

HISTORICAL AND TECHNICAL REPORT

MERE POUNAMU GREENSTONE CLUB

A.2954-292

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES
CALIFORNIA, USA.



REPORT PRODUCED BY
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JULY 2025

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KUPUTAKA/GLOSSARY

| Kupu ē-kaupapa/Term | Whakamāramatanga/Definition |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hapū | Sub-tribe |
| Haehae | Parallel lines used in carving designs |
| Hītori | History |
| Iwi | Tribe |
| Kaiwhakairo | Carver |
| Kakau | Handle |
| Kaumātua | Respected elders |
| Kawa | Protocols of practice, how things are done (see also tikanga) |
| Kowhau | Hole |
| Onewa | Stone (usually basalt) |
| Pounamu | Greenstone (Nephrite Jade) |
| Pūrākau | Stories, oral history |
| Mātauranga | Traditional knowledge |
| Rangahau | Research |
| Rangatira | Chief or chiefly in nature |
| Rau | Blade of a weapon |
| Reke | Butt or pommel |
| Taonga | Cultural treasure or artefact |
| Tāhuhu Kōrero | Background story |
| Taura | Thong or strap attached to a weapon |
| Tikanga | Correct procedure or custom (see kawa) |
| Tinana | Body |
| Tūpuna | Ancestors |
| Te Ao Māori | The Māori World or Māori worldview |
| Uhi | Chisel |
| Whakanakonako | Embellishments |
| Whakapapa | Genealogy |
| Whānau/Whanaunga | Relative/s |

KUPU WHAKATAKI/PREFACE

‘Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro nōnā te ngahere, ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōnā te ao.’

The forest belongs to the bird who feasts on the miro berry, the world belongs to the bird who feasts on education.
Māori Whakatauki/Proverb

The *whakapapa* and *hītori* of *taonga*, or the provenance and history of cultural treasures, are as important as the items themselves. Whenever the term *taonga* is used within this report, the author is referring to cultural treasures, although Western practice usually refers to them simply as artefacts or objects.

Mātauranga (knowledge) of who the *kairaranga* (weaver) or the *kaiwhakairo* (carver) was, the *iwi* or *hapū* (subtribe) from which they affiliate, the identity of the receiver, and the reasons for the gifting – are also *taonga* and unfortunately, far too much of this information has been lost to time.

Māori *taonga* rest in countless institutions around the world, museums, galleries, libraries, and private collections, and although the author does not take issue with this as such; he does feel that far too many *taonga* are displayed, or held, without an appropriate level of cultural and historical context. After visiting several museums in Europe, the United States of America, Australia, and the United Kingdom, the author noticed that several of our *taonga* had either minimal information, no cultural context, or worse, some information panels bore the terms ‘Unknown’ or ‘Unidentified’ and the name of the collector or collection was more prominent than the *taonga* itself.

As a weaver, a novice carver, and a Māori historian, the author felt that he was able to examine select *taonga* from institutions in countries to which he travels and produce documents that would provide these institutions with a general level of historical and technical information. The author has been fortunate to have undertaken extensive international travel, for work, research, and holidays, and has recently begun integrating museum and gallery visits into these trips; contacting institutions prior to any of his *haerenga* (journeys), to ascertain what *taonga* they have, and what he might want to access and examine – or what they would like to know more about.

By no means does he claim to be an expert in the study of Māori *taonga* and feels that there are others of greater standing within the field; however, he offers his knowledge, as best as he is able, to produce research documents that provide substantially more information than is currently held on these specific *taonga*.

The compilation and provision of these reports serve several purposes: to do the *taonga* justice by visiting and spending time with them; to examine them and promote their whereabouts; make their locations known to Māori (and other interested persons); and to uncover their *pūrākau* (stories) and bring them back to life. This third practice of uncovering their *pūrākau* achieves several outcomes, these being: to reunite them with *uri* (direct descendants) and *whanaunga* (relatives); to provide the institutions with a credible and informative record of the respective *taonga*; and ensuring their stories are not forgotten – *ka maumahara tonu tātou kia rātou*.

This particular *pūrākau* (story) focuses on a *mere pounamu* (greenstone club) sometimes known as a *patu*, which is part of the E Coll Brown donation, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles (NHM), California, USA. The word ‘*patu*’ translates as ‘to strike’, which is an apt name, as this precisely what is done with a weapon or tool of this kind. *Mere* and *patu* can be crafted from a variety of stone (commonly *pounamu*), wood, and *wheua paraoa* (whalebone).

HAURONGO/BIOGRAPHY



The author's cultural background sees him affiliated with the *iwi* (tribes) of Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Tūhoe, Te Whakatōhea, and Te Whānau-a-Apanui, as well as having connections to Alveston in Gloucestershire, Bloomsbury in London, and Helsingborg in Sweden – all of which he has visited.

He is ex-military, having served in the army as a paratrooper and then military police officer; before studying a Bachelor of Arts, and then a Master of Teaching degree, and becoming a history teacher, and a military and Māori historian.

The author is a cultural practitioner: *kairaranga* (weaver), novice *kaiwhakairo* (carver), and *kaihaka* (performer).

He is a published author, producing articles, reports, and story books; produced a historical short film; delivered lectures around the world; and contributed towards exhibitions in institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia.

The author's research has been referred to in the media; mentioned in legal cases; used on government websites; presented in museums; stopped the sale of *taonga* at auction and assisted in the repatriation of *taonga* back to Aotearoa New Zealand.

