



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## REVIEWS

**Bruno David, Bryce Barker and Ian J. McNiven (eds) 2006. *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra. 384 pp, figs., bib., index. Paper. \$AUD39.95.**

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This book is dedicated to Harry Lourandos who recently retired from a long teaching career in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Queensland. To some extent, the book follows the festchrift format in that it is an edited collection of essays dedicated to Lourandos. However, it also makes the case for ‘Social Archaeology’ as a distinct archaeological approach, one that was introduced to Australia through the work of Harry Lourandos. It is this second aspect which provides a framework by which we might examine the case studies presented here, asking: ‘What is social archaeology?’; and, ‘How successful are the case studies in terms of the programmatic claims made for it?’ As this review is for New Zealand readers, in the concluding section I will also discuss the relevance of the social archaeology approach for New Zealand archaeology.

Between 1983 and 1997 Harry Lourandos published a series of articles and books which challenged the prevailing paradigm of Australian archaeology. That paradigm owed much to the teaching of Graham Clark and Eric Higgs at Cambridge University (Murray and White 1981: 258). The major themes of this programme were determinist, change in the Aboriginal past was recognised in terms of homeostatic adaptations to shifts in the environment. Lourandos took a neo-Marxist and Childean approach, arguing that causality should be based on contradictions within the social relations of production. The editors’ introductory essay titled ‘The social archaeology of Indigenous Australia’ expand these points, pointing out that this shift opened the way to considering the environment as being socially constructed and challenged the social evolutionary notion that hunter gatherers were necessarily stuck in a time warp below the stages of either barbarism or civilisation. The editors (pp 4–6) outline what is distinctive about social archaeology in terms of three key dimensions:

1. understanding the contemporary social contexts of researching Aboriginal pasts;

2. understanding social interactions in the past; and
3. understanding contemporary social impacts of archaeological representations of indigenous pasts.

In pointing out that two of these three dimensions relate to the social relations between archaeologists and indigenous peoples in the present, and in referring to ‘pasts’ in the plural, the editors situate social archaeology within a reflective, critical, even post-modern, context (see also McNiven and Russell 2005). Certainly the approach advocated by Lourandos turned the archaeologist’s attention towards a wider range of contextual and empirical evidence, including the organisation of social space through rock markings and ceremonies (pp 14–18). The second and third chapters in this introductory section provide a useful interview with Harry Lourandos, giving further conceptual depth to the debate, and a short, but well written academic biography of Lourandos by Sandra Bowdler.

The second part of this volume is titled, ‘Tyranny of the text’ and consists of four essays, each examining a single aspect of the interpretation of Aboriginal archaeology. David and Denham discuss the supposed divide between hunter gatherers and horticulturalists, McNiven criticises diffusionist theories, Barker, the inadequacies of textual sources and Brian looks at the intensification debate. While all are useful, of the four, Barker’s discussion benefits from having the central Queensland coast as a specific context from which the problems of textual accuracy are worked through.

Five essays in the section titled ‘Anthropological approaches’ attempt to broach the divide between archaeology and social considerations. The first discusses archaeological resource management and addresses the issue that Aboriginal metaphysical concerns should have an impact on archaeological surveying. Here Godwin and Weiner provide a thoughtful discussion of the fact that Aboriginal meanings must find a place in survey methodologies if archaeologists wish to avoid being a danger to themselves and their hosts. Langton expands on this theme through examining Aboriginal knowledge systems of Cape York in terms of earth, wind, fire, and water as elements of the landscape. Two essays discuss aspects of Yanyuwa (southern Gulf of Carpentaria) anthropology. The first, by Bradley, provides an important addition to the literature on cycad utilisation, while the second, by Kearney and Bradley, stresses that Aboriginal meanings derived from oral traditions are an essential part of understanding the landscape. They argue that archaeologists wishing to unravel indigenous meaning in the landscape must step outside their usual approach to studying relationships between people and material culture. The most challenging essay is by Tamisari and Wallace, who argue (p 220) that “if...archaeological approaches have shifted towards the primacy

of place, they have done so by bypassing the living body which is essential to inhabiting, perceiving and being-in and being-with place.” This article attacks foundational aspects of current archaeological practice in terms of landscapes, time/space dimensions, location and visual (scenic) appreciations. Archaeologists struggling to identify individuals in the record will find this call for a sensual archaeology rather difficult to deal with.

