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FREDERICK VINCENT KNAPP - ETHNOLOGIST : AN HISTORICAL NOTE

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As New Zealand archaeologists pause to review the first twenty-five years of their Association, it is perhaps also a good time to reflect on the contribution made by those who preceded the archaeological era. New Zealand has been fortunate in having a number of distinguished ethnologists : Hamilton, Chapman, Best, Skinner, Fisher, Phillips, Barrow and Duff are perhaps the best known. These were essentially museum men. F.V. Knapp was not one of this group, rather he was a provincial amateur. Yet it is the contention of this writer that his contribution to archaeology and ethnology was and is still of some value. After Knapp's death in 1945, H.D. Skinner (1946:81-2) wrote an obituary which included the following remarks:

"He is to be ranked amongst the earliest field collectors of Maori artefacts and at his death his collection was among the two or three largest ever made.

His most notable achievement was his recognition of the fact that the types of unpolished wood-working implement first recognized by him in Nelson, were not purely local forms invented and elaborated there because Nelson argillite was especially suitable... but were present on all Maori sites where suitable stone was available.

In spite of concentration on unpolished woodworking tools, Knapp was interested in Maori Ethnology along a broad front, being used by Best as his principal informant on the use of excavated gravel in the cultivation of Kumera, and discussing in print other aspects of Maori culture."

Knapp was born in Nelson in 1863 where he went to school and spent the rest of his life as a school teacher and in retirement. He does not appear to have begun publishing his research on unpolished woodworking tools until after his retirement in 1922, though most of the research was undertaken before this date. During the post-1922 period of his life, Knapp was active on the Nelson Education Board, The Board of Governors of Nelson College and the Board of Trustees of the Suter Art Gallery. Knapp was widely read, and corresponded with such ethnological authorities of the time as Elsdon Best (Dominion Museum), and H.D. Skinner (Otago Museum).

Field work

From a study of the Knapp papers deposited in the Nelson Provincial Museum it is possible to gain some indication of the extent of his field work in Tasman Bay. In one unpublished paper alone ('Tasman Bay Maori', see References below) he discusses sites at D'Urville Island, Greville Harbour, Hope's Bay, Ohana, Waikawa, Croiselles Harbour, Whangamoa, Whakapuaka, Nelson, Bell Island, Rabbit Island, Oyster Island, Rough Island, Best's Island, Mapua, Ruby Bay, Kina, Moutere Inlet, Motueka and Riwaka, and he discusses local sources of argillite, red ochre, granite, quartz and notes the presence in sites of the imported materials, obsidian and basalt. A number of additional areas are discussed in other papers. This demonstrates his extensive knowledge of the archaeological landscape. Much of this information is still not included in the Archaeological Association site record file. Thus these unpublished papers could form a valuable beginning point for future research.

Knapp also collected material from many sites in the Tasman Bay area. As far as the author is aware this involved only a limited amount of 'digging'. In accordance with contemporary practice he did not keep adequate records of his excavations, though some general descriptions of these activities have survived.

Private collection

Knapp, besides having a private collection of artefacts, also exchanged artefacts with individuals and institutions. By 1926 Skinner was able to write to Knapp that he thought the Otago Museum had a representative collection of Nelson area artefacts. A letter dated June 1924 from Skinner to Knapp outlines some of the artefacts Knapp received from the Otago Museum in exchange for local material: American stone pestle and arrow, various articles from Otago beaches (including Shag River Mouth) and a Moriori collection. The Knapp collection is now stored at the Nelson Provincial Museum, Stoke, Nelson.

Unpublished papers

Knapp's unpublished writings are also important in that they reflect a much wider field of interest in the prehistoric Maori than his published papers would suggest. He was naturally interested in stone sources, since this was directly related to his research speciality. More surprising are his discussions of settlement pattern, communication networks, trade networks and subsistence economics, not that he discusses them in these terms, but his subject matter would now be seen as falling into these areas of research.

Knapp was interested in the local elaboration of Skinner's 'culture area' thesis (Knapp, n.d.a.), and he was aware of the importance of contacts across Cook Strait. An interest in the physical anthropology and origins of the Maori are also evident from his papers.

