



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

Cristophe Sand and Patrick V. Kirch, 2002. Edward W. Gifford and Richard Shutler Jr's Archaeological Expedition to New Caledonia in 1952. *Les Cahiers de l'archéologie en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 13. Service des Musées et du Patrimoine, Noumea. 192 pp., figs. In French and English. •12.50

Presented in coffee-table format, this commemorative book was put together in time for the 50th anniversary of one of Pacific archaeology's foundational moments: Gifford and Shutler's 1952 expedition to New Caledonia. Archaeologists remember this trip for at least two reasons. The first is the easily forgotten fact that it was Gifford and Shutler who first documented a decent time-depth to human occupation in the Pacific. They did this by dating (to around 2800 BP) some charcoal from sites along the Grande Terre's Foué Peninsula, using Libby's new-fangled radiocarbon technique—Pacific archaeology entered the nuclear age here, in French Melanesia. The second reason is that the site that yielded the earliest date, a beach front deposit underneath an old yam field, contained a style of uniquely decorated pottery, which, from this point onwards, has been known as Lapita.

The rest, as they say, is history. Fittingly, this book presents a historical account of the expedition, drawing on archival documents and photographs to describe the day to day activities of the archaeologists. The text is bilingual, arranged on the page in two columns, with French on the left and English on the right, in italics. This bilingualism is important because the book is professedly for the people of New Caledonia as much as it is for archaeologists interested in disciplinary history. Local Kanak men were employed at most sites excavated during the seven months of fieldwork, and feature in a great many of the book's photographs. Their descendants will presumably be interested in seeing them, not to mention the changed landscape of the Grande Terre. In fact, it is with the photographs that the authors justify the book's existence – very few have been seen before, having been locked up in the basements of the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology at Berkeley in the intervening years. Some will be familiar to archaeologists who attended the Lapita 2002 conference in Nouméa, during which an exhibition was staged. This book will serve as an appropriate keepsake for those who were there.

The book begins with a brief introduction to the expedition and the photographic collection, written by Sand. Kirch then offers an ‘appreciation’ of Edward W. Gifford, the expedition leader, in terms of his career and its impact on the discipline. It is an enlightening chapter, presenting a man who had received no formal education past High School, but had spent his early years publishing on conchology and ornithology before turning to ethnographies of Tonga during the 1920s. Aged 64 in 1952, he was entirely self-taught in archaeology. Sand later notes that Gifford claimed to have learnt all he needed to know about excavation from an afternoon’s conversation with Robert Heizer, the editor of the classic *Manual of Archaeological Field Methods*. These methods were designed for the shell mounds of California and proceeded like this: a grid of rectangular ‘trenches’, each measuring 6 by 3 feet, was arrayed in transects across the site, before excavation by way of arbitrary 6 inch spits regardless of stratigraphy or inter-cutting features. Shovels were the tool of choice, and everything was screened through $\frac{1}{2}$ or (occasionally) $\frac{1}{4}$ inch mesh. Gifford strictly adhered to these methods during the New Caledonia trip, much to the chagrin of grad student Shutler. The latter seems to have rebelled once or twice by attempting to expose some stone ovens, but was reprimanded. This led him to pen, in the field, a short method paper with a slightly frustrated tone, pleading for more care in stratigraphic control (presented in full in the notes of this book). Gifford was, however, ahead of his time in terms of his rigorous collection and recording of faunal remains and sediment.

The remainder of the book is written wholly by Sand and consists of a series of chapters detailing expedition preparations, survey and excavation proceedings, and post-expedition analysis. These sections are all written in the present tense, and I found this jarring initially—its not exactly standard for a historical work. Nevertheless, the material is interesting. The story is pieced together from letters and entries in the journals of Gifford, his wife Delila, Shutler, and his wife Elizabeth—the only member of the team who was fluent in French, and a competent excavator and amateur ethnographer. So, the men fly off to the islands, with their wives following by boat. They survey the Grande Terre assisted by the ethnographer Jean Guiart, selecting sites to be excavated and digging around Nouméa before moving further afield. They go to church, and make friends with the locals: the Kanak men wear tennis shoes, notes Elizabeth, and take them off before walking in mud; photos are taken in full face and profile. They excavate near hotels, for the aged Gifford’s sake, get bored with all the shells turning up in the screens, and finally (p. 139) during their last excavations near an old village called Lapita, find a lot of unusual pottery.

