropology Today* 19, no. 3 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3695286>.

<sup>57</sup> Emphasis mine; Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 144.

<sup>58</sup> Stanton took it this way: Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 189.

<sup>59</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 194.

<sup>60</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 145.

<sup>61</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 145.

is blunt: “there are about one hundred and fifty islands in the group, sixty of which were then inhabited by one hundred and fifty thousand cannibals.”<sup>62</sup> Granby, a Levukan resident who Wilkes enlisted in Tonga, was apparently unphased when the Captain pronounced that “you will find when we get to the islands that I know as much about them as you do.”<sup>63</sup>

To Wilkes and his crew Fiji was both known and unknown. Charles Erskine and his companions on the *Porpoise* “shuddered” at the view of Fiji, for “this fair group of islands” were “the homes of a ferocious race of cannibals, or man eaters.”<sup>64</sup> Wilkes offers a similar pairing of beauty and threat, when he remarks how he “found himself in the midst of a number of beautiful islands” whose picturesque aspect almost made him forget that “they were the abode of a savage, ferocious, and treacherous race of cannibals.”<sup>65</sup> Tracy Banivanua-Mar points out that European travellers like Wilkes “opportunistically elaborated the beauty and utility of the islands as a canvas on which the vista of cannibalism could materialise in stark contrast.”<sup>66</sup> In this sense, the tension of projected violence was not only as much a stage as the islands themselves, it was at this point inextricable from them. It could in turn be argued that the Expedition approached the shoals and heights of the Fijian archipelago not to discover but to survey; cooking pits and blood drenched idols leered from the valleys and peaks of the shoreline, and all that remained was their inscription.<sup>67</sup> In this reading, Reynolds’ *yet* is promise, not jest.

The idea that the Expedition’s path in Fiji was forged by confirmation bias is at times very persuasive. You “cannot move about” the writings of the Expedition, or about the Expedition, “without stumbling over some arrangement of aspect most ominous.”<sup>68</sup> However the fetish of cannibalism, while looming large, offers some, but not an entire account of the squadron’s behaviour. There is an ambiguity to *yet* that bears examination. This ambiguity is arguably a product of the kind of relationship that existed between the Tui Levuka and Wilkes, or Ratu Tānoa and Whippy; a sort of intimacy and reciprocity that rebuked or at least complicated “deeply engrained fantasies of cannibalism.”<sup>69</sup> Reynolds sums this up perfectly in

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<sup>62</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 145.

<sup>63</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 143.

<sup>64</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 144.

<sup>65</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Tracey Banivanua-Mar, “Cannibalism and Colonialism: Charting Colonies and Frontiers in Nineteenth Century Fiji,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 2 (2010): 5. this staging has deep roots, as Mario Klarer argues, it was “a leitmotif in the travelogues of Columbus and Vespucci,”; Mario Klarer, “Cannibalism and Carnavalesque: Incorporation as Utopia in the Early Image of America,” *New Literary History* 30, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 389.

<sup>67</sup> The idea of Wilkes not discovering but surveying is repurposed from: Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 79. For an excellent elaboration of a similar idea see: L. Katherine Smith, “Cartographic Sea-Changes in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*: Ahab, Charles Wilkes, and the US Exploring Expedition,” *Journal of Transnational American studies* 10, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5070/T8101043945>.

<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 74.

his description of hosting Ratu Tānoa Visawaqa; “[he] did me the favour to hug me in his arms and call me his son ... the idea that those arms had slain so many men made me feel quite strange.”<sup>70</sup> Greg Dening argues that hindsight has a blinding quality, if so then foreshadowing embraces that glare.<sup>71</sup> The murmurs of coming violence can drown out the “past’s uncertainties” but they can also constitute a part of that uncertainty; the primeval difficulty of distinguishing the wind’s rustle in the trees from an approaching tiger.

## “Old Snuff”

“On the 12<sup>th</sup> [May, 1840], while engaged at the observatory, the canoe of Tanoa, the King of Ambau, was discovered rounding the southern point of the island.”<sup>72</sup> Charles Pickering was returning from a foraging expedition and witnessed the arrival of Ratu Tānoa to the beach at Levuka: “his canoe was the finest we had seen, or that probably exists amongst these islands ... richly ornamented ... with the large white ovula [the shells of a type of sea-snail].”<sup>73</sup> Such vessels were the product of the Eighteenth Century relocation to Fiji of expert canoe builders from Tonga and Samoa.<sup>74</sup> The canoe’s “magnificent appearance, with its immense sail of white mats ... was fit accompaniment to the magnificent scenery around.”<sup>75</sup> Nine years before, Captain John Eagleston, out of Salem, describes a similar scene: “As she drew near, the sight became more novel and beautiful. The natives, under a shining coat of oil, with a great display of white tapa from their heads and loins, give the appearance of the finest body of men I had yet seen.”<sup>76</sup>

Ratu Tānoa, rather than seeking out Wilkes (and thus responding to the Captain’s summons), made his way to “his quarters at the bourrai [bure, a dwelling]” to be hosted by Tui Levuka.<sup>77</sup> This manoeuvre neatly sidestepped Wilkes’ attempt at establishing his authority over the Vunivalu, and after being welcomed by his vassal, Ratu Tānoa sent Whippy, the Mata ki Bau, to inform Wilkes of his presence.<sup>78</sup> The Captain responded with an emissary of his own, Lieutenant Carr, who informed Ratu Tānoa that the *Vincennes* would be ready to host him in the

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<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 149.

<sup>71</sup> Greg Dening, “Empowering Imaginations,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 9, no. 2 (1997): 423.

<sup>72</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 46.

<sup>73</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>74</sup> Nicholas Thomas et al., “From Chief to Chief: the Biography of a Fijian Breastplate,” in *Artefacts of Encounter: Cook’s Voyages, Colonial Collecting and Museum Histories*, ed. Nicholas Thomas et al. (Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2016).

<sup>75</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 54.

<sup>76</sup> John Eagleston, *Journal of Captain John H. Eagleston, Ship Peru in Fiji, 1831*, John Henry Eagleston (1803-1884), MH87, Peabody Essex Museum, Philips Library.

<sup>77</sup> Bure: “men’s house,” in this case referring to what is described by Wilkes as the “council-house” of Levuka. Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>78</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 55.

morning.<sup>79</sup> Whether these manoeuvres left Wilkes “one up” over Ratu Tānoa is questionable.<sup>80</sup> Either way it shows Wilkes presumed authority over one he described as “King,” as well as Ratu Tānoa’s awareness that such politics were at play.

The Expedition’s commander utilised his knowledge of Fijian diplomatic customs, acquired through the white residents of Levuka, in his efforts to gain the upper hand in his meeting with Ratu Tānoa. The inverse is also true, as is clearly illustrated by the latter’s arrival aboard the *Vincennes* the next morning. At 10am he climbed aboard the *Vincennes*, only to be met with a harsh welcome from “Sydney,” Wilkes’ formidable Newfoundland dog, who drove him up against the side of the ship before being restrained, at least according to Wilkes account.<sup>81</sup> Aside from this hostile canine greeting, the *Narrative* recalls that “every thing was prepared to give them [Ratu Tānoa and his retinue] a most marked reception, *excepting the salute*.”<sup>82</sup> Naval salutes, which had their origins in the Royal Navy, were offered to visiting dignitaries as a matter of course -cannons at this point required time to reload, and firing them in this manner temporarily disarmed a ship- and were an important symbolic element of shipboard negotiations. Wilkes’s failure to salute Ratu Tānoa was not unnoticed.

“For a considerable time his majesty said nothing, nor could we conjecture what caused him to be so silent,” recalls Colvocoresses. After some time Ratu Tānoa “directed the interpreter, David Whippy, to ask if we were offended with him.”<sup>83</sup> He asked this because “he was led to suppose so, from the fact that we did not fire a salute upon his coming on board.”<sup>84</sup> This response – both the sustained silence and the implication that Wilkes had not observed appropriate diplomatic protocols [which, considering he referred to Ratu Tānoa as a “King” he had not] – put the Captain on the back foot, and he directed Whippy “to assure him” not only that they were pleased to have him aboard but that “before he left the ship ...[they would] fire a large salute.”<sup>85</sup> Just as Wilkes had moved to employ Fijian custom against Ratu Tānoa, the Vunivalu utilised US Naval tradition against Wilkes, yet unlike Wilkes, the Fijian was successful in gaining the upper hand.

This diplomatic outmanoeuvre was only the beginning of Wilkes’s troubles. The primary purpose of the meeting – in Wilkes’s mind anyway – was to secure trading rights for the

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<sup>79</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 55.

<sup>80</sup> Roberta Sprague, “The United States Exploring Expedition in Fiji” (Graduate Seminar in South Pacific History and the Pacific Research Seminar, UH-Manoa, Department of History, 1985/1986).

<sup>81</sup> “Sydney” was named after the place he was acquired as a gift from the Governor of NSW. The same breed was a companion to an earlier Expedition, that of Lewis and Clarke, whose dog “Seaman” accompanied the Corps of Discovery for their entire journey:

<sup>82</sup> Emphasis mine. Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 140.

<sup>84</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 140.

<sup>85</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 140.

Expedition, something he had done without incident in Samoa and Tahiti.<sup>86</sup> These rights, which are recorded in the *Narrative*, entailed protection of US subjects, rules for the distribution of salvage, the capture of deserters and a ban on the trade of “spirituous liquors,” amongst other things.<sup>87</sup> If Wilkes expected an easy assent, he was mistaken, and Ratu Tānoa, as befitted his station, refused to conduct negotiations via Whippy alone, but through the medium of a man Wilkes describes as his “prime minister.”<sup>88</sup> Joyce points out that this forced the commander to “follow Fiji rules and regulations” and, with the above considered, lost Wilkes even further ground.<sup>89</sup> The regulations were eventually consented to, and presented in a “bright round tin case,” but, as Wilkes subjected Ratu Tānoa to a diatribe about the importance of “protecting the whites,” the Fijian undercut the entire affair, indicating that “he had always done so; that the advice was good but that he did not need it.”<sup>90</sup>

Overall Wilkes had come out the worse for the negotiations, and the mocking musical accompaniment to Ratu Tānoa’s welcome to the gun deck -a song called “the King of the Cannibal Isles”- did little to change that.<sup>91</sup> In a rather blunt show, he ordered that the “salute” to Ratu Tānoa take the form of a show of naval force; the crew loaded the *Vincennes*’ cannon with grapeshot and used it to rake the water. The account of Ratu Tānoa’s silence and affront at the lack of naval salute is only mentioned in two sources, that I could find, and not discussed by the major historical works writing about this meeting. These two sources – Wilkes and Colvocoresses – disagree about the timing of this conversation. The former describes Ratu Tānoa’s rebuke being voiced after negotiations had ceased, and therefore in the less formal context of a tour around the ship.<sup>92</sup> The other source, Colvocoresses –who is not so invested in downplaying Wilkes’ faux pas – describes it as part of the opening reception.<sup>93</sup> This is not the only point where the two men offer differing accounts of the relationship between Ratu Tānoa and the Captain, the second dispute also relates to custom and authority, and, importantly; provisions.

In his autobiography, Wilkes announces that he “determined on first arrival to assume the authority of a great chief over all those of the Island.”<sup>94</sup> As much was clear in the *Narrative*, which cites this as his motivation for his summoning of Ratu Tānoa. However, the next point is absent; “[I] at once ordered the taboo which then existed to be removed as it was impossible to

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<sup>86</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 95.

<sup>87</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 408.

<sup>88</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 56.

<sup>89</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 96.

<sup>90</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 57.

<sup>91</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>92</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 57.

<sup>93</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 140.

<sup>94</sup> Wilkes, *Autobiography*, 458; Wilkes, *Autobiography*.

obtain any provisions of the natives.”<sup>95</sup> The tabu in question had apparently been placed on the coconuts and other food in the region around Levuka after a death in the bay.<sup>96</sup> Colvocoresses refers to this, on 21 May; “it is very gratifying for us to learn that a messenger arrived here this afternoon from Ambou [Bau], with permission for the Chief Levuka to take the taboo off the cocoa-nut trees.”<sup>97</sup> Choosing between the veracity of these two accounts is easy, for Wilkes contradicts himself in the *Narrative*; “at the time of our arrival [we]... found all the cocoa-nuts tabooed” and “in consequence could obtain none, until I spoke to the chiefs of Ambau [Bau], who removed the taboo.”<sup>98</sup>

A tabu on provisions, as the Expedition approached a rationing crisis was no small thing, and it was just one of the ways that Wilkes was forced to operate within the cultural ecosystems of the Fijian world. His negotiations with Ratu Tānoa showed that he was willing to use Fijian norms to his own advantage but did so with mixed results. The relationship between the two authorities also show that even at this early stage Wilkes was struggling to reconcile his own sense of influence with the degree to which he and his crew were subject to the whims of those he viewed as beneath him. This struggle is simply elaborated by his repetition of Ratu Tānoa’s nickname amongst the kaivalagi of Levuka; “Old Snuff.” This name, due according to Wilkes is a “begrimed look” and according to others his peculiar style of speech (which rendered him incomprehensible to all save those who knew him well, which included Whippy).<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps more than nicknames or mocking musical accompaniment, Wilkes dealt with the dissonance between his own self-perception and the realities of his situation through an invocation of race and character. A twentieth century biography of Wilkes aptly impersonates the Captain’s account of the negotiations: “the King dimly comprehended some of this, and finally nodded and said he would agree to a treaty.”<sup>100</sup> Ratu Tānoa, “appeared dull and stupid,” and required the captain to constantly check to see if he was being comprehended.<sup>101</sup> The accompaniment to this was the emphasis, present in most accounts, of Fijian bewilderment and wonder at technology or even the acrobatics of the crew. Ratu Tānoa’s “actions resembled those of a monkey” when he was presented with quicksilver by Wilkes and the Fijians on shore at Levuka “screeched like so many hyenas and performed such antics that we could hardly believe they belonged to the human race” recalls Erskine.<sup>102</sup> In the accounts of Peale, Colvocoresses,

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<sup>95</sup> Wilkes, *Autobiography*, 458; Wilkes, *Autobiography*.

<sup>96</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 100.

<sup>97</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 56.

<sup>98</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 56.

