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# THE FIRST THOUSAND YEARS

Regional Perspectives in New Zealand Archaeology

Edited by Nigel Prickett



# INTRODUCTION

This volume had its origin in 1976 when a suggestion was made that the New Zealand Archaeological Association celebrate its 25th anniversary in 1980 with the publication of a book of essays on New Zealand archaeology. The initial proposal was for a volume on advances in archaeological methodology. After some discussion, however, the council of the Association decided that, rather than produce something of interest mainly to the archaeological community to mark such an occasion, an attempt should be made to present something of the work of the previous quarter century to the wider public. That is the aim of this book.

In the past 25 years New Zealand archaeology has undergone a revolution. Most importantly there has been an enormous increase in the amount of survey and excavation fieldwork carried out. Radiocarbon dating now gives us an independent assessment of the date of archaeological sites and remains. Furthermore, while major questions such as who are the Maori and where did they come from are answered only to a degree, today's archaeologists are interested in a very much wider range of issues than were their predecessors in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Recent work has led not so much to new answers, but to new questions. The focus is no longer 'the whence of the Maori', to use the 19th century phrase, but the nature and variety of the Maori adaptation to our temperate island world.

It is no coincidence that the anniversary this volume celebrates may be linked with another which is arguably even more important for New Zealand archaeology. In 1954 the first lecturer in archaeology was appointed to a New Zealand university. Jack Golson was an Englishman who was not only instrumental in founding the New Zealand Archaeological Association, but was the first of a number of overseas archaeologists who have introduced New Zealand students to the methods and theoretical ideas of the archaeological world of the northern hemisphere.

In the past 25 years the direction of research in New Zealand has depended very much on university trained and university employed archaeologists. But while this has enabled work here to benefit from the tremendous advances being made elsewhere in the world, it has tended to increase the gap between archaeologists and the public — even the interested public. What is more, much of the growing output of publication has been aimed at the fellow professional and is neither readily accessible nor easy to understand. It is to bridge the gap that this volume has been produced. Its content owes much to the developing theory and highly technical methodologies of recent years.

The old emphasis on adzes and other finished artefacts resulted in the vast bulk of material found in archaeological sites formerly being thrown away or ignored. Recent advances in techniques of analysis, however, have coincided with changing theoretical priorities to make midden, waste stone and other material, as well as 'postholes' and other structural evidence, among the most informative products of any excavation. Thus archaeologists have a major interest in subsistence economics, aimed at filling out a picture of the seasonal round of activity

and food supply. Likewise the study of artefacts has moved to embrace not just typological and historical questions, but those of geology, technology and problems of trade and exchange as well. Questions of settlement pattern, the accurate dating of archaeological remains, the geological sourcing of stone tools and waste, and the identification of midden remains and their relation to diet are all subjects of a considerable literature.

Growing archaeological knowledge has increased our understanding of the variety of ways of life in Aotearoa. While the entire population from North Cape to Stewart Island shared in the most characteristic and expressive aspects of being Maori, many of the basic aspects of living varied greatly from region to region according to the wealth and variety of natural resources. Thus, in the Bay of Islands district, for example, a large population made use of abundant good soil for kumara cultivation and obtained a rich harvest from sea and shore. On the shores of Foveaux Strait, on the other hand, the climate ruled out kumara cultivation and the open and hostile sea made the year-round gathering of seafood hazardous for the small numbers of people living in the region. The north and south are two extremes. Something of the great variety of ways the Maori lived and of the archaeological remains this activity has left us, are presented in this book.

Finally, I would like to thank those who at last see their work in print for bearing with me over the many years between proposal and fruition. The many gaps in this book I hope will be filled in a future edition. Indeed, I look forward to such an increase in knowledge that this volume will be superceded in the not too distant future.

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