

Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke, c. 1815 – 1896

Jenifer Curnow

Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke was the author of more than eight hundred pages of manuscript in Māori, which encompass features of Māori language, genealogies, legends, traditions, contemporary history, political commentary, customs, proverbs, songs, literary commentary, and autobiographical material. The manuscripts were the source of most of the prose material in the appendices to Sir George Grey's *Ko Nga Moteatea me Nga Hakirara Maori* [Poems, Traditions and Chaunts of the Maoris] (1853), and much of the material for his *Ko Nga Mahinga a Nga Tupuna Maori* [The Deeds of the Maori Ancestors] (1854), and hence of its translation, *Polynesian Mythology* (1855). Thus Te Rangikāheke's writings became the major part of the earliest accounts of Māori history and culture.

Grey did not acknowledge his informant and introduced alterations, combinations, and omissions in *Ko Nga Mahinga a Nga Tupuna Maori*. In 1854 he presented his library to the Cape Town Public Library where it was catalogued, titles in English being given to Te Rangikāheke's manuscripts where necessary. Little was known of Te Rangikāheke until 1906 when W. H. Williams visited the Cape Town Public Library and made known the full extent of Te Rangikāheke's contribution. After 1922 Grey's library was returned to the Auckland Public Library where it became accessible to scholars. A few letters are held elsewhere, including one address and one letter in the John White Papers held in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. In later life Te Rangikāheke was a government official and leader in his tribal area. He was a renowned orator.

Te Rangikāheke, also known by his baptismal name, Wiremu Maihi (William Marsh), was born in the early nineteenth century, about 1815 (MAK 3:151), and possibly at Puhirua or Te Awahou, on the northern shores of Lake Rotorua in the North Island of New Zealand. His father, also called Te Rangikāheke, was from Ngāti Kererū tribal group of Ngāti Rangiwewehi of Te Arawa and had kinship ties with Ngāti Rangitahi (GNZMMSS 81:52, GNZMMSS 44:929). His mother, Kaihau, was descended from Tamahou, Pupu and Hinepō (GNZMMSS 81:29). His father, noted as a warrior, was possibly also a tohunga (priest or expert). Te Rangikāheke was taken captive as a child, together with his parents and siblings, at the siege of Mokoia Island by Ngā Puhi in 1823; they were later ransomed (GNZMMSS 118:58-63).

Little is known about Te Rangikāheke's early life and education in Māori lore and tradition, or in other matters. He was taught to read and write as a young adult after the Church Missionary Society station was established in Rotorua in 1835 (GNZMMSS 87:175, NZH 8/2/1896). As he was an adherent of the Anglican Church in later life, it is probable that he was baptized about this time. There is no evidence to suggest that Te Rangikāheke spoke or wrote in English.

Te Rangikāheke was married at least three times. His first wife, Mere Pinepire of Ngāti Pīkiao, was the mother of his three children (GNZMMSS 81:50). She was later put away by Te Rangikāheke, possibly for religious scruples (NZH 4/2/1896). His son, Hataraka, was killed fighting on the government side in the New Zealand wars in 1869. Hataraka's two sons died at boarding school. There were two daughters, Hiria Hauā who had four children, and Ngārongo Pinepire (ROT 36:104-105). According to a letters he wrote to Grey on 13 May and 13 June 1851, it was his first wife who was with him and his children when he was working with Grey (GNZMA 691, 682).

Te Rangikāheke made his first visits to Auckland, the capital, in 1842 and 1843, recorded by Lady Martin, the wife of the then Chief Justice, on whom he called (1884:19-20). Government Letterbooks tell of his first contact with the government when he wrote to Governor FitzRoy (1843-1845), and suggest that his writing for Grey began possibly as early as 1846 (MA 2/1, 1845:293, MA 7/1, 1847:unpaginated). Te Rangikāheke's reputation as a writer of tradition was well established by 1849, as Cooper in December of that year, describes obtaining an original manuscript 'from a chief of the tribe ... called Te Rangikāheke or William Marsh, a person of repute in such matters.' (1851:128) It is probable that this manuscript was one of the three versions of the story of Hinemoa, written by Te Rangikāheke.

