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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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BOOK REVIEWS

The Island Civilizations of Polynesia. Robert C. Suggs. Mentor: Ancient Civilizations. The New American Library, New York. 1960. N.Z. price : 5/-

The Island Civilizations of Polynesia is to be welcomed as the first attempt in print to summarise and interpret the prehistory of Polynesia in the light of post-war archaeological research. Information from other fields is discussed in terms of its relevance to the archaeological data. The main difficulty in such an undertaking is that our knowledge of the archaeology of the area is still so incomplete. However, it is obviously useful to take stock of the field although one suspects that a summary taking into consideration the next few years of research, or even existing information available since the manuscript was completed, might lead to very different conclusions. In other words, this work must inevitably seem a little premature; archaeology in Polynesia is just getting into full swing, and each new excavation brings new and crucial information.

Aside from its general interest as a summary and one man's interpretation of what we know at present (1960), the most interesting part of the book is the first account of Suggs' own rich material from the Marquesas, a result of the American Museum Crane Expedition of 1956-7, under the direction of Dr. H.L. Shapiro. Suggs' interpretation of Polynesian prehistory is heavily influenced by the expedition's findings in the Marquesas, the account of which, though tantalisingly brief, is of extreme interest. The complete report of Suggs' research, The Archaeology of Nuku Hiva, in press at the American Museum, will be a most welcome addition to the literature.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the information of the book, I must voice my criticism of the technical flaws in the Mentor "Ancient Civilizations" series, of which The Island Civilizations of Polynesia is the third number. (Many readers will already be familiar with Fairservis' The Origins of Oriental Civilization and Cottrell's The Anvil of Civilization. Among the more glaring deficiencies are the following: the text is inadequately documented (one gets the impression that Mentor has a policy of limiting the writer to a small proportion of the footnotes that scholarship demands); there is no bibliography (when one finds a Figure referenced to a particular work, one must proceed through the footnotes in order to find the full reference); the maps have no compass directions or scale (perhaps not so serious a fault, since they are merely sketches); and, most objectionable of all to archaeologists, the illustrations of artefacts contain no indication of scale, and in fact each figure seems to contain pieces of various scales. Although it might be argued that these technical requirements are for the specialist and that this series is aimed at the non-specialist, one is forced to point out that Penguin Books manages to produce an extremely high quality of archaeological publication while obviously not sacrificing public appeal.

Suggs begins his book with a general account of the geography of Polynesia, followed by a discussion of what botanists, physical anthro-

pologists, linguists, folklorists and other non-archaeologists have to say that is relevant to the reconstruction of prehistory. These chapters are to be recommended to the general reader as an indication of the wealth of evidence that is available. However, the factual information ought to be approached with caution as the referencing is too incomplete to be of much use and a number of points might be challenged by the specialists themselves. For instance, Suggs would agree with Merrill (1954) that the kumara is likely to have had its origin in Africa, or at least in Southeast Asia (p.23), an assumption with which few Pacific botanists agree.

Following his treatment of the non-archaeological evidence, Suggs proceeds to a discussion of the archaeological, drawing freely on ethnography and traditions of the various islands where the archaeological data is inadequate. It is in these sections, on the prehistory of Tonga and Samoa, the Marquesas, Tahiti, Hawaii, Easter Island and New Zealand, that the inadequacy of the referencing of the book becomes most apparent. The narrative moves back and forth from fact to conjecture, often giving little indication of the dividing line between them. It is obviously necessary to use a great deal of imagination at our present state of knowledge, but it is only fair to the reader who is not familiar with the literature to make clear the status of the material presented. It is often very misleading as well; the argument moves from a cautious statement on one page to summary statements about 'the present state of our knowledge' a few pages later. An example of this is the Western Polynesian summary, which will be discussed later.

On the basis of excavated material from Formosa and collections from southern Asia, particularly Indochina, Suggs asserts that the Polynesians originated in the South-China-Indochina coastal area. Bearers of the proto-Polynesian culture, speaking Malayo-Polynesian languages moved through the Phillipines and then south into Melanesia and Papua (p.66), and were present, he suggests, in the fringe areas of Polynesia (Fiji and New Caledonia) by the beginning of the first millenium BC (p.72). This he infers not from the presence of Polynesian-type material in these areas but from the fact that in 120 BC the Marquesans possessed Melanesian-type adzes, shell scrapers (shells with a sharpened hole in one side, which, Suggs is the first to point out, appear to be a basic item in the Polynesian tool kit), pottery, and pearl shell 'kapkap' ornaments (the nearest modern record of which, other than from the Marquesas themselves, is from the New Hebrides).

