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KANAKA MARATTA: a History of Melanesian Mackay

Thesis submitted by
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in June 1981

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Department of History at the
James Cook University of North Queensland

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

**C.R. Moore
23 June 1981.**

ABSTRACT

This is a history of Melanesian Mackay, studying in detail the migration of Malaitan (Solomon Islands) labourers between 1871 and 1904. It describes the life and work of the Melanesian community of the district in the nineteenth century, following the compulsory repatriation of the majority after the federation of the Australian colonies and the progressive divorce of the few who remained in Queensland from the sugar industry they and their fellows had done so much to create. Also included is a brief outline of the subsequent fate and present status of that community. To make this Melanesian history fully comprehensible it also gives a detailed account of European settlement, and more especially of the evolution of the sugar industry, at Mackay.

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PRELIMINARY DATA

1. MEASUREMENT

2. DEFINITIONS:

- a. Names of ships and sugar mills
- b. Blackbirding, Cultural kidnapping, Kanaka, Kidnapping, Recruiting

3. REFERENCES

4. ABBREVIATIONS:

- a. Published sources, libraries and archives
- b. Other abbreviations used in footnotes

5. GLOSSARY OF FATALEKA AND OTHER MALAITAN WORDS

1. MEASUREMENT

Linear measure has been converted into metric, but square and cubic measure and weights have been left unchanged.

2. DEFINITIONS:

a. Names of ships and sugar mills

The names of all ships and farmer's mills are in italics. The names of plantations in other cane growing regions, and the names of Mackay plantations (as defined in the introduction to Appendix Three) are in italics. (ie. *Miclere*). If the reference is to an area of cane later to become a plantation it is treated as a farm and marked by parenthesis (ie. "*Miclere*"). Mill names are often also rural area names. When the mention is of a rural area the name is in the normal type-face. (ie. *Miclere*).

b. Blackbirding, Cultural kidnapping, Islander, Kanaka, Kidnapping, Melanesian, Recruiting

Blackbirding

Part of the problem in any discussion of the labour trade is semantic: different interest groups place different connotations on terms used to describe the recruiting process. During the trade "blackbirder" and "blackbirding" were commonly used to describe recruiters and recruiting without pejorative overtones. Today, Islanders, the academic-fringe writers and the general public use "blackbirding" to mean any form of transporting Melanesians to Queensland, including voluntary enlistment. The term is derived from the African slave trade and has strong connotations of illegality. When used by Australians today the implication certainly is of shady, if not illegal, activity. Although it is a wonderfully descriptive word its meaning is too imprecise and it has not been used in this thesis.

Cultural kidnapping

The term "cultural kidnapping" has been used in the text in situations when it seemed necessary to indicate, that regardless of what good intentions European recruiters may have had towards the Melanesians, and the "voluntary" enlistment by many of the Melanesians, Europeans were taking cultural advantage of them. Those who were not physically kidnapped were certainly "culturally kidnapped".

Islander

"Islander" has been used interchangeably with "Melanesian".

Kanaka

Kanaka, a Polynesian word for man, was used during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to describe Pacific Islanders who participated in the labour trade. It also has modern usages: canaques in French Melanesia, used as a term of national pride; Kanaka in Queensland, used to denote descendants of the original Melanesian sugar industry labourers.

Unfortunately Kanaka has racist overtones in Australia, and although it is still widely used by the media and by some of the descendants, some Australian Melanesians are uncomfortable over its continued use.

The word seldom appears in this thesis unless in terminology borrowed from the nineteenth century ie. Kanaka store or Kanaka hospital.

Personally I would like to see both Kanaka and Blackbirding continue in the language as words denoting the Melanesian labour trade.

Kidnapping

The definition of "kidnapping" in the British *Kidnapping Act of 1872* has been adhered to throughout this thesis.

In the Act kidnapping is said to have occurred if a British subject commits any of the following offences:

- "1. Decoys a native of any of the aforesaid islands for the purpose of importing or removing such native into any island or place other than that in which he was at the time of the commission of such offence or carries away confines or detains any such native for the purpose aforesaid without his consent proof of which consent shall lie on the party accused

2. Ships embarks receives detains or confines or assists in shipping embarking receiving detaining or confining for the purpose aforesaid a native of any of the aforesaid islands on board any vessel either on the high seas or elsewhere without the consent of such native proof of which consent shall lie on the party accused
 3. Contracts for the shipping embarking receiving detaining or confining on board any vessel for the purpose aforesaid any such native without his consent proof of which consent shall lie on the party accused
 4. Fits out mans navigates equips uses employs lets or takes on freight or hire any vessel or commands or serves or is on board any such vessel with intent to commit or that any one on board such vessel should commit any of the offences above enumerated
 5. Ships lades receives or puts on board or contracts for the shipping lading receiving or putting on board of any vessel money goods or other articles with the intent that they should be employed or knowing that they will be employed in the commission of any of the offences above enumerated."
- (35 and 36 Victorie No. 19, Part 9, Sections 1 to 5.)

