



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/>.



REVIEWS

Richard Walter. *Anai'o: The Archaeology of a Fourteenth Century Polynesian Community in the Cook Islands*. Monograph 22 of the NZAA Monograph series, 1998. Members price \$20.00, non members \$28.00 (plus postage in both cases)

Richard Walter had the privilege of being the pioneer archaeologist on Ma'uке in the Southern Cooks. Ma'uке is a raised coral island with a narrow fringing reef flat and a remnant volcanic core. This island is not a scene of quite the scale of some of the other pioneering efforts in the region, of the Emorys or Suggs of the past, but never the less the monograph produced has something of the same spirit.

Richard addressed his attention to a site at Anai'o on the leeward coast of the island, adjacent to a surge channel through the reef, where tools had been surface collected for a number of years. The site was one where there had been good preservation of bone and shell material in a stratified context in coral sand. Despite a reasonably extensive investigation the amount of this material and artefacts in other materials recovered was not large. Good evidence was found though, of the structures in the site and their patterning. The analysis is tackled in a number of ways. The spatial patterning is analysed, the forms and functions of the tools, the bone and shell material, for the evidence of the subsistence activities. The discussion of the fish and shellfish material in relation to the fishhooks, the local environment and contemporary fishing is a particular strength. Some of the material did not readily yield conclusions and the report is a model for seeking information from material which does not always speak for itself. Local people supplied the workforce for the excavation and in several places their contribution to the analysis from their knowledge of their home and its history is evident and

clearly valuable. The material culture is argued to be a representative of a wider Eastern Polynesian archaic. Certainly not all of the characteristic artefacts are there, but there are enough to make a convincing case that the site fits in the pattern.

Some of the finds were noteworthy in a broader context - there are some new contributions to the thin scatter of pottery from Eastern Polynesia and probable imported adze material from Samoa. New Zealand archaeologists cannot help but be intrigued at the presence of a single New Zealand fur seal bone - they seem to have lead the way for contemporary New Zealanders taking winter holidays in the Cooks. There is an in-depth analysis of the stone material sources - mostly external to Ma'uke - and the relatively high number of pearl shell artefacts and debitage in the site in relation to later sites - is also put into context of the external source of pearl shell and its implication for exchange relations.

There is a convincing case put up for the inhabitants of Anai'o being the beneficiaries of a wide exchange community, wider than operated later in Cook Island prehistory. But Anai'o was not site occupied when the island was first settled. The dating, the dominance of adventive land snails and the negative evidence of the few birds recovered, lacking the species one would expect in an exploitation of an untouched island, all argue against that. The imported materials then cannot be the result of the efforts of explorers, rather of a more settled pattern of voyaging and exchange.

The site is of just the age that if continued contact was maintained with New Zealand one might hope to find evidence of it. The explanation of the seal bone is almost certainly more prosaic and perhaps the island with its reduced resources compared to the high islands is not a likely place of departure or port of call for return voyagers.

The monograph draws out conclusions and comparisons at several levels, on settlement patterns and economics to do with life on Ma'uke, contrasts and comparisons with the now much better known archaeology of the Southern Cooks, conclusions on the exchange of stone and pearl shell over the course of the history of the Southern Cooks and on settlement and later interactions generally in tropical East Polynesia. Some of this presentation is not always easy reading as it occurs spread through the volume - one jumps from a description of a class of finds to local implications, to a Cook Island perspective and often to a wider one again, then back to the next area of

detail. The absence of illustrations of the adzes found is surprising given that conclusions are drawn from the cross sectional forms found.

However there are convincing opening and closing chapters which draw the material and the state of research in the region into a more satisfying whole. In these and in the detail, there is much to interest archaeologists with interests beyond the Cook Islands and New Zealand archaeologists in particular.

The monograph is attractively produced in what has now settled in the NZAA style. I did find though, that on my looking up cited authors in the references section, more than one was missing.

Garry Law
Auckland

Anthony Dreaver. *An Eye For Country. The Life And Work Of Leslie Adkin.* Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1997. \$49.95

Leslie Adkin (1889-1964) has a mixed reputation among archaeologists. His fieldwork, drawings, and cartography, as exemplified in his best-known work *Horowhenua* (1948), are highly regarded. His work in the Horowhenua provides a solid record of the archaeology of the area but his model of New Zealand prehistory gained little acceptance at the time and is now of little more than historical interest to archaeologists. The revival of his model in recent years, however, demonstrates that even bad ideas can persist. There have been occasional claims of Waitaha sites of great antiquity in Northland appearing in the news media in recent years, along with the inevitable assertions of a cover-up by archaeologists.