He has also appeared on television and radio in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, as a *tumu kōrero* (historian), in documentaries, news, and cultural programs.

The author is a husband, father, and grandfather, who believes in the importance of teaching his *whānau* (family) *mātauranga* and *toi Māori* and including them in his *kaupapa rangahau* (research projects); taking them with him on these *haerenga* (journeys) if the opportunities allow.

It is his goal to contribute toward *Māoritanga* and *Te Ao Māori* (The Māori World) in a positive and impactful manner and hopes that this report goes some way towards achieving this objective.

ARA RANGAHAU/RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



The author recording details of the *mere pounamu* during the examination process at the NHM LA.
Photograph courtesy of Dr Amy Gusick (2025).

This report was compiled by the author, utilising: online and library/archive-based research; consultation with curators; conducting interviews with *kaiwhakairo* (carvers); as well as carrying out a physical examination of the *mere pounamu* itself. The physical examination of the artefact was undertaken at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles (NHM), 900 Exposition Blvd, Los Angeles, California, on 23rd April 2025. The online and library-based research was undertaken between April 2025 – July 2025. The consultation process and interviews with Māori academics and *kaumātua* began in May 2024, and are ongoing, as per Māori *kawa* and *tikanga*.

Facsimiles of original documentation, provided by the NHM during the research process, included: Catalogue card x 2 A.2954-292. Information from, and images of these documents, are either provided by, or taken, by permission of the NHM. All physical descriptions, including measurements, and any condition notes, were obtained during the author's examination of the *taonga*. All images are provided by the author unless otherwise noted.

HE MIHI/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks, and acknowledgment goes to the following people and institutions for their support and assistance: NHM (Dr Amy Gurnick – Curator of Anthropology and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Officer, and KT Hajeian – Collections Manager – Anthropology (Ethnology)).

PŪRONGO KŌRERO O NEHE HISTORICAL REPORT

TĀHUHU KŌRERO/BACKGROUND STORY

‘Kaua e mate wheke mate ururoa.’

‘Don’t die like an octopus, die like a hammerhead shark.’

- Māori whakatauki.

Octopus are renowned for their lack of resistance when being captured, however a hammerhead shark will fight bitterly to the end, which is what occurs once combatants fight in close combat.

Mau Rakau/Māori Weaponry

A *patu* or *mere* is an effective striking weapon for use in close combat, a preferred method of warfare.ⁱ The word ‘*patu*’ translates as the ‘*to strike*’, which is its purpose, whether being wielded as a weapon or used as a tool. Some *patu* are known to have been used as pounders to crush fern root for food preparation, and to soften wet hanks of *muka/whitau* (extracted *harakeke* fibres) during the *kōmuri* (softening) process in readiness to *whatu/weave* garments.

While the term *mere* was, and is, used in some regions to refer exclusively to clubs made from *pounamu* (greenstone), in other regions, *mere* was more broadly used to refer to *patu* of a similar shape and design made from hardwood (*meremere*, *mere rakau*), whalebone (*patu paraoa*), or stone (*patu ōnewa*) – in these areas, a *mere* made from greenstone was known as a *mere pounamu* or *patu pounamu*.

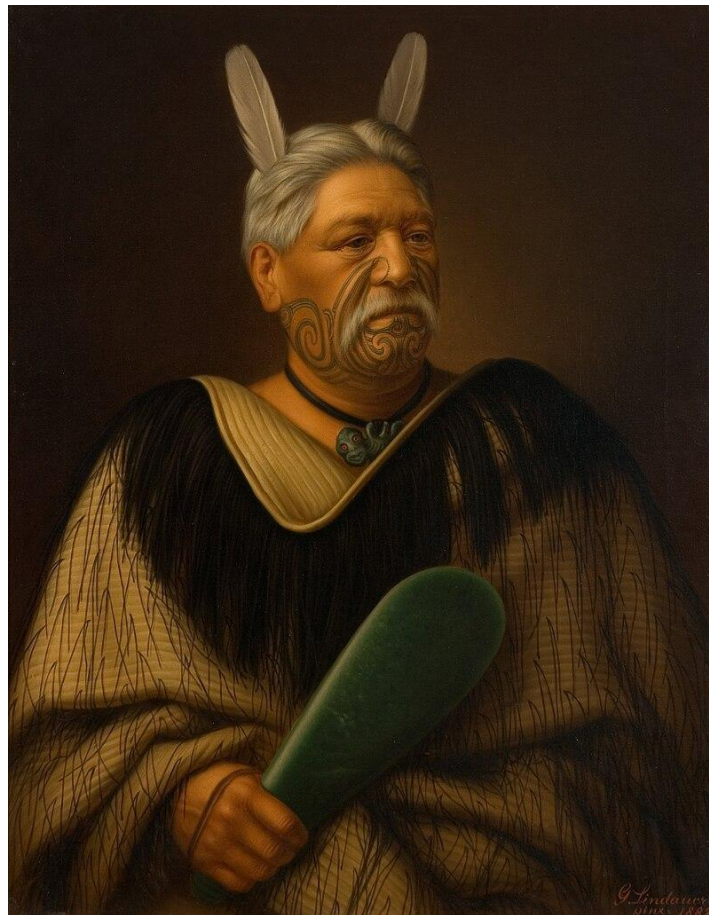


Patu onewa, ⁱⁱ *Mere paraoa,* ⁱⁱⁱ and *mere pounamu.* ^{iv}

Most of the time, a Māori warrior would take two weapons into battle, a short, striking one (such as a *mere*, *wahaika* or *kotiate*) and a long weapon (*pou*, *taiaha* or *tewhatewha*), which allowed him to stand further away from his enemy.



