

Islands *of* *the* Pacific

Cameron Macintosh



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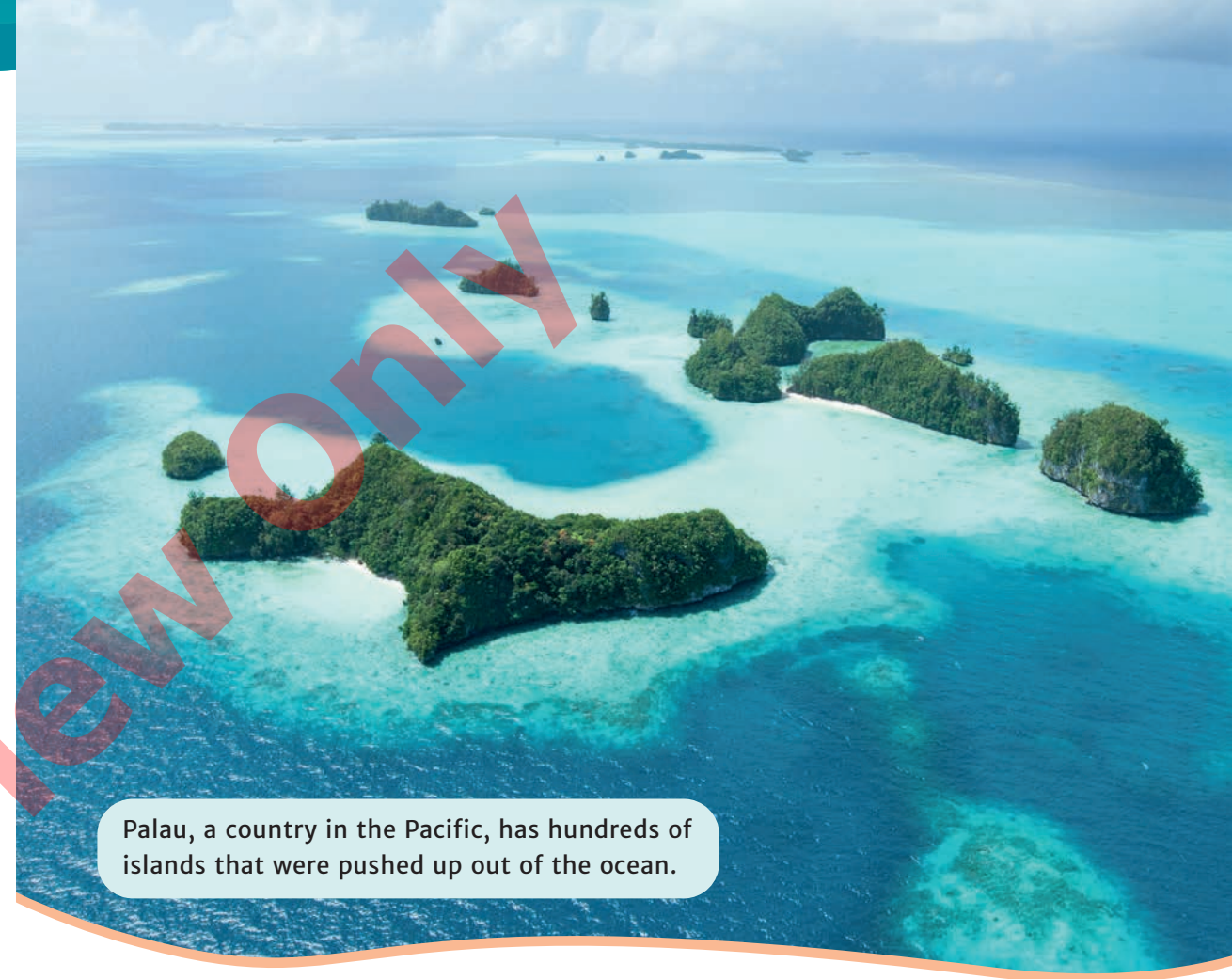
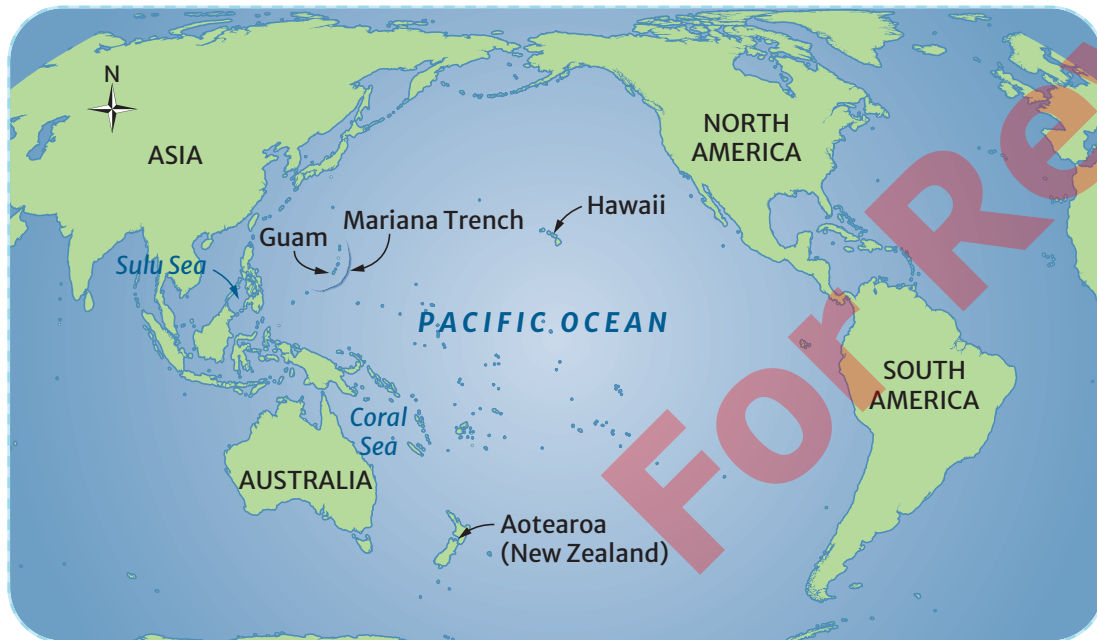
Islands of the Pacific

