

The Archaeology of Missions and Missionisation in Australasia and the Pacific

Stuart Bedford^{1,2,*}, James Flexner³ and Martin Jones⁴

This volume is dedicated to Angela Middleton, an archaeologist and historian from Aotearoa New Zealand who passed away in March 2019 (Bedford *et al.* 2020; Smith 2019a and b). Her career was primarily focused on studying colonial encounters through the lenses of missionisation in her homeland using archaeological inquiry, archival research and Māori oral traditions. In many respects her research has transformed the study of missionisation in New Zealand and has also had impacts well beyond its shores. No longer are mission sites seen as quaint remnants of the efforts of isolated pioneering missionaries dotted across the landscape. Rather, archaeological research has revealed these places to be key sites of interaction and transformation set within the Māori world, which was then connecting with the wider world. They are associated with phases of cross-cultural stimulus and change that ultimately had huge influence on the development of New Zealand as a nation. Such sites and their social and geographical landscapes are now assessed from a range of different theoretical perspectives including gender, class, society, health and disease, ideology, colonisation and capitalism (see Middleton 2008; Smith 2014; Smith *et al.* 2012, 2014).

This collection comprises eight papers centred around missions and missionisation located across a vast region primarily composed of sea and islands. Case studies span mainland Australia, the Torres Strait and the far corners of the Pacific, including Vanuatu (the former New Hebrides), the Tuamotu Islands, Guam and New Zealand, the place where Angela's career and influence began. The complexity and depth of Christian missionisation across Australasia and the Pacific is demonstrated by the time depth and variety of Christian denominations that are represented in these contributions. They include Spanish and French

Catholics, in Guam and the Tuamotu archipelago respectively, the Protestant London Missionary Society in the Torres Strait, Wesleyans in Western Australia and New Zealand, and Presbyterians in Vanuatu (Figure 1).

Missionisation in western Micronesia has a tradition that stretches back into the seventeenth century, while in New Zealand, Australia and much of the rest of the Pacific the first missionaries arrived two centuries later. Had attempted Spanish settlement in the Solomon Islands (1568, 1595) and New Hebrides (1606) been successful (Flexner *et al.* 2016; Gibbs 2011), Catholic religious conversion would have been a fundamental component of the enterprise and the region's history might have been very different. Nonetheless, widespread conversion was a feature of the nineteenth-century Pacific, among both independent and still-colonised nations. What exists, however, are distinctly indigenous versions of the religions that were first introduced by European missionaries. Christianity has not completely replaced indigenous practice and belief systems. Rather, it has been incorporated into Pacific Island traditions, ultimately producing a range of hybrid spiritualities that continue to evolve to this day (e.g. Flexner 2016; Lydon 2009; Sissons 2014).

There are both similarities and differences in missionary practice and missionisation amongst the Pacific Islands as well as Australia and New Zealand. Missions played a key role in the colonisation process of New Zealand, being associated with the first intended European settlement of the country from 1814 (Smith 2019c:106–131). Individual Māori leaders, or rangatira, were quick to see the advantages of having 'their own' resident missionary which facilitated access to European goods, the newfound skills of reading and writing, and valuable international connections well beyond their shores. In Australia, missionisation was introduced relatively late and was peripheral to the colony's principal purposes (Lydon and Ash 2010: 4; Middleton 2010). Ironically, the inverse has been the case in terms of archaeological interest and focus, with much of the earliest research focusing on missions in Australia (e.g. Birmingham 1992). It was with the research of Angela Middleton, which commenced during the early 2000s, that the extraordinary potential in New Zealand began to be demonstrated. The Pacific missions remained largely unknown from an archaeological perspective until the last decade or so.

1 Archaeology and Natural History, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australia National University, Canberra, Australia.

2 Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, 07745 Jena, Germany.

3 Department of Archaeology, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, The University of Sydney, Australia

4 Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, Auckland, New Zealand.

