

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand: Episode 12: Powhiri. When the last episode was released, it was a day or two before I appeared at the start of Robin Pierson's the History of Byzantium podcast. Since then, we have reached a high of number 20 in Educational on Spotify in New Zealand and number 12 in History in New Zealand on iTunes. So huge thank you to Robin and to you out there listening! I hope some of you are going to stick with us as we move through the history of Aotearoa!

Hopefully you have also listened to the previous episode as last time we talked about Maori women and what their life was like in pre-European society. This week we are going to return to the marae talk about what you would be doing on one, specifically the most common ceremony at the beginning of a meeting, called a hui, the powhiri. Like last time though, I do need to warn you that there will be another rather explicit topic this time, cannibalism. We are going to take a bit of a longer look at it so if you would rather not have your kids listen to me talk about people eating other people, then maybe skip this one too.

A couple episodes ago we talked about the marae and what it looked like physically but we didn't really talk too much about what it was used for or why you would bother to build a structure like that in the first place. The marae was the centre of all community, political and diplomatic matters, it was where people came together to engage in debate, feast, mourn and give their case on legal claims. As we mentioned some time back, rangatira were only really totally acknowledged in war with most community matters being decided by consensus from discussion by the kaumatua. In fact, hapu in the South Island formed runanga, tribal councils in which whole communities participated and would be chaired by a upoko runanga, community heads. In cases involving inter-hapu relations or within iwi, rangatira that were dominant at the time would be nominated by the rest of the tribe to represent their interests and on rare occasions an ariki would be nominated to speak for an entire iwi. To me, this system seems really similar to those described on board 17th century pirate ships. And I am not saying pre-European Maori are in any way similar to pirates, so lets just nip that in the bud right now. Pirates had a system of democracy, more or less, where captains were elected, along with quatermasters who looked out for the interests of the crew and had right of veto on all the captains decisions. Many other crew wide issues were decided among the crew by consensus, as to where to look for prizes. The only time this didn't apply was in battle, where the captains command was law, cause you can't go questioning your captain, or rangatira, when every second counts and your hapu's lives are at stake.

Anyway, the point is, this system basically revolved around the idea of a hui. A hui is a fairly general term meaning a meeting or gathering of some kind. To avoid conflict, potentially because they were unable to fight or the risk was too great, hapu and iwi would come together to compete in non-violent ways, such as providing the best hospitality, issue oratory challenges, display their haka and ability to wield a taiaha, waka races and display feats of memory like reciting whakapapa and other stories, they even liked to debate those stories. In general, it was a place to secure or renew relationships, eat, drink and gain mana. I think you would likely find a lot of similarity between Maori hui and pre-Norman conquest, Anglo-Saxon feasts. Hui would go on to serve Maori well when they were faced with the titanic bureaucracy of the European empires as a method to organise discussions, alliances and war.

All hui were roughly similar but had slight variations between districts or tribes. In some hapu, the host spoke first and in others the guests; some alternated between the host speaking and then the guests and in other tribes all speakers from one side had their turn before the other; some tribes forbade women from speaking at all while others tolerated it with even fewer encouraging it. So,

like everything we have been talking about the past few weeks, there is a general structure but every different hapu and iwi has their own little variations.

With that in mind, let's do a bit of a run through of what you would expect if you were to arrive onto a pre-European marae or even today as this is still largely followed in the modern era. The powhiri or welcoming ceremony is what this collection of events and rituals is called, starting with the manuhiri, visiting group, gathering outside the marae complex or even some distance away from the marae, given hapu likely wouldn't want rivals in their village without knowing their intentions. The visiting group was often sorted into some sort of hierarchy, which would determine how they entered and who spoke first, largely depending on their intentions.

Before the guests would reach the gates to the village though, a sentry armed with a taiha or patu would run out to give a wero, a challenge. Naturally in a time when war was common, a large group approaching a sometimes fortified settlement was something to be worried about so he would alert the hapu to be ready to fight or welcome them before he rushed out to issue the wero. This would almost be a mini haka in the way he spoke and gestured, it would be designed to be confrontational and fearsome. This served a couple of different purposes: the first was to remind the party that they here were not tangata whenua, people of the land, that was the hapu. They were manuhiri and if they were here to fight, the local hapu would fight to the bitter end to defend their land and lives. The other was to allow the warrior to get a gauge of how the visiting party reacted to the challenge, which would tell him a lot about their intentions. If one of them broke ranks to take up his challenge, then they were clearly hostile. And don't think this bloke was performing this wero for show, like the guards at Buckingham Palace he would be a real warrior, highly skilled with his weapon and would very prepared to kill anyone who seemed like a threat. However, if the visitors approached him and made no threatening moves, he would place a gift on the ground which would be picked up by the leader, indicating they had arrived peacefully. The warrior would then lead the group back to the village, not without keeping eyes in the back of his head, of course.

