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Forgotten Taonga Māori in Russia: The 1820 Visit of the Bellingshausen- Lazarev Expedition to Queen Charlotte Sound

We should treasure the fact, and glory in the fact that despite all the trauma and experience of Europe and Russia, in particular that these treasures, from this little place, collected here by this remarkable sailor, scholar, voyager, geographer, scientist Bellingshausen should have survived and have been kept and treasured in that remote place.

Sir Tipene O'Regan¹

Russia is a country of extensive and unique collections of all kinds from the Pacific. Over many centuries Russian travellers, explorers and avid private collectors were bringing and exchanging rarities and antiques. The stunning cultural treasures, taonga Māori, preserved and kept on the vast Russian territory are of ultimate importance and enduring value to the world, and especially to New Zealanders as they bear sacred significance and are considered to be ancestors.

This article opens the discussion of the urgent need to thoroughly record and study Māori heritage in Russia. It reflects on a particular collection from Queen Charlotte Sound in the South Island of New Zealand brought to Russia by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition two centuries ago. The

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study also provides a description of previously unstudied taonga in Russia recently attributed to this expedition.

On 29 January 2020 by the decision of the Special Expert Commission of the Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg several ethnographic artefacts, including some Polynesian exhibits of the early 19th century, were included into the main fund of the Museum collection².

These artefacts were transferred to the Russian Museum of Ethnography from the Russian Imperial collection held in the Arsenal Museum in Tsarskoye Selo in Saint Petersburg back in 1907 but only now have they gained attention of the Russian museum experts. They have survived the chaos and destruction of WW1, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War of 1918-1920, the bombings and Siege of Leningrad during WW2, the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Expert Commission established not only the names and the countries of origin of these long-kept treasures but also the fact that these unique artefacts were brought to Russia by Russian explorers during their expedition of 1819-1821 to the South Seas under the command of Faddej Bellingshausen¹ and Mikhail Lazarev (Fig.1).

These recently-attributed exhibits include a *pare* (a wooden carved door lintel), previously neither studied nor mentioned as a part of the Māori collection brought to Russia by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition.

It is hardly a coincidence that the attribution results were confirmed almost on the day when 200 years ago, on 28 January 1820 (New Style) the same Russian expedition

¹ Full original name in English language sources: Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen. The author of this article decided to follow the Russian tradition of spelling Bellingshausen's name and the names of other Russian explorers as these are the names they are using in their reports and by which they are known in Russia.

became the first official expedition to sight part of the Antarctic continent (now called the Fimbul Ice Shelf).³



Fig. 1. Captain Bellingshausen (left) and Captain Lazarev (right), stamps released by JSC “Marka” and JSC “Eesti Post” in 2020 and dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica. Artist Ivan Ulyanovskiy.

Source: Public Domain,

<https://www.rgo.ru/en/article/russia-and-estonia-cooperate-release-postal-stationery-dedicated-200th-anniversary>

The authentic Russian accounts about their South Seas journey have international historical value. Currently six written accounts of this expedition are known, namely those of Captain Bellingshausen, Captain Lazarev, astronomer Simonov, surgeon Galkin, midshipman Novosilskii and leading seaman Kisilev. The Russian collections also include drawings and sketches of the people and places visited by the expedition made by the onboard artist Mikhailov of the Russian Academy of Art.

We cannot exclude the fact that there could be more original unpublished primary sources about the expedition on the territory of the former Russian Empire. After all, all officers (and perhaps literate sailors and an Orthodox priest) on board the vessels had instructions to record their everyday adventures. For instance, the manuscript diary of the above-

mentioned leading seaman Yegor Kisilev was found in a pile of old books in the Russian provincial town of Suzdal in the 1930s, almost 125 years after the expedition returned to Russia⁴.

For the heritage of New Zealand, the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition is of critical importance due to the fact that it was the only European expedition of the early 19th century that interacted with the Māori of the South, and not of the North Island. Russian explorers left written and artistic evidence of their interaction with Māori, which provide unique perspectives on the life, culture and character of the Māori, as well as the flora and fauna of the Tōtaranui region (Queen Charlotte Sound) in 1820.

Previous Research on the Subject

The subject of taonga Māori in Russia remains poorly researched for a number of reasons, including historical and political circumstances, geographical distances, language and culture barriers, professional challenges and funding matters. Despite all of the above, some attempts to study this ethnographic collection have been previously made.

In 1907 the New Zealand historian Robert McNab made reference to the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition in his book *Murihiku and the Southern Islands: a history of the West Coast Sounds, Foveaux Strait, Stewart Island, the Snares, Bounty, Antipodes, Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie Islands, from 1770 to 1829*⁵.

In 1909 McNab published the translated New Zealand section of Bellingshausen's journal in *Murihiku: A History of the South Island of New Zealand and the Islands Adjacent and Lying to the South, from 1642 to 1835*.⁶ His English translation is made mainly from an existing German translation of a Russian text and is not fully accurate:

‘Copies of Bellingshausen's work in Russian are very rare. The author has only had an opportunity of examining one, in the

British Museum, and he is not aware of any in Australasia. In 1904, in Germany, there was published an abridged translation of the original Russian, and this work can be readily procured to-day. No English translation has been made and the references to Bellingshausen in English books are exceedingly few and very meagre in detail'.⁷

Although McNab did not give any details about taonga Māori in Russia, his publication must have sparked some curiosity in the New Zealand intellectual circles. On 27 May 1910 Bernard Quaritch, a famous London book dealer and collector, wrote to Alexander Turnbull Library:

'With regard to Bellingshausen's Voyage, Russian original edition, I have been on the look out since you first asked for this work, a correspondent in Russia informs me that it is extremely scarce. I will make repeated enquiries and let you know if I can secure a copy'.⁸

He was never able to get a copy.

Taonga Māori collected by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition gained more academic interest in the West in the second half of the 20th century, often as a by-subject about the dispute on the discovery of Antarctica and subsequent territorial claims there. The study of the collection and the primary sources located in then-Soviet Russia by non-Russians was also problematic for political reasons, including the viewing of Russian history through the prism of the Cold War.

One of the first notable works devoted entirely to the topic of the Russian visit of 1820 to New Zealand is the book by the Canadian historian Glynn Barratt *Bellingshausen, a visit to New Zealand, 1820*⁹ (1979). Barratt's book is based on his articles in the *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*; it summarizes the background information of the expedition, and provides some biographical data on its main participants. Barratt also made some selective translation from Russian into English of the written evidence compiled by several Russian participants of the expedition about their interaction with the Tōtaranui

Māori in May-June 1820. The translation contains some discrepancies and, in the view of this author, would benefit from some revision to ensure exactitude of understanding of the Russian records and observations². The technological capabilities of the 1970s allowed only a few low-quality black-and-white photographs of the taonga collected. There is a brief analysis of some items and groups of items in *Appendix D* of the book prepared by D. R. Simmons, ethnologist of Auckland Museum.

In 1981 the *Auckland War Memorial Museum* published an article by D.R. Simmons *Stability and change in the materials culture of Queen Charlotte Sound in the 18th century*¹⁰ in which the author describes the items collected on the voyages of Captain James Cook and by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition ‘to establish the Māori material culture of the region and the changes occurred in that material culture’. Such comparison allows, perhaps, the drawing of some conclusions about the development of the Tōtaranui Māori and their taonga, as well as the preferences of the Russian explorers for barter. However, many of the items mentioned in the Russian records cannot be now located in the Russian museum collections, and, thus, the analysis may not be fully correct. Besides, in the light of the recent attribution of a *pare* the taonga list in the above-mentioned works is incomplete.

In 1987 Professor Barratt together with a group of scientists made another critical contribution to the development of the research of taonga Māori in Russia. The book *Queen Charlotte Sound: The Traditional and European Records 1820*¹¹ published under his editorship not only lists the items included in the 1820 collection in Russia but also briefly

² For instance, ‘*корольки*’ (‘assay (metal) buttons’) in the context of the Russian barter with the Māori are translated incorrectly as ‘*strings of coral*’. Another example is that ‘*наши кабинеты редкостей*’ (‘our cabinets of curiosities’) is generalised as ‘*our store of rarities*’, however, such interpretation loses the original meaning that not everything bartered with the Māori became part of the expedition’s collective store. Some items were kept by the crew as their personal collections. Barratt’s translations in this article are revised by the author of this research, a professional Russian-English translator.

names the artifacts mentioned by the Russian eyewitnesses in their accounts.

A further contribution by Professor Barratt is *Volume 2 of Russia and the South Pacific 1696-1840, Southern and Eastern Polynesia*¹² (1988). In addition to his previous research, Professor Barratt presents more data on early Russian knowledge about New Zealand and provides a more detailed physical description of that part of the Russian collection that was known in the 1980s. However, no connection with the Māori folklore, beliefs or values was made.

