A RECENTLY REVEALED TINO AITU FIGURE FROM
NUKUORO ISLAND, CAROLINE ISLANDS, MICRONESIA

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This article has been prompted by the unexpected emergence of yet another, previously unknown, large Nukuoro figure into the public domain. This figure is now in the private collection of Mina and Ed Smith of San Diego and is currently on loan for display at the De Young Museum, San Francisco. In his detailed and extensive 1994 survey of all known Nukuoro figures, Bernard de Grunne (1994) listed 30 figures, including those in museum collections and private collections. His listing (referred to herein as BdG) also included a very wide range of figures, from large, pre-1877, possibly stone-carved, major cult figures to small crude modern curios made for the tourist trade. The unexpected appearance of such a large, important and hitherto completely unknown Nukuoro figure has prompted some discussion among museum curators and private collectors regarding the authenticity and age of this figure. This report provides an account of the provenance of this figure and addresses those concerns of the figure’s age and authenticity. The numbers, cultural and religious significance, and the deployment of these figures in the temples on Nukuoro have been described in some detail by Kubary (1900), Eilers (1934) and Volprecht (1968) among others. Therefore, there is no need to rehearse this information except to note where this information is relevant to understanding the provenance of the Smith figure.

THE SMITH FIGURE

Description
The wood is breadfruit (Artocarpus sp.) as identified by Kew Botanic Gardens in April 2000. Kew was apparently unable to be more definite about the species identification of the breadfruit. In the documentation prepared for the sale of this figure, the wood was named as Artocarpus incisus but on whose authority is unknown. In her study of the Kawe figure in Auckland Museum, Davidson (1968: 77) suggested that the wood of Kawe “is probably breadfruit (Artocarpus incisus)”. However, subsequent to her publication, Davidson received a report on a sample of wood from Kawe from the New Zealand Forest Research Institute which stated that the timber was a hardwood (dicotyledon) which could not be matched among their several hundred samples. This ruled out the possibility that it could be one of the following species known to occur on Nukuoro: Artocarpus incisus, Barringtonia
Figure 1. Male figure in Smith Collection, San Diego. Photographs: Scott McCue, courtesy of De Young Museum, San Francisco.
speciosa, *Calophyllum inophyllum*, *Erythrina indica* or *Terminalia catappa*. Consequently, Davidson has suggested (pers. comm. 19 August, 2008) that Kawe may have been carved from a hardwood drift timber that had arrived from New Guinea, Indonesia or the Philippines.

The wood of the Smith figure has been subjected to two radiocarbon 14 dating procedures, apparently from samples taken between the feet by Wayne Heathcote.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lab. No.</th>
<th>CRA</th>
<th>$\delta^{13}C$</th>
<th>AD Range</th>
<th>Probability</th>
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<tr>
<td>ZURICH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETH-21938</td>
<td>160 ± 40</td>
<td>-28.7 ± 1.1</td>
<td>1667-1789</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1790-1825</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1826-1888</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1909-1954</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARIS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETH 23799</td>
<td>180 ± 45</td>
<td>-26.7 ± 1.1</td>
<td>1656-1823</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1830-1885</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1911-1955</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both sets of results were calibrated with the CalibETH programme (*Radiocarbon* 34(3): 483-92, 1992). In addition to recognising that these possible dates refer only to the age of the wood and not the time of figure production, Carbon 14 dates are notoriously difficult to interpret for items of relatively recent date. As Dr Georges Bonani concluded in his report, “Unfortunately, the age is too small to give more precise information about the true age ranges”.4

