Trading Contacts in the Bismarck Archipelago during the Whaling Era, 1799–1884

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Historians of New Guinea have had little to say about the whaling era, and in the histories of the Bismarck Archipelago the whalers have been virtually invisible, even though significant work has been done on the roles of missionaries, beachcombers, castaways and traders. It has been acknowledged that whalers first arrived around 1800, but where they went, the patterns they adopted, what they traded, with whom, and with what effect have yet to be discussed. This paper argues that with the judicious and intensive use of the logs of especially American whalers, it is possible to form a detailed picture of trading and contact between islanders and Europeans. By using them in conjunction with other historical and non-historical sources, it is possible to elucidate the significance of the whalers and the impact of their trading on island societies.

Most of the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago had experienced some contact with Europeans before the whalers began arriving in the 19th century. Ships in the East Indies and China trade had contacted islanders, introducing glass and metal to the New Guinea mainland, particularly in the west. From 1528 when the Spanish ship Florida was attacked in the Admiralties, there was an irregular stream of European visitors: the Dutch explorers Schouten and Le Maire in 1616, Tasman 1642, Dampier 1700, Carteret 1767, Bougainville 1768, Hunter 1791 and D'Entrecasteaux 1792.

The impact of such contact is more difficult to assess. Before 1800 contact was sporadic and relations characterised by suspicion, tentative trading and occasional violence, each side’s behaviour based upon fear and uncertainty as they grappled with their own spiritual and material perceptions to incorporate the other. Knowl-

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1 See, e.g., I. Hughes, New Guinea Stone Age Trade (Canberra 1977); P. Hempenstall, Pacific Islanders Under German Rule (Canberra 1978); S. Firth, New Guinea Under the Germans (Melbourne 1982); D. Oliver, Bougainville, A Personal History (Melbourne 1973); and K. Howe, The Loyalty Islands, A History of Culture Contacts 1840–1906 (Canberra 1977).

2 There appears to be little surviving oral evidence. In consequence, this study has relied upon 54 whaling logs of which 46 recorded some form of contact with islanders. These logs have been filmed for the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (hereinafter PMB) and in New Zealand are held on microfilm in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, and in other participating libraries.

3 For sources, logs have been supplemented by the whalers’ journals, memoirs, newspapers and records of the Royal Navy for information about trading and contact. Ethnographical and anthropological material on the Bismarcks has been used in conjunction with the primary sources to elucidate the impact of contact and trading.

4 Hughes, New Guinea Stone Age Trade, 13; J. Whittaker et al., Documents and Readings in New Guinea History (Milton, Qld 1975), 176.

edge of iron remained limited and most islanders had no contact with or knowledge of Western visitors.

By the turn of the century this had changed profoundly. The position of the Bismarck Archipelago on the direct sea link between Australia and East Asia meant that its waters were traversed regularly after British settlement of New South Wales in 1788. After this time routes northeast from Sydney to China were in regular use by government and private vessels. While large and faster ships kept to the east seeking maximum sail in the open sea, smaller ships chose the shorter inner routes, especially when refreshments were required. The St George’s Channel route was best for this purpose.6

But in addition to the increase in maritime and commercial through-traffic, there was another presence. During the first half of the 19th century regular visits by whaling ships gradually succeeded occasional contacts by European explorers or passing merchant ships. Whalers, as opposed to merchants making their run to China or Bengal, had the opportunity and inclination for both contact and landing because they were constantly cruising the waters around the Archipelago. The first whaling ship arrived in 1799, and there was a gradual increase in their numbers in the 1830s. As the Atlantic became less profitable, American and British whaling ships increased their activity in the Pacific.7 The heyday of Pacific whaling lasted from 1835 to 1850,8 but in the Bismarcks the peak, as indicated by the number of whaling ships present, was reached in 1840. Remaining steady until 1870, numbers declined dramatically in the 1880s. The last recorded whaler there was in 1884, the year the Germans annexed the islands.9

The New Guinea waters were fished for sperm whale over three grounds,10 and, while larger grounds existed elsewhere in the Pacific, the New Guinea waters played an important role in what was essentially a seasonal industry. J. Whittaker suggested that the most extensive of these was off the northern coast of the main island on either side of 140°E longitude, and killings were made from October to November. However, according to the logs used in this study, an overwhelming majority of whalers bypassed this area in favour of the ground that stretched from New Hanover past New Ireland to Bougainville. Whittaker acknowledges that this was used and suggests it was fished from February to March, and another ground on the northeast coast of the main island was used in the season October to January.11 As he tentatively suggests, the New Guinea whaling grounds were used in conjunction with whaling in the northern and central Pacific; virtually all the

6 Whittaker, Documents, 320.
7 For general histories of the Pacific Whaling industry, see J. Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons (Honolulu 1987); E. Dodge, New England and the South Seas (Cambridge, Mass. 1965); H. Forster, The South Sea Whaler (Sharon, Mass. 1985); C. Ralston, Grass Huts and Warehouses, Pacific Beach Communities of the Nineteenth Century (Canberra 1977); S. Sherman, Voice of the Whaleman (Providence 1965); E. Stackpole, The Sea Hunters (New York 1953); A. Starbuck, History of the American Whale Fishery (New York 1964); R.G. Ward, American Activities in the Central Pacific 1790–1870, Vol. 1 (New Jersey 1966); A. Whipple, Yankee Whalers in the South Seas (London 1954), and also Whittaker, Documents.
8 Ralston, Grass Huts, 16.
9 See Gray, ‘From Windfall’, Appendix 1 and 2.
10 See Forster, The South Sea Whaler, 143.
11 Whittaker, Documents, 316–21.
American whalers fished the waters of the Archipelago before heading to Japan, the Solomons, Carolines, Australia and New Zealand to whale there or rest and replenish before returning or heading home.\textsuperscript{12}

It has been generally held that during the season April to September the Japan grounds and the coast of Japan were fished. For the remainder of the year the on-the-line ground was utilised, and the New Guinea grounds were used in conjunction with this large and important ground.\textsuperscript{13} But while a few ships followed this pattern there is little evidence from the logs that the New Guinea grounds were fished seasonally. In fact little or no pattern emerges. For example, the \textit{Resource} whaled off New Ireland in October 1799, and the \textit{Elizabeth} did the same in November of 1849. The \textit{Clarice} in 1844 spent April off New Britain, while the \textit{Virginia} was off Buka in November 1845. Moreover the \textit{Young Hector} was in Bougainville in July of 1859 and off New Ireland and Lihir during October of 1860.

