

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand, Episode 18: A Carver and his Carvings. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Eric, Rachel, Patrick and Lars. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Just before we started you heard from the awesome people at the For Your Reference Podcast. If you're into movies like I am then I would highly recommend checking them out and hearing their hot takes on various films and TV, such as their view on History's Vikings, which I fervently disagree with! If you need another reason though, I was a guest on their show recently to talk about one of my favourite films, Predestination starring Ethan Hawk. So if for someone reason you can't get enough of me and want to hear about another subject I am passionate about, look up For Your Reference! Also don't forget about the giveaway! I am giving out three caps and three beanies with the HANZ tuatara on them to some lucky people. To enter, just follow the instructions in the show notes or on the website under this episode. It ends in two weeks so get in while you can!

Last time we talked about the mythical origins of carving, telling the story of how Ruatēpupuke went down to the realm of Tangaroa, god of the sea, to rescue his son, only to burn down a whare and steal the pou and tekoteko, which his son had now become. We also talked a bit about the development of carving across the centuries and ended with tokotoko, the carved walking sticks that are still wielded today by great orators. This time we will talk more about specific motifs used in Maori wood carving, focussing particularly on the depiction of humans as well as some examples from the archaeological record and talk a bit about carvers themselves.

One of the first times a European was presented with examples of motifs and patterns used by Maori carvers was in 1909 when Anaha Te Rahui of Rotorua carved some patterns for Augustus Hamilton, the Director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington. That building is still standing, by the way, it was where the Great War exhibition with the trench experience was recently held near the war memorial. Anyway, these sixteen pieces showcase some of the most common motifs used in Maori carving as well as five representations of people. The first human depiction was the weku, a front facing person who usually shows their full face and body. It's the one most of you are probably familiar with. Another was the koruru, named after the owl, which was also front facing but featured large eyes and a split tongue. Similar to this was the ruru, which was a variant of the koruru but with much more pointed brows, kinda like its namesake, the morepork. Arguably the most interesting though was the manaia, what you might call a side facing mermaid, sort of. They were typically humans with bird heads and fish tails although this has been disputed for some time. The thought is that they don't represent bird people but are the result of art developing over time, showing humans to have longer and longer lips but due to a lack of evidence, we aren't really sure. The other pieces showed the various patterns that were common, such as different spirals and the unaunahi pattern of fish scales that we mentioned last time. I'll put the images of these little sample squares in the shownotes if you want to see them. Other popular forms were the taniwha, a kinda mermaid form as they feature figures with human top halves and fishy bottom halves. Taniwha are generally considered in Maori mythology to be large reptiles and are distinguished into saltwater, freshwater and land taniwha as well as essentially good and bad taniwha. We will talk more about them in future though as they feature in a lot of different myths about how the world was formed. Epa are found on the ends of marae and are figures with full faces, cocked heads and kinda look like their dancing with a bend at the hip and one arm up and the other down. Tekoteko is something we have briefly talked about as it is what Manuhiri turned into after not paying proper tribute to Tangaroa. They are the figures at the tops of marae, usually the ancestor the whare nui represents, and are full 3D figures, though the term tekoteko could refer to any 3D figure, not just the ones found on marae. Again, we have already briefly mentioned lizards, which were used to signify death or evil, with images of men biting or eating lizards to show bravery. This is really just touching the

tip of the iceberg though. There are so many different symbols of animals, people, gods, the sea, the moon and everything else you could think of shown in so many different ways and styles, it would be impossible to tell them all here. What we will focus a bit on though is the human figures in Maori carving as those are arguably the most important part of carvings as a whole. We have to remember that this was a method of recording history as well as expressing ones self through art. It's arguably the closest thing pre-European Maori had to writing. The figures in each carving are depictions of people that potentially existed, they tell the story of an individual, a whanau or an iwi and you should keep that in mind whenever you look at any Maori carvings.

