



Whatu Kākahu / *Māori Cloaks*

edited by **Awhina Tamarapa**



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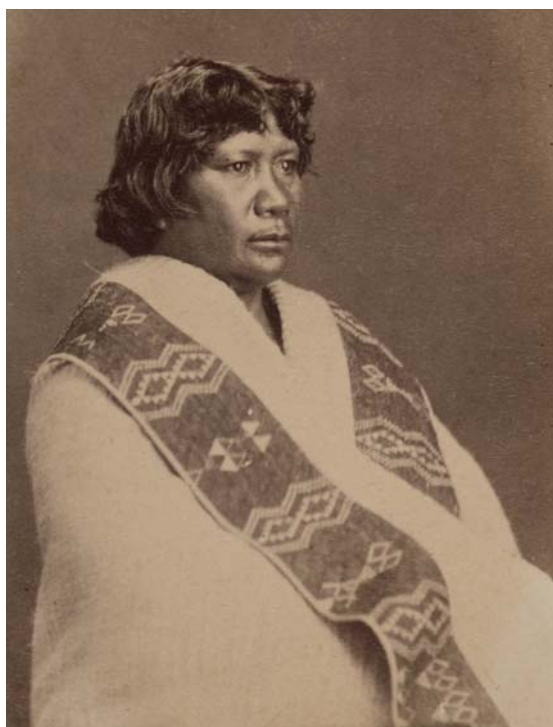
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It is so important for the world to know that not only is there a catalogue of all these cloaks, but there is the knowledge, the meaning, that gives them value

– Kataraina Hetet



Mere Kapa Ngāmai I (assumed) wearing a kaitaka, c.1870, Ngāti Te Whiti/Ngāti Tāwhirikura, Te Ātiawa iwi.

Whakawai wai ai	Enchanting to the eye
Te tū rā Taranaki	Art thou, o Taranaki
Ō kahu hukarere	Clothed in the snowy garment
I hua tau ai koe rā	O mountain glorious arrayed
Huhia iho koe	In spotless cloak of glistening white
Ki tō parawai mā	With fringe-patterned border
Tō kahu tāniko	A robe of radiant beauty
I tino pai ai koe rā	Yon cloud that wreathes thy lofty brow
Me tīpare koe	Is a mourning chaplet
Ki te rau kawakawa	Soft band of kawakawa leaves
He tohu arohanui	Emblem of sorrow for the dead
Ki ngā iwi e ngaro nei	Love cirlet for the vanished ones
Waiho rā e Rangī	For ever lost to us
Kia tāria ake	Remain thou there o peak of Rangī
Ka tae mai he karere	Steadfastly keep thy silent watch
E kore rā e hoki mai	For ocean-borne grief messenger
	From those who will come no more

In this chant of praise by Mere Kapa Ngāmai I of Te Ātiawa for her sacred ancestral mountain, Taranaki, the splendour of the chiefly peak is described by its array of prestigious cloaks. The cirlet of kawakawa leaves is a symbol of mourning, a reference to loved ones who have passed on and to ancestral connections.¹

The art of whatu, or finger weft-twining, reaches its highest expression in the form of the prestigious kākahu – the Māori cloak. The largest museum collection

Previous page Detail of *Kōkiri* on page 135.

of kākahu in the world is held at Te Papa, and this book aims to unlock the museum's storeroom doors to reveal the taonga within, and the immense cultural value and significance these beautiful garments have for Māori. In researching *Whatu Kākahu: Māori Cloaks*, fundamental connections between the makers of the kākahu and their modern-day descendants have been uncovered.

