

## Review Essay

Philip Edwards (ed.) *“Captain James Cook: The Journals”*. London: The Folio Society, www.foliosociety.com, 2018. 736 pp., three volumes and a chart of the voyages, illustrations, maps, bibliography, indices. US \$185.00, CDN \$235.00, cloth; OCLC #1066235678.

Vol. 1 -*The First Voyage, 1768-1771*. Vol. 2 -*The Second Voyage, 1772-1775*. Vol. 3 -*The Third Voyage, 1776-1779. Chart of the Voyage of Captain James Cook*.

When I was a boy, my father enchanted me with stories of James Cook and his epic voyages. Sometimes, he even managed to weave these into effective life lessons, not the least of which was to consistently eat my fruits and vegetables. After all, he emphasized, Cook made sure his men ate their daily ration and thus, conquered the dreaded scurvy. I will never forget an elementary school teacher’s compliment for finishing the cafeteria’s lukewarm green beans. “Dad says they prevent scurvy,” I proudly piped. She stared at me wide-eyed. Alabama certainly had its share of problems during the mid-1960s, but scurvy was not among them.

A few years later, Dad presented me with a plastic model kit of HMS *Endeavour*. By then, I was dexterous enough not to glue my fingers together and spent many pleasant hours hunched over a battered desktop littered with molded parts, paint bottles and brushes, glue tubes, X-Acto-knife, and smudged instructions. The model’s distinguishing characteristics were its blunt bow and boxy hull, big longboat perched amidships, and short mizzen mast. Stringing the rigging correctly and getting the ratlines taut were challenging, but in due course the job was finished and the ship placed atop a bookshelf. There it sat for years, victim of periodic housecleaning mishaps that compromised the stand and broke the main mast, leaving it suspended catawampus in the tangled rigging. Alas, the model’s ultimate fate is long since forgotten.

These memories recently came tumbling back with news of the various sestercentennial observances of James Cook’s Pacific voyages, and most excitingly, the 2018 discovery of the *Endeavour*’s wreckage off the Rhode Island coast. Besides all of the fanfare in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Tahiti, including a heritage flotilla, festivals, coconut cutting contests, exhibitions, lectures, and some protests from indigenous peoples, too, there have also been

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books.<sup>1</sup> Among the latter is a handsome reissue of Captain Cook's journals by The Folio Society. As one would expect from this publishing house, the set is a glory—three clothbound volumes with handsome printed cover art, creamy Smyth-sewn pages, glossy colour plates, and separately bound chart, all snugly fitted in a sturdy teal box.

The set represents a roughly two-thirds distillation of John Cawte Beaglehole's massive four-volume edition, first published between 1955 and 1974 by the Hakluyt Society. That incredible effort remains the standard reference for Cook scholars and serious maritime historians.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s, however, Penguin Books decided there was a likely market for a shorter version and asked the distinguished British literature professor Philip Edwards (1923-2015), to trim the journals for a more accessible reading experience. Edwards's abridgement was published in 1999 and is now reprinted by the Folio Society in celebration of Cook's voyages. For lay readers and armchair explorers, this edition is perfectly adequate. Edwards exercised an intelligent editorial philosophy, the guiding principle of which was to "preserve the wholeness of Cook's daily entries, with their conjunction of routine sailing matters and unusual incidents." (xix) He also kept Cook's "idiosyncratic spelling" (xvi), to altogether charming effect. Lastly, he provided brief introductions to each volume and, when necessary, linked journal entries by short explanatory paragraphs. Despite Edwards's reductions of some entries, the transitions are polished, and Cook's voice dominates throughout as it should.