Anyone who has conducted research using the manuscripts of our forebears will know the somewhat voyeuristic fascination this sort of material can hold. But those hoping for either scandal or the minutiae of excavation practice will be disappointed. There are some conflicts: Shutler fumes at Gifford's habit of smoking cigars in the truck with the windows rolled up; hard of hearing Gifford gets paranoid that people are whispering about him behind his back. The excavations are related vaguely, but there is enough detail to give a taste of the breadth of sites. Only one map is provided though, and it is entirely inadequate for keeping track of site locations—I learnt more about nickel mines. I also wondered at some of the material included. I'm not sure why I needed to read Gifford's letter to the 'Better Hearing Center' requesting six batteries for his hearing-aid. The archaeologists shipped a new Chevrolet truck to New Caledonia, and it assumes almost albatross like proportions in the text—the story of its acquisition, use and eventual sale is related in all possible detail. I was impressed that they managed to drive 23,000 km in seven months though. I noticed a number of typos, and occasional errors in the numbering of notes within the text. There was an inexplicable blank page in the middle of the review copy.

The photographs, however, are the main attraction, and I enjoyed looking through them. The colour shots are presented in their original surreal 1950s colours—milky blues and yellow-greens, with sudden variations in saturation—adding period ambience. Readers familiar with New Caledonia will get the most from them, especially the landscapes and towns. The archaeological photos are mainly snapshots of general proceedings – holes in the ground with people standing around with shovels, or at the sieves. Only a few are of stratigraphy, but then this isn't meant to be a site report. Gifford is seen more often than Shutler, usually wearing a pith helmet and safari suit, fiddling with a bit of shell, screening midden, or standing pensively in a field. He pops up out of the ground on the cover. Incidentally, the cover photograph is not of the famous site 13, even though Gifford's handwritten note "Lapita was name of village at this site" is superimposed over it.

All in all this book is well worth the asking price. It is nicely printed on heavy, glossy paper and contains over 130 photographs that you won't see anywhere else. It offers a candid look at Pacific archaeology in its 1950s incarnation, on the cusp of the modern era, and is a valuable tribute to Gifford and Shutler. For archaeologists wanting to learn more about the sites excavated it is perhaps best read in conjunction with the official field report published in 1956. But in those terms alone it provides a nice companion volume.

Tim Thomas, Department of Anthropology, University of Otago

Richard Walter and Atholl Anderson, 2002. *The Archaeology of Niue Island, West Polynesia. Bishop Museum Bulletin in Anthropology*, 10. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu. 167 pp., figs. tables, appendices. US\$60.00.

Located on the eastern fringes of Western Polynesia, the upraised makatea island of Niue combines isolation with an environment with an extremely limited resource base that does not avail itself particularly to intensive human settlement over a long-term period. There are no beaches or harbours and no running water, and a third of the island's land surface comprises bare coral rock. Soils are variable with limited capacity for fertility. The meagre archaeological record as outlined in this publication by Walter and Anderson certainly reflects a scenario of a population strongly influenced by environmental constraints. However it also clearly highlights that those areas of the island that might be typically expected to reveal early sites associated with initial colonisation comprise a landscape that is not particularly favourable for any accumulation of archaeological deposit or site survival.

Previous archaeological research on Niue was largely restricted to the efforts of a team led by Michael Trotter in the 1970s (Trotter 1979) which concentrated on site surveying and the collection of surface finds. Twenty years later the Niue Archaeology Project was initiated with three broad research objectives: to contextualise Niue's place in the broader West/East Polynesian colonisation and settlement debate; to determine what levels of external interaction had occurred; and to further enhance our knowledge in understanding human adaptations to these distinctive islands of uplifted coral atolls. The Introduction and Chapter Two set the research in context—historical, theoretical, environmental and ethnographical.

Archaeological fieldwork was initially concentrated on the leeward coast of the island in the search for evidence of the earliest occupation of the island, following a predictive model that suggests that the sheltered passages and wide flat terraces located there provided more favourable conditions for settlement. Test excavations were undertaken on a total of 12 rockshelters and 35 open sites and further more detailed excavation was undertaken on three of the sites. No evidence was recovered which indicated either large scale or early human settlement. Rather the evidence in the cave and rockshelter sites indicated intermittent and somewhat ephemeral occupation. Despite quite clear evidence for substantial disturbance and removal of deposits in a number of the caves during hurricanes the authors conclude that what they have uncovered in the archaeological record reflects an accurate picture, suggesting that while first settlement may have

occurred in this area no large scale settlement developed there until the historic period.

Fieldwork then shifted to the far less inviting windward side of the island, where “along most of the coastline steep cliffs rise vertically from the reef platform and the raised coral reef beds run inland for a kilometre or more before there is any appreciable soil cover” (p. 35). Much of this landscape is simply not habitable, and it was only in the excavated caves and rockshelters that indications of frequent short-term occupation were uncovered. More permanent settlement appears to have occurred on a second terrace some 1.5–2 km further inland, possibly because permanent ground water supplies were located nearby.

