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(O'Malley, V., 2018)



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HISTORY

Without He Whakaputanga, there might have been no Treaty of Waitangi

by Vincent O'Malley | Feb 4, 2018 | 2 🗨️ | 15 min read

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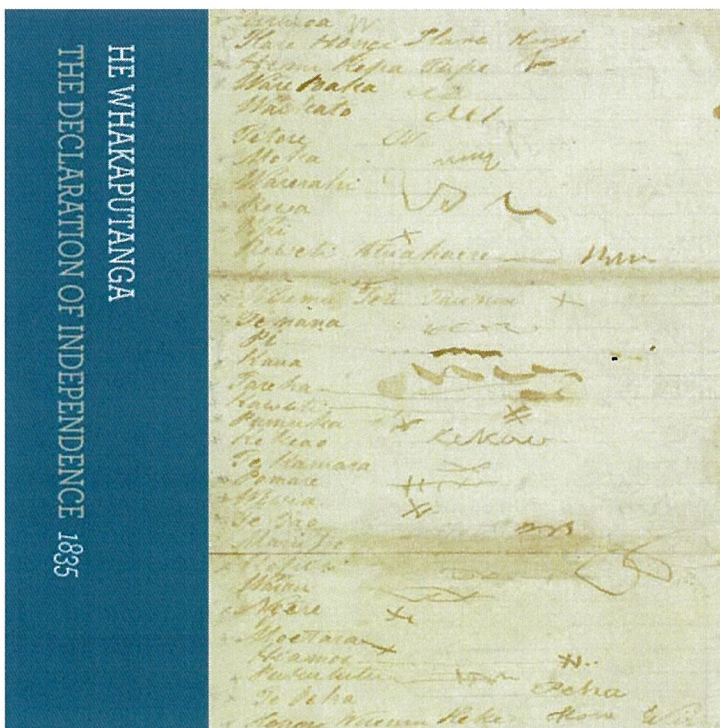
Baye Riddell and his clay creations



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He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni

He Whakaputanga — The Declaration of Independence of New Zealand, 1835 — has often been regarded as no more than a minor prelude on the journey to the Treaty of Waitangi.



*But this undersells the significance of this “taonga”, by which Māori leaders declared their mana and sovereignty to the world — and without which, as Vincent O’Malley writes in his introduction to the history of **Te Whakaputanga: The Declaration of Independence, 1835**, there might not have been a Treaty.*

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He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni was debated, agreed upon, and ultimately signed by thirty-four rangatira at Waitangi, in the Bay of Islands, on 28 October 1835, and later by a further eighteen chiefs from the north and elsewhere, through until 22 July 1839.

Also known as the Declaration of Independence of New Zealand, this Māori-language document is often called by its shortened name, He Whakaputanga.

That can mean “an emergence”, referring to the birth of a new nation, Nu Tireni — New Zealand — but also marking steps towards unified forms of governance among the many different rangatira and their hapū and iwi.

This new sense of nationhood was still in its infancy at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Yet for many Māori, the Treaty did not, and could not, erase the clear assertion of rangatiratanga — chiefly authority or sovereignty — made through He Whakaputanga.

For that reason and others, He Whakaputanga remains a taonga of great significance today.

New encounters

To understand why He Whakaputanga matters, we need to know the kind of world into which it emerged.

After the ancestors of Māori arrived from the Pacific in the thirteenth century, distinctive new cultural practices emerged in response to the unfamiliar climate and environment. At some point in the next century or so, all contact with the ancestral homelands of Hawaiki was lost. Uniquely Māori patterns of identity developed that were free from outside influences.