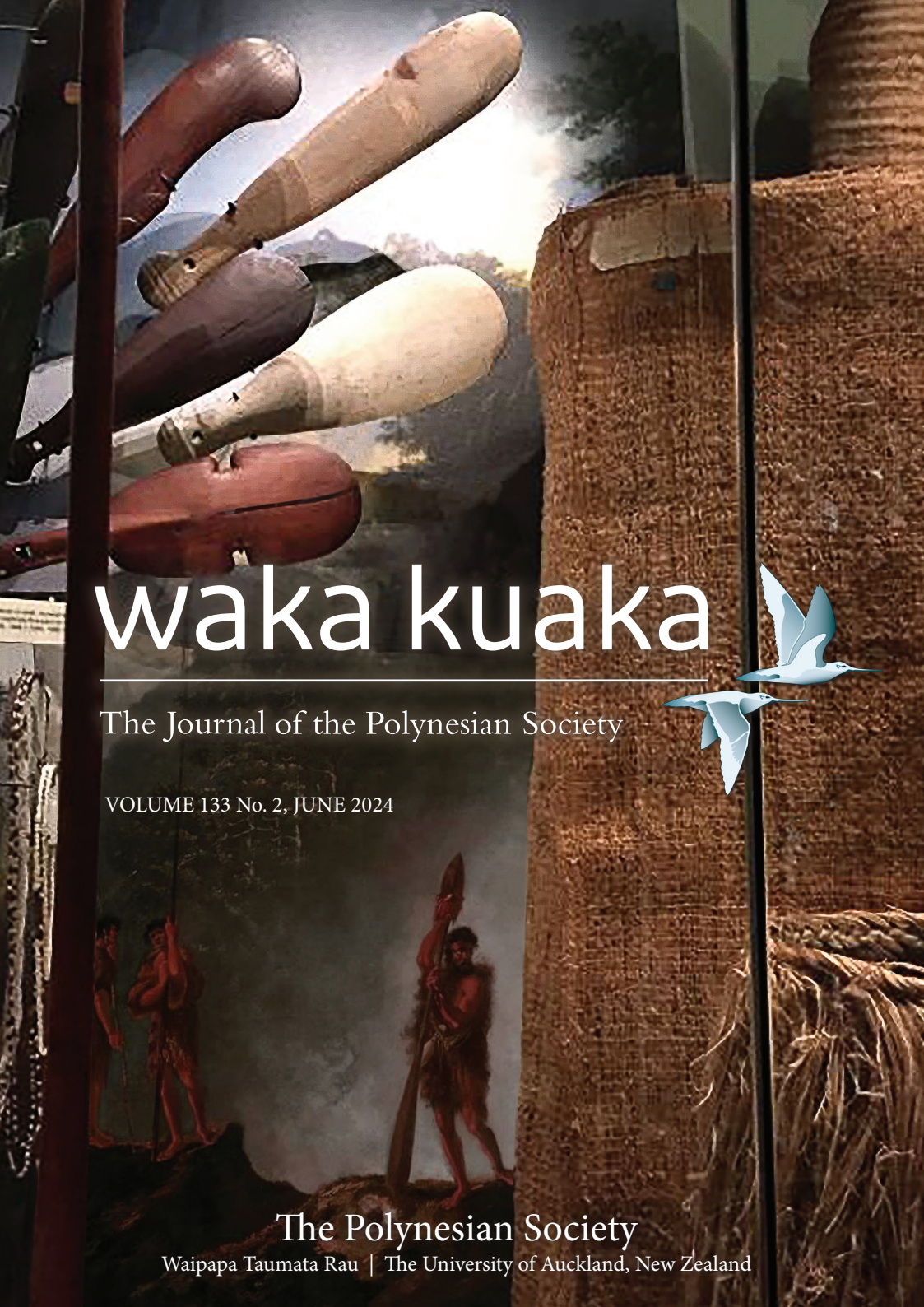




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IMAGES OF DISPLACEMENT: PORTRAITS OF MĀORI IN THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, OXFORD

