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REVIEWS

Anne Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings between Maori and Europeans 1642-1772*. Viking, Auckland. 1991. 477 pp. $69.95.

This is, at least for the time being, the definitive account of early contact between Maori and European. The narrative is a product of an exhaustive study of the European accounts, illuminated by insights derived from studies of tribal histories and customs, and archaeology. In chapter after chapter there is a wealth of detail drawn from the original European accounts, including reproductions of original charts and drawings, along with a commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of the sources, and an interpretation of what occurred as Maori and European met for the first time.

Two Worlds is the main product of the 'Early Eyewitness Accounts' project. The project was begun over a decade ago and associates have published some of the less accessible primary sources, including *Extracts from Journals Relating to the Visit of the French Ship* St Jean Baptist *in December 1769 under the Command of J.F.M. de Surville* and *Extracts from Journals Relating to the Visit to New Zealand in May–July 1772 of the French Ships* Mascarin *and* Marquis de Castries *under the Command of M.J. Marion du Fresne*.

The records of the early European visitors have always had a prominent place in the way archaeologists think about New Zealand prehistory. There are existing detailed studies of the archaeology and documentary evidence relating to early visits to places such as the Bay of Islands and Queen Charlotte Sound and *Two Worlds* is no substitute for these, at least in terms of detailed discussion of the archaeological implications of the records and the interpretation of the archaeological landscape. *Two Worlds* is, however, comprehensive in terms of both its geographical coverage and the range of sources employed, and these are just two of its many strengths.

What comes across particularly well is the complete inability of either Maori or European to understand the intentions of the other, and the failure of good intentions to prevent conflict. The well-intentioned instructions given to Cook, and his best efforts to carry them out, could not prevent bloodshed. Du Fresne's belief in the 'noble savage', and his ignorance of Maori lore and custom, caused him to ignore warnings that the French presence in the Bay of Islands was about to provoke a violent reaction. The narrative goes into events in considerable detail, but is very readable.

The explanations of what was happening at the first meetings relies on there having been substantial continuity in behaviour between the time of the visits and later, better-documented, periods. This is not an endorsement of the notion that people belonging to a culture share the same values and the same understandings, have shared them through time, and thus have a privileged view of the past. It may, regrettably, be seen as such. The explanations which are offered seem generally plausible enough, but the past is peculiarly plastic in the

face of this sort of approach. Even where behaviour remains the same, changes in other areas of society can alter the meaning beyond all recognition.

Salmond is critical of an anthropology which produces static, standardised, accounts of the pre-contact way of life. This is, however, now a rather rare form of anthropology. More understandable is the emphasis placed on regional variability (long a theme of archaeological studies) and on landscapes, sites, ancient objects and remembered stories, as well as documents. Salmond has put considerable effort into recovering Maori views of the first encounters and stresses that there are different sources and different perspectives. Each has its place, depending on the circumstances, but no source or perspective can be exempt from the appropriate scrutiny. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work out that way in practice.

Salmond argues that the visitors were shaped by the standards and expectations of the societies which produced them and that this needs to be considered in interpreting their writings. It is appropriate, therefore, to ask what current concerns helped shape the book under review. *Two Worlds* is part of the current rethinking and rewriting of New Zealand history and, like so much of this effort, it expresses a hope to remove 'some of the misconceptions and bigotries that appear in popular talk' (p. 12). The problem is that it is difficult, particularly for Pakeha writers, to subject to scrutiny Maori accounts and perspectives, even about events of some 220 years ago, without potentially getting entangled in destructive ideological battles. This has made it unwise to treat Maori sources and perspectives in the same way as others: instead, they have to be treated with an almost exaggerated respect. Salmond would probably want to describe the situation differently but, whatever the description, there is undoubtedly a dilemma here for scholars.

Salmond makes much play of the new perspectives Maori sources have to offer. The first meetings were, however, peripheral events in tribal histories. This imbalance in the available material has always prevented a detailed discussion of tribal perspectives. This should not be, but in the present climate often is, mistaken for bias. Salmond is, in the final analysis, as unable to overcome this imbalance in the available sources as any of her predecessors.

The Maori material is uniformly disappointing. It consists of reminiscences of the events collected long afterwards and scanty information, some not very specific to the people and places on the Maori side, from tribal histories. These sources do sometimes add something to the picture but they can at best only supplement or offer a perspective, sometimes patently unconvincing, on the fuller European accounts. Te Kani-a-Takirau's story about gunpowder (p. 181), for example, probably has its origins in humour, not tribal histories. Salmond's commentary on these accounts is muted and indirect. Stories of the introduction of a variety of European items at Tolaga Bay draw only the comment that some details probably reflected later events (p. 184). This probability, however, changes everything.

A text purporting to record an early unknown visit by Europeans, possibly Portuguese or Spanish, is also reproduced. It is not clear from *Two Worlds* when this account was written down and which details represent traditional material handed down and which represent more recent commentary on that

material. There is no genealogical information associated with the story, and nothing to suggest why it was passed down. There is, therefore, every reason to be sceptical about its significance.