National Library of Australia. Reference: nla.pic-an2948236-v
Watercolour by Joseph Merrett.^v



Ngāti Maniapoto Rangatira/Chief Wahanui Reihana Te Huatare holding a *mere pounamu*.^{vi}

In lieu of an origin of this *taonga* regarding where and when it was created, a provenance has been included from the first-known existence to its current location.

*For more information – see the Whakapapa/Provenance section pp. 24-27.

PŪRONGO KUPU Ā-KAUPAPA

TECHNICAL REPORT

Pūrongo Tīariari/Existing Report

There is no existing report as such, however, the few documents held by the NHM indicate that this *taonga* has been in the museum's collections as early as August 1938.

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| SPECIMEN: | War club (Maori) | CATALOG NO | A1 2954-292 |
| COLLECTOR: | E. Coll Brown | | |
| DESCRIPTION: | Spatula shaped war club of nephrite, a native green stone of New Zealand wh. resembles jade Such clubs are used only by the chiefs and are called mere, ordinary war clubs <u>patu pounamou</u> . Meas: 14" X 4 5/8" | | |
| DATE ENTERED: | September 1938 | | |
| DATE WITHDRAWN: | | | |
| DISPOSITION: | gk | | |
| PHOTOGRAPHED: | NEG. NO. | | |

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| SPECIMEN: | WAR CLUB | CAT. NO. | A.2954-292 |
| ORIGIN: | New Zealand | | |
| PERIOD: | Modern | | |
| COLLECTOR: | E. Coll Brown | | |
| RECEIVED: | August 1, 1938 | | |
| DESCRIPTION: | War club of green nephrite. Spatula-shaped. Called "mere" or "patu pounamou". Only the nephrite clubs are termed "Mere", and are used by the chiefs, only 14" x 4-5/8". | | |
| EXHIBIT ROOM: | | | PHOTOGRAPH: |
| STORE ROOM: | | | |

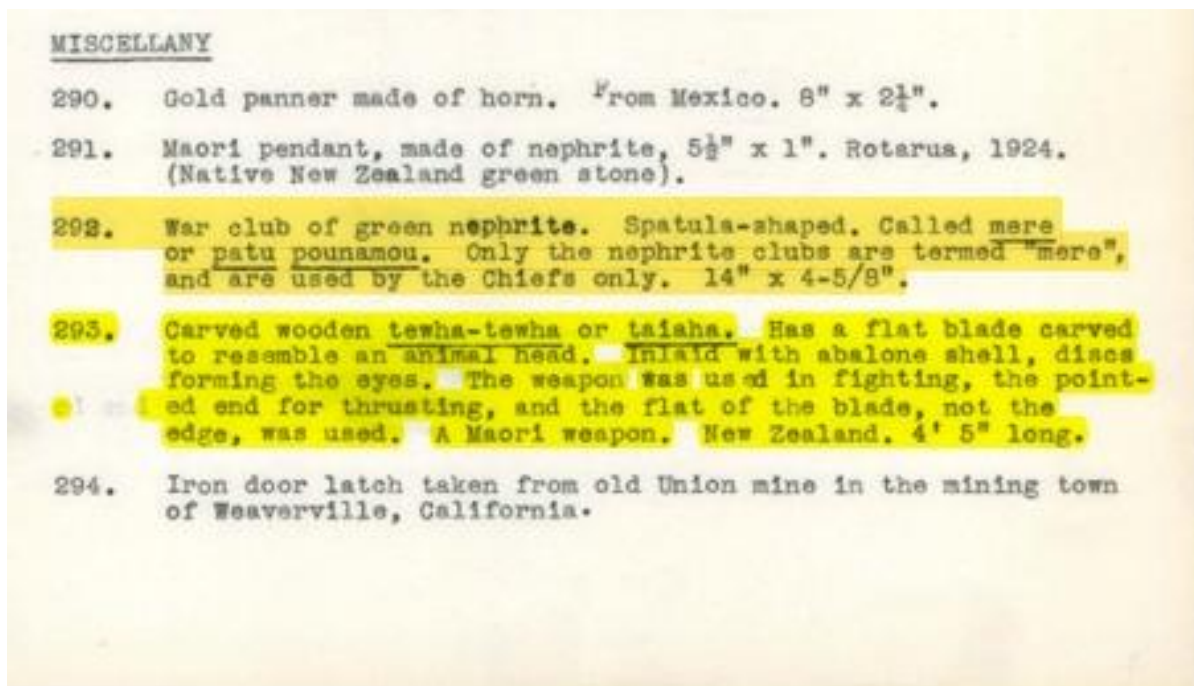
This accession record provides the name and address of the donor of this *mere pounamu*, as part of a collection of hundreds of other objects.

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ACCESSION | 2954 |
| FROM | BROWN, E. Coll |
| ADDRESS | 4445 Gainsborough Ave. Los Angeles, California |

The following document A.2954-292 lists and describes this *mere pounamu*, which provides the same information as the catalogue card on the previous page.

