

## Two Unusual Maori Carvings from Northland

By GILBERT ARCHEY

In this brief notice we have the pleasure of describing two unusual objects, both from Northland, presented to the Museum: a canoe stern-post of unique form given by Mr. T. Wallace of Tokerau Beach, Doubtless Bay, and the decorated base for an elevated storehouse, the gift of Mr. Lacy M. Neilson of Kohukohu.

### Elevated Store-house Base.

The placing of food, treasures, offerings or mortal remains in a receptacle set high on a pole was a common practice in Polynesia (Cook, 1784; pl. 25, Tahiti; Webber, 1808, pl. 6, Tahiti, pl. 8, Huahine). Early

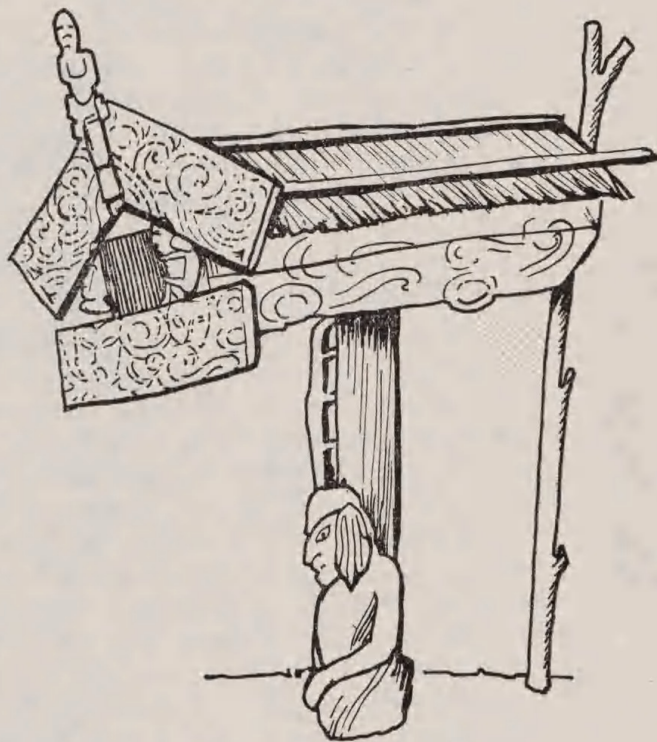


Fig. 1

accounts of New Zealand sometimes include one such in an illustration: our text-figure 1 is copied from a drawing in Earle's 'Narrative of a Nine Month's Residence in New Zealand in 1827'; Duperray (1826, pl. 41 : 3) illustrates portion of a canoe used as the upraised repository; Angas (1847) portrays several types (Frontispiece; pl. 8; pl. 30; they are repeated in White, 1891); Taylor's record (1855; 32) is of the tomb of Heu Heu; in a Charles Heaphy drawing of 1839 in our library, a small pole-pataka appears above the palisade of a fighting *pa* built at Waitangi, Chatham Islands by the Maori invaders who had then come to inter-family conflict; Best (1916: 48-49) briefly describes the elevated *pataka*.





These descriptions and illustrations provide no more than a general outline of the form of the receptacle itself; even the best of them (our copy fig. 1), which clearly shows the contact or insertion of the supporting shaft, gives no hint of the craftsman's technique for securing a junction tight enough to prevent a large box—really a small building—from wobbling or coming adrift. In a few illustrations diagonal stays are shown. There are no sockets in the present example to receive such supports, but a square recess and a continuing mortise to receive the pole from below give some understanding of the method employed though with speculation as to detail.

### Description.

A heavy slab of totara (Fig. 2) 141 cm. long, 36.7 cm. wide, 13.0 cm. thick at the centre, with a large central rectangular boss projecting a further 10 cm. downward; at the sides or edges, which are slightly bowed outward, the thickness is 7.0 cm. The total length comprises the main rectangular slab, 113.5 cm.; and heads projecting 13.0 and 14.5 cm. at the ends, each borne on a neck, recessed presumably for lashing.

The lower surface and the edges are fully carved; the smoothed upper surface has a shallow (1.0 cm.) rebate across either end, four rectangular mortised holes close to the edge on one side and five on the other. Where the rectangular (9.2 x 7.0 cm.) mortise for the supporting pole or shaft appears at the upper surface (Fig. 3) a rebate 4.7 cm. wide slopes down into each longer side to about 1 cm. depth. I have studied these details with Mr. Trevor Bayliss, and we conjecture that they are clearances for a pair of wedges driven into recesses, or more likely a hole right through the pole (Figs. 4 and 5), to tighten the junction. A through perforation instead of recesses would require some upward extension of the pole to hold the strain.

