

BOOK REVIEWS SECTION

Akihiro Iwashita (2015). *Japan's border issues: Pitfalls and prospects*. London: Routledge. Hbk. 141pp+Index. ISBN: 978-1-138-91677-7. US\$160.

Consult the official map of Japan, titled 'Japanese Territory', available off the website of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/territory/>. The map highlights three island areas, all of which are deemed "inherent territory of Japan": Dokdo, an island known as Takeshima to the Japanese, currently controlled by South Korea; the South Kuriles, known as the Northern Territories to the Japanese, administered by Russia/Soviet Union since 1945; and the Diaoyu islands (known as Diaoyutai to Taiwan, and Senkaku to the Japanese), currently administered by Japan as part of Okinawa prefecture, but claimed by China (and Taiwan).

In Japan's border issues: Pitfalls and prospects, English language readers will finally be able to dig their teeth into a full-length academic text and delve into Iwashita's pioneering research into border issues. This slim volume comprises seven chapters that distil Professor Iwashita's thoughts, analysis and experiences about Japan and its border issues, focusing specifically on its three pending, and festering, territorial squabbles with its neighbours.

Small or marginal islands can loom large in the national psyche. The author makes very interesting and valuable points that can help lead to a situation where cooperation and resolution over such border issues become more realistic and feasible. The key point is to climb down from populist and nationalist-friendly positions that claim islands as indisputably integral parts of national territory, and which by definition render any form of resolution impossible. Instead, a dialogue on regional (rather than national) history, with the more pragmatic and flexible voices and intent of local stakeholders, holds richer promises for solution. Regional cooperation offers opportunities for non-state actors, plus local government, to broaden agendas and recover a cross-border discourse that acknowledges and privileges mobility, connections and migrations rather than sovereignty and territoriality. Iwashita has been actively involved on this front, leading a series of initiatives that have explored regional cooperation between Taiwan and the Yaeyama islands, as well as Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. These projects are vividly documented in an excellent series of DVDs, also available with English voice-overs and translations.

For island studies scholars, this book is makes pertinent reading for two main reasons, the first being the more obvious: all these three pending issues deal with islands, reminding us that Japan is an archipelago nation with no (current) land borders with any other country. The implications of this are that such border issues that Japan faces cannot be properly addressed with due process and care to maritime issues as well – fishing rights, navigation rights, rights for sea bed mineral exploration, the right to stop and search vessels and detain foreign sea captains and crew.

The second is more subtle and would require readers to look its Iwashita's professional past. As a professor of Sino-Russian border issues based at the Slavic and Eurasian Research Centre, Hokkaido University, the author has spent a considerable number of years in his career looking at the chequered history that led to the resolution of *all* border issues between Russia and China: at over 4,000 km, this is the world's sixth-longest international border. A significant stretch of this border lies along the Amur river, and the determination of the ownership of various islands along this river, and therefore the exact location of the international border, consumed many hours of tense diplomacy between Moscow and Beijing,

even leading to a military confrontation in March 1969, when Chinese forces occupied Zhenbao / Damanski island. The last unresolved territorial issue between the two countries was only settled in 2004. With that agreement, Russia transferred part of Abagaitu islet, Yinlong/ Tarabarov island, about half of Heixiazi / Bolshoi Ussuriyski island, plus a few adjacent river islets, to China. As an eclectic comparatist, Iwashita has drawn insights and lessons from this confrontation and deploys them with regard to Japan's territorial squabbles with its three neighbours. Indeed, the unlikely 'fifty-fifty' solution that has led to the division of Heixiazi / Bolshoi Ussuriyski when all else failed may find itself being considered again.

The book is largely autobiographical: the author makes extensive use of his own insights and earlier publications to tease out contexts, arguments and suggest future scenarios. The disadvantage of this approach is that the book is rather short in length and economic in terms of background reading: there are six pages of references in all, around half of which are in Japanese, Russian, Korean or Chinese (and inclusive of the author's own work).

The text comes with various useful maps at different scales. Strangely enough, the map centered on Hokkaido (p. 123) is displayed with south at top: this may confuse a few readers.

This book is essential reading for all those seeking to understand the complex nature of Japan's three ongoing border issues, as well as the likely mechanisms that could help secure their eventual solution, reducing tension in that part of the world.

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Samuel Edquist & Janne Holmén (2015) *Islands of Identity: History writing and identity formation in five island regions in the Baltic Sea*, Stockholm, Södertörn Academic Studies 59. 418 pp, ISBN 978-91-86069-98-8, 259 SEK.

Islands of Identity is an extensive presentation of the history writing and the formation of regional identities in the islands of Gotland, Åland, Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Bornholm, combined with a comparative analysis of similarities and differences related to the islands' varying geographical locations and historic circumstances.

The book begins with a detailed discussion of the theoretical and methodological background employed by the authors. By focusing on the emergence of regional history-writing and regional identities, Holmén and Edquist have chosen an approach which has been less often applied: a lot of historiographical research has been committed to the examination of historians' constructions of national identities, whereas the emergence of regional identities has been less studied. The islands selected for examination differ in their remoteness from the mainland, in their previous affiliations with foreign countries, linguistic differences and presence or absence of political autonomy.

The Swedish island of Gotland is the largest of the Baltic islands and has a population of approximately 57,000 inhabitants. At present, Gotlanders consider themselves Swedes, but the medieval language of Gotland is considered by linguists to have been different from Swedish. The author of the chapter on Gotland, Samuel Edquist, elaborates islands' history-writing from the perspective of the main tendencies that have underpinned identity-formation in the region. He does so by including not only the dominant history-writing narratives with

their particular emphasis on medieval history, in the first case, and peasant, democratic Gotland, in the second, but also the exceptions to them, thus creating a versatile picture of a variety of different views. As the author mentions, Gotland has an extensive amount of academic and popular history-writing, including thousands of books and articles. His distinction between a medieval and a folkloristic narrative is particularly helpful. 'Indigenous' Gotlandic history-writing has had much to say about recent centuries in the islands' development; whereas the 'external' or tourist discourse has been focusing on prehistory and the Middle Ages. The medieval and folklore narratives have sometimes coexisted in the same book, even if one of them is stronger. In addition, a new, third narrative is being built by the history-writing that differs from both of the dominant discourses. On the whole, Gotlandic regional identity has served as a complement to Swedish national identity.

