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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEWS

M.P.K. Sorrenson, Maori Origins and Migrations, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1979. 102 pp., references, index. \$5.85.

This little book arose out of Professor Sorrenson's Macmillan Brown lectures given at the University of Auckland in June 1978. The writing style owes much to the original presentation and makes for easy reading.

In his preface the author notes that the title of the lecture series was "Some Modern Maori Myths and Legends", but that on reflection the title was somewhat misleading. He writes, "I was concerned with some modern myths and legends about not by Maoris, and the myth-makers I discussed were, for the most part, Pakehas rather than Maoris." The book is an elegant, if brief, history of ideas about Maori origins, their coming to Aotearoa and their way of life here.

Three sections begin with "The Whence of the Maori" - a phrase that will strike a familiar chord with anyone who has looked at the mass of late 19th century material on the topic. The subject gave room for the most unbounded speculation and romanticism, and not a little racialism. What could be more fitting than that the Maori, who were so admirable in most respects, could be demonstrated to have sprung from the same Aryan origins as ourselves. The diffusionist assumptions behind this idea are still with us in popular mythology and, more eccentrically, in the form of Professor Fell's well publicised fairy-tale of an off-course canoe of Egyptians.

Professor Sorrenson then looks at the topic "The Coming of the Maori" - again a well known phrase. In this chapter he looks at the idea of the 'great fleet', and at the debate on the antiquity of human settlement in these islands - a topic in which archaeology played no small part. The third chapter is concerned with "The Making of the Maori". The most interesting discussion here dwells on the late 18th-early 19th century debate between those who believed in the conflicting myths of the 'noble' and 'ignoble' savage.

Read this book. Our present understanding of the topics examined by the author is unlikely to be the last word on the subject: the historical perspective carries with it a salutary reminder that our ideas too will be under scrutiny one day.

Nigel Prickett

H.S. Gibbs, New Zealand Soils: An Introduction. Oxford University Press, Wellington, 1980. 117 pp. \$11.95.

Soil is a product of it's environment and consequently New Zealand has an unusual variety for its size. New Zealand Soils: An Introduction brings together in its 117 pages a great deal of basic information about the various soil groups in a form suitable for university-level students and those who have a general background in the earth sciences. Any work that deals with soils at this level of generality must obscure a great deal of detail and skip over topics - including those facets of the subject that are of prime interest to archaeologists. H.S. Gibbs manages to condense a considerable body of material in this book although in places this has unfortunate consequences in terms of style and readability. No concessions are made to readers who are unfamiliar with the terminology; terms are thrown in without explanation and although there is a glossary this may not prevent the reader being left somewhat vague about what it all might mean. Instead reference is made to texts that explain, for example, the implications of different types of clay for soil properties.

Like Soils of New Zealand (Soil Bureau Bulletin, 26(1) 1968) this book is also concerned not only with the soils themselves but also with their proper use. The overall balance can be gauged from the chapter headings. There are ten chapters and three appendices. Chapters 1-3 cover various aspects of identifying, describing and classifying soils; chapters 4-7 are concerned with details of soil groups under headings such as "soil description", "soil formation", "soil uses", and "soil classification". Chapter 8 is about palaeosols and, finally, there are two chapters on soil resources and land use. The text is well illustrated with photos, maps and diagrams. There is a select list of references at the end of each chapter.

Archaeologists are users of soil information and while this particular book is of peripheral relevance it does provide the background important to the informed reading of the more detailed Soil Bureau Bulletins. As such it will undoubtedly find a place on the bookshelf.

Tony Walton