John Terrell, *Prehistory in the Pacific Islands.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. 299, 88 illustrations, 5 tables, bibliography, index. £30 hardback.

Reviewed by Peter Bellwood, Australian National University

This book is a welcome new addition to the large and often controversial literature on the origins and prehistory of the peoples of the Pacific, particularly its Melanesian and Polynesian geographical portions. The author, an archaeologist, writes clearly and makes allowance, partly through a careful use of rhetorical questions and the friendly first person plural, for those who may be unfamiliar with some of the subject matter. I think it should be stated clearly, however, that this book does not pretend to give a connected overview of current knowledge of Oceanic prehistory. It is concerned with a number of very specific questions and geographical arenas, and the author uses the ten chapters to argue for his own interpretations on such diverse topics as the peopling of the islands, the origins of the languages of the Pacific, the sources of social inequality, and the causes of biological and cultural diversity.

As Terrell states in his introduction, one of his main themes is that "perhaps nearly all of the presently observable diversity among the Pacific Islanders in custom and possibly even in language and human biology could have arisen locally and gradually over the course of time" (p. xv). This means that migration as a source for any major aspects of biological or cultural variation is ruled out, and the links during the past five thousand years between Oceanic and Island Southeast Asian peoples--which have been stressed as important by many scholars, including this reviewer--are dismissed as either "highly suspect in themselves" or "chance correspondences" in a single paragraph (p. 35). Since I disagree very strongly with this rather offhand dismissal, I feel I should state that I do have personal reservations about many of Terrell's conclusions. This does not mean that I disagree with the whole book or would not recommend it as worthy reading for any honest scholar with an open mind.

One of the concerns that Terrell reiterates throughout his book is that prehistorians should seek a more scientific and objective approach to their data, via the method of deductive model building and hypothesis testing. Nevertheless, he is honest enough to state, with respect to the past, that "we will probably never be 100 percent right on any question of real complexity and excitement" (p. xiv). Furthermore, he admits (p. 37) that one of his major hypotheses, that of a local development of all the presently-observed biological variation in the western Pacific, is "possibly just as speculative" as a different view that stresses a mixing of two separate populations, one indigenous and one from Island Southeast Asia. Given that Terrell presents such doubts, I am inclined to question whether the intensive model-building approach he favors is going

to revolutionize our search for knowledge about the prehistoric past, and little opportunity is taken in the book to test the many models presented against a Pacific-wide range of hard data. Terrell favors certain of his models for exactly the same reasons as other scholars prefer theirs --they fit his own personal worldview of prehistory.

Let me now summarize the contents. The first chapter sets out the deductive model-building approach, and the second applies it to theories of Oceanic settlement. Does the record support settlement by "pure races," or slow differentiation through processes of local change and isolation? Terrell prefers the latter, and most modern scholars, including this reviewer, would regard these processes as highly significant. But just how significant? Did all the people of the Pacific really evolve, as Terrell seems to think, from the original human population of western Melanesia solely via the processes of founder effect and genetic drift, with no significant input at all from Island Southeast Asia subsequent to the arrival of those ultimate founders? Have the Papuan and Austronesian languages of western Melanesia separated from a common ancestral group of languages simply through local processes of divergence, as suggested in chapter 3? Or do the Austronesian languages record a much more recent population movement from Indonesia, as virtually all modern linguists believe? I have my own views on these questions, and they differ from Terrell's quite substantially in that I allow major significance to both human expansion and local differentiation as factors in Pacific prehistory. Terrell, as any reader of this book will soon realize, has taken a fairly entrenched stand in favor of purely internal mechanisms of human diversification.

Chapter 4 is concerned mainly with the settlement of Polynesia, by a population that Terrell regards as derived via the biological founder effect from a nearby Melanesian rather than a Southeast Asian source. The archaeology of this settlement is discussed, and relevant observations on navigational methods and possible reasons for island discovery are listed, again within a framework of a series of models. What is not specified, and cannot be specified owing to a current lack of data, is the range of physical appearances of the inhabitants of eastern Melanesia during the second millennium B.C. Until more skeletal data are available, Terrell's view is no better than that labeled "the orthodox view," which derives Polynesians, and a proportion of the eastern Melanesian genotype, mainly from an ancestral population source in Island Southeast Asia.

The later chapters in the book move away from questions of origin and early settlement of the islands to discuss some of the processes that

Terrell regards as important for the evolution of human diversity in the Pacific. In chapter 5 we are shown how small island populations can be very vulnerable to extinction or replacement and how multiple prehistoric settlements on some islands might have occurred. Chapter 6 is devoted to the role of isolation in the production of human diversity; Terrell discusses here the "Black Spot" of dark skin pigmentation in the northern Solomons and returns to the inevitable Polynesians to demonstrate that all physical variation in the Pacific is self-generated.

In chapter 7 Terrell approaches the question of adaptive change in a situation of geographical diversity, focusing mainly on the islands of Buka and Bougainville in the northern Solomons. Bougainville is here regarded as a microcosm of human diversity, generated through processes akin to adaptation and natural selection. Terrell favors a biological style of terminology throughout the book, in accord with much current interpretation in Oceanic prehistory. In general, this choice works well.

The final chapters cover population models and the continuing "big man versus chief' debate in the Melanesian-Polynesian context. A very lengthy and somewhat inconclusive discussion of the origins of chiefship in Bougainville takes up much of chapter 9, and the final chapter, perhaps the most informative in the book, yields conclusions under the general heading of "Science and Prehistory."

Given that this is not a straightforward book on Pacific prehistory for a general reader, Terrell's approach, which is to focus on small-scale situations to illustrate his preferred processes of diversification, must be classed as successful. However, although he is often eager to castigate others for what he describes as their "preconceptions and unexamined prejudices" (p. 242), there can be little doubt that even he falls prey to the same human weaknesses. His favored hypothesis in favor of an entirely local evolution of diversity in Oceania, produced solely from a western Melanesian founder population of 30,000 to 50,000 years ago (p. 244), is not supported by any consideration of Pacific-wide factual evidence, and a good deal of evidence against this view is totally ignored. Indeed, the book presents very few actual *data,* particularly from the highly relevant disciplines of linguistics and biological anthropology from which Terrell generates many of his models.

Apart from my disagreement with Terrell on the points I have raised in this review; I did find many positive points in this book. Many of the case studies on the causes of linguistic, biological, and cultural diversity in individual geographical and cultural circumstances are very well written and, for the most part, very convincing. In reality I probably

disagree with Terrell on very little-- those primeval processes of founder effect and random drift, adaptation, selection, diffusion, local population movement, and population replacement have all operated in the past in the domains of language, biology, and culture. They are of extreme importance, and it is perfectly obvious that they still work today, whether we examine our own Western society or those of the ethnographic record. Of course an enormous proportion of the diversity visible in the populations of Oceania was generated within Oceania. But was it all?