



NZJPH 6

NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HISTORY

TWENTYEIGHTEEN



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

COVER IMAGE

Natasha Te Arahori Keating & Bethany Matai Edmunds, ‘Te Kōpū’, an installation held at Māngere Arts Centre Ngā Tohu o Uenuku, 27 January – 3 March 2018.

‘Te Kōpū’ is a collaborative exhibition showcasing the work of Natasha Te Arahori (Ngāti Tūwharetoa and Ngāi Tūhoe), and Bethany Matai Edmunds (Ngāti Kuri). The collaborative works are paintings on upcycled native timber by Keating, and woven adornments by Edmunds, made from flowers and fibres harvested in the bush and the streets of Tāmaki Makaurau. In this exhibition the artists create a space in which atua wāhine — Māori goddesses — are depicted. As wāhine Māori, the artists are challenging the known creation narratives, often authored by non-Māori males, and in so doing creating a safe place from which reflection can take place. The exhibition also acknowledges the political legacy of the women who asserted their right to vote, and is part of the wider celebration of women’s suffrage.

For more on ‘Te Kōpū’ see <<http://ondemand.facetv.co.nz/watch.php?vid=8580181a2>>.

EDITOR

Nadia Gush

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Fiona Martin

EDITORIAL ADVISORY GROUP

Giselle Byrnes, Massey University Te Kunenga Ki Purehuroa, Palmerston North.

Catharine Coleborne, University of Newcastle, Australia.

Nadia Gush, University of Waikato Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Hamilton.

Stephen Hamilton, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia; Massey University Te Kunenga Ki Purehuroa, Palmerston North.

Bronwyn Labrum, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

Mark Smith, University of Waikato Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Hamilton; Oamaru Whitestone Civic Trust, Oamaru.

REMEMBERING MAKEA TAKAU ARIKI, THE QUEEN OF RAROTONGA, 1871–1911.

Joanna Cobley.

CENTRING THE OTHER/FRAMING MAKEA

History remembers regal heroines due to their inherited status, while their life achievements are usually framed as those of an ‘honorary man’, ‘a singular exception to the norm’ and, on occasion, as ‘better than a man’.¹ Historians charged with the task of writing women’s histories find that historical evidence surrounding women’s worlds and lived experiences are often either invisible or derived from second-hand accounts, which helps to generate a legacy of misconceptions, legends and mythologies.² In this commentary I reflect on how both these historiographical aspects relate to a South Pacific regal heroine, Makea Takau Ariki, Queen of Rarotonga from 1871 until her death in 1911.³ As a researcher with an interest in public history and intangible heritage, I found that feminist historian Antonia Fraser’s tropes of the ‘honorary man’, the ‘singular exception’ and sometimes ‘better than a man’ simultaneously existed alongside Makea’s position as an indigenous woman, something which became apparent through my readings of Makea in the public record and reinforced by historians. Makea Takau Ariki was an exceptional nineteenth-century South Polynesian woman leader who ensured the protection of the Cook Islands group during a period when the Pacific had economic and geopolitical importance to colonial New Zealand.

THE CULT OF QUEEN VICTORIA

When Makea became Ariki in 1871 she immediately proclaimed herself Queen of Rarotonga. Historians and contemporary observers believe that Makea was inspired by Queen Victoria, who used naval power to expand the British Empire and secure crucial trade routes.⁴ Makea hoped that as a British

¹ Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp.3–13.

² For example, in his introduction Michael Evans argued that the dearth of historical evidence on regal heroine Eleanor of Aquitaine has meant that biographers have also included speculation and myths in their analysis. Evans described the phenomena as ‘Eleanorism Exceptionalism’. See Michael R. Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval World and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p.1.

³ An Ariki is an inherited chiefly title, granted to the first-born of high-ranked social elites, which gives them the right to govern.

