

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF REMOTE OCEANIA,
EARLIEST SITES IN THE MARIANA ISLANDS

Mike T. Carson, 2014.

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First Settlement of Remote Oceania examines the earliest archaeological sites in the Mariana Islands, an arc of islands in western Micronesia, including the island of Guam, the largest in the region. Out of eleven chapters, several summarise important data sets including those on environment and subsistence, material culture, and the excavation background of the earliest sites in the Marianas. A great benefit of the book is having this information presented in a single place for the first time. However, the most interesting parts of the volume present new (although having appeared in slightly earlier articles), and currently debated, interpretations of two related issues: first, what is the cultural relationship between the pottery-using, colonising populations of the Marianas and the populations that deposited Lapita pottery in the Bismarck Archipelago and neighbouring islands at roughly the same time, some 1,800 km to the south; and second, are the colonization deposits with pottery in the Marianas actually earlier than the Lapita pottery deposits in the Bismarcks?

Across multiple chapters Carson discusses the relationships between the first pottery using populations in the Marianas and those in the Bismarcks. He approaches the issue from general interpretive overviews, primarily in Chapter 1, Defining Early-Period Marianas Settlement, and Chapter 2, Position of the Marianas in Oceanic Prehistory, and Chapter 7, An Epic Adventure?, and from more specific material culture comparisons, primarily in Chapter 6, Defining Earliest Marianas Pottery, and Chapter 10, Early Period Material Culture at House of Taga in Tinian. Carson frames the question of the relationship between the earliest pottery-users in the Marianas and the earliest Lapita pottery users in the Bismarcks within what I would call the standard scenario of ancient Island Southeast Asian and Near Oceanic demography (not the snappiest of monikers, to be sure). All researchers in the region recognize the standard scenario as outlined by Carson throughout the book. People speaking Austronesian languages migrated from Taiwan and southern coastal China about 3000 BC. This diaspora is archaeologically attested by pottery styles, evidence of agricultural subsistence, other components of material culture, and contemporary language similarities. These farmers made their way to the Philippines by about 2000 BC, where they met a resident population of hunter-gatherers and low-inten-

sity horticulturalists. After this meeting in the Philippines, red-slipped pottery with circle and dentate stamp designs appeared there about 1800 BC. Then sometime between 1500–1350 BC culturally related, but more elaborate, Lapita pottery appears in the Bismarcks, a product of the continuing migration of people from Island Southeast Asia. Perhaps at the same time or maybe 100 years earlier (as Carson argues), a group of people, related to, but distinct from the group that migrated to the Bismarcks, left the Philippines and colonized the Mariana islands. Thus we have two daughter populations, one in the Marianas, one in the Bismarcks, who split from their earlier cultural (and linguistic and biological) parent population in the Philippines.

However, I would like to suggest that in fact the human biological, botanical, archaeological and linguistic data from Island Southeast Asia and Near Oceania do not support such a clear picture of bounded human groups moving across the land- and sea-scape, maintaining their inherent essences. I will mention the relevant research briefly. Modern human genetic data, analysed at a variety of scales, do not support the interpretation that speakers of Austronesian languages moved as a group from Taiwan south and east through Island Southeast Asia, the Marianas, and Near Oceania (HUGO 2009; Lansing *et al.* 2007; Soares *et al.* 2011). Also, the evidence that more intensive or somehow qualitatively different agricultural behaviours swept southwards from Taiwan and the Philippines with Austronesian language speakers is not convincing (Denham 2011). And the dating analyses of pottery from the Philippines and other locations throughout Island Southeast Asia, the Marianas, and the Bismarcks do not unequivocally demonstrate a Philippines to east-southwest, oldest to youngest trend. As one example, Hung *et al.*'s (2011) oldest radiocarbon date range on unidentified charcoal from deposits at Nagsabaran containing pottery that is decoratively similar to the earliest Marianas pottery is 2023–1417 cal. BC (discounting, as do Hung *et al.*, a 6065–4900 cal. BC date). This range overlaps both the earliest date ranges for Marianas pottery presented by Carson and, just barely, the earliest date range for Lapita pottery (Denham *et al.* 2012). Finally, recent linguistic analyses (see Donohue and Denham 2010) question the staged, migratory movement of speakers of Austronesian languages as typically revealed through subgrouping, although not the origin of these languages on Taiwan.

So what does this mean for the new data presented by Carson and his explanation of the cultural relationships between the Philippines, Marianas and Bismarck populations approximately 1500 BC? It means that our understanding of material culture variation across this vast region, and at more local spatial scales, cannot place the explanatory burden on the movement of bounded human groups. It is more realistic, and more empirically

defensible, to explain similarity and variation in pottery decoration, manufacturing technology and use as a product of various mechanisms operating within populations at different geographic scales defined by the frequency of cultural trait sharing (see Lipo *et al.* 1997). There are no boundaries, after all, that are impervious to the sharing of ideas, just differences in the frequency of transmission. It is pretty obvious, thanks in part to the work of Carson and his colleagues, that at one scale there are surface treatment similarities amongst the first pottery assemblages of the Philippines, the Marianas, and the Bismarcks, that are likely explained by a single process, the transmission of stylistic variation within a single population. At other scales and for other dimensions of variation, such as pottery manufacturing techniques across the Marianas and the Philippines, other processes may be relevant (compare, for example Carson's Chapter 6 and Winter *et al.* (2012) on ceramic manufacture).

