

# TUPAIA: PALINGENESIS OF A POLYNESIAN EPIC HERO

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RIASSUNTO: Nel 1769, il navigatore polinesiano Tupaia salì a bordo della *Endeavour*, capitanata da James Cook, assumendo il ruolo di intermediario culturale e interprete nei primi incontri tra europei e Māori su Aotearoa (Nuova Zelanda). Ciò che sappiamo di Tupaia si deduce dai diversi resoconti stilati dai membri britannici della spedizione, mentre non sono sopravvissute fonti Māori o polinesiane dalla sua morte nel 1770. In occasione delle celebrazioni “Tuia 250” nel 2019, la storia di Tupaia fu ripresa dalla poetessa Courtney Sina Meredith e dall’illustratore Mat Tait in *The Adventures of Tupaia*, una graphic novel che accosta dati storici e aneddoti con interpretazioni narrative di alcuni aspetti della sua vita. Nello stesso anno, la regista Lala Rolls terminava di produrre un’altra opera artistica volta a reinterpretare la vita di Tupaia, il documentario *Tupaia’s Endeavour* (2020). Questa ricerca si propone di interpretare queste due opere come segni di un processo di palingenesi di Tupaia come eroe epico, e di ricostruire la sua identità eroica tramite temi e aspetti in comune tra la graphic novel e il film.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Tupaia, Polinesia, *hero-poiesis*, palingenesi, epica mancante

ABSTRACT: Polynesian navigator Tupaia boarded Captain Cook’s *Endeavour* in Tahiti in 1769, becoming a cultural intermediary and interpreter during the first encounters with the Māori people in Aotearoa. What we know of Tupaia is gathered by several accounts by members of the British expedition, but no Māori or other Polynesian sources have survived after Tupaia’s death in 1770. As part of New Zealand’s “Tuia 250” commemoration in 2019, Tupaia’s story was retold by poet Courtney Sina Meredith and illustrator Mat Tait in *The Adventures of Tupaia*, a graphic novel which combines historical facts and anecdotes with fictional interpretations of some aspects of Tupaia’s life. In the same year, director Lala Rolls was finishing producing another major



artistic work reinterpreting Tupaia's story, 2020 documentary *Tupaia's Endeavour*. This research argues that these creative works are signs that we are now witnessing to Tupaia's palingenesis as a Polynesian epic hero and it attempts to construct Tupaia's heroic identity by looking at shared themes between the graphic novel and the film.

KEY-WORDS: Tupaia, Polynesia, *heroo-poiesis*, palingenesis, missing epic

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## INTRODUCTION

On 19<sup>th</sup> June 1767, HMS *Dolphin*, commanded by Captain Samuel Wallis, entered Matavai Bay in Tahiti. The first encounters with the local islanders did not go very well: he killed many people, and the peace-making rituals that followed were not easy.

By 8<sup>th</sup> July, the British had not managed to form any official alliance with any local chief, but this was about to change. Purea, a woman of «authority and regal demeanour»<sup>1</sup> and her counsellor Tupaia, approached the crew. For five weeks, Purea and Tupaia spent time with the captain and invited him on shore to visit Purea's palace, in what Druett calls the «State visit», which was interpreted by the British as the official surrendering of the island by her queen.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1768, after the *Dolphin* returned to England, news of the fertile and populous island circulated widely. A newly promoted lieutenant, James Cook, was given permission to sail to observe the transit of Venus across the face of the sun. Four members

<sup>1</sup> SALMOND 2012: 6.

<sup>2</sup> DRUETT 2011: 80-104.

of the *ex-Dolphin* crew managed to sign on to the muster roll of Captain Cook's *Endeavour*, as well as young and talented botanist Joseph Banks.<sup>3</sup>

The *Endeavour* arrived in Tahiti on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1769, but the political situation of the island had changed, and Parea took some time before paying the British a visit. Meanwhile, the officers interacted with reigning chief Tutaha and his courtiers.<sup>4</sup> Tupaia was one of them.

The encounters with the Tahitian in the weeks that followed swung from civil and positive to awkward and dangerous, but Tupaia proved a loyal and useful friend to the British. He learned to interpret between English and Tahitian; and he guided the British on a circumnavigation of the island.<sup>5</sup>

When the group was back at Matavai Bay, Tupaia delighted Banks with his decision to join the crew for the entirety of their trip. Cook came to appreciate Tupaia's navigational knowledge, piloting the *Endeavour* through the Society Islands, from Tahiti to his home island, Ra'iatea.<sup>6</sup>

Cook, like Wallis before him, had secret orders to find Terra Australis, the hypothetical continent which was supposed to counterbalance the landmass of the northern hemisphere.<sup>7</sup> A change of latitude and weather meant that Tupaia and Taiata began to suffer from the cold; however, they spent time learning as much as they could while the *Endeavour* was sailing through uncharted and turbulent waters. On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1769, a young boy called out land, and Banks and others rejoiced, as they thought they had found the missing continent.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi: 127-137.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi: 148-154.

<sup>5</sup> SALMOND 2012: 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi: 9.

<sup>7</sup> DRUETT 2011: 270.

They had not, of course. They had found Aotearoa New Zealand, and soon Tupaia discovered that the local people not only understood him but also understood his status as a «man of great *mana* [‘power’] with special connection to the gods».<sup>8</sup>

In 2003, Professor Dame Anne Salmond published *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, a historical account of Cook’s voyages foregrounding the process of mutual discovery between Polynesians and Europeans. The name of Tupaia appeared frequently in the book, drawing the attention of researchers and artists alike.

These were the circumstances in which, fourteen years ago, 2020 film *Tupaia’s Endeavour* was conceived by Lala Rolls, who read *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog* and discussed it with illustrator Michel Tuffery.<sup>9</sup> Another artist who found out about Tupaia through Salmond’s book was Mat Tait, who was commissioned to illustrate the graphic novel *The Adventures of Tupaia*, which accompanied the *Voyage to Aotearoa* exhibition at Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira in 2019-2020.<sup>10</sup>

When I visited the *Voyage to Aotearoa* exhibition in January 2020, I did not know who Tupaia was. I left the museum thinking that he must have appeared in lots of films and novels, convinced that he must be part of New Zealand’s collective imagination, as familiar to Māori and Pākehā as Ulysses and King Arthur are to Europeans. While researching his figure, I was surprised to find out that only recently people have been exposed to his story, which remains very little known outside New Zealand and the field of Pacific Studies.