A very different case study is the case of Åland, examined by Janne Holmén. Whereas Gotlandic regional identity has, in most cases, served as an addition to, or part of, Swedish national identity, despite its regional peculiarities and particular distinctiveness, Åland was given a different role in the national narrative after the partition of the old Swedish kingdom in 1809. At present, Åland is the only one of the Baltic islands that enjoys regional autonomy. Interestingly, however, regional history-writing on Åland did not start until the second half of the nineteenth century – later than Gotland, Bornholm and Saaremaa – and was initially closely linked to the rise of Finnish nationalism. Holmén has demonstrated how narratives on Åland identity were transformed by the use of history as a weapon in conjunction with the Åland question (1917-1921) when the rhetoric of historians from Sweden and Finland differed accordingly to the nationalist demands and how the achievement of autonomy led to an extensive identity-building process. The task of defining what constitutes regional history-writing was easier in this case because, since the 1920s Åland's regional government initiated or funded most publications about Åland's history. The presentation of Åland stands out as a systematic, and richly detailed analysis of history-writing. The connection between history-writing and changes in political and economic circumstances is clearly discernable in this case. Unlike Gotland and Åland, Bornholm is more distanced from Denmark, its mainland nation-state, with several other nations nearby: this condition has offered the possibility to examine and analyze how this different geopolitical position has affected the history of the region. Neither Bornholman history-writing nor Bornholman identity have been the objects of detailed research, so the present chapter introduces a variety of less-often studied facts and details. Although the book does not deal with dialectal or linguistic diversity to any great extent, references to the work of linguists is an interesting addition. For example, it is revealing to find out that a study of the regional dialect's importance for Bornholman identity has come to the conclusion that there is a Bornholman regional patriotism, but that the dialect does not play a positive part in it (p. 318).

In the cases of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, both islands of Estonia, as the book demonstrates, regional history-writing does not emphasize tensions between islands and mainland: somewhat similarly to the situation in history-writing on Gotland in relation to mainland Sweden. Saaremaa and Hiiumaa experienced several shifts in national sovereignty in the twentieth century and, despite geographical closeness, have belonged to different states or Russian governments. Interest in Saaremaa's history first started among the German elite, whereas on Hiiumaa there was no Baltic German regional history-writing and only a few booklets were published in Soviet Estonia. History-writing during the Soviet period affected both islands and the contiguous mainland because of censorship and control over writing. As a

result, islanders in exile (especially those in Canada, Sweden and Germany) wrote a substantial amount of regional history.

The comparative conclusions of the book, as the case studies themselves, demonstrate the influence of islandness on regional identities: islands are not neatly delimited by natural borders; and their treatment as metaphors does not do them any justice. Instead, physical geography is relevant to the formation of collective identities, but only in combination with an understanding of a series of complex historical processes from different time periods.

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Margaret Pointer (2015). *Niue 1774–1974: 200 years of contact and change*. Honolulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press, in association with Otago University Press, Dunedin, New Zealand. 376pp. ISBN: 978-0-8248-5586-4. US\$45.00

Pacific Islanders revere, and are revered for, their exquisite expressive oral arts such as their intricate oral histories of events, people and places. But as many chroniclers of Pacific history can attest, there is often a quandary on how to balance the ephemera of indigenous oral histories with the voluminosity of written documentation produced over the centuries by cultural outsiders. Few writers have navigated this inequality as well as New Zealand historian Margaret Pointer in her masterful history of the Pacific Island state of Niue from the time of first European contact in 1774 to the dawning of self-governance in 1974.

As Pointer notes in the book's preface, Niue's story embraces yet embellishes the many familiar themes of Pacific history in the broad areas of contact, interaction and change. As with its more centrally located neighbours, Niue also endured European 'discovery' and the interventions of missionaries, colonialists and traders; yet, its unique characteristics, such as its 'iron-bound coast' of reefs and cliffs and its considerable isolation even in the context of the vastness of Oceania meant that Niueans experienced the ebb and flow of history quite differently. It is this difference in historical perspective as articulated through Niuean oral history that Pointer endeavours to weave into a written history in equal measure with written Euro-American accounts in her book.

Niue is one of the least documented island states in the South Pacific. This 100-square-mile 'Rock of Polynesia,' as Niue is colloquially called, offered little to attract colonial interest. Historically, its domestic population seldom topped 5,000 and the island lay far from established shipping lanes. Thus, transportation and communication services were limited and irregular until the latter half of the 20th Century.

As with neighbouring Cook Islands and Tokelau, Niue is one of a handful of Pacific island territories to eschew full sovereignty during the global decolonization push of the 1960s-1970s. It remains an internally self-governing 'freely associated' state within New Zealand's realm. Since 1901, Niueans have enjoyed full New Zealand citizenship rights, which are enshrined in Niue's 1974 constitution. So attractive is the allure of a more prosperous life overseas that today an estimated fifteen times more Niueans live in New Zealand than on-island. The steadily shrinking local population is one of many threats to the continued vibrancy of Niuean language and oral arts.

Trained as a historian, Pointer worked as a secondary school teacher of history, geography and social science before moving to Niue in the late 1990s with her young family and diplomat husband, who served as New Zealand's high commissioner to Niue. Her interests in Niuean history were first directed toward chronicling the experiences of Niuean soldiers in World War I, which she published in a well-received volume. For this present book, Pointer was awarded a Copyright Licensing New Zealand Writers' Award in 2013.

From the first flip of pages, it is clear that *Niue: 1774-1974* promises to take readers on a sensory journey. Through her considerable storytelling talents, Pointer animates the sensual aspects of Niuean social history: the blaze of bonfires lit to celebrate village events, the wailing of women who have lost family men to 'blackbirders' or other slave-hunters, and the feasting, singing and dancing presented to honour foreign dignitaries.

The book is richly embellished with photographs, many of which are published for the first time. They offer intriguing glimpses into the rhythms of island life from bygone days. We might not hear the people's voices or sit in the presence of their stories, but we can discern something about their lives from the photographs. Consider the women in Mother Hubbard dresses clustered in groups under their umbrellas along a palm-lined road (p. 153), or the sweaty labourers mining a coral reef for road-building material under a midday sun (p. 179), or the diligent group of weavers producing pandanus hats for the export market (p. 187), or the solemn faces of Niuean soldiers bound for World War I battlefields from where one in four would not return (p. 198). True, nearly all the photographs were created by non-Niueans and thus carry the potentially biased 'gaze' of cultural outsiders. Yet, there is a poignancy about these photographs that makes us want to believe in their truth. Similarly, the eloquence of Pointer's writing and the exactitude of her research encourage us to also want to trust in her telling of Niue's story.

As a historian, Pointer clearly relishes the colour that can be gleaned from primary historical documents as opposed to later published, and thus edited, editions. She delightfully embroiders her storylines with passages from captain's logs, sailor's letters, missionary diaries and similar intimate communication. Given that much of the recent historical record comprises government documents, Pointer attempts to humanize them by adding the missing social context, such as describing how a highly publicized criminal trial needed to be held in a banana shed on the wharf because it was the only building large enough on the island to hold the gathering (p. 251). Although descriptions can at times be thin, Pointer does endeavour to explore how grassroots Niueans experienced the march of modernity, such as the introduction of electricity, cinemas, jazz music and helicopters.

Niue 1774-1974 is organized into four parts, chronologically presented. Four chapters in Part A focus on Niue's first contact with European explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries and they quickly set the pace for the rest of the book. For example, Pointer juxtaposes written European accounts of 'first contact' with Niuean 'myths' that celebrate the bravery of island warriors and those who 'challenged' the foreigners with "war songs and dances" (p. 29).

