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RELIGIOUS RUPTURE AND REVIVAL IN THE PACIFIC

THE TARANAKI ICONOCLASM

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ABSTRACT: This article proposes that regional iconoclasm occurred in Taranaki (New Zealand) in the 1850s. Like the Polynesian Iconoclasm, the Taranaki Iconoclasm was pursued in the interests of greater centralisation and involved the destruction and/or desecration of tapu 'sacred' places and objects, including wāhi tapu 'sacred groves', mauri stones 'stones containing life essences', god-images and ancestral relics. In its later phases, this iconoclasm was orchestrated by a tohunga matakite 'seer/prophet' named Tamati Te Ito who, in 1857, became the inspired leader of a pan-tribal movement whose members called themselves Kaingārara.

Keywords: Māori prophets, iconoclasm, Christian conversion, centralisation, tapu, tohunga 'priest, ritual expert'

In a recent book, *The Polynesian Iconoclasm*, I sought to show how Christian conversion in East Polynesia was a ritual and seasonal event that comprised a series of closely linked iconoclastic episodes, each an emulation of an earlier one (Sissons 2014). Beginning in Mo'orea in 1815, chiefs and priests in the Society Islands, Austral Islands, Hawaiian Islands and Cook Islands expelled their personal and tribal *atua* 'gods, ancestral spirits, demons' by defiling their god-images and eating with commoners at collective feasts. In some cases, the food consumed at these feasts had been cooked on fires into which god-images had been thrown. In making an argument for a single regional event I excluded Māori conversions in New Zealand for two reasons: firstly, because mass conversion to Christianity was initiated by Māori leaders in the late 1830s and early 1840s and did not appear to involve any intentional emulation of the iconoclastic events in Island Polynesia; and secondly, because god-images and temples such as those destroyed during the Polynesian Iconoclasm did not feature strongly in Māori religious practice.

I have since discovered, however, that although there was no widespread iconoclasm in New Zealand, many *ariki* 'high chiefs' and *tohunga* 'priests, ritual experts' throughout the country did expel their atua (and hence violate their personal *tapu* 'sacredness', a state derived from associations with atua) in the late 1830s and early 1840s by pouring warm cooking water over themselves or touching parts of their bodies with cooked *kūmara* 'sweet potato' (Sissons 2015). These rites appear to have cleared the way for mass

conversion and so paralleled to some extent the Polynesian Iconoclasm—in 1839 there were only around 2,000 baptised Māori adults, but after the expelling of atua this number increased dramatically, reaching around 60,000 within five years (Yates 2013: 127). Subsequent rites for driving atua from burial grounds and *wāhi tapu* 'sacred groves' in the 1850s appear to have been a sequel to the deliberate violation of personal tapu prior to baptism. While the tapu of chiefs and priests had been significantly reduced, their altars and sacred remains deposited in the wāhi tapu (including hair and nail clippings, food scraps and items of clothing) remained dangerous—particularly so, since the atua that guarded the groves were now effectively uncontrolled. Examples of these latter rites have been documented for Taranaki, Northland and the lower South Island (Sissons 2016).

In this article, my focus is exclusively on these and other post-conversion rites as they were performed in Taranaki. While there was no New Zealand iconoclasm, I will argue that the destruction and/or desecration, throughout Taranaki, of god-images, sacred groves, stone altars and ancestral relics, together with the unearthing of *mauri* stones (stones that had been buried in abandoned hill settlements and into which the life essence of the settlements had been instilled) constituted a regional iconoclasm which, like the Polynesian Iconoclasm, was directed towards political centralisation. While, strictly speaking, stone altars, mauri stones and relics were not icons, they were all, like the East Polynesian god-images, tapu indexes of divine or ancestral agency (Gell 1998: 106–15). I have chosen to emphasise this shared quality by naming the regional event "the Taranaki Iconoclasm". Whereas in East Polynesia, centralised Christian polities were promoted by priests acting on behalf of high chiefs who would become "kings", in Taranaki, a related political and religious project was pursued by a local *tohunga matakite* 'seer/prophet' acting on behalf of local chiefs who were seeking to unite as one pan-tribal body. The prophet's name was Tamati Te Ito Ngāmoke, and his pan-tribal movement called themselves "Kaingārara".

