Mangaia is one of the largest islands in the southern Cook Islands. In 1777 Captain Cook attempted to land there without success, though he did manage to meet some of the tangata ‘enua, ‘people of the land’, and give them gifts. Mangaians were to remember that moment of time in several ways: through poetical compositions, as well as stories about those material artefacts that came across the beach. One of these is an iron adze head known as Tute’s toki ‘Cook’s adze/axe’ and it is one of the two iron toki that are the focus of this essay. The other axe is the creation of one of New Zealand’s foremost 20th century poets, Allen Curnow, who got his idea from the Mangaian writings of the Māori anthropologist, Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck), and used it in a play The Axe in order to explore how foreign ideas (in this case Christianity) were able to transform the social and religious order in Mangaia.

Cook’s adze is best known through of the publications of William Wyatt Gill, a missionary ethnographer of Mangaia’s pre-Christian culture, who resided there from 1852 to 1872. A great admirer of Cook, Gill questioned his parishioners about the 1777 visit, collected as much information as he could and published much of it. Of particular interest is a dramatic performance about the Mangaian response to Cook’s visit composed a few years after the event by a warrior named Tioi (Gill 1984:253). He also obtained, but did not publish, an anonymous manuscript written for him about the iron adze, recounting how Mangaia’s leaders appropriated it for their own uses. I came across this short text as I traced Gill’s manuscripts through various New Zealand archives in search of Mangaian people’s traditional knowledge. Years later, Jenifer Curnow brought to my attention the fact that her late husband, Allen, whose poetry I already knew, had written a play about Mangaia. I was intrigued that he chose an imported axe as a symbol for the revolutionary reordering of Mangaian society, and I was reminded of the actual adze head which Cook had gifted Mangaians and which they had turned to their own purposes. European axes like their older, indigenous counterparts, adzes, are called toki in Mangaia. I thought something might be made of a juxtaposition of these two quite distinct texts about the reception of real or imagined European artefacts in Mangaia. Read together, these works, along with supplementary material from Cook’s records and other Mangaian sources, allow us to explore how successive generations of Europeans and Mangaians have described the time when the tangata ‘enua ‘indigenous people’ began to meet tangata kē ‘strangers’, and receive new material objects and ideas.
Curnow’s play highlights other connections between Mangaia and New Zealand. When *The Axe* was first performed in the Little Theatre of Canterbury University College in 1948 (Pocock 1953:2), Mangaia, like the rest of the Cook Islands, was an integral part of New Zealand, having been annexed in 1901. It was to remain so until 1965. More recently, Curnow has been identified as part of that generation of Pākehā New Zealanders whose attempts to create a national literature and history contributed to the development of an insular form of cultural nationalism (Gibbons 2003:38-39). By contrast, the historian John Pocock, who directed and acted in the 1948 performance of *The Axe*, argues that New Zealanders of his and Curnow’s generation understood both their island’s geographical separation from other lands and the necessity of crossing that space in time in order “to know ourselves as people” (Pocock 1992:44-48). For Curnow himself (1972:7), Mangaia was “a metaphor for New Zealand”. In both places: “Out of the sea /Comes change, comes danger” (Curnow 1972:54). “By shifting the scene to another island”, Curnow (1972:8) argued, “I might mirror New Zealand” and thereby reflect on its own experience of change, where, like Mangaia, “the old centre was shifting” (Curnow 1972:80). *The Axe* not only reflects New Zealand’s sense of identity, but this country’s historical and cultural relationships with other islands in the Pacific. Tute’s *toki* provides another mirror, reflecting how at least one islander understood the fate of that foreign object. For both islands: “The sea surrounds us all: /What comes out of the sea concerns us all” (Curnow 1972:32).

**A GIFT FROM THE SEA**

Curnow’s play imagines the revolutionary transformation of Mangaian society which followed from the successful introduction of Christianity in 1824. His initial source was a description of the coming of Christianity to the island written by Te Rangi Hiroa (1939). After the play’s first performance, the young playwright was able to meet with Te Rangi Hiroa on his last visit to New Zealand; the latter, according to Curnow (1972:12-13), “approved the liberties I had taken with his text”. Many of the play’s characters were actual individuals in these historical events. Other parts of the play’s text were drawn from various Bishop Museum Bulletins, especially Teuira Henry’s (1928) *Ancient Tahiti* (Curnow 1972:13). Thus the play is a creative work of imagination but one firmly anchored in contemporary scholarship and bearing the imprimatur of one of New Zealand’s most distinguished Pacific scholars.

The axe of the play’s title is described as “not an ordinary axe”, being “harder and sharper than any stone” and able to “pass through a man’s flesh as easily as your finger through sand” (Curnow 1972:34). The fictional character Hema, a young man of rank who early converts to Christianity, acquires the
axe which he describes as something “that came out of the sea with the new god” (Curnow 1972:34). It is one of the “[m]any good gifts” promised to the ruling chiefs by the Tahitian missionary, Davida, historically one of the young men who introduced Christianity to Mangaia (Curnow 1972:31). But the gift is not received without cost. It becomes an instrument of quick and sudden death in the battle that follows between supporters of the new god and those who back the old. For Hema it becomes a means of vengeance, but ultimately the axe brings about his own death: “It is a gift from god ... dipped in filth ... it possesses /Magical powers of destruction” (Curnow 1972:86). For Curnow, this ambiguous gift from the sea also becomes the instrument that severs the island from its former sense of existence: “The axe will cut away the ropes that bind /The island to the sea’s bed ... /Severing the future from the past” (Curnow 1972:54, 69). In so doing, the gift of the axe, like Christianity, changes Mangaian society forever (e.g., Curnow 1972:88).

COOK AT MANGAIA

Cook had left New Zealand behind on 27 February 1777, hoping to make a swift passage northwards to Tahiti, but the winds at that time of the year were against him, and he found himself among unknown islands that more than a century later were to bear his name. There, on 29 March, his expedition sighted Mangaia (Beaglehole 1967:xcix-c), which was not to prove an especially fruitful stopover. The lack of suitable landings or harbours meant that this first encounter lasted only one day. However, there were a series of brief contacts and transactions with local people, during which particular European things were passed over to visitors from the shore.