An example of current concerns finding their way into the text involves the role of women. Salmond argues against the views of some early visitors that 'the women do ... all the drudgery' (p. 271) and 'men make women do all the work' (p. 423). Picking up on a comment by Banks, Salmond argues that it suggests something which is 'a far cry from the miserable, toil-worn drudges depicted by some earlier European writers' (p. 271). Yet Banks clearly says 'how the sexes divide labour I do not know'. A note by Pottier draws the comment that it indicates 'much less gender-based division of labour than has been suggested' (p. 354). These remarks address the argument that women enjoyed different, but equal, roles in pre-contact New Zealand. This argument has little to do with the past and much to do with concerns about the place of women in contemporary Maori society.

The sketches of the European societies of the 17th and 18th centuries seem to suggest that life was generally nasty, brutish and short. How realistic is this portrait? How representative are the quoted records of starvation from the burial registers of La Croix-du-Perche, for example? The section on the 18th century English background dwells on the contrasting lifestyles of the rich and the poor, the harsh punishments, and the commonplace rowdiness and rioting. The point is reinforced by the choice of illustrations: a public hanging and a cock fight – both by the satirist William Hogarth – and of a fashionable part of London. This is all rather too simple. Instead, Salmond seems to be drawing a rather pointed contrast between the European societies on the one hand and Maori society on the other. The 'noble savage' lingers on in *Two Worlds* in an attenuated, rhetorical, form.

It is important to end by noting that my complaints are essentially minor ones. *Two Worlds* remains a remarkable achievement.

Tony Walton

Thor Heyerdahl, *Easter Island - The Mystery Solved*. Souvenir Press, UK. 1989. 225 pp. $79.95.

Thor Heyerdahl's latest book is a lesser tome than the title claims. For the serious student of Oceanic archaeology the level of scholarship will disappoint. Heyerdahl's return, after 30 years, could at least have been the catalyst for an overdue review of the recent fieldwork by both indigenous and Chilean archaeologists.

Sadly that was not the result. The volume single-mindedly attempts to validate theories launched with Kon Tiki in 1947, almost exclusively without reference to recent decades of research elsewhere in the Pacific.

Yet this is a popular publication that will have enormous impact, because the author is who he is. At 75, Heyerdahl, the 'Living Treasure', is the undisputed doyen of the armchair anthropologists. In a career spanning four decades and almost as many continents, he has challenged the orthodox, proposed the preposterous and done the unthinkable. If dissension promotes the progress of knowledge, archaeologists are in his debt.

It appears that the book is intended as a definitive culture history of Easter Island. There are five sections: an introduction, a narrative of European discovery and contact, an account of traditional and oral histories, an archaeological summary, and conclusions. Having claimed that the cultural history of Easter Island was shrouded in mystery, Heyerdahl capriciously juggles with whatever evidence fits best to sustain the storyline and build to a finale. A single sentence summarising Easter Island tradition reveals the author's design – 'Long-ears from the direction of America first, short-ears from the direction of Polynesia afterward' (p. 239).

Undoubtedly much of what Heyerdahl presents has factual veracity, but the failure to observe the process of methodological syllogism requires the reader to reject the good with the bad. Few archaeologists reject South American influence in the Pacific; the debate is about process, extent, chronology and impact. Archaeo-botanical remains of kumara in Polynesia potentially by 1000 AD (D. Keys, Captain's Log 28,000 BC: Made Man's First Sea Voyage, *The Independent on Sunday* 1991: 7) clearly demonstrate contact, but beyond that simple statement increasingly lie the realms of speculation.

Good culture history requires sustainable evidence to document:

1. the date of first settlement,
2. the geographical and cultural origin of the settlers,
3. the process of cultural adaptation after settlement with explanation of observed change, and
4. the effects of proto-historic contacts on the culture under study.

Although Heyerdahl must be aware of the demands of good scholarship he fails to deliver the goods.

Heyerdahl also treats other branches of the discipline with inexcusable superficiality. The physical anthropological evidence includes an inconclusive study of blood groupings, two pages of 'mug-shots' and the clearly erroneous assertion that rocker jaws are not a Polynesian anatomical feature. The linguistic evidence, comparative ethnology and art-historical discussions are similarly plagued with contestable or erroneous evidence beyond the scope of this review to rebut.

Of even greater concern is the systematic academic violence done to the notion of Polynesian culture. Heyerdahl claims that the three most commonly listed Polynesian culture markers are the wooden tapa mallet, bell-shaped stone poi pounder and wooden kava bowl.

The archaeological absence of these elements in Easter Island, he dares to argue, demonstrates that the Polynesians were not the first settlers, but came 'humbly and empty handed' and surrendered their customs and beliefs to the

pre-Inca occupants! (p. 173.)

In Heyerdahl's story the Polynesians are linguistically and physically present, but become culturally invisible.

The tragedy of all this, of course, is that having been published as a coffee-table volume, everything within its covers will become the authorised version in households around the world.

The book is handsome, lavishly illustrated with black and white and colour photography supported by extensive captions. There are few typographical errors or spelling mistakes. A pity really, because too many people judge a book by its cover.

Roger Fyfe