At 174cm in height, the Smith figure (Fig. 1) is considerably shorter than Kawe, the Nukuoro figure in Auckland Museum and the tallest known, at 217cm. But after Kawe, the Smith figure is the next tallest of all the other Nukuoro figures. Its width at shoulders is 45cm and greatest depth is 30cm. The figure has a long columnar neck, round head with pointed chin, deep chest volume with a horizontal ridge where the shoulders meet the chest, sturdy arms with flared hands, a recessed genital area, protruding buttocks, subtle lumps representing knees which are slightly flexed, and large square feet with vertical grooves marking the toes. The nose is shaped by a horizontal cut below with two nostril holes. A subtle naturalistic ear is depicted on the true
right side of the head. Tattoo is represented on the shoulders by grooving and incised lines. Dark pigment has been applied over the shoulders and down to the horizontal chest ridge. Other areas, especially on the left buttock and thigh and other parts of the back, have faded and faint yellow coloration which may be the result of anointing with turmeric and coconut oil. The surface has been smoothed and polished but is now much stressed by abrasions, impacts, scratches, cracks, decay and insect damage. There are borer holes around the decay-damaged areas on both arms. Surface scratches run in many random unrelated directions. Stress cracks following the grain penetrate deep into the timber, some leading to subsequent decay.

Provenance
One document describing the provenance of this figure is available. This is a handwritten note in ink on lined paper that was provided on request to a prospective purchaser in July 1997 by Matt (Mattie) Poole of Auckland. The transcribed text is as follows:

Father [-] Percy Matthew Davidson Poole
1912 Based in Sydney.
Worked for South Seas Evangelical Mission who had plantations at Bundaberg, Aust.
He was engaged in recruiting labour (native), when the natives finished their contract indenture they were taken back to where they were recruited from. He left them and got a job with the government on the Belama [?] going around the Solomon group taking the commissioner Mr Workman and punitive expeditions if there was any trouble with the natives.
In about 1920 he left govt employ and was thinking about setting up a plantation (coconut).
The [My?] mother did not tell me much about him. The mother returned to Auckland to live with her sister. Quite a lot of his gear she gave away. There were [a] lot of spears which she gave to a man interested in that sort of thing, mainly Solomon Islands. He [presumably the man who took the spears] used to make and refurbish eiderdown quilts from Upper Queen Street [Auckland]. I think that he was in the coast guard.
The mother did not tell me anything [about] the deal with J. Young about going into partnership in a plantation, was going to buy all his gear but it fell through before it was completed as he died.
All that was left was two large figures and the small stuff.
He was born in Nelson, NZ. He died before I was born. Died about October 1920. I was born 1 Feb 1921.
July 1997
Matt Poole.
At that time, Mr Matt (Mattie) Poole was aged in his mid-70s and living in Auckland. He died a short while later. He had no living descendants, so there is no possibility of further information from that source. His letter is the work of an elderly person of limited education, making it difficult to understand the detailed sequence of events. In March 1920, that is while Percy Poole was still alive, a Miss Lillian Poole of Auckland, presumably Percy’s daughter, donated 31 artefacts (AM 8891-8903) from Malaita in the Solomon Islands to the Auckland Museum.

There are no known photographs showing this Nukuoro figure, apparently one of “two large figures” in the possession of the Poole family, said to have been owned by James Lyle Young. Percy Poole apparently did have a camera and collected photographs of the Solomon Islands and other places during his employment in the islands but none of the surviving photographs cover any ethnographic specimens of note.

As reported by Matt Poole, his father Percy Poole was associated with James Lyle Young and planned to go into partnership with him. They had shared similar life and employment experiences in the Pacific and were then both living in Auckland. These overlapping periods in their life histories need to be examined in more detail in order to determine the time when the Smith figure might have been collected and when it could have been transferred from Young to Poole.

**JAMES LYLE YOUNG**

James Lyle Young was a remarkable Pacific character whose amazing life experiences across the full breadth of the Pacific have not yet been fully documented, although some of his voluminous and detailed diaries have survived (Langdon 1968). Born in Ireland on 4 July 1849, James moved with his family to Australia in the 1850s. As an adventurous young man, Young left his home at Kyneton, Victoria in February 1865 to work on farms in Victoria and New South Wales. In June 1870 he left Melbourne for Fiji where he spent the next five years. He left Fiji about April 1875 on his first trading voyage, subsequently spending much of the next year in Samoa.