Along with the question of cultural relationships, the other currently debated issue presented in *First Settlement of Remote Oceania* concerns the dating of the earliest sites in the Marianas. Carson and his colleagues (Clark *et al.* 2010) have both, somewhat independently, excavated the current earliest site in the Marianas, Unai Bapot. The earliest date range for Unai Bapot from Carson's book is 1916–1558 cal. BC (2σ , Table 4.1, Beta-216616) on *Anadara* sp. shell. Carson argues, however, that the best date range for earliest human activity at this site is 1612–1558 BC. The early end of this best date range, 1612 BC, appears to be taken from the earliest value of a calibration of a date (Wk-25210) from another *Anadara* sp. shell from a similar stratigraphic context excavated by Clark *et al.* (2010: Table 1). The late end of Carson's best date range is the latest value of his 1916–1558 cal. BC range. There are two things to point out about Carson's best date range: first, it is not possible to apply probabilities to date ranges constructed in this ad hoc way. What is the probability that the actual dates for the death of these *Anadara* sp. lie between 1612 and 1558 BC? We have no way of knowing. Second, all the earliest dates marshalled by Carson, and the Clark *et al.* dates he uses as support, are on shell and, given the work on ΔR values for the Unai Bapot area (Clark *et al.* 2010), it is not clear if accurate ΔR values for marine calibration have yet been determined. Also there is a single unidentified charcoal sample from the same depth as Clark *et al.*'s oldest *Anadara* sp. shells and dating of this charcoal returned a more recent range of 1251–1007 cal. BC at 2σ . Carson suggests that this charcoal has been vertically displaced or has been assigned incorrect provenance. Although certainly possible, I think many archaeologists will wait for better data before they easily accept a pre-1500 BC date range for Unai Bapot.

There is, of course, much more in Carson's book than questions of cultural relationships and earliest dates. Chapters that consider landscape evolution and environmental change, and presentations of general material culture and

ceramic variation are welcome (although data on actual sherd variability would be great instead of just summary statements – perhaps in a subsequent publication?). Although not all will agree with his conclusions and analyses, Carson has written a valuable book that brings together a great deal of important information on a neglected area of Oceanic prehistory.

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TRADITION AND CHANGE IN MĀORI AND
PACIFIC ART: ESSAYS BY ROGER NEICH
Edited by Chanel Clarke, Fuli Pereira & Nigel Prickett
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Roger Neich (1944–2010) held ethnological positions at the (Dominion then) National Museum in Wellington from 1969–1986 and at the Auckland Museum from 1986–2009. His international reputation in the areas of Maori and Pacific art and material culture was long held and well-deserved. This is a thoughtful, valuable and appropriate tribute to a man who enriched us all with his scholarship and generosity of spirit. His Auckland Museum colleagues – Chanel Clarke, Fuli Pereira and Nigel Prickett – are to be thanked and congratulated for the time and care they have obviously taken in producing a work to honour him. They have succeeded – it is a volume to be cherished.

Roger Neich is best known for his books *Painted Histories: early Maori figurative painting*; *Carved Histories: Rotorua Ngati Tarawhai woodcarving*; *Tapa of the Pacific*; and *Pacific Jewellery and Adornment*; his work with Janet Davidson on William Oldman's Polynesian collection; his work with staff of the British Museum on their collection of Maori artefacts... once begun the list quickly grows. His essays are less widely read, some are much harder to access, but they are equally rewarding.

The title of this book – Tradition and Change – encapsulates much of Roger's work. In an obvious sense these themes bookend his career. He celebrated and wrote about them; he developed a museum collection that illustrated them. Tradition, in the sense of handing on information (or inspiration) to future generations, is at the heart of much of his research: tracing and identifying historical traditions, the expectation that accrued knowledge will be added to and developed in future years, and the passing on of traditions of scholarship and engagement to younger researchers and colleagues. It invokes the idea of Roger's community. The range of his associations is easily shown by his own acknowledgments. His personal humbleness and professional authority are much in evidence.

Change – that process of becoming different – summarises another important aspect of his work: identifying and explaining change in the real or postulated past and documenting contemporary change. Changes, too, in relationships and ways of working, and the change his work has effected – most obviously Roger's painstaking and inspired study has altered our perception, appreciation and understanding of 19th century Maori carving.