In 1994 an article *From Russia with Respect*¹³ by Gerard Hindmarsh was published in *New Zealand Geographic*. In his article the journalist spoke in a positive light about the Russian visit to New Zealand in 1820. Hindmarsh's text is a magazine article aimed at a general audience. It contains valuable commentary by Māori experts, such as Sir Tipene O'Regan. Another positive addition is several colour photographs of taonga Māori held in museums in Saint Petersburg and Kazan.

The book *Te Tau Ihu O Te Waka, Volume 1* by Hilary and John Mitchell (2004) is a selection of stories on Nelson and Marlborough regional history and culture. The Russian visit is presented as a part of the *Official Explorers After Cook* chapter and mainly in the form of the abstracts from the Russian accounts previously translated by Barratt. These descriptions are interconnected by brief commentaries. Despite some imprecisions in the story of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition, it is told in the cultural context and the effort should be commended.¹⁴

In 2011 a documentary *'The Russians Are Coming'*¹⁵ was filmed by *Tawera Productions* and screened on Māori TV and at Australia's Message Stick Festival (Fig 2.). The author of this article contributed to the idea and preparation of the visit to Russia by Moana Maniapoto and her crew. The Russian actors based in Auckland reenacted some scenes of the Māori-Russian interaction as per the Russian diaries. Although the

film makers could not provide detailed analysis of the artefacts they visited, that was an emotional story with most valuable commentary from Sir Tipene O'Regan.



Fig. 2. Moana Maniapoto visiting the taonga Maori in Russia in 2011.

Source: *The Russians Are Coming*, by Tawera Productions,

<https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/the-russians-are-coming-2011>

In the Soviet Union and Russia, in addition to the museum catalogues, the question of the taonga brought by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition has received even less attention. Although the existing records of the Russian witnesses and their biographies have been published with some detailed commentaries, the Soviet and Russian researchers strategically concentrated on systematization of knowledge related to the discovery of Antarctica. Therefore, most of these publications only indirectly relate to the research of the taonga in Russia.

Given the Stalinism and the Cold War context, it is understandable that Soviet anthropologists and ethnographers often worked in scientific isolation from their counterparts outside the USSR, and mainly with Soviet and other museum collections and catalogues rather than in active collaboration with their foreign counterparts. Their classifications and conclusions sometimes carry serious discrepancies. That said,

the works of N. A. Butinov and L. G. Rozina on the Māori culture and Māori collections in the former Soviet Union¹⁶ and of V. R. Kabo and N. M. Bondarev on the Oceanic collection brought by Professor Simonov¹⁷ undoubtedly are important contributions and should be taken into account by modern researchers.

In 2012, a book with illustrations of the only onboard artist Pavel Mikhailov was published. It contains some sketches and drawings made by Mikhailov during his stay in Queen Charlotte Sound in 1820¹⁸.

Background Information

It is not possible to appreciate in full the significance of the taonga Māori collected by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition in 1820 without knowing its background information.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries the Russian Empire was in possession of the third most powerful fleet in the world, and was exceeded in the number of vessels only by the fleets of Great Britain and France.

The Russian Emperor Alexander I (1777-1825, ruler from 1801-1825), Catherine the Great's favourite grandson, actively supported explorations of the Russians in the Pacific (Fig.3).

In 1803-1806 the first Russian global circumnavigation was undertaken by two sailing sloops, *Nadezhda* and *Neva*, under the command of Ivan Krusenstern and Yuri Lisiansky. The expedition collected invaluable information and material around the globe and made several discoveries in the Pacific, as well as connecting by sea Russian America and closing the last undiscovered areas in its Northern part.



Fig. 3. The Portrait of Emperor Alexander I. by S.S. Shchukin. Early 1800s.
Source: Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, via Google Cultural Institute

It was during the second Russian circumnavigation under the command of Vasily Golovnin on the sloop *Diana* (1807-1809) that Russians for the first time recorded an interaction with Māori. This came about in 1808 when Golovnin and his *Diana* crew while being forcefully detained by the British at Cape Town met Chief Te-Pahi's son, the eighteen-year old Matara, of

the Ngāpuhi tribe. ‘*His Zealand Highness*’¹⁹, as Golovnin called him, had spent the whole year in Great Britain and was returning to New Zealand. Matara was invited by Golovnin aboard the *Diana* for dinner and a discussion. According to Golovnin’s publication the young Māori proved easy-going and intelligent and helped to adjust some facts, maps and drawings concerning the Māori people which the Russians had on board *Diana*.

After Russia’s legendary victory over Napoleon in 1812, Alexander I became the head of the anti-French coalition of European powers. He used scientific, cultural and military opportunities to strengthen the growing success of the Russian Empire. His era marks the beginning of the Golden Age of the greatest Russian literature and art. During his times Russian classicism was transformed into Russian romantic patriotism where ‘facepowder could not have competed with gun powder!’³

A further five Russian circumnavigations built on the success of Alexander I and led to Russian discoveries and studies of a large number of islands in the Pacific. The circumnavigations were by Mikhail Lazarev on the *Suvorov* (1813-1816), Otto von Kotzebue on the *Rurik* (1815-1818), Leontij Hagemester on the *Kutuzov* (1816-1819), Zakhar Ponaftidin on the *Suvorov* (1816-1818) and Vasily Golovnin on the *Kamchatka* (1817-1819).

In fact, the Russians became so active and so successful in the Pacific aquatorium that the British became alarmed. Sir John Barrow, Secretary of the Admiralty Board, in 1817 warned the House of Commons of possible Russian domination of the seas and demanded that Britannia, ‘*the Ruler of the Waves*’, take a more active stance:

‘it would be somewhat mortifying if a naval power of but yesterday were to complete a discovery in the 19th Century which was so happily commenced by Englishmen in the 16th’.²⁰

³ ‘*Facepowder cannot compete with gunpowder!*’, is generally believed to have been said by the Russian Generalissimos Alexander Suvorov (1730-1800)

Sir John Barrow had plenty of grounds for his frustration. On 24 June 1819 the future Queen Victoria was christened privately by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Kensington Palace. She was baptised as 'Alexandrina' after her godfather, Emperor Alexander I of Russia. The second name 'Victoria' after her mother was added at the very last minute and was not used until she became the Queen of England. At the christening ceremony Alexander I was represented in proxy by the Duke of York as he had to be in Saint Petersburg: as it happened, the Russian Tsar was making his official royal inspection of four sloops for two newly-arranged expeditions.

A couple of weeks after this inspection, in July 1819, these Russian circumnavigation expeditions simultaneously left Kronstadt port with the blessing of Alexander I. In so doing they expanded the renown of the Russian Empire on the then world stage, while further arousing the mounting concerns of the British about a Russian challenge to Britannia's oceanic supremacy.

The first of the two '*squadrons*', as the expeditions were known, was that under the command of Mikhail Vasiliev on the *Otkrytie (Discovery)* and Gleb Shishmarev on the *Blagonamerennyi (Good Intent)*. Their mission was to complete discoveries in the Bering Strait and of unknown lands of the Russian Far East.

Their sister-expedition was that under the command of Bellingshausen on the *Vostok (East)* a sloop of 900 tonnes and Lazarev on the *Mirnyi (Peaceful)*, of 530 tonnes. The announced purpose of this expedition was researching the Southern Polar region further southwards than Captain Cook, who had written, half a century before:

I can be bold to say, that no man will ever venture farther than I have done and that the lands which may lie to the South will never be explored'.²¹



Fig. 4. Southern lights. Sloops 'Vostok' and 'Mirnyi' in the South Pole. Drawing by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: Public Domain

The fact that the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition reached the shores of Antarctica very often overshadows other significant 'acquisitions' made by the Russian explorers on this journey (Fig.4). During the expedition its participants discovered and mapped several islands, including those in the Pacific Ocean, visited Australia, Tahiti and Fiji Islands little known by Europeans.

Despite the fact that the expedition of two sloops was assembled in a very short period of time, and, had only one scientist onboard⁴, the explorers carried out detailed hydrographic studies and astronomical observations, and acquired extensive natural scientific and ethnographic collections.

⁴ Astronomer Simonov had to collect and explain all natural matters during the expedition as two hired German scientists - Franz Karl Mertens and Gustav Kunze - did not turn up at the designated port of Copenhagen in mid-June 1819 as agreed to join the expedition.