On 25 May 1876 Young left Apia for Ebon as a trading agent for Thomas Farrell. The next few years of his Pacific travels were concentrated in Micronesia. He visited or lived on many of the islands: Ebon, Butaritari, Mille, Majuro, Arno, Jaluit, Kili, Namorik, Yap, Guam, Ponape, Rota, Saipan, Tinian, Lamotrek, Kusaie and Nukuoro, where he nearly drowned in November 1879. During these years of 1877 to 1881 he made the acquaintance of people such as Kubary, Cozens and Rev. E.T. Doane of the Boston Mission, all names associated with the collecting of _tino aitu_ figures from Nukuoro. Young clearly had many opportunities to collect such figures for himself.
Between mid-1881 and 1882, with travels to San Francisco, Young established himself as a manager of trading firms at Tahiti. From 1882 to 1911 he made nearly 100 sea voyages in the eastern Pacific, including Pitcairn and Easter Island, and between San Francisco and New Zealand. He married Mary Stringer at Pape’ete on 23 August 1884. Young eventually moved to Auckland in 1904, where he became the Managing Director of Henderson and MacFarlane, and continued to travel constantly to Tahiti and San Francisco. He was a founder member of the Polynesian Society in 1892. In 1909 he donated two Tahitian model canoes to Auckland Museum and in 1915 a large stone bowl from Eastern Polynesia and a large stone head from Easter Island. In later life he moved back to Australia, dying there at Warren, New South Wales in 1929.

1877 to 1878: A Period of Intense Collecting on Nukuoro

Metal tools had been introduced into Nukuoro as early as 1830 by Captain Benjamin Morrell (de Grunne 1994: 28) and probably earlier by other visitors. No doubt the new tools were put to good use in carving wooden tino aitu figures and utilitarian items. Visiting though not landing at Nukuoro in June 1874, the missionary Rev. E.T. Doane of the Boston Mission reported: “Idols carved from wood are common here, a very large one being in their temple” (Doane 1874: 205). Kubary (1900: 53) explained how “[t]he wood idols te tino aitu must from time to time be renewed, since many, especially those made from breadfruit, become decayed and collapse. Such old idols are called wai soni and are kept in the temples.” Also according to Kubary, each clan had its own gods and temples multiplying the actual number of wooden figures on the island at any one time. The god Sope alone had six wooden figures dedicated to him in one temple.

These comments explain how such a large number of wooden figures were available to be collected by passing Europeans, especially in the short period of 1877 to 1878. Obviously, this must have been the time when the traditional Nukuoro religion and ancestor reverence was losing its hold in the face of European pressures. Doane (1874: 205) reported the presence of a trader on Nukuoro as early as 1874. There even seems to have been a spirit of competition for the best and largest figures among the small group of Kubary, Cozens, the American missionaries and James Lyle Young.

In 1877, Kubary was at Nukuoro on his second visit. Approximately 11 figures, mostly now in German collections, can be traced back to that visit. These are listed by De Grunne (1994) as 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 16, 22, 23, 24, and 25. This high number of mostly large figures probably indicates that Kubary had the resources at his disposal to outdo the other collectors. It is
also testimony to the presence of many figures that Nukuoro people were prepared to trade. A Nukuoro figure (now in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Number 7814, BdG 15) was sent by an unnamed person to American missionary A.A. Sturgess at Ponape on 3 December 1878. The Rev. E.T. Doane collected a small figure (BdG 19) at Nukuoro sometime between 1860 and 1880.

This may also be the time that Cozens obtained the Kawe figure (BdG 1), although he did not present it to Auckland Museum until October 1878. There has been much discussion about the suggestion that Cozens obtained his figure after Kubary had already negotiated its acquisition on Nukuoro but this is still inconclusive. There is even some doubt that Cozens actually obtained his figure on Nukuoro itself. Investigations of the identity of the ships that Cozens travelled on and their itineraries have not resolved these questions.

