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The Meeting Place: M?ori and P?keh? Encounters, 1642-1840

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Vincent O'Malley is an experienced and respected historian of Treaty of Waitangi claims research. He has published widely in aspects of Crown-M?ori interactions, including the books *Agents of Autonomy: M?ori Committees in the Nineteenth Century*, *The Beating Heart: A Political and Socio-Economic History of Te Arawa* and *The Treaty of Waitangi Companion: M?ori and P?keh? from Tasman to today*.(1)

Vincent O'Malley has specialised in Treaty of Waitangi research for the past two decades. For O'Malley, and the many others of us who have worked in this area, the focus is predominately the aftermath of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, 6 February 1840. In this book, O'Malley focusses instead on early encounters between M?ori as *tangata whenua* or people of the land, and the European explorers and settlers who encountered this southern land, from 1642 onwards. The key focus of *The Meeting Place* is the period between 1814 and 1840 when, according to O'Malley, the characteristics of the middle ground were most obvious.

It is sometimes said that history reflects the time it is written as much as the period that is written about. Vincent O'Malley's book is one of a number of historical works published recently which focuses on the early period of contact in Aotearoa/New Zealand between M?ori and newly-arriving P?keh?. These include Joan Druett's *Tupaia: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook's Polynesian Navigator*, and Alison Jones and

Kuni Jones? *Words between us ? He K?rero: First M?ori ? P?keh? Conversations on Paper*.(2) Of course these early interactions have long been an attractive area for researchers since the work of Anne Salmond and Judith Binney raised the profile of this period. Do we look back to the beginning as an attempt to better understand the present, or at least to better understand how we got to the present?

In *The Meeting Place* Vincent O'Malley presents a period of New Zealand history when the balance of power was set to change irreconcilably. He concentrates on the early years of encounter between M?ori and the early European arrivals. The model that O'Malley uses for these early interactions is that of the 'middle ground', as first presented by Richard White in his ground-breaking history of the Great Lakes region of North America, first published twenty years ago. White identified certain elements which are necessary for a middle ground to emerge, namely confrontation, a rough balance of power, a mutual need or desire for what the other possesses, and an inability of either side to commandeer enough force to compel the other to do what it desired. These elements existed in the Great Lakes Region of America between 1650 and 1815. O'Malley contends that these conditions existed in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the years 1642?1840, and in particular in the years between 1814 and 1840 (p. 8). During this period both M?ori and P?keh? sought to appropriate goods, technology, and access to their own ends, and in seeking these, each culture influenced the other. The existence of this rough balance of power will not be a new concept for anyone familiar with the tentative establishment of early European settlement. Were it not for the acceptance and generosity of their M?ori hosts the early mission stations would not have been able to survive. Likewise many sealers, located on remote corners of New Zealand were at the mercy of these hosts.

The strength of O'Malley's book is in drawing together many sources and threads into one publication. For example the works of Anne Salmond, Judith Binney, Angela Ballara and others have been used to demonstrate the interaction and exchange between M?ori and P?keh? cultures in this key period. O'Malley brings new evidence to well-known historical events, such as the encounter between the expedition of the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman and Ng?ti Tumatakokiri in Golden Bay at the north-western tip of the South Island in December 1642. O'Malley describes the cross-cultural miscommunication which resulted in the death of several of Tasman's crew and unknown damage and injury to Ng?ti Tumatakokiri. Much of O'Malley's account is based on Tasman's Journals and references Anne Salmond's *Two Worlds*.(3) But O'Malley also attempts to add an extra level of understanding to the situation through reference to recent work by archaeologist Ian Barber, who has suggested that Tasman's ships arrived in a key place for food and gardening, 'at the height of the k?mara growing season' (p.19). The suggestion is that these new arrivals may have been seen as threatening local food resources, which constitutes a new reading of this episode in Golden Bay.