One of the sources of inspiration for my understanding of the Polynesian Iconoclasm as a process of centralisation was the highly original, at times brilliant, writings of A.M. Hocart. Marshall Sahlins has half-jokingly claimed to be "a Cartesian—a Hocartesian" (2017: 91). In some respects, I am too, but, strangely, my Hocart points me in the opposite direction to that divined by Sahlins. While the Hocart from whom Sahlins claims to have drawn inspiration bears an uncanny resemblance to Sahlins himself—he anticipated the ontological turn and "freed himself from anthropological conventions by adhering to indigenous traditions" (p. 91)—my Hocart was an unconventional theorist of centralisation who would have had little time for the mythological underpinnings of the ontological turn. Following Hocart's lead, Sahlins proposed, in the inaugural Hocart Lecture, that the "original political society"

was cosmologically organised, existing first as myth and later as reality. My Hocart would have stressed, however, that the original political society was *ritually* organised; myth was significant because it was "a true record of ritual" (1952: 25). Defending his focus on ritual, Hocart wrote:

> A friend of mine thinks I hang too much on the peg of ritual. When you see a man reducing many things to one, it is natural to get alarmed, to think he has a bee in his bonnet; but my friend forgets we all have one great bee in our bonnets and that is Life—life for ourselves, life for our progeny, as much life as is possible with as great a margin as possible over bare existence. … One technique for securing life we call ritual. (1952: 51)

In my view, Hocart's most profound insight, and one that potentially opens up a whole post-Foucauldian anthropology of the colonial state, is that all government has ritual origins—governmentality is essentially a ritual phenomenon. In his posthumously published *Kings and Councillors* Hocart was scathing in his criticisms of economists and sociologists who were unable to appreciate the place of ritual practice in human political history:

> Ritual is not in good odour with our intellectuals … In their eyes only economic interests can create anything as solid as the state. Yet if they would only look about them they would everywhere see communities banded together by interest in a common ritual; they would even find that ritual enthusiasm builds more solidly than economic ambitions, because ritual involves a rule of life, whereas economics are a rule of gain, and so divide rather than unite. (1970: 35)

Kings and Councillors seeks to show that state formation was a process of ritual centralisation that entailed an initial concentration of collective life in the person of the king and a subsequent transformation of ritual functions into state functions. In relation to the role of religious ritual in the centralising projects of kings, Hocart wrote:

> It may seem a roundabout way of centralizing government to let one god devour all the rest. It seems roundabout only to those who are still possessed by the idea that the primary function of the king is to govern, to be the head of the administration. We shall see that he is nothing of the kind. He is the repository of the gods, that is of the life of the group. (1970: 98–99)

Hocart further claimed that iconoclasm needs to be understood as integral to this process of ritual centralisation, noting that "the struggle between idolaters and iconoclasts is … at bottom a struggle between local autonomists and centralizers" (1970: 248).

Indeed, Hocart's generalisations precisely describe the activities of the priests and high chiefs of Polynesia who, taking Jehovah as their "one god",

initiated the Polynesian Iconoclasm, centralising their societies around themselves in ritual formations that were stronger than any that they had known previously. And they also describe well the activities in the 1850s of the Taranaki tohunga matakite Tamati Te Ito, who, like the Polynesian priests, employed "one god to devour all the rest"—except that in Tamati Te Ito's case, the "god" most immediately employed was Karutahi, a pre-Christian atua that had elsewhere assumed the form of a *taniwha* 'water-dwelling guardian'.

THE TARANAKI ICONOCLASM, PHASES ONE AND TWO

The Taranaki Iconoclasm, as I conceive of it, occurred in three distinct but closely related phases: (i) the desecration of sacred groves by local tohunga, 1851–1852, (ii) the unearthing of mauri stones from abandoned *pā* 'fortified settlements' and contemporary villages, 1853–1855 and (iii) the building, throughout 1857, of large bonfires into which were thrown heirlooms, ancestral treasures and tapu material that had been excavated from the sacred groves. In making a claim for a three-phase iconoclasm in Taranaki in the 1850s my interpretation of the iconoclastic activities will differ significantly from that provided by Bronwyn Elsmore in her general overview of biblically influenced Māori social movements (Elsmore 1989: 127–40). Elsmore understood these activities as healing "responses" to the introduction of the gospel to Taranaki in a context of high levels of mortality among Māori caused by introduced diseases. Certainly, healing appears to have been of primary concern for tohunga and their communities during my Phase One; however, I will argue that political centralisation became an equally or perhaps more significant concern during Phases Two and Three. Because she understood the 1850s as "a decade of the healers" (pp. 95–106), rather than a decade of extreme colonial tension in relation to land, Elsmore failed to register the transformation, under Te Ito's guidance, of a Christian healing movement into a Christian political movement.

The collective eating that characterised the first phase of the iconoclasm began in New Plymouth in 1851 (Taylor journal, 13 August 1851) and was quickly taken up by communities all along the west coast as far south as Whanganui. Directed by a number of different local tohunga, the rites entailed piling together wood and stones—including, in some cases, those of the ritual altar (*tūāhu*)—into a large fire upon which potatoes were roasted and eaten by the whole community. People stood in a circle around the fire and passages from the Bible were read by the tohunga while the food was being consumed. This rite was intended to expel any *atua kikokiko* 'malevolent ancestral spirits' that haunted the grove in the form of lizards and which were thought to be causing widespread sickness. Cooked food was understood to be the antithesis of all things tapu, including places to which atua had been ritually called or installed as guardians. Cooking and eating food in sacred groves, therefore, rendered these places uninhabitable for atua.