Unlike other areas such as the Carolines and New Zealand, there were no permanent settlements or resorts in the Bismarcks, only common anchorages. More than two whalers were seldom at the same place at the same time. But virtually all of them spent months cruising the waters adjacent to the Archipelago, having sporadic contact with the islanders and each other. Because American whalers did all their processing at sea in huge tryworks that boiled the blubber down to oil, one of the tasks of whaling ships was to maintain supplies of wood, and some islands became centres for this activity, while others were conspicuously avoided because it was felt the islanders were too hostile or because there were no supplies.\textsuperscript{14} Many whalers' captains passed through the Archipelago and avoided (or did not log) all possible contact with islanders.\textsuperscript{15}

While first contact with some groups on virtually all islands had occurred in the previous century, and some European trade goods had diffused through indigenous trade networks to many coastal and some inland groups, most of the contact between islanders and whalers through to the 1870s was relatively new and was never easy for either side. Where the contact between the two cultures occurred was often a matter of chance. The location, the quality of anchorages, the presence of reefs, the wind direction, in addition to the inaccuracies of charts, determined most where contact took place.

Even so it is clear from maps compiled from the sources that there were four epicentres that remained relatively constant. Cape Denis on the northeast point of the Trobriand Islands\textsuperscript{16} was a major stop for wood and bartering for yams. Generally, contact there was on land. On the New Ireland coast, Gower's Harbour

\textsuperscript{12} There were of course exceptions. The \textit{Avala} fished with considerable success out of season around New Ireland.
\textsuperscript{13} Whittaker, \textit{Documents}, 321. One example of this seasonal fishing was the \textit{Stephania}, which spent Jan. and Feb. in the New Guinea grounds before moving north to the Japan grounds.
\textsuperscript{14} See, e.g., the \textit{Gay Head} in the Trobriands which would cut wood and then leave it to season before returning to pick it up later. The \textit{Superior} focused on Jovency Island for its supplies. Never once did a whaler record venturing on shore at Buka or Bougainville to collect wood. The entry in the log of the \textit{Avala} on 10 Mar. 1872 was 'went on shore gunning and got five pigeons' at the Duke of Yorks, a known and relatively safe place of contact.
\textsuperscript{15} See, e.g., the \textit{Sea Queen, Sea Breeze, Sun and Peruian}.
\textsuperscript{16} While this group does not lie within the confines of the Bismarck Archipelago, 19th-century whalers had it firmly within their mental map of the New Guinea grounds as a whole.
situated just within Cape St George was a popular site for refreshment and repair. For example, in 1859 the Superior moored there, the ship was washed, the sails dried, a leak in the bow fixed, 2,069 gallons of sperm oil stowed, water taken on, and hogs traded for with the islanders. Probably the most frequented spot was Port Hunter, a small bay at the northwest part of the Duke of York Islands, where it was generally agreed that the islanders were friendly, or became so as time went on, where there was ample fresh water and the anchorage was good. Buka Bay was the other most visited place, but there are only two recorded cases of contact on shore. Not only was the number of contacts greater in these places but the actual time the whalers spent there was longer.

In addition to showing the major foci of whaling contacts and trade, the maps reflect some of the changes that took place. What becomes clear is that during the whaling era some islands lost their popularity with the whalers, and in the later period there was a major re-orientation in the location of contact and trade. Buka and Bougainville, major centres of contact from 1840, were conspicuously avoided after the early 1870s, possibly because relations at other islands for onshore trade had improved, enabling whalers to avoid Buka and Bougainville and its sea trading.

In the same way, the Trobriands were ignored after 1860 except for one contact in 1875, possibly because supplies of firewood there were exhausted. The Duke of Yorks, a major centre of refreshment for the whalers, were totally ignored for nine years after 1872 (although this fact is not highlighted by the final map). The overwhelming majority of contacts from 1860 onwards occurred on the coasts from New Hanover down the north and east coasts of New Ireland between Tabar, Lihir, Tanga and Feni to Green Island. There was a slight increase in the number of ships during those later years, but more importantly an increase in the intensity and frequency of their contact. New Hanover, for example, was unvisited before 1870 but received intensive attention after then from two ships in particular, the A. R. Tucker and the Palmetto.

Some ships returned time after time to the exact place and tribe to replenish their supplies. The Lusitania in December 1828 at the northwest end of the St George’s Channel logged,

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17 Superior, Sat. 2 Apr. to Tue. 12 Apr. 1859, Kendall Whaling Museum, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (hereinafter PMB) Microfilm no. 818.
18 The Duke of Yorks group consists of 13 low islands where there were approximately 37 recorded contacts. Hunter, when he called, was attacked while collecting water and the islanders were only kept at a distance by periodically firing into the wood. See Whittaker, Documents, 323. A 'romantic and secluded spot', Lusitania, a British whaler, Thur. 13 Nov. 1828, MS Papers, Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library.
19 Approximately 46 recorded contacts.
20 See D. Sprod (ed.), The Tigurtha Log (Sandy Bay, Tas. 1980), 101; A. R. Tucker, 22 Oct. 1872, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 802; Lusitania, Wed. 11 Feb. 1829, Alexander Turnbull Library; Avola, Mon. 28 Dec. 1868, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 803. One of the difficulties in the compilation of trading and contact situations was that some ships merely mentioned that they were in, say, Gower’s Harbour for a month, but did not mention every specific instance of trade. While this may make a quantitative difference, because these situations happened around the epicentres already mentioned there is little qualitative change. The patterns remain the same.
21 The presence of other Europeans contributed to the rapid inflation of prices, which whalers could not afford to pay. The whales themselves must have been rapidly depleting with the extensive whaling activity. What seems most significant, however, is that there was a growing new focus for the whalers.
8 canoes were seen coming off from the land and we were wishing to procure a supply of taro the ship stood in to meet them. About 18 canoes containing upwards of 100 natives came alongside and on board. Among the number were many of our old friends who readily and gladly recognised us. The old chief of the village which is called Tupyia … undertook to supply us with what we wanted. The trade which was wholly in iron hoop was conducted with the utmost honesty and good temper. The old chief of Tupyia [sic] came on board and was shown the process of boiling. He was so overcome that he was unable to speak. The art of heating water is wholly unknown among the natives.
A later reference adds:

Most of the natives recognised us, many of them calling our Marquesians by name. The old man with the wonderful nose was at the head of them busy as a bee.22

When it came to bartering goods the situation was a little different. Obviously trade did not occur in all contact situations,23 although without doubt not all

23 The *Lasitania* in 1829 logged, 'many visitors from New Britain who amused us for hours with their musical instruments'. *Lasitania*, Duke of Yorks, Mon. 5 Jan. 1829.
log-keepers noted every instance. Of over 360 recorded instances of contact, 260 involved trading. When whalers wanted to trade, they were a great deal more circumspect in their choice of location because close relations with the islanders were required. The political stability of the area, the whalers' perceptions of the place, and its previous record were important factors, as were the geography of the area and whether supplies of tradable commodities were plentiful. In many other parts of the Pacific the prevailing sexual codes influenced the frequency of whaling contact but this, it seems, was never a part of the Bismarcks' pattern. While the relative economic wealth or poverty of specific islands may have determined the type of trade and contact elsewhere, it is hard to prove or disprove that this was of any influence in the Bismarcks.