In the first section of this research, I will discuss the *kaupapa* (‘spirit’ or ‘set of values’) of this research, which borrows a general approach – *Te Hihiri*, the process of

<sup>8</sup> Ivi: 366.

<sup>9</sup> [ROLLS 2020], [TUFFERY 2020]. Here and below square brackets signify private conversations of the author; see *infra*.

<sup>10</sup> [TAIT 2020].

coming to know – from Māori philosophical research studies.<sup>11</sup> In the second section, I will consider what makes Tupaia a historical and an epic hero, relating Tupaia's narrative to Andrea Ghidoni's *heroo-poietic* model.<sup>12</sup> In the third and case studies section of my research, I argue that *The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour* are signs pointing to Tupaia's palingenesis as a Polynesian epic hero, and I analyse the points of intersections between these two artistic responses as a way to hypothesise what episodes and themes would characterize Tupaia's epic narrative.

The case studies section also considers what is missing from Tupaia's story as it is being represented, ending with a brief reflection on the role of the unknown in the formation of a new epic.

## 1. TE HIHIRI - THE PROCESS OF COMING TO KNOW

If we want to engage honestly with a historical figure outside our Western tradition, it is only fair to make the effort of expanding the horizons of our methodology to non-Western approaches. I have found in Nicholson's *Te Hibiriri: A Process of Coming to Know* a valuable model which matches the *kaupapa* of this research.

Nicholson looks at how Māori wisdom regards knowledge as an «active process of coming to know», *Te Hibiriri*.<sup>13</sup> *Te Hibiriri* process «promotes meaningful research, practice and theory»<sup>14</sup> and its practice in academic literature stems from the need to validate and legitimise *mātauranga Māori* ('Māori knowledge'), an effort promoted by «[s]ocial justice, cultural revival and decolonisation movements».<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> NICHOLSON 2020.

<sup>12</sup> GHIDONI 2018 and GHIDONI 2020.

<sup>13</sup> NICHOLSON 2020: 133.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi: 135.

One of the pillars of this approach is the recognition that oral literatures «transmit and preserve sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the world and the place of humans with it» and that they can be recognised as «legitimate historical accounts».<sup>16</sup> It also proposes practical solutions to academic referencing, such as foregrounding in-person conversations and oral literature with square brackets to «both honour the Māori voice and allow the reader to differentiate between the written and oral literature».<sup>17</sup> I will follow this approach to quote personal conversations with the artists who have worked at *Tupaia's Endeavour* and *The Adventures of Tupaia*.

The second pillar of *Te Hihiri* which complements my approach is the recognition that «the role of the researcher is to become aware and recognise the *tohu* that guide the journey».<sup>18</sup> *Tohu* is the Māori concept for any kind of 'sign' which acts as navigation point, according to an approach which looks at wayfinding as a research method:

Māori researchers are navigators who see an ocean vessel as stationary. The destination is then called to the wayfinder, whose role is to stay present and be guided to action by the surrounding *tohu*. It is the reciprocal energy between the destination and the wayfinder that brings the potential into being in the present. Ancestral knowledge teaches us to pause, focus our thoughts and wait for the energies to align.<sup>19</sup>

If our destination is the idea that in the next few years Tupaia will have completed his palingenesis and will regenerate as an epic hero in some sort of text (written or oral; literary or in another form of visual storytelling), the process of coming to know instructs us to search for the *tohu*, the signs of this process already happening.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi: 134.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi: 135.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi: 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

*The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour* are *tohu*, and the points of intersections between these two works can give us an idea of what Tupaia's epic will look like, feature and elaborate on. These points of intersections are heroic themes and episodes of Tupaia's life as it has been told so far.

Ghidoni distinguishes between heroic narrations depending on what principle they are based on: "punctual" or "linear". A punctual narration would generate around one specific event, such as a battle or the hero's journey home; a linear narration would have at its core «the hero itself, therefore his biography, the succession of [his or her] adventures or the set of these (not necessarily ordered in a clear diachronic chain)».<sup>20</sup>

Tupaia's narrative is neither punctual or linear, since each episode of his life is one piece of the puzzle linked to a specific aspect of his identity: Tupaia the 'arioi, Tupaia the interpreter, Tupaia the artist, the political mediator, the spiritual leader and Tupaia the navigator. By looking for these episodes and themes in *The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour* we can construct Tupaia's identity as an epic hero and imagine not only what his epic will feature, but also the gaps it will aspire to fill.

## 2. TUPAIA: HISTORICAL OR EPIC HERO?

While I intend to make the point for Tupaia to be considered an epic hero whose epic narrative is yet to be written, the surge of academic and artistic interest in his figure demonstrates his validation as a historical hero, too.

In Sidney Hook's *The Hero in History*, Hook distinguishes between two types of historical heroes: the eventful man and the event-making man. The first «is any man whose actions influenced subsequent developments along a quite different course than

<sup>20</sup> GHIDONI 2018: 151.

would have been followed if these actions had not been taken».<sup>21</sup> This is certainly true for Tupaia, whose mediating intervention was behind those first overall successful encounters both in Tahiti and in Aotearoa New Zealand. An event-making man is, on the other hand, «an eventful man whose actions are the consequences of outstanding capacities of intelligence, will and character rather than accidents of position».<sup>22</sup>

In his *An Anatomy of Leadership*, Jennings agrees with Hook on the hero's extraordinary abilities but adopts a very critical position, stating that a hero has «a deep and disturbing sense of mission for which tremendous social power is necessary», implying that heroes behave like power-seekers motivated by a noble mission.<sup>23</sup>

This is quite a condemning statement, but it does allow us to reflect on the aspect of the hero's motivations. In Tupaia's case, this is one of the most difficult aspects of his life to interpret, particularly since his figure has been looked at using British sources (the *Endeavour's* captain's and officers' logbooks), where Tupaia's personality and intentions are overlooked.

Shifting from the definitions of historical heroes to a more complex discussion on epic heroes, I will refrain from offering a range of definitions to talk about one framework I have chosen to apply to Tupaia's narrative: Andrea Ghidoni's model of *heroo-poiesis*.

The concept of *heroo-poiesis* derives from the anthropological notion of *anthropo-poiesis* developed by Francesco Remotti to explain how human beings are fabricated in the course of their existence.<sup>24</sup> According to Ghidoni, the hero's *poiesis* ('creation', 'production', 'fabrication') develops across twelve aspects or "theses", touching on the hero's initiation, its semiotic representation in the text and other

<sup>21</sup> HOOK 1943: 151-158.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi: 155.