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ABSTRACT: A collection of portraits of Māori, painted in Nelson in the early 1840s by English-born Isaac Coates, was rediscovered in 2005 at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. The subjects include Ngāti Toa rangatira (chief) Te Rauparaha, and while others remain unidentified, the collection—the subject of a 2012 publication—is recognised as an invaluable historical record. It represents a wide range of Māori society, at a time of widespread disruption and demographic change. It is likely the collection entered the Pitt Rivers between 1887 and 1902, a period of British imperial expansion when Indigenous material was being amassed and fitted into European notions of social development. The Pitt Rivers, whose extensive Māori and Pacific holdings include its Cook-Voyage Collections, has recently carried out major changes to displays which reinforced stereotypical attitudes towards Indigenous cultures. More broadly, museums are now recognising the part colonialism played in the formation of their collections. This has resulted in a number of instances of repatriation, as in the return of stolen Māori and Moriori ancestral remains to Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand in 2022. Discussions continue, as on such well-known cases as the Parthenon marbles, held in the British Museum, and Benin objects resulting from a British punitive expedition in 1897 and now held in a large number of institutions worldwide.

Keywords: British Museum, Cook-Voyage Collections, Jocelyne Dudding, Isaac Coates, Nelson, Edward Burnett Tylor, repatriation, Indigenous collections

James Cook's three voyages in the eighteenth century drew attention to the material culture of the Pacific, which was soon being sought by the public institutions and private collectors of Europe. A major beneficiary of this influx was the British Museum, which holds the world's largest collections of Māori material outside New Zealand—just over 2,300 objects (Starzecka *et al.* 2010: 7). Its first such acquisitions were made in October 1771, three months after the *Endeavour* had returned to England from its circumnavigation (Starzecka 1996: 150–51), while further donations from this and subsequent voyages were made by Cook himself, Banks and others. The British Admiralty's requirement that its contribution be displayed in a manner that would be “a monument of these national exertions of British munificence and industry” resulted in the “Otaheiti or South Sea Room” (Miller 1973: 75), a popular attraction which was open by August 1781,

and possibly as early as 1775 (Anderson 2012: 58; British Museum 2003: 18; Chambers 2007: 10–12; Miller 1973: 75). No images of it appear to have survived, but an 1803 guide provides a sense of what was surely the earliest display of Māori material in a public institution. It included flax items, combs, greenstone pendants and ornaments, adzes, a canoe bailer and a kotiate, a handclub described as “exactly in the shape of a violin, and all calculated for the most murderous effect.” Reflecting the unsystematic nature of collecting at that time, the walls of the room were hung with “hundreds” of unidentified weapons and paddles sourced from throughout the Pacific (Malcolm 1803: 528–29).

Another major repository of Māori material is the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, established in 1884 and named after the donor of its founding collection, archaeologist Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers (1827–1900). Two years later Oxford University decided to consolidate its anthropological collections, previously held at both the Ashmolean Museum and the local Natural History Museum, placing them in the Pitt Rivers. Today the museum is distinguished by the richness of its displays, and of special significance is its Cook-Voyage Collections 1772–1775, of Māori and Pacific material gathered on the first two expeditions, on the *Endeavour* in 1768–1771 and the *Resolution* and *Adventure* in 1772–1775.

Among its collection of more than 500,000 objects, the Pitt Rivers holds in excess of 1,000 Māori items (Fig. 1). At the same time as Europeans were acquiring such material, artists—both visiting and, later, resident—set about the challenge of recording Māori society. The resulting imagery includes a series of 52 Māori portraits in the Pitt Rivers Museum, which only came to light in December 2005 when discovered by New Zealand-born Jocelyne Dudding, then senior curatorial assistant (Photograph and Manuscript Collections) and currently collections manager at Cambridge’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The portraits were found among works on paper and, as Dudding (2006: 115–17) recounts, were stored in an “unpretentious-looking and slightly scruffy folder” labelled simply “New Zealand—Maori watercolours”. Inside it she found 52 “entrancing portraits of Māori individuals, portraits that had a beauty and *mana* (authority) that demanded to be addressed”. She also observed that the portraits were “clearly the work of a trained artist or, at least, a skilled draughtsman” (p. 115). They were also in pristine condition, having never been exposed to daylight for any extensive period. The Pitt Rivers’s records contained no information as to the identity of the artist or the history of the portraits, but a typescript list dating from around the 1960s provided a vital clue, a reference to one Frederick Tuckett (p. 117).