The most important point characterising trade in the Bismarck Archipelago was that it predominantly happened at sea. B. Macdonald has noted that in the Gilbert (Kiribati) and Ellice (Tuvalu) Islands (where there were few good anchorages), trade took place on ship rather than on shore because from the whalers' point of view it was quicker, much safer, and the initiative remained with them rather than with the islanders. There is a clear parallel with the Solomon Islands, where before 1820 whalers traded with canoes only at sea. This hesitancy to go on shore can be seen in the experience of the Resource, the American trader which ventured into the region in 1799, when off the coast of New Ireland.

at 3 pm had the 2 boats on shore well armed ... the surf so high that they thought most prudent not to continue on shore. The natives swam off to the edge of the surf threw coconuts to them ... this manoeuvring was similar to that of when we landed in 1794 & was obliged to kill 12 of them before they would disperse, and I believe had our boats tried landed at this time they would had a lesson with them. They are a mean set of the largest men all together I ever have met with their weapons, is a club of 4 feet long a hatch a tomahawk their complection is a light brown and long black hair their nose rather flat and their appearence to support them a hostile set of people.

Apprehension and fear played a predominant role in the early period of contact and trade, with particularly Buka and Bougainville being avoided as much as possible for beach trading. Yet throughout the entire period trade was carried out on shore in the Trobriands. In fact, in the Bismarcks a surprising amount of barter was completed on shore and this was linked directly to whalers' perceptions of known and safe places. Islanders travelled long distances to trade both over land and out to sea. Travelling nine kilometres out was common, with the longest distance recorded being 25 kilometres from Gower's Harbour and a similar

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24 B. Macdonald, Cinderellas of the Empire, Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu (Canberra 1982), 17.
26 Resource, Sun. 6 Oct. 1799, San Francisco Maritime Museum, PMB 790. The reference to 1794 indicates that either the log keeper had been in the Bismarcks in 1794 in another ship, or that the same ship had been there on a previous voyage, or had called at the same place earlier during the present voyage.
27 When the General Scott did venture on shore at Buka in 1860 they 'found them very wild panic struck again'. See General Scott, 24 Jan. 1860, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 809.
28 The Lastiania, Wed. 11 Feb. 1829, at Carteret harbour, logged that natives had travelled overland a great distance bringing with them one hog which they exchanged for an old whaling lance.
distance from New Ireland into the St George’s Channel in 1872: ‘a canoe came from New Ireland some 15 miles from shore, all they bought off to sell was 2 eggs and 7 coconuts & 6 taro & 4 shells’. In 1860, the Mohawk recorded that some islanders off Cape Dcnis spent the night on board and their canoe was hoisted up onto the ship because they were so far from the shore. Huge numbers of islanders would often converge on whale ships, whose decks would instantaneously be transformed into markets. Upwards of 50 canoes were often alongside, with a couple of hundred islanders.

In most instances the initial period of trade was difficult and often dominated by misunderstanding, not only about the danger of attack, but what was actually being sought. T. Beale wrote of a situation where

a number of canoes came off... the captain ordered 2 boats to be manned and sent to them... I wore at the time a small white calico riding cap... and I placed it on the head of one of the men who appeared to be the chief, the effect was instantaneous; a yell of satisfaction from the assembled multitude arose. We set about endeavouring to make them understand that we wanted either fresh animal or vegetable... but failed to show them this.

All sorts of information, real or imaginary, was passed between whalers at sea when the ships met or at the ports around the Pacific and at home on the eastern seaboard of America, and this had a strong influence on the trading relationship between islanders and whalers. But it was rarely constant. For example, in 1806 the Salem trader Eliza wrote of the islanders of Buka ‘the men... appeared friendly’, yet by 1863 the perception of the Massachusetts was ‘from appearances they are a savage and treacherous race’, and by 1871 the Arctic recorded ‘the natives came alongside in canoes one at a time being allowed alongside... as they will attack the ship in a very short time’. The differences could be explained by Wilson’s comment in the log of the Gypsy in 1840.

The natives of Bougainville seldom or never come off the ships afraid to venture near vessels the like of which have vomited forth lightening and death. The natives of Bouka it is who come off and by treating them fairly with a pretty constant supply of refreshments can be depended on while cruising there... [The straits of Buka is] beset with large shoals and is not navigable. A Sydney whaler was lost in this bay and abandoned by her crew. She was speedily taken possession of by the natives and plundered. Subsequently to that it was to be the custom with vessels from that Port to fire at natives on approaching the ship in their canoes, sinking them, and wounding and killing the natives! Owing to that they were deterred from coming off to the ships, a serious drawback as pigs are scarce on New Ireland, and vegetables obtained with much risk and trouble. Now, however, they venture off but approach with caution, but

Mohawk, Tue. 4 Sept. 1860, PMB 390.
Usitania, 4 Jan. 1829, in the Duke of Yorks.
Lusitania, Thur. 20 Nov. and Mon. 29 Dec. 1828, in the Duke of Yorks. Clarice on 3 May 1844 reported 50 canoes alongside, New Bedford Free Public Library, PMB 319.
James Arnold, 4 Sept. 1858 off Bougainville, PMB 260.
having once become satisfied that no harm is intended them, they come off whenever there is an opportunity.37

Perceptions differed for every place. The Massachusetts on a previous voyage had logged that the Admiralty Islanders ‘do not appear to [be] very savage’.38 The Stafford considered the people of the Woodlarks to be very friendly,39 which accounts for the high proportion of trade that occurred there on shore.

Other striking features of barter developed. Some islanders were deserted by their fellows, ‘with the intention to fetch on board some pigs but they did not return so had the natives on board all night, at day light canoes began to come off but they bought no pigs did not trade with them put out three boarders into one of the canoes’.40 However, when it became clear that they were not allowed on board, islanders did not stay.41 At times elaborate exchanges took place. The surgeon on board the British whaler Coronet reported in 1838, ‘while cruising here every day that we stood in towards land, and several canoes came off to us & the natives bought with them cocoanuts, Yams, Taro, Sugar cane, Arrows, Spears, clubs, shells, Tortoise Shell, nuts, calabashes, and many other articles which they gave for small pieces of iron hoop, balls of cotton, strips of red shirt & such like objects’.42

From the beginning and throughout the trading period coconuts were one of the most important trade items. They provided some variety in the diet of the crew and were also used to feed the pigs that were kept on board.43 Root crops, yams and taro were eagerly asked for and just as vociferously pressed on the whalers. In addition, a wide range of fruits, bananas, plantains, ‘apples’, tropical fruits, ‘almonds’ and watermelons were exchanged at times. Pigs were bought on the beach or paddled out in canoes to the ships to be bartered. Less frequently chickens, sugar-cane and fish were exchanged.44

There was rapid expansion in the making of handicrafts, with the sale of baskets, clubs, spears, bows and arrows, shells and fish hooks. Some of these were used on board but most were traded as a sideline and taken home as ‘curiosities’ to America and Europe. The captain’s wife on board the A. R. Tucker recorded that in addition to food her husband traded for bracelets, beads, spears, bows and arrows, miniature canoes, and other ornaments. He even traded a pig so that she could have a ship-board pet. Some of these were rare goods, and of some value, which suggests that by the 1870s the trading relationships were changing and that a measure of dependence was emerging, with islanders now exchanging goods of indigenous value that were not surpluses such as food. Whalers, however, pre-dominantly traded for diamonds, ivory, tortoise shell and various other goods that were highly valued in the West.45

