

Te Hei Tiki

An enduring
treasure in
a cultural
continuum

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TE PAPA



PRESS

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01

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Ngā whakamāramatanga

Use and meaning



This hei tiki features pale-coloured feather fractures in the stone, possibly induced by heat treatment.
Type II, shape C; Auckland; pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, inconclusive source; 85 x 65 x 10 mm.

There are many customary uses and meanings attached to hei tiki. One view is that they constitute an ancient form which has been continually reinterpreted, so that many of the current meanings for the form are of comparatively recent origin, the latest iterations of many.¹ An adaptation of this view is favoured here, as it allows for a diverse range of uses and meanings coexisting at any one time, with the likelihood that so-called new uses and meanings are often old uses and meanings which have been brought to the fore again due to changing circumstances. Hei tiki, after all, are multifaceted taonga. They embody a range of meanings and purposes on which emphasis can change from day to day, moment to moment, or between different historical time periods and tribal localities, depending on social occasion or circumstance.

The meaning of the name 'hei tiki' can be explained by breaking it down into its separate parts. The word 'hei' denotes something worn around the neck. ('Hei' and 'āhei' are names for the collarbones; the hei delineate that part of the upper body upon which hei tiki and other neck adornments naturally rest.)² 'Tiki' is a generic word used by Māori and other Polynesian cultures for human images, large or small, whether carved in wood, stone, bone, or some other material. A hei tiki is therefore an image carved in human form that is worn suspended around the neck.

It is sometimes explained that Tiki was the first man created by the atua (deity) Tāne. According to some traditions, Tiki and Hine-ahu-one were the first

human pair. Others consider Tiki, or Tiki-āhua, to be an atua himself, and the progenitor of humankind.³ Man, god, or demi-god, there seems to be consensus that humankind descends from Tiki's lineage.

'Te aitanga a Tiki' is an early expression for humanity and was used as an accolade to designate persons of high birth. That these pendants take their name from the human form in a general sense, rather than represent Tiki himself, is indicated by the fact that when the sex of early hei tiki is shown they are invariably female.

A pakiwaitara (traditional story) tells of how the ancestor-like god Ngahue fled from tropical Hawaiki, the ancestral homeland, with his coveted pounamu fish Poutini. They were chased away by Hine-tua-hoanga and her abrasive cutting-stone Whaiapu. After a long journey Ngahue and Poutini made landfall at Tuhua (Mayor Island) in the Bay of Plenty. But they soon sensed the arrival of their foe and continued onwards, arriving at length at the remote Arahura River on the South Island's West Coast. Here Ngahue deposited Poutini, making this an eternal resting place for his precious stone. He then returned to Hawaiki with a portion of pounamu taken from the side of his fish. Back in Hawaiki, Ngahue told the people of the richness of the large land he had discovered. He worked upon the pounamu to fashion the first hei tiki adornments, making also kuru-pounamu (ear pendants) and toki (adzes). The adzes were used to construct ocean-going canoes, and voyages of settlement began, bringing the people and their pounamu treasures to Aotearoa.⁴

Another hei tiki creation narrative involves Hine-te-iwaiwa and is set in tropical Polynesia. Hine-te-iwaiwa was a goddess of exceptional beauty, who acquired the first hei tiki as a gift from her father, Tāne.⁵ Another name by which Hine-te-iwaiwa is known is Hinauri. Hinauri was married to Irawaru; a dispute arose in which Irawaru was transformed into a dog by his brother-in-law, Māui.⁶ One account says Hinauri threw herself into the sea out of grief for the loss of her husband, and she eventually came ashore at the island home of Tinirau,⁷ who was highly regarded as the most handsome man of his time.

Other versions say that Hinauri/Hine-te-iwaiwa had heard of Tinirau, and she made her way to his island either by swimming or by sailing upon a shellfish.⁸ She and Tinirau then slept together, and this angered Tinirau's other wives, Makai-atua-uriuri and Makai-atua-haehae. A fight took place in which Hine-te-iwaiwa killed these two co-wives. In one account, she killed the women by intoning a powerful karakia (incantation) and by throwing stones at them. As they were hit the women's bodies burst open, letting forth a mass of greenstone, and it was by this means that pounamu had its origins.⁹

This hei tiki features a distinctive peaked head and raised knuckles of the hands. It also has deeply grooved eyes.