A kākahu, the general term for a Māori cloak, is a garment worn about or over the shoulders and enveloping the wearer's body. The word shares a common form with other Pacific languages: Hawai'ian and Tahitian use 'ahu; Rarotongan, kakah'u; and Marquesan, kahu. In former times, many variations of styles and types of kākahu were worn for warmth and protection, while others symbolised status. Although no longer garments of everyday wear, kākahu continue to signify cultural pride, prestige, honour, and ancestral connections. Kākahu were, and are still, also given as esteemed gifts to individuals and families to honour and reciprocate significant relationships, tribal exchanges, events and agreements. In both physical and spiritual terms, kākahu are a form of protection. The ultimate honour for departed loved ones is to cover their casket with a cloak, expressing mana, aroha and manaakitanga, or care, and to dress them symbolically for their final journey.

The development of kākahu weaving came from generations of accumulated knowledge, an evolving process originating with the first ancestral migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand from the eastern Pacific 800–900 years ago. The country's cool climate and diverse environment meant that these new settlers needed suitable clothing in order to survive. The finger weft-twining technique of whatu, used to make fish traps, was adapted to form new types of garment. Different materials also had to be found, as the aute (paper mulberry tree), which was used to make clothing in the Pacific, did not thrive in the temperate climate of Aotearoa. Harakeke was soon identified by Māori as a superior fibre with which to make garments (the plant is actually a member of the *Hemerocallis* family; European traders thought that it resembled the *Linum* plant, so named it flax). Subsequently, most kākahu have been made from muka, the silky fibre obtained from harakeke, though other fibres are also used. Some highly unique cloaks have been made from pātīti/wīwī (tussock grass/rush), tikumu (mountain daisies) and mosses.

The kākahu featured in this book are defined by the use of whatu to form the kaupapa, or body of the cloak. This method of construction differentiates these garments from the rāpaki and pākē kārure, garments of free-hanging strands that were generally worn around the waist as a type of skirt but also sometimes worn across the shoulders. The rāpaki and pākē kārure were superseded by the piupiu, which evolved after European contact. Piupiu are also waist garments, made up of lengths of free-hanging, two- or three-ply rolled muka strands, or cylindrical dried harakeke strands, incorporated into a twined or plaited waistband.

Kākahu made and worn by Māori can be divided into two main types. The first are known as rain capes and are coarse, resilient garments made by attaching strips of various plant material to a whenu (warp thread) base. Their construction protected the wearer from the wind and the strips were arranged so that rain flowed off the cloak. Rain capes were worn during bad weather or if the wearer was sleeping outside while travelling.² The other type of cloak is the magnificent and finely worked kākahu worn by important individuals in Māori society to signal their rank, such as ariki (persons of noble lineage) and tohunga (priests and holders of esoteric knowledge). These include the prestigious kahu kurī, cloaks



Mt Taranaki, by Brian Brake, 1960s–80s.



A group wearing variations of kaitaka, c.1870–90. The man standing on the right is wearing a kaitaka huaki, cloak with double tāniko, now in Te Papa's collection. The cloak was associated with the Māori leader and prophet Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Tūruki, and was purchased by the museum from the Bryce family.

and in this respect whakairo, or symbolic patterning, expresses and passes on ancestral knowledge. Unfortunately, many of the meanings and histories woven into the tāniko have been lost, but general patterns can still be understood. Weavers from different tribal areas have developed their own patterns and symbolism over time; interpretation of these varies as there is often more than one meaning to a Māori term and the terms differ according to region. There are, however, several basic traditional groups of pattern that are common throughout Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Aronui/aonui are triangular-shaped patterns. Translated as 'knowledge of the natural world', this design relates to the pursuit of knowledge of the physical world.
- Aramoana, meaning 'pathway to the sea', is a repetitive horizontal zigzag that refers to the access the ocean and other waterways provide to other places.
- Tukemata, literally 'eyebrows', consists of serrated zigzag patterns. This design has varied interpretations from area to area according to tribal histories.
- Kaokao is translated as 'lateral bends' or 'ribs'. It refers to the stance of a warrior prepared for battle.
- Whakarua kōpito, a pattern of vertical pairs of diamond shapes, is translated literally as 'to make two points' and is sometimes described as 'two mouths' or 'openings'.
- Wahi-a-rua kōpito is also a pattern of vertical pairs of diamond shapes. Translated literally as 'two places/sides/aspects, bent' this pattern is a reminder that change occurs at the meeting of people, circumstances, events.
- Nihoniho, literally 'teeth', are serrated or notched triangular patterns. They are a reminder of the need to be alert to avoid harm.

