

lay at the heart of Confucianism. He largely rejects Richard Solomon's views that old patterns of psychological "dependency" in Chinese family and political life have been transmitted into current Chinese political culture. He gives short shrift to modern Western academic analysts of Maoism or of Chinese communism more broadly defined. If I may attempt a clumsy summary, Metzger is trying to show that the "radical" wing within the Confucian tradition, which had been torn by anguish for so long, found that the coming of the West reawakened a "traditional zeal for total

moral goals could thus be given its head once more.

This accounts for the burst of radical optimism that has suffused twentieth-century political quests in China, and can be found both in Tang Chun-i and in the People's Republic, for to both there is a "rising sense of impending solution." The Chinese have long been used to appalling misery and crisis in their country, and hence can draw on a tradition that "defined moral action precisely as... coping with almost unbearable disasters." If, Metzger points out in conclusion, the hopes are dashed,

of "partial moral failure" and hence the old Confucian predicament will re-emerge among the senior cadres of the new socialist state. As Maoist imagery yields to the more cautious pronouncements of Teng Hsiao-pingism, we may well watch and wonder.

Confucianism, therefore, breathes as a living force for Metzger across a wide spectrum of time and society; it does not sit idly within the sphere of conservatism once we see its radical potential, and in the hands of major current thinkers it is certainly neither farce nor fraud.

relevance of Confucianism that gives such a sense of spontaneity to Metzger's work. Indeed, there is more vigor and energy in this book than in any recent contributions to the story of Chinese communism that I can think of reading it, one gets a feeling that a corner is being turned in Chinese historiography, and even though the goal is not clear, the general direction is: it is a search for enrichment and complexity in a zone where cliché had begun to rule. This is the sort of book that has the density and the originality to push scholars—even reluctantly—in new directions. □

Cannibalism: An Exchange

To the Editors:

In what a contemporary scholar of the sixteenth century characterized as one of the most curious episodes of European intellectual history, the most learned figures of Christendom's most powerful nation gathered at Valladolid, Spain, in 1550 to debate and sit in judgment on the moot question of whether the Indians of the New World were "Dirty Dogs" or "Noble Savages." Even at the time, the issue was somewhat academic, since the Contact Era had already obliterated many of the indigenous cultures. Furthermore, the practical representatives of European civilization in the Americas were conducting their business as usual among the native remnants, with little regard for the sophisticated musings of the scholars and monks in the Old World.

Needless to say, the Aztecs and their surviving representatives figured heavily in this intellectual post-mortem on the moral propensities of the New World Indians. What stirred and perplexed the debaters was the magnificence of Aztec cultural achievements, which Cortés himself put on a par with Spain's. A rationale for the destruction of such a culture and a legitimization for colonial rule was sorely needed. This was soon provided by the liberal wing of Western scholarship which admitted that, since the Aztecs were indeed idolaters, cannibals, and sodomists, their conquest was justified. Yet at the same time, as Las Casas, the Aztecs' "defender," put it, they were equal in potential intellectual and spiritual achievement to any European and therefore they could be guided along the path of salvation at the hands of Christian emissaries. Thus, what had been done and what was to be done was clearly called for, and the collective conscience of Christianity could rest at ease in reflection on this first Latin rendition of the "White Man's Burden."

The present controversy between Harner and Harris, on one side, and Sahllins² and yet unknown supporters, on the other, is a direct descendant of this great debate. Each camp views the Aztecs in much the same opposing fashion as their sixteenth-century predecessors. To Harris we are all "dogs" in some sense, since our culture responds to environmental and biological strictures. Harris would have us believe that a culture marches on its stomach, while Sahllins has a more noble view of human nature. In the context of the Aztec riddle of human sacrifice, this means that for Harris the Aztecs resorted to man-eating for their human needs, while Sahllins suggests the act was a response to spiritual ones. If it can be called such, one of the few bright spots in

¹Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One* (Northwestern Illinois Press, 1974).

²Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings* (Random House, 1977); and Michael Harner, "The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice," *Natural History* (1977, Vol. 76, pp. 47-51); Marshall Sahllins, "Culture as Protein and Profit," *The New York Review of Books*, November 23, 1978, pp. 41-52.

