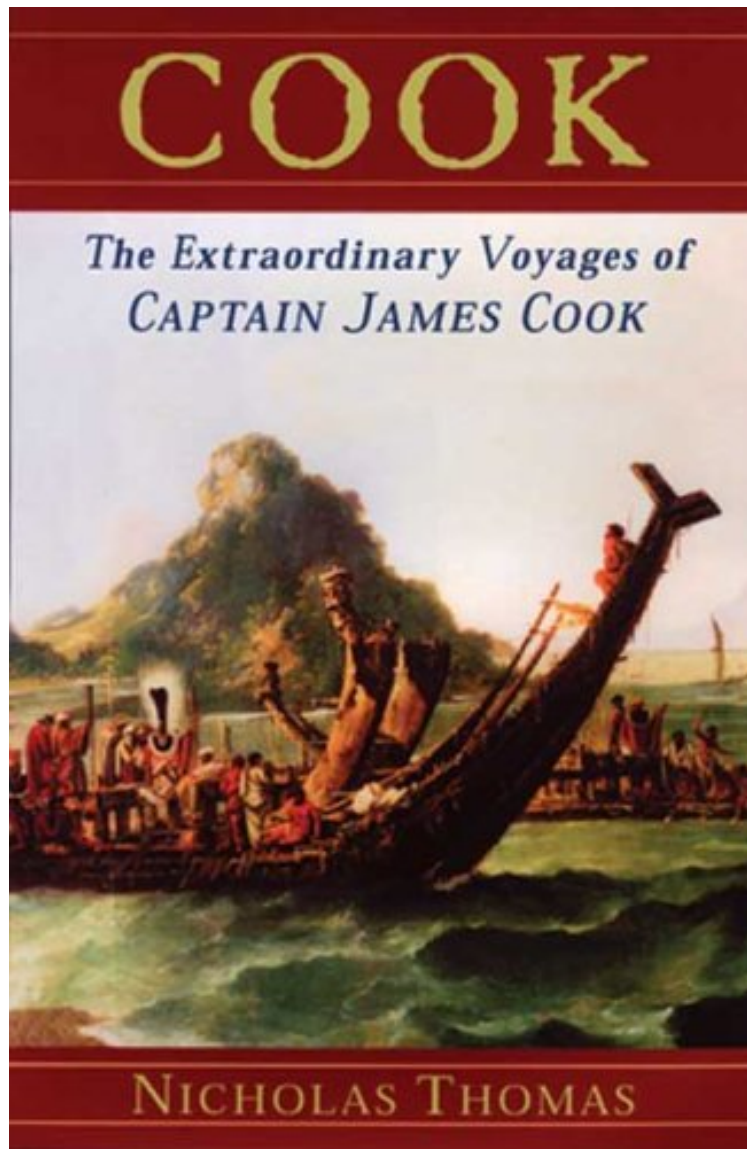


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Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook

Nicholas Thomas

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Nicholas Thomas : Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook:

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. The Arrogance of HindsightBy Corn SoupThis is an anthropologically informed history of James Cook's three voyages to the Pacific. If you are looking for a biography of James Cook, a general history of Cook's voyages, or a maritime history, this book is not for you. The anthropological

approach seems perfectly suited to these voyages since they included a number of first contacts between Polynesian and European civilization. In some cases, especially in his discussion of the artwork and the scientific approaches of 18th century Europeans in confronting Polynesia, Thomas is engaging. However.... As some other reviewers have noted, there is an air of anachronistic academic disdain that permeates the narrative and distracts the reader from engaging the subject. I'm not quite sure what Thomas's point is in much of the contempt he has for his subject. For example, he will deride Cook et al. for misinterpreting a certain aspect of Polynesian society, and tisk at the ignorance and cultural insensitivity that supposedly malinformed this misinterpretation. After all this, you'd think he'd supply better interpretations, right? Well, sometimes yes, with all the arrogance that 250 years of hindsight will buck you up with. Yet strangely, quite a bit of this book is devoted to his own guesses and speculating about Polynesian society. Perhaps these guesses are informed by that 250 extra years of scholarship, but they are often poorly argued and unconvincing. Read a more standard history of Cook before you read this, and then be prepared to wade through quite a bit of the ideological sludge that sullies some interesting material.

3 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An extraordinary tale of a great explorer
By Richard Sawyer
This is a highly absorbing account of the three voyages of Captain Cook. The author has done a very commendable job of describing all the people, places, and cultures that Cook and his crew encountered. His descriptions of the populations indigenous to the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific Northwest, etc., and of the geography of these places are well researched and fascinating. The interplay of cultures between the British explorers and those they encountered is emphasized with great effect. The personalities and motivations of the key figures, including Cook, are brought to life as well. The account of the voyages reads like an adventure story, while simultaneously being based on very solid research. Included are a number of excellent maps and a large number of excellent illustrations, primarily of paintings and sketches done by artists who accompanied Cook. Very highly recommended.

