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A REDISCOVERED TAURAPA FROM THOMAS KENDALL'S 1823 *MARIANNA* CONSIGNMENT OF WHAKAIRO RĀKAU (MĀORI WOOD CARVINGS)

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ABSTRACT: The last unaccounted-for whakairo rākau (Māori wood carving) from an 1823 consignment of eight sent to London from the Bay of Islands by the missionary Thomas Kendall has now been located in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The rediscovery of this taurapa (sternpost) from a waka taua (war canoe) completes research undertaken to establish the whereabouts of the consignment. The taurapa's identification also sheds new light on the role of Tungaroa, a high-born woman from Rangihoua, as the probable interpreter of the whakairo rākau for Kendall.

Keywords: Tungaroa, Church Missionary Society, William Oldman, Horatio Robley, whakairo rākau, taurapa, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

In the December 2023 *Waka Kuaka* article “Nukutawhiti Rediscovered: Finding Thomas Kendall’s 1823 *Marianna* Consignment of Whakairo Rākau (Māori Wood Carvings)”, I described my research locating, in museums around the world, seven whakairo rākau sent from New Zealand’s Bay of Islands to London two centuries ago, and previously thought lost (Brown 2023). The rediscovery restored provenance to the whakairo rākau and raised public interest in their story and journeys around the world. However, the whereabouts of the eighth and last whakairo rākau from the consignment, a taurapa (sternpost) from a waka taua (war canoe), had proved elusive. The taurapa has now been located in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa), giving rise to further consideration of the consignment’s interpretation, as explained here.

The Bay of Islands-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Thomas Kendall sent the whakairo rākau consignment to the CMS’s London headquarters in 1823 on board the ship *Marianna*. He wrote an accompanying letter, in which each whakairo rākau was given a number and a description of its Māori spiritual meaning (Kendall 1823b: 208–10). “Nukutawhiti Rediscovered” described how Kendall “acquired” the whakairo rākau during

a turbulent time in the Bay of Islands' history, when the local Ngāpuhi tribe were engaged in the Musket Wars further south. It explained how his fall from grace and the CMS's management of its Indigenous collections were factors in the disassociation of the whakairo rākau from Kendall's descriptions. The acquisition of six of the whakairo rākau (including the taurapa) by London-based artefact dealers Horatio Robley and later William Oldman, and subsequent redistribution of four of them to museums in Europe, further distanced them from their provenance.¹ As the article explained, only when research associated a Roman numeral carved into one of the whakairo rākau with the corresponding number on Kendall's numbered list was the provenance restored. Most of the remaining consignment was then rediscovered in Berlin, Christchurch, Dunedin, New York and Zurich through archival and museum research. Each whakairo rākau had a Roman numeral corresponding to the list carved into its surface, following Kendall's written instruction to do so on their arrival in London (Kendall 1823b: 210). Missing was taurapa "no. 10" on Kendall's list, predicted in the article to be identifiable by a Roman numeral "X" carved onto its surface.

The taurapa was located in Te Papa's Te Ahuru Mōwai collection store in October 2024 following communications between me and Te Papa's Curator Mātauranga Māori, Matiu Baker. In "Nukutawhiti Rediscovered", I assumed it was still in Aotearoa New Zealand as it was likely to have been purchased by the New Zealand government from William Oldman's private collection in 1948 (Brown 2023: 422). In 2004, Roger Neich and Janet Davidson provided a list of known locations for Oldman collection taonga Māori (Māori treasures) bought by the government and distributed to museums around the country (Neich and Davidson in Oldman 2004: xxxvii). They noted that "unlisted items are in Te Papa or did not come to New Zealand". The taurapa was not on Te Papa's publicly accessible database and was not put up for auction, along with other unsold items from Oldman's personal collection, by his widow in 1950 (Sotheby & Co.: 1950). I forwarded my *Waka Kuaka* article to Baker, which prompted his search of Te Papa's internal database and eventual identification of the taurapa in the Te Ahuru Mōwai store.

Museum records identify the taurapa as "no. 49" from the *The Oldman Collection of Māori Artifacts*, and it is still identified as "OL000049/1" in the museum. As anticipated, there is a Roman numeral "X" carved into one side of the uppermost principal manaia (beaked character in profile) figure's forehead (Fig. 1). The faint markings of the "X" inscription appear in an image of the taurapa published in a catalogue of missionary exhibits at the 1867 Paris Exposition universelle d'art et d'industrie (*Musée des missions évangéliques* 1867: plate II; see Brown 2023: 402, fig. 1). This evidence supports the claim that the "X" was carved into the taurapa before 1867 and, therefore, at the same time the other seven *Marianna* consignment whakairo rākau were inscribed with their Roman numerals.



Figure 1. Detail of taurapa from the 1823 *Marianna* consignment with a Roman numeral “X” inscribed on the uppermost principal manaia figure’s forehead. Purchased by the New Zealand Government in 1948, as part of the Oldman Collection. OL000049/1, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Photograph by Maarten Holl.



Figure 2. Starboard side of the taurapa from 1823 *Marianna* consignment. Purchased by the New Zealand Government in 1948, as part of the Oldman Collection. OL000049/1, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Photograph by Maarten Holl.



