

White on Black: Writings on Oceania

**A Monograph and Translation Series
of
Pioneer Texts
in
Manuscripts, Rare Journals, Pamphlets
and
Languages other than English**

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General Introduction

Choosing now, as we do, the title **White on Black** for our monograph series provides an obvious association with colonial and global contexts. However, it is not our intention to assemble texts of critical assessment of these processes and thus contribute to a huge, already existing body of literature. Rather, we want to present writings from some early periods that helped shape the modern scene of the southwestern Pacific region, with as good and as solid a contextualization as we possibly could give: our quest is an historical one, with the aim to reveal some essentials of their *Zeitgeist*. By covering 'scenes' from this point of view, the collection envisages documents of agencies that had an impact on Melanesian and Australian aboriginal culture and religious life - often with singular intentions but complex means to achieve their goals. It is with these thoughts in mind that we present some western views of the Other.

Our selection of texts meets some mundane 'motives' as well. We aim to make writings available that otherwise may be difficult to access: location is one aspect (in this context one could reflect on the politics of controlling knowledge); the tongue of writing is the other, pointing to our shrinking interest in taking up language studies that do not focus on the projected specialization of the day, which proves that choices are often been made too early in life. The collections we propose will include texts (often in handwriting) from archival holdings; pamphlets, usually published in limited numbers only and now difficult to trace; 'discussion' and 'working' papers, usually mimeographed and distributed only in small circles, and one had to be part of the scene or knowing someone who could and would pass on a copy; and publications that are (physically) difficult to come by despite all digitalizing efforts of IT.

Much of the materials have had to be translated into English (the most widely accessible language of our days) and/or given a stringent editing. In either case the texts are given the respect as documents of their time. This seems to be a relevant point to make since the series deals the mind-sets of those who encountered the indigenous people in the past and present views of "whites on blacks" that tell us about their perceptions and could reflect either religious or cultural 'superiority,' paternalism or racism. As social scientists we certainly appreciate and scrutinize the data they provide us with as early 'eye-witnesses' and take in, where appropriate, critical voices aired over decades since by scholars. But at the same time we leave the field open to an emergent critical appraisal of southwest Pacific people of writings of their past by some Westerners. After all, sources of contact history should be shared.

The Editors