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Searching for Tūpuna

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Abstract

The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture opened the "Pacific Voices" exhibition in 1997, a community-led exhibition of Indigenous cultures throughout the Pacific Rim, including Māori. Twenty years later, Nicola Andrews, a Ngāti Pāoa Māori student at the University of Washington, serendipitously visited the Burke and began collaborating with the museum to reframe *taonga* (treasure, anything prized) descriptions in its catalogue and physical spaces. The Burke collection also includes 962 Māori photographs spanning the 19th century, which were removed from Aotearoa New Zealand and donated to the museum in 1953. These photographs had been digitized but not published, and the museum had almost no identifying information about their subjects. This article describes what is perhaps the first attempt in over six decades to identify the *rangatira* (chief, person of high rank) depicted in these images, and ways for the Burke to honor the *tupunā* (ancestors) and *taonga* in its care as it prepared to open a new location in late 2019.

Keywords

Searching for Tūpuna

Grounding in Place

The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture (hereafter, the Burke) is situated on the unceded lands of the dxʷdewʔabš Duwamish Nation, part of the Coast Salish territories of the Pacific Northwest (Duwamish Tribal Services, 2018). In 1885, a group of museum enthusiasts called the Young Naturalists' Society founded the Hall of Young Naturalists within the University of Washington (Burke Museum, 2018d). In 1899, the Hall was designated as the Washington State Museum, and it went through various building iterations before its current name and building in 1962 on the University of Washington campus. At the time of this writing, a new museum building was scheduled to open on campus in late 2019; the New Burke successfully opened to the public in October 2019 (Burke Museum, 2019).

Currently, the Burke supports teaching and learning at the University of Washington, including Indigenous Studies, Museology, and Information Studies, and is also open to the public. Its collections include 16 million objects in the fields of biology, geology, paleontology, cultural studies, and material culture (Burke Museum, 2018e). The Culture Department includes the Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Native Art, as well as materials which cover archaeology and ethnology (Burke Museum, 2018a). More specifically, the materials span cultures from the Pacific Northwest and which border the Pacific Rim but include the Pacific Northwest Coast, the Alaskan Arctic and Subarctic, the Plateau, Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, Mexico, Central America, South America, and Asia. The highlights of the collections include 500 canoes and 8700 woven baskets from all over the world, as well as extensive

archival photographs (Burke Museum, 2018b). The Burke relies on donations instead of

purchasing artifacts outright and, consequently, their origins are not always known.

Encountering the Burke

I undertook my Master of Library and Information Science at the University of

Washington Information School, beginning my part-time online studies from Bellingham,

Washington, in 2014 and graduating in the summer of 2017. I had first visited the Burke during

a campus orientation day. I was astonished and humbled to see that the entire ground floor

was dedicated to showcasing treasures from Pasifika cultures as an exhibition called "Pacific

Voices," which opened in 1997 and was developed in deep consultation with community

members—a radical approach at the time (Dobkins, 1999). The exhibition featured Māori

taonga (treasure, anything prized) such as *tukutuku* panels, and a large contemporary carving

by Fred Graham. As an immigrant/settler in the USA, I do not often get to connect with my

culture, and I was grateful to know that I would have access to this presence during my studies.

As such, I did not critically evaluate the materials on display or the means by which they were

presented.

The "Pacific Voices" exhibition includes a small audiovisual display where visitors and

school groups are encouraged to sit and watch a series of short clips from the cultures

represented in the exhibition. During one visit, I overheard a familiar sound—the effervescent

laugh of Billy T James, a beloved Māori comedian who passed away in 1991. I was surprised to

see clips of Māori stories narrated by the actor Temuera Morrison and the late Billy T James—

grainy video clips that I had seen in my youth during commercial breaks. For me, this encounter

illustrated that the exhibition was outdated and that, as Māori, we had the potential to actively

share much more dynamic forms of art and storytelling. This, and a lack of information in Te

Reo Māori, led me to write to the Burke, expressing my concerns and advocating for an

updated approach. Holly Barker, Curator for Oceanic and Asian Culture, responded, welcoming

my engagement with the Burke and the Māori collections, whether as a visitor, researcher or

community collaborator. Holly readily agreed to act as my sponsor for a three-month Directed

Fieldwork project addressing the ways in which the *taonga* were displayed.

The fieldwork

Directed Fieldwork is an elective degree component within the University of

Washington Information School, where students can gain practical experience working on a

project for an institution in the galleries, libraries, archives, and museums sector while earning

up to five credit hours toward their degree. Typically, students pay the university tuition to

undertake this work while providing free labour and being supervised by someone outside of

the university—but the Directed Fieldwork model is still popular among students.

