
SHORTER COMMUNICATIONS

TUTAURU, THE ADZE OF NGAHUE, IN MYTH AND HISTORY

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Giving an individual personal name to an important artefact is an ancient Māori practice occurring frequently in the traditions about the migrations to New Zealand from Hawaiki, and continuing into more recent times. Some of these are famous jade ornaments such as Kaukaumatua made from Ngahue's piece of jade. Several others are adzes associated with the building of specific migration canoes such as *Tutauru* of Te Arawa, *Te Whiro-nui*, *Matangi-rei*, *Hui-Te-Rangiōra* of Takitimu, and *Te Rakuraku-o-Tawhaki* of Tūhoe. The most celebrated of these adzes was Te Awhiorangi used to sever the embracing arms of Rangi and Papa, and then brought to New Zealand on either the Takitimu or Aotea canoes, finally coming into the possession of the Ngā Rauru tribe of Waitotara (Best 1974: 240-45).

Indigenous Māori cultural adepts and other scholars of Māori culture have long recognised that the transference of the individual names and associated narratives of lost famous artefacts on to obviously more recent objects of the same type is an authentic and long-standing Māori strategy to preserve their mythical and historical relevance (e.g., Chapman 1891: 486). Examples of the conferring of a famous traditional name on a recently discovered (or rediscovered) artefact are widespread and in most cases the identification is not subjected to any rigorous questioning. Whether the object is actually the original or a replacement is not usually regarded as a relevant question in the mythological and historical world in which such objects continue to function. One of the best documented is the case of the adze Te Awhiorangi hidden many generations ago by its guardian Rangi-taupea of Ngā Rauru until found again on the 10 December 1887 in a hollow tree by an unsuspecting woman. The adze was immediately recognised as the fabled Te Awhiorangi and was welcomed with elaborate ceremony by the tribal experts (Best 1974: 242-43).

Evidence is assembled here to document some aspects of this practice in the very early case of a famous and tribally most significant item, namely Tutauru the jade adze originally owned by the Polynesian explorer Ngahue. The Māori identification of this adze in 1793 offers the earliest known example of a Māori artefact having its individual personal name recorded

in European archives and the earliest known mention in European/Māori interaction which refers to the famous Ngahue myth.

THE ADZE NAMED TUTAURU

The adze named Tutauru (Fig. 1) is now part of the William Oldman artefact collection, and is currently held in Auckland Museum with the registration number AM 31904. Oldman had catalogued it as Number 115 in his collection and recorded it in his manuscript list as follows:

115; 23; Chief's adze (TOKI), 11½ x 10¾, blade ex fine [extremely fine]. 9 x 3. See history label. Ex Wisdens of Broadwater Downs. W.H. Fenton; 12/19; 25; 40. (Oldman n.d.)

As well as recording the dimensions of the adze and its handle, this entry notes that Oldman purchased Tutauru in December 1919 from the London artefact dealer W.H. Fenton. The relevance of the other numbers is now unknown.

The “history label” that Oldman’s manuscript catalogue refers to is still there (Fig.2), glued on the handle of Tutauru, but a present reading differs slightly from that recorded in Oldman’s publication of his collection. My transcription reads:

Maore Axe called Tutauru [belon]ged to Purahokura [giv]en to Miss Jennings by her great uncle. July 1794.

In the publication of his collection, Oldman (2004: 6) used all of this information to produce a comprehensive description of the adze and its history:

Chief's adze (*toki*); extremely fine jade blade 9 in. x 3 in.; very pale, bright-green, even colour with white “mackerel” markings or flakes; upper edges are serrated in groups. Short haft, carving unfinished; square hole for wrist-cord. Size over all, 11 ½ in. x 10 ¾ in. The head is bound on with plaited cord and also quilllets of white dogs hair bound on thin hide strips is attached to head where the carved figure has been eaten away with wood-worms; the whole is riddled with same. Attached to handle is a label: “Maore Axe called TUTAURI (or O) ... jed to PARAHOKURA ... en to Miss M. Gorjan ... by her great Uncle, July 1794.” This adze was for many years in the family of the Wisdens of Broadwater Downs.