A Note on the Ethical Aspect of the Collection

The debate about the morality of ethnographic collections usually accompanies studies of the early Pacific collections by Europeans. None of the Russian accounts of the early Pacific explorations suggest that Russians took the liberties taken by the French crew of Dumont D'Urville six years after the Russians visited in New Zealand when:

'The sailors, prowling about, discovered some abandoned huts from which they carried off various objects used by the natives'.²²

Moreover, these ethnographic objects were collected by the Russians in a friendly environment as it was recorded in the primary sources. The following *Instructions* were given by the Russian Emperor Alexander 1 to Bellingshausen via the Minister of the Navy I.I. de Traverse just before his expedition's departure:

'The sovereign also commands in all the lands to which they will reach, and in which the inhabitants will be, to treat them with the greatest affection and humanity, avoiding as much as possible all cases of causing offenses or displeasures, but on the contrary, trying to attract them in every way with caress and not ever come to strict measures unless in necessary cases, when the salvation of the people entrusted to his superiors will depend on this'.²³

In his personal note to *the Instructions* the Russian Minister of the Navy added:

'In all places where you will land, you should try to find out: the customs of peoples, their customs, religion, military tools, the type of vessels used by them, and the products that are available, also regarding natural history and other; it's equally important to find out people of what nations visit the native tribes, whom they love more, and other details regarding trade, barter and benefits thereof'.²⁴

The expedition was well prepared for barter and gifts. As Bellingshausen noted:

In order to induce natives to treat us amicably, and to allow us to obtain from them through barter fresh provisions and various home-made articles, we had been supplied at Saint Petersburg with such items as were calculated to please peoples in almost primitive state of culture'.²⁵

Both sloops *Vostok* and *Mirnyi* carried the biggest dry cargo in the Russian naval history to that point. Apart from food and various amenities for the crew, their cargoes contained sixty-two varieties of trade goods, including 522 miscellaneous knives, 20 saws, 100 axes, 50 scissors, 300 steel flints, 185 bells and whistles, 12 dozen old buttons, 125 gimlets, 100 rasps, and dozens of other metal tools, 5000 needles, 1000 wax candles, 1000 mirrors, 120 glasses, 24 kaleidoscopes, 100 pounds of seeds of plants and flowers, and 218 arshins⁵ of rolls of red flannelette, as well as more lengths of various other fabrics.

Also, in the case of new discoveries of any islands and other still unknown shores, and in memory of the Russian expedition, the expedition was instructed to present silver medals to the chiefs of previously unknown lands, and bronze medals to the chiefs of others. These medals were specially minted at the Saint Petersburg Mint. On one side there was an image of Emperor Alexander I, and on the obverse, there was an inscription: "*the sloops 'Vostok' and 'Mirnyi', 1819*", that is, the time when these sloops set off on their circumnavigation.

The Authenticity of the Russian Visit to New Zealand

What makes this Russian interaction with the Māori of Tōtaranui even more authentic and unique is that the Russians had not planned to come to New Zealand in 1820. The visit was an accident, the result of a storm which blew the expedition's vessels towards New Zealand where they were able to find as safe haven as identified by Captain Cook (Fig. 5).

⁵ Arshin (plural arshins) is an obsolete Russian length unit, equal to 71.12 centimeters.

The Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition focused its efforts on trying to get further south than Cook. The vessels twice tried to break through the ice in the Southern latitudes. Upon return from the expedition, in a letter of 24 September 1821 (Old Style) Captain Lazarev wrote to his friend Alexei Shestakov:

‘Cook challenged us to such extent that we were forced to be exposed to the greatest dangers, so that, as they say, we would leave good accounts of ourselves’,²⁶

The Russians spent their first season in the icy waters of the South Pole from December 1819 till March 1820 and as we now know from their mapping the explorers were able to reach the shores of the Antarctic continent.

After 130 days of their Antarctic sailing severe snowstorms and winds badly damaged both sloops to the extent that *‘it was very unpleasant to see the movement of the parts of the sloop and hear how they cracked’*.²⁷

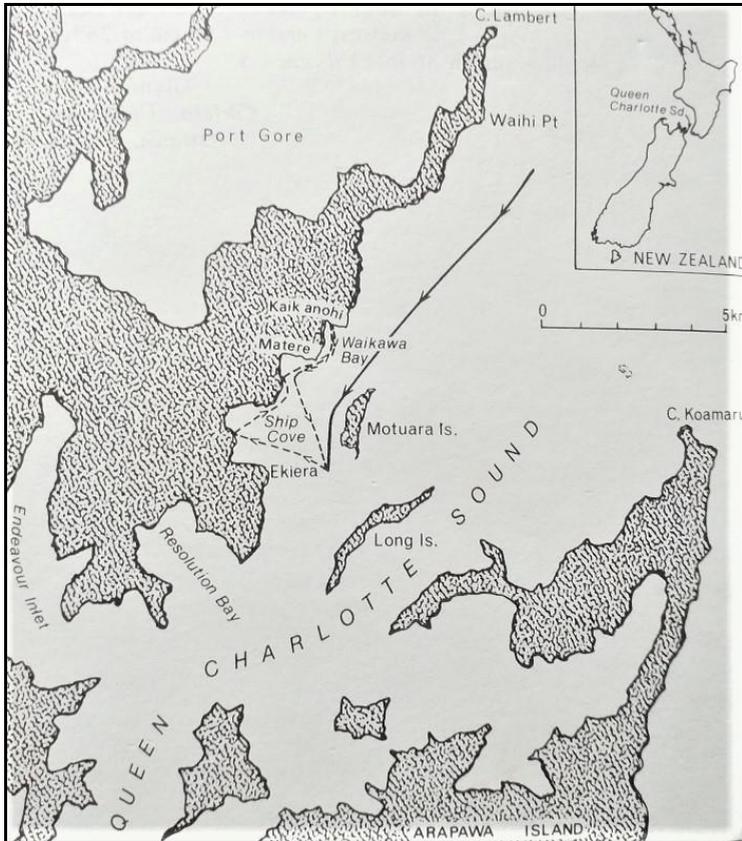


Fig. 5. The Russian expedition in Queen Charlotte Sound in May-June 1820.
 Source: Glynn Barratt, *Bellingshausen, a visit to New Zealand, 1820*, 1979; ISBN 0908564333

In March 1820 the expedition left Antarctic waters for the first time in order to take a well-deserved break in a warmer climate, to repair the sloops and replenish their food stocks, and conduct further research in the southern tropical Pacific Ocean. During their 40 day stay in Sydney (then Port Jackson) Bellingshausen met with the local governor Lachlan Macquarie, who had visited Russia back in 1807. The Governor recorded this meeting in his diary:

Tuesday 11. Apr. 1820

This forenoon anchored in Port Jackson, His Russian Imperial Majesty's Ship of War *Wostok*, [Vostok] Commanded by Capt. Billinghamen, [sic] employed on a Voyage of Discovery to the South Pole. — Capt. Billinghamen waited on me soon after the Ship came to anchor, and afterwards Saluted the British Flag with 15 Guns, which was returned with an equal number from our Battery'.²⁸

In the hope of making new discoveries Lazarev's smaller and slower sloop, *Mirnyi*, was following another route. Badly damaged in storms it arrived at Port Jackson about a week after the *Vostok*.

Following a month of capital repairs and rest in Australia (then New Holland) the Russians turned their sloops back in the direction of Antarctica. The visit to New Zealand was not planned, but after leaving Port Jackson the sloops were caught in a bad storm which drove them across the Tasman, and Cook's charts led them to Cook Strait to shelter and repair in Queen Charlotte sound.

The Māori-Russian Encounter in 1820. Arrival of the Taonga to Russia

For ten days, from the end of May to the beginning of June 1820, the sloops were anchored in the Sound. They then sailed away, never to return to New Zealand. The first encounter between Russians and Māori in New Zealand was recorded as follows:

'We had hardly let go anchor before two craft filled with natives came out from the shore and approached us... the first craft having come near our sloop, one individual, probably the senior man among the natives present, stood up and began to address us in a singsong voice... we let out our white handkerchiefs in order to make our amicable disposition clear to him... at first only the aforementioned elder would come on board. He shook our hands by way of greeting... the captain

gave him a small mirror, a small pocket knife, and some beads. The New Zealand elder was delighted with his presents'.²⁹

'They had with them in their craft no weapon of any kind which perhaps was indicative of their complete trust of us'.³⁰

While the chief was having a glass of rum the Russians looked up the local word for fish in '*Captain Cook's Voyage*' they had onboard in Russian translation. They founded that it was *ika*. According to the Russians the locals immediately understood them and were excited that the visitors tried to speak their language. Several dozens of kilogrammes of various fresh fish, known and unknown to the Russians, and crabmeat very soon were traded for Russian goods.