While I was excited to engage with the *taonga*, I struggled with whether I had the right

to influence how *taonga* may be displayed—I did not have a background in museology and,

more critically, I was not brought up with *tikanga Māori* (customary and correct procedures or

protocols within Māori culture) or Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). Even if I had been, I was

not of the specific *iwi* (extended tribal group) or *hapū* (subtribe) communities that were

represented within "Pacific Voices." However, the Burke was supportive of my attempts and,

after consulting colleagues and friends Whine Te Whiu and Theresa Graham at Tāmaki Paenga

Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum, I decided that my recommendations would be simply

that – recommendations and not an assumption of authority.

Undertaking the fieldwork, I first took an inventory of the 55 physical *taonga* in the

collections and noted how they were described in both ARGUS, the museum catalogue, and the

Ethnology Collections Database (now the Contemporary Culture Database, Burke Museum

2018c, Contemporary Culture Database). In order to frame the descriptions from a *mātauranga*

Māori (Māori knowledge) perspective, I suggested that *taonga* be described in Te Reo Māori;

iwi and *taonga* creators be acknowledged; and there be more care to associate *taonga* with

specific *iwi* and land – framing Māori as contemporary people.

I was advised by Whina Te Whiu (personal communication, Now Curator, Museum @ Te

Ahu, 16 March 2016) that Ngā Upoko Tukutuku (Māori Subject Headings) are accepted within

Library of Congress subject headings, so this became a natural starting point (National Library,

2018). Using Ngā Upoko Tukutuku, a Māori dictionary, and collections in Te Puna Mātauranga o

Aotearoa/the National Library of New Zealand, I created a list of current terms used by the

Burke and suggested new terms in Te Reo Māori and English. Examples of these include

"feather," *huia,* and "huia feather"; or "plank", *pare*, and "lintel." I also made some smaller

suggestions, such as incorporating macrons, correcting the typographical error "Auteroa" on

the Burke website, using updated audiovisual content, and removing an acrylic *tā moko*

(chiseled and inked facial adornment) mask which had been an interactive part of a display.

Lastly, with the Burke preparing for its new location, I did some work to contact

contemporary artists who had contributed *taonga* to the "Pacific Voices" exhibition, such as

Mereana Ngatai and the family of Erenoa Hetet. I also attempted to find more information on

affinity groups that the museum could incorporate into future outreach and programming.

The Elmore collection

As my fieldwork project was wrapping up, I was introduced to the Elmore collection –

962 photographs of Māori life spanning approximately 1850–1950. The photographs were

donated to the Burke by Dr John Elmore in 1953. Dr Elmore also donated many other *taonga* to

the Burke, including casts of objects whose originals are now on display at Auckland War

Memorial Museum in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bethany Matai Edmunds Assistant Curator Māori,

Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum, personal communication, 20 February

2017). The corresponding item records from the Auckland Museum include that the objects

were "removed from New Zealand by Dr. John Elmore between 1900–1912"; it is my

speculation that the items were smuggled out of the country.

The photographs can be summarized into broad categories: studio portraits, candid

shots, exoticized tourism photographs and curios, and photographs of miscellaneous *taonga*

including other museum collections. The majority of these appear to be prints of glass negative

images, although some are cardboard-mounted albumen prints, as well as negatives and slides.

Each photograph has an accession number but is simply labeled within ARGUS and other

records as "Photograph—Māori." Some of the item records also include the photographer. The

listed photographers include Josiah Martin, Arthur Iles, Burton Brothers, Muir & Moodie, and

the New Zealand Government Tourist Department. However, most of the photographs do not

have any identifying information and, beyond a few with etching on the front or handwriting on the back, none of the photographs display records of the subject, date, or location of the image.

With permission from the Burke, I began to work with the photographs – both for my own interest and as a focus for a Digital Humanities class I was taking in my final quarter. Taking place over six decades after the photographs were donated to the museum, this project may have been the first deliberate attempt to consider the *mana* (prestige, influence, authority) of this photographic collection and display the photographs in connection to the people and land they came from.

The collection in context

As of this writing, the Elmore collection is digitized and stored on hard drives and in physical folders at the museum, although none of the photographs are displayed either at the museum or online. The collection is not publicized, although the Burke is happy to allow visitors to view it and has brought the collection to the attention of visiting Māori scholars. The collection becomes more important when considering the potential rarity of such a collection in North America, and that some of the prints appear to be in better condition than ones displayed in Aotearoa. It should also be noted that although records appear for many images housed in institutions in Aotearoa, not all of these have been digitized and published.

