

KUPE THE NAVIGATOR, IS SOMETIMES SEEN AS THE FIRST POLYNESIAN TO SETTLE IN AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND), PERHAPS IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY. BUT HIS STORY IS ACTUALLY MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN A MYTH OR HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT. IT HELPS TO MAKE THE PAST USABLE FOR MĀORI PEOPLE TODAY.

THE MĀORI PEOPLE OF AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND) SOMETIMES TALK ABOUT THE PAST THROUGH STORIES OF HEROES, SUCH AS THE GREAT NAVIGATOR KUPE.

"Kupe was skilled at building carved houses, adzing out canoes, and other crafts of the land. He was also a skilled seaman who would cause fish to turn their path to the places where he wanted them, and he could also catch the bird called albatross. Kupe could seize and secure it."*

*AS WRITTEN DOWN BY HIMIONA KAAMIRA

WHEN EUROPEANS LISTENED TO THE MĀORI TELLING THIS STORY, THEY INTERPRETED IT AS EITHER A MYTH (OR FOLKTALE) OR A HISTORY, IN THEIR OWN SENSE OF THE WORD. THAT IS, THEY EITHER TRIED TO UNDERSTAND THE STORY AS LITERATURE, OR THEY TRIED TO ATTACH DATES AND PRECISE ROUTES TO IT.

In many tellings Kupe came from the Polynesian homeland, Hawaiki, where there was a problem: All of the fish were disappearing.

Kupe discovered the fish were being driven away by an octopus that belonged to his rival Maturangi. Kupe resolved to kill the octopus.

He chased it so far that he eventually reached an uninhabited land that his wife Kuramārōtini named Aotearoa - "land of the long white cloud."

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!KUPE! historic or mythical figure?

EUROPEANS UNDERSTAND THIS STORY AS EITHER A MYTH OR A HISTORY. HOW DO THE MĀORI UNDERSTAND IT?

THE KUPE NARRATIVE IS A USABLE PAST-LIKE THIS COURSE!

BECAUSE FEATURES OF THE LANDSCAPE ARE SAID TO BE RELATED TO KUPE, THE STORY ALSO GIVES THE MĀORI A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE LAND.

FINALLY, THE STORY HELPS EACH MĀORI COMMUNITY UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES AS PART OF A WIDER MĀORI-AND EVEN POLYNESIAN-COMMUNITY.

FIRST, THE KUPE STORY HELPS MĀORI COMMUNITIES GET A SENSE OF BELONGING TO A HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENT-SUCH AS DEVELOPING THE SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGY TO CROSS THE WORLD'S LARGEST OCEAN.

THESE BOULDERS AT MOERAKI ARE SAID BY SOME TO BE CARGO FROM KUPE'S CANOE.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PAST, TO THEIR LAND, AND TO EACH OTHER, THE STORY OF KUPE IS ABOUT AS USABLE A PAST AS YOU CAN FIND!