<sup>23</sup> JENNINGS 1960: 85.

<sup>24</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 296.



expressive forms, and its relevance and phenomenology in other cultural areas. I will analyse some of these features in the context of Tupaia's story.

The first aspect considered in Ghidoni's *heroo-poietic* model is "birth" and "births". The hero's biologic birth is taken for granted, if we subscribe to the most common literary theory which defines a hero as an extraordinary human who is born, lives and dies. Ghidoni, however, mentions signs of "eccentricity", or unfavourable circumstances, like being born in exile or being abandoned, often triggering the «voyage and return» pattern.<sup>25</sup>

Tupaia was born in the mid-1720s in Ra'ia'atea, in the Society Islands. His family was a high chiefly family; they had estates and titles both in Ra'ia'atea and in neighbouring island Huahine. One might think that he was born in quite favourable circumstances, but here is what Druett urges to consider:

At the instant of his birth, Tupaia's life hung in the balance. Infanticide was widely practised on his native island, Raiatea, partly because of overcrowding, and partly because of social pressure. The father might not want to acknowledge the child. The moment a chief's heir was born, he ruled as his son's regent, and was no longer an *ari'i* in his own right, and so he might order the child to be smothered.<sup>26</sup>

Over the life of an individual, subsequent "social births" and rituals determine his or her identity. This, according to Ghidoni, does not happen to epic heroes, because their nature allows them to be subjected to rites of passages, trials and adventures without having their identities altered.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ivi: 301-303.

<sup>26</sup> DRUETT 2011: 1.

<sup>27</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 302-303.

In Tupaia's case, I believe that his social births have such an impact on his adult life that they are worth acknowledging. As a child, Tupaia displayed characteristics which gained him access to school, since learning was only reserved to boys who were «intelligent, tall, flawless in looks, deft and sure-footed, as well as high-born».<sup>28</sup> In Taputapuātea, the greatest *marae* ('place of learning') in Polynesia, he distinguished himself and proved deserving of another social birth or rite of passage: the admittance to the '*arioi*' order.

The '*arioi*' were an exclusive society who dedicated themselves to spreading the cult of 'Oro, the god of war and fertility. Salmond gives us an idea of how talented and diligent apprentice '*arioi*' must have been, considering the range of roles they played: «Some of the '*arioi*' were dancers, musicians, singers, actors or artists [...]; while others, like Tupaia, were navigators, chiefs, priests and specialists in ancestral lore».<sup>29</sup> Because of his talent and intelligence, Tupaia became a leading navigator unrivalled in his knowledge of the islands and ancestral lore.<sup>30</sup>

The aspect which Ghidoni favours over social birth is what he calls "epiphanies": moments in which the hero's exceptional nature is revealed to other witnesses.<sup>31</sup> Tupaia flaunts several epiphanies, and some of these will be reprised in the case studies section, where they will be linked to aspects of his identity which make him an epic hero.

As an example of a typical epiphany, let us look at Tupaia's past pre-arrival of the British in Tahiti. When Tupaia was in his early thirties, Ra'īātea was invaded by warriors from neighbouring island Bora Bora. In battle, Tupaia was speared in the back with a particularly nasty weapon tipped with a stingray barb. This wound would have been fatal

<sup>28</sup> DRUETT 2011: 4.

<sup>29</sup> SALMOND 2012: 2.

<sup>30</sup> DRUETT 2011: 8.

<sup>31</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 303.

to anyone else, but, with the aid of a wound dresser, he survived, rescued the paramount chief of the island's grandson and fled to Tahiti, where Captain Wallis met him in 1767.<sup>32</sup>

As an epiphany, Tupaia surviving a fatal wound has more of a classic feel than the one I am about to mention, which makes him an unconventional hero whose extraordinary deeds have less to do with loves, ladies, knights and arms.

The first of the Aotearoa New Zealand encounters ended in tragedy. The main officers left four boys to guard the yawl they had used to go ashore on the bank of the river and went off to explore a small settlement nearby. While they were away, a small group of warriors challenged the boys and the coxswain shot one of them, Te Maro, (Ngāti Oneone) dead.

The next day, Tupaia addressed the Māori warriors standing by the dead body of Te Maro in his language and found out that the Māori understood him. This was a moment of revelation for the British, the Māori and Tupaia himself. He took the initiative to address them in the first place – while Cook had not even bothered asking him to go along the first expedition, which led to Te Maro's death – and discovered that he was understood by the Māori having had no previous contact with them. This is only one of the instances in which Tupaia put his linguistic and negotiation skills at the service of the British – he had saved the day plenty of times in Tahiti already – but his presence and intervention in Aotearoa New Zealand not only helped negotiations, but also meant the difference between life and death.<sup>33</sup>

The third parameter proposed by Ghidoni is that of “incompleteness”. This relies on the premise that a young hero is incomplete until he or she «has a chance to demonstrate [his or her] valiancy”. Ghidoni comments that often a young hero is “unpromising, defenceless, despised, marginalised».<sup>34</sup> According to contemporary

<sup>32</sup> DRUETT 2011: 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi: 224.

<sup>34</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 305.

studies, historical sources and oral literature, we can be sure that that was not the case for Tupaia. Quite the contrary: he was born with privilege and talent, and it was only after he boarded the *Endeavour* – as an adult, then – that he was faced with the disregard of the crew, «who thought themselves degraded by bending to an Indian», feeling lonely and unappreciated.<sup>35</sup>

With regards to the two parameters that follow, *heroo-poiesis* and *anthropo-poiesis*, it is time to deviate from Ghidoni’s model to explain why I have chosen to call this process “palingenesis” (literally, ‘again-birth’). While the *poiesis* element emphasises the concepts of fabrication, invention and fiction, I would like to steer away from the idea that the hero is fabricated by someone (an author, a storyteller, an audience) or something (circumstances, events, etc.), and to simply witness Tupaia’s own process of regenerating as an epic hero.

As to *how* heroes are represented (their semiology), Ghidoni mentions “denotative elements” which help contextualise epic heroes, for example in comparison to other exceptional heroes.<sup>36</sup> In that respect, the contrast with Captain Cook and Joseph Banks would be the logical comparison, but I will refrain from delving into such a complex topic, which would deserve a chapter of its own.

