Object type: Head
Indigenous name: Upoko
Culture/location: Māori, New Zealand
Date: mid-19th to early 20thcentury
Materials: Wood, obsidian, red paint
Dimensions: H.8 in.
Institution and accession number: Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 1994.424

Object type: Treasure box
Indigenous name: Wakahuia
Culture/location: Māori, New Zealand
Date: 19th century
Materials: Wood, stain, paua shell
Dimensions: L. 480 x W. 165 x D. 80 mm.
Institution and accession number: Museum of New Zealand, *Te Papa Tongarewa*, WE000946

In this summary I consider two artworks from the Māori culture. Whether identified by their formal characteristics or where they were found, each piece tells a different story, emits a certain spiritual significance, and serves a specific purpose. More specifically, this summary compares and contrasts two carved and amazingly detailed objects, a *wakahuia* (treasure box) and an *upoko* (head), highlighting the similarities and differences between them regarding function and design.

For the Māori people an important element in establishing identity is the manner in which cultural memory is incorporated into each individual's very existence (Farrimond 1996, 408). Most notably reflected in oral history, this incorporation of cultural remembrance correlates directly to the individual's *whakapapa* (genealogy). However, the transmittance of history and prestige is not limited only to the spoken word. Māori art objects are essential in expressing the values of a community. These two objects were not only important for cultural memory. They were also social agents, possessing the power to affect hierarchal status in their function as well as their appearance (D'Alleva 1998, 18).

Although both objects are made primarily of wood, they served dissimilar functions. Most apparent are the practical properties of the *wakahuia* simply found in the translation of the Māori term for a treasure box. This *wakahuia* was utilized to protect the user's most prized possessions, most notably: feathers, combs, ear pendants and green neck stone pendants (Te

Anga 1998, 14). In the Māori culture these objects contained substantial amounts of *mana* (force of nature, related to hierarchy, order, spirit and effectiveness), Like that of the *wakahuia*, the *upoko* is an important piece when considering preservation, yet in a completely different context. Whereas the *wakahuia* relates to the preservation of objects, the *upoko* relates to the preservation of body. More precisely, the *upoko* was used in the *tangihanga* (burial practice) which was the culmination of mourning rituals following the passing of a community member. They included spiritually significant exercises and the utilization of spiritually infused objects (Waimaire Nikora and Te Awekotuku 2013, 170). In this sense, the *upoko* pictured here was thought to have served as a replacement for one of the most important pieces of the human body as seen by the Māori people – the head. Although the theft of a deceased man's head may sound peculiar, this practice may have been conducted by the enemy of the deceased, commonly forming fish-hooks, flutes, and bird piercers out of the discovered bones (Museum of Fine Art Boston 2016; Best 1914, 110). The replacement of the skull can be seen as an attempt to replenish the loss of *mana* due to the removal of the skull. The unique form of preservation employed by both pieces may differ, yet the two pieces do share some similarities in their designs and motifs.

The *upoko* and *wakahuia* display first and foremost a strong material connection to the natural world. Carved from wood, these pieces highlight the theme of Polynesian cultures in relation to their environment. They also demonstrate the skillful, intricate carving representative of the finest Māori sculpture. Carvers in earlier centuries could not rely on electrically powered tools, instead they carved using manual labor. Therefore, it is likely that both objects were carved from wood pieces that may have resembled the objects' respective shapes. Additionally, both pieces share similarities in their choice of outer designs (low relief carving), like the appearance of the *koru* (spiral). The *koru,* often used as a symbol for creation, is based on the shape of the unfurling fern frond, and represents perpetual movement and reflects the concept of origin (Royal 2013, 1). While we do see some differences between the two, like that of the employment of *moko* (tattoo) on the *upoko*, and some *tikis* (carved figures) on the *wakahuia*, we can easily see that both pieces, like most Māori art objects, were carefully finished (Firth 1925, 282)

I chose these two objects, equally stunning and captivating, because they tell unique stories, yet also refer to themes specifically found in Māori culture. In the fall of my junior year at Denison University, I chose, and was thankfully accepted to study for a semester in New Zealand at the University of Otago. While attending the university in Dunedin, I took a Māori culture class and had the pleasure of learning a great deal about the Māori concepts of *mana, tapu* (of sacred decent), and what it meant to be Māori. These pieces were most interesting to

me in that they had different functional properties, yet both engaged Māori ideals involved in preservation while also showing similar design motifs.

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