James Cook was born in 1728, the son of a simple Yorkshire farmer. As a boy he

1 For a list of the observances worldwide, see "Commemorations," [www.captaincooksociety.com](http://www.captaincooksociety.com) (accessed August 20, 2019). On discovery of the *Endeavour*, see Michael McGowin, "Wreck of Captain Cook's HMS Endeavour 'discovered' off U. S. Coast," *The Guardian*, 9 September 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/19/wreck-of-captain-cooks-hms-endeavour-discovered-off-coast-of-america> (accessed 20 August 2019). There have been numerous articles in the world press about the protests. For a sampling, see Tom Barnes, "Australian plan for Captain Cook monument to mark colonial landing prompts anger: 'It's an invasion,'" *Independent*, 29 April 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/captain-cook-new-landing-site-memorial-statue-australia-sydney-controversy-aboriginal-protest-a8327946.html> (accessed 20 August 2019); Jonathan Pearlman, "Captain Cook statue to be removed from hill in New Zealand after Maori protests," *The Telegraph*, 2 October 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/02/captain-cook-statue-removed-new-zealand-mountain-maori-protests/> (accessed 20 August 2019); and Peter Jackson, "Cook anniversary celebrations defended," *NZ Herald*, 14 May 2019, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northland-age/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1503402&objectid=12230651](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northland-age/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503402&objectid=12230651) (accessed 20 August 2019).

2 See J. C. Beaglehole, ed. *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery*. (Cambridge, England: Published for the Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1955-1974). Beaglehole was a New Zealander and a widely traveled Cook scholar. Of his work on Cook's *Journals*, Michael E. Hoar wrote that it represented "an extensive and lasting watershed in Cook researches from which all further critical material must and will flow." See Michael E. Hoare, *In the steps of Beaglehole: Cook Researches Past and Prospect*. (Dunedin: Hocken Library, University of Otago, 1977), 21.



doubtless spent considerable time managing livestock, rambling the countryside, smelling the salt air, and watching vessels with stained sails hug the shore. He learned his letters and sums well enough but later said he hadn't had "the advantage of much school education." (xvii) At seventeen he clerked in a grocery/haberdashery, where, as Beaglehole put it in his magisterial 1974 biography, he "measured out raisins and ribbon."<sup>3</sup> Nothing in Cook's pedigree or circumstances distinguished

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 5. Beaglehole died in 1971 while finalizing the manuscript of the Cook biography. His son T. C. Beaglehole, also a historian, saw the work through to publication three years later. The *New York Times* wrote of the resulting volume, "All of us must admire the massive scholarship which

him, but he proved eager to learn, and older men respected his sobriety. Better was to come. A year later Cook apprenticed to a Quaker shipowner and merchant out of Whitby, a busy northern English coal and timber port. Soon he was sailing on board sturdy colliers between there and London, gaining sea sense and mastering the coastal trade's particularities. Whitby-built colliers were well regarded among old salts for their roomy capacity and tough build. Working these ships, Cook earned trust and skill and then made longer voyages into the Baltic Sea. He won steady advancement, but rather than continue hauling cargo, he joined the Royal Navy in 1755. The King's service carried him across the Atlantic where he mapped the St. Lawrence River (1759) prior to the Battle of Quebec and surveyed the coast of Newfoundland (1762-1767). During brief sojourns at home amidst these duties, he married an innkeeper's daughter named Elizabeth Batts, with whom he eventually had six children.

As made clear by Olaf Uwe Janzen in a recent issue of this journal, Cook's experience mapping the Newfoundland coast was significant but has been underappreciated by historians. The work involved threading unfamiliar islands and shoals far from any authority, **sounding depths**, **charting harbours**, and solving problems on the go. According to Janzen, this proved "absolutely critical to his training as a navigator, a hydrographer, and as a commander" and explains why he was chosen for the Pacific voyages.<sup>4</sup> This maritime maturation dovetailed with an important scientific moment. There was much excitement among astronomers and mathematicians about the upcoming 1769 Transit of Venus. This was a rare phenomenon, when Venus's inky black shadow would describe a stately march across the solar disk. Accurate observations of the event from different points on the globe would help determine the distance between the earth and the Sun, as well as improve calculations on longitude, essential to effective navigation. The Royal Society of London wanted to record the Transit from three locales—Norway, Hudson's Bay, and the south Pacific. Scientists agreed that Tahiti, only recently discovered, was an ideal choice for the Pacific. The island's precise longitude and latitude were already known, and its weather was generally clear. If the Royal Society was going to mount a successful expedition, it needed to get to Tahiti, and to do that, it needed the Royal Navy.<sup>5</sup> George III endorsed the plan and awarded

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pieced together so many fragments—of naval records, historical geography, the history of astronomy, navigation and natural history, with scores of biographies and countless details of daily life in the 18th century—into a chronicle of the great voyages." See Daniel J. Boorstin, "The great negative explorer: The life of Captain James Cook," 24 March 1974 <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/03/24/archives/the-life-of-captain-james-cook-the-great-negative-explorer.html> (accessed 20 August 2019).