⁴ Richard Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820–1950*, ed. Ron Crocombe (New Zealand; Fiji: Victoria University Press in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1980); see also Dick Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH: A Cook Islands History*

Protectorate, Rarotonga and the other islands in the Cook Island Group would be safeguarded from other imperial interests by Queen Victoria's Royal Navy, and that this would also help boost their economy. Since Tahiti and the Marquesas became French Protectorates in 1843, followed by New Caledonia in 1853, French interest in the Cook Islands increased so the Ariki — and Queen Makea in particular — lobbied Britain for annexation (this was achieved in 1888).⁵

The act of self-proclaimed Queenship helped women feel powerful. Feminist historian Katie Pickles neatly demonstrates Queen Victoria's womanly power in her work on the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), a Canadian women's organisation founded in 1900. Pickles notes how IODE members drew self-confidence for their imperial projects from Queen Victoria.⁶ For example, on Victoria Day members imitated and dressed up as Queen Victoria, and in doing so experienced the aura of Queen Victoria's royal status and feminine authority. Further, as a way to inculcate and educate others about Queen Victoria's virtues and powers, political dignities, business leaders and children were involved in IODE festivities.

Makea deliberately performed rituals associated with the powers of office that evoked Queen Victoria.⁷ A number of other elite nineteenth-century South Pacific women similarly adopted the title 'Queen', such as Aimata Pōmare IV Vahine, Tahiti's longest reigning Queen from 1827–1877.⁸ During the last decades of the nineteenth century, four of the five high-ranking Rarotongan Ariki were women, and all, including Makea, adopted the title and status of

(Rarotonga: Cook Islands Trading Corporation, 1991); and Dorothy Thomson, *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

⁵ Damon Salesa, 'A Pacific Destiny', in *Tangata o le Moana: New Zealand and the People of the Pacific*, ed by Sean Mallon, Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Damon Salesa (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2012), p.100.

⁶ Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁷ Through an Act of Parliament, with the support of Prime Minister Disraeli, Queen Victoria more or less self-proclaimed the title 'Impress of India', Thomson, *Queen Victoria*, pp.17, 128–131.

⁸ Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820–1950*; Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH*; Edward Reeves, *Brown Men and Women, or, The South Sea Islands in 1895 and 1896* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1898); Falaniko Tominiko, 'Women leaders of the Pacific', *Newshub*, 10 June 2012, <<https://www.newshub.co.nz/general/women-leaders-of-the-pacific-2012061112>>.

Queen.⁹ Makea's nearby South Pacific contemporaries included the Rarotongan-born Tui Ariki, known through marriage as the Queen of Samoa, and Lavinia Veiongo Fotu, Queen consort of Tonga from 1899 to 1902. These South Pacific Queens invented new court traditions, co-created with the European outsider (trader, colonial agent, politician, and tourist) and other South Pacific leaders. These South Pacific Queens built European-styled palaces, and greeted their guests with food, cultural performances and gifts. They did this so that those wielding power would recognise their authority.¹⁰

MAKEA, 'NATIVE WOMAN'/'HONORARY MAN'

Makea, like other regal heroines who operated in the public sphere of economics, governance, security and trade, was treated as an 'honorary man'.¹¹ These heroines' portraits appeared on postage stamps, both as a symbol of their geographic power and to generate revenue. In Makea's case, subtle differences are noted. Makea was part of a collective of ruling elites, not a supreme ruler. At times the other Ariki were envious of Makea's symbolic power as 'Head Ariki' of the Cook Island group. For example, in the lead-up to the Federated Cook Islands second postal stamp issue in 1893, the British Resident, Frederick J. Moss, wrote and urged the New Zealand government to hasten the commission. Moss explained to the then New Zealand Premier, the Hon. John Ballance, that even though the vote had been 10: 2 in agreement that Makea's image would be on the stamp, some jealousy had emerged within the ruling Ariki (see figure 1).¹² Makea's race also created difference.¹³ For instance the stamp designer, Alfred Cousins, had instructions not to make the

⁹ The names of the Ariki are hard to trace. One New Zealand newspaper mentioned two other Queens reigning on the Island of Rarotonga, Marepa and Mary Anna; see 'Queen Makea of Rarotonga', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 October 1885, p.4.

¹⁰ Eva Saar, *Memoirs of Makea Nui Teremoana Ariki CBE* (Paula Lineen, 2014), pp.18–19.

¹¹ Fraser, *The Warrior Queens*.

¹² Bertram W. H. Poole, *The Stamps of Cook Islands, Mekeel Handbook No. 1* (Boston, Mass.: Mekeel-Severn-Wylie, 1912), p.9; Issued five-penny Cook Islands 'Queen Makea Takau' stamp in olive black. Government Printer, Wellington 1902. PH002442, New Zealand Post Museum Collection, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Reproduced with permission.