According to Suggs, the Polynesians must have explored and settled in Samoa and Tonga some time during the first millenium BC. From there they explored into the Marquesas and Society Islands, using these later as new dispersal centres. As regards the Marquesas, Suggs cites traditional evidence that Raroia, in the Tuamotus, was settled by a Marquesan chief, and ethnological evidence for the relationship between Mangarevan, Easter Island and Marquesan cultures.

Suggs concludes that the Marquesans must have come from Western Polynesia because of the similarity of the material from the Ha'atuatua site and certain Samoan and Tongan artefacts (p.116). This is the weakest part of his argument and is misleading because the Western Polynesian reconstruction is presented early in the book before we come to the Marquesan findings from which it is derived. The solid evidence boils down to the presence of flaked quadrangular ungripped adzes and Tonna shell 'breadfruit' scrapers, two artefacts which may eventually be shown to be present in other high islands in Polynesia, and pottery at Ha'atuatua. Our knowledge of Samoa around the birth of Christ comes from Golson's 1957 excavation at Vailele (Golson 1957). The basic information derived from this excavation is that the Samoans at that period used the same sort of adzes that they did 2,000 years later (ungripped quadrangular of Duff type 2C), that they possessed undecorated pottery, and that they dug pits and postholes as a part of some sort of structure at ground level. Our knowledge of Tonga in this period is even more limited. The rest, unfortunately, is inference and informed guesswork.

Suggs' interpretation both of Polynesian cultural evolution in general and of the sequences of culture in particular island groups is unilinear, ignoring the possibility that a number of islands may have been settled directly from outside Polynesia or by more than one group of settlers. In this regard one is disappointed that Suggs has not dealt with previous theories of culture history in Polynesia, notably Duff's and those of Speiser and other more recent German and Swiss ethnologists (Speiser 1946). The Polynesians, Suggs assumes, arrived with a basic tool kit, represented by those items that have a wide distribution within Polynesia, but the special artefact, building and art forms of the various Polynesian cultures are interpreted as local developments, with minor concessions to imported items, such as the introduction of Tahitian poi pounders to the Marquesas (p.122-3). Following the dispersal from Western Polynesia into the more easterly island groups, local cultures underwent a period of settled evolution before dispersing again, primarily under pressure of population growth and warfare, to settle 'marginal' Eastern Polynesia — Hawaii, Easter Island, New Zealand, etc. Western Polynesia remained conservative in comparison to Eastern, according to Suggs, maintaining relative uniformity throughout by continued contacts by sea, and showing a much less marked evolution in material culture. Tahiti is also depicted as a conservative area, maintaining, for instance, the same house types throughout its prehistory, but one wonders if this simply reflects the absence of archaeological data from Tahiti, since Suggs has only the immediately pre-European and field survey data to go on. In all these cases, the crucial element in the evolution of culture according to Suggs, is adaptation to the peculiarities of the local environment in virtual isolation rather than the influence of contacts with, or new settlers from other island groups.

The best documentation of a local culture sequence is that from the Marquesas. Using one early settlement site as the base, two rock shelter sites as a mid-point, and the post-European culture as an end, Suggs

arranges artefact and construction types in a logical sequence. Unfortunately he does not as yet give 14C dates for the shelter sites.

The earliest settlement of Marquesans discovered by the Crane Expedition is Ha'atuatua, dated to 120 BC  $\pm$  120, notable as the earliest site yet known in Polynesia. The site is also notable as giving the first evidence from Eastern Polynesia of pottery, and also as probably the richest archaeological site excavated to date in Polynesia, containing evidence of all aspects of living. The beach community at Ha'atuatua included a cluster of houses (a confusing pattern of postholes, without stone pavement, representing to Suggs small boat-shaped houses of poles and thatch), a nearby temple (an oblong enclosure of stones, with two basalt uprights) with a burial ground surrounding it (without grave goods, but showing special preservation of male skulls) and with all the artefactual and culinary rubbish of living in and around the settlement. Included were a full range of artefacts; fishhooks (several types of one-piece shell and bonito hooks), fishhook manufacturing tools (basalt flakes and coral files), food preparation tools (coconut graters and Tonna shell scrapers), adzes (the commonest being ungripped rectangular, but also including some gripped rectangular, triangular, and 'Melanesian' types with cylindrical and plano-convex sections), and 'kapkap' ornaments (drilled pearlshell discs and buttons).