The Russians interacted with the locals with sincere interest which is reflected in their commentaries on various aspects of Māori life including Te Reo, the Māori way of life, the status of women, the nature of clothing, the type of dwellings, musical instruments and even the haka:

'We saw the fire of intellect in their eyes and martial pride in their bearing'.³¹

'The New Zealanders love to laugh and joke, and can imitate Europeans most amusingly. They are energetic, steady in their pursuits, and they possess mechanical skills. They also understand trade'.³²

The Russian explorers tried to follow the Māori traditions they learnt about through their observations by reciprocating with demonstrations of traditional Russian hospitality and respect (Fig.6):

The next day I received the chief with all the courtesy of the South Sea, embraced him and by touching noses, so to speak confirmed our mutual amity which we preserved on both sides for as long as the sloops remained in Queen Charlotte Sound'.³³

The captain sat him (*the chief*) at table in the place of honour between himself and M. P. Lazarev... as a proof of his disposition, made a present of a beautifully polished axe to

him, as the Chief. Receiving this precious object, he exclaimed: 'Toki! Toki!' And his face expressed his joy.³⁴

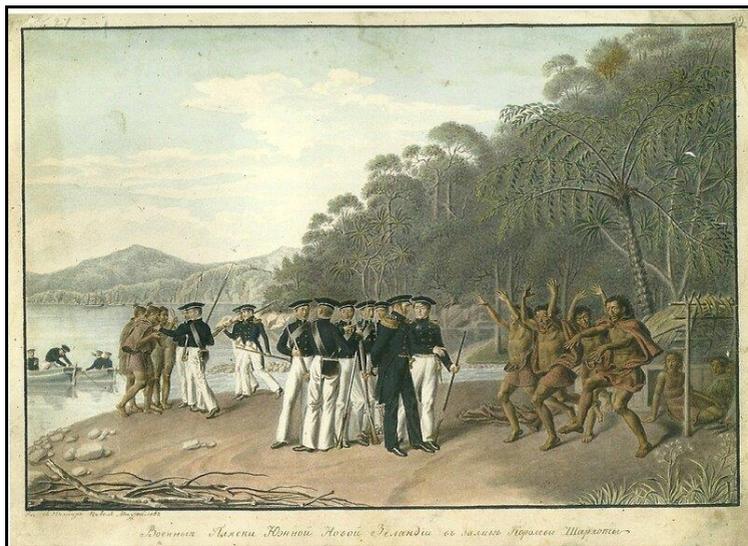


Fig. 6. 'Military dances of South New Zealand in the Queen Charlotte Sound on May 30, 1820'. Drawing by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository

During ten days of their stay the Russians daily met with the Māori (Fig.7):

'Sometimes, making merry, they would give us the pleasure of watching their dances and listening to their songs. For this, about 15 men would stand in a single line. One of them, stamping his foot, would begin to sing. In mid-verse there would suddenly be a common, quite quick and wild shout, then they would lift their arms up, extend them, and let them fall, while strongly stamping their feet, distorting their whole bodies and making fierce faces. They would finish this song by going down on one knee and making a hellish, lingering laugh. Our sailors learnt to imitate them very well indeed, and on our sloop at the South Pole where the daily dangers depressed the

spirit, they would occasionally cheer everybody up with their imitation.³⁵

The Zealanders at once undertook to help our seamen, and shouted in time. When a cord that they were pulling happened to part, they fell down and laughed loudly. Then they began to dance. All stood in a long row in pairs, hopped from one foot to the other, and chanted loudly:

Gina reko,
Gina reko!
Tovi gide
Ney ropo!³⁶



Fig. 7. 'Military dances of South New Zealand in the Queen Charlotte Sound on May 30, 1820'. (Two front Russian officers are the captains Bellingshausen and Lazarev). Sketch fragment by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: The State Russian Museum, <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/>

'...we entered the village. The old chief whom we knew came out to meet us. He received us in the friendliest manner, greeted us by touching noses, and led us towards his house...Its exterior looked like a Russian *izba* (traditional Russian countryside log dwelling – OS, Fig.8)'.³⁷



Fig. 8. A traditional rural carved Russian house

Source: www.reznoe.ru

The trade, or barter was well organised and must have been an exciting and pleasant experience for both parties:

'In Cook's time, the New Zealanders had preferred bottles and shirts to many other things; but now they would not give even a simple fish hook and line for the former. But nails delighted them, for each individual was incessantly offering, for them, shells, fishing tackle, basalt axes, etc... When it appeared that they had nothing left to barter, we showed our knives. In their joy, they started to jump and shout... one after the other, the natives took out, from under their clothing, things made of green stone and shell of superior make'.³⁸

Such team spirit and the chief's fair attitude towards his own people were indeed noted by the Russians. Similar values must have made the communication easier. For both captains the physical and mental health of their crew was a priority. Commander Bellingshausen abolished all corporal punishment on board, an unheard precedent in the naval

history of the time. The crew was made of volunteers only and paid very high remuneration two years in advance so their families could carry on should their breadwinners not return from their inherently dangerous and lengthy journey.



Fig. 9. South New Zealanders, 1820. Drawings by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: The State Russian Museum, <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/>

Moreover, the crews experienced no serious cases of scurvy due to the extracts of various Russian berries and the chicken broth cubes³⁹ that were provided in their rations. The expedition's concern for the welfare of its sailors can be contrasted with the experience of other European expeditions. For example, there was sad experience of de Surville's expedition when the French rowed boatloads of sick and trembling scurvy sufferers including their slaves, to the shore to the complete shock of the local Māori⁴⁰.

Describing the exchange between the Russians and their Māori guests, the expedition's account records:

'Our honoured guests were being entertained with coffee while this haggling proceeded. They liked it very well. The chief even requested a second cup. Finally, the bartering came to an end, and the chief sat his people down and divided up among them the biscuit that he had obtained from us'.⁴¹

After the trade and coffee, the Russians continued entertaining their new friends and '*invited the ship's flautist to play the flute while a drummer beat a drum*'.⁴²

The locals repaid Russian hospitality by striking up a song. As a sign of respect and friendship and to let others know of their presence the Russians fired a few rockets and shots into the night sky as their guests departed.

I gave my friend the Chief and other elders the seeds of various plants that might be of use to them: turnips, swedes, carrots, pumpkins, broad beans, and peas; I showed, and to the extent I was able, explained to them how to plant these seeds. The natives understood me well, were well pleased, and promised to plant the seeds in their plots'.⁴³



Fig. 10. Russian officers are trading with the Maori, 1820. Sketch fragment by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: The State Russian Museum, <http://en.rusmuseum.ru/>

Ten days later Bellingshausen and Lazarev ordered the anchors weighed. The locals were on the *Vostok* for the last time:

‘Both by words and signs, their Chief expressed his sincere regret on seeing our preparations for a prompt departure’.⁴⁴

‘He expressed unfeigned regret and all the natives there asked us to return to them... The Chief embraced me and said farewell sadly repeating the words ‘E! E! E!’⁴⁵

One of the young men wanted to go on a journey with the Russians but ‘*all the others entreated and prevailed upon him to remain with them and to return to the shore*’.⁴⁶

Bellingshausen left the decision to him.

The Russians treated the Māori with due respect and honour and behaved as true ‘*ambassadors of the great nation*’, as Alexander I nominated them in his blessing speech thinking about the reputation of their country. Here is one of the advanced thoughts of Captain Bellingshausen, his record made on 31 May 1820 (Old Style) in New Zealand:

‘I wanted to collect some seed of the New Zealand flax in order to attempt to grow it on the southern shore of the Crimea, where there is a similar soil and climate. I hoped thereby both the natives of this region and my Fatherland would benefit from that’.⁴⁷

Artist Mikhailov made several sketches and drawings during the visit: views of the islands and settlements, wildlife, portraits of the locals and even of the performance of the haka. The records of the expedition show that Mikhailov used to present some of his sketches to those who had posed for him (Fig.9).

For the Russian part, the interaction with the Māori was most effective thanks to a number of factors including the good character and previous extensive experience in the Pacific of both captains; also the Russian knowledge acquired when dealing with the tribes of the Arctic circle, Siberia, Far East, the Caucasus and other parts of the growing Russian Empire; studies of the accounts of Russian previous round-the-world expeditions, and of other European explorers translated into Russian. A meeting in London at the very start of the expedition with Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society, who took part in Captain James Cook's first great voyage (1768–1771), certainly contributed to such success.

As a result of this friendly Māori-Russian encounter it was possible to exchange the Russian goods for Māori weapons, jade and bone items, caskets, linen samples and other artefacts (Fig. 10). The Bellingshausen-Lazarev collection of taonga became the backbone of the general collection of Māori artefacts in Russia through until the present day⁴⁸.