<sup>99</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 190.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Silverberg, *Stormy Voyager: The Story of Charles Wilkes* (New York, NY: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1968), 121.

<sup>101</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 57-59.

<sup>102</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 59; Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 145, 57.

Wilkes, Pickering and Erskine, Fijians are at various points “greatly astonished,” or some other form of the phrase, at the technology of the Expedition.<sup>103</sup>

Astonishment, incomprehension, wonder, are words which speak to Fijian incapacity. They are not “impressed” by the Squadron and its crew, they are “astonished,” awed; childlike or animalistic. A similar theme is present in Wilkes’ deployment of “sullenness;” whereby the offence Ratu Tānoa expressed at his inadequate reception aboard the *Vincennes* is transformed from a diplomatic manoeuvre to a childish tantrum.<sup>104</sup> This tantrum in turn finds its way into the *Narrative’s* description of the “Customs of the Feejee Group” and from there into contemporary narratives, and finally even into the work of historians, as the above-mentioned biography indicates.<sup>105</sup>

The Expedition’s invocation of Fijian wonder drew upon a potent historical trend. “Wonder was socially powerful, and eighteenth-century elites... set their wonder against the ‘gawking wonder’ of crowds.”<sup>106</sup> The ability to perform or invoke wonder, to secularise and rationalise it, was an exertion of self-esteem. It offered a sense of superiority not merely to the scientifics, but across a crew of varied social standing and heightened paranoia. Yet this sense of superiority was tenuous and self-conscious, the Fijians always threatened to strip away that apotheosis by shifting from wonder at plumes of salt water raised by cannister shot to desire for the cannons that spawned them. Demonstrations of technical prowess as a foundation for superiority thus always bore an edge that cut both ways. Wilkes gifted Ratu Tānoa a “patent rifle” – a breech loading firearm known properly as the 1819 Hall rifle, the height of United States military ingenuity – “the like of which had never been seen in Fiji,” but the Vunivalu’s wonder at the object clearly lasted for less time than his possessiveness towards it.<sup>107</sup>

Charles Pickering was a witness to most of the above events, though his account of them is not in depth. On the afternoon of 8 May, 1840 he “went on shore at Livuka, and commenced ... acquaintances with this remarkable people, one of the least known of any of the branches of the human family.”<sup>108</sup> Race was by this point central in his mind, and in Fiji he found opportunities for observation and categorisation with the potential to settle ongoing disputes back in the

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<sup>103</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 175; Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 140; Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 57; Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841; Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 161.

<sup>104</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 76; Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 40.

<sup>105</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 76; John Elphinstone Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise Among the Islands of the Western Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 173.

<sup>106</sup> Delbourgo, *Electricity and Enlightenment*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 149; Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, *American Military Technology: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>108</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

United States. One aspect of these disputes was the question of the cannibalism that rarely went unmentioned in contemporary conversations about the islands and their people.

## The King of the Cannibal Islands

“Oh have you heard the news of late, about a mighty king so great? If you have not, ‘tis in my pate – the King of the Cannibal Islands,” so begins “The King of the Cannibal Islands,” the tune to which Ratu Tānoa was welcomed aboard the *Vincennes*.<sup>109</sup> The Expedition’s encounters in Fiji often had musical accompaniment but this song deserves particular attention. Music, as Vanessa Agnew speculates, had the potential to soothe those on both sides of an encounter.<sup>110</sup> After the business of negotiations aboard the *Vincennes* were concluded; “the marines were put through their exercises, marched and countermarched to the music of the drum and fife, which delighted them [Ratu Tānoa and his retinue] extremely.”<sup>111</sup> Yet the music they marched to was, at least in part, a mockery of the Fijian, a song whose lyrics rendered his speech to nonsense: “hokee pokee wonkee gum, puttee po pee kaihula cum.”<sup>112</sup> Their jest, described by Pickering as a “conceit of the musicians,” offered an insult to Ratu Tānoa without (apparently) his knowledge or consequences.<sup>113</sup>

This musical mockery, with all its “knowing looks and stifled laughs” of “behind the scenes cunning” was often a facet of shipboard life.<sup>114</sup> In *Twenty Years before the Mast* Erskine records a number of such sailor’s ditties; composed specifically by and for the crew of the Expedition.<sup>115</sup> Songs could, as Denning’s example of skylarking aboard the *Bounty* shows, be used to undermine figures of authority and it is unlikely that Wilkes escaped their aim.<sup>116</sup> Yet when their targets lay outside of the crew, mocking songs offered a source of companionship and group solidarity; an in-joke that could be returned to easily, as illustrated by the several mentions of the song at Ratu Tānoa’s expense.

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<sup>109</sup> Broadside Ballad Entitled ‘King of the Cannibal Islands, 1858, Shelfmark RB, m 143 (147), National Library of Scotland; Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841; Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 148.

<sup>110</sup> Vanessa Agnew, “A Scots Orpheus in the South Seas: Encounter Music on Cook’s Second Voyage,” *Journal for Maritime Research* 3, no. 1 (2011): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21533369.2001.9668310>.

<sup>111</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 58.

<sup>112</sup> Broadside Ballad. There are a few versions of this song’s lyrics but the theme and mockery of Pacific languages is shared even in versions performed today: Orlando Hodgson, *Hodgson’s Singer’s Budget for 1836: a Collection of Popular New Songs, Comic and Sentimental* (London: O. Hodgson, 1836).

<sup>113</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>114</sup> Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 73.

<sup>115</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 36, 130, 230, 49, 66, 91. James Dwight Dana composed a number of songs from the expedition, which were compiled in an unpublished songbook: Elizabeth Truswell, “Thulia: a Tale of the Antarctic (1843): The earliest Antarctic poem and its musical setting,” in *Antarctica: Music, Sounds and Cultural Connections*, ed. Bernadette Hince, Rupert Summerson, and Aran Wiesel (Acton: ANU Press, 2015), 34.

<sup>116</sup> Denning, *Bad Language*, 73.

In both Rio de Janeiro and in Sydney the crew engaged in a sort of nineteenth century “battle of the bands.” Sound carries well across water, and in the evenings the crew of the English ship *Thunderer* would sing songs “very aggravating to [the] American patriotism” of those aboard the *Vincennes* floating in Rio’s harbour.<sup>117</sup> In response Wilkes eventually called “fifty of the best singers” to, as he put it, “give it to them in thunderous tones, with plenty of Yankee lightning.”<sup>118</sup> This melodic warfare was repeated in Sydney drinking houses a few months later.<sup>119</sup> Nationalistic songs, like those recounted by Erskine and written by sailors like James Croswell Palmer (a surgeon on the Expedition), built group as much as nationalist solidarity, and Wilkes’ Rio concert was likely arranged to precisely those ends.<sup>120</sup>

If the *Vincennes* performance of “the Parliaments of England” - “what you gained by British force the Yankees have o’erthrown” - built upon nationalist sentiment, “The King of the Cannibal Islands” arguably served a similar function for race. In European Pacific ethnography “those islanders who responded favourably to European music were ranked higher than those who exhibited indifference or disliking.”<sup>121</sup> What Agnew terms the “music test” was used to construct a racial hierarchy.<sup>122</sup> The “King of the Cannibal Islands” shows another, less consciously ethnographic way in which racial hierarchies were constructed. The shared mockery of Ratu Tānoa, which drew upon a popular song written in England a decade before – and described by Behlmer as a popular “code for rank savagery in a benighted sea of islands” aimed at the “common folk” – allowed the crew to maintain a sense of superiority over the Fijian entourage aboard the *Vincennes* without anything approaching a direct conflict.<sup>123</sup>

Yet like tales of Fijian wonder, the crew’s musical trickery had a second edge to it, a kind of foreshadowing. If the prank of the ballad acted to quell racial insecurity, some of its lyrics would likely have been less comforting. The final verse declares; “he sent for all his guards with knives, to put an end to all their lives ... carving their heads off, one by one; and the king laughed to see the fun ... the King of the Cannibal Islands.”<sup>124</sup> The targets of the described violence are not European, and given that the song was composed at a remove from any potential Fijian “knives” or “carving,” its role as a metropolitan ballad about islander inferiority made it successful in London taverns and probably Sydney public houses. For those preparing for “boat duty” amongst the islands the song probably took on a different tenor.

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<sup>117</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 33.

<sup>118</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 36.

<sup>119</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>120</sup> Truswell, “Thulia,” 28.

<sup>121</sup> Agnew, “Encounter Music,” 12.

<sup>122</sup> Agnew, “Encounter Music,” 18.

<sup>123</sup> Behlmer believes that “the insult presumably escaped Tanoa”: George K. Behlmer, *Risky Shores: Savagery and Colonialism in the Western Pacific* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 36.

<sup>124</sup> Broadside Ballad.

“That every member of the expedition knew the popular song ‘King of the Cannibal Isles’ ... suggests deeply ingrained fantasies of cannibalism” argues Paul Lyons.<sup>125</sup> The song makes an excellent illustration of the way that the crew’s thinking about Fiji, “the Cannibal Islands,” was primed by transatlantic popular culture. The singing of a ditty about a cannibal king to one the crew saw as a cannibal king mimics the ironies of the carnival, which Klarer argues is a strong theme of Atlantic conceptions of cannibalism.<sup>126</sup> As he puts it “all the various manifestations of the cannibalistic ... share a utopian longing for unity through sublation of difference.”<sup>127</sup> While I disagree with the Freudian elements of his argument, the ubiquity of cannibal themes, even where direct experience lends them no impetus, arguably points towards the utility of the idea for bringing about, if not a fulfilment of “the longing for unity,” then at least some kind of cognitive consonance.

Histories of the Expedition relate to the crew’s cannibal tales in a variety of ways. Stanton narrates a transition from scepticism to disgust and then enlightened non-interference; the crew initially doubt the reality of cannibalism, then, as “evidence mount[s]” they are convinced and in turn horrified, yet they finally come to a “remarkable agreement that cannibalism ... was solely the concern of the natives.”<sup>128</sup> Philbrick echoes Stanton, noting that “cannibalism became one of the fundamental institutions of” Fiji and though “then as now there were those who insisted that rumours of cannibalism were nothing more than the white man’s worst nightmare projected onto an innocent native people” the crew were eventually led to concede its realities.<sup>129</sup> To both men the crew’s encounter with cannibalism is one of enlightenment voyagers appraising the evidence available and coming to the most rational conclusion, with Philbrick’s “then as now” applying both to cannibalism’s believers and its sceptics, and presumably the process by which they drew their conclusions.

Charles Pickering makes an account of cannibalism in Fiji that follows the same lines as this conversion narrative. On 3 July many members of the crew had been “so well treated by the Natives” that they began to view the negative depictions of the archipelago’s inhabitants as the product of malicious slander.<sup>130</sup> The matter had become a focus of increasing debate, “seriously discussed at the wardroom table” after the day’s work was done. Yet on that day Pickering – who acknowledged that any cannibal act could not be attested to by any “person of credit” who

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<sup>125</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 74.

<sup>126</sup> Klarer, “Carnavalesque,” 400.

<sup>127</sup> Klarer, “Carnavalesque,” 405.

<sup>128</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 202-3.

<sup>129</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 197, 200.

<sup>130</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

had witnessed the event first hand – was belowdecks when he was informed that numerous members of the crew along with both Peale and Dana were on deck above when just such an event had occurred. The *Peacock* anchored at harbour was visited by “3 to 4 canoes” who came to bring evidence of a “feast on shore,” the passengers of which apparently reenacted the act for the Americans’ confirmation. Despite not observing the incident himself, the authority of the scientific observers satisfied Pickering enough to avoid adding “mud to the stream of knowledge” with his subsequent widespread reporting of the practice’s ubiquity.

The language of a scientific appraisal similarly takes the fore in Joyce’s narrative, whereby the crew awaited “hard evidence” of cannibalism’s reality and were then provided “ocular proof” before departing from the scene in disgust, “leaving the puzzled though well-fed epicures of Fokasinga bobbing in their wake.”<sup>131</sup> Joyce also emphasises that “most by now were remarkably even-tempered about the incident” but that nonetheless “relations between the islanders and crew rapidly deteriorated from this point onwards.”<sup>132</sup> *American Ethnography* locates the violence which followed the “ocular proof” firmly in a “clash of cultures,” with “a semblance of patience and forbearance for island culture gave way to shortened fuses and violent reprisals against the man-eating Fijians.”<sup>133</sup>

Ann Fabian’s *The Skull Collectors* partly follows this reasoning; the violence of the Expedition in Fiji was directly related to Fijians “finally behaved as Americans expected.”<sup>134</sup> While from their arrival the crew had been treated hospitably, violence directed at the Expedition along with “proof” of cannibalism confirmed deeply held beliefs and in turn opened the floodgates of violence. The racial ideas of Wilkes and the rest of the squadron are thus understood as a latent trigger; a mental slipway down which they ran as soon as “proof” offered an impetus. Those Fijians who were the targets of the Expedition’s wrath “bore the brunt for past Fijian wrongs, real and imagined,” with the latter a reference to tales of Fijian crimes that move “through the accounts like some version of the children’s game of telephone.”<sup>135</sup>

The historical writing of Stanton, Philbrick, Joyce and Fabian all, though in slightly different ways, emphasise the importance of the witnessing of cannibalism; “ocular proof.” This proof is taken as transformative, shifting known to unknown or alternatively unleashing a latent ferocity. Paul Lyons synthesises the two transformations, whereby the act of witnessing “dispels” the “shudders” of the unknown yet at the same time acts to preserve preconception by

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<sup>131</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 103-4.

<sup>132</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 104-5.

<sup>133</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 105.

<sup>134</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 151.

<sup>135</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 151, 247.

“transferring authority over the object to the perceiver.”<sup>136</sup> Knowing via witnessing is thus made contingent, and the scepticism about the reality of cannibalism becomes far less significant in the process. Rather than a pivotal event, to Lyons the cannibal scene is subsumed within a web of relationships, firmly aligning him with Gananath Obeyesekere, who he cites extensively. The performance of “King of the Cannibal Islands” and its metropolitan composition, not to mention Cook’s journal and the tales of Charlie Savage, were, according to Lyons, all integral in the staging of the cannibal scene that followed.