*Corresponding author: stuart.bedford@anu.edu.au

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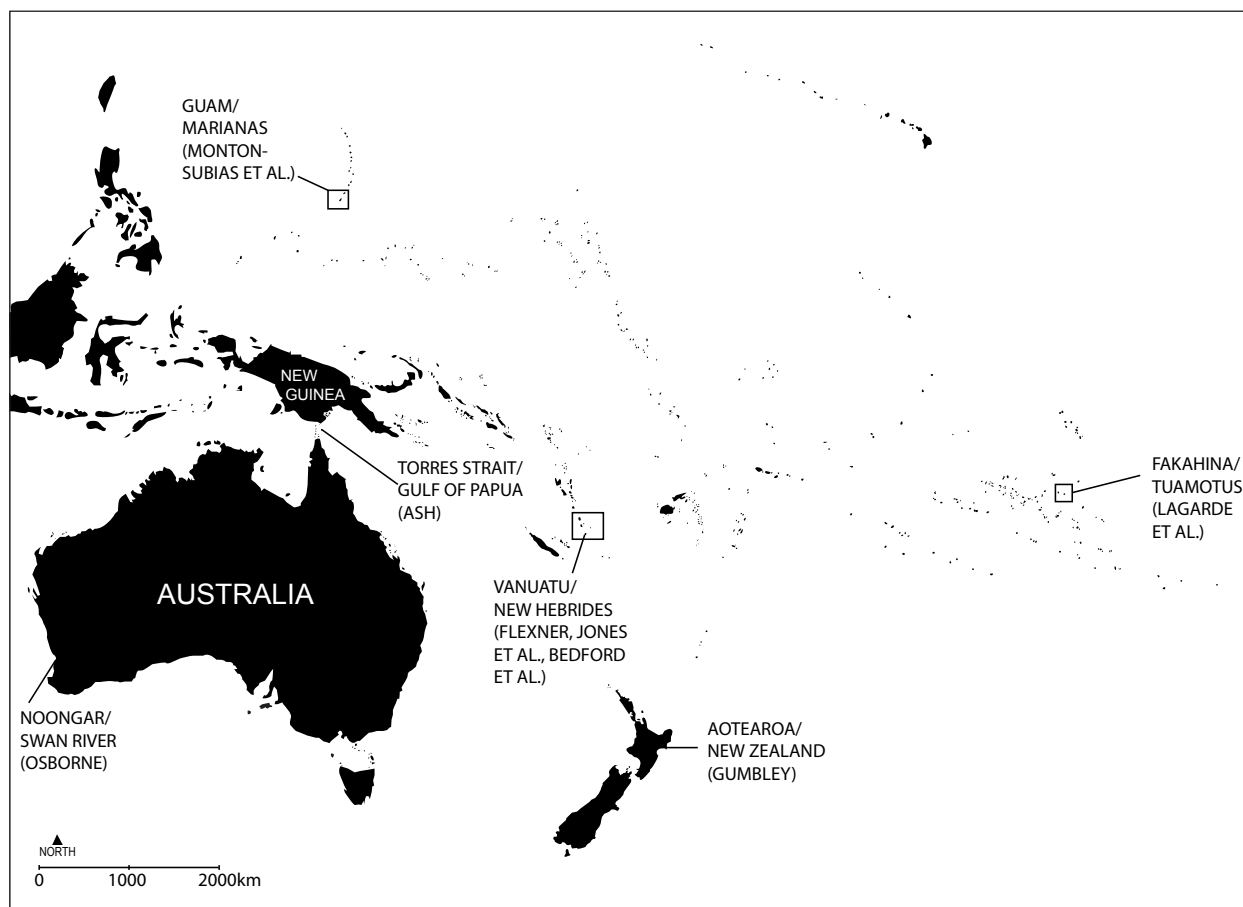


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of case studies in this volume, covering the broad geographic area of Oceania (including Australia) and the temporal range of missionary activity from the 1600s through to the twentieth century.

A 2010 special Issue of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* highlighted the growing interest in the archaeology of mission sites in Australasia. While it was lamented that archaeologists had been slow to engage in such sites and landscapes in Australia, the Issue demonstrated the growing focus of archaeologists and the increasing realisation of the importance of these sites to more fully understand the colonial past particularly from and with an Indigenous perspective (Lydon and Ash 2010:11). Both New Zealand and the Pacific were understandably underrepresented in the Issue, reflecting even then the lack of archaeological engagement with such sites in these places. This collection goes some way towards addressing the disparity in the archaeological focus on Pacific missionisation and makes further contributions to the growing body of work in Australasia. However, it again highlights the very preliminary nature of much of the archaeology of missionisation in all regions, with a number of papers representing a first attempt to investigate missions of varying denominations in different regions.

