

## A DETAILED PROVENANCE FOR KAWE, THE NUKUORO FIGURE CARVING IN AUCKLAND MUSEUM

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Several studies (Davidson 1968, De Grunne 1994, Eilers 1934, Kubary 1900, Neich 2008) have described the appearance, history and relationship of Kawe to other known large wooden figure sculptures from Nukuoro. However, none of these has been able to provide a detailed account of exactly when and by whom Kawe (Auckland Museum Registration Number 38740) was removed from Nukuoro and brought to Auckland Museum. A recent discovery of a contemporary document in the archives of Auckland Museum and a reassessment of the accumulated information now allow a more detailed provenance to be reconstructed.

In his comprehensive account of the results of his 1877 ethnographic fieldwork and collecting expedition on Nukuoro, Kubary (1900: 27) described the goddess Kawe:

*Ko Káwe ist eine weibliche Gottheit mit einem grossen hölzernen Götzen in dem Amalau; sie wird angesehen als die Frau des Ariki tu te natoáki und ist zugleich die Schutzgottheit der Sekáwes.*

(Ko Kawe is a female god figure with a great wooden idol in the Amalau; she was seen as the wife of the Ariki Tu Te Natoaki, and is therefore the patron goddess of the Sekawe clan.)

In a footnote to this description (Kubary 1900: 27, fn. 33), he added:

*Dieser Götze, sammt einem anderen, wurde für mich angekauft und verschifft, ist mir aber durch den bösen Willen des Kapitäns vorenthalten worden.*

(This idol, together with another, was purchased and shipped for me, but through the spite/ill-will of the captain was withheld.)

Based on these notes, subsequent writers have made the reasonable assumption that the figure in Auckland Museum must be identified as the goddess Kawe. This present reassessment confirms that identification and

explains how the name Kawe was brought to Auckland Museum at the same time as the figure was presented.

Kubary had made a brief visit to Nukuoro in 1873. Then he carried out a longer period of fieldwork there for about two to three months sometime between February 1877 and May 1877, in the course of his return journey from the Mortlock Islands to Ponape (Kubary 1900: 3). During this 1877 fieldwork on Nukuoro, Kubary collected several large and small carved wooden figures and other ethnographic material in his role as collector for their museum. These he sent off to the trading house of Godeffroy in Hamburg. With the collapse of the Godeffroy firm in 1879, the figures were dispersed in various museum and private collections (De Grunne 1994, Eilers 1934). Without a careful assessment of the previous information, most writers have assumed that Kawe was collected on Nukuoro by Kubary at the same time as his other figures, but that subsequently she became separated from them and ended up in Auckland.

In her 1968 article, Davidson quoted from a later source that reproduced this earlier *New Zealand Herald* report, which she was not aware of at the time.

Mr Cousens, who has lately been trading to the 'islands' brought to Auckland a curious idol, which was found at New Goa and is a great curiosity in its way. It is very rude, but it is for this reason a proof of the barbarous and primitive worship that obtains in some of the islands. It is stated that there was an altar in front of where it was found standing, upon which altar human victims, were until very recently, immolated. Whether the statement is well founded we cannot say, but it is probably true. Mr Cousens has presented the 'idol' to the museum, where it is to be found, with other evidences of the kind of the condition of the natives of the South Sea Islands. (*New Zealand Herald* [NZH] Thursday 17 October 1878: p. 2).

This quote does not identify the ship that brought Mr Cozens (the correct spelling of his name) and Kawe back to Auckland, but a newspaper note from 11 days before reads:

The brig Vision whose arrival we described in yesterday's issue came up the harbour yesterday morning, after a 7 ½ months cruise among the Line Islands. She brings into port a quantity of copra, pearl and tortoise shell and other island produce. She has been employed chiefly in the Marshall and Caroline Groups, being as far west as Yap. She sailed from Majuro September 5 for this port.... She brings no island news of importance, and has only two passengers G. Cozens and W. Bonar. (*NZH* 5 October 1878: p. 4)

The *Vision* was a brig of 159.22 tons, 105.9 feet long, built in New South Wales in 1866 (Watt 1963?). In 1877-78 she was owned by Captain William Daldy of Auckland, making frequent almost continuous trading voyages of several months duration to Micronesia, usually with a very quick turnaround time in Auckland and with a different captain taking over for each voyage. George Cozens often travelled to Micronesia on her in his role as an agent for Thomas Farrell's Pacific trading company of Auckland.

