



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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# ASPECTS AND PHASES OF THE 50TH

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The 50th anniversary of the foundation of the New Zealand Archaeological Association, significant of itself, must carry particular resonance for today's members who were among the first to join. I was a comparative late-comer, becoming a member two weeks after arrival in New Zealand in July 1958, at the foundation meeting in Wellington that set up the site recording scheme. There appointed site recorder for Otago and Southland, I desperately needed advice. I got it, of course, in the Far South, but aside from Les Lockerbie, and especially Michael Trotter, that shining archaeological star of North Otago, joined soon after by Lin Phelan and Hardwicke Knight, initially members were thin on the ground. Those I got to know in the North Island were, if need be, equally helpful, especially at Wellington Council meetings and their boozy aftermaths (at the Midland Hotel?). And there were those annual meetings, especially useful when I did a two-year stint as Secretary.

My work at Otago, discussed in *Archaeology in New Zealand* (Gathercole 2000), needs no reiteration here. However, until Dave Simmons arrived as the first full-time anthropologist at the Otago Museum in early 1962, awareness of the existence of the NZAA and its indispensable *Newsletter* was a continual comfort for me working largely on my own. I could teach generally as I wished, but the lack of departmental support, critical or not, was only overcome when Les and Rosemary Groube arrived in 1963.

Until then, however, I possessed one great, indispensable ally in H.D. Skinner, with whom I shared a boarded-off section of the basement moa bone store in the museum. From its foundation Skinner was a strong supporter of the NZAA being, in 1955, the first Chairman of its Council. He was particularly delighted by the rapid growth of archaeology in the North Island, itself a factor that brought the Association into being.

His special pleasure at this time, though, was the publication in 1959 of his *festschrift*, *Anthropology in the South Seas* (Freeman and Geddes 1959), launched one sunny December afternoon in the Belleknowes, Dunedin garden of Margot and Angus Ross. Angus, presiding with infectious enthusiasm, had been Skinner's only MA student, and he and Les Lockerbie were the only

contributors present. The garden was thronged, however, by many university colleagues and Friends of the Otago Museum. Claimed by the Vice-Chancellor as the first *festschrift* for anthropology presented in New Zealand, it was a great occasion.

Various proofs of the book's articles had begun to arrive in the moa bone store from mid-1959, punctuated by numerous telephone conversations with Mr Doig at the Otago Daily Times, charged with the printing of the volume. Intrigued, I went through Freeman's lively memoir of Skinner himself. But what caught my particular attention was Golson's paper on culture change in prehistoric New Zealand.

I was an academic novice, looking for signposts to understand what made New Zealand prehistory tick. I had learned from Roger Duff, with whom I always had good personal relations, about Moa Hunters, but he seemed to see them as different from Maori. Was this possible? What impressed me about Golson's paper was a refreshingly different conceptual classification of New Zealand prehistory, where Archaic was substituted for Moa Hunter, and Classic Maori for Maori. The configuration of this paper demonstrated, incidentally, something I had not appreciated earlier. Within the NZAA and its affiliated societies and groups in Auckland and elsewhere in the North Island extensive discussions on the nature of archaeology, with Fulbright Scholar Roger Green considerably involved, had helped bring the paper into being. Such discussions did not exist then in the South Island.

I first heard of the concepts of Archaic and Classic from Golson himself when he gave the Macmillan Brown Memorial lectures at Otago in November 1959, a month before the *festschrift* was published. There, however, his discussion had been briefer and less theoretical, being part of the content of the first lecture of three, which also dealt with equally exciting developments in the archaeology of Polynesia and further afield in Oceania. Reading these lectures again today I recall the impact they had on the academically diverse Otago audience in the Medical School Lecture Theatre. Since Skinner's retirement in 1954 Pacific anthropology and archaeology had been pushed to the sidelines. The lectures gave it once again a contemporary relevance.

It was clear, even to me at the time, that the first phase/period/culture of New Zealand prehistory could not continue to be called Moa Hunter, because it was impossible to prove that moa-hunting was both primary and uniform throughout both islands. At the same time, it was evident from radiocarbon dates and, insofar as the evidence could be accepted, the absence of records of any sightings by 18th Century Europeans, that the moa was extinct (except possibly in environmentally marginal areas) by the time of those outside contacts.

Golson's solution; replacing Moa Hunter with the less charged term Archaic, and to introduce Classic as an adjectival addition to Maori for what chronologically followed the Archaic; was clever, elegant and convincing. As Golson put it to me recently (I had said that I could not find Classic used previously in the literature by, for example, Best and Duff):

I think that I must have picked Classic up from the American literature that I was using and adopted as appropriate for the phase of New Zealand prehistory on the threshold of European contact, thus having achieved its 'classic' expression, and particularly appropriate since, in the absence of substantial archaeological evidence, the reconstruction made use of early European observations, i.e. recording evidence at the very point of contact. (Golson personal communication 2004)

The widespread adoption of Golson's scheme thereafter did not mean lack of critical comment, demonstrated for example, by Green and Shawcross (1962), Green (1963), Groube (1967), Davidson (1984: 7–9, 1993: 240) and Samson (2003: 21–24). The discussion was necessarily open-ended, not least because of the paucity and limitations of appropriate evidence. It could even be termed circular. For example, Samson (2003: 21) has argued that

Golson was treating collections as if they were archaeological assemblages. In actuality, through analogical reasoning and the structuring of his survey, he effectively placed curios from collections within established early and late 'phases' of New Zealand prehistory. By buying into the received perception that certain artefact forms were 'early' and others 'late' he was effectively embedding the very rationale he was trying to negate through his advocacy of the phase–aspect model.