*The Artefact Collection of James Lyle Young*

When Young moved to Auckland in 1904 he either brought his artefact collection with him or had already been assembling it in Auckland. In September 1920 Mr. J. Allan Thomson, the Director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington, was requested by W.A. Judd of the Bishop Museum to provide a valuation of the collection. He arrived at a round figure of 2000 pounds, a figure that the Bishop Museum subsequently accepted.

A detailed catalogue of the collection, compiled by Young on 23 August 1920, was supplied to Thomson for his valuation process. Most of the items in the collection had been collected in Tahiti and Easter Island with a few from the Marquesas Islands, Moʻorea, Huahine, Borabora, Makatea, Maupiti, Raiʻatea, the Tuamotu Islands, Mangareva and the Cook Islands, reflecting the later years of his business dealings in Eastern Polynesia. However, some other items from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, the Gilbert, Marshall and Caroline Islands, and New Caledonia show that he had been collecting artefacts from the first years of his Pacific career in Micronesia. Among these are Numbers 235 and 236 which are described as “wooden images from Nukuoro Island” with the date 1878, which can only mean the year that Young obtained them. He recorded the name of these figures as “Te Hata o Tui Tapu”, explaining that the name signified “Likeness or shadow of the sacred king”.

These are the only independent records that document Young actually collecting *tino aitu* figures on Nukuoro in 1878, and both of them can now be accounted for in museum collections. Bishop Museum figures B 3581 (BdG 17) and B 3582 (BdG 21) were purchased from Young in 1920 by the Museum, as part of his collection for a total price of 2000 pounds.
Dating the Collection of the Smith Figure

Young certainly had many opportunities to collect tino aitu figures on Nukuoro during his years working in Micronesia and his collection documentation proves that he did in fact collect two figures in 1877. However, Young may have visited Nukuoro in later years or, with his extensive Pacific business contacts, he may have obtained the Smith figure at any time later during his business career.

For some reason he must have kept the Smith figure out of the sale catalogue that he prepared in August 1920. The most likely explanation is that he had already given it to Percy Poole, perhaps as a straight gift or possibly as part of the partnership that he was setting up with Poole. Percy Poole died in October 1920, therefore Young must have left it with him sometime before that date. It has now been shown that it is not possible to say exactly when Young obtained the Smith figure, except that it must have been between 1877 and 1920. From the information assembled above about the 1877 to 1878 period of intense figure collecting on Nukuoro, all the indications and probabilities are that Young also obtained the Smith figure in 1878. This date accords well with the size and age appearance of the Smith figure.

From the recorded date of his death, this figure must have been in the possession of Percy Poole in Auckland before October 1920. However, the date when Young first brought it to New Zealand is unknown. It could have been brought to Auckland by Young along with the rest of his artefact collection at anytime from 1904 until 1920.

THREE CATEGORIES OF NUKUORO FIGURES

Most noticeable among the variable distinctive features displayed by these figures are the presence or absence of Nukuoro-style male tattoo on the shoulders, the presence or absence of Nukuoro-style female tattoo on the pubic area, the presence or absence of female breasts, the presence or absence of a vulva. Of secondary distinction is the presence or absence of a projection at the lower apex of the genital triangle which may be interpreted as the representation of a penis.

These gender markers become important in evaluating these figures and their relationships. Without any special pleading or ambiguities, these features immediately establish three categories of Nukuoro figures: female, male and indeterminate gender. Other distinctive features, such as facial details and hand shapes, could be charted but their occurrence does not establish clear categories in the same unequivocal way as do the gender markers.

Traditional Nukuoro tattoo for both males and females has been described by Kubary (1900: 80). These were cut with a small “fork” of tortoise shell struck with a small mallet. Tattooing was said to be obligatory for the women
and was done during the course of an elaborate series of rituals over several
days in association with food offerings to the gods and other fertility rituals.
The female pattern was a small triangle on the mons veneris with the point
facing downwards.