Human figures in carvings were generally not to scale, something we see in other Polynesian cultures as well as Maori. As we have mentioned in a previous episode, certain styles would have the head take up two thirds of the whole figure or with one third for the head, a third for the abdomen and a third for the legs. The head itself can even be subdivided into thirds for the brow, eyes and mouth. We do see some figures that are more anatomically correct though and it has been thought that the reasons for stylising these figures is that carvings depict deities or revered ancestors. Maori didn't want to make them seem too human, perhaps so their accomplishments and mana aren't diminished. Humans were usually represented standing with bent knees and elbows, their arms sometimes across their chest or stomach or sometimes at their sides, reaching to their mouth or covering the pubic region. The hands are actually interesting in and of themselves cause they are typically shown with only three fingers and there is a bit of dispute where this came from. Some say the first man had three fingers and carved his human figures that way when he was taunted by others that he couldn't do as much as five fingered people. Other suggest that the technique used to make fire with a stick was done with three fingers and another story says that Hingangaroa, the guy who set up the wananga in the 1500s, had three sons who spread knowledge of carving, though this explanation is less likely as Hingangaroa may be too recent and may not fit the timeline. Or it could have something to do with birds, perhaps relating to the manaia, as bird talons are often represented in a similar fashion. Then again, it could be what we mentioned earlier, that it was a way to make figures look less human and more divine. The fact of the matter is, we really don't know but it is amazing that such a simple depiction, that may just have resulted from a stylistic choice, has sparked so much debate.

Another common depiction in human carving is out thrust tongue, probably better known to most as the pukana. You know, that thing the All Blacks do immediately before or after a haka where they stick out their tongue so it curls around onto their chin and their eyes go wide so you can really see the whites in them. Makes you really wet yourself in fear. Moving on... This motif was used a lot to show defiance and you most commonly find it in places where defiance would be a key characteristic of the piece. So typically on objects related to war, waka taua, war canoes, carved gateways and outside marae to name a few. One of the sources I read references Te Hau ki Turanga, the marae I keep mentioning a few episodes back that sits in Te Papa as a good example of this. As a side note, that marae is currently on loan from Rongowhakaata, an iwi from around Gisborne and is due to be returned in the next few years.

Just like any piece of art. When looking at carvings there is a lot to take into account to discern their meaning. Where is the carving located? What tribal area is it in? What is its function? Is it a whare nui, pataka, waka or some other taonga? Is it part of a larger piece? How does it signify tribal presence – is there some way that the stories and memories of the iwi are represented? Are there other carvings nearby that tell other aspects of the story? In the specific case of humans there is even more to read into them, such as with the head. Are the eyes alert and watchful or downcast, contemplative? Is the mouth large, reflecting someone who may be gregarious? Or small reflecting a

humble person? A tongue that is significant may show someone who is talkative and knowledgeable, or maybe defiant? Alternatively a large mouth and tongue may show a great orator. Large shoulders may show a strong warrior or fisherman. How are they holding their hands? Across the belly indicating self-protection? Are they holding a weapon? Do their genitals indicate if they are male or female? Are there smaller figures between the main figure's legs, representing descendants? Other elements or symbols around them may tell a wider story, such as lizards indicating evil or death. The other thing that we haven't really mentioned is likely the first thing you notice when you see a human carving. The eyes are often sparkly and bright from the paua shells used to really accentuate them and bring the figure to life.

If you remember back to the social structure episodes, the whare nui was the most important structure of the marae complex and could take years to build. A well decorated whare nui or whare whakairo was the pinnacle of a carver's achievements, usually their magnum opus. The carvings were so prized in fact that if it was known an attack was coming from a neighbouring hapu, the carvings might be removed and hidden in a swamp or cave nearby, which did happen during the later Musket Wars. When a community wanted to construct a whare nui or whare whakairo an outside master carver was often brought in to oversee the project if those skills weren't available locally. This was also the same for constructing a pataka or waka taua. All of these carvers would be fed and housed at the local hapu's expense and sent home with gifts of ornaments or garments as payment for their services. The interesting thing about carvers themselves was that they were from all walks of life. Even slaves could become renowned carvers if they showed the aptitude for it, being elevated somewhat, although they may not be allowed to work on more tapu projects like a whare whakairo due to their station. It was expected though that the noble class, rangatira, have some sort of artistic skill, which was often carving but could also be ta moko, singing waiata, whaikorero or wielding a taiaha. When a whare nui or whare whakairo was complete, a hui would be had that would involve the presentation of the marae to the community and tapu lifted from it. This was arguably the most dangerous time for the master carver. Given the high amount of tapu and as such spiritual importance, as well as physical importance for mana, a perceived mistake by the new owners could result in the execution of the master carver and his subordinates. Partly due to this, problems during the carving were often seen as bad omens and needed to be removed by ritual means. One such example is of a carving team from multiple hapu who had some men fall ill and die, taking this to be some sort of curse. It was found that the women were using the wood chips from the chisel of the ariki in their fires to cook food. As we know, women and food are noa and those wood chips would be very tapu so this was a big no no. To combat this, chips were burned and kumara cooked on them. The chief's daughter then ate the kumara which removed the curse. Once the whare was complete, three women were asked to walk across the threshold to ensure any tapu or curse was totally removed. Not only is this interesting in how it relates to carving, it shows the complex interactions and beliefs Maori had and do have around tapu and noa. Another little tidbit of the construction of a whare nui is the use of two different compositions, either figure dominated or spiral dominated. Spirals are probably one of the most defining features of Maori art, particularly the double spiral, and often featured on door lintels, illustrating a theme of breaking apart and unification, like the idea of broken and disparate elements entering together into a whare. We see this theme throughout Maori art and is thought to be perhaps a bigger idea in Maori society as a whole.

