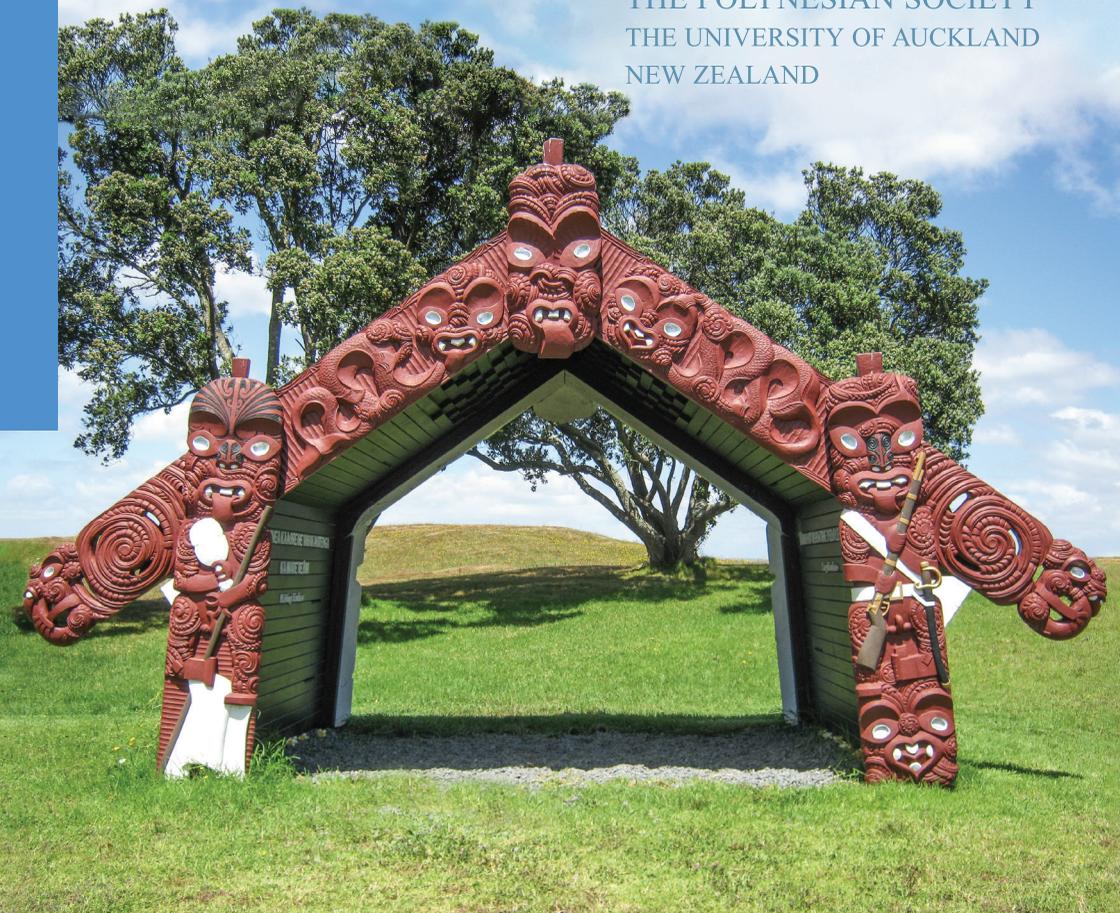


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DAVID ROY SIMMONS, MBE (1930–2015)

The passing of David Simmons was noted with sadness at the Polynesian Society's Annual General Meeting in May 2016. Dave was a member of the Council of the Society from 1979 to 2010, except for the years 1992–95, and he regularly attended the Annual General Meetings after that. His contributions and enthusiasm for the Society were greatly appreciated by Council members. He studied at the University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, and also at the University of Paris, Sorbonne and the University of Rennes, before completing his Master of Arts degree in Anthropology at the University of Auckland in 1962.

While a student at the University of Auckland, Dave participated in excavations organised by the archaeologist Jack Golson. On one of these expeditions, at Kauri Point near Katikati in the Bay of Plenty in 1961, the team put on a party at the local *marae* (which relaxed the alcohol ban for the day), to thank the *tāngata whenua* for allowing them to dig there. Andrew Pawley, now a Professor Emeritus at the Australian National University, gave a speech of thanks and farewell at the event, and reports that the occasion was made especially memorable by Dave Simmons giving a spirited performance of a *haka* as a substitute for a *waiata* or song following Andrew's speech. Colleagues generally found Dave congenial and helpful, and full of enthusiasm for his work.

His MA thesis was the basis of his ground-breaking book, *The Great New Zealand Myth*, published by Reed in 1976. In this work Dave investigated the basis for the "received tradition" concerning the migration of the ancestors of the Māori from a Polynesian homeland to Aotearoa, and found it to have been based on a selective, incomplete and often inaccurate pastiche of material recorded by Māori elders or Pākehā scholars in the 19th century. He then set about investigating the 19th-century material rigorously to find out what the various traditions actually said, and how this might be better interpreted. This was a major work of scholarship which involved the meticulous scrutiny and documentation of numerous primary sources, making them available at a time when there were no computerised databases and such material was very difficult to locate. This work is still of immense value to those interested in reading the words of the ancestors, providing access to Māori genealogies and narratives that are still relevant and helpful to students of Māori history.

After completing his MA degree, Dave was appointed Keeper in Anthropology at the Otago Museum. While there he contributed to Henry Skinner's Otago Museum publication *The Māori Hei-tiki* (1966), and also published an article on "Perspectives in Māori carving" in the prestigious literary quarterly *Landfall*. In 1968 he became the Ethnologist at the Auckland

Institute and Museum, and ten years later was appointed Assistant Director of the Auckland War Memorial Museum, from which he retired in 1989. His contribution to the work of the Museum was marked by the award of the Auckland Museum Medal in August 2013. In 1985 he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for his services to ethnology and the Māori People. His scholarship had previously been recognised by the Polynesian Society, which presented him with the Elsdon Best Memorial Medal in 1978. It was probably during this time that he made his greatest contributions to Anthropology and Māori studies, although some of his later works appear to have been influenced by informants of questionable reliability.

*The Great New Zealand Myth* constitutes an enduring memorial to David Simmons as a scholar, and his friendship and kindness warms the memories of those of us who knew him. *Requiescat in pace*; may he rest in peace.

Richard A. Benton, President