An original note (Fig. 1), recently located in the Auckland Museum archives, was handwritten and signed by George Cozens. Unfortunately it is not dated but almost certainly dates to the time when he presented Kawe to Auckland Museum, which is October 1878 according to the museum's acquisition and registration record:

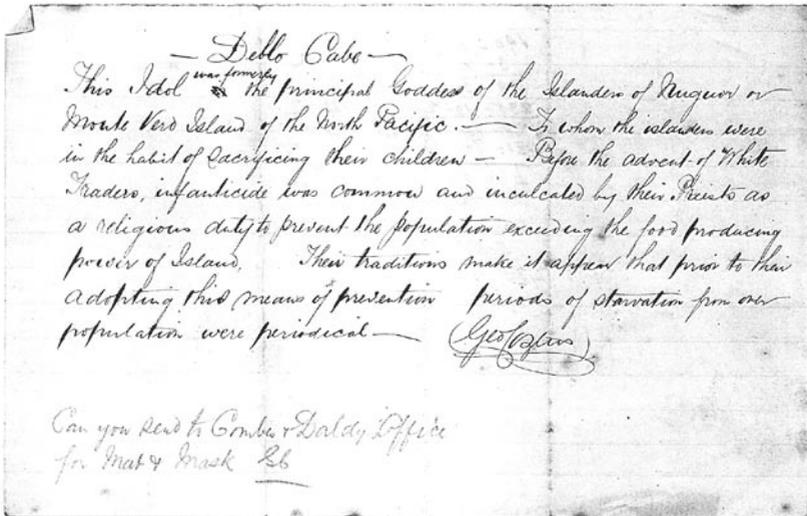


Figure 1.

Deblo [? Devil] Cabe [Kawe?]

This Idol was formerly the principal Goddess of the Islanders of Nuguor or Monte Verd Island of the North Pacific. To whom the islanders were in the habit of sacrificing their children. Before the advent of White Traders, infanticide was common and inculcated by their Priests as a religious duty to prevent the population exceeding the food producing power of Island. Their

traditions make it appear that prior to their adopting this means of prevention periods of starvation from over population were periodical.

Geo. Cozens

Can you send to Combes and Daldy Office for mat and mask. GC.

Read in conjunction with the two newspaper reports, this handwritten note allows some new deductions about the provenance of Kawe. The title “Deblo” is probably a local reference to a “Devil”, the term commonly used especially by missionaries at this period to refer to native carvings of gods and ancestors. Firstly, this note confirms that Cozens knew her name as Kawe (“Kabe”) from the time he collected her, either on Nukuoro or from information supplied when he took over ownership. So this replaces and confirms the inference that she must have been the Kawe figure that Kubary described in his Nukuoro study (1900: 27 and fn. 33). Cozens’s note also raises the vexed question of the pronunciation and orthography of the figure’s name. Kubary spelt it as “Kawe” and this is the spelling that has usually been followed by later writers. However, it seems likely that the “w” in Kawe is a Germanic “w” as recorded by the German-speaking Kubary and would have been pronounced in English as a “v”. Certainly, there is no “w” in the modern Nukuoro orthography (Carroll and Soulik 1973). But for the sake of continuity with Kubary’s original record, the spelling “Kawe” has been retained in this article although “Kave” is probably the best English equivalent for the name recorded by Kubary.

Secondly, this note referring to Daldy, the owner of the *Vision*, definitely identifies the ship that brought Kawe and Cozens to Auckland. Cozens’s mention of a mask refers to the Mortlock Islands mask that he presented to Auckland Museum on the same occasion and may account for Kubary’s mention in his footnote of “another” item withheld from him. It is not known where Cozens obtained his information but the emphasis on human sacrifice and infanticide suggests from a missionary or sailor, rather than Kubary himself, although Cozens and Kubary were often together in Micronesia. Cozens was not regarded as an ethnographer and Davidson (1968) has reviewed much of the recorded information on human sacrifice in Nukuoro.

Given the common assumption that Kubary collected Kawe at the same time as all his other figures, this would leave a gap between the time when Kubary collected Kawe in early 1877 and her arrival in Auckland on 5 October 1878. There has been speculation that maybe Kubary had her stored somewhere in Micronesia and then Cozens obtained her there and brought her back to NZ on the *Vision* in October 1878.

