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The Big Smoke
New Zealand Cities 1840-1920
Ben Schrader
Bridget Williams Books, Wellington (2016)

I should start by pointing out the obvious: this is not a book about archaeology. In fact, archaeology is only mentioned once throughout the entire text (more on that later). This does not mean that Schrader's *The Big Smoke* is not worthwhile reading for those working or interested in New Zealand archaeology, however, as it holds a wealth of relevant and accessible information about our country's urban spaces.

The introductory chapter clearly outlines what to expect from the rest of the book in a thesis-like manner, complete with an in-depth discussion of the aims, scope and approach of the work, a review of previous literature, and a chapter by chapter outline. Schrader explains his chosen timeframe begins in 1840 with the foundation of New Zealand's first planned settlement (Wellington) and ends in 1920 when "following the end of the First World War, New Zealand emerged as a post-colonial society separate from Britain" (p. 22). This choice is intended to emphasise the part which urban centres and populations played in the creation of modern New Zealand, as opposed to the rural-centric focus of most other major national histories conducted over the past few decades. He is also quick to point out that this is more of a general overview than an in depth look at individual aspects of urban colonial life, and freely admits that there are areas which he does not touch upon. Some of these gaps are purely down to the time and funding constraints Schrader faced but others, including the role of non-Europeans (other than a brief foray into Māori experience and influence) and city life later in the twentieth century, are missing because they are severely understudied.

The main chapters for the most part flow chronologically and chart the growth of the cities, with each chapter focusing on an issue pertinent to each stage of development. Chapter 2 tackles the initial laying out and construction of the cities while the following chapter explores how these physical characteristics affected the new inhabitants. The role of the urban population in cultural landscape and identity formation is discussed in Chapter 5 now that the cities are large enough to become centres of these processes, and the emergence of dynamic pluralistic identities that respond to new ideas and technologies forms the basis of Chapter 6 as the cities continue to grow. Many of the processes discussed up until now occurred out in the streets of the five cities, but by the end of the nineteenth century (and Chapter

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6) authorities were discouraging “street life.” Chapter 7 covers one of the foremost reasons for this shift: public health. As New Zealand’s urban populations boomed around the turn of the twentieth century and the cities themselves began to age, the healthiness of these spaces came to the forefront of public concern. The final body chapter (8) describes our nation’s transformation from a rural to urban society, when the numbers of people living in cities first outnumbered those in the country in 1911. Schrader considers in this chapter the reasons why this has been viewed as a negative, or at best ignored, by previous history scholars, and why the classification as an urban society has sat so uncomfortably with many New Zealanders for so long. The exception to the chronological structure is Chapter 4 which provides an overview of the role Māori played in city life. Schrader mentions early on that this aspect of New Zealand urban history is severely understudied and devotes a chapter solely to this topic to draw attention to that.

One of this book’s biggest strengths is its approachable style. In contrast to traditional histories which tend to be rather dry and devoid of personality, Schrader’s voice can be heard loud and clear throughout the text. He even starts with a personal account of his connection to several New Zealand cities, which I feel is a nice touch. It immediately lets the reader know that this book is about *people* as much as it is about buildings and streets. The early histories of the first five cities are covered well and the copious notes throughout allow for specific interests to be followed up and explored in more depth by readers motivated to do so. Schrader also does well to provide a refreshing perspective on cities as positive social spaces. He goes some way to challenging the traditional view of urban centres as dirty and places which settlers would have lived only if they were unable to live on their own farm in the country.

The Big Smoke does not take enough risks to have many glaring flaws, although Schrader’s devotion of a single chapter to Māori input rather than attempt to incorporate them throughout the narrative could be seen to have the opposite effect to what he intended. This issue is tricky in that, as Schrader mentions, so little research has been done into this aspect of New Zealand’s past that the odd mention of Māori involvement in urban life scattered through the text would easily get lost or appear as an afterthought, and yet sectioning the topic off into its own anachronistic chapter runs the risk of perpetuating the idea of urban Māori as marginal and not heavily influential to the colonial processes. This is something that can only be addressed with more research on the topic and will take time, so Schrader cannot bear all the blame for that one.

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The main weakness is, again, not one that can be entirely attributed to the author. The lack of engagement with archaeology is disheartening to say the least. As mentioned above, there is only one explicit reference to archaeology's contribution to the understanding of New Zealand's urban development (investigations at Te Aro pā on Wellington's waterfront) which itself is not even featured in the main text, instead tacked onto the end of a figure caption (p.25). This is despite the fact that a huge proportion of archaeology occurring in New Zealand today takes place in urban contexts and provides just the sort of social data which Schrader is so desperate to bring to the fore. Every day archaeologists around the country are recording sites, features and artefact assemblages which provide tangible links to the experiences of the past inhabitants of our towns and cities. This data has the potential to be used to piece together the entangled stories of the built environment and those who occupied it in precisely the way which Schrader entreats, and yet the bulk of it ends up languishing in the grey literature. Obviously, it is not possible or even necessary for all the information held within these reports to be published but as a field we need to take more pride in what we do and recognise that people outside of archaeology want to hear the stories we unearth, no matter how mundane many of them may appear. We need to remember that the evidence we gather during cultural resource management work is relevant and important, and not just for legislative purposes.

In conclusion, *The Big Smoke* provides an easy to read overview of the formation and early history of New Zealand's first five cities. This alone makes it beneficial to those archaeologists who work in any of these centres but it offers so much more than that. It is an exploration of the relationship between cities and their inhabitants: how cities shape people just as people shape cities. Schrader admits that this book is more of a starting point than a definitive work on the subject, but it is a starting point which can give some validation and welcome direction to the vast amount of urban archaeology being undertaken in New Zealand centres today. Archaeology is well suited to asking these types of questions as we deal with the physical remains of both the urban environment and the material remains of the people who interacted with it, the two of which often overlap and highlight the entanglement which underpins most of Schrader's work. *The Big Smoke*, therefore, would make a useful addition to the bookshelf of any New Zealand archaeologist who works in urban areas or anyone who simply wants to know a bit more about the city they live in.

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