While for Stanton and Philbrick, Pickering’s account of scepticism towards the presence of cannibalism amongst the Fijians is taken as emblematic of a suspension of judgement, for Lyons it is contrasted with the volume of other accounts which voice no such doubts.<sup>137</sup> This contradiction points towards the criticality with which *American Pacificism* approaches the Expedition and its historiography. “Clearly” he points out “this is not scientific anthropology, but storytelling that fills various needs.”<sup>138</sup> Such storytelling he classes as a “vulgar” form of American Pacificism; employed to relatively blunt effect by Wilkes, whose *Narrative* is the focus of his analysis.<sup>139</sup> Pickering’s suspended judgement is, in this understanding, simply the top point of the arc of a flung grenade; a moment of stillness as fleeting as it is bound towards an inevitable explosion of violence.

As Lyons goes on to point out, Pickering’s rapid capitulation on the matter of cannibalism lends strength to the argument.<sup>140</sup> Yet this conversion – from reservation about cannibalism’s very existence to affirming that in Fiji the practice is “almost a distinct art” – is perhaps not so dramatic as it would seem. The naturalist’s expression of doubt is not, though characterised otherwise, the face of self-doubt. Pickering’s description of the debate at the wardroom table does not take on the tone of other points where he was convinced by experience to change his stance; the first-person pronoun is notably absent.<sup>141</sup> His journal reads: “some of us began to think” and “some even doubted,” and not “I had begun to think” or “I had even doubted.” It is a kind of objective phrasing that deliberately avoids naming the discussants and echoes the way he described past disagreements where he wished to avoid precisely that (naming) and yet still make it clear that he was correct. By July, when this “witnessing” came to pass, he had long been convinced, and the anonymous naysayers merely lend weight to his conviction.

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<sup>136</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 75.

<sup>137</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 83.

<sup>138</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 85.

<sup>139</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 19.

<sup>140</sup> Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 83.

<sup>141</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

There is an echo of Philbrick's "then as now" in Pickering's tone; a level of indignation at the denial of what to him was an obvious reality of Fijian culture, and by that point the race he termed "The Oriental of Asiatic Negro True Ethiopians."<sup>142</sup> His journals from his time in Fiji appear to have been collated from less organised notes soon after the departure from the islands, something shown by occasional confusions of tense as well as references to events yet to occur. These notes open with a long series of observations about race, which are largely similar to a letter he sent to Samuel Morton on 8 August 1840 (just before the Expedition's departure from Fiji).<sup>143</sup> It is possible that his certainty is hindsight but there is little to indicate as such.

Charles Pickering himself did not witness anthropophagy firsthand. When that group of canoes approached the *Peacock*, he was "below."<sup>144</sup> The previous two weeks had been spent in expeditions from the *Peacock* to various places on and surrounding Vanua Levu, the second largest island of the archipelago. The *Peacock* operated mostly out of what Pickering refers to as "Sandalwood Bay," now known as Bua Bay, which had a good supply of fresh water and had been used by Europeans first for the collection of Sandalwood (as the name implies) and then as a base for Bêche-de-mer fishing. The *Leonidas*, a ship based in Salem, was engaged in exactly that trade when it met the crew of the *Peacock* on 12 June, and Pickering observed the work of Bêche-de-mer production in person.<sup>145</sup>

## the productiveness of nature

Two days after the reception of Ratu Tānoa on the *Vincennes*, Wilkes dispatched surveying parties, their numbers bolstered by vessels acquired from the whites of Levuka. At the same time both Hale and Pickering were assigned "temporary duty" aboard the *Peacock*, joining Dana in the process.<sup>146</sup> Charles Pickering was pleased to be rid of Ovalau, as the year before it had been the base of Dumont D'Urville's Expedition, and the island and its botanical potential had "been pretty well ransacked in every part by the French."<sup>147</sup> The *Peacock* had been tasked by Wilkes to make for Viti Levu, the largest of the Islands and location of a large Fijian settlement on the Rewa River.

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<sup>142</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>143</sup> Pickering, "Introduction."

<sup>144</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>145</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>146</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>147</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

Rewa, now a province which includes the capital of modern Fiji, Suva, was then and remains the seat of the Roko Tui Dreketi; who was known amongst the crew as the “King of Rewa.” The town itself, with a population of around five thousand, was too far up the Rewa River to have direct access to the sea, which both shielded it from direct naval attack but also made it less suited to trading with the European and American vessels that visited the islands.<sup>148</sup> The two rival population centres had, over the preceding decades, been expanding their respective spheres of influence, something which would in 1843 result in what Marshall Sahlins calls “the Polynesian War.”<sup>149</sup> Having secured Ratu Tānoa’s signature upon a trade agreement, Wilkes despatched the *Peacock* to Rewa to seek out the same from the Roko Tui Dreketi.

The holder of that title at the time was a man named Ro Kania, who was part of a powerful family that held sway in Rewa. His brothers; Ro Cokānauto, Ro Veidovi and Ratu Qaraniqio were all influential men, and the Expedition already knew of them before the *Peacock*’s arrival in Viti Levu. At Levuka a man named Patrick “Paddy” O’Connell approached Wilkes to inform him that Ro Veidovi was behind an attack on a US brig called the *Charles Daggett* seven years earlier.<sup>150</sup> Given his mandate to make the islands safe for trade, Wilkes was eager to bring the perpetrator of an attack on a US trading vessel to justice. He dispatched a letter to Hudson sometime around 19 May, leaving the Captain with the task of both securing a trade agreement with the Roko Tui Dreketi and arresting his brother.

The *Peacock* reached the mouth of the Rewa on 16 May and dispatched a launch to the town. The launch returned with Ro Cokānauto on board. Amongst his brothers, Ro Cokānauto was the youngest, and he was known to the kaivalagi as “Phillips,” a name Pickering says he acquired “from a well-known merchant of Salem.”<sup>151</sup> He spoke English “tolerably well” and also had “some knowledge of other European languages.”<sup>152</sup> That evening he impressed the crew of the *Peacock* when he “saluted [them] with a variety of cant phrases” as he enquired about their names and hometowns, speaking of “‘Salem shags,’ ‘New York highbinders,’ ‘Baltimore Mob-e-Town’” and other familiar terms.<sup>153</sup> Pickering’s description offers an image of a man of great charisma, who had “made one voyage to Tahiti in an American vessel” and desired to eventually make his way to the United States.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 132.

<sup>149</sup> A reference to Thucydides and the Peloponnesian war, reflection upon both being the subject of; Sahlins, *Apologies*, 15.

<sup>150</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 103.

<sup>151</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>152</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>153</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>154</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

Ro Cokānauto was the son of one of the daughters of Ratu Tānoa and when war finally broke out between Rewa and Bau he sided with the latter.<sup>155</sup> While the crew of the squadron were fed information by the kaivalagi of Levuka, their perception of Fijian politics was limited not least by the complex structures of authority in the islands, which not only had they little time to learn but also differed by region. The eagerness of “Phillips” to forge close ties with the Expedition makes sense when his Bauan allegiance is offered in retrospect. In *Apologies to Thucydides*, Marshall Sahlins draws a comparison between the land power of Rewa and the sea power of Bau with that of Sparta and Athens respectively.<sup>156</sup> As a land power Rewa was not invested in good relations with the United States, if anything the Rewans would have seen US profit as that of their rivals. Ro Cokānauto - with his interest in the US, longstanding relationships with white traders in Fiji and familial ties to Bau was bound to be a Rewan exception. To Hudson’s view though “Phillips” was engaged as a mere “interpreter and pilot.”<sup>157</sup>

After a short excursion, which was cut short by mosquitos, on 17 May, Pickering remained on board the *Peacock* for the reception of the Roko Tui Dreketi on 18 May 1840. The reception of Ratu Tānoa, though without Sydney the dog, established the format for such ceremonies.<sup>158</sup> Later accounts describe the hosting of the royal party as part of a plot to ensure that the Roko Tui Dreketi was comfortable enough to return, at which point Hudson’s trap for Ro Veidovi would be sprung.<sup>159</sup> If, however, we look at the timeline provided by Wilkes of his conversation with Paddy O’Connell, this is unlikely to have been the case, as he did not dispatch a letter for Hudson until some time after 19 May, a day after the *Peacock* played host. Regardless, Hudson did need to make an effort to ensure that the Roko Tui Dreketi was comfortable. When the *Peacock* dispatched men into town after arrival the river mouth, Wilkes says that “Lieutenant Budd observed much fear amongst the chiefs and the people.”<sup>160</sup>

This anxiety, if it occurred, could perhaps be due to a fear that the Expedition acted on Bau’s behest. When the *Astrolabe* reached the islands in 1837 the French had burned the town of Viwa, a rival of Bau, and Wilkes reports that “the people of Ambau spoke vauntingly of having given the French permission to destroy Viwa, as though it was nothing.”<sup>161</sup> Given that Wilkes had signed an agreement with the Vunivalu of Bau, and then dispatched a man-o-war to Rewa, it would not have been that outrageous an assumption on behalf of the Rewans. Assurances

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<sup>155</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies*, 217.

<sup>156</sup> Sahlins, *Apologies*, 13-14.

<sup>157</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 111.

<sup>158</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>159</sup> Jan Kenneth Herman, “Vendovi: Cannibal and Curio,” *US Navy Medicine* 77, no. 2 (1986): 19.

<sup>160</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative III*, 111.

<sup>161</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 110.

however were given, “that we were their friends,” and the impression that the *Peacock* was a proxy of Bau was averted, for a time anyway.<sup>162</sup>

## dancing in the firelight

The Expedition’s accounts often describe the way that the crew and the Scientifics needed to constantly navigate the seen and unseen expectations and fears of the Fijians they encountered. On the one hand they understood their position as a kind of scientific and commercial neutrality, not imperial standard bearers but agents of the “empire of science and commerce.” On the other hand, the martial quality of the Expedition was a constant aspect of their interactions and bearing. What Smith calls the “twin instruments of science and violence” did not always act in concert.<sup>163</sup> The complicating capacity of figures like Ratu Tānoa to utilise the Expedition’s presence to their own advantage is something that is largely undiscussed in historical accounts of its work in Fiji, though works like Smith’s *To Master the Boundless Sea* have begun some of that work.

Edwin Hutchins’ *Cognition in the Wild* offers an account of the cognitive environment of the USS *Palau*. The *Palau* was an amphibious helicopter transport, and an initial glance at its bulbous grey hull might defy comparison with the ships of the Expedition, built many centuries before. Yet *Cognition in the Wild* offers a useful picture of naval vessels as a cognitive unit, a picture that transcends the technical differences between the *Palau* and the *Vincennes*. The complexity of a large ship, regardless of its means of propulsion, mean that its operations – navigation, steering and so on – are broadly distributed. This distribution means that no individual, not even the ship’s commander, has a clear picture or knowledge of its individual parts. For such a ship to operate effectively, its social, material and mental environment must work as a unit.

More than just social spaces, ships are headspaces. Ship life, the “wooden world,” entails something like what Melville terms a “hempen bond,” “the precise situation of every mortal... [in] connexion with the plurality of other mortals;” an abiding and persistent, yet fractious, symbiosis; a sharing of mental work.<sup>164</sup> Yet this work is not confined to language - to the calls and codes of shipboard cant - it extends to the very substance of the ship itself. The material and geography of its innards; the clothing of its crew, the paint upon its decks, its maps and its

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<sup>162</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 111.

<sup>163</sup> Jason W Smith, *To master the boundless sea: The U.S. Navy, the marine environment, and the cartography of empire* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 72.

<sup>164</sup> Denning, *Bad Language*, 57; Melville, *Moby Dick*, 341.

sextants and its pennants. Reynolds' "aspect most ominous," the belligerent physicality of gun ports, sabres and breech loading muskets, was the quality of the Expedition's thinking. "The blade itself incites to deeds of violence."<sup>165</sup> Just as the hydrographic work of the Expedition worked as an effort to quell the uncertainty inspired by a capricious ocean, so the Expedition's armaments were a tool for a mental ordering that were integral to their practice in the islands.<sup>166</sup>

The ubiquity of the language and potential of violence complicated the already difficult work of surveying and collecting in Fiji. There is almost a tone of frustration in Pickering's assertion that "a white man who understands the language and travels about these islands, providing he has nothing to tempt the cupidity of the native" would undoubtedly be "hospitably received" and "fare as well as the natives themselves."<sup>167</sup> As part of a much broader political context, something that at times almost seems to subsume him, Pickering was rarely given such opportunities, for even his connection to the Expedition was a commodity of value, desire, as well as threat.

Leclerc-Caffarel notes that Wilkes' was arguably the first Expedition to acquire certain ritual objects that were previously "beyond transaction."<sup>168</sup> Most notable of these are five anthropomorphic figures, which are now held at the Smithsonian Museum. Of these, one had questionable ritual significance and another had suffered damage which possibly meant it "was no longer tabu when it was exchanged."<sup>169</sup> Of the others, two are of unknown origins but the last was acquired by Titian Peale on the island of Vanualevu. Peale's account of the exchange shows the worry he personally felt at taking such an object of obvious significance, though it was offered in exchange. After the larger part of his party pulled back on approaching a tabu, "consecrated piece of ground," a man and a boy "from the upper village" offered to sell an "idol" which was amidst offerings there.<sup>170</sup> These two expressed "a desire that [Peale] should carry off whatever [he] wanted" however he "could not do [so] without knowing of their superstitious regard for them."<sup>171</sup> Despite making the trade, he waited to the next day to return at sunset to retrieve the "idol" in question.<sup>172</sup>

Peale's acquisition is one of a number of incidents whose effects has only been hinted at in historical accounts of the Expedition. These are points in the voyage where the Scientifics and

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<sup>165</sup> Attributed to Homer: Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself* (London: Hachette, 2006).

<sup>166</sup> For an excellent account of the complexity of surveying work see: Smith, *To master the boundless sea: The U.S. Navy, the marine environment, and the cartography of empire*, 62.

<sup>167</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>168</sup> Leclerc-Caffarel, "Exchange Relations," 167.

<sup>169</sup> Leclerc-Caffarel, "Exchange Relations," 167-70.

<sup>170</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 175.

<sup>171</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 175.