Instead, let us consider Cook and Banks (as well as other officers on board the *Endeavour*) in a different role, the role of narrators who for a very long time have contributed to the one-sided nature of Tupaia’s story in its «semiologic tradition».<sup>37</sup>

Finding written texts talking about Tupaia *outside* a British and Euro-centric tradition so far has proved an impossible philological challenge; in fact, all artists and creators involved in *The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia’s Endeavour* consulted Salmond and Druett, who have based their research on the *Endeavour*’s logbooks or the

<sup>35</sup> DRUETT 2011: 294.

<sup>36</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 311.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi: 312-314.

missionaries' accounts.<sup>38</sup> It is not that Polynesian sources do not exist; it is more of a case of indigenous literature and knowledge being more difficult to find, let alone integrate in academic and non-academic research.

It is not a coincidence that *Tupaia's Endeavour* – demonstrating Rolls' enormous effort to include as many Tahitian and Māori sources as she could find – has taken fourteen years to be completed.<sup>39</sup>

With regards to the debate around the question «is the hero a grade or a form», Ghidoni concludes that heroes are a grade on the human-divinity spectrum who perform certain actions which humans «cannot/are not able to/must not perform». <sup>40</sup> In Tupaia's case, I would argue for his heroic nature to be evidenced even more by the actions he *decided* to perform. He decided to join the *Endeavour's*; he decided to mediate between the British and the Tahitians, first, and then between British and Māori; he decided to share the incredible wealth of knowledge that other Tahitians would have deemed too sacred to be shared. Tupaia's heroic nature did not only translate into extraordinary actions, but into extraordinary decisions, too.

This theme of personal initiative is reprised in the last of the twelve theses exposed by Ghidoni, «heroes and epic», where it is considered a fundamental characteristic of heroes. Elaborating on these two concepts, Ghidoni reflects on the idea that heroes and epic are not mutually dependent concepts, and that heroes do exist in a wider landscape which includes epic literature; likewise, epic is considered a super-genre «undertaking to articulate the most essential aspects of a culture». <sup>41</sup>

As suggested before, Tupaia's epic is, in a way, still missing. This makes Tupaia an epic hero suspended between the realms of history, mythology and literature, and the two

<sup>38</sup> [ROLLS 2020], [TUFFERY 2020], [TAIT 2020].

<sup>39</sup> [ROLLS 2020].

<sup>40</sup> GHIDONI 2020: 323-324.

<sup>41</sup> Ivi: 329.

case studies I am using to support my argument (*The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour*) are exactly this: creative works that act as a bridge to a missing epic which I hope will follow Tupaia's rebirth and recognition as a Polynesian hero.

### 3. CASE STUDIES: *THE ADVENTURES OF TUPAIA* AND *TUPAIA'S ENDEAVOUR*

*The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour* are works fundamentally rooted in Tupaia as a historical figure, committed to uncovering Tupaia's identity listening to both sides of the story and offering a mediated British and Polynesian perspective. The timing of their releases coincided with (or shortly followed) *Tuia – Encounters 250*, the commemoration marking 250 years since the first extended contact between Māori and Europeans in 1769.

*The Adventures of Tupaia* is a graphic novel conceived by Auckland Museum to accompany the 2019 exhibition *Voyage to Aotearoa: Tupaia and the Endeavour*. Author Courtney Sina Meredith and illustrator Mat Tait were commissioned to create this work, which was researched in collaboration with the Pacific department of the museum along with Tahitian experts. Mat Tait confirms that in his research he consulted Salmond's and Druett's works, while trying to «read between the lines» and embrace a Māori perspective at the same time.<sup>42</sup>

When I asked where in the fiction/non-fiction spectrum this work can be placed, Tait explained that from a Māori perspective this is not an easy question to answer, since the difference between fiction and non-fiction is not so «cut and dry», and the boundaries between myth, legend and history are not fixed and often vary «depending on who you ask».<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> [TAIT 2020].

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

Tait's *kaupapa* to *The Adventures of Tupaia* was that of discovery and self-discovery, knowing a fair bit about Tupaia well before starting the project and learning more about himself and his own Māori identity as an emergent speaker of te reo Māori as his connection to Tupaia was growing stronger.<sup>44</sup>

Tuffery speaks of his own process of coming to know Tupaia, discovering a family connection to Taputapuatea, the *marae* and school of learning where Tupaia was formed in his youth. Tuffery's contribution to the film was driven by a strong, personal connection which allowed him to respond artistically while making sense of his own identity.<sup>45</sup>

Artist Michel Tuffery, who produced illustrations for *Tupaia's Endeavour*, seems to agree on the complexity of those boundaries, but also clarifies that re-enactments (which are used in the film to complement interviews) are a Polynesian tradition taken very seriously, a way for history to be told with the aid of music, sound, dance and visual imagery.<sup>46</sup>

Rolls' documentary showcases a diverse range of storytelling techniques, blending narration with static or animated illustrations and re-enactments, breaking the fourth wall, alternating interviews with scholars with conversations with local people and descendants of characters linked to Tupaia, who also got involved as actors in the re-enactment scenes.

It was inspiring to discover how pervasive the theme of identity and feeling of personal connection to Tupaia is among the artists who have worked at the graphic novel and the film, because it demonstrated the principle of «relationality of knowledge to the experience of life» according to *Te Hibiriri* process.<sup>47</sup> Artists who were looking at offering

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> [TUFFERY 2020].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> NICHOLSON 2020: 133.

a most authentic picture of Tupaia's story ended up discovering aspects of their own identity in the process.

This leads us to the core aim of this research: to construct Tupaia's identity as an epic hero looking for key moments or aspects of his life as they have been portrayed and talked about in *The Adventures of Tupaia* and *Tupaia's Endeavour*.

As previously stated, Tupaia was gifted with many talents and finding a one-size-fits-all definition of who he was is simply impossible.<sup>48</sup> According to Salmond, he was «a high priest, artist, scholar, warrior, linguist and navigator, whom George Forster described as a “genius”». <sup>49</sup> These identities are intertwined, but for the purpose of this research I have decided to look at them separately and link them to themes, episodes or aspects of Tupaia's life and how these feature in the film and graphic novel. I have chosen five of these themes and identities: the 'ariori, the artist, the mediator, the storyteller and the navigator.

For the journey between historical figure and epic figure to be completed, I conclude with a brief reflection about what has been imagined about Tupaia. Considering the unknown will allow us to speculate where literature will intervene to add the missing details, filling the gaps with imagination, perhaps, through the creative responses of other Polynesian artists and writers discovering their own identities.