The first encounter with Mangaians began early on Sunday 30 March when Cook reached the western side of the island in search of possible anchorages. Shortly after seven in the morning, William Anderson, surgeon on the Resolution, discerned groups of “several people” observing them from different parts of the reef as the ships passed (Beaglehole 1967:826). David Samwell, surgeon on the Discovery, says “they shouted together very loud” (Beaglehole 1967:1003). Towards eight in the morning the ships drew closer to shore, those on board reported that the people on the reef seemed to be armed with long spears and clubs which they “brandished in the air” and appeared at least to some to be calling the visitors to “‘Harami’” (‘Aere mai, ‘Come here’) (Beaglehole 1967:78 and fn.2). One account claimed that there were about 500 or 600 men “armed with spears and clubs drawn up in a body upon the beach shouting and running [sic]about” in a defiant and threatening manner; another estimated about 300 or 400 (Munford 1963:22; Beaglehole 1967:1003). A chorus in Tioi’s drama sings “‘Aere mai, e Beretâne!’” “Come on, ye Britons” and confirms they were a great number: “Kua rau; kua rau /Te
The Two Iron Axes of Mangaia

toa, te toa” “Hundreds on hundreds /Of warriors”) (Gill 1984:257).

Whatever the exact numbers, within an hour a sizable force had been assembled on shore, ready to deal with whatever threat the intruders presented.

Tioi’s drama confirms a belligerent attitude: “Kua tā Mangaia, kua tā te pa‘i!” “The Mangaians will attack and destroy the ship” (Gill 1984:255).

To their visitors, the tangata ‘enua appeared to have been stripped for battle, naked except for maro ‘loincloths’, with their long hair tied up in topknots and covered by “a piece of white [tapa] cloth ... not much unlike a Turban”.

However, some in the group, who appeared to be leaders, were differently clothed, with “pieces of cloth as a garment thrown about the shoulders” (a poncho-like upper garment called a tiputa), and a few wore “a high conical cap” (Beaglehole 1967:81, 826).

This was probably the conical-shaped headdress, the pare piki, usually adorned by various brightly coloured feathers, and considered to be of great prestige; obviously items only worn by persons of rank (Gill 1984:27).

Apparently, English intruders were faced by an armed and organised force under the immediate control of warrior leaders.

These leaders and their warriors were asking their own questions about these intrusive pa‘i, ‘ocean going vessels’, and their occupants, as Tioi recollects: “E pa‘i kua a‘a teia?” “What sort of ship is this?”; “Ko‘ai mā ē?” “Who has come?” (Gill 1984:256, 258).

Mangaians also perceived that the intruders were different or foreign; Tioi refers to “te vaka manu‘iri ā tae” “[a] boat full of guests is here” (Gill 1984:257). Tioi refers to another source of anxiety for Mangaia’s leaders: “Nā Tangaroa te vaka: /Kua tere i te aka i te rangi ē!” ‘The vessel belongs to Tangaroa /Sailing from the roots of the sky (the horizon)’.

Tangaroa, the tuakana ‘elder brother’ of the island’s dominant atua ‘god’, Rongo, had gone into exile across the seas when defeated by his teina ‘younger brother’ (Gill 1876:11-14, Hiroa 1934:16-17). Something arriving from Tangaroa might therefore be considered very threatening to the chiefs and people who even today refer to themselves as te pā manu ā Rongo ‘the people of Rongo’.

Tioi certainly evokes fear, describing these strangers as “e atua matakū” “fearful spirit powers” (Gill 1984:258).

A concern to identify the visitors may provide the context for the next response. Tioi recounts this action: “Tukua ma‘ira ta‘i ori i te vaka” “Launch speedily a canoe” (Gill 1984:255), which the English also reported and which was to bring the two groups into close contact, enabling the first transaction of European commodities. The first canoeist failed to reach the ships, and instead turned back to shore. Another man then joined him and they paddled out again. They appear to have shadowed the ships, as Cook wrote, “when we stoped [sic] they did the same” (Beaglehole 1967:78). Finally the canoeists ventured close enough for conversation and transfer of goods to occur.
Maʻi of Raʻiatea (Maʻi in Mangaian, Omai to the English), then returning from England to the Society Islands, played an important part in convincing the men to come alongside the ship by quieting “their apprehensions” (Beaglehole 1967:826). As the visitors noticed, the languages Maʻi and the canoeists spoke sounded similar, though the visitors thought the Mangaian language was more “guttural” than Maʻi’s (Beaglehole 1967:830). Conversely, Tioi represents these manuʻiri ‘outsiders’ speaking in falsetto (Gill 1984:255 and fn.1). While Maʻi was conversing, the English were displaying various “trinkets” and making signs of “to conciliate” them (Munford 1963:22). Part of this signing may have included the offering of gifts—throwing items to the canoeists “fastened to a line” or “tied to a piece of wood” (Beaglehole 1967:78, 826). Most of the accounts agree that the items included one or more spike nails, a piece of red cloth, and some beads. Cook threw a shirt into a canoe that came closer, and one of its occupants tied it around his head “like a Turban” (Beaglehole 1967:1003).

Anderson wrote how at first: “They seem’d afraid to touch these things and put the stick in one end of the canoe without untying them, which might arise from superstition, for Omaee said when they saw us offering them they ask’d something for their [‘E atua] or God” (Beaglehole 1967:826-27). A few moments later, before taking hold of a rope thrown over the ship’s stern, Anderson observes that one of the canoeists “repeated some words with a devout air” (Beaglehole 1967:827). According to Gill (1984:246), they recited a karakia ‘incantation’ to their atua, Mötoro, in order to obtain the spirit power’s protection. Having sought the protection of their atua against these strangers associated with Tangaroa’s domain, the men were more confident.