<sup>172</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 175.

crew wandered into webs of significance that they themselves were ill-equipped to understand, and historians to date, myself included, have at times had even less capacity. One example of this is the repeated theft of marker flags, something that vexed the Expedition's surveying work. Stanton describes such thefts – which on 21 May led to the imprisonment of the “delinquent” responsible – as a product of Fijian covetousness.<sup>173</sup> Joyce alternatively describes this phenomenon as a product of “offence.”<sup>174</sup> Pickering's journal implies that the thefts were a response to some kind of affront, as he puts it: “the putting up of the flags was complained of by the natives as a grievance.”<sup>175</sup> Colvocoresses' account of a similar theft, this time on 30 July offers a different interpretation. He reports “all the signals were found missing” having been “stolen during the night” in order “delay our operations.”<sup>176</sup> This offers the possibility that such thefts were a deliberate effort to sustain the Expedition's presence in the archipelago, something possibly viewed as beneficial by the alleged perpetrator: Tui Levuka.

If that explanation is sound, then its result was a rising tension, for Captain Hudson responded to the theft in July by threatening to set fire to the village of those he viewed responsible. It was not an idle threat, Wilkes had destroyed a village that month in response to the theft of a cutter and the *Peacock's* commander had the month before razed two Fijian villages for the theft of “clothing, books, charts, instruments of the officers, sails, water casks” along with one of the boats used for surveying.<sup>177</sup> Hudson was not the first representative of an exploring expedition to carry out such chastisements in Fiji, in 1838 Dumont D'Urville had burned a village with the justification of an earlier assault on the French vessel *l'Amiable Josephine* that killed the captain and many of its crew.<sup>178</sup> In her discussion of D'Urville's actions Bronwen Douglas points towards the likelihood that his “threatening presence in Fiji was managed by local leaders to make him an unwitting pawn in chiefly politics.”<sup>179</sup> D'Urville was prompted to this action by a representative of none other than Ratu Tānoa. D'Urville convinced like Hudson and Wilkes of Fijian lack of guile was arguably easily manipulated to ends they had little vision of.

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<sup>173</sup> Though the imprisoned man was subsequently released after it was revealed he had already been punished by the Tui Dreketi Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841; Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 196.

<sup>174</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 110.

<sup>175</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>176</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 155-56.

<sup>177</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 150.

<sup>178</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 188.

<sup>179</sup> Bronwen Douglas, “Affect, agency, and ambiguous praxis: French expeditions in the Pacific Islands, 1827-50,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 18, no. 1 (2017), <https://login.proxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/scholarly-journals/affect-agency-ambiguous-praxis-french-expeditions/docview/1892212912/se-2>.

The text of the agreement between Ratu Tānoa and Charles Wilkes makes no mention of the United States of America.<sup>180</sup> Instead, when speaking about citizens of the United States and their rights in the islands, it uses the general term; “foreigner.” In his dictionary of Fijian language, Horatio Hale renders the word “foreigner” as vavalāji [papalāji] and, importantly, he translates the same phrase into another English word: “white man.”<sup>181</sup> Hudson’s threat to Ro Veidovi echo Wilkes’ demand after the collective chastisement of the inhabitants of the island of Malolo; that they should pledge “never to do the like [kill] ... a white man.”<sup>182</sup> This emphasis on the racial over the national was used not just by the Americans but also to the advantage of Fijians, sometimes with unforeseen results. An example of this is that the trade agreement between Wilkes and the people of Rewa was cited by the latter when the British schooner *Starling* arrived on Viti Levu and was forced to pay for provisions.<sup>183</sup> When at Ovalau Wilkes met Belcher, the *Starling*’s commander, this drove animosity between the two (normally animosity prone) men, and in turn possibly to a further delay to the Expedition’s progress.<sup>184</sup>

The homogenising racial identification of white and Fijian was used in efforts to quieten the voyage’s dissonance, but it was simultaneously a cause of further disquiet. The underestimation of figures like Ratu Tānoa, based so often on racial descriptors, was only one way that race disrupted the Expeditions collective investment in their own independence and superiority. When Columbus sailed West, he was confronted with what Hulme describes as a “discursive conflict.”<sup>185</sup> This conflict, played out in Columbus’s *Journal* was between Marco Polo’s accounts of Oriental civilisation and Herodotus’s account of Oriental savagery. The textual legacy of this conflict, and “the defeat of the Oriental discourse,” Hulme argues, form the “articulating principle of [Columbus’s] *Journal*.”<sup>186</sup> A similar managing effort is shown in Pickering’s racial theorising that followed arrival in the islands; a racial theory which cast the Fijians as “the proper ‘Cannibal Race’” but also acknowledged their “progress in the fine arts.”<sup>187</sup>

The Expedition was surrounded by what Pickering called “the productiveness of nature” and yet by 25 May 1840 the crew of the *Peacock* were already on reduced rations.<sup>188</sup> Even in those circumstances where vessels like the *Peacock* or *Vincennes* had sufficient supplies, the smaller surveying boats were often loathe to land and at times forced to “eat raw fish” as it was all they could get.<sup>189</sup> Some of the crew at times could spend up to two weeks on small vessels

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<sup>180</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative Vol 3*, 3, 408.

<sup>181</sup> Hale, *Ethnography and Philology*, 420.

<sup>182</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 203.

<sup>183</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 200.

<sup>184</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*, 95.

<sup>185</sup> Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, 21-22.

<sup>186</sup> Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, 31.

<sup>187</sup> Pickering, *Journal*, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>188</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 146.

<sup>189</sup> Peale, *Journals*, 172.

messy with “provision boxes and a hundred other things.”<sup>190</sup> These small boats took on their own individual character, christened with the names “Greyhound, Lion, Fox, Turtle, Nightingale, Lizard, Leopard, White Handkerchief and Bear.”<sup>191</sup> The crew would refer to these smaller units of the Expedition by their names in turn, calling out with phrases like “Away there, you Leopards, away!”<sup>192</sup> Wilkes who felt “great anxiety for the safety” of these smaller units issued extensive instructions for the conduct of trade, but their independent character and norms, combined with the intensity and danger of their work meant that such instructions were inevitably disregarded.<sup>193</sup>

I have previously mentioned the burning of Fijian villages, which, prior to 26 July, occurred apparently without Fijian casualties.<sup>194</sup> It is difficult to ignore the correlation between the Expedition’s dwindling provisions and these acts of destruction, which were simultaneously acts of plunder. Wilkes’ “chastisement” of a village on Vanu Levu came on the same day that the purser had indicated that even the squadron’s salt rations were running short.<sup>195</sup> The difficulty sourcing provisions to feed the Expedition’s hundreds of members increased the likelihood of violence, not least because the aftermath of apparently “punitive” expeditions often netted the Americans an influx of supplies. I have not found this pragmatic intention expressed anywhere in the Expedition’s account, and it is entirely possible that those aboard the squadron did not admit such motivations to themselves. If anything, men like Wilkes were at pains to indicate the noble intention behind even the seizure of food and water.

The desire for provisions, the increasingly tense political context on the Islands, the racial fright and paranoia of the crew are not contradictory imperatives towards violence, and neither was revenge. One perhaps surprising element of Pickering’s journal is the fact that, given the violence that was so omnipresent in the lead up to the Expedition’s departure from Fiji, it occupies relatively little space in his writing.<sup>196</sup> This is particularly true of the event that is so often foreshadowed in historical accounts of the Expedition’s time in Fiji: the massacre at the island of Malolo.

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<sup>190</sup> Reynolds, *Journal of William Reynolds*, 143.

<sup>191</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 150.

<sup>192</sup> Erskine, *Twenty Years*, 150.

<sup>193</sup> Wilkes, *Autobiography*, 353.

<sup>194</sup> Wilkes burning of a village on Vanua Levu was reported by some to have led to several deaths but Wilkes denied this: Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 107.

<sup>195</sup> Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition*, 150.

<sup>196</sup> Pickering is also rarely cited by such historical accounts, possibly for this lack, see Smith for an example Smith, *To master the boundless sea: The U.S. Navy, the marine environment, and the cartography of empire*.

as safe as in New York

Charles Pickering's relative silence on the violence in Fiji does not necessarily indicate that it was not something that occupied his mind. Inserted between the pages of his journal are two newspaper articles from the 1850s, both on the topic of Fiji, and one authored by none other than David Whippy.<sup>197</sup> In this article Whippy argues that the "chastisement in Malolo had a lasting effect" leaving the island safe "as in New York."<sup>198</sup> The second article, also written in 1855 by the ship's cook of a US Navy brig after a visit to the island, complicates Whippy's conclusion. It describes the USS John Adams' retribution for reported assaults on American citizens on Viti Sevu, in the form of an American military expedition that burned several towns on the island. The cook, Frank Myers, assures the reader that such violence entailed a "lasting check on these savages," leaving the "commerce of this republic secure."<sup>199</sup>

Pickering's characterisation of the Fijian race dwells on the contradiction between their capacity for art and violence. In *Races of Man* his assertions about cannibalism illustrate an ongoing dissonance. Reports of the practice outside Fiji are dismissed as unreliable or ascribed to a Fijian origin, while any doubts or denunciation of the practice in Fiji are similarly abrogated.<sup>200</sup> While among other races "instances of cannibalism have occurred, sometimes from extreme necessity," amongst the "Papuan Race" he finds it "interwoven" within Fijian society. While he travelled widely through the islands without directly observing the practice he claims that "instances are of a daily occurrence." This apparent contradiction remains on the pages of both his journal and the publication that followed it.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the assertion that Fijians habitually practice anthropophagy sit alongside assertions of the effectiveness of punitive violence. The expedition arrived a little over a year after Dumont D'Urville had carried out just such a disciplinary endeavour, and Frank Myers' account shows that more would follow.<sup>201</sup> The racing of the "Papuan" through cannibal tales offers a potent accompaniment to acts of violence cast as necessary and carried out with dubious efficacy for their claimed purposes. While Pickering's silence on the violence at Malolo could speak to discomfort, it is also possible that the Expedition's actions had already spoken, leading to justificatory paths that preceded him. Of all his characterisations of race his descriptions of the "Papuan" were the most overwhelmingly

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<sup>197</sup> Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>198</sup> David Whippy in Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>199</sup> Frank Myers in Pickering, Journal, May 1840 - November 1841.

<sup>200</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 167.

<sup>201</sup> Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 190.

negative. Maybe the simplest explanation for this is that of all those races he constructed, the people of the archipelago were those most subject to the Expedition's violence.



## Chapter Six: Terminus

before I depart I sweep my eyes o'er the scene fain to absorb it all,

Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscurity,

some of them dead

- Walt Whitman, from *A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the*

*Road Unknown*

# The United States

## Washington D.C.

While the rest of Washington's great buildings speak of Rome, the design of the Patent Building takes its cues from the Parthenon. Its columns and skylights are intended to invoke not just statehood, but mysticism. Yet in 1843 its Great Hall smelled not of incense but rot. It was there that a large portion of the specimens of the United States Exploring Expedition were gathered as in a hoarder's jumble. The collection in its entirety would never be gathered in the one place, with the *Peacock's* wreck at the entrance to the Columbia River accounting for one part, and widespread pillaging from the first crates to reach the US from Rio another. Yet even diminished, this pile represented a volume of scientific and ethnographic material that was unprecedented in the United States' history. One inventory book, painstakingly prepared by the scientifics, contains a note which reads: "this account book was found by the undersigned inside a Feejee Basket when registering the same in the Smithsonian Catalogue, Feb 27 1867 – E Foreman."<sup>1</sup>

Edward Foreman was clerk of the Smithsonian Institution, and two and a half decades after the collection's arrival in the States he was still working on their arrangement. Both his note and the Expedition's inventories give a good sense of the chaos and diversity of those specimens. Horatio Hale - described as "the Philological Department" - collected pamphlets, copies of missionary newspapers, boxes of books from Hawaii and Histories of the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> "3 Bundles of war clubs," "1 box containing a sleigh from Kamchatka," "7 skulls and a lot of bones," "1 spatula from New Zealand" and "Box X no 24 containing 1 double and 2 single canoes" are some of the entries from a single page.<sup>3</sup> Amidst these lists are instructions for caring for the objects; "Note: the 2 beakers and glass jars should have the alcohol poured off and replenished with fresh spirits immediately on the arrival of the specimens – care being taken not to disturb any of the labels" (this request by the conchologist Couthouy was probably to little avail) and long lists of contributors.

Beyond indicating the volume of the collection, the Expedition inventories show the many sources of the objects therein. The aforementioned sleigh was "presented by Captain Roy of Ship *Hero* of Nantucket" and one "native pelavo [a lei niho palaoa; necklace] made from human hair and of the sea horse Tooth" which had been carried by "Governor Boki" who

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<sup>1</sup> Original Invoices and other Official Papers of the US Exploring Expedition, Box 3 Folder 6, United States Exploring Expedition Collection, 1838-1885, SIA RU007186, 28, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Invoices and Other: 88.

<sup>3</sup> Invoices and Other: 88.

brought it with him as he “attended the King Kamehameha on his visit to England in 1828, presented to the Expedition by Mr. Mrs. French of Honolulu.”<sup>4</sup> Amidst a list of specimens from Chile and Argentina there is a note reading: “3 Ampullaria fragilis – N. Zealand (Donation).”<sup>5</sup> Of the more than forty thousand shells collected and documented, the vast majority were not gathered by the scientifics but by the crew and officers, mostly in Fiji.

These collections, sprawling, smelling, some waterlogged, others plagued by insects, had been catalogued and categorised aboard the expedition, but the momentary order given by the scientifics was fleeting. Volume met decay and the degradation of the flimsy paper labels tied to bird feet and strung through shells added anonymity to the chaos. While the elements and insect life ate at the collection, human hands joined in on the assault. “This box has had the seals broken,” “this box has indications of having been opened since it was packed,” note several entries, one upon a box whose contents are listed as “2 New Zealand Heads;” a description inviting curiosity’s trespass.<sup>6</sup>

The specimens of the Exploring Expedition, even in their sorry state, were enough to make a naturalist’s career. Their breadth and novelty offered decades of research in any field, with the ethnographic objects from Fiji described as “one of the three most important” in the world.<sup>7</sup> Yet Charles Pickering, who was tasked with their arrangement on his return to the United States on 10 June 1842, left them a little over a year later.<sup>8</sup> They were enough to make a naturalist’s career but by the publication of his first book, *Races of Man* in 1848, Pickering was describing himself as a “naturalist” in the past tense.<sup>9</sup> He was now a race scientist. The best example of this new orientation now lives in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University.