4 Olaf Uwe Janzen, "The Making of a Maritime Explorer: James Cook in Newfoundland, 1762-1767," *The Northern Mariner*, XXVIII, No. 1 (Winter 2018), 23.

5 For an excellent discussion of planetary transits in general, and the 1769 Venus transit in particular, see Nick Lomb, *Transit of Venus: 1631 to the Present*, (New York: Powerhouse, 2011), 82-83. The astronomer Charles Green died during the return voyage, but his observations were published in 1771 by the Royal Society.

the Society four thousand pounds to pursue its investigations. Further, he ordered the Navy to provide transportation. Enter James Cook.

Neither the King nor the Admiralty had any particular interest in the Transit per se, but they did want to push British influence into the Pacific and discover whether or not the long-rumored *Terra australis incognita*, “the unknown land of the south,” was fact or fable. That was Cook’s secret charge, to be executed after the Transit. In order to conduct the voyage, Cook was made a lieutenant and given command of a recently purchased Whitby collier, a 366-ton, 106-foot-long bark renamed HMS *Endeavour*. There could not have been a better conjunction of vessel and man. The collier build was thought perfect for a long voyage through unknown waters. Its slow speed was not a detriment, its ample hold could store plenty of provisions, its reasonable 14-foot draft promised safer maneuverability among islands, and its strong timbers could withstand heavy seas and minor mishaps. Of course, no one knew the type better than Cook.<sup>6</sup>

But before *Endeavour* sailed, she had to be refitted for the voyage, an enormous task. First her outer hull was covered with felt and then a thin layer of planks fastened in place by large-headed nails. This was done to slow down the destructive teredo worm, bane of long voyages. Unlike some vessels, the *Endeavour* was not coppered, since the thin metal could prove difficult to repair if damaged in far off seas deficient in naval yards. Even though *Endeavour*’s mission was peaceful, at least some firepower was considered prudent; thus, half a dozen four-pounder carriage guns and eight swivel cannon were hoisted on board. Meanwhile, riggers scrambled aloft, carpenters banged away below decks, and draymen arrived in a continual stream, loaded with barrels, boxes, and crates of lemons, oranges, sauerkraut, sugar, raisins, salt, water, wine, biscuits, salt beef, tools, cloth; carefully packed scientific instruments including telescopes, clocks, and watches; and trade goods for the indigenous peoples like nails, mirrors, colourful beads, and toys.<sup>7</sup>

The vessel finally in readiness, passengers and crew came on board. Foremost, of course, was 39-year-old Lt. Cook himself, in command of 85 officers and men. The latter included sailors, 12 scarlet-coated marines, a surgeon, a carpenter, and a cook. The *Endeavour*’s most distinguished passenger was 25-year-old Joseph Banks, a prominent naturalist and Fellow of the Royal Society. Beaglehole called him “one of those fortunate beings, an eighteenth century English landed proprietor with ample income that would continue to rise, partly and largely through his own good management of his estates, partly through family bequests.” Given his wealth and status, Banks came with an entourage that consisted of a private secretary, two artists—Sydney Parkinson and Alexander Buchan—four servants, and two dogs. One wonders what the weathered jack tars thought when this host clambered up the gangplank with their cumbersome trunks. Other special guests included two

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6 Beaglehole, *The Life*, p. 123-25.

7 *Ibid*, 130, 135-7.

Swedish naturalists and the astronomer Charles Green.<sup>8</sup>

At last, on Friday, 26 September 1768, *Endeavour* put to sea. At noon the leadsman took a sounding, and Cook wrote in his journal, “50 fathoms grey sand with small stones and broken shells.” (11) They were underway, before them the Atlantic entire. A sense of how the *Endeavour* looked and felt under sail may be gained by watching YouTube videos of the 1993 replica vessel currently berthed at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney. “The ship, the movement of her,” states one young woman of her time on board, “she’s got like a really particular movement that is just quite comforting, and she just slides off the sides of waves and it’s really good.”<sup>9</sup> Doubtless there was some sea sickness during the voyage’s earliest days, but Cook was more concerned about getting accurate measurements with the Royal Society’s various instruments. To that end he had a table top suspended by ropes that compensated for the ship’s near ceaseless motion afloat.