The theme of identity runs as a *fil rouge* through this essay, hinting at a much wider phenomenon concerning a pan-Pacific awakening from the colonial slumber denounced by scholars who are interested in looking for a Polynesian (if not Pacific/Oceanic) shared identity, here symbolised by Tupaia, the hero.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> In DRUETT 2011 and SALMOND 2012 he is often referred to as “the navigator-priest”, probably for convenience, rather than as a deliberate dismissal of his other roles and talents.

<sup>49</sup> SALMOND - ROWLANDS 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. HAU'OFA 1994. Hau'ofa anticipated the pan-Pacific awakening by outlining what unites Pacific islands – places that have always been connected by a shared mythology, by the use of genealogy and oral history, as well as by the idea of the Ocean as a channel that unites, rather than separates each island and culture to the



*The Great Marae of Taputapuatea: Tupaia the ‘arioi’*

In the film, the crew visits Taputapuatea with a spirit similar to that of pilgrims visiting a holy place. On the grounds of the *marae*, the film’s intentions are narrated: it becomes apparent that the crew experiences a strong connection to the place, both as a group of artists but also as individuals and human beings. «A *marae* is not only a physical entity», narrates Torrance, «it is like a spiritual [dimension] filling the whole space between the sea, the sky and the mountains». <sup>51</sup>

Taputapuatea is the place where Tupaia’s journey to becoming an epic hero begins. Borrowing *Te Hihiri* notion of *Te Hihiringa*, the «state of ignition where an idea emerges and creates a desire to change, act, or undertake of discovery», <sup>52</sup> Taputapuatea is where the spark ignited in the form of a prophecy: as narrated in *Tupaia’s Endeavour*, Tahitian lore recalls high priest Vaita falling into a trance and predicting the arrival of the Europeans. In the film, cultural revivalist Richard Ariihau Tuheiava reads Vaita’s prophecy:

Here is the adorned offspring [the clothed Europeans] of *te tumu* [the source of mankind] who come to see this forest here in Taputapuatea. Their bodies are different, our bodies are different. We both come from the *tumu* [but we are all the same]. And this land will be taken by them. The ancient ways will be destroyed. The sacred bird from the Ocean will arrive on this land, coming to lament over what this broken tree has to teach. These strangers come on board a vessel without an outrigger. <sup>53</sup>

next. As it will become clear in the case studies section, Tupaia’s story clearly resonates not only with Tahitian or Māori artists, but artists with a wider Polynesian (or Pacific) heritage, a *tobu* of the process of shift in each culture’s self-perception, as anticipated by Hau‘ofa’s research.

<sup>51</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:08:36-01:08:41.

<sup>52</sup> NICHOLSON 2020: 137.

<sup>53</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:28:23-01:28:58.

In *The Adventures of Tupaia*, Tupaia's beginnings are told in first person, unlike the rest of the story, which is narrated in third person. The book opens with a spread featuring a young boy in front of Taputapuatea *marae*, followed by progressively older representations of Tupaia. The first-person narrator briefly introduces his life, and mentions being «fated to be a *tabu'a* navigator». On one page showing Tupaia as a teenager sailing his canoe, the background features (quite prominently, but in pastel tones of yellow, easy to overlook) the image of hands marking *tātau* ('tattoo') with the traditional hand-tool known as *uhi*.<sup>54</sup>

The importance of *tātau* as a social marker is also picked up by *Tupaia's Endeavour*, where Rolls breaks the fourth wall showing tattoo artists airbrushing actor Kirk Torrance with a stencil. Finding out what the art of the tattoo would have been like at the time was a challenge, because the missionaries had prohibited the *tātau* practice, so the crew combined the «instincts of the modern *tātau* revival to the *Endeavour's* records and Michel [Tuffery]'s own experience of Samoan *tātau*». <sup>55</sup>

I have no doubt that Taputapuatea will be recognised by Tupaia's epic narrative as the place where it all began. Not only for its prophetic nature, but also as the cradle of Tupaia's knowledge and connection to his childhood. There is also an added historical element to Taputapuatea's role in his story to consider: when the Bora Bora invaders arrived in Ra'iaatea, Tupaia was forced to leave this place of great learning and home to flee to Tahiti.

Taputapuatea is, therefore, the home of our exiled hero, and the repository of his childhood memories.

<sup>54</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 2-5.

<sup>55</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:23:24-01:27:27.

*Watercolours: Tupaia the Artist*

Because of their rarity and unique circumstances in which they were produced, two images appear alongside any scholarly or non-scholarly publication about Tupaia: a map of Pacific islands (“Tupaia’s Map”), and a watercolour of a Māori trading a crayfish with Joseph Banks. The map will have its own section later, while now I am looking at Tupaia’s watercolours and how these are portrayed in the graphic novel and in the film.

Tupaia’s watercolours made history for several reasons. Sketches like the «Dancer and costume of the Chief Mourner» or his even more famous «Tahitian musicians» provided «a rare glimpse of daily life in ancient Tahiti». <sup>56</sup> Apart from a sketch of Taiata playing the nose-flute, the *Endeavour*’s draughtsman, Sydney Parkinson, drew «nothing to show men and women going about ordinary activities». <sup>57</sup>

In *The Adventures of Tupaia*, we see him in the act of sketching a Tahitian festivity, and the narration below reads:

His sharp eyes, which were constantly bloodshot from reading the stars and the seas, also served him well as an artist. He was able to give shape and colour to the world around him in a way that no Tahitian had done before. <sup>58</sup>

The watercolour showing Banks trading tapa cloth for crayfish with a Māori is unique as it discloses another aspect of Tupaia’s personality, a talent within the talent: it is a caricature interpreting an episode of trade with the Māori, showing Tupaia’s flair for humour.

In Druett’s words:

<sup>56</sup> DRUETT 2011: 190.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 14-15.

It is [Tupaia's] most famous work, because of the emotions expressed in the humorous little scene. Both figures have their legs braced, and they are glaring into each other's eyes; the Māori holds the lobster by a string, ready to snatch it back at the first opportunity, while Banks keeps his piece of *tapa* just out of reach. The outcome of the battle of wills is left to the imagination of the viewer.<sup>59</sup>

According to Harriet Parsons, Tupaia's artwork is unique because he had learned to sketch in the European style – Polynesian artwork, like *tātau* and *tapa* decorations, used different media and had a different purpose – and his learning process gives us an idea of the creative and collaborative relationship between Tupaia and the *Endeavour's* artists.<sup>60</sup> This collaboration is noticed in *The Adventures of Tupaia*, where we see Tupaia watching closely as a white officer paints on an easel. The accompanying text reads:

Tupaia was in awe of Parkinson's sketches and paintings. The paper, paints and easel were all new to him, but the painting reminded him of *tapa* designs. He was keen to try it for himself, so Parkinson began teaching Tupaia to paint like he did. In return, the 'aroi taught the artist Tahiti's language and traditions.<sup>61</sup>

Tupaia's art features prominently in *Tupaia's Endeavour*, marking Michel Tuffery's emotional journey: as he looks at the watercolours archived at the British Library he confesses feeling as if he was «flipping through the family album».<sup>62</sup>

When I asked Tuffery what he thought Tupaia was doing when he produced those watercolours, he replied that he was «being himself». He was responding creatively

<sup>59</sup> DRUETT 2011: 375.