The islands of the southern New Hebrides, were the locations of the first mission encounters in Island Melanesia. Initial activity was undertaken by the London Missionary

Society (LMS) and later by Presbyterians who followed strategies and philosophy heavily influenced by LMS practices that had been pursued in Polynesia over some four decades previously. The missionary records of Vanuatu have long been mined by historians as the missionaries left abundant archives and publications. Pioneering work by Spriggs had demonstrated the value of combining archaeology, history and oral traditions with his identification of the location of the 56 schools set up by the missionaries on the island of Aneityum (Spriggs 1985). The southern islands have also more recently been the focus of an archaeological research program carried out by Flexner (2016) on early missionisation on Erromango and Tanna. Three of the contributions from this volume build upon this foundation, with two focusing on the large mission station of Anelcauat on Aneityum and the third examining the theme of gender in the missions of the southern New Hebrides.

Angela Middleton's theoretical approach made a major contribution to understanding the complex role played by gendered relationships in mission communities and landscapes. The paper in this volume by Flexner takes a similar approach to understanding the traditional gender roles of both Western and indigenous communities

during mission encounters in the New Hebrides. Analysis includes the relationships between missionaries and indigenous populations as well as the domestic sphere of the missionary families themselves. Flexner summarises evidence from nine years of archaeological research on mission landscapes and material culture from southern Vanuatu in exploring the implications of gender for understanding these colonial encounters.

A fundamental goal of Christian missionaries in the Pacific was to depose indigenous deities and idols, often in a destructive and public fashion, and replace them with Christian substitutes. Hence, missionaries were constantly battling indigenous idolatry and idols. This aspect of missionisation has been spectacularly highlighted by David King in the case of the LMS in his book *Food for the Flames: Idols and missionaries in Central Polynesia* (King 2011). It is a focus here in the paper by Bedford *et al.* on the destruction and repurposing of indigenous 'idols' in some of Vanuatu's earliest long-term mission encounters. On Aneityum, idols were primarily unmodified stones ranging in size from small fist-sized cobbles to massive boulders. From the very beginnings of the mission enterprise these idols were targeted for ridicule and destruction often in public displays. Sacred stones were regularly offered to the church as a sign of conversion and in some cases were incorporated into missionary buildings. Guided by oral traditions, a cache of such stones was excavated at the mission station at Anelcauhat. They highlight the ongoing negotiation between *kastom* and Christianity in Vanuatu that began more than 150 years ago.

The Jones *et al.* paper addresses the important issue of health and disease during missionisation in the tropical Pacific, focusing again on the remarkable standing structures of Anelcauhat, which date to the 1850s in their earliest phases. Staying healthy was a major consideration for both indigenous peoples and missionaries in the New Hebrides during early contact. For the latter endemic malaria, caused by factors that were little understood, often had severe consequences restricting their ability to undertake religious work. In a demonstration of the power of Christianity, missionaries nevertheless sought to contrast their health and those of new converts with that of unconverted heathens at a time when local communities were being devastated by introduced disease. One of the practical ways seen to overcome the impact of tropical ailments was the construction of 'healthy' homes. From the 1850s onwards, Presbyterian missionaries began to construct such dwellings for themselves and to also encourage the Aneityumese to follow suit. One of the oldest surviving European buildings in Melanesia is the masonry mission house at Anelcauhat (1852–3). Detailed study of this well-preserved structure sheds substantial light on nineteenth-century European perspectives about the causes and spread of disease, as well as associated matters connected with local communities, health and architecture that potentially impacted on effective missionary endeavour.

