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Review by Noel Murphy

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OPENING UP THE PACIFIC

You have to feel for someone like young Jacob Le Maire, the 17th century Dutch navigator who struck a Pacific trade route from Europe to Asia, via South America's treacherous Cape Horn, in 1616. No sooner did he achieve this historic feat and land in Batavia, present-day Jakarta, than he was deported back home because Dutch authorities refused to believe him capable of such a feat. Fatally compounding matters, he died en route.

Why anyone would willingly sail around the bottom of South America with its mountainous angry seas and fiendish, rugged coastline in a tiny wooden tub — the Eendracht—powered only by the wind, is difficult to comprehend without some idea of the spice trade of the era. Spices were as valuable as, if not more than, gold. Nutmeg, pepper, cloves ... they not only camouflaged the taste of rancid, non-refrigerated foodstuffs; they were considered to hold powerful medicinal properties too.

The Dutch had a stronghold on the East Indies spice trade. But for all its lucrative returns, it was a brutally exacting trade. Ships and crew suffered greatly. Many died and a sailor who completed three return voyages without dying to scurvy, fever or some other disease was a rarity. Pirates were an occupational hazard as well and if there was another route between Europe and Batavia, the Dutch wanted to know it. So too did other nations—propelled by the lure of a mythical Great Southern Land the size of Europe, and untold wealth.

Le Maire's voyage, therefore, was the "giant leap for mankind" of its time although, perhaps like Neil Armstrong's lunar mission, it was some time before the route became a regular passage. The simple fact was that the Pacific was, as it remains, huge. And without ready means of calculating longitude it was nigh on impossible for ships to navigate the mighty expanse of ocean with any real degree of competence or assurance. Even so, a succession of explorers followed Le Maire's lead: Abel Tasman, Bougainville, James Cook ... and all referred to their Dutch predecessor's achievement. In the fifth of its prestigious Australian Maritime Series, Sydney rare book dealer Hordern House has acknowledged the historic efforts of Le Maire with a magnificent facsimile of the original 1622 book, *Mirror of the Australia Navigation*. This features beautifully reproduced pictures from the original; complete Dutch and English accounts—the latter by Alexander Dalrymple, who was pipped for Cook's job on the *Endeavour*—and an introductory essay by Edward Duyker, one of Australia's foremost history writers.

Mirror invites the reader on the mission, detailing its travails—the Hoorn actually caught fire and had to be abandoned—and its contact with Pacific natives. It is immensely readable; in short, a real-life adventure thriller.

"... our purser, Aris Claesz, went to fish by the moonlight and, having caught some fish, went to the king, where he found a troop of fine young girls, all naked, who danced before the king."

But it was far from all beer and skittles as the intrepid voyagers made their way across the Pacific and into history. Hunger, thirst and violence awaited them all the way

although as fortune would have it only three died during their sojourn. That, of course, doesn't count the indigenous folk they encountered along the way.