<sup>60</sup> PARSONS 2015.

<sup>61</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 13.

<sup>62</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:23:53-01:24:44.

to history in the making, offering a Polynesian perspective while borrowing a European form of figurative art.<sup>63</sup>

The role of Tupaia's watercolours in his epic in formation is not only yet another validation of Tupaia's talent, but a way for him to have a say in his own story and the way it is told (its "semiology"). We are accustomed to epic narratives being written or told, but Tupaia seems keen to convey a message, requesting for art to feature in his epic.

Evidently, the curators who commissioned *The Adventures of Tupaia* and the director and producers' team at *Tupaia's Endeavour* seem to have heard his request loud and clear, and obliged.

*Voyage to Aotearoa and First Encounters with the Māori: Tupaia the Mediator*

In an iconic re-enactment scene in *Tupaia's Endeavour*, actor Kirk Torrance as Tupaia steps out of an illustrated background behind him and addresses Māori warriors in his language.<sup>64</sup> This moment perfectly encapsulates Tupaia's heroic epiphany, the revelation that he can communicate with Māori people and has the power to mediate between them and the British after the disastrous first approach which resulted in Te Maro's death.

Tupaia was not present at Te Maro's death, since the officers did not have the foresight to invite him to the first landing in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the film, Te Maro's death develops as a moving sequence of re-enactment scenes, illustrations and commentary by Te Maro's descendants.<sup>65</sup>

In the graphic novel, images of 'Oro, the Polynesian god of war and fertility, features prominently in the pages where Te Maro's death is described, expressing the

<sup>63</sup> [TUFFERY 2020].

<sup>64</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:59:07-01:59:42.

<sup>65</sup> Ivi: 01:49:22-01:57:35.

tense atmosphere between the British and the Māori with a palette featuring red, black and white.<sup>66</sup>

Both the documentary and the graphic novel dedicate space and visual imagery to reinterpret this and the following moments which set the mood for what would be the tortuous process of making friends with Aotearoa's indigenous people. After Tupaia has managed to convince one of their elders to meet Captain Cook on the sacred rock Te Toka-a-Taiau, the two leaders perform a *hongi* (traditional Māori greeting).

Tuffery's illustration of the *hongi* scene in *Tupaia's Endeavour* highlights the red and white British uniforms in the background, and the two leaders' expressions in the foreground. Cook appears to have a scowling expression and both leaders' body language speaks of the intensity of the moment. «*Hongi* is not just about the touching of the noses, it is about sharing the breath from the other person, that is really important [...]. It is about being honest, the energy between the two of you» explains Tuffery. The narrator then goes on to reveal that the *hongi* between Cook and the Māori chief was only «the calm at the centre of the storm».<sup>67</sup>

In *The Adventures of Tupaia*, the same illustration conveys this feeling of peacefulness – both the Māori's and Cook's expressions appear quite subdued – perhaps as a way to contrast the drama that will soon follow. Reprising 'Oro's colour palette, the following page shows the image of a British soldier killing Te Rakau, the young chief who had audaciously tried to steal an officer's short sword during the short peaceful exchange.<sup>68</sup>

Te Rakau's death is the climax of this revelation moment, as it instigates Tupaia to make another iconic gesture:

<sup>66</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 34-37.

<sup>67</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:01:12-01:02:01.

<sup>68</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 40-41.

[...] the priest navigator had realised that Te Rakau was still alive. Tupaia knelt down beside the great chief, taking his hand. In Te Rakau's final moments before he died, the two men spoke as though they were *wbanau* ['family'].<sup>69</sup>

What was said between Tupaia and Te Rakau is unknown. British officers had no way to know what Tupaia would say to Māori people unless Tupaia told them (sometimes he did, sometimes he did not); and we would not know unless the officers bothered to document this in their journals (sometimes they did, sometimes they did not).

*The Adventures of Tupaia* dares to fill the historical gap with a short exchange:

Te Rakau: «Tell me about Hawaiki, about Ra'iaātea, the place my spirit will return to».

Tupaia: «Ra'iaātea is beautiful beyond imagination. Go well, my brother. A place is being prepared for you among the stars».<sup>70</sup>

When directory Lala Rolls and actor Kirk Torrance were faced with the choice of writing Tupaia's words or not, they decided not to. Instead, a mourning chant sung by three Māori women in modern clothes opens the illustrated scene of Tupaia kneeling beside Te Rakau.<sup>71</sup>

This scene is then followed by a commentary by Raipoia Cowan Brightwell of Tamatoa Tautu lineage (Taputapuātea, Ra'iaātea), who reflects on what formalities Tupaia could have exchanged with Te Rakau:

He would have probably acknowledged the chief first, and then he would have introduced himself, [stating] his name and which island he came from; and also possibly talked about

<sup>69</sup> Ivi: 43.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>71</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:03:56-01:04:34.

the link that the two had [...]. As in, the chief's family or ancestors would have come from the same island [...].<sup>72</sup>

She then recites what sounds like a ritual formula in Tahitian, translating only the last line «the path to Hawaii», the same concept (Hawaiki) mentioned in *The Adventures of Tupaia*.

After Te Maro's and Te Rakau's deaths, Cook realised that becoming friends with the locals was going to be a much more difficult process than he had expected, and he had paid a high price for not realising Tupaia's potential as a negotiator straightaway. As pointed out by Barney Tupara, Te Maro's direct descendant, some of these wounds are still open and reconciliation is needed.<sup>73</sup>

Without Tupaia's heroic intervention as a mediator, however, there would have been many more wounds to heal and many more errors to amend.