Kahu huruhuru/Feathered cloaks

Kahu huruhuru also grew in prominence from the mid-nineteenth century, with the kahu kiwi, the kiwi-feather cloak, becoming the prestige garment of the twentieth century. Birds are the children of Tāne and their connection to atua, as well as their ability to change form and their accompanying mythological stories, are all qualities that are valued within Māori tradition. The nocturnal, shy kiwi is known as te manu huna, or the hidden bird, of Tāne.¹⁹ Quiet and secretive, the kiwi lives in the realm of darkness, and is rarely seen. The qualities of the bird are, in turn, transferred to the kahu kiwi, giving the garment its exclusive status. By the early twentieth century the kiwi had also become an iconic national symbol of New Zealand, and this, too, may have increased the mystique of the garment.

The rarity and status of kahu kākā (also called kahu kura), the red-feathered cloaks of the gregarious kākā, were encapsulated by the chiefly characteristics of the bird, particularly its superb 'oratory' skills. Red is a powerfully potent and sacred colour throughout the Pacific, and kahu kura as symbols of chieftainship were consequently viewed with great awe. There are many stories of chiefly ancestors who merely needed to display their kahu kura to invigorate their people to achieve the most herculean of tasks. Kahu kura are also often referred to as symbols of peace, as alluded to by a mōteatea (classical Māori chant) from Tainui:

Tākiri mai te ata i tua, ko te ata	Strikes forth the dawn yonder,
i au e i;	comes the morn to me
Auē kau au ki te iwi ka ngaro!	As I cry in vain for the absent tribes!
E kore e ngaro; he pakū waka nui	They will not be lost, for the canoe is
	one of renown;

Opposite Complex arrangement of patterns within the tāniko and awe (dog-hair tassels) lining the edge of a kaitaka aronui/pātea.





Black fibre degradation

Despite being colourfast, some black-dyed fibres or entire garments show signs of degradation because of the high acid content of the dyes. Textile conservator Rangī Te Kanawa has been investigating this problem, working with a team of biological materials scientists from the Industrial Research Ltd Crown Research Institute. Their research has allowed them to identify the chemical processes that cause the disintegration of harakeke fibre that was traditionally dyed black. Oxidisation by light and heat weakens the chemical bond between the groups of tannins that create the black colour – ferric ions and phenolic hydroxyl ions. Consequently, the ferric ions can be transferred to other substances in the cellulose in the garment’s fibres, which allows these ions themselves to oxidise and so degrade the cellulose.¹⁴ The team has developed a ‘post-dye tannin treatment’, which has successfully decelerated the ageing process on *new* fabric that has been coloured black using traditional techniques. Further testing will evaluate the treatment and establish whether it can be used on older materials.

However, some black-dyed garments collected as early as James Cook’s eighteenth-century voyages, very possibly from coastal settlements, do not show the same deterioration and still appear to be stable. They suggest directions for further research, covering a large range of variable factors. For instance, the potential effects created by differing paru composition, tannin solutions, possible differing absorption rates of various harakeke cultivars and differing soaking times, as well as differing combinations of all these conditions, in addition to questions of possible over-dyeing, are still relatively unknown. Some exploratory work was carried out by senior kairaranga Emily Schuster and Māori and Pacific textiles specialist Mick Pendergrast in the 1980s, comparing paru from Whakarewarewa and Maketū. At that time, Schuster commented that the Maketū source was not favoured because it produced a less intense black.¹⁵ Eventually, comparisons of paru and of black-dyed fibres may allow researchers to establish the accurate provenance of some early taonga.