This mention of Tuckett led to the realisation that the portraits were painted by his acquaintance, Isaac Coates, who was born in 1808 near present-day



Figure 1. Examples from the current Maori displays at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Stockton-on-Tees, in County Durham, England, and emigrated to New Zealand, where he lived for a little over four years. Prior to leaving England Coates had been a partner in a business operating variously as a bookseller, stationer and bookbinder. In January 1841, and perhaps for reasons of his health, he sailed for New Zealand, landing at Port Nicholson (Wellington). By February the following year he was in Nelson, where he reportedly took an active role in local affairs. But before long he had left for Adelaide, where he arrived in late September 1845 (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 54, 57).

Coates's subjects—three-quarters of whom were males—were drawn from a cross-section of Māori society, and their portraits have the historical value of recording the sitters' names, place of residence and tribal affiliation. All were affected by the exodus from the northern districts of the North Island resulting from intertribal rivalry. There was further conflict on 17 June 1843 known as the Wairau Affray—or Incident or, earlier, Massacre—some 25 km from Nelson, when an armed party of New Zealand Company settlers clashed with Ngāti Toa over the purchase of land. The first serious confrontation between the new arrivals and Indigenous people after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, it resulted in the deaths of 22 settlers and 4 Māori.

The following year Coates was one of nearly 600 citizens—among them future prime minister William Fox and politician Francis Dillon Bell—who petitioned Parliament, expressing criticism of Governor Robert Fitzroy's lack of action regarding Wairau, by “declining to bring before the constitutional tribunals of the law the parties charged with the massacre of so many of her Majesty's faithful subjects” (*Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* 1844: 59). The petitioners were also concerned with the establishment of, as they put it, “the authority of British law as supreme and inflexible, alike over the ruler and the ruled, over the native and the European, throughout these islands” (p. 59).

Coates's portraits were probably executed at his base in Nelson, and it is believed that most, if not all, date from the few months prior to the conflict at Wairau. They consistently present the sitters' heads and shoulders in strict and mostly left-facing profile. Close attention was paid to hairstyles and adornment, although moko (tattoos) and facial markings were often less well delineated, possibly because of the artist's unfamiliarity with these traditional practices. The materials used have been identified as pencil, ink and aquarelle, the latter being a type of cake watercolour used by surveyors for making maps and plans, and with the application of gum arabic to impart a sheen to the subjects' hair (Dudding 2006: 119; Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 80–82, 85, 88).

Little is known of Coates the artist, and the means by which his portraits ended up in Oxford also posed something of a mystery. In late 1845 he left New Zealand for Adelaide, where he was visited by Frederick Tuckett, the

chief surveyor of the New Zealand Company, whom he had known back in Nelson. Tuckett is known to have assisted Coates financially, perhaps by purchasing the folder of paintings. Alternatively, Coates may have gifted it to his friend as a mark of gratitude (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 91). The folder subsequently passed to Tuckett's nephew, Francis Fox Tuckett, who was brother-in-law of Anna Tylor, the wife of E.B. (Edward Burnett) Tylor, anthropologist and, from 1883 to 1909, keeper of the University Museum in Oxford, of which the Pitt Rivers Museum began in 1884 as a subdepartment. Tylor was also the author, in 1871, of *Primitive Culture*, a landmark book which defined nineteenth-century ideas on cultural evolution. Francis Fox Tuckett made donations to the Pitt Rivers—of North African and European amulets, pottery and musical instruments—in the period 1887–1902, and in the light of these personal connections it would seem likely that Coates's portraits also arrived at the museum at this time (Dudding 2006: 120; Morton 2013).

