



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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/>.

THE ROLE OF N. Z. IN PACIFIC ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGY

Roger Duff

The allocation of a morning's session of the Royal Society of N. Z. 's Eleventh Science Congress at Auckland in February 1965 to activities in the tropical Southwest Pacific marks the coming of age in N. Z. archaeology in the tropical Pacific. During the sessions we heard first hand accounts of expeditions to Samoa and Tonga (Auckland University); Rarotonga and Southern Cooks (Canterbury Museum); Pitcairn (Otago University) and locally based excavations at Viti Levu, Fiji (J. B. Palmer of the Fiji Museum). In addition Mr D. R. Simmons of the Otago Museum reported a beginning of systematic archaeology in the Chatham Islands. As Chairman of the Session I record here the background introduction which programme pressure prevented me from giving at the time.

Although our activities have been confined to our own temperate islands, N. Z. has the longest record of archaeological activity in Polynesia, the earliest researches (published in the Transactions of the N. Z. Institute from 1872) being inspired by the publication of Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" and reflecting the pioneer interest of Colonial scientists in the role played by man in the extinction of the flightless moas, N. Z. 's most interesting demonstration of the negative of Darwin's theory of the role of competition in organic evolution.

Until World War II the four major museums were the promoters, repositories and beneficiaries of archaeological research, with the generation between the Wars marked by the inspiration of Dr H. D. Skinner as Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Otago. Although lacking refinement in stratigraphical excavation and neglecting structures this museum phase of archaeology achieved the first demonstration for Polynesia of a polarity of difference between the first (Moa-hunter) phase and the last (Classic) phase of Maori culture, a surprising degree of differentiation within a time scale revealed as somewhat more than one thousand years. Museum based typological comparison of diagnostic artifacts beyond New Zealand further indicated an early East Polynesian provenance for the first settlers in particular. The Classic differentiation was proposed as a process of internal evolution arising in the North Island and sparked off by the introduction of kumara agriculture at a mid-point of Polynesian occupation.

This simple but significant reconstruction gave N. Z. archaeology an interest in and claim to extending our field research to tropical Polynesia itself. Our ability to do so, assuming the necessary financial support, was affected by the absence of any professional practitioner, and the absence of a sufficient labour force of skilled amateurs. Both these needs were provided

by the appointment, in 1955, of professional archaeologists to the Universities of Auckland and Otago, and the consequent rapid recruitment through the N. Z. Archaeological Association of the largest group of skilled amateur field workers available anywhere in the Oceanic Pacific.

The opportunity to move into Polynesia was provided unexpectedly by the Tenth Pacific Science Congress at Honolulu in August, 1961. Studying at the Bishop Museum prior to the Congress I was asked by the Director, Dr Alex. Spoehr whether New Zealand could participate in a three year field programme proposed by the Bishop Museum, with support from the U.S. National Science Foundation.

I replied with confidence that we were ready to extend our "technique and wide field experience to tropical Polynesia, calling on the services of a large pool of experienced field workers and counting on the research and laboratory facilities of four museums and two universities." Our claim to participate was not only justified in terms of our resources, but also necessary to test and check our reconstruction of Polynesian cultural evolution within N. Z. This was a two-stage migration from Polynesia, with an ultimate East Polynesian origin in the Society Islands for the earlier and a probable second migration from the same area. With the arrival of Roger Green we had to nominate in haste which N. Z. institutions were ready to participate and where.

For Western Samoa we nominated Auckland University which was naturally interested in a following of Golson's break-through at Vailele, 'Upolu in the Tri-Institutional Pacific Programme (1957). The two other active N. Z. institutions, Canterbury Museum and the Otago Museum and University were to be assigned East Polynesian areas, but where? Hawai'i and the Society Islands were pre-empted by Bishop Museum and the University of Hawai'i; Easter Island by the Norwegian Expedition; Marquesas by Robert Suggs for the American Museum of Natural History; Mangareva (and Mo'orea) by Roger Green for the American Museum. There remained the Australs, the Cooks and Pitcairn. Because of readiness of access and the close links with N. Z. it was decided to nominate Canterbury for the Cooks, and Otago for Pitcairn.

The next step was the essential Congress resolution, readily passed by the assembled archaeologists, requesting archaeologists interested in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia to develop a list of important specific localities within reach of the three areas where surveys and excavations are immediately desirable, to coordinate activities and to prepare detailed proposals. Roger Green was appointed to represent N. Z. on a six member Steering Committee for the Pacific Island Archaeological Programme headed by the Director of the Bishop Museum.

Being specifically interested in Polynesia the Bishop Museum proceeded with a detailed proposal to the U.S.N.S.F. requesting funds for a three season programme to the Society Island and American Samoa (Bishop Museum), Western Samoa (Auckland), Cook Islands (Canterbury) and Pitcairn (Otago). The objection to granting funds to applicants other than U.S. nationals was met by the Bishop Museum nominating one representative of each N.Z. institution as a Bishop Museum Associate. Each N.Z. institution was to operate on an annual budget, modest by American standards, ranging between 3,300 and 2,000 dollars.

In the event Auckland compounded its grant into one visit (December 1963 - June 1964) members: Roger and Kaye Green, Eleanor Crosby, Janet Davidson, Stuart Scott, George Boraman, with Janet Davidson continuing in Tonga (July - September, 1964). Canterbury made two visits to Rarotonga (December 1962 - January 1963 and June - November 1964, members: - Roger and Myrtle Duff, R. H. Parker, Bade and Alice Norris, Owen and Joan Wilkes, George Boraman, Robin and Ian Duff). Otago made one visit to Pitcairn (December 1963 - February 1964) with R. M. Carter, L. R. Cowell, M. Howse, H. Knight, E. L. Phelan, G. A. Rogers and Peter Gathercole as the expedition leader.

The Congress Committee had proposed that the Chatham Islands should be a local N.Z. responsibility, and the expedition of D. R. Simmons, Otago Museum, including Rhys Richards and H. J. R. Brown, (November 1963 - February 1964) was largely made possible by a grant from the N.Z. Historic Places Trust because of its special interest in recording and salvaging the fast disappearing dendroglyphs.

The appointment of J. Bruce Palmer as Director of the Fiji Museum, Suva, placed an experienced N.Z. Archaeologist in a strategic position to organize continuing site surveys in Vitilevu and the specific excavations at Carobo and Sigatoka which were reported to the Auckland Congress.

Those who attended at Auckland, or read the following summaries, will agree that N.Z. Archaeology has made an impressive debut in tropical Polynesia, Fiji and the Chathams. The tropical Polynesian results in particular have satisfied the Bishop Museum and it is probable that the variety and scope of N.Z. participation will increase in future programmes.