His acquaintance with Grey, who was almost an exact contemporary (1812-1898), sprang, as Grey explains, from his need to be acquainted with the Māori language, manners, customs, religion, and modes of thought in order to govern Māori successfully (Grey 1855:vii). Te Rangikāheke also saw a political purpose in the collaboration, writing in a draft letter to Queen Victoria on 18 May 1850 that the Governor had the double task of looking after Māori and Pākehā, and that matters within the Māori realm had been neglected under the Queen's rule, perhaps because governors did not know the Māori language and customs. Te Rangikāheke lived with the Governor in order to teach him. For a time, probably between 1849 and 1853, Grey paid

Te Rangikāheke £36 a year and provided living quarters for him and his family, attached to his own house in Auckland (GNZMA 723:264). Hence James Belich terms Te Rangikāheke “New Zealand’s first professional historian.” (1996:192). Te Rangikāheke’s writings show that he and Grey worked together in a warm and close relationship. He notes Grey’s kindness and generosity in another part of this draft letter to Queen Victoria (GNZMA 723: Pt 2:279), and he marvels at the generosity of the Governor in another manuscript (GNZMMSS 45:939). Some of Te Rangikāheke’s manuscripts exhibit the extent of their collaboration with interlinear comments by Grey or Te Rangikāheke (e.g. GNZMMSS 81:56).

All of Te Rangikāheke’s manuscripts, with one possible exception, were catalogued in Cape Town after 1854, where ten of the manuscripts were attributed to him. So it can be concluded that Te Rangikāheke produced his large volume of written work – twenty-one manuscripts, some 670 pages of which he was the sole author, and seventeen more to which he contributed about one hundred pages – in the period before 1854. Only seven of the manuscripts are dated, three of his most important manuscripts being dated 1849. It is possible that the writing started earlier than this. The remainder of the manuscripts returned from Cape Town have been attributed subsequently, from writing or internal evidence, by other scholars. In addition Te Rangikāheke contributed to Grey’s major folios of songs and proverbs. Fifty-seven of these songs and six proverbs were published by Grey (1853, 1857a, 1857b). There are also at least twelve letters, which cover a longer period. All manuscripts are written in ink, in a legible, neat, consistent hand. Williams notes that Te Rangikāheke’s style was ‘singularly free from that erratic joining and breaking of words that characterize most Maori writing.’ (1906:179). Bruce Biggs agrees, “he [Te Rangikāheke] deserves to be remembered for the quality and quantity of manuscripts on Maori matters that he gave to Grey.’ (1952:179). Margaret Orbell comments on ‘the literary sophistication of Te Rangikāheke’s writing’ and describes him as ‘a very talented writer (1968:8-12).

Eight manuscripts, covering more than 130 pages, deal with legends and tribal history. The three most significant are: ‘Nga Tama a Rangi’ (The Sons of Heaven) (GNZMMSS 43) (1849), ‘Tupuna’ (Ancestors) (GNZMMSS 44) (1849) ‘Maori Religious Ideas and Observances, Incantations, Legends, Ancient Poems, Proverbs, Genealogies etc’ (GNZMMSS 81) (18 October 1849). Te Rangikāheke’s account of history covers all time, from the evolution of the universe, the origin of man with the separation of primary parents, Rangi-nui (the Sky Father) and Papa-tū-a-nuku (the Earth Mother), the

quarrels of their sons, the deeds of the demi-god, Māui, the migration of the seven canoes from Hawaiki to Aotearoa/New Zealand, the voyage and arrival here of the Arawa canoe, and the spread of Te Arawa tribe from Whangaparaoa to Maketū and the inland lakes. All three manuscripts give extensive genealogies. It is a comprehensive and sequential account, connecting the past to the present and claiming mana (authority) and land for his tribe. Genealogical recital and narrative are the techniques used to recount the events. These manuscripts were the source of most of the prose material in Grey's published works (verbatim in 1853: iii-lxxxii; with considerable alterations in 1854).