## Cambridge, Massachusetts

Two paintings, a man and a woman, both watercolour, and both probably Fijian. On the back of one painting, twice written in faded pencil, is a name: Charles Pickering. This attribution, which is not made in Pickering’s hand, is affirmed by the objects carried by the two figures. While

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the Governor of O’ahu, who accompanied King Kamehameha II to England; Invoices and Other.

<sup>5</sup> Now known as *Salinator fragilis*, this is a type of shell. Invoices and Other: 128.

<sup>6</sup> Annotated Lists of Specimens Received from the US Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842, Box 3 Folder 7, United States Exploring Expedition Collection, 1838-1885, SIA RU007186, 8-9, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Adrienne L. Kaeppler, “Anthropology and the U.S. Exploring Expedition,” in *Magnificent Voyagers: the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, ed. Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Prof. Benjamin Pierce, 8 October 1843, Historic Letter Collection, 1796-1940; Charles Pickering letters, HL Pick 1, Gray Herbarium Archives, Harvard University.

<sup>9</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, 1.

some - a throwing club, shell bangles - are of a common type, the woman's liku, skirt, is a rarer design, and an uncanny match for one still held in the Expedition's collections in the Smithsonian. The providence of the paintings also confirms a connection to Pickering: they came to the Peabody through the estate of Margaret Mayall, an astronomer at Harvard who acquired at least part of the possessions of Edward Charles Pickering (Charles Pickering's nephew) after his death.<sup>10</sup>

Dating their composition precisely is not easy, and they do not appear to have been made for public consumption. It seems unlikely that they were painted on the voyage, as they bear none of its marks, and would likely have been considered part of the "products" of the Expedition, property of the US government. Yet the close similarity between the objects in the Smithsonian collection and those in the painting seems to imply they were drawn with the collections as a reference. This would place them around 1842/1843, when Pickering was working in the Patent Hall, and the "shades of [human] complexion" which eluded "fixing in the mind" were still fresh.<sup>11</sup>

Around this same time, Pickering wrote a letter to Philadelphian race scientist and his long-time colleague Samuel George Morton, informing him that Ro Vaidovi had fallen ill, and that Morton should rush to visit him, for his friend was "in for *anthropology*" and "unlikely to see such a specimen of humanity" again.<sup>12</sup> The irony in "specimen" offers a pointed analogy but it also shows how Pickering's work diverged from that of his colleague.<sup>13</sup> When and where the two figures were painted may remain a matter of speculation, but it is *what* they represent that is more worthy of note. They are images of *type*: material culture and body both. For Morton, Ro Vaidovi was of more use as a specimen dead than alive: his osteographical work did not need living subjects. Pickering on the other hand was not "in for anthropology" and these two paintings are representative of the connection between his work and the Expedition, they are an effort to "fix in the mind" the moments of encounter to which he no longer had access.

"I shall not soon forget the rush of sensations" and it is sensation instead that resounds in both his journal and first book; *The Races of Man and their Geographical Distribution*.<sup>14</sup> Sensation - seeing, touching, hearing - were the foundation of the book's authority yet at the same time they located it in the many fractured moments of the Expedition, and it is a book that lays bare all of the dissonance of the voyage. In late 1843 Pickering departed the United States for a self-funded tour of the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and the Horn of Africa. *The Races*

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Mayall, interview by Owen Gingerich, 12 September 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Fabian, *Skull Collectors*, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 23.

*of Man* would include not just reflections from the Expedition but also accounts of that trip. The book forms the primary historical record of that second expedition. It contains an incomplete, tantalizing, picture of his travel to Cairo, Oman, Zanzibar and Mumbai, yet it seems to have offered him no more than confirmation of his findings on the Expedition.<sup>15</sup> First published in 1848, his conceptualising of race is largely unchanged when compared with his field notes, written more than half a decade before publication.

The first printing of *Races of Man* entailed only a few copies, at a price that “kept it a sealed book from all readers but those of very ample means” and in a format intended as diplomatic gifts.<sup>16</sup> The Expedition’s publications were “as handsome as any book ever produced in the United States” reflecting their purpose as “tools for asserting US cultural maturity.”<sup>17</sup> The first printings of *Races of Man* were large, with colourful maps and illustrations, and its content shifts between an account of Pickering’s travels and explanation of his racial theory. The prestige of such copies likely fed popular demand for the book, which became more accessible through subsequent editions. *Races of Man* is never far from his journal, both in its introspective tone and its fragility, and he is at pains to emphasise the value of his first-hand experience throughout. Its tenor, visual and textual, placed it within a genre of “contemporaneous visual compendia” alongside other works of both zoology and racial science.<sup>18</sup> Within, Pickering addresses the reader almost as a confidant, recounting the surprises, confusions, sensations and revelations of the voyage.

What is most distinctive about *The Races of Man* is that while it could be expected that this introspection terminates in a resounding conclusion, it does not. He indicates that “many difficulties, which previously existed in my own mind, have vanished since making a sea-voyage” however his characterisation of the nature of race itself remains hazy.<sup>19</sup> Race to Pickering takes a few different, and dissonant forms. It is at one moment a capability, a character trait, like “amphibious” or “enduring” which is accompanied with some “counterbalancing” defect.<sup>20</sup> At another it is physiological and thus quantifiable; something found in the curl of the hair or the shape of the skull. In turn it is a geographic orientation, a type

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<sup>15</sup> Chapter 9 and 10 in particular are of interest to historians of African history for his extensive accounts of local histories of East and Central Africa: Pickering, *Races of Man*, 182-219.

<sup>16</sup> The first edition was priced at 3 guineas, the second 3 shillings: Charles Malcolm, “Address to the Ethnological Society of London, Delivered at the Anniversary, 14th May 1851,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1848-1856) 3 (1854): 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> Verney, *A Great and Rising Nation : Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, “‘Even the Most Careless Observer’: Race and Visual Discernment in Physical Anthropology from Samuel Morton to Kennewick Man,” *American Studies* 53, no. 2 (2014): 17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24589586>.

<sup>19</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 286.

<sup>20</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 280.

of belonging. Finally it is elided, contradicted and complicated, by humanity's shared nature and origins, Christian universalism and natural history.

The goal of the book, he says, is to define the "geographical boundaries of the races."<sup>21</sup> Yet such a goal is an assertion that place and race are tied, a self-fulfilling logic. Just as "nature" has made plants and animals -so long the object of his study- suited to specific environments, so the families of man find their homes in the world's many biomes.<sup>22</sup> Many places, many men, and for each place a race. It is a proclamation that is fractured even as it is made, for Pickering's history of humanity entails a documentation of humanity's global spread, and with that, hybridity. The Expedition itself was a vector for that spread, as he writes "a Negro, I believe, effected his escape from one of the vessels of the Expedition; and in this manner, a fourth race was added [to Oregon]."<sup>23</sup>

Racial interaction and mobility therefore need integration into his thinking, and they become central to a "history of man" tied to racial collaboration. By his understanding, the multiplicity of racial traits require a "union" to "attain the full measure of civilisation."<sup>24</sup> This goes beyond the idea that "each race has qualities and failings," as expressed by navigator Louis de Freycinet, to a symbiotic process spreading civilisation.<sup>25</sup> Here "civilisation" entails the settling of previously uninhabited parts of the world, so the "Polynesian," who is "born on the waves" finds a home in Oceania through a collaborative process. Muddling his own narrative in turn is an acknowledgment that "the productiveness of nature" has few limits, meaning that "new and undreamt of combinations of features" are always arising to vex him.<sup>26</sup>

This points to the second complication to his conceptualisation of race, which does not refer to character but instead to physicality. The "Arabian," Pickering announces, has "the nose prominent, the lips thin, the beard abundant, and the hair straight or flowing."<sup>27</sup> The "Papuan" on the other hand has "features not prominent in the profile" and a "beard abundant" with "skin harsh to the touch, and the hair crisped or frizzled."<sup>28</sup> Such purely physical demarcations fray too. He writes: "while in the Arab countries and in Western Hindostan, there is an astonishing diversity of aspect in the population," nonetheless, "the varieties of feature have appeared

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<sup>21</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> This echoes the conclusion of Louis de Freycinet, who visited Oceania in the early nineteenth century and wrote on similar lines in the 1830s: Nicole Starbuck, "'Primitive race', 'pure race', 'brown race', 'every race': Louis Freycinet's Understanding of Human Difference in Oceania," in *Discovery and Empire: the French in the South Seas*, ed. West-Sooby (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2013), 240.

<sup>23</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 273.

<sup>24</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 280.

<sup>25</sup> Starbuck, "Freycinet's Understanding," 240.

<sup>26</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 11.

susceptible of reduction to the arrangement adopted in the present work.”<sup>29</sup> This reduction, which he concedes as continually stymied through his own difficulties in observation, finds an uneasy attachment to the previously mentioned association between race and character.

In a time when many of his contemporaries were fascinated with crania, projecting flesh onto bones, Pickering’s racial typology largely focussed on more immediate, living, physicality.<sup>30</sup> He asserts that Fijians possess a “harshness of the skin” which explains some of the differences between them and Polynesians, including “even traits of character.”<sup>31</sup> To his dismay the “Feejeean does not permit himself to be handled” and he attributes to this a general lack of “friendship” and lasting social ties. In contrast he recounts that when a man with a “strongly marked Polynesian countenance” walked alongside him, he “placed his hand upon his shoulder, for the purpose of examining the texture of the skin.”<sup>32</sup> This, he says, not only offered proof of its “extreme softness” but also through the act “won his confidence.”<sup>33</sup>

Friendship, something he valued throughout the voyage, is conceived as an institution as well as a character trait linked with physicality. Friendship is thus understood as culturally variable, something related directly to the physicality of each of his types. Yet such “institutions” are themselves, he notes, at the same time often a matter of convenience. At once friendship was caused by physicality, but at the same time it was, like all cultural institutions, something variable and mechanistic. While many of his contemporaries, with the exclusion of Horatio Hale, understood language as a marker of race, for Pickering it was something easily transferred or “succeeded to” with shifts in populations and circumstances.<sup>34</sup> Such a process in terms of language is, he says, “very much a matter of convenience, depending often on the numerical majority.”<sup>35</sup>

As with language he describes cultural diffusion as a type of “convenience.” However, his understanding of cultural diffusion makes it clear that for Pickering there are no coincidences. The “order of nature” is clearly expressed through the spread of the tools required by humanity to settle the world. The best example of this is in his discussion of the Pacific, and particularly the canoe: “from the trunk of a tree, rudely fashioned, is simply grooved to afford foothold, while an outrigger is attached, and a mat is spread for a sail.”<sup>36</sup> This invention, which he argues is the product of the “Negrillo” race, would not, because of their aversion to contact with

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<sup>29</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Armstrong-Fumero, “Physical Anthropology,” 20.

<sup>31</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 279.

<sup>35</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 279.

<sup>36</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 279.

strangers, “have come to benefit mankind” were it not for the intervention of the Fijians, who “acquired, elaborated and improved” upon it, and then its dispersion by the “proper children of the sea:” the “Malayan.”<sup>37</sup>

Cultural diffusion, building on what he terms “the spark of civilisation” is thus conceptualised as a compound interaction of complimentary racial characteristics, in concert with environmental imperatives and in accordance with a divine plan, though the latter element is only hinted at. He explains this process through an analogy to biology that, were it written a decade later would have echoed Darwin: “In the organic world, each new field requires a new creation; each change in circumstances going beyond the constitution of a plant or animal is met by a new adaptation, until the universe is full.”<sup>38</sup> In caveated language he goes on: “some analogy may possibly exist in the human family; and it may even be questioned whether any of the races existing singly, would, up to the present day have extended itself over the whole surface of the globe.”<sup>39</sup>

In his letters to Morton, in his journal, in his article “Enumeration of the Races” and in *Races of Man* he is careful to emphasise that “the existence of races, it should be observed, is a phenomena independent of climate.”<sup>40</sup> It is a strident assertion that distinguishes him from many of those monogenists who preceded him, whose narrative of human differentiation was of human variation – sometimes a degradation – as a function of the effects of climate. It also distinguishes him from contemporaries like Robert Knox who had by the 1830s begun to argue that the deadliness of certain climates was the cause for independent racial centres of creation.<sup>41</sup> “The phases of climate,” as he notes elsewhere “partition out the soil and vegetable growth,” something which in turn has its implications for human societies. He argues that “three natural divisions” – places devoid of vegetation, those sparsely covered with it but not forested and those “clothed with continuous woods” – “very nearly correspond with *desert, pastoral* and *agricultural* countries.”<sup>42</sup>

This, as I have discussed elsewhere, was an observation linked directly to his experiences on the voyage. At the same time, as Laura Dassow Wells argues, his “interdisciplinary biogeographical methodology” was an application of, and elaboration upon, the methods of Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>43</sup> Aleš Hrdlička, a physical anthropologist writing in

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<sup>37</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 280.

<sup>38</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 280.

<sup>39</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 280.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Pickering, “Enumeration of the Races of Man,” *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* xlvii (1850): 268.

<sup>41</sup> Suman Seth, “19th-century medicine and The Races of Men,” *Lancet* 401, no. 10377 (Feb 25 2023): 639, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00359-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00359-8), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/36841608>.

<sup>42</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 13-14.

<sup>43</sup> Laura Dassow Wells, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 119.

the early twentieth century, placed Pickering in the tradition of James Cowles Prichard.<sup>44</sup> Prichard goes uncited in *Races of Man*, though Humboldt is mentioned, and to understand him as a direct product of either is perhaps misleading. To configure Charles Pickering as a culmination or continuation of those two thinkers threatens to make his thought representative of an older mode of racial thinking, a mode that was arguably being left behind as the nineteenth century approached its mid-point, and the United States slid towards Civil War.

## Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In his letter from Madeira in the first few months of the Expedition's passage, Pickering wrote of the contrast between the Spanish colony and his homeland. Unlike the United States, in Madeira "the people have no elections" and "there are no wars or rumours of wars, no rising or falling of Real Estate, no Banks, no Slaves and no Abolitionists, no rail roads or even wheat carriages and where shocking accidents very seldom happen!"<sup>45</sup> In this configuration, the United States is a place of tumult, with Pickering in its midst. His letter reminds the reader of the many controversies of the decades preceding; the ongoing wars of American expansion to the West, the real estate speculation that led to the Panic of 1837 and the Westward movement by rail and covered wagon that accompanied those wars and their rumours. Most significant for Pickering though was the question of slavery.