Figure 1. Jade adze named Tutauru. Oldman Collection, Auckland Museum registration number 31904. Photo: Auckland Museum.



Figure 2. Original “history label” on handle of Tutauru adze. Photo: Auckland Museum.

A recent detailed examination of the adze and its label has clarified that the name of the woman given the adze is Jennings, not Gorjan as in Oldman’s transcription. This examination has confirmed that the plaited cord is flax, but there are now no signs of the “quilllets of white dogs hair”. Not mentioned by Oldman are the spaced series of fine “genealogical” notchings down both front edges of the blade. With the dense lashings it is impossible to determine if the blade has the usual perforation near the top for the secure lashing of a *toki pou tangata* blade but the proportions are clearly those of a classic *toki pou tangata* ‘ritual adze symbolic of authority’. All that remains of a possible carved figure on the top of the handle are two curved shaped facets at the base of the fragmented “worm-eaten” terminal. This does not necessarily imply that the carving was unfinished. No use marks are visible on the blade’s edge.

The features of dog hair, short non-functional haft, the possibility of a carved figure, the proportions of the blade and the “genealogical” notching are all consonant with this being regarded as a *toki pou tangata* composition, albeit lacking the streamlined grace, delicately carved figure and fine patina of other known historic early 19th century *toki pou tangata*. This difference may be attributed to the greater age and possibly earlier style of the Tutauru composition. But as with other fine *toki pou tangata*, the blade of Tutauru is of the highest quality South Island West Coast nephrite.

TUTAURU IN MYTH

According to Arawa tribal traditions recorded in 1849-1853 by Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke of Ngāti Rangiwewehi for Sir George Grey (Grey 1854: 68-69, 1855: 99-101), the sacred jade adze named Tutauru was made back in the Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki by the mythological explorer Ngahue from New Zealand jade that he had brought back with him from his New Zealand travels. Tutauru was then used to carve out the Arawa migration canoe. Te Rangikaheke also stated without further comment, that Tutauru was used to cut off the head of Uenuku who had been the main protagonist in the dispute that led to the migration. Matene Te Whiwhi of Ngāti Raukawa also confirmed in his version of the migration myth that “Tutuaru split Uenuku’s head.” (Simmons 1976: 112). The use of Tutauru to behead Uenuku was also mentioned in Te Tai Te Tomo’s explanations for a famous Ngāti Tūwharetoa lament (Ngata 1928: 195). A much later newspaper article by W.H.S. Roberts of Oamaru (*Grey River Argus* newspaper, 18 June 1908, p.1) claims that the name Tutauru literally means “the back of the neck of an ancestor named Uru, the head”.

Te Rangikaheke reported in his account that “The adze Tutauru was only lately lost by Purahokura and his brother Reretai, who were descended from Tama-ihu-toroa”. In Arawa genealogies, Tama-ihu-toroa is three generations in direct descent from Tama-te-kapua, the captain of the Arawa canoe, and is recognised as the eponymous ancestor of Ngāti Tama (Simmons 1976: 276-80, Stafford 1967: 66). Purahokura and Reretai (or Reretoi) of Ngāti Tama are said to have been killed at the battle of Waiwhitiinanga at Rotorua caused by Ngāti Tama’s killing of a famous *taniwha* ‘water monster’ named Kataore (Stafford 1967: 67). After this battle, the Ngāti Tama survivors were widely dispersed as far as the Waikato and Taupō. No other traditions subsequent to this battle have been recorded as to who might have become the guardians of Tutauru. This traditional account locating Tutauru with Te Arawa at Rotorua versus its actual collection off the Northland coast (see below) leaves a considerable distance, and presumably lengthy interval of time, between these two locations. However, on the basis of some recent tribal suggestions, Tutauru is very likely at that time to have been in the care of Ngāti Huarere, a tribe of Arawa origin living in the Coromandel area of Hauraki.

