



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## REVIEWS

**Trapeznik, Alexander (editor). *Common Ground? Heritage and Public Places in New Zealand*. Otago University Press, Dunedin. 2000. 164pp. index. \$39.95 paperback.**

This volume was conceived while the editor was planning the Master of Public History Programme at Otago University. Alexander Trapeznik designed it to offset the dearth of publications dealing with heritage and public history in New Zealand. It consists of invited contributions from public historians, a conservation architect, an archaeologist, and a planner, most of whom have some association with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and with ICOMOS.

The first chapter by Trapeznik and Gavin McLean usefully raises issues of definition, e.g., of what is meant by the terms public history and heritage. The authors also discuss the currents and counter currents (some might say whirlpools) of heritage practice in New Zealand today. Where one sector of the community talks national identity, others are working in terms of a plural definition of the past, one that supports those who struggle to maintain ethnic, class or gender identities against more orthodox views. Those who seek to use heritage as a marketable commodity often decontextualise the material evidence while practitioners debate the ethics of fabric retention. There is a useful section on the role of house museums of the HPT variety. The authors argue that house museums should be sites where the preconceptions of the past are challenged and re-examined. The past, however, continues to be an area of contestation, as in the 'Black-armband' debate in Australia, or the controversy about the now-lapsed proposal to fence the Kerikeri Mission Station. The uses and abuses of heritage are as much about contemporary power struggles as they are about history.

In a chapter on the preservation of heritage buildings, Jeremy Salmond argues that current terminology applied to the built heritage is inappropriate. He contrasts the preservation of buildings, which must continue to be lived in and used, with the conservation of objects in a museum. He also states that we should be clear about the differences between buildings which are significant because of their aesthetic values and those which inform us about an earlier period in history. The waters here are muddied by the emphasis on style and architectural history in the lists of scheduled buildings attached to district plans. Salmond also raises the question of authenticity - historians might be interested in narratives which span the entire history of a building's use while conservationists might seek to preserve, or return the building to an original, more 'authentic' state. Conservation charters, plans and cultural values attached to buildings are also usefully discussed.

Two chapters in this volume are authored by Gavin McLean, and another two are jointly so. The introductory review chapter, written with Alexander Trapeznik, has been discussed above. McLean's substantial contributions to this volume are in Chapters 2 and 5, on the history of New Zealand's heritage movement(s) and the changing use of historic places to illustrate New Zealand history. Read back to back, they provide an excellent discussion of how New Zealand arrived at its present position in terms of heritage.

The legislative framework established by government is analysed by Greg Vossler. He points out that while the terms heritage or historic appear in only a few pieces of legislation, there is an extensive list of Acts which directly or indirectly influence the protection and management of historic heritage in New Zealand. After reviewing the relevant pieces of legislation, he concludes that collectively they fall well short of providing a cohesive, integrated framework for historic heritage protection and management. More recently, proposals for amendments to the *Resource Management Act* have been announced including the long-awaited-for elevation of historic heritage to being a 'Matter of National Importance'. This particular battle is not yet over as property owners and developers are loud in their condemnation of the existing provisions in the RMA let alone new ones which would advance the cause of heritage protection and tangata whenua rights.

The final three chapters in this volume deal with landscapes (Barber and McLean), archaeological sites (Barber) and the assessment of non-archaeological heritage (Kelly). Though none would fully satisfy specialist practitioners, they provide a useful review of each topic.

The dual purposes of this edited collection, to provide information for the interested public and, secondly, a good background for students undertaking Masters level study, are well achieved. In terms of the readership of this journal, archaeologists would benefit from both the archaeological and the non-archaeological chapters. Most of the references in the bibliography are to New Zealand articles or authors. This offsets the predominant use of overseas sources in most university courses on heritage protection and management. However, it also suggests a certain insularity of viewpoint. It raises the question whether the sum total of heritage effort in New Zealand is still less than its various parts. Despite the title of this excellent volume and the efforts of its contributors, I still detect an inability on the part of archaeologists, heritage planners, conservation architects and public historians to work effectively together. In the context of a new push for intensified profitability at the expense of our archaeological, historical and cultural heritage, any lack of coherence and cooperation on the part of heritage professionals and supporters is something that New Zealand cannot afford.

