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A partnership approach to repatriation: building the bridge from both sides

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ABSTRACT: Māori and Moriori ancestral remains were traded throughout Europe, the Americas and Australia from the 1770s onwards. Repatriation requests have successfully secured the return of many ancestral remains, but the act of repatriation does not always lead to a lasting legacy of friendship and continued collaboration. The University of Birmingham and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa worked together to build a bridge that allowed collaborative work to continue beyond the formal handover ceremony of Māori ancestors in 2013. The bridge was built by mutual respect, increased levels of understanding and willingness to cooperate for the good of both parties through the handover ceremony. From the university's perspective, the act of repatriation was a moral duty, providing an opportunity to address colonial attitudes that had led to the collection and retention of the ancestors. From Te Papa's perspective, the formal handover ceremony provided an opportunity to show respect to the ancestors in an appropriate and culturally sensitive way.

KEYWORDS: Māori, Toi moko, repatriation, ceremony, partnership, culture, belief, ancestral remains, reconciliation, iwi.

Introduction

During the nineteenth century, Britain experienced a growing fascination with exoticism. Visiting travelling shows, which displayed animals and people with rare conditions and unusual human anatomy, became a popular Victorian day out (Qureshi 2011). Medical museums also became fashionable attractions. Alberti (2011) sets the historical context to contemporary debates about collecting and displaying human remains for educational purposes. Anatomical displays of the 'partial person' promoted academic and public discourse about the nature of disease and death. On the one hand, medical museums valued the objects on display as teaching aids and promoters of knowledge, whereas on the other, opening the medical museum to general viewing provided a source of revenue and an opportunity for the public to indulge further in its morbid curiosity. As the public became more aware of these collections in the mid-twentieth century, questions were raised about how the objects were gathered. In the United States, Native American graves were disturbed to gather skulls for prestigious museums and medical schools to expand their comparative anatomy collections (Fabian 2010). The rights of indigenous people not to have grave items taken was finally addressed by the enacting of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990. In Britain in the early twentieth century, the use of paupers' bodies to teach anatomy to medical students was challenged as unethical and deeply dishonouring to the destitute, who could not protect their bodies in death any more than they had been able to in life (Hurren 2012). The context of morbid curiosity and ethical questions about collecting practices provide the background for Māori human remains to be considered.

The beginning of dealings between Māori and Europeans has been described as a time of 'mutual incomprehension', with both sides soon seeking to benefit from new relationships (O'Malley 2012: 14). One aspect of incomprehension on the part of the Europeans was the traditional Māori practice of preserving the heads of loved ones and enemies, each for different purposes. This practice soon became the ground for trade between Māori and Europeans, who seemed to overcome any reticence they may have had in order to make a profit when they traded heads back in Europe. Today, Māori view this part of their history very differently and have come to a position where they seek repatriation of preserved heads and other human remains back to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Museums and medical schools are commonly referred to as 'holding institutions' in debates about repatriation. Requests for repatriation of human remains place a holding institution and indigenous communities in a unique relationship. This relationship is most often one of an extreme power imbalance, with communities requesting the return of ancestors who hold positions of great importance to them and institutions facing the potential loss of valuable parts of their collections. Indigenous communities have no power beyond that of request, whereas institutions may be governed by a legal remit to ensure their collections remain intact. Therefore, the most common experience is one of indigenous communities requesting repatriation and holding institutions being unable or unwilling to comply.

This paper details the unique relationship that has been built between the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) and the University of Birmingham, which began in 2011 when the university offered repatriation of a previously unknown collection of Māori ancestral remains. The relationship continues beyond this act of repatriation, building a long-lasting collaboration that is mutually beneficial to both sides. The two institutions are consequently ideally situated as partners working together to promote the understanding of repatriation of ancestral remains within the wider contexts of the values and beliefs held by both.

