

waka kuaka

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in a room, in a house, on an island, in an ocean



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model experiences of grit towards the conception of successful shows and collectives and even the hard truths on rejection from some of our own leading arts trusts. These insights provide a gafa for the next generation of makers (and audiences) to work from or critique towards new reflections on Pacific arts and their place in Aotearoa.

The heftiness of this publication is a representation of the layered and complex obligations and responsibilities taken up by the editor and the contributors in their attempts to capture the broad intersections of Oceanic creative practices and their place in Aotearoa.

After reading this publication, I hope that in the future the documentation of our creative practices can be shared through different formats such as podcasts, performing arts festivals, fashion shows or film documentaries—formats that equal the institutional mana (authority) a publicised book provides for the canon of Pacific arts and our Pacific artists. I am thinking about our grandparents (who might struggle to read the small text) and our young people (who roll their eyes when presented with reading for study). However, I can imagine this publication being the va'a (canoe) an emerging or established creative is navigating as they move towards new worlds of Pacific arts across Aotearoa.

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JONASSEN, Jon Tikivanotau Michael: *Pe'e Māori: Traditional Cook Islands Chants*. Rarotonga: Mana Heritage Publications, 2022. 280 pp., biblio., list of chants, photos, plate, tables. NZ\$50.00 (softcover).

LIAM KOKA'UA

Ngāti Makea Ārera, Rarotonga

Tāmaki Paenga Hira | Auckland War Memorial Museum

Pe'e Māori was the last book published by Jon Tikivanotau Michael Jonassen before he died in 2023. To use a kama'atu (verse of wisdom) published in one of his earlier works, *Kama'atu* (2005: 123):

Na te rima 'uru'uru tena i rave.

It was done by hairy (accomplished) hands.¹

Jonassen was a highly respected tumu kōrero (oral historian) of the nation commonly referred to as the Cook Islands, or, as he called it, ‘Avaiki Manavanui. Pāpā Jon also held the traditional title of Tikivanotau Mata‘iapo Tūtara from the island of Aitutaki, which out of respect I will use here. Pe‘e Māori is a name for the Indigenous chants of ‘Avaiki Manavanui. Māori, as in Aotearoa New Zealand, is our word denoting Indigeneity.

The use of Tikivanotau’s own pare kura (red feathered headdress reserved for chiefs) on the cover page is a beautiful symbol of authenticity and mana (authority) and is indicative of what is to come. The image of the pare kura is one of many examples of the deep symbolism represented by objects composed of natural materials that are often used by orators and the relationship between the meaning of pe‘e and the material culture of ‘Avaiki Manavanui. Throughout the book Tikivanotau features many photographs from his own personal collection, spanning decades, to provide visual examples of oratory, dance and their associated material culture.

The real richness of the book is, of course, the pe‘e themselves, almost all of which have been committed to paper for the first time. Any aspiring ‘Avaiki Manavanui orator would recognise immediately the value in accessing these oral traditions. What is additionally useful is the detail Tikivanotau goes into to explain the context for each category of pe‘e.

Macrons and glottal stops are extremely important in the twenty-first century for our ‘Avaiki Manavanui people to learn pronunciation of our Māori words, as the majority of our people in the diaspora as well as many in the islands are second-language learners. Glottal stops are used in the book in most places where they should be, but some are missing, such as in words that include the prefix ‘aka-. Macrons are used, as far as I can tell, only in places where Tikivanotau believes there should be a lengthening of the vowel to produce oratorical effect. This is useful in terms of knowing how to use this lengthening in a particular word for artistic emphasis but could be detrimental for second-language learners simply wishing to know the correct pronunciation of a word. Readers in the latter group would benefit from having a copy of Jasper Buse and Rautiti Taringa’s *Cook Islands Māori Dictionary* (1996) to cross-reference a particular word from within a pe‘e with its dictionary entry, which will have accurate diacritics added.

Tikivanotau provides an impressive 19 categories of pe‘e, equating to 19 chapters dedicated to covering pe‘e of all types of origin and purpose, many of which were composed by Tikivanotau himself. Another important chapter is an extremely informative ‘Akamārama (Introduction) that establishes the cultural context of pe‘e, something that is crucial to understanding. An extremely useful addition in the ‘Akamārama is a template to equip the reader with the basic knowledge of how to compose their own pe‘e, this information normally being quite well guarded within our culture.

I found the ‘Ātui‘anga manako (Weaving Ideas) section within the ‘Akamārama chapter interesting, as it details a key element of the composition of pe‘e. I have been composing basic pe‘e for around three years and have appreciated how Tikivanotau has described a process of “weaving ideas”. One must often consider the context of where the pe‘e will be recited: family backgrounds of the key individuals, the cultural event in question, the land the pe‘e is being recited on. In Aotearoa I have also found acknowledging the iwi (tribe) or hapū (subtribe) whose land we are on is just as vital, regardless of whether it is an ‘Avaiki Manavanui cultural event taking place or not. Sections in the ‘Akamārama explaining what a chanter should wear or carry while reciting a pe‘e are extremely useful, because as far as I know this has not been explained elsewhere.

In the section titled ‘Akateni‘anga (Pronouncing), Tikivanotau acknowledges the accents of not just individual islands but even individual tribes, as well as people’s personal style of chanting—these are important pieces of information. He uses the example that certain words, while pronounced the same, can actually mean different things across the six different language dialects of ‘Avaiki Manavanui. He also provides useful explanations to assist second-language learners in their pronunciation of Māori words, such as the *d* sound in *t* and the “missing *h*” in certain words (e.g., (*h*)ua, *pō(h)iri*).