15 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Excellent account marred by a few lapses in style
By W. Gross
I am not sure that the reviewers who complained about the "political correctness" of this title actually read the same book that I did. Nicholas Thomas presents an interesting, thoroughly researched, and balanced account of Cook's three voyages. Rather than depicting Cook as a malicious abuser of native societies, I was surprised to find that Cook was remarkably understanding, for his time, of cultural differences. The account of Cook's death in Hawaii (I trust I am not giving anything away), which to some extent was provoked by an unfortunate coincidence having to do with the native religion, was particularly fascinating. My one quibble with the book, for which I deduct "one star", is with the style: first person asides, gratuitous use of the "F-word", and a sprinkling of contractions (e.g., "I'm", "they're"--this is a book, for heaven's sake, not a post-it note!). It is too bad that an otherwise excellent and scholarly work was marred by inelegant language.

Commonly regarded as the greatest sea explorer of all time, James Cook made his three world-changing voyages during the 1770s, at a time when ships were routinely lost around the English coast. He made history by making geography-- sailing through previously unknown southern seas, charting the eastern Australian coast and circumnavigating New Zealand, putting many Pacific islands on the map, and exploring both the Arctic and Antarctic. His men suffered near shipwreck, were ravaged by tropical diseases, and survived frozen oceans; his lieutenants-- including George Vancouver and William Bligh-- became celebrated captains in their own right. Exploits among native peoples combined to make Cook a celebrity and a legend. Cook is not, however, viewed by all as a heroic figure. Some Hawaiians demonize him as a syphilitic racist who had a catastrophic effect on local health. Indigenous Australians often see him as the violent dispossessor of their lands. Nicholas Thomas explores Cook's contradictory character as never before, by reconstructing the many sides of encounters that were curious and unusual for Europeans and natives alike. The result of twenty years' research, Thomas's magnificently rich portrait overturns the familiar images of Cook and reveals the fascinating and far more ambiguous figure beneath.

From Publishers Weekly
Rich, vivid and deeply provocative, Thomas's work combines premiere adventure story with thorough history and intensive sociology. The University of London anthropology professor explains Cook's drive to find "the lands South" (in the 18th century, most presumed there was another continent at the south end of the world). Cook (1728-1779) made three harrowing trips in the 1770s in which he discovered Antarctica. In those travels, he explored worlds previously unknown to Europeans: the Pacific and its panoply of island nations. Cook first charted Australia, New Zealand and the entire southern hemisphere, and this aspect of his career is the book's most fascinating portion. Thomas explains that Cook was most interested in charting territories previously unheard of by Europeans; he was, like Lewis and Clark, at heart a geographer and cartographer. However, Cook didn't discover just longitude and latitude; he found whole new peoples. The results of explorations by Cook and his crews (which included an artist and diarist) informed European society of native cultures. How the elevation of some groups and devaluation of others evolved would, Thomas explains, influence centuries of perception about nonwhite, non-European societies and redefine words like "primitive," "savage" and "conqueror." Thomas diligently contextualizes Cook, who appears both heroic and demonic as he finds worlds where people had lived in thriving societies since the dawn of time and where his crews wreak havoc (e.g., bringing venereal disease) even as they attempt to "civilize" those they meet. Thomas

displays sure, careful research and thoughtful interpretations, with a style matching the adventures detailed. He spent two decades on this work, and it shows. 8 color, 50 bw illus.; 7 maps. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Drawing on 20 years of research, Thomas recounts Captain James Cook's original three voyages in the 1770s. Thomas writes that his aim is "to capture the sense of a particular time, and his starting point is not Cook's ancestry or birth but his consciousness of himself at the age of about 39. Thomas divides the book geographically into what he labels "England's Atlantic," "To the South Sea," "Towards the South Pole," and "To the North Pacific." Thomas writes much about Cook's anthropological and scientific research, describing various ethnic groups, their customs, and their religious concepts. In one of Cook's letters describing Tahiti, he writes, "A virgin is to be purchased here, with the unanimous consent of the parents, for three nails and a knife." Thomas also writes of the flora and fauna in the places that Cook visited and of the horrendous weather he encountered at sea. With 54 illustrations and nine maps, this is an exceptionally researched work, one of the most detailed and insightful accounts of Cook's voyages. George Cohen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Deep in its research, broad in its sympathies, imaginative in its reconstruction of events and thought processes and graceful in its prose style, Cook presents a winning combination of qualities. The New York Times Book The definitive volume for this moment in our history. Simon Winchester, The Globe and Mail Thomas helps to bring this most enigmatic of men to life. Chicago Tribune [Thomas] offers a different and compelling look at the naval captain. The Dallas Morning News Rich, vivid and deeply provocative, Thomas's work combines premiere adventure story with thorough history and intensive sociology Thomas displays sure, careful research and thoughtful interpretations, with a style matching the adventures detailed. He spent two decades on this work, and it shows. Publishers Weekly (starred review) This is a definitive book on a mythic character. Science News An extraordinary biography Brave, stubborn, eaten by curiosity, occasionally the victim of his own inner furies, Cook emerges from this splendidly written volume as a greater hero than we thought, though with larger flaws. Islands