Melanesian

A small number of the Pacific Islander labour recruits who worked in Queensland were actually Polynesian or Micronesian, but the overwhelming majority of them were Melanesian. All Islander labour recruits to Queensland have been referred to as Melanesians.

Recruiting

"Recruiting" has been used as a wider term than as originally specified under the 1868 Queensland Act. "Recruitment" is defined in the Queensland Polynesian Labourers Act of 1868 as the labourers having "voluntarily engaged themselves and entered into their agreements with a full knowledge and understanding of the nature and conditions of same".

(31 Victorie No. 47, Section 8.I.)

In this thesis the entire Melanesian labour trade is referred to as the recruiting trade: involving some kidnapping as well as voluntary enlistment.

Europeans recruited Melanesians: Melanesians either enlisted voluntarily or were kidnapped or stolen.

3. REFERENCES

For a work cited more than once, the full title with place and date of publication is given at its first appearance. Thereafter only a short title is used. The full reference is repeated in the bibliography. Where it appears significant, the original date of reprinted works is indicated.

4. ABBREVIATIONS:

a. Published sources, libraries and archives

ADB	<i>Australian Dictionary of Biography</i>
AJofP&H	<i>Australian Journal of Politics and History</i>
ANZJS	<i>Australia and New Zealand Journal of Sociology</i>
APSP	<i>American Philosophical Society Proceedings</i>
ASJ	<i>Australian Sugar Journal</i>
BA&NZ Mail	<i>British Australasian and New Zealand Mail</i>
BOHC	<i>Black Oral History Tape Collection, History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland</i>
BPP	<i>British Parliamentary Papers</i>
CWA	<i>Commonwealth Government Archives</i>
CW Acts	<i>Acts of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia</i>
CWPP	<i>Commonwealth Government Parliamentary Papers</i>
HS	<i>Historical Studies</i>
HTBR	<i>Holy Trinity Anglican Parish Baptismal Register, Mackay</i>
HTMR	<i>Holy Trinity Anglican Parish Marriage Register, Mackay</i>
JofPS	<i>Journal of the Polynesian Society</i>
JPH	<i>Journal of Pacific History</i>
HSofQJ	<i>Historical Society of Queensland Journal</i>
JCUNQ	<i>James Cook University of North Queensland</i>
MCCA	<i>Mackay City Council Archives</i>
MCH	<i>Mackay Court House</i>

Mitchell	<i>Mitchell Library, Special Collections Section of the State Library of New South Wales</i>
MM	<i>The Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser, after 1906, The Daily Mercury</i>
MM Centenary 1962	<i>The Daily Mercury: City of Mackay Centenary Edition, 6 April 1962</i>
MM Diamond Jubilee 1922	<i>The Daily Mercury: Diamond Jubilee Issue, 1922</i>
MM Jubilee 1912	<i>The Daily Mercury: 1862-1912 Fifty Years, the Jubilee of Mackay, August 1912</i>
MM Show Centenary 1979	<i>The Daily Mercury: A Century of Shows, Souvenir Supplement, 19 June 1979</i>
MM Sugar Centenary 1967	<i>The Daily Mercury: Sugar Industry Centenary Feature, 31 July 1967</i>
MS	<i>Mackay Standard</i>
MUBA	<i>Melbourne University Business Archives</i>
PIPC	<i>Pacific Islanders' Photographic Collection, History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland</i>
Printout	<i>Computer Printout of Islander Baptism, Marriage and Death Statistics</i>
Pughs	<i>Pughs Almanac</i>
QActs	<i>Acts of the Queensland Parliament</i>
QCGC	<i>Queensland Cane Growers' Council</i>
QGG	<i>Queensland Government Gazette</i>
QLCJ	<i>Journal of the Queensland Legislative Council</i>
Qlder	<i>The Queenslander</i>
QPD	<i>Queensland Parliamentary Debates</i>
QS	<i>Queensland Government Statutes</i>
QSA	<i>Queensland State Archives</i>
QS'tic	<i>Queensland Government Statistics</i>
QVP	<i>Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly</i>
RNAS	<i>Royal Navy – Australian Station Records</i>
RSNSWJ	<i>Royal Society of New South Wales Journal</i>
SAPP	<i>South Australian Proceedings of the Parliament</i>
SJ&TC	<i>Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator</i>
St PBR	<i>St Patricks Catholic Church Baptismal Register, Mackay</i>

u. Other abbreviations used in footnotes

AUC	<i>Assistant Under Secretary</i>
CS or Col.Sec.	<i>Colonial Secretary (or after 7 July 1898, Chief Secretary)</i>
CSD	<i>Chief Secretary's Department</i>
GA	<i>Government Agent</i>
Gov	<i>Governor</i>
IA	<i>Immigration Agent</i>
IPI	<i>Inspector of Pacific Islanders</i>
M–MQSCo	<i>Melbourne–Mackay Queensland Sugar Company</i>
NG&S	<i>New Guinea and Solomon</i>
OIC	<i>Officer in Charge</i>
PILB/O	<i>Pacific Island Labour Bureau/Office</i>
PMQ	<i>Prime Minister of Queensland</i>
Pros	<i>Prosecutor</i>
PUS	<i>Permanent Under Secretary</i>
Q	<i>Queensland</i>
RDC	<i>Resident Deputy Commissioner of the Western Pacific High Commission</i>
RG	<i>Registrar General</i>
S	<i>Secretary</i>
US	<i>Under Secretary</i>
WPHC	<i>Western Pacific High Commission</i>