The return of the expedition was triumphant. At dawn on 24 July 1821 (Old Style) after over two years of journey the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition saluted Kronstadt. Crowds of curious people of all ages and ranks from Saint Petersburg and other parts of the Russian Empire gathered at the busy port. The Russian writer Pushkin, a contemporary of the expedition, described another event but it could be easily applied to the crowd greetings of the Russian expedition: *'Their enthusiasm was truly intoxicating, when, welcoming the conquerors, they cried 'Hurrah!' 'And threw their caps high in the air!'*⁴⁹

The Emperor Alexander I visited the sloops at Kronstadt and spent several hours with the crew talking about their journey. One of the most progressive Russian literary magazines at that time *Otechestvennye Zapiski* (*Annals of the Fatherland*)⁶ posted a reasonably detailed description of the arrival of *Vostok* and *Mirnyi* sloops in Kronstadt, noting especially that the travellers collected ‘a great many products, tools and clothes used by the wild [peoples] of the southern hemisphere, many of which amaze with their perfection’,⁵⁰

Unfortunately, the expedition’s triumph was rather short-lived as major political changes altered Russia’s political focus, turning it inward. In November 1825 Alexander I suddenly died. His death was followed by the Decembrist revolt, the first open breach between the government and reformist elements of the Russian nobility, in a protest against Nicholas I’s assumption of the throne. The uprising was cruelly suppressed, executions and exile followed. Among those Decembrists sent to Siberia in shackles were several officers of both 1819-1821 expeditions.⁷

Bellingshausen who was made counter admiral after his return in 1821 was now fighting the Turks on the Danube River. And it took ten years for the Russian government to find the funds and publish 600 copies of Bellingshausen’s manuscript with his maps and other observations.⁵¹

The Russian Items of 1820 in New Zealand

The specific tribe of the time of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition visit remains unidentified. In their accounts the

⁶ ‘*Otechestvennye Zapiski*’, variously translated as *Annals of the Fatherland*, ‘Patriotic Notes’, ‘Notes of the Fatherland’, etc.) was a Russian literary magazine published in Saint Petersburg on a monthly basis between 1818 and 1884.

⁷ For example, Lieutenant Konstantin Torson, late of the ‘*Vostok*’, was incarcerated for his complicity in the Decembrist movement and then sent to the Siberian exile. His draft manuscript on the voyage was initially confiscated. Despite some evidence that his draft was sent to him to Siberia sometime after, his memoirs of the voyage are considered to be lost.

Russians describe a grouping of about 80 people. During their stay the Russian crew visited the village on *Hippah Island* (no inhabitants, only several abandoned huts on the summit of the cliff of Hippah); *Ship Cove* was also uninhabited (Bellingshausen described one hut with no people but many shellfish inside); in *Cannibal Cove* they saw three more temporary habitations (*'three small low huts'* with an old man and two women sitting inside, the others took a run but then returned); in *Little Waikawa Bay* the Russians found a large settlement protected with a palisade a little higher than a man, but generally not strongly fortified. Some historians believe these could have been temporary settlements⁵². Indeed, the Māori were highly mobile, and had *'temporary huts spread over hapū (sub-tribal) lands, they moved from place to place as seasonal duties demanded'*.⁵³ However, the Russian records (*Galkin*) suggest that it looked like the people lived there for a long time. According to Sir Tipene O'Regan, Tōtaranui region was a trade gateway, a *'Māori railway station'*, where many tribes interacted, in particular *Ngāi Tara, Rangitāne, Ngāti Apa, Ngāti Tahu, Ngāti Kuia and Ngāti Tūmatakōkiri*.⁵⁴ Today it seems almost impossible to ascertain the fate of the Russian items presented and exchanged in 1820. Most historians suggest that this Tōtaranui tribe was erased by internal war seven years after the Russians visited Queen Charlotte Sound.⁵⁵

In 1977-78 a team from the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch undertook archeological survey work in the area visited by the Russian expedition. Their research confirmed that the settlements the Russians described had existed, and numerous artefacts were found, as well as the sites for food preparation and consumption. One of the unusual items that caught the eye of Michael Trotter of the Museum, was a cutter made of bottle glass:

This particular piece may have been obtained from Europeans more recently than 1820, but it does provide an excellent example of the Māori utilisation of European materials, such

as might well have been done with some of the items that the Russians traded with the Māoris while in Queen Charlotte Sound'.⁵⁶

Bellingshausen's account states the preferences of the local Māori when trading:

'On our return to the sloop, it was reported to me that natives had come onto both vessels and bartered as before. They had brought spears, various carved boxes, fish hooks, staffs, the insignia of chiefs, bludgeons made of green stone, axes, and various clasps and ornaments of green basalt which they usually wear around the neck. They had also brought cloths. All these objects, which they had made with the greatest labour out of hard stone or wood, they attempted to exchange for axes, chisels, gimlets, assay buttons, mirrors, flints and glass seed beads'.⁵⁷

Apart from barter the Russians presented the locals with many gifts such as metal objects (nails, knives, axes, needles), mirrors, red woollen cloths, red silk ribbons, and at least one bronze medal⁵⁸ according to their accounts (Fig.11).



Fig. 11. A bronze medal commemorating the departure of the Russian expedition for the around-the-world voyage: 'Alexander the First, Dei Gratia the Emperor of All Russia / Sloops Vostok and Mirnyi. 1819'. At least one of such medals was presented to the chief in New Zealand in 1820.

Source: Auction House 'Imperia';

<http://www.auction-imperia.ru/wdate.php?t=offline&i=38722>

While it is obvious that to find more connections with the Russian goods in New Zealand requires more methodical excavation and archeological work in the area, tracking the Māori artefacts in Russia collected by this expedition seems more feasible. The precious artifacts taken by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition in 1820 to Russia now form one of the earliest collections of taonga Māori in the world.

The Ethnographic Value of the 1820 Taonga Brought to Russia

The work on the ethnographic value of the 1820 collection undertaken by Glynn Barratt, D. R. Simmons, Gerard Hindmarsh and others mentioned above, was predicated on the assumption that the Māori artefacts collected by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition during their stay in Queen Charlotte Sound in May-June 1820, are held in two Russian museums: *the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) in Saint Petersburg* and *the Kazan State University*.

Before the recent attribution by the Special Expert Commission in Russia we have known of only 42 objects from New Zealand acquired by the Russians in May-June 1820: 31 items in the Peter the Great Museum and 11 items in the museum of the Kazan State University.

However, the collection that has survived to this day is far from complete as many of the Russian expedition participants actively traded with the Māori and they must have brought to Russia more than the 42 objects recorded.

For instance, in their accounts of the visit Russians mention several specimens of Māori weaving, several seal skin parka-type clothing, “javelins” (perhaps the bird-spears), a finely-ground bone needle, and a musical instrument. All these artefacts are now lost somewhere between 1820 and the present.

At the same time there are artifacts that are not mentioned in the Russian accounts known to us but which were brought by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition to Russia from New Zealand. One of the most controversial artefacts is *mokomokai*, or *Toi moko*, the preserved heads of Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, decorated by *tā moko* tattooing:

'At G. Galkin's house, I saw the dried head of a New Zealander, on which the skin, hair and patterns are perfectly preserved: unique rarity! Iva ... ko. Two such heads are in the Museum of the State Admiralty Department in St. Petersburg. Editor S. O'.⁵⁹

'the Zealand heads are exceptional, kept in such completeness that if you put in their eyes, they could be mistaken for alive, some of them have not lost even a single hair or tooth, and all the features of embroidery on their skin are very clear (tatoué) with which they are decorated. These are the heads of defeated enemies, kept by the Zealanders among their war trophies. (*) (*In Portugal they were offered 600 talers for such a head)'.⁶⁰

Breaking Up of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev Collections

At the end of their 751 days journey *Vostok* and *Mirnyi* brought the artifacts, specimen and gifts to Saint Petersburg where these treasures became part of private and imperial collections.

It is known that many of the items collected by the astronomer Simonov travelled with him to the Kazan University, in Western Russia, over 1500 kilometres from Saint Petersburg where Professor Simonov was appointed the University Rector. Simonov's collection formed the main part of *the museum at the Kazan University* and 11 of these items are still kept there. The main part of the ethnographic collections brought by the expedition were transferred to *the Museum of the State Admiralty Department*. However, in 1827–28, this museum was abolished, and its collection became part of the *Kunstkamera*, the oldest museum in Russia, established by

Peter the Great and completed in 1727 as a cabinet of natural and human curiosities and rarities. Then, in the 1830s, the *Kunstkamera* collections were dispersed to newly-established imperial museums and universities. The taonga of 1820 originally kept in the *Museum of the State Admiralty Department* became part of the *Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Peter the Great Museum)*, established in 1879 which exists to this day.

But the recent announcement by Russian experts of the *pare* attributed to the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition located at another museum in Russia - *the Russian Museum of Ethnography* in Saint Petersburg - is revolutionary. It shows how little is researched about this collection and taonga Māori in Russia in general.



Fig. 12. The Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg
Source: Public Domain

The museum experts in Russia believe that the *pare* and some other artefacts from the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition came to *the Russian Museum of Ethnography* in Saint Petersburg (Fig.12), formerly the Ethnographic Collection of the Russian Museum of the Emperor Alexander III, from the ethnographic collection of the *Arsenal Museum* in 1907⁶¹.

From the early 19th century the *Arsenal Museum* was part of the richest collection of weapons and other memorabilia belonging to the Russian imperial family which was kept in the Arsenal pavilion in the palace park of Tsarskoye Selo, about 25 kilometres from Saint Petersburg (Fig.13).