On the other hand, as Anderson has shown, the use of the term Classic might well clarify, even if it does not solve, a particular problem. In his study of Ngai Tahu prehistory, for example, Anderson discussed the question of the degree to which, and at what time, Classic Maori figured in the material culture of southern New Zealand. Anderson regarded the Classic as "typical" for late sites throughout New Zealand (Anderson 1983: 31), but what did this mean in southern New Zealand? In Anderson's view the evidence did not justify sole association of the Classic with the Ngai Tahu; indeed, association with the earlier Ngatimaoe people might be preferable. "But", Anderson (1983: 32) continued, "if we go back to the Classic material itself and consider its nature, a rather different kind of explanation seems to be called for, one which lays a stronger emphasis on continuity than on change." So, in varying situations, Classic Maori can be flexible in its application as a defining category, an option, incidentally, also discussed by Golson (e.g., 1959: 66–67).

This flexibility is particularly evident when considered in the context of the commonly assumed chronological termination of Classic Maori, defined artefactually by objects seen, and more specifically, acquired, during Cook's visits between 1769 and 1777 (Kaepler 1978: 171–205, personal communication 2003, 2004, Coote 2004, personal communication 2004). These total some 342 objects. With some exceptions, detailed localisation in terms of date and place of manufacture, use, cultural significance and other indigenous characteristics, especially time depth, are not always immediately apparent. What often characterizes these objects, providing a starting point for research on them, is their time and place of acquisition by Outsiders. Thus they are often seen as symbolizing an end-point of Maori prehistory. In some cases they can be dated only to the 1770s, the period of collection. To have a plausibly apparent time depth they often require comparison with other similar artefacts that can reveal either typological or chronological affinities, or both. Such an association has been demonstrated recently by Leach and Purdue (2003) in their important paper on fern-root beaters. Among many examples they emphasise the importance, because of its documentation, of the beater in the Forster Collection, Oxford, acquired in New Zealand in 1773 or 1774. Although the authors at one point regard its identification as only “highly likely” (Leach and Purdue 2003: 130) one is tempted to regard it as a type-specimen.

Cook artefacts are sometimes seen as Classic in a different sense, as quintessential examples of a material culture about to be transformed by colonialism. From our perspective of the 1770s, they appear as destined to be transferred to utterly new, alien cultural contexts, particularly private or public cabinets of curiosities in the Northern Hemisphere (Kaepler 1978).

A dramatic example of a Cook object now viewable as both Classic Maori and Classic in this other sense is the flax cloak, *kaitaka*, with a *taniko* border and dog-hair tassels, very recently identified by Jeremy Coote as part of a collection of objects identified as acquired on Cook's first voyage, and given by Joseph Banks to Christ Church, Oxford, his undergraduate college (Coote 2004, personal communication 2004). In Coote's opinion this is the cloak worn by Banks in the well-known portrait by Benjamin West, now in the Usher Gallery, Lincoln, England, reproductions of which have often been published (e.g., Kaepler 1978: 41, Figure 51).

Here is an artefact certainly of Classic Maori provenance, a characteristic it retains. But, because of its depiction as a garment flamboyantly, indeed possessively, worn by Banks in a well-known oil painting, executed by a popular and fashionable painter of the time, it acquires another role. It also becomes quintessentially Classic in a western cultural sense. Losing its original cultural context by becoming a treasured museum artefact, it takes on a certain timeless

quality, an attribute enhanced by its depiction in West's painting. In a more modest sense, some of the engravings of Oceanic artefacts in the official accounts of Cook's voyages can be seen in a similar way. For example, the Maori shell trumpet acquired on Cook's second voyage (Gathercole 1976), especially as illustrated on Plate XIX of the official account and seen primarily as another form of trumpet, becomes to the western viewer, a timeless, aesthetic—and so, one might say, Classic—object.

The overall question that can be asked, therefore, is what sort of antiquity such specimens had; and if on visual and collecting evidence this seems slight, to what degree do they nonetheless epitomise ancient forms, designs and practices? Are they 'Classic' in this generalised sense, also demonstrated, for example, in the material culture of the Maori described—some would say idealised—with such affection by Elsdon Best in *The Maori As He Was* (Best 1974)? The book's popularity since first publication in 1924, with three unchanged reprints (described in the Preface to the 1974 reprint as "a classic introduction to Maori life" [Best 1974: vii]), suggests that Best presented a view of the Maori past welcomed by its readership.

Such varieties of meaning of Classic can be said to have fitted Golson's concept of the Classic Maori in 1959 very well; it was, by definition, open-ended, and, I think, remains so. One can read Davidson's paper of 1993 (appropriately included in Jack Golson's *festschrift*), surveying fifty years of discussion of issues in New Zealand prehistory, as a commentary on its continued relevance.

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