

John Wilson, ed., *From the Beginning: The Archaeology of the Maori*. Auckland: Penguin Books in association with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 1987. Pp. 175, illus., maps, appendix, bibliography, index. NZ\$32.50.

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From the Beginning is a landmark work for New Zealand archaeology. In a popular and attractive format, with clear text and color as well as black and white photographs and illustrations, editor Wilson has assembled a series of essays detailing the principal results of recent archaeological research into the New Zealand Maori past. The introduction sets out clearly the book's objective: to simplify archaeological results so as

to inform “those who are not familiar with what archaeologists do or what they have learned” about the Maori past (p. 9). The essays retain the scholarly trappings of footnotes and suggestions for further reading.

For the purposes of this review, I shall consider the individual essays and their contribution to the books stated objective under several broad themes of my own choosing.

As *context and background*, Tipene O’Regan’s introductory essay, “Te Kupenga o nga Tupuna” (The Net of Ancestry), discusses the pre-European past from the perspective of Maori tradition and contemporary cultural identity. For O’Regan, the record of the past is made relevant to Maori society today through the expression of *whakapapa* (genealogy), which relates individuals to each other, to their wider community and physical environment, and to other autonomous but (ultimately) related groups. In introducing the reader first to a contemporary Maori view of the past, the archaeological essays that follow are placed in perspective as addressing matters of importance to “a people whose culture lives on” (preface, p. 7).

O’Regan’s concluding essay, “Who Owns the Past?: Changes in Maori Perceptions of the Past,” deals with the Maori response to Pakeha (non-Maori) scholarship. Asserting a long-standing Maori resentment towards, and alienation from, the institutional scholars of Maori life, as well as a growing sense of tenure over things Maori, O’Regan also concedes that Maori perceptions of the past have been extended favorably where Pakeha scholars have communicated effectively. O’Regan reminds the reader that myth, custom, and, most importantly, *whakapapa* remain the essential Maori links to their own past, constituting areas where the outsider proceeds at “peril” (p. 145). The caution is salutary in reinforcing both the limitations of archaeological scholarship and the too-often overlooked perspective of those who are ultimately the subject of enquiry in New Zealand’s pre-European archaeology. I shall return to this last point later.

Janet Davidson’s essay “Origins of the Maori” provides the archaeological background from Oceania. The expected discussion of the “Lapita people” as Polynesian progenitors is relatively orthodox although Davidson acknowledges that, as the subject of “intense investigation” at present, new light may yet be shed on such matters (p. 36). For east Polynesia, Davidson gives Kirch’s 1986 reevaluation of the earliest settlement evidence credence against the more usually cited A.D. 300 date for first colonization (pp. 31, 33). On the vexed question of initial Polynesian settlement of New Zealand, Davidson allows the likelihood of first arrival “several hundred years” before A.D. 1100 while ac-

knowledging a date earlier than A.D. 600 to be problematic (pp. 35-36), a compromise position unlikely to satisfy any of the antagonists in the current debate.

Under a theme of *ecology and subsistence economy*, I include first Bruce McFadgen's "Environmental Change." McFadgen is insightful and original in synthesizing evidence for the environmental impact of the Maori over time, especially deforestation and depletion of food resources. Phil Houghton's challenging if brief essay, "Health and Well-Being" (with authorship incorrectly ascribed in the table of contents to Davidson), describes the paradox of a tall, robust, and relatively healthy pre-European Maori population for whom longevity was generally proscribed by diet and environment.

Specifics of this diet are provided by Atholl Anderson and Helen Leach. In "Hunting and Fishing," Anderson continues McFadgen's argument in demonstrating that a greater reliance on finfish and shellfish over time can be attributed to the scarcity (and eventual extinction) of moa and, especially, seal. Anderson corrects a popular perception that moa was a "mainstay" of the early Maori diet, though acknowledging the significant dietary contribution of these large birds in certain districts. The dietary contribution of the domestic dog is also discussed. Overall, Anderson provides a comprehensive summary of foods fished and hunted, omitting only the introduced (and hunted) Polynesian rat.

In one of the book's most detailed essays, "Gathering and Gardening," Leach amplifies the dietary perspective by documenting the vegetable foods gathered and cultivated by the pre-European Maori. Leach notes the relative success of gardening in some warmer, northern locations, but stipulates that the seasonal climate of temperate New Zealand forced the Maori to put much time and effort into processing wild plants for food as well, especially in the south.

Cumulatively, these four essays clearly communicate the unique challenges that faced tropical Polynesian settlers in temperate New Zealand and the relative success of Maori subsistence adaptation.

Janet Davidson's essay "Cultural Change" may be considered under the theme of *culture change and material culture*. Davidson proposes a three-period archaeological sequence for the Maori past ("settlement," "expansion," and "rapid change"), a model that is discussed along with Maori scholar Sid Mead's stylistic/art-history chronology of change. Davidson acknowledges earlier theories that attributed change to the arrival of new migratory groups, including the variant of a single North Island locality where Maori culture purportedly developed and from whence it (rather suddenly) spread. In a challenging counterinterpreta-

tion to this last view, Davidson suggests instead that "it is just as likely that changes took place in different regions at different times," spreading in a manner that was "gradual and complex" (p. 44). Davidson's model introduces the general reader to more useful categories of Maori culture change than earlier two-period sequences have allowed. In common with the earlier scenarios, she acknowledges the importance of environmental and demographic influences but also highlights the need to consider regional factors, both in the timing and very nature of pre-European culture change itself.