As the visitors approached the karanga, calls, would begin. This would be sung in a wavering, high pitched voice by a specially trained woman, those of you who live in New Zealand are likely familiar with what I'm talking about. Most commonly, a woman from each group would call back and forth to one another as the visitors slowly advanced. If the visitors didn't have a woman capable of doing this, sometimes the local hapu would provide one. The karanga can be done by men as well, apparently but I've personally never seen it and there are some traditions that say only women can dispel the tapu of a marae properly as these calls were to not only welcome the visiting group but to also dispel tapu and placate the spirits.

Once both groups had come close enough, each would perform their haka. We will talk about haka in a later episode about warfare, as that is what it is most associated with but like the wero, this was done both for practical and ritual reasons. Namely, it showed off the martial prowess of each group, showing off muscle, weapons and how much wehi you could instil as well as the fact that some traditions say the marae belongs to Tu, the god of war.

After everyone had calmed down, whaikorero, formal speeches, would commence, which would include a pepeha, a very formal way of saying who you were by saying where you were from and who you were related to. You have probably heard this called a mihi or a mihimihi which isn't strictly true. A mihi is the formal greeting at the beginning of a formal speech, of which a pepeha is a part of, usually the first thing someone will say as part of a mihi. Even to this day it is not uncommon to see someone use this in formal settings when introducing themselves. The exact contents of

these will vary from place to place (are you sick of me saying that yet?) but to give you a very VERY general example here is a basic pepeha:

Ko Takitimu te maunga. Ko Otepunī te awa. Ko Ingarihi te Iwi. Ko Rillstone te Hapu. Ko Te Whanganui-a-Tara te whare nui. Ko Dominic raua ko Denise oku matua. Ko Thomas Toku ingoa.

The mountain I affiliate with is Takitimu. The river I affiliate with is Otepunī. My tribe is the English. My sub-tribe is Rillstone. My great house is Wellington. My parents are Dominic and Denise. My name is Thomas.

So, there is a few things to unpack here cause the Maori in the audience are probably fuming right now and not without reason. That was a rather, quite frankly, barstardised pepeha because I made it myself with zero consultation from someone who actually knows what their doing, so please don't judge me on something I have only used as an example! If you intend to introduce yourself using this in a serious, formal in event I would highly recommend getting help from someone who knows how to get you going, it will save you a lot of embarrassment. It's also a bit harder cause with me not being Maori, I don't affiliate with an iwi, hapu or marae. I've been told you can substitute your iwi for your ancestral country of origin, which I'm unsure of and changing the hapu to your last name makes sense but marae is a bit harder. Your marae is essentially meant to be your turangawaewae, the place where you have the right to stand, your place of residence. Since I live in Wellington and am registered to vote here to participate in local and national elections, I substituted that for my marae, it's not really a great stand in. The mountain and river are fairly self explanatory as it shows where I am from and where my roots are. Other things that are often added in are your waka, which Pakeha typically will substitute the ship their first ancestors in New Zealand arrived on (don't say Endeavour, I've seen that before and you just look like an idiot), you can also add grandparents, a prominent or founding ancestor and the pepeha should be preceded and followed by a formal greeting. The whole thing is meant to be said with humility and respect, part of that is making sure you greet everyone present appropriately. Again, seek professional advice before you do anything in front of a bunch of important people that you might regret!

Anyway, back to the speeches. This section of a powhiri could be quite long depending on the event and how many people speak but usually a speech would only last a few minutes. As we have said, more often than not women would not be allowed to speak and would be located behind the men when entering a marae. Nowadays though, a woman with great mana may have a man speak on her behalf to preserve tradition, such as the late Dame Te Atarangi Kahu, the former Maori Queen, who often travelled with a speaker until her passing in 2006. Yeahhh, bet you didn't know Maori had a monarchy! You have to wait a while longer before we talk about that! Anyway, this restriction on female speakers is a bit controversial today, given we are meant to be a fair and equal society for all and this could be seen as women being inferior to men. However, the opposing argument is that by men being in front of women, both physically when doing a haka or entering a marae, and in terms of speaking, it elevates women as being more important as the men are protecting them from danger. However, I'll leave you to decide which side of the fence you sit.

Each speech would end in a waiata, song, that would be sung by either the speaker and his group or just the speaker alone. I say song but it could be anything from a chant to a small haka as well. Again, the waiata served a couple of purposes; strengthen bonds between the two groups if the song was well known each side could join in and indicate agreement on the subject of preceding speech. They were also a way of increasing mana if the speaker was a particularly adept singer, since everyone can appreciate a good voice. No one would usually hold it against them if they weren't that good though, you can't excel at everything!

After whaikorero and waiatas would be the koha, gift giving, usually by the guests to their hosts. This could range from food, taonga, tribal treasures or money in the modern day. The gifts given should be of equal or more value to what it would cost the host hapu to feed and house the visitors, essentially this idea relates back to utu, reciprocation. We have briefly touched on utu in the negative sense, the idea that a rangatira could seek utu from someone for being wronged but there was also the positive aspect, the reciprocation of goods and hospitality because you wouldn't want the host hapu to starve next winter cause your greedy group ate all their winter stores. This gift giving would also imply to the host group that if they were to visit the marae of the guests that they would be afforded the same level of treatment.