5. GLOSSARY OF FATALEKA AND OTHER MALAITAN WORDS

'ai ni gao	<i>an ebony-like wood used in weapons; literally "wood of Gao (Santa Isabel)"</i>
-------------------	---

akalo	ancestral spirit
ambu	sacred, forbidden
anoasa	spirit
asi hara	middle lagoon zone of the Lau conception of territorial zones
beu	men's house
bata	shell money
beu aabu	sacred shrine; burial place
beu alea	sacred house
beubaita	literally 'big house'; the central <i>beu aabu</i> of Bina
beubungua	Ifunakulu's round house in Bina
bisi	the hut used by females during menstruation and birth
fata aabu	priest
fata abu	priest (Lau)
foakali	head priest
gwasu	pudding made from pounded taro and coconut
keni	female; woman
kikesiha	'Are'are ritual distribution of goods
lifoia	porpoise teeth necklace
luma lalo	women's sleeping quarters
luma nare	kitchen, cooking house
luma tio	sleeping house for a family group
maoma	mortuary ceremony and sacrifice
mamana	Maliatan variation of the Oceanic word <i>mana</i> , meaning power, success, truth, fertility, legitimacy
ngali	Canarium almond (<i>Canarium sp.</i>)
ngwane baita	Bigman; important man
ngwane inoto	Bigman; man of high status (To'ambaita)
ngwane ni fo'a	priest; man of prayer (To'ambaita)
ngwane ramo	warrior (To'ambaita)
ramo	warrior
sua	ritually impure
tafuli'ae	shell-disk currency
taniota	supreme aofia
tatalofaa	supreme aofia
walebaele	priest; man of prayer (Langa langa)
wane	male; man
wane asi	coastal or saltwater people
wane baita	Bigman; important man
wane initoo	Bigman; man of high status
wane ne fo'a	priest; man of prayer
wane ni foa	priest; man of prayer (Baegu)
wane tolo	hill or bush people living in the interior

Introduction

This is a history of Melanesian Mackay, studying in detail the migration of Malaitan labourers (Kanakan Maratta)¹ between 1871 and 1904. It describes the life and work of the Melanesian community of the district in the nineteenth century, following the compulsory repatriation of the majority after the federation of the Australian colonies and the progressive divorce of the few who remained in Queensland from the sugar industry, they and their fellows had done so much to create. Also included is a brief outline of the subsequent fate and present status of that community. To make this Melanesian history fully comprehensible it also gives a detailed account of European settlement, and more especially of the evolution of the sugar industry, at Mackay.

From the outset of this research I consciously aimed at avoiding the Eurocentric approach shared by most earlier writers on similar subjects, one in which Melanesians appear as objects of European policies, practices and legislation - sometimes as victims of European exploitation - but never as active participants in events. Initially I also saw parallels between my approach and that of 'the new social history' which seeks to rewrite history, with the aid of oral testimony, from the bottom up, from the viewpoint of the lower strata of society; but I came to see that this was itself a Eurocentric view, one quite alien to the Melanesians themselves. The culture and cosmology of the large majority of labour recruits who returned to their islands and descent groups after serving in Queensland, was unchanged in essentials. Even those who remained in Queensland, after the mass deportation in 1906-08, retained a rich cultural heritage: Melanesian religico-magical beliefs and practices co-existed with active membership of Christian churches, traditional forms of authority survived, often without the knowledge of the Europeans in whose midst they lived. Probably it is only since the Second World War that Melanesians at Mackay have come to see themselves as Europeans have always seen them: at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. It is significant that

1. "Maratta" is the name for Malaita in common use during the Queensland labour trade.

this same period has seen the emergence of novel phenomena: attempts at organizing in order to win political benefits from governments, and moves, so far more fruitful, to renew contact with kinfolk in Melanesia.

Ironically, while Melanesians in Australia have begun to solicit government assistance, historical research has demolished their principal argument in support of their claims: the assertion that their forebears were kidnapped, brought to Queensland and made to work by force, against their wills. That portion of the thesis which studies the recruitment of Malaitans for labour in Queensland confirms the findings of recent historians rather than the claims of present day Australian Melanesians. Though it was no more part of my aim to support than to undermine political aspirations, the thesis does show that, the treatment accorded Melanesians who remained in Australia after the deportation era, affords their descendants ample justification for seeking special assistance.