37 The log of D. Parker Wilson, the surgeon/log-keeper on the British whaler Gypsy, in Whittaker, Documents, 324.
38 Massachusetts, Thur. 8 Nov. 1849, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 813.
39 Stafford, Mon. 8 Sept. 1862, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 957.
40 Palmetto, 6 Mar. 1881 at Lihir, Old Dartmouth Whaling Museum, PMB 250.
41 A. R. Tucker at New Hanover, ‘Daniel traded with them bought some ... bracelets and beads ... and a piece of music made of bamboo, they are very noisy but do not stop round the ship long at a time if they cannot come on deck’ 9 Oct. 1872.
42 Coronet, the British whaler, between Tabar and New Irelend, Feb. 1838, Whaling Museum, Nantucket, PMB 375.
43 Macdonald, Cinderellas, 17.
44 See Gray, ‘From Windfall’, Appendix 2.
inantly traded for subsistence, with little, if any, further economic interest at stake except perhaps for the purchase of tortoiseshell, which could be re-sold for high returns elsewhere, and was a common commodity of exchange.

Different goods were received and traded at different islands. In the Trobriands, it was yams, which were the only edible item given other than coconuts. The Admiralties traded in everything except pigs and fruit. The same was the case for Green Islanders (Nissan), who throughout the 85 years traded in everything from taro to tortoiseshell, but not pigs or fruit. It can only be surmised that either they did not exist there, or they were not considered surplus and were too valuable to trade. Trading in the Woodlarks was almost exclusively in yams, while in tiny Lihir and Tabar virtually every available foodstuff and artifact was traded throughout. Lihir came to the whalers' attention only towards the end of the era. Initially, yams were virtually the only product offered at Tanga but as the instances of contact increased trade items became more diverse. On the other hand at New Hanover, which first experienced the whalers' trade as late as 1870, a very wide range of products was on offer. Feni was infrequently contacted throughout the period and traded in 'potatoes', coconuts, yams, and fruit but not pigs.

On Buka the most traded item was taro, which gradually diversified to include pigs and tortoiseshell. At Bougainville, where there was less trade overall, both taro and tortoiseshell predominated. The Duke of Yorks, because of their central position and friendly reputation, had numerous trading contacts and traded in all items, notably in fowls.

New Britain was largely avoided as a source of trade throughout the period, but what trade did occur happened mainly around Blanche Bay and was in a wide range of products. New Ireland was overwhelmingly the location of the greatest amount of trade and all along its 500 kilometre north and south coasts all items were offered for barter, including coconuts, pigs, fruit, taro, yams, tortoiseshell, trinkets, plantains, pumpkins and even eggs.

Specific items were sought by the whalers only to the south of the Archipelago at the Trobriands. This may have been because of the availability of the goods rather than the whalers' demands. There appears to have been growing diversity in the range of trade, and while there were not so much specific changes in the goods that were traded from different islands, there was an increasing transition in the demands as contact became more regularised. It must also be remembered that what was traded, and from where, had a great deal to do with the ship doing the trading. The Young Hector in 1854 traded throughout the whole Archipelago, but only in yams. Similarly the James Arnold, trading for a number of weeks in 1858 in Bougainville, demanded only taro and tortoiseshell.

On the islanders' side, iron had always been the most sought after item. The crew of the Lusitania in 1829 were dismayed to learn that the coffin of a crew member whom they had recently buried had been exhumed and the nails removed. Hoop iron used in the manufacture of casks was readily available and cheap and proved popular because of its versatility. Its trading value could be

45 Lusitania, 11 Feb. 1829.
enhanced by shaping lengths into crude knives and other implements. Specialised tools like plane irons, axes, knives and files probably had a limited market because they were beyond the reach of most villagers, although ‘big men’ actively sought them.46

Later, as coastal settlements became saturated with these items there emerged a new hierarchy of demands that was generally consistent throughout coastal communities. Even as early as 1829 the Lusitania at the Duke of Yorks logged that iron hoop was no longer marketable and without axes the islanders would scarcely trade.47 By 1858 iron hoop was no longer acceptable at Bougainville and the islanders there would only take axes.48

Unlike in Tuvalu, where there was an explosion in the demand for tobacco,49 in the Bismarcks, where the betel-nut was widely chewed, demand seems to have been relatively tame.50 It was only around the growing European settlement in the Duke of Yorks in the 1870s, and when the amount and intensity of trading had increased, that trade in, and a demand for tobacco developed.

In many other places in the Pacific, sexual encounter both voluntary and enforced was used as a strategy for economic exchange, and through its use islanders exploited European visitors.51 However, in much of the Bismarcks, with the exception of New Ireland and the Trobriands, there were stricter sexual codes and chastity was highly prized, women being valued for their bride price. And while it is possible that women were sometimes used as sexual bait, there was certainly none of the pressing of women on to willing whalers by their menfolk that occurred in Kiribati and Tuvalu or Tahiti.52 In fact the logs mention little contact with women. The only actual recorded instance of prostitution is in the log of the Gypsy, off Cape St Mary in New Ireland where

the third mate (White) ventured ashore (although not deemed altogether safe); he placed himself under the protection of a chief and was introduced to his wife and child and to some other sable damsel with whom he cohabited at the cost of a common clasp knife.53

Beale mentioned that he saw no women except on shore.54 The Avola in 1869 mentioned, ‘the natives came off and bought some yams and ladies’.55 In contrast to other centres of whaling activity such as Ponape or Hawaii, there were few

46 Macdonald, Cinderellas, 18.
47 Lusitania, 11 Feb. 1829, although this must have been confined to the Duke of Yorks.
48 James Arnold, Tue. 14 and 15 Sept. 1858, PMB 260.
49 Macdonald, Cinderellas, 18.
51 See for the experience in the Solomons, Bennett, The Wealth, 29–30, and in Kiribati and Tuvalu, Macdonald, Cinderellas, 19.
52 Macdonald, ibid., 19.
53 Wilson of the Gypsy, in Whittaker, Documents, 325.
54 Beale, The Natural History, 304.
55 Avola, off Cape Mimias New Ireland, 8 and 11 Mar. 1869, PMB 803.
examples of whalers deserting to live with island women.\textsuperscript{56} Other than Wilson’s comments there is little to indicate the likely exchange rates for sex.

