

# JPS

The Journal  
of the  
Polynesian Society

VOLUME 126 No.4 DECEMBER 2017

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY  
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND

---

## REVIEWS

---

MacCARTHY, Michelle: *Making the Modern Primitive: Cultural Tourism in the Trobriand Islands*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016. 270 pp., biblio., illus. US\$68.00 (cloth).

JOSEPH M. CHEER  
*Monash University*

*Making the Modern Primitive* is arguably a tribute to Bronislaw Malinowski, founding father of ethnography and responsible for putting the Trobriand Islands on the map. The ways of the primitive man underlined Malinowski's work, and in establishing the method of participatory observation, he theorised about the mores of the exotic Other and applied this knowledge to understandings of the way society and institutions operate (or not). Just over a century later, the Trobriands continue to pique the interest of anthropologists and ethnologists, especially amidst recent doubts cast over the efficacy and ethics of Malinowski's *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that his legacy has inspired *Making the Modern Primitive*. What is more, it is difficult to avoid relating *Making the Modern Primitive* to Dennis O'Rourke's epic documentary *Cannibal Tours*, where he stated: "There is nothing so strange in a strange land as the stranger who comes to visit it." O'Rourke's observation is apropos to cultural tourism where not only is the spectacle centred on the hosts but also the presence of the tourist itself invites a reverse gaze.

In *Making the Modern Primitive*, the paradisiacal underpinnings that embody tropical islands, islandness and islanders are discernible. The predictable and increasing shifts toward embracing the tourism economy is now widespread in the Pacific Islands, and that tourism has made its way to the Trobriands is no surprise given its location between Southeast Asia and Australia and its proximity to the growing cruise-line pathways in the region. The commodification of culture depicted in *Making the Modern Primitive* is unassailable in tourist destinations across the globe, and criticism of it as an agent of damaging and long-lasting acculturation is countered with praise that the economic and symbolic value attributed to culture is its saving grace. However, the risk of treating cultural tourism and its attendant effects superficially and simply as a transaction between hosts and guests is immense, as is any attempt to unpack the complexities surrounding matters of cultural authenticity and what is traditional. *Making the Modern Primitive* tries to find the sweet spot between the anthropological lens the author looks through and something that is more relateable to cultural tourism and the pursuit of the spectacular and entertaining and at times profane.

In illustrating the ethnographic context and the links to cultural tourism, MacCarthy creates an impression of time standing still where, despite over a century since Malinowski, islanders are still enchanting and friendly, and the island maintains its

inimitable charm. However, this elides serious acknowledgement of the modern-day challenges that islanders face as they negotiate the impacts of wider global and nationwide shocks to their ways of life. Cultural tourism is yet another disruptive, neocolonial incursion over which hosts in indigenous and developing-country contexts have little agency, and *Making the Modern Primitive* needed to give this more weight.

Notions of culture in touristic contexts very often play to oversimplifications of people and place and more importantly to the whims of marketers and the global travel supply chain. Thus, any attempt at conveying authentic or traditional experiences becomes severely tested, especially when tourism success is often measured in economic terms irrespective of the non-economic imposts. For example, how do you cost tourism-induced cultural change? Notions of an unchanged Trobriands with traditional ways of living alongside lashings of modernity underline and are intrinsic to the modernity–primitivity binary. Thus, fixing the tourist gaze is given substantial attention, as is the problematic nature of the consumption of culture and the postcolonial contexts where the reaffirmation and/or reclaiming of indigeneity and sovereignty are earnestly pursued.

To suggest that tourism is forced upon unwitting islanders would be an overstatement and most probably inaccurate because it seems that in the Trobriands, islanders are very much at the forefront of packaging themselves for tourist consumption. The question of whether this is a kind of commodification, and the extent to which it is a departure from what is real, is raised in *Making the Modern Primitive*. Yet the question of whether this matters at all, and to whom and why, is of far greater importance. After all, islanders face the weighty aspiration to modernise and develop, and promoting unsullied primitivity seems highly unrealistic and fanciful.

Consequently, *Making the Modern Primitive* seems to reluctantly concede that cashing in on culture is inevitable in a world where Trobriand Islanders must negotiate their place in order to bolster the futures of their descendants. As MacCarthy emphasises, the intersection between tourism and culture is essentially based around material exchange, and ideally it should embody a process of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Yet the world over, this is mostly not the case, and cultural commodification is largely driven by forces beyond the local. It is only when manageable thresholds are breached and adverse impacts are experienced that the enthusiasm for tourism declines.

