

Reviews

The Origins of the First New Zealanders. Edited by Douglas G. Sutton, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1994. 269 pp. NZ Price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-098-4.

DOUG SUTTON, in the preface to this edited volume, correctly points out that although its theme — origins — is ‘as old as the Polynesians’, its depth of systematic enquiry and its presentation of archaeological, ethnological, linguistic, biological and palaeoenvironmental analyses are innovative. Questions discussed include place(s) of origin, chronology of settlement, number of settlement events, geographical pattern of settlement and return voyages to tropical Polynesia.

In the preface, Sutton outlines the origin of these papers and reviews the history of origins’ research. The volume developed from a session of the New Zealand Archaeological Association Conference, May 1988, in turn stimulated by reaction to a 1987 paper by Sutton, which proposed that revision of the Polynesian colonization sequence by Patrick Kirch and evidence of environmental change suggested that New Zealand may have been settled between 0-500 AD. This was considerably earlier than the traditional archaeological figure of circa AD 1000-1200. Most of the papers in this volume have developed with subsequent debate and include references as recent as 1991.

The volume consists of 13 chapters in six sections. The first section contains one paper by Roger Green reviewing the prehistory of Oceanic colonization. This succinct introduction to Oceanic prehistory highlights the implications of early Polynesian colonization for an understanding of New Zealand settlement. In the second section Ben Finney reviews experimental voyaging between Rarotonga and New Zealand while Gary Law uses mathematical modelling and simulated voyaging to investigate probabilities of multiple settlement in marginal East Polynesia. Both papers are useful examples of active lines of research in Polynesia.

A section on linguistics includes papers by Bruce Biggs on the relationship between Rarotongan, Tahitian and New Zealand Maori; by Ray Harlow examining evidence for origins found in Maori dialects and by Ross Clark on the relationship between Maori and Moriori. These papers mark the growing importance of historical linguistics as an independent analytical tool in the construction of prehistory. While the authors are careful to point out methodological difficulties, their results are exciting, especially the insight provided into the difficult question of multiple settlement.

The fourth section contains papers that apply methods from the physical sciences. Matt McGlone, Atholl Anderson and Richard Holdaway develop a resource based model for all of New Zealand prehistory emphasizing the importance of ‘wild’ foods, while Patrick Grant uses alluvial morphology and climatic data to model the environment at the time of Maori settlement. Only the last paper by Bruce McFadgen, on coastal soil formation and chronology, deals explicitly with the fundamental methodological problem in origins research — dating settlement. Palynology, which is presently the key method used to search for early human ‘signals’ in the Pacific, is only briefly summarized by McGlone,

Anderson and Holdaway.

The section entitled 'Archaeological Evidence for the Settlement of New Zealand from East Polynesia' includes summaries by Janet Davidson of the East Polynesian origins of the New Zealand 'Archaic' and by Richard Walter on the Southern Cooks as a Maori Hawai'iiki. Both point out the difficulty of studying the postulated archaeological antecedents of Maori, when the early periods of East Polynesia are represented by so few sites, limited excavations and small samples of material culture. Questions of origins exist throughout Polynesia and they are necessarily interrelated. The final paper by Kazumichi Katayama examines the biological evidence, specifically comparing New Zealand and the Cooks. He finds little similarity between Cook Islanders and Maori but strong affinity between the Southern Cooks and Western Polynesia, a link increasingly documented by research on the physical origins of adzes recovered from early sites in the Southern Cooks.

The volume concludes with Sutton reviewing the contributions of the authors and much of the recent literature. There is little primary data in this volume on the dating of colonization, other than the work of McFadgen. Since 1988 there has been considerable publication on 'chronometric hygiene' or critical review of radiocarbon dating evidence,¹ with the result that sequences have been shortened. In response to Anderson's 1991 'short prehistory' date of circa AD 1200, Sutton argues that critical sites need further dating and key regions, such as Northland, need more investigation.

Although Sutton concludes that the authors are in agreement on the geographic origin of Maori, the suggested region includes most of East Polynesia. This may indicate multiple points of origin or simply reflect the methodological problems associated with comparing the historic endpoints of complex, and poorly understood, evolutionary or developmental sequences of cultural, linguistic and biological change.

The questions of how many colonization events occurred and whether the colonizers returned home are linked to our understanding of Polynesian sailing ability and the degree of prehistoric interaction among island groups. Historic and increasingly archaeological data attest to the presence of widespread interaction during early prehistory. We do know that people travelled back toward Polynesia. This is demonstrated by the presence of Mayor Island obsidian in sites on the Kermadecs. Given such evidence multiple settlement events seem probable, although the most useful evidence may come from studies of Maori dialect as presented by Hooker.

Sutton concludes by mentioning recent advances, including work on Maori tradition and genealogy, methods of determining sources of archaeological materials, the use of palynology to document human impact on vegetation and the improvement of dating methods. The resolution or refinement of most questions about origins will involve the development and application of methods of archaeological science. Fortunately researchers in New Zealand are pre-eminent in the refinement of radiocarbon dating, the development of obsidian hydration dating, characterization of archaeological materials and the use of palynology. This decade promises exciting new contributions to the old question of origins and although we may never attain archaeological answers with the precision we seek in the process of trying archaeologists will most certainly enrich our understanding of New Zealand and the Pacific. I look forward to the next 'Origins' volume.

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¹ See A. Anderson, 'The chronology of colonization in New Zealand', *Antiquity*, 65 (1991), pp.767-95; M. Spriggs and A. Anderson, 'Late colonization of East Polynesia', *Antiquity*, 67 (1993), pp.200-17.