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the history of the cannibal complex has been the voluntary willingness of the intellectuals of all eras to come forward to defend and absolve the man-eaters of their deeds. In our age, instead of learned monks with their mastery of Canon Law and Aristotelian logic, we encounter instead media professors referring to caloric tables and structural models to

ing one of the most little-known facts bearing on the entire problem, viz. the literature contains no firsthand description of Aztec cannibalism nor any native admission to having practiced the deed. Consequently, it is not overly difficult, as Sahllins so eloquently demonstrated in his review, to undermine Harris's vulgar propositions about Aztec culture. Among other things, Harris failed to mention that by all accounts the inhabitants

the scene, presuppose and allude to the idea that the Aztecs were cannibals, but their reminiscences contain no description of the event. Indeed Tapia,⁴ another of the Conquistadors, points out that the Aztecs also had their suspicions about the Spaniards on this very score, but the losers are rarely permitted to write the official history of their defeat, so we hear little further about this.

The lack of documentation in these primary works meant the Aztecs were fashioned into hardened cannibals by the next generation of ethnohistorians, who in the main were missionaries to the New World and shared a very dismal view of the traditional native culture. The two major figures in interpreting pre-conquest Aztec culture and society, decades after the onset of colonial rule, were Durán and Sahagún. The former was of the opinion that, if the Aztecs were to find God, the remaining roots of their culture would have to be "torn out," including "that which smacks of their ancestral religion." He also subscribed to the lost-tribe theory of history and wrote, "I cannot help but believe that these Indians are the children of Israel." As a result, he spent a portion of his time searching for a Bible in his travels throughout the countryside. Interspersed among his commentary, he referred in only the most vague manner to the fact that among their many sins the Aztecs were also formerly cannibals, but provided no evidence for such statements.

Sahagún, the other highly touted scholar for the era, suffered from fewer delusions, but shared his colleague's general orientation toward Aztec culture. Despite his other attributes, which were many, objectivity was not among them. Among other things, he believed that the Aztecs earned their destruction for failing to immediately abandon their religion, and he held most of their other achievements in little regard. Furthermore, his manuscripts were subjected to the scrutiny and censorship of the office of the Inquisition, a process which could add little to the objective nature of the final outcome. These remarks are not meant to sabotage the material contained on cannibalism, for it is astounding, in terms of the contemporary reliance placed on the *Florentine Codex*, that there is little reference to cannibalism per se.⁵

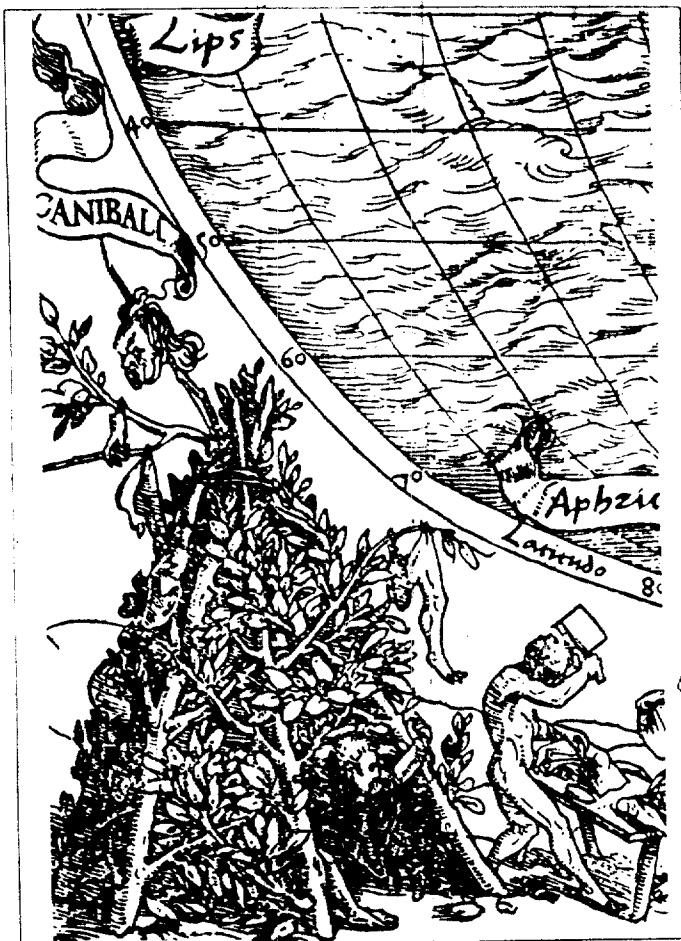
The information in the thirteen volumes collected from informants by Sahagún's trained Christian assistants contains only fragmentary references to man-eating. There

(Norton, 1962); Pedro de Alvarado, "Two Letters of Pedro de Alvarado" in *The Conquistadors*, edited by Patricia de Fuentes (Orion Press, 1963); Bernard Diaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* (Octagon Books, 1973).