'An Address by Te Rangikāheke, a New Zealand chief, to the Inhabitants (imaginary) of Hawaiki' (GNZMMSS 45) is a pivotal short manuscript demonstrating Te Rangikāheke's wish to seek confirmation of the accuracy of his account of history from the ancestors in Hawaiki. He mistakenly believed his account would be taken back by a man he had met in the Governor's office. This address, together with the pagination and other internal evidence in 'Tupuna' and 'Nga Tama a Rangi', indicates that these two manuscripts were really one manuscript intended for the ancestors in Hawaiki. The other, "Maori Religious Ideas...", was an account for Grey. Thus Te Rangikāheke's reason for writing an account of the same subject twice becomes apparent. In her introduction to the translation of this manuscript.

Other manuscripts are concerned with tradition and contemporary history. 'Ko Nga Mahi a Tiki-Tawhito-Ariki' [the Deeds of Tiki-Tawhito-Ariki] (GNZMMSS 79) is the story of the first incest by an ancestor of former times. 'Ancient Poems, Legends, Ceremonies and Services appropriate to nearly all the circumstances of a New Zealander's life' (GNZMMSS 51) includes the stories of two significant ancestors, Manaia and Whakatauihu.

The story of Hinemoa is found in three manuscripts, (GNZMMSS 60, 70, and 118). One of these is GNZMMSS 70, referred to by Cooper (1851:128) and received on Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua, from where Hinemoa's lover, Tūtānekai, swam to court her. The version in GNZMMSS 118 includes the story of the tohunga, Ngā-toro-i-rangi's journey to Tongariro. It is an example of Te Rangikāheke's use of digression and dialogue.

Because he had taken part in the tribal wars of the 1830s and 'knew of them first-hand' Te Rangikāheke agreed to write about them for Grey in two manuscripts (GNZMMSS 87:206). The two are 'A description of the battle of Te Haramiti at Motiti; the history of the wars formerly carried on between the tribes of Tauranga and Rotorua' (GNZMMSS 86), and 'A book describing the

murder of Te Hunga; the history of the wars formerly carried on between the tribes of Rotorua and Waikato' (GNZMMSS 87). Information about Māori warfare and death customs is also given in the latter manuscript.

Other manuscripts tell of Māori-Pākehā relations. In 'Various Writings' (GNZMMSS 98) Te Rangikāheke reflects on the good and evil results of the arrival of the Pākehā in New Zealand and advocates peace, and the acceptance of Christianity and Queen Victoria. Three draft letters to Queen Victoria (GNZMA 732, 724 and 323), written in May, and July 1850, indicate the political purpose he intended in his association with Grey. 'A Dream of Te Rangikāheke' (GNZMMSS 93) (27 August 1850) tells of a dream in which he claims a vision of the future when Māori and Pākehā would fight, each considering the other to be the aggressor. This piece can be considered part of his commentary on Māori-Pākehā relations. Orbell comments on his foresight in fearing for the future in this piece. (Orbell 1968:8).

Marriage customs, leadership qualities, religious observances and an exposition of Māori knowledge are also described. Marriage customs are found in 'The mode of obtaining a wife, all the ceremonies attendant on a marriage, and the religious observances on the birth of a first child' (GNZMMSS 92), the attributes of chieftainship in 'Description of customs, connected with chieftainship, and terms used to express different degrees of relationship' (GNZMMSS 85) and tattooing in 'A minute description of all the ceremonies observed on the occasion of tattooing a chief, and the mode of performing the entire operation' (GNZMMSS 89). In 'Ancient Poems, Legends, Ceremonies and Services appropriate to nearly all the circumstances of a New Zealander's life' (GNZMMSS 51) (25 October 1853) Te Rangikāheke gives his exposition of Māori knowledge, its retention and transmission.

