

Book Reviews

Pākehā Settlements in a Māori World: New Zealand Archaeology 1769-1860

Ian Smith

Bridget Williams Books, Wellington 2019

Archivists are used to finding stories of the past amongst the dust: for archaeologists, those stories are disinterred from the dirt beneath our feet. Ian Smith's final book, *Pākehā Settlements in a Māori World: New Zealand Archaeology 1769-1860*, draws both methods of knowing the past together to construct an important and innovative retelling of Aotearoa New Zealand's early contact history.

The title is prosaic, but the ambition of the book is not. Smith's book offers considerably more than a survey of Pākehā settlement. Over seven chapters, he takes the reader on a tour of the material remains of both Māori and Pākehā settlement, often pausing to tease out the intricate interplay between indigenous and imported cultures. It is a survey made possible by the author's lifelong commitment to historical archaeology in Aotearoa New Zealand, and many of the sites that inform this book were excavated by Smith, his colleagues, and students.

The chapters frame almost a century of what Smith refers to as the "early colonisation period". His classification is further subdivided, separating periods of sojourning from later dispersal and diversification. Still, some historians might quibble with this definition, as it rolls together eighteenth-century European exploration, and the sojourning experiences of those who came - or were left - in New Zealand to exploit resources like timber or seals, with the qualitatively and quantitatively different settlement period that began in the 1840s. Yet terminology aside, there is a compelling logic to telling a story that begins with "the first non-Māori footfall" and ends at the point when settler population growth meant what had once been te ao Māori was increasingly a European world.

The book begins with a brief but assured summary of early Polynesian settlement, one that will surely find itself, like most of this text, in regular use in undergraduate teaching. This foundational chapter is followed by equally lucid and economical coverage of first European contacts, in which Smith neatly dispatches those myths of lost caravels and Chinese expansionism that have proved so remarkably durable in the public imagination. From these starting points, Smith then weaves together history and archaeology to reconstruct the daily lives of whalers and sealers, missionaries and traders, governors and settlers. Fragments of rusting iron and shards of pottery capture the cold comforts of the first European settlement at Luncheon Cove in Dusky Sound, while square-sided gin bottles (designed for easy shipping), clay pipes and even an empty bottle of Chateau Lafitte sketch out the essential elements of life in Aotearoa's first town, Kororāreka. From these beginnings, Smith traces the physical relics of formal colonial power structures, including the Treaty House, the first parliament, and military fortifications, and their informal expression in the "instant townships", industry, commerce, and agriculture that characterised the spread of Pākehā settlement.

All of these activities left their impressions, however faintly, in the landscape. Smith demonstrates how archaeology works to coax stories from these traces, using maps, tables, cross sections of excavations, period artwork and an abundance of photographs to help bring the settler past to life. Yet as Smith deftly reminds us, European detritus tells us much about contemporary Māori life too. Perhaps the best example, singled out from the many that fill these pages, is a stone slate, found under the kitchen of the Kerikeri mission house. A critical tool in the inculcation of literacy, seen by missionaries as a stepping stone to Christian conversion, the slate is powerful reminder that 'many Pākehā introductions were as much "ideas" as "things"'. (p.266) We might add that these things and ideas were used by Māori in their own ways, and for their own purposes. Inscribed in elegant copperplate, the slate holds not a catechism but the text of a waiata whakatau, the earliest extant example of a written waiata, almost certainly composed by a woman attending the mission school.

Some of these complexities are developed within the text, but its main job is exposition. Archaeology's contribution to historical debate is largely

developed in the conclusion, where ideas like adaptation and entanglement are clearly, if concisely, explored. Here Smith offers a further challenge to the idea of “rapid cataclysmic changes in Māori culture” (p.276) arguing instead that archaeological evidence suggests a high degree of continuity in cultural practice during this period. These short sections show the impact of cross disciplinary approaches and the possibilities for more are clear. What light might archaeology shed on other longstanding debates? One example might be the social structures of settler society? Do material remains suggest atomised loners or integrated communities? And how might archaeology illuminate new ones, like the role of consumption in settler and Māori lives?

Question like these are not answered by this book. However, that they might be raised at all is proof of its success. In this expansive, accessible, and detailed book, Smith has provided an indispensable introduction to settler history through an archaeological lens, bringing a “more nuanced understanding of a formative time in this country’s history and the development of its cultures” (p.277). At the same time, he has shown beyond doubt the value of interdisciplinary approach to Aotearoa New Zealand’s past. In the dirt as well as in the dust, there is gold.

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