

TANGATA WHENUA:
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY.

By Atholl Anderson, Judith Binney and Aroha Harris.
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This is a large book in every sense. It weighs 3 kg, is in folio format, there are nearly five hundred pages of text, forty pages of tiny notes, it has an impressive index and is richly illustrated with photographs, diagrams and maps. The project took six years to accomplish, surviving the death of principal author Judith Binney in 2011, when fellow historians, Vincent O'Malley and Alan Ward, completed and checked her drafts. It is a magnificent and ambitious achievement, an illustrated history of Māori from ancient origins through the Pacific to far-off New Zealand /Aotearoa from first arrival to the present day.

The book is in three parts: Te Ao Tawhito: The Old world (3000 BC to AD 1830) written by Atholl Anderson; Te Ao Hou: The New World (AD 1820 to 1920) by the late Judith Binney, with Vincent O'Malley and Alan Ward; and, Te Ao Hurihuri: The changing world (AD 1920 to 2014) by Aroha Harris.

In Part One of this volume, Atholl Anderson presents forty years of his research joined with newer information. His work is always stimulating and challenging, albeit here presented in a relatively low key manner. To my mind, the most interesting points made concern Polynesian sailing abilities. As with Andrew Sharp's observations of the 1950s and 60s, Anderson argues that, throughout the prehistoric period, Polynesian sailing was limited in its upwind capabilities, and that the abilities seen by Cook and the early explorers had existed from the earliest origins in South-east Asia, through the Lapita period, and the colonization of Western and later Eastern Polynesia. Against the idea that oceanic sailing abilities had declined post AD 1500, when the major landfalls had been reached, the argument is advanced that there was in fact an improvement in later sailing abilities. Alongside this goes a lack of belief that contemporary voyages replicate the prehistoric situation in any substantial manner.

The question is posed – how then was Eastern Polynesia colonized when prevailing winds would prevent downwind sailing? Here, Anderson refers to a second major theme within his work – that of environmental determinism. In this case, a posited peak in El Niño between AD 1100 and 1300, created a window of opportunity, where westerly winds allowed downwind sailing to the Cook Islands and New Zealand without the need for upwind sailing abilities. By AD 1400, the El Niño peak was over, winds

were unfavourable and the period of colonization and the possibilities of return voyaging were over.

This is not the only occasion where climatic determinations are invoked. In asking – 'Why did people migrate?' – attention is directed to a major volcanic eruption, possibly in Mexico or Ecuador, described as the '...first lurch of the Little Ice Age' which created a sudden deterioration of climate and low garden productivity, where migration (voyaging) was the response to a changed demographic situation. Similarly, within New Zealand, the shift to Pā construction and increased conflict is put down to a combination of population growth and falling garden productivity:

It is not difficult to imagine how very cold and mostly wet conditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might have induced strong competition for the most productive lands... (p.122).

As far as New Zealand is concerned, such ideas have been around for a long time, dating at least to Groube's work in the 1960s. They are plausible scenarios, they might well be right. What, however, is remarkable, is that in the past half century so little detailed archaeological work has been carried out to test such hypotheses, work that might allow these correlations to move towards tested explanations. Climate change and demographic forcing are high-level explanations that ignore the fact that such changes were mediated through a framework of possibilities and limitations relative to specific technical, social and environmental relations. The transformations of Māori social life observed in the prehistoric period are too profound to be the result of a mechanistic response to demography and climate.

It would be churlish here, however, not to mention that Atholl Anderson's section of the book also includes significant research into Māori ethnohistory and traditions. An attempt is made here to integrate these different aspects by including sections on genealogy, traditions, Māori social and territorial organization and the changes accompanying the arrival of the Europeans.

At one point, it is stated that '...adding whakapapa [to traditions] produces a sequential structure that can be tested outside the narrative [providing]...a historical framework for the analysis of content' (p.62). There are glimpses of a possible deeper narrative structure for understanding later Māori prehistory, where the shift towards a 'Classic Māori' artefact assemblage is linked to a demand for high status objects, especially jade (pounamu). A similarly rich account is given of the various migrations of North island Māori to the South Island.

Judith Binney's section in this volume is beautifully written and illustrated. The New Zealand history here is lively – with a firm understanding of the lack of compre-

hension on the part of both Māori and Pākehā. This is well illustrated in the incident where Hone Heke was knocked down by a European blacksmith for taking a coal from a brazier to light his pipe. Henry Williams sacked the smith, Collins, but Governor Hobson immediately employed him. This was an unforgivable affront to a chief's mana. Judith Binney presents an account of the individuals and the circumstances they found themselves in, over a century of land sales, war, prophecy movements, disease and recovery.

Aroha Harris, as the youngest of the three scholars, had possibly the hardest task in presenting events leading up to the present. Contemporary history is the hardest to grasp and understand as we are still close to the events. Harris has attempted something that is at once a social history of music, entertainment, the arts, a political history of government policies and Māori resistance to them, of changing Māori institutions, and the Waitangi Tribunal. The comprehensiveness of this third part of the volume is both its advantage, as a reference work, and its downfall in terms of the fluidity of expression and readability.

In terms of the volume as a whole, Part Three possibly works best as an illustrated history, as a series of brilliantly illustrated essays joined in terms of a theme of Māori resistance, resilience and renewal. Against this, Parts One and Two more seamlessly integrate historical, anthropological and archaeological accounts. Whether the single large volume of three parts works as well as three separate volumes might have done is academic. What we are presented with here is a volume of exceptional scholarship and usefulness, one that well deserves its prize as the 2015 Royal Society of New Zealand Science Book of the Year.

From an archaeological point of view, Atholl Anderson's contribution presents a truly excellent account of the Māori past set within a consistent framework. It should stimulate much further research on questions which have hardly been posed in any detail, let alone resolved. I have some quibbles about the mix of popular and academic aspects of the book; the notes are hard to use, artefact illustrations do not have scales and are given a greater prominence than some of the maps and diagrams, which are almost impossible to read. But these are minor issues in a volume that sets the highest possible standards and achieves them.