Here is a description of the rite as performed by the Ngāti Ruanui of southern Taranaki:

> Pirimona assembled the inhabitants in the wahi tapu or sacred grove in the midst of which the "tuahu" or praying stone still stands and having lit several fires in the middle of the grove, whilst the entire population sat round in a circle, he read a chapter from the Testament and cooked some potatoes, which he hukihukied or strung on short sticks and then laid on the fires, which being done he presented some to each person in the circle … On my speaking to a person who had done so he said "was it not right to drive away the ngararas or reptiles from them (so they called their gods)". (Taylor journal, 10 September 1851)

I will say no more of the events of Phase One here, partly because I have discussed these in detail in an earlier article (Sissons 2016) but also because while they were a prelude to Tamati Te Ito's centralising activities, they were all local ceremonies led by local tohunga. It is quite possible that Te Ito was one of these tohunga, but I have yet to discover any direct evidence to support this view. Te Ito is said to have returned to Taranaki from the Victorian goldfields in 1853 (AJHR 1869, A-13: 15); if so, he would have been absent from New Zealand during at least some of the Phase One period. Between 1851 and 1854 some 300 Māori miners were camped at Bendigo in the Australian state of Victoria and Te Ito may have joined this group (Cahir and Clark 2014: 118–19).

During Phase Two of the Taranaki Iconoclasm, mauri stones were removed from the sites of abandoned fortified villages by a large group of horsemen led by Tamati Te Ito. Robert Parris, who as district land purchase commissioner and a fluent Māori speaker gained a good knowledge of Te Ito's activities, wrote:

> A party of young men, varying from twenty to thirty, was made up for him from the different tribes, and maintained for a very long time doing nothing but digging over their tapued grounds, gathering stones and old trophies, such as he chose to pronounce to be sacred. (AJHR 1869, A-13: 15)

Mauri stones were consecrated fetishes into which the life essence of the community had been instilled before they were buried by tohunga to prevent their discovery by enemies. Alfred Gell, in his brilliant discussion of distributed personhood, termed them "aniconic idols" and explicitly likened them to the iconic idols of Tahiti that were destroyed during the Polynesian Iconoclasm. Both, he argued, were indexes of divinity that participated in social life, distributing or concentrating divine personhood in the process (1998: 106–15). We have no way of knowing how many of the stones unearthed by Te Ito were, in fact, ancient mauri, but this pan-tribal *whakanoa* 'tapu removal' project appears to have proceeded under the *mana* 'power, status' of tribal leaders who recognised Te Ito's visionary abilities.

There are two further accounts of Tamati Te Ito's Phase Two activities, both of which generally support that of Parris quoted above. The first was written by an eyewitness who, remarkably, was none other than Stephenson Percy Smith, future Surveyor-General of New Zealand and founder of the Polynesian Society. Percy Smith was born in 1840 and so would have only been a boy of 13 or 14 when he observed the events he recorded. Here is his account in full, written around 67 years after the activities he witnessed:

> We do not know what was the immediate cause of the movement that took place to remove the *tapu* of the old *pas*; but one man named by white people Tamati Tito, but whose proper name was Te Ito, suddenly came to the fore as a *tohunga*, or priest, with the assertion that he had the power to remove the *tapu* from the sacred stones. And this he proceeded to do by visiting all the old *pas* in the neighbourhood of New Plymouth and surrounding district. We have no record of his visiting *all* the old *pas*, but he probably did—I can at least vouch for his visit to Ngaturi, the old *pa* on which was afterwards built—during the Maori war—the Omata stockade.
>
> Either in 1853 or 1854, I was passing this place and there saw a large body of Maori horsemen, some fifty or sixty in number, some looking after the horses, others on top of the *pa*, which is not a large one—perhaps half an acre in extent—the ancient *maioro*, or ramparts, of which are still (1920) distinguishable. Being curious to learn what was going on, I went up to the *pa*, but was not allowed to go further than the entrance. I saw at the far side a group of men going through some performance which, after knowledge enables one to say, was the recitation of *karakias* ['chants'] by one of the men. This was Te Ito, and as I learned, he was *whakanoa*, or removing the *tapu* from the place. Though I saw nothing of any stone in this case, I heard at the time from others that Te Ito always searched for some sacred stone in the many *pas* he visited, and in most cases these stones were removed to other places and buried in spots known only to a select few of the old Maoris. (Smith 1920: 150–51)

