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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEWS

Early Eyewitness Accounts of Maori Life: 2. Extracts from Journals relating to the visit to New Zealand in May-July 1772 of the French ships Mascarin and Marquis de Castries under the command of M.J. Marion du Fresne. Transcription and translation by Isabel Ollivier with an Appendix of charts and drawings compiled by Jeremy Spencer. Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust with Indosuez New Zealand Limited, Wellington, 1985. 395 pp.

This is the second in a promised series of five volumes of accounts of French voyages to New Zealand in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the one that will probably be of greatest interest to archaeologists. We already have de Surville's brief visit to Doubtless Bay in 1769; still to come are d'Entrecasteaux, Duperrey, and Dumont d'Urville (1827).

The visit of Marion du Fresne has long had a particular fascination for archaeologists, because of the length of the visit and the observations on Maori life and custom, including the descriptions and plans of the pa on Moturua Island, now known as Paeroa Pa. Although the inhabitants of the Bay of Islands had previously had contact with the Endeavour on Cook's first voyage, the 1772 visit still stands right on the borderline between prehistory and history in a way that later voyages do not.

Some accounts of the voyage, or at least those parts of it relating to New Zealand, have long been available. Ling Roth's English translation of the published French version of the journal of Crozet, second in command of the Mascarin, was published in 1891. The 'historical journal' of du Clesmeur, the youthful commander of the Marquis de Castries, and the journal of Roux, ensign on board the Mascarin, were published in English and French in McNab's Historical Records of New Zealand, Volume 2, in 1914. These three accounts of the voyage were used by Kelly and later by Kennedy and Groube in their studies of the sites in the Bay of Islands.

The new volume draws together surviving manuscripts relating to the voyage, which have been accurately transcribed in French and translated into English, setting the translation beside the original, page by page. Each account is preceded by a brief introduction to the author, his journal, and the source of the manuscript. There is an appendix listing all known manuscripts and their locations, and another, compiled by Jeremy Spencer, of charts and drawings associated with the voyage. Most of these are reproduced.

In this volume we have authoritative versions of du Clesmeur's historical journal and Roux's journal, but only the summary of Crozet's account of the voyage, as the original manuscript from which the French account was published has been lost. Three additional accounts are du Clesmeur's "navigational journal"; a summary of the voyage by Paul Chevillard de Montesson, ensign and clerk on the Mascarin; and a longer anonymous summary which can be confidently attributed to Le Dez, first lieutenant on the Marquis de Castries. The first of these is largely concerned with nautical matters, but includes correspondence between the two captains about what to do when the vessels reached the northern tip of New Zealand. The second is a straightforward account of the voyage, including observations on the inhabitants of the Bay of Islands. The third is a more thoughtful and interesting account of the voyage, by an educated observer of rather philosophical turn of mind, and must be regarded as a discovery of major importance. Le Dez provides a new eye witness account of the abandoned village at Spirits Bay, previously known only from Roux's description. He was at the masting camp during the fateful time when Marion du Fresne himself and a number of his men were killed, and his account of events there is an important addition to the versions of the others: du Clesmeur on board, Roux at the hospital camp on Moturua, and Crozet further inland still where the masts were cut. Le Dez's account includes quite extensive observations on the Bay of Islands and its inhabitants, as well as some interesting observations on Tasmania and Guam.

An item of some historical interest is a letter with comments on the voyage by a prominent French hydrographer of the time, D'Apres de Manneville. He wrongly assumed that Marion du Fresne anchored in exactly the same bay as de Surville three years earlier, and concluded that Marion's fate was probably the direct result of de Surville's behaviour.

The only annotations concern obscure words and problems of translation. Readers who expect to be told which places were visited or what plants and animals are being described will be disappointed. Most readers interested in detail at this level will need to read the journals with other reference works at their elbow. The glory of this book is that it brings together in one place all the known extant accounts in as accurate form as it is possible to achieve. Gone for ever are some of the earlier inaccuracies in translation, such as Roux's "skeleton of an ass", now more satisfyingly translated as "a form of a trough". People interested in a particular problem, and having a little French, can ponder the way a particular word is used by different writers and what exactly it means. For example, the word pagne, or paigne, is usually

translated as "loin cloth". But there are places where the item referred to is clearly not a loin cloth, and it is rendered as cloth. One feels that perhaps there are other places where cloth, rather than loin cloth, might be more satisfactory. The point is that the originals are there to be considered.

On another level altogether, the varying accounts of a few dramatic weeks in our history can be read for the exciting stuff they are. The translations are scholarly but they read well and vividly, and the different perspectives of the narrators come across clearly. By and large the French officers professed to find the Maori women totally unattractive. Chevillard de Montesson, however, found some of them most enticing. One can see how false rumours begin. Roux, who led the attack on Paeroa Pa, found no sign of the lost Frenchmen or their possessions there. Chevillard de Montesson, however, who wasn't there, would have us believe that many of the French possessions were recovered from Paeroa, as well as from the villages of Te Kuri and Pikiorei.

There are no dramatic new discoveries about prehistoric Maori life to be found here. Instead there is the satisfaction of reading exactly what several different observers had to say about the same things, and of knowing that although most were writing retrospectively, we are reading what they wrote, without having to worry about editorial alterations, as we still must with the published version of Crozet's narrative. No one should be under any misapprehension about the amount of sheer slog that is involved in tracking down original manuscripts and publishing them accurately. Isabel Ollivier is to be congratulated on a major piece of scholarship, and on a major coup in tracking down and obtaining permission to publish Le Dez's account of the voyage. Everyone involved in this project can feel proud of a very important achievement.

Janet Davidson

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Gordon Ell, Shadows on the Land. The Bush Press, Auckland, 1985. 112 pp., numerous illustrations, index. \$21.95.

Archaeologists have often commented on the need for a straightforward layman's introduction to the New Zealand archaeological landscape - and here it is at last, written by a non-archaeologist! Gordon Ell has written, illustrated, and published through his own press, an excellent beginners' guide to the archaeological landscape of the Maori past. One can only hope that it gets into the hands of as many New Zealanders as possible.

The origin of this book was the author's association with Dave Simmons in two very stimulating television programmes produced in recent years, "The people before" and "Shadows on the land". During visits to many different locations for filming, Gordon Ell took the many photographs which make up the heart of the book.

The standard of photography is set by the evocative front cover of an old canoe in a rock shelter in the Kaingaroa forest. Inside are 24 pages in full colour and more than 50 black and white photographs. They show sites and places in the northern half of the North Island because that is the area Gordon Ell knows, but they illustrate site types that have a New Zealand-wide distribution and interest. The pictures of stone walls and garden mounds are the best I have seen published. Historical sketches, such as of gunfighter pa, help in interpretation.

The text is brief and well written, and probably pitched at just the right level for many who are looking at and thinking about the sites for the first time. The author tries to 'people' his sites and is not afraid to use his imagination to wonder about the circumstances and nature of life there in the past. There is an especially good coverage of early beach sites, gardening sites, and traditional and musket pa.

This book probably could not have been written by an archaeologist. We know too well the complications and exceptions. But if members of the Association find that their knowledge is not extended by the text, the photographs themselves are worth the price. Or buy a copy and give it to a friend: there is no better introduction to the subject matter of New Zealand archaeology. Perhaps the people who are introduced to the 'shadows on the land' by this book will want to know more and will join the Association!

Association members can order "Shadows on the Land" from the publisher for \$19.95 post free. Send money with order to:

New Zealand Nature Books,
P O Box 32037
Devonport,
Auckland 9.

Nigel Prickett

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