The 1830s had seen a marked shift in the tempo of debate about slavery in the United States.<sup>46</sup> 1831 saw the Southampton Insurrection, or Nat Turner's rebellion, "the major outbreak of its kind between the Revolution and the Civil War."<sup>47</sup> The Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 and by 1831 "all Spanish-speaking countries in mainland South America had begun the process of gradual abolition."<sup>48</sup> At the same time the abolitionist movement within the US adopted an increasingly radical tone, in conflict with gradualist approaches to anti-slavery, as much as slavery's Southern proponents.<sup>49</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, Pickering came from the latter lineage: influenced by his grandfather; an East

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<sup>44</sup> Aleš Hrdlička, "Physical Anthropology in America: an Historical Sketch," *American Anthropologist* 16, no. 4 (1914): 522.

<sup>45</sup> Pickering, Journal, Madeira-Peru.

<sup>46</sup> Cristin Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman: Race and Materiality in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>47</sup> David F. Allmendinger Jr., *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Atlanta, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 103.

<sup>49</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 14.

Coast federalist with unitarian religious convictions and a gradualist. Yet Colonel Pickering was by 1842 over a decade in the grave, and the political and intellectual landscape had shifted.

With this shift came a popularisation of race science, Pickering's own field.<sup>50</sup> He found himself amidst what Ellis describes as a clash between "pro- and antislavery strains of biological thought."<sup>51</sup> That dichotomy is a useful one, but Louis Agassiz shows how blurred that line was. Agassiz maintained a stance against slavery, but expressed an open disgust at "men of color" who he says, "made it impossible [by their physical characteristics] to repress the feeling that they are not of the same blood."<sup>52</sup> Prior to his arrival in the United States, Agassiz had been a monogenist, but in Morton he found a kindred mind, and converted -with all the religious implication that word carries- to polygenism. Race was expressed by both men as a matter of science, not politics, and both Agassiz and Morton understood their work as divorced from moral concerns. This allowed them to be both for and against slavery simultaneously, expressing a dislike for the institution while at the same time lending it the authority of racial hierarchy.

Divorcing politics from race thinking could perhaps come across as a cynical manoeuvre but without that separation much of the authority of both men -as observers- would collapse, and as da Silva argues this universalist manoeuvre was at the core of racial thinking.<sup>53</sup> In 1836 Pickering had described himself as a "Republican."<sup>54</sup> Such a description leaves a fair opening for interpretation; the context of the letter was the funding of the Expedition near the end of Andrew Jackson's presidency. Jackson's party, by then the "Democratic party," "is often regarded as more or less continuous with Jeffersonian republicanism."<sup>55</sup> His grandfather had supported Jackson's election campaign before his death, but this does not necessarily mean that grandson followed suit.<sup>56</sup> As Jefferson wrote in 1822 "all indeed call themselves Republicans" and the name was used by both major parties at the time of writing.<sup>57</sup> That his political allegiances are so difficult to define is itself revealing, while his grandfather sought constantly to insert himself into national politics, even after his relevancy withered, Charles Pickering avoided taking a stance, at least publicly.

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<sup>50</sup> Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Agassiz, December 1846, Louis Agassiz Correspondence and Other Papers, MS Am 1419, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>53</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xiii

<sup>54</sup> Charles Pickering, Letter to Asa Gray, 23 September 1836, Historic Letter Collection, 1796-1940; Charles Pickering letters, HL Pick 1, Gray Herbarium Archives, Harvard University.

<sup>55</sup> "Our Sea of Islands," 198.

<sup>56</sup> W. Allan Wilbur, "Timothy Pickering, Federalist Politician: an Historiographical Perspective," *The Historian* 34, no. 2 (1972): 281.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Johnson, 27 October 1822, General Correspondence. 1651-1827., Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, Library of Congress.

Cedric Robinson points out that, as far as he could find, “none of the historians of abolitionism or race science make reference to Pickering” who while “a creditable and worthy opponent of the racialists ... could hardly match their extraordinary resources.”<sup>58</sup> *Races of Man* was a “demolition of the justifications for slavery” an “apostasy” from the racist norms of his day.<sup>59</sup> That Pickering understood all races as capable of civilisation was arguably a dispute to some racialists/justifications of slavery, including some of his colleagues. Some of his condemnations, at least in private, could place him amongst the radicals of his time. “Our government of people are in a fair way to receive a lesson” Pickering wrote to his cousin Mary and followed the assertion with a bible verse: “they that smite by the sword, shall perish by the sword.”<sup>60</sup> If Pickering made a “credible and worthy opponent” of the racialists, then his close association with those like Agassiz and Morton show that the apostasy was amicable.

Some of Pickering’s contemporaries at least concurred with Robinson in his status as an opponent to the “racialists.” A reviewer in *The Standard of Freedom* to describe Pickering as “of soundest judgement, most extensive knowledge, and most cautious habits of induction,” adding the product of his “elaborate and scholarlike investigations as additions to the score of Christian evidences” in favour of universalism.<sup>61</sup> *The Standard* was the newspaper of John Cassell, an English teetotaler, free trade advocate and firebrand Christian.<sup>62</sup> The review, probably written by Cassell, places Pickering alongside James Prichard as a scholarly advocate of the Christian doctrine of *ab uno sanguine* in refutation of the polygenist assertions of those “undistinguished by acuteness of intellect or depth of research” whose rash conjectures clash with the “simple statements of the sacred narrative.”<sup>63</sup>

This interpretation of Pickering’s work is affirmed by “Dr Hall’s introductory paper” to the editions of the book published after the first. While the body text of later editions of *Races of Man* remained unchanged from that published under the auspices of the Expedition, the addition of an introduction by John Charles Hall placed it in a more radical category. Hall was, like Pickering, a doctor, and he shared the latter’s interest in natural history. While Pickering dabbled in politics only when pushed, Hall’s career was orientated towards labour reform and activism, including both temperance and abolitionism.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 66.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, *Regimes of Race*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Pickering, Letter to Mary Orne Pickering 16 February.

<sup>61</sup> “Races of Man,” *The Standard of Freedom* 14 September, 1850.

<sup>62</sup> Cassell and Company, *The Story of the House of Cassell* (London - New York - Toronto - Melbourne: Cassell and Company, 1922).

<sup>63</sup> “Races of Man,” 12.

<sup>64</sup> “Obituary: John Charles Hall MD,” *The British Medical Journal* 4 (1876): 607.

Hall's introduction to *Races of Man* is as combative as Pickering is tentative. The polygenicists are "men who have 'laughed and wondered if a negro's soul could feel'"<sup>65</sup> and thus "likened him to a brute" in order to "sink him below the level of the human species, for the purpose of degrading him."<sup>66</sup> This is done, Hall argues, "to justify selling him in the market as a beast ... to blunt the stripes that fall on his lacerated back ... to gild with the sunbeam of humanity the black plague cloud of slavery."<sup>67</sup> He then goes on to refute, using Pickering and other scientific contemporaries and predecessors -including Pritchard, Blumenbach, Buffon and Cuvier, as well as the Bible- arguments against the unity of humanity.<sup>68</sup> All this, he says, shows the "harmony existing between the facts which are exhibited in the Book of Nature, and the record given of them in the Word of God."<sup>69</sup>

In doing so he takes aim at Josiah C. Nott and Louis Agassiz, two Americans known well by Pickering, and the addition of Hall's commentary seems to remove some of the lingering ambiguity about the stance of *Races of Man* on polygenism.<sup>70</sup> This ambiguity is never truly resolved. "Mr. Pickering argues that the human races radiated from four centres – 1 from Thibet in Asia; 2 from Abyssinia in Africa; 3 and 4 from North and South America" writes an anonymous review repeated in a number of different North American newspapers.<sup>71</sup> It is stated with the same certainty as an erroneous description that has him as "an English author of a book entitled above," and it seems equally erroneous, apparently a misunderstanding of what Pickering termed "natural centres of civilisation;" places suited to the emergence of agriculture.<sup>72</sup> However this imputation of polygenism is the most easily explained, other indications of a polygenicist inclination are more difficult to explain.

One such difficulty relates to the publication of the *Races of Man* itself. The initial, pricey, edition of the book was published under the auspices of the US government and funded from the Expedition's budget. However, its limited print run may have had as much to do with controversy about the book as it did with the budgetary constraints levied upon the returnees. A letter from Charles Wilkes to Samuel George Morton points to this, wherein he refers to the fact

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<sup>65</sup> A quote taken from a late seventeenth century play called *The Castle Spectre* and is spoken by an African man named Hassan, recounting his last view of Africa from a slave ship and the way his humanity went with it: Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: the Early Years 1807-1833* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 70.

<sup>66</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, xiii.

<sup>67</sup> John Charles Hall, *Interesting Facts Connected with the Animal Kingdom with Some Remarks on the Unity of Our Species* (London: T. Brooke, 1841), 95.

<sup>68</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, xxxvii.

<sup>69</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, lxx.; the final lines of his introduction are entirely capitalised, reading "THE BLACK MAN, RED MAN, AND THE WHITE MAN, ARE LINKS IN ONE GREAT CHAIN OF RELATIONSHIP, AND ALIKE CHILDREN WHICH HAVE DECENDED FROM ONE COMMON PARENT;" lxxii.

<sup>70</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, xxxvii-xliv.

<sup>71</sup> "The Race of Man," *Portage Sentinel* 12 May 1851, 4; "The Races of Man," *The Republic* 25 November 1850, 1; "The Races of Man," *Sunbury American* 23 November 1850, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, 309-12.

that the Joint Committee supervising the Expedition's publications would "be cautious in publishing any new enquiries relative to the history of man" lest it "shock the public mind."<sup>73</sup> The only reference to Pickering in Reginald Horseman's *Race and Manifest Destiny* refers to this event, stating that "to avoid controversy [Pickering] simply ignored the question of whether these races constituted separate species."<sup>74</sup>

Adding to this impression is a letter written in Fiji to Samuel George Morton. Much of the letter is a direct copy of Pickering's journal, quoting his writing from New South Wales word for word. Pickering tells Morton that despite the fact that he "started on the expedition with the firm persuasion that there are 5 races of mankind" he had "now seen 8!" This is not extraordinary, but it is followed by: "some points however I shall insist on. 1. ... a hybrid race (or a new race) cannot now originate or be continued. 2. *These races have different origins, or, were originally placed in different localities.*"<sup>75</sup> For James Lander at least, this is sufficient cause to cast Pickering as a polygenist of Morton's stripe, but who "watered down his language" in order to publish.<sup>76</sup> Hall's introduction, he argues with a little mirth, was added by an editor who "actually thought Pickering was arguing *for* the unity of the human species!"<sup>77</sup> This latter interpretation was first put forth in William Stanton's 1960 work *The Leopard's Spots*, who argues that amidst Pickering's guarded language was a meaning "skilfully hid" from "the guardians of the public morals on the Library Committee," namely that humanity was product of two distinct centres of creation: polygenism.<sup>78</sup>

In the lineage of attitudes towards race in the United States, Stanton thus casts Pickering as part of the build up towards Samuel Morton's 1846 proclamation of polygenism to the American Ethnological Society.<sup>79</sup> Such a characterisation places Pickering's writing as reflecting "both the growing scientific and demotic appeal of polygeny and the countervailing moral and political inertia exerted by the established doctrine."<sup>80</sup> Morton had begun a monogenist, as had Prichard. Over the course of the latter's work, he had "so defined 'permanent variety' as to make it in practical terms little different from the 'race' of the believers in polygenesis."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Wilkes, Regarding Dr. Pickering's Wish to Have his Works Published in the United States, 6 November 1846, Box 2 Folder 53, P7389 F 42, Library Company, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>74</sup> Reginald Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 330.

<sup>75</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup> James Lander, *Lincoln and Darwin: Shared Visions of Race, Science, and Religion* (Carbondale, Ill.: SIU Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>77</sup> Emphasis his: Lander, Lander, *Shared Visions*, 83.

<sup>78</sup> William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Towards Race in America 1815-1859* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 96.

<sup>79</sup> Stanton, *Race in America*, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Bronwen Douglas, "'Novus Orbis Australis': Oceania in the science of race, 1750-1850," in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750-1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Acton: ANU Press, 2008), 125.

<sup>81</sup> Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 52-53.

Understanding Pickering's writing in *Races of Man* as similar to the "strategic vacillations" of other race theorists of the mid-nineteenth century offers a tidy explanation for the lack of clarity that pervades the book.

Bronwen Douglas points towards the ripples of a French polygenist consensus crossing the English Channel and assailing the "ideological dominance of Evangelical humanitarianism" in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> James Poskett asks us to consider the role that the United States played in that same assault.<sup>83</sup> At the 1839 British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting at Birmingham James Cowles Prichard was the first to display Morton's cranial illustrations to a European audience, and Morton had by that point openly proclaimed his polygenism.<sup>84</sup> The close collaborative relationships across the Atlantic and between apparently rival monogenist and polygenist thinkers is something that Poskett argues is surprisingly missing from research on race thinking in the period.<sup>85</sup>

Another point of support for reading *Races of Man* as a work of obfuscation is Pickering's close ties to not just Morton but also Josiah Clark Nott, George Gliddon and Louis Agassiz, who collaborated, with others, on a book titled *Types of Mankind*.<sup>86</sup> *Types of Mankind*, "perhaps the single most important book to set the issue of race in a peculiarly scientific context for the general public," brought together the work of several prominent polygenists, and a scientific luminary in the form of the widely esteemed Agassiz.<sup>87</sup> The book itself is almost a festschrift in honour of Morton, who had died three years preceding.<sup>88</sup> It sets out Morton's abandonment of monogenism "when compelled by the force of irresistible conviction"<sup>89</sup> and offers a theological, biological and archaeological argument in favour of "original human diversities."<sup>90</sup> Pickering is described therein as "our dear and valued friend" and finds mention in many of its footnotes, particularly in the form of arguments against hybridity.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Douglas, "Oceania in the Science of Race," 131.

<sup>83</sup> James Poskett, "National Types: the Transatlantic Publication and Reception of *Crania Americana* (1839)," *History of Science* 53, no. 3 (2015): 264-95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0073275315580955>.

<sup>84</sup> Poskett, "National Types," 267.