Adaptations to the climate

The construction of strong, practical rain cloaks and capes, with an outer thatch-like surface of overlapping tags arranged to shed cold rain, was a crucial development for survival in the winters of Aotearoa’s temperate climate. Measuring around 1200 mm by 900 mm in size, garments such as the timu, pora and whakaitipu (varieties of rain cape) were designed to serve this purpose. They were woven from suitably prepared harakeke, with work commencing at the hemline. Hundreds of hukahuka, or tags, were prepared from roughly 200–300 mm lengths of harakeke, which had been slightly softened in a process called hāro (scraping with a mussel shell), so that they would lie flat. A few centimetres in the centre of each hukahuka piece were then scraped to allow their attachment, so they would eventually form folded, doubled hanging strips with loose ends. Successive rows of hukahuka were incorporated into the whatu aho pātahi (single-pair weft-twining) or whatu aho rua (two-pair weft-twining) as the garment was being made. When the desired length was reached, the whenu warp threads at the neck edge were skilfully twisted into a robust, rope-like whiri (plaited) finish. Other styles of rain cape used different botanical sources, with fibrous rather than flat thatching. Some incorporated the hukahuka into the whenu as the weaving progressed, and received a different finish at the neck edge.



Some old tāniko (patterned borders) retain strong black hues, with no sign of fibre degradation.



Other tāniko show severe deterioration of black-dyed yarn.

Opposite The superior craftsmanship of both inner and outer surfaces of a kahu tōi.



The muka bodice made by Diggeress Te Kanawa in 1953 for Kiri Te Kanawa.



Kohai Grace's mawhitiwhiti (cross-over pattern) garment.

Opposite Exquisite variations of tāniko incorporating coloured wool on a range of kaitaka in the Te Papa collection.

a special occasion. This may account for the many textile-based cloaks seen at graduation ceremonies and other important events in recent years. Made from bought fabrics and adorned with stitched-on feathers, these cloaks nevertheless fulfil the function for which they were made. Each time they are worn for a significant occasion or used at a tangi they gain another layer of memory and mana, eventually becoming treasured family taonga like the muka, candlewick and wool cloaks that preceded them.

Crossovers and continuities

Currently, weavers throughout the country are reviving the art of producing their own muka and using natural dyes, split flax leaves and other traditional plant materials to create exciting new garments. Coloured muka has replaced wool in the decorative pāheke patterns, and feathers again dot cloaks in place of ngore. Kapa haka competitions, exhibitions, wearable art events, and fashion shows like Style Pasifika and Cult-Couture have inspired weavers to produce striking new designs reflecting an ongoing exploration of materials and techniques. This trend is exemplified in a garment by Kohai Grace that features an overall mawhitiwhiti pattern in black muka to stunning effect (BOTTOM, LEFT).

Mawhitiwhiti patterns have become extremely popular in contemporary cloak-making, perhaps reflecting the widespread influence of teachers like Rangimārie Hetet, Diggeress Te Kanawa, Emily Schuster and Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, all of whom included them in their cloaks and taught them to students making their first taurira. Mawhitiwhiti forms part of the structure of the kākahu, in which sets of existing whenu warp threads are crossed over each other and interlaced, rather than extra strands applied to the surface as seen in some of the decorative wool cross-stitches. It is not known when structural mawhitiwhiti techniques first appeared in kākahu. In Te Papa's drawers, this technique is not evident in the older cloaks but is seen in less traditional items like a small, fringed kete muka (flax-fibre basket), a baby's shawl and even an altar cloth worked in gold crosses on a black background. Mawhitiwhiti may have derived from European cross-stitch, as did needlepoint 'tapestry' in kapa haka bodices, or could have been adapted from tukutuku, the woven wall panels used to decorate whareniui. Christianity and sampler-making may have been an early influence on the adoption of such patterns because of their inherent cross symbolism.