Miscellany

292. War club of green nephrite. Spatula-shaped. Called mere or patu pounamou [sic]. Only the nephrite clubs are termed "mere", and are used by the Chiefs only. 14" x 4-5/8".^{vii}



Taipitopito tirohanga/Examination details

Initial Examination Date: Wednesday, 23rd April 2025

Examination location: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, 900 Exposition Blvd, Los Angeles, California, USA.

Staff present at examination: Dr Amy Gusick Ph.D – Curator, Anthropology, and KT Hajeian M.A. – Senior Collections Manager, Anthropology (Ethnology).

Momo Taonga/Type of Object:

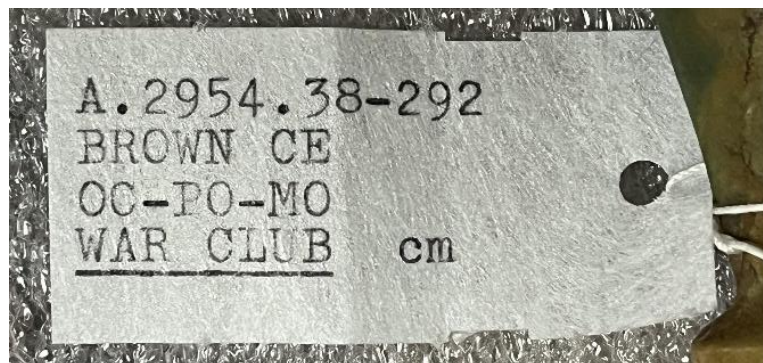
Mere pounamu – greenstone hand club.

Accession Number:

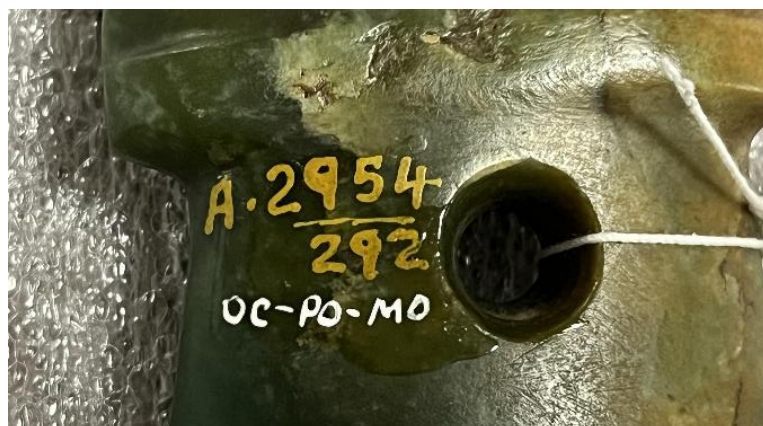
A2954.38.292

Pinetohu/Labels, tags:

There is a small, white-coloured cardboard tag or label tied to the *mere pounamu* with a thin, white-coloured cotton thread (threaded through the kowhao/hole) and bearing the following accession details typed in black ink: 'A.2954.38-292 BROWN CE OC-PO-MO WAR CLUB cm'

