HUMAN REMAINS FROM NEW ZEALAND
Briefing note for Trustees

We have received a claim from the National Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa) for 16 items from the collection. Similar claims have been addressed to other museums; for example National Museum of Liverpool recently decided to transfer 5 items, including 3 preserved heads, to Te Papa Tongarewa. The letter from Te Papa Tongarewa is attached. It has been acknowledged.

The 16 items comprise 7 preserved heads and 9 skeletal remains. They are all less than 300 years old, so qualify for serious consideration in terms of the Human Tissue Act and the BM policy.

The claim is made by Te Papa Tongarewa on behalf of the New Zealand government, as the letter makes clear, so the claim meets the Trustees’ requirement for endorsement by the relevant national government.

We have a further 22 objects incorporating modified human remains which have not been included in Te Papa’s claim. These fishhooks, flutes, pendants and earrings using human bones and teeth were included in the listing of human remains from New Zealand that was sent to Te Papa in December 2004, and details of them are available on the BM website. James Te Puni (Director Maori Strategy, Te Papa) stated during his visit to the British Museum on 17 November 2004 that Te Papa and the New Zealand government are seeking the repatriation of ‘all unmodified Maori human remains from international sources’. Presumably therefore the additional 22 human remains are not claimed since it is accepted that they were modified. (A summary object list is below.)

The human remains requested are certainly New Zealand Maori remains, and the claim has the support of New Zealand Maori and their representatives at a government level. It is a consistently-expressed wish across New Zealand Maori communities that ancestral remains be returned from international repositories to New Zealand.

Preserved human heads

The 7 preserved, tattooed heads (mokomokai) were acquired by the British Museum primarily in the 19th and early 20th century, but possibly (in the case of the 'NZ' numbered heads) as early as the end of the 18th century. Four of the preserved heads show signs of post-mortem tattooing in addition to the pre-mortem tattooing. Heads were primarily of warriors killed in battle. They were prepared for two main purposes. One: the respectful commemoration of a kinsman. Two: the disrespectful commemoration of a triumph over an enemy.

Preserving a head (by smoking) was a potent way to commemorate and keep a revered leader, father, or warrior chief with his community. Taking the head of a recently-killed kinsman from the battlefield assured it would not fall into enemy hands. According to Gilbert (2000:67), once preserved, these heads were kept by their immediate families in ornately carved boxes. They were protected by strict taboos (tapu) and brought out during key events and ceremonies, as a way of retaining the leader’s involvement in his community and its activities (Gell 1993: 251-252).
Alternatively, if an enemy was killed in battle the victors would strive to secure his head, which would be preserved and displayed on a post as an object of derision. This was not only a deep insult to the warrior and his community but a source of torment to prisoners. The heads would be put away and brought out again on important occasions, when stories of the victory would be recounted and insults thrown at the heads again (Starzecka 1992). These heads were sometimes, according to Robley (1896), used in peace negotiations, the terms requiring heads to be finally returned to their grieving kin (Robley 1998: 138).

A third use, as trade valuables, was added after British travellers, settlers and traders arrived in New Zealand and created a demand. It appears that the heads of enemies were usually those sold, perhaps as a further insult. The first recorded sale of heads was to Joseph Banks, during Cook’s first visit to New Zealand, 20 January 1770. Some Maori brought out four heads of men ‘they had lately kill’d’ to the ship and traded them for some white linen clothes (Beaglehole 1963, II, p.31). The last time a Maori head was offered for sale was at Bonham’s, London, May 1988. It was withdrawn from sale under public pressure and the owner returned it to New Zealand (information from Dorota Starzecka, former Assnt Keeper, Oceania, 1992).

European collectors and museums sought to acquire preserved Maori heads from the late 18th century, but particularly from the early to mid 19th century. This trade was among the most effective ways for a tribe (iwi) to secure muskets and ammunition, crucial to keeping up with the arms race and protecting lands and people from British settlers and from other iwi.

Old enmities were stoked up again for the sole purpose of taking heads for sale. There is record of slaves (captive enemies) being tattooed for the purpose and being killed for traders (Maning, 1863, pp.120-22). The tattooing was no longer being carried out as a mark of life achievement and respect for ancestry but being done rapidly with little concern for quality. Some scholars have suggested the heads with post-mortem tattooing were done so to ‘improve’ them for sale (Starzecka 1992, p.5).

The trade in preserved heads reached its height in 1820-1831, when hundreds are estimated to have changed hands (Blackburn 1999:18). Governor Darling in Sydney banned the import of ‘heads’ in 1831, which helped to slow the trade (Gilbert 2000: 68).

