

## Review Article

# Macrons in the Microscope



*The Oxford History of New Zealand*. 2nd ed. Edited by Geoffrey Rice. Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992, xviii, 755 pp. NZ price: \$59.95.

THE FIRST edition of the *Oxford History of New Zealand*, edited by W.H. Oliver with B.R. Williams, appeared in 1981. Why should there be a second edition so soon? As the new editor, Geoffrey Rice, points out, there is no rival textbook — although another *Pelican History* is expected soon. There were a few errors — how could there not be in five hundred pages? — but a small omission in a graph or a squabble over the origins of the Six O’Clock Swill can hardly justify a whole new edition. Fundamentally, Rice argues that the 1981 version was ‘becoming outdated’ largely because of ‘the rapid pace of economic and social change in New Zealand during the 1980s’ (p.vii).

Without doubt, the past decade has produced extensive challenges, both political and intellectual, to accumulated ideas of what New Zealand has been all about. In politics and social issues, the fourth Labour government impaled almost every sacred cow on its own horns. It is understandable that one of the few excisions in the new text should be Robert Chapman’s speculation that the defeat of Labour in 1975 might prove to mark the end of an era. It is simply too early to assess the full significance of the political changes: as Rice remarks in his own chapter on social policy, ‘every revolution creates the possibility of a counter-revolution’ (p.497).

Similarly, the 1985 political decision to extend the mandate of the Waitangi Tribunal back to 1840 (the date is garbled on p.516) has brought into the open issues which will take some time to resolve and more to digest. Ann Parsonson’s new chapter, ‘The Challenge to Mana Maori’, positively throbs with the ferment of the Waitangi Tribunal, and no doubt the flood of material from this source will force its own revision on all our ideas about Maori responses to colonization — but maybe not just yet. Similarly, it is too soon to measure what impact, if any, the sudden collapse of Soviet power will have on New Zealand’s international position, and W.D. McIntyre has been bold in taking his survey of external relations as far as the Gulf War.

In New Zealand historiography, four publications stand out from the past decade. Claudia Orange, in *The Treaty of Waitangi* (1987), and James Belich, in *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (1986), have created a new framework for the discussion of Maori-Pakeha relations. In *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (1989), Miles Fairburn offered a provocative reassessment of the foundations of Pakeha society. Lastly, in 1990, came the first volume of the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, which

provides a marvellous quarry for the compilation of group portraits which fall between the random and anecdotal on the one hand, and the arid and statistical on the other.

Most academics nowadays are over-stretched: New Zealand historians and those who review their work are no exceptions, and nobody has any right to condemn them for recognizing the limits on their time. The majority of contributors to the first edition either declined to revise their chapters or — it would seem — found it impossible to deliver on promises. As a result, 14 of the original 16 chapters are republished either in identical form or with relatively minor revisions. For instance, there are minor changes of wording in the chapter by P.J. Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion', while two paragraphs on the 1890s have been added to W.J. Gardner's chapter, 'A Colonial Economy'. In a more subtle revision, Erik Olssen has sharpened the definition of modernization in 'Towards a New Society' and also added some new material on juvenile delinquency and skilled workers. Chapman has surrendered most of the 1970s to Alan McRobie, while Gary Hawke has extended his economic survey by a dozen pages to 1992, abandoning his former title, 'The Growth of the Economy'. The only full substitute chapter is that of Ann Parsonson, and even that engages only marginally in dialogue with the work of Orange and Belich. In summary, this new edition simply passes by the most exciting work of the last decade.

There are six additional chapters, three of them seemingly added in response to the criticisms of reviewers — such as those in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, 16, 1 (April 1982), pp.68-76. Critics complained that the *Oxford History* was inward-looking: there are now two useful chapters by W.D. McIntyre on New Zealand external policy. It was noted that all the contributors were Pakeha. The new edition has a chapter on 'The Maori People Since 1950' by Ranginui Walker, which is especially good on urbanization. The remaining three chapters extend the basic story to 1992. Alan McRobie is predictably competent on electoral politics. Geoffrey Rice was successful in imposing a thematic division on the work of the fourth Labour government, and can hardly be blamed if such intellectual tidiness collapses in his chronicle of National's activities since 1990. Peter Simpson complements and extends Bill Oliver's cultural survey in a chapter, 'The Recognition of Difference', which is open to Richard Shannon's criticism of the first edition — that it is a sardine can packed with names and titles — but it begins well with a play on the ambiguity of meaning in the word 'difference' — distinctiveness without and divisiveness within.