History of trade of indigenous remains in Britain and Europe, and from Aotearoa New Zealand

During the colonial period, several philosophies emerged to explain and justify treatment of indigenous communities. Among these was the fascination in Britain and Europe with the exotic 'other', and a morbid preoccupation with beliefs and rituals surrounding life and death. When explorers and traders brought back evidence of cultural diversity, a trade grew to supply museums and private collectors with, among many things, human heads. Tapsell (2005) explains that there were diverse motives for this trade. Profit was one motive, with museums and private collectors paying considerable sums for good specimens, while exchange of goods was another, whereby museums with large collections of indigenous objects were willing to exchange these for European museum objects (Tapsell 2005: 157–159). Some individuals sought to expand their personal collections, such as Horatio Robley (1840–1930), who amassed Toi moko (preserved tattooed Māori head/s) from curio shops in London (Robley 2001). Others, such as the American physician Samuel George Morton (1799–1851), sought skulls from around the world to advance physical anthropology, which gave way to scientific racism, where the shape of a skull was thought to indicate the intellectual and moral characteristics of the race to whom the person belonged (Gould 1978: 503–509). This bolstered colonial beliefs about 'superior' and 'primitive' cultures, creating a rationale for much of the treatment of indigenous people we now find abhorrent.

Europeans arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand

Europeans began arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand coastal waters from 1642, when Dutch explorer Abel Tasman visited the country but failed to land owing to a skirmish between his men and the local iwi (tribe) Ngāti Tumatakokiri at Golden Bay in northwest Te Waipounamu, or South Island. During Captain James Cook's visit to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1769, the first exchange of Māori human remains occurred between Māori and Pākehā (foreigners), with a mummified child 'accepted' by ship's surgeon William Monkhouse from an elder at a village near Anaura Bay, about 75 km north of the modern-day city of Gisborne (Salmond 2004: 124). On the same voyage, but this time at Queen Charlotte Sound in northeast Te Waipounamu, botanist Joseph Banks exchanged a pair of used linen underwear for a Toi moko after he cemented the exchange by producing a musket to provoke the male elder into releasing the head (Te Awekotuku & Nikora 2007: 48).

Some rangatira (chiefs), such as Hongi Hika (Ngāpuhi, 1772–1828) and Pōmare I (Ngāpuhi, ?–1826), became heavily involved in the trade of Toi moko between 1815 and the late 1820s, as they realised a mummified head could command a valuable exchange in items such as muskets, ammunition and metal goods (Te Awekotuku & Nikora 2007: 48; McLintock 2011). Many of these Toi moko are from warriors who were defeated and died in battle, and whose heads were quickly mummified by the victors and then traded at will to visiting ships from Europe, Australia and America (Lee 1983: 145; Ballara 2003: 133). This, however, is only part of the story of how Māori and Moriori remains found their way into collections abroad.

On 6 February 1840, Māori chiefs signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), which provided for the British Crown to govern Aotearoa New Zealand, while Māori retained property rights to their land, fisheries and forests, and also became British subjects (Brookfield 1999: 98–99). Settlers from Britain began to enter the country at this point, and became interested in obtaining Māori tribal lands for farming. Many iwi resisted selling their lands, however, and under increasing pressure from the settlers, the Crown began to obtain the land actively through confiscations of iwi territories (Durie 1998: 35).

From the late 1860s, weighed down with the pressure of the New Zealand land wars, iwi became extremely despondent and vulnerable, and many were unable to protect their lands, including wāhi tapu (sacred repositories), from the prying eyes and hands of Pākehā (Durie 1998: 35; Smith & Aranui 2010: 190; Prebble 2012). With the establishment of colonial and regional museums from this period, the newly appointed directors and/or curators became part of an active trading network involving private collectors, traders, international museums, medical institutions and universities that extended from Europe and the Americas to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Museum directors such as Julius von Haast of the Canterbury Museum and James Hector of the Colonial Museum (now Te Papa) either 'collected' kōiwi tangata (Māori skeletal remains) or received the tūpuna (ancestors) from other 'collectors' in Aotearoa New Zealand (Smith & Aranui 2010: 190; Solomon & Forbes 2011: 217). Te Papa's research of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed in institutions around the world indicates most were stolen after 1860 and traded within Aotearoa New Zealand or directly to collectors, auction houses, museums and/or institutions in Australia, Europe and America.