Malaitans were the largest group from any one Pacific island to migrate to Queensland: 9,000 out of 62,000 labour recruits. It cannot be assumed that they were typical in all aspects. Melanesian societies, like those of Europe, have broadly similar cultures and cosmologies which exhibit enormous diversity of detail. It is as rash in Melanesia as it would be in Europe to reach conclusions about the whole region by extrapolation from what is found to be true of one group or locality. One respect in which Malaita certainly differs from most other parts of Melanesia greatly facilitated their present study. Few of the other Melanesian societies remained so little affected by European influences, or retained a cosmology so dogmatically intact into the twentieth century. The resilience and conservative characteristics of Malaitan society make it a richly rewarding source of oral tradition: clearly there may be other aspects of Malaitan society equally atypical. But even if the Malaitan experience in North Queensland should prove totally unlike that of any other Melanesians - and I see no reason to expect this - the number involved, 14.7% of all Melanesians indentured in Queensland, would justify this study.

The first section of this thesis describes the people of Malaita and the Malaitan labour trade. Chapter One is an ethnography of the inhabitants of Malaita, concentrating on the myth-history of the Fat-aleka dialect area in pre-European times. Although based on several months field research on Malaita, it is unlike any other chapter of the thesis in that it depends heavily on the work of other scholars, particularly anthropologists who have worked on Malaita. Chapters Two and Three discuss the complex mixture of coercive and voluntary forces which resulted in Malaitans being shipped to Queensland and show that it was possible for Malaitans to deal conceptually with the recruiting trade and wage labour in European surroundings within their pre-existing cultural patterns. Complex multi-dimensional exchanges between Malaitans and their ancestors took place when the recruits were taken from Malaita on board recruiting ships and later in Queensland.

The major sources on which these initial chapters are based are twenty-four complete records of voyages from Queensland to the Pacific islands which include Malaita, although my research has uncovered 260 such voyages. Information from all of these voyages has been used in analysing the Malaitan recruiting trade. Of the twenty-four extant logs, five are by Captain W.T. Wawn,² nine come from two Governments Agents, Douglas Rannie and S.M. Smith,³ nine

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2. W.T. Wawn visited Malaita as Master of the *Stanley* (1881 and 1882), the *Ariel* (1888), the *Borough Belle* (1890-1), and as Mate on the *Para* (1894).

W.T. Wawn, *The South Sea Islanders and the Queensland Labour Trade* (London, 1893). A new edition, edited by Peter Corris, was published in Canberra in 1973. The manuscript of the *Para* log is contained in Mitchell A1477-1.

3. Douglas Rannie visited Malaita as Government Agent on the *Para* (1887). S.M. Smith visited Malaita as Government Agent on the *Helena* (1893), the *Ariel* (1894), the *Roderick Dhu* (1895), the *Sybil* (1896-7), the *Lochiel* (1897), the *Fearless* (1897-8), the *Sybil* (1898-9), and the *Sydney Belle* (1900).

D. Rannie, *My Adventures among South Sea Cannibals : an account of the experiences and adventures of a government official among the natives of Oceania* (London, 1912); JCUNQ (History): the Diaries of Sydney Mercer Smith, 1893-1900.

from a recruiter, Jock Cromar,⁴ and one from a journalist, D.J. Melvin.⁵ The other references to voyages including Malaita have been gleaned from newspapers, documents in the Queensland State Archives (QSA), the records of the Royal Navy Australian Station, and Queensland plantation records.⁶ Information concerning these voyages has been correlated with the names of Malaitan recruits in QSA and plantation registers, and oral testimony collected on Malaita and in Queensland. From personal interviews with twelve surviving Melanesians in the late 1960s, Peter Corris was able to compile short biographical studies of their individual careers. Although no known Malaitan recruits were still living when I began research, information collected from kinsfolk during fieldwork on Malaita in 1976 and 1978 enabled me to compile short biographies of a further 132, some of which can be found at the end of Chapter Three. This section of the thesis also identifies the districts of origin of 2,023 Malaitan recruits, and examines instances of Malaitan resistance to the recruiters.

The second section of the thesis examines the European context into which the Melanesian labourers were placed. In the absence of a good general history of Mackay, it was necessary to write this section on the basis of my own research into the primary sources. Chapter Four traces the development of the plantation system and of European society at Mackay from 1860 to 1885. Chapter Five considers the place of European small farm cultivators in the industry from the

4. Jock Cromar visited Malaita as recruiter on the *Madelaine* (1884), the *Stormbird* (1884), the *Helena* (1886, 1886), the *Fearless* (1888, 1888-9), and the *Sea Shell* (1889).

J. Cromar, *Jock of the Islands : early days in the South Seas. The adventures of John Cromar, sometime recruiter and lately trader at Marovo, British Solomon Islands Protectorate, told by himself* (London, 1935).

