Forthcoming (June 2010*):

WHARE KARAKIA: MĀORI CHURCH BUILDING, DECORATION, AND RITUAL IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, 1834–1863

by Richard A. Sundt

With the arrival of Anglican missionaries to New Zealand in the nineteenth century, Māori were slowly converted to Christianity and recruited to build New Zealand’s early churches. These early whare karakia—houses of worship—were in a distinctive and arresting new style that combined Māori art and architecture with elements from British ecclesiastical traditions.

In Whare Karakia art historian Richard Sundt chronicles for the first time this early phase of Māori church building in New Zealand. He traces the emergence of seven large-scale whare-style churches from around the North Island—the last standing, Rangiātea at Ōtaki, burned down in 1995.

By the peak decades of the missionary movement (1830s to 1850s), indigenous builders had transformed the small-to-moderate-sized whare into the larger whare-style structure. The whare scheme, with its central row of posts, became the most common building type for Māori churches, and while initially challenging Western architectural presumptions around the use of ritual space, it was later accepted by the Anglican establishment as a convenient model for its missions.

Sundt describes the technological process through which this occurred and examines the interactions between Māori and missionaries during this period—from the training Māori received in European building technology, to the resolution of arguments over carving, painting and the use of liturgical space as they applied these skills to their first attempts at church building.

A ground-breaking work that sheds new light on the history of religion, architecture, and the story of Māori and Pākehā in New Zealand, Whare Karakia is extensively illustrated with rare and detailed images and plans of churches now destroyed.

Richard A. Sundt is associate professor in art history at the University of Oregon. He has published extensively on gothic architecture—in particular on the Dominican church at Toulouse in The Art Bulletin (1989) and on Dominican legislation on art and architecture in the 13th century in the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (1987). Following a sabbatical in New Zealand in 1997, he has been researching early Māori churches and has published three articles in the Journal of the Polynesian Society based on this work.

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