Although needlework-inspired patterns proliferate in contemporary cloak-making, wool is now thought of as non-indigenous and has fallen from favour with many weavers. Conversely, and despite renewed interest in native plant dyes, commercial dyes remain acceptable, along with the experimental use of non-traditional materials such as copper wire. As in the past, the korowai continues to evolve, maintaining its long-standing role as a launching pad for innovation. This is demonstrated in Digger's 'tāniko korowai', completed in 2002, which was inspired by an earlier cloak of similar design from Ōtaua in Hokianga. Small diamond-shaped tāniko motifs decorate the kaupapa ngore-style, replacing the hukahuka that originally gave the korowai its distinctive appearance and name.²⁷

These cloaks and other woven taonga provide revealing insights into the numerous ways our predecessors responded to new materials, techniques and designs, transforming them to become an authentic part of Māori cloak-making heritage. Today's weavers are following in their ancestors' footsteps and, should they choose to welcome wool back into the practice, a kaleidoscope of colourful new kākahu to rival those of our tūpuna can be anticipated.



The garments themselves tell us what did occur but to understand them, we must learn their language as expressed through the minute details of technique

– Te Rangi Hīroa



Makurata Paitini weaving a korowai, Heipipi, Ruatāhuna, 1903–13. The woman on the left may be Marewa-i-te-rangi (SEE PAGE 171).

As Te Rangi Hīroa emphasised, to understand kākahu fully we must look at the details of their construction.¹ This involves tracing the pathways of the two sets of interacting threads – the whenu (warp, or vertical) and aho (weft, or horizontal) – and closely observing both sides of the fabric, the starting and finishing edges, and any decorative additions. Doing so will allow understanding and appreciation of the remarkable technical and aesthetic achievements of Māori in developing the art of making kākahu. Among Te Papa’s rich collection, finely made, prestigious kākahu contrast with protective, practical rain capes, yet all illustrate the versatility of Māori cloak-making.

The first comprehensive description of kākahu and their construction, *The Evolution of Maori Clothing*, was written by Hīroa and published in 1926, and remains an important foundation for the study of kākahu.² Hīroa’s first anthropological article, ‘On the Maori Art of Weaving Cloaks, Capes, and Kilts’, published in the *Dominion Museum Bulletin* in 1911,³ informed this later study. Hīroa became a major scholar of Māori and Polynesian cultures. He began his research on Māori weaving by closely looking at kākahu and learning from Whanganui weaver Tira Hori.⁴ Hīroa’s groundbreaking work on this subject is critical, because he proposed that Māori developed whatu, a form of weft-twining, after arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand.⁵ It is now known that Māori have used whatu for at least 500 years to make kākahu.

Terminology

An essential step in the study of Māori fabrics is the use of an accurate and consistent terminology to describe their structure. For this reason I use terms that

Previous page Detail of the kaitaka huaki paepaeroa on page 139.

distinguish the structure of a fabric from the processes of making it. In Aotearoa, the word ‘weaving’ is used to describe the two primary Māori fabric structures: raranga, which is plaiting; and whatu, which is weft-twining. Raranga is widely used for making whāriki (mats) and kete (baskets), but there are a small number of kākahu in museum collections made using raranga, including one in Te Papa, a kahu raranga pūputu, or closely plaited cape (SEE PAGE 157).

Neither raranga nor whatu are ‘weaving’ as understood in the international field of textile studies. Although whatu and weaving both contain two sets of threads crossing at right angles, the difference is in their interaction. In the whatu structure (CENTRE, RIGHT), two aho twist or twine around each other to enclose adjoining whenu. This structure is described as weft-twining. No device can assist this process: it must be worked with the fingers. In a woven fabric, a single weft thread passes over and under successive warp threads row by row (BOTTOM, RIGHT). This structure is typically made with the aid of a loom, which holds the warps under tension and can lift and lower alternate warp threads to allow the weft to pass between them across the width of the fabric in one movement.