The maps of Maori tribal locations have been re-drawn, identifying five additional groupings, and indicating a more complex pattern of claims to areas such as Nelson and Poverty Bay. In general, however, the maps remain inadequate, a common fault in history texts and one which is all the more to be regretted in view of what McRobie demonstrated can be achieved in his 1989 *New Zealand Electoral Atlas*. As an unrepentant academic tourist, I was able to accompany Ann Parsonson to Moeraki and up the Kapiti coast, but I needed the *Mobil New Zealand Travel Guide* to follow her to Murihiku or Keith Sorrenson to Otorohanga. I suspect that undergraduates may be just as ignorant and maybe not as resourceful. Macrons have been added to all Maori words, and the glossary expanded by just 14 entries: I should have welcomed the inclusion of such terms as mahinga kai, rahui and rohe, some of which are defined on introduction but recur to puzzle the somnolent reader. The glossary defines kauri and kumara, but the reader is left to deduce that inanga are fish and matamata are little inanga. Other notable omissions are rangatiratanga and kawanatanga, confirmation that this edition of the *Oxford History* knows not Claudia Orange. The overall standard of production is high. I shall not identify the respected scholar who has perpetrated the horror that problem X 'mitigated against' the success of project Y, but I warn against any repetition.

Geoffrey Rice was given an impossible task and deserves congratulation for producing any kind of revision at all. Still, it would have been better to have reissued the first edition,

with an opening chapter 'situating' the work in the New Zealand of 1981, a country about to be sent over the political equivalent of Huka Falls, and perhaps pointing to arguments and assumptions in the existing text which would be overturned or undermined in the decade which followed. A brief concluding chapter might have offered a thematic sketch of subsequent events, leaving it to the next generation of scholars to select which minuets of policy change need to be emphasized in the longer perspective of history.

Modestly, Rice insists that this edition 'is not "The *New Oxford History of New Zealand*": that task awaits a younger generation of historians, and a different editor'. How might a new textbook be organized? I would abandon the distinctions between 'Maori' and 'general' chapters, and between internal history and external relations: by and of themselves, the Statute of Westminster and ANZUS do not have the meat to stand alone. Rather, I should organize the book around four deliberately interlocking and helpfully confusing themes: abundance, conflict, identity and isolation. Each theme would naturally embody its opposite: dearth, reconciliation, rootlessness and dependence. Thus abundance would look at nineteenth-century economic development both through the perspective of the colonial improver and of the Maori whose land was grabbed. Abundance would confront the unpalatable truth that New Zealand's welfare state owed more to luck than to Kiwi decency, and so seek to place Rogernomics in a historical frame. Abundance would also take care of urbanization, and would have something to say to culture.

It is easy to see how conflict would group together Gate Pa and Gallipoli, but it would also intersect with abundance to examine class friction and the union movement, and would have something to say about sectarianism, an area in which the *Oxford History* remains robustly secular and thereby silently off-beam. It is also worth exploring the significance of absence of conflict: the fact that colonial gestation took place during the long European peace from 1815 to 1914, that New Zealand has escaped invasion. Above all, the new international disorder makes it vital to study how conflict has been contained if not resolved. It always seemed quaint that New Zealanders referred to their Yugoslavs as 'Dalmatians', but it may be that the country has been more effective than most in accommodating the building blocks which the Canadian scholar Ramsay Cook has termed 'limited identities'. It may not be possible to understand how New Zealand has coped with conflicts of class and race without identifying the tension between populism and non-populism in the country's politics, an analysis which will push academics into a more sophisticated definition of populism than 'any movement with mass support disapproved of by intellectuals'. The virtual breakdown of any ideological divide between Labour and National could make more sense if we train ourselves to place Seddon, Savage, Muldoon and Lange in one column and Forbes, Nash, Marshall and Palmer in the other.

The theme of identity could well start from Simpson's dual definition of 'difference'. We need to talk not simply about New Zealand nationalism and kotahitanga, important as these are, but also about gender, about religion — Ratana as well as the Church of England — and also about landscape, both as a source of cultural inspiration and as a human construct which surveyors and settlers sought to shape according to their own priorities. Above all, we shall have to decide whether it is possible to generalize about Maori or Pakeha society, or whether the one was all shifting hapu, and the other simply atomized chaos.

To grasp the significance of isolation in shaping the history of New Zealand, we have to think of distance looking its way as if through a constantly swivelling telescope, making the country at one moment eerily close to the outer world, at the next impossibly far away. This is a theme which stretches back beyond 1769: it is easy to overlook the significance of the fact that Maori could understand Cook's Tahitian companion, Tupaia, but did not

seem to know where he came from. This double-sided coin of isolation will buy entry into the outlying imperial farm and its refrigeration plants. It will enable historians to discuss the outer world as something more than noises off-stage: to look at the United States both as protecting power and cultural blanket, and to ask how it was that Japan was absent from the mental maps of the Wakefield settlers. Above all, New Zealand historians must stop pretending that Australia does not exist. Whether by symbiotic relationship — before 1840, during the gold rushes, in the 1890s (and where may I ask was that quintessential New Zealander Micky Savage born?) — and as contrast and safety valve, Australia's presence in New Zealand's firmament must be explored more consistently. There is a world of meaning in the finding by G.A. Wilkes in *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (1985 ed.) that in Sydney slang, 'kiwi fruit' means transvestite.

Such a history of New Zealand would be a difficult book to write, and it would undoubtedly be a brute to edit. It would, however, have one overwhelming advantage. By definition, it would be so much a statement of its own moment in time that no publisher would ever dare to warm it over ten years later.

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