The Burke has identified several barriers to exhibiting the collection digitally: the lack of staff expertise or a structured online data management system, the lack of staff time, and fear that publishing the photographs online will breach copyright. In further correspondence with the Auckland Museum, a rights specialist noted that any photographs taken before 1944 would

be out of copyright and therefore fine to publish online through a "no known copyright restrictions licence," the equivalent of a "public domain license" in the USA (Bethany Matai Edmunds, personal correspondence, 12 March 2017).

The *Tūpuna project*

The final project of my Digital Humanities class was to prototype an online exhibition, displaying a small selection of photographs from the Elmore collection. I chose to call the exhibition *Tūpuna,* meaning "Ancestor." The final prototype, created with Squarespace, featured 13 photographs recording the following:

- *Ingoa* (name);

- *Iwi* (tribe);

- *Rohe* (region);

- *Marae* (meeting house);

- *Kaiwhakaahua* (photographer);

- Date of birth and date of death;

- Burke record number.

It was my intention to center Māori by using Māori subject terms before English ones, to consider ways that Māori users could easily discover items in the Burke databases, and to ultimately connect these photographs with the *iwi* and *whenua* (land) from which they came. I also wished to demonstrate the potential of these photographs to be actively used by the Burke and wider Indigenous community.

My prototype included links to other institutions which held images of the subject, and a Google Maps widget which depicted the *marae* or *urupa* (cemetery or burial ground) of the subject in cases where this was public knowledge. Lastly, I included a brief biography of the subject in the hope that additional context would allow any current descendants in the area to connect with the *taonga.*

Identifying *rangatira*

Identifying any *rangatira* (chief, person of high rank) within these photographs presented a daunting task. However, as a researcher, I had a couple of initial leads which had sparked my interest in this project. First, I recognized one of the photographs as being a print of an image by Elizabeth Pulman. I recognized one image —"Tita Wirum Te Wahanui's Sisters"—because it had been prominently featured in the Aotearoa New Zealand news in 2016 when six of Pulman's albumen prints were auctioned in a London auction house (Stuff, 2016). Archives New Zealand contained digital records of these images, including some identifying information.

Second, some of the images included the names of the subjects, places, or photographers. Identifying either the subject or the photographer could produce a domino effect, where I could enter the names as search terms, either in Google or in the search function of a specific institution (Archives New Zealand, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland Libraries, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Christchurch Art Gallery, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Library of New Zealand), and find other copies of these photographs. My relative familiarity with Māori history and the galleries, libraries,

archives, museums, *marae*, and *iwi* sector in Aotearoa New Zealand meant that I intuitively knew which institutions to consult and had several personal contacts and professional organizations that assisted be during this project.

One surprise in my research came while researching the photographer Josiah Martin in the National Library of New Zealand online databases. I came across TAPUHI, the "Turnbull Automation Project for Unpublished Heritage Items" (Sullivan, 2015). Scrolling through the TAPUHI images, I found several images from the Burke that the National Library listed as "Unknown Māori man." While also adding to the mystery, it is somewhat reassuring to know that even the National Library cannot identify all of the images in its records.

In *kaupapa Māori* (Māori approach or set of principles), it is typical that when working with *taonga* in any sort of *kaitiaki* (custodianship, stewardship) capacity, one needs to spend a lot of time interacting with the *taonga* or being physically present with them. While I was not able to physically spend much time at the Burke, I spent time considering the images and viewing the files that I had been sent to work with. In addition to adding to my appreciation of being able to conduct this project and attempting to follow *kaupapa Māori*, it was helpful in a practical sense. When browsing through my search results, I would often save an image that looked familiar, only to be able to identify it later.

This familiarity was also very useful in attempting to find similar images in the excellent resource Lindauer Online. Lindauer Online is a digital humanities website which presents 78 of Gottfried Lindauer's portraits with biographical information about their subjects, including the capacity for users to leave comments about their *tūpuna*, and individual galleries of photographs of the subjects (Manatā Toi o Tāmaki, 2009). I also consulted a book of portraits

by Charles F Goldie (Blackley, 1997) for likenesses, and had some success. In most cases, an online photograph would provide a name and *iwi*, which I could then use in other online sources such as Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand or New Zealand History to find a biography of the subject.

Project limitations

This is an ambitious and incomplete project, and although I found it personally rewarding, there were many challenges. One challenge was finding uniform biographies for each *rangatira*. Many personal details (*marae*, date of birth, date of death, *urupa*) were unknown or contested, although digitized obituaries were sometimes accessible online. I included *urupa* in my prototype only in cases where they were publicly known and anyone could pay respects to them (e.g. Rewi Maniapoto), but in most cases omitted this entry. The addition of maps of *marae* or *urupa* sites, and links to other photographs or oil paintings of the *tūpuna*, hopefully created a much richer and contextual experience than simply the photographs themselves.