Fig. 13. The Arsenal in Tsarskoye Selo

Source: CC BY-SA 4.0 , Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository

Upon their return to Kronstadt the Russian explorers would, as was the tradition of the times, have presented gifts to their patrons, including the Russian royal family members. What might have been included in such gifting? Journalism provides a clue.

After the *Vostok* and *Mirnyi* arrived in Kronstadt a journalist from the above mentioned *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* went to see the collections on board. He recorded that the numerous items brought back by the expedition included a large collection of gems and rare minerals (*'a gift from the Brazilian princess'*), a

cockatoo and other colourful parrots in cages, stuffed penguins and albatrosses, possums and platypuses, exotic weapons, jewellery, items of clothing, as well as the above-mentioned *mokomokai*.

One particular gift excited the journalist the most:

‘That must have been a fervent desire to bring joy and pleasure Her Majesty the Empress Maria Feodorovna that gave Faddej Fadejevich Bellingshausen such opportunity to preserve a pot of the most beautiful New Holland tulip in all its freshness of colour’.⁶²

The Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna was keenly interested in the Pacific studies and actively supported the idea of acquiring and developing the Pacific and American possessions of Russia⁶³. Any of the Pacific gifts that Bellingshausen most likely made, would have excited her no less than the New Holland tulip (Fig.14).



Fig. 14. The Portrait of Empress Maria Feodorovna, by George Dawe, 1820s.
Source: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository

Besides, Maria Feodorovna appreciated fine works on wood, bone and precious stones. She learnt how to use a lathe for working with her own art objects of amber and ivory, and that was unusual for a woman of the early 19th century, especially of her status.

It is highly likely that the Emperor Alexander I and other members of royal family also received various rarities from the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition. Knowing that the Emperor and especially his brothers collected military memorabilia it could have been some rare weapons and war trophies.

The Logic Behind Attribution of the Artefacts

At least some of the objects brought back by Bellingshausen and Lazarev formed the first ethnographic section of the Arsenal Museum although from 1819 till 1825 they were listed in various sections, and not as an independent collection.

The section *Weapons and American Items* of the Arsenal museum began with a collection of 25 objects presented to Grand Duke Nikolai Pavlovich (the future Nicholas I) by his mother, Empress Maria Feodorovna on 6 November 1825.⁶⁴

The gift of various rarities included arrows, harpoons and everyday items of the Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians of North America and spears, clubs, idols and other artefacts of the peoples of the southern part of the Pacific Ocean such as Fiji, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia and others.

Fourteen of twenty-five objects were annotated as *'from the Islands of Ono'* or *'of the Ono people'*: '8. Four oars of the Ono people'; '18. Three spears from the islands of Ono'; '19. A sceptre from the islands of Ono'; '20. Six clubs from the islands of Ono'.⁶⁵

Ono Island is a small island, a part of Lau Group, in the southern part of Fiji archipelago. Back in 1774 James Cook had been the first European to discover the island of Vatoa, also of the Lau Group. Faddej Bellingshausen in 1820 became the first European to discover and visit the islands of Ono-i-Lau, Mikhailov (Tuvana-i-Ra) and Simonov (Tuvana-i-Tholo).⁶⁶ In his travel notes Bellingshausen several times mentions that the Ono islanders exchanged *'a lot of weapons and all kinds of objects'* for Russian goods. Also, the onboard artist Mikhailov

prepared several drawings of Ono weapons that look the same as the artefacts at the Russian Museum of Ethnography.⁶⁷

The Russian museum experts compared the names and numbers of the items in *the Catalogue of the Arsenal museum of 1840*⁶⁸ and of the items in *the List of the Ethnographic Collections, i.e. Weapons and Various Items of Peoples Inhabiting the Islands and Coast Areas of the Pacific Ocean Transferred from the Arsenal in Tsarskoye Selo* of 1907 (Fig.15) found in the Archives of the Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg.⁶⁹ Their analysis revealed that these objects have the same numbers.

Considering these findings, the Russian Expert Commission concluded that the gifts of the dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna to Nicholas consisted of artefacts brought back by the simultaneous expeditions of the two 'squadrons': the Vasiliev-Shishmarev expedition that conducted research in the Northwestern Pacific Ocean in 1819-1822, and the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition that travelled to the South Seas in 1819-1821.⁷⁰

<u>29/150</u>	Макара.
<u>30/17</u> <u>99</u>	Макара японских сапоговъ.
<u>31/145</u> <u>165</u>	Макара хитанских сапоговъ.
<u>32/154</u> <u>245</u>	Макара Мадриманских перс. императорск.
<u>33/174</u> <u>234</u>	Угави обитателей Новой Зеландии
<u>34/113</u> <u>265</u>	Макара-ми, сохранивой
<u>35/0</u> <u>66</u>	Угави изъ разнотъ дерева.
<u>36/18</u> <u>79</u>	Макара истребъ отъ о-ва Око
<u>37/128</u> <u>172</u>	Макара истребъ Русской импер.
<u>38/111</u>	Иха японскихъ вещей ОНО.
<u>39/124</u> <u>33</u>	Иха вещей изъ Новой Зеландии
<u>40/124</u> <u>79</u>	Вещи изъ Новой Зеландии
<u>41/17</u> <u>35</u>	Каменническя вещи.
<u>42/124</u> <u>209</u>	Иха вещей изъ Новой Зеландии

Fig. 15. The List of the Ethnographic Collections, i.e. Weapons and Various Items of Peoples Inhabiting the Islands and Coast Areas of the Pacific Ocean Transferred from the Arsenal in Tsarskoye Selo, the Archives of the Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg

Source: the Museum website <https://ethnomuseum.ru/>

The 1820 Māori Artefacts at the Russian Museum of Ethnography

In the context of this article the most interesting items of the dowager Empress's gift are the artefacts numbered 12 and 13. The above-mentioned Arsenal Museum catalogue of 1840 described them as *'pagan figures from New Holland'*.

However, in 1907 in *the List of Ethnographic Collections of the Arsenal Museum* under numbers 12 and 13 we find: *'33/12/234 An Idol of the inhabitants of New Zealand; 34/13/225 Same, large'*.

According to the Russian museum experts one *'Idol from New Zealand'* was transferred to the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography as mentioned in the lists of 1938 of the Russian Museum of Ethnography⁷¹.

But what happened to the second *'Idol'*?

The black and white photograph made at the time of the World War II sheds some light to the story. It depicts the artefacts of the Russian Museum of Ethnography stored at the basement during the Siege of Leningrad (present-day Saint Petersburg). In the foreground, a large carved board with traditional Māori figures can be easily recognized. This is the artefact number 34/13/225 that was never transferred to the Peter the Great Museum (Fig.16).

During the World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as it is called in Russia, Soviet museums suffered a tragic fate. Many museum buildings were not simply damaged but wiped off the face of the earth. The Siege of Leningrad began in September 1941, just two months after the first German attack on the Soviet Union. For days and nights, the museum staff and volunteers risked their lives by frantically removing priceless paintings from their frames and by wrapping in paper the most fragile artefacts but there was not enough time to evacuate most collections. The largest museum objects, such as sculptures, were buried underground by staff. To mark the spots where they were hidden flowerbeds were planted. For almost three years as the horrific siege continued, both people

and artefacts were ‘*hiding*’ from German aviation in the deteriorating conditions of the museum basements which were used as bomb shelters.



Fig. 16. The pare during WW2 from the Fund of the History of the Russian Museum of Ethnography.

Source: the Museum website <https://ethnomuseum.ru/>

The item '34/13/225 Same, large', current registration number *REM 13454-1*, is a *pare* (a wooden carved door lintel) and could be one of the oldest surviving pre-1820s *pare* in the world. This extraordinary taonga was a silent witness of the incredible hardships endured by the civilian population of Leningrad where at least one million people perished during the Siege.

The experts of the Russian Museum of Ethnography describe the artefact as: '*a composition of five anthropomorphic dancing figures, the space between them is filled with a slotted spiral ornament*'.⁷²

Such description seems rather general, and a thorough professional research of the recently attributed artefact by a taonga Māori expert or a group of experts is needed.

Proposed Initial Description of the Pare in the Russian Museum of Ethnography

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions the visit the Russian Museum of Ethnography is not possible in the nearest future. Thus, this analysis of the *pare* is based on several photographs on the Museum website, the background information in the Russian primary accounts and the data on similar carvings including their composition, Māori symbolism and philosophy of cosmos.

As noted above, it appears that none of the items of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev collection from New Zealand have received detailed interpretation '*in the context of their traditional symbolism, spiritual significance, and historical resonance*'.⁷³

The description below does not claim to be complete or fully accurate. But it represents a first effort to identify specific characteristics of the newly-attributed cultural treasure. The author's humble intention is to attract the attention of the taonga experts, invite them to a discussion and stimulate further research.



