



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



This document is made available by The New Zealand  
Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

BOOK REVIEWS

Kirch, P. V. and T. L. Hunt (eds) (1988) Archaeology of the Lapita Cultural Complex: A Critical Review. Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum Research Report No. 5. 181 pp. \$17 (U.S.)

Since the recognition nearly 40 years ago of the significance of Lapita pottery in Polynesian and Pacific prehistory, a great deal of time and effort has been devoted to the excavation of Lapita sites. Yet with few excavations fully reported and some reported in only the most minimal form it has been difficult, even for serious scholars of Lapita, to obtain all the necessary information for thorough comparative study and interpretation of what the Lapita cultural complex really is. Archaeology of the Lapita Cultural Complex is a timely attempt to review the present state of Lapita studies.

This useful volume is the outcome of a seminar series convened by Pat Kirch at the University of Washington in 1987 in which the participants "ferreted out, read, and debated every available published and unpublished reference to Lapita." The review revealed many significant gaps in our knowledge of the Lapita cultural complex and consequently provides some useful pointers to areas where further research (accompanied by better publication of results) is badly needed. The review covered all research up to but not including the Lapita Homeland project.

Pat Kirch opens the volume with a brief history of Lapita archaeology, and closes it with a discussion of the major problems and issues identified in the review. The other eight chapters consider the spatial and temporal boundaries of Lapita, the context of Lapita settlements, the technology and decoration of the pottery, the study of flaked stone assemblages, the faunal evidence of fishing and other faunal remains, and the trial application of graph theoretic network models in the study of Lapita exchange.

The authors were surprised to discover that neither the spatial nor temporal bounds of Lapita are as well established as they had expected. Although they have made a valiant effort to provide as correct as possible a list of radiocarbon dates, some mistakes have slipped through. Because of the former practice of the New Zealand laboratory of reporting shell dates already adjusted for marine reservoir effect, the correct conventional radiocarbon dates for some of the shell samples analysed in New Zealand are not given, and the calibrated ages are considerably too young. These problems can only be eliminated by writing to the laboratories for the CRA as now understood.

A more surprising discovery is Dana Lapofsky's conclusion that the Lapita settlement pattern appears to be generalist; coastal, but not specifically directed towards the exploitation of marine resources. It is perhaps therefore not so surprising that there turns out to be very little firm evidence about Lapita fishing practice.

Lisa Nagaoka's review of faunal evidence other than fish suggests that domestic animals are present but rare; where shells have been analysed results seem not to support a strandlooper hypothesis. However, the evidence about faunal remains other than fish is even worse than the evidence about fish.

Another important area where more information is badly needed is the study of long distance exchange. Roger Green has built up a compelling case for Lapita long distance exchange in his study of Lapita sites in the Reef Islands/Santa Cruz group, and from this, long distance exchange has somehow become a sine qua non of all Lapita sites. More evidence on this point is needed from the Bismarck Archipelago but also from Fiji and Western Polynesia, for the view that an early and extensive Lapita trade network in the central Pacific rapidly broke down into a series of isolated communities is quickly hardening into orthodoxy without very much hard data to support it.

There is no doubt that Lapita studies will provide a fertile field for debate about a variety of issues for many years to come. In the meantime, however, this volume will be a useful resource both for practising archaeologists and for senior students seeking to come to grips with Lapita without having to repeat all the background work that provided the basis for the volume. Unfortunately, the exchange rate means that for New Zealand readers the book is not the inexpensive buy it was no doubt intended to be.

Janet Davidson

- - - - -

Simmons, D.R. (1987) Maori Auckland. Bush Press, Auckland. 96 pp. \$19.95.

David Simmons's latest book, Maori Auckland, is composed of three discrete sections. The first part deals with the initial settlement of Tamaki and clearing of the bush for gardens and is based on both archaeological and Maori sources. The second part of the book consists of photographs, ancient and modern, of some places of interest with accompanying information relating to that place. The third part is a reprinting of George Graham's "Maori Place Names of Auckland".

The first section contains information which will interest the reader, but the topics are very loosely strung together and there is no flow from one theme to the next. The Maori description of their gardens written in 1854 (Shortland mss.) is most informative. This section also deals with the seasonal and lunar cycle which, while not relating specifically to Auckland, does continue the theme of gardening practices. The section on the "Nights of the Moon", while it is of interest, does not further the topic of gardening nor refer to Auckland. Simmons then turns to the traditions of Tamaki Makau Rau relating those of Kawerau, Ngati Whatua, Ngati Paoa, Ngati Tai, and other sources. The legends and traditions from so many different tribal sources makes this section stilted. I wonder if it would have been preferable to concentrate on the legends and traditions from one tribal source.

The photographic section is outstanding. If the purpose of the book is to alert the reader to the destruction of many of Auckland's magnificent pa, Simmons succeeds brilliantly. The old photographs are well reproduced and provide a wealth of visual information. My only regret here is that I would have liked this section to be larger, with some more Kinder photographs and possibly a Winkleman panorama which would illustrate the skills of our early photographic recorders as well as give a wider range of sites.

The final section is George Graham's "Maori Place Names of Auckland". The reproduction of this piece in this volume makes the information more readily available to the general public than in the Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum where Simmons originally published it. It has often been remarked that translations of single words and phrases out of context can affect their meaning and it is possible that there are alternative translations for some of the place names.

The majority of the place names mentioned in the text are shown on a map although the lack of precision in identifying some of the the actual places needs to be kept in mind. My main criticism here is that the Tamaki River, with its associated pa and settlements, is apparently not significant enough to be included in a map of prehistoric Auckland - this is a serious omission.

It is hard to criticise a book with so much information and from so many sources. It is designed for the general reader not the specialist, but the referencing of the legends and traditions does mean that it can be used by the serious student.

This book, with its attractive cover, excellent photographs and well presented layout, will be a welcome addition in many Auckland homes.