Gill learned about the subsequent history of some of these items. Mangaia’s Ariki or King, Nūmangātini, gave him two of the beads received that day. They were blue coloured and as big as a large marble. Because of their colour, local people associated the beads with the rangi, that is the sky or space surrounding Mangaia, and called them “‘sky pebbles’” (kirikirirangi or kirikiri-ā-rangi), still the name for beads today (Buse with Taringa 1995:179, Savage 1980:105). Gill explains that this name suggested the beads were “veritable chips of the azure arch which encloses earth and sky” (an allusion to the traditional Mangaian model of the universe) (Gill 1984:271). The beads were highly valued, so much so that those in the possession of a woman called Rimarima were buried with her (Gill 1984:243). Subsequently, one of the spike nails was attached to an “ironwood handle” and transformed into “a bradawl for boring holes”, by means of which “different portions of canoes” were bound together with sennit. It was regarded in Gill’s day as a “relic” commemorating its possessor, Mourua or Kavoro, the warrior leader in the canoe who had received it from Cook (Gill 1984:271).
The shipboard observers provide circumstantial information about Mourua and his companion, whom Gill decades later found out was called Makatu (Gill 1984:271). Mourua evidently took the lead in interacting with the strangers. As they held on to the rope off the stern, Mourua made clear to Ma’i (as reported by Anderson) that they were there under orders: “the people on shore desir’d they would not go on board, at the same time directing them to enquire from whence our ship came and to learn the name of the Captain” (Beaglehole 1967:827). Some of the information Mourua gleaned is reflected in Tioi’s performance: “Tā’au ariki o Avarua /Nō Tu [Tute] ‘oki ē Ma’i tērā ē!” / “A great chief is off Avarua /The ship belongs to Cook and Ma’i” (Gill 1984:258). During subsequent contact with the Mangaians on shore, Cook observed that the warriors complied with Mourua’s instructions: “I judged he must be a person of some consequence, indeed if we understood him right he was the Kings brother” (Beaglehole 1967:79). Years later Gill learned that he was the cousin and “companion” of the then mangaia ‘high chief’, Kirikovi or Tea’ei (Gill 1984:245, 278). These kinship terms suggest that he was Kirikovi’s teina ‘younger brother or cousin’. We can assume he was acting on instructions of his tuakana ‘older brother’ when venturing out to the foreign ships.

The ship observers describe at length Mourua’s finer appearance and his ornamentation, all indicating someone of high status (e.g., Beaglehole 1967:827-28, 1004). Gill found out that the other man was Mourua’s “friend”, Makatu; both were from the dominant ivi ‘tribe’, Ngāriki, who worshipped the atua ‘god’, Mötoro (Gill 1984:323). This ivi resided in the western districts of the island, which probably explains the men’s presence on the western shoreline (Hiroa 1934:106). However, the descriptions of Makatu indicate someone of lesser status, a footsoldier in the service of one of the chiefs, perhaps Mourua’s. Makatu’s mother, Kārua, a woman of consequence in Tepei (or Teipe), a kōpū ‘clan’ of the Tonga’iti ivi, had apparently married someone from Ngāriki (identified by some sources as Terianu or Te Riana [Mamae n.d.: Ikoke 13, Ponga n.d.]). Mourua’s rank explains why he took possession of the European goods and why he did all the talking with Ma’i.

Mangaians made this first contact with these intruders deliberately, intending to learn more of their origins and identity. This initiative engaged members of the Ngāriki ivi who resided in the western districts of the island, suggesting that it was Ngāriki warriors who mustered on the shoreline under their tribal leadership to face the intruders. The European goods may have been unexpected, but once the men had sought their atua’s protection, these items appear to have lost their associations with these manu‘iri, and become the property of particular Mangaians. For example, Mourua’s bradawl was
preserved, as Gill points out “as a relic... not of the giver, Cook, but of his dusky friend”, Mourua, who had demonstrated his courage by engaging with these tangata kē (Gill 1984:271).

Cook remained determined to make a landing on Mangaia, and his persistence provided an occasion for a second transaction of European goods. Around mid-morning, Cook ordered the ships’ boats to sound the coastline for a landing place: “with this View I went in one of them taking with me such things to give the Inhabitents [sic] as I thought would gain their good will” (Beaglehole 1967:79). Gill was convinced that the iron adze head given to Mangaians was one of the items Cook took with him on board the boat (Gill 1984:266). Mourua now confidently boarded Cook’s vessel. With Ma’i acting as interpreter, Cook asked Mourua to show them some landing places. One of them was Avarua, a narrow channel through the reef used by canoes (Gill 1984:254 fn.3). As they approached this entrance, the body of Mangaian warriors still deployed on the western coastline, converged on this area, but Mourua ordered them to stand back (presumably to allow the boats to land if they chose to).

Not everyone complied, and some Mangaians jumped into the sea and swam out to the boats, where the English commentators describe a scrummage as numbers of men now entered the boats: the crew struggled “to prevent them carrying off every thing they could lay their hands upon” (Beaglehole 1967:79). According to one account, four Mangaians entered one boat which pulled away to prevent more boarding. One of these men grabbed “a Paper of Beads” and jumped overboard. Others tried to take firearms “& were with Difficulty Prevented”. Two Mangaians were offered hatchets and “Looking Glasses”, but they only took the latter, suggesting to the crew that “they did not seem to Know the Value of Iron”. The men called these hatchets toki “the same as in New Zealand” (Beaglehole 1967:79 fn.3).

When the boats rowed back to the ships, all the Mangaians save Mourua jumped off. He accompanied Cook to the ship but was very reluctant to board (presumably as he had indicated this to Ma’i earlier because he had been instructed not to by either Kirikovi or other leaders). When he did board, he remained “very uneasy”, and Cook soon had him returned to shore where he was surrounded by the assembly of Mangaian warriors “as if with an eager curiosity to learn what he had seen”. They remained in that position until the ships had lost sight of them (Beaglehole 1967:79-80, 828).
Gill opened his chapter about Cook’s axe by describing for his readers how he almost rejected it when an old man brought him “a bit of old iron”: “I was surprised that he should set store by such rubbish, and desired him to take it away.” But the man persisted: “‘You have been inquiring about Tute’s (Cook’s) visit here. This axe came from Tute; it is the first foreign axe ever seen here. I give it to you as a countryman of his.’” The old man proved to be the axe’s custodian, having safeguarded it for some 50 years, wrapping it in “many folds of tapa”, suggestive of its prestige (Gill 1984:265-66). Though Gill thought the man gifted the axe because an abundance of steel axes had now made it redundant, the caretaker seems in fact to have been motivated to present the axe because Gill and Cook shared a common affiliation to England; in effect, they were connected through a shared English ‘akapapa’anga ‘genealogy’. Recognising its significance at last, Gill presented the item to the British Museum: the insignificant piece of iron now treasured for its historical connections with Cook and his Pacific explorations.