Dreaver's biography of Adkin is a fascinating account of his life and times. In the first half of this century, many sciences struggled to maintain a foothold in the country's institutions and many advances in knowledge relied on the efforts of amateurs and the work of voluntary organisations like the Polynesian Society. This was the situation for much of Adkin's life and it only began to change in the 1950s. The New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) was formed in 1954 and Dreaver's discussion of Adkin's involvement is virtually a mini history of the early years of the organisation. Yet, almost from the beginning, Adkin was an outsider. There was a generation gap, heightened by Adkin's rural conservative politics, and

his Methodist upbringing. He had served as a young man in Massey's Cossacks in 1912 (along with Elsdon Best), loathed the Labour Party, and seems never to have been entirely at home in the increasingly urbanised New Zealand of the 1950s and early 1960s. Although he drifted away from the church in his middle years he came back to it towards the end of his life. He tended to dislike beards, academics, and Aucklanders.

Adkin's approach to prehistory was only one of three or more models of prehistory which were debated in the late 1950s. His model of settlement was framed in terms of migrations and displacements of groups with different cultural assemblages. (The most succinct summary of this model and the evidence on which the chronology was based is an article by Adkin in *N.Z. Science Review* in 1952.) The model was already an anachronism - a reminder of the way prehistory used to be written, but no longer was. Adkin was critical of Golson's model and felt it was full of useless generalities and often thought that his views were denied a fair hearing. This was heightened by Golson's attacks on his position, most notably in a 20 page article in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1960. Inevitably, the text tells the story of these years from Adkin's point of view but Dreaver is scrupulously fair to all concerned. The 1950s were also productive years for Adkin's scholarship. His book on *The Great Harbour of Tara: Traditional Maori Place-names and Sites of Wellington Harbour and Environs* (1959) is still regularly consulted by iwi and archaeologists alike.

Adkin's attitudes to Maori also tended to put him offside with many in the Association. To their credit, many of them were far adrift from contemporary popular attitudes in their insistence on a role for Maori and in their emphasis on consultation. This was felt by Adkin to be wrong-headed. He was scathing of those who encouraged what he regarded as Maori pretensions to know what had happened in the distant past. Yet this is only part of the story for Adkin respected kaumatua with expertise in traditional knowledge and did believe that there was historical truth to be found in oral traditions (his critics claimed with some justification that he was working with corrupted material). He peppered his own writings with Maori words in a ways that foreshadows modern New Zealand English.

Dreaver has produced a very readable account and has made very good use of Adkin's own photographs and drawings to illustrate the book. Adkin deserves to be remembered an extraordinary person who created a role for himself as an amateur geologist and archaeologist in an unpromising setting.

Through his publications and unpublished notebooks and other material, he has made an enduring contribution to the study of prehistory.

Tony Walton
Wellington

Bahn, Paul (ed.). *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. pp. 386. 372 figures and plates. A\$64.95.

In his Forward to this most excellent book, Lord Colin Renfrew describes the past as the last great unknown continent and invites us back on a voyage of self-discovery. But we are hardly surprised that this Cambridge vessel barely reaches the Pacific. That story remains for us to write. In the editor's Preface, Paul Bahn takes a more mundane line in considering archaeology as two parallel soap operas. The first we recognise instantly as the archaeologists themselves: the "cliques, power-groups and mafias, saints and scoundrels, bores and bullies, insiders and outsiders, just as in any other walk of life". The second is archaeology's view of the past, which is constantly changing with new discoveries and methods in a changing context of ideas. If the first soap is all too factual, the second is inevitably fictional, although most archaeologists try to be objective about the past, Bahn says.

The book follows the slow development of archaeology from the fumbings of early antiquaries to the sophisticated multidisciplinary approaches of the present; from the days of the polymath to those of the extreme specialist. One main development - not always a blessing - has been the ability to find out more about less. While it is still important to find *things*, archaeology now concentrates on finding out *about* things. Bahn and his stable of co-authors strike a fine balance between the spectacular discoveries and the developments in ideas which archaeologists have used to make sense of the past, "from the naive assertions and speculations of the beginnings to today's post-modern navel-gazing and lack of confidence in 'facts'".

Above all, the book is beautifully illustrated with a very large number of drawings, paintings and photographs of people, places, sites and objects. As a witness to generations of students grumbling their way through the study of the history of anthropology, I felt that the illustrations in this book, alone, could make the teaching and learning of the history of archaeology more lively. However, this book is also appealing to the layperson, student and

professional archaeologist alike.

The organisation of the book is by period, then region, person and site, and the coverage is (almost) global. The first chapter is concerned with pre-modern ideas about the past and it seems that the notion that humans had a considerable antiquity existed among Babylonians, Greeks and Mesoamericans. Yet, as late as the nineteenth century, the past was still locked into Archbishop Ussher's conventional Biblical chronology that the World was created as recently as 4004 BC. Chapter 2 covers the period from 1500-1760 when the rise of antiquarianism combined an awareness of the field evidence of the past with new revelations about other exotic societies being discovered around the World. My favourite antiquary is Gerald Camden who, in the sixteenth century, found in the study of the past "a sweet food of the mind, well befitting such as are of honest and noble disposition".