However, as *Making the Modern Primitive* suggests, the situation in the Trobriands is one where cultural tourism and the imposts it places on islanders is still very much in a steady state. Nevertheless, MacCarthy sounds a note of caution against embracing something that can easily be the instigator behind the unravelling of island life. The implication for Trobriand Islanders is that they once again find themselves under the scrutiny of the global gaze, and in this case, the tourist gaze. If marketers and placemakers become the dominant voices in the process and islanders lose their agency, this is surely a slippery slope toward the precarious bastardisation of culture—this is a lament that MacCarthy appears to hold. Finally, *Making the Modern Primitive* leaves the reader hanging, suggesting that anything is possible and leaves a hint that perhaps the inevitability of change means that if we are to know what Trobriand Islands culture is really like, now might be the best time to go before things change beyond recognition.

RICHARDS, Rhys: *Tracking Travelling Taonga: A Narrative Review of How Maori Items Got to London from 1798, to Salem in 1802, 1807 and 1812, and Elsewhere up to 1840*. Wellington: Paremata Press, 2015. 274 pp., biblio., illus, indexes. NZ\$30.00 (soft cover).

JEREMY COOTE

*Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford*

The latest production of Rhys Richards and the Paremata Press brings together information relating to two bodies of historic material: shipping records and Māori collections in overseas museums. The idea behind the volume is to fill in gaps in museums' records by linking the objects in their collections to individuals known to have been in New Zealand or in places—like Sydney—close enough to have obtained Māori material. As is clear from the dates in the book's subtitle, Richards is not concerned with the *taonga* 'treasures, artefacts' collected on Cook's voyages. Of what he estimates to be some 5,000 post-Cook-voyage but nevertheless early Māori objects in overseas museums, however, Richards discusses some 400. All researchers of and curators of historic *taonga* will be interested to see what Richards has to say about the objects they research and/or curate. As the curator responsible for significant historic Māori collections at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), I focus here on what Richards has to say about the *taonga* in my care—in the hope that my particular comments might be of more general relevance and interest.

To begin positively, it has been a pleasure to be able to enhance the PRM's records with information provided in *Tracking Travelling Taonga*. For instance, it was already recorded that some samples of flax, presented apparently anonymously to the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum in 1822 (and transferred to the PRM in 1886), had been acquired by someone on HMS *Westmoreland*. Thanks to Richards (p. 113), I have now been able to add that the *Westmoreland* "was at the Bay of Islands from 11 July to 27 November 1821" on her return "from London and Sydney with two chiefs, Hongi and Waikato, whom Rev. Samuel Marsden and Thomas Kendall had taken to London to see the King". Such information provides a richer context for what might otherwise be regarded as rather unassuming museum specimens. To take another example, the information Richards provides (p. 154) about the Lawson family of whalers, their ships and their visits to New Zealand waters in the 1810s, 1820s and 1830s adds to what can be said about three *taonga* that were given to the PRM by a descendant of the Lawson family in 1936. Similarly, it is a pleasure to learn more about the activities of the whaling family to which William Bennett—donor to the Ashmolean in 1827 of a model canoe (again transferred to the PRM in 1886)—belonged, and to learn of other *taonga* associated with him in the Field Museum (Chicago) (p. 156).

It is, however, necessary to set beside these satisfying contributions to knowledge some others where the information provided in *Tracking Travelling Taonga* is either highly misleading or just plain wrong. This is particularly frustrating as Richards and I exchanged emails about the PRM's collections while he was compiling information for his book. Unfortunately, our communications were clearly insufficiently thorough or detailed.

Take, for example, the account that Richards provides of the collection of Polynesian material bequeathed to The Queen's College, Oxford, by Dr Robert Mason in 1841, which has been on loan to the PRM since 1940. This collection is comprised of ten items, seven from New Zealand, along with two paddles from Tubuai and a club from Fiji/Tonga. Assuming for some reason that all the objects in the collection are Māori, Richards concludes that some must be missing as there are only seven records for Māori objects. More problematically, he claims that two "greenstone tiki" that he thinks missionary Thomas Kendall sent Mason in 1817 "are no longer identified among the ... items now in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford" (p. 162). Apparently, Richards has been misled here by a mistranscription in the University of Otago's Marsden Online Archive. In the transcription available there of a letter from Kendall to the Reverend Joshua Mann dated 14 July 1817 (MS 56/59), both Mann's wife—"Mrs Mann"—and his brother—"Rev. W[illia]m Mann"—were transformed into "Masons" (though this was promptly corrected in May 2017 after I pointed out the error). We know from this letter that Kendall sent the Rev. William Mann "1 wedge of green talc used by the natives as an axe, and 1 green talc (a man in miniature) worn by the natives at the bosom in memory of a departed friend. It is worn as an ornament, and not esteemed as a deity as had been reported". Having been sent to Mann, it is not surprising that they do not survive in the Mason Collection. (I have yet to discover what happened to the objects Kendall sent Mann. Mann refers in his will (The National Archives, London; PROB 11/1983/9) to "my Museum or Cabinet of Curiosities", which he left to his wife; but I do not know what happened to it.)