An unknown Mangaian contemporary also provided Gill with the following manuscript about Cook’s toki (Anon. n.d.). The writer began the text with a chant called a pūę that referred to the toki, but for the purposes of this paper I have reversed the order here, so that the chant follows the story about this adze, in effect acting as a kïnaki, ‘complementary relish’, to this tara ta’ito, ‘story from the old times’. The prose narrative and its translation are followed by relevant historical and cultural information regarding persons or events identified in the text.

Text

Tërä te tara i taua toki nei


The toki from Tute’s ship came into the possession of Tea‘ei. That toki became his. Afterwards, Tetonga fetched it from Tea‘ei’s hands in order to carve his bowl, and that toki remained in his hands. Afterwards, Makatu fetched it to
carve his bowl, and it remained with him. Afterwards, Pötiki acquired it, to do his deeds, and that tokī remained with him. Afterwards, Teau acquired it, to do his deeds. Afterwards, Tetonga acquired it, and the tokī came back into Tetonga’s possession for a second time. Afterwards, Kauni’o fetched it from Tetonga, to carve his bowl, and that tokī remained with him.

É muringā‘o’o, tikina atūra e Metuarangia, keiā‘ia mai i roto i te ‘are o Kauni‘o, riro atūra iāia taua tokī nei. I taua tuataua rā i mate ai ‘a Ngakauaria. Nā Teraki i tā i taua tangata rā. É ‘ia mate ‘a Ngakauaria, tē ‘aka’oki rā ‘a Metuarangi i taua tokī rā i roto rāi i te rima o Kauni‘o, kā rua vainga i te tokī i te rima o Kauni‘o. I reira i tikina [a]i e Kaoā, te tokī i keiā‘ia mai ai i roto i te ‘are o Kauni‘o. ‘Aka’oki‘ia atūra e Kaoā, i roto i te rima o Koroa, nā Kaoa [sic] i ‘aka’oki i te tokī i roto i te rima o Koroa, vai atūra te tokī i te rima o Koroa.

Afterwards, (the tokī) was fetched by Metuarangia, stolen from inside Kauni‘o’s house, he took possession of that tokī. In those times, Ngakauaria died. Teraki killed that man. And when Ngakauaria died, Metuarangi returned that tokī into the hands of Kauni‘o for the second time. Then it was fetched by Kaoa, the tokī was stolen from within the house of Kauni‘o. Kaoa returned it into the hands of Koroa, the tokī remaining in Koroa’s hands.

Nō Marokore te mangaia i riro ai te tokī i te rima o Koroa. Ė ‘ia tae i te puruki i Teatuapai, tē vai rāi te tokī i te rima o Koroa. E tae mai i te puruki i Taukuara, tē vai rāi te tokī i te rima o Koroa. E tae i te puruki i Rangi‘ura, tē vai rāi te tokī i te rima rāi o Koroa. Ko te puruki ‘oki ia i ō [?] ai ‘a Koroa, riro atūra i Tava‘enga i te rima o Vaipō mā rātou ‘o Karomatangi mā, no’o atūra i reira.

Marokore, the mangaia, took the tokī from the hands of Koroa. But when it came to the battle at Teatuapai, the tokī remained in Koroa’s hands. Coming to the battle at Taukuara, the tokī still remained in Koroa’s hands. Coming to the battle at Rangi‘ura, the tokī still remained in Koroa’s hands. That is also the battle when it went out of Koroa’s into the hands of Vaipō and the others, and Karomatangi and the others, at Tava’enga, (and) remained there.

‘Ia rongo ‘a Ruru ē, ka ‘aere ‘a Koroa, ē tāmate rakikia e taua aronga rā, tē unga rā i te karere e tiki i ia Koroa, ē ‘aere mai iāia rā. Tē rere maīra Koroa, i nā raro ake i te tai i te ‘aerenga mai, i ‘eke ake ake [sic] i Oneroa e kake mai i Tearatoirau, e pae eke te tau tai, ‘aere atūra i te kāinga i ē Ruru rā. Inārā, ‘ia tae i te kāinga iā Ruru rā, tē karanga [a] ‘o rā Ruru ia Koroa, ka no’o tāua. Tē no’o rā rāua i Veitātei, no’o atūra i reira, kāre atūra i ‘oki i Tava‘enga, ‘ua mau‘ia e Ruru. I reira i riro ai te tokī i te rima o Ruru, vai atūra iāia. Ei muringā‘o’o ‘oki, riro atūra i te rima o Atara, vai atūra taua tokī nei iāia. Ė muringā‘o’o ‘oki, riro atūra i te rima o Pa’a, vai atūra iāia taua tokī nei. Kāre rā i kītea ē, teia ai rā i muringā‘o’o. Ko ‘tira ua tāku ngā’i i kīte Amene.
When Ruru heard that Koroa was going to be defeated by that group, (he) sent a messenger to fetch Koroa, to come to him. Koroa raced there, travelling across through the sea, descending further down at Oneroa and ascending at (the path called) Tearatoirau, where some go down to fish, and proceeding to the home of Ruru. But when (he) arrived at Ruru’s home, Ruru called to Koroa: ‘We shall abide (together).’ They stayed at Veitātei, living there, and did not return to Tava‘enga, (Koroa) being detained by Ruru. Then the *toki* came into the hands of Ruru, remaining with him. Afterwards, (it) came into the hands of Atarau, that *toki* remaining with him. Afterwards, (it) came into the hands of Pa‘a, that *toki* remaining with him. It was not seen after those days. That is the portion that I know. Amen.

**Analysis**

This story confirms Gill’s assertion that the piece of iron passed over during the second transaction between Cook and the Mangaian was quickly taken possession of by the *mangaia* of the day, Tea‘ei, also known as Kirikovi. No doubt the item was either given to him by Mourua or another, or claimed by Tea‘ei as the most senior secular leader of the island. According to Gill, Kirikovi had this iron adze head turned into a *toki*, secured with *ka‘a* ‘sinnet’ to a wooden handle. It was kept wrapped in its protective *tapa* (Gill 1984:265-66). Its initial association with the *mangaia* indicates that from the very outset this item possessed *mana* as a prestigious commodity. The subsequent story of this *toki* confirms that it remained an artefact of great utility and value, the possession of which was prized by various men of rank who endeavoured to get hold of it.

