



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

**Kerry Howe , 2003. *The Quest for Origins: Who first discovered and settled New Zealand and the Pacific Islands?* Penguin Books, Auckland. Paper, 235 pp, index. \$29.95.**

The past is an imagined place and in any society multiple ideas exist about the nature and trajectory of prehistoric life. The injection of unorthodox or fringe beliefs about the past into the public consciousness via the print and electronic media is a by-product of a democratic and pluralist society, which raises important issues for academics and others holding conventional views. Kerry Howe's *The Quest for Origins* had its own genesis in the furore of the Kaimanawa Wall; a natural rock formation which was claimed by Barry Brailsford in May 1996 to be the work of a pre-Maori megalithic society. It is a measured and timely response to representations of the past which diverge starkly from what is taught today in university courses or published in text books and academic journals. Clearly, Howe believes that it is incumbent on academics and intellectuals to challenge representations of the past that exist well outside traditional scholarship and for this he is to be congratulated.

What distinguishes *The Quest for Origins* from other critical assessments of alternative and New Age views—like Jack Golson's 1965 discussion of Thor Heyerdahl's Easter Island sequence—is that Howe uses his intimate knowledge of Pacific sources to situate orthodox and unorthodox perspectives in the broader discourse about Pacific Islander origins, a discourse that developed in the mid-to-late 18th century from the work of Charles de Brosses, Johann Forster, Dumont d'Urville and others. It is clear that the main ideas in both modern orthodox and fringe scholarship concerning the settlement of New Zealand and the Pacific have echoes or direct antecedents in late 18th and 19th century writings, particularly of the Enlightenment.

Since scientific archaeology is a relative newcomer to most parts of the Pacific the interpretive frameworks used to think about population migration, settlement and origins tend to derive from the older disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. By identifying and contextualising long-held ideas about the arrival of people in Oceania, Howe traces the intellectual pedigree of contending

hypotheses. These sections of the book will prove of most value to archaeologists because they show how debates about prehistoric origins and the interpretation of culture change have generally followed similar conceptual pathways for more than 200 years.

It might seem out of place for a Professor of History to write on the origins of Pacific Islanders and archaeologists will no doubt find fault with parts of Howe's overview of Oceania's prehistory, some of which rely on outdated material, like the timing of the Austronesian settlement sequence (Map 4, pg. 68). However, *The Quest for Origins* is, overall, a genuine and thoughtful cross-disciplinary examination that will, hopefully, attract a wide readership.

For a book whose impetus was the fanciful New Age ideas of Barry Brailsford, Howe appears hesitant to challenge directly, by conventional scholarly critique, the claims of alternative prehistorians. For this he was recently castigated in a recent review published in the *New Zealand Listener*. As a historian Howe is not well equipped to evaluate claims of pre-Maori or non-Maori prehistoric occupation, and nor are archaeologists because in many cases support for alternative renderings of the past rests on the interpretation of natural phenomena or on claims of secret knowledge. In addition, while it is appropriate to challenge alternative conceptions of the past it is altogether a different proposition to make a frontal attack on all those who hold different beliefs.

This is especially so, when many of the ideas underpinning or supporting alternative prehistories derive from scholars whose work was once considered 'orthodox' (S. Percy Smith) or are from researchers who have made conventional contributions (Barry Brailsford). Further, in support of their interpretations of the past alternative prehistorians can use results from conventional approaches, like the claim that *Rattus exulans* has been in New Zealand for 2000 years, which is referred to in Ross Wiseman's *New Zealand's Hidden Past* (Discovery Press, 2001). By maintaining a historical focus Howe neglects some of the significant linkages between conventional and unconventional views, and I would also have liked to have seen a deeper analysis of the modern social context which seems to spawn so many fringe beliefs.

These minor criticisms aside *The Quest for Origins* is a convincing and clearly written exposition about why the past is conceived in particular forms, and how the limits of 'knowing' prehistory in an absolute sense should not stop us from promulgating orthodox views in the public arena.

*Geoffrey Clark, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University*

**Fred Johns, 1998. *Strike a Light: Wax Vesta Tins & Matchboxes Brought into or Sold in New Zealand, 1840-1993*. Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth. 303 pp, figures. Out of print.**

*Strike a Light* has been produced in small numbers by the Taranaki Museum. It is the work of local resident Fred Johns, with editing and foreword by Neville Ritchie. The book catalogues, dates and illustrates the various forms of matchbox available in New Zealand from the 1850s until the 1990s.

The value of matchboxes for dating historic archaeological sites has long been recognised, with Anson (1983) and Bedford (1985) being the two standard New Zealand references in use to date. The advantages in dating matchboxes lie in their short duration of use (they were generally not curated in the same fashion as glassware and ceramics), together with the relative durability of the tinplate varieties. Even very rusty examples can sometimes be identified. An accurate and comprehensive guide to locally available matchboxes is thus of considerable use to anyone involved in historic archaeology, particularly archaeologists working in arid regions such as Central Otago, where tin matchbox preservation can be excellent.