5. J.D. Melvin was a journalist with the Melbourne *Argus*. He sailed to Malaita on the *Helena* in 1892 and subsequently published a report on the voyage in the *Argus*.

J.D. Melvin, *The Cruise of the Helena*. Edited by Peter Corris, (Melbourne, 1977).

6. The registers used were: QSA PRE/83a-b; QSA IPI 12/1; QSA IPI 3/3; QSA IPI 3/37; JCUNQ (Archives); Pioneer Mill Register of Pacific Islanders, 1895-1906.

1860s until the 1920s, concentrating on the years after the mid-1880s when the industry was transformed from its initial plantation base to the regime which remains today : European owners of small farms, supplying cane to co-operatively owned central mills. These two chapters contain detailed statistical data and graphs, tied to an explanation of fluctuations and changes in the structure of the industry in terms of European economics, politics and society. Several short biographies are included, continuing the biographical sub-theme begun in the first section, and pursued throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Section Three (Chapters Six to Nine and the Epilogue) concentrates upon the working and private lives of Melanesians in the Mackay district, leading through to the development of a pan-Melanesian society in the twentieth century. Chapter Six discusses Queensland legislation on employment of Melanesian indentured labour, its implementation, and the gradual restriction of work categories available to Melanesians. Chapter Seven covers wages, banking, Melanesian reactions to the European monetary system, and restraints placed on Melanesians by the legal system and more informal mechanisms. The position of island-born Melanesians within Queensland and Australian society underwent a series of changes. With the passage of years, from a single category of indentured labourers, there emerged three distinct groups within the colonial Melanesian working class: first-indenture labourers; time-expired labourers; and ticket-holders, differentiated by varying degrees of freedom, earning potential and ability to cope with life in colonial Australia. Chapter Eight deals with the health and welfare of Melanesians in Queensland up until the 1930s. Two significant conclusions emerge: that the high mortality rate resulted from exposure to a new epidemiological environment rather than from harsh living and working conditions; and, in consequence, that it was largely confined to first-indenture labourers in their first few months in Queensland. Among those who survived beyond their first year, the death rate fell to a figure apparently similar to that of other groups of labourers.⁷

7. Deficiencies in the statistics make it impossible to be more precise.

Chapter Nine begins with an examination of the 1901-08 deportation period when most Melanesians were forced to leave Australia. The chapter endeavours to explain the major features of the pan-Melanesian society which had come into existence by the turn of the century, stressing Islander politics, power and authority, settlement patterns, Christianity, the missions and education, language and race relations. The Epilogue deals with two subjects: it begins with a description of the Islander farmers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and concludes with a discussion of the self-perception of the present-day Islander community, stressing the importance of the kidnapping myth in their outlook. Chapters Eight, Nine and the Epilogue depend strongly on the oral testimony of Australian Pacific Islanders, particularly those of Malaitan descent, backed by a computerized re-sorting of Islander baptism, marriage and death records.

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This thesis covers two geographic regions, the Pacific and Australia, and two schools of historiography. For more than a century there have been popular regional histories and memoirs written by early settlers and visitors: H.H. Finch-Hatton, E.B. Kennedy and H.L. Roth⁸ all published accounts based on their sojourns in the Mackay district. The best is Roth's *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland*, a rather disjointed but nonetheless valuable historical account of European settlement in the Pioneer valley, based on information collected during his residence there in the 1870s and 1880s. The pioneering study of North Queensland as a whole was published in 1963: G.C. Bolton's *A Thousand Miles Away*,⁹ still the standard work. In the same year J.A. Nilsson and P.G. Cone completed Honours theses on the history of European settlement and

8. H.H. Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia* (London, 1885); E.B. Kennedy, *Four Years in Queensland* (London, 1870); H.L. Roth, *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland* (Halifax, 1908).

9. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away : a history of North Queensland* (Canberra, 1963).

agriculture in the Pioneer valley, and in 1971 R.L. Evans published his two-part article on Mackay's early Aboriginal reserve.¹⁰ These were followed in 1980 by John Kerr's *Pioneer Pageant*,¹¹ a history of the Pioneer Shire. The present thesis is one of a number of regional studies on North Queensland which have been completed in the last few years or are currently in progress.

It is not possible to tell whether what has been shown to be true for the Mackay region is broadly true of other sugar areas¹² or for other regions of Australia. This was pointed out by B.J. Dalton in his short paper 'What makes North Queensland history different?' :

The problem is that, for the most part, there do not exist comparable studies from other regions of Australia. As a result it is often impossible to tell whether what has been shown to be true for a North Queensland topic is broadly similar to, rather different from, or totally at variance with its counterpart in other regions or in

