



Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imaging in the Public Domain

Max Quanchi

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Photographing Papua is a study of photography in the public domain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that southeastern New Guinea, known as British New Guinea and then as Papua when it became an Australian colony, was created as a geographical place through visual representation in illustrated magazines and newspapers, lavishly illustrated travelogues and mission hagiography, serial encyclopedia, lantern slides and postcards. Readers 'knew' Papua because many thousands of black and white photographs of Papuans, villages and material culture rapidly swamped the reading public once the process of halftone, newsprint reproduction became possible. In an innovative and breakthrough fashion Photographing Papua switches attention from a few well known prints in museums and archives, in some cases repeatedly reproduced, but mostly rarely seen outside of scientific and scholarly circles. It deals instead with thousands of photographs, often used in ways not intended when the photograph was taken, but which editors and publishers (and subsequent photographers) gradually made conform to an iconographic imperative, a sort of abbreviated visual gallery of 'natives' and a quick-access pathway to the actual and imagined lives of Papuans in the 'last Unknown' as New Guinea was titled. It is a study of representation, colonialism, cross-cultural encounters and the early world of illustrated media and photo-journalism.

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