It was in the best interests of both parties that harmonious, uninterrupted and continuous trade occurred, but still misunderstandings took place, more particularly, as we have seen, during the early contact period when fear was more prevalent. In 1806 at the Duke of Yorks, the \textit{Eliza} noted, ‘four men and myself went after several canoes requesting they had some fruit but all to no purpose. They ran from us.’ The \textit{Clarice} reported in 1844 that canoes coming off from the Mother and Daughters in New Britain could not be induced to come alongside.\textsuperscript{57} For the islanders, traditional beliefs determined that the ship men were possibly spirits, and therefore any behaviour that did not correlate with these beliefs made them wary. In 1828 the \textit{Lusitania} in Dampier Strait noted, ‘I apprehend that the sight of a ship is a wonder to them and they were preparing for hostilities.’\textsuperscript{58} For the whalers, there was the fear of attack. As the \textit{Clarice} logged in 1844 off the Duke of Yorks, ‘six canoes along side with a few shells the natives will bear watching’.\textsuperscript{59} While off New Ireland the \textit{Gypsy} sent two boats on shore to trade. Each boat had an anchor and warp, two muskets and cartridges. They had orders to anchor off shore and not to venture among the islanders.\textsuperscript{60} Such suspicions were hardly unfounded. Evidently one of the European navies had at some stage obliged the New Irelanders off Cape St George with a show of force, as the log of the \textit{Sun} in 1862 stated: ‘about 2 pm the canoes came off & after they found out we were not a Man of War they came alongside and traded what few things they had which consisted of Bows and Arrows, Coconuts & Yams’.\textsuperscript{61}

Often misunderstanding led to hostilities. For example the logkeeper of the \textit{Coronet} had a fortunate escape at the Tabar islands,

I certainly had a very narrow escape here and if it had not been for … James who was in the boat I think it more than likely some of us would have been speared. One of the crew lit a pipe and began smoking … the natives see this … and those who had spears hurled them at us. I soon saw the cause and told the man to leave off smoking, he did so and threw the pipe overboard.\textsuperscript{62}

Of the islanders of Port Hunter the \textit{Avola} recorded in 1868, ‘came near shooting one today’, and at the same place in 1872, ‘it is rather a long way to go for water

\textsuperscript{56} Though there were already some beachcombers, John Coulter’s account of his 1835 voyage on the trader \textit{Hound} gives lengthy accounts of three: one supposed to have been living in southwest New Guinea, and one each in New Britain and New Ireland (John Coulter, \textit{Adventures ... including a Narrative of Incidents at ... New Ireland, New Britain, New Guinea, and other Islands in the Pacific Ocean} (London 1847), I, 243–8, II, 1–30, 67–98)](information supplied by Clive Moore). Wilson’s log from the British whaler \textit{Gypsy} recorded in 1840 that beachcombers were already living in New Ireland; there was a West Indian living in one village, at another there had been four European residents, and at Gower’s Harbour, near Cape St George, there were 18 deserters from Sydney ships (H.E. Maude, ‘The cruise of the whaler “Gypsy”’, \textit{Journal of Pacific History}, 1 (1966), 193–4).

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Eliza}, Sat. 31 May 1806, PMB 217; \textit{Clarice}, Mon. 22 Apr. 1844, PMB 319.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Lusitania}, Wed. 3 Dec. 1828.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Clarice}, Sat. 20 Apr. 1844, PMB 319.

\textsuperscript{60} Wilson’s log of the \textit{Gypsy}, in \textit{Whittaker, Documents}, 325.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Sun}, Thur. 2 Jan. 1862, Nicholson Whaling Collection, PMB 894.

\textsuperscript{62} Evidence surely that by 1838 there was no knowledge of tobacco on Tabar. See \textit{Coronet}, Feb. 1838.
and we take a gun with us to keep the natives afraid'. In 1833 the Caroline recorded,

near the shore we observed the natives pursuing a man who threw himself into the sea & although hotly pressed succeeded in swimming to our boats who took him on board. His story ran that he and another seaman had been left behind by the vessel they belonged to — about 5 weeks previous — that the natives had murdered his comrade & seeing our boats he had made a desperate effort to escape. A few days afterwards I took two boats into St Mary's bay to trade with the natives ... we had commenced to barter when a gang of naked women came to the beach and by lascivious actions invited us onshore ... The story continued that the islanders had seized the boats and tried to drag the whalers in, but the boats escaped and the islanders fired arrows. This episode was less serious than the violent confrontation between the Lady Rowena and islanders of New Britain, also in 1833. The ensuing inquiry by the governor of New South Wales concluded that the captain, Russel, had meted out unjustifiable and harsh punishment. According to the ship's cooper the boats of the Lady Rowena had gone on shore to trade and 'were met by two large canoes and several small ones and previous to any warlike aggression on the part of the natives [although this was disputed by the mate] the boats fired on the canoes by which several of the natives were killed'. A chief was shot in a canoe by Captain Russel, another of the islanders picked up and landed on a different island. Another example of direct conflict occurred on Tanga in 1859. The mate of the Young Hector was sent ashore 'to trade there for yams, the natives arose up against him & he was forced to fire into them & then come off although one was wounded supposedly severly'.

What emerges is that there was little pattern in these isolated incidents, and if in fact they are all accurate, some major re-thinking about the perceptions of the plundering nature of whaling crews, the savagery of the islanders and the frequency of violence must be undertaken. Violence was a feature of less than 1.1% of the contacts between whalers and islanders. In more than 360 contacts in the Bismarcks there were only four recorded examples. Violence was obviously not the norm and places that were supposedly reputed for it also carried out significant trade. Considering the overall levels of contact there were in reality very few cases of theft, deception or violence. Trading contacts between islanders and whalers in the Bismarcks were overwhelmingly peaceful and co-operative. Both sides realised the interests they had in making sure that trading continued in an orderly way.

The working relationship between islanders and whalers functioned with few incidents because the whalers did not interfere in island life, and only then

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65 Letter from General Bourke, Governor of New South Wales, to HMS Tinogene, Sydney, 5 July 1833, MS Papers 910, Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library.
66 Deposition of Ed Gillets, Cooper of lady Rowena, MS Papers, 910, ibid.
68 Only one case of theft was discovered; when the Lusitania was in the St George's Channel an islander was detected in the process of stealing a boat knife. See the Lusitania, Mon. 2 Mar. 1829.
if there was a probability of one of the crew being in danger. The whalers’ needs were few and limited to food, wood and water, and there was seldom, if ever, a need to venture much further than the beach. For most of the period, both groups only offered their surpluses for barter and only those commodities that were dispensable. To the whalers, the goods they offered had little value because iron hoop was in abundant supply on board their ships, and nails and bottles were inexpensive. Axes were a little more expensive, but were not of great quality. The same was true for the islanders of the Bismarcks. There were often surpluses of goods such as taro, yams and other vegetables. Furthermore, they did not prize tortoiseshell highly and it was traded liberally from Buka and Bougainville. Both sides sold goods which they perceived as having limited value and bought goods which they perceived to have high value. Nevertheless, the degree of dependence was greater for the whalers because fresh food and water were essential for them. The islanders in the initial phase of the whaling era remained relatively independent economically.

The impact of the contact and trade between islanders and whalers is vastly more difficult to assess. Inevitably, contact was patchy, so that, while some areas were receiving regular European visitors and establishing patterns of trade, others not far away had no direct contact. Some islands in this initial stage, such as parts of New Britain, Tabar, Lihir and Tanga, remained oblivious of the new iron age that was emerging amongst their close neighbours. Certainly inland tribes were untroubled by it, as were some coastal dwellers who were bypassed by the whalers.