Type I, shape A; pounamu (nephrite), kahurangi variety, central Westland source; 90 x 53 x 14 mm.





LEFT: A large impressive hei tiki with pointed elbows, worn knobbed knees and ankle projections.

Type I, shape A; pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, Te Koroka source, Wakatipu; wax; 165 x 80 x 22 mm.

OPPOSITE: Originally the inanga from which this hei tiki is made would have been much lighter in colour, but the stone has darkened over time.

Type I, shape C; pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, aged, central Westland source; 81 x 49 x 11 mm.





OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hei tiki; type I, shape C; Ohaeawai, Northland; Ngāpuhi (attributed); pounamu (nephrite), heat treated, central Westland source; pāua shell, kōkōwai; 162 x 93 x 18 mm. Hei tiki; type I, shape C; pounamu (nephrite), heat-induced inanga variety; 80 x 59 x 11 mm. Hei tiki; type I, shape C; pounamu (nephrite), kahurangi variety, central Westland source; 88 x 60 x 13 mm. Hei tiki; type I, shape A; pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, Te Koroka source, Wakatipu; wax; 87 x 43 x 10 mm.

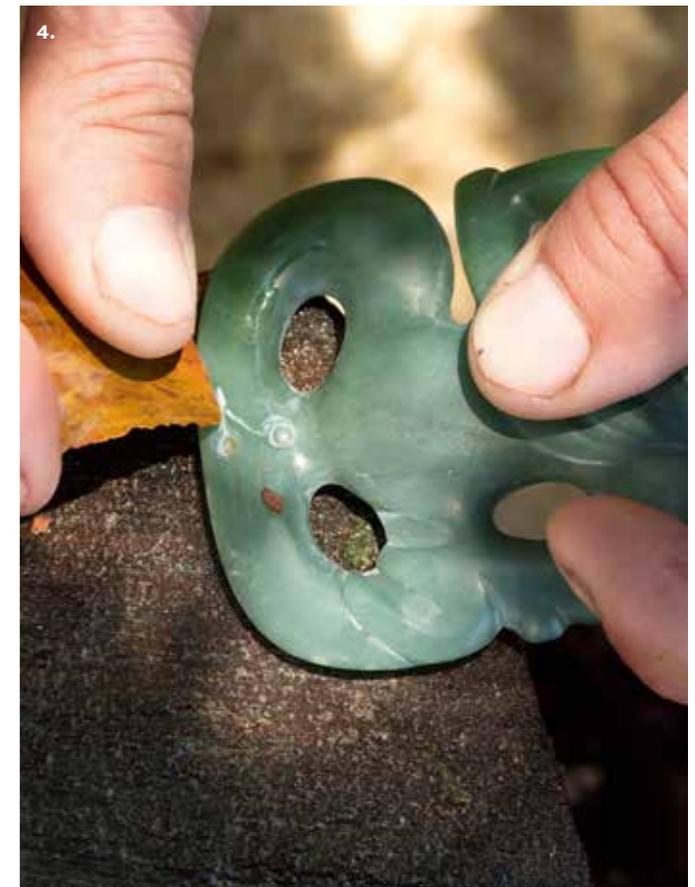
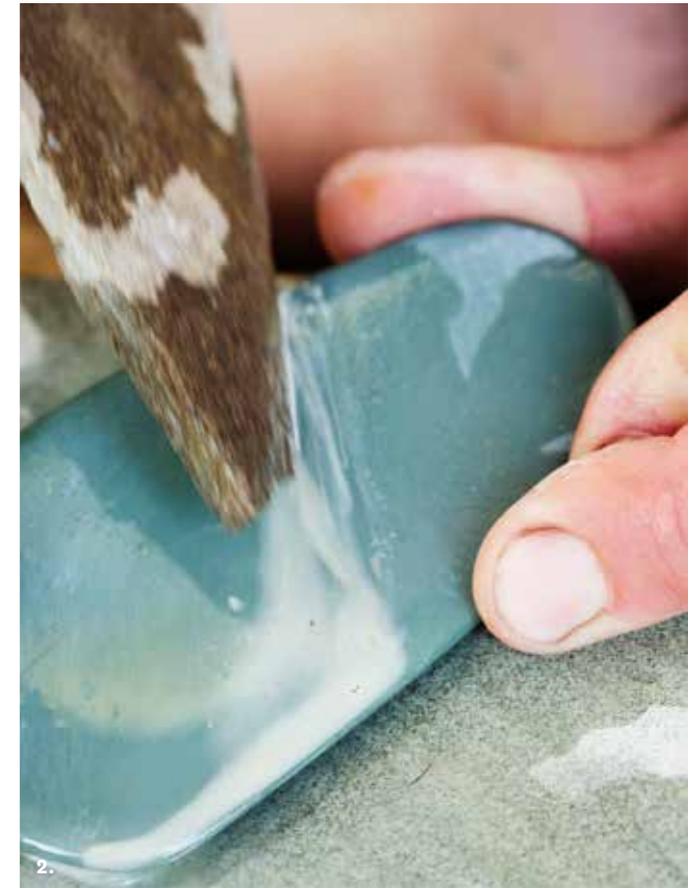
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hei tiki; type I, shape A; Rangiriri, Waikato; Tainui (attributed); pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, central Westland source; 145 x 72 x 19 mm. (This hei tiki was taken from a fallen rangatira at the battle of Rangiriri, after the assault on the redoubt, 20 November 1863.) Hei tiki; type I, shape A; pounamu (nephrite), heat treated; 87 x 50 x 13 mm. Hei tiki; type I, shape A; pounamu (nephrite), inanga variety, aged, central Westland source; 134 x 67 x 20 mm.