Richards goes on (p. 164) to suggest a number of provenances for the Māori material that does survive in the Mason Collection:

They were probably collected in 1809 by "Mr Mason, late officer on the London whaleship *Speke*" (*Sydney Gazette* 28 April 1810.) Another possibility though was "Captain Robert Mason" who made two sealing voyages from Sydney to southern New Zealand in 1809–1811, was at the Bay of Islands in 1810, was the captain of the *Active* for voyages from Sydney to Calcutta for the reputable Sydney merchant Robert Campbell in 1812. He went to Tahiti and the Pearl Islands (Tuamotu group in 1812–1814, probably visiting New Zealand twice, on both the outward and home voyages. ... It seems that no-one else named Mason was recorded as an adult in Sydney or New Zealand from 1805 to 1815.

Such confident assertions—"were probably collected"—seems to depend upon an idea that every item in a "named" collection must be traceable to someone else with the same name. Given that we all have two parents, four grandparents, etc. and thus a potentially wide circle of relations with different surnames, this seems unwarranted, not to mention the fact that objects are known to pass along paths of friendship as well as through exchanges of various types. In this case, from what is known of Mason's life and activities, it seems much more likely that he acquired the objects (he also had a large Egyptological collection) from dealers and auctions than that he was given them by a relative who had travelled to the Pacific. Richards is right to think

that there is much work to be done to fill in the gaps in the history and provenance of Māori objects in overseas collections; however, he is wrong to think that matching collections and shipping records through the sharing of names is necessarily such a productive way forward. Finding matching names is always exciting, but it should only ever be regarded as a starting point, as a clue that might lead somewhere—but just as well might not.

These problems are compounded in *Tracking Travelling Taonga* by Richards' over-reliance on the supposed provenances provided by David Simmons in his various typescript catalogues of "Maori material" in overseas museums. Many of these histories, which now bedevil catalogue entries in museums around the world, are fanciful. For example, Richards notes (p. 102) how "a *patu rakau* or wooden club" and "a kotiate club and a baler" in the PRM were "probably given to Dr Lee by Hongi Hika", in 1820. He goes on to explain that:

Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge University worked with the chiefs Hongi and Waikato in 1820 to create a written form of the Maori language in which to publish the first text in Maori. It would be interesting to test the woods of these items as they may have been carved by Hongi while he was living in England, [or] while living in Parramatta [now a suburb of Sydney].

Richards provides no reference for this wholly inaccurate and misleading account of the history of these three *taonga*, but it is clear that his source is the entries for these objects in the unpublished two-volume typescript "Draft Catalogues of Maori Material in English Museums Prepared by David Simmons from Records Made in 1978" (Simmons n.d.).

Unfortunately, for some reason Richards and I did not correspond about this material while he was preparing *Tracking Travelling Taonga*. If we had done so, I would have been able to explain to him that these three *taonga* are part of the collection of material from Tahiti and New Zealand that Joseph Banks gave to Christ Church, his Oxford college, after returning from his voyage around the world on the *Endeavour* with Cook, a collection that I first identified in 2002 (for the most recent account, see Coote 2015). The reference to "Dr Lee's Trustees" on some surviving labels and in associated documentation is to "The Dean, Chapter and Students of Christ Church" who had responsibility for the collections housed in the Anatomy School that had been founded through the benefaction of Dr Matthew Lee (1695–1755) and where the college's "ethnographic" collection was also housed. They were—and continue to be—"Dr Lee's Trustees". There is no connection with Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge, nor with Chief Hongi Hika or Chief Waikato, and the suggestion that there is or might be was and is completely unwarranted.

I have discussed these two examples at length as they seem to me to illustrate well the problems with Richards' approach. Curators and researchers will want to explore the provenances he provides for the *taonga* that are in their care, or that are the focus of their research, but they must treat them not only with due care and attention but with suspicion. Not all museums with historic Māori *taonga* in their collections have specialist ethnographic—let alone specialist Pacific, let alone specialist Māori—

curators, and it is well known that many labels and catalogue entries for *taonga* in museums around the world that are based on Simmons's assertions are speculative at best. It would be a shame if some of the histories given in *Tracking Travelling Taonga* were to compound the problems that already exist.

