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BOOK REVIEW

John Wilson (ed.). From The Beginning: the archaeology of the Maori. Penguin Books, Auckland, 1987. 169 pp., numerous illustrations. \$32.50.

It is good news that the New Zealand Historic Places Trust has produced an attractive well-illustrated book to provide an account of Maori archaeology 'from its beginnings' for the general public. The twelve chapters have been written by nine practising archaeologists and by a Maori scholar, Tipene O'Regan, under the editorship of John Wilson on behalf of the Trust.

Much of the contents will be familiar to members of the Association, particularly if they have read Janet Davidson's recent The Prehistory of New Zealand, but this book is designed for a wider audience. It is written in clear and simple language and with few exceptions is free from technical jargon. The illustrations assembled by the editor include many that are new; they have been given informative captions which should tempt a casual reader to tackle the full text. There are also a series of convincing reconstructions, some in colour, by Chris Gaskin, showing Maori everyday activities in the gardens and on the coast, a significant change from the usual warriors at the pa.

The editor contributes a thoughtful introduction concerning the practice and meaning of archaeology, including its limitations. To my mind, excavation is not synonymous with archaeology, though many think it is; it is the patient listing and surveying of sites sponsored by our Association and the Historic Places Trust that has provided an understanding of some of the wider issues. Wilson also has wise words to say about the relationship of archaeology and tribal traditions, emphasising that each illuminates different aspects of Maori life in the past.

The reader is then given a general outline in Chapters 2 and 4 by Janet Davidson of the Early Polynesian origins of the Maori people, their mode of arrival and their development in New Zealand. The essential cultural and racial continuity is no longer in doubt. The changes in settlement patterns and material remains are recognised as insular developments, within a three period sequence: Settlement 800-1200 A.D., Expansion 1200-1500 A.D. and Traditional 1500-1800 A.D., or to translate the more picturesque Maori terms put forward by Mead, 'The Seeds', 'The Growth' and the 'Flowering'. This framework can easily be understood, but it remains for the archaeologists to work out its application in detail in the different regions of New Zealand.

The chapters which follow are concerned with topics rather than chronology, emphasising the archaeological evidence for the peoples' activities. They include man's impact on the landscape (Bruce McFadgen), the manufacturing of stone and bone implements with some excellent diagrams (Kevin Jones), hunting and fishing (Atholl Anderson), gathering and gardening (Helen Leach) in which unusual wild plant foods are emphasised, house building and settlement (Nigel Prickett), warfare (Janet Davidson) and the arts (Wendy Harsant).

There is some overlapping in the discussion of pa, often a prominent feature in the landscape and so familiar to the general public. Prickett considers the fortified sites together with the undefended as part of a general settlement pattern which would have benefitted from a local distribution map. Common to both types of settlement are the rectangular houses, ancestral to the Maori meeting house, and the cooking places and storage pits. Davidson looks at the fortifications in more detail, but does not mention the entrances nor the summit platform, the tihi, the likely place for the chief's house. It is regrettable that the only full records of a pa interior that can be obtained came from early 19th century European artists; the need for further large scale excavations by archaeologists is obvious.

The chapter describing the 'Arts of the Maori', is rather disappointing, coming after the success of the 'Te Maori' exhibition. Admittedly there is no certainty, as Harsant points out, about the sequence of Maori carving styles, nor firm evidence for their origins and date. Nevertheless, early techniques can be recognised such as notching. Above all, Maori carving was not merely decorative, it has meaning related to its function and place, as for example the ancestor figures in the meeting house or the fertility motifs on the pataka.

In the concluding chapter O'Regan considers the Maori's approach to the past, emphasising a personal involvement because of his ancestry and his tribe and his special relationship with the land. It is good that the Maori indifference to the work of the archaeologists, so marked when I came to New Zealand in 1973, has now been replaced by feelings of proprietorship, but sad if it develops into antagonism. The practise of archaeology is not a closed shop; it is open to all who understand and who will work within its discipline. Happily there is increasing communication between excavators, the Historic Places Trust and the local Maori people, but as O'Regan recognises, a difficult decade lies ahead.

This book successfully achieves what it set out to do, to provide a simply written account of what is now known from

the findings of archaeology about Maori life and works in New Zealand. It also gives the general reader something to think about for the future. One mistake must be mentioned: in the Contents Table, Chapter 3 is assigned to Janet Davidson instead of to its real author, Philip Houghton.

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