Gill’s information supports the details about the uses to which this *toki* was put in this narrative. He reported that it “was in constant requisition amongst the chief people of the island for preparing smooth blocks of wood, on which their wives and daughters beat out the bark of the paper-mulberry for cloth; also for the finishing off of the wooden troughs which, in native life, answer to our tubs, buckets, and basins” (Gill 1984:266-67). Indeed, the “beautiful finish” of various “troughs” (*’uete* in the text) was ascribed to the use of this iron *toki* (Gill 1984:267). Three men took possession of the *toki* in order to carve *’uete* for themselves: Tetonga, Makatu and Kauni‘o. In addition, Gill says the *toki* was used for making the *tutunga* ‘anvils’ used in the manufacturing of *tapa* (see Hiroa 1944:69). He further understood that the *toki* was employed to make weapons, such as spears and “wooden swords” (Gill 1984:267).

Most of the characters mentioned in this story can be identified: their fuller genealogical details are provided in the Appendix. Almost all were men of rank from the varying kin groups who sought to gain political dominance in the years following Cook’s brief visit. Acquisition of Cook’s *toki* was a visible marker of that power.
Kirikovi, the *mangaia*, was a son of the outstanding warrior leader, Manini, from the Te ‘Akataura *kōpu* of Ngārki. Kirikovi’s mother was one of two sisters, Kurapē‘au and Te Uoro (probably the former), both daughters of the famous Ngāti Vara *mangaia*, Mautara (see Appendix). Under his leadership Ngāti Vara had become a major political player. Thus, Kirikovi was the child of a marriage intended to sustain an alliance between the newly powerful Ngāti Vara and the ancient *ivi* of Ngārki.

Tetonga who took the *toki* from Kirikovi is probably the prominent Ngāti Tāne ancestor of that name. Various genealogical reconstructions (see Appendix) place him as a contemporary of the other men in this account. His Ngāti Tāne grandfather, Te Vaki, was mother’s brother to Mautara, who subsequently provided protection to Te Vaki and other Ngāti Tāne when opposing kin groups sought their destruction. According to some accounts, Tetonga’s father, Taumua-marō-i-tē-rangi-tātāia, was raised amongst Mautara’s own sons (Hiroa 1934:73-74). That Tetonga gained possession of the *toki* twice, both times from important members of Mangaia’s leading tribes, suggests he was ambitious to enhance his *kōpu*’s own standing after many years of living under Ngāti Vara’s protective mantle. This confirms a general understanding that under Mautara’s protection the Ngāti Tāne started to re-establish itself (Hiroa 1934:73-74). Tetonga’s actions show that by the time of Kirikovi’s reign as *mangaia*, the former’s *kōpu* was gaining greater public prominence and was becoming more confident as an independent political player.

Makatu, who obtained the *toki* from Tetonga in order to carve his ‘*uete*, may well have been the companion of Mourua. If the identification is correct then this may indicate that the Ngārki *ivi* was reasserting its control over the *toki* from the upstart Ngāti Tāne.

Pōtiki, who took the *toki* back off Makatu, was another of Mautara’s grandsons, descending from ‘Ikoke’s first marriage (to Pe’ereka, widow of Mautara’s slain second son, Raumea) (see Appendix). There was a family connection between Makatu and Pōtiki, since the former’s mother, Kārua, had been sister-in-law to Raumea and later on became ‘Ikoke’s sixth and last wife (Mamae n.d.: Ikoke 1, Reilly 2003:60-61). Following the death of his childless older brother, Pōtiki had become the eldest living son, a position of great *mana*. He assumed the *mangaia* title following the short reign of Kirikovi’s brother, Pa‘i (who had succeeded his sibling). Thus the acquisition of the *toki* by Pōtiki reflects the shifting of the *mangaia* title from the Ngārki back to Pōtiki’s *kōpu*, Ngāti Vara.

Teau who obtained the *toki* from Pōtiki was a more junior ranking descendant of Mautara, from the fifth son, Takurua (see Appendix). Teau’s actions point to a newly emerging tension developing within the *kōpu* between different *tuakana* and *teina* lines (e.g., Reilly 2003:71-72), each of which was
trying to gain possession of the *toki* from the other as part of a campaign to become the dominant lineage in Ngāti Vara.

Kauni’o, who twice got hold of the *toki* (the first time from Tetonga of Ngāti Tāne), was another member of Ngāti Vara. There are several men by this name, but the likeliest candidate was another of ‘Ikoke’s sons from his second wife, Mika. Kauni’o was only the fourth son of that union and so was somewhat younger than his senior half-brother, Pōtiki. Thus, it is not surprising that in this story Kauni’o appears to compete with Pōtiki’s son, Koroa, for the *toki*. Such inter-generational overlaps highlight the variation in ages that typically existed between half-brothers from different marriages. We know that around this time Ngāti Vara was experiencing tensions and conflict between its *tuakana* and *teina* lines. A major division lay between Koroa and other offspring from the high born Pe’ereka and the children of Mika as well as Mautara’s youngest sons (Reilly 2003:79). In this interpretation, Kauni’o came from a competing genealogical line to Koroa’s. This helps explain why Kaoa stole the *toki* from the former and gave it to the latter.

Kaoa is likely to be the third *ariki nō te tāpora kai* ‘high priest responsible for food’ of that name whom we know held office during Pōtiki’s period as *mangaia* (Hiroa 1934:118). This suggests that these various attempts to take hold of the *toki* probably occurred when Koroa’s father ruled the island. Koroa was being groomed for leadership then, as Gill (1876:206) reports, he “was associated... with his father Potiki in the government of the island”.

The *toki* was first stolen from Kauni’o by an unknown character, Metuarangia. He may have belonged to the *ivi*, Tonga’iti, who had long competed for the *mangaia* title and who were mostly located in the eastern district of Tamarua. This may explain the juxtaposition of his act with the killing of Ngakauaria. The theft of the *toki* appears to coincide with an attempt by Tonga’iti to wrest the *mangaia* title away from Ngāti Vara. This is said to have occurred either at the beginning or at the end of Pōtiki’s reign (Reilly 2003:76). The placement in this story suggests it occurred nearer the termination of that reign.