Slabs laid across the upper surface, the middle one probably pressing down upon the wedges, and lashed somehow through the edge mortises, would form the pataka floor (Fig. 6). We cannot be certain as to which side would have been front, back or sides, for the rebate at either end of the base would presumably have received either. But we should not expect the carved heads to project from under the *paepae* of the front nor at the back; moreover the projecting heads borne

Fig. 2

on the cross bearers of the Te Oha *pataka* (assembled 1825) in this Museum, suggest a construction such as that indicated in text-figure 7.

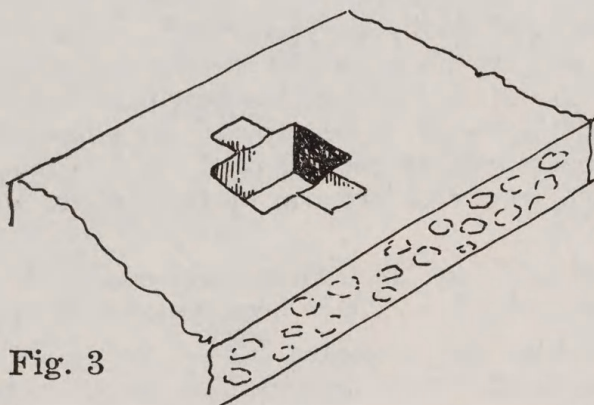


Fig. 3

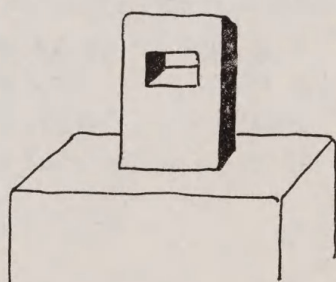


Fig. 4

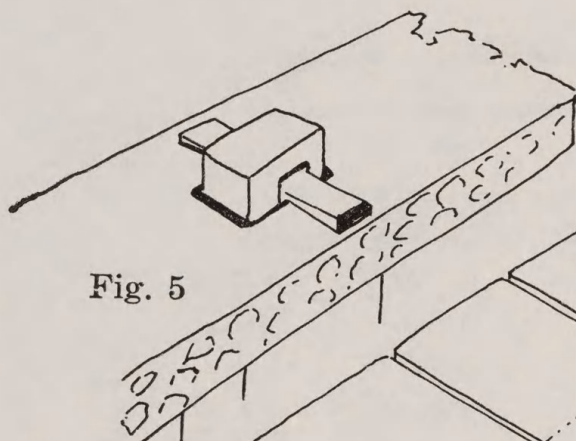


Fig. 5

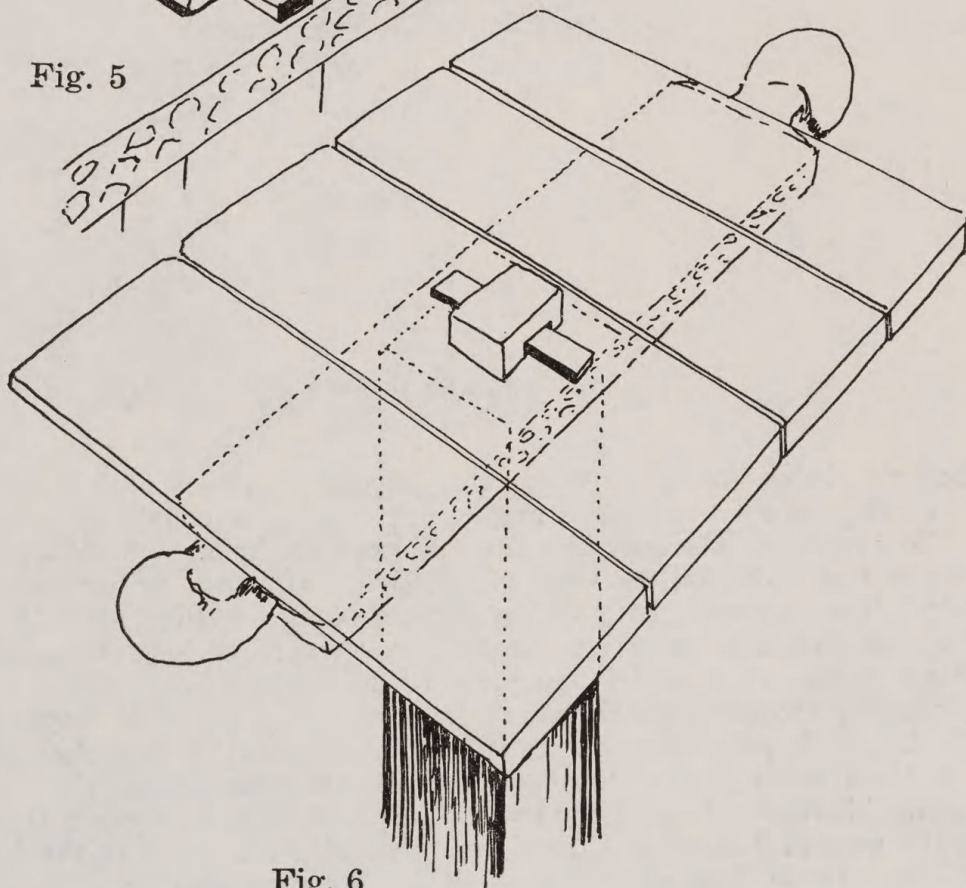


Fig. 6



### Decoration. (Figs. 8-10)

A full-face human figure in relief covers each side from the central boss to the end where the head sculptured in the round projects as already described.

The flat shoulder discs and thighs are each covered with a lightly carved double spiral. From the shoulders the slender tapering arms curve first inward and then outward where they reach the outer edge of the thigh disc. A slender fore-arm slopes upward to a band-shaped hand with two tapering fingers lying on the side of the body. Connecting chocks can be distinguished from the fore-arm by the straight shallow grooves carved on them.

The legs are narrowed below the thigh areas; they end on the slope of the boss; indications of feet, if any, have been abraded away.