Having systematically searched the coasts for archaeological evidence the team moved into the interior, firstly focusing on a complex of coral mounds, platforms and enclosures (Paluki Complex) and subsequently an inland cave site. Efforts were made to define the chronological sequence that was associated with the construction of these features. Six radiocarbon dates were obtained from the complex of structural features and a further two dates from the cave site. The dates suggest that occupation here was associated with some of the earliest settlement of Niue from 2200 BP.

Chapters Seven to Ten move onto outlining material culture and subsistence (fish, bird bone and molluscs). Material culture, as emphasised by the authors, can be a valuable tool in defining prehistoric patterns and cultural interaction. Alas, on Niue the excavated pickings were slim indeed (Table 1, p. 77) the artefact assemblage being “distinguished by its sparseness” (p. 86). Much of the recovered materials were either pumice or historic-period artefacts (as were those earlier collected by Trotter) severely limiting any information that could be gleaned from such a sample. A single polished basalt flake may have originated from Samoa. The almost total lack of evidence for some artefact forms, such as stone adzes, might well reflect Niue’s state of isolation. The fact that not a single piece of pottery has ever been recovered on Niue is certainly a strong indicator, as noted by the authors, that it was not reached during the phase of Lapita expansion. A series of appendices outline the detail of the radiocarbon dates, archaeological fauna, stone sourcing and fossil fauna respectively.

The concluding chapter is a valuable discussion which summarises the Niue research and sets in a wider Pacific and theoretical context. Despite the sparse nature of the archaeological record, the authors do manage to tentatively piece together nearly 2000 years of human history on the island, which is divided into

three broad periods: Colonisation Period (2200–1500 BP); the Middle Period (1500–800 BP); and the Late Period (800–200 BP). They conclude that the inhabitants of Niue were strongly conditioned by the extremes of environment found on the island and that these influences ultimately created “an island within an island” where people lived and looked inward, never having sustained or retained any external contacts or trade.

This was an intensive archaeological research program involving extensive survey and a whole series of excavations. While some intriguing gaps in the archaeological history of the island might remain, which may well have as much to do with unfavourable conditions of site survival as anything else, it is very unlikely that archaeologists will be returning to Niue in the very near future. There is no doubt that this publication, along with more recent research such as that carried out by Sand (2002) on Walpole Island, adds significantly to our understanding of the human colonisation and settlement of the Pacific in general and more specifically to these very more remote and somewhat bleak landscapes, the makatea islands. The research is also further testimony to the remarkable human capacity for adaptation to even the harshest of environments.

Sand, C. 2002. *Walpole. Ha colo, une île de l'extrême archaéologies et histories*. Les Cahiers de L'Archéologie en Nouvelles-Calédonie. Noumea, Departement Archéologie Service des Musées et du Patrimoine.

Trotter, M. 1979. Niue Island Archaeological Survey. *Canterbury Museum Bulletin* 7. Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

Stuart Bedford, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Auckland

Giovanni Bennardo (ed.), 2002. *Representing Space in Oceania: Culture in Language and Mind*. Pacific Linguistics 523, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra. 260 pp., figs., tables. AU\$59.00.

Although the authors of the papers in this volume are primarily linguists, cognitive scientists and social anthropologists, what they have to say about space is very much worth the while of Pacific archaeologists to examine closely. Almost all archaeological data have a spatial component, and very often our analyses are to a large extent spatial analyses. The way in which space is used, how settlements are laid out, how they relate to their environment—these sorts of questions are common in archaeology, and both question and answer are primarily spatial. Our analyses are dependent, however, on how *we* perceive space, and that is

generally one defined by xyz Cartesian coordinates. This means we can apply powerful tools like GIS to our data—which is fine as analytical practice, but we often forget that space is a cultural construct. Our Cartesian space has its roots in our mercantile economy—space, and time, are measurable commodities that can be traded in the marketplace. The representation of space in other societies will be dependant on radically different constructions, which may readily be obscured beneath our own biases and computer aided analyses. Hence the value of this volume, which explores spatial concepts in Oceanic societies in a way that is often very relevant to archaeology, and will be of immense assistance to any of us who seek to think outside the Cartesian square.

Section One: “Language and Space” contains four papers that are not without interest, but are densely linguistic and beyond my competence to comment on (on Ambae one cannot hide behind a tree, because trees don’t have backs. Unfortunately at the end of the paper I was still not *entirely* sure why).

Section Two: “Space in Mind”, is of much greater relevance. It begins with Bill Palmer’s “Absolute spatial reference and the grammaticalisation of perceptually salient phenomena.” Clearly the author is having fun here, but the paper is much more readable than the title, which we may translate as ‘how we refer to space is largely dependent on how we perceive it.’ Indo-European languages employ a spatial reference based on the speaker—in front of me, or, anthropomorphising the object, in front of the house. Conversely many Austronesian languages employ an *absolute* system not dependent on the speaker—east~west, or landward~seaward. This is why trees on Ambae have no back—one may hide *uphill* of the tree, but not *behind* it. Hence we get the familiar tai~uta, or landward~seaward contrast in Polynesian languages. Palmer argues that for many Austronesian speakers, who live by the sea, the boundary between sea and land is “highly salient” and so becomes the basis for understanding direction in absolute terms.

