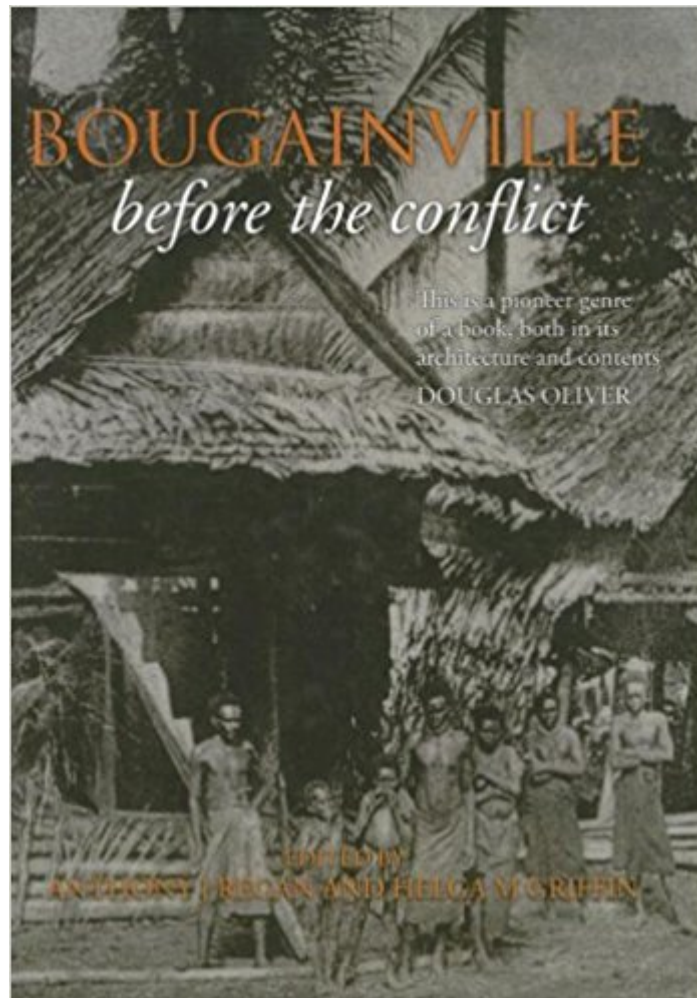




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Bougainville Before The Conflict



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Customer Reviews

I wrote this review in 2006, and it was published in Pacific Affairs, Summer 2006: volume 79, No. 2. This is an important volume that belongs in the library of anyone seriously interested in Bougainville before - and after - the conflict. Like all volumes that derive from conferences, it contains a variety of viewpoints and professional orientations - so many that it might be subtitled "Ways of Seeing Bougainville." Although the first two sections of the book's five sections are written by "the usual suspects," the next three sections include work by authors new to me. It is a fine thing to see new names associated with Bougainville research and commentary, and even finer that among the 23 authors (of 30 chapters) 6 are Bougainvilleans. (Disclaimer: I am a Bougainville anthropologist and know many of the authors; I was asked to contribute a chapter, but was unable to do so in time for the publication.) Contributors to the first section ("The Place and the People") represent archaeology, geology, linguistics, and anthropology. All make the point that Bougainville language and culture is impressively diverse and complex. For example, there are perhaps 25 languages among some 175,000 people. Numeric caution is required here, as elsewhere in the book: the authors have as many ways of counting and classifying as ways of seeing. This is a virtue, not a defect, because Bougainville has been in state of flux for many decades. These, and other, chapters offer no support for those who might prefer to characterize Bougainvilleans as homogenous. The second section ("The Colonial Period to World War II") is the work of historians. The chapters are of uneven quality, and overlap considerably.

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