Kevin Jones considers the skill base and variety of Maori material culture in "Maori Technologies." Much illuminating detail and great space is given to adze manufacture, a situation influenced by both the durability of stone in archaeological contexts and the concentration of previous research. Descriptions of wood, fibre, and (very briefly) bone technologies are also provided.

Wendy Harsant's "Arts of the Maori" deals with material culture from the perspective of (archaeological) art history. Harsant documents the richness of ornamentation, variety, and skill in archaeological examples of wood carving, rock art, necklaces, pendants, amulets, and the fibre arts. In this regard some comparative, regional aspects of change are elucidated. However, the paucity of material objects interpreted as Maori art from securely dated archaeological contexts means that, at best, only broad generalizations can be made about diachronic development and change in art forms. Harsant does at least place Maori art in context as a unique development from earlier Polynesian precedents.

From a *settlement-pattern* perspective, Nigel Prickett's "Houses and Settlements" considers the physical evidence of settlement and domestic sites in particular. This, at least, is one area of cultural adaptation where the archaeological and early historical evidence facilitates a useful level of reconstruction. Prickett's essay generally accomplishes this, emphasizing the persistence of both larger settlement and (especially) individual house forms over time, and even space. Prickett discusses and compares the later *pa* (fortification) sites, Maori archaeology's most impressive landscape form, as defended settlements, though he does not deal explicitly with the challenge these sites pose to a scenario of settlement-pattern continuity.

In "Warfare and Fortifications," Janet Davidson takes up this last point. The "cycle" of *pa* building, she observes, began about five hundred years ago, and then spread rapidly throughout both the North Island and the northern South Island. Before that time, "unfortified villages and hamlets, usually on coastal flats," were the dominant settle-

ment pattern (p. 109). On the basis of other archaeological indicators, however, Davidson observes that this earlier settlement pattern should not necessarily be construed as negative evidence for a lack of aggression (pp. 109, 120). This is a sensible conclusion that highlights the difficulty in explaining the later proliferation of defensive earthworks, as does her critical review of theories for "*pa* warfare" (p. 111). In some instances, this last term may even be something of a misnomer in my opinion. Just as weapons could serve as symbols of prowess (p. 120), *pa* may sometimes have had a primarily symbolic, territorial function, as much linked to increased competition for status and prestige as to specific patterns or incidents of Maori warfare.

Under a final theme of *archaeological legislation and the general public*, Brian Sheppard's appendix, "Protection and Management of Archaeological Sites," is an excellent summary of relevant legislative, ethical, and practical site management issues. The confusion since engendered by the creation of the government Department of Conservation and the legislative review of the Historic Places Act means that some of his discussion is dated already, however. As one might expect, this essay from Historic Places Trust employee Sheppard argues an official, management perspective.

This last observation leads to an issue I wish to consider in penultimate conclusion. In a review of this book published outside of New Zealand, O'Regan's concluding essay is characterized as overtly political, Marxist rhetoric, ultimately about Maori nationalism, which "entirely alters the balance of the book" and is in "fundamental conflict" with its aims (Shawcross 1989:80, 81). Although it is not my intention to review someone else's review, a response to this possible interpretation is deemed appropriate, relating as it does to fundamental issues concerning the book and its New Zealand context.

Certainly, from the prefatory remarks of Historic Places Trust chairperson Dinah Holman (p. 7) and editor Wilson's introductory remarks (p. 12), there is no sense that O'Regan's chapters are out of harmony with the book's overall intent. Wilson introduces O'Regan's essays in discussion of the relation between archaeological and traditional Maori views of the past (pp. 11-12). Archaeology and tradition illuminate different aspects of that past, Wilson notes, and Maori people act "of right" in requiring consent for any archaeological investigation of the same. Archaeologists proceeding from a position of respect recognize "that the past they are helping to piece together belongs in a special sense to the Maori people," while many Maori now recognize that archaeological findings (*per se*) "do not infringe on Maori ownership"

or “distinctively Maori uses of that past.” These last are “the uses described by Tipene O’Regan,” Wilson concludes (p. 12).

O’Regan’s essays describe those uses explicitly and, as no Pakeha archaeologist could convey, the resentment and protest that has resulted from the co-option of the Maori past by Pakeha institutions, frequently without consent. In that context, O’Regan’s observation that where Pakeha scholars are prepared to dialogue with the Maori, “there is, happily, another side to all this,” becomes all the more meaningful to the general reader. This is certainly asking that archaeologists do more than “become good mannered towards the Maori” (Shawcross 1989:81), but this is entirely in harmony with Wilson’s previously cited introductory remarks (see also Sheppard’s comments, p. 149) and the contemporary requirements of successful Maori archaeology in New Zealand. The issues O’Regan raises of indigenous consent, communication, and respect are now being defined as crucial to the future discipline of archaeology in a number of countries (Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990). Incorporating such an indigenous perspective is no more partisan (or inappropriate) than the justification of the official statutory perspective by Sheppard. In New Zealand today, the exclusion of either perspective from a text such as *From the Beginning* would be as political an act as inclusion.

Overall, *From the Beginning* accomplishes admirably what it sets out to achieve. For undergraduate students and the general reader, there has never before been such a user-friendly introduction to the findings, scope, and limitations of the archaeology of the Maori. It is an example that could (and should) serve as precedent for archaeology and archaeologists in other Pacific and Pacific rim countries.

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