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**Stephen Wickler.** *The Prehistory of Buka: A Stepping Stone Island in the Northern Solomons.* Terra Australis 16: a joint publication by the Department of Archaeology and Natural History and Centre for Archaeological Research, The Australian National University. 2001. 295x208mm, 306pp., 41 half-tones, 120 tables, 67 figures. \$45 Aus.

Based without obvious update other than a change in title on his PhD (Wickler 1995), this book presents Wickler's construction of a 29,000 year archaeological sequence for the Buka /Nissan area to the north of the Bougainville mainland. The Terra Australis format provides a welcome boost in production values and readability over the UMI Dissertations version previously available, with a more readable and compact style of double-sided text, an improved format for tables, substantially improved resolution of half-tones, and complete re-drafting of the figures, along with a significant weight reduction.

Wicklars aims are:

"to document and explain long-term changes in aspects of settlement, economy and subsistence on Buka ...." (p.1)

More specifically he wishes to test and refine Specht's Buka ceramic sequence (Specht 1969), while "documenting Lapita occupation more fully" and investigating the pre-Lapita situation. While his primary focus is chronological, he attempts to make an explanatory contribution in covering the transition to the ceramic Lapita phase, and from Lapita to post-Lapita ceramics. These broad aims are considered an appropriate thesis research topic in view of Spriggs characterization of Island Melanesian archaeology as in a pioneering, data-led phase (p.7 and Spriggs 1993). Wickler assesses Oceanic archaeology as traditionally dominated by a culture-historical theoretical framework (p.7), noting also various culture-evolutionary approaches, but does not identify his own research in terms of any theoretical approach beyond stressing the primacy of his concern with chronology.

A notable innovative feature of Wickler's survey strategy was the systematic examination of reef flat locations in addition to the more traditional focus on coastal areas and rockshelters, a rewarding approach which yielded the principal evidence for Lapita occupation (p.21). He interprets these assemblages as resulting from a pattern of settlement comprising stilt villages over water (p.241), possibly indicating avoidance behaviour, which, in the context of results from the Lapita Homeland Project (Kirch 1988; Gosden 1989; Specht 1991; Spriggs 1991), raises fundamental theoretical and methodological issues for archaeologists interested in Lapita in Near Oceania (see also (Felgate in press).

Terrestrial site survey was oriented towards discovery of suitable deposits for excavation, and it is clear that a site approach was taken rather than an off-site or distributional approach. This approach was noted as being of limited utility in view of the dense surface record of the east coast of Buka (p.19), echoing the sentiments of both Specht and Terrell on Buka and Bougainville (Terrell 1976: 237), and also Miller and Roe a little further south on the north coast of New Georgia (Miller and Roe 1982). Hopefully future researchers in these areas will learn from these experiences.

Wickler's Pleistocene and pre-Lapita Holocene cave deposit sequences represent significant substantive contributions to Oceanic prehistory, as do Wickler's collaborative research on starch residues on stone tools, but in this review emphasis is on Wickler's ceramic analyses as being within the reviewer's area of expertise.

The reef sites DAF, DES and DJQ yielded substantial ceramic assemblages. Wickler (p.25) reports 60 sherds per m<sup>2</sup> for the 400m<sup>2</sup> DAF area 2, but understates the significance of small sherd sizes (average 5g) for his analysis of

Lapita vessel form (pp.77-93) and decorative motif. While he uses Shepard's vessel form terminology (Shepard 1956), his vessel forms are based primarily on the examination of rim attributes (p.77), and no detail is given on how he discriminates between everted-rim restricted vessels and everted-rim unrestricted vessels, one of the fundamental issues in the attribution of potsherds to vessel forms. Given the small sherd size reported, this is a significant omission. Similarly, in reporting his most common Lapita stamped and incised motif frequencies as Anson motifs 435, 2, 187/188 and 421 (pp. 124-125 and see Anson 1983: 189-256), the effect of sherd size in assignment of these very similar motifs is not discussed. In view of the small sherd sizes reported, how does one differentiate between motifs 435, 297, 190, 188, 187 or 434 when these are all made up of parallel lines? Illustration of examples on which such identifications were based would have clarified these issues, as would presentation of his raw analytical data, including sherd sizes, vessel parts represented on the sherd, vessel form ascription and motif ascription. By extension, such omissions limit utility of his functional analysis of ceramic assemblages, and one must question, in the absence of illustrated examples, how much faith can be placed on both his motif frequencies (p. 126) and on his conclusion that there is a decline in the frequency of shallow bowls through his Lapita ceramic series and a reduction in diversity of vessel form (p. 241). The potential effects on his similarity matrix analysis of motif occurrence and frequency (pp.127-129) are unknown.

