

Domestic and Religious Structures in the Emily Bay Settlement Site, Norfolk Island

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ABSTRACT. At Emily Bay, domestic structures include earth ovens, scoop hearths and a possible rectangular house inferred from posts and postholes. An area of stone paving nearby is argued to be a religious structure, or *marae*. Made of naturally available stone, it lies slightly below the surface of the darker sand cultural layer. Obsidian flakes were found above it and postholes beneath. Several edging blocks of various shapes are noted. Radiocarbon dated to c. 700–600 B.P., this platform fits within the known parameters of other East Polynesian *marae* of similar age.

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Some clues to the nature of domestic and social life in the Emily Bay settlement are afforded by structural remains, and the existence of a religious construction is of considerable significance for Polynesian prehistory more broadly. Most of the relevant remains consisted of infilled holes and hollows of shapes characteristic of particular structures, such as postholes and earth ovens. The identification of these, however, varied across the site and their recorded distribution may not describe all those which once existed within the stratigraphic contexts which we excavated. There has been significant post-depositional disturbance of the site. The upper surface of the cultural layer, observed everywhere as smooth and almost level, almost certainly represents a period of wind planation, and possibly water planation, following the cessation of site

occupancy and prior to the advent of the modern dunes over the site. In contrast, the lower margin of the cultural layer was very uneven, as might be expected from human activities in dune sand but, in addition, the burrowing of procellariids (petrels and shearwaters), which still nest on the margins of the site, has completely obliterated the internal structure of the cultural layer in some places and carried cultural material up to 0.8 m below the normal depth in a complex of hollows and lenses. Consequently, while the existence of stone paving protected a number of postholes in Trench EB97:24, it was often difficult in Trench EB97:23 to distinguish holes and hollows that might have been constructed deliberately from those representing casual impact or non-cultural activity.