⁴Andrés de Tapia, "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," in *The Conquistadors*, edited by Patricia de Fuentes (Orion Press, 1963).

⁵Fray Diego Durán, *The Aztecs* (Orion Press, 1964); and *Book of the Gods and Rites, and the Ancient Calendar* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

⁶Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* (University of Utah Press, 1951-1975).



explain away cannibalism. In their respective times, liberal-minded scholars have taken upon themselves the responsibility of defending the savage mind and body without giving the matter of the evidence on this purported phenomenon even the minimal consideration. This stage in the process is avoided, for Indians without souls to be saved or bizarre customs to be interpreted would be of little value to either missionaries or anthropologists. For this reason, when it comes to such matters, representatives of both groups are often found taking the same position vis-à-vis the natives.

This preamble sets the stage for introduc-

of the Aztec capital starved to death by the thousands during the Spanish siege which would be a rather strange response for those who were supposed to survive on human flesh as part of their daily diet. Yet Sahllins was not content to merely dismiss Harris's excesses, possibly because the task was not challenging enough, and he revived the notion that the Aztecs were really only ritual cannibals. Although a more modest idea, this position cannot be substantiated with any degree of certainty, either. The accounts of Cortés, Alvarado, and Diaz,³ who were on

³Hernando Cortés, *Five Letters 1519-1526*

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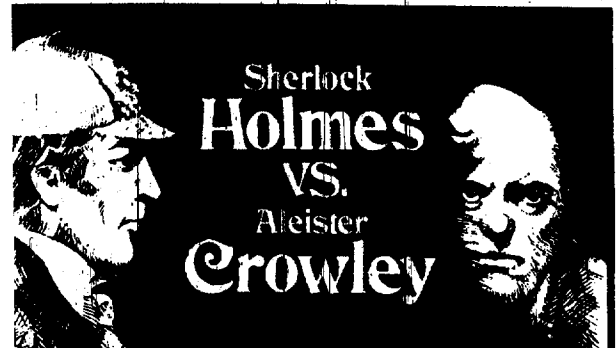
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are no eye-witness accounts nor admissions of participation, since it involved a former custom of the then discredited political, economic, and religious elite of Aztec society. In addition, Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* also contains hundreds of illustrations depicting various aspects of indigenous culture, but not one indicates Aztec cannibalism, which we are led to believe was once so prevalent. In recognition of this paucity of evidence, Harner, who first proposed the protein-deficiency theory, dismissed this problem with the notion that the Aztecs took this aspect of their behavior for granted, and failed to dwell on it. Thus, in a peculiar inversion of the scholarly method, the lack of evidence on a phenomenon is assumed to substantiate its existence.

The above remarks obviously do not prove that the Aztecs were not cannibals, but do suggest we do not possess the evidence to conclude they were either ritual or protein anthropophagists. Nonetheless, the Aztecs have come down to us today as man-eaters *par excellence*, so that 300 years later Prescott could write of elegant dinners among the nobility, garnished with human flesh, and in our time a contemporary textbook author describes mass cannibalistic orgies at the base of the pyramids.⁷

A full explanation for this curious anti-intellectual process and debasement of Aztec civilization is beyond the scope of this communication, except to suggest that our culture, including its anthropologists and historians, has felt the need to create and recreate savagery in its most gruesome form by calling into existence man-eaters at the fringes of our time and space. I conclude with another little-known piece of information. From what I can gather from an extensive review of the literature, every human culture, sub-culture, religion, cult and sect, including our own, has been labeled cannibalistic at one time or another by someone. Yet no one has ever observed this purported cultural universal. This should give pause to consider whether we are dealing with historical reality or an extremely satisfactory myth.