The male tattoo pattern is a series of simple linear designs on the shoulders
and upper chest, and some simplified compositional features shared by other
Polynesian Outlier male tattoo patterns. According to Kubary (1900: 80) the
application of these was constrained by the same “tapu” as applied to women’s
tattoo. For these reasons, while female tattoo was widely practiced, male
tattoo was very seldom undertaken. With female tattoo hidden from general
sight by clothing and male tattoo limited in occurrence, it is no surprise that
Dumont d’Urville, visiting Nukuoro in December 1838, while praising their
physical appearance, made no mention of tattoo (1843: 117). His colleague
Roquemaurel (d’Urville 1843: 307) even stated categorically that the people
of Nukuoro did not practice tattoo.

Male and female tattoo patterns are indicated on the wooden figures
by simple deep incised or grooved lines, mostly straight, but occasionally
forming a ring around the lower neck. The tattoo does not seem to have been
emphasised or picked out by any applied pigment but this may have been
lost by the time the figures were collected.

The Female Figures
Considering the figures with regard to their gender indications, most rare are
those with obvious female breasts and vulva indicated. Table 1 lists all of the
known figures displaying these features.

The classic example of this category is Kawe (Fig. 2, now in the Auckland
Museum, Registration 38740), the largest of all Nukuoro figures. Kawe also
has extensive incised and grooved patterns around the genital area, apparently
representing the standard Nukuoro style female tattoo (Fig. 3). No other
figures seem to have such extensive female genital tattooing.

Table 1. Figures with female gender markers.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Registration</th>
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<th>Height</th>
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<th>Vulva</th>
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<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>AM38740</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>217 cm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>MI 2084</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>44 cm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leipzig</td>
<td>MI 2083</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>36 cm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>?</td>
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Another figure (Fig. 4) with clear indications of breasts and vulva is a small figure probably collected in 1877 by Kubary for the Godeffroy Museum (see Mi 2084 in Eilers 1934: 277, Abb. 199). This figure was later owned by Patricia Withofs of London until it was sold in June 1987 to a private collector at Sothebys in London. It was listed as Number 16 by Bernard de Grunne (1994). Despite being much smaller than Kawe, this figure has the

Figure 2. Kawe figure in Auckland Museum 38740. Photo: Auckland Museum.
Figure 3. Representation of pubic female tattoo on Kawe, Auckland Museum 38740. Photo: R. Neich.

Figure 4. Female figure collected by Kubary (BdG 16). Formerly Leipzig Museum Mi 2084. After Eilers 1934: 277, Abb. 199. Photo: Courtesy of Patricia Withofs.
same definite gender markers as Kawe and was most likely collected by Kubary at the same time as all his others. A third figure with indications of female breasts is in the Leipzig Museum (Mi 2083, BdG 24), illustrated by Eilers (1934: 277, Abb. 198). Therefore, all three definite female figures were collected in that 1877 period of rapid dispersal of Nukuoro figures. The last two have round bases with no feet delineated, which may suggest that Kawe also had a similar base before decay removed it.

Figure 5. [left] Male figure in Berlin Museum VI 46 934 (BdG 2). Photo: Courtesy of Markus Schindlbeck, Berlin.

Figure 6. [right] Male figure in Hamburg Museum E 1894 (BdG 3). After Eilers 1934: 278, Abb. 201.
The Male Figures

Of those figures with clear indications of male gender five stand out, among them the Smith figure. The prime indicators of male gender are the male tattoo representations on the front and/or rear shoulders and upper arms. A secondary indicator of male gender is the projection of the inverted genital triangular area into a pointed appendage which can reasonably be interpreted as a representation of a penis. This appendage occurs only rarely on any other figures.