Problems in using matchboxes for dating can include the time delay between the introduction of a box design in the country of manufacture (often England), and the actual date of discard in New Zealand, and the generally archaeologically-based dating of these boxes in Anson's and Bedford's works. John's book incorporates much archaeological information, but there is also a large bulk of historic information gleaned from his own research and from the work of several British historians. This has provided absolute dates for many matchbox types and variations, which were not previously available.

The book is essentially a catalogue, with some brief historical background for some of the main match manufacturers, so it can not be "read" as such. It is solely a reference work, and its use relies strongly on the index at the rear, where match makers are listed alphabetically. The actual text is organised with sections for locally-made matches, imported matches, matchboxes from archaeological sites, rounds, cardboard boxes etc. For most archaeological purposes it will only be the tin matchboxes that are of interest, and it is essential that the name of the maker is legible for identification to be possible.

The work is heavily illustrated, which is essential for archaeological work. The quality and clarity of the (black and white) drawings varies somewhat, as they

are from many different sources. Generally the best are the line drawings taken from various archaeological papers, and photocopies of clear high-contrast printed covers. Some of the line drawing are very basic, and only show the matchbox lid designs without any detail of box construction, but it is the lid design that is generally essential in matchbox identification; small variations in construction are less important.

There is no attempt at seriation beyond simple chronological ordering of boxes from each maker, but this is not a problem for basic dating purposes. However the lack of any systematic type numbering makes referring to specific boxes untidy, as one often has to use page notation.

Checking the accuracy of the information in this work is not possible, as it is the first comprehensive New Zealand publication, but in use to date I have had no reason to doubt any of the information presented. There is the issue of time lag between production of a box in Britain and discard in New Zealand, but this is only a problem if very fine-scale dating is being attempted. Some of the boxes are very closely dated, Johns giving a four-year date range for a Palmer & Son box recently recovered in Dunedin.

A strange and inexplicable omission is the title or even Johns' name on the cover; the book is bound in plain black with no external identification.

This is a valuable addition to the dating sources for New Zealand historic archaeology, and can be recommended to all practitioners. While it lacks the gloss and presentation of works from professional publishing houses, the information it contains is invaluable for those attempting to closely date historic sites. It is highly empirical, but this is no disadvantage for this type of reference work; Godden's work (2001) on British pottery makers marks (originally published in 1964) has long been a standard reference for ceramics analysis, and is little more than an illustrated list.

*Strike a Light* is one of the essential texts that New Zealand (and possibly Australian) historic archaeologists should keep on their bookshelves for ready reference when analysing any assemblage that contains matchboxes.

The book was produced by Taranaki Museum in limited numbers, at an original cost of \$40 per copy. It is currently out of stock, but if there is sufficient demand, a new print run may be commissioned. Contact Kelvin Day at Puke Ariki (Taranaki Museum), Private Bag 2025, New Plymouth.

## References

Anson, D., 1983. Typology and Seriation of Wax Vesta Tins, Central Otago. *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology*, 5: 115-138.

Bedford, S., 1985. A Simplified Classification for Tin Wax Vesta Matchboxes. *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter*, 28(1): 44-64.

Godden, G.A., 2001. *Encyclopaedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks*. London, Barrie & Jenkins Ltd.

*Peter Petchey, Dunedin*

**Stuart Bedford, Christophe Sand and David Burley (eds.), 2002. Fifty Years in the Field: Essays in Honour and Celebration of Richard Shutler Jr's Archaeological Career. *New Zealand Archaeological Association Monograph*, 25. Paper, 260 pp. \$45.00.**

Festal volumes tend to be an eclectic mix, and this is to be expected when the subject of the festschrift has research interests as diverse as Richard Shutler Junior, spanning chronometrics, ceramic studies and linguistics across Southeast Asia, the Pacific and the USA. Nevertheless, the theme of this book is firmly anchored to Shutler's work in the Pacific, which makes it particularly useful to those with an interest in the archaeology of Oceania. The introduction by such luminaries as William Solheim II, William R. Dickinson, Roger Green, and Yoshiko Sinoto testifies to the breadth of his achievements and influence in Oceanic Archaeology, and also to the fond regard of his colleagues. Limited space precludes discussing every paper as they deserve, so this review is limited largely to papers on Lapita, which is no reflection on those not discussed.

The volume opens with a paper by Green making the case for Lapita as a house-based society, rather than hierarchical or tribal over any great region. Integrating evidence from historic anthropology and archaeology he suggests that structural features excavated in the Nunembo site, Talepakemalai, and other sites such as Lakemba are consistent with this interpretation, since there are no indications of larger structural types or monumental architecture in these settlements.

Specht's paper concluding that there is data suggestive of a colonization-related pulse in the size of obsidian pieces from Lapita sites (where colonisers carried plentiful supplies of the stone, negating the need for economizing behaviour) is thought-provoking. Specht echoes others in noting that the degree of resource-maximizing behaviour may relate less to the supply rate than to culture. Profligate

use of obsidian might confer social advantage. The general cultural milieu may have been one of “spend” rather than “hoard” where in later times acquisition of subsistence resources might have been an altogether more arduous and resource-intensive business.

