

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand: Episode 12: Ladies.

Before we get going, I want to give a big thank you to Robin of the History of Byzantium, who you heard just before. He was a huge help to me getting this whole started as well as being part of the inspiration for the format of the Maori myth episodes. I highly recommend you check out his podcast, its absolutely fantastic! He was also kind enough to let me pop into his own show so for those of you who came from there, harae mai, welcome! I hope you will enjoy learning about Aotearoa New Zealand! But I should say that I recommend you go back to the first episode and work your way up to here. It will give you a much better understanding of what we are talking about now and help you with learning words from Te Reo Maori, the Maori language, which we use a lot of to illustrate certain ideas. If you are struggling to remember what each Te Reo word means, there is a page on the website, historyaotearoa.com, that should help you remember and understand the words we have used thus far. So, now you have listened to all the episodes, let's get going!

Last time we talked about how Maori viewed their own borders and ownership of land and how that contrasted with European ideas along with what houses were made of and the importance of maraes. After looking at the script for this episode again, I realised it was going to be really long. So instead of doing one big episode I'm going to make it two shorter ones. To decide which topic to focus on this week, I put up a poll on Twitter and Facebook, and democracy decided we are going to change tack a bit and look specifically at traditional Maori women and their place in society, which is something that is often omitted in written histories. Women don't tend to have much power throughout history and the people writing stuff down were men, who often weren't interested in what women were up to cause in their mind, they weren't up to much so being able to have some information about them is fairly rare but supremely interesting. We will return to the marae next time to talk about what you would be doing in one, specifically the most common ceremony at the beginning of a meeting, or hui, the powhiri.

Before we get started though, in the course of today's topics are going to talk about one rather explicit thing so if you are listening with your kids, and I know there is the odd one of you out there that does, then you may wish to stop here and screen this episode before letting your children's ears listen to my filth (pause). They gone? Alright, today we are going to discuss something so embarrassing, so socially reprehensible, we barely even like to discuss it in public or acknowledge its existence, sex! So, with that warning in place, let's get into it!

As I mentioned, women throughout history don't tend to get talked about much and generally when they do get some air time its mostly to lambast them for being too lustful or trying to kill their stepson. So we sometimes don't know much about specific women but thankfully we do know what Maori women were generally up to in the pre-European era. From a young age both boys and girls were having their bodies manipulated to bring them closer to what was considered attractive such as the nose being pinched and the knees being rubbed occasionally. Women would also have the first joint of their thumb bent outwards to aid in weaving and flax preparation later on in life. Both men and women would also be expected to have some sort of ta moko, tattooing, before they would even be considered for marriage. We will talk about it more in a later episode but women would generally get only their lips and chin tattooed whereas men would get their entire face and most of their body done, although just some facial tattooing was required for a young bachelor to be thought of as attractive. Women naturally wanted to marry a hard working man who could provide for them and there were sayings among female circles that reinforced this, such as, and I do apologise for the pronunciation, I'm not used to speaking full sentences in Te Reo, "*Tane rou kakahi ka moea; tane moe i roto i te whare kurua te takataka*". If a man is proficient in gathering shellfish, marry him; if he sleeps lazily in the house, reject him. Which I think is pretty fair enough. Men did

have a corresponding proverb though that went “*Wahine i te ringaringa, waewae kama, moea; wahine i te ngutu kakama, whakarerea atu*” If a girl has nimble hands and feet, marry her; if she is only agile at talking, leave her alone. Now, this may sound harsh but just remember, women were weaving clothes and mats for warmth. A man’s survival relied just as much on a woman making him warm clothes than a woman relied on a man to get food. Anyway, the general gist is that men wanted women that could weave and prepare food for them, as well as be proficient at hospitality and dancing, although this was more important for rangatira and women wanted a man who could provide that food for preparing so they wouldn’t starve.

