

Recreating the Past through Technology and AI

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Recreating the Past through Technology and AI Practices

So here we are: using technology not to replace history, but to reach back into it.

There is a familiar feeling that comes with reading old journals, letters, or historical accounts - a picture slowly forms in the mind. It is vivid, emotional, and deeply personal, yet strangely difficult to describe. Even more ironic is how hard it is to draw or reproduce that image on paper. It exists clearly in thought, but resists translation.

That same feeling came rushing back to me while reading about the last recorded Hiri voyages.

What made this experience different was encountering an image that brought that imagined past closer to reality. Although the background of the image was created using artificial intelligence, the challenge it seeks to address is an old one: how do we transform imagination, memory, and fragmented history into something visual? From a traditional Motu Koitabu perspective, this is particularly difficult because much of our history was never written down. Yet whatever little has been recorded deserves to be expressed - even if that expression now includes modern tools such as AI to help “recreate the past.”

What makes this image even more powerful is that it does not simply recreate a moment in history. The subject of the photo, Sye Vye, is recreating his own great-great-grandfather, Kohu Vagi - a man listed as one of the last to sail on the historic Hiri voyages.

Kohu Vagi, from Kwaradubuna, was the Badi tauna, and Dai Oala from Tubumaga was the Dori tauna, with the others identified as shown in the inserted image. From my interactions with elders a few years ago, Kohu Vagi was remembered as one of those villagers who resisted drastic changes to the way we lived. Tradition was central to his life and guided how he walked in the world.

My first look at the image immediately took me back to the piece I had read about the final recorded voyages. What struck me even more was the possibility that neither the subject in the photo nor the creator of the image may have realised they were recreating something far more significant than a general historical scene - that this sail, in fact, represented the last of the Hiri voyages, a defining moment in Motu Koitabu history.

Sye may have been walking in the footsteps not only of his ancestors, but of his own great-great-grandfather - and of the “last voyage” itself. That unintentional recreation adds another layer of meaning, doesn’t it?

So here we are: using technology not to replace history, but to reach back into it. To bring forward the images our ancestors left behind only in memory and story, and in this case, to reflect on a defining moment: the last voyage. And what better way to recreate that moment

than through bloodlines - classic!

My thanks to the person who created this image. Patrick M.

Give us a shout out if you can see your great grandfather's name in the list!

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