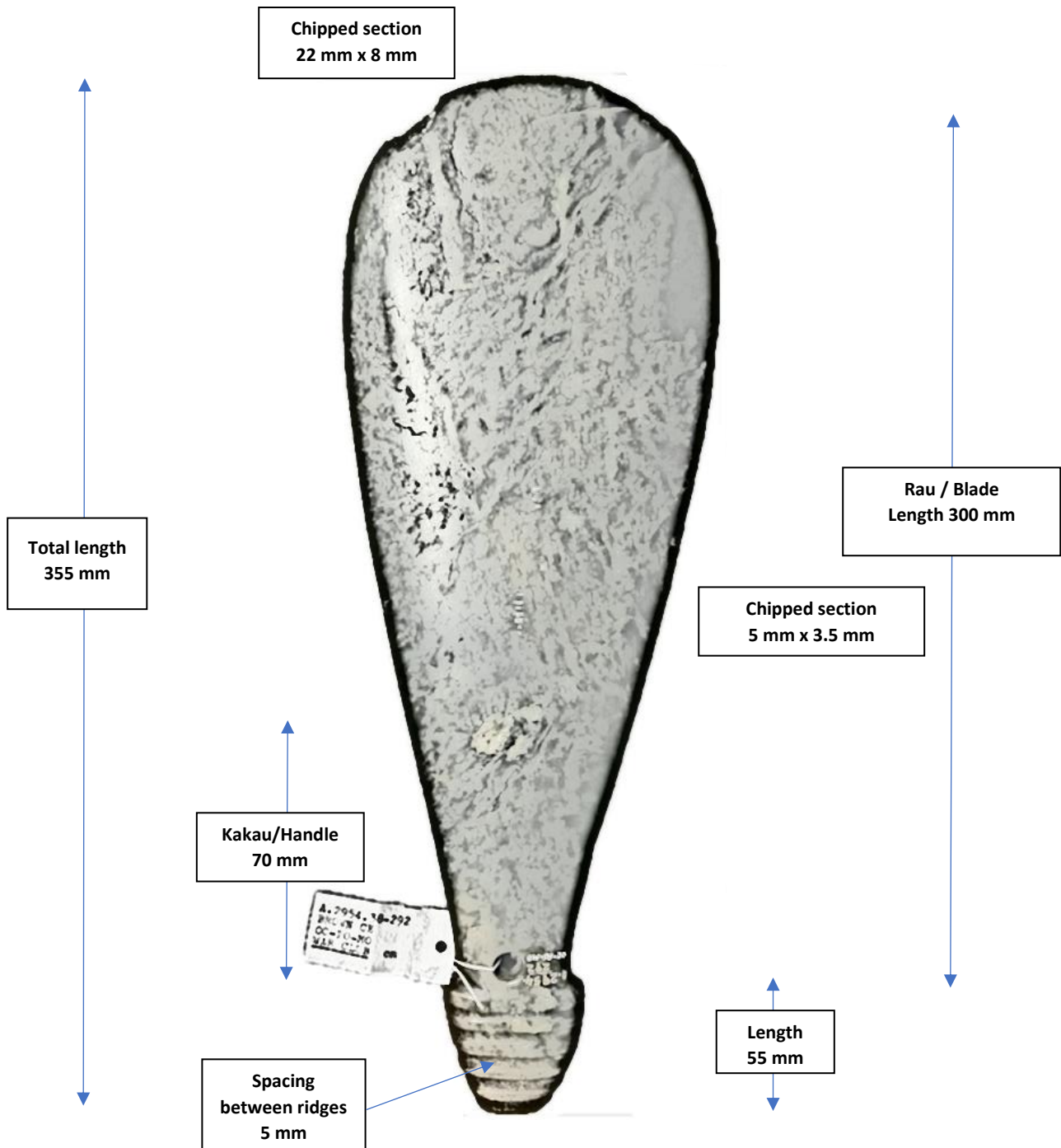


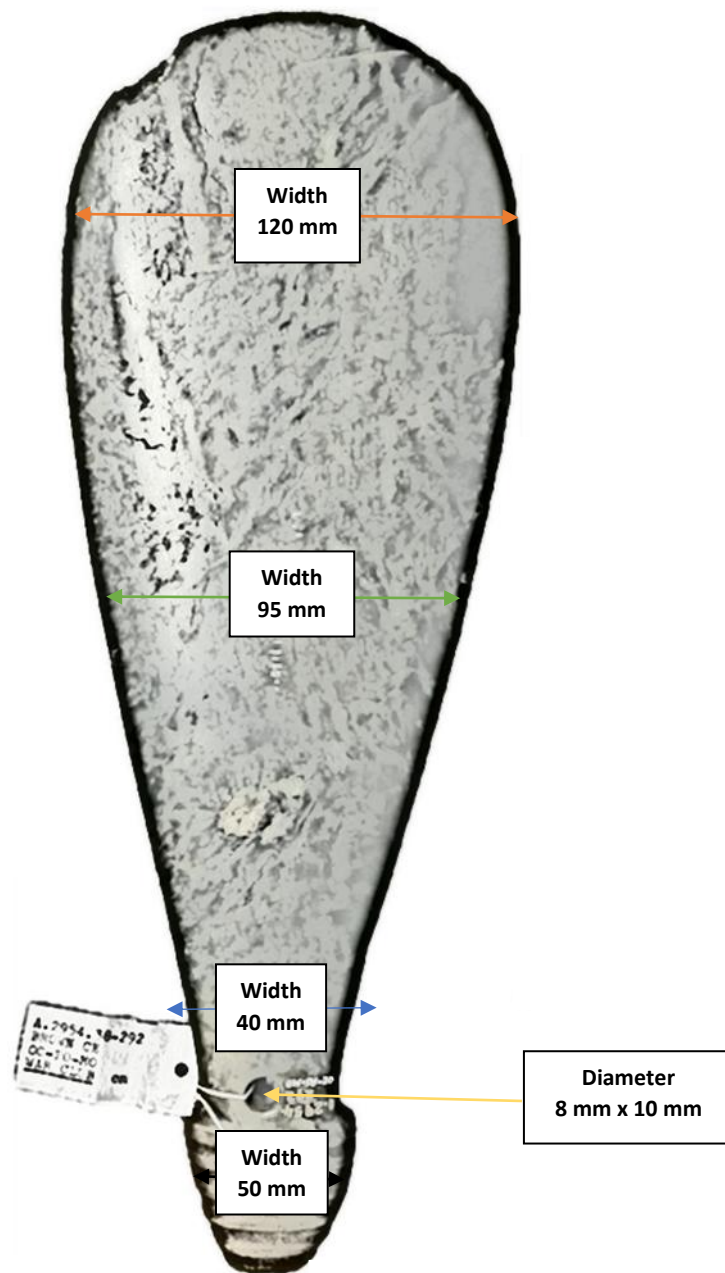
There is also an identification reference (A.2954-----292) written or painted directly onto the *mere pounamu* itself, using a gold or brass coloured paint, and (OC-PO-MO) in white coloured paint.



Inenga/Dimensions:

The length of this *taonga* at the longest point is 355 mm measured from the top edge of the *rau* (blade) to the bottom of the *reke* (butt/pommel). This *taonga* is also 120 mm in width at its widest point, 95 mm in width at the midpoint, and 40 mm wide at its narrowest point at the *kakau* (handle). The design is quite generic, and it is symmetrically shaped.





Taimaha/Weight:

This *mere pounamu* weighs 900 grams.

Rauemi/Materials:

Pounamu (Nephrite Jade) or greenstone is a durable and tough gemstone with a unique fibrous structure, making it ideal for carving and jewellery. It's known for its green colour, but can also be white, yellow, brown, or black. The interlocking structure allows for a high polish, enhancing its visual appeal. *Pounamu* has a hardness of 6-6.5 on the Mohs scale with a specific gravity of 2.90-3.10. *Pounamu* is extremely durable, has a high density and strength, which makes it ideal for use as a striking weapon, especially as a club with a narrow edge around the *rau* (blade).