How do you get to the point of marriage though? Well, we find that in areas like this, women had a lot of freedom. Women frequently initiated courtship, especially where the woman was of higher rank than the man she was interested in. She could do this in a couple of different ways, such as by simply announcing her choice in public or by making more discrete gestures like squeezing his hand or pinching his knee. Not sure how that last one is meant to be discrete though, it’s not like you can just casually lean down and pinch someone’s knee. I would have thought it would be rather obvious? In any case, that’s what they apparently did to indicate attraction. What would they do with that attraction? Well, what anyone does when they meet an attractive person on Tinder! They get busaaay! In all seriousness, premarital sex was actually pretty common and well accepted for both sexes, except for daughters of chiefs. Many early explorers commented on the sexual freedom of young women but a lot of reports that we get are also from European sailors who were often presented with women for their pleasure, which was usual and expected in Maori culture. In these same accounts though, sailors quickly begin to realise that the removal or absence of any women when receiving hospitality was an indication of an impending attack. Of course, sexual promiscuity in a hapu was limited by a few things such as whether the hapu was small, incest and large differences in rank. The other thing to note from this is that even though Maori society was promiscuous it didn’t mean you could just go waving your John Thomas in the middle of the street, exposure of the pubic region in particular was considered indecent. In fact, it was thought so indecent that there is an account of a woman being attacked whilst naked and instead of covering her head she covers her genitals! In terms of marriage, not all sex was equal though. Sex outside of the house was just that, sex. But sex inside the house was more important and implied marriage and if you wanted to marry a man who the hapu didn’t approve of, well, just have someone catch you getting it on at his place!

Although mutual attraction was something that was the foundation of a marriage, there was likely a bit of politics thrown in there too with the heads of families also having some influence over who a woman could marry, especially if she was daughter of a chief or similar high rank. If she was unwilling to marry her chosen suiter then she may be confined to a pataka until she agreed, which was not an uncommon punishment. Once a marriage was decided there wasn’t really a marriage ceremony as such, just the handing over of the bride from her male relatives to her new husband as his property, a tradition called pakuha. Given that a woman was seen as her husband’s property, adultery was naturally a serious offence, often leading to war. It wasn’t just as simple as catching them in the act though, you had to determine who was at fault. By that I mean if they were found in the woman’s whare, the man was considered the seducer and killed, if in the man’s whare, she was killed for seducing him. Makes you wonder if they had arguments over where they would have their next meeting given one of them would very clearly be on the hook if caught! The interesting thing about this pretty severe punishment was that it was universally accepted as an appropriate punishment and as such utu was not often pursued in response to the execution. There were some instances of the husband or wife that had been crossed getting support from their hapu and attacking the hapu of the seducer, potentially eating them. It wasn’t all grim though, for example

there was one report where a chief forgave his wife for cheating on him with a slave who was meant to guard her as she was the one who instigated the affair. Had it been the other way around, the slave would have been executed and eaten. If adultery wasn't discovered through catching them in the act, the other way was to find out through omens such as undercooked food or catching a fish through the tail rather than its mouth.

Although adultery was a serious crime, polygamy was also present, meaning men would commonly have more than one wife. We aren't totally sure if there was a limit to the amount of women a man could marry, some say it was a max of four whereas others say there wasn't a limit at all. Most chiefs are said to have had anywhere between five to 12 wives with most men having at least two if they had the means to do so. A man didn't just marry a bunch of women with no structure to it though. One of the women would be the first or principal wife, called the *wahine matua*, and would have all the privileges and responsibilities that would come with that position. One such privilege is if the union bore children they would get precedence over children born from other wives when it came to rank and succession. The first wife would usually be of similar rank to her husband to preserve his mana and because the marriage was usually for political reasons, such as allying two hapu together. For a chief, having more than one wife conferred a lot of prestige and was a good way to show off your wealth by being able to indicate that you could feed and house everyone under one roof. This was enhanced if one or more of his wives was a noble and brought slaves, property and alliances with her to her husband. What is interesting is that if a woman had rights to or owned any land she would often continue to reside thereafter with her chiefly husband travelling to spend time with each woman in turn. It wasn't all sunshine and roses though between the wives and there was often tension between them. When women were asked if they would prefer monogamy they, fairly predictably, say yes, they would prefer to have a monogamous marriage. What's interesting though is that we hear of a chief who also said he would prefer to have only one wife so he wouldn't have to deal with the friction polygamy caused. This may have contributed to a common practice of sisters being married to the same man, perhaps to keep any issues in house, as it were. Polygamy also led to the obligation of a man to marry his brother's wife or wives when he died so as not to leave them destitute. Despite what people thought though, the economic, labour and prestige incentives likely made it much more worth it. This can be seen in a proverb from the time, "*Ka mate whare tahi, ka ora whare rua*", one house brings disaster, two houses, life. Where there is marriage, there is divorce and a woman could be divorced if she failed to produce children. In particular male children as they were the ones who would inherit and bring the most mana to a whanau or hapu. This was one of the areas where women got a bit shafted because women were generally accepted as being the receptacle and bearer of a man's "spirit", which came from the story of the god Tanemahuta and his wife. Despite this, women were held responsible for a lack of conception, hence the divorce which in some instances was insisted on by the woman herself, often suggesting her husband marry her sister instead. Quick sidenote, it seems that homosexuality for both males and females may have been not only common but reasonably well accepted, which is present in other Pacific cultures as well.