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10. J.A. Nilsson, *History of Mackay the Sugar Town, 1862-1915* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1963); P.D. Cone, *The Historical Development of Agricultural Settlement in a Pioneer Region* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of New England, 1963); R.L. Evans, 'Queensland's first Aboriginal Reserve: Part 1 - The Promise of Reform, Part 2 - The Failure of Reform, *Queensland Heritage*, v. 2:4 (1971), 26-38, v. 2:5 (1971), 3-11. Another early B.A. thesis on Mackay, R. McDougall's *Pattern of Expansion of the Sugar Cane Industry in the Mackay District since 1915* (University of Queensland, 1959?), is not available for reading outside of the History Department of the University of Queensland.
 11. John Kerr's *Pioneer Pageant : a history of the Pioneer Shire* (Mackay, 1980), commissioned by the Pioneer Shire Council, which covers essentially the same region as this thesis, is carefully researched and meets very well the needs of the ordinary reader for whom it was written. It does not, however, aspire to the analytical detail and statistical rigour attempted in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.
 12. Histories exist of other sugar cane producing areas, but they are all either "scissors and paste" chronologies or general histories and not suitable for comparison with the present study. J. Nolan, *Bundaberg: history and people* (Brisbane, 1978); J. Kerr, *Northern Outpost* (Mossman, 1979); D. Jones, *Trinity Phoenix: a history of Cairns and district* (Cairns, 1976), and *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: the story of Innisfail and the shire of Johnstone, North Queensland* (Cairns, 1973).

Australia generally. 13

Many of the conclusions reached in this thesis, based on the lives of Melanesians at Mackay and the sugar industry at Mackay, are at variance with conclusions arrived at by Bolton for North Queensland, and by K.E. Saunders and A.A. Graves¹⁴ for the colony and the state as a whole. Many more regional studies are needed before their work can be fully assessed.

The position of this thesis within the historiography of the Pacific in general and the labour trade in particular is much more complex than its place within Australian historiography. Historical writing on the labour trade dates back more than sixty years to B.H. Molesworth's 1917 M.A. thesis on Pacific island labourers in Queensland. Since Molesworth more than a dozen theses (Honours, Masters and Doctoral) have dealt either directly with the Queensland labour trade or with it as part of the wider labour market in the southwest Pacific.¹⁵ Some of these theses were subsequently adapted as monographs, articles in journals or chapters in books. Other major writing on the labour trade has appeared in the pages of the Australian National University's *Journal of Pacific History* or in that university's

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13. B.J. Dalton, 'What makes North Queensland history different?', *Australian 1888 : a Bicentennial History Bulletin for the study of Australian history centred on the year 1888*, No. 6 (1980), 61.
 14. K.E. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage: an analysis of indentured labour in Queensland to 1907, with particular reference to the Melanesian servants* (PhD. thesis, University of Queensland, 1974); A.A. Graves, *Pacific Island Labour in the Queensland Sugar Industry* (DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1979).
 15. Refer to the Bibliography, Section A. 6 : B.H. Molesworth (1917), R. Drost (1935), D. Dignan (1949), O.W. Parnaby (1953), A.R. Tippet (1959), R.T. Linker (1959), J.P.C. Sheppard (1966), P. Corris (1970), R.D. Bedford (1971), P.M. Mercer (1972), K.E. Saunders (1974), J.A. Bennett (1974), A.A. Graves (1979).

Early studies of the labour trade depended entirely on European documentary sources, which failed to produce Islander-centered Pacific history. In the last two decades Pacific history has undergone a revolution: the late J.W. Davidson led the field in arguing that Pacific history had to change from a study of European exploits in the Pacific to a study of the history of the Islanders themselves. He and this modern school of Pacific history have produced detailed works which explore cultural interaction and resultant changes in Pacific societies confronted by the empires of Europe, showing the Islanders as active participants in contacts with Europeans, not just the helpless natives of the 'fatal impact' theory. The demarcation point between the old and new approaches to the labour trade was Peter Corris' 1970 Doctoral study of Solomon island labour migration to Queensland and Fiji, undertaken in the Department of Pacific and South-east Asian History founded by Davidson. All students of the labour trade are indebted to the ethnohistorical approach utilised by Corris. Roger Keesing, reviewing the book published from Corris' thesis praised his combination of archival work with anthropological knowledge and field research, extolling the approach as a model for field research in Pacific History:

...going this deeply into the cultural context of colonial history makes the line between history and anthropology hard to draw and opens the way for even deeper probing. At every Solomons 'passage' a researcher could - by staying longer, learning

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16. Flourishing alongside this academic school is a more widely read Pacific history genre; the academic fringe writers on the Queensland recruiting trade: Holthouse, Docker and Bandler. Faith Bandler's *Wacvie* is the first account of the Queensland plantation days written by a Melanesian. Written as a novel in semi-fictional form, the book is nonetheless significant as a Melanesian perception of the recruiting trade. Unfortunately, Bandler's book shares many of the faults evident in the work of Holthouse and Docker, who carry on the old approach to the labour trade oblivious of revisions in historical thought.