A rough, unworked piece of *pounamu*.^{viii}

Reke/Butt or Pommel

The *reke* (butt or pommel) comprises of five horizontal, concentric ridges, which measure 55 mm from the point to the uppermost ridge at the widest point, and has a width of 50 mm at its widest point. The *reke* can be used to strike at the *ūpoko*/head, usually the temple, using a backhanded strike.



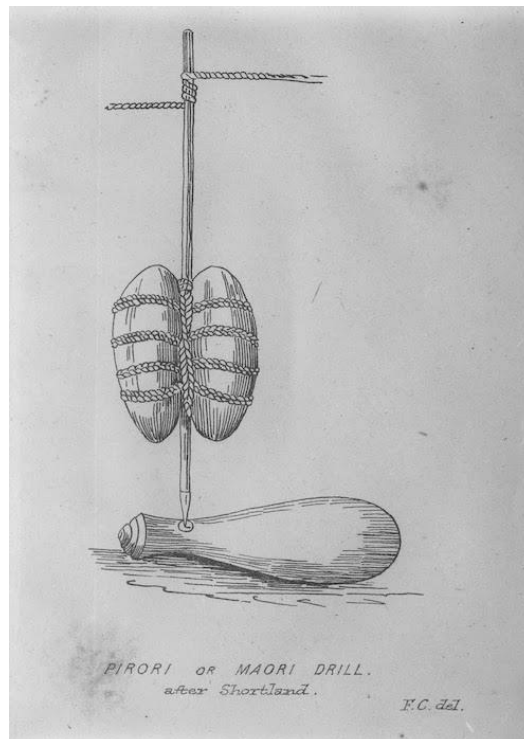
The ridges are not clearly delineated, and uniform in size, which is a good indication that this is a traditionally worked *taonga*.

Kowhau/Hole

The *kowhau* (hole) serves as a point where a *taura* (thong) was threaded through, to ensure the security of the weapon. The *kowhau* appears to have been created using a *tūwiri* or *pirori* (traditional drill), the recessed grooves (hourglass shaped hole) bear evidence of this method of drilling. The *kowhau* is drilled into one side, then the *taonga* is turned over and the *kowhau* is drilled into the opposite side until the pair of recesses join, this creates the hourglass shaped hole. 19th & 20th century metal drills cut cleaner, cylindrical holes. The diameter of the *kowhau* measures 10 mm x 8 mm, and it is situated 60 mm from the point of the *reke* (butt or pommel).



The *kowhau* showing the hourglass-shape, rather than a clean cylindrical cutting.



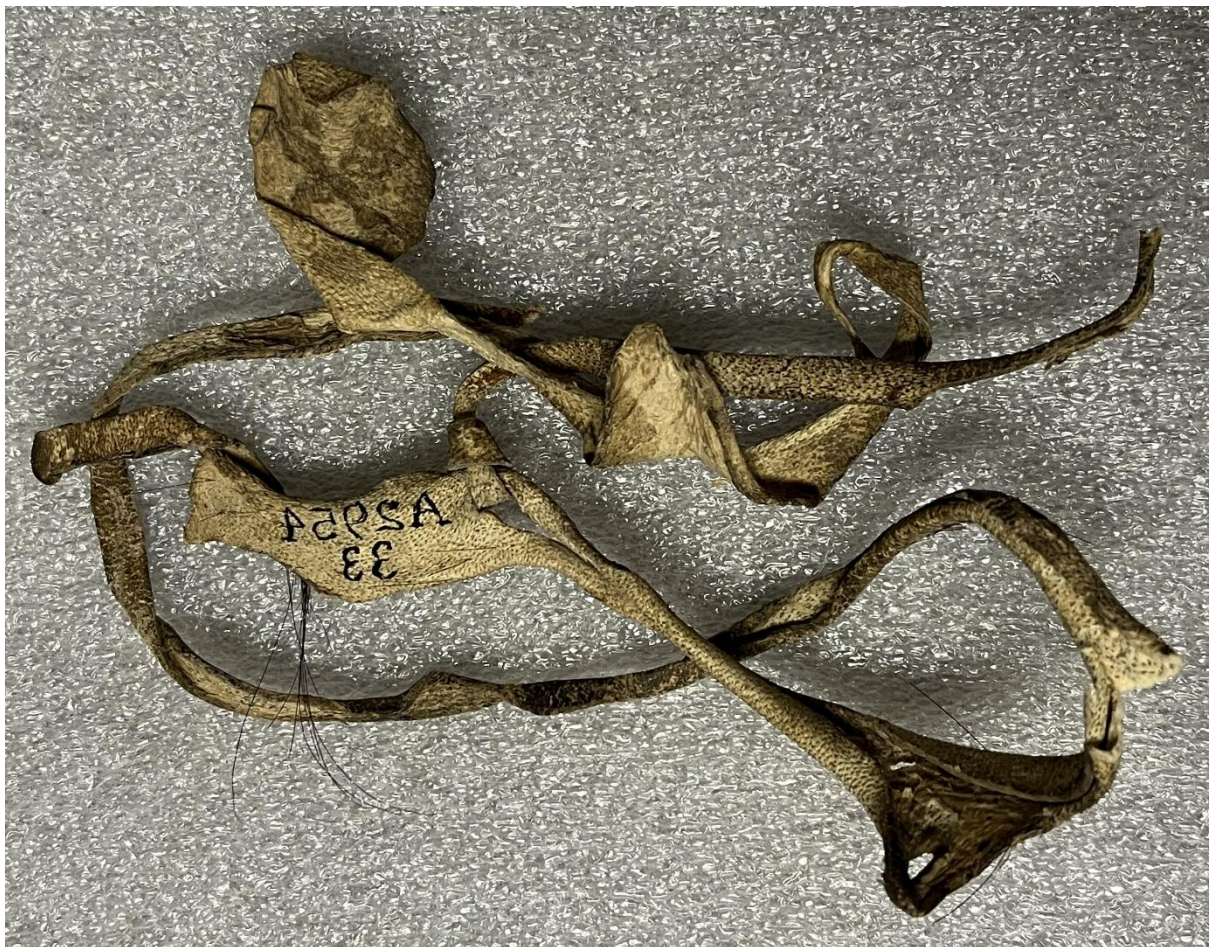
A sketch of one type of *tūwiri* or *pirori* (traditional drill).^{ix}

