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BOOK REVIEWS

Patrick Vinton Kirch (ed.), Island Societies: archaeological approaches to evolution and transformation. New Directions in Archaeology Series, Cambridge University Press, 1986. 98 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. \$84.00 hardcover.

This volume contains eight papers drawn from two symposia at the XIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, held in Vancouver in August 1983. Although there is no paper about New Zealand, several papers deal with issues or regions that are of particular interest to New Zealand archaeologists. Four are concerned with Polynesia proper, one with a Polynesian outlier, one with Fiji, one with southern Vanuatu, and one with the Micronesian group of Palau. The editor provides a brief introduction and overview. It is the Polynesian and Fijian chapters that will be of most interest to New Zealand readers.

Roger Green offers a plea for a rigorous approach to the reconstruction of ancestral Polynesian society, using a combination of archaeological, comparative ethnological, and historical linguistic evidence. As his paper documents, the desire to reconstruct ancestral Polynesian society has been with us for a long time, and refuses to go away. Indeed it has taken on a new lease of life in the 1980s, with Green himself and Kirch among its foremost proponents. After a brief example of reconstruction of ancestral technology in the form of fishing gear, the paper concentrates on settlement patterns. This paper could be described as "vintage Green", dealing as it does with a topic with which the author has been concerned for many years.

Terry Hunt provides a thoughtful discussion of the causes of change in Fijian prehistory. His paper includes a useful summary of what was, at least until recently, the orthodox view of Fijian culture history, but its particular interest to New Zealand readers lies in his clear and undogmatic discussion of the theoretical basis (or lack of it) underlying orthodox culture historical reconstructions, and the question of gradual internal change versus sudden disruption due to migration. Much of this is very relevant to New Zealand. Hunt's paper was presumably written before Simon Best's thesis on Lakeba was completed but I do not think it has 'dated' as a result.

Robert Hommon's contribution on social evolution in Hawai'i presents a succinct summary of some aspects of the Hawai'ian sequence in the form of a model, "based on inferences drawn from a broad range of archaeological and ethnohistorical information" which is intended as "a tentative explanation of the

evolution of the unique Hawai'ian polities". He compares radio-carbon dates and volcanic glass age determinations, concluding that they may be of similar reliability. The dates support a three-phase division of precontact history: initial colonization and coastal settlement (ca. AD 500-1400); large scale expansion into the inland zone with development of the ahupua'a system (c. AD 1400-1600); and formation of polities resembling those described in early written accounts (ca. 1600-1778).

Summary papers on Hawai'ian prehistory are very helpful to those not directly embroiled in any of the enormous amount of work that has been going on there. This paper, with its emphasis on the inland expansion, is a good one. It also brings into focus some of the problems about both Hawai'i and New Zealand, particularly the date of settlement of these two marginal and remote Polynesian groups, and the currently fashionable problem of why Hawai'i developed a more complex social system. The length of this early and poorly known first phase of Hawai'ian prehistory before the inland expansion has always puzzled me, particularly since the relative lack of bird fauna in the known early sites seems to imply even earlier but largely unrecognised sites. Is the early phase of Hawai'ian prehistory really equivalent to the total span of New Zealand prehistory? What does this suggest about population growth and social evolution in these two very different island groups? Or, as some suggest, is it now time to push back the accepted span of New Zealand prehistory too?

Christopher Stevenson's paper on the socio-political structure of the southern coastal area of Easter Island draws very heavily on obsidian hydration dates. In fact, these dates enable the Easter Island sequence to be divided into thirteen 100-year analytical phases beginning at A.D. 700 and ending in 1864. Such fine time control will be greatly envied elsewhere in Polynesia. Stevenson used a multivariate analysis of 14 architectural attributes from 33 complete ahu structures to define five types of ahu. He then examined the distribution of these types and certain other structures in the study area during phases 7 to 12 as a basis for discussing settlement history. Stevenson believes that much of the ethnographic data from Polynesia is limited and anecdotal in nature, and accordingly he draws on an ethnographic example from the Ibo of south-eastern Nigeria in an attempt to demonstrate the nature of the link between ceremonial architecture and social organisation. Personally I found this digression unconvincing.