Throughout its course the trade had been contested and considered sacrilegious (Robley 1998: 178). Records describe Maori recognising the head of a family member and attacking the white traders who refused to give them up. Preserving the heads of respected chiefs and family members appears to have stopped in the mid c18, as it left them open to the desecration of theft and sale. The heads of two chiefs were apparently stolen from a burial cave in the 1840s and sold in Auckland some ten years later to a British sea captain. They ended up at the London Royal School of Medicine, were later exchanged to the Auckland Museum and then returned to the community in 1999. (New Zealand Herald, 3 April 1999).

Preparation of mokomokai

Within Maori understanding the head was (and still is) considered the most sacred part of the body. Tattooing the face reflected and accentuated this sacredness. The process of tattooing was connected to divine power, because cutting was a technique of creation used by the gods. Each tattoo design was individual. It marked an individual’s status, rites of passage, tribal affiliation, and connections to specific ancestors.

Once severed, the soft organs were removed, plugged with grass or other materials, some parts given extra support with inserts of wood, apertures such as nostrils were often plugged. It was then dried and smoked.
We need to carry out more research on the roles given to *mokomokai* and Maori mortuary practices to see if it is possible to make confident assessments about the heads in our collection.

*Unmodified Skeletal remains*

Te Papa Tongarewa has also claimed 9 segments of human bone. These segments have been confirmed as human. They were collected by F.E. Meinertzhagen in the North Island of New Zealand between 1866-1881. They comprise 4 fragments of bone, including some portions of human skull. All 4 are blackened by fire, possibly involved in a cremation. There are also 5 lengths of bone, cut at one or both ends. It is possible they were bones from a burial, disinterred. Alternatively, they may have been raw materials intended to be turned into flutes. There is no evidence of modification, other than their being burnt. This may be evidence of mortuary disposal.

Meinertzhagen collected archaeological and contemporary objects in New Zealand and Pacific Islands between 1866-1881. The British Museum holds 693 items of these objects.

*Maori mortuary practices*

In both traditional and contemporary practice, a deceased person is laid out for a number of days or over a week before burial. Members of the family and community visit and keep the dead person’s spirit company, as it accompanies the body until burial. In early Maori practice the cleaned bones of the dead would be interred in a cave, a hollow tree, in sand or, in the case of high-ranking persons, in a carved wooden box (Donne, 1927, pp.58-60). Bones were carefully hidden, to avoid their being found by enemies and turned, disrespectfully, into fishhooks barbs, flutes and jewellery. (Best, 1914: 110)

Cremation was only occasionally used as a method of disposal. Elsdon Best, writing in 1914, reported on several conditions under which cremation was practiced such as when a group of warriors or travellers were outside their *iwi*’s territory and needed to bury one of their party; sometimes, to stop the spread of disease (Best 1914: 110).

In view of the above the following further steps could be undertaken:

- We ask the Trustees their view on whether they will consider Maori as one cultural group (as opposed to many *iwi*).
- The commissioning of two reports by independent experts regarding the cultural significance of the items in particular the questions of cultural continuity and mortuary disposal. Their scientific importance for studies such as epidemiology or genetics. Similar reports were commissioned for the Tasmanian case.

Depending on the discussion at the Board we would hope to bring the matter to the Board for a full discussion at its meeting on 29th March, and we shall write appropriately to Te Papa Tongarewa.

The Board is invited to advise on the next steps.
References

Best, E. ‘Cremation practices amongst the Maori Tribes of New Zealand’, Man, 1914, no.s 49-50, p.110f.

Jenny Newell
Jonathan King
Department of Africa, Oceania & Americas
Maori Human Remains in the British Museum

Summary list
38 specimens, ordered by type of object

A. Specimens requested for repatriation

MOKOMOKAI

1. Oc1913,0519.1 preserved head (completed tattoo, much post-mortem tattooing)
2. Oc1921,1014.1 preserved head (complete tattoo, slight post-mortem work)
3. Oc1925,-.46 preserved head (incomplete tattoo. No post-mortem work)
4. Oc,+.1998 preserved head (complete tattoo, slight post-mortem work)
5. Oc,NZ.69 preserved head (incomplete tattoo. No post-mortem work)
6. Oc,NZ.70 preserved head (incomplete tattoo, slight post-mortem work)
7. Oc,NZ.71 preserved head (complete tattoo. No post-mortem work)

BONE SECTIONS & FRAGMENTS

1. Oc1895,-.396 length of bone
2. Oc1895,-.397 length of bone
3. Oc1895,-.627 length of bone
4. Oc1895,-.628 length of bone
5. Oc1895,-.629 length of bone
6. Oc1895,-.630 bone fragment
7. Oc1895,-.631 bone fragment
8. Oc1895,-.633 bone fragment
9. Oc1895,-.634 bone fragment