Taura Here/Thong

There is no *taura here* (thong), or evidence of one attached to this *mere pounamu* or in the storage area. *Taura* are usually plaited cords made from *harakeke* (Phormium tenax) or made from narrow strips of *kiri kurī* (dog skin).



An example of a *taura* (plaited by the author) which would normally be found on this type of weapon.



An example of a *taura kiri kurī* (dog skin thong). This is from the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles' collection.

Kakau/Handle

The *kakau* (handle) is rounded without any motifs or designs and representative of the common style of *kakau* found on most *mere* or *patu*. It is 40-50 mm in width, and 70 mm in length. There is a *kowhau* (hole) drilled into the *kakau* approximately 60 mm up from the base of the *reke* (butt or pommel) through which a *taura* (thong/cord) would have been threaded.



Rau/Blade

The *rau* (blade) measures 300 mm in length from the tip down to the *kowhao* (hole), 120 mm in width at the widest point (toward the top), 95 mm in width across the centre, and 40 mm across the narrowest point of the *rau*. The *rau* has convex edges. Missing are two small portions of the front edge of the *rau* (one on each *kauko* or edge). These 'chips' measure 22 mm x 8 mm on the upper edge, and 5 mm x 3.5 mm on the right *kauko*. The *kauko* (edges) of the *rau* are quite thin and sharp, and capable of slicing the skin of enemy combatants as well as breaking bones with impact focussed on such a narrow edge.



Left: The front view of the *rau*/blade.



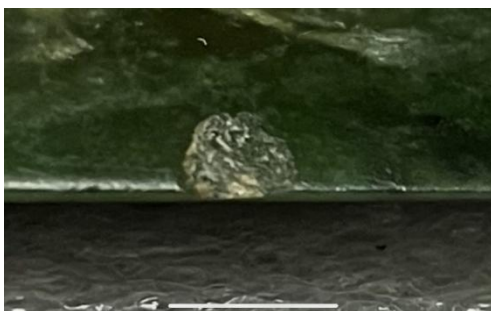
Right: The side view of one of the *kauko*/edges.

Whakanakonako/Decorations and embellishments:

There are no discernible embellishments to this *taonga*.

Pakarutanga/Condition:

Overall, this *taonga* appears to be in extremely good condition, however, there are two significant chips on *kauko*/edge of the *rau*/blade; the largest being at the top-left of the *taonga*, and the other being halfway down the right side. The patina and appearance of the *taonga* itself is indicative of its estimated age (circa 16th or 17th centuries), and the chips on the top front portion could very well have been sustained in battle. There is a very small amount of white paint on the front surface which has most probably been sustained when this *taonga* has been resting on a surface with wet paint. There are a few small, parallel scratches etched into the reverse surface.



Left: Small chip on the right *kauko*/edge approximately halfway down the *rau*/blade.



Right: Larger chip on the upper edge of the *rau*/blade.



Left: Slight white paint marks on the front aspect of the *mere pounamu*.



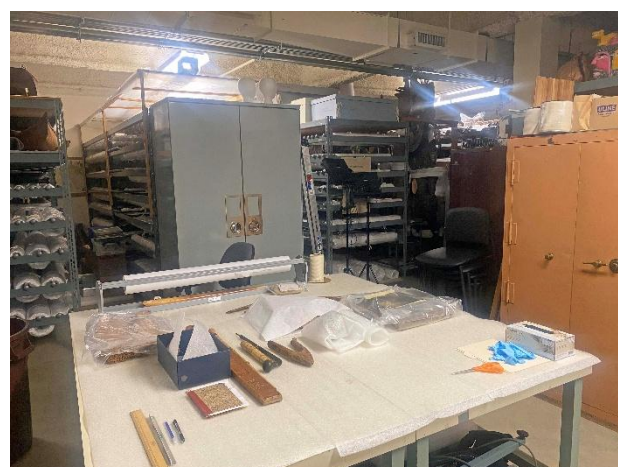
Right: Small parallel scratches etched into the reverse surface of the *mere pounamu*.

Whakaaturanga, Whakahaumarutanga rānei/Display, Storage:

This *taonga* is currently stored in cardboard boxes in the *Pacific Islands rack*, being an open shelving unit within the Ethnology Storeroom, under the following conditions: 20-22.2°C (68-72°F and between 45-55%.



Pacific Islands rack^x



The Ethnology Storeroom.

