



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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A LIMITER OF NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGY

W. Ambrose, A. N. U.

Terrell (1965:125) has recently cast doubt on the usefulness of the regional "aspect" as the basic operational unit in New Zealand archaeology and proposes in its stead a counsel of despair, by suggesting that correlations between even proximate areas will be difficult, if not impossible, because of the paucity of what he calls "diagnostic artefactual complexes". His remarks are directed mainly at the use of complex habitation and defence works common in New Zealand archaeology. It is difficult to discuss Terrell's view that New Zealand's archaeological remains are bereft of a wide range of artefact types since this is a relative question and he cites no examples for comparison. We can agree however in noting "a paucity of those kinds

of data with which archaeologists elsewhere in the world traditionally have based their reconstructions" (Terrell 1965:126). Surely this is the point accepted by Parker (1962:222), Groube (1964) and others in their reliance mainly on data which excavations have yielded to formulate hypotheses about settlement patterns and cultural correlations. To imply, as Terrell does, that the absent portable artefact or assemblage of artefacts could give finer cultural divisions or correlations is rather a superfluous observation. It further assumes on unsubstantiated theoretical grounds that the portable artefactual assemblage will have more "limited space and time dimensions" (Terrell 1965:128) than architectural features encountered on New Zealand sites. This is a doubtful assumption to make when New Zealand archaeology has been bedevilled for so long by the imposition of the presumptive "diagnostic" artefact on evaluations of other less "traditional" evidences.

If we are to ignore the similarities of pits, pit layouts, defensive systems and occupational histories of contiguous sites, while at the same time claiming that there are insufficient "diagnostic" artefacts to make comparisons between these sites, then surely we are adopting a rather blinkered approach to our sites' archaeological potential.

Terrell finds that the lack of the traditional archaeological evidence of the diagnostic artefact has "forced" the New Zealand archaeologist to try to analyse the pits themselves and this he sees as a disadvantage; at the same time he finds the occupational sequences, demonstrated in the superimposition of constructional features to be "barren of prehistoric meaning". His inertia in accepting as data anything but the traditional "diagnostic range of artefact types" no doubt accounts for his view that New Zealand archaeologists are "forced" to analyse the pits themselves. Yet surely there is no more compulsion here than in any other site in the world where the archaeologist, having selected his site, is concerned to analyse what is recovered. The implication of Terrell's approach is that if the right suite of artefacts was recovered the architectural features would not need to be analyzed. This seems to be based on an inflexible methodological approach which has produced his restrictive view of New Zealand archaeology.

Bearing in mind the views of Groube (1964:104), Shawcross (1964:81) and others, that there is likely to be marked seasonality in habitation of settlement sites, it is difficult to see how the characterisation of this seasonality can be achieved except by close excavation and stratigraphic control of whatever site component is under the trowel, whether this be workshop areas, middens, habitations, agricultural sites and so on. It is the recovery of internal evidence from these sites which has produced the first real advances in the vexing questions of economics and warfare in New Zealand sites, rather than the proliferation of generalisations based on "traditional diagnostic artefacts".

It is the correlation of events described at each site in stratigraphic terms which will allow the definition of the boundaries of the "aspect" at some period in time and describe the broader parameters of the regional sequence. Architectural features are excellent media for the description of events at the "aspect" level and promise to give the information necessary for the description of regional