How the indigenous ancestors arrived at Birmingham University

While many museums and universities have excellent provenance for the indigenous ancestors housed in their collections, in others provenance is either lacking or completely absent. However, in institutions like the University of Birmingham, where collections exist without provenance, some pointers do still remain. The university's medical school building was established in 1825, when surgeon William Sands Cox began a course of anatomical demonstrations in his father's house. The first dedicated medical school was constructed in 1828 and the Queen's Hospital opened as a teaching hospital in 1841. The school was officially opened on its current site at the University of Birmingham in 1938.

Birmingham was an affluent city in the nineteenth century and home to numerous famous physicians, many of whom may have had personal collections of skulls for teaching and research. One tantalising glimpse of this comes from an all-too-brief single line in the minutes of a Medical Faculty meeting held on 30 January 1911: 'Dr McMunn donated mummy heads and skulls to school' (University of Birmingham 1911). This was most likely Charles Alexander McMunn (1852–1911), a life governor of University of Birmingham, who practised as a physician in Wolverhampton (26 km from Birmingham) throughout his career. We have not been able to identify further records of skulls being donated to the university, but it is undoubtedly the case that the physicians themselves, or their families, donated the skulls from their personal collections as public opinion increasingly viewed skull collecting in a morally problematic light.

Māori requesting the return of their ancestors

As indicated earlier, from 1769 Māori became aware that the remains of their kith and kin were departing their villages and coastal regions for locations beyond their iwi territories. Through the activities of men like naturalist and collector Andreas Reischek and Julius von Haast, who plundered wāhi tapu and took tūpuna, iwi became increasingly aware that their ancestors were being stolen for collections in institutions overseas (Smith & Aranui 2010: 190; Prebble 2012). For those tūpuna that remained in museums in Aotearoa New Zealand, some were placed on display and

would remain there until the 1960s (as was the case for the National Museum, now Te Papa) and into the 1970s (in the case of the Whanganui Regional Museum).

Museum practice in Aotearoa New Zealand gradually began to change under the influence of people such as Māui Pōmare of Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Ngāti Mutunga, who in the 1970s was chair of the National Museum. Through his work, the National Museum established an informal wāhi tapu for Māori and Moriori remains in the 1980s. At the same time, some iwi responded by making their own arrangements to bring their ancestors home, such as the Whanganui people, who in 1988 repatriated their rangatira Hohepa Te Umuroa from Maria Island in Tasmania, and the Tainui people, who in 1985 repatriated their rangatira Tūpāhau from the Imperial Natural History Museum in Vienna, later burying him on Maunga Taupiri. Also in 1988, Sir Graham Latimer, on behalf of the Māori Council, sought an injunction in England to prevent the auction of a Toi moko. This tupuna was eventually returned home and buried in the Taitokerau (Northland). In the late 1990s, entertainer Dalvanius Prime of Ngā Rauru Kītahi and Ngāti Ruanui was another campaigner who was active in arranging a number of repatriations.

With the growing support for the repatriation movement in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 1990s, iwi gathered at national hui (meetings) to seek resourcing and establishment of a programme supported by the New Zealand government. It would, however, take a number of years before a fully realised and resourced initiative would eventuate.

The British response to indigenous repatriation requests

Through the work of Māui Pōmare with museums in the United Kingdom and Ireland in the 1980s, Māori ancestral remains discreetly began their journey home. However, the first formal requests for repatriation from the United Kingdom came from Australia on behalf of the Aboriginal community. The prime ministers of the United Kingdom and Australia issued a joint statement in 2000, declaring that increased efforts would be made to repatriate human remains to Australian indigenous communities 'where possible and appropriate' (Law Library of Congress Australia 2009). A working group was commissioned in May 2001 to examine the status of human remains within publically funded museums and galleries in the United Kingdom, and to consider the possibility and desirability of legislative change to allow repatriation to take place (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 2005). The recommendations of the working group were incorporated into the United Kingdom Human Tissue Act 2004, which in subsection 2 of section 47 states that institutions previously prohibited by law from de-accession of human remains would now be able to 'transfer human remains from their collections if it appears to them appropriate to do so for any reason whether or not it relates to their other functions. The power only applies to human remains which are reasonably believed to be of a person who died less than 1,000 years before this section comes into force'.

