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TWO UNKNOWN OBJECTS FROM TAPUI-NIKAU SWAMP, WAREA, TARANAKI

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In 1973, during the course of draining a swamp (P20/97), named Kiakia (Day 1984:16), adjacent to Tapui-nikau pa (P20/21), Warea, a number of wooden artefacts were uncovered. Included among these were kakau, kumete, ko, worked wood, toki, some fibre remnants and pieces of hue. a magnificent paepae was recovered in the same swamp in 1976 (Ford 1979:443-459).

It is assumed that these items were hidden in the swamp just prior to the raid on Tapui-nikau pa by a taua of Ngati Toa and Te Atiawa under the leadership of Te Rauparaha in 1818 (Smith 1910:288-292). The pa was besieged over several days, the conflict finally being resolved when Rangi Topeora (sister of Te Rauparaha) called the Taranaki chief, Te Ra-tu-tonu, from Tapui-nikau and claimed him for her husband. Under cover of darkness the people of Tapui-nikau then left the pa for their stronghold of Te Kohatu on the Patua Range. The defenders were mainly drawn from the Nga Mahanga, Ngati Moeahu and Patukai hapu of Taranaki iwi.

Included among the discoveries were two items which appear to be unique and are not represented in any other collections I have examined. The fact that they were found together and that they are so similar in shape tends to indicate that the items had a complementary function.

DESCRIPTION

Both items are manufactured from wood (species unknown) and consist of 'stirrup' type handles from which a shaft projects. One shaft ends in a pointed 'kink', while the other has an oval perforation at the end of which is a small knob-like projection.

'Kinked' example

This has a maximum length of 172 mm and is well finished (Fig.1a and Plate 1). All surfaces, except those where the end grain appears, are worked smooth. The handle is 'stirrup' shaped with one side continuing on as a shaft to the 'kinked' end. The top outside edge of the handle is worked flat, 4 mm below this a groove has been cut around the circumference. The shaft gently

reduces down until the 'kink' is reached. Where the 'kink' and shaft meet there is a slight reduction in circumference. The 'kink' ends in a well formed point.

At the junction of the long side and the flat top, a hole has been drilled at an angle of approx. 30 degrees to the flat top. This is clogged with swamp debris but appears to be approx. 2 mm in diameter.

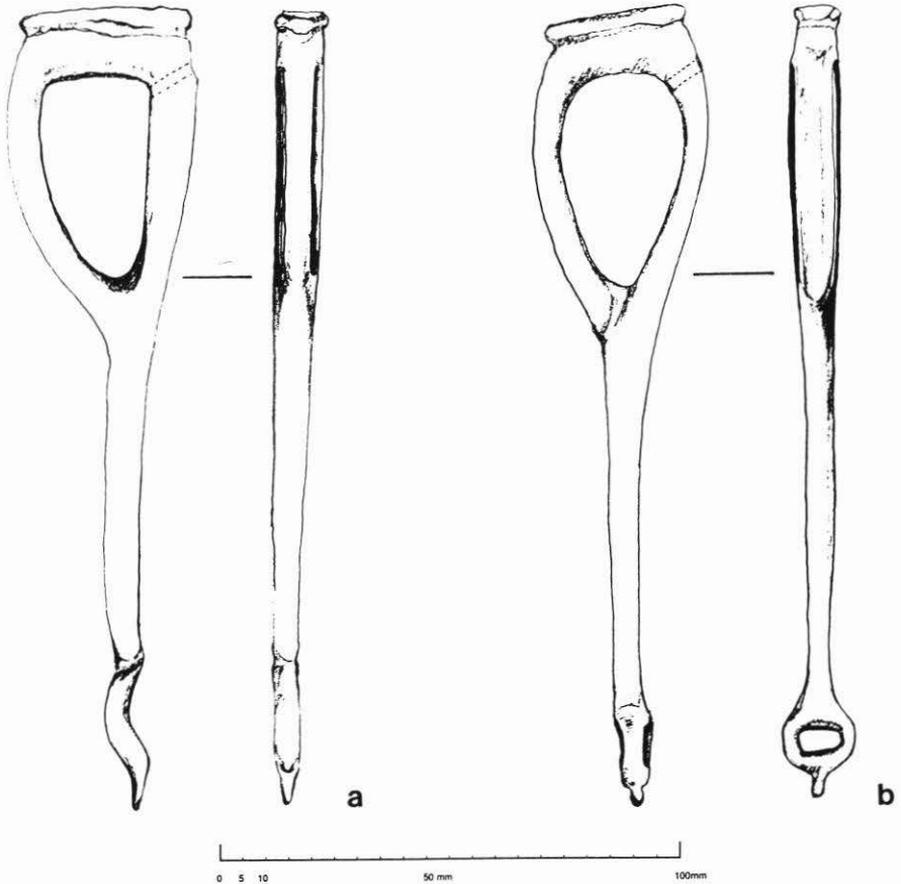


Figure 1. (a) 'Kinked' wooden artefact. (b) 'Perforated' wooden artefact.

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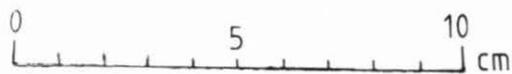


Plate 1. Two unknown wooden objects from Tapui-nikau pa swamp, Taranaki.

'Perforated' example

This has a maximum length of 170 mm (See Fig. 1b and Plate 1). Like the other artefact it is well finished and apart from areas of end grain, is worked smooth. Unlike the previous example the handle is more 'egg-shaped' with the shaft coming off the apex. Again the top is worked flat, although angled down towards one side. A groove, 3 mm below the top, extends around the circumference. One side is noticeably reduced in diameter before it connects with the shaft. At the point of connection there is a grooved depression, 3 mm wide, extending around three sides. The shaft gently reduces down until an expanded, circular feature with an oval perforation is reached, at the end of which is a small, 5 mm knob-like projection. This feature is at right angles to the handle.

As with the other example, a hole has been drilled at the junction of one side and the top at an angle of approximately 33 degrees. It is also clogged with swamp debris, but appears to be approximately 3 mm in diameter.

DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, there do not appear to be other similar items held in the collections of the major museums.

David Simmons (pers. comm. 19.6.1996) has suggested that they are a class of artefact called hango. Williams records that hango is a shovel and that hangohango is "an implement for digging, and setting potatoes" (1971:34). Simmons states that, according to elders he has spoken to, these items were used in the propagation of kumara destined for the gods and for the first harvest feast. "The method I am told was to place the kumara in the space wrapped in muka, stick the stick [hango] in the ground and pile up with compost. The grooves at the top were used to tie a little thatch roof to protect the tipu and tubers".

Elsdon Best notes the word hangohango but is unable to describe the item saying, "Its form is unknown to the writer, but this may be a local name for some well known tool" (1976:46). I do not know of any subsequent work since Best which has identified any more precisely what form hangohango took. This poses a slight problem with assigning that name for the above items with confidence.

There appears to be no doubt that the two items belonged, and functioned, together. They are the same basic shape and size. The drill hole appears in the same place and angle in both, the only difference being the extremities of each. At present I feel we cannot allocate a function to them with any degree of certainty and for the moment they must remain mystery objects.

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I would welcome any comments or thoughts readers may have on these objects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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