The physical features of the Archipelago were major factors in determining the spread and intensity of impact. Safe anchorages and abundant supplies were the whalers’ primary determinants. Moreover, indigenous politics and networks of relations would have been significant in blocking the diffusion of Europeans’ material and social culture. It seems that in these years differences in affluence between groups were increasing and bush dwellers often languished while their salt water neighbours exploited their geographical advantage. It is probable that after mid-century many societies in coastal areas became saturated with iron while those in the bush did not own even a single axe; or that while inland dwellers were hunting with spears and arrows, coastal dwellers warred with firearms. It would have been in the interests of coastal dwellers to try to prevent the supply of iron reaching others in order to maintain the favourable imbalance.

For the islanders of the Bismarck Archipelago, the main significance of the whalers lay in the arrival of new technology in the form of iron. Iron’s impact on other Melanesian cultures has been extensively documented by Judith Bennett, while anthropologists R.F. Salisbury and A.L. Epstein have carried out in-depth studies of specific tribes within the Bismarcks. However, so far there has not been any

70 Ibid., 43.
71 Moreover, in places where the process was observed, a person in a coastal community who had any iron to spare would sell it to a distant place because there the price was highest, maximising the economic advantage. Pers. comm, H. Nelson.
synthesis of the full impact of iron in the Archipelago, therefore the tentative
cclusions drawn here are necessarily analogous, brief and deserving of intense
study in themselves. Throug knowledge of iron was probably confined to some coastal areas before
the arrival of the whalers, once relatively constant supplies could be procured the
impact on islanders was huge. Inter-tribal warfare increased markedly, as did
intra-tribal ritual in response to a sense of disorientation in the period of growing
contact. When whalers had regular or even sparse contact with a single tribe, this
was regarded with overt jealousy by its neighbours. In 1828 the Lusitania reported
the envy that was aroused in a village where they had frequent contact in the St
George’s Channel:

[The habitations had been surprised by their enemies from Mantelect and every
woman and child murdered and that they were the miserable remnant of the men who
were left after the battle ... the plantation was laid waste, the houses destroyed and the
ground thickly strewn with skulls and bones.]

A further example was observed on the American brig Margaret Oakley in 1835 when
it was approached by a friendly canoe in the Admiralty Islands. Other islanders
from a different community arrived almost immediately in several other canoes,
chased the friendly one towards the land and killed the friendly islanders, despite
being fired at by the ship. Later, in 1881, a pearling schooner, Ariel from New
South Wales, attracted the attention of two Matankor canoes and two Usiai canoes
in the Greater Admiralty. After all four canoes had traded with the vessel the
Matankor killed and then robbed the occupants of one of the Usiai canoes. It seems
the presence of a foreign vessel with its precious metal goods encouraged some
islanders to ignore another community’s boundaries in the expectation of trade.

As a consequence of the introduction of iron, power structures were altered as
wider and wider alliances were sought for mutual protection and combined assault.
In such volatile and changing times, new enemies were made in the competition for
tortoiseshell and other items that could be traded, and old allies and trading
partners were rendered redundant when their stone and shell products lost their
exchange value in the new economy. As islands were drawn into a wider
economic network some groups suffered materially. Islanders could not escape
far-reaching alterations from without and within to the existing dynamic balance of
their societies. For example, iron was sought because it had distinct economic
advantages over stone and shell. It saved the enormous time and energy required
to make stone tools; it had huge significance in time saved in felling trees to make
gardens, building canoes and houses, and for fishing and warfare. Iron led to the
replacement of all stone tools, and there was a greater velocity in the circulation of
valuables. The effect of its introduction was to pull together large groupings to

73 See F.X. Hezel, ‘New directions in Pacific history; a practitioner’s critical view’, Pacific Studies, 11, 3 (July 1988),
107.
74 For more detail see Gray, ‘From Windfall’, ch. 3.
75 Lusitania, 13 Nov. 1828.
77 Bennett, The Wealth, 36.
participate in ceremonial exchanges, and to increase the power of the big men. There was probably a great increase in ceremony and war. These activities were not new, but new commodities were used in them, while the amount of time spent on them and the volume of goods handed over increased enormously. One of the consequences was to throw out of balance the traditional system of giving and receiving wives, because the newly rich groups took more women in marriage.

In the absence of historical or anthropological works dealing specifically with the issue, the exact inflationary pattern that the Archipelago experienced can only be surmised, but it would be safe to assert that a complex pattern of diffusion working simultaneously from the epicentres of contact up and down the coasts was in progress, and at the same time probably slower and more irregular diffusion working inland from coastal contact sites, gradually affecting the prices and values of commodities, inflation rates, and related social institutions such as marriage.\(^78\)

In addition, the diseases that the whalers brought almost certainly introduced some disequilibrium to the societies of the Archipelago.\(^79\) American whalers in the region carried pleurisy, and 'cholic'.\(^80\) The *Active* in 1853 had '8 men sick but getting better', and the *Young Hector* in 1854 had 'men off duty sick'.\(^81\) The *Palmetto* logged in November 1882, 'Boatsteerer Dick is sick off duty with some kind of fever', and a few days later reported, 'crew very sick'.\(^82\) The crew of the *Lusitania* in December 1828 had 'bad illness on board' and by 1829 it was so bad that it precipitated the ship's early return to Britain.

Disease took its toll of islanders as well. In 1854 off Buka the *Miantonomi* recorded that a Rarotongan crew member, Bill, had smallpox very badly and he died on 3 November. Worse followed when six other crew men had caught it. By mid-November 10 were off duty with smallpox and two had 'something else'. The ship managed to limp as far as Ponape in the Carolines, but because so many of the crew were sick the three boats could not tow her through into the harbour and she drifted onto the reef and was wrecked. In the next miserable and mutinous weeks the ship's remains were plundered by crew and islanders alike. Ponape became the last resting place for many more of the crew through smallpox before the remnants were finally picked up.\(^83\)

Venereal diseases frequently accompanied whalers around the Pacific. The crew of the *Superior* were thoroughly infected on its voyage in 1860.\(^84\) The *Arnolda* carried

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\(^79\) Bennett, ibid., 38.

\(^80\) Alfred, Tue. 5 Sept. 1848, Kendall Whaling Museum, PMB 801; pleurisy of course is not infectious. The captain of the *Palmetto* was 'taken very sick again with the cholic'. Sun. 26 Nov. 1882, PMB 250.

\(^81\) *Active*, Sat. 2 Apr. 1853, Nicholson Whaling Collection, PMB 571. *Young Hector*, 1 May, and 12 May 1854, PMB 819.

\(^82\) *Palmetto*, 19 Nov. and 26 Nov. 1882, PMB 250.