Gill (1984:267) spelt Ngakauaria as Ngakauvarea and describes him as a “leading warrior” of Tonga’iti. According to Gill’s testimony, Ngakauvarea was slain by Terake while guarding the entrance to the Tonga’iti refuge cave, Tautua (Gill 1984:268-69). Terake is clearly the same character as Teraki. The connection with the *toki* is explained by Gill who learned that Ngakauvarea was actually killed with this iron adze. Gill suggests that others were also killed among the Tonga’iti with this *toki*, including another warrior, Ngutukū (Gill 1984:270). Presumably as a consequence of this defeat, Metuarangi (probably a misspelling of Metuarangia) returned the *toki* back to Kauni’o, suggesting that the Tonga’iti had for the time being given up on regaining their previous political dominance.
The loss of the toki to Marokore reflects the loss of the mangaia title at this time from Pōtiki’s line. The attempt by Tonga’iti to seize political power had evidently weakened Pōtiki’s own mana as leader in the eyes of his kōpū, Ngāti Vara. As a result, the title was taken by his kinsman, Marokore. The Tonga’iti victims were used as human sacrifices to inaugurate this new reign (Reilly 2003:76). Marokore was closely related to Pōtiki, both of them being descended from Pe’ereka’s two marriages into Ngāti Vara (first to Raumea, and following his death, to his younger brother, ‘Ikoke) (see Appendix).

Teatuapai is the name of a battlefield in the district of Ivirua, on the northern side of Mangaia, where Koroa and his allies beat Marokore’s army (Reilly 2003:77-78). Thus Koroa’s possession of the toki at this time coincides with his assumption of the mangaia title. Taukuara is another battlefield, in the district of Kei’ā, though it is usually understood as the occasion when Pa’ī had defeated his brother, Kirikovi, and taken the mangaia title (Reilly 2003:73). At Rangi’ura, in the southern district of Veitātei, Koroa, the mangaia, was defeated by another kinsman, Makitaka, the medium of Mōtoro (the latter’s mother was Tetonga’s sister according to some authorities (see Appendix)). While Ngāti Vara retained the supreme chiefly title, the toki itself came into the hands of a group led by Vaipō and Karomatangi.

Vaipō and Karomatangi were or subsequently became kairanga nuku ‘sub-district chiefs’ of the sub-districts Ta’iti and Maro respectively, in the north-western district of Tava’enga (Hiroa 1934:83, 129). Vaipō was a member of an emergent kōpū, the Ngāti Mana‘une, who in an alliance with Ngāti Tāne and under the overall political leadership of Pangemiro (of Ngāti Mana‘une and Ngāriki), were to obtain the mangaia title from Makitaka (Reilly 2003:78-82; see Appendix for genealogy). Thus the iron toki is again taken by those who were shortly to dominate the island’s polity.

Mana‘une, the eponymous ancestor of Ngāti Mana‘une, had been adopted into Ngāti Vara by the older Mautara and served alongside this leader’s sons; hence he would have been a similar age to ‘Ikoke and his brothers (Gill 1984:193-97). Thus his grandson, Pangemiro, was probably of a similar age as Koroa or Makitaka, whereas Vaipō must have been quite a young man at this time (see Appendix). We know that Vaipō fought with Pangemiro at Ara’eva around 1821 (Reilly 2003:82-85). Vaipō’s taking of the toki might therefore be interpreted as the act of a youth seeking to establish a name for himself among his kōpū.

After Rangi’ura, the defeated Koroa received an invitation from Ruru to live with him. The story relates how Koroa, who appears to have then resided in Tava’enga, made his way through Oneroa, on the seaside in Kei’ā, to Ruru’s residence in Veitātei, parts of which contained the ancestral homelands of the Ngāti Vara. At that time Ruru came into the possession of
the toki. The adze then passed to Atarau, and finally to Pa’a. At that point it disappears from public notice, presumably until its custodian approached Gill. These ancestors were all members of Ngāti Vara. The Ruru who best fits the story’s role was Atarau’s second son. Atarau and his father, Rautoa, were both first-born sons descended from Mika’s marriage to ‘Îkoke and therefore held an important place among the descendants of this union (see Appendix). Rautoa had been a prominent member of Ngāti Vara in his day (close to Pōtiki and other leaders), was distinguished as a worshipper of Ngāti Vara’s old atua, Tāne (also the atua worshipped by Ngāti Tāne), and a friend of important Ngāriki leaders such as Kirikovi (he died along with his fishing companion, Mourua, when the latter was slain by Ngāriki assassins) (Hiroa 1934:70, Reilly 2003:74-76). Ruru presumably felt compassion for Koroa’s situation and invited the defeated senior kinsman to come and live with him in their tribal lands. Pa’a was Ruru’s elder brother. Hence the toki was finally lost from Koroa’s line and ended up among the senior descendants from the second marriage of his ancestor, ‘Îkoke.

Song

The following pūē ‘chant’ is associated with the story about Cook’s toki because it refers to certain events and ancestors found in the prose narrative. Gill has a version of it in his own history of this adze, though there are a number of variant lines (Gill 1984:272-73). The chant was composed by Tumea about her father, Ngakauaria (Ngakauvarea in Gill’s account), the Tonga’iti warrior killed by Ngāti Vara opponents using Cook’s toki. Gill (1984:273) described the song as “a specimen of the ballad poetry of olden times”, though it seems more like a lament, filled as it is with expressions of the daughter’s grief at her father’s death. Since she had married into Ngāti Vara she was not able to be with her father and could only try and supply him secretly with food (Gill 1984:274). No doubt her enforced separation added to her pain and sorrow and explains her haunting opening lines, in Gill’s translation, “A daughter is seeking for her cave-dwelling father. /Where, oh, where is Ngakauvarea?”

Pūē nō Ngakauaria
Nā Tumea

1  Nā metua no’o rua i ketu te metua
    Tei’ia rā Ngakauaria?
    Tei te ana o Tautua vai ake i reira.
Seek for the parent, the cave dwelling parent
Where is Ngakauaria?
Lying there at the cave of Tautua.