Wickler revises Specht's suggestion of a cultural discontinuity between Buka phase (Wickler's late Lapita phase) and the post-Lapita Sohano phase, citing some evidence for continuity of temper and rare transitional decorated sherds, and Summerhayes' conclusion that the same clay sources were used (pp. 139-144). He concludes that

"Although handicapped by low sample sizes, disturbed deposits and a lack of reliable radiocarbon dates, the available evidence indicates a temporal overlap in the production of Buka and Sohano style ceramics and a gradual replacement of the former by the latter." (p.144)

The interpretation of excavated mixtures and techno-stylistic continuities as temporal overlap in production and gradual ceramic change would seem to go beyond the available evidence. In this regard he might have found it useful to make distinction between seriation as a continuous measure of time and stratigraphy as a discontinuous measure of time (O'Brien and Lyman 2000: 9, 219-225) as this duality poses problems for some of his explanatory

interpretation. Demonstrating techno-stylistic continuity is not the same thing as demonstrating the rate of ceramic change or the temporal relations of production of styles. The seriation chronology established through Wickler's and Specht's stylistic and technological studies involves an assumption of gradualism (O'Brien and Lyman 2000: 121), of temporal overlap of styles and of continuity (O'Brien and Lyman 2000: 118), and cannot be used to establish the rate of ceramic change, or the existence of temporal overlap, and mixed ceramic deposits do not help either.

Geochemical analysis of major elements of clays was conducted by Dr Terry Hunt (p.100), and resulted in a pattern that

"most closely approximates a model of Lapita exchange proposed by Hunt (Hunt 1988: 57)..." (p.106)

No thin-section petrographic analysis of sherds was made.

Wickler suggests a pattern of increasing use of obsidian through the Lapita phase, principally from the Lou source on the basis of specific gravity method, but this is based on a settlement series from early reef sites to late adjacent terrestrial sites (pp. 214-215), without consideration of potential postdepositional removal of obsidian from reef sites by the later adjacent terrestrial occupation. Alternative site formation explanations have thus not been ruled out.

Wickler's work is broad in scope, and represents a major research contribution in a region notable for paucity of archaeological research and for a high attrition rate among fieldworkers. This is a substantial addition to the dataset of Oceanic prehistory, marked by innovative survey strategy and the extension of the North Solomon's sequence to the Pleistocene. While as a reviewer I feel unequipped to comment on some major aspects of the book, a reading of the ceramic analyses as detailed above highlights the need for ceramic stylistic and functional analyses to be linked back to the raw ceramic data, and ultimately to the sherds themselves; in the absence of this link laboratory analyses can be difficult to assess, and confidence in higher level conclusions can be compromised. An aspect of the sequence building aims and methodology which could be better developed is the difficult but rewarding subject of site formation processes (see for example (Schiffer 1995), but that is a big subject and possibly an argument for more intensive and specialised programmatic approaches in general rather than a criticism of Wickler's particular work. This book is essential reading for those working in Near Oceania or on Oceanic



ceramics, and a welcome addition to the inestimably useful Terra Australis series.

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**Morrison, J.S., Coates, J.F., Rankov, N.B., *The Athenian Trireme, The History and Reconstruction of an Ancient Greek Warship* (2nd ed.). Cambridge. Cambridge Univ. Press. 2000. 319 pp. 15 maps. 85 illustrations. Aus. \$49.95**

The subtitle of this publication promises a coffee table book with many colour illustrations of the reconstruction of the most famous warship of ancient times, successfully defending Greek freedom against Persian despotism. The unobtrusive small paperback with only black and white pictures does not deliver this promise. What it delivers is a fascinating scholarly voyage leading to the current understanding of how a Trireme was built and used.