<sup>85</sup> Poskett, "National Types," 266.

<sup>86</sup> Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1854).

<sup>87</sup> Audrey Smedley and Brian Smedley, *Race in America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4 ed. (Boulder: Westview, 2012), 233.

<sup>88</sup> It is dedicated "to the memory of Morton"; Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*.

<sup>89</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, xlv.

<sup>90</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, li.

<sup>91</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, 66, 125-6.

*Types of Mankind* is thus a polygenist manifesto, and it not only denies the unity of mankind but also makes clear assertions of racial hierarchy. “The negro thrives under the shadow of his white master” while contact with white men is “fatal to the Red American.”<sup>92</sup> For this reason, it is argued, the study of race is of “exceeding interest” to “the American statesman and the philanthropist, as well as to the naturalist” as “our relation to and management of these people must depend, in great measure, upon their intrinsic race character.”<sup>93</sup> As an example of gilding “with the sunbeam of humanity the black plague cloud of slavery,” it is archetypal, and it makes a clear alignment between polygenism and racial hierarchy, and slavery in turn.

The search for, and creation of, “intrinsic race character” is, in *Types of Mankind*, partly archaeological. For racial character to have real permanence it needed to transcend time, something dissonant with the archaeological interest in Egypt, whose civilisation, to Pickering’s mind anyway, was not a product of the white race. Morton therefore concluded that “the Valley of the Nile, both in Egypt and in Nubia, was originally peopled by a branch of the Caucasian race,” in turn claiming the works of Ancient Egypt as another manifestation of eternal white civilization, and corresponding black servitude.<sup>94</sup> This argument, originally made in his *Crania Aegyptica* came two years after Pickering’s letter from Fiji, which said in no uncertain terms that “the most enduring monuments” were product not of the white race but “the most remarkable of all the races:” the Egyptian. Further, Pickering’s work on Egypt told him that “whites [in Ancient Egypt were] often serving in the capacity of slaves” and that he was “not aware of any fact contravening the assumption that Negro slavery may have been of modern origin.”<sup>95</sup>

The gulf between the hierarchical polygenism of *Types of Mankind* and Pickering’s expression of race in *Races of Man* was wide, so wide that it leads Joyce to conclude that viewing him as a polygenist was arguably a case of “guilty by association.”<sup>96</sup> A letter from Asa Gray in 1845 observes that when dealing with Benjamin Tappan, who headed up the Library Committee, that Pickering “though a patient man, once threw up his position in disgust, but by some concessions made to him, was finally persuaded to retain it.”<sup>97</sup> Gray expressed his frustration at Tappan, the “impractical ignoramus,” whose ignorance of the “spirit of interchange that prevail amongst naturalists” was a continual barrier to the full use of the Expedition’s materials. These barriers were erected to the work particularly of James Dwight

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<sup>92</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, xxxiii.

<sup>93</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, xxxiii.

<sup>94</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, xli.

<sup>95</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 185-86.

<sup>96</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 151.

<sup>97</sup> Asa Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 1, 2 vols.*, vol. 1, ed. Jane Loring Gray (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 337.

Dana and Pickering, with whom he was long acquainted.<sup>98</sup> One of Tappan's "impracticalities" was arguably his position on slavery.

Early in his career, Benjamin Tappan was an outspoken opponent of slavery. In 1818, while a judge in Ohio he pronounced "I will never sanction any doctrine which directly or indirectly contravenes that principle on which our Government rests, that all men are created free and equal."<sup>99</sup> While a sentiment espoused in the Declaration of Independence, equality's implications regarding slavery were rarely taken so far as Tappan, who, after a failed slave rebellion "offered to provide guns to slaves who would try again."<sup>100</sup> By 1840, by then a senator, his public position had moderated so much that he argued slavery was a state matter, bound for extinction without need for intervention.<sup>101</sup> Yet, as Feller argues, this was perhaps more of a reconfiguration than a moderation. Tappan's opposition was to abolitionism, which he viewed as merely "ancient federalism, under a new guise," "fatally contaminated by its implicit links to the Whig party and the American priesthood," rather than a new-found moderation on the issue of slavery itself.<sup>102</sup>

Tappan placed barriers to the publication of Pickering's *Races of Man*, and Joyce argues that these objections were founded upon that book's potential "trespass on the hallowed ground of Mosaic revelation."<sup>103</sup> However Tappan, who once described the Bible as "all damned nonsense," makes an unlikely champion of biblical literalism.<sup>104</sup> The senator may have objected to insinuations of polygenism in Pickering's work, but he would have found implications of abolitionism as much, if not more, distasteful. Given that Pickering's name is that of a prominent federalist, the latter seems the more likely interpretation than the presence of naked polygenism in the original draft. The precise nature of Tappan's objection is unclear, a letter from Wilkes only mentions Pickering's "strange notions" regarding the "investigation of the races."

Charles Hall placed Pickering's writings alongside Pritchard, Blumenbach and Cuvier as part of a tradition of monogenist racial thinking.<sup>105</sup> The anonymous editor in abolitionist periodical *The Standard of Freedom* concurred.<sup>106</sup> Despite this, just as historians have struggled to place him in either camp, some of his contemporaries would likely have shared the same

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<sup>98</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 1*, 1, 337.; Gray describes both men as his "personal friends" in 1836, and their appointment to the Expedition as "at his suggestion"; 62.

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Tappan quoted in: Daniel Feller, "A Brother in Arms: Benjamin Tappan and the Antislavery Democracy," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 53.

<sup>100</sup> Feller, "Antislavery Democracy," 53.

<sup>101</sup> Feller, "Antislavery Democracy," 53.

<sup>102</sup> Tappan in Feller, "Antislavery Democracy," 60; Feller, "Antislavery Democracy," 60.

<sup>103</sup> Joyce, *American Ethnography*, 151.

<sup>104</sup> Tappan in Feller, "Antislavery Democracy," 51.

<sup>105</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man with Introduction*, xxxvii.

<sup>106</sup> "Races of Man," 12.

difficulty. After the publication of *Races of Man* he published a short article titled "Enumeration of the Races of Man" in the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*.<sup>107</sup> This article (which contains the same narrative as *Races of Man* but condensed) does nothing to clarify his stance on polygenism, though it was not constricted by the watchful eye of Senator Tappan. Its conclusion is that "on the one hand, it seems quite impossible to trace the four African races to any part of Asia; and on the other, it will be equally difficult to connect the Mongolian race with the African continent."<sup>108</sup>

After returning to the United States from his second expedition, Pickering wrote to Charles Wilkes, who was then overseeing the publications of the Library Committee. He requested that *Races of Man* be published without the oversight of the committee. Wilkes appears to have been bewildered by the demand: "how... can he or any person for one instant suppose that a committee of congress ... would order to be published a manuscript of any kind before they knew what its contents was?"<sup>109</sup> The request came, as Wilkes tells it, because Pickering was aware that the "public mind" was "particularly sensitive on such subjects" and he was inclined to agree, for the Committee, "however freely they may thinking themselves... may deem it extremely necessary to be cautious in publishing any new enquiries relative to the history of man."<sup>110</sup> This sensitivity was, as Ellis argues, not simply about a clash between monogenist narratives of human origins (aligned with liberal humanism) and polygenicist strains (aligned with a biological and hierarchical approach) but about the dissonances of the latter.<sup>111</sup>

Wilkes wrote in that same letter "I do not believe there is one of the committee who have any scruples whatsoever on the subject of whether we are derived from a single pair or fifty," and Stanton takes this as a sign that Pickering was arguing for fifty (or at least eleven), however there is a broader point implied.<sup>112</sup> The importance of Pickering's work did not lie in the question of whether or not he believed that humanity's origin lay in Central Africa, "the mother of peoples" or distributed around the globe in "centres of civilisation," the question for those reading his work was not "from whence does race come" but rather "what does race do." While Stanton emphasises Pickering's phrase: "these Races have had different origins, or, were originally placed in different localities," as important from the same letter is a line preceding: "I

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<sup>107</sup> Pickering, "Enumeration," 266-69.

<sup>108</sup> Pickering, "Enumeration," 269.

<sup>109</sup> Wilkes, Pickering's Wish.

<sup>110</sup> Wilkes, Pickering's Wish.

<sup>111</sup> Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman*, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Stanton, *The Great Expedition*.

will not at present enter into the question of species, but as the world seems to think [humanity is] one ... I am content to let them have their way.”<sup>113</sup>

Such a consensus, in the United States at least, may have been accurate when Pickering left in 1838, but by the time he wrote to Morton in 1840 it had been under assault for some time. In that letter he notes that Morton had “probably published something on the same subject by” the time of writing, and he was correct.<sup>114</sup> Morton published *Crania Americana; or, a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America: to which is prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species* by subscription in 1839 and it is the latter part of its lengthy title that fulfilled Pickering’s expectation.<sup>115</sup> *Crania Americana* and both this and the previously mentioned *Crania Aegyptica* not only presented race as immutable, but at the same time adopted a similar position to Pickering in terms of the order of nature - in Morton’s case explicitly God’s plan - “fitting [of] human varieties to the specific moral and physical circumstances in which they were supposed to live.”<sup>116</sup> Morton’s argument echoed an earlier American polygenicist, Charles Caldwell and found its ultimate expression in *Types of Mankind*.<sup>117</sup>

The racial hierarchy and the immutability of race in *Types of Mankind* offered Josiah Nott, and men like him, the justification for ownership of other men, now made less than that. At the same time, it lent a justification to Morton, and men like him, of the racial segregation they desired, but was not entirely solid, in the North. Agassiz wrote that those philanthropically minded men who would make black people “citizens of their community,” and abolish slavery, would at the same time never “dream of marrying a negress,” so a path was needed between philanthropy and slavery.<sup>118</sup> The fear of miscegenation that Agassiz invoked calls up *Types of Mankind*’s anxieties about the end of the white race.

## Extinction

Fear of racial extinction is also present in *Races of Man*, though with an inverse orientation to Agassiz’s disgust at miscegenation. “The aboriginals of our Eastern States, have been suffered to

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<sup>113</sup> Wilkes, Pickering’s Wish.

<sup>114</sup> Wilkes, Pickering’s Wish.

<sup>115</sup> Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana; or, a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America: to which is prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species* (Philadelphia, P.A.: J. Dobson, 1839).

<sup>116</sup> Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 284.

<sup>117</sup> Bethencourt, *Racisms*, 284.

<sup>118</sup> Agassiz in Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 106.

pass away, with little care taken to preserve a record of their attainments and the arts in their possession” Pickering writes. Another century, and of their implements, stone hatchets and arrow-heads will almost alone be left, to tell that such a people has existed.”<sup>119</sup> As Nicholas Mirzoeff indicates, extinction became a frequent motif in race thinking over this period.<sup>120</sup> Georges Cuvier, who is generally credited with the “discovery” of extinction, finds his way into Charles Hall’s introduction to *Races of Man* as a theorist of race.<sup>121</sup> Agassiz, who is most known for his documenting of ice ages, shared Cuvier’s interest.<sup>122</sup> When ideas about race were tied to ideas about history, they were in turn tied to geological time, and thus to extinction.

Yet as Pickering shows, this racial eschatology was not solely the province of fears of unviable “hybrids”. Robert Knox -whose 1850 book *The Races of Men*, in title and content, has been understood as a direct strike at Pickering’s *Races of Man* and Prichard’s 1847 *Natural History of Man*- offers another bleak and ostensibly anti-imperialist example.<sup>123</sup> “As a living material being, the history of man is included in the history of the organic world ... you cannot separate his history from the organic world” Knox argues.<sup>124</sup> The conclusion that follows is a bleak image of racial conflict leading not to white mastery but an end to humanity entirely.<sup>125</sup> Knox’s ecological thinking, so similar to Pickering’s application of von Humboldt, refuted “the comforting biblical story of the earth being made for” humanity, in stark contrast with the order of nature in *Races of Man*.<sup>126</sup>

The repetition of some version of the phrase “Races of Man” is almost as ironic as it was persistent.<sup>127</sup> This irony is in the way that, as Ellis points out, race thinking was not just about “the constituency of humanity (who qualifies?) but also the meaning of ‘the human’ as such.”<sup>128</sup> Knox’s assertion that man is a “material being” illustrates how thinking about race was also thinking about the nature of humanity itself.<sup>129</sup> While *Types of Mankind* equates true humanity

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<sup>119</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 43-44.

<sup>120</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, “It’s Not the Anthropocene, It’s the White Supremacy Scene; or, The Geological Color Line,” in *After Extinction*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 123-49.

<sup>121</sup> James K. Boyce, *Economics for People and the Planet: Inequality in the Era of Climate Change* (London: Anthem Press, 2019), 29.

<sup>122</sup> Mirzoeff, “Geological Color Line,” 133.

<sup>123</sup> Miranda Morris, “In Perilous Waters: Single Female Migration to Post-Penal Tasmania,” in *Nineteenth-Century Worlds: Global Formations Past and Present*, ed. Keith Hanley and Greg Kucich (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 228.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Men* (Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 16.

<sup>125</sup> Kathy Alexis Psomiades, “Polygenist Ecosystems: Robert Knox’s *The Races of Man* (1850),” *Victorian Review* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41413848>.

<sup>126</sup> Psomiades, “Polygenist Ecosystems,” 35.

<sup>127</sup> Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* had a chapter by that name, and many after Pickering published books by similar and even the same title, some examples being: Oscar Peschel, *The Races of Man and their Geographical Distribution* (New York, NY: Appleton and Company, 1889); Joseph Deniker, *The Races of Man: An Outline of Anthropology and Ethnography*, 3 ed. (London: Walter Scott, 1913); Sonia Mary Cole, *Races of Man* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1965); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York, NY: Appleton and Company, 1875), 165.