Whakaaturanga, whakaputanga hītori ranei/Publication & Display history:

It is possible that this taonga may have been displayed ‘in one of the various small case exhibits of the Pacific Islands material from the 1940s-1960’s but it was definitely on display in the former “Art of the Pacific Islands” Hall that opened in 1966.’^{xi} Versions of that hall stayed on exhibit until the 1980s.

Ngā tuhinga a te kaituhituhi/Author’s notes:

As a former soldier, I am always drawn to weapons, and as a former fighter (Kyokushin Karate and Muay Thai), the idea of close-quarter combat is something that I am versed in, and I am aware of the damage that combat with these types of weapons could inflict.



The author at the School of Infantry, Lone Pine Barracks, Singleton (1996).



The author competing in a Muay Thai fight in Thailand in 1999.

This particular *mere pounamu*, when wielded, feels relatively right for its size and would have been used with a series of strikes from a range of angles; with the intent being to causing blunt force trauma i.e. breaking bones (clavicle, humerus, radius and ulna) and cause severe damage to the cranium.

The opportunity to test weaponry such as this is an interesting proposition, especially as the blade edge was so sharp, however, I did not feel the need to do anything other than hold and admire this *taonga*.

I find this *taonga* an aesthetically attractive piece, with the combination of the smooth, glossy surface and patina; and the two significant chips on the *rau* (blade) edges giving it quite a striking appearance, the damaged sections adding to the weapon's appeal.

Knowing that this is a weapon of war, and that it may have taken lives reminds me of the reverence I must practice whenever I handle a *taonga* such as this, both as a former soldier, and a human being, the gravity of this is not lost to me.

The 'hourglass' shaped *kowhao* (hole) and the lack of clearly delineated ridges on the *reke* (base or pommel) are indicative of traditional methods being used, and as such, I am inclined to view this as being produced in the 1600s-1700s.

An aesthetically pleasing and authentic *taonga*, with evidence of use in training or battle.

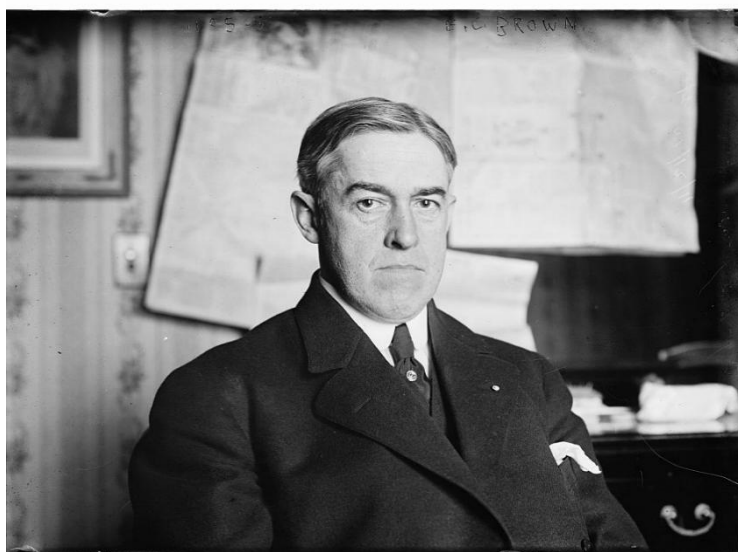
Whakapapa/Provenance:

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles (*kaitiaki*/custodian 1938-current)

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles has been the *kaitiaki*/custodian of this *taonga* since 1938, when it was donated to this institution by E.C. Brown, of 4445 Gainsborough Avenue, Los Feliz, Los Angeles. Records held by the NHM confirms this *taonga* as being received by this institution on 1st August of that year. Additional records also held by the NHM indicates that this *taonga* was entered into its catalogue sometime in September 1938.

E.C. Brown (*kaitiaki*/custodian 1920s-1938)

E. C. Brown was a collector and donor of this *taonga*, which he acquired in the 1920s.



E.C. Brown^{xii}

The E. Coll Brown Collection is a collection of photographs and other materials documenting mining, landscapes, people, social life, and customs in various locations, including Baja California, Eastern Sierras, Honduras, Guatemala, and New Zealand, as well as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. It is held by the Seaver Center for Western History Research at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The collection spans from 1901 to 1924, with some undated materials.

Amongst the objects that Brown donated to institutions, were: two birds, being a kererū (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) and a whitehead (*Mohoua albicilla*), to the Auckland War Museum, which he collected in 1906,^{xiii} as well as selling items^{xiv} from Vanuatu to The British Museum in 1969-1979.^{xv}

Brown's background involved the creation of the Brown Drilling Co., which started in Los Angeles. Brown Drilling Co. of Australia Ltd; and who operated 3 strings of tools in West Australia for the California Texas Oil Co. Ltd. (which later became the Caltex brand)^{xvi} and the West Australian Petroleum Pty. Ltd.^{xvii}

As there are no labels or markings on this *taonga*, unfortunately no further leads are available regarding earlier provenance; however, the traditional production methods indicate it may date to the 16th or 17th centuries.

The author would like to acknowledge and thank Myles Maniapoto, for his Te Reo Māori translations, without whom, this report would not have been produced in its current, bilingual format.

Tutohu/Sign off

Ingoa/Name: Brent Kerehona Pukepuke-Ahitapu
Historian | Author | Cultural Practitioner

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Ra/Date: 16 July 2025

Rārangi pukapuka/Bibliography-End Notes

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