The instigation for the Human Tissue Act 2004 was public outrage at the retention without parental consent of around 850 children's organs in more than 2000 pots at Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, from 1988 to 1995. The vast majority of the Act consequently deals with appropriate handling of current human tissue, with only section 47 dealing with the possibility of repatriation. In the absence of clear and specific legislation, museums and other institutions need to make moral decisions about how to respond to repatriation requests.

The creation of the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme

In 2003, the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme (KARP) was established by Te Papa, which was mandated by the New Zealand government to seek the repatriation of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed overseas (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatū Taonga 2004). To offer clarity about Te Papa's role to iwi and also within the international sector, the work of KARP is governed by six overarching principles and policy guidelines:

- the government's role is one of facilitation – it does not claim ownership of kōiwi tangata;
- repatriation from overseas institutions and individuals is by mutual agreement only;
- no payment for kōiwi tangata will be made to overseas institutions;
- kōiwi tangata must be identified as originating from New Zealand;

- Māori are to be involved in the repatriation of kōiwi tangata, including determining final resting places, where possible; and
- the repatriation of kōiwi tangata will be carried out in a culturally appropriate manner. (Department of Internal Affairs 2003)

From its establishment in 2003 to March 2015, KARP has negotiated the return of 355 Māori and Moriori remains from more than 50 international institutions (Herewini 2015). Five of these, including a Toi moko and four kōiwi tangata, were returned from the University of Birmingham in October 2013.

The beginning of a partnership

Following the introduction of the Human Tissue Act 2004 in the United Kingdom, the University of Birmingham's School of Medicine formally separated human tissue used for teaching and research from its collection of ancient human remains. In January 2011, a thorough inventory of the ancient collection began. By reviewing the collection and examining anatomy and physiology ledgers, it became clear that there was little available provenance for much of the collection. Although the collection had been preserved, no accompanying documentation has been found to date and is presumed lost during extensive renovations and relocations of the medical school. One part of the collection that had provenance by virtue of its uniqueness was the Toi moko. A series of meetings began between the dean of the School of Medicine, the university's head of religious and cultural beliefs and the director of its Human Biomaterials Resource Centre. These meetings focused around the desire to proactively initiate contact with Te Papa to offer the Māori ancestral remains for repatriation. The decision centred on the moral duty of the university to return Māori ancestral remains, because they were an identifiable part of the collection, they had never been used for teaching or research, and an established Māori repatriation programme was in place that made clear the desire for repatriation. The meetings also highlighted the nefarious historical collecting practices of Toi moko, which strengthened the university's resolve about the moral need to undertake repatriation. In February 2011, the Te Papa repatriation manager was contacted via email by June Jones, the university's head of religious and cultural beliefs, to initiate dialogue and offer repatriation.

Repatriation claim, negotiation and agreement

Email dialogue and the exchange of information established the remains as being Māori. This was then followed by a repatriation claim, issued in writing by Te Herekiekie Herewini, repatriation manager at Te Papa, to the University of Birmingham. It detailed the mandate Te Papa had on behalf of the New Zealand government to make such a claim, along with a request for a written response from the university, inviting formal agreement. The university agreed to the claim after consultation with its legal department ensured that it had the lawful right to de-accession the ancestral remains from its collection. The university acknowledged that the repatriation process could go ahead at a point agreeable to Te Papa, taking into account their schedule for wider repatriation throughout the United Kingdom and Europe. The timeframe for repatriation was negotiated, allowing flexibility for both sides to set a mutually convenient date.

The formal handover ceremony

Once the repatriation date had been agreed, work began on organising the formal handover ceremony. The university was honoured that Te Papa offered the possibility of a two-day visit, with a repatriation seminar and a Māori music demonstration for staff, students and members of the public to be held the day before the formal handover ceremony. This provided the university with the opportunity to understand and fully engage with the significance of repatriation of Māori ancestral remains. An outline of both seminars was provided, which the university gratefully accepted. The repatriation seminar was held in the School of Medicine lecture theatre, while the music seminar was held in the newly opened Bramall Music Building. Both events were advertised throughout the university and wider community, and drew significant interest and appreciation.

