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REVIEWS

Roger Neich. *Carved Histories Rotorua Ngati Tarawhai Woodcarving*. Auckland University Press. Auckland. 2001. 424pp. \$89.95.

Carved Histories Rotorua Ngati Tarawhai Woodcarving is a magnificent book and is a companion volume to Neich's earlier study, *Painted Histories*, of Maori figurative paintings which was published in 1993. In *Carved Histories* Neich documents and analyses the work of the Ngati Tarawhai people of the Rotorua district noting they "were the most prolific and the most influential group of Maori carvers in New Zealand." In fact, it is the Ngati Tarawhai carving style which has become the most recognised 'tourist' style in Maori art.

Ngati Tarawhai have maintained a continuous, distinctive carving style from pre-European times through to the present and this has provided a wonderful opportunity to study the work of individual carvers and document their influences. An example being: who were the patrons and how did they manage to influence how the artworks being produced?

The first few chapters provide a historical setting in which Ngati Tarawhai lived and worked. This begins with the first settlement of the Lake Okataina area followed by accounts of the more recent battles with other iwi, such as Ngapuhi, and the arrival of the missionaries. Other chapters discuss Ngati Tarawhai and the New Zealand Land Wars and Ngati Tarawhai as an iwi.

The chapter which documents each of the known woodcarvers of Ngati Tarawhai I found most fascinating. Neich has skilfully pieced together, from a variety of sources, details about each of the carvers. From this their relationship to one another and the time periods within which they worked can be determined. Being able to sequentially document the carvers, their genealogical relationships with each other and their works from the late eighteenth century

to the present provides a wonderful insight into changing styles, what was carved and who it was carved for.

Two chapters examine the theoretical aspects of art and theory along with style and causality. This helps to provide a framework in which the carvings can be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

The chapters dealing with Maori patronage and European patronage I found intriguing. The relationship between the artist and the patron and how this relationship can initiate new trends as well as perpetuate traditional ones makes for absorbing reading. An example of how some patrons operated, such as Charles Nelson and Augustus Hamilton, is shown by their 'instructions' to the artists as to the form the carving should take rather than allowing the work of the artist to be dynamic and changing. However, despite this artists were able to incorporate innovative features in their work.

Carved Histories is superbly illustrated with over 400 images of sites, carvers and taonga. The Appendices which catalogue all the known works of Ngati Tarawhai, together with their relatives Ngati Pikiāo, will be a constant reference source for those interested in woodcarving and Maori art. This book has set the benchmark in the study of Maori artists and woodcarving, I thoroughly recommend it for anyone with an interest in Maori art.

Kelvin Day
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R.C.J. (Russell) Stone. *From Tamaki-Makau-Rau to Auckland*. Auckland University Press. 2001. xiii 342 pp. Paperback. NZ\$59.95. ISBN 186940 259 6

Regional or local history is not an especially strong genre in New Zealand academic studies as it should be. In the Auckland region, certain key influences on our history come into clearer focus. These include the north-south frictions ('utu debit accounts') that led to the one-sided slaughter of the more southern iwis in the musket wars (1818-1835).

The period covered by Emeritus Professor Stone is from 'prehistory' to about 1840. In the recorded Maori narratives, the pursuit of sectional advantage, from the viewpoint of the narrator, can be taken for granted. Some revisionist historians can take from this a licence to interpret and write to suit their own

ends. Not so Professor Stone. He balances his sources carefully and produces a clear and detailed story.

Why has this isthmus of little land area, set between enormous harbours, attracted so much conflict both before 1840 and in the one hundred and sixty years since? Probably because this generally fertile land has always been at centre stage for large, if not the largest, concentrations of New Zealand population, and because it is the key to four great harbours or waterways—Kaipara, Waitemata/Hauraki, Manukau and Waikato.

The key players in the pre-1840 conflicts were:

- Ngati Whatua, now recognised as holding mana whenua over the area, but originally centred on the Kaipara Harbour.
- The Marutuahu confederation (from the Firth of Thames), including Ngati Paoa, who have long had an interest in the Tamaki River and the southern parts of the Hauraki Gulf.
- Nga Puhi (from Whangarei to the Hokianga and Bay of Islands), the most numerous of all iwis, with longstanding grievances against Ngati Whatua and the Marutuahu confederation.
- Waikato or Tainui on the southern fringes of the isthmus.