TUTAURU IN HISTORY

With this documented early date and such detailed Māori information, this adze must have been collected by an early European visitor to New Zealand with access to Māori language skills and some knowledge of Māori oral traditions. Although there was some other intercourse between Māori and

European naval and whaling ships at this time, the most obvious candidate is Philip Gidley King, Lieutenant-Governor of Norfolk Island, who came to New Zealand on HMS *Britannia* from 8 to 13 November 1793. Apart from King's wider plans for a settlement in New Zealand with access to flax and spars, the ostensible purpose of his visit was to return to their homes two chiefly Māori men, Tuki and Huru, who had been kidnapped six months earlier in the futile hope that they could teach the convicts on Norfolk Island how to process flax. As a result of their extended stay on Norfolk Island, King and some of his officers had learned sufficient Māori language, and Tuki and Huru sufficient English, for some detailed knowledge of Māori mythology, social customs and tribal organisation to be gathered. Hence, King was certainly capable of recording this sort of detail about a tribal heirloom. This link to King is supported by the possibility that Miss Jennings [Gorjan?] was the great niece of either King or Evan Nepean, at that time the British Government Secretary in Charge of Colonies.

On the *Britannia*, King had several contacts and trading exchanges with Māori at the North Cape before he had to return to Norfolk Island. On the 12 November, the *Britannia* reached and rounded North Cape coming to anchor off Tokatoka Point. A total of only 18 hours was spent off this coast and nobody from the *Britannia* went ashore. All the trading was carried out between the ship and the numerous canoes that came out from a large fortified village (*pā*) just within the point. King and his crew traded scraps of iron and European items for a wide variety of Māori artefacts, including weapons and jade ornaments. Just before he departed, King presented an impressive and valuable range of gifts to Tuki and Huru and the local people (Salmond 1997: 230), perhaps accounting for the reciprocal gift of such a valuable jade heirloom as Tutauru. On his return to Norfolk, on 19 November 1793, King sent a "box of New Zealand curiosities" which most likely included this adze to British Government Secretary Nepean. Confirming the circulation in England of Māori items collected by King, a record in the register of the British Museum describes "An Ornament used by the Chiefs in New Zealand: from Governor King" presented on 8 July 1797. Unfortunately, this item cannot be identified in the British Museum collection at present but the date of presentation probably indicates that King obtained it in New Zealand at the same time as received Tutauru. Research into any connection between the names of King, Nepean, Gorjan, Jennings or Wisden has not revealed anything that might indicate a continuous chain of provenance for Tutauru after it left New Zealand.

Using the information and a detailed map of northern New Zealand provided by Tuki and Huru to King, Salmond (1997: 216-33) has been able to reconstruct something of the tribal relationships obtaining in this area at

that time. It provides some of the earliest detailed European knowledge about tribal relationships in New Zealand. This reconstruction indicates that Tuki and Huru's people had ongoing relationships, both in alliance and hostile raids, with the people of Hauraki, perhaps explaining how Tutauru came to be in the far north. In these relationships, a valuable object such as Tutauru would have figured in both reciprocal gift exchanges and the proceeds of raiding.

TUTAURU IN A WIDER HISTORY

The phrase "Tutauru [belonged] to Purahokura" on King's label seems to have preserved a snippet of an oral tradition known in the north that bridges the long temporal gap between Purahokura and King's informants. However, Te Rangikaheke's comment from 1849-1853 that Tutauru was only recently lost and his other comment that the jade pendant Kaukaumatua, made from the same piece of jade as Tutauru, was lost as recently as 1846 raise interesting questions about the relationship between mythology and history within a reconstructed cultural context of early Māori/European intercourse. The story of Tutauru is hovering right on the border or threshold between myth and history. Curnow (1983: 104-5) has demonstrated that Te Rangikaheke was endeavouring to construct a sequential narrative history covering all time in chronological order from the origin of the universe, the origin of man and the Māori settlement of New Zealand down to contemporary dated events. His new single historical narrative had the characteristics of both history and myth, going beyond a simple opposition of myth and history in a perfect example of the distension of myth into history (Neich 1993: 153).

This becomes even more intriguing when it is realised that Tutauru is the first Māori artefact ever collected accompanied with some of its traditional oral history. This mention of the names Tutauru and Purahokura on King's label also represents the earliest recorded historical reference to this important Arawa oral tradition.

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