Te Papa delegation

Chosen for their knowledge in tikanga (Māori philosophical and customary practice), and of the repatriation process, the delegation from Te Papa included Taki Turner (kaumātua, or senior male elder), Ratau Turner (rūruhi, or senior female elder), Arapata Hakiwai (Te Papa's kaihautū, or Māori co-leader), Te Herekiekie Herewini (Te Papa's repatriation manager) and Te Arikirangi Mamaku (Te Papa's repatriation coordinator) (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Delegation from Te Papa with June Jones at the University of Birmingham on 18 October 2013. Left to right: Arapata Hakiwai (kaihautū, or Māori co-leader, Te Papa), June Jones (head of religious and cultural beliefs, University of Birmingham), Te Herekiekie Herewini (repatriation manager, Te Papa), Taki Turner (kaumātua, or senior male elder), Te Arikirangi Mamaku (repatriation coordinator, Te Papa) and Ratau Turner (rūruhi, or senior female elder) (photo: courtesy of University of Birmingham).

The delegation was charged with four main kaupapa (themes) to uphold: to pay their respects to the tūpuna according to Māori cultural practice; to physically prepare and place the tūpuna into their travelling cases according to Māori cultural and conservation practice; to provide an understanding of why it is important for Māori to repatriate their ancestors; and to emphasise and convey the wairua (spirit) of whakaaro pai (dignity, respect and goodwill). This last kaupapa became a shared theme for the two institutions at the formal handover ceremony and continues as the relationship is forged further.

Components of the formal handover ceremony and their significance

Te Papa supplied the university with very useful documentation about hosting a ceremony in accordance with respecting Māori traditional beliefs and practices. The room layout requirements and the order of ceremony were clearly described, allowing the university to select the most appropriate room. Photographs and a video tour of the room chosen, the university's Senate Chambers, were sent to Te Papa to ensure that it provided the optimum opportunity for the ceremony to be conducted in accordance with Māori beliefs and practices. In October 2013, the Te Papa delegation visited the university for the formal handover ceremony of five Māori ancestors.

The university chose to host the handover in its Senate Chambers for a number of reasons. First, it is the most prestigious room in the institution, a place where senate members meet to govern the university. Second, it is a circular room with movable furniture and two private entrances, providing easy access. And third, it is situated above the main entrance to the Aston Webb building, where staff who died whilst serving in the two world wars are honoured in two large marble memorials. This room

Fig. 2 Repatriation handover ceremony in the Senate Chambers at the University of Birmingham on 18 October 2013 (photo: courtesy of University of Birmingham).

represents the importance of governance, decision-making and honouring those no longer with us – concepts all relevant to repatriation.

The ceremony itself lasted 35 minutes, beginning with the sounding of the pūtātara (conch-shell trumpet) to acknowledge the arrival of the tūpuna, and followed by te hikoi (the procession of the ancestral remains), karanga (the female spiritual acknowledgement to the ancestors), mau kākahu (placement of contemporary Māori cloaks on the ancestors), karakia me te mihi (traditional male-led prayers and greeting to the ancestors), whaikōrero (speeches by members of the university and Te Papa), hainatanga o te whakaaetanga (signing the legal transfer agreement between the university and Te Papa), koha (exchanges of gifts between the university and Te Papa) and hongi (Māori greeting in which noses and foreheads are pressed together to share the breath of life). To complete the ceremony, rūruhi Ratau Turner farewelled the tūpuna with a karanga as they were carried from the room to their waiting transportation. As the participants left the ceremonial room, they had the opportunity of wai whakanoa (cleansing oneself with water), and sharing something to eat.

An important element of the formal ceremony was the customary giving of a gift to members of the university taking part. Te Papa provided a number of gifts, including a range of books about Māori culture and neck pendants made of pounamu (New Zealand greenstone). The university reciprocated by giving a fine print of the architect's drawing of the Aston Webb building, where the repatriation ceremony was being held. For both institutions, the presentation of gifts is seen as a lasting memento of their partner organisation, namely the place where the ceremony was held, and the homeland to where the tūpuna returned for their final rest.