After shaping the head Phil uses flint or chert flakes to grave out a circular track for the eye grooves. Once these are fairly well defined, he attaches a length of hollow bird bone to a tūwiri and drills out the remaining depth of the eye grooves in core-drill fashion. It takes him about three days' work to make the eyes.

When Phil uses a drill with a hollow bone bit, he will drill for a time, then dip the bit into a container of water and then quickly dip it into a bowl of sand. Some of the sand will adhere to the wet bone tip, which is then put back to use drilling out the eye grooves until it is time to repeat the process of rewetting and resanding the bit. Phil modifies the end of the bit by cutting grooves across it to act as teeth. He will also sometimes press the bone tip further into the sand so that the hollow interior of the bone will fill up with sand. Pāua shell is usually used for the eye inlay, although Phil has also seen mussel shell inlay used in some old hei tiki.

Like other customary practitioners, Phil talks of the duty that goes with the practice to uphold the art form and ensure its survival. He stresses that it is a responsibility, not a right. He also sees a social agenda in teaching and encouraging the younger generation to take up this practice. 'As a young person, doing this mahi helped ground me; it gave me a purpose, a drive, a passion.' While not an easily financially viable activity with which to support oneself, the revival of these ancient skills is a valid practice, a form of artistic expression unique to Aotearoa. He comments that making a hei tiki in this manner is a learning experience that will likely test your capabilities beyond anything else you may have experienced. It is a challenge that will lead to self-discovery. 'In today's modern society we are so driven by bills, bills, bills, money, money, money. Really, sometimes we forget who we are.'



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ABOVE: Remnant saw scarves to start a hole on the back of the head of a hei tiki.
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OPPOSITE: Stages of hei tiki making.
 1. Sketching.
 2. Sawing.
 3. Filing.
 4. Etching.



Portrait of Tukere,
photographer unknown.

resources, impoverishment, and population decline as a result of European colonisation. Access to pounamu sources by Ngāi Tahu and other iwi was restricted soon after the 1864 West Coast gold rush, as pounamu became an economically important commodity of trade for Europeans. In 1891 Chapman recorded, 'The greenstone-cutter of olden times has almost disappeared, though Captain Mair, a high authority, informed me a few years ago, contrary to the opinion I had expressed . . . that some old men still worked hei-tikis.'³²

In 1912, as a result of his recording work amongst the Tūhoe people of the Urewera region, the ethnologist Elsdon Best chronicled what may be the last known accounts of Māori who had recently worked hei tiki by hand using stone tools. Best recorded that in years past, Te Whenuanui (the first) was highly regarded for his skill in fashioning hei tiki. By 1910, however, only one of the old hei tiki makers was still alive in the Ruatāhuna district. This was the elder Atama Te Kikiwa (Kutu). Although he was famed for being the last hei tiki maker of his people 'he had not wrought any for some years past'.