It is always uncomfortable criticising other people's work, but the study of Polynesian, particularly Māori, material culture has suffered too long from a reluctance to point out mistakes. It should go without saying that our scholarship needs to be as thorough and as rigorous as for any other body of material. References to published and unpublished literature need to be clear and accurate; accession and inventory numbers need to be precise. Errors should be pointed out and corrected. Otherwise mistakes are perpetuated and scholarship hampered. One last—Oxford unrelated—example must suffice. Richards refers (p. 248) to “a tattooed head” that was given to “the Red House Museum in Oxford” by D. Kenny of Halifax in 1834. There is and never has been a Red House Museum in Oxford. As I understand it, this *toi moko* (head) was in fact given to the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society by D. Kenny in 1834 and was passed in due course to the Bankfield Museum in Halifax (founded 1887); in 1937 it was acquired by exchange by the collector Harry Beasley (d. 1939); in 1954 it was donated by Beasley's widow Irene to the Red House Museum in Christchurch in Hampshire; in 1985 it was loaned to Leeds Museum; and (as Richards notes) in November 2005 it was repatriated to Te Papa. That it is now at Te Papa may be the most important point, but if one is going to refer to its history one might as well get it right, or as right as one can given the present state of knowledge.

The volume contains two useful indexes: one for “Surviving *Taonga*”, organised by type of object, and a “General Index”, which includes the names of many of the individuals mentioned in the text. Unfortunately, there is no index for the institutions holding the collections discussed. The volume also includes three “Annexes: Notes on Moko”: “A New Zealand Artist, Aranghie”, “A Note on the Interpretation of Moko”, and “Chronological List of References to Preserved Heads (Mokomokai) up to 1840”. These annexes sit oddly with the rest of the volume, especially the latter “Chronological List” with its long quotations from contemporary sources. These make for unpleasant reading and would have benefited enormously from greater contextualisation. I would be loath to say that non-Māori scholars should avoid the subject altogether. As with the *taonga* in museum collections, there is certainly a role for non-Māori—and for non-specialists—to make significant contributions to historical and provenance research relating to *toi moko* and other *kōiwi tangata*. Perhaps the time has come, however, for non-Māori researchers to take a step back, leaving it to Māori scholars to decide what to publish about (the remains of) their ancestors, where, when and how.

Overall, then, it is difficult to welcome *Tracking Travelling Taonga* wholeheartedly. Specialists and specialist libraries will wish to acquire a copy of it, of course, but as with Simmons's overambitious “catalogues” its contents need to be treated with caution. So much remains to be done to research and publish the historic *taonga* in overseas museums. Shipping and museum records, like those drawn on here by Richards, certainly contain clues worth following up, but if the complex travels of

surviving *taonga* are to be tracked fully then they must also be traced through the documentation that survives in institutional and personal archives. Such painstaking work tends to be most successful when carried out on a small rather than an ambitious scale—and there is plenty more to do.

### References

- Coote, Jeremy, 2015. The Cook-voyage collections at Oxford, 1772–2015. In J. Coote (ed.), *Cook-Voyage Collections of “Artificial Curiosities” in Britain and Ireland, 1771–2015*. Occasional Paper No. 5. Oxford: Museum Ethnographers Group, pp. 74–122.
- Simmons, David Roy, n.d. Draft Catalogues of Maori Material in English Museums. Prepared by David Simmons from Records Made in 1978. Unpublished typescript (2 vols). [Copy consulted in the Anthropology Library and Research Centre, Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, The British Museum, London.]

SKELLY, Robert John and Bruno David: *Hiri: Archaeology of Long-Distance Maritime Trade along the South Coast of Papua New Guinea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017. 569 pp., biblio., illus., index. US\$85.00 (cloth).

JIM RHOADS

*University of Western Australia*

*Hiri* is the second major work about Papuan prehistory published this year. The other, *Excavations on Motupore Island* (Allen 2017), stands as an interesting companion. *Hiri* sets itself the task of re-evaluating south coast Papuan cultural history in light of recent research, by focusing on three objectives:

- (i) clarifying the ancestry of the *hiri* exchange system,
- (ii) backtracking the Papuan ceramic sequence from the ethnographic present in the Kouri lowlands (the research area) as a means to historicise the *hiri*,
- (iii) providing a secure chronology for the mid-Gulf region via an extensive AMS dating program (p. xii).

From the outset, the authors give the book a wider agenda—promoting the hypothesis that “studies of ceramic and broader cultural trends across the Kouri lowlands ... are thus a story about the deep history of long-term connections between peoples along the south coast of Papua New Guinea” (p. 4).