Fig. 17. The pare from the Bellingshausen-Lazarev collection, 1820, at the Russian Museum of Ethnography
 Source: the Museum website <https://ethnomuseum.ru/>

This fully and beautifully carved *pare* (Fig.17) of 123 cm long appears to follow the principles of Māori design consistent within Māori carving between the late eighteenth century and the early-nineteenth century to express important cultural values such as:

- *Kotahitanga* (unity)
- *Whakapapa* (genealogy)
- *Whanaungatanga* (family interconnectedness)⁷⁴.

The main design elements consist of a dramatic multidimensional composition of five anthropomorphic figures combined with a bilateral zoomorphic figure and several phytomorphic elements, all symmetrical upon the key central figure.

The central figure is a male with two support female figures at the sides, another mythical creature with two outward facing heads beneath them and two flanking mythical figures.

Traditionally to Māori compositions the sequence of the main composition is 'an alternation of human figures full-face and in profile'.⁷⁵

The anthropomorphic figures have protruding tongues and three fingered hands and are in dynamic poses. The central male figure has similar to haka gestures, two female figures have their one hand to stomach, perhaps in the position of pregnancy⁷⁶ and the other hand on their chin and mouth forming the shape of traditional female *moko kauae*.

The exaggerated scale of the heads, as we see in the central male figure and the flanking figures, is sometimes considered as '*the pathway to inter-dimensional communication*',⁷⁷

Both male and female figures draw back their thighs to expose their sexual organs that also carried symbolic meanings⁷⁸ and is often represented in Māori carving.⁷⁹ The Māori word *tawhito* referred to the genitalia of both sexes has also the meaning of 'source, origin'⁸⁰ and 'old, ancient'⁸¹. Some researchers suggest that in Māori folklore the phallus was believed to have '*the protective power*', while the female organ contains '*the destructive power*'.⁸²

Each of two flanking outward looking mythical figures is holding their tail with one hand and their long tongue with another hand. Possibly they are *marakihau*⁸³, sometimes described as *taniwha*, sea monsters with upper limbs and human heads and reptile-like tails and long hollow tongues called *ngongo*⁸⁴. In Māori legends *taniwha* could be both guardians and harmful to people:

'certain *taniwha* were called upon for assistance when man was in peril on the sea, and so also were these creatures employed in some cases to punish those who had transgressed some rule of tapu.'⁸⁵

There is also an opinion that such reptile-like figures could be '*the ancestors with the bulbous head, three fingers, and serpentine body that reflects the Māori view that humans had amphibious origins*'⁸⁶.

Interestingly, the first European note obtained on the subject of *taniwha* was collected by Captain James Cook during his third voyage in February 1777 in Queen Charlotte Sound, the

very place where 43 years after the Russian expedition obtained this pare:

'We had another piece of intelligence from him (*a local New Zealander*), more correctly given, though not confirmed by our own observations, that there are snakes and lizards there of an enormous size. He described the latter as being eight feet in length, and as big round as a man's body. He said, they sometimes seize and devour men...'.⁸⁷

Beneath the central figure there is another mythical figure with two beak-like faces, which could be *manaia*. *Manaia* body can have human features, thus, symbolically they could represent 'the concept of balancing the spiritual and physical halves of our being'.⁸⁸

Unlike *marakihau*, *manaia* are often support figures in Māori carving:

'The *manaia* became a favourite motif and was used in designs of door and window lintels, barge boards, outer threshold beams, ceremonial adze hafts, and various other objects'.⁸⁹

The symmetrical design of *manaia* on the *pare* from the Russian Museum of Ethnography could represent *pekapeka*, the native New Zealand bat (*Mystacina tuberculata*)⁹⁰. In Māori art *pekapeka* has the profile of two onwads facing bird-like heads sharing one body and is often a motif of jade or bone carving.

A nocturnal animal that lives in caves, the *pekapeka* in Māori folklore is often 'the messenger between the earthly world of mortals and the domain of the spirits', 'a guardian against evil', which 'foretells death or disaster'.⁹¹ It is also believed to guide safely those travelling⁹², or needing strength in some way.

Between the heads of *manaia* we may see the main phytomorphic element that looks like *ponga*, the New Zealand silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*). The motif of four large fronds is carved in a way as if we are looking up towards the tree. *Ponga* has high significance in Māori folklore and stood for strength, stubborn resistance, and enduring power.⁹³

The undersides of the fronds are usually white, or ‘silver’, and believed to reflect moonlight, ‘making them useful aids to navigating bush pathways at night’⁹⁴. The Māori word *ponga* (o with a macron) has also the meaning of *nightfall*.

The other two identical large phytomorphic elements separate the female figures and *marakihau* forming a *koru*, an unfurling silver fern frond and could symbolise creation, new life and growth⁹⁵. This motif is an integral part of the Māori art.

On this *pare* the *rauponga* pattern (Māori: *rau* - leaf, frond; *ponga* - a silver fern⁹⁶) is used for the phytomorphic elements and for the *rauru* spiral elements (Māori: *rauru* - umbilical cord (end attached to the mother); *rauru whanaunga* - blood relatives⁹⁷) on the bodies of the figures. The *rauru* spirals is the main type used in the large house *Te Hau ki Tūranga* from Gisborne⁹⁸.

Three other carvings brought by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition and studied before have been referred by the experts as influenced by Gisborne and Whanganui styles:

‘Carvings

1. Tekoteko - female with male tattoo Wanganui style carving.
2. Tekoteko - male tattoo Wanganui style carving.
3. Figure group in Gisborne style⁹⁹.

Also, some paddles collected had ‘Taranaki style’ carvings¹⁰⁰.

The space between the anthropomorphic figures is filled with four large *takarangi* spirals (Māori: *taka* - revolution, rotation; *rangi* - Heavens, Heavenly realm). This style uses spaces to separate solid spirals; it is the space that allows us to see the spirals and the light through them. Here are some of the symbolic meanings of *takarangi* spirals:

‘The two intersecting solid spirals represent Ranginui and Papatuanuku (Sky father and earth Mother) and the close bond they share. The center of the Takarangi represents the origin of all, the beginning, singularity. The open space between the two spirals symbolises Te Ao Marama (The World of light and Knowledge) and the link man has with the Wairua (Spiritual dimension)’.¹⁰¹

The takarangi spirals may represent the turbulence at the moment of creation when, according to Māori legend, Tāne (god of forests and birds) separated the earth and sky in order to let in light.¹⁰²

Such spirals are especially common in Te Arawa carved houses.¹⁰³

The *takarangi* spirals in carving offer the alternating movements of the forms but also used on the prow of waka as they *'provide added stability and balance allowing wind and wave to pass through'*.¹⁰⁴

This *pare* resembles a *waka*, a Māori canoe, with the central male and two female figures in it. The use of two outward looking sea guardians - *marakihau* - emphasizes the point.

In this respect, although the *pare* is not mentioned by Bellingshausen or his crew directly, Bellingshausen describes the prow of the Māori *waka* that is some way could be compared to the lintel:

'at the prow, open carvings with snail patterns and a representation of a human head with tongue protruding, the eyes being made with shells. The stern rose up about 6 feet - a beam set at right angles to the craft. The oars were shovel-like as are those of all the peoples of the South Sea. The whole was stained a dark red colour'.¹⁰⁵

'On these craft... open-work carving continues behind the head, in the form of numerous circles and so looks like what is called filigree work'.¹⁰⁶

In their accounts Bellingshausen, Simonov, Novosilskii and Galkin provide some description complimented by Mikhailov's drawings of the Māori settlements and dwellings that they visited in Queen Charlotte Sound in 1820.

In particular, in Little Waikawa Bay Captain Bellingshausen gives details of the chief's house. Bellingshausen didn't enter it but commented that it was made with three rows of posts and was *'larger and better finished than the rest'*:

The structure consisted of posts, placed in three rows. The central posts were twice as high as a man, and on each of

them an ugly human figure had been carved and decorated with a red colouring. On these posts and the outer rows, which were a fraction lower than the shoulder of a man, transoms had been placed to support the roof, which consisted of beams covered with leaves. A screen six feet inside the entrance produced an ante-chamber. The whole interior was neatly covered with fine matting; several mats were also placed on the floor, where the inhabitants of that building usually sit and sleep. Pikes about 24 feet [7.3 m - OS] long were hung along the walls of the dwelling, together with a staff, various insignia of a chieftain, and human figures carved out of wood and stained red. The other dwellings were not so finished.¹⁰⁷

The experts of the Russian Museum of Ethnography suggest that the *pare* is a lintel of a *wharenuui*, a Māori communal house¹⁰⁸. However, the introduction of *wharenuui* started in 1840s. Prior to that it that was a chief's house, '*whare rangatira*', that carried in some way a communal function. For example, a chief could host a *manuhiri* (a visitor) in his private home¹⁰⁹. Wharenuui later 'adopted' the architectural elements of earlier chiefs' houses, including *pare*.

