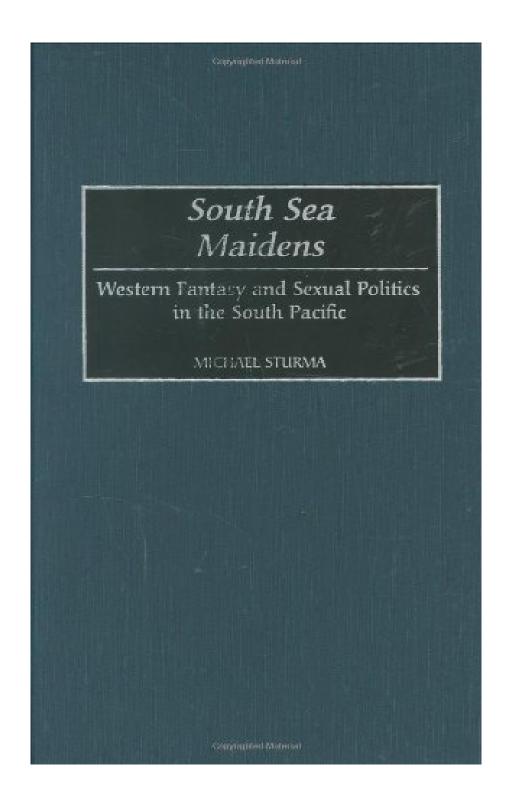


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Review

"Anyone with a passing interest in South Sea maidens will welcome it. As part of the series 'Contributions to the Study of World History', it speaks to historians, but scholars and students from many disciplines will find Sturma's survey and bibliography useful."-The International History Review

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About the Author

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From the first European contact with Tahiti in 1767, the myth of the South Sea maiden has endured through many incarnations. Although the maiden frequently provided an idealized antidote to Western women's self-assertion, the South Pacific also afforded a space where boundaries between the sexes could be relaxed and transgressed. From James Cook and Captain Bligh to James Michener and Margaret Mead, the Island girl has occupied a special place in the erotic imagination of the West. In a sweeping study that embraces history, literature, visual arts, anthropology and film, this study gives fresh insight into the myths and reality of a Western icon.

While women from far off lands have always been presented as exotic and alluring, the South Sea maiden has come to symbolize feminine sexuality, as an integral part of the adventure, sensuality, and romance of the South Pacific. Everyone from early explorers to 19th century writers and artists to latter day anthropologists, film makers, and tourism promoters have extolled their virtues and their bodies. Sturma looks behind the popular clich^D'es to reveal how the myth-making process reflected not only Western desires, but the cut and thrust of changing sexual politics. The result is an intriguing look at both South Sea image-makers and the women whom they found so seductive.

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First Contact, Gender, Colonialism, and Other Matters.

By Jeffery Mingo

When Rudyard Kipling stated that East and West would never meet, he was refering to relations between the West and India. Discussions about when Europeans reached Polynesia also reveal sharp contrasts between two cultures. However, there is more suggestions of blending.

This book discusses the film "Mutiny on the Bounty" and those who liked that movie may love this more academic meditation on those facts. What happens when starved, exhausted, Christian-raised sailors come to islands filled with scantily-clad women who have far fewer restraints about their sexual activities and options? This book looks at that dynamic from a Women's Studies perspective.

Westerners who reached Polynesia did not just meet less conservative women. They saw societies that allowed for broader gender representations. Many other texts and historical accounts mention the mahu or the aikane. For example, some sources say Kamehameha the Great had female and male lovers. However, the sexual orientation dynamic or transgender dynamic isn't brought up here at all. I found that absolute erasure disappointing.

I recommend that readers see the Polynesian chapter in "The Pacific Experience." For those who want to hear more about third genders, read Lee Wallace's "Sexual Encounters: Polynesian Texts." Can I be honest about something? As the book focuses on gender, I just assumed the author was a woman. It's only now that I'm reviewing this that I see the author is a guy! Whoops! I hope that doesn't make my thoughts moot.

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