Nigel Prickett's biographical essay is an excellent introduction to this collection, setting Roger in context, identifying his history and influences, the traditions and changes that marked his career. Almost by definition the contents of *Tradition and Change* have already stood the test of time. The Neich-authored papers are presented chronologically – there are three from the 1970s, six from the 1980s, five from the 1990s and four from the first decade of this century. The first, 'A Prehistoric Stone Bird from Bougainville', (chapter 1) was published in 1971; the most recent, 'Powaka Whakairo: A Third Form of Maori Treasure Box' (Chapter 18) in 2005. There is one paper with a Solomon Islands material culture focus, two more on Papua New Guinea questions ('Basketwork Fertility Figures from the Western Enga and Nearby Groups' (Chapter 2) and 'A Semiological Analysis of Self-Decoration in Mount Hagen' (Chapter 5)), three on Samoan themes and 11 on Maori art subjects. The selection – surely a fraught process – reasonably represents his decades of work at the National and Auckland museums. The essays differ in approach, type of focus and anticipated audience. Taken as a group they indicate the breadth of his interests and the range of publics to whom he communicated. Seven first appeared in New Zealand museum records series; three are from the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*; the remainder were published in a range of edited volumes produced by other institutions and organisations – international, national or regional in reach and emphasis. In searching for mention of this volume on the Auckland Museum website I noted nine Roger Neich papers among the contents of the *Records of the Auckland Museum* listed there (volumes 37–47) – another forum in which he will be missed.¹

Many of the papers I frequently consult are present – 'Processes of Change in Samoan Arts and Crafts' (chapter 7), 'Samoan Figurative Carvings' (Chapter 8) and its 'a Further Note' (Chapter 12), 'Jacob William Heberley of Wellington' (Chapter 11), 'The Emergence of the Individual in Maori Woodcarving' (Chapter 14), 'The Gateways of Maketu' (Chapter 16), and 'Papahou and Wakahuia' (Chapter 17). Not mentioned elsewhere in this review are 'Some Early Maori Woodcarvings from Ruatahuna' (chapter 3), 'The Complementarity of History and Art in Tutamure Meeting House' (Chapter 6) and 'Maori Figurative Painting' (chapter 10). But some absences were a surprise, not finding 'New Zealand Maori barkcloth and barkcloth beaters' or 'Tongan figures: from goddesses to missionary trophies to masterpieces' struck me. Most readers will no doubt feel the same – probably over different papers – and that is another mark of the richness of Roger's career.

From first sight one is struck by the handsome nature of this volume. Its production is a credit to Bridget Williams Books and the trouble that must have gone into

1 <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collections-and-library/library-info-centres/museum-publications>, viewed 16 April 2013

securing image reproduction permissions was worthwhile. Neil Pardington's cover and internal design are very attractive. The detail images chosen for the former are beautiful and appropriately span the geographical scope of the contents. The frontispiece image might be even more powerful but is best placed in its current location. It shows the carved entrance to a Maori semi-subterranean storehouse of great visual, even emotional impact. The figure embodies or articulates ideas developed in the paper in which it also appears as an illustration (Chapter 13): a corrected earlier misidentification (a point expressively made through the attached historic label); the limitations imposed by what is known (or not known) of a donor or collector; the postulation of a category of material culture with a list of possible attributes; obvious knowledge of international collections; and informed comment on such topics as date and place of origin.

The editors' contributions maximise the usefulness of this volume. In particular, the full listing of Roger's publications is a valuable reference and the Index is thorough and effective. The single general bibliography for works referenced in all the Neich papers included is an elegant solution. The four quotations on the back cover are a graceful means of highlighting important tributes from close friends and colleagues, experts in their own right.

Although not closely comparable publications, reading *Tradition and Change* does bring to mind another compilation inspired by similar motivations: H. D. Skinner's *Comparatively Speaking: Studies in Pacific Material Culture 1921–1972*. Hirini Mead's (1976) review of that publication described Skinner's 'great mana as the founding... ancestor of anthropology in New Zealand' and identifies the book as a measure of that standing. *Comparatively Speaking*, however, had a sense of primarily historical reference and perspective. In contrast, while *Tradition and Change* certainly does evidence the esteem and affection in which Roger is held, it also brings home how far ahead of his time he was in many areas, a point Nigel Prickett makes more than once in the Introduction. 'A Survey of Visitor Attitudes to a Maori Art Exhibition' (Chapter 4) and 'Interpretation and Presentation of Maori Culture' (Chapter 9) are good examples. Not only the descriptive data but the broad social and historical context that characterises so much of Roger's work will bring it to our hand time and again. And that exercise will be made easier by having them republished in this form.

Nearing summary, there is a temptation to turn Roger's words back on himself, or his editors. As he wrote of the many strands entwined in 'From Canoe to Church on Late Nineteenth Century Ulawa, Solomon Islands' (Chapter 15) so does this volume if not tangle, at least link or juxtapose many strands in Roger's work. His summary of the benefits of the powaka whakairo paper can be generalised: identification and documentation of material culture traditions and change; adding to the literature; working towards identification of individual artists; and an admira-

tion for Maori and Pacific art, its creators and users.

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary includes 'substitution of one thing or set of conditions for another' among its definitions of change. On that understanding I would happily change this volume for 18 new papers by Roger Neich but failing that, this invitation to reacquaint ourselves with the four decades of thought and work represented, and with Roger's unparalleled contribution to ethnological and museological studies is most welcome. It is hard to imagine that *Tradition and Change* would not be recognised as among the highest of compliments, even to a man already in possession of as many of the accolades of his profession as Roger was. I hope it is up for a prize.

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