Women could also be offered up as part of peace negotiations after war. Usually it would be a high ranking woman or the chief's daughter which would boost the mana of the victorious chief. Women who were captured in battle were usually referred to as concubines but were well treated, along with their children, despite their lower status.

We have talked about the division of labour a little bit before with men doing the more arduous and physical tasks with women taking the more monotonous tasks. In saying that though, Women did do some rather physical tasks such as carrying logs for building houses or paddling waka when going

to war. They wouldn't do this in the war canoes though, as they were highly decorated with carvings. Women would follow in their own canoes. What's funny about this is that it was also a woman's job to load waka for travel and apparently more than one chief did have difficulty loading canoes due to a lack of women present. Like, come on fellas, harden up and do it yourself! Many jobs were even undertaken side by side such as when planting, men would dig up the soil with women following along with the seeds or men fishing as women collected shellfish. The only exception to that second one is paua, men dived for that as it is found a bit deeper. Even though there was this division of labour some tasks were performed by both sexes, such as foraging for plants, preparing dyes and we even see men weaving baskets and cloaks, with some high value cloaks having been made by men rather than women. This didn't necessarily swing the other way though given women's noa status. So, things like ta moko and carving, both very tapu professions, were unavailable to them. In short young women weren't just child carers and homemakers, they were expected to pull their weight in the community.

As a woman got older her responsibility would change to looking after the next generation. They would sing lullabies to children that would detail their whakapapa, mythology and other tribal history. Matters on tapu were also taught at a young age, again told in the form of stories, people receiving punishment for stepping on tapu ground and such. As the child got older, independence and curiosity was regarded highly with parents and grandparents sometimes not punishing their children as harshly so as not discourage bravery and audacity, mostly in males. Altruism with the tribe was also encouraged with the education of children being the responsibility of the entire tribe and children helping with chores when they were old enough. In the case of girls, they would have learned how to prepare a hangi, carry firewood, clear weeds and prepare flax for weaving by about 9 or 10 years old. Training in weaving itself also began around 10 but this was with much more ritual and tapu. Mothers also spoke rather freely about menstruation as this involved tapu as well. For example, women could not prepare a hangi if menstruating as the food would not cook properly. Another way of teaching cultural norms was through games, haka and poi, which is a traditional form of Maori dance which involves spinning weights held by a rope.

So, after all that I bet there are some of you jumping up and down wondering if women could become chiefs, given I have exclusively referred to rangatira and ariki as being males. Well, I do have to disappoint you a little as although it was not unheard of for a woman of high rank to become a chief, it was fairly rare. Usually if the first born was a girl she would be afforded much more respect than if she was born further down the line and as such she would be referred to as ariki-tapairu or perhaps just tapairu, chief by association, with her oldest brother assuming the actual chieftanship. But, as we have discussed, women could rise to some prominence, such as the late Maori Queen and depending how you view things, traditional Maori women did have a lot of freedoms that their European counterparts may have not.

Next time, we will return to the marae to look at powhiri, the traditional Maori ceremony of greeting which will involve speeches, challenges, singing, fancy introductions and we will talk a bit about cannibalism too. So you may want to skip the next one too if you don't want to have your kids listening to that either.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can reach me through email at historyaotearoa@gmail.com or Twitter at History Aotearoa or Facebook at History Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast. Don't forget to rate us on iTunes or your preferred podcast platform and to tell your friends to help us grow and teach more people about the history of our island nation! As always, haere tu atu, hoki tu mai. See you next time!