¹³ For further discussion on how researchers address imbalances 'based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, dis/ability, age etc.', see Nina Lykke et al., 'Editorial Introduction', in *Writing Academic Texts Differently: Intersectional Feminist Methodologies and the Playful Art of Writing*, ed. by Nina Lykke (New York; London: Routledge, 2014), p.3.

Joanna Cobley.



Figure 1. 'Queen Makea Takau' stamp in olive black, 1893.

Queen of Rarotonga's likeness 'look too dark'.¹⁴ And a year after her death, Mr Vivian C. Gossett reminded *Montreal Philatelist* readers that Makea was not a real queen, but self-proclaimed. Gossett qualified Makea's importance in terms of her 'mythical' hereditary status — her ancestors were among the first settlers of Rarotonga and her family narrative linked back to ancient Hawaiki.¹⁵

¹⁴ Poole, *The Stamps of Cook Islands*, p.10; see also Robin Gwynn, 'Cousins, Alfred Ernest', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2c34/cousins-alfred-ernest>>.

¹⁵ Poole, *The Stamps of Cook Islands*, p.12.

Gossett's narrative clearly positioned the honorary Makea as an exotic, native queen.

MAKEA'S EXCEPTIONALISM

Regal heroines are portrayed as 'singular exceptions to the norm' to explain their right to rule. And even though five Ariki collectively governed Rarotonga during Makea's reign, historians squarely frame Makea as exceptional. For example, Gilson claimed that in addition to her economic power as the Ariki of the largest and most prosperous island in the Cook Island Group, Makea's extraordinary 'force of personality' helped elevate her to 'Head Ariki' and with it the symbolic position as sovereign authority.¹⁶

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s colonial New Zealand's imperial aspirations in the South Pacific amplified and so too did the significance of Makea's honorary role as Queen of Rarotonga. In 1885 John L. Kelly led an Auckland Chamber of Commerce delegation to Rarotonga. Kelly imagined Auckland as the manufacturing centre for Cook Island produce. He also promoted the idea of the South Pacific as a tourist destination in his rather celebratory poem titled 'Lovely Rarotonga'. Perhaps as a salute to Edmund Spenser's epic poem first published in 1590, Kelly situated Makea as a Faerie Queene:

And she who rules this fairy scene —
Makea — loved and loving Queen —
Peaceful and just her reign has been
In lovely Rarotonga!
May she be spared for many a day
To reign in Awarua Bay,
While Commerce thrives beneath her sway
In fertile Rarotonga!¹⁷

Leveraging her position as 'Head Ariki', in October 1885 Makea boarded the New Zealand government-subsidised postal steamer the *Janet Nicol* and headed to Auckland where she planned to meet politicians, manufacturers and iwi

¹⁶ Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820–1950*, p.51; see also Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH*, p.50. One source states that Makea was appointed as Head Ariki in 1888; see 'Makea Nui (Chiefly Title)', <<http://members.iinet.net.au/~royalty/states/cookislands/makeanui.html>>.

¹⁷ Kelly cited in Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH*, p.42.

leaders and lobby for annexation, trade opportunities and seek funds to improve the Islands' infrastructure. New Zealand newspapers widely reported Makea's visit. The *Timaru Herald* wrote that the Queen of Rarotonga arrived 'unannounced' with her entourage, which included 'maids of honor', described as 'fair specimens... of the island kingdom', the Prince consort, and Enoka, 'the Keeper of the Royal Mats'.¹⁸ The Mayor of Auckland, William Waddel (1883–1886), 'hosted the regal guests' and organised events and tours. Makea strategically acknowledged the ancestral links between the Cook Island and New Zealand Māori, and met Ngāti Whātua leader Paora Tuhaere.¹⁹ The Hon. John Ballance, Minister of Native Affairs, also met Makea. In his November 1885 Report Ballance observed that the Cook Island Ariki would formally request the British Crown for protection, and if necessary, annexation to New Zealand (completed in 1901, see figure 2).²⁰ Makea and Ballance both stressed the importance of the Cook Islands collective and autonomous rule to continue following annexation.