W. Arens

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⁷W. H. Prescott, *The Conquest of Mexico* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1909); R. Pearson, *Introduction to Anthropology* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

Marshall Sahlins replies:

Mr. Arens contends that "the literature contains no firsthand description of Aztec cannibalism nor any vague admission to having practiced the deed.... The accounts of Cortés, Alvarado [sic], and Díaz, who were on the scene, presuppose and allude to the idea that the Aztecs were cannibals, but their reminiscences contain no description of the event."

Such, he says, are "little-known" facts. Another "little-known piece of information," discovered from his "extensive review of the literature," is that although every human society at one time or another has been accused of cannibalism, "no one has ever observed this purported cultural universal." (I assume by this last Arens means no one has observed a single instance of cannibalism, rather than that no one has ever observed the universal. Also, I will leave aside well-known instances of hunger cannibalism in Western society, such as the Donner party or the recent case among survivors of an airplane crash in the southern Andes.)

These assertions so entail one another that a few strategic examples, such as the descriptions of cannibalism among the Aztecs and other Indians that actually appear in the Spanish chronicles, will bring down the lot. For instance, Díaz writes of events witnessed en route to Mexico City in 1519: "Every day we saw sacrificed before us three, four or five Indians whose hearts were offered to the idols and their blood plastered on the walls, and the feet, arms and legs of the victims were cut off and eaten, just as in our country

we eat beef brought from the butchers." The Spanish chronicles do not presuppose or allude to an idea of cannibalism; they quite plainly report the practice of it. That the notices of the actual eating are often brief is not surprising, since by comparison with the spectacular, public ceremonies of human sacrifice, the rituals of consumption were relatively simple and usually private.

One of the most famous scenes in the conquistador literature is Díaz's description of the culinary fate of a number of Spanish soldiers and their Indian allies, fallen to the Aztecs during the siege of the capital. Díaz and his companions hear the "dismal drum" of the god Huitzilopochtli sounding from the great temple of the City. "We all looked towards the lofty Cue [temple]," Díaz recounts,

and saw that our comrades whom they [the Aztecs] had captured when they defeated Cortés were being carried by force up the steps, and they were taking them to be sacrificed... with stone knives they sawed open their chests and drew out their palpitating hearts and offered them to the idols that were there, and they kicked the bodies down the steps, and Indian butchers who were waiting below cut off the arms and feet and flayed the skin off the faces, and prepared it afterwards like glove leather with the beards on, and kept those for the festivals where they celebrated drunken orgies, and the flesh they ate in *chilmole*. In the same way they sacrificed, all the others and ate the arms and legs and offered the hearts and blood to their idols, as I have said....

It should also be noted that we were not far away from them, yet we could render them no help....

Then at the moment that they were making the sacrifices, great squadrons of Mexicans (i.e., Aztecs) fell on us suddenly....

Then the words and threats which they said to our friends the Tlaxcalans [Indian allies of the Spanish] were so injurious and evil that they disheartened them [the Tlaxcalans], and they threw them roasted legs of Indians and the arms of our soldiers and cried to them: "Eat of the flesh of these Teules [god-images, i.e., the Spanish] and of your brothers, for we are already glutted with it."²

As for the Indians' "admission" of cannibalism in this passage, Díaz's account contains a number of further examples, whether in the form of threats to the Spanish enemy of the destiny in store for them (p. 129), confessions of the practice and/or promises to renounce it (pp. 173, 181-182, 209), or unashamed statements of fact: "Pedro de Alvarado said that he found most of the bodies without arms or legs, and that he was told by some Indians that they had been carried off to be eaten" (p. 85). Of course, since the notices of cannibalism—of which there are more than two dozen—in the later works of Sahagún and Durán were taken from Aztec informants, these are so many further "admissions."

Incidentally, Arens says that Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* "contains hundreds of illustrations depicting various aspects of indigenous culture, but not one indicates Aztec cannibalism, which we are led to believe was once so prevalent." This may be true only because we do not know the tribal identity of the man eating a human thigh, while a human head boils away in a nearby pot, appearing in picture 31, Book IV in the edition of the *Florentine Codex* cited by Arens (see accompanying illustration on page 47).³

¹Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 102.

²Op. cit., pp. 436-437.