The second supporting account was written by the Wesleyan missionary T.G. Hammond. Hammond's account of Te Ito's activities appears to draw upon information supplied to him by George Stannard, a missionary stationed at Waitōtara, southern Taranaki, in the period 1850–1857 (Missionary Register 1851: 222). Hammond emphasised that Te Ito was a tohunga matakite, an inspired seer who had the power to divine the presence of "representations of deities", including mauri stones, "under buildings, alongside rivers and in various other places" (1940: 59). In an insightful comment, dismissed by Elsmore because it contradicted her argument for a "healing response" inspired by Scriptural command, Hammond further noted that Te Ito's project was probably in "anticipation of circumstances in relation to the retention of

land by the people" (p. 59). This opinion finds support in a pithy comment by Te Ito himself. Smith met Te Ito in 1906 and asked him why he had thought it necessary to remove the mauri stones from pā. Smith was told: "We wanted to combine all the Maori people from Mokau to Patea in one body, and to remove the *tapu* from the old *pas*, as it was harmful to people" (Smith 1920: 151). Mōkau and Pātea are at the northern and southern boundaries respectively of the Taranaki district.

In addition to removing mauri from pā and other tapu places, Te Ito and his group of horsemen attempted to expel Maru, an extremely powerful atua, from at least one god-image toward the end of this Phase Two. Rangipito Te Ito, one of Smith's main Taranaki informants and a relative of Tamati Te Ito, told Smith that Maru "was a very powerful god, indeed he was like Jehovah". He added that Maru "was the principal god of Taranaki, indeed of all descendants of those who came in the 'Aotea canoe', as also of [Te] Ati-Awa" (Smith 1908: 143). In a note written to Smith in 1906, Hammond recorded:

> The stone image of the god, Maru, which the Patea people formerly possessed, was burnt by Tamati Te Ito, and his *ope whakanoa* (or party who took the old *tapu* off the *pas*, etc. in about 1855. Te Ito is still alive, a very old man, at this day, 1906). The stone broke in pieces when burnt. (p. 143, unnumbered footnote)

Maru had also been called upon by tohunga to reside in a wooden "god-stick" approximately 25 cm long with a carved head at one end and a smooth, tapered shaft, wrapped tightly with flax cord, at the other. Hammond wrote that this image was also burned, although possibly not by Te Ito, since he implied that its destruction occurred earlier "when they embraced Christianity" (Hammond correspondence, letter to Percy Smith, 29 December 1891). In East Polynesia, the wrapping of god-images in order to fix the spirit of the god into the image was central to most seasonal rites. The binding of the wooden Maru image had no doubt been a closely related practice, probably with the same intended result. In Taranaki, but rarely elsewhere in New Zealand, these bound images, termed *rākau whakapākoko* or *atua whakapākoko*, were used by tohunga in rites performed beside altars such as those destroyed in Phases One and Three of the Taranaki Iconoclasm (Smith 1908: 143).

In a useful rethinking of the concept of the "fetish", David Graeber (2005) proposed that the production of fetishes is always a socially creative activity that may, at times, be revolutionary. Indeed, in the aftermath of iconoclasms in the Society Islands, the printing, binding and distribution of biblical texts by missionaries under the kingly authority of Pōmare was a revolutionary process of fetish production that replaced the pre-Christian production and distribution of god-images by his priests (Sissons 2014: 101–16). Tamati Te

Ito's unearthing of mauri previously distributed throughout Taranaki and his reburying of them in a secret location can be viewed as a reversal of this process of fetish distribution—it was, instead, one of fetish concentration. Yet, since it was a concentration of fetishes into the hands and control of one powerful tohunga, it was also a process of Hocartian political centralisation. Mauri stones, some of which were hollow, were, like the god-images, believed to contain power and life, concentrating the productivity of people, forests, gardens and fishing grounds. Te Ito's ability to "see" these and the presence of their guardian atua throughout Taranaki, and his ability to bring them under his control, was evidence of his exceptional mana as a tohunga matakite. By boldly destroying the stone image of the powerful god, Maru, and surviving the iconoclastic episode unharmed, Te Ito further enhanced his reputation throughout Taranaki, so much so that by 1857 he had risen to become the prophetic leader of his pan-tribal Kaingārara movement.

Up to this point, our lens has been focused closely on the details of Te Ito's Phase Two ritual activities. I now want to zoom out, widen the view and provide some necessary political context for his project. This will enable us to understand Te Ito's actions as constituting both a ritual struggle with local atua and a political struggle against colonial aggressors.