H. Holthouse, *Cannibal Cargoes* (Adelaide, 1969); E.W. Docker, *The Blackbirders : the recruiting of South Seas labour for Queensland, 1863-1907* (Sydney, 1970); F. Bandler, *Wacvie* (Adelaide, 1977).

more of the cast of characters and local political system and culture, collecting oral literature more seriously and deeply - reconstruct a more complete and revealing picture of the labour trade and plantation work. 17

In the past, just as too few anthropologists bothered to search thoroughly for all available documents relevant to their research, too few historians bothered to cross the artificial line between history and anthropology.¹⁸ This present thesis follows the ethno-historical path blazed by Corris and attempts to apply Keesing's injunction.

Three aspects of the research on which this thesis is based distinguish it from all previous research into the Queensland labour trade. It is primarily because of these different sources that the thesis has been able to arrive at different conclusions. Firstly, research included two visits to the Solomon islands, involving five months field work, predominantly on Malaita. Secondly, the thesis contains a considerable amount of oral testimony¹⁹ collected at Mackay and in other sugar districts between 1973 and 1981. Except for Corris, previous historians have attempted to write the history of Melanesians in Queensland from surviving nineteenth century documentation, ignoring what was and is the most valuable source of all - the recruits, their children and grandchildren. Thirdly, a computer programme was developed which enabled Islander baptism, marriage and

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17. R. Keesing, review of P. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation* (Melbourne, 1973), in *JPH* v. 9 (1974), 215-6.
 18. C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (G.B., 1977), 12. Also refer to C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, 1975): Chapter One, 'Thick Description: toward an interpretative theory of culture', and G. Dening, *Islands and Beaches: discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Melbourne, 1980): Chapter One, 'Reflection : on history at the edges of culture'.
 19. The term "oral testimony" rather than "oral history" has been employed in this thesis. The type of verbal information available from the descendants of the Melanesian labour recruits cannot be classed in the same category as the oral traditions of Africa or Polynesia, which mainly consist of narrations exhibiting many of the qualities of a written work of history or literature. In Melanesia there is not the same disciplined chain of transmission of traditional history and lore; this applies even more so to Melanesians in Australia.

death records to be re-sorted into more useful sequences, providing a firm chronology to use alongside oral testimony.

Malaita

In preparing this thesis I have read all of the English and French published anthropological literature on Malaita and discussed particular points with individual anthropologists both in person and by correspondence. I have tried systematically to utilise this material in interpreting historical data, whether derived from documents or from oral testimony. Heeding Keesing's advice to Pacific historians, to stay longer and to learn more about their research areas, I spent several months living on Malaita, mainly in the east of the Fataleka dialect area. From September to November 1976 and from May to July 1978 I was based at Ambe village overlooking Fakanakafo bay, collecting information on labour recruiting between Kwai and Ataa, gaining an overall perspective of the peoples' contemporary culture and society and their own perception of their history, both in its mythic and factual context. I worked, of course, not as an anthropologist but as an historian attempting to utilise anthropologists' insights in order to interpret the data I was gathering. Keesing, in line with current thought in cognitive anthropology, condemns any attempt to distinguish Malaitans' knowledge of their languages from their perception of the world.²⁰ My visits were too brief for me to learn the Fataleka dialect; I picked up only a smattering of Malaitan words. This certainly was a handicap. But even if it had been possible for me to take the time necessary to master the Fataleka dialect, I should still have been dependent upon a combination of pidgin English - the *lingua franca* of the Solomons - and interpreters, to communicate with informants in the eight other language/dialect areas into which my search for information on labour recruiting took me.

Offsetting this were several advantages. I was not just a visiting researcher but a family guest of the Rakwane descent group from

20. R. Keesing, 'Linguistic Knowledge and Cultural Knowledge : some doubts and speculations', *American Anthropologist*, v. 81:1 (1979), 15; also refer to W.H. Goodenough, *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology* (Chicago, 1970), 98-130.

east Fataleka. My 1976 visit to Malaita was in company with Ishmael Itea, a Rakwane Bigman and past government Headman of Fataleka; a man well-known throughout north Malaita. Itea had been visiting his family in Mackay and I travelled to Malaita at his urging and under the sponsorship of the Queensland branch of his family. The entrée to east Fataleka provided me by Itea and his family proved invaluable. When I first went to Malaita I had already been collecting oral testimony for a number of years amongst Pacific Islanders living in Queensland, and had read widely in primary and secondary sources relating to the recruiting trade. As well, I was fortunate enough to enlist the help of Dr Daniel de Coppet of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, Paris, an anthropologist who has worked for many years with the 'Are 'are of Malaita. Dr de Coppet kindly read drafts of the first three chapters of this thesis, provided valuable criticism and guidance, and willingly answered my many questions about the island and its people. Although only I am responsible for the final interpretation I am deeply indebted to him for his assistance.