In terms of hosting the content, my initial plans were to use either Omeka or Mukurtu CMS for building this project. Both platforms have been used widely within museums and libraries, and Mukurtu CMS was developed in consultation with the Warumungu community for presenting Indigenous knowledge. However, due to my own technical, financial, and time limitations, I created my project using Squarespace, which I was able to use at a discounted student rate, allows the use of widgets without upgrading plug-ins or using an application programming interface key, and is easily customizable. The limitations of Squarespace included

limited fonts which supported macrons, the labor and inflexibility of inputting content

manually, the prominent display of my personal site header (my name) on every page, and the

lack of Street View within the Google Maps widget.

The biggest limitation in this project was the relative lack of time available and inability

to consult people and resources in person in Aotearoa. I am proud of the progress I was able to

make and how I was able to demonstrate the potential of this collection to the Burke, but I

eventually hope to research further in my home of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Recommendations and conclusion

Museums, like many "knowledge institutions," have always been aspirational for me,

yet I never thought I would have the opportunity to undertake museum work. It has been an

honor to have been welcomed into the Burke for the six months I officially worked with the

"Pacific Voices" exhibition and Elmore collection, and I hope my *whakaaro* (thoughts) and *mahi*

(work) serve our tūpuna well.

At the end of both projects, I made recommendations to the Burke. The first was to

update ARGUS and the public ethnology catalogue to include update terms in Te Reo Māori, as

well as other information I was able to find about the subjects and creators of various *taonga.*

Holly Barker happily reported that updating ARGUS is at the top of the priority list for the

Ethnology Department once the move to the new Burke building is completed (personal

communication, 22 July 2018).

In terms of my *Tūpuna* project, one hosting alternative – Mukurtu CMS – attempts to

protect the integrity of Indigenous knowledge through prominent labeling of "traditional

knowledge" artifacts and by offering varying levels of access to community and institutional members. Installing, hosting, and using Mukurtu CMS may be a viable option in the future.

The photograph collection has great potential to connect *whānau* (families) across the globe, and I am hopeful that the photographs may be published online one day and be a comfort to Māori living abroad, as they have been to me. I would love to see more *rangatira* identified and associated with their *iwi* and *whenua*, as well as potentially identify if physical *taonga* in the photographs have survived and are housed by *iwi* or other knowledge institutions. One way to achieve this might be through the use of social media or forums to assist in crowdsourcing identification of the images. A large-scale version of the *Tūpuna* project raises challenges, including hosting, labor, and taxonomy. I am hopeful that grant applications might be an option to address this, or even the opportunity for increased work in the new Burke building. I also advised that some *tapu* (sacred) images in the Burke's care—*taonga* displayed as 19th-century museum curios or photographs of *mokomokai* (also known as toi moko – preserved Māori heads bearing ta moko, inked facial carvings) – should remain objects that are not displayed.

Since undertaking this project, the Burke has hired Dr Mārata Tamaira to provide further consultation around community engagement and display of *taonga*. The Burke is taking action to advance decolonization, and I am pleased to report that, per my recommendations, Indigenous languages will take precedence over English in new identification labels, and dates are being removed to emphasize cultures as contemporary (Holly Barker, Curator for Oceanic and Asian Culture, Burke Museum, personal communication, 22 July 2018). My input was sought recently in deciding whether it was appropriate to display an anonymous *rangatira* with

a *tā moko* for a display on tattooing, and we instead selected a *rangatira*—Anehana—whom I

had identified during the *Tūpuna* project (R. Crisostomo Community Outreach Coordinator,

Burke Museum, personal communication, 4 December 2018). The display in the new Burke will

now also include information about Anehana's life and achievements. As a member of the

Māori community, my input was also sought to provide a quote to be used in the display, which

is a way of minimizing the voice of the Burke over Indigenous peoples.

In November 2018, a celebration was held to honor the contributions of those who

collaborated on the original "Pacific Voices" exhibition (Raghavan, 2018). It is clear that the new

Burke will preserve the community connections of the past and continue to create more

transparent ways for *iwi* and community members to provide feedback and assert their

sovereignty within museum spaces. I look forward to eventually visiting the new museum

building, knowing that Pacific voices will always find ways to be asserted and heard.

the generous granting of a Toiroa Scholarship which aided my travels from Raleigh, North

Carolina, USA to Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand, where this project was originally

presented at the International Indigenous Librarians Forum in 2019.

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