B. Specimens not requested for repatriation

OBJECTS INCORPORATING BONE & TEETH

1. Oc1850,0206.1 bone flute
2. Oc1896,-.930 bone flute
3. Oc. 1716 bone flute
4. Oc,LMS.145 bone flute
5. Oc1922,0607.1 bone tiki (pendant)
6. Oc,NZ.156 bone tiki (pendant)
7. Oc,NZ.157 bone tiki (pendant)
8. Oc1944,02.207 fragment of fish hook point: bone
9. Oc.2057 fish-hook with bone point
10. Oc.4317 fish hook with bone point
11. Oc,NZ.188 bone fish-hook
12. Oc,NZ.189 bone fish-hook
13. Oc,NZ.190 bone fish-hook
14. Oc,NZ.191 bone fish-hook
15. Oc,NZ.192 bone fish-hook
16. Oc,NZ.193 bone fish-hook
17. Oc,NZ.195 bone fish-hook
18. Oc,NZ.196 bone fish-hook

19. Oc.4294 ear-ring of teeth
20. Oc.4295 ear-ring of teeth

21. Oc,NZ.162 ear-ornament of teeth
22. Oc1981,Q.1359 necklace of teeth
Formal request for repatriation of Maori Koiwi Tangata (Ancestral Human Remains) from The National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

22 June, 2006

Mr Andrew Burnett
Deputy Director
British Museum
Great Russell Street
WC1B 3DG
ENGLAND

Tēnā koe Andrew

RE: MĀORI KŌIWI TANGATA (ANCESTRAL HUMAN REMAINS)

Thank you for your positive letter of 28th April addressed to Mr James Te Puni and for informing us that you are the primary contact for repatriation discussions. We are also grateful to you for explaining the repatriation claims process.

I would like to take this opportunity to make a formal request for the repatriation of the kōiwi tangata (as outlined below) held in the collections at the British Museum. In accordance with the British Museum’s policy on human remains, I would note the following and also refer you to the enclosed supporting document for this application:

a) The kōiwi tangata being claimed for repatriation are less than 300 years old

b) The National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa was mandated by the New Zealand government in 2003 to set up the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme and to carry out repatriation work. Importantly the programme is also supported by iwi (Māori tribes).

c) Kōiwi tangata are immensely sacred to Māori. Kōiwi tangata are part of a living culture and as such their removal to collections overseas has not broken the continuity between Māori today and their ancestral remains. Therefore, the desire of Māori to have their tūpuna (ancestors) returned has not diminished over time.

Te Papa would like the British Museum to consider the following kōiwi tangata for repatriation:

- 7 Tōi moko (Oc1913.0519.1; Oc1921.1014.1; Oc1925,-.46; Oc+.1998; Oc.NZ.69; Oc.NZ.70; OcNZ.71)

- 9 skeletal remains (Oc1895,-.396; Oc1895,-.397; Oc1895,-.627; Oc1895,-.628; Oc1895,-.629; Oc1895,-.630; Oc1895,-.631; Oc1895,-.633; Oc1895,-.634)

I am glad that you see this process as an opportunity for relationship building and mutually beneficial projects. Certainly we regard negotiations, which result in tūpuna (ancestors) being repatriated to Te Papa, as representing only one facet of these relationships. Therefore, we look forward to future collaborations with your institution.
I look forward to working with you and your colleagues to progress this repatriation claim at your earliest possible convenience. If there is any further information that you require, please don’t hesitate to contact Natasha Barnett, Repatriation Researcher, natashab@tepapa.govt.nz. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Nāku noa, nā

[Signature: Te Tari White]

Te Tari White
KAIHAUTŪ
Kōwi tangata Repatriation Application – The British Museum

Te Papa’s Repatriation Application

Te Papa has been involved in repatriation discussions with the British Museum since the beginning of the Karanga Aotearoa programme. At the end of 2004, the Director Māori Strategy and the Manager of Karanga Aotearoa met with The Director of the British Museum and other key members of staff to advance these discussions.

Since this time Te Papa has been in correspondence with the British Museum and has been waiting until such a time that a change in UK legislation would legally enable the British Museum to repatriate human remains and develop its own policy on this.

Te Papa would like the British Museum to consider the following kōwi tangata for repatriation (7 Toi moko and 9 kōwi):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country of origin and source community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oc1913,0519.1</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1921,1014.1</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1925,-,46</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc,-,1998</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc,NZ.69</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc,NZ.70</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OcNZ.71</td>
<td>Toi moko</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,396</td>
<td>Implement (?) made of bone (human, thigh?)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,397</td>
<td>Implement (?) made of bone (human, thigh?)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,627</td>
<td>Implement (?) made of bone (human, femur)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,628</td>
<td>Implement (?) made of bone (human?)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,629</td>
<td>Implement (?) made of bone (human)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,630</td>
<td>Specimen of bone (human, skull)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,631</td>
<td>Specimen of bone (human, cranium)</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oc1895,-,633-634</td>
<td>Two specimens of bone (Human). One apparently part of a cranium</td>
<td>New Zealand, Māori</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Te Papa's Mandate for Repatriation Work

Te Papa, the National Museum of New Zealand (formerly the Dominion Museum and Colonial Museum) has been involved in the repatriation of kōrū and koimi tangata for some years, beginning in the 1980s with the work of Māui Pomare, Chair of the Museum Council.