Publications

Knapp published eight times in the Journal of the Polynesian Society (see references). Four of these papers relate to his interest in unpolished woodworking tools. He offered typologies for scrapers (Knapp, 1928) and saws (Knapp, 1941). He felt that his research enabled him to refute the claim of his eminent contemporary Hamilton (1912:11) that the making of war canoes was confined chiefly to the East Coast of the North Island. By deducing the functional characteristics of the unpolished stone tools left in beach sites, Knapp was able to suggest the building of large and elaborate canoes in Tasman Bay. Two ethnological notes regarding rare artefacts (Knapp, 1929, 1939) show his interest in artefacts other than unpolished woodworking tools. Knapp (1940) also shows an ability to offer a realistic interpretation of archaeological evidence in recording a sand dune site on Rabbit Island which contained lines and heaps of slate stones. These he suggests were sinkers for large fishing nets, attached to the nets by bags rather than perforations or waisting.

Conclusion

Knapp must certainly be seen as one of the first ethnologists in New Zealand to provide interpretations for the use of stone tools in the absence of traditional or historical information. His contribution is an important part of the history of archaeology and ethnology in Tasman Bay. Jones (1972:30) summarized Knapp's contribution to the study of stone technology as "demonstrating the range of functional characteristics of flake tools rather than serious attempts at a descriptive or functional typology". Certainly archaeologists have since been more stringent in their formulation of typologies and their interpretation of function, it is none the less very true that Knapp contributed to the development of the discipline of ethnology in New Zealand and his contribution was recognised by his contemporaries.

A programme of site surveying and archaeological resource assessment is currently being undertaken in the Waimea Estuary, Tasman Bay. This research has been aided by reference to Knapp's records of this area (S. Bagley, pers. comm). Future research in Tasman Bay may also be served by the results of his field work and research.

References

Unpublished. Knapp collection: Papers held in the Nelson Provincial Museum Archives, Stoke, Nelson. All papers by F.V. Knapp.

- (a) Maori Culture Areas. Notes for remarks at the meeting of the Scientific Branch, Nelson Institute, July 1921. Includes a discussion of Skinners 'culture area' thesis in relation to the Wakatu area, nature of settlement pattern, site type, resources and economy reflected by archaeological sites.
- (b) Tasman Bay Maoris. No date. Includes a discussion of subsistence economics. Outline of areas in Tasman Bay where sites have been located. Notes sources of stone material, and quarries.
- (c) Ancient Maori Life in the Nelson District. No date. A discussion of factors involved in site location in Tasman Bay.
- (d) Letter, Knapp to Cawthron Institute Trustees, 11 May 1941. Notes his ethnological interests, and offers his collection to the Institute Museum, giving his reasons.
- (e) Maori Methods of Handling Tools. No date. Notes resemblance of neolithic technology of Europe to that of N.Z. Maori. Suggests avenues of further research into Maori stone technology.
- (f) Letter, Knapp to New Zealand Institute. Report on research at the Rushpool on the old Maungatapu Track from Nelson to Pelorous, April 16, 1928. Knapp challenges Skinner's interpretation of the site's formation history.
- (g) Maoris in Nelson District. A note book discussion of the Rushpool, and sites at Rabbit Island, Best's Island, Aniseed Valley (a map also), Mt. Heslington and River Terrace, Waimea Paa site at Appleby (map), Snowdens Bush Pa site (map), Maungatapu Quarry, Wangamoa Quarry, Pepin Island. (A second notebook also lists a number of sites, offering comments).
- (h) Letter, Knapp to the President of the Research Grants to the committee of the New Zealand Institute. 5 November 1926. Report on sites and artefacts observed during a visit to the islands in the estuary of the Waimea River. Some digging undertaken and brief descriptions of this given in report. He reports the discovery and excavation of a workshop which he suggests was used for canoe building.

- (i) Whence the Maori.
An essay written from general sources of the period showing a familiarity with the literature on Maori origins and physical anthropology.
- (j) Social Customs of the Ancient Maori. Read at Wakefield, 2 July 1910.
A general paper.
- (k) The Material Culture of the Maori. No date.
References to communication networks, quarries, and site location (e.g. Wangamoa River Mouth).

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- Hamilton, A. 1972 Maori Art. The Holland Press, London.
- Jones, K.L. 1972 Prehistoric Stone Technology. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Anthropology Department, University of Otago.
- Knapp, F.V. 1924 Canoe building tools of the Tasman Bay Maori. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 33:103-115.
- 1928 Maori scrapers. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 37:113-124.
- 1929 Interesting Maori artefacts, Nelson District. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 38:27-28.
- 1932 Double canoes of the Maori at Nelson. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 41:324.
- 1938 Maori rasps and burnishers. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 47:16-19.
- 1939 Patu Miti, a rare type. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 48:192.
- 1940 Trawling customs of the Tasman Bay Maori. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 49:375-381.
- 1941 Maori saws. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 50:1-9.
- Skinner, H.D. 1946 Obituary. Jnl Polyn. Soc., 55:81-82.