In the early 1700s Ngati Whatua, displaced Waiohua, the earlier iwi of the isthmus. In Professor Stone's phrase, the Waiohua suffered not only 'the condign punishment of retaliatory invasions', but also the indignity of having their own history lost in the 'triumphalist' accounts of Ngati Whatua.

From about 1818, Nga Puhi had gained the psychological and military advantage of muskets (which had flooded world markets at the close of the Napoleonic Wars). Mustering as many as 1000 men, they set out in a series of war parties to the south. Ngati Whatua and Ngati Paoa were dispersed from the isthmus.

For some time Ngati Whatua came under the protection of Te Wherowhero on Maungatautari on the Waikato River. In 1832 there were virtually no Maori apart from a very few Ngati Whatua, who lived in fear of the Nga Puhi.

Following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by Ngati Whatua in 1840, Hobson formally annexed New Zealand on the shores of the Waitemata and became Lieutenant Governor. In April 1841, the first sales of land by the Crown fetched up to 600 pounds per acre (similar prices to that for bare land near London or Liverpool).

Among the many virtues of this book, Professor Stone makes a discerning use of S. Percy Smith's histories and the ham-fisted generalisations of Chief Judge Fenton of the Native Land Court who considered the Orakei case. It will become a model of regional history for its period, and will be of wider interest than just Auckland.

The book should also be read by people of Ngati Whatua, Ngati Paoa and Tainui descent. An unnamed but accomplished Maori scholar is noted in the foreword as saying 'that it was not a history that a Maori would have written'. One of Professor Stone's achievements, to be accounted for in the future, may be a response from a well qualified Maori historian.

Kevin Jones

Simon Best, *Lapita: a view from the past*. New Zealand Archaeological Association Monograph 24. 2002. 113 pp plus figures.. \$45.00 \$35 NZAA members.

The Lapita colonisation of the Pacific is one of the great stories of world prehistory, many details of which are now well known while others remain speculative. Least well charted is the question 'why'. Why did Lapita people deliberately set off into the unknown when there is little evidence of overcrowding, resource depletion or hostility at home, little need or expectation of discovering new resources for trade or exchange, little gain for great risk. The technology, rationale and scale of exploration are now understood. So too are the mechanisms and adaptation processes that allowed colonisation to succeed. We also have a good sense of what happened next, of how in each new place many classic elements of the colonising culture quickly disappeared. Models that have been proposed to explain this decline have hinted at the weakening of whatever social force triggered and sustained the colonisation process. But the nature of this trigger has never been convincingly demonstrated. The 'why' of Lapita colonisation is a poor cousin to the 'how' and 'when'.

Lapita: a view from the past aims to set that right. For Best, the nub of the matter is this: during the Late Holocene settlement of the Bismarck Archipelago an event occurred of religious and political proportions that created a brief moment of 'founder ideology' responsible for the colonisation movement whose momentum carried people vast distances into the Oceanic unknown. Best's reconstruction of the suggested event is skeletal and hypothetical, although he bravely identifies a location (the Mussau group), a possible catalyst (volcanic eruptions) and a driving force (charismatic aspects of shamanistic

religion). The event was fleeting; over as soon as it began. Its consequences, however, were profound.

To my mind, the details of the event proposed by Best will remain unconvincing until more archaeology has been done. Perhaps he will be proved right, but the book's great value lies in its approach, a sort of master class of what sort of archaeology *needs* to be done and what sorts of socially complex questions can be addressed by adhering scrupulously to the archaeological data. It is no secret that Best is an opponent of the triangulation method by which Lapita and Ancestral Polynesian societies have been reconstructed from linguistic and ethnographic cognates. He wants to discover Lapita society in the archaeological data itself, and provides us with a methodology for doing so, taking a scythe to the accumulated Lapita data set and bullying us into achieving greater precision of excavation, dating and analysis. The words "hard", "archaeological" and "evidence" are constant companions throughout the book.