³This picture was also reproduced by George Valliant in *The Aztecs of Mexico* (Doubleday, Doran, 1944), Plate 61, along with the following caption: "Ceremonial cannibalism. The *Codex Florentinus* artist had obviously never taken part in such a feast, fairly common before the conquest." *The New York Review*

Cortes also made definite observations of acts and threats of cannibalism—sometimes both at once, as when the Spaniards' Indian allies caused dismay among the Aztecs by showing the latter pieces of their cut-up countrymen, saying that they would dine off them that night and breakfast off them the following morning, which in fact they did... Of the Aztecs' suspicion that the Spanish ate men, (recounted by Andres de Tapia), Arens neglects to mention it was because they believed the Spanish to be gods, and the Aztec gods generally eat men. This kind of ethnographic report is common: the Hawaiians, for example, for the same reason were apprehensive that Captain Cook's people would eat them. So both the Europeans and the "savages" feared the others were cannibals, but on opposite grounds: the Europeans because they believed the "savages" were something less than men; the "savages" because they took the Europeans for gods—thus posing the question, as Lévi-Strauss says in an analogous context, of who did more credit to the human race.

Actually, the "debasement" (Arens's term) suffered by the Aztecs in European literature was consequent on the notoriety of their human sacrifices, not their cannibalism as such, which, as Mr. Harris observes, has been fairly ignored for centuries. One possible reason for the neglect is that there were much better examples of cannibals still extant in South America, Africa, Southeast Asia,

such effect on some of them as to cause them to vomit.

Faced by a similar incredulity, another British captain, Erskine of HMS *Havannah*, was compelled to preface his discussion of Fijian cannibalism by lengthy quotations from eyewitness reports of earlier European visitors. These include accounts from the voyage of the *Astrolabe* (1838), the US Exploring Expedition (1840), and from the missionary-ethnographer John Hunt (1840). Erskine also prints in full the narrative of John Jackson, a seaman resident in Fiji from 1840 to 1842, which contains three detailed descriptions of cannibal feasts (pp. 411-477). I excerpt from one:

...as I had seen so much of their dark ways, and knew that my absence or presence would not affect their proceedings, I thought I would witness all I could, till I saw an opportunity of getting off the islands.... The [three] bodies, which were painted up with vermilion and soot, were carefully handed out, and placed on the road, or rather square, between the king's house and the bure [temple].... At last they hauled them up to a place that was used purposely for the dressing, cooking, and eating of human flesh.... The king being very impatient to begin, and not choosing to wait till it was properly prepared, told the butcher just to slice off the end

had expressed disbelief about Lockerby's earlier experiences. "We were then passing a hut where an old woman was eating the foot of a child," Lockerby writes. "I requested her to give it to me; which she did, decently folded up in a plantain leaf. I carried it on board and presented it to Mr. Sept."

Likewise, Charles Wilkes, commander of the US Exploring Expedition, was not to be satisfied withoutocular proof. He got it in a double sense when he saw a Fijian aboard the US *Peacock* pop down a human eye: "Another was seen eating the last of the flesh from the thighbone."¹⁰

One could easily multiply examples from published works on Fiji, New Zealand, and the Marquesas Islands, to mention only the Polynesian cases. If further evidence of cannibalism in other places is needed, reference might be made to Ewald Volhard's *Kanibalismus* (see especially the photograph, Plate 24).¹¹ This book is truly an extensive review of the literature, world-wide in scope, covering hundreds of cases.

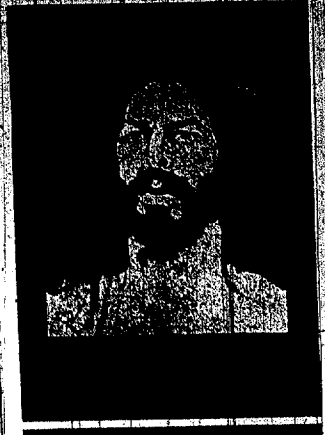
Reflecting on the strain of unwillingness among Europeans to credit the existence of cannibalism, Captain Erskine remarks:

The notion of using the bodies of our fellow creatures for food is so revolting to the feelings of civilized men, that many have refused all belief in the systematic exercise of such a habit, and the general disinclination to give it credence is often shown by meeting all allusions to the subject by foolish jests, which, did they not express incredulity, would evince a somewhat discreditable indifference to the custom.¹²