By far the most significant development in southern Taranaki tribal politics in this 1853–1855 period was an attempt by Ngāti Ruanui leaders, supported by others from northern Taranaki (Te Āti Awa and Taranaki Iwi) and Ōtaki (Ngāti Toa and Ngāti Raukawa), to build a strong political alliance able to better resist colonial pressures for land sales and provide a strong, united voice in dealing with the Government. With the proclamation of the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1853, most Māori became disenfranchised citizens. The Act created Provinces (including the Province of New Plymouth), a Legislative Council and a House of Representatives elected by British subjects who were over the age of 21 and who owned land worth 50 pounds. While some Māori were able to vote under these provisions, most were excluded because their land was owned collectively. Section 71 of the Act also made provision for the setting apart of areas in which Māori "laws, customs and usages" could prevail so long as they were "not repugnant to the general principles of humanity" (*Taranaki Herald*, 13 October 1852, p. 4). In February 1853, and at least partially in response to this Act, Mātene Te Whiwhi and Tamihana Te Rauparaha from the Ōtaki tribes Ngāti Toa and Ngāti Raukawa began canvassing support for a Māori king, visiting Taupō, Rotorua, Maketū and Waikato. Ngāti Ruanui leaders supported this political initiative and in May of the same year they began building, at Manawapou (near present-day Hāwera in southern Taranaki), what would be at the time New Zealand's largest meeting house. Named Taiporohēnui by Matene Te Whiwhi, it was to

be a pan-tribal parliament house (Taylor journal, 26 May 1853, 9 May 1854; Church 1992: 117). Taiporohēnui was also a ritual name for the west coast of the North Island and in its new application is said to have referenced a blocking of the tide of European settlement (Sinclair 1969: 85 n33).

Opposition to land sales by Ngāti Ruanui leaders predates the New Zealand Constitution Act, and a local landholding alliance appears to have been forming immediately prior to the start of Te Ito's Phase Two activities. In September 1852, the local inspector of police, George Cooper, reported that on a recent journey through Ngāti Ruanui territory he had been told by local leaders that "Ngati Ruanui were bound by an oath never to sell any land and they never would till the end of the chapter" (Cooper to McLean, 12 September 1852). Cooper later wrote that Ngāti Ruanui were supported in their desire to hold onto their land by leaders of other Taranaki tribes (Te Āti Awa and Taranaki Iwi), describing this alliance as a "land-league" that had been solemnised through the burying of a Bible:

> The league has been ratified and confirmed at several meetings with various formulas and solemnities, a copy of the Holy Scriptures having on one occasion been buried in the earth and a cairn of stones erected on the spot in attestation of the inviolability of the oath to oppose the sale of land to Europeans. (Cooper 1854: 35; Donald McLean, Chief Land Purchasing Commissioner, also described this ceremony in February 1854, AJHR 1861, C-1: 197)

This ceremony had probably been held by Christian leaders of Taranaki Iwi in August 1853. The Lutheran missionary Johann Riemenschneider noted, in his December 1853 report to the North German Missionary Society, that a copy of the New Testament had been buried, adding that the purpose of this was:

> … to place for all of Taranaki and for ever a sacred oath and divine tapu (ban) against all complete and partial sale to and settlement by Europeans! (Oettli 1996: 86)

While there is no evidence to suggest that Tamati Te Ito was present at this ceremony, it is surely no coincidence that it was being staged at the same time that he was beginning his Phase Two activities—as already noted, Te Ito is reported to have returned from the Victorian goldfields sometime in 1853, and Smith saw him with his *ope whakanoa* 'tapu-removal troop' in 1853 or 1854 (AJHR 1869, A-13: 15; Smith 1920: 150). Both the placing of the New Testament in the earth and the removal of mauri stones from the earth were undoubtedly informed by the same understanding—the Testament represented a new form of mauri, a consecrated fetish or "aniconic idol" which contained the power of God. It made perfect sense, therefore, for Te

Ito to remove the tribally specific mauri stones that, in effect, competed with this new centralising mauri and the tribal alliance it indexed.

In May 1854, a grand, pan-tribal hui was held in the large Taiporohēnui meeting house, again attended by the Ngāti Raukawa leaders and around 500 Ngāti Ruanui. At a huge feast, which included 140 pigs, 1,000 baskets of potatoes, 900 baskets of kūmara, 700 baskets of taro and bread baked from two tonnes of flour produced by a local mill, the opposition to land sales was reaffirmed (Taylor journal, 8 May 1854). Tamati Te Ito and his party of horsemen (ope whakanoa) would have been fully immersed in their whakanoa project at this time.

THE TARANAKI ICONOCLASM, PHASE THREE

The final phase of the Taranaki Iconoclasm commenced in early 1857, when Tamati Te Ito moved out of the shadows as leader of the ope whakanoa to orchestrate spectacular *ahi whakanoa* 'tapu-destroying fires' as the prophetic leader of the pan-tribal movement which named itself Kaingārara. It appears that Te Ito and his supporters had concluded that the rites of cooking and eating in sacred groves during Phase One and the removal of mauri stones during Phase Two had not been effective enough in combating the dangerous presence of atua—epidemics were still ravaging local Māori communities—and despite the burying of a Bible, people were becoming more politically divided in their attitudes towards land sales.