Some thirty pages in eight manuscripts are concerned with language usage. Three of these contain examples of reduplication, passive agreement, and the use of the causative prefix; one refers to the position of post-posed particles; five deal with synonyms, terms and forms of address, two compare Ngā Puhi and Arawa dialects. Grey's writing in two of these manuscripts beside and below Te Rangikāheke's indicates collaboration between the two to supply Grey's translation requirements. An explanation in the Māori language of various proverbial expressions is also given.

'A commentary on Sir George Grey's *Ko Nga Moteatea me Nga Hakirara o Nga Maori*' (GNZMMSS 118), probably dating from before 1854, is an

unusual document, intermingling commentary and explanation. Te Rangikāheke states in a foreword that his purpose is to disclose the meaning and customs within the songs. He proceeds to annotate the first 143 items in Grey (1953), with particular detail about songs from Te Arawa and Waikato. This manuscript also includes a version of the Hinemoa story and Ngatoro-i-rangi's journey, as well as 'Waiata Haka Oriori' [A Lullaby song with dance], which gives facts about Te Rangikāheke's capture on Mokoia Island in 1823.

Te Rangikāheke was acknowledged as a brilliant orator by Māori and Pākehā. He was chosen to speak on important occasions, such as the departure of Grey in 1853, where his charm and liveliness were displayed (Davis 1855:1).

After 1854 Te Rangikāheke wrote little that is retained, apart from letters and speeches. He gave the address to Governor Gore Browne on 9 September 1855, on behalf of the Rotorua chiefs living in Auckland, in which he deplored the system of recalling governors and advised the Governor to make Māori ideas law (MS Papers 75, Folder A, 119C). He became a frequent writer to the Native Office from different addresses, some requesting money and goods, some indicating his opposition to the King Movement, an opposition he maintained throughout his life (e.g. MA 2/37:1857:69, 129, MA 2/39, 1860:855).

Te Rangikāheke remained in Auckland for most of the decade after Grey's departure. He lacked a settled occupation and earlier had expressed his anxiety about his future when writing to Queen Victoria (GNZMA 723, Pt 1:275-6). He left Auckland towards the end of 1860 and returned to Maketū and Rotorua, where he became involved in administrative, tribal, and political affairs. From 1862 at least until 1880, he held several official appointments over a period of more than eighteen years, as clerk of works to the Native Department, as clerk of the circuit court and land purchase agent, and as assessor in the Native Land Court from 1874, (AJHR 1866 D-3:64, 1871, G-10:19, 1875, H-11:37, NZGG 1874:665, 1880:1546).

As tribal leader and a government official Te Rangikāheke played a significant part in the New Zealand wars of the 1860s. Ngāti Rangiwewehi supported the Māori King, with the exception of Te Rangikāheke's hapū (tribal group), Ngāti Kererū. He wrote to Grey on 7 November 1864 about his fear of attack from Waikato and his belief that as the days of Māori power were gone, he considered an alliance with the Queen was more appropriate (GNZMA 75). Te Rangikāheke attended gatherings in the 1870s at all of which he spoke

against the King Movement (e.g. AJHR 1873,G-1B:7-11). His advocacy of road development brought him antipathy from Te Arawa and others (e.g. McDonnell MS Papers 151, Folder 8).

Te Rangikāheke's later marriages were to Tīrangī Repora, the widow of Hataraka (TWM:5/6/1877), to Teranga (NZH 4/2/1896), and possibly also to Kahau (MOK 1:67). The dates of the marriages are not known but would have been after the death of his son in 1869.

He was probably the first Māori to stand for election in a European seat, contesting the East Coast constituency in 1875-76. He advocated land development and road and railway expansion and drew attention to the loyalty of his tribal group to the Queen. At the time only Māori owning land on European title could vote in such seats and hence he polled only ten votes out of a total of 616 votes cast (AJHR 1876, I-2-30).

