

Maori Carvings from the Three Kings Islands

By GILBERT ARCHEY, Director.

The carvings here described were discovered in April, 1946, by Messrs. M. and B. Chaney, members of the Internal Affairs Wild-life Branch expedition to exterminate the goats on the island.

The larger carving (Pl. 29) was recovered from a small cave or arched cavity about three feet high and ten feet deep at the ground level of a large outcrop rock; a similar cavity ten feet to the right contained three small rectangular boards, one with a lightly carved area (Pl. 30, fig. 1), a few human bones (lower jaws, ribs and vertebrae) and some locks of human hair; a small greenstone chisel was found by sifting the floor.

The larger carving is 106 cm. long and 53 cm. high; its thickness varies from 2 to 5 cm. at the top and a flange at the bottom projects about 3 cm. backwards. It is abraded and broken at both ends, so what length is missing can only be guessed; its height and the nature of the carving do, however, give some grounds for conjecture as to its purpose.

The carved figures, one full face and the other in profile, present an alternation of stance almost invariably followed in Maori carving when a long, narrow area is to be decorated with human figures. On the canoe wash-strake, for example (Pl. 30, fig. 4), there is such a succession; in this case the figures are recumbent and close together head to feet, forming a continuous band of carving. Other examples of this rhythmic alternation are the *paepae* of a house or food-store (Pl. 30, fig. 5) or the side of a *pataka*, but here again the *manaia* and *tiki*, now upright, usually stand close together. The figures stand apart on the barge-board (*maihi*) of a *pataka*; usually they are vertical and consequently oblique to the length of the *maihi*, though a few examples with the figures at right angles to the length are known (i.e., Copenhagen Museum); *maihi*, however, do not have a ridge on the lower edge. Another possibility is that the carving is part of a small *pare* or door lintel containing three figures; but *pare* have a clearly defined basal portion, usually undecorated, and the top curves downwards on either side of the central figure. The most likely conclusion would, therefore, seem to be that the carving is part of a *paepae* or of the side of a *pataka*.

In style the carving follows the North Auckland manner. Typically northern are the undecorated body, the partly decorated limbs with knees and elbows sharply angular, the long, tapering fingers and the pointed feet. The triangular full-face head with its sharp protruding tongue is unusual in the northern school, where a high, narrowing forehead is customary; triangular faces, or at least faces with broad foreheads, are, however, common in Taranaki carvings (Pl. 30, fig. 3). The pattern decorating the limbs is in the northern style, but is crude by com-

parison with the graceful movement of the finest work of this school (Pl. 30, fig. 2). Both figures have a sturdy quality, and one can well envisage the dynamic vigour expressed by the profile figure before deterioration and decay had set in.

The profile face of this *manaia* also has Taranaki tendencies. This is not to say that northern profile renderings were never of its type; too few examples are known to warrant a general statement; the only pieces known to me are the markedly aberrant Doubtless Bay and Awanui carvings I described in 1933, and the richly intricate canoe prow in the British Museum (Archev, 1933, Pl. 49, fig. 1), which, though generally attributed to North Auckland, actually has no recorded locality. The most that one can say on this point is that the Three Kings carving gives some support to the relationship between Northland and Taranaki carving noted by the writer in the paper referred to.

One of the smaller boards (Pl. 30, fig. 1) found in the second cavity has two projections at one end, one perforated by a rectangular mortice; another has a transverse groove near one end. These features doubtless have to do with fitting and tying, but I have not managed to fit the pieces together. Neither have I been able to discover any coherent pattern in the shallow carving on the first-mentioned piece. It is a medley of scrolls and loops typically northern in style; perhaps it is its incompleteness that hides whatever anatomical significance the pattern may hold.

With regard to the date of the work, all that can be affirmed is that it is earlier than 1840, when the last Maoris left the Three Kings Islands. Great Island was occupied when Tasman passed it in 1642 (Heeres, 1898) and inhabitants were seen by Marion du Fresne in 1772 (Roth, 1891, p. 23) and by D'Entrecasteaux in 1793 (Labillardière, 1800). North East Island has also had some degree of occupation; Major Buddle and Major Johnson, who hazardously achieved a landing early this year, found stone retaining walls for garden terraces similar to those on Great Island described by Mr. W. M. Fraser, 1929). The group appears to have been without inhabitants early in the last century, until a party of Maoris from Tom Bowling Bay reoccupied Great Island. These residents, who were visited by the Rev. Geo. Puckey in 1835 (Puckey, 1836), finally withdrew, as already stated, in 1840.

The wood of the carving has been identified by the State Forest Service as *totara*, which did not grow on the Three Kings. We have, however, no means of knowing whether the carving was done on Great Island or the mainland.

The fact that the carvings had been placed carefully in rock recesses together with mortuary remains, indicates that they were valued for some reason, probably as historical relics of some tribal event or personage. It is unfortunate that they are in such poor condition, particularly when it is just the defaced upper part of the larger carving that might have provided better evidence of its relationships. Nevertheless, they are welcome additions to our scant knowledge of northern carving styles.

For cultural reasons, this image has been removed. Please contact Auckland Museum for more information.

Carving from Great Island, Three Kings; probably part of a pataka side, or of a paepae.

I have pleasure in acknowledging information given to me by Mr. E. G. Turbott as to the manner in which these articles had been carefully set apart by their Maori owners, and the collation of historical details of the islands supplied by Mr. A. W. B. Powell.

REFERENCES.

- FRASER, W. M., 1929. N.Z. Journ. Sci. Tech., vol. 9, p. 155.
- HEERES, J. E. (ed), 1898. Abel Jansoon Tasman's Journal, etc., Amsterdam, Frederik Muller.
- LABILLARDIERE, J. J., 1800. Relation du Voyage a la Recherche de La Perouse, etc., Paris, H. J. Jansen.
- PUCKEY, Rev. W. G., 1836. Missionary Register for 1836, p. 473.
- ROTH, H. L. (trans.), 1891. Crozet's Voyage to New Zealand, Tasmania, etc., 1771-1772. London, Truslove and Shirley.

1

3

For cultural reasons, these images have been removed.
Please contact Auckland Museum for more information.

2

4

5

- Fig. 1. Carved slab from Great Island, Three Kings; Auckland Museum.
- Fig. 2. Burial chest, Bay of Islands; Auckland Museum.
- Fig. 3. Carved slab from Taranaki; Taranaki Museum.
- Fig. 4. Part of wash-strake of war-canoe Te-Toki-a-Tapiri; Auckland Museum.
- Fig. 5. Carving from side of pataka from Maketu; Auckland Museum.



Archev, Gilbert. 1948. "Maori Carvings from the Three Kings Islands." *Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum* 3, 207–209.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/289985>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/357239>

Holding Institution

Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira

Sponsored by

C & L Gregory Trust

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira

License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Rights: <http://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.