Figure 3. Port side of the taurapa from 1823 *Marianna* consignment. Purchased by the New Zealand Government in 1948, as part of the Oldman Collection. OL000049/1, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Photograph by Maarten Holl.

The taurapa has suffered some breaks and fissures, as one might expect for a taonga Māori that had experienced a useful life on the water even before it circumnavigated the world by ship between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Figs 2, 3). This damage has now been treated by Te Papa conservator Nirmala Balram. Other, historical disjunctions are still to be mended. It is the only whakairo rākau from the *Marianna* consignment to have been recorded with a location, in this instance “Te Puke”, in Oldman’s inward acquisition register. No locations were included in Kendall’s inventory. “Nukutawhiti Rediscovered” considered how this attribution may have arisen and which “Te Puke” it might have been describing, without settling on a final conclusion (Brown 2023: 423–24).

Thomas Kendall’s *Marianna* consignment list describes “No. 10” as “The stern of feet of a War Canoe; representing the Dual of Mystic Rib, held together at the extreme points or toes by a bird, and defended at the lower part adjoining the Canoe by a narara [*sic*] or reptile” (Kendall 1823b: 208). As discussed in the *Waka Kuaka* December article, the “bird” is the taurapa’s uppermost principal manaia and the “narara” is one of the lower manaia (Brown 2023: 422). Kendall had confused “narara”, or more correctly ngārara (serpent), with “ngā rara”, or “ribs”, to describe one of the lower manaia that terminate two carved stems running down the taurapa’s length (Binney [1968] 2005: 149). The historian Judith Binney has argued that this led Kendall to associate the “Dual of Mystic Rib” (the two stems) with the rib that God took from man to create woman in the Book of Genesis (2:22), thus reinforcing his flawed proposition that Māori spirituality was connected to Christianity (Binney [1968] 2005: 149). Kendall’s mistake reveals he was receiving, and not fully understanding, information in te reo Māori (the Māori language) from a Māori source about the taurapa’s compositional details. The Māori source was not a passive “informant” but someone who was attempting to bridge two worlds, Māori and Pākehā (European), in their explanation of whakairo rākau to a Pākehā.

Kendall’s objective in sending the *Marianna* whakairo rākau consignment to London was to explain the “language, idolatry, theology, mythology, traditions of the New Zealanders [Māori]” to the CMS (Kendall 1823a: 202). It was, in part, a response to CMS secretary Josiah Pratt’s request for missionaries to send to the CMS headquarters Indigenous objects that might explain “native superstitions” and could be displayed in the Society’s museum (Pratt 1819a, 1819b). It was also in keeping with Kendall’s 1820 project at the University of Cambridge to transcribe te reo Māori and thereby increase intercultural intelligibility. Whereas today Hongi Hika and Waikato are acknowledged collaborators on the transcription project, more credit should be given to Tungaroa, who interpreted the whakairo rākau for

Kendall. Tungaroa was a high-born young woman from Rangihoua, where Kendall's mission was based. She was most likely the source of the taurapa's interpretation. Her role is too often diminished in histories that dismiss her as Kendall's lover, or presuppose that the missionary was more strongly influenced in his thinking by men: Tungaroa's father, the tohunga (spiritual leader) Te Rākau, and her brother, Wharepoaka (Binney [1968] 2005: 106). This is despite Kendall identifying her as an important supplier of information about Māori spirituality (Thomas Brisbane to Josiah Pratt 29 April 1823, in Binney [1968] 2005: 127). The role of Tungaroa in the interpretation of these whakairo rākau Māori needs to be recentred and celebrated.

Collection-based Māori art historical research is about bringing taonga Māori back into Te Ao Mārama (The World of Light). Tungaroa and Kendall interpreted this taurapa and other whakairo rākau to illuminate the Māori world for the Christian church and the British audiences. The CMS headquarters, Robley and Oldman took these whakairo rākau out of the light by breaking their connections to their origins and stories. My research, undertaken in collaboration with curators such as Matiu Baker, has moved the whakairo rākau towards Te Ao Mārama by reconnecting them with their ancestrally informed written narratives and identifying their current whereabouts. The research published in December's *Waka Kuaka* has been widely reported in Māori and general New Zealand media (Cooper 2024; Ngawhika 2024; Oneroa 2024; RNZ 2024; Smith 2024; Te Ao Māori News 2024; Waatea News 2024). It has also prompted the making of a Canterbury Museum documentary about kōrupe (door lintel) "VIII" (Canterbury Museum 2024), the exhibition of pare (door lintel) "IX" in New York, and conservation treatment and photography of taurapa "X", thus shifting the whakairo rākau towards Te Ao Mārama once again.

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NOTE

1. The seventh whakairo rākau, a pare (door lintel) now in New York's Brooklyn Museum, was never collected by Oldman; the museum purchased it from the Judith A. Small Galleries in New York on 11 October 1961 and has no definitive record of previous ownership (Meghan Bill, pers. comm., 1 November 2023).

GLOSSARY

The terms in this glossary are te reo Māori unless otherwise stated.

kōrupe	door lintel
manaia	beaked character in profile
ngārara	serpent
ngā rara	the ribs
Pākehā	New Zealand European
pare	door lintel
taonga Māori	Māori treasure
taurapa	sternpost
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tohunga	spiritual leader
waka taua	war canoe
whakairo rākau	Māori wood carving

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