He was involved as witness or claimant in numerous cases in the Native Land Court between 1867 and 1879 (e.g. ROT 1, MAK 1). The evidence of history and genealogy he gave was extensive and coincides closely with his accounts in the manuscripts, showing as D. M. Stafford notes, "his genuine, or at least superior, knowledge of things Maori" (1967:362). Undoubtedly his activity brought enmity, a number of the claims being highly contentious.

Te Rangikāheke moved from Maketū to Ōhinemutu about 1880 and remained there until about 1890 when he moved to Mokoia Island, where he had cultivations (MOK 2:26). It was from here that he wrote to Grey on 13 April 1893, asking him to intercede with the government to get him a house at Ōhinemutu. He recalled their earlier work together and complained that he had been forgotten by the government. He asked Grey to act speedily because winter, a bad time for his rheumatism, was approaching (GNZMA 766). Apparently Grey, himself now aged, did not help. After falling ill at Mokoia in 1895, Te Rangikāheke was taken to Te Awahou, the marae (tribal meeting ground) of his group (MOK 1:109). He died during the night of 2 February 1896 (ROT 36:104).

His funeral was on an unusually large scale. Archdeacon W. L. Williams gave an address in Māori, and at the conclusion the body was placed in a boat and taken for burial to Ōrangī-kāhu height, about three miles away (HLC 10/2/1896).

Notices of his death and obituaries were published in a number of newspapers, drawing attention to his work with Grey in compiling traditions, to his prominence in political, social and literary matters, to his acquaintance with governors, politicians and civil servants and to his superb oratory. He was described as a many-sided man who was truly great (NZH 4/2/1896, 8/2/1896, AWN15/2/1896).

It is for his accounts of Māori legends, traditions, customs and language that Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke will be remembered. His writing is clear and lively; there are many beautiful comparisons, as well as analogies, digressions and effective use of dialogue. His grammar and style are generally regarded as 'classical Maori'. Through Grey's publications Te Rangikāheke's writings have reached a wide audience. With the return of Grey's library from South Africa to the Auckland Public Library in 1922 it became possible to transcribe the manuscripts as Te Rangikāheke wrote them, to translate them exactly, and to acknowledge their author. A number of important manuscripts have been treated in this way, by Biggs (1952, 1953, 1967, 1970a, 1970b, 1980a, 1980b), Orbell (1968), Agathe Thornton (1992) and by the author (1983, 1990, 1992).

LINKS

[New Zealand Electronic Text Centre](#)

[Translations by Margaret Orbell in Te Ao Hou](#)

[Dictionary of New Zealand Biography](#)

WORKS

Appendices to Sir George Grey's *Ko Nga Moteatea me Nga Hakirara Maori*.
Wellington: Robert Stokes, 1853, pp. xlix-lxxl.

PAPERS

Collections of Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke's manuscripts, written 1846?-54, are held in the Auckland Central City Library (AP). As well, there are copies in many other libraries in New Zealand.

Grey New Zealand Māori Manuscripts (GNZMMSS), (AP):

36 'Examples of Changes in New Zealand Words.

43 'Nga Tama a Rangi' (The Sons of Heaven).

44 'Tupuna' (Ancestors).

45 'An Address to the Inhabitants (Imaginary) of Hawaiki'.

51 'Ancient Poems, Legends, Ceremonies and Services'.

- 79 'The Deeds of Tiki-Tawhito-Ariki'.
- 81 'Maori Religious Ideas and Observances, Genealogies etc.'
- 82 'Various Ancient Maori Poems'.
- 83 'Various Maori words with different forms they assume'.
- 84 'Maori Names to denote Heaven, Winds etc.'
- 85 'Customs connected with Chieftainship, Terms of Relationship'.
- 86 'The Wars between the tribes of Tauranga and Rotorua'.
- 87 'The Wars between the tribes of Rotorua and Waikato'.
- 89 'The Ceremonies observed when tattooing a chief'.
- 92 'The Mode of Obtaining a wife and related ceremonies'.
- 93 'A Dream of Te Rangikaheke'.
- 98 'Various Writings'.
- 106 'Explanation of Various Proverbial Expressions'.
- 114 'Specimens of Ngapuhi dialect'
- 115 'Specimens of Rotorua dialect'.
- 118 'Commentary on Grey's *Ko Nga Moteatea*'.