The data of choice for Best is the Lapita pottery itself, or more correctly its decoration and the message it signalled. He starts where he knows best—Fiji—by rehearsing the ceramic sequence there, valuably summarising the key points from his own dissertation and other studies for the wider audience they deserve. Much time is spent arguing the detail of the ceramic changes: (a) complex dentate decoration is only found fleetingly on early sites, which are often large and nucleated; (b) decoration then devolved into vestigial elements on stylised 'plainwares' as settlement became dispersed, decentralised and conflict-ridden; (c) other decorative elements appear in later ceramic traditions—notably carved paddle—but these lack the overt display of Lapita decoration until the very end of the prehistoric sequence; (d) crucially, the process of decline and dispersal in Lapita occurred in the same way at the same time throughout Fiji. Why crucially? Because throughout the book Best uses Fiji as a microcosm for similar processes of decline that he argues occurred throughout the Lapita world. That is to say, throughout the Lapita world complex anthropomorphic decoration was in some way locked up in the colonisation event, but quickly fell out of the potter's repertoire when no longer needed, or survived anachronistically in stripped down forms.

Other archaeologists have taken the arguments almost as far, but Best pushes on and asks what did this mean in terms of social rupture. This is illustrated by his superimposition of the two ends of the Fijian sequence within which the cycle of ceramic efflorescence and its denouement are similar. Common to both is the co-appearance of elaborately decorated pottery (and other media) with new socio-political-religious systems: a phenomenon that is demonstrable at the late

end of the sequence and which Best wishes us to believe also happened for Lapita. Again, other archaeologists including myself have made this analogy, but once more Best extends the argument by reconstructing the ceramic technology by which the socio-political message was disseminated. Here he challenges previous reconstructions of Lapita dentate stamping technology and revives ideas of rouletting whereby decoration was applied by rolling a carved wheel across the clay. Best painstakingly examines complex Lapita designs on excavated sherds and concludes that rouletting was both the principle method for applying design and was an Oceanic innovation, not present in precursory South East Asian assemblages. Why is it significant? It allowed the semi-industrial replication of the Lapita design message in its most complex, *original*, and frequently fully anthropomorphic form. As a demonstration of this Best presents the results of his own experimental reproduction of the famous RF-2 face design, a winking facsimile of the original, replicable he claims in under an hour.

The implications of Best's discovery are far-reaching and important. It is precisely this sort of breakthrough that allows the production, control, and distribution of the socio-political message to become archaeologically visible. We begin to see the fabric of Lapita ideology and the mechanics of its dissemination. But Best's coup-de-grace is to trace the simplification of Lapita design by way of an unexpected analogy: with Persian prayer rugs. In both examples—pots and carpets—designs became simpler and more stylised as they moved away from the nexus of political control. Best demonstrates the same process also occurring with latter day Fijian pottery as decoration slipped out of socio-political significance and entered the tourism market. The similarities in the ways designs were transformed are as convincing as they are surprising; distance in time and space equates with a technological decline, a cheating, a cutting-of-corners so that soon—remarkably soon—just the ghost of the original designs was visible. By the end of the Lapita sequence, that too had faded away.

Do the comparisons stand up? That is for the reader to decide. Personally, I don't think it matters. In making the comparisons Best draws our attention to the relationships between iconography, technology and social control in a way that drags Lapita out of its introspective cul-de-sac and thrusts it into conversations of global concern. Conversations about similar phenomena, occurring in parallel ways, on a range of media around the wider world: Chinese bronzes, Neolithic Beaker wares, Mayan polychrome vessels, or, indeed Persian carpets. Does it really answer the 'Why' of Lapita? I think not, but it poses the question in a most elegant and entertaining way. If I have a disappointment, it is that at times Best is a little too dismissive of alternative views and interpretations, the language unnecessarily strident, the claims a little too black and white. It would

be a shame if a book that has the potential to lift Pacific archaeology out of its introspection were to allow itself to slide into the rug-pulling mire. I, myself, am not in full agreement with Best on many points and believe that he focuses too much on the flashy Lapita designs without due recognition of the extreme formal and decorative conservatism of the plainware assemblages, which co-exist with the decorated wares and are as socially significant in their own way.

But at 92 pages of text, one can't ask too much of the book. This volume takes the Lapita discussion on in leaps and bounds. There will of course be those worried about the detail that has been left behind, or who take umbrage with Best's critical review of the archaeological data. So what if a few feathers are ruffled along the way? Here is an important book full of ideas to remind us that Lapita is a great story that both deserves and needs a wider audience.

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