Thus, taking into account the age of this taonga, and the accounts of Bellingshausen and his crew, it could be a door lintel of a *whare rangatira*, not of a *wharenuui*.



Fig. 18. The Maori settlement, 1820. Sketch fragment by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: The State Russian Museum,
<http://en.rusmuseum.ru/>

From Bellingshausen's account we know that the chief himself invited the Russians to see the village and led them to his house. It is not clear why Bellingshausen didn't enter the house but just looked inside. It could have been his choice or he was not invited to do so (Fig.18).

For the Māori of 1820 the house itself would have represented the body of either the progenitor ancestor of the tribe or some other significant ancestor.

The passing through kūwaha (doorway) and pare of a whare has great symbolic importance... The act of entering a house was a secondary sort of rite de passage which frequently involved a change of social position, as it were, for the person who crawled through the narrow doorway beneath the lintel into the body of the house'.¹¹⁰

Pare and other house carvings were safeguarded from anyone outside the group. A number of *pare* have been found in caves

and swamps in late 19th and 20th centuries where they may have been placed in times of war.

The *pare* located at the Russia Museum of Ethnography may be the earliest *pare* known collected by a European expedition. The early house carvings are rare in the collections outside New Zealand.

Fifty years before the Russians Captain Cook obtained from a *whare* in Uawa some carvings including a *poupou*, a wall panel located underneath the veranda of a *wharenuī* (and a *whare rangatira*) that was believed to represent the spiritual connection between the tribe and their ancestors¹¹¹. There are still debates among researchers about how Cook collected these precious objects - whether they were presented to him or his companions as gifts¹¹² or 'stolen' from a *tapu* (sacred) house.¹¹³

How could the Russians have acquired such a precious Māori object?

The fair exchange between the Russians and the Māori in 1820 is evident and well documented, and the *pare* may have been given to the Russians as a gift or exchanged. That could be possible if the *pare* didn't represent the ancestors of that particular Māori group, i.e. they initially obtained it by trade, gift exchange or war from other tribal groups.

As mentioned above the Bellingshausen-Lazarev collection also includes two *tekoteko*, carved, human like figures, usually found at the top or the post of a *wharenuī* (or a *whare rangatira*) and also playing a guardianship-like role (Fig.19).



Fig. 19. One of the *tekoteko* and *wakahuia* (Maori treasure box, also called feather box) collected by the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition in 1820 in Queen Charlotte Sound.

Source: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the Kunstkamera),

<http://www.kunstkamera.ru/>

Further indirect evidence in support of such theory could be the fact that the Russians brought from that voyage several *mokomokai*, which, as noted above, were also not mentioned in the surviving accounts of the expedition participants.

Experts should be able to identify whether the *pare* was made with stone or metal tools. Judging by the photographs from the Russian Museum of Ethnography it has sophisticated rhythm and various levels of relief, and, thus, could be the product of metal tooling, more used in the North Island rather than in the South Island in the early 19th century. For their part, the Bellingshausen expedition reports emphasise the fact that the Māori group they visited used stone tools only:

These craft are indeed not made with the skill shown in those of the northern part of New Zealand, as described by Captain

Cook on his first voyage. All the same, the time and patience expended on their construction may well, and especially considering the builders' lack of iron, astonish a European'.¹¹⁴ In fact, in the Russian 1820 collection there are several taonga in the styles of the areas outside Queen Charlotte Sound including the *taiaha* (a chief's staff of rank¹¹⁵ and a Māori traditional weapon), the figure group, a paddle and two *wakahuia* (treasure boxes) of Gisborne style from the East Coast of the North Island.¹¹⁶

Bellingshausen described the moment he received the *taiaha* from the chief (Fig.20):

'We were ready to leave the place, when the old man detained me. At his instruction, his men brought out an eight-foot-long staff, the top of which was halbert-shaped, carved, and inlaid with shell eyes, while the bottom was like a narrow paddle. I supposed that he was making me a present of the staff; but when I took it and was about to hand it to the cutter, the old man seized it with both hands, and I understood at once that he was not giving it away but wished to barter it. In order to gratify him I gave him two arshins⁸ of red cloth. He was quite delighted with his bargain, and told his countrymen all about it at the top of his voice'.¹¹⁷

⁸ See 'arshin'. Two arshins equal 142.24 centimeters.



Fig. 20. The Maori Chief and his wife, 1820. The Chief is holding the taiaha. Drawing by Pavel Mikhailov, the onboard artist.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository

This illustration is particularly important as to the Māori a *taiaha* is ‘a symbol of tribal faith which keeps the mana or pride strong’¹¹⁸ and such gift could be regarded as ‘a symbol for renewed trust, peace and quietness’¹¹⁹ between two groups. Such a taonga was often passed down as a precious heirloom from generation to generation.

It is of interest from the above account that Bellingshausen at first assumed, based on other Russian experience of interacting with indigenous peoples, that the chief was presenting him with the *taiaha* as a gift at the end of the tour of the chief’s village. The Russians were not aware of the Māori concept of *utu* (‘payment in return’) and *hau* (‘a spiritual power’):

The taonga and all goods termed strictly personal possess a hau, a spiritual power. You give me one of them, and I pass it on to a third party; he gives another to me in turn, because he

is impelled to do so by the hau my present possesses. I, for my part, am obliged to give you that thing because I must return to you what is in reality the effect of the hau of your taonga'.¹²⁰ Having been shattered by the historical dramas of the Russian history and lying forgotten in a foreign land for two centuries, the *pare* at the Russian Museum of Ethnography deserves to be given a new lease of life and needs some considerable restoration of its physical state but also its *mana*.

Even a quick visual comparison of the *pare*'s black and white photograph at the time of Siege of Leningrad in the 1940s with the current photograph on the Museum website shows that some further damage has occurred in the past 80 years, i.e. parts of the left female figure, the central male figure and the *taniwha* are broken off, *pāua* shell is missing from the eyes of the figures and other fine details such as spirals are chipped off. Close examination of the taonga is required by practitioners and conservators.

The initial research on this ancestor have helped to trace some of its history, and there is still a lot more to be done to fill out its remarkable biography.

Conclusion

Today, when the process of deglobalization in different parts of the world is highly noticeable, and the search for self-identification, driven by the desire for cultural authenticity and diversity, is becoming a priority for many nations, the topic of taonga Māori located overseas is relevant as never before. Such researches and collaboration projects are essential not only for iwi and hapū, but also for the whole of New Zealand.

The 200th anniversary of the Russian discovery of Antarctica in 1820 by the expedition of Bellingshausen and Lazarev has been overlooked for various reasons, including the current political environment and the coronavirus pandemic priorities.

This article expands the traditionally framed analyses of New Zealand's early years of European interaction and colonization and tells an incredible story about the history of the Māori interaction with the Russians.

Recognising the deep connections of taonga to the communities in New Zealand the study of the taonga located in Russia deserves more attention on different levels. As the *whakataukī* (a Māori proverb) teaches us: '*Kia mau ki tō ūkaipō*' ('Not forgetting your roots').

Having studied the primary sources in Russian, i.e. reports of the Bellingshausen-Lazarev expedition participants, their memoirs, published lectures, diaries and letters, and the taonga Māori in the Russian museums including the newly-attributed *pare* we can also conclude that in the territory of the former Russian Empire there could be other unknown and unexplored artifacts from the same expedition, which are yet to be identified and at least studied, and, possibly, repatriated to their homeland.

For example, in their press-release the Russian Museum of Ethnography mentions two wooden fish hooks that were transferred from the Cabinet of Antiquities of the Imperial Kiev University of St. Vladimir in 1909¹²¹. Judging by the style of the carved anthropomorphic figures on one of the hooks, they also come from New Zealand, perhaps of similar source but further information about the collector and the time of admission to Kiev yet to be researched and attributed (Fig.21).



Fig. 21. Some of the Polynesian fish hooks at the Russian Museum of Ethnography waiting their attribution and research.

Source: the Museum website <https://ethnomuseum.ru/>

As the experience of museums during the coronavirus pandemic shows, the artifacts of interest to New Zealand may become temporarily or permanently inaccessible for study and examination, and, therefore, urgent compilation of electronic catalogues and 3D digital models of taonga Māori around the world is required.

The emphasis also should be put on the importance of initiating a consistent and continuous dialogue between the New Zealand and Russian museums.

Such collaboration is always productive and two-way: the Russians may need advice in attribution of the artefacts and recommendations for their storage and restoration, while the New Zealanders could begin addressing the issue of potential repatriation of these cherished items as a part of the *Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme* and under *The Protected Objects Act*.

This development, however, will not materialise without a carefully considered strategy based on historical precedents, knowledge of the intercultural communication nuances, and involving Russian and indigenous scholars and curators.

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