The first hint of Te Ito's changed mission is contained in a report by Rev. Riemenschneider to his German Missionary Society, written in June 1857. The missionary wrote that during the period January to March 1857, Te Ito had been performing "miracles" among the Ngāti Ruanui people who had thus become "entranced" by him (Riemenschneider 1857: 113). By July of the following year, Riemenscheider had become convinced that Te Ito's movement had millennial dimensions—it sought "the fulfilment of the divine order to come" by clearing away tapu, the main obstacle to this fulfilment:

> He needed to clear away this obstacle which still lies between [God and Māori] in the name of God in order to open the way for their perfection and completeness … This fulfilment [of the divine order to come] will and must take place when his work is completed … and nobody should be allowed to doubt him or his work … . (Riemenschneider 1858: 327)

The Kaingārara conception of a divine hierarchy included three levels of atua: on the highest level was the atua of Paihia—the Church Missionary Society God; below him was the Catholic atua; and on the third level were Māori atua termed *atua whakapākoko*—atua that could enter images and human mediums (Te Whena 1858). In accordance with this conception, Te Ito

was now orchestrating the clearance of tapu as the inspired medium of a third-level atua named Karutahi (lit. 'one-eyed'). An apparently knowledgeable correspondent, perhaps Riemenschneider or the Wesleyan missionary Rev. John Whiteley, reported in the *Wellington Independent*:

> This *Puketapu* man [member of the Puketapu *hapū* 'kin group' of Te Āti Awa], whose name is Tamati, asserts that Karutahi, an old Waikato deity has entrusted him with a divine commission to abolish the ancient and sacred rite of *Tapu*. Tamati has become the medium whereby the god Karutaha [*sic*] reveals to the maori race the *cause of their rapid diminution*. It runs this :—The all potent institution of Tapu has of late years been disregarded; the "wahi tapu," or "sacred place," has been desecrated; from the consecrated grove, flax and toetoe [a grass] have been gathered … vengeance [of atua], assuming the form of a *Ngarara* (lizard) enters the body of man, consumes his vitals, and thereby causes death. (*Wellington Independent*, 22 July 1857, p. 2)

Karutahi is known today as a Waikato taniwha, an ancestral guardian who inhabits a swamp near Meremere. When Transit New Zealand was carrying out an improvement to State Highway 1 in 2002 the *hapū* 'kin group' for whom Karutahi now acts as a guardian atua (*kaitiaki*) objected that the new route would pass through Karutahi's abode, and after negotiations the original route was altered in 2002 (Keene 2007: 8). If Te Ito was acting as a medium for this taniwha then he was embodying the atua of a powerful neighbour who had 25 years previously driven many Taranaki people from their homes, forcing them to migrate south to Ōtaki, Waikanae and the South Island. Taniwha often take the form of *ngārara* 'large reptiles'; hence it seems that in taking on the power of Karutahi to expel the lizards from sacred groves Te Ito was embodying the spirit of a large Waikato ngārara to defeat a multitude of smaller Taranaki ngārara. Appropriate, therefore, that his followers named themselves "Kaingārara", lit. 'reptile-eaters'. As I have said, in Hocartian terms, Te Ito was bringing about centralisation by calling upon "one god to devour all the rest".

In its associations with Karutahi, Te Ito's movement exhibited a curious parallel with another movement in Northland that began around the same time. In January 1856, the Church Mission Society missionary, Richard Davis, was shown a drawing of a flying ngārara which he termed a "flying dragon". He subsequently learned that the image provided protection from an epidemic that a tohunga matakite, or 'doctor' (as Davis described him), predicted would visit the world. Davis (1856) wrote that the unnamed tohunga's followers protected themselves by looking at personal renderings of the image and that there was "scarcely a tribe throughout the country" which did not possess a copy. Like Te Ito, this man formed a tapu-removal party and with this ope

whakanoa visited many pā and sacred groves throughout Northland during 1856 and 1857 (Davis 1857). While it is possible that this movement was influenced by that of Te Ito, the two ngārara and their atua-expelling projects appear to have been quite distinct.

Riemenschneider took a particular interest in Te Ito's activities and lectured on them as a local expert in New Plymouth. Percy Smith, now a 17-year-old youth, recorded in his diary on 11 June 1857:

> My 17th birthday. Attended interesting lecture by Mr Riemenschneider on the movement going on amongst the natives, viz "Whakanoa" or making "common" their Tapu places, which is done by a Prophet named Tamati of Ngati Ruanui.