The first three (Figs 1, 5, 6) of these seven male figures are also distinguished by the blackened pigmentation applied to the shoulders above the breast line. In the case of the Hamburg figure E 1894 and the Smith figure, this blackened pigmentation has been extended to the head. This feature of applied black pigment apparently does not appear on any of the other figures, male or female. These first three figures therefore constitute a distinct subgroup with considerable height, feet with toes instead of a round base, pigmented shoulders, and early collection dates. This is the group where the Smith figure can be comfortably included. Out of all the known figures, the figure most similar in various respects to the Smith figure is the Berlin one.

The other large male figures with round bases instead of feet and toes, and an absence of pigmentation, can be considered as another subgroup within the larger, early male category of figures. The last male figure is an anomaly within this category, with its late date and small size. The shoulder tattoo patterns are very rudimentary, curved instead of linear and only lightly incised, giving the impression that this figure has been deliberately created in modern times on the model of the other male figures, probably intended for sale to outsiders.
Figures of Indeterminate Gender
All of the remaining figures are of indeterminate gender, with a ridge line across the upper chest, flat round base with no feet indicated. Most of these are relatively short in height as compared with the female and male figures listed above. Some have an early collection date but this third category also includes all of the more recently collected figures.

On the basis of these three categories of figures, the Smith example fits very clearly within the category of the larger, older male figures with shoulder tattoo, possible penis, clearly delineated feet and pigmented upper body. There are no features of the Smith figure that are anomalous within this category. This grouping of the three larger male figures has been arrived at independently of an earlier analysis carried out by Douglas Newton (n.d.), and therefore the parallels of the Newton and Neich analyses are that much more striking and convincing.

Sculptural Proportions
Reviewing all of the known existing Nukuoro figures, it is clear that they adhered to a strictly regulated canon of proportions. This canon is most consistently followed in the earlier and larger figures, including the Smith figure. Then, over time, some drift in this canon can be observed especially among the smaller figures where the strict delineation of volumes by raised or edged boundaries often gave way to rounded, less-controlled bulging shapes. With this weakening of the canon, more variations of form came to be accepted within the total range. This drift of the canon is definitely not apparent in the Smith figure, providing further confirmation of its authentic adherence to the earlier “classic” canon.

Newton (n.d.: 5) attempted to analyse this canon by expressing certain body part measurements as a percentage of the total height over a sample of four figures. He found conformity of these percentages within the ranges of head and neck at 19-22 percent of the height, torso at 52-60 percent, legs at 26 percent, and shoulder breadth at 30-33 percent of height. Applying this scale of measurements to the Smith figure, the head and neck is 20 percent, the torso is 57.5 percent, the legs 35 percent and the shoulder breadth 27.5 percent. These measurements all fit within Newton’s definition of the canon of proportions. On the strength of these measured proportions Newton found further support for his grouping of the same three large male figures including the Smith figure. Newton (n.d.) and this present report both identify the same grouping as an authentic expression of the earlier “classic” canon, providing more evidence for the authenticity of the Smith figure.

Some critics of the authenticity of the Smith figure have pointed out that it appears too long and slender in the torso and legs, that the angles at the chest
and pubic area are too pronounced and that the feet look “odd”. It is true that
the shoulder breadth ratio of the Smith figure is slightly less than the “classic”
ratio, which may account for the apparent slender look. However, viewed
in the context of the three early male figures, these objections are readily
accommodated within the canon that includes the appearance of the “male
toed” feet. Modern replica makers have great difficulties in reproducing the
subtle proportions of classic Polynesian sculpture especially such “abstract”
figures as those of Nukuoro. The classic proportions of the Smith Nukuoro
figure could only have been produced by a carver trained and active in the
Nukuoro wood-carving tradition.

SURFACE CONDITION

The original surface treatment of the Smith figure had been carefully finished
to produce a smooth, polished and elegant appearance. Most indications are
that the figure was cut out, shaped and finished with metal tools as is consistent
with the history of Western contact at Nukuoro. A comparison of the way
that tattoo has been depicted by grooves and incised lines on the pubic area
of Kawe in Auckland (Fig. 3) and the shoulders of the Smith figure (Fig. 7)
reveals that exactly the same technique has been followed, further proof of
the antiquity of the Smith figure. Similar proof of authentic skilled Nukuoro
craftsmanship is seen in the subtlety of minor surface features such as the
ears and the knee caps.