Another of Best's informants on Tūhoe history, Rāwiri Te Kokau, recalled that he had seen Atama Te Kikiwa work pounamu at Ruatāhuna. Graving tools were fashioned from quartz fragments flaked to a point, and used in a rubbing motion with the application of water. When fashioning a hei tiki, the tūwiri (pump drill) with its stone bit was used to make holes. Next, a stone file was employed, being thrust through each hole and worked in an abrading manner to enlarge and shape them into the desired form.³³

It seems that these accounts bear witness to the close of te ao kōhatu, the age of early Māori stoneworking, in about the year 1900. Atama carried out his work largely in customary manner, except for use of the tūwiri, which had replaced the earlier cord drill among Ngāi Tūhoe. It may be that the Tūhoe people used the name 'tūwiri', pronounced tūiri in Tūhoe dialect, for the cord drill in earlier times and transferred the same name to its replacement.

By the year 1900 the toki pounamu had long been replaced by metal carving tools; the mere pounamu, too, had long ceased to be used as a weapon for warfare, but it retained ceremonial importance. In contrast, Māori were still wearing hei tiki as adornments, and these may have maintained close to their full assortment of cultural use and meaning.



Joel Marsters (left) and Lewis Gardiner (right) at work at Rākai Jade, Rotorua, 2018.



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Tipuna Wahine by Stacy Gordine (Ngāti Porou), 2009. This hei tiki represents a female ancestor. The figure is unadorned except for the moko-kauae (chin tattoo). The elaborate topknots in her hair indicate high status. Positioning of the hands to the thighs and the configuration of the legs are both typical of hei tiki. The style of this adornment has been inspired by poutokomanawa (ridgepole support) figures, which are typically of naturalistic appearance.

Type I, shape C; whalebone, black goat horn, synthetic cord; 75 x 40 mm.

Technology, to improve his skill levels in working stone, particularly hard stone.

His work gravitated towards Māori forms in a personal exploration into his whakapapa and taha Māori (Māori side). Typical of his work at that time was his kete series: miniature kete (woven bags) rendered in bone and stone. While he had a strong interest in the early customary Māori forms and had studied them closely, at that time his work was 'sort of around the edges', more contemporary in its approach. He didn't feel quite ready or comfortable to execute his work in the customary manner of the early practitioners.

That changed in 2005, when Stacy spent a year doing the whakairo rākau (woodcarving) course at Te Wānanga o Raukawa, tutored by Hemi Tahuparae and Tākuta 'Doc' Ferris Jnr. He was still running his carving business in Hawke's Bay, but was regularly travelling down to Ōtaki to do noho (stay-overs) at the wānanga. Stacy enjoyed the holistic structure of the course: learning more of the reo; doing iwi and hapū studies, which involved going back to his whenua (ancestral lands); conducting interviews; and then learning woodcarving and how to carve the rākau forms. It was a pivotal year, which changed the direction of his work and led towards the mahi he's doing now.

Stacy talks of a 'lightbulb moment' when he thought, 'I know what — I'll mix what I know from the bone and stone, my skill base there, with the wood [carving] and miniaturise it.' This led on to his poupou (wall post) series and the pou-tokomanawa (ridgepole support figure) series: adornment pieces derived from architectural elements of rākau, but miniaturised into a different format.

During their final year on the course at Te Takapū the students research and carve hei tiki in various forms, including the type I and type II hei tiki and the hei poupou form introduced by Stacy. Even though he has been carving now for thirty-odd years, Stacy says that he's still on a journey, still learning about his whakapapa and artistic media, still researching customary forms and translating them. He is inspired by the depth of tradition, the depth of the whakapapa of Māori art forms, and by his being a part of that huge legacy.

Stacy talks of the influence of urbanisation upon Māori art forms, drawing a comparison with his own experience of growing up in Heretaunga (Hastings) during the 1970s and 1980s, outside of his tribal lands of Ngāti Porou. Urban Māori of that generation often studied art at polytechnics, learning European methods and tools; and then slowly, over time, their culture shone through with those new processes. 'So if you look at that, it's Māori going to a European learning institution as opposed to a whare wānanga, and then learning in that environment and picking up the technologies and tools and then expressing who they were with those modern tools and processes.'

Stacy observes that Māori culture has always been about technology, and it is never static and unchanging, as it has sometimes been portrayed. 'At one point in time . . . so-called traditional work was actually quite contemporary and