To appreciate the wide scope of the discussion, it is necessary to have a look at the team of authors. Morrison is a leading authority on the history of ancient ships, Coates was the Chief Naval Architect at the British Ministry of Defence and Rankov is the Head of the Department of Classics at the University of London with the added experience of leading Oxford to many wins in the Boat Races. Thus archaeology, history, classics and modern naval architecture blend

into a happy marriage, resulting in an impressive and successful reconstruction, based on a similar impressive background of research.

This background research occupies the bulk of the book, easily accessible and neatly arranged, once you get over the first confusion: The authors call the trireme not by this, its usual English name, but 'trieres' (plural: 'triereis'), its original Greek name, which is still used by many continental European nations.

The first two chapters introduce the long scientific debate about the way triremes worked. The discussion about the arrangements of the rowers has an especially long history. During this discussion the authors also introduce the fragmented, archaeological record, which is essentially painted potsherds and some pieces of broken stone relief. As the triremes had positive buoyancy, they floated even when wrecked, therefore it is highly unlikely to ever find a preserved wreck underwater.

The next chapters examine in detail the ancient texts written about the naval operations in the fifth and fourth century B.C. involving Athens. Athens was the city state which developed the concept of the trireme into the successful weapon on which their superior naval power rested. I found this part of the book the most interesting, as the skill and knowledge of extracting practical naval information from - often ambiguous - ancient texts is simply astonishing. Many maps explain the often confusing battle actions. One chapter summarises the structural elements of this kind of naval warfare.

Based on this evidence three chapters discuss the different roles and placement of the crew and the structural features of triremes, followed by a chapter on the materials used in ancient times. Constant referral to the classical literature and archaeological sources make these chapters awkward to read, but they contain the bulk of our current scientific knowledge of triremes and they are the textbook for anybody doing research into this area.

Up to this point in the book, knowledge of classical literature, archaeological finds and naval architecture profited from each other and allowed for a more comprehensive approach than ever before. The next two chapters comprise the naval architectural reasoning for the actual design of the reconstructed warship OLYMPIAS. It is fascinating to see how 2500 years ago the Athenians designed a ship on its physical design limits. This insight is only available with the help of modern naval architectural knowledge and dispenses with any idea of a primitive, ancient craft. The Athenians were as much on the edge of watercraft

development as any high tech racing craft of today. They were only limited by the available materials of the time.

The last chapter is new to the second edition of the book and summarises some of the results of five campaigns with the reconstructed trireme. Shortcomings of the current design are relentlessly exposed. The experiences on a personal level of the people who rowed this vessel are documented. I expected more from this part of the book, especially more hard data from the sea trials. The few anecdotal passages just whetted the appetite for more detailed stories from those sea trials. But I guess this would be asking too much from the format and purpose of the book.

I leave the last word about the book to the authors, as they summarise the success and hurdles of their approach:

‘... Since its inception nearly twenty years ago, the Athenian Trireme project has benefitted from the input of historians and archaeologists, naval architects and shipbuilders, rowers, sailors and seamen, physicists and physiologists, and many others. Their co-operation has necessitated a considerable willingness on the part of individuals schooled in widely differing disciplines to understand each others’ modes of thinking. By the same token, this multi-disciplinary approach has often made it difficult to convince specialists outside the project of the validity of some of the evidence and arguments. Historians have found it hard to understand just how narrowly definitive are the laws of physics upon the design of an extreme ship-type such as the trieres. Archaeologists have been reluctant to accept a design which is based on historical, archaeological and iconographical evidence but not on actual ship remains. Naval architects and physicists have found it difficult to deal with data which are subject to shifting historical interpretations...’ (p.275)

The question is - what relevance has the research into a reconstruction of a Greek warship for us here in the Pacific? Apart from the fascination about the classical world which the colonial power brought to Aotearoa, there is a deeper issue concerning research design which is of interest to this part of the world. The problem is highlighted by a recent article by Anderson on Pacific seafaring (Anderson 2000). He based a major part of his argument on the assumed nautical capabilities of ancient sea-going canoes. The team of authors of *The Athenian Trireme, The History and Reconstruction of an Ancient Greek Warship* with their assembled range of expertise and knowledge shows us the weakness in this current discussion about voyaging canoes. Only a comprehensive

approach from widely different views will deepen our understanding of the voyaging culture of the Pacific.

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Reference

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