Suggs describes the Marquesan sequence of development of house and ceremonial structure types, fortifications, artefacts and art forms in four main periods. Houses begin as the simple pole and thatch houses on sand of Ha'atuatua and move through the addition of stone pavement, veranda, and artificially terraced foundations, as well as an increase in size, to the modern type, the platform of which was constructed partially of huge stones. The ceremonial structures change from the simple enclosure to one with a platform, to ones with specialised platforms, high stone retaining wall, terrace 'seats' along the sides, and bordering houses. Again, the sequence is also one of increase in size (up to 600 feet long). The appearance of fortifications, ditches and wooden pallisades enclosing small houses and storage pits, is attributed by Suggs to the period 1100-1400 AD, and such structures continued until the 18th century.

These sequences are logical enough, except that as yet we have been given no 14C dates to confirm their chronology. One wishes, in the absence of such dating, that Suggs had made some mention of the presence or absence of such structures elsewhere in Polynesia for relative dating or as confirmation of them as Marquesan innovations. Fortifications of the Marquesan type, as far as can be understood from this brief account, are apparent in many other high islands; if they were in fact invented independently in the Marquesas, and if, as Suggs believes, they are not part of the Archaic repertoire in New Zealand and presumably wherever the Moa-hunters had their origins, how did they come to be found in New Zealand several centuries later? The implications of Suggs' Marquesan sequence as regards the rest of Polynesia in this, as in other respects, are only superficially treated.

The artefact sequences are less complete, due obviously to the limited scope of the excavations to date. Between 100 and 1100 AD pottery degenerates, 'Melanesian' type adzes disappear, some types of one-piece fishhook disappear, and other types of fishhook (unspecified) are invented. Between 1100 and 1400 AD, a system of reinforcing one-piece shell hooks with a separate piece of shell bound over the section where the shank and the point join was invented, according to Suggs, and the poi pounder appeared probably as an import from Tahiti. In regard to the hook reinforcing, one is reminded of what seems to be a parallel development in the New Zealand Archaic hooks where one-piece hooks came to be manufactured in two separate pieces with a binding at the point of greatest strain (Golson pers. comm.) Suggs attributes the inspiration for Marquesan stone carving to the introduction of poi pounders, which were elaborated in later periods. He suggests that this also led to the carving, during the period 1400-1790 AD, of small and large stone tikis, and bone tikis, and to the development of Marquesan woodcarving and tattooing in their present form. Suggs also attributes the Marquesan petroglyphs to this period.

This culture sequence, as reconstructed by Suggs, credits nearly all changes in artefact, art, and construction types to the inventiveness of the Marquesans, who found they could produce large surpluses of breadfruit in their islands, and were thus able to expand their population (Suggs estimates a peak of 100,000) and organise themselves politically in an efficient way which permitted, in the later stages of the sequence, the construction of impressive stone structures and a pre-occupation with warfare. The sequence is convincing as far as it goes, but the credit to the Marquesans as independent innovators must await confirmation as the culture sequences of other island groups are discovered. As well, one wonders if when further excavations are conducted in the Marquesas, or when more radiocarbon dates are obtained, the sequence will be quite so neat; our experience in New Zealand is that the prehistoric sequence is not chronologically simple, and that groups with basically different equipment were apparently contemporaries. In fairness to Suggs, however, the possibility that some islands in the Marquesas lagged behind others in development is occasionally admitted in his discussion.

A unilineal interpretation is also applied to New Zealand. Suggs believes for two reasons that 'Classic Maori culture is the result of local evolution (p.199-200); he feels that it would be impossible for a migration as small as the Fleet is traditionally depicted to be to change the basic orientation of the pre-existing native culture, and that the differences between Moa-hunter and Maori are really very minor. He invokes Golson as our local authority who "has stated the conviction that the Maori culture is a result of direct evolution from the Moa-hunter without benefit of exotic stimuli" (p.199). This statement is somewhat surprising, since current research in New Zealand is attempting, among other things, to demonstrate what in fact the relationship of the two in archaeological terms might be. Returning to the reference cited by Suggs, one finds that his reading of the statement made by Golson, that such "a case could be made", in terms of strictly typological analysis of adzes from the Auckland

province, but that no archaeological evidence was yet available, was inaccurate. One is irritated by Suggs' oversimplification of one of the basic questions in New Zealand prehistory when a more cautious statement could have been offered instead.