New Zealand newspapers published details regarding the Queen's appearance and behaviour. The *Herald* published a portrait of Makea and described her as 'a fine, intelligent, portly woman of 45 years of age'.²¹ Historian Dick Scott believed that publishing her portrait was unusual for the time.²² The *Timaru Herald* described the Queen, who attended a business function, as 'elegantly attired in a royal robe of black velvet'.²³ Ballance also commented on the Queen's intellect and 'civilised' dress in his Ministerial Report.²⁴ Accounts of Makea noted that she did not speak English and worked through an interpreter. Yet Makea could understand and write English very well, as was

¹⁸ 'Arrival of Distinguished Visitors', *Timaru Herald*, 5 November 1885.

¹⁹ Salesa, 'A Pacific Destiny', pp.97–121.

²⁰ *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1886 Session 1, A-01, Sub-Enclosure, The Hon. J. Ballance to Sir William Jervois, Native Office, Wellington, 18 November, 1885, A-1, p.15; 'Governor-General Lord Ranfurly reads the annexation proclamation to Queen Makea, with the British resident Walter Gudgeon looking on, 1901'. PAColl-4235. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, Wellington, New Zealand. Image reproduced with permission.

²¹ 'Queen Makea of Rarotonga', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 October, 1885.

²² Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH*, p.40.

²³ 'Arrival of Distinguished Visitors', *Timaru Herald*, 5 November, 1885.

²⁴ Sub-Enclosure, The Hon. J. Ballance, November 1885, A-1, p. 15.

Joanna Cobley.

evident in her petitions to the British Crown and correspondence with the colonial New Zealand government.²⁵

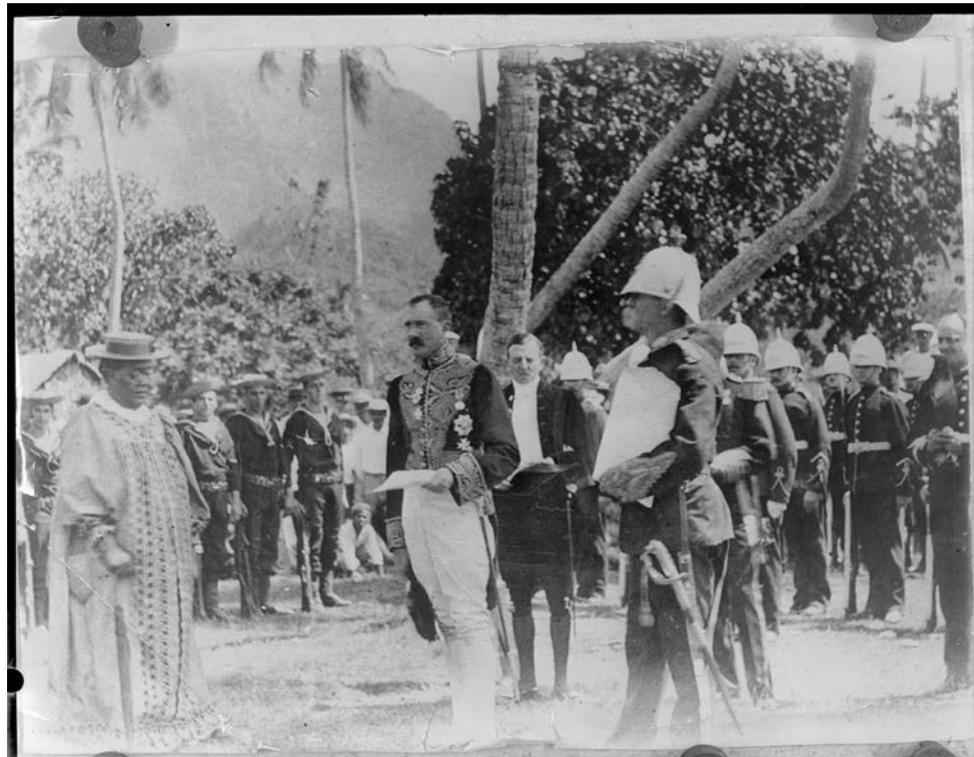


Figure 2. Governor-General Lord Ranfurly reads the annexation proclamation to Queen Makea, 1901.

MAKEA, THE 'BETTER MAN'

Women and men could inherit the Ariki title, yet as 'Head Ariki' and chief of the largest island in the Cook Islands group, Makea embodied the 'better man' status.²⁶ This becomes apparent through comparison with her husband Ngamaru Rongotini Ariki, paramount chief of Atiu, Mauke and Mitiaro, three small islands in the Southern Cook Islands group. Edward Reeves, an English

²⁵ Poole, *The Stamps of Cook Islands*, pp.9–10.