#### *Tupaia's Cave: Tupaia the Storyteller*

As the *Endeavour* travelled along the coast of New Zealand, Tupaia's name travelled across land, with more and more Māori asking after him and demanding to negotiate with him. This was even more apparent after Tupaia's death, like Druett reports:

When the ships of Cook's second expedition arrived in New Zealand, everyone clamoured for Tupaia. The news that he had died was received first with disbelief, and then with deep mourning. [...] Tupaia's name was apparently known throughout New Zealand, and was as familiar to those who had never seen him as to those who had listened to his stories. His name is still part of the New Zealand landscape. Just as Captain Cook named places after

<sup>72</sup> Ivi: 01:05:05-01:05:33.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi: 01:12:56-01:13:34.



his officers, his crew and his patrons, Māori have memorialised Tupaia by naming places after him.<sup>74</sup>

One of these places is Tupaia's Cave in Tolaga Bay.

In the Tolaga Bay episode in the graphic novel, we read: «For a few days, the priest navigator took shelter at Ōpoutama, making the cave his temporary home. Here, he was visited by many leaders from the local school of learning, Te Rawheoro».<sup>75</sup>

The text is accompanied by an illustration of Tupaia drawing the outline of the *Endeavour* on the walls of the cave. Sadly, this drawing has not survived two and a half centuries, but a woman from Te Aitanga ā Hauiti *iwi*, Anne Iranui McGuire, tells the crew of *Tupaia's Endeavour* that she remembers seeing it as a child, when she was told Tupaia's story of when he arrived and spent his time «talk[ing] to the multitudes».<sup>76</sup>

Both Salmond and Druett choose the same quote by Banks to emphasise the extraordinary knowledge exchange that must have happened in Ōpoutama between Tupaia and the Māori: «They seemed to agree very well in their notions of religion, only Tupaia [*sic*] was much more learned than the other and all his discourse was heard with much attention».<sup>77</sup>

In Michel Tuffery's words, Tupaia became some sort of personal “superhero”, for making such a strong impression on the Māori people as an intellectual and spiritual leader,<sup>78</sup> and his connection to Ōpoutama shines through the entire segment, from the initial sequence of landscape illustrations of the natural cove framed by Māori motives to Tuffery's personal tribute to the place, laying down *tapa* for Tupaia. The segment closes

<sup>74</sup> DRUETT 2011: 269.

<sup>75</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 49.

<sup>76</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:17:00-01:17:24.

<sup>77</sup> DRUETT 2011: 367 and SALMOND 2012: 13.

<sup>78</sup> [TUFFERY 2020].

with the moving discovery of Tupaia's charcoal graffiti of a marine creature and writing in Tahitian 'dolphin warrior'.<sup>79</sup>

It should not be surprising if Tuffery chose to give his personal tribute to Tupaia in Tupaia's Cave, the place where the 'ariorior', the artist and the mediator became an intellectual hero or, according to others, a legend.<sup>80</sup>

*Tupaia's Map: Tupaia the Navigator*

When the *Endeavour* left the Society Islands, Cook was eager to begin his course towards Terra Australis, so he did not listen to Tupaia's advice to sail westward, missing the chance to explore Tonga, Samoa, the Cooks and Fiji with the «benefit of having the prestigious linguist and intermediary on board».<sup>81</sup> As Druett points out, «Cook also missed a golden opportunity to learn how a Polynesian master navigator found his way».<sup>82</sup>

Two months and twenty-five days passed between the *Endeavour* leaving Tahiti and sighting Aotearoa New Zealand on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1769. During that time, Tupaia shared as much knowledge of the Pacific islands as he could with the marine officers, producing a chart of 74 islands which only survives as a copy. Tupaia was accustomed to learning lists of islands by heart, reciting them together with instructions and pieces of nautical culture unintelligible for Cook and Banks. In an extraordinary effort showing how Tupaia was willing to reach out to a different culture, he designed a map integrating European and Polynesian concepts of space and orientation, a testimony to the complex and ongoing conversation between him and the British officers.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:18:28-01:23:30.

<sup>80</sup> DRUETT 2011: 269.

<sup>81</sup> Ivi: 273.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> PARSONS 2015.

Tupaia's Map has become as legendary as his author, and this remarkable achievement is yet another shared feature of *Tupaia's Endeavour* and *The Adventures of Tupaia*, which discuss the map and its creation thoroughly.

In Meredith and Tait's graphic novel the story behind Tupaia's Map is spread across four pages in the format of tiers of panels, unlike the rest of the work which favours full-page ("splashes") or two-page illustrations ("spreads").<sup>84</sup> The comic-book-like storytelling sequence recreates the moment in which Tupaia tries to explain how the map should be read, but Cook and Banks seem unable to understand.

Tupaia: «The islands are in the direction I've marked but you must consider the star paths, currents and winds. All things are connected. The birds, the wind, how the waves swirl and break...».<sup>85</sup>

*Tupaia's Endeavour* is just as fascinated by the mysteries of Tupaia's Map and leaves it to illustrator Michel Tuffery and actor Kirk Torrance discover how the map could have been read according to the latest studies on the subject.<sup>86</sup>

In the film, it is argued that Tupaia continued to work at that map and discussed it with Māori knowledge-holders in Aotearoa New Zealand. The indication of «heavy cold seas» on the map could be a hint to what that conversation was about: perhaps Tupaia was telling his new friends that instead of travelling west and then south, Cook had decided to sail south straightaway, passing through some «heavy cold seas».

Looking at the map, Torrance points out that Aotearoa is «exactly in the wrong place», while Tuffery explains that he is looking at it from a Western perspective, while

<sup>84</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 24-27.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> ROLLS 2020: 01:37:40-01:42:06.

he should try to look at it like a Polynesian navigator, bearing in mind that «we are not going *to* the islands, the islands are coming to *us*».

The map is then animated to further explain that Polynesian wayfinding still is inextricably linked to oral history, which passes down knowledge through words, not images. The narrator concludes:

Most of all, Tupaia was not making this chart for the Brits. It was a Polynesian conversation. He was dovetailing two world views, imagining an amazing return home, where he could unpack all the stories, the *taonga* [‘treasure’], and a map with his people, and perhaps, even restart the Pacific voyaging.<sup>87</sup>

Rolls’ interpretation of Tupaia’s map is reinforced by the Māori concept of *whakapapa*, often loosely translated as ‘genealogy’, and links to an earlier interpretation of Tupaia’s cartography by Margaret Jolly, who argues for an idea of kinaesthetic knowledge being passed down «through genealogical stories and chants, through the materials of the canoe and the sails, and through the embodied practice of navigation».<sup>88</sup>

### *The Unknown: Tupaia the Man*

A hero’s death marks one of the most important episodes in an epic narrative either because it coincides with a pivotal event, like a battle, or it can reinforce heroic characteristics, or both.