Other readers may also be concerned by Suggs' lack of accuracy in minor points of fact; one wonders, for instance, where he got the information that there are ostriches in Australia, emus in New Guinea, and that moas built their nests of twigs and laid a few eggs in each (p.190). (See Golson 1957:272). This unfortunately characterises other chapters than the New Zealand one, and one wishes he had found himself a well-informed proof-reader.

Nevertheless, the New Zealand chapter will be of interest to the general reader. Another chapter to be recommended is that concerning the maritime culture of the Polynesians, entitled "Sails and Stars" (Chapter 7). This is a digression to discuss the navigation techniques and equipment used in their sea voyages. Suggs bears personal testimony to the contemporary skill of Polynesians in navigation (with which I would concur), and he would remain in the camp of the believers in the extraordinary skill and organisation of the Polynesians in deliberate sea voyaging and exploration. He makes some interesting points in a brief criticism of Sharp's Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific.

Suggs points out that what Sharp has demonstrated is that "there is some reason to doubt that at the European contact period the Polynesians were doing a great deal of long voyaging" (p.83). However, Suggs feels that the case is not proved as there was no systematic enquiry by early Europeans in Polynesia into the subject of navigation, and as well that Sharp has overlooked evidence which does not support his theory (Suggs gives several examples on p.83-4). Suggs suggests that even if it were true that 18th century Polynesians were restricted in their ability in voyaging, this does not mean that this was always so in the past; many items in Polynesian technology, such as pottery, were not evident in European times.

However, the argument of most interest is based on archaeological data; in the earliest known settlement in the Marquesas, food preparation tools suggest the presence of food crops such as the coconut, taro, breadfruit and yams (or so he claims on the basis of ethnological parallels) and the bones of nearly the full repertoire of domestic animals (pig, dog, and possibly chicken) suggest that the immigrants were voyaging in well-equipped expeditions. He also claims comparable evidence from Hawaii but does not cite specific data (p.153). Suggs suggests that the absence of some of these items and animals in more remote islands, such as New Zealand, is more plausibly explained by saying that they perished, en route or after arrival, rather than that they were not included in the voyagers' outfit in the first place. Suggs does not dismiss the plentiful evidence for the distance and frequency of accidental voyages, but suggests that what evidence we have is better accounted for by the theory that the Polynesians

were highly skilled seafarers who were deliberately exploring and settling the island world of the Pacific.

Finally Chapter 16, entitled "The Kon Tiki Myth", and Chapter 13, on Easter Island, should be heartily recommended to the fans of Aku-Aku. Suggs gives enlightening personal information on the techniques of the Heyerdahl contingent in the Marquesas which ought to disillusion at least some devotees, though this is probably unnecessary for the readers of this Newsletter.

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The Concise Encyclopaedia of Archaeology.

Edited by Leonard Cottrell. London, Hutchinson, 1960. 512p., 160 plates, 16 colour plates. Price approx. 59/-

Although designed for the non-specialist reader, this volume brings together for the first time most aspects of world archaeology, under one cover, classified and with bold type cross referendoing.

Detail is lacking, due to the limitations placed on the nature and size of the book, but on the whole there is sufficient to answer most queries.

Apart from the obvious disadvantages of such a publication there are some useful non-encyclopaedic sections which form a useful introduction and appendix. They are a "Classified List" according to area or topic, "What is Archaeology?" by the Editor, "Chart of the Cultural Traditions of Early Man", "For Further Reading", and "Notes on Contributors" who are 48 in number and of world standing.



There are omissions. Some are serious. Of modern excavations that at Jarmo is one of world importance. There appears to be no reference to this and many other American excavations.

By far the most serious omission, however, is the total absence of any information on Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand and the Pacific except for two and a half pages on Easter Island (equal to the entries for Air Photography, Carbon 14 Dating and the Iron Age combined), as well as no mention of the Keilor Skull of Australia and the following at the end of the Neolithic entry: "whereas Captain Cook found the Maoris of New Zealand still in the Neolithic period".

This makes us wonder if books like those by Best, Buck, Duff, Firth, Sharp and "Anthropology in the South Seas" together with Polynesian Society and Bishop Museum publications are not read beyond the Pacific. Such is not true. Penguin Books who published Sharp in 1957 print at least 40,000 copies for each edition.

It is to be hoped that subsequent editions rectify these serious faults and change this publication from a good to a first class concise encyclopaedia of archaeology.

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