In Part B, Pointer takes us through the early years of European settlement, including a chapter appropriately devoted to the transformational figure of Reverend William George Lawes of the London Missionary Society. Pointer employs her considerable storytelling talents to explore how islanders might have experienced their changing ways of life, for example, in the silence of night-time villages now that so many men had migrated overseas for employment or the anxieties arising around farmers' decisions on whether to grow crops for

sale or donation to merchants or missionaries, respectively. Pointer writes with a detached precision about Imperial Britain's and later New Zealand's administrative neglect of Niuean interests, neither exaggerating nor defending acts of perceived "colonial arrogance" (p. 270). For example, from the mid-19th Century onward, Niuean chiefly councils and the village people repeatedly articulated their interests, often through written petition drives, to be more fully integrated into the British Empire; only to be rebuffed by disinterested colonial administrators. Part B ends with Niueans expressing unhappiness at their annexation into New Zealand's colonial administration, with the consequence that Niuean interests were frequently subsumed under those of the neighbouring Cook Islands.

Part C explores Niue's experiences of the early 20th Century, from its eager but delayed involvement in World War I, its keen but rebuffed involvement in World War II, and the ongoing challenges of "adjusting ourselves to meet the modern conditions" (p. 245) through "practical" development and political change. Again, Pointer artfully mines the historical lode to unearth insightful views on events and people, such as the 1953 murder of New Zealand's contentious resident commissioner to Niue, Hector Larsen. Pointer uses Larsen's story to explore the contradictory elements in Niue's relationship with New Zealand's colonial administration, such as the systemic inattention within the colonial bureaucracy to both the Niuean people's petitions for more responsive governance and similar calls for assistance from its own civil servants who were often assigned to, and then left stranded in, this hardship posting. The chapter also reveals Pointer's research thoroughness where, some 62 years after the murder occurred, she is the first to interview Larsen's son who as a child had witnessed the events of that day. Pointer uses intimate snapshots from the Larsen family collection to personalize Larsen, as well as reveal glimpses into everyday life on Niue in the early 1950s.

The final chapters in Part D explore the localized dynamics of the international decolonization movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Unified Niuean voices had repeatedly opposed what appeared to be a United Nations-led juggernaut toward full independence that rolled along with New Zealand's acquiescence. Skilfully, Pointer balances her narrative of these momentous times by including Niuean views and sensibilities. For example, she captures both the social awkwardness and Niuean nonchalance when an esteemed Niuean elder, on his first visit to Wellington, New Zealand, to take part in the first meeting between Niuean and New Zealand leaders on New Zealand soil, becomes entangled in a turnstile and stumbles into the Parliament chambers (p. 292). Similarly, she describes the nervousness of Niuean representatives as they prepared to explain before the United Nations General Assembly why they were swimming against the global tide by opposing full independence (p. 320).

In general, *Niue 1774-1974* offers a highly enjoyable and well-documented narrative of an island people's struggle for recognition and respect over two centuries. At times, readers might be left curious to learn more about what grassroots people, especially women, thought about the changes sweeping through their lives, such as universal suffrage or the introduction of land-use laws. But such is the difficulty for Pacific historians in hearing fading voices from bygone times. This fascinating book will appeal to those with general interests in Pacific Island history (including its photographic history) and in New Zealand's Pacific colonial era.

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Susanna Hoe (2015). *Malta: Women, history, books and places*. Oxford: HOLO Books / Women's History Press. 450pp. pbk. 2 maps, 58 illustrations. ISBN: 978-0-9572-1535-1. £19.99stg.

Back in 2002, I had lamented the fact that women are hardly ever mentioned in our Maltese History books. I said that women cannot be found in Maltese history because their story has yet to be written; till now we have just touched the fringes and Maltese women are still outside the history of our country. This situation had various repercussions not least in history education which is my area of specialization. Six years later, I wrote that one potent way of making women visible is to actually start teaching women's history as part of our local history curriculum; however, when it comes to teaching women's history, I realized very early on that before any teaching could go on, historians first have to start writing women's history.

I did not lose heart: I predicted that, similarly to what happened abroad where publications on women's history suddenly took off, the same would happen in Malta and one day we would not need to ask anymore where are women in Maltese history. With such books as Susanna Hoe's *Malta: Women, history, books and places*, that day has definitely arrived. We are indeed lucky that a writer of women and history of Susanna Hoe's calibre, who has written on women in Madeira, Crete, China and Tasmania to mention just a few, has decided to turn her attention to our island. It is true that history books as well as various academic papers on women in Malta have been slowly but surely trickling in over the past few years, but these have tended to be narrowly specialized pieces which focus on very particular historic periods. On the other hand, Susanna Hoe's book reviews all that is presently available and produces a delightful extravaganza of women in Malta throughout history.

The author makes valid extrapolations where literature is lacking for such periods as pre-history, classical times and early medieval Malta. She writes about oil preparation in food and the cultivation of vines where she imagines women must have been involved. She also mentions Roman empresses like Julia Domna; an inscription is dedicated to her in Gozo. The author suggests that, since she is referred to as 'mother of military camp', then Roman campaigns in the east may have passed through Gozo. For the Middle Ages, there are references to a number of medieval women who if not all strictly Maltese ladies, did spend a considerable time in Malta and were definitely caught up in the politics of the island - like Ricca Cafor, Lucina Pistore and Margarita d'Aragona, the latter married to the Hakem (ruler) of Malta.

On the other hand, there is no shortage of history work on women in more modern times and Susanna Hoe makes full use of all the research historians have produced. For example, for the 18th century she presents the various occupations women indulged in, as well as their adventures and activities as individuals in their society, including those that had been trouble makers and others who had been victims; and their participation in both religion and magic. The author also brings to light historians' work on widows. These women were allowed more freedom due to their status and they often managed their deceased husbands' businesses; like Maria Caruana who was in charge of a quarrying business and Vincenza Matilde Testaferrata who acted as Despositario within the Inquisition.

In the 20th century, besides well-known Maltese women like Josephine Burns Debono and Helene Buhagar, Hoe also refers to lesser known individuals like Rosaria Fenech, Vincenza Flores and Liza Fenech who were all active in women's issues and political life on the island; although more could have been said on Agatha Barbara who eventually became the first woman President of the Republic of Malta.

All authors are inclined to be predisposed to favour some topics above others and it is clear that British ladies on the island have a special attraction to Susanna Hoe. She goes into quite some detail on these ladies in Chapter 12 *Women and medicine 1846–1909*, confirming my view on British ladies based in Malta in the 19th century as being an amazingly entrepreneurial group. It was truly enjoyable to read about an array of these characters, some very famous indeed and who all came to Malta, with some spending quite a considerable amount of time here. The writer re-tells the colourful and unique life of Dr. James Miranda Barry, a female doctor whose sex was only revealed upon her death. We are reminded that Florence Nightingale visited Malta and was indeed highly critical of the governor, Richard More O’Ferrall. Mary Seacole, the beloved heroine of mixed race, also visited Malta on the way to Constantinople, although unfortunately she did not think much of the islands! In any case, as Hoe says, there was never a shortage of women passing through Malta!

The overview approach adopted in this book has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that, probably for the first time, we have a collection of not just Maltese women but anything female and the Maltese islands, all gathered together in one book: from Roman goddesses like Proserpina to the busy activities of various female British archaeologists working in Malta in the nineteenth and early 20th century.