²⁶ Fraser, *The Warrior Queens*.

steamboat traveller who visited the Queen at *Para O Tane* palace, described the Prince consort as like a ‘drone attendant on a queen bee’.²⁷

The arrival of the European foreigners marked a rupture point in traditional Cook Island society and an opportunity for South Pacific regal heroines such as Makea to emerge. From the early 1820s John and Mary Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS), assisted by Tahitian converts, introduced Christianity and other European influences to the Cook Island people. Whaling and sealing gangs also expanded into the South Pacific. Diseases followed. Epidemics of dysentery, whooping cough, mumps, influenza and measles led to rapid population decline. In addition, with over seven hundred Cook Island men lost through slavery, combined with deaths caused by natural disasters, by the end of the nineteenth century the population had collapsed from an estimated seven thousand to fewer than two thousand.²⁸ Contemporary observers and historians believe that the sudden male shortage contributed to a change in the status of Cook Island women and, for members of the elite class, this meant that the succession of the Ariki title could be inherited by a woman in her own right.²⁹

When the Premier of New Zealand, the Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, visited Makea at her Rarotongan palace, he was the ‘lesser man’, as Seddon’s May 1900 South Pacific tour on the steamer *S.S. Tutanekai* was partly on doctor’s orders.³⁰ Seddon was also in Rarotonga to formalise New Zealand’s annexation of the Cook Island Group. Makea ‘the greater man’ honoured Seddon and his entourage appropriately, with a feast and cultural performances. In recognition of his status and as part of the ritual, Makea gifted Seddon some woven mats, which signified wealth and social status within Pacific women’s culture. Evidence of these finely-woven gifts have yet to emerge; if they do exist their provenance may not have been sufficiently

²⁷ Reeves, *Brown Men and Women*, p.202.

²⁸ Scott, *Years of the POOH-BAH*, p.32; Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820-1950*, pp.37–42; Saar, *Memoirs*, p.14.

²⁹ Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820–1950*, pp.35–36.

³⁰ Edward Tregear, *The Right Hon. R. J. Seddon’s (the Premier of New Zealand) visit to Tonga, Fiji, Savage Island and the Cook Islands, May 1900* (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printers, 1900). Allegedly written by Eugene McCarthy.

Joanna Cobley.

documented.³¹ However Makea, the Queen of Rarotonga, captured the occasion for public memory and posed for photographs with her Prince consort, Ngamaru, Seddon, and the New Zealand Premier's wife, Louisa (see figure 3).³²



Figure 3. The Prince consort, Louisa Seddon, Makea, and the New Zealand Premier Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, 1900. Photographer: Frederick Sears.

CONCLUDING NOTES

Regal heroines are remembered due to their highborn status, yet few studies have been published on South Pacific regal heroines. South Pacific women leaders existed historically, and how they have been portrayed is both

³¹ Email correspondence from Jean Mason, Manager/Curator, Cook Islands Library & Museum Society (November and December, 2017).

³² 'Makea, the New Zealand Premier, Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, and his wife Louisa, seated beside the Prince consort, 1900'. PAColl-7599-1. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, Wellington, New Zealand. Image reproduced with permission.

Joanna Cobley.

fascinating and varied.³³ As Ariki of the largest island in the Cooks Makea had economic and symbolic power, and successfully operated in the public sphere of governance, commerce, security and trade as an ‘honorary man; a ‘better man’ than her contemporaries. Despite Makea’s hereditary status, her extraordinary presence and her ceremonial functions as Queen, attitudes of white racial superiority permeated through the historical documents, and provided justification for the paternalistic rhetoric in speeches made by businessmen, travellers and politicians whom Makea entertained at *Para O Tane* Palace. In these accounts Makea was always constructed as a native woman first and foremost; yet she was a pragmatic and skilful negotiator who collaborated within a collective of sometime jealous Ariki to achieve her goals.

Joanna Cobley is Researcher Development Coordinator for Research & Innovation and Adjunct Senior Fellow in History at the University of Canterbury. She writes about women, food, cultural heritage and teaching and learning.

³³ Tominiko, ‘Women leaders of the Pacific’, *Nemshub*, 10 June 2012.