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References

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- (2) Mabon, A.D.; Pullar, W.A. 1961. "Kaputerangi (Toi's Pa)" Historical Review. Journal of the Whakatane and District Historical Society. Vol. IX No. 3. p119 and 122.
- (3) Golson (Ibid) p41.
- (4) (Ibid) p39.

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE AGE OF ROCK CARVINGS AND "CAVE DWELLINGS," ONGARI POINT, KATIKATI

By J.C. Schofield

Introduction

Mr. W. Ambrose¹ records the presence of rock carvings "cut at intervals along a section of low cliff face between Kauri Point and Ongari Point in the northern Tauranga Harbour area". He points out that there are two forms of carving, namely incised and "linear bas-relief" and concludes that because of Roman lettering associated with the former and script lettering associated with the latter, that the "age for the whole group" dates from "the earliest years of European contact."

My own views are that there are two periods of Maori carving, namely the period of incised carvings and an older period of bas-relief type. The incised type is associated with incised, carefully printed, Maori names in Roman capitals and extends up to arms-reach above the present ground surface. This careful printing, guided by incised parallel lines at top and bottom of the word, reminds one of a child's copy book and it seems likely that this form of carving was associated with the Christianised Maori community of 1842.² Similarly the Maori words done in script are in a "copper-plate" style and seem to be of the same age. It certainly post-dates the bas-relief, for the script has been incised over areas removed to produce the latter type of carving. Both the Roman lettering and script are quite different from, and most certainly older than, the crude initials and doodlings perpetrated by recent vandals.

The bas-relief type is confined to one small area (NZMS 1: Sheet N54 (Paeroa) 453816) along the cliff, which is also the only area where there are artificially formed - or at least enlarged - "cave dwellings" cut at the base of the cliff and now almost completely infilled. Besides this association they also differ from the incised carvings by extending from ground level, the lowest being partly buried, up to only 3.5 feet above the present ground level.

The above facts led me to believe that the bas-relief carvings were older than the incised type and that excavation might provide further evidence for this view and for their age. Consequently, during the Christmas and New Year period, trowel in hand, I returned with my family to Ongari Point.

Excavations

Two excavations were dug, one partly within the "cave dwellings" and another at the base of the cliff with bas-relief carvings. Briefly these disclosed almost identical sections consisting of interbedded man-associated and natural beach sediments. The uppermost 9 inches in both consisted of man-associated sediments formed since the coming of the Europeans. No evidence of European contact was found at deeper levels. Although there are several layers of man-associated sediments, only the lowest is considered to be an occupation level formed when the "cave dwellings" were in use. (Space does not allow the reasons for this view to be elaborated). This occupation layer consists of light grey, dirty sand, free of shell but containing charcoal, obsidian flakes and hangi stones. It lies directly on top of a wave-cut platform which is now 3-4 feet below ground level. Roof height of the "cave dwelling" entrances is 5 feet above

this occupation level, and when standing on it, the top of the highest bas-relief carving can just be reached at arms length.

Over the small area of cliff face disclosed by excavation no new carvings were found. However, a natural projection formed by two coalescing wave-cut notches near the base of the cliff (in profile, imagine figure 8 cut in half) and now buried, had been used to form a "seat". Groove and pick marks left by the Maori pick (wauwau) during the hewing of the "seat" are preserved just as they are on the roofs of the enlarged "cave dwellings". These marks were sealed in, and the "seat" levelled, by the same shell-free sand that forms the occupation level. When seated on the "seat" ones feet rest on the occupation level and the frieze of bas-relief carvings mentioned by Ambrose lies at shoulder level. All the evidence suggests that the "seat", the "cave dwellings", the bas-relief carvings and the occupation layer are of the same age.

Sea Level During Occupation

In both excavations, the top of the occupation layer lies a few inches more than 2 feet below the level reached by the sea during present storms and slightly more than a foot below present high spring tide level. The layer immediately above the occupation layer consists of storm deposited shell and has several features that distinguish it from other forms of beach deposit. It contained, at its base, hangi stones, a wedge-shaped instrument of obsidian, and two polishing stones and/or net-floats fashioned from pumice. These artefacts were no doubt picked up by the sea during its first incursion over the occupation layer. All the evidence, some of which is not presented, suggests that during occupation, sea level was more than 2 feet lower than the present, and that its subsequent rise may have been the reason for abandoning the site.

Age

Charcoal from the occupation layer has been forwarded for radiocarbon dating but the related sea level suggests that 200 years will be a minimum age.

References

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- (2) Gifford W.H. and Williams H. Bradney. 1940. A Centennial History of Tauranga. p112.