But *Malta: Women, history, books and places* is more than just a mere collection of facts and information. It is extremely well researched with an extensive literature review; so it is definitely not just a summary. It is a captivating book where the narrative flows easily as very interesting material is presented in an excellent manner and discussed. How can one not get immediately attentive when in the introduction you are greeted with of all things a crater on planet Mercury named after the first known Maltese woman painter, Maria de Dominici, born in 1645. Now, how on earth did I not know that?

Nevertheless, there are disadvantages with an overview approach: the main weakness of the book is that it is not possible to focus and produce an in-depth study which adds new insights to the academic history discourse in Malta. The content is mostly based on what has been written already and no new primary historical sources come to light.

Malta: Women, history, books and places is not for highly specialized researchers in women’s Maltese history today, except perhaps to secure some basic background knowledge before embarking on their particular area of research. Still, this text is a very useful tool for history teachers in schools or anyone else who wants a quick and handy reference to what is ‘out there’ on women in different epochs of Maltese history: a no mean feat in itself.

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Société belge d’études orientales (2013). L’île, regards orientaux : Varia orientalia, biblica et antiqua. Hans Hauben in honorem. Acta Orientalia Belgica, 26. Lille, France: Ed. Ch. Cannuyer. 222 pp.

This edited collection presents the papers submitted during the 50th gathering of Belgian scholars of the Orient, held at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Louvain (COL), Belgium, as well as the Institute of Papyrology and Egyptology at Charles de Gaulle University, Lille, France, in honour of COL Professor Hans Hauben.

These papers are organized in two sections. The first presents research that deals with questions that pertain to oriental antiquity, as manifested by different types of data: from items of correspondence to iconography, from philology to archaeology, and from myths to snippets of daily life and mundane culture. The second section is dedicated to the oriental gaze on 'the island', in the broad and symbolic meaning of the term, by means of an erudite and rich analysis that focuses on certain specific islands, from Atlantis to Utopia, celebrated by means of texts and ancient authors, and located in the Aegean and the Mediterranean seas, the Indian Ocean as well as at the extremities of the known world. Beyond the maritime realm, these chapters also deal with oases, islands in the desert, in Egypt as well as on the border with Sudan.

It is difficult to find a unifying and connecting thread that does justice to all these papers, other than a shared passion by the researchers to explore worlds and civilizations so distant from us time-wise, but close enough to us in terms of the heritage they have endowed us with, the customs they have thrust upon us, the work of arts that have transcended them and the myths that they perpetuated and which stubbornly linger on.

'Big picture' island-related issues have gripped the interests of scholars of the Orient, and have been explored by the member-scholars of the Belgian Society for Oriental Studies for at least a century. Major research topics have coalesced around the search for a more rigorous science and a better understanding of a region that is the source of so many myths and legends, and yet is the cradle of Indo-European civilization, of the histories and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, but also of Assyria and Mesopotamia, of Egypt and Sri Lanka, of the Arab and the Judeo-Christian worlds.

The publication opens with a comparative study of Greek and Indian texts through the representations of mythical rulers, allowing for the building of relations between the two seemingly disparate literary worlds. It is followed by some candid reflections on Egyptian Christianity, focusing on the Meletian schism that split the Church of Egypt in the 4th century AD.

The reference to Atlantis by Plato connects to the memory of Egyptian priests through some old details pertaining to this mythical island, and establishes the lingering memory of this alluring isle as part fact and part fiction, the latter possibly contrived by the Greek philosopher.

Meanwhile, the oldest known paintings and murals in the world, discovered in the Near East, bear witness to the influence of Egypt and the Levant in the Cycladic Islands as well as in Minoan Crete.

Even the writing of the name of God, as it appeared in various narratives dealing with the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery under the Persian Empire, bears testimony to the real complexity of such a rendering: naming the deity is as much a challenge to humankind as conceiving its essence.

The second part of the publication is more directly concerned with the approach and problematique of the island perspective; with islands of the sea as much as islands of the mind and of the desert being herewith foregrounded. The text here takes the reader on an exciting yet erudite journey to the islands that lie at the edge of human knowledge, from those discovered and described in Assyrian and biblical texts, to the 'island of perpetual fire' buried in the religious texts of ancient Egypt. It next moves to the island of Ceylon/Sri Lanka where Adam, father of humankind, would have appeared as an act of spontaneous creation and would have presumably deduced, through his acute powers of observation and reasoning, the

existence of God: a theme adopted and transformed by various classical Arab authors as well as by the Ismaelian Tayyabites of Yemen. Next stop is to the islands of the Indian Ocean as they are described, even if probably mainly imagined, in medieval Arab texts.

The shift from myth and imagination to discovery and fact is often difficult to entertain in an age when such divisions were not necessarily considered logical or rational: hence the real challenge of interpreting texts from the vantage point of contemporary epistemology. A case in point is how to deal with the island of the Blessed, evoked in certain apocryphal texts of the Old Testament.

These discussions present a suitable segue to dealing with the ‘islands of the desert’, through the texts and oases occasionally mentioned in the sayings of the Fathers of the Desert. The reader is next invited to discover the islands of Grand Turk and Little Turk, part of the sprawling Bahamian archipelago in the Caribbean, even if it remains unclear as to whether these islands have any connection with Turkey. Moving on, an exploration of the fortified coastal cities, as depicted in Assyrian art, follows. Next is the rediscovery of the pomp of the exotic East Indies through the renaissance vision of Flanders and the fantastic vehicles of fictional writings of the utopian genre.

One would have surmised by now that, for all the exciting revelations presented in this text, it remains addressed mainly to an expert audience, with an analytic language appropriate to scientific inquiry, and not so much to amateurs and the general constituency of islophiles.

This is, however, not intended as a critique that discounts this text for its considerable (if erudite) merits. This is a pivotal volume in its field, contributing to such diverse disciplines as Egyptology, Assyriology, the study of Islam and India, as well as biblical studies. It serves also opportunely as a worthy paean to Professor Hans Hauben, a specialist of ancient history, by his appreciative colleagues.

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Rachel Price (2015). *Planet/Cuba: Art, culture and the future of the island*. London and New York: Verso. Pbk, 256pp, ISBN: 978-1-78478-121-7. US\$ 22.58.