The circumstances around Tupaia’s death, unfortunately, are not particularly remarkable, only miserable. Disappointed by his discovery that Aotearoa New Zealand was not a continent, Cook guided the *Endeavour* to explore the uncharted east coast of

<sup>87</sup> Ivi: 01:41:46-01:42:06.

<sup>88</sup> JOLLY 2007: 509.

New Holland (Australia), where Tupaia discovered that his extensive knowledge of Polynesian languages was useless with the Aborigines.<sup>89</sup> It took the *Endeavour* more than three months to navigate through the maze of the Great Coral Reef, and in that time Tupaia's health began to fail: deprived of fresh food for too long, he had begun to show symptoms of scurvy. Once in Batavia, he showed signs of recovery, but it did not last long: Batavia was a very unhealthy place, and both Tupaia and Taiata fell ill again. After less than a month in Batavia, Taiata died, and Tupaia followed him two days later.<sup>90</sup>

Tupaia's death is, interestingly, not a moment of intersection between the film and the graphic novel, since the latter only mentions it in an epitaph on the last page, reading:

Tupaia and Taiata died from their illnesses before they ever made it to Great Britain on board the *Endeavour*. Taiata passed away first, and the following day Tupaia joined him in the realm of the ancestors.

Tupaia's legacy survives to this very day because, without Tupaia's wisdom, Cook would not have been able to navigate the South Pacific the way that he did.<sup>91</sup>

Instead of portraying Tupaia's death, the graphic novel closes with a ten-page lyrical segment called «Tupaia and Taitata in the Night Sky».<sup>92</sup>

This segment, narrated in first person, reimagines Tupaia as a man suspended between the human and the spiritual world, touching on aspects of Tupaia unknown or little known to us. One of these is the relationship between Tupaia and Taiata, his young acolyte who travelled with him on the *Endeavour*.

<sup>89</sup> DRUETT 2011: 464-496.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>91</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 64.

<sup>92</sup> Ivi: 54-63.

Taiata sadly passed away in Batavia two days before Tupaia did, and Druett considers that this not only must have broken Tupaia's heart for his affective connection to his little helper (to whom he was related), but it also deprived him of «the vessel chosen to hold his vast fund of lore»:<sup>93</sup>

In Tahiti and Ra'iātea, a very learned man who was about to pass away summoned his chosen heir and acolyte, and with their heads close together they would share his last breaths, and so, symbolically, the transfer of precious knowledge was confirmed.<sup>94</sup>

In the graphic novel, this segment interprets as what Tupaia could have told Taiata as his young friend was dying.

Taiata, take heed! To be a navigator is to pierce through walls of sacred light. [...] It's important that you understand and remember, Taiata. You must know where you come from in order to know where you are going. To leap into the great unknown means you must be able to find your way home. [...] There are sky domes and sky pillars, and there are different sky chiefs to learn from along the points of your voyage. They will help you, Taiata.<sup>95</sup>

A strong theme in this section is the idea of looking at the stars to find one's way home, an idea also hinted at in *Tupaia's Endeavour*, which alternates images of the night sky to sequences of Tupaia swimming in the dark.

In conversation, Rolls commented that one of the most difficult aspects to research and portray in *Tupaia's Endeavour* was Tupaia's personality and his thinking.

<sup>93</sup> DRUETT 2011: 482-483.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>95</sup> MEREDITH - TAIT 2019: 54-57.

In her words, the swimming sequences represent «Tupaia's freedom»,<sup>96</sup> perhaps another way to leap into the unknown, similarly to but less explicitly than the "Tupaia and Taiata in the Night Sky" segment in *The Adventures of Tupaia*.

"Tupaia and Taiata in the Night Sky" links to Tupaia's identity as a navigator, proposing some literary answers to many questions which historical accounts could not provide because who wrote them simply could not understand.

This segment elegantly brings us full circle to *Te Hibiriri* approach, which compares researchers to wayfinders, «whose role is to stay present and be guided to action by the surrounding *tobu* [...], standing still with the expectation that something will be revealed». If we stand still, if we look closely, we will see more *tobu* of Tupaia's palingenesis unfolding and eventually, one by one, new stories will come towards us, like the islands on Tupaia's Map.

## CONCLUSION

*Te Hibiriri* approach invites researchers to look for *tobu*, signs that work as navigation points in the knowledge creation process. By applying this profound methodological principle to Tupaia's journey from historical figure to literary and epic hero, these signs can be found in the works of Polynesian artists who are engaging in personal conversations with Tupaia's story and are succeeding in restoring the balance in what so far has been a story traditionally told from a Western perspective.<sup>97</sup>

Graphic novel *The Adventures of Tupaia* and documentary *Tupaia's Endeavour* are two examples of artistic creations approaching Tupaia's narrative with a similar *kaupapa*, that of celebrating and presenting a historical figure whose natural talent and

<sup>96</sup> [ROLLS 2020].

<sup>97</sup> NICHOLSON 2020: 139.

initiative left a significant mark in history and contributed to the destiny of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The rediscovery of Tupaia as a historical figure is paralleled by his palingenesis as an epic hero, a process which I have decided to demonstrate using points of intersections between the graphic novel *The Adventures of Tupaia* and the film *Tupaia's Endeavour*. These moments and aspects of Tupaia's life are considered within the literary framework of Ghidoni's twelve-theses model for a *hero-poiesis* and form the base of Tupaia's epic in formation.

They also have been identified as facets of Tupaia's identity and testimonies of his complex nature as an unordinary hero.

Tupaia's story begins with a prophecy by priest Vaita in the great *marae* of Taputapuatea. In the same *marae*, he was formed as an *'ariori*, a travelling preacher of the cult of 'Oro, and he acquired an immense knowledge of ancestral lore and navigation. On board the *Endeavour*, he showed passion for sharing his knowledge and for learning, picking up a form of figurative art entirely new to him, and mediating between a Polynesian and a Western way to represent the world; his mediating and linguistic skills were proved conclusively when he decided to intervene in Cook's first approaches to the Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, where his gifts as a storyteller and orator won him the Māori's respect and brought him fame within a people that was not his own.

These are the elements of Tupaia's epic that already exist, and his literature is only waiting to be written or told. Even the elements that remain unknown or that are still being discussed can and should form part of his epic, as they can be seen as openings where imagination and cultural response can intervene and expand or even redefine Tupaia's identity as a Polynesian epic hero.



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