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AN UNRECORDED TAINUI TOKOTOKO

Alan Taylor
Auckland

Among the lithographs illustrating the travels of G.F. Angas in the Waikato region during 1844 is a detailed study of a meeting house (Fig. 1). The house was built by Puatia, an Otawhao chief, to commemorate the Waikato conquest of Maketu in the Bay of Plenty. It is remarkable for a series of almost abstract carvings set along the exterior wall of the building; among them figures which bring to mind the highly stylized Lake Ngaroto carved post Uenuku-tuwhatu in the Te Awamutu Museum.

In addition to the wall carvings, and probably symbolically related to them, is a tokotoko (a staff, rod, or "walking stick") set in the ground close to the building's left-hand amo. The tokotoko takes the form of a zig-zag staff and is similar to one in a series of symbolic staffs illustrated by White (Fig. 2) and described by Buck (1982) as associated with the god Tangaroa.

The tokotoko stands beside a stylised carved figure and is approximately 6 ft in height. It has eight equal facets terminating in a point, rather than a rounded knob as depicted in White's illustration.

Mead (1986) identified the Otawhao meeting house carvings with established early Tainui carving. Until then the figures had not been regarded by ethnologists as convincing representations of traditional work. Barrow (1974), for example, saw them simply as "extraordinary", while others have rejected them as reflecting poor observation or draughtsmanship by the artist. In all this the tokotoko, and its distinctive form, was overlooked.

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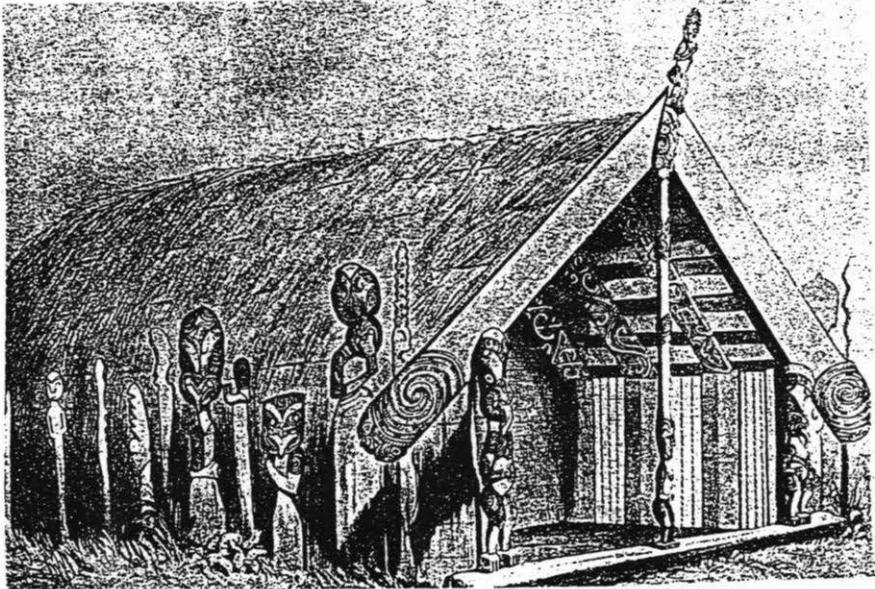
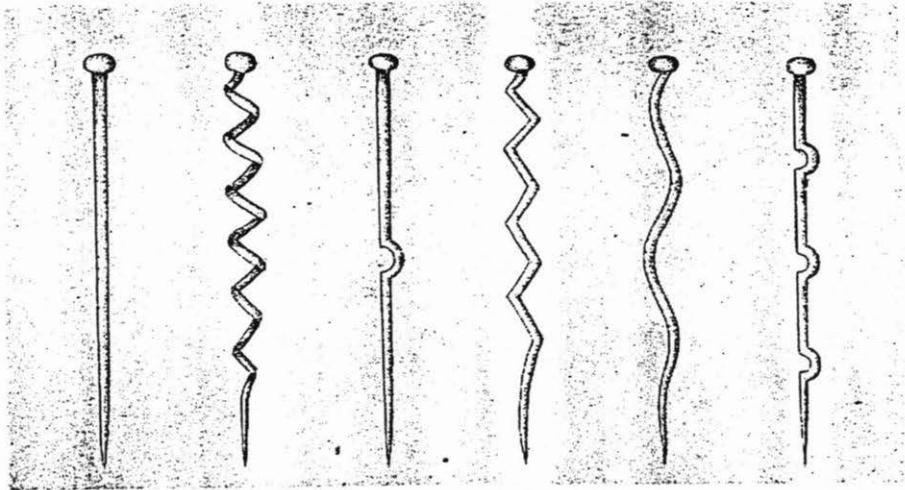


Figure 1. Meeting House, Waikato (Angas)



Tu-mata-usaga. Inuiri-maza. Tane. Tanga-roa. Rongo. Haumia.

Figure 2. "Symbols of the Gods" (White)