

Reviews

The Prehistory of New Zealand. By Janet Davidson. Longman Paul, Auckland, 1984. 270 pp., 157 illustrations. N.Z. price: \$39.95.

HITHERTO, there has been no definitive survey of New Zealand prehistory. The best known classics are heavy works of reference; ageing, interminable corpora, unreadable as history. More recent and easily digested accounts cover narrower fields. Now we have *The Prehistory of New Zealand*, an authoritative, systematic, illustrated account of the origins, physical anthropology, artefacts, subsistence economics, social life, communications and art of the pre-European human occupation. It sets out to be an overview of trends of continuity and change, a descriptive discussion stressing national similarities and variations. Within its own defined limits it is exhaustive, from childbearing to pumice patu, from art styles to the diet of the Polynesian dog; but the defined limits are narrower than the title suggests. The book is, as it states, based mainly on the results of archaeological excavations.

The exclusion of other lines of archaeological evidence and enquiry is surprising. The results of surface field surveys are generally not referred to. The one site distribution map is of Waiheke Island. Field evidence of ditches cutting across terraces on pa sites is not admitted in the discussion of the development of fortifications (p.182; the work of Fox (1977), *Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum*, 14, 1-24, is relevant). The conclusions of detailed regional surveys of field evidence are omitted, so that some parts of the country are hardly mentioned (e.g. Nelson; and see Challis (1978), *Motueka: an Archaeological Survey*, Auckland). The book is light on relationships between layers in individual sites, on correlations between sites, on regional case studies, and on analysis, theory and processes. Many would want more.

Possibly helpful is the sparing use of the ethnographic record. This has reduced the field and sharpened the focus. Even so, ethnographic conclusions are imposed very firmly at times (e.g. p.142), and the book is particularly helpful for the student where it does assess the ethnographic material and theories based upon it, in the chapter on art. One would wish that the traditional material, which is almost entirely excluded, and the ethnographic accounts and the archaeological evidence had been brought together more frequently. To do this, apparently, is to move in the direction of writing prehistory (p.199).

The presentation of the physical anthropology is courageous. There will be those who do not appreciate the well-illustrated summary of studies of human skeletal remains, or the section on burial customs. Currently the treatment of human skeletal material is an issue in the museum profession, in which there are calls for a non-

display policy (e.g. Trotter, M. (1984). *Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand News* 15.3, 4-6). It should not be assumed, from the rather similar illustrations of the excavated leg bones of a medium sized moa and an eighteenth century human burial, that the approach of the archaeologist in New Zealand to the two situations is the same (p.3, fig.2; compare p.175, fig.115). The foremost plea in the book is for further study of human skeletal remains.

The general reader may find progress slow and uncertain in parts. The editorial policy of not referring to illustrations in the text leaves the two aspects of the presentation unrelated. Considerable study and imagination are sometimes required to make the link, particularly with fish hooks. Many illustrations appear unannounced on pages following the relevant passage in the text, which disturbs the flow. Lists of provenances do not fire the interest, nor does the refrain that clearly a great deal remains to be learned about almost everything.

But, having found it necessary to emphasize the book's self-confessed limits, how could anyone detract from its significance? Its value in the hands of anthropologists, archaeologists and historians, of students and teachers will be great. For us it is an enormous landmark in the history of the discipline, an essential reference in all departments, scholarly and reliable, presenting much of the archaeological evidence of the prehistory of New Zealand, in relation to its East Polynesian background. Should any think they can do differently and better, they face a monstrous task.

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Waimate North

Hawaiki: a new approach to Maori tradition. By Margaret Orbell. The University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1985. 81 pp. N.Z. price: \$12.50.

THIS SMALL book presents the revised text of the Macmillan Brown lectures given in 1983. It is divided into three sections: the Homeland, The Voyages, and The New Land. Though brief, this book of eighty-one pages is far more important than its size suggests. Margaret Orbell, in her preface, is of the opinion that Maori oral tradition and its literary aspects produced in the 19th century 'have come to be interpreted as historical accounts. This misconception led to many more, for it made very difficult the serious study of the ritual, poetry and folklore Approached with an understanding of the nature of mythology, these narratives reveal their meaning.' That is the essence of Margaret Orbell's new approach. The emphasis on the nature of oral tradition is important but she argues 'that these migration traditions (from Hawaiki) are myths, or religious narratives, and it seeks to show something of their complex significance'.

In discussing Hawaiki, the homeland (p.3), she quite rightly points out that it is to be regarded as akin to the Garden of Eden, a paradisaical land as spoken of in religious traditions. That, however, is only one aspect of a very 'complex' tradition. Orbell summarizes the archaeological evidence and picks up the discussion on related place names, identifying Savai'i in Samoa, Hawai'i and the Society Islands' Ra'iatea, as the known Hawaiki. She then considers that the original Hawaiki was Savai'i in Samoa; thus the 19th century scholars were correct in their identification of a real Hawaiki. She then identifies a mythical Hawaiki, the source of life and death, located to the east for life and the west for death. Similarly, the voyages of the found-