He Whakaputanga

The Declaration of Independence, 1835

Introduced by Vincent O’Malley

He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni/The Declaration of Independence of New Zealand was signed by fifty-two rangatira from 1835 to 1839. It was a powerful assertion of mana and rangatiratanga, made after decades of Māori and European encounters that had been steadily expanding – both within Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere on the globe as Māori travelled abroad. As rangatira reached out, they also forged new alliances. He Whakaputanga was part of that process, reinforcing ties between northern rangatira and the British Crown that dated back nearly half a century.

As Vincent O’Malley notes in the introduction, He Whakaputanga can mean ‘an emergence’, referring to the birth of a new nation (Nu Tireni or New Zealand) but also marking steps towards unified forms of governance among the many different rangatira, their hapū and iwi. This was a visionary document – remarkable in its time and no less pertinent today.

In these ways and others, He Whakaputanga remains a taonga of great significance. It is shown here along with narratives about the people who signed and those who witnessed. Through these histories new light is shed on a document that signalled New Zealand’s place in the world.

He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni ... is an unequivocal statement of rangatiratanga by a people confident enough in their authority, ideas, and aspirations to debate their concerns in a period of rapid change ...

Now physically fragile,

He Whakaputanga encourages us to remember and value that past and those forebears.

—Dr Aroha Harris (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi), Foreword

Vincent O’Malley is a founding partner of HistoryWorks, a Wellington consultancy specialising in Treaty of Waitangi research, and is the author many books on New Zealand history. His landmark research into the New Zealand Wars has established him as one of New Zealand’s most recognised historians.