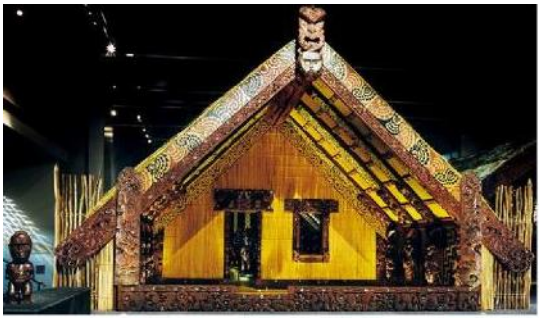
Object Type: Ceremonial Adze
Date: Late 18th, Early 19th Century
Cook Islands
Materials: Wood, Stone, Sennit
Dimensions: 27.5 inches
British Museum
Oc1981,Q.1609



Object Type: Meeting House
Name: Te Hau ki Turanga
Date:1842
Maori, New Zealand
Materials: Wood
Dimensions: 56x24x14 feet
Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tangarewa
B.013049

Mana represents the major force in Polynesian cultures, flowing throughout the world and between people, becoming infused in objects, passed down through generations, and determining power structures. Cultural practices, such as the concept of tapu, revolve around this concept of mana preservation, accrual, and loss. From these specific cultural practices, objects develop to accommodate conventions. Two such examples are ceremonial adzes, such as the one included in this module from the Cook Islands, and meeting houses, or wharenui, such as the Maori example displayed above. Just as the meeting house represents and reinforces power structures within the built environment of Maori culture, the ceremonial adze represents and reinforces the power structures within the ritual culture of the Cook Islands.

The Te Hau ki Turanga marae is currently housed in the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand. Originally built in the 1840s, the structure is the oldest existing marae meeting house in New Zealand (Grabski 2016). The design has become a model of traditional Maori meeting houses, inspiring the construction of new, traditional meeting houses elsewhere in New Zealand. Meeting houses were one component to the greater religious and ceremonial marae complex. The structure is made primarily of wood and has a proportionally tall peaked roof that dominates the structure's silhouette. This shape creates a spacious interior with tall ceilings. Decorative carving in low relief covers almost all of the exposed wood, exhibiting classic Maori motifs such as the fern spiral. The interior also contains numerous carvings of motifs and representations of ancestors and gods while the walls are decorated with woven tapestries.

Common in Maori marae meeting houses, Te Hau ki Turanga's form represents a highly coded space. In its entirety, the marae symbolizes the human body. The sloped roof beams

represent outstretched arms, the ridge of the roof is the backbone, the rafters are ribs, the interior space is the belly, and the central, interior ridgepole is the heart (Yoon 1973, 123). Furthermore, various sculptural components represent ancestors, gods, and myths. The ridgepole depicts an ancestral deity, a sculpture at the peak of the façade illustrates the creation myth, and interspersed carvings represent other gods and ancestors. Each component mentioned adds mana to the building, which explains the tapu nature of the space. In total, the Te Hau ki Turanga meeting house provides an excellent example of the highly symbolic space of a Maori marae and the mana it contains.

As a tapu space containing significant mana, Te Hau ki Turanga and the practices performed within and without the space embody and reiterate the power structure of Maori culture. The idea of tapu references a spiritual practice that deems spaces and objects with significant mana forbidden and limit interactions within these spaces or with these objects. As a tapu space, visitors must perform certain precautionary rituals before entering to avoid an unwanted transfer of mana. These rituals restrict access to the marae for the common Maori, necessitating the presence of a priest in order to enter the space. The genealogical symbolism reminds the visitor of their own place within their community, mediating their behavior within the space. To borrow Michel de Certeau's concept of strategies in built environments, each of the mentioned effects of the space represent clear and intentional strategies of the Maori ruling class (1984, 37). de Certeau describes strategies as, "actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourse) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed" (1984, 37). Essentially, power-holders use strategies to take advantage of space in order to enforce social constructions. In this case of the marae within Maori culture, the ruling class uses the meeting house to enforce the social hierarchy, transforming the socially constructed system into the concrete form of the meeting house. Within greater Polynesian culture, this concept of using the physical or material to represent and reinforce ideological concepts is not isolated to the Maori meeting house.

The ceremonial adzes of the Cook Islands accomplish a similar goal through their physical form. The adze depicted above is an example of a ceremonial object made in the period following European contact. The wooden, sennit, and basalt object currently resides in the British Museum. The handle is meticulously carved, notched, and punctured with a metal nail. The repeating geometric patterns reference the contiguous genealogy and the great amounts of mana associated with such longevity. Similarly, the stone head is attached to the body with wrapped sennit. This repeated action provided the opportunity for an esteemed artist

– probably a priest – to infuse the object with copious amounts of mana through repeated incantations as it was manufactured. This painstaking crafting process resulted in the highly valued status object depicted above. Adzes were exclusively made for chiefs and high-ranking individuals as markers of rank and as ritual objects because of their mana and spiritual role.

Similar to the meeting house, the adze represents the way in which the power-holders reinforce and maintain the social structure of the Cook Islands. A common Cook Islander would most likely never come into physical contact with a ceremonial adze, since its mana could harm the commoner. In this respect, such high status objects contribute to reinforcing the social structure within a community. Objects reserved for powerful individuals and related social practices like tapu ensured the continuity of power structures. Whereas the meeting house made use of spatial strategies to preserve social hierarchies through its architecture and sculptural program, adzes do not use space to maintain hierarchy. The independence of power from space emphasizes the ubiquity of the Polynesian social structure. Within Polynesian culture, social structure was not tied just tied to the land and objects, but to genealogy and ancestral heritage. Valuable objects, like the marae meeting house and adze, were both the products of power structures and critical to their perpetuation – a structure that the commoner must heed.

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