Despite the post-modern configuration of the title *Planet/Cuba*, Price presents readers with a well-rounded and thoroughly researched view of Cuba, and particularly Havana through the eyes of various artists and thinkers. Those looking for a deeper understanding of the daily complexities will gain an insightful grasp of the main themes vexing inhabitants on the largest island in the Caribbean. The author has framed the work with reference to the events leading up and after 17 December 2014 when both US and Cuba simultaneously announced their path towards normalised relations. The book is comprised of an introduction followed by six chapters with each one based around a core theme. The Introduction, “A Treasure Map for the Present”, outlines the main tensions and places frequently associated with Cuba and in particular Havana including life during and after the Special Period in Peace Time, agrarian reforms, growing economic and class divisions, continued deindustrialisation, and a many of the ways these tensions are expressed through literature and art. In this way Price locates Cuba in a growing world of commodification but also in stark reality of destruction through imagined and ‘real’ catastrophe stemming from climate change. Thus collapse or decay along

with ecological change might be seen to be a central themes of the book however many works are framed and interpreted in multiple ways so that overall the book is balanced and not overly negative in outlook.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 are inextricably linked by their shared use of green plant life in *We Are Tired of Rhizomes* followed by *Marabusales*. In rhizomes the author traces the history of contemporary art and its links to trees and the environment more generally which is sometimes deemed as a type of new arborism. Themes explored include the praise of trees and other greenery both for their inherent cultural and social beauty but also their utility, with notable citations for tobacco, bamboo, rice, sugar cane and jocuma trees. Historical deforestation, from colonial periods, explains imperialism imposed dangerous practices and then later tried to reverse some of these. The *zafra* (harvest) of sugar cane features large in this chapter and other places in the book as a prime example of hard rural life in the rugged Cuban agricultural landscape, but also of mistakes made in campaigns, collectivisation, unpredictability of commodities and precarious lifestyles. The author also explodes the myth of tropical island or paradise, even Eden, though some of the thought provoking installations constructed by Cuban artists some of which include full sized potted trees ‘planted’ some 2 meters above desertified plazas hung by cables. Viewers of the trees are invited to climb up a set of stairs and sit in the potted plant on a small bench with vistas above the usual horizon. These stories of cultivation lead well towards chapter 2, which tends to take a more natural/unnatural view of botanicals. *Marabú* (or marabou, *marabusal* – marabou bush) is a non-native species of bush which has taken over much of the sugar fields which have been left uncultivated. This invasive weed works as a metaphor of the failings of the state power in controlling its growth during the Special Period, when petroleum was scarce and used in some place to kill the roots; instead, it saw a resurgence. Wood from the plant has also been used in art forms and the plant itself has been almost immortalized in tapestries, poetry, films and paintings. *Marabú* becomes a symbol for an alien species which recolonizes Cuba and acts as a sort of pre-cursor to a more dramatic invasion of climate catastrophe which makes the leap to *Havana Under Water* (Chapter 3).

Havana Under Water summarizes the frightening futures potentially depicted by artists trying to capture the rapid nature of climate change. Multiple images of Havana’s Paseo and the Plaza de La Revolución being flooded or with water lapping at the four stories above the previous ground level make these images and their interpretation disturbing yet compelling. Hurricanes, floods, tsunamis melting icebergs all depict the moments running up to ‘climate departure’ and capture the apocalyptic vision of collapse. Titles such as ‘the island on the day after’ position the work in such a way to force the viewer to consider future scenarios. Water, and the sea, as a critical element of destruction and as boundary from the external world will resonate with other island scholars.

Price takes us forward to carbon and coal with a series of works looking at the memory of those who might live in a post-carbon world in Cuba in Chapter 4 (Post-Panamax Energies). This section concentrates attention on petroleum and Cuba’s reliance on it as well as the country’s connectivity to other through the shipping port of Mariel, to the west of Havana. The final chapters (5: Free Time, and 6: Surveillance and detail in the era of camouflage) move away from environmental themes and towards play and labour in modern day Cuba. Work, non-working time and leisure practices form the basis for this chapter. The final section considers various interpretations of a growing body of Cuban art which include topics about paranoia, control systems and surveillance.

Overall, I found this a solid piece of work which many who want to gain deeper insight into the Cuba psyche through writings and art and is timely. The interpretations and details of the cultural works are excellent and will complement other future facing studies of this island.

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Daniel Barbu, Nicolas Meylan and Youri Volokhine (Eds.) (2015). *Mondes clos: Les îles*. Gollion: Infolio, 274pp. French. ISBN: 978-2884743549. US\$38.45.

A collection of essays on islands under the heading of *Closed worlds* might appear strangely out of place in a critical landscape that has come to prefer to think of islands in terms of interconnection and archipelagic relations rather than isolation and separation. The fact that this is the second volume of a series that began with a book on gardens might further lead one to suspect that its discussion of island imaginaries in literature, myth, politics and history subscribes to an essentialist conception of islands as naturally enclosed spaces. However, a closer look at the twelve chapters actually reveals a nuanced understanding of different modalities of imagined islandness. In the introductory essay, Youri Volokhine emphasizes that crossings, passages, and openings have been equally constitutive of island representations across the world as barriers, limits and borders (p. 12); and indeed, many of the contributors to this volume are committed to an exploration of islandness in a continuum between boundedness and interconnectedness, with a variety of intermediary positions.

Accordingly, its impressive range of topics, geographical locations and historical moments is one of the great strengths of the collection. The essays take the reader on an insightful journey through a global archipelago of real and imagined islands, spanning the oceans of the world and addressing texts from regions and periods rarely discussed in the island studies community. Thus, Philippe Bornet's article on the life and strangely surprising adventures of two mythical Indian islands, *Śvetadvīpa* (white island) and *Suvarṇadvīpa* (golden island), is an original piece of research that demonstrates how these islands were creatively appropriated by both British and Indian historians. Thus, as Bornet shows, the orientalist Francis Wilford (1761-1822) attempted to demonstrate that the white island of Indian mythology is in fact the island of Great Britain, creating an Anglocentric vision of the origins of Indian religion and myth. In his second example, Bornet shows how a historian of the Greater India Society, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (1888-1980), used the myth of the golden island as evidence that India acted as a mighty colonial and civilizing power in southeast Asia in the early centuries AD. Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel's contribution takes us to the mythical islands of ancient Mesopotamia. Explaining that Mesopotamia was in fact a world of islands until the fourth millennium BC due to very different climatic conditions, with island cities being linked via rivers and the sea, she argues that islands were subsequently relocated to the periphery of the known world in the cosmology of Mesopotamian maps and narratives like the Epic of Gilgamesh, where they functioned as liminal spaces for the for a meditation on the zone between the human and the divine, between mortality and immortality.

The broad geographical and historical focus of the collection has the added benefit of opening up and questioning the very notion of the island in the juxtaposition of diverging linguistic and cultural conceptions of island space. Thus, several contributors make it clear that

the terms for ‘island’ in the texts they analyze do not necessarily correspond to our use of the concept. In his discussion of Book V of Diodorus of Sicily’s *Bibliotheca historica*, Philippe Borgeaud reminds us that the Greek νῆσος (nêsos) implied a close relationship to the sea and could thus also refer to certain ‘continental’ spaces like peninsulas (p. 150). Rendu Loisel points out that the Akkadian term *nagû* is indeterminate, referring both to islands and to regions or administrative districts more generally (p. 91). Bornet points out that the Sanskrit term *dvîpa* in fact referred to a space surrounded by water on both sides, with the Indian subcontinent itself qualifying (p. 64). Finally, Frank Lestringant convincingly shows how the indeterminacy of the island concept in Marco Polo’s late medieval *Travels* led to a confusion of maritime continental and insular spaces in early modern atlases (p. 205).