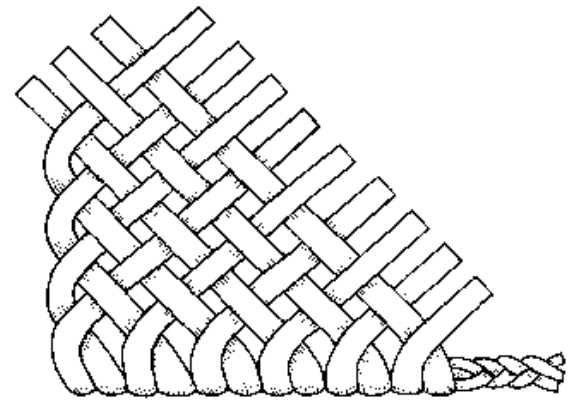
In Polynesia, looms were used only in a few outlier islands in the western Pacific near Micronesia and Melanesia, which both have loom-weaving traditions. Late in his life, Hīroa published an account of the material culture of the Polynesian island Kapingamarangi,⁶ which includes a description of a loom and woven cloth.

Weft-twining in other cultures

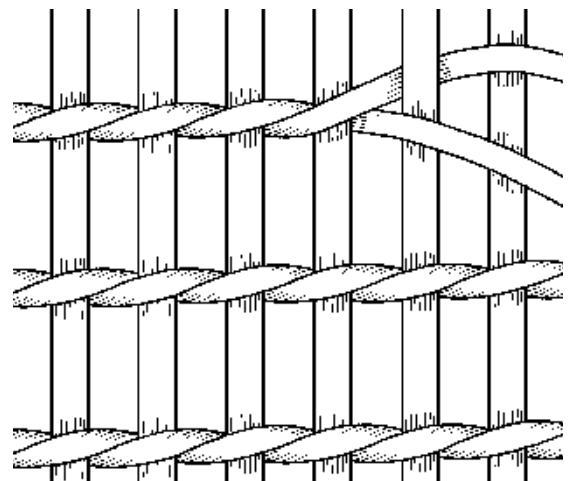
Māori constructed their garments using weft-twining and, sometimes, plaiting. Such fabric structures have been used worldwide for thousands of years, with some of the earliest examples found in Anatolia (now eastern Turkey). Throughout North America, many native tribal groups made baskets, bags and some footwear with weft-twining techniques, and in California the Maidu people made feather mantles by weft-twining.⁷ Some of the best-known weft-twined garments are the Chilkat ceremonial cloaks from the Tlingit tribal groups of the northwest coast of Canada and Alaska.⁸ These cloaks were made with a variety of compact weft-twined structures. However, the simpler cedar-bark garments from this area, made by single-pair spaced weft-twining, are more similar to kākahu. It is also interesting to note that European naturalist Joseph Banks collected a hammock in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and later likened its structure to kākahu.⁹

Single- and two-pair weft-twining were used on some items worn by rural workers in Japan. In areas of Indonesia, weft-twining has been used to make protective garments, small bags and decorative borders on fabrics woven on a loom.¹⁰ In Jordan, Bedouin women make patterned woollen rugs and bags by weft-twining, using a loom to hold the warp threads under tension and manipulating the weft threads with their fingers.¹¹ Zaire has been a great centre of weft-twining in Africa, where the technique has been used to make baskets, shields, girdles, hats and mats. On Zaire shields I have observed full-turn weft-twining of the same structure as tāniko, the borders that decorate lustrous kaitaka cloaks.

