

Repatriation Claim – The British Museum
Additional Comments for the Board of Trustees
Karanga Aotearoa – Te Papa Tongarewa
March 13rd 2008

General Comments

1. Provenance to Māori and evidence of cultural continuity

Our claim for repatriation of the 7 Toi moko and 9 kōiwi/koimi tangata is made on the basis of their certain provenance to New Zealand and to iwi Māori. The practice of moko (incised scarification) and preservation of heads is unique to Māori and the Ta moko (incisions) are unique to each wearer. The 9 kōiwi tangata were purchased by the Museum from G. E Meinertzhagen in 1895, who lived in the Hawkes Bay from 1866-1881. These have collector/donor information which shows provenance to the North Island (for 6 kōiwi) and to NZ for the remaining three.

Māori and Moriori connection to the remains of their ancestors is profound and enduring. Funerary practices regularly involved the recovery of bones or preservation of heads in order to retain loved ones physically close. Iwi express a profound loss at the separation of loved ones, especially those who chose not to leave these shores. Their cultural value is not served by their ongoing retention by an overseas museum and we argue that they need to come home to rest amongst their descendant communities.

2. Mortuary disposal and post mortem work

Post mortem work has been carried out on all the Māori ancestral remains at the British Museum. This is common for Toi moko where the practice of post mortem Ta moko and post mortem enhancement was carried out, sometimes to enhance the sale of Toi moko, and other times to enhance the moko after the preservation process, which sometimes results in the moko shrinking or being slightly damaged.

The 9 kōiwi tangata are pieces of bone which have been cut. Again, this is not unusual and may have been done by Māori after the bones were removed, or by curious collectors.

Toi moko are preserved by Māori specifically to honour the dead person and in this sense most assuredly meet the criterion of “intended for mortuary disposal” as they were preserved for the purpose of allowing the deceased to be at rest.

Funerary practices, including preservation of Toi moko, tangihanga (funerals) and burials are of such extreme importance to iwi Māori and Moriori that we have sought a response from a leading researcher in Ta moko, Chaz Doherty. Mr Doherty is a PhD candidate on “the critical analysis of Ta moko and customary practices” and was interviewed by Dr Bolton in 2007. His response on the matter of mortuary disposal is set out below:

The tangihanga (funeral process) is a ritualistic process for Māori to focus and commit to supporting the wairua (spirit) to depart from the tinana (physical body) to return to our spiritual origin. This ritual is still one of the foremost practices in the Māori world that we still commit to, today. It is one of our strongest measures that express our uniqueness.

In former times the disposal of the tinana (physical body) included depositing them in to urupa (burial sites) that were secured and in most cases secreted. This ensured that the individual, related whanau and hapu, would not be put at risk of having their dead disinterred to suffer indignities that could be extracted upon them. These urupā or wāhi tapu (spaces of sacredness) had people whose occupation was to care for them, so to protect their tīpuna (ancestors) from harm.

By not committing the tinana to 'mortuary disposal' keeps the physical in a state of limbo, which arrests and disables the wairua (spirit) to return to its resting place, to the origin of our spirit. For Māori that place is Hawaiki Nui, Hawaiki Roa, Hawaiki Pāmamao. These actions condemn that group of people to a fate worse than death, a state we might call kahupō, or spiritual blindness. Kua pokea te tangata!

The mokomokai/tupapaku held in the many institutions around the world is testament to that suffering. During the early 1800s and especially around the time of the Ngapuhi war chief, Hongi Hika, who raided and attacked other iwi around the North Island. Their actions supported the trade in mokomokai, which supported the indignity that they extracted on other people. Hongi and others supplied a demand for the 'well tattooed heads'. Transactions included the trading of heads for muskets. For those individuals and their families that degradation needs to be rectified or as we state, 'ka ea a aituā' that peace should be brought upon these people, the living as well as the dead.

As for the reference to mokomokai as 'art pieces' this can only be seen as further humiliation for that group of people. This highlights how we have abandoned the sacredness of the wairua (spirit) for physical curiosity. Comments like this support the co modification of our ancestor's personal mana.

The actions of the past where mokomokai were bought and sold under very dubious circumstances have influenced this understanding. Some Māori may hold this view that these ancestors be reduced to being objects of art, but I think that is for reasons of fascination as a response to the aesthetic beauty of the moko, however, this is another example of how we have lost sight of the tradition of the tangihanga, (funeral) as being a time to dispose of the tinana to recognise the wairua.

In conclusion we must not complicate this situation by simplifying the context of 'mortuary disposal' by over shadowing this process with a time in our histories where the colonising of Aotearoa led to catastrophic outcomes, like, the 'selling' of human remains for personal gain. We must view that this is an opportunity to right the wrongs, it is a time to reinforce Māori tradition and practice pertaining to 'mortuary disposal' and relieve our dead and let them pass over.

I think the English equivalent is 'Rest in Peace'

3. Genetic research and the public good

The Endicott report argues for the retention of human remains because of the genetic information recoverable from them that may assist in research that contextualises the history of Polynesia. We would argue that there are many other ways of carrying out research that provides information on the history of Polynesia, including genetic research on living people. The public good would be better served by an ethical approach to research that respects international accords and codes of ethics, such as the Vermillion Accord.

All research carried out by Te Papa into the provenance of these ancestors will be shared with The British Museum.

4. Karanga Aotearoa Information Resources

Copies of these resources have been sent to staff at the British Museum in the past and we would like them to be in the material given to the Trustees because we feel that they address some of the questions that may arise. They also show active engagement of iwi in the repatriation process.