Despite these valuable observations, the collection would have gained in strength if the contributors had elaborated on the relevance of their case studies to a discussion of islandness more frequently and more thoroughly. While the scholarship displayed is often impressive, the essays sometimes remain rather narrow in focus. It is thus surprising that the authors largely ignore the rich body of island scholarship in both French and English by critics like Jean-Michel Racault, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, John R. Gillis and many others; while the specific topics of each article are carefully researched and coherently presented, the collection does not participate in a larger debate about islands: instead, it contributes to many individual debates. Nicolas Meylan’s contribution, for instance, offers an interesting discussion of how thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas subtly critiqued Norway’s expansionism by juxtaposing models of brute force with alternative models of political power; the article, however, does not address the importance of Iceland’s island status in those texts beyond an attributive reference to Iceland as an insular community (p. 225). Borgeaud’s discussion of Diodorus of Sicily’s *nesiotike biblos* (island book), in turn, remains a largely descriptive account of the mythical significance of the islands described by the Sicilian Greek, even while it is valuable for reminding us of the classical origins of the *isolario* genre.

This being said, several articles do present theoretically sophisticated arguments that make important contributions to the study of islands. One of the most original essays in the collection is Doralice Fabiano’s discussion of the mythological history of Delos. In Pindar’s version of the myth, the Titan goddess Asteria became the floating island of Ortygia by jumping into the sea to escape from Zeus; only when offering to accept Apollo and his temple on her territory did she become the fixed island of Delos. Fabiano convincingly demonstrates that in its phase of errantry and infertility, the floating island was in fact a mere rock in the sea, associated with a female body unwilling to accept sexuality and matrimony; in the following, Delos became a rooted and ‘proper’ island made fertile and inhabitable by the offerings brought to Apollo – as one might add, it is only by becoming anchored that Ortygia/Delos becomes an island conforming to the UNCLOS definition of 1982, i.e. capable of sustaining human habitation. Lestringant’s contribution, in turn, sheds light on the multiple sediments and geological strata (pp. 210-211) that make up the maps of early modern atlases like Guillaume Le Testu’s *Cosmographie universelle*. Drawing on his work on the *isolario* genre (notably in his influential *Le livre des îles*), Lestringant relates the spatial mobility and drift of islands in early modern maps to the textual drift and dispersion characterizing the genre of the *isolario* itself. Lestringant thus presents a powerful argument about the time of islands in the late medieval and early modern periods, when islands played an important part in the production of a dynamic, open and mobile spatiality (p. 207).

Other articles are to be valued for shedding light on the cultural and political import of specific aesthetic island constructions. These include Jan Blanc's article on the work of William Hodges, the painter who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific. While Blanc's essay does not engage with important pioneering work on Western 'scientific' representations of Pacific islands by scholars like K. R. Howe or Jeffrey Geiger, his contribution is an excellent examination of how artistic and scientific constructions of South Sea islands were intertwined; as Blanc shows, the enlightenment artist/scientist moved in a tension between charting the island as *terra incognita* and *terra cognita*, with the island being tied to the desire for novelty itself. Angela Benza, too, focuses on the island as an artistic image. Through an analysis of three portraits of Elizabeth I, she argues that the island was gradually constituted as the King's third body during Elizabeth's reign, adding a territorial body to the natural and political bodies. While her reading would have benefited from an engagement with broader discussions of the discursive construction of British insularity (e.g. Jonathan Scott's *When the Waves Ruled Britannia*), she convincingly traces how the island was gradually mobilized to construct a stable image of national, political and cultural unity and coherence. This is an image, one might add, which stretches from John of Gaunt's speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II* ('This royal throne of kings / This scepter'd isle') to the wartime rhetoric of Winston Churchill ('we shall [...] defend our island home').

Generally speaking, then, the high level of scholarship of the individual contributions makes this book a welcome addition to the bookshelf of anyone interested in the role of islands in the cultural imaginary, even if it does not make a significant intervention in the field of island studies *per se*. Its value lies elsewhere, and this academic *isolario* certainly does justice to the multiple meanings and conceptualizations of islands in the world archipelago. It is appropriate, therefore, that the volume should end with Neil Forsyth's excellent deconstructive reading of Andrew Marvell's 1654 poem 'Bermuda', which draws attention to the subtle ironies that destabilize the poem's Puritan praise of the strong hand of divine providence in leading the English to the islands of the New World. In a wonderfully poetic reflection on the fraught experience of the sea of islands off the American coast by English colonizers, Forsyth ends by suggesting that the poem's apparent vision of a happy island might in fact mask a much more uncertain experience: an experience of endlessly rowing in the sea with no (is)land in sight.

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Editor's note: *Island Studies Journal* has not yet published reviews of books about Mexican islands. And so, presenting these reviews of three books, published between 2010 and 2014, gives *ISJ* readers an opportunity to learn about some islands which belong or once belonged to Mexico. Among the numerous Mexican islands (4,111 according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography), some are notable for their history and geography, regardless of their surface area or population, and others for their environmental and social peculiarities, as is the case of the examples presented in these reviews.

Víctor Busteros (2010). *Expedición al México de ultramar*. [Expedition to Overseas Mexico] México: Amate editorial. 220 pp. ISBN: 978-970-764-960-6. US\$13.00; Mx\$230. On line: <http://mexicodeultramar.blogspot.mx/>

This work recounts, in the form of a diary or log, a 24-day journey through the Pacific Ocean, with the goal of exploring some little known Mexican islands located quite far from the shores of Mexico. During that time, the voyagers traversed over 5,000 km aboard the French ship *Albatrus II*. Through descriptions and anecdotes, the book gives the reader a clear notion of the intense experiences lived during the journey.

Led by the Spanish sailor Raymundo González, the expedition had the primary goal of contributing fresh information gathered during the journey for the making of a documentary about the route followed by the *Nao de China*, the Manila galleon, to get to New Spain from the Philippines. It is well known that, for three centuries, this famous vessel crossed the Pacific to carry goods to their final destination, and its travels allowed intermittent cultural exchange between Asia, America, and Europe.

The expedition on board the *Albatrus II* had the additional mission of conducting research on the environment (geology, marine biology, oceanography) as well as geographical, historical and political topics in a little-studied area: the outer islands of the Mexican Pacific.

Apart from its twelve crew members, the French vessel hosted twenty travelers of various nationalities, among them the author of the book here reviewed, biologist Víctor Busteros, whose account of the journey is both entertaining and befitting his scientific background. Busteros describes every aspect of the journey, from the everyday occurrences on the ship to the activities in which he, as a biologist, was invited to partake for example, as diving aid to the researchers and documentarians in their exploration of the submarine landscape surrounding the islands.

In his foreword, the author emphasizes the Mexican government's neglect of the country's insular territories. In 2002, Busteros wrote an article for an environmental magazine in which he alluded to the most prominent instance of said neglect: the loss of Clipperton Island, currently under French control. To his surprise, that article was a key factor in his being invited by Raymundo González to take part in the expedition to the islands, along with two other Mexicans, journalist Adela López and conservationist Juan Kuan. With this, González meant to include a Mexican point of view in the projected research.