The Pacific Ocean

The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. Asia and Australia are located to the west of the Pacific Ocean, and North and South America are on its east. The Pacific Ocean is so large, it is bigger than all of Earth's islands and continents put together, and it is about twice as big as Earth's other great ocean, the Atlantic Ocean.

The Pacific Ocean also includes a number of seas, or bodies of water that are fully or partially surrounded by land, such as the Coral Sea and the Sulu Sea.

The Pacific Ocean



As well as being the world's biggest ocean, the Pacific Ocean is also the deepest. The deepest known point is the Mariana Trench, which has a depth of just over 11 kilometres.

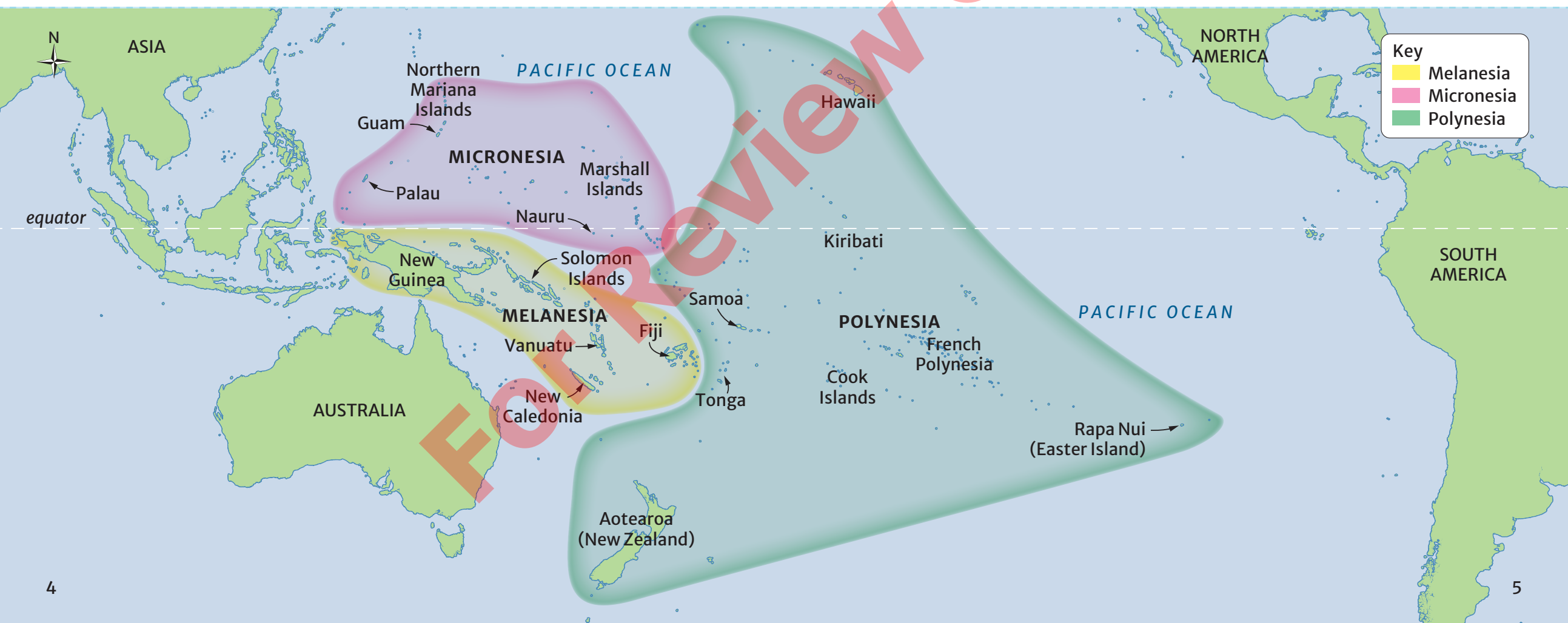
There are between 20 000 and 30 000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. Some of these islands were formed by eruptions from volcanoes. Others were formed by movements in Earth's **crust**, which pushed areas of the crust upwards.

Although there are thousands of islands in the Pacific Ocean, most of them are too small to be **inhabited**. Most of the inhabited islands are found in three regions: Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. These regions are grouped by geography and by the cultural similarities of the people who live in them.

The Regions of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia

Melanesia is located north of Australia and includes a large area from New Guinea to Fiji. Micronesia is located north of Melanesia. Most of its islands are smaller than Melanesia's, but it covers an area of similar size. Polynesia is located to the east of Melanesia and Micronesia, and is by far the largest of the three regions.

Many of these islands are grouped near the equator, which means they tend to have warm, humid weather most of the year.



The people of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia share a wide range of cultures and languages. Approximately 1500 different languages are spoken throughout these regions. Many of these languages have similarities as a result of people migrating from island to island over the centuries.



a craftsperson creating a wood carving in French Polynesia



a man playing a bamboo instrument on New Guinea, in Melanesia



a traditional dance in Tahiti, in Polynesia

These island regions have been deeply affected in recent centuries by the arrival of European **colonisers**. French colonisers in particular took control of many Pacific **islands** in the 1800s. When French colonisers noticed the similarities and differences between the cultures and languages of the **islands'** inhabitants, they gave the regions the names we **use** for them today.

In addition to France, countries such as Great Britain, the USA, the Netherlands, Japan and Germany also attempted to take control of much of the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Some Pacific islands are still under the control of these colonising powers. For example, Hawaii in Polynesia is now a state of the USA. Another example is French Polynesia, which has been a territory of France since 1842, though it now manages most of its own affairs.

This illustration shows some local Polynesian people in the Marquesas Islands confronting French sailors as they land in 1890.

