

Woven By Water. Histories from the Whanganui River. By David Young. Huia Publishers, Wellington, 1998. 323 pp. NZ price: \$54.95. ISBN 0-908975-59-7.

WRITTEN WITH PASSION and commitment, both to the Whanganui River and its Māori people, *Woven By Water* draws together the threads of the stories of the river and its people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first major book on Māori and the river since 1915, it captures settler difficulties, colonial hopes, the physical and spiritual relations Māori had and still have with the river's waters, and the river's teetering ecology as progressive official and settler intervention threatened it and the lives of its Māori communities.

Young has captured many aspects of the Māori world-view superlatively: early Māori land boundaries had 'the blurred and shifting edges, as well as the genetic exchanges, of an ecosystem'. There are many more such moments of revelation. There are valuable and delightful cameo studies which step aside, for a while, from the main chronological progression to its enrichment: the study of William Moffatt, the chapter on tuna (eels) and the weirs, an excellent survey of the changing focus of the 1995 Pākaitore/Moutoa protest. There are valuable moments recaptured from the tortuous but rich process of Young's consultations with the elders, which evoke so well the difficulties of Pākehā scholars and their methods, even when at the service of rather than in confrontation with mana and tikanga. Young recreates superlatively the atmosphere and the changing phases of relations with Pākehā settlers and officials.

Yet this book begins, as it were, in the middle. Young is a victim of his own integrity, and perhaps also of his own training as a journalist rather than a historian. With proper sensitivity, he consulted with Titi Tihu, Hikaia Amohia and others, but with incomplete scholarship he chose to take only what they and a few other contacts would share concerning the identity of the people of the Whanganui River. Among those things which they chose not to share were whakapapa, traditional history especially from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the schemata of hapū allegiances according to descent and kinship. Among those things which they could not fully share, because oral traditions often shift their emphases over time as they serve new purposes, were the shifting allegiances, formation and re-formation of political groups before their lifetimes, that is, before c.1880. These are important losses in a book which purports to deal with the Māori history of the river.

We are left with the understanding that Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi was, at least from the arrival of the Aotea canoe and Haunui-a-Pāpārangi himself, the overriding tribe of the river, and that all the hapū of the river, including Ngā Paerangi and several others who 'claim ancestry back into the mists of time', were always parts or subsections of that overriding tribe. This is not the picture which emerges from studies of nineteenth-century primary documents, such as Richard Taylor's journals, the Woon manuscript tribal registers, or from the (admittedly few) traditions and whakapapa deriving from earlier traditions recorded in such places as the manuscripts of the Polynesian Society.

Whanganui Māori, perhaps more so than in other regions, have been reluctant to commit their whakapapa to books open to inspection. This may be because their line of tohunga and their whare wānanga committed to keeping such matters tapu beyond the mid-twentieth century. But greater use of Ruka Broughton's thesis, of Pei Te Hurinui's writings, of *Nga Moteatea* and other Māori and European sources, would have helped to establish that in the early nineteenth century at least 20 independent tribal groups existed in different districts up the course of the river, each with their own few hapū. At least seven of these had many hapū living in different kāinga (settlements); one of this group of major tribes was 'Ngāti' or 'Te Āti' Haunui-a-Pāpārangi. The primary whakapapa lines of many of them, especially in the lowest and uppermost reaches of the river, reached beyond the Aotea. These sources would suggest that allegiance to the overriding tribal name was a post-colonial construct

designed to check the increasing tendency to use the popular Pākehā appellation, the 'Whanganui Tribe', and to establish a Māori, pan-Whanganui entity capable of confronting Pākehā power. Even if this material was eventually rejected on the basis of better Māori evidence, at least it should have been discussed.

These issues might not have been of such importance if it was not for the possibility that the amorphous treatment of identity on the river has obscured motivation in some of Young's accounts of the great Māori crises in the later nineteenth century. Why did the lower river tribes support the colonists and the government against the up-river tribes? Was it self-interest, proximity, or committed loyalty, or was there not also a long-standing division of allegiances based on whakapapa? Why did Mete Kīngi refuse to join Te Keepa's grand, land-preserving union, symbolized by Kemp's Pole at Kauarapāua in 1880? Was it not at least partly because his mana — his local paramountcy — would have been compromised? The basis of that mana was genealogical and confined to a particular river tribe and its set of hapū.

There is no room in a short review to substantiate these kind of points, or for other criticisms, and it would be ungenerous to continue. Young has written a fine study, and has properly subtitled it '*histories from the Whanganui River*'. That there are other histories still to write springs from his self-imposed limitations, deriving from the sensitive integrity of his dealings with the river people. Leaving aside these matters, however, one is enriched after reading *Woven By Water*.

Some minor quibbles concern the map at the beginning — it is a very clear representation of the river from about the mid-nineteenth century but lacking in names important earlier (more detailed maps of limited stretches of the river would have been helpful). Other strictly minor concerns include various incomplete references, and the strange use (at times) of the macrons which mark long vowels. Young has chosen not to macron personal names, a necessary touch of sensitivity because people alive today are apt to react negatively to macrons on their names, but he has used macrons for iwi and hapū names, some incorrectly (e.g. Ngā Rauru, not Ngā Rāuru — *vide* Ruka Broughton, Ngāti Hāua of upper Whanganui, not Ngāti Hāua — *vide* Pei Te Hurinui and Bruce Biggs). Why has he chosen the form Te Atihaunui-a-paparangi, when the late twentieth-century convention is to separate the name of the ancestor from the group prefix (Ati, Ngāti, Ngāi etc.), and to capitalize proper names within a larger name (Te Ati Haunui-a-Pāpārangi)? Some place names have macrons; others do not. Why not Rānana, Rākātō, Ohinemutu, Opepe, Hātete, Whakatāne, Ruamāhanga, Tāmaki and Waihi, and why Petaania instead of Petānia? In the end, however, these are minor matters of optional style, and they probably upset only a few copy-editors.

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Dictionary of New Zealand Biography

To Be a Hero: Sir George Grey 1812–1898. By Edmund Bohan. HarperCollins, Auckland, 1998. 374 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-86950-279-5.

LAST YEAR was the centenary of Sir George Grey's death. Unfortunately Edmund Bohan's biography of Grey, *To Be a Hero*, is not the book New Zealand needed to mark that occasion. Admittedly, Bohan has beautifully rewritten long-known facts for popular consumption, and does introduce new material which nuances Grey's complexity. However, he does little more here than 'humanize' the perspective of Grey that emerged years ago with the work of Sinclair, Rutherford, McLintock and Dalton, and an unfortunate television series.