The expedition officially set sail from Panama in early April 2005. The three Mexicans embarked at Salina Cruz (Oaxaca, Mexico) on April 12, and from that point the author begins his account. The first site of interest for the expedition, and the only non-Mexican stop in the journey was Clipperton, located 1,652 km from the Oaxacan shoreline. They disembarked there on the third day after their departure. Despite Clipperton's small size, the expedition remained on the island for four days, due to the environmental and historic appeal it has for both scientists and documentarians.

Next, the boat headed for the four emerged landmasses that make up the Revillagigedo Archipelago. These are, from west to east: Clarión, Roca Partida, Socorro and San Benedicto. The members of the expedition remained on the archipelago for nine days, moving from one island to the next. The two biggest islands, Clarión and Socorro, are occupied by small detachments of the Mexican Army, and like most Mexican islands, are highly valuable from a strategic and biogeographical point of view. It is no wonder that they have been called 'The

Mexican Galapagos', since they are home to endemic species so fragile they could become extinct through either direct or indirect human influence.

Despite his background as a biologist, one of the questions the author omitted is how certain taxa got to these remains of volcanoes that had risen from the sea: due to the distance between the islands and the continent (Clarión, the furthestmost island, is located 1,100 km away from continental Mexican shores), the animal and plant species could only have gotten there by sea or air, as the theories and models of insular biogeography explain. The four islands in this 'archipelago', poorly connected due to the great distances between them, are highly interesting, especially for diving, owing to the diverse marine life that inhabits those inter-tropical transitional waters and makes up a unique submarine landscape.

The journey from the Revillagigedo Archipelago to Isla Guadalupe would take four days, on some of which the expedition faced bad weather, both storms and high waves. Before reaching Mexico's westernmost island, they briefly touched peninsular land at Cabo San Lucas, and afterwards they headed for Rocas Alijos, a series of rocks which they merely observed without stopping to dive, as had been scheduled in the original timetable. Once they reached Guadalupe, also guarded by the Mexican Armed Forces, the expedition stayed for two days to document some of the most important aspects of this island, whose biodiversity has been affected by exotic species and which, the author notes, was a spot of interest for both Japan and the United States of America during the Second World War.

Regarding his stay at the Coronado Islands (near Mexico's northwestern border with the United States), the last stage in his journey, Busteros details the problems arising from multinational company Chevron-Texaco's intention of installing a natural gas facility near the small archipelago. At the time, this situation caused a controversy that only resulted in a partial resolution. A few days later, on May 6, 2005, the expedition came to a close at Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico.

Following the chronicle of the 24-day journey, the book includes an Appendix in which the author recounts some events that occurred in the five years after the expedition, up until the book's publication. For instance, he points out the negative response to Chevron-Texaco's project in the Coronado Islands, due to the environmental impact it would entail. There is no information, however, on the documentary filmed during the journey, so the reader does not know whether it was finished or how it turned out.

Finally, the work includes a list of the animal species inhabiting the islands visited by the expedition, as well as their endangerment status, a glossary, and a list of the sources used for the text. The maps accompanying the text are primarily illustrative and not completely accurate, but they give a general sense of the insular spaces visited. The narrative is generally entertaining and helps readers relive the journey in their imagination, although a few photographs would have been useful to give a better idea of it. Throughout the text, the author includes valuable historical facts which, intertwined with the account of the journey, make the content richer. This is one of the book's strongest points. The work contributes to increase public awareness of the insular territories visited by the expedition, both as a means and as an end. It showcases an original point of view, little-used in the 21st century, and it is worth reading if one wishes to rediscover territories of limited accessibility but high interest for various fields of knowledge.

Nelson Álvarez & María de la Luz Sevilla (2012). *Estrategias de adaptación en las Islas Marías*. [Adaptation Strategies in the Islas Marías] México: Instituto Politécnico Nacional, 168 pp. ISBN: 978-607-414-295-2. US\$8.00; Mx\$140.

In Mexico, islands have been insufficiently studied in the field of social sciences. Therefore, academic papers about them are scarce, and many papers resulting from research on some insular territory have only been published long after they were written.

The work of Nelson Álvarez and Luz Sevilla is one instance of this. Both researchers conducted a sociological study in the Islas Marías archipelago, perhaps the only archipelago with a place in the collective imagination of the Mexican people due to the presence of a federal correctional facility on one of its islands, María Madre. The link between insularity and confinement is a model whose continuity in Mexico dates back to 1905. This link has long existed in some countries; for instance, Devil's Island in the French Guiana, Alcatraz in the United States, and Robben Island in South Africa. It has also been portrayed in literature, as in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Although the authors use the plural in their title, *Adaptation Strategies in the Islas Marías*, only the largest island in the archipelago, María Madre, is permanently inhabited by the convicts assigned to that penal colony. In the first section, the study presents the framework on which the authors based their work, as well as the methodology used for the research. Following this section is a historical account of this particular insular space. It supplies a historical outline from the discovery of the islands in the 16th century to the first decades of the 20th century, when, as the text highlights, the penal colony was the final destination for some *Cristeros*, Catholic insurgents who rebelled against the restrictions imposed by the government on religious cults in 1927 and 1929.

In their 'Description of the Habitat', the authors point out that in the 1980s there were temporary campsite settlements on the islands of María Cleofás (Ocampo) and María Magdalena (Prieto). This leads them to describe everyday life in the María Madre settlements, most of which are distributed around the shore (due to the island's volcanic origin) and connected by a 50 kilometer dirt road, built by the convicts' forced labor between 1963 and 1969. The settlements described in the book are Hospital, Morelos, Laguna del Toro, San Juan Papelillo, Camarón, Bugambilias (Cica), Aserradero, Nayarit, Primero de Mayo, Zacatal and Balleto. The latter is the most populated and serves as the island's 'capital'. This section of the book describes the activities or 'melgas' assigned to convicts, which consisted of forced, unpaid labor, as well as the degree of isolation in each campsite and the services available to the inhabitants at the time of the study.

The facts, anecdotes and fragments of interviews featured in the book were collected by the authors during their field work in 1986, when there were 3,500 convicts, and in 1996, with approximately 1,800 convicts. In both visits they gathered information on the experiences of some prisoners and workers. One of these anecdotes concerns the use of food stamps as the island's ironic form of currency. It is worth noting that, back then, the convicts were allowed to take their spouses and children under 15 to live in the colony. In that case, they were assigned a house and provisions, in order to relieve the tension between them.

The main point of the section 'Adaptation Strategies' is the interpretation of a model of prison culture which stems from direct observation and data collection. A clear example of this is the analysis of the heavy use of natural resources, such as fauna, which the authors link to the lack of belonging. Despite the forced settlement, some prisoners' children were born on

the island of María Madre, and, among those who did their time and were set free, some refused to leave the island, and some returned, sometimes as workers.

The analysis laid out by the authors in this section seeks to explain the so-called ‘jail subculture’ based on the lack of attachment to the space, due to the fact that convicts do not occupy it willingly. The authors use an anthropological framework (among other things, the adaptation strategy of ‘total institutions’) to identify whether the relations between convicts are based on self-interest or solidarity, since social cohesion only arises from supposed loyalty, as illustrated by the custom of tattooing.