Or maybe, as some have suggested, Kubary went back to Nukuoro in 1878 to pick up Kawe. But this is most unlikely, in view of his known movements

at that time. Kubary went to Nukuoro and the Mortlocks in February 1877 until May 1877. Then in May 1878, he went to Truk for 14 months of fieldwork (Paszkowski 1971: 52). Unfortunately, Kubary's and Cozens's detailed movements in 1877 and 1878 are not better known. It is quite likely that Cozens himself never actually visited Nukuoro but he did travel widely in the Carolines on the *Vision* and other ships.

A careful reading of Kubary's footnote about Kawe clearly implies that he was not on Nukuoro himself when Kawe was picked up and shipped "for him", by somebody that he had previously authorised either on the ship or in the island. This must have taken place on the 23 February to 4 October cruise of the *Vision* in 1878 with Cozens as a passenger, which brought Kawe back to Auckland, thus making it unnecessary to account for the time gap. The captain of the *Vision* on this voyage was a Captain Harris, thereby identifying him as the "spiteful" captain of Kubary's footnote. But Harris was only one actor among the cast of a New Zealand-owned ship, a New Zealand captain and an acquisitive New Zealand shipping agent, who together outmanoeuvred Kubary.

The figure of Kawe is much larger and heavier than all of the other figures collected by Kubary. Conservation reports carried out at Auckland Museum indicate that she has some internal areas of dry rot, areas of surface rot that have had to be consolidated by museum conservators over the years, and her feet or original stand had rotted away long before she was collected. The native term of *wai soni* recorded by Kubary (1900: 53) was applied to old idols that had become decayed and collapsed but were still kept in the temples. This reconstruction suggests that the figure of Kawe had become a *wai soni* lying on the ground in the *amalau* 'main temple' well before she was removed from the island. As such, probably because of her extreme size and weight and her poor condition compared to the other figures still standing in the temple, Kubary did not remove her from Nukuoro with the others in 1877, but later determined to recover her, not expecting to be beaten by another collector.

A slight confusion that has arisen, based on information contained in the Auckland Museum files on Nukuoro and Kawe before the discovery of the original Cozens's handwritten note, should be discounted here. The *Vision* arrived in Auckland on 21 July 1877 under a Captain Hawkins after a voyage in the Marshall and Caroline Islands (NZH 23 July 1877), then left again under Captain Hawkins for the Marshall Islands on 10 August 1877 with "J. Cosen" as a passenger, expecting to be away about three months (NZH 10 August 1877). In the event, she did not return until 12 January 1878 (NZH 14 January 1878). She then left again very soon after under Captain Harris on 23

February with “Mr. Cousins” on board, for the voyage ending on 4 October 1878 (NZH 25 February 1878). Some of this information was supplied by Stuart Park, then Director of Auckland Museum, to Father Francis X. Hezel, S.J. of the Micronesian Seminar for his comment (Letter, S. Park to Father Hezel, 13 August 1980, Ethnology Department Files, Auckland Museum). But at this stage, Park was assuming that Kawe had probably been removed from Nukuoro during 1877 at the time of Kubary’s fieldwork there, and encouraged Hezel to consider this year only. On the basis of this information, Hezel replied (Letter, Father Hezel to S. Park, 6 September 1980, Ethnology Department Files, Auckland Museum), suggesting that the ship involved was either the *Agnes Donald* or the *Vision*, both owned by Captain William Daldy and used by Thomas Farrell of Auckland. He further suggested that the ship bringing Kubary from Nukuoro in 1877 was the *Vision* and the villainous captain then must have been a Captain Morton, rather than Hawkins or Harris. This misleading deduction from the Auckland Museum files was supplied to Bernard De Grunne in the course of his 1994 researches on all the known Nukuoro figures, and has recently been published in his essay on Nukuoro figures for the catalogue of the Fondation Beyeler exhibition in Basel (De Grunne 2009). The reconstructed provenance presented here now supersedes this.

In summary, Kawe was lying in the *amalau* as a *wai soni* for an unknown length of time. Kubary may have seen her in this situation and condition during his 1873 visit. But he certainly saw her like this between February and May 1877, but did not remove her at that time. At some time subsequent to this, he authorised an agent either in Nukuoro or probably at Ponape to purchase and ship her for him. This agent shipped her on the *Vision* sometime between March and September 1878. While on the *Vision*, the decision was made to convey her directly to New Zealand. The *Vision*, with Kawe and Cozens on board, arrived at Auckland on 4 October 1878 and she was presented to Auckland Museum on or before 17 October 1878.

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