Oral Testimony in Queensland

I was born and raised in Mackay, so I have had a long acquaintance with Islanders, but my first interview with a Queensland Pacific Islander was not conducted until January 1973. Then in March 1974, under the auspices of a black oral history project organized by Henry Reynolds through the History Department of James Cook University, I began in earnest to accumulate a bank of Islander oral testimony. In April I was joined by a departmental colleague, Patricia Mercer : together we spent all our spare time over the next few years gathering oral testimony from the Australian-born descendants of the nineteenth century immigrant Melanesian labourers. Initially we concentrated on the oldest of the Islanders, and on what they could remember of the plantation days: we were too late to meet any Islanders actually born in the islands.

In 1960 Robert Tan, a postgraduate student from the University of Queensland, began a tentative oral history research project with Pacific

Islanders in Queensland, interviewing seventeen descendants and two original recruits. Unfortunately lack of funds curtailed Tan's project and no tape recordings were made of the interviews. Next, in 1964, Tom Dutton, a linguist then based at the University of Queensland, interviewed two original recruits living at Ayr. The transcripts of his tapes have recently been published. The first attempt to search systematically for Melanesian men and women who had worked in the Queensland sugar industry was made by Peter Corris in 1968. For his study of the Solomon labour trade he interviewed eighteen elderly men who had been recruited from the Solomons to Fiji and Queensland, and spoke to the descendants of others in Queensland and the islands.²¹ The Australian-born Islanders interviewed by Patricia Mercer and myself were aged up to ninety-nine, with many in their seventies. Most of the older Islanders are the children of original labour recruits, although the community now spreads over six generations. The majority of the Islanders interviewed live along a thousand kilometres of Queensland coast between Maryborough and Ingham. The greater number of the tapes were recorded around Mackay (the main center of Islander population), at Bowen, Ingham, and at Ayr/Home Hill in the Burdekin delta.

Over eight years, eighty-seven cassette tapes have been recorded and placed within Section B of the Black Oral History Collection held in the History Department of James Cook University. Varying in duration from two hours to a few minutes, most of the tape recordings cover an hour or so, and are structured conversations based on the lives led by Pacific Islanders in Queensland. Many conversations, before and after the taped interviews, are recorded only as brief notes in a research diary, and a few interviews are preserved as typed transcripts within the Collection. During these years I have participated in many of the activities of the Islander community in Queensland, attending weddings and funerals, visiting many homes out of friendship, not

21. Robert Tan, Report on Research Trip to North Queensland (10 November 1960), and letter to the author, 26 September 1975; T. Dutton, *Queensland Canefields English of the Late Nineteenth Century : a record of interview with two of the last surviving Kanakas in North Queensland, 1964* (Canberra, 1980); Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, Appendix Two, 151-4.

merely academic interest. The tapes form only a fragment of my experiences with Australian Pacific Islanders, but they are the kernel of these experiences, and they are designed to cover the full range of types of conversations in which I have participated.

Also included in the Department's Oral History Collection are thirty-six interviews which I recorded between 1973 and 1980 with Europeans and Malays at Mackay, and in 1976 and 1978 with Malaitans in the Solomon islands.

Computer analysis

The third aspect of this thesis which distinguishes it from previous writing on the Queensland labour trade is the use of a computer as an aid in re-ordering Islander baptism, marriage and death records from Mackay, into chronological sequences of names, places of residence, and islands of origin. The programme was developed to my specifications by Millett Vincent of the Civil and Systems Engineering Department of this university. The initial 1,210 register entries, covering the years 1878 to 1959, when re-ordered allowing for possible name and spelling variations, produced 4,938 entries. The Printout, used in conjunction with Islander oral testimony and files on crop liens and mortgages, has produced reliable biographical information on the recruits who stayed behind in the twentieth century, and on their children. Much more elaborate and sophisticated computer programmes have been utilised in historical demography in some other countries. The fullest possible exploitation of the computer in analyzing the data I have already compiled would entail at least a further year's full-time research. For the present it must remain one of the areas in which future work may be possible. Technically simple though it is, the use made of the computer in this thesis appears to break new ground in the field of Australian and Pacific history.²²

22. It is my intention to publish a paper explaining in detail what was involved in setting up the programme.

This thesis substantiates much of the past research into the recruiting trade and the Australian sugar industry, but at the same time it is revisionist and occasionally critical of sources used by other scholars and of their interpretations. My intention has been to clear the ground of misconceptions and to suggest future directions which scholars might profitably pursue. I am only too conscious that a later generation will find as many misconceptions, in their terms, in this thesis, as it has sought to correct in earlier work. There are many aspects of the topic which are either neglected in this thesis or to which only cursory attention is paid. I regret not having been able to pay more attention to the position of Aborigines and Asians within Mackay society. The role of women, and the intricacies of Melanesian kinship are but two of the many other themes which could have been pursued. Later scholars may view these omissions as glaring faults, not just minor short-comings. Each reader will have to judge the validity of my conclusions and decisions; amongst my judges will be the immigrant Melanesian population of Australia and the people of Malaita, to whom I dedicate this thesis. My hope is that it is worthy of the trust they have placed in me for so long.