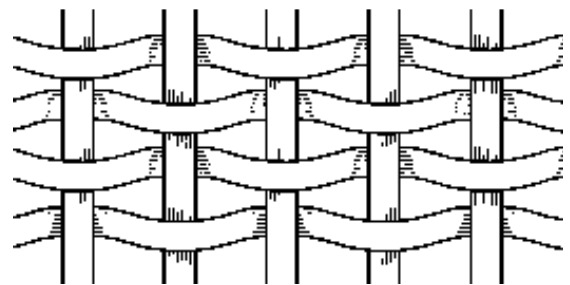
Garments made by extended plaiting and weft-twining from the Tuamotu Archipelago¹² and Tahiti¹³ in eastern Polynesia, although rare, are found in museum collections in the United Kingdom and Hawai‘i. Other Polynesian examples of weft-twining have been found on Rarotonga¹⁴ and Tonga; some of these include feathers in their construction. However, the gorgeous feather cloaks from Hawai‘i, such as the ‘ahu ‘ula given to European explorer James Cook and now on display in Te Papa, were made with a knotted net background fabric.



Raranga (plaiting) usually uses strips of harakeke leaves, or occasionally muka (New Zealand flax fibre).



Whatu weft-twined structure: two aho (wefts) for each ara (row).



Woven structure: single aho (weft) for each ara (row).



Kahu kurī

Early Te Huringa I (early 1800s)

Te Ātiawa (attributed)

Muka, traditional black and brown dyes, dogskin, dog hair,

1190 × 1090 mm

Gift of W. Leo Buller, 1911

This kahu kurī was one of four dogskin cloaks collected by Sir Walter Buller, who described them as ‘A specially valuable collection of Maori garments – two of the dogskin cloaks in a perfect state of preservation.’¹ According to museum records, it was acquired by an early Wellington settler from a Te Ātiawa chief in around 1842 and was bought by Buller in 1890; in 1911 his son gifted it to the Dominion Museum.

The kaupapa, or body, of the kahu kurī is muka (New Zealand flax fibre) twined in compact single-pair twining. There are six whenu (warp threads) per centimetre. The aho poka (shaping rows) are in three sets of simple elliptical inserts, 230 mm and 380 mm from the bottom, and 160 mm from the top of the shoulders. The narrow strips of dogskin are between 2 mm and 4 mm in width. The strips commence from the bottom and are overlaid end to end, with a slight overlap. They vary in length, with the white body strips 180–330 mm long, and the shorter 80 mm pieces forming blocks of brown on the side edges. The strips are sewn onto the pauku (the single-pair compact weft-twining that forms the kaupapa) with two-ply muka thread, worked horizontally from left to right.

Separate strips of white dog hair form the kurupatu, or neck fringe, and are attached in the middle with muka thread, just below a seven-aho (weft thread) row of tāniko (patterned border) in the aronui pattern of repeating triangles. The brown band of dog hair is neatly trimmed, complementing the ruffled effect of the kurupatu. The muka aho can be clearly seen against the dense, closely twined foundation.

Two rows of white dog-tail hair, called awe, are fastened to both side edges of the kahu kurī. Each awe is bound with fine muka thread in a series of close half-hitches. The result is a fringe of luxuriant hair edging the sides of the garment. The two-element decorative finish, oversewn with dyed muka thread, is visible on the edge.

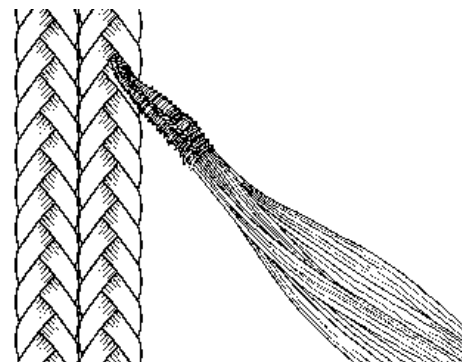
The tāniko kauko (side borders) consist of six aho rows and eight whenu per centimetre, of natural and traditionally dyed black and brown aho in the aronui pattern. Worked from the inside, the pattern is revealed when the cloak is turned back.



Double row of dog-hair tassels, or awe, incorporated into the three-plait braided muka cordage.



Inside proper left (left side when worn) of the kahu kurī. Worked from the inside, the tāniko (patterned border) pattern is revealed when the cloak is turned back.



Awe attachment, used on both side edges of the cloak.

Previous page Detail of the kahu huruhuru on page 171.