

Exploration of the South Seas in the Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century was a period of great exploration and discovery, with numerous expeditions setting sail to uncover the secrets of the world. One of the most fascinating areas that captivated the imaginations of explorers and adventurers alike was the vast expanse of the South Seas.

The South Seas, also known as the Pacific Ocean, presented a challenging and alluring destination for explorers, as it was largely uncharted territory at the time. The allure of discovering new lands, cultures, and resources drove many men to embark on perilous journeys, enduring treacherous conditions and facing the unknown.

One of the most renowned voyages to the South Seas was led by Captain James Cook, a British explorer who embarked on three separate expeditions between 1768 and 1779. Cook's expeditions revolutionized our understanding of the Pacific region and contributed significantly to the exploration of the South Seas.



Exploration of the South Seas in the Eighteenth Century: Rediscovered Accounts, Volume I: Samuel Wallis's Voyage Round the World in the Dolphin 1766-1768 by Paul Watson(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Captain James Cook's First Voyage

Cook's first expedition to the South Seas began in 1768, as he set sail on the HMS Endeavour. His primary objective was to observe the transit of Venus across the Sun, which would allow for more accurate measurements of longitude. However, this voyage also had a secondary mission - to explore and chart the unknown regions of the South Seas.

The voyage took Cook and his crew into the Great Barrier Reef, where the Endeavour was significantly damaged. Despite this setback, Cook managed to repair the ship and continued on his exploration, eventually arriving in New Zealand. He then ventured further west, charting the eastern coast of Australia, becoming the first European to do so.

The Second and Third Expeditions

Cook's second expedition, which took place between 1772 and 1775, saw him cross the Antarctic Circle and navigate around Antarctica. This expedition greatly contributed to our understanding of the South Pacific and the extent of the Southern Ocean.

During his third and final expedition, Cook attempted to find the Northwest Passage, a rumored sea route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Although he did not succeed in finding the passage, he explored the Pacific coasts of North America and made several significant discoveries, including the Hawaiian Islands.

Contributions and Legacy

Cook's explorations of the South Seas had a profound impact on the understanding of the world at the time. His meticulous mapping and charting of previously unknown territories enabled future explorers and traders to navigate more accurately.

In addition to mapping, Cook's expeditions also provided valuable insight into the cultures and peoples of the South Seas. His interactions with indigenous groups allowed for cultural exchanges and opened the door for future scientific and anthropological studies.

The South Seas became the focus of numerous subsequent voyages, as explorers sought to build upon Cook's insights and expand their knowledge of the region. These expeditions played a crucial role in shaping the colonial history and trade routes of the Pacific region.

The Romance of South Seas Exploration

The exploration of the South Seas in the eighteenth century holds a special place in history. The allure of distant lands, exotic cultures, and the possibility of finding undiscovered treasures continues to captivate our imagination.

With the advent of modern technology and satellite imagery, much of the South Seas has been explored and mapped. However, the spirit of adventure and the legacy of those early explorations live on.

Today, we can stand in awe of the bravery and determination of those who sailed into the unknown, navigating treacherous waters and risking their lives for the sake of discovery. The exploration of the South Seas in the eighteenth century remains a testament to the human desire to expand our horizons and uncover the mysteries of the world.



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The publication of key voyaging manuscripts has contributed to the flourishing of enduring and prolific worldwide scholarship across numerous fields. These navigators and their texts were instrumental in spurring on further exploration, annexation and ultimately colonisation of the pacific territories in the space of only a few decades. This series will present new sources and primary texts in English, paving the way for postcolonial critical approaches in which the reporting, writing, rewriting and translating of Empire and the ‘Other’ takes precedence over the safeguarding of master narratives. Each of the volumes contains an that sets out the context in which these voyages took place and extensive annotations clarify and explain the original texts.

The first volume makes available Samuel Wallis’ logs of the Dolphin’s voyage 1766-68 in their original form for the first time. Captain Samuel Wallis was the first Englishman to come across the Tuamotus and the Society Isles in the South Pacific, specifically Tahiti. His writings predate the available textual sources by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, the logs of the Spanish voyages and James Cook — whose text Wallis’ prefigures. The three logs attest to the very first encounter between Europeans and Tahitians, but until now comparatively little research has

been conducted on the more elaborate second volume and none on the first. The Polynesian archipelagos grew into objects of discourse over the years and Wallis' logs may very well be located at the heart of these evocative constructs.



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