Flanking the figures, the slab carries a 5 to 7 cm. wide outer border of interlocking or alternating loops, some simple others S-shaped,

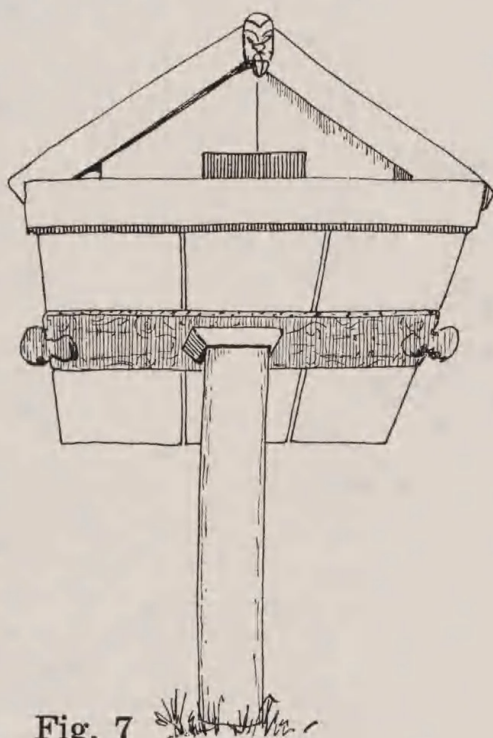


Fig. 7

the pairs being joined by connecting chocks distinguishable from the loops themselves by being straight and bearing a couple of straight shallow grooves. The only hint that the loops might be of limb origin is that one of them, on the edge of the slab, terminates in two tapering finger-like processes. In a similar pattern along the edge (Fig. 9) the loop-alternation is more regular and bears more consistently a small detail, namely rhomboidal depression (c 2.5 cm. x 1.5 cm. to c 3.5 cm. x 2.5 cm.) at approximately where the horizontal connecting chocks join the loops. A secondary decorative order appears in that the spaces cut down between the loops and the chocks come into a pattern of rhomboids repeated in oblique rows 2-3-2-3- etc. along the edge. Indeed, in the present somewhat blurred condition of the borders of the loops, this pattern of deep rhomboids is dominant; incidentally the mortised



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

lashing holes along the edge of the slab find their places within this order. The whole gives a distinct sense of planned design. As for its relationship we might compare the elements with the loops of Taranaki *pare* background detail (Archey 1960, pls. 42-43), but I would not stress the resemblance.

All the carving outlines are blurred or softened by abrasion or decay; very little remains of the head detail but I would hazard a pristine face-rendering somewhat as outlined in text-figure 10.