Just one of the pleasures of this set is the ability to follow Cook’s progress with the accompanying colour chart, a reproduction of Lt. Henry Roberts’s 1784



The tomb of a Tahitian killed by one of Cook’s men

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8 Beaglehole, *The Life*, 142 (“one of”), 145-7.

9 Australian National Maritime Museum, “Voyage on HMB Endeavour,” (24 March 2009) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKeP9V4Pv5o>

world map of the three voyages. Roberts had sailed with Cook and thus, worked from considerable firsthand knowledge. At 21 by 35 inches fully opened, the chart will nearly cover a desk. Each voyage is traced by a different colour line. While significant portions of Cook's journeys are easy to see—long runs across the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans; loops and plunges below the Antarctic Circle—the weavings about New Zealand and Tahiti are at too small a scale to be meaningfully useful. More detailed maps are provided at the beginning of each volume to correct the imbalance, with even tighter detailed boxes of complicated areas like Queen Charlotte Sound and Australia's Great Barrier Reef where *Endeavour* grounded. Still and all, the absorbed reader will likely want more. Beaglehole's edition excelled in its use of maps, and this is the one area where The Folio Society's edition may be considered disappointing.

Another of the journals' pleasures is getting to know Cook as a commander. He certainly understood how to manage men. By the spring of 1769, *Endeavour* had crossed the Atlantic, called at Rio de Janeiro, rounded Cape Horn, entered the Pacific, and made Tahiti. On Thursday, 13 April, Cook wrote that there were but "very few men upon the sick list and these had but slight complaints." (35) This was very good news indeed, and Cook chalked it up to the regular ration of sauerkraut, soup, and malt that he provided for the crew. But in order to get them to stomach the sauerkraut ration, he had to use a little reverse psychology. He had a portion "dress'd every day for the Cabbin Table, and permitted all the officers without exception to make use of it." (36) He told the men they could take it or leave it as they chose, but when they saw the officers eating it, they clamoured for so much that Cook had to "put everyone on board to an allowance." (36) Cook declared that this was a practice he had never once seen fail with common seamen, "the moment they see their superiors set a value upon it, it becomes the finest stuff in the World and the inventor an honest fellow." (36) Harsher measures were always available for serious disobedience, not least the cat-o'-nine-tails, but Cook was no tyrant.

Just as planned, Cook and Green were able to record the Transit of Venus on Saturday, 3 June. Cook wrote that "an atmosphere or dusky shade" around the planet "much disturbed" (53) the observations, but the measurements proved accurate in the end. Throughout his weeks among the Society Islands, Cook worked hard to curry favour with the native people and took one of them on as an interpreter. This was Tupaia, who was to prove extraordinarily useful. Cook "found him to be a very intelligent person and to know more of the geography of the islands situated in these seas, their produce and the religion laws and customs of the inhabitants than any one we had met with." (63-4)

From Tahiti the *Endeavour* made her way to New Zealand. The Maori were more cautious than the friendly Tahitians. On 10 October, Cook was reconnoitering in a small boat and approached a Maori canoe. Tupaia told the natives they would not be hurt, but they tried to paddle away. Cook ordered a musket fired over their heads, thinking they would either surrender or jump out of their canoe. Unfortunately, he admitted, he was "mistaken for they immediately took to their arms or whatever

they had in the boat and began to attack us.” (70) The British opened fire, and several natives were killed and wounded. For his part, Banks was disgusted. Edwards quotes him in a footnote: “thus ended the most disagreeable day my life has yet seen. Black be the mark for it, and heaven send that such may never return to embitter future reflection.” (71) Like the Tahitians, the Maori had no concept of private property and regularly absconded with trifles as well as important tools and instruments. This led to further confrontations, including another native death at the hands of John Gore, one of Cook’s officers. Cook thought the punishment “a little too severe for the crime.” (87) Tragic incidents like these, as well as the long and often painful colonial histories that followed, have inspired the modern Cook commemoration protests.