A meeting held between Māori, Te Papa and New Zealand Government agencies in May 1999 gave clear support for Te Papa's continued involvement in this important work. In February 2001, the Board of Te Papa Tongarewa approved its policy on kōrū tangata. This provided a comprehensive framework for the management and care of ancestral remains at Te Papa, as well as guidelines for responding to requests to repatriate kōrū tangata from overseas institutions.

In 2003, Te Papa was mandated by the New Zealand Government to establish the repatriation programme - Karanga Aotearoa for the return of all Māori and Moriori kōrū tangata (from New Zealand and the Chatham Islands) from overseas institutions and museums and domestically back to their iwi where possible. Importantly, this project has been underpinned by an active research programme. A key role of the Karanga Aotearoa is to facilitate discussion with iwi in order to determine the final resting place of these ancestral remains.

Karanga Aotearoa's work is supported by a Repatriation Advisory Panel made up of kaumātua, or tribal elders, whose role is to provide leadership and advice to the Karanga Aotearoa Programme. In addition, Te Papa facilitates ongoing opportunities with a wider iwi Māori and Moriori representation to seek further advice and to discuss matters such as caring for unprovenanced remains1, appropriate tikanga and final resting place options.

Cultural and spiritual significance of kōrū tangata

Te Papa does not recognise kōrū tangata as being artefacts or collection items. They are tūpuna, and as such have permanent ties to their descendants and descendant communities.

It is important to understand that Māori kōrū tangata held within overseas collections continue to contain Mātauranga Māori, which remains unbroken despite the removal of these ancestral remains from Aotearoa. This information can only belong to Māori people themselves and is part of this living, vibrant culture.

All Māori human remains are tapu and have immense sacredness for Māori. In particular, Toi moko can represent the heads of chiefs and loved ones, which were often preserved as a sign of great respect and affection. Their storage in international museum/institution collections is particularly inappropriate in this context.

From a historical perspective, Māori believe that Papatūānuku was the foundation from which all things were sourced. The practices of gifting the placenta of children back to Papatūānuku and the traditional burial of kōrū tangata are still kept today. For Māori, Aotearoa represents the concept of Papatūānuku and Tūpuna need to return back to Aotearoa to complete a continuing cycle of returning to where they came from.

Repatriation also offers some way forward towards reconciliation for iwi and for reconnections to occur. It also provides an opportunity for museums to work as advocates for understanding and interpreting cultures by being part of this process.

---

1 The issue of unprovenanced kōrū and koimi tangata is to be addressed at a national wānanga being held at the end of June this year by Te Papa
Removal of kōiwi tangata

In the majority of instances, kōiwi tangata were removed without permission. There are cases whereby Toi moko were traded by Māori. However, the historical context of this time during the land wars between Māori and the Colonial forces and the colonially stimulated market in Toi Moko, needs to be taken into consideration.

Today there is a strong feeling that all kōiwi tangata should be returned to Aotearoa regardless of how they entered overseas collections.

Reasons against retention by overseas museum and institutions

Te Papa acknowledges that ancestral remains held within the collections of overseas museums and institutions may have ongoing scientific value to the museum community. However, given the continuing importance of kōiwi tangata to Māori today and changes in museological thought and practice surrounding repatriation of human remains, it is no longer tenable that scientific knowledge should take precedence over cultural significance.

Te Papa believes that the retention of kōiwi tangata in overseas museums and institutions can only further contribute to a lack of understanding of the connection that still exists between Māori and their tūpuna. This is inconsistent with the role of museums as advocates for understanding cultures. It has been demonstrated in a number of circumstances that the repatriation of human remains can and does lead to enhanced relationships between museums and indigenous communities.

In order to be able to develop these relationships and to work towards domestic repatriation, remains must be in the country from which they originated. At the very least, the community from which the human remains came from must be involved in decision making in relation to the ongoing care and management of their ancestors.

Care of kōiwi tangata at Te Papa

The human remains at Te Papa are not collection items. Accordingly they are stored and treated with dignity and in a manner sympathetic with cultural and scientific requirements. Te Papa maintains two wāhi tapu for the storage, care and protection of kōiwi tangata. The wāhi tapu are afforded the same degree of respect as any urupā/grave or burial site and are separate from collection areas.

Te Papa should however only be viewed as a temporary repository. Kōiwi tangata only remain in the care of Te Papa until such time as matters of provenance and long term care have been discussed and agreed upon with Māori.