### Stern-post (*taurapa*). Figs. 11-13.

The canoe stern-post presented by Mr T. Wallace, was discovered by him in 1959, while discing on a farm at Tokerau Beach at the northern end of Doubtless Bay. All other simple sternposts known have the general outline of the large decorated *taurapa* of the war-canoe, that is of a *plank* narrow from side to side, curving gently upwards and backwards in prolongation of the after-sheer of the canoe (cf. Fig. 11; sternpost in Taranaki Museum). The Doubtless Bay *taurapa* more than any of these, is literally a stern-post (Fig. 12) narrow and round or



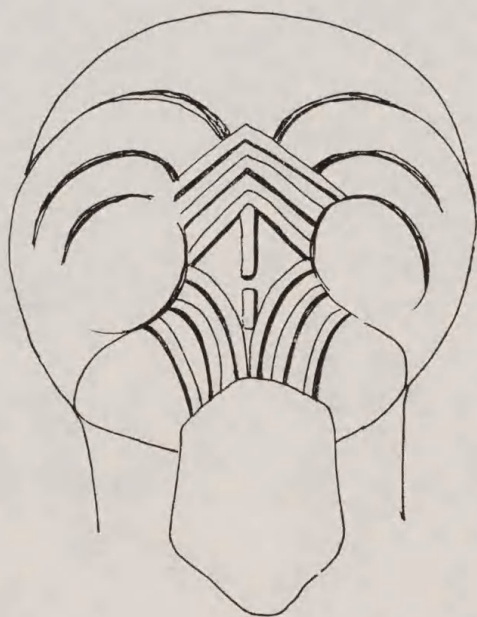


Fig. 10

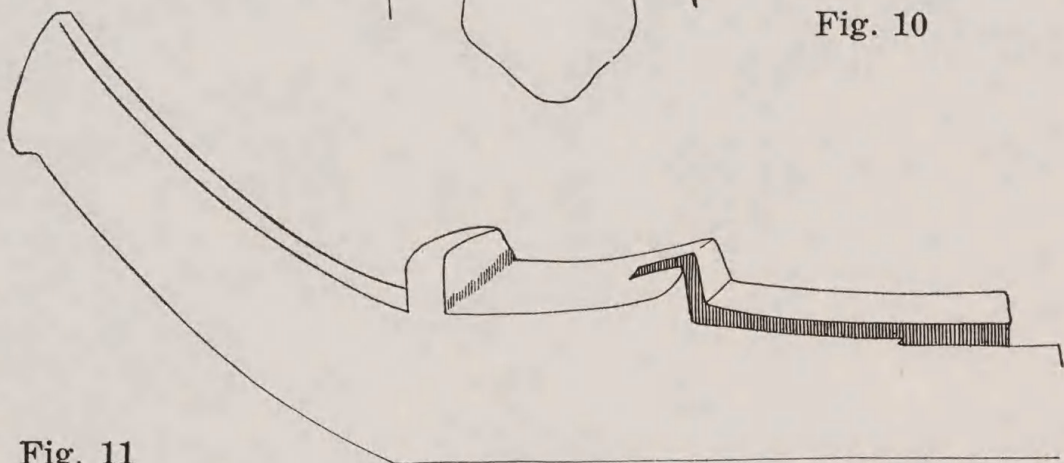


Fig. 11

elliptical in section of sufficient thickness to act as a firm rest against which to lay the long steering paddle.

The wood appears to be *pohutukawa*, *Metrosideros excelsa*, somewhat knotty or irregularly grained and, of course, hard and strong. It must have been tough to shape and carve, but a piece of timber already of helpful outline may have been selected for it. Its dimensions are given with the outline drawing of text figure 12.

The base is a typical stern-cover, hollowed beneath for the lashing which would have passed through the square-chiselled holes, four on the port side and three on the starboard. It is 26 cm. wide at front, and 18.5 cm. across the two carved projections at A-A1. The additional holes cut through the upper edge might have been for mast-rigging, which, if so, would imply a sailing canoe.

The upward-curving post itself is half-elliptical in section, chamfered 10 cm. wide in front and sharp-edged behind. It is expanded terminally where a dog-like creature (Fig. 13) with curled tail is carved on the port side, the other being smooth. The creature has a manaia-type profile face; its fore-limb is thrown up and back in an attitude more human than quadrupedal. The face has a round eye under an evenly arched eyebrow which terminates below in a flat boss in the position of an ear. Projecting backward from the eyebrow are three long spines recalling the projections on a canoe-prow of unusual form,