\(^83\) See the *Miantonomi* from Mon. 22 Oct. 1854 until its wreck and rescue months later at Ponape. It is not recorded if the *Miantonomi* spread the disease amongst the islanders. Both D. Hanlon in *Upon a Stone Altar* (Honolulu 1988) and F.X. Hezel in *The First Taint of Civilization* (Honolulu 1983) seem to have missed this calamitous event. They do, however, record that the *Delta* of New York spread smallpox to Ponape in that same year.

it in 1874, and the Lion recorded off Green Island in 1856, 'at 3pm Sylvia the Spaniard died from the effects of venereal of long standing'. But the impact on islanders of the Bismarcks was limited because of prevailing sexual ethics, and endemic yaws which seems to have resulted in immunity to syphilis.

Islanders of the Archipelago were rarely, if ever, recruited to work on whaling ships, as they were to be later in the century as indentured labour on plantations, and were therefore not a factor in the spread of diseases as happened in the Solomons, or the Loyalties, where there was increased islander mobility. In the logs of the whalers there is no mention of any epidemics such as influenza or dysentery. In fact the only comment that could be found on islanders' health or appearance was in the log of the Lusitania, which stated that 'among the tribe [of the Duke of Yorks] it was impossible to pick out a good looking man, their teeth were horribly discoloured with the chewing of chewaw having astonishingly large mouths'. There is no mention of diseases such as measles, mumps, or chicken-pox, yet it is likely that whaling contacts exposed islanders to new exotic and epidemic diseases which aggravated those already present and resulted in the decline of general health.

As well as iron and various ailments, the whalers brought ideas, and these were of some significance. The ideas of other Pacific islanders were introduced, as well as those of the Europeans, and growing perceptions of the islands in the context of the Pacific developed. This gave islanders the opportunity to form more realistic images of Westerners. Their views of Europeans altered as contact increased and as the influence of the few castaways and deserters spread. As the era continued Europeans ceased to be seen as returning ghosts, or their goods perceived as having spiritual qualities. Nevertheless, as only some whalers carried women and families, islanders' perceptions of Europeans in the initial period remained relatively unbalanced.

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85 Arnolda, Tue. 17 Feb. 1874, 'Anton Andrew sick (venereal)', PMB 721. Lion, Tue. 9 Sept. 1856, Old Dartmouth Whaling Museum, PMB 875.
86 Howe, The Loyalty Islands, 148; but this is a point that is questioned by D. Stannard in Before the Horror (Honolulu 1989), 75–7.
88 Chewaw is a betel nut; see the log of Lusitania, Tue. 30 Dec. 1828.
89 E.g. Marquesans were aboard the Lusitania in 1828. See Lusitania, 13 Nov. 1828.
90 The impact of deserters from whaling ships in the Bismarcks was limited. Other than the small settlement in Gower's Harbour cited by Maude in 'The cruise of the whaler Gypsy', there were few cases of deserting. The only cases of whalers deserting were: at Gower's Harbour in 1844 when three men ran from the Clarice (Clarice, 14 and 15 Apr. 1844, PMB 319); in 1854 at Gower's Harbour, six of the crew of the Young Hector deserted, only five returned and the ship sailed on regardless. Young Hector, 17 Oct. 1854, PMB 819). The captain of the Lusitania even deliberately left troublesome crew on shore. 'One of our Marquesian men ... who has not been able to attend the working of the ship on account of his health ... In order to induce him to shake off his lethargy and to take exercise, the blood appearing to have stagnated in his legs, the captain had frequently threatened to put him on shore among the savages ... Accordingly on the Sunday by command of the captain he with his chest was put on the land and left to himself. In my opinion it was a most shameful trick ... They left him there but during the night 2 of his countrymen left the ship & swam to where he'd been left ... That morning another man ran away from the watering party followed the others ... It was supposed that the deserters would make for the nearest village so the captain & 2nd mate went to the village of King Deet.' The deserters came back the next day having gone 76 hours without food. See Lusitania, 13 Nov. 1828.
It was not until the 1870s that the first missionaries established themselves, and not until later did any of their ideas have any impact. Deserters and castaways from whaling ships were only marginally more successful than the missionaries in establishing themselves, but their cultural impact, beyond their goods and mechanical skills, was slight and hardly such as Wilson in the *Gypsy* lamented in 1840: "such worthless & reckless characters ... are the first to reconcile the dark savage to hold a friendly intercourse with the white ... and eventually it paves the way to this civilisation. But then what fatal habits they introduce among them." This may have been the case at Guam or Ponape, Papeete or the Bay of Islands but not on the rugged coasts of the Bismarck Archipelago.

Many studies of culture contacts in the Pacific assert that the introduction of firearms into existing indigenous hostilities resulted in unprecedented mortality. There was probably an increase in the frequency of conflict, but this did not necessarily mean that there was a correlating increase in deaths. Indigenous methods of warfare persisted and, in fact, pre-European weapons would initially have been of far greater value than the guns that were being introduced. In the Bismarcks, however, the possession of muskets provided definite psychological value. Wilson on the *Gypsy* noted that as early as 1840 'Several of the natives ashore were observed parading the beach with a musket thrown over their shoulder.' This is a very early instance of the possession of firearms by islanders in western Melanesia. What is clear, however, is that they almost certainly did not come from whalers. There are no recorded examples throughout the 85 years of contact of any bartering involving muskets. While there were a number of firearms in the Archipelago during the whaling era, the dealing in arms came later and more accurately belongs to the trading era.

One final way that the whalers affected islanders, and later traders, was by providing networks of contact and trade and establishing the patterns that were to hold good for many years to come. So later in the 1870s, when those in search of profits arrived in the Bismarcks, there were some places that were known to be safe to set up trading stations and much of the ground work in the relations between the two sides had been done. The trading patterns, behaviour and relationships that were established during this early phase paved the way for later relations between islanders and other Europeans. Hernsheim and Co., for example, initially set up in the Duke of Yorks.

From the arrival of the whalers, regularised trade became an accepted part of life for coastal societies. In the early years there was no deliberate intention on the part of the Europeans to bring technological, economic and social changes to the Archipelago. As Bennett noted for the Solomons, with the exception of the missionaries it is doubtful whether the Europeans wanted to change islanders in any

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91 *Gypsy*, in Whittaker, *Documents*, 325.
92 Howe, *The Loyalty Islands*, 134.
93 See D. Shineberg, 'Guns and men in Melanesia', *Journal of Pacific History*, 6 (1971), 61; and, O.H.K. Spate, Paradise *Found and Lost* (Canberra 1988), 232. Spate noted that trade muskets were the cast offs from armies and were extremely unreliable.
94 The log of the *Gypsy*, in Whittaker, *Documents*, 325.
TRADING CONTACTS IN THE BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO

Of course this changed with increased missionary activity and the arrival of traders in the 1870s and 1880s. But iron tools, utensils and fish hooks made traditional occupations less demanding and allowed more time for the manufacture of articles for trade, and other traditional activities, as well as to collect shell, coconut oil and later copra. For some, like the Tolai of New Britain, commerce offered a means to expand the limited technology that was provided by their environment and their knowledge. Through trading links the impact of the new iron age spread to communities that had not had direct contact with the whalers. There was a slow but growing dependence on the wider European economy as iron, once a luxury for some coastal dwellers, became increasingly vital to sustain the new way of life the islanders were choosing.

