

# **Polynesia 900–1600**

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# **Polynesia 900–1600**

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## Preface

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Upon first glance, this book may seem like an odd fit—Polynesia and the Middle Ages. Because the Middle Ages are a European phenomenon surely? While this is true, much is lost by limiting our perspective to one continent. Europe is not the natural centre of the world it has been constructed as, not least by historians.

This book therefore attempts to present the views and understandings of the South Polynesians between 900 and 1600 CE. One of the tribes I descend from is one of the first groups to inhabit the northern South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand: *Ko Ngāti Kuia, he iwi Pakohe, he iwi karakia e* (Ngāti Kuia, the tribe of Pakohe [argillite], the tribe of prayer). I also descend from Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Rangitāne o Wairau, and Ngāti Koata, in the northern South Island. It is from my position as an Indigenous woman working in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand that this work emerges.

What follows is intended to provide a short, useful overview of the history of South Polynesia for both the general reader and scholar. It is not intended to be a scientific exercise, which will become clear as the reader progresses through the chapters. Through this work, I aim to give an innovative and unique perspective on South Polynesian history. I hope it encourages the reader to think about regions outside Europe during this period. I also implore the reader to re-evaluate any preconceptions they may have about Polynesia. As one would expect, although the themes and perspec-

tives are different to those of the European Middle Ages, they are no less valid.

Lastly, it must be noted that this is a new and (it is to be hoped) burgeoning field of research. Material artefacts and literary records are thus far limited, and we can perhaps expect new discoveries that upend the timeline for South Polynesian voyaging and settlement. Similarly, given the brevity of this volume, I cannot cover everything, and the bibliography points the reader towards further research into each theme covered.

Kia heke iho rā i ngā tūpuna, kātahi ka tika  
If handed down by the ancestors, then it would  
be correct

## Tāne and the Baskets of Knowledge

Tēnei au te hōkai nei o taku tapuwae | This is  
 the journey of sacred footsteps  
 Ko te hōkai nuku ko te hōkai rangi | Journeyed  
 about the earth journeyed about the heavens  
 Ko te hōkai a tō tupuna a Tānenui-a-rangi | The  
 journey of the ancestral god Tānenuiarangi  
 Ka pikitia ai ki te rangi tūhāhā ki te Ti  
 hi-o-Manono | Who ascended into the heav-  
 ens to Te Tihi-o-Manano  
 Ka rokohina atu rā ko Te Matu-kore anake |  
 Where he found the parentless source  
 Ka tīkina mai ngā kete o te wānanga | From  
 there he retrieved the baskets of knowledge  
 Te kete-tuauri  
 Te kete-tuatea  
 Te kete-aronui  
 Ka tiritiria ka poupoua | These were distributed  
 and implanted about the earth  
 Ka puta mai iho ko te ira tangata | From which  
 came human life  
 Ki te wheiao ki te ao mārama | Growing from  
 dim light to full light  
 Tihei-mauri ora! | There was life.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Author unknown, *iwi* (tribe) unknown. “Ranginui—the sky—  
 Ranginui as knowledge and life,” *Te Ara—The Encyclopedia of New  
 Zealand*, [www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/ranginui-the-sky/page-2](http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/ranginui-the-sky/page-2).