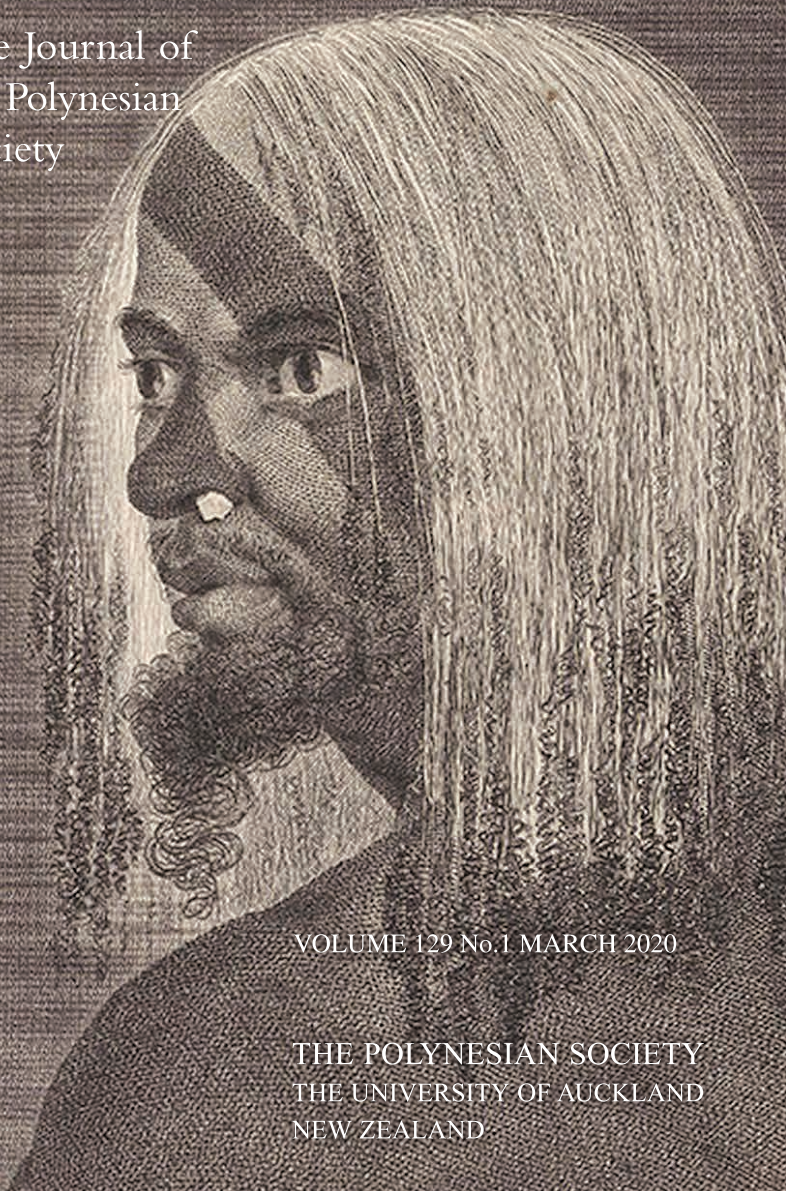


JPS

The Journal of
the Polynesian
Society



VOLUME 129 No.1 MARCH 2020

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

REVIEWS

COCHRANE, Ethan E. and Terry L. Hunt (eds): *The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 513 pp., biblio., illus., index. US\$150.00 (cloth).

BENJAMIN DAVIES

University of Utah

The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania, edited by Ethan Cochrane and Terry Hunt, joins the ranks of the *Oxford Handbook* series that aims to provide “up-to-date surveys of original research in a particular subject area”. While sole author surveys benefit from the consistency of their underlying narrative, edited volumes often present a wider range of viewpoints and highlight issues currently under debate. Comprised of 21 chapters written by leading researchers, the handbook is a trove of information organised principally along a regional–temporal framework that will be familiar to anyone studying the deep past of the Pacific.

The first few chapters deal with the arrival of humans and subsequent cultural Near Oceania, and exemplify the strengths of the multi-author survey. O’Connor and Hiscock summarise Pleistocene migrations of humans into greater Australia and Near Oceania from mainland Asia, addressing contested topics like migration routes and megafaunal extinction. Denham presents evidence from island Southeast Asia and challenges the prevailing notion that Austronesian languages dispersed through this region and into wider Oceania as part of a coherent cultural and genetic package carried by voyager-farmers from Taiwan. Complementary chapters on New Guinea and its adjacent islands (by White and Specht, respectively) likewise discuss ongoing debates, particularly related to subsistence practices and interaction, but also address uncertainties from limited investigative coverage.

Heading into Remote Oceania, the book features several chapters on island groups defined by their contemporary political boundaries, an approach that works well since each group has a unique history of archaeological research. This is particularly striking in the chapter from Sand, who reviews the archaeology of New Caledonia against the backdrop of colonialism and Kanak cultural ownership, raising questions of archaeology’s value to indigenous people. Along similar lines, Bedford and Spriggs conclude their summary of Vanuatu archaeology by highlighting the growing role of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in directing archaeological research and coordinating public outreach.