The work concerns a time in the penal colony before the establishment of the Protected Natural Area in 2005, which currently restricts use of the territory and surrounding marine resources. However, despite having been published in 2012, the book does not include an appendix to update information about the island’s new reality, whose rules have evolved even though the island’s essential function of confinement remains.

The book’s main asset is its portrait of jail life between the 1980s and 1990s, which serves as a complement to legal studies such as *Islas Marías: una visión iconográfica* by Héctor Madrid and Martín Barrón (2002), and to historical and sociological studies concerning the 1960s, such as *La colonia penal de Las islas Marías* by Javier Piña y Palacios (1970), which differ from portraits of the islands in literature and cinema during the 1930s and 1940s, which featured the cruel image of a prison with walls made of water, as stated by author and activist José Revueltas. While the use given to this insular space remains the same, the reality has evolved.

Pablo Raphael (2014). *Clipperton*. México: Literatura Random House – Círculo Editorial Azteca, 459 pp. ISBN: 978-607-312-719-6. US\$18.30; Mx\$329.

Clipperton is an island that once belonged to Mexico, but nowadays is a French overseas territory. It is located in the Pacific Ocean; with regard to its natural configuration it has been classified as an atoll, and with regard to its dimensions and inhabitability, as an islet. Throughout the last four centuries, it has been given various names in maps from different eras (Isla de la Pasión, Médanos, and some lesser-known ones such as Farallón Blanco, San Pablo or San Bartolomé), but Clipperton, the name of the corsair who used the island as his hideout in the 18th century, prevailed over all the other names. Pablo Raphael chose this name, which represents both the island and the pirate, as a compelling title for his work, and with that idea he weaves the content of the book, written in ten years of painstaking research whose results were captured in many drafts before the book came out.

The novel is divided in three parts: ‘Universal history of the Island, ‘*The Nao de China*’, and ‘Apocalypse or The End of the Voices’. The first section is, without a doubt, the richest narratively speaking. In it, a real discourse (historic facts) is intertwined with a fictional one created by the novelist. With these elements, Raphael weaves an outstanding fabric.

In the first part, the section ‘General Chronicle of Those Who Have Ruled the Realm of Clipperton’ is worth noting. Concentrated here are the core moments of interest in the island’s Mexican history. One of these revolves around the arrival in the early 20th century of a group of military men and their families. The detachment, led by Captain Ramón Arnaud, was sent to occupy the island and safeguard its sovereignty, but they were left on their own without provisions during the years of the Mexican Revolution. This has been highly

interesting to Mexican novelists, jurists and historians. In his book, Raphael gives the story new nuances. He gives center stage to characters who had been secondary in previous versions, and he assigns them flaws and virtues with equality, without the bias of official discourse. For instance, in the case of Victoriano Álvarez, who has been portrayed in chronicles as an abusive lighthouse keeper, Raphael vindicates aspects denied by other authors; instead of an ignorant despot, he describes a cunning but ill man who has suffered the throes of solitude. His situation invites the reader to reflect on the adage that the dead, having no voice, cannot defend themselves.

Other interesting characters in this version are the German engineer Gustave Schultz (who went to the atoll to exploit guano in the 19th century, before the arrival of the Mexican detachment), Lieutenant Higinio Simón (brother of Victoriano Álvarez and author of a 'vindication notebook', who, away from the island, gives context to a part of his story), and the child Rosalía Nava, mute survivor of an incident that was crucial to both the real and fictional events at Clipperton, that place where 'lies are a reptile that changes skins until it becomes a more complex truth' (page 91).

The first part of the book includes other sections of great interest. In 'Operation Pollywog' the author recalls that some American presidents were interested in the atoll's strategic location, particularly Roosevelt in the years of the Second World War, a fact that has been poorly addressed by his biographers. In 'An Exposition of Failures', Raphael jumps to the 21st century to make an ironic account of the 2012 international multidisciplinary expedition to the island in which he participated as part of The Clipperton Project. This is a personal story that transcends the author's collage of facts to portray a moment closer to today. More than a travel log, it is a narrative game that describes the island as a museum where armies of crabs and rats will ultimately fight for the territory.

The second part, 'The *Nao de China*', is a tangle of facts that, despite including curious anecdotes about John Clipperton, the 'ship hunter', might be too much for readers not looking for pirate stories. This section includes the most fiction, which blends with historic facts and sometimes contradicts them. This is deliberate on the part of the author, for he states at one point that some chapters come from drafts of different versions of the text. This section focuses on a series of 18th century maps drawn by cartographer Emmanuel Bowen, maps which years later would become crucial to the island's fate. The plot becomes even more complicated with fictional place names and voices that may or may not have actually existed.

In the third part, 'Apocalypse or The End of the Voices', readers will come to understand the context of several of the situations recounted in previous sections, as the timeframes are interlinked. However, not everyone might feel inclined to go back and revisit those previously mentioned and incomplete core fragments of island history.

In this same part, the author revisits information about a collection of 11th-century Japanese dolls, filled with pearls, which are an interesting thread that connects historical fact with literary fiction, and which became one of the island's most coveted treasures during its various occupations. However, as is often the case with legends, the truth of all this is uncertain. Another 'finding' mentioned in the novel is a text written in the early 20th century by Mexican author José Juan Tablada, about a map of Clipperton drawn by Bowen, whose text is surrounded by superfluous anecdotes. This part of the novel includes the section 'True History of the Conquest of Clipperton' in which Raphael recounts some details he found in his research for the novel long before he imagined going on an expedition there. He also describes details he perceived in his journey to the atoll in 2012, which complement those in the first

part. Next, he alludes to a documentary about the island made by Jacques Cousteau in 1980, but he gives the reader anecdotes and facts beyond what is recorded in the film. Before the end, the author decides to give God, who has already served as narrator in the first part, an ironic voice. He does this through some recordings allegedly found in an armored shelter in the atoll. This part of the book could be considered a little pretentious and dispensable.

Clipperton is one of the islands in the Pacific that have stirred the most passions. This version of its history, blending fiction with reality, yields a new point of view that will be appealing to readers interested in various topics, such as the ethics of human beings in isolation.

There are other prominent literary works about Clipperton, such as *Isla de la Pasión* (1989) by Laura Restrepo and *Isla de Bobos* (2007) by Ana García Bergua, which focus on the Mexican detachment led by Captain Arnaud, as well as Miguel González Avelar's book *Clipperton: isla mexicana* (1992), considered the most important historical, legal and diplomatic reference about the dispute over the atoll. With this precedent, Raphael tries to complement previous works and offer an integral view.

Throughout the novel, the author cites several highly interesting historic facts that give readers a sense of the connection and larger implications of events. These facts are one of the book's strong points, and highlight the painstaking research involved in its writing. However, in some sections the narration can be confusing, with a sea of facts, names and voices that, even though they are meant to be sufficiently contextualized, can lose the attention of a reader not interested in so many details scattered between simultaneous timelines. It is worth noting, however, that the author had made this peculiar warning in the book's epigraph: 'Like universal history, this book is riddled with lies'.

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