The *Taranaki Herald* later printed a lengthy summary of Riemenschneider's lecture. The missionary had attended some of Te Ito's ceremonies and had learned that frequent deaths had been attributed to the continued presence of atua kikokiko that haunted burial grounds. To free people from their influence, the grounds had been excavated "in various directions", and the material that had been collected was burned in large fires. Riemenschneider added that Te Ito had begun his movement in the south where he had performed his ceremonies "to the complete satisfaction of the Ngāti Ruanui tribe" and that, at the time of speaking, he was working with Te Āti Awa living to the north of New Plymouth (*Taranaki Herald*, 20 June 1857, p. 2).

The results of some of Te Ito's southern Ngāti Ruanui ceremonies were recorded by Rev. Richard Taylor in March 1857. In January, at Weriweri and Waiheke (between present day Hāwera and Eltham), Taylor was told that certain stones, which had been placed by pre-Christian tohunga around the boundaries of kūmara gardens to signify that the crops were under the protection of atua, had been causing sickness and death (Taylor journal, 4 and 5 January 1857). Then, some three months later, he wrote:

> All the old stones used as land marks and many others had been bewitched by their forefathers and they caused the death of all who touched them. They had therefore carefully dug them all up and carried them to one spot where they formed a heap of considerable size, there were several tons of them. These they heated in a large fire and then cooked potatoes with which the whole pa partook. This was done to w[h]akanoa or render common the stones and destroy the spell supposed to land on them. (Taylor journal, 28 March 1857; Elsmore (1989: 131) incorrectly dated this event as March 1858)

If, as Riemenschneider noted, Te Ito was performing "miracles" among Ngāti Ruanui at this time these activities had almost certainly been orchestrated by him. In concluding its report on Riemenschneider's lecture the *Taranaki*

Herald expressed its hope that after the tapu had been removed from the land people would be more willing to sell it—a comment that suggests an extraordinary level of ignorance or hopeful thinking among settlers in relation to Te Ito's motivation.

A further report on Te Ito's movement was later sent to the Wesleyan Missionary Society by their missionary, Rev. John Whiteley. He wrote that the movement had been occurring all along the coast, and that the "destruction of all their sacred places" had been "attended to with great zeal and parade" (Wesleyan Missionary Society 1857). The "parades" included the blowing of "trumpets", possibly the long wooden trumpets termed *pūkāea* (*Lyttelton Times*, 15 August 1857, p. 2).

Following the parades and trumpets, large bonfires were lit. Whiteley, an "anxious" witness to these, later wrote:

> Cart-loads of stones, and trees, and rubbish were dug out and collected from the *wahi tapus* of the respective settlements and tribes; and then, with great ceremony, reading of the Scriptures and pretended devotion, burnt in large fires made for the occasion. (*Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, 23 January 1861)

In his insightful book *Maori Folk Art*, artist and writer Alan Taylor described what appears to have been one of these events. His account is unsourced, but given that much of Taylor's deep knowledge of Māori art history came from interviews with Taranaki Māori informants, it is likely that it derives from local oral tradition. Taylor wrote:

> The death rate in south Taranaki was so alarming that tribal elders threw onto a bonfire all they could find of their old culture—carvings, ornaments and figures of ancient gods—in the hope that this might lessen the calamity that had come upon them. The fire burnt for three days, but to no purpose: the death toll continued to rise. (1988: 48)

A related oral tradition, included by John Houston in his *Maori Life in Old Taranaki*, tells of "carvings of wood and stone" being destroyed in a fire at Taki Ruahine pā, situated south-west of Hāwera, "subsequent to the introduction of Christianity". Houston wrote that "the fire burned for days, until in the end one special stone image burst asunder with a loud report, to the consternation of tribesmen" (1965: 118). It is possible that the "special stone image" referred to here was the same Maru figure which Hammond said was "formerly possessed by the Patea people", but this is unlikely given that Taki Ruahine pā is some 15 km north of Pātea.

Te Ito's iconoclasm continued throughout 1857—in addition to the Pātea fires, the New Plymouth police commissioner, Henry Halse, reported fires

at New Plymouth, Ōakura, Wārea and Umuroa, near present-day Ōpunake (Halse to McLean, 15 June, 5 and 19 September, 12 and 19 October 1857). In September, after having attended Te Ito's Ōakura ceremony held at Poutoko pā, Halse thought that Kaingārara was destined to become a national movement, writing to the Native Secretary and Chief Land Purchasing Commissioner, Donald McLean:

> The only occurrence of the past week has been the meeting at the Poutoko pa about the Kai ngarara ceremony. It took place on Wednesday and was attended as nearly as I could reckon by about six hundred and fifty-five natives. The particulars of which will appear in my diary. Tamati Te Ito is at Poutoko and was to leave this day for Warea [heading south down the coast] and thence to Umuroa. Where he will proceed next is not at present known, but it is supposed that he will be called upon to perform his ceremony all over this island. (Halse to McLean, 14 September 1857)