The prominence of movement and interaction is an expected element of a text on the Pacific past, and this becomes increasingly apparent as the text moves further out into Remote Oceania. Mobility is considered key to understanding cultural change in Fiji, where Cochrane uses evidence from a wide range of sources (archaeological, biological, linguistic) to show changing scales of interaction over time, and in Tonga and Sāmoa, where Burley and Addison argue for differences in connectivity and exchange between the two archipelagos driving social differences in both ceramic

and aceramic periods. Chapters on western and eastern Micronesia emphasise the importance of voyaging and interaction as a stimulus for social complexity: Fitzpatrick pays particular attention to western exchange networks like the ethnographically known *sawei*, while Athens draws on Petersen's (2006) notion of a subsistence revolution facilitated by hybridisation of eastern and western breadfruit varieties.

Adaptation is also a recurrent theme throughout the text, especially in later chapters dealing with East Polynesia. East Polynesia encompasses substantial environmental variability between islands and island groups, requiring different adaptations from incoming human groups and influencing social organisation. Kahn illustrates this by comparing the cultural trajectories of Central East Polynesian archipelagos, particularly the Austral, Society and Marquesas groups, and Kirch describes how contrasts between dry and humid areas influenced the rise of socioeconomic inequality in an overview of the cultural history of Hawai'i. In a chapter on South Polynesia, Anderson avoids the problematic dichotomy between Archaic and Classic phases for Aotearoa/New Zealand with the inclusion of a "Middle Phase" defined by diverging adaptations between the highly productive north and the more ecologically sensitive south. Hunt and Lipo give a thorough review of the history of archaeological research and interpretation on Rapa Nui, where narratives of "ecocide" through deforestation and warfare have shifted toward recognition of long-term agricultural intensification and post-contact depopulation.

Several chapters discuss overarching ideas that do not fit neatly within the regional framework but are thematically important in the context of the Oceanic deep past. Some present these topics in a straightforward manner: Rieth and Cochrane, for example, provide a stock-taking of chronology in Remote Oceania, including a detailed consideration of changing approaches to dating in Hawai'i, and a very useful two-and-a-half-page table listing the earliest dates from different island groups and their contexts, and corroborating archaeological and palaeoenvironmental data. Other chapters in this vein include Dickinson's succinct treatment of coastal geomorphology and its implications for human settlement, and Pawley's summary of linguistic research that underlies many models of origins, migration and subsequent interactions in Pacific.

There are also chapters that cover a topic while criticising prevailing thinking or practice. Denham's chapter on island Southeast Asia and Cochrane's essay on Fiji are examples of this, as is Morrison and O'Connor's review of settlement pattern studies in the Pacific. A predominant approach since the 1970s, the authors highlight settlement pattern research in Sāmoa and Hawai'i before raising questions about comparability between regions. Drawing on ideas from distributional archaeology and time perspectivism (see chapters in Holdaway and Wandsnider 2008), the authors set a series of practical goals to extend the range of future settlement pattern studies. Terrell's chapter on Lapita also falls into the critical category, invoking "baseline probability analysis" as a way to build more specificity into existing models and drawing on the pedagogical notion of "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998) as a way to bridge between localised behaviour and wider material distributions. This chapter is a thought-provoking contribution to be sure, but given its emphasis on epistemology and limited engagement with the wealth of existing work on Lapita, it is somewhat out of step with the rest of the book.

In the final chapter, Anderson returns for a discussion of Pacific seafaring, commenting on “traditionalist” models that promote voyaging against the prevailing easterly winds of the Pacific. Although many experiments have demonstrated the efficacy of windward sailing for exploration, Anderson points out limitations in the available data on vessel performance characteristics, in particular on the antiquity of triangular, stayed-mast rigs. An alternative, “historicist” model bypasses the need for these by restricting travel to downwind, but also has serious ramifications for many of the ideas related to migration and interaction that occur throughout this book. This continues to be an active area of debate and research, thanks in no small part to Anderson’s continued questioning of widely accepted narratives.

The sheer volume and diversity of subjects covered in this book is impressive, but at the same time this makes a few omissions easier to spot. The Solomon Islands, for example, receive little attention, which is curious given how thoroughly other island groups are covered. Also, given the substantial contributions of genetics in the last two decades, it is surprising that this received only passing mention in some chapters.

These issues aside, as a survey of contemporary research, the *Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania* succeeds and then some. Most chapters are very accessible as introductions to their respective topics, making the text useful for students and teachers. The wealth of information and the variety of views it contains makes this book a worthwhile investment for anyone interested in the deep history of the Pacific.

References Cited

- Holdaway, Simon J. and LuAnn Wandsnider, 2008. *Time in Archaeology: Time Perspective Revisited*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Petersen, Glenn, 2006. Micronesia’s Breadfruit Revolution and the Evolution of a Culture Area. *Archaeology in Oceania* 41 (2): 82–92.
- Wenger, Etienne, 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

COOPER, Annabel: *Filming the Colonial Past: The New Zealand Wars on Screen*. Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2018. 304 pp., biblio., illus., index, notes. NZ\$49.95 (softcover).

AMBER RHODES
University of Auckland

Filming the Colonial Past: The New Zealand Wars on Screen looks at the way New Zealand productions have portrayed the colonial conflicts sometimes known as the New Zealand Wars. The wars took place in various regions across New Zealand between 1843 and 1916, causing major divisions between Māori and Pākehā ‘New Zealand European’ as well as between *iwi* ‘tribal’ groups. The title itself, *Filming the Colonial Past*, implies that the *construction* of our past occurred through the act of filming the interpretation of the past and, like the interaction between Māori and Pākehā in society, this past has been built through sometimes mutual and not always easy or equal means. The author has worked chronologically discussing the social