*Hiri* begins with a lengthy review of the history and ethnography of the Motu annual trading voyages to the Papuan Gulf, the *hiri*. The presentation is balanced and comprehensive, and will serve readers well as a contemporary reference. A brief examination of the environment and cultural context comes next. Afterward there are ten chapters, comprising about two-thirds of the book, which describe the archaeology of the Kouri lowland.

The archaeological research draws, in the main, from Rob Skelly’s PhD thesis. In all, about 14 m<sup>3</sup> were excavated from 13 sites. More than 60 AMS determinations, ranging from almost 3000 BP to the ethnographic present, securely establish the



region's archaeological sequence. Notably, a 500-year gap occurs from about 1,200 years ago, a pattern which is common in Papuan archaeological sequences elsewhere.

About 2,300 rim sherds were excavated and a further 2,000 rims were collected from surface deposits at six sites, which enabled the authors to produce a very credible ceramic sequence for the Kouri lowlands. This aligns reasonably well with material found in other south Papuan coast assemblages. For example, Allen (2017: 324-25) notes that the sequence's last 700 years "reflect the continuation of the Motupore trajectory towards decorative simplification", while observing only "generic similarities" in the pottery decorations between the Kouri lowland collection and his Motupore assemblages.

No sourcing of the Kouri potsherds was attempted, so tagging sites to manufacturing locales along the Papuan coast is not directly possible. This analysis is an essential first step in advancing our understanding of the geographic framework for understanding coastal Papuan trade and exchange.

But wait! The last two chapters present a model for the south Papuan coast's cultural development over roughly the last 4,000 years. The first starts from the Kouri lowlands looking outward, following the convention "regardless of where [the] Kouri ceramics were manufactured, spatial patterning in decoration, vessel shape, and manufacturing characteristics indicate that ancestral Kouri peoples were socially connected in geographically widespread ways generating broad patterns of information flow" (p. 475). The second concerns a wider vision—the nature of maritime exchange in island Papua New Guinea, so as to position the *hiri* "in a broader-scaled historical geography" (p. 498).

Spatially dispersed archaeological data, which vary in quality, and diverse ethnographic accounts are knitted together to establish a cultural history for coastal Papua. For the period up to 1,000 years ago, the authors theorise about:

- the colonisation by Austronesian language speakers—the first pot makers, who settled in villages and outposts and established exchange relationships with people living as far west as the Torres Strait,
- the enduring connectedness among the different early villages from the Kouri lowlands to Amazon Bay, as revealed in the similarity of ceramic attributes and the movement of obsidian from Fergusson Island,
- the descendants' expansion into the Kikori–Purari Delta in order to acquire sago by trading pottery, and thereby sustain their ongoing presence along the coast.

*Hiri* unflinchingly proclaims a new, panoramic vision. Credible evidence, plausible deductions, unequivocal assertions and, as I believe, leaps of faith all are brought to bear to refashion a narrative for Papuan prehistory.

I must admit to being bewildered by the paucity of clear ideas about how the authors would go about systematically testing their vision, either by revisiting current archaeological information with a more refined attention to detail or by the pragmatic discovery of new data.

On a personal note, I am rather surprised stone axes/adzes receive little mention, especially in the last chapters. The ethnographically documented inland-to-coastal trade of Owen Stanley Mountains axes/adzes were discovered in Papuan Gulf

archaeology deposits probably dating from about 1,600 years ago up to the time of European contact (Rhoads and Mackenzie 1991). Arguably the axe/adze trade continued, albeit to a diminished extent, during the 500-year hiatus termed the “ceramic hiccup”. Also, the form analysis of prehistoric axes/adzes roughly dating from the last 2,000 years offers interesting results (Rhoads 2012). Namely, social exchange was a key driver of axe/adze trade between 2,000 and 1,000 years ago, and more entrepreneurial pursuits dominated axe/adze trade during the most recent 500 years.

Regardless of these drawbacks, readers should not ignore this work. It is an important contribution to the body of knowledge about Papua New Guinea prehistory.

### *References*

- Allen, Jim, 2017. *Excavations on Motupore Island, Central District, Papua New Guinea*. University of Otago Working Papers in Anthropology No. 4. Dunedin: Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Otago.
- Rhoads, James W., 2012. Prehistoric Papuan axe/adzes: A spatial and temporal analysis of form. In I. McNiven and M. Green (eds), *Southern New Guinea & Torres Strait, Special Issue in Honour of Ron Vanderwal*. *The Artefact* 33: 56-69.
- Rhoads, James W. and Douglas E. Mackenzie, 1991. Stone axe/adze trade in prehistoric Papua: The travels of Python. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 57 (2): 35-49.