Also parts of GNZMMS at AP:

- 12 'Table of verbs, and some obscure terms in Poems'.
- 13 'Table of the Ancestors of Tutanekai'.
- 14 'Ancient Poems'.
- 38 'New Zealand Poems and Tales'.
- 42 'New Zealand Songs, *Karakias* (incantations) etc.'
- 60 'The Legend of Hinemoa'.
- 66 'Maori Poems'.
- 69 'Maori Poems'.
- 70 'Ancient Poems and Fragments of Poems'.
- 71 'Ancient Poems written by Maoris'.
- 73 'Ancient Maori Poems'.
- 75 'New Zealand Proverbs'.
- 90 'Various Poems and Traditions'.
- 95 'Ancient Poems'.
- 101 'New Zealand Songs'.
- 102 'Letters Poems and addresses'.
- 119 'First Part of a Maori-English Dictionary'.

Collections of Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikāheke's correspondence are in the Auckland Central City Library (AP) and the Alexander Turnbull Library Wellington (WTU). Correspondence, 1850-93, Grey Maori Letters (GNZMA) AP; exceptions* in WTU in White MS Papers 75.

- 723 Two letters to Queen Victoria, 18 May 1850'.
- 724 'Letter to Queen Victoria, 17 July 1850'.
- 323 'Letter to Queen Victoria, 17 July 1850'.
- 691 'Letter to Grey, 13 May 1851'.

- 682 'Letter to Grey, 13 June 1851'.
 680 'Letter to Grey, undated' [before 1854].
 406 'Letter to Lady Grey, undated' [before 1854].
 Folder A, 119C 'Address to Governor Gore-Brown, 9 September 1855'*.
 Folder 84 'Letter for the Government of New Zealand, 23 July 1857'*.
 70 'Letter to Bishop Selwyn, 3 October 1863'.
 75 'Letter to Grey, 7 November 1864'.
 766 'Letter to Grey, 13 April 1893.

TRANSLATIONS

- Biggs, Bruce G. 'The Deeds of Tiki-Tawhito-Ariki'. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 61 (1952): 183-187.
- . 'He Waiata Haka Oriori'. *Te Ao Hou* 45 (1953): 56-57. Includes transcription of an extract from GNZMMSS 118.
- . 'Ngaa Tama a Rangi'. *Working Papers in Anthropology* 15. Auckland: Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland, 1970a: 1-4. Includes translation of extracts from GNZMMSS 43 as 'The Sons of Heaven'.
- . *Maori Marriage*. Wellington: Reed, 1970b. Includes translation of GNZMMSS 92.
- . 'Ko Maui Tikiti-o-Taranga'. *Paanui 3 o Aakarana*. Auckland: Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland, 1980: 65-73. Includes extracts from GNZMMSS 43.
- . P. Hohepa and S. M. Mead, eds. *Selected Reading in Maori*. Wellington: Reed, 1967. Includes transcription of two parts of GNZMMSS 118 – Hinemoa legend, and information on tattooing.
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- Curnow, Jenifer M. 'Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke: His Life and Work'. M.A. Thesis, University of Auckland 1983. Includes transcriptions and translations of parts of GNZMMSS 43, 44 and 81.
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- . 'A Manuscript about Maori Knowledge, its retention and transmission by Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke'. *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* 8 (1992): 85-96. Includes translation of part of GNZMMSS 51.
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- Thornton, Agathe. *The Story of Māui by Te Rangikaheke*. Christchurch: Department of Maori, University of Canterbury, 1992. Translation of part of GNZMMSS 43.

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———. *Polynesian Mythology*. London: J. Murray, 1855. Translation of *Ko Nga Mahinga a Nga Tupuna Maori*.

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