One of the interesting things about carving that we haven't really mentioned yet is the variety of objects Maori would carve. We have mostly focussed on whare nui carvings up until this point but we see things like combs, weapons, including muskets when they became available, musical instruments, paddles, fish hooks and all sorts of other things in not only wood but bone, stone and

pounamu, depending on the item in question. This would not only add personal significance to their owners but also perhaps instil some mauri into them, particularly in the case of weapons and muskets. Unlike the more flashy carving found on things like toki poutangata or whare whakairo, these everyday objects had more restrictive carving in that they used what may have been shorthand or mini versions of wider designs and motifs. What is most interesting about these though is that they generally show no regional variation, unlike larger designs. This could be because there widely accepted stylistic conventions for smaller pieces or perhaps just simply due to the restrictively small size of the medium.

Objects like these have been used to kinda track how Maori styles developed from that East Polynesian rectilinear style to the more Maori curvilinear style but in saying that, we aren't entirely sure if that more curvilinear style was brought with them as we see both styles present in other parts of Polynesia. We even see some of the earlier styles closer to East Polynesia in Southland although this could be caused by Southland's isolation from the rest of the Maori population. Another reason trying to map the development of Maori carving is difficult is that pretty much all our examples come from the 18th century or later. Really anything prior to that period is guesswork as we just don't know and we really shouldn't assume one way or the other. Doesn't stop historians and archaeologists trying though! Some carvings we don't know the age of but are thought to be of earlier creation due to their similarity to the East Polynesian style but again, we really don't know. One point of reference we do have is from pieces preserved in swamps, in particular we have one site from a swamp in Kauri Point, in the Bay of Plenty, which was excavated to reveal combs and wood carving motifs, the earliest dating to the first half of the 1600s, even showing the change in styles and trends for these objects. From the combs in particular we see a change from square tops to more rounded tops which could have a range of simple to more elaborate carving to decorate them. Some of the earlier pieces found in this deposit weren't adorned at all, perhaps indicating that decoration and carving of these objects was a later feature but we should remember that a lot of our information comes from the collections made by Europeans, who naturally were more interested in what looked cool rather than getting a broad snapshot of a communities carving talent. There was also anthropomorphic figures found at the top and bottom of the deposit, so the earliest and latest periods and we find that they are not in what you would call that Maori style, really driving home that fact that carving styles were more broad and complex than what we really know. We do know that carvers passed down their styles, motifs and the meanings behind them, such as with the combs likely being made by the same few related craftsmen. On the flip side, however, not knowing the meanings behind the motifs can lead to some carvings being copied with small but still noticeable changes. This actually has happened overtime, especially when you look at the modern day, as the widespread loss of knowledge across the country pretty much forced Maori artisans to kind of pick up the pieces and figure it out. Social upheaval could provide the right environment for a change in styles or popularisation of motifs to occur to represent the triumphs, struggles and such of a particular group, as we see in other cultures. The migrations of the 14th and 15th centuries could be a potential candidate for this along with the arrival of the British Empire

