

Decolonising Conservation: Caring for Maori Meeting Houses Outside New Zealand.* Dean Sully, ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007. 272 pp.

Reviewed by Vicki-Anne Heikell

Decolonising Conservation: Caring for Maori Meeting Houses Outside New Zealand, is one volume of the series, Critical Perspectives on Cultural Heritage, in which series editor, Dean Sully aims to define a new area of research that makes a radical break with routinized accounts and definitions of cultural heritage. The publication examines alternative understandings in the conservation of Māori meeting houses and a shift of focus from the conservation of the physical object to a broader understanding of conservation and preservation that encompasses evolving and dynamic cultural practices and opinions of Māori and the retention of their material knowledge.

A focus of many of the articles is the carved ancestress meeting house *Hinemihi* belonging to the *Ngāti Hinemihi hapū* (sub-tribe). *Hinemihi* Meeting House resides in Clandon Park Estate, Surrey England and is cared for by The National Trust (UK). As a case study it provides an easier entrée for the reader into the practical issues of both the physical and cultural conservation of these *taonga*, or treasures.

Interestingly, the introduction of the reader to *Hinemihi* is not by the direct descendent of *Hinemihi* herself, but through the editor Dean Sully and Alan Gallop. While not to dismiss their article it seemed to me that if the publication seeks to break with routine examinations and different understandings and approaches in conservation, then the way in which the publication is set out should also signal that intent. For example, in a Māori context outlining where and who you are descended from (*whakapapa*) is the most important introduction. *Hinemihi and Ngāti Hinemihi* by Jim Schuster in Chapter 10 does just that—it introduces the ancestress *Hinemihi*, from where she descended and in turn from where the author descends. *Whakapapa* is nearly always at the centre of Māori community's discussions on the conservation of their *taonga*. This is an important cultural construct that should have seen Schuster's article placed at the beginning of this section as a tangible illustration of a Māori cultural value that this publication is seeking to examine.

One of the strengths of this publication is that the diverse group of contributors—including conservators, anthropologists, lawyers, and Māori—provides a range of views from many different approaches. While the title of the publication is unambiguous it might however have been useful to include articles on the care of Meeting Houses within New Zealand. *Te Hau ki Tūranga* Meeting House, held at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and *Hotunui* Meeting House at Auckland War Memorial Museum Tamaki Paenga Hira are two examples that would have complemented the articles on the care of *Ruatepūpuke II* in Chicago, and *Rauru* and *Te Wharepuni-a-Maui* in Germany, similar to the way in which the article *Marae Conservation in Aotearoa* complements the subsequent articles on the conservation and care of *Hinemihi* Meeting House in England.

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While the publication sets out to examine a more dynamic conservation process some of the potential gems are “hidden” or at least only alluded to. For example, *Introducing Hinemihi* refers (quoting earlier work by Eilean Hopper-Greenhill [1998]) to elders in 1996 “proposing a system of co-responsibility between The National Trust and Ngāti Hinemihi which was well received but politely refused” (p. 146). Knowing what the proposal included and why it was refused might have illuminated the issues and obstacles of cross-cultural collaboration, as both *Ngāti Hinemihi* and The National Trust are represented as contributors.

Each article in this book provides useful entry points for conservators and aligned professionals to examine their own work methods and practice, from practical examples of a decision-making model used by the Conservation and Restoration of Modern Art (CRMA) illustrated in the paper by John Edward Terrell, Désirée C. J. Wisse, and Christopher J. Phillipp through to an introduction to *Kaupapa Māori* research framework developed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith of Auckland University, New Zealand. Gamini Wijesuriya’s stresses the importance of the concept of continuity using Buddhist treasures as examples and is useful to contrast and compare to both Māori and “western” approaches in this publication.

Aside from irritations of Māori language spelling errors and the use of the umlaut rather than the macron to indicate the long vowel sound of Māori words this publication is a useful addition to cultural heritage practitioners and to the discourse of evolving international conservation practice.

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