

Any conclusions reached from such a brief investigation must be offered cautiously. Two points were clear, however. First, over half the items in the James listing (forty-two of seventy-three) were represented in library collections by only one or two copies; most libraries had some unique holdings. Second, each collection was likely to hold unrecorded items (the Grey Collection for instance had ten not listed in James). It was also significant, both for institutions wanting to assess their own collections, and for researchers, that the holdings of several major collections could not be ascertained.

Some island groups, it is true, have excellent bibliographical coverage of their publications, but the example of the Cook Islands is not so atypical that it cannot lead to wider conclusions. The strongest collections of publications in the languages of the Pacific are held in research libraries located on the fringes of the region. Within these libraries the collections are so briefly identified and described that the published finding aids cannot be relied upon as a true indication of holdings. The existing bibliographic tools and supporting literature are likely to have been published in small print runs and are frequently expensive or scarce. Although they may meet the needs of people who have access to copies held in research libraries, they are difficult to acquire. Several large scale works have been in preparation or close to publication for years.⁷ Of the ten or so mentioned by H. E. Maude in 1971 only three appear to have been published since then.⁸ There is an obvious need to assist the publication of bibliographies of the region. In particular, even basic draft listings of the known publications in Pacific Island languages or the holdings of individual libraries would be of great value. Very little has been written about the printing history and spread of literacy in the Pacific, apart from Lingenfelter's *Presses of the Pacific Islands, 1817-1867*⁹ and the inclusion of press histories in some bibliographies. *ABHB*, the Annual Bibliography of the History of the Book, has had only one entry for the entire region in the past fifteen years.

Apart from the usual forms of historical and linguistic research which these collections sustain, the 'laboratory' of the Pacific is being used in the increasingly popular fields of the history of the book and literacy, and the changes from oral to book-based methods in the transmission of knowledge. Bernard Smith, among others, has shown how important the images of the Pacific were in shaping the Western mind's perception of people and place. Conversely, missionaries are said to have found illustrations essential for conveying the concepts of the Bible.¹⁰ There has been little examination of the rising impact of radio, pirated TV and video and their adoption as a means of communication. Neil Postman laments the decline of the age of typography in twentieth century Western life. He speaks of the clashes of resonances, such as the continuing importance of oral testimony in our courts of law, even