Coates spent upwards of six years in Adelaide, but there is no evidence of his having painted any further portraits. During this time he suffered the misfortune of the deaths of both his young daughter and wife, whereupon he appears to have been drawn to the prospects of the Victorian goldfields, where he remained during most of the 1850s. Then in 1860 he returned to England, remarried in 1872 and died six years later at the age of 70 (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 354–71).

In 1874, some two years before Coates died, an exhibition of photographs of his portraits was held in Nelson, in the premises of bookseller and stationer J. Hounsell of Trafalgar Street. Described as “sun pictures”—presumably contact prints made using sunlight—they were produced by a photographic firm in Bath. The originals were held in England, and the prints were owned by an S. Strong, quite probably the same S. Strong who had displayed flax twine at the previous year's Nelson Exhibition (*Colonist* 1873: 3). The portraits represented included “Rauperaha” (Te Rauparaha) and one of his wives, as well as “Rangehaetea” (Te Rangihaeata) and his wife, who was a daughter of Te Rauparaha and said to have been the first person to be killed in the clash of 1843 (*Colonist* 1874: 3).

Of the 52 Māori portraits by Coates held by the Pitt Rivers Museum, the best-known subject is Te Rauparaha (ca. 1768–1849), rangatira (chief) and war leader of the Ngāti Toa tribe. Thanks largely to the possession of muskets, he was able to conquer new territories and thereby alter the tribal structure in central New Zealand. Coates's profile of Te Rauparaha (Fig. 2) clearly captures his distinguishing features, the aquiline “hook” nose and overhanging lip. Chiefly status is indicated by a swatch of white feathers—probably albatross—suspended from his left ear, and a single forward-pointing white feather in his hair. Along with Te Rauparaha in the Pitt Rivers's collection of portraits is a depiction of one of his eight



Figure 2. Isaac Coates, *Rauparaha*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



Figure 3. Isaac Coates, *Cootia*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

wives, Cootia (Fig. 3), more commonly known as Kutia or Pipi Kutia. She accompanied her husband on many of the tribe's military forays, and—as captured by Coates—was distinguished by her spectacularly large mass of combed-up hair (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 107).

Although named, some of Coates's portraits remain unidentified. There is, for example, no record of any such person as Biraka (Fig. 4), or similar, and no known antecedents or descendants. Many of the names reflect varying degrees of European influence, hardly surprising given when the portraits were produced. Thus, Poomip (Fig. 5) is almost certainly a transliteration of Bumby, a result of the visit of Wesleyan missionary John Bumby to the northeast of the South Island in 1839. Similarly, Manu, a chief at Wakapuaka, near Nelson, was also known as Wi Katene, a transliteration of William Cotton, the Anglican missionary who baptised Manu in 1844.

Evidence of settler influence was also apparent in the red sealing wax attached to the shark's-tooth ear ornaments worn by Poomip and Erou. In addition, these head-and-shoulders portraits record examples of European-style dress, such as the black waistcoat or coat and black jacket worn by Manu (Fig. 6) and Erou's (Fig. 7) loose blue blouse tucked into her tartan skirt or blanket (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 141, 145, 191, 229). The majority of Coates's subjects also have moko and wear European blankets as capes, while a large number of portraits include a glimpse of the back of a European chair.

Māori art, collected by Joseph Banks, George Forster and those who sailed on Cook's and other voyages, found its way—often by circuitous means—to the Pitt Rivers Museum, as would these portraits by Isaac Coates. If he had seen them, Augustus Pitt-Rivers would have no doubt fitted them into his scheme of social development, which identified universal evolutionary stages, with European societies representing the most advanced rank (Pitt Rivers Museum n.d.). But irrespective of whether they were seen as conforming to nineteenth-century museological and anthropological classifications, Coates's Māori portraits can now be recognised as having much greater significance and relevance. Collectively they have been hailed as representing “an invaluable historical record” and, among other things, reproduction of the original images, in newspapers and other publications, helped bring attention to events in New Zealand to a much wider audience than would have been possible otherwise (Mitchell and Mitchell 2021: 372).