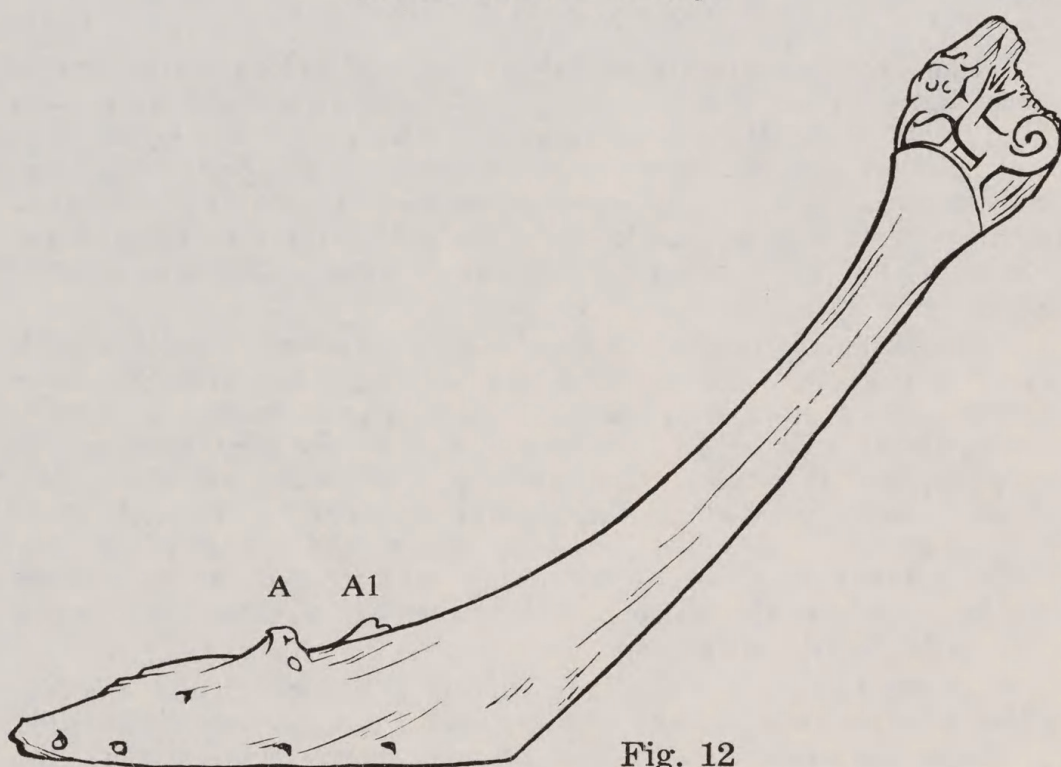


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Dimension of stern-post, fig. 12: Length 92.1 cm.; height 61.0 cm.

also from Doubtless Bay, previously described by the present writer (Archey, 1933: 209-211).

Two triangular profiles (Fig. 12A, A1) of distinctly bird-like form project from each side of the upper edge of the base. They, and the 'dog' face, are carved in somewhat the same style as the faces of the Doubtless Bay prow, though not with point-by-point detailed similarities.



The strongly curved upper jaw of the 'dog' and its nearly straight lower jaw are present, for example, in the small figure behind the main head of the prow; the eyes however are different—round in the 'dog' and elliptical in both large and small heads of the prow. The 'dog' and the small prow head both lack the teeth which are so prominent in the main head of the prow, where also the backward projecting eye-brow spines of the "dog" appear as forward projecting triangular eyebrow studs.

These slightly varying similarities have an interest, and a significance in relation to the fact that both carvings came from the same swamp, but at an unknown distance apart. The prow was discovered during the first draining of the area in 1933 by the then owner of the property, Mr. T. Neilsen, who has been dead several years, and Mr. Wallace cannot say where in the swamp it occurred. The general resemblances however, including the same timber, and the fact that Mr. Wallace disced the whole former swamp area without finding another specimen, indicate the strong possibility that we have here the *taurapa* and *tauihu* of the same canoe.

Structurally each is typically Maori: a bow-cover and a stern-cover with projecting head in the one and a post to bear the steering paddle in the other. One feature, straight sharp-pointed fingers, the stern-post shares with a carved slab from a swamp at Awanui only ten miles distant, also described by the present writer in 1933 (p. 210); in other respects however, particularly in the form of the eye, the Awanui slab stands closer to the prow than to the stern-post. Nevertheless all three are undoubtedly of the same general style or school, known so far from but one restricted Northland area.

As director at the time these articles came to the Museum I take the privilege of expressing our grateful thanks to Mr. Neilson and Mr. Wallace for their generous gifts of two such unusual and interesting examples of Maori art and workmanship. My personal thanks are given to Mr Bayliss for his valuable contribution to constructional interpretations and to Mrs. Betty Brookes for giving them such admirable portrayal.

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