Previous archaeological research in New Zealand missions has focused in the north of the country, including the earliest Bay of Islands missions established by the Church Missionary Society beginning in 1814 (Middleton 2008; Smith *et al.* 2012, 2014). While valuable, this research has great potential to be expanded. There were more than 67 mission stations established before 1845, associated with a range of denominations, that were spread throughout the North Island and the top of the South Island (Middleton 2013). Of these, 10 have had some level of archaeological investigation but many more are only known from the historical record, their physical location as yet to be identified. The paper by Gumbley *et al.* represents both the first archaeological investigation of a Wesleyan mission station in New Zealand and also the first such detailed study of a mission station of any denomination south of Auckland. Te Nihinihi Mission Station was the third in a chain of missions established by the Wesleyan Mission Society along the west coast of New Zealand's North Island and the interior of the Waikato. The mission was established in 1839 and operated until 1881. The missionaries were active and popular with Māori, but during this period the environment changed from one dominated by Māori to one colonised with land purchases by Europeans. Shortly after the original missionaries left in 1863, land confiscation followed militarisation of the area during the British invasion of the Waikato. The layout of the mission describes the integrated yet separated nature of Whaingaroa, and hints at its changing status and relationship within the colonising process of the region.

Spanish Catholics were the first to attempt missionisation in Oceania. While Spanish settlement and associated missionisation had failed in the southwest Pacific in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the Spanish were able to effectively colonise islands in Micronesia. Montón-Subías *et al.* outline research into early Spanish Catholic Missions in Guam dating to the seventeenth century, well before the Protestant missionaries who have been the focus of the majority of the archaeological research in the Pacific. This article offers the first published analysis of a colonial mission cemetery from the Pacific region, as well as archaeological evidence relating to the early mission church constructions of San Dionisio. As in the more recent encounters, Montón-Subías *et al.* point to the extraordinary resilience and adaptability of Chamorro people, who have experienced the longest, most varied, and most sustained colonial encounters in the Pacific.

Remarkably the paper by Lagarde *et al.* marks the first time that a French mission station has been investigated in detail archaeologically in the French-controlled Pacific. Hokikakika in the Tuamotu Islands was the location of a nineteenth century Catholic 'model village' and copra plantation. Archaeological research reflects the integration of religious and economic activities in the village, and the ways that village form and domestic architecture were transformed in response to changes in patterns of eve-

ryday life. Considering the scale of the French Catholic endeavour in the Pacific, this is a significant preliminary study that will hopefully inspire further research on this kind of mission, which appears to be somewhat distinctive both materially and socially. Like the work of Jones *et al.*, it demonstrates the importance of investigating standing buildings to gain a greater understanding of missionary activity and strategies.

Returning to the theme of the destruction of sacred sites and Indigenous idols as a key component of missionisation is Ash's paper on the LMS in the Torres Strait (NE Australia) where he focuses on this aspect drawing predominantly on archival materials, ethnographies and museum collections. Despite arriving relatively late in the 1870s the LMS missionaries pursued a well-trodden path in the region of burying, burning and collecting powerful and animate objects and ritual installations in attempts to transform the spiritscape. Ash outlines this destruction in detail but argues that despite these widespread acts of erasure, indigenous spirits and places were not extinguished but rather regenerated in new sorts of encounters and dialogues in an enduring Islander spiritscape.

Finally, Osborne provides an historical analysis of the mission network of the Swan River Colony (Western Australia) from 1829–1879. This study involves an overview of the various missions and other residential institutions operating during the first 50 years of the Swan River Colony, which institutionalised First Nations (Nyungar) children and young adults. Closer analysis then focuses on three institutions operating within this network, at Perth, Wanneroo and York, run consecutively by Wesleyan Methodists between 1840 and 1855. The paper considers the ways that surveillance and control of Nyungar lives in urban space transformed into attempts to create a 'civilising' agrarian frontier for converts through projects such as experimental farms.

Overall, the papers in this volume significantly expand the geographical and denominational coverage of archaeological studies of mission sites in Australasia and the Pacific. There remains much work to be done on this topic to understand the full variability of these encounters and their archaeological remnants. These papers nonetheless offer a fitting tribute to the pioneering work of Angela Middleton, who provided such a strong foundation for subsequent research into mission encounters throughout the Pacific region and beyond.

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