Therefore even in the face of alienation, disease, technological, economic and social change, the islanders rarely refused to trade with visiting ships. They held the upper hand because the whalers’ lives depended on their sources of food and water. Although the islanders of the Bismarcks clearly wanted iron, their growing dependence on it was never such that they gave up their power of choice to the foreigners. A relationship emerged based upon mutual advantage: an economic symbiosis, with just as much manipulation, exploitation and choice on both sides.

One of the problems in assessing the impact of the trading contacts between islanders and whalers is the difficulty of quantifying it, given the quality of the sources. The logs of the whalers as historical documents may be of enormous value in exploding some misconceptions about the extent and nature of trading contacts, but when it comes to assessing the impact of those contacts their value is limited. With the exception of Wilson and Beale, the whalers were not seeking to document the consequences of their actions. Another problem is that by the time the last whalers were plying the waters of the Archipelago they were no longer alone. After 1875, they were part of a more pervading general trend of European contact, and the significance of the whalers in this diverse context is difficult to distinguish from that of the other European influences and even more difficult to quantify, as some of the consequences of their trading would not have become apparent until decades later. Whalers were not alone in seeking to replenish supplies of vegetables and trade trinkets to take home to America. Traders were beginning to barter for coconuts and coconut oil, missionaries were seeking to diffuse their version of an ideal moral code, and labour recruiters wishing to fill their ships for New Britain, Samoa or perhaps Queensland had arrived. Moreover, the remnants of the New France scheme of the Marquis de Rays limped to New Britain in 1880-81. While only a handful of survivors remained in the Archipelago, they were for a time

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96 Bennett, The Wealth, 44.
97 Ibid., 45-4.
98 There had been a limited amount of private and irregular trade throughout the whaling era. For fuller coverage of the traders, Godaffroy’s, Hernsheim, Farrell and Forsyth and their impact in the Bismarcks, see Gray, ‘From Windfall’, ch. 4; Bennett, The Wealth, 45-6; P. Biskup, The New Guinea Memoirs of Jean Baptiste Octave Mouton (Canberra 1974) 5; P. Sack, Edward Hernsheim, 204; Epstein, Matupit, 16; Salisbury, Vunamami, 19; Firth, New Guinea Under the Germans, 127.
99 In Sept. 1875, the Wesleyan Methodist missionary George Brown arrived with eight Fijian teachers and made his headquarters at Port Hunter in the Duke of Yorks.
a visible force. Another presence was the British navy, which had established its Australia Station in 1857 and throughout the 1870s and early 1880s was in the Archipelago checking disputes involving British subjects.

For the islanders, these were the new influences that emerged in the Archipelago during the 1870s and 1880s, and in contrast to the irregular effects of the whalers their combined impact was a great deal more general and tangible. From 1875 on, there was land dispossession, extensive trading and commercial dealing. And in this time of sustained and regular contact there were far-reaching consequences for island tribal life — changes from traditional trading patterns and networks to new demands, new economic priorities, changes in agriculture practices, and cultural life. The cumulative effects of land alienation, recruiting and the accumulation of power with big men led to a marked increase in the amount and intensity of cross-cultural, inter- and intra-tribal rivalry, tension, violence and death.

Where previously contact had been restricted to two sides, where both knew what the other wanted, and when it happened at sea, there was little chance for misunderstanding. With the arrival of the new groups, expectations raised by previous contact with whalers were disappointed and changed, and this was a source of immense dissatisfaction. One of the main results of the sustained contact between resident Europeans and coastal dwellers of the Archipelago was a marked increase in violence. From isolated incidents in the time of the explorers and the whalers, it reached its most intense period with the ‘Six Day War’ between Talili and George Brown, which changed the balance of forces between Europeans and islanders of New Britain and surrounding areas, and the Mioko Massacre of 1881.

It was the inability or the negligence of European governments to regulate the relationships between their subjects and the islanders that was the most disruptive feature. The coastal and island people of the Archipelago came into sustained contact with a variety of semi-permanent Europeans who were out of range of any effective control. Most of the violence was centred on the area of most

100 For the New France scheme of the Marquis de Rays, see Biskup, The New Guinea Memoirs; Records of the Royal Navy Australia Station, Pacific Islands 1879–81, Vol. 3, PRO; Sydney Morning Herald, 24 Mar. 1881; and J.H. Niau, The Phantom Paradise (Sydney 1936).


103 Individual ‘big men’ were able to increase their power by selling land on behalf of the tribe, cultivating support from one mission or other, and forming inter-district alliances. See Hempenstall, Pacific Islanders, 15. For the many murders of traders in the early 1880s, see Sack, Eduard Hernshein, 69; King, ‘The End of an Era’, 61; Hempenstall, Pacific Islanders, 122; Bennett, The Wealth, 57; Records of the Royal Navy Australia Station, Pacific Islands 1857–84, Vols. 1–4, PRO; Gray, ‘From Windfall’, ch. 4; and Whittaker, Documents, 410.

European activity around the St George’s Channel, and what had been short-term conflict in isolated encounters became prolonged racial tension, and acts of sustained hostility and retaliation that involved virtually the whole European population and large numbers of islanders.105

The Bismarck Archipelago was annexed by Germany in November 1884, ironically the same year as the last American whaler, the Belvedere, hunted the coasts of the islands of the Bismarcks for sperm whales. The belated colonial adventure of New Guinea provided for Germany an area of huge diversity, in the midst of a complex transition taking place at many different levels around its coasts. And although they probably did not realise why, in their relations with islanders they met two general categories: islanders that had experienced substantial previous contact, and those, generally inland dwellers, who had not. What they were not to know, and what the traders were in the process of finding out, was that islanders in the Bismarcks behaved differently and had different demands if they had known Europeans in the past. Either way, the determining feature was the whalers. What had begun with the whalers at the turn of the 19th century with the simple barter of surpluses across the beach or handed tentatively down to waiting canoes had in a mere 90 years been transformed into trading in people, land and souls.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on my Honours thesis, ‘From Windfall to Copra: Trading Contacts in the Bismarck Archipelago 1799–1884’, completed at the University of Otago in 1989. Though the main focus is upon the Bismarck Archipelago, some reference is made to nearby groups.

ABSTRACT

Judicious use of whaling logs provides rich insight into the history of the Bismarck Archipelago. During the whaling era 1799–1884 there were three whaling grounds and four common anchorages in the region, which had a profound impact on the nature of contact and trade with islanders. Trading contact was predominantly at sea. The logs provide details of exact items traded, whalers for subsistence, islanders for iron. Only surpluses were exchanged. Contact was overwhelmingly friendly. Because whalers’ needs were few they rarely ventured further than the beach. They brought some disease, and new ideas, but had no deliberate intention of altering Islanders’ way of life. A pattern of mutual advantage and economic symbiosis emerged. The logs say much of the contact but little of the impact. The islanders remained economically independent. A complex pattern of diffusion occurred working inland from coastal contact sites, affecting prices, values and inflation. The spread of iron came from epicentres of trade and intra-island relations were forever altered.

105 See Whittaker, Documents, 409.