Areas of black pigment applied on the shoulders and yellowish areas
on other parts of the body are probably remnants of the traditional ritual
anointing and decorating that would have been applied to the figure in its
original religious ceremonial situation. Other features indicate that the figure
was used in this religious situation over a relatively long period. There is
evidence of darkening and wear and routine handling along with native infills
and repairs. A black resinous gum-like substance has been applied to fill
some of the deeper cracks. At the rear of the head, a crescent-shaped piece
of timber has come loose and this has been re-inserted and glued back in
place with the same resinous gum. At some time in the remote past the left
arm has broken off. This arm has been re-attached with a large wooden peg
and the repair infilled with the same resinous gum (Fig. 7).

The present condition of the surface of the figure with its abrasions,
impacts, scratches, cracks, decay and insect damage indicates a long duration
of stress from various environmental agents. Some of this may have developed
while the figure was still in its original traditional situation but it is most likely
that much of the damage has occurred after the figure had been removed to
other environments. Decay-damaged areas on both arms show the effects
of insect borer attack. Random surface scratches and impacts are a result of
careless handling and storage over a long period. Environmental temperature and humidity variations have resulted in stress cracks following the grain that penetrate deep into the timber often leading to subsequent decay.

Beneath these surface manifestations of stress, the surface treatment, tool marks and wear of the Smith figure and Kawe in Auckland are both consistent with manufacture at about the same period and by craftsmen working in the same tradition. Kawe shows little sign of weathering in more recent times and this is consistent with its history of storage in a museum since 1878. In contrast, the stressed condition of the surface of the Smith figure suggests that it has undergone a period in more recent times of standing or lying out in the weather, perhaps in a New Zealand backyard. All these effects of aging are impossible to duplicate in modern timber, even by the most clever of replica makers.
RECENT PRODUCTION OF NUKUORO FIGURES

After the period of intense collecting of large Nukuoro figures in 1877-1878, no further large figures seem to have been made there. The production of smaller figures for religious use may have continued for a short time before developing into a short-lived tourist art trade. The precedents for such a process are widespread in Pacific Islands’ histories, especially during that short period when the traditional religion has lost its hold but there are still surviving skilled craftsmen trained in the old methods of art production. But this stage degenerates very quickly into the production of spurious and crude remote copies by unskilled workers. When Davidson carried out her archaeological investigations on Nukuoro in 1965, she noted that no-one on the island was making figures by that time. In 1971 an American Peace Corps volunteer brought a resin replica cast of one of the Bishop Museum figures to Nukuoro. A local carver is said to have made three copies of that figure and since then similar copies later appeared for sale to tourists in the district centre of Ponape. However, none of this later production of figures was even remotely capable of producing a replica with the fine qualities of the Smith figure.

* * *

On the strength of the evidence presented above, of provenance, adherence to the classic canon of Nukuoro figures, sculptural proportions, surface treatment, and the qualities of skilled subtle craftsmanship, the Smith figure can be confidently accepted as a very fine example of an authentic Nukuoro figure. The circumstantial evidence supports the argument that it was collected by James Lyle Young on Nukuoro in that intense period of figure collecting during 1877-1878. As such, it is a member of that corpus of fine, early, large figures collected by Kubary and Cozens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Lesley Bone (Conservator at De Young Museum, San Francisco), Christina Hellmich (Curator at De Young Museum, San Francisco) and Ed Smith (owner of the Smith Nukuoro figure).

NOTES

2. Letter, Dr R.N. Patel, Forest Research Institute, Rotorua, to J. Davidson, 11 June 1968. Auckland Museum Ethnology Department files.
A Recently Revealed Tino Aitu Figure from Nukuoro


REFERENCES