The earliest wood carvings are from Waitore Swamp, dating between 1380-1500 or so. There are a number of items that were found at the site but the most significant were a small carved head and a decorated board that is thought to be part of a waka. The head seems to have been originally attached to something, maybe a godstick, which is basically some sort of decorated stick that could be used to channel the power of a particular god by planting it in the ground or using it in rituals. The head resembles other godsticks found in Whanganui, near the site it was found as well as others around the country so given that and other evidence, it's presence isn't too surprising. The double spirals on the board, however, are much more interesting as it is the first major indication of that

motif, 400 years before European arrival in Aotearoa. I'll put some pictures up of this and the head but the interesting thing about the spirals is that they aren't made the same way you see spirals made in other Maori carvings. Their just notches in the wood which is something that is really unusual in general but we do see this method used to decorate other items in this deposit. It isn't clear whether this was a widespread style or something that was isolated to just this area but it is thought that this was an early style of decoration.

To finish off, I want to talk about something that I thought was so cool, I just had to put it in somewhere. Even if it meant making this episode longer than it should be and it isn't strictly carving. What I'm talking about is rocks, mostly found in the South Island in North Otago and South Canterbury, that have been dated to before 1500 that have been drawn on. Not carved, drawn with charcoal or red ochre, mostly found in limestone shelters, overhangs and outcrops of rock. If that doesn't amaze and fascinate you by now, you having been paying attention the last four episodes! This to me is such an anomaly, we always hear about and see the carvings but I've never heard of Maori rock drawings and I bet you haven't either. What's even more fascinating is that the red ochre, which was used as pigment, despite often times being applied dry, was perhaps applied wet. You know what wet drawing is? Well that's painting baby! So Maori were drawing and painting and they were depicting all sorts of subject matter, both realistically and stylistically. Humans, birds, fish, taniwha as well as various designs and shapes. The human figures are usually represented in full face or profile with flexed limbs and are the most easily recognisable, with birds that are clearly moa being the next most common. There are also dogs which are often stylised heavily and potentially dolphins although they could just be stylised fish. Most of the patterns are geometrical, curvilinear designs like chevrons, spirals and concentric curved lines. What makes these even more interesting is that they styles stay the same across time and space, indicating little cultural change, which would make sense in the sparsely populated, isolated regions south of modern Christchurch. The majority of the carvings date more specifically between 1200-1500, which lines up with the time that the area was most likely abandoned due to those factors we discussed in previous episodes. In the North Island there isn't many comparable pieces but we do know that Joel Samuel Polack, an early European writer in New Zealand wrote about some drawings in a cave in Tolaga Bay on the East Coast of the North Island in 1838. Some were allegedly drawn by Tupaia, the Tahitian guide on Cook's first voyage, some 70 or so years prior. This is disputed but not outside the realms of possibility as the piece was particularly faded, indicating that the drawings didn't last long in those conditions, perhaps a reason why we don't see as much rock art in the North Island as the South Island. The other interesting nugget from these is that the thinking goes that these drawings were mostly for fun, rather than function, like carvings were, which just raises all sorts of other questions! Ones we can't answer now though. Like always, you can find images of some of these amazing drawings on the website under this episode. You didn't think I just said all that just to leave you hanging, did you?

Going back to carving, there have been lots of amazing carvers throughout Aotearoa's history with many likely being lost to history or only found in oral tales, like Hinengangaroa. Today, if an aspiring carver isn't taught by a local tohunga, they are often taught at the New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute in Rotorua, whose predecessor was established in 1927 after a major period of Maori cultural suppression, most famously in the form of Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907, which is pretty much exactly what it sounds like. Te Wananga Whakairo Rakau o Aotearoa out of the Maori Arts and Crafts Institute accepts five students each year from across the country to teach wood carving. One of the sources used for these episodes was actually written by a student from the first batch taken in 1967 who is currently the master carver! Along with whakairo rakau the school teaches carving for bone, stone and pounamu as well as ta moko, weaving, waka building and bronze casting.

With that, here ends our look at Maori carving, I hope you have enjoyed listening to this as much as I have producing these episodes. It really is a fascinating topic that I've only scratched the surface of and probably got a few things wrong just due to its vastness. It is extremely important though to building that picture of pre-European Maori, who they were, what their motivations were, what they valued both materially and spiritually to really round out our understanding, especially as the main theme once Europeans arrive will be one of conflict between two very different cultures and we