2  Vai ake i reira, tikina rā te rima
    Retia mai, mau’ia ē,
    Paria rā e te toki pa’i ē!
Lying there, taken by the hand
Dragged, taken hold of
Cut down by the ship’s adze!
3 Te toki pa‘i ē, nō‘ou ‘ua rava
   Te tokotoko i raka atu
   ‘O te toa ‘ua te tua iā‘au,
   The ship’s adze, certainly only for you
   The weapon (literally, stick) that caused it
   Only the warrior laid you low.

   Kāku ‘oki te metua ē,
   tama e Ngakauaria
   Pushed by Ka‘arau
   Kāku was also the parent,
   Ngakauaria the son,
   Carried down below.

5 Kavea rā i raro, ‘o ‘ai te tarava ai,
   Tō vaka e rava [a]i, e rave ‘uāke,
   O mātou tokotoru ‘ua ē,
   Carried below, who will fill
   You boat [i.e. army] so there is enough, (and) save
   We three alone, there is much talk (?)
   ‘Akairia ake koe rā!
   You are hung up (or, You are mourned)!

6 ‘Akairia ake koe rā
   Kopunga i raro, e naoe rā te karanga ē,
   ‘Aere mai ‘ā puruki, ‘āriāna ‘ia karo
   You are hung up (or, You are mourned)
   (A) burial ceremony below, keep shouting,
   Come here (and) fight, wait a while,
   that (we) may look at the light,
   ‘Avaiki was afraid.

7 ‘Avaiki ē, ‘ā reru rā te tāki,
   ‘ā kave rā te kura,
   ‘Ei tiki ki te rua ē,
   Do not remain,
   ‘Avaiki, dance the war dance,
   carry the request,
   To fetch to the cave,
   what is the talk (in) the cave,
   (you) will certainly die there.

8 ‘Ā mate rava i reira,
   ‘ua ruma te a‘ia ‘i,
   Tūatu ka ‘aere tātou,
   (You) will certainly die there,
   the evening is dark,
   Stand up, let us go,
   the parent has wept
   In the resting place.

9 Te vairanga ‘ua ē
   ‘Oro i Poutoa, ta‘u mai
   I te pakaraurangi.
   The resting place,
   Run away to Poutoa, and cook there,
   The pakaraurangi [Gill, wild leaves].

10 Te paka raurangi, e tatari te metua
    ‘Āore e tā‘ia, e voro
    E tiaki nā te ara.
    The wild leaves, (where) the parent waits,
    (He) is not killed by hunger (?)
    (He) guards the pathway.

11 E tiaki nā te ara, ‘ua pā te rongo
    ‘Ua pau te puruki,
    ‘ua ‘inga Ngakauaria
    (He) guards the pathway, the news is heard
    The battle has ended,
    Ngakauaria has fallen
    (He) is still lying there in Tamarua.
The Two Iron Axes of Mangaia

12  Tē vai rāi i Tamarua,
vairanga kino ē,
Vairanga tau rere ē, e taeake ē!
E Tuturi i rave ake ai?

Still lying there in Tamarua,
a bad resting place
Lying exposed, o kinsman,
O Tuturi, why not take (him) up?

13  I rave ake ai rā, tikina retia ē,
Te aronga e tangi te tua'ine ē,
Paraakere i vai ake ai.

Take him up, fetch (him), drag (him),
The group weeps (for) the sister,
Paraakere who is left behind.

In Verse 2 Tumea directly refers to the weapon that killed her father: “Paria rā e te tokī pa’ī ē!” (‘Cut down by the ship’s adze’). Whereas Gill’s translation (“And slain with the white man’s axe”) highlights the adze’s link to the foreign Papa’ā ‘Europeans’, Tumea’s text directs our attention more specifically to its origins from a visiting ship. Verse 5 alludes to the three Tonga’iti killed by this tokī: “O mātou tokotoru ‘ua ē”. In addition to Ngakauaria, they were Uruata and Ngutukū (also known as Va’arire (see Gill 1876:310 fn. 1)). Ka’arau (in verse 4) was a close relation of these warriors. Because his wife belonged to the other side, she was able to convey warnings to him so that he could hide within the cave out of harm’s way (Gill 1984:274). The line may suggest that he encouraged the others to take the fateful guard duty: Gill (1984:272) translates it, “Ka’arau saved his own skin”. According to Gill (1984:274), verse 7 refers to a discussion in which Ngakauvarea proposed to the besieged people that they die fighting, rather than be picked off individually, but the heavily outnumbered party refused battle. Verse 9 refers to Tumea’s efforts to secretly feed her father. Poutoa, an area in Tamarua, is not far from the cave. Here Tumea collected various wild leaves to cook for him (Gill 1984:274). In the last line, the manuscript song refers to Paraakere, the youngest daughter of Ngutukū (Gill 1876:312), whereas in Gill’s version that name is replaced by Kuraka’au, Ngākauaria’s wife (and the daughter of Mourua).

* * *

Whereas The Axe emphasises the theme of radical change caused by external agents, the Mangaian accounts given to Gill suggest that Tute’s tokī and other commodities were quickly re-presented by the Mangaian people themselves as items associated with their own brave and daring ancestors, such as Mourua or Kirikovi. Cook as much as Ma’i remained part of a vaka manu’iri ‘boat of guests’, remembered locally as entities within a Mangaian view of the world. The story about the tokī demonstrates how it became a valued commodity of great prestige, much sought after by those who aspired to obtain greater mana. The passage of the adze from one holder to another
often stands for the waning of one man’s mana and the waxing of another’s. Typical narrative themes appear in this account. There is the ambition of the young man who aspires to make a personal name for himself among his senior kinsmen, the contestation between kōpū each of which hope to gain secular power, or the inter-generational struggles between competing genealogical lines within a kin group. For them all, possession of this unique iron toki served to mark in a very public sense their claim to positions of high status and prestige within the island’s polity. The toki itself had qualities that contributed to its undoubted fame and even notoriety amongst Mangaians: its origins from manu’iri associated with the domain of Tangaroa, its transformation into a toki by the mangaia, Kirikovi, its use as a weapon to slay warriors, and not least its hardy metal which created aesthetically pleasing artefacts. These elements must have ensured that for generations of leaders, or those who aspired to become leaders, this adze was a thing of much mana and therefore worth the getting.