At the end there is a chapter on *kōrero kama‘atu* (wisdom verses), which appear to have been extracted from Tikivanotau’s earlier publication, *Kama‘atu* (2005). Despite the repetition I think it useful to have included these selected *kama‘atu* in this book, as they can convey deep cultural meaning and can easily be incorporated into the composition of new pe‘e.

Stylistically, the font type used through the book is beautiful, as are the *tātatau* (tattooing) and carving motifs subtly displayed at the start of each chapter, which add yet another deep layer of cultural knowledge to the book. Tikivanotau’s English translations of the pe‘e are literal, which is a double-edged sword; if the reader has little cultural or contextual knowledge, they may not appreciate the deeper meaning of words. For example, *Vaeruarangi* does indeed mean “heaven’s spirit”, but it is specifically an *ariki* (chiefly) title of *Aitutaki* and could be translated as “Chief *Vaeruarangi*”. I do acknowledge here that the book is likely designed for ‘Avaiki Manavanui people who already have some knowledge of their own cultural contexts.

Tikivanotau drives home important messages for the aspiring orator. For example, one should have *papa‘anga* (genealogy) to a particular tribe if they wish to recite a tribal pe‘e. He issues a challenge to the reader that they have a “responsibility” to add to their family’s *kete* (basket) of chants, as many such *kete* are becoming “empty”. He also provides provenance for many chants in the book.

Interestingly, Tikivanotau explains that the phrase “Iō kōkou” (ē-kokō, “a shout of triumph of glee” (Buse and Taringa 1996), sometimes pronounced as Ī-ē-kō-kō or other variations), often included in pe’e Māori, is actually a reference to ‘Io, the “Almighty God” of ‘Avaiki Manavanui ancestors. Tikivanotau explains that ‘Io was not generally mentioned in everyday conversation, which is a convenient explanation for his significant absence from ‘Avaiki Manavanui literature (whether written by European or Māori authors), and one we have also received from some Māori cultural authorities in Aotearoa, such as Te Mātorohanga in his teachings. This representation of ‘Io as the supreme deity over the other deities is not one I personally buy into, and in my opinion it may reflect an attempt to merge the Christian God into Māori spirituality. I also think sound of the word ‘Io has a special frequency. I do think the explanation that ‘Io was the “Almighty God” enables Tikivanotau to safely discuss pe’e Māori without backlash from certain groups in ‘Avaiki Manavanui who are staunchly Christian. Such groups are disapproving of ‘ētene (heathen) practices, of which pe’e are included, alongside tātatau, consumption of kava and references to the old gods of our ancestors such as Tangaroa, and perhaps, ‘Io.

On page 39 Tikivanotau gives his own interpretation of the word karakia (prayer chant), breaking down the word to mean, “Ka rā ki ‘ea?” (Where will the blessings fall?). I disagree with such attempts to break down core Polynesian words which likely have thousands of years of use and cognate forms across our region. I have also seen this attempted by Māori in Aotearoa (such as breaking down the word “Māori”) and personally believe certain words should be viewed in their entirety. This said, one of the things for which I most respect Tikivanotau is that he stuck to his guns in refusing to use the name imposed by the coloniser to refer to our island nation. In the book Tikivanotau uses a number of names to refer to the nation, generally favouring ‘Avaiki Manavanui. I am inspired to know someone of his standing in our community (as well as former High Commissioner to New Zealand) expressed his dissatisfaction with our current national name and was doing something about it by normalising his own Māori name for our nation.

Despite my frankness in reviewing certain aspects of this book (it would be a disservice to Tikivanotau’s intellectual legacy to not engage in honest critical dialogue), I do believe *Pe’e Māori* is one of the most significant contributions to ‘Avaiki Manavanui cultural literature since the art of writing was introduced to our shores. I believe it will sit alongside classics such as the manuscripts of other revered ancestors such as Teariki Tara’are and Māretu. I leave with a pe’e mate (death chant) taken from the book (pp. 111–12):

Auē. E metua. E ‘akaperepere,
Kua oki ki Avaiki i roto i te pō.
Kua ‘oki ki ō Tangarōa. Ararā,

O te pou. Kua 'akaruke mai.
 I tāna i rave. Kua tuku mai i tana,
 I moemoeā. Na tatou i 'apai,
 Kite meka meka 'ōpengā.
 Kia akameitaki ia te Atūā,
 No te au mea kātoatoa.

A parent, a loved one, has returned to the land of origin in the night.
 Returned to Tangaroa.
 Left behind what he has done.
 Left behind the dreams and aspirations that we need to finish.
 Bless God for all that happens.

Note

1. In keeping with journal policy, the extracts featured here reproduce spellings and diacritical marks exactly as published in the book under review.

Glossary

The terms in this glossary are Cook Islands Māori (Rarotonga dialect) unless otherwise stated.

ariki	chiefly
'ētene	heathen
hapū	subtribe (New Zealand Māori)
iwi	tribe (New Zealand Māori)
kama'atu	verse of wisdom
karakia	prayer chant
kete	basket
mana	authority
papa'anga	genealogy
pare kura	red feathered headdress reserved for chiefs
pe'e Māori	Indigenous chants
pe'e mate	death chant
tātatau	tattooing
tumu kōrero	oral historian
vaeruarangi	heaven's spirit

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