

# Investigating the Stories of Tainui Ancestresses: A Work in Progress

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## Abstract

*This paper summarises current and ongoing research where some of the key findings have identified how Tainui women's stories have been preserved, by whom and the type of story that has been maintained. Comparisons with the details of both inter and intra tribal historical accounts of Tainui women have also been undertaken.*

## Introduction

As a woman with Tainui ancestry who is keenly interested in the histories of those women mentioned in my whakapapa and iwi accounts, the lack of information in the established literature has been particularly noticeable. Stories of the men who sailed on Tainui however and their male descendants are comprehensive and elaborate in comparison. My study seeks to locate the various narratives of a selection of significant Tainui women using both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources that have been used include manuscripts that have been written by Māori men such as Te Whiwhi (1852), Uremutu (1860) and Aoterangi (1863). Documented stories that have been told to and recorded by Pākehā men such as Hamlin (1842) are also manuscripts that have been researched. There do not appear to be any primary sources attributed to women. The secondary sources I have accessed are those accounts that have been published in books and journals by men such as Grey (1854), Smith (1907), Kelly (1949), Phillips (1989) and Carkeek (2004). A critical analysis of the sources has been an important component of the study as it has established the accuracies and/or inaccuracies of the accounts that are more readily available today.

Within this paper I provide a brief account of one of the earliest women to be written of in Tainui history, she is Whakaotirangi of the canoe traditions. The retelling of her story, although in shortened form for the purposes of this paper, is an example of a significant Tainui woman.

## Scope of study

The study covers three women from the canoe traditions, five women from the pre-contact era and three from post contact. Whakaotirangi, Marama and Kahukeke or Kahurere as she may also be known are represented in the canoe traditions. From these women came the naming of significant Tainui lands such as Pirongia (Cowen, 1905) and the establishment of one of the earliest Tainui tribes, Ngā Marama, was to come from Marama's influence (Phillips, 1989).

Within the pre-contact period, the study includes Ruaputāhanga, Māhinarangi, the twin sisters Reitu and Reipae and Te Kahureremoa. Their combined histories are representative of an era which records them as beautiful chieftainesses and their marriages are noted for the genealogical geo-political alliances created (Taonui 2005, personal communication). Through the marriages of these women, Tainui peoples are aligned with a significant number of iwi of the North Island.

Finally the post-contact studies of Rangiaho, Waitohi and Te Rangitopeora highlight considerable composers of powerful waiata and curses, and influential women in relation to war and land holdings. Rangiaho and her marriage into Tuwharetoa was significant for a number of reasons but in particular, she was to become the mother of the future leader of that iwi, Te Heuheu (Grace, 1959). Waitohi and Te Rangitopeora, sister and niece respectively to Te Rauparaha, became leaders in their own right of their iwi, while Te Rangitopeora became one of only five women to sign Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## The story of Whakaotirangi

There are several distinguishing events and experiences that contribute to the importance of Whakaotirangi within Tainui traditions. Her qualities, which continue to be told through a variety of whakataukī and kīwaha, were those of selflessness, prudence and planning. Whakaotirangi took responsibility for a variety of plants and seedlings, ensuring their survival while on board Tainui canoes and introducing them to the new lands. Most notable of these was the kūmara. Whakaotirangi was to

establish an immense garden at Pakarikari (Aoterangi, 1863). In doing this a consistent and valuable food source was available and the area was settled by Tainui. Place names from home were given to the region and new names established thereby identifying the occupants. Whakaotirangi's children moved to other areas and in this way new territory was added to Tainui's land mass and the kūmara was further distributed. Whakaotirangi is written of as a chiefly woman and also the principal wife of Hoturoa who was the leader of the Tainui people and captain of the Tainui waka (Aoterangi 1863, Nahe 1880).

An interesting aspect of Whakaotirangi's story is the claim by other iwi that she (or another woman named Whakaotirangi) was on board their waka. While Belich (1996) asserts some five iwi claim this noteworthy woman, he does not give any detail in relation to this claim. Te Arawa however do write of her more intimately than any others I have been able to discover. Both Tainui and Te Arawa iwi provide elaborate details of her and both put up evidence to support their claims.

Kelly's 1949 account of Tainui history tells of Tama te Kapua, the captain of Te Arawa, attempting to entice Whakaotirangi from Hoturoa but such a fight was put up that Tama te Kapua left without her. Rangikaheke (1849) of Te Arawa describes Tama te Kapua sailing off with Whakaotirangi (stealing her) while Te Uremutu (1860), also of Te Arawa, claims her as Tama te Kapua's wife and gives a list of their descendants (the only account I have been able to find of this). Another Te Arawa narrator, Takanui Tarakawa who gave information to Percy Smith says that there were no children between the couple (cited in Simmons, 1976). Accounts within Te Arawa mention the kūmara with Whakaotirangi's name and there are many whakataukī that support this.

From accounts put forward by Tainui and Te Arawa that I have read to date, Tainui are consistent with information in relation to Whakaotirangi. There are many whakataukī in relation to tracts of land, kūmara and her forethought. Documentation is clear in relation to her children and grandchildren, her status and her marriage to Hoturoa. Te Arawa who also provide a considerable number of whakataukī in relation to Whakaotirangi are contradictory in other aspects of the traditions that focus on her. One source alone provides information about a marriage to Tama te kapua

and descendants from the union, that of Te Uremutu (1860). Various narrators give other accounts.

#### Final comments

A biographical study of authors of the earlier published accounts provides some detail of men from religious backgrounds or certainly men who wrote for their audience, resulting at times in the altering of those narratives taken from the Māori men they consulted. An example of this is that of the tradition of Marama, said by Tainui to have committed adultery (Aoterangi, 1863). Hamlin (1842) and Grey (1854) write (and publish) instead that Marama had special powers or describe Tainui as being tapu as an explanation for the circumstances which arose from Marama's illicit affair. This example tends to reveal that traditions have changed over time and there could be a variety of reasons for this. The description of the tradition of Marama by Hamlin (1842) and Grey (1854) illustrates the sanitation or censorship by Pākehā of the more widely known Māori tradition. At times the positioning of the men in society and their life experiences has affected how they have interpreted or retold Tainui women's histories. Hamlin for example came to New Zealand as a missionary (Ryburn, 1980).

This ongoing study brings to light examples of women of great diversity who emerge in roles of leadership and who have abilities and talents in waiata composition, cultivation and exploration, being responsible for the naming of large tracts of Tainui lands. Prominent also is their role in the maintenance and preservation of Tainui iwi and hapū. Yet the representation of Tainui women in literature is sparse. Children they produced or the men of note they married tend to have been the focus for those who have retold the traditions.

Continuing to investigate and research manuscripts will hopefully add to the information about the women named here. As details of their lives that are not so commonly known come to my attention these will be included in the study.

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NOTE: Adapted from a paper given at Ngā Kete a Rēhua Symposium, Christchurch, New Zealand: <http://www.maori.canterbury.ac.nz/symposium/index.shtml>