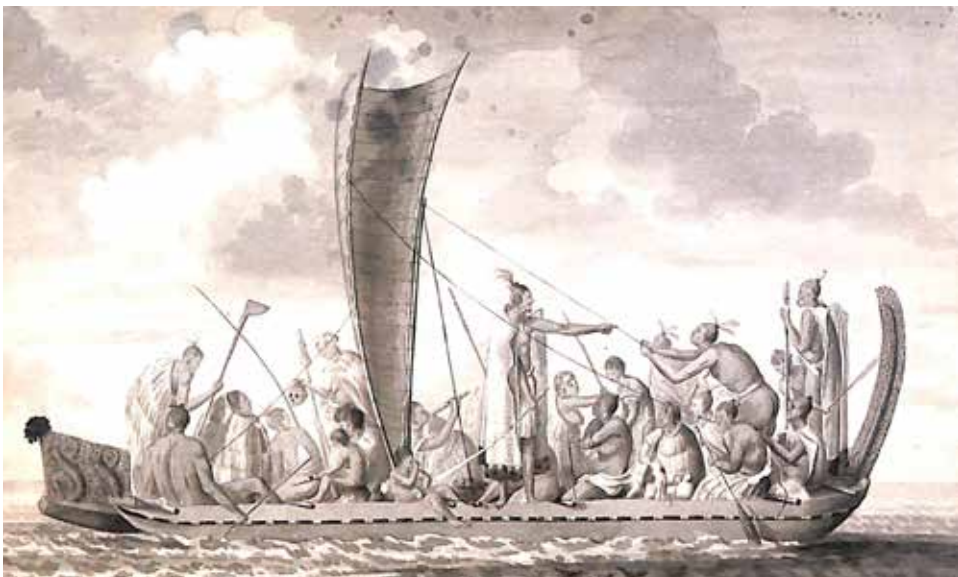
Expert navigator and surveyor that he was, Cook explored the islands of New Zealand, probed promising inlets, and sought out natural resources. He did the same along the eastern coast of Australia, where he famously landed at Botany Bay, named for its profusion of plants. The people living there were even less welcoming than the Maori: “all they seemed to want was for us to be gone.” (126) He made several onshore forays, observing the exotic kangaroo—“it bears no sort of resemblance to any European animal I ever saw” (156)—and naked human inhabitants with “soft and tunable” (154) voices. Those inhabitants knew about the Great Barrier Reef, but unfortunately Cook did not and *Endeavour* crashed into it on 11 June 1770. The ship lurched and began taking on 14 inches of water an hour. Cook’s effort to save the ship has been oft praised, and his journals make clear that it was an exhausting and difficult struggle for all hands. Sail was taken in, soundings made, the ship lightened by throwing over the heavy guns and spoiled stores, and the pumps worked round the clock. In an effort to slow the leak, Cook resorted to fothering. This practice, he wrote, involved positioning sailcloth filled with oakum, dung, and “other filth” (143) over the hole and pulling it taut by ropes. The debris in the sail “is washed off and part of it carried along with the water into the leak and in part stops up the hole.” (143-4). It wasn’t perfect, but it made a decent patch.

By October the *Endeavour* hailed Batavia in the Dutch East Indies, where she was hove down and thoroughly repaired. Unfortunately, virtually everyone took ill with fever, and 30 men died by the time the vessel made the Cape of Good Hope in mid-March 1771. Among the dead were Tupaia; Green, the astronomer; the surgeon; and the talented painter Parkinson. It was an especially bitter coda to an otherwise remarkably healthy voyage. Four months later *Endeavour* anchored in English waters once again, and Cook headed to London with his charts and reports. By any measure, the achievement was astonishing—the Transit observed, New Zealand explored and determined to be insular rather than the tip of an unknown southern continent, and eastern Australia claimed for the King, which Cook dubbed New South Wales. As yet unresolved was whether or not a southern continent was still hiding somewhere in the higher latitudes closer to the South Pole. That was the primary goal of Cook’s second voyage, along with thorough trials of several chronometer models meant to calculate longitude at sea.