Besides a somewhat discreditable indifference to custom, it also takes a considerable indifference to the historical and ethnographic sources. At the same time, Mr. Arens accuses Mr. Harris, myself, and others of joining an "anti-intellectual" conspiracy to lay cannibalism on the natives. Now Arens is about to publish a book under the imprint of a famous university press which expounds on the thesis of his letter.¹³ (I have seen an advance copy.) It all follows a familiar American pattern of enterprising social science journalism:

Professor X puts out some outrageous theory, such as the Nazis really didn't kill the Jews, human civilization comes from another planet, or there is no such thing as cannibalism. Since facts are plainly against him, X's main argument consists of the expression, in the highest moral tones, of his own disregard for all available evidence to the contrary. He rises instead to the more elevated analytical plane of ad hominem attack on the authors of the primary sources and those credulous enough to believe them. All this provokes Y and Z to issue a rejoinder, such as this one. X now becomes "the controversial Professor X" and his book is respectfully reviewed by non-professionals in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Yorker*. There follow appearances on radio, TV, and in the columns of the daily newspapers.

The effect is to do away with the usual standards of scholarly value, such as use of evidence or quality of research, as criteria of academic success. Like the marketing of automobiles or toothpaste, academic research is submitted to the one characteristic sense of criticism left to American society: *Caveat Emptor*. So the publishing decisions of academic presses, and ultimately the nature of scholarly research, are drawn irresistibly into the orbit of the average common opinions of the consuming public. It's a scandal.



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and the Pacific Islands. It is unfortunate that Arens's "extensive review of the literature" did not get this far. He would have found not only unimpeachable testimony of cannibal practice, but some reference to the skepticism these descriptions often occasioned in Europe. Mr. Arens writes in a good Western tradition: cannibalism is so unthinkable in Europe that there were no laws against it through the turn of the twentieth century.¹

Captain Cook encountered the same skepticism when he reported cannibalism among the Maoris of New Zealand in the account of his first voyage to the Pacific. So on his second visit, he made doubly sure:

some of the officers went on shore to amuse themselves among the Natives where they saw the head and bowels of a youth who had lately been killed, the heart was stuck upon a forked stick and fixed to the head of their largest Canoe, the gentlemen brought the head on board with them, I was on shore at this time but soon after returned on board when I was informed of the above circumstances and found the quarter deck crowded with the Natives. I now saw the mangled head... a piece of the flesh had been broiled and eat by one of the Natives in the presence of most of the officers. The sight of the head and the relation of the circumstances just mentioned struck me with horror and filled my mind with indignation against these Canibals, but... being desirous of being an eye witness to a fact which many people had their doubts about, I concealed my indignation and ordered a piece of the flesh to be broiled and brought on the quarter deck where one of these Canibals eat it with a seeming good relish before the whole ships Company which had

of the noses, and he would roast them while he was getting the other parts ready. The butcher did as he was ordered, and handed the three ends of the noses to his majesty, which he grasped hold of very nimbly, and put on hot stones to warm a little, not wishing to lose any time. The first he hardly let warm through, but while he was eating it, the second got a little better done, which he quickly demolished.... The flesh was then put into this "lovo" (oven), and when cooked, which was not till the next morning, shared out according to rank, distinction, etc. I saw that the king, priest, orator, and butcher, had by no means a scanty share. Other chiefs getting no more than about a pound each, of which they would eat very sparingly, inviting their most intimate acquaintance to have a taste.... Several invited me to partake of their small allowance, and all were equally surprised... at my refusal. [Pages 425-428; see also pages 437-438, 454-455.]

The earlier Fijian journal of William Lockerby (1808-1809) describes several like scenes, during one of which, "After I had been almost four days without food I was offered a part of a man's leg."² On another occasion, Lockerby felt compelled to gather evidence from a cannibal feast he was witnessing for a certain Mr. Scot, a gentleman aboard a British ship anchored offshore who

¹J.C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure 1772-1775* (Cambridge: The University Press for the Hakluyt Society, 1969), pp. 292-293. The journals of other members of the ship's company corroborate Cook's account: *Ibid.*, pp. 293n, 818-819.

²John E. Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise among the Islands of the Western Pacific* (Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1967, reprinted from the 1853 edition), pp. 257 ff.

³Sir Everard Im Thurn, *The Journal of William Lockerby* (The Hakluyt Society, 1925), p. 45.

⁴Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico* (Crosman, 1971), p. 223; see also pp. 188, 251, 351.
⁵Basil Thomson, *The Fijians* (Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), p. 104.