Discussion

This paper concludes with personal perspectives on the handover process from the authors, who represent both parties involved. The first two paragraphs are by June Jones

from the University of Birmingham, while the remainder of the section is by Te Herekiekie Herewini of Te Papa's KARP.

From an ethical perspective, repatriation of indigenous remains is an important endeavour. Working in partnership with the Te Papa delegation allowed University of Birmingham staff to explore how this ethical endeavour could best be undertaken. Having guests present to take part in the ceremony was important. In partnership, we took the decision to invite the New Zealand High Commissioner and 50 other guests, including senior members of the university, members of the chaplaincy and student representatives, as well as members of partner institutions in the local community. We created a ceremony booklet for each guest, in the form similar to an order of service common at funerals in the UK. This served as a sign of respect to the Māori delegation and as an indication of what would happen during this unique ceremony, enabling guests to feel more comfortable as they encountered the unknown. As the ceremony finished at lunchtime, we chose to invite all of our guests to stay for a buffet lunch in a room close to the handover ceremony. This created a relaxed atmosphere where guests stayed to meet the Māori delegation and network with colleagues. It also served as an informal opportunity for colleagues to debrief after the ceremony. Several guests found the ceremony very emotional and lingered to reflect rather than returning immediately to work. We chose to provide an elaborate buffet because we wanted to honour our Māori guests and demonstrate our intention of a good legacy, with a lasting friendship that would endure beyond the process of repatriation. The final act of repatriation created the opportunity for a legacy of which both the university and Te Papa is proud.

Photographs of the ceremony served a number of important ethical purposes. They demonstrated to those members of the Māori community who could not be present that due respect was paid to the ancestors through upholding Māori beliefs and practices. They also served as a point of reference for the university in recording the acts that took place. Photographs of the repatriation delegation and hosts served as a legacy of important relationships. In partnership with Te Papa, we decided that we would use the university's press department to liaise with media outlets. We collaborated to invite selected media to the ceremony, including BBC News, BBC History, Māori TV and TV New Zealand. Each media organisation was provided with a strict protocol by the press department about ways in which the ceremony could be recorded and the recordings used. Te Papa provided the media format for recording the ceremony, where media are not permitted to enter the sacred space created as part of the ceremony. The Māori delegation and university host were interviewed live for local BBC news. In collaboration with Te Papa, the university made a recording of the ceremony for YouTube (University of Birmingham 2013), so that as many people as wished could have access to it. Our intention was to create a resource that other institutions could consult when considering how to host their own repatriation ceremonies. The recordings also mark the significant collaboration between the University of Birmingham and Te Papa.

The focus of the repatriation team at Te Papa is bringing our tūpuna home with their mana intact. It is important for us to convey the strong connection that remains between us, as their living descendants, and these ancestors, male and female, who lived and fought on our behalf so many generations ago. From 1769 Māori and Moriori ancestral remains have been viewed by Europeans as exotic curiosities, for trade and exchange, and placed in private collections, museums and medical institutions, where they were examined, probed and displayed. Most likely the hundreds and possibly thousands of people who came across the tūpuna gave little thought as to their past lives, the dark trade in indigenous remains, or how these deceased people came to be exhibited and displayed as part of collections so far from their indigenous homelands. We have little power to change the past and the deeds or misdeeds of our ancestors, but as the present generation we do have the opportunity to offer mana and whakaaro pai in how we bring the misdeeds to a conclusion.

The process of offering whakaaro pai is not to forget how the tūpuna arrived overseas, because that is an important element of the story. For the Te Papa repatriation team, the elements tono (request), whakawhitiwhiti kōrero (negotiation), and tuku tūpuna (releasing the ancestors) and hiki tūpuna (uplifting the ancestors) are equally important, as they allow both institutions involved to achieve tatau pounamu (enduring peace) and to make the exchange with whakaaro rangatira (honour). The process also allows both groups to walk away as rangatira, with dignity, respect, power and prestige.

The collaboration with the University of Birmingham allowed the Te Papa delegation to bring closure to the events of the past in a way that our tūpuna would be familiar with,

and where both groups offered each other resolution in the process and created a new chapter to the story that started in 1769. The experience will remain in the memories of those who participated.

E kore e warewaretia. Never to be forgotten.

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