Barry Rolett's study of iconographic interpretation of Polynesian petroglyphs takes as its starting point a newly discovered petroglyph boulder on Nukuhiva in the Marquesas, and concentrates particularly on the turtle motif, here recorded for the first time in the Marquesas. Although turtles may

seem of relatively little relevance to New Zealand, Rolett's approach of studying iconographic themes within a cultural context, his interest in "recovery of mind", and his observations about Polynesian petroglyphs in general, are certainly of interest.

Pat Kirch's own contribution is a restatement of the archaeological evidence for external contacts with the Polynesian outlier of Tikopia during the 3000 years of its prehistory. Kirch reminds us that small islands like Tikopia cannot be viewed as closed systems; both internal change and external contacts have to be considered in understanding the development of Tikopian culture.

The remaining two papers take us further afield and serve to remind Polynesianists of the diversity of Oceanic prehistory beyond Polynesia. George Gummerman in his study of Palau takes up a topic of great theoretical interest - the interplay of cooperation and competition in the development of complex societies. He discusses the use of game theory and particularly the iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. This is an interesting theoretical discussion but I felt that the demonstration would have been more convincing if more than one Micronesian society had been included as examples. Matthew Spriggs provides a fairly lengthy account of environmental and political changes in southern Vanuatu, particularly Aneityum.

It is interesting to note that half these papers are derived from thesis research: Spriggs, Hunt, Hommon and Stevenson, while Rolett is also a PhD candidate. Obviously, research of major significance continues to be carried out for these.

The book is very nicely produced, well edited and well illustrated. There is only one thing wrong with it: the price. When the price approaches \$1 per page I cannot recommend News-letter readers to buy it unless they are compulsive book collectors. I do recommend them to borrow it from a library and read those chapters which interest them.

Janet Davidson

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John Wilson (ed.). The Past Today: historic places in New Zealand. Pacific Publishers, Auckland, 1987. 183 pp., numerous illustrations, index. \$49.95.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust is lucky to have an editor of the energy and ability of John Wilson, who not only puts together the quarterly journal Historic Places in

New Zealand but also has assembled from a variety of contributors the raw material for a superb book such as The Past Today. With this book the Trust reaches out to the wider community to urge the case for protection of the historic landscape.

The Past Today comprises nineteen contributions describing a wide variety of historic landscapes throughout New Zealand. These range from Auckland's volcanic cones to the Benhar (South Otago) potteries. Topics which I certainly knew little about include the Catholic settlement at Otaki, Maori settlement at Taumutu (Lake Ellesmere), Raharuhi Rukupo's carved houses at Manutuke, the old Hokianga town of Kohukohu, the mining town of Blackball on the West Coast, Timaru's flourmills, Ashburton's brick buildings and early twentieth century workers' dwellings in Christchurch.

Of special archaeological interest are Janet Davidson's chapter on the Auckland cones and Beverley McCulloch on the archaeology of Kaikoura. Among illustrations for the first of these are reproductions of just a few of Boscawen's superb photographs of the cones as they looked almost one hundred years ago. The text deals briefly but comprehensively with geology and traditional history, and the archaeology, settlement and economy of these marvellous sites.

Beverley McCulloch has a narrower focus, but does deal well with a range of important sites on the Kaikoura Peninsula. The claim that the Fyffe site (Avoca Point) is so very early in the New Zealand sequence is open to question, however, and the title of this chapter, "New Zealand's First-comers: the Maori at Kaikoura", may serve to reinforce the debatable assertion of primacy in the public mind. Nonetheless, the story of the long human history of the district is nicely developed by the author whose interest in cultural continuity does not end with the coming of the Pakeha.

The Past Today is profusely illustrated in colour. Pictures show a wide range of cultural adaptations in an equally wide range of natural environments. Maori and industrial archaeology and historical architecture come together in a feast for those who would fix the centre of our history in New Zealand.

Nigel Prickett