We have received positive feedback from many institutions about the resources and the help they have been in carrying out negotiations.

“I was able to look through the repatriation resource pack yesterday, which was waiting for me when I got back, and found it be really very useful and very well put together. I think it will be extremely helpful for museums to be able to look at something like this, as it 'de-mystifies' the processes involved by clarifying the different steps that might take place in a repatriation (recognising, of course, the need to be flexible). I think the emphasis on openness with regards to process will be really welcomed by museum staff, and will also, I hope, encourage museums who may wish to approach Te Papa with regards to discussing collections to do so. It's a great model and thank you so much for sharing this with me”¹.

“After examining a few repatriation programs around the place, I must admit, you guys run a pretty impressive program. I will be sharing with my colleagues here in Australia your Repatriation model and resource kit as I believe that it is the most effective, productive and culturally appropriate program. So congratulations on doing such a great job!”²

Comments on Report of Dr Bolton

We appreciate that Dr Bolton had limited time in Aotearoa (New Zealand), however the number of people interviewed and their relative experience with repatriation meant that she is likely to have had a fairly restricted view into the iwi perspectives on repatriation. Whilst of course it would not be possible for a study to fully represent

¹ Dr Alison K. Brown University of Aberdeen

² Franchesca Cubillo, Senior Curator, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Australia

the views of iwi it may have helped if she had talked with iwi representatives with whom we have carried out repatriations. Specifically, we have some concerns and comments on the following headings:

1. Omission of iwi Moriori

The report does not make reference to Moriori and yet Karanga Aotearoa and our kōiwi tangata policy specifically makes reference to this programme being for the return of Māori and Moriori ancestors. Moriori have their own language and cultural practices and they are identifiable as a “cultural group”. Interviewing Moriori contacts would have also been beneficial as approximately one third of the kōiwi/koimi tangata repatriated are, or will be Moriori. Dr Bolton made late contact with the Deputy Chair of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust, Mr Maui Solomon, who was unable to make a meeting at very short notice. However, he did respond by email, which was copied to us. We would like this to be added to the dossier before the trustees (attached).

2. Funerary Practices

Dr Bolton states that “traditionally most people were buried.” This is true for a post-colonial contact period. Prior to this a wide range of funerary practices were employed by Māori and Moriori, most of which involved a process of later recovery of bones. The practice applies universally, not just to “high-ranking individuals”. Preservation of human remains was not confined to the Toi moko. It included the preservation of complete skeletal remains.

3. Iwi unity

On page 2 Dr Bolton refers to lack of iwi unity apart from commonalities in language and some cultural practices. Whilst all iwi maintain tribal identity based on genealogical lines, there are fundamental points of unity in Māori culture, which means that in certain instances (such as repatriation) one agency can act as a representative body or conduit for the tribes. In fact, in 1987 Māori coined the political movement for self-determination “Kotahitanga”, which means unity. The movement was a response to problems Māori were facing with regard to Crown breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi – another ongoing and very relevant unifying force for iwi. Other examples of Māori unity are seen in:

- responses to resource management and land sales (the Waitangi Tribunal claim WAI 262 is specifically dealing with policies on Māori stewardship over natural resources and associated intellectual property);
- Government policies on land use (e.g. the Foreshore and Seabed legislation);
- development and enhancement of Māori language through the formation of the Kohanga Reo (language nests), kura kaupapa (Māori immersion schools), and;
- the love and respect Māori have for each others’ marae and wharepuni (ancestral meeting places) and for events such as funerals.

It is certain that there is a “*wide diversity of Māori knowledge and opinion on every topic*” but it is also certain that when necessary iwi work together for the common benefit of Māori culture. The same will be said for Moriori. When it comes to repatriation this unity is strongly expressed during the pōwhiri (welcome home ceremony) where iwi from around the nation gather to pay their respects and show their joy at the return of these ancestors.

4. Involvement of iwi in repatriations and identification of iwi before return

Often the provenance for the kōiwi/koimi tangata is known when we begin negotiations with overseas institutions. Most often this provenance relates to a physical burial location as opposed to the genetic connection with specific families. When this provenance is known Te Papa works closely with the relevant iwi regarding the process for return. In some instances we may consider taking elders from that iwi to assist with the return voyage.

When domestic repatriations are planned, these are entirely iwi led. Iwi direct the manner, timing and all other arrangements for the return of their loved ones and Te Papa pays for the expenses. This includes the expenses involved in getting them to New Zealand, of which the freighting and packaging costs are considerable (note that Dr Bolton indicates that the financial burden for iwi may make accepting kōiwi a difficult responsibility, page 3). Our Information Resources show examples of how we engage with iwi to facilitate a return. Te Papa is a conduit for the return of ancestral remains – not an end-point.

5. Te Papa research practices and research into Toi moko provenance

On page 4 of the report Dr Bolton states that *“it is far more difficult to ascertain provenance for preserve heads than for the bones”*. Where we have good provenance information for kōiwi/koimi tangata such as collector or archaeological information this may be the case. However, we are currently engaged in research on Ta moko practices as to whether this may assist with provenance. We are also investigating research using isotopes for the possible determination of geographic provenance.

We note that the report refers to the “careful archival research” of Auckland Museum in determining provenance. Te Papa researchers use a combination of research methods but do not rely on accession records alone. We employ research methodology which explores records such as collector diaries and notes, auction house records, archaeological information with oral history and information gained from traditional sources such as waiata (traditional songs) and genealogical records. We find that in many cases accession records are not accurate and so we carry out comprehensive research to test them, which is always shared with the institution we have repatriated from.