Specht does not discuss whether subsistence practices correlate with obsidian reduction practices. The balance of activities may have differed during the Lapita period from that of earlier or later periods, possibly requiring larger flakes. Is there any correlation between faunal assemblage composition/size of fauna and flake size? Larger flakes might be a utilitarian way of reducing a core in some circumstances.

Spriggs, ever the wit (in sections titled “New Faces”, “Ageing Faces”, “Looking into the Face”, and “In Your Face”, the latter regarding Best’s recent NZAA monograph), reviews in his paper (“I’ve Grown Accustomed to Your Face”) additions to the corpus of Lapita face designs on pottery and discussion about these since his seminal facial analysis paper at the 1991 Lapita design workshop. His suggestion that some of the decorated bowls illustrated by Summerhayes (2000) must in fact be lids, as the geometric stylised “faces” are otherwise upside down, begs the question why, if these are lids, the invisible underside of the lip of the lids are all highly decorated, while the base (the top in Sprigg’s view) is flat and plain in the one case where it is present. This section may have been better headed “Unable to Face Up To It”.

A paper by Ambrose describes five large intact pots recovered from beneath volcanic ash layers on Lou Island, providing a reminder that the tephra-covered landscapes of the Bismarck Archipelago must conceal a treasure-trove of archaeological heritage, and also suggesting (as do other large pots recovered from New Caledonia) that the very broken assemblages of sherds often recovered by archaeologists probably obscure evidence for such voluminous vessels. It could be added that use-life differences between these large vessels and more common sizes might also account for under-representation in less well preserved contexts, where breakage due to use rather than site abandonment might be the process by which sherds become incorporated into midden deposits.

Ian Lilley also revisits earlier work, raising the possibility of a previously unrecognised immediately post-Lapita phase in his data from the KLK site on Tuam, in the Siassi islands. The difficulty Lilley encounters in separating out a chronological sequence for the period following the demise of dentate stamping is symptomatic of a general problem in Lapita studies, where it is easy enough,

for some sherds, to identify Lapita, but very difficult date less distinctively decorated ceramics on the basis of style alone. This is the great challenge facing Oceanic ceramic studies, and its solution in my view will require more careful attention to sampling and classificatory systematics than has been the case within a culture historical approach.

The paper by White *et al.* investigating landscape formation processes for the Boduna Lapita site near the Willaumez Peninsula is a welcome clarification of the importance of such studies for interpretation of the recorded Lapita distribution. The presence of water-rolled pottery across a small raised coral islet, as recorded during the Lapita Homelands surveys in the mid 1980s, has always tended to suggest that the materials were formerly in the sea and that substantial emergence of what was formerly a stilt village has taken place. The detailed landscape study seems to confirm this, and places formation studies centre-stage.

In the section on Southern Melanesia (a region in which Shutler made a seminal contribution) Davidson, Leach and Sand re-examine Gifford and Shutler's conclusion that fishing played little part in Lapita subsistence in New Caledonia. It seems the sites are characterized rather by fish bones of a small size, requiring finer mesh sizes than were used in the 1950s. The authors conclude that New Caledonia is unusual in their experience in that the fish evidenced in middens were of such small size.

Remarkably, the Gifford and Shutler crew retained fish otoliths from sediments at the Oundjo site, long before these were used for archaeofaunal studies. Weisler reports identification of these using a scanning electron microscope. The results show that fine-boned species such as *Albula glossodonta*, seldom found in Oceanic assemblages today, were present in the Oundjo midden, and did not escape entirely the coarse-screening method combined with the retention of bulk sediment samples from all units.

The central and Eastern Pacific section opens with a quantitative ceramic analysis by Burley, Storey and Witt from the last decade of Lapita excavations in Tonga. As the authors are careful to note, the brokenness of the sherd assemblages means that vessel form identification is coarse. In analysing decoration they follow Poulsen more than Mead, but for the purposes of the paper lump decorative classes into six broad categories, without much focus on temporal variability within this analytical scheme. The presence of a few "Western Lapita" sherds in the Nukuleka site, and the early dates for that site seem to satisfy the authors that



temporal variability is easily understood in terms of evolution from a Western Lapita founding style of the simple open geometric designs common (and highly varied) in the widespread later site-samples. The authors see the Western Lapita sherds as evidence for a leap-frog mode of colonization of Polynesia by Lapita peoples rather than the clinal expansion model favoured by Anderson and Clark. Hopefully a more detailed monograph treatment of ceramic variability is in preparation.

Jeff Marck has the last word, with recollections of Shutler's Tule Springs research, including his first sight of Shutler wearing a fishing hat, "smiling and waving" from a helicopter several hundred feet overhead—he subsequently learned they were trying to get him to move out of the way so they could drop cargo. Marck recounts details of Shutler's accessibility and friendliness towards his students, and outstanding level of concern for their well being. He also notes Shutler's wide interests in history, the arts and sciences, and his propensity for an after-lunch nap in the office.

This substantial volume incorporates papers with valuable insights on old data and much new data. Shutler was moved to tears when it was presented to him, and will not have been disappointed on reading it.

*Matthew Felgate, Anthropology Department, University of Auckland*