The Meeting Place depicts a vibrant, dynamic period of 'mutual discovery', as M?ori and P?keh? interacted and adjusted to each other. O'Malley reminds us that this was not a one-sided, one-way relationship. For M?ori society this was neither a period of outright resistance to change, nor a period of being assimilated into European society. Rather, this was a period of selective engagement with a new way. During this period key aspects of M?ori society remained in place, with some adaptation to preferred aspects of European society. For example, O'Malley follows the adventures of several M?ori who travelled to England during this period and seemed to adapt to aspects of English society, yet on return to New Zealand ?abandoned? any trappings of English culture. Te Pehi Kupe of Ngati Toa was one such adventurer, travelling to England in February 1825. Te Pehi's travels in England were recorded, but what he made of his experiences can only be guessed. On his return to New Zealand it was observed that Te Pehi had not been 'altered fundamentally as a result of his time in England' (p. 68). M?ori society and the individuals in it were ultimately altered fundamentally by the coming of Europeans, but that change sits outside the period of this study. O'Malley is interested in that period of interaction, of encounter held in the balance, before population and power tipped against the *tangata whenua*.

O'Malley tells us that 'the nature and extent of contact and encounter varied greatly from one end of the country to the other' (p. 70). Given the geography of New Zealand?s long islands this variation is hardly surprising. However, the reader is left with less of a sense of how this variation played out on the ground. The focus tends to be on the Bay of Islands, in the north of the North Island, which was often the first port of

call for travellers and explorers. Although O'Malley alludes to variation in experience between geographical locations the details and effect on the ground are not always fully examined. For example, O'Malley writes about the increased use of cash as a method of payment in the Bay of Islands from the mid 1830s, concluding, 'With the barter economy now at least partly replaced by a cash one, and with the much earlier introduction of direct bargaining and immediate repayment, it might have appeared that Bay of Islands M?ori had fully integrated themselves into the new capitalist order of things' (p. 116). We are left wondering when this adoption of the cash economy spread to other parts of the country, which leads to the question of whether these multiple experiences in distinct geographical locations and in separate time periods can be viewed as a single experience, despite the different fronts and manifestations. There was great variation, for example, between the ?missionary north? and the ?sealer south?. With this variation of encounter and experience, was there a singular meeting place or multiple meeting places?

A study such as this relies predominantly on the survival of written observations. Naturally this written record is dominated by those early explorers, missionaries, and settlers, as M?ori was not a written language prior to the 1820s. As O'Malley points out, 'those ?observers? were hardly innocent bystanders' (p. 2). Even European sources are biased towards the more educated. O'Malley is up front about the limitations these sources may present and points out that within the available sources there is great variation between groups, such as the missionaries and others. The work, as with any dealing with this early encounter period, should be read with these limitations in mind.

O'Malley presents a lively view of early encounter history. He demonstrates the meeting of M?ori and P?keh? as a 'dynamic, fluid and evolving process of mutual discovery, reaction, adjustment and reflection' (p. 10). However this mutual benefit could not last. The model of the middle ground only held as long as each party in the situation had a mutual need of the other and within a few short years the situation changed. By the 1850s the P?keh? population was growing and the balance of power shifted irreconcilably. In conclusion, Vincent O'Malley suggests that lessons from those early encounters could be drawn on in contemporary M?ori and P?keh? relations.

Notes

1. Vincent O?Malley, *Agents of Autonomy: M?ori Committees in the Nineteenth Century* (Wellington, 1998); Vincent O?Malley and David Armstrong, *The Beating Heart: A Political and Socio-Economic History of Te Arawa* (Wellington, 2008); *The Treaty of Waitangi Companion: M?ori and P?keh? from Tasman to today*, ed. Vincent O?Malley, Bruce Stirling and Wally Penetito (Auckland, 2010).Back to (1)
2. Joan Druett, *Tupaia: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook's Polynesian Navigator* (Random House NZ, 2011), Alison Jones and Kuni Jones, *Words Between Us ? He K?rero: First M?ori ? P?keh? Conversations on Paper* (Wellington, 2011).Back to (2)
3. Anne Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans, 1642-1772* (Honolulu, 1991).Back to (3)

The author thanks Therese Crocker for her review and does not wish to respond.

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