‘Late Holocene change’ presents archaeological approaches to the Late Holocene by Pate, Veth, Tibby *et. al.*, Rowe and Carter. Each of these essays is useful, but do not advance the cause of social archaeology to any great extent. They are largely conventional and empirical studies, though Veth’s exploration of art, archaeology and linguistic prehistory for the Western Desert is an exception. These archaeological studies are in the nature of preliminary statements. I am mindful of the fact that a number of the authors represented in this volume, including the editors, and Peter Veth, have initiated new research projects designed to explore the issues of social archaeology. The volume ends with a highly readable and personal essay by Barbara Bender.

Having read this volume, I return to the questions posed at the beginning of this review. I now have a better understanding of social archaeology. However, the articles in this volume fall short of *demonstrating* the superiority of this approach to the exclusion of others. While the issues raised are interesting ones, the problem of how to move from archaeological data to social inference continues unresolved. I was surprised not to see greater mention of Isabel McBryde’s historical / social approach to Australian archaeology, itself the subject of a recent festschrift (Macfarlane *et al.*; Allen 2006). McBryde’s approach offers a parallel methodology to the social archaeology advocated here. Finally, the most successful essays in the volume emphasise the social over the archaeological, and in so doing, demonstrate just how far archaeologists must travel to truly discover indigenous meanings in their data. If there is an area where social archaeology is essential, it must surely be in archaeological resource management which continues to privilege tangible archaeological findings over intangible indigenous meanings in resource management decisions.

How does this volume relate to New Zealand archaeology? Crosby (2004) reviewed social approaches to New Zealand archaeology and concluded that Maori social practices, including rituals, were a driving force of Maori life. New Zealand would benefit from debate around these issues. They are raised by individual practitioners, such as Barber (1996), and earlier by Irwin (1985), but the majority paradigm still explains the New Zealand past in terms of environmental adaptation in isolation, despite the loss of a sufficient time span necessary to sustain such a process. While this isolationist

explanation was clearly an advance on the ideologically-minded colonisation scenarios of the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is time that the adaptation in isolation model was also examined for its ideological content. Certainly, the minimalist, single arrival model (McGlone et al. 1994: 137–138), should be reconsidered in terms of its effective marginalisation of all Maori traditional knowledge. New Zealand archaeological resource management, in particular, would benefit from further discussion concerning the relationship between Maori systems of meaning and landscapes, which are presently defined largely in archaeological terms.

It is the absence of any parallel debate in New Zealand archaeology which makes *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* essential reading for New Zealand archaeologists. As the Australian editors point out, two of its three key dimensions concern the contemporary relationships between archaeologists and indigenous Maori. That is a topic which New Zealand archaeologists continue to ignore at their peril.

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**Louise Furey 2006. *Maori Gardening: An Archaeological Perspective*. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 137 pp, tables, figs., appendices. Paper.**

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For some time now the Department of Conservation has commissioned both regional (Conservancy based) and thematic reviews of current archaeological knowledge in New Zealand. This publication reviews the archaeological evidence for Maori gardening. It provides a careful assessment of the evidence as well as clear pointers for future research.

The author covers various aspects of the topic systematically, with suitable caveats about the nature of the data. She presents a balanced account of what is known and indicates where there are conflicting interpretations.

The archaeological evidence is placed in its wider context – the plants themselves, the gardening techniques as recorded ethnographically, and the climatic limitations. The section on plants deals with the six cultigens introduced by Maori – kumara, taro, yam, hue (gourd), ti pore (a tropical cabbage tree) and aute (paper mulberry). There is no discussion of the possible cultivation (or at least encouragement) of indigenous plants.