The second paper is by Giovanni Bennardo—“Mental images of the familiar: cultural strategies of spatial representations in Tonga.” He proposes that Tongan spatial reference is radial—that is to say a “centre” is envisaged within the environment and other entities are located with reference to this centre, along radiating or centrifugal relationships to it. This spatial view is demonstrated, for instance, in the way in which food is gathered for a feast—the extended family bring food in to the centre—and the left over portions are distributed after the feast—from the centre back out to the periphery of the extended family. The

radial pattern established in the linguistic aspects of space may be far more deeply embedded throughout Tongan culture.

The third and final paper in Section Two is by F.K. Lehman and David Herdrich—“On the relevance of point fields for spatiality in Oceania” (Herdrich, we might note, is an ethnographer and archaeologist). They propose that there are only two possible imaginable generalised ways of representing space. There is the ‘container’ model, where space is bounded, things are located *in* space. This is by far the most common worldwide, perhaps the human cognitive ‘default.’ In a point field model space extends indefinitely from a point until it comes up against another such point field, so forming a boundary between the two. This has obvious parallels with Bennardo’s paper, and in many ways formalises his observations.

Consider the word *mata*, which commonly translates in many Polynesian languages as ‘eyes’, but also as a ‘point’. Numerous compound words use the term *mata* to describe physical and social spaces: *matāgāluenga*, a government or church department, not a place in which to work, rather a place from which work emanates; *matā āiga*, an extended family; *matāvao*, a plantation boundary. *Vao* means the bush, so the *matāvao* is the place where two point fields, plantation and bush, intersect. In fact another common meaning for *mata* is ‘boundary’. In such a system boundaries are only temporary, moving with the waxing and waning strength of the point fields that intersect on them, in other words the *mana* of the chief or land-holding group.

As a brief aside, in an article by Marilyn Head in this weeks New Zealand Listener (June 7 2003) I note that Matariki, the constellation Pleiades, whose rising marks the Maori New Year, is translated as “little eyes” (p. 30). Lehman and Herdrich’s analysis immediately enriches our understanding of this midwinter boundary between one year and another.

Space, in Western culture as on this page, is bounded, and I only have enough of it to mention one more paper, from Section Three: “Space and Culture.” In Polynesia, a *locus classicus* of the chiefdom, to quote Norman Yoffee, we are always conscious of, if not obsessed by, status. Elizabeth Keating’s “Space and its role in social stratification in Pohnpei, Micronesia” makes clear the link between space and status. Stratified space is constructed through language, which conditions actions and relations within such space. On Pohnpei east is a higher status direction than west—Nan Madol is located on the east side of the island, and directional description is also influenced by the relative location of the speaker with respect to Nan Madol. In the *nahs* (feast houses) the further in one

sits, and the higher vertically, the higher ones status. The paramount chief's *nahs* faces eastward, and out from the centre of the island. The paramount faces down on everyone else, who look up to him. This is reflected in language—he, the chiefess and high ranking members of his clan are *sohpeidi*, literally 'facing downwards.' Such linguistic and social practices are also, as often elsewhere in the world, embodied. Right and left on Pohnpei mark status—right is high status, left is low. Men sit on the right side of the *nahs*, women on the left, looking from the entrance. But for the chief, facing towards the entrance, these become reversed. For high status people and in high status activities left is privileged over right, for instance, the left hand is used to carve meat.

“A habitual mental representation of spatial relationships can constrain individual and social behaviour” (Bennardo p. 168). The lesson for archaeology is clear and simple. We ought to expect the long term aggregate of this constrained behaviour to be present in the archaeological record. Spatial perceptions and conceptions will be reflected in human behaviour, which in turn creates the spatial patterns of settlements or gardens or the orientation of sites. These, then, will be visible on the ground. Seeing them and interpreting them is another thing of course, but if we take the lessons of this volume on board we will at least know to look for them.

Janet Keller, in concluding the volume, stresses the strength of an interdisciplinary approach to space in evaluating what is universal, and what is unique to Oceania. As archaeologists we have much to learn from studies of this kind, but we have been dealing directly with space for a long time, and in turn we have much to offer. Space is not where we actually live—that is a closely related but much more complex and inclusive thing—place. To begin to understand the alternative spaces presented in this volume is to begin to work towards understanding places, and that too is something we have been doing for a long time.

Matthew Campbell, Anthropology Department, University of Auckland