<sup>128</sup> Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman*, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 16.

with whiteness, first *Races of Man* and then *Races of Men* put in question the uniqueness of that category at all. This is shown clearly in Pickering's assertion that "there is surely no reason why the order of nature should be set aside, for the special accommodation of physical man."<sup>130</sup> This is a strong differentiation from Prichard, who, in line with his Quaker world view, argued at length against similar materialist analogies.<sup>131</sup>

The door for race thinking was opened, Horseman argues, by "Enlightenment thinking" which, while emphasising a universal human capacity for improvement, at the same time "accelerated the process of secularization of thinking" that allowed unorthodox conceptualisations of human origins: polygenism.<sup>132</sup> *Races of Man*, tied as much to the locations and dissonances of the Expedition as to von Humboldt or Cuvier, complicates this narrative by illustrating how much that secularisation was tied to both the earth sciences and a changing global environment. Pickering's conclusion that "man" is "of a tropical constitution" is an apt demonstration, "was human skin ever intended to be exposed to a perpetual steam-bath?" he writes, having complained of his own "enfeebled condition" in the tropics: tying his own frustrating experience to a range of observations about race, geography and history.

Discussion of secularisation, human origins and the earth sciences in the mid-nineteenth century cannot but lead to Charles Darwin. Through anachronism, Charles Darwin seems to stalk the Expedition. From shared footprints by the Río Negro, to Dana's coral chains to muted competition with William Sharp Macleay, he dashes before or follows behind. This is variously the result of the wide reach of mid-nineteenth century scientific networks, the volume of historical literature about Darwin himself, and my own, perhaps overactive, pattern recognition. Darwin owned a much-annotated copy of *Races of Man* and his reading notebook indicates he read it at least two times.<sup>133</sup> Yet the appreciation does not appear to have been mutual, with no mention of Darwin in any of Pickering's later works. This is despite his close association with not only collaborators with the Englishman, but with both sides of the United States first early battles about evolution and natural selection.

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<sup>130</sup> Pickering, *Races of Man*, 302.

<sup>131</sup> Hannah Franziska Augstein, "JC Prichard's Concept of Moral Insanity – a Medical Theory of the Corruption of Human Nature," *Medical History* 40 (1996): 315.

<sup>132</sup> Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 46.

<sup>133</sup> Jixing Pan, "A New Inquiry into the Chinese Sources Used by Charles Darwin," *Chinese Annals of History of Science and Technology* 2, no. 2 (2018): 25, <https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1461.2018.02019>; Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause: How a Hatred of Slavery Shaped Darwin's Views on Human Evolution* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 220.; "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," Darwin Correspondence Project, University of Cambridge Library, 2022, <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/people/about-darwin/what-darwin-read/darwin-s-reading-notebooks>.

Gray disapproved of slavery and abolitionism in almost equal measure. "I would send [copies of] 'the Evangelist' did not Mr. Leavitt fill it up with too much anti-slavery" he wrote to his father in 1835.<sup>134</sup> His correspondence with Charles Darwin offers a contrast between New England Whig gradualism and English abolitionism.<sup>135</sup> Gray's objection to slavery, like that of Timothy Pickering and many of his contemporaries, was founded less on a profound moral revulsion than practicality for "it will take some generations to breed out the barbarian they bring to the country."<sup>136</sup> What was needed was to replace "barbarous by civilized and free institutions" through a process that "cost no life, injured no property, but benefited all as it went on."<sup>137</sup> Around the time of the publication of *Races of Man*, Gray expressed an admiration for Agassiz, and considered his polygenism mildly heretical but not worthy of condemnation.<sup>138</sup>

In 1856, Gray, and Dana with him, felt that the "idea of unity of the human species" was "confirmed more and more."<sup>139</sup> By 1863 he instead believed that humanity, and races with it, were product, at least in part, of the less rigid dictates of natural selection.<sup>140</sup> By that point he had gone "in Darwinian direction" in cohabitation with "faith in a Diety who has created and governed all things."<sup>141</sup> Gray was then, in the midst of the Civil War, convinced that the abolition of slavery through force of arms was imminent, confirming his ambivalence about both abolitionism and the question of race that accompanied it. His gradualism speaks to a discomfort about the extremes of abolitionism, something maintained even as the question of slavery came to a head. This discomfort appears to have been shared by Pickering, at least in the late 1830s, and was a common sentiment.

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<sup>134</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 1*, 1, 55.

<sup>135</sup> Janet Browne, "Asa Gray and Charles Darwin: Corresponding Naturalists," *Harvard Papers in Botany* 15, no. 2 (2010): 15, <https://doi.org/10.3100/025.015.0204>.

<sup>136</sup> Pickering maintained an opposition to slavery throughout his life but in his time as a senator his voting record prioritised maintaining the economic strength of the US over efforts to undermine the institution of slavery, see: John Craig Hammond, "They Are Very Much Interested in Obtaining an Unlimited Slavery": Rethinking the Expansion of Slavery in the Louisiana Purchase Territories, 1803-1805," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 3 (2003): 369, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3595044>, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3595044>. Asa Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 2*, 2 vols., vol. 2, ed. Jane Loring Gray (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 515.

<sup>137</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 2*, 2, 534, 36.

<sup>138</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 1*, 1, 346.

<sup>139</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 2*, 2, 426.

<sup>140</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 2*, 2, 462.

<sup>141</sup> Gray, *Letters of Asa Gray Vol 2*, 2, 492, 801.



# Conclusion

He is not here, he is risen!

– Matthew 28:6

## Punchbowl, New South Wales

The etymological origins of the word ‘conclusion’ are revealing. The word comes from the Latin: “concludere,” meaning “to shut up” or “enclose.”<sup>1</sup> The genre conventions of a thesis call for closure and demand a resounding ending, yet I, like the naturalist I research, find such endings hard to come by. These words, an exogram like Pickering’s journal, have their own temporality – this sentence was written at AEST 09:28 20 August 2023, give or take a few minutes – their own contingencies – the timing mentioned was made a lie by my youngest son calling from the kitchen – and, though it perhaps undermines their authority, their own fleeting moments of coherence – I already question this manner of conclusion and even the structure of this sentence. The writing of a thesis is a maelstrom, and a conclusion is a kind of sleight of hand to give the reader the sense that the storm has abated. Sarah Stoddard Pickering was left to perform conclusion’s sleight of hand on his behalf after his death on 17 March 1878.

Sarah Pickering’s hand ornaments much of her husband’s archival legacy. She wrote the Preface to *The Chronological History of Plants* and both his original Expedition journals at the Massachusetts Historical Society and his field notes from the Harvard Archives contain an explanation of their contents along with her initials: S.S.P.<sup>2</sup> The couple’s remains were buried in adjacent graves at Mount Auburn Cemetery near Cambridge, Massachusetts. Mount Auburn preserves Pickering’s connection with the Expedition, for it hosts a cenotaph erected to commemorate the Expedition’s dead. Pickering was also placed amongst the scientists of his day, lying a few hundred metres from the botanist Asa Gray (buried beneath a rectangular stone slab with a cross in relief) and geologist Louis Agassiz (beneath a boulder transported from a glacier in Switzerland).<sup>3</sup> It alludes to the dissonance in Pickering’s writing too, with the grave of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. – the critic who compared *Races of Man* to low priced sausage – lying just down the path. Invoking Pickering’s final resting place is one way to indicate this thesis’s end, with a neat set of deceased connections ready to remind a reader of important themes, but it also points towards what’s missing.

The Pickerings are buried on the edge of Mount Auburn, it is a family plot, including his brother, nephew and mother. His famous grandfather is buried in Salem, his father on a hill in rural Pennsylvania. The Pickering graves, 10 in all – tinted green by algae and shaded by maples – indicate that “S.S.P.” went by “Sally” to those close to her. Charles’ grave is inscribed with a

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<sup>1</sup> “Conclude (v.) updated 20 February 2018,” Douglas Harper, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/conclude>.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Stoddard Pickering, “Preface,” in *The Chronological History of Plants: Man’s Record of His Own Existence Illustrated Through Their Names, Uses and Companionship*, ed. Charles Pickering (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1879), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Mount Auburn Cemetery, *Map of Mount Auburn Cemetery*, (Cambridge, Mass.: 2017).

curious epitaph: “he is not here, he is risen.” It is a bible verse, and hints at a life beyond Pickering’s scientific work, which steered well clear of direct invocation of God.<sup>4</sup> His grave too looks outwards, facing a gentle incline beneath the maples, to a chain-link fence and a view to a suburban street lined with stately houses. Most of his life outside the Expedition goes unrecorded in these pages. Perhaps, vexed by the reception of *Races of Man* his retirement to Boston to work as a medical doctor marked the decision to abandon the sciences as anything beyond a hobby, leaving his extensive paper trail in the scientific societies of his day as merely a receipt for long lunches and carousing of the type he enjoyed at Harvard.

In trying to imagine Pickering, historians have utilised a specific scholarly archetype. He is described as “bookish” and “bespectacled”, and looking at the only remaining photo of him, it is easy to imagine him as the archetype of a bumbling professor.<sup>5</sup> Short-sighted, like his grandfather, Pickering’s slight build was matched by a generally understated character. Yet looking at the range of his travels it is hard to pin him to that conservative, cautious model, for even before he left on the expedition he had journeyed widely, and at times into danger. As the *Relief* floundered in the Straits of Magellan, at the height of the worst storm of the voyage, the naturalist retired to his cabin, wrapped himself in his cloak, and promptly fell asleep. My efforts to write him into coherence, to chart his thinking through its artefacts, will at best only capture enigmatic moments. I could end it there, say that the shutters may close but the storm rages, and repeat Foucault by saying “leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order.”<sup>6</sup>

Instead I will close with the imposition of one last bit of order. The artefacts of Charles Pickering’s race thinking show the way that race mattered deeply to his navigation of the world. They also show that his capacity to use race, to believe it, to manage its dissonances, was often depended on the cognitive environment within which his mind dwelled. In the Colony of New South Wales, in the United States, in those places that were increasingly deploying race as tools of governance and justification, places that were ordered on racial lines and thus made race real, belief was easy, and dissonance scarce. Those places where the increasingly white supremacist logics of race started to fray, where people and environments defied expectation and the narration he carried with him, those were the places where his cognitive dissonance threatened

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<sup>4</sup> While some of his obituaries were published in the scientific press, one was published in *The Unitarian Review* by a Unitarian reverend: John H. Morison, “Biographical Notices,” in *The Chronological History of Plants: Man’s Record of His Own Existence Illustrated Through Their Names, Uses and Companionship*, ed. Pickering Charles (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1879), ix.

<sup>5</sup> Descriptions by: Joyce, *American Ethnography*, x; Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 69. Joyce, *American Ethnography*, X and Philbrick, *Sea of Glory*, 69. There is a single known picture of Pickering, taken a few years before his death and published in *The Chronological History of Plants*, according to: Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, *Magnificent Voyagers: the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 17.

to overwhelm him. But that process did not end with his mind, the artefacts of that dissonance management had a life of their own beyond him.

The first few lines of *Chronological History of Plants* note that “at length the face of the Globe itself has changed.”<sup>7</sup> The examination of Charles Pickering’s race thinking show how this change became inextricable from race itself. It shows not just race’s contingency but also its solidity, its growing inscription in environment and thought, up to the point where it became bedrock. It is my hope that this artefact of my thinking also offers a tool for the geology of that bedrock.

## Cambridge, Massachusetts

In August 2024 I visited the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. In 2019 I had contributed my research to a global exhibition titled *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* and five years later I was able to observe the Peabody’s part of the Exhibition in person.<sup>8</sup> One of the exhibition’s explanatory panels notes that many early scholars of race held “inadequate ideas of race, origins, and migration.” This thesis has tracked the shifting nature of that inadequacy, but it has also captured something of race’s utility. Race’s inadequacy was, as Charles Pickering illustrates, one of its strengths. Its partiality, its temporality, often led to a kind of intellectual productivity. The naturalist’s thinking about race was not extraordinary in this respect, and he was far from the only race thinker to flounder in incoherence.

I believe that this study of racial incoherence complicates and broadens the study of race that often emphasises intellectual lineage. Histories of racist thought in the United States have often stressed the importance of Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and that works’ presence or lack thereof in Pickering’s work offers an example of this complication.<sup>9</sup> The young Charles Pickering would naturally have heard of Jefferson, but there is little to indicate that he read *Notes on the State of Virginia* (and if he did it was likely with contempt). It is without reference in any of his publications as far as I am aware, and it finds no mention in the syllabus he studied at Harvard. “After Jefferson’s election in 1800, (Colonel Timothy) Pickering was his greatest opponent” Almog argues, and while Charles differed from his grandfather in

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<sup>7</sup> Pickering, *History of Plants*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> For the publication on the exhibition and my chapter therein see: Hilary Howes, Tristen Jones, and Matthew Spriggs, *Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania*, ed. Hilary Howes, Tristen Jones, and Matthew Spriggs (Canberra: ANU Press, 2022). <http://press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/pacific/uncovering-pacific-pasts>.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Allen Driggers, “The Chemistry of Blackness: Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, Everard Home, and the Project of Defining Blackness through Chemical Explanations,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.5325/critphilrace.7.2.0372>.

some respects, in their opinion of Jefferson they would likely have been in union.<sup>10</sup> While the occasional physicality of Pickering's race thinking bears comparison with Jefferson, the latter's hierarchical conception was something that the naturalist largely disavowed.

Colonel Pickering viewed Jefferson as the leader of those aristocratic Virginians who undermined and ultimately defeated the former's New England faction of federalists. Far from an egalitarian himself, the Colonel spent the last ten years of his life raging against the ebbing of the benevolent paternalism he championed – replaced by what he viewed as a corrosive racial order particularly embodied in the institution of slavery – and his grandson partly inherited.<sup>11</sup> An easy pair of binaries could be erected parallel between Jefferson's aristocratic race thinking and Timothy Pickering's benevolent paternalism on one hand, and Samuel Morton's hierarchical polygenism and Charles Pickering's paternalistic racialism on the other. This would however undermine the project of this thesis by asserting altogether too much coherence.

I began this thesis with an emphasis upon the incoherence of Charles Pickering's racial thinking and I return to it now at the end. I asserted that the Expedition's factotum has been overlooked in historical research because of his lack of clarity, and so to conclude I want to emphasise that it is that same lack of clarity that justifies his place. To look at his thinking in its temporality and transience offers a more convincing understanding of the way that race functioned, and to chip away further at its bedrock.

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<sup>10</sup> Almog, "Guilty of a Skin not Coloured like Our Own: Timothy Pickering on Slavery and Race, and the Complicated Legacy of New England High Federalism," 3.

<sup>11</sup> Almog, "Guilty of a Skin not Coloured like Our Own: Timothy Pickering on Slavery and Race, and the Complicated Legacy of New England High Federalism," 30.

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