Up until this point, neither side would have likely made physical contact so now was the time to embrace and greet each other with hongiri. Hongiri is a traditional form of Maori greeting performed by pressing noses together, usually with eyes closed. This stems from the myth of the creation of the first woman, Tanemahuta breathes life into her via the nose, which we heard in Episode 8. It is sometimes called the sneeze of life, although I've never heard it called that, and it is all about sharing and breathing the same air. Hongiri is still used today, particularly at formal events, for example between government officials and iwi representatives. It has a bit more of a modern twist now as it is often done in conjunction with a handshake or a kiss to the cheek if one or both of the people are women.

Once you got through all that, you were likely a bit peckish so everyone head to the whare kai, dining hall, and have hikari, a feast. This in part would represent the return to the non-tapu physical realm as the powhiri is lathered in tapu and is extremely spiritual. Now, I don't quite know where to put this but I really want to talk about it at some point and feasting seems like the place to do it so lets quickly talk about the C-word, cannibalism. Cannibalism is a bit of a controversial topic in modern day Aotearoa as no one really likes to admit their ancestors did something that we would today consider morally reprehensible, even more so if your culture places heavy emphasis on ancestral veneration. However, it seems to be fairly well accepted among scholars that cannibalism did occur in New Zealand prior and during the arrival of Europeans as we have seen evidence of it in archaeology as well as in the writings of explorers. One such explorer is Alexander Majoribanks, who was well, quite the character, shall we say. In his book *Travels in New Zealand*, first published in 1847, he said New Zealand was once called the "Cannibal Islands" and pretty much said cannibalism was common among Maori. According to him though, they didn't just eat anyone, prisoners of war or those killed in utu, or slaves as we have touched on before were mostly the ones eaten but only certain parts of the body. For example the head was considered tapu so that was often buried. He even tells of reports from battlefields with recently killed warriors being seen with legs and arms missing and body parts all over the area. He says that broken bones were found that were picked clean of the meat and marrow. Majoribank is quick to state that despite what he has heard, Europeans are exempt from this custom and will not be eaten, although he does describe attacks on American and French ships that resulted in the crews being eaten. Some of Captain Cook's officers even tried some and said it tasted like pork, with others Majoribanks talked to confirming that. He also tells of some pretty brutal stories, for example, a missionary coming across a group who were cooking a 14 year old boy and the cook held him up so the missionary could get a better look at him but "he was not enough done at that time." Another story he tells is of a chief cutting the neck of a prisoner and drinking their blood and even another of a chief having a slave girl unknowingly prepare a hangi, that when she asks for the food to put in it, she is told she is to be the food and when she breaks down in tears, she is pushed in.

Now, if all of this sounds a bit graphic and maybe even tinged with a bit, or even a lot, of racism, you would be right. You may have picked up that I said Majoribanks heard this or reported that. As far as I can tell, he never actually saw any of this, most of it is just taken from stories he hears from people he meets, which isn't exactly a great way to gather evidence. He also seems to perhaps misunderstand, or those he talks to misunderstand, where the tradition cannibalism comes from. Namely the god of war, Tu eating his brothers, such as Tane and Tangaroa. To me, this sounds like the myth potentially talks more about how Tu, creator of the first man, eats the children of his brothers, the birds, lizards, fish and such, and establishes how man should have dominance over the land and beasts. That's just speculation though. To add to this, Majoribanks was horrifically racist, stating that the practice of cannibalism was dying out as the Maori became "civilised". And you might think he thought they were uncivilised because lots of tribal peoples were seen as such for being non-Christian with much different traditions and a much different way of living but for him it was a bit weirder. Majoribanks thought Maori originated from the same group as Jews before God chose them to be his people. He thought when God spoke to the Jewish people and told them to do things like not mark their bodies, which he takes to mean things like tattooing, something Maori were fond of, this group of proto-Jews split into those who followed the word and those who didn't. By that I mean, the Jewish people followed the word of God but Maori were worse cause they heard the word but ignored or refused it. He backs this up with evidence from the Bible, naturally but also by saying that since Maori loved money and were greedy they were obviously descended from Jews! Which is just bonkers, no matter which way you slice it. What I'm trying to get at is take his stories with a hefty grain of salt. But for both sides, those who don't really wish to acknowledge the cannibalism of their ancestors and the rampant racism and likely exaggeration given by Majoribanks, it is important to understand that these were products of their time. This was a different people in a different age with different beliefs, views and living in a world that was day to day much different than our own. We can acknowledge that these practices and views are terrible and do not fit in today's moral code but to do that we must accept and own that this happened and remove ourselves from judging these people based on modern day morals.

That concludes our look into Maori social structures and social interactions. It isn't the end of our dives into pre-European Maori culture though, oh no, we are just getting started. Next time we will be doing a Maori myth, probably something on Maui before cracking into our next topic, carving!

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!