* * *

If what Te Ito told Percy Smith in 1906 was true then Te Ito had never had any intention of taking his ceremony "all over" the island as Halse predicted. Rather, Te Ito and his chiefly supporters were seeking to unite *Taranaki*—"to combine all the Māori people from Mōkau to Pātea in one body". And this is exactly what he and the leaders of Te Āti Awa, Taranaki Iwi and Ngāti Ruanui began to do in earnest after the last of Te Ito's bonfires in October 1857. Letters written to Te Ito by his Kaingārara followers in villages throughout Taranaki show that in 1858 plans for a pan-tribal settlement near Parihaka (where Te Whiti's pacifist community would later be formed) were well underway and a court system had been instituted (Goode 2002; Sissons 2019). In her introduction to her translations of these letters Penelope Goode noted that people appealed to Te Ito for judgement and advice on a wide variety of cases. She continued: "These cases strongly suggest that the Kaingārara Movement had much in common with the King Movement in its focus on law and order and the development of policies for land rights" (2002: 15). Indeed, one of the letters, signed by Rewi Maniapoto, a leading supporter of the king, suggests that Te Ito's Taranaki iconoclasm and associated pan-tribal vision were viewed as a challenge to the wider ambitions of the King Movement. This letter, written to Te Ito and the tribes of Taranaki in December 1859, was blunt:

> E hoa ma, whakamutua ta koutou mahi kikokiko. Kaua e tohe.
> Whakamutu rawatea.
>
> Friends, cease your atua-expelling work. Don't continue with it.
> Cease completely. (Goode 2002: 159–60, my translation)

Te Ito did, in fact, cease his ritual "work" soon after receiving this letter, but not because he had been commanded to do so by Rewi Maniapoto. Rather, in March 1860 the Kaingārara's plans for a pan-tribal settlement were dashed when government troops destroyed Tamati Te Ito's village at Waitara, initiating the Taranaki wars (see map in Cowan 1922: 156 which identifies Te Ito's *kāinga* 'village'). Te Ito, who had been living at Waitara with the leader of Te Āti Awa, Wiremu Kīngi Te Rangitāke, sought refuge, along with many Te Āti Awa families, at an inland pā named Mataitawa, near present-day Lepperton (Whiteley journal, 11 March, 8 April 1860). He would remain there throughout most of the 1860s.

Priests and prophets do not become kings, they serve kings; and, as Hocart recognised, they do so via the performance of centralising rituals. While Te Ito's ability to organise public spectacles and to oppose the malevolent influence of some atua did translate into a temporary increase in his personal mana, this was not the enduring mana of chiefly status, grounded in genealogical primacy and connection. While the Polynesian Iconoclasm could produce kings because the priests who orchestrated it were the priests of high chiefs with ambitions of more centralised rule, Tamati Te Ito had no such local high chief to serve—Taranaki was not Tahiti, Rarotonga or Hawai'i. Instead, Te Ito's Taranaki Iconoclasm was intended to clear the way for the emergence of a new pan-tribal community where God would be fully present. This was to be a Christian community whose members also recognised the continued presence of local atua and the need to combat their potentially malign influence. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Riemenschneider reported in 1857 that church attendance in his district had increased at the time of Te Ito's bonfires. He added that Te Ito had never opposed him or the work of the mission but that he instead saw his work as preparing the land for God (Oettli 2008: 154; Riemenschneider 1857: 326–27).

The military invasion of Taranaki meant that the political vision of Te Ito and the other Kaingārara leaders would never be realised. Instead, a new form of Christian community would be established at Parihaka under the biblically inspired leadership of Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi. Most of the former Kaingārara moved to Parihaka in the mid-to-late 1860s and Tamati Te Ito joined them in 1870 (AJHR 1870, A-16: 18). Although Te Whiti referred to himself as the "King of Peace" (Elsmore 1989: 245), he was not the kind of king that Te Ito could serve. Indeed, contemporary Parihaka traditions, related to me by a knowledgeable descendant of Te Whiti, record that when Te Ito joined the Parihaka community Te Whiti told him to cease his work as an inspired seer (*pōrewarewa*). This is confirmed by a report of a meeting at Parihaka on 18 March 1870 at which Te Whiti spoke against three sources of confusion: the Māori king, the Government, and prophets, specifically referring to Te Ito as one of the latter:

> … as to the Prophets he most emphatically condemned them, and said they had all been guilty of perverting the truth. One he referred to personally, Tamati Teito [*sic*] who he said was an idiot (*porewarewa*). (AJHR 1870, A-16: 18)

Pōrewarewa were certainly not “idiots”, as the report states. They were, instead, inspired prophets and mediums; the prophet, Te Ua Haumene, had used this term to refer to his emissaries (Head 1983: 170). Nonetheless, Te Whiti had strongly signalled his opposition to Te Ito’s Kaingārara movement and had effectively declared it ended.

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