George III personally promoted Cook to Commander, and once again the Witby collier design was chosen. Two ships were made ready this time, the *Resolution* and the *Adventure*, Cook in command of the former and Tobias Furneaux, the latter. Eager for more South Seas excitement, Joseph Banks intended to accompany the expedition, but his onerous demands for his entourage (including two horn players!) and mounds of baggage exasperated Cook. Once all of the extra cabins had been hammered together above decks, Cook suspected that *Resolution* would prove “crank” (227), that is, top-heavy and unwieldy, and so she proved to be. Nonsense seaman that he was, Cook had all the work torn out, and Banks furiously withdrew amid loud protestations. Cook dismissed his charges as “highly absurd” (228) and got on with the preparations. The German scientist Johann Reinhold Forrester replaced Banks.

Some of Cook’s best writing may be found in Volume 2. His descriptions of the Antarctic fringe and towering icebergs, for example, are wonderfully eloquent.



A Maori war canoe. Note the warrior holding a severed head.

On 24 February 1773, at latitude sixty-one degrees South, Cook wrote of the “romantick views many of these islands exhibit and which are greatly heightened by the foaming and dashing of the waves against them and into the several holes and caverns which are formed in the most of them.” (261) What the common seamen thought he didn’t say, but he did note they were well-protected by Fearnought jackets and trousers, large caps, and an extra jot of morning brandy. Besides these frigid southern forays, there was a visit to Easter Island and further stops at New Zealand and Tahiti.

Cook genuinely liked his men though Royal Navy discipline was omnipresent. He was most troubled by the men’s enthusiastic sexual contact with indigenous women—an iron nail was their price of affection—but his attempts to curtail it

were futile. Cook worried about corrupting these isolated societies: “we debauch their morals already too prone to vice and we introduce among them wants and perhaps diseases which they never before knew and which serves only to disturb that happy tranquility they and their forefathers had enjoy’d.” (281) Of all the native customs that Cook was curious about and took the trouble to record, none piqued his interest so much as cannibalism. He was constantly on the lookout for evidence of it, and on 23 November 1773, he witnessed a demonstration on *Resolution’s* deck. Some New Zealanders had killed a young native, and the scientists brought the remains on board, along with a few natives. Cook returned just as the demonstration was in progress, and forced himself to watch in order to confirm a practice many people had doubted. The natives ate the flesh with a “seeming good relish before the whole Ships Company which had such effect on some of them as to cause them to vomit.” (325-6)

The second voyage ended without discovery of the rumoured southern continent. Cook’s ships had circumnavigated the globe at latitudes perilously close to the Antarctic ice shelf, and cruised vast stretches with only large rollers visible to all horizons. Cook confidently wrote on Saturday, 17 December 1774, “I have now done with the SOUTHERN PACIFIC OCEAN, and flatter myself that no one will think that I have left it unexplor’d.”(409) Even though no continent was found, the chronometers were thoroughly tested, and navigation measurably improved as a result.

For his third voyage, Cook was tasked with discovering the long-elusive Northwest Passage. If it existed, the Admiralty reasoned, there was no one better to find it than Cook. The last volume differs markedly from the first two. Cook was consciously writing for posterity and a presumed large public in these pages, and the result, by most critics’ lights, is disappointing compared to the less laboured initial volumes. Certainly, the later passages are more discursive, though interesting. Cook was a careful, methodical wordsmith, if not a stylist, and any lover of the sea will revel in his practical sailor’s voice. The voyage is most famous, of course, for Cook’s discovery of the Hawaiian Islands and his death at the hands of the people there on Valentine’s Day 1779. Initial contacts, however, were relatively friendly. Cook took careful note of the similarities between the Hawaiians, who understood the Tahitian language, and other peoples he had encountered on his journeys. This caused him to muse, “How shall we account for this nation spreading itself so far over the ocean? We find them from New Zealand to the south, to these islands to the North and from Easter Island to the Hebrides.” (550)

It is impossible to convey in such a short space the incredible richness and sheer fascination of these journals. To read along with the master mariner as he probes the unknown and to pore over the beautiful paintings, sketches, and large chart constitute a delightful intellectual adventure. It would be difficult to find a better way to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cook’s world-changing voyages.

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