Curnow’s play reflects on the dangers of change wrought by an unknown gift from the sea. For Mangaian writers, Cook’s iron adze head was refashioned into a locally-made toki and became a part of their own world. Nonetheless, Curnow’s (1972:8) insight that it is the “stain of blood that writes an island story” was true of Mangaia. Tonga’iti warriors, such as Ngakauaria, remembered in the song by his grieving daughter, Tumea, died from blows delivered by a toki pa’i ‘ship axe’, a weapon gifted by strangers from Tangaroa’s dominion. If the motivations of the Tonga’iti and other possessors of this toki reflected the age-old pursuit of mana then the means to achieve such power and prestige were indeed beginning to change. Ngakauaria and his compatriots were slain, in Curnow’s (1972:86) words, by a foreign “gift ... dipped in filth” and possessing “powers of destruction”. By Gill’s time, this piece of iron had come to seem a beginning point for the longer term incorporation of Mangaia into an English world, as represented by the London Missionary Society. Tute’s toki thus fulfils the predictions of Curnow’s concluding chorus: “Who wields the axe? / Time, and a hand unknown / Set living and dead adrift, by sea-winds blown” (Curnow 1972:88).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Jenifer Curnow who first told me about her husband’s play, then kindly loaned me a personal copy of his work, and read and approved my use of his text. Thanks too to Kate de Courcy, Manuscript Collections Librarian, Auckland City Libraries/Tāmaki Pātaka Kōrero, for giving permission to quote the anonymous manuscript, “Tērā te tara i taua toki nei”. Judith Huntsman and the Journal’s readers, as usual, have provided much sensible editorial advice which has helped clarify the text. Particular thanks to Terry Sturm who provided the items written by John Pocock about The Axe.
NOTES

1. Several ships’ journals record interesting fragments of the encounter with Mangaia. The ones used in this discussion are James Cook’s journal (Beaglehole 1967:78-80), William Anderson’s “A Journal of a voyage made in His Majesty’s sloop Resolution” (Beaglehole 1967:826-30), David Samwell’s “Some Account of a voyage to the South Seas” (Beaglehole 1967:1003-4), and Munford 1963:22-23.

2. All further references to Tioi’s drama come from Gill 1984:254-58. The English translations in quotation marks are by Gill, those without are my own. Tioi’s text has been corrected to indicate long vowels and glottal stops.

3. Cook seems to be referring to the *tiputa* when he records that some Mangaians wore “pieces of coloured cloth like a sash, which passing round the neck behind was crossed upon the breast and then collected round the waist like a belt” (Beaglehole 1967:81).

4. Te Rangi Hiroa (1944:103) thought these headdresses were probably composed of a wooden framework covered by tapa and feathers.


6. Makatu’s membership of the *ivi*, Ngāriki, indicates that his father must have been from that tribe. The Mangaiian custom of *tu’a tamariki* ‘sharing children’ ensured that offspring from a marriage between partners from different tribes were shared between the parental kin groups. In Makatu’s case he was allocated to his father’s *ivi* and no doubt was dedicated at birth at the *marae* of the Ngāriki *atua*, Mötoro, located in Kei’a on the western side of Mangaia (see Hiroa 1934:97-99).

7. Word divisions, paragraphing, capitalisation, punctuation, glottal stops and macrons have been corrected to accord with modern usage based on the following authorities: Buse with Taringa 1995, Savage 1980, Shibata 1999.

8. This sentence is an approximate translation of the Mangaiian text. The Mangaiian phrase “tāmate rakikia” is difficult to translate accurately but clearly refers to Koroa’s military defeat at Rangi’ura (see Reilly 2003:78-80).

9. Taumua-maro-i-te-rangi-tätäia was the product of a late union intended to sustain a Ngāti Tāne bloodline. Taumua was therefore around the age of Mautara’s sons with whom he grew up (see Hiroa 1934:74).

10. No sources identify the sister of Kārua who was married to Raumea, but presumably it was in fact his only wife, Pe’ereka. Raumea’s older brother, Te Uanuku, also married into the Teipe, a Tonga’iti *kōpū* (his wife, Tangitoa, was the sister of Teipe’s leader, ‘Akatara). Kārua, and presumably Pe’ereka, were their cousins (Gill 1984: 161). If this speculation is correct, then Pōtiki, a son of Pe’ereka and ‘Ikoke, would have been a cousin to Makatu. Ngāti Vara, the kin group of both Te Uanuku and Raumea, had long standing ties with the Tonga’iti; for example, Mautara’s maternal grandmother, Moeau, was a high born Tonga’iti woman. Her name was given to one of the daughters of Pe’ereka and her second husband, ‘Ikoke. This may also point to Pe’ereka’s own connections with that *ivi* (Hiroa 1934:59, Māmāe n.d.: Ikoke 1).
11. This Paraakere may be the second wife of Va‘arua, the first born son of Ngārā, who was Mautara’s eighth and last son. This Paraakere would have lived around the time of Kauni‘o, Koroa and Marokore, who were important actors in the events surrounding the death of her father (Mamae n.d.: Ngara 1). Given Tumea’s marriage into Ngāti Vara, it seems that a number of Tonga‘iti women may have been married to men from the former kōpū, an acknowledgement both of a tradition of such intermarriage between these two groups and of Ngāti Vara’s political dominance at this time.

REFERENCES


Ponga, ‘Akaiti, n.d. Genealogy Book. Manuscript 171. Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. This is a more recent typescript copy from the same original source as Mamae n.d.


**APPENDIX**

The following genealogical tables depicting the various holders of the *toki* come from the following sources: Hiroa 1934:59, 75, 77, 79, and Mamae n.d. Pangemiro’s descent from Pute is based on Gill’s statement that Kino was the former’s brother (see Gill 1885: 227). The final genealogical chart is based on a statement attached to Mamae n.d. (according to Te Rangi Hiroa, written in an old Bible by Mamae). Note: * = same person repeated in genealogy.

![Genealogical Chart](chart.png)

Figure 1. Connections between ancestors of Ngāti Mana‘une, Ngāti Tāne, Ngāti Vara and Tonga‘iti.
Figure 2. Ngāti Vara and connections associated with Cook’s *toki*. 
Figure 3. Another genealogy for Tetonga and Makitaka.