



Object type: Maori Meeting House
Indigenous name: Mahina-a-Rangi
Culture/location: Turangawaewae Marae,
Ngaruawahia, New Zealand
Date: 1929
Dimensions: L. 39 – 98 feet
Institution and accession number: National
Library of New Zealand, APG-0953-1/2-G



Object type: Neck pendant
Indigenous name: *Hei-Tiki*
Culture/location: Maori, New Zealand
Date: 10th century
Materials: Nephrite, halotis shell
Dimensions: H. 9 in.
Institution and accession number: Indiana
University Art Museum, 80.5.2

The human body is represented in several forms with subtle as well as distinctive variations between the islands of Polynesia. The symbol of the human body points to the accumulation and reservation of *mana*, the value of genealogy, and the display of family lineage. In the Maori culture of New Zealand, the meeting house, *whare hui*, and the pendant, *hei-tiki*, are a site and an object that served as records of genealogy and possessed the form of the human body. Connecting their functions and visual representations suggest the body functions as an agent of communication between generations across time. I connected with these objects because they exemplify a recurrent theme in my life. From my everyday interaction and reflection, I realize how much my identity is shaped by my mother and grandmother, the older generations of my family. These objects allow me to further reflect on the body being a part of a process that involves various influences rather than a finished product. The appreciation for family lineage and human connection emerges from this reflection.

Maori meeting houses were built and carved in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The meeting house functioned as the living space for an ancestor for whom it was built and named. It served as the community space where various ceremonial community gatherings and social gatherings took place (Sissons 2010, 373). The building has a monumental structure and presence. It is not compartmentalized like the contemporary house

but is one open space where all activities are performed, making the space a palimpsest of ceremonial activities throughout time with the accrual of *mana*.

The structure was built to resemble and symbolize the body of the ancestor for whom it was built. The porch is regarded as the brain (*roro*). The carved figure, *tekoteko*, on the rooftop in front of the house represents the head; the front large boards are the open arms; the short boards at the front represent the legs. The ridge-pole, *taahuhu*, running down the length of the roof represents the spine, and the rafters, *heke*, around the walls represent the ribs. The interior of the house represents the chest (*poho*) of the ancestor (van Meijl 2006, 207). The intricate wood carving decorations on every surface of the house and the figural sculptures in the interior serve as the reminders of their creation, commemorators of the dead, and demonstration of family genealogy (Simmons 1984, 62). By representing the building as a human body, the carvers and builders of the meeting house demonstrated reverence for the past and deference to the ancestors.

The form of the human body symbolized in the meeting house has several significances. It suggests that the human body is the connection between the ancestors and the descendants, serving as the mediator of *mana* and the forms through which communication between generations can be carried out. The activities performed inside the space can be considered to contribute to the growth and creation of the human body, implying that the ancestor's body was the component of a collective process. Thus, in the context of the meeting house, the body became the agent through which the past and the present connected, contributing to the creation of the community, identities, and family genealogy.

In contrast to the meeting house, the pendant, *hei-tiki*, represents the human body in a less monumental but equally powerful way. The pendant is made of nephrite, requiring an extreme amount of time to carve and create (Barrow 1962, 254). The general surface resembles the motif *tiki-manaia*, a human with bird-like head, which is a main decorative motif in Maori culture in New Zealand (Grabski 2016). The name comes in two parts, *hei* meaning pendant and *tiki* meaning a carved figure (Skinner 1916, 310). The pendant is the most important piece of Maori jewelry. The pendant could be suspended with sennit and worn around the neck. The *hei-tiki* had a great amount of *mana* due to the nephrite materials and the skill and time-commitment of the artist. Another significant source of *mana* is from the pendant's ability to accumulate *mana* from the owners; the *mana* would increase with the age and with the position of the succession of owners (Skinner 1916, 310). Therefore, its *mana* accrued over time as the jewelry was passed down from generation to generation as an heirloom.

There have been many debates over the form the *hei-tiki* represents. Various scholars have cited Elsdon Best's speculation that the *hei-tiki* represents the human embryo and the fertilizing agent (Skinner 1932, 205). The absence of a clear answer allows the form to be left open for interpretation. However, the *hei-tiki* is usually associated with procreation, fertility, and genealogy. The movement of the pendant through time as an heirloom contributes to this association. The human form of *hei-tiki* is more obvious than that of the meeting house; however, its representation of community is not. The women of different generations who wore the pendant can be considered as a community. Each relationship with the pendant is unique to the woman and her generation. This relationship was built upon the previous relationships of her ancestors with the jewelry, and would inform those of her daughter and grandchildren in the future. The pendant's presence against the movement of time demonstrated that it served as the site of contact for people of across generations. With regards to the pendant, the human body embodied genealogy but also functioned as the record of lineage.

The Maori meeting house and the *hei-tiki* are both examples of how the representation of the human body on spaces and objects that embody genealogy demonstrates that the human body is a product of a collective process. The body is shaped by those that came before and those that will emerge after, serving as the site of communication through time.

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