On a personal level, Coates's subjects were drawn from a wide range of Māori society. With a few exceptions, they are now known only by these images, and their personal stories remain mostly unrecorded. Nevertheless, these individuals represent a particularly tumultuous period in the colony's history, and in Māori society and demography in particular. The portraits



Figure 4. Isaac Coates, *Biraka*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



Figure 5. Isaac Coates, *Poomip*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

constitute a unique resource, one that resulted from an internal diaspora as groups sought to escape tribal conflict and reestablish themselves in the Cook Strait region. These images, like many other items produced both by and of Indigenous peoples, and which reside in museums on the other side of the world, are now accessible to all, thanks to a magnificent publication by Nelson historians Hilary and John Mitchell, *He ringatoi o ngā tūpuna: Isaac Coates and His Māori Portraits* (2021).

As one of the world's leading and best-known museums of anthropology, ethnography and archaeology, the Pitt Rivers recognises that its history and many of its objects are closely tied to British imperial expansion and colonial collecting practices. As a result it recently carried out some major changes, with a focus on those displays that reinforced stereotypical attitudes towards other cultures or that included looted objects or featured human remains. By its own admission, its initiatives represent “one of the most pioneering approaches to decolonisation at a museum in the UK” (Pitt Rivers Museum n.d.).

Museums worldwide are currently undergoing unprecedented change regarding issues associated with Indigenous material. In late 2022, collections of treasures from Benin, taken when the kingdom (in modern-day Nigeria) was sacked during a British punitive expedition in 1897, were handed over to Nigeria by a group of four German museums and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (*The Guardian* 2023). At the same time, there were reported “rumblings of frustration” with Britain, which held the single largest Benin collection—at the British Museum—but whose governments had long resisted debates on restitution (Oltermann 2022). Since 1816 the British Museum has also been home to the fifth-century BC Parthenon marbles, obtained in 1801–1812 in contentious circumstances by Lord Elgin. “Preliminary” talks are now taking place between the British Museum and Greek officials on what has been described as “the world's longest-running cultural dispute” (Smith 2022). In early 2023 English writer and actor Stephen Fry offered his view on the matter, likening the removal of the marbles from Athens to taking the Eiffel Tower away from France or Stonehenge from Britain (Khomami 2023).

Late 2022 also saw the return of stolen Māori and Moriori ancestral remains, from Vienna's Natural History Museum to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. Of the 64 sets of remains, 49 had been exhumed and “collected” by Austrian naturalist and taxidermist Andreas Reischek when in New Zealand between 1877 and 1889. Their repatriation was the culmination of 77 years of negotiation with Austria, and followed the recent return of similar material from London's Natural History Museum and four *toi moko* (tattooed Māori heads) from two separate



Figure 6. Isaac Coates, *Manu*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



Figure 7. Isaac Coates, *Erou*, ca. 1843–1845, pencil, ink and aquarelle, with gum arabic, on paper, 535 × 350 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

German institutions (Chumko 2022). More recently, in early 2023 there was a call for the return of taonga Māori (Māori treasures) listed for sale by London auction house Sotheby's. Among the objects was a mere (short club) made of pounamu (greenstone), originally given by Ngāti Whātua chief Pāora Tūhaere to a British vice-admiral in 1886 on condition it remained in the latter's family. As the mere had now passed out of the family's hands, Ngarimu Blair, deputy chair of the Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Trust, called for it to be returned to the tribe, and hoped a future buyer would consider repatriating it (McClure 2023).

It is not just museums of anthropology and ethnology that are responding to changing attitudes. The Natural History Museum in London is also now committed to becoming a “diverse and inclusive” institution, and a label in a recent (January 2023) display admits that hallmarks of the legacy of “empire, colonialism and exploration” are to be seen in its collections and galleries.

GLOSSARY

The terms in this glossary are New Zealand Māori unless otherwise stated.

kotiate	violin-shaped handclub
mere	short club
moko	tattoo
pounamu	greenstone
rangatira	chief
taonga Māori	Māori treasures
toi moko	tattooed head

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