Chapter 3 concerns the contributions of antiquarians and explorers in the period 1760-1820. Whereas a Medieval view of the past had been that humans were intransigent backsliders from God's plan into degeneracy, by the end of the eighteenth century the view was reversed. A belief in progress led to enquiry, exploration, and even excavation. The grand tour was made to the Classical world and the Orient was discovered. Chapter 4 looks at the mid-nineteenth century from 1820-1860 which marked a transition from antiquarianism to archaeology proper, and culminated in the acceptance of the great antiquity of humans and with Darwinism. By 1860 major excavations were taking place around the world, the classification of artefacts injected order to material remains and to a sense of their relative time depth, and national museums were displaying antiquities to the public.

Chapter 5 is about the search for human origins from 1860-1920 which began in an imperial spirit of unilinear evolution. In this period, substantial light was thrown on the substance of prehistory, world-wide. The quality of some work was as good as today's but some was rougher stuff. Sir Mortimer Wheeler said of the Holy Land that "more sins had been committed in the name of archaeology than in any commensurate portion of the earth's surface". Chapter 6 describes archaeology as coming of age between 1920-1960. While major discoveries were still made, advances in science were of great importance to a maturing discipline of archaeology. Contributions such as aerial photography, pollen analysis and radiocarbon dating led to a new

professionalism. By 1960 archaeology was a thriving discipline but, freed from the preoccupations of complicated chronological reckoning, archaeologists were expressing dissatisfaction with traditional approaches.

The period from 1960 to the 1990s is described as one of new techniques and competing philosophies. In recent decades there has been a marked improvement in the ability to extract detailed information from material using new methods. Yet, at the same time, much of the energy and resources of archaeology have been channelled from "pure research" to salvage projects - some of obvious value but many others of dubious quality. Against this background there have been many theoretical debates including those of the "new" processual archaeology with its various strands including emphasis on environment, systems analysis as a model for society, "scientific" hypotheses, quantitative methods, "middle-range theory" and cognitive systems. Inevitably, this led to a "post-processual" reaction which has corrected many of the excesses of the "new" archaeology and raised other issues such as gender and ethnicity. However, arguably, post-modernism raises further problems of its own. In recent decades we have also seen major developments in areas such as zooarchaeology, palaeobotany, computer simulation, urban archaeology, wetland archaeology, and underwater archaeology. So the book brings us right up to the present.

When reading history one is inevitably tempted to try to take lessons from it or, at least, to make up moral fables, and a number come to mind. Firstly, this book goes into much more detail than most histories of archaeology about the source of particular ideas and theories, many of which are attributed to great figures although often not actually originated by them. For instance, Thomsen's Three-Age System was anticipated in classical times.

Secondly, while it is certainly true that unbridled *theory* without *fact* may be colourful but often unhelpful, archaeology has also repeatedly shown that fact without appropriate theory is stifling. A good early example of the latter case concerns the English gentlemen who, after about 1800, obsessively dug some thousands of British barrows. Their approach was empirical and scientific, for its day, and their famous catch-cry was "never mind theories, we speak from facts". Needless to say their theories were inadequate to inform those facts. With regard to a useful balance of fact and theory, I am reminded of the way chronometric hygiene has been applied to the question of the

colonisation of New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific Plate, over the last decade. The focus, so far, seems to have been not on *what* happened but, rather, on *when* it happened (whatever it was). It seems to me that a theory of each is needed to inform the other.

Archaeology in the service of states has had some sinister episodes reaching its worst excesses in Nazi Germany earlier this century. However, the past is never politically neutral. Inevitably, in contemporary New Zealand, as in all modern nations, ideas about the past are contestable and political. Interested parties of all kinds have a range of perspectives on archaeology while archaeologists, themselves, take a range of different positions on issues with social and political implications. Our reactions to such issues can be expressed in various ways, some helpful, others less so. For example, it is not constructive or realistic for archaeologists to regard excavation more as a mode of destruction than as a source of the knowledge needed to inform the conservation management of archaeological landscapes.

Finally, we note that the post-modern world allows the past to take some curious twists. A contribution of critical theory since the 1970s, is that no knowledge is politically innocent and this questions the objectivity of any history. As Bahn says, it makes it difficult to rank claims about the past, as truth. This helps the Druids to flourish still at Stonehenge. In New Zealand we have numerous bizarre and unsubstantiated stories such as the exploits of the builders of the non-existent "Kaimanawa Wall" - or of various but, as yet, unidentified explorers from the Old World who, it is claimed, repeatedly reached New Zealand before Tasman.

Which all goes to show that many things can crawl out of the woodwork of the past. However, Paul Bahn's first rate *Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology* is a sane, stimulating and first-rate book to look at, to read, and to own.

Geoffrey Irwin
Department of Anthropology
University of Auckland