



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## REVIEWS

**Kelvin Day. *Maori Wood Carving of the Taranaki Region*. Reed. Auckland. 2001. 132 pp. \$34.95.**

The Maori wood carving styles of the Taranaki region have long been recognised as very distinctive and beautiful, yet enigmatic in the wider range of Maori arts. Mystery has surrounded the reasons why such a significant art tradition, that was clearly a major cultural component of the Taranaki people, could come to a halt so suddenly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, understanding where the surviving Taranaki carvings sit in relation to other Maori carving traditions in New Zealand has also been problematic.

In recent years however, through the work of iwi and the Waitangi Tribunal, we have come to understand the type of culture-shock that the Taranaki Maori people were exposed to as a result of the colonisation process. We now understand how the people, their culture and their art were torn apart. From Kelvin Day's new book we can also now gain a new appreciation and insight into the magnificent art tradition that was lost.

In his book Day catalogues, describes and analyses 88 major pieces of Maori art drawn from across the Taranaki region. These are mostly pieces that have been recovered from the numerous swamps of Taranaki where they were hidden. There continues to be a steady flow of swamp finds from the region and there are now enough pieces to be more certain about stylistic variation and provenancing, both issues that Day addresses in his book. He also draws some conclusions about the artists of the region and the types of structures that some of these pieces were produced for.

With 124 pages of text, the book is also extremely well illustrated with photographs for each piece that is analysed. There are also reproductions of

relevant ethnographic sketches and paintings, line drawings of some artefacts and coloured photographs of some of the more significant pieces. As well, each of the artefacts has a comprehensive description of the main attributes of the carving embellishment. The attention to detail in these descriptions will satisfy even the most dedicated of specialist researchers.

This book will be a compulsory addition to the libraries of students of Maori art, history and culture as well as those interested in the social and cultural history of the Taranaki region. It will especially serve as a source of inspiration to the steadily growing numbers of Maori artists in Taranaki reviving the Taranaki carving styles.

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