



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEWS

Glynn Barratt, Bellingshausen, a visit to New Zealand: 1820.
The Dunmore Press, 1979. 184 pp., 29 plates. \$16.50.

In 1820 two Russian ships, the Vostok and the Mirnyy, under the command of F.G. von Bellingshausen, spent eight days in Queen Charlotte Sound, in the area visited by Cook some 50 years previously. Contacts between Maori and Russian were cautiously friendly. Trade took place, and the Russians visited several Maori settlements in the vicinity of Ship Cove and Waikawa Bay. Professor Barratt's book draws together all available evidence about the visit and particularly about the Maori inhabitants, who were at that time still largely unaffected by European contact, but shortly to be annihilated by inter-tribal wars.

Central to the book are translations of five Russian accounts of the visit, by Bellingshausen himself, I.M. Simonov (astronomer), P.M. Novosil'sky (midshipman), N.A. Galkin (surgeon), and Y.Kiselyov (leading seaman). Of these, only Bellingshausen's journal has previously been available to English readers in translation. All contain something of interest, and together with lithographs of two original drawings by the artist of the expedition, P.M. Mikhaylov, add considerably to our knowledge of the Sounds Maori in 1820. The Russians were interested in the Maori people they met and like earlier and later visitors were anxious to acquire 'curiosities'. Two collections of Maori artefacts in Russia can be definitely attributed to the expedition. These collections are described item by item, and many of the specimens in the N.N. Miklukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnography in Leningrad are illustrated by photographs.

The journals themselves, the artefacts and the lithographs provide the original data. The book also contains extensive scholarly analysis and commentary. The history of Russian involvement in the Pacific, the personal histories and biases of the journalists themselves and the subsequent fates of their journals are described. Various aspects of Maori life as revealed by the journals and drawings are discussed under headings such as food and agriculture, structures, music and dance and the canoe. The list of artefacts surviving in Russia is compared with the items described in the journals and those known to have been acquired by the Russians. The three most important categories of artefact described and collected - woven pieces, personal ornaments and paddles - are considered in greater detail.

Appendices include an account by Michael Trotter of his site survey in the area visited by the Russians (in which three sites described in 1820

were identified and recorded) and a note by David Simmons on the artefacts in the Leningrad collection, and particularly their regional affiliations (which suggest a mixed population with South Island, south-west North Island and East Coast connections). Also of interest is a speculative (and largely unsuccessful) attempt to translate and interpret the fragmentary and inaccurate rendering of the words of a chant, apparently a haka, in one of the journals.

The author is Professor of Russian at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. He worked on this book during two years as a Sabbatical Visitor at Waikato University and obviously gained great assistance from various New Zealand scholars during that time. It is very fortunate that someone with the necessary skills in Russian should have taken so much trouble to explore the ethnographic aspects of the Russian visit. Professor Barratt's prose style is rather heavy going in places. In the translations of the Russian texts, however, he has followed the spirit of the originals and all are clear and easy to read.

The book is attractively produced and extensively illustrated, with location map and portraits of three members of the expedition, as well as the artefact photographs and reproductions of lithographs. Unfortunately the quality of some of the artefact photographs is disappointing. Several minor typographical errors may be a reflections of the speed with which the book was produced.

This book would be valuable for the original Russian data alone. The extensive commentary and analysis are a welcome bonus.

Janet Davidson

Paul Ashbee, The Ancient British. Geo Abstracts Ltd, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 1978. 313 pp., 85 figures. No price.

Richard Wainwright, A Guide to the Prehistoric Remains in Britain, Vol. 1, South and East. Constable, London, 1978. 325 pp., 5 maps and numerous illustrations. \$10.75.

There are many popular books about the prehistory of Britain and its great variety of sites dating from the Neolithic of the fourth millenium B.C. to the Roman conquest of 43 A.D. Here are two more, which can be recommended for very different reasons to members of N.Z.A.A. Paul Ashbee, who is the Senior Lecturer in charge of Archaeology at the University of East Anglia, is an experienced field worker and the author of a standard book on Neolithic long barrows. The key to this book lies in the sub - title, 'a social-archaeological narrative'. A sociological approach to

British prehistory is, of course, not new. Gordon Childe, Ashbee's acknowledged master, entitled his survey of a similar range of material in 1940 'Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles', whilst the latest authoritative survey by Professor Barry Cunliffe similarly is concerned with 'Iron Age Communities in Britain'. To integrate the remains of the past, both sites and artefacts, in terms of people and social change require a highly disciplined imagination. It is only too easy to interpret the manifestations of the past in terms of the present: for example in the last phase of British prehistory is it right to assign the new large cremation cemeteries in the south-east to 'a numerous and prosperous middle class' (p.220)? and for Ashbee to draw on medieval courtly life for analogies with the early Bronze Age (p.178) seems rather far-fetched. In general, however, Ashbee's interpretations are stimulating and he provides enough data and references, so that the discerning reader can check the facts.

The book is of interest to the New Zealand archaeologist because it underlines the need for the interpretation of prehistoric sites in socio-logical terms. Boldly following Ashbee's example, the archaic burials at Wairau Bar, for instance, with the funerary ostentation of both male and female graves might be interpreted as revealing a hierarchical society, analogous to the rich Wessex type of early Bronze Age burials in Britain, and similarly based on trade connections exploiting the argillites of the South Island, as compared with Irish gold. From these, it is only a short step to the development of a prestige class of chiefs and warriors who are known to have dominated classic Maori society at the time of European contact.

Richard Weinwright's book is much more down to earth; it provides a lucid and workmanlike guide to over 400 sites in the south of England, with a brief introduction to the sequence of the periods and to the categories of sites. The guide is arranged by regions, each preceded by a key map and there are useful directions how to find each site as well as its grid reference. The descriptions are concise and up to date and the relevant information from recent excavations is well summarised. The book is well produced, though the illustrations are unnumbered and are variable; the Iron Age hut on p.27 has an extraordinary deep hole in the middle of it that is quite uncharacteristic and presumably of earlier date. This neat little book can be highly recommended to any New Zealander wanting to visit prehistoric sites on a trip to England.