The limitations of ethnographic evidence about gardening techniques are acknowledged. One wonders, however, to what extent nineteenth century cropping and fallowing periods were influenced by the widespread use of potatoes, which in some areas could produce more than one crop in a year.

Furey takes a conservative approach to the possibilities of climatic change during the period of Maori occupation of New Zealand, while noting that there is ongoing research on this subject. She stresses the importance of microclimates; soils; the significance of wind, rainfall, temperature and incidence of frost; and mentions the usefulness of predictive modelling for analysing site/landscape relationships at a regional level. Not surprisingly, the distribution of recorded gardening sites is heavily weighted to the north of the country.

A major section discusses the field evidence under the headings of stone structures, ditches and channels, borrow pits, garden soils, and garden terraces. This is the heart of the work, 'defining the resource', as these DOC reviews are intended to do. The various features are described and research carried out on them is discussed. After initial caution, Furey accepts that stone walls and rows were garden boundaries. Trenches and ditches in wet and dry locations pose a major problem of interpretation. Furey calls for further investigation of these features and consistency in collecting information about them. She provides a sensible caution about identifying Maori garden soils.

The discussion of types of garden evidence is balanced by the subsequent review of evidence by regions. For each Conservancy the types of evidence found are described and a map of garden sites is compared with a map of pit sites, used as a proxy for kumara gardening. In some Conservancies the evidence of garden sites alone as an indication of the extent of gardening is very misleading.

Six case studies are presented. Furey provides a detailed but not entirely convincing justification for the selection of these sites. The six are Panau, Clarence, Okoropunga, Pukaroro, Cape Runaway–Potikirua Point and Rangihoua–Marsden Cross. I am probably fortunate to have been to all of these places myself. I consider them good choices, with the possible exception of Clarence – the extent of destruction of this site complex is mentioned but will not be apparent to readers unfamiliar with the area.

The volume then moves on to sections on nineteenth century Maori gardening (for which there is plenty of historical evidence but little known archaeological data apart from ditch and bank enclosures) and factors affecting site survival.

The concluding section summarises what has gone before, but then wanders off for a while into a historically and traditionally based discussion which might have been better placed in a separate section. Important points include an emphasis on regional and temporal diversity and individual practice, and the time needed to build up enough stock for gardening to spread to all the parts of the country where it was practised, as well as locally after abandonment during conflicts.

Furey ends with a number of recommendations for future work. These include analysis of change through time in an area; better understanding of Northland ditches and slope systems; where and how specific crops were grown (for which study of plant microfossils is valuable); detailed regional analysis and synthesis of the recent accumulating data from mitigation archaeology; and a more inclusive approach to the study of gardens in relation to other aspects of settlement and economy. I hope her study will stimulate new work along these lines.

Two appendices are revealing. The first lists garden excavations by region, date of excavation and other details. Three quarters of the investigations listed took place more than 20 years ago. For at least one major project (the Wiri Oil Terminal) nothing has been published. In this respect it is worth noting that the map of the garden areas surrounding Pouerua in Northland, which should be a truly important resource for studying garden lay-out, has also not been published.

The second appendix is of radiocarbon dates for garden sites. Unfortunately it is not clear what is meant by the heading "Date (BP)". The dates are mostly taken from publications, many of them more than twenty years old. Furey states that where they differ from published results, "calibrated results" from the radiocarbon database have been used in preference, but all are expressed as dates BP. It appears that at least some of the shell dates are conventional ages without marine reservoir correction. Even so, and allowing for inbuilt age in older charcoal samples, there is a surprising number of old dates here. A useful project would be a careful makeover of this date list to provide consistent CRAs and calibrated ages.

The volume has some editorial lapses. There are a few errors on the maps (e.g., the location of Titirangi on Figure 2 and Kapowairua on Figure 8). The quality of the black and white photographs is generally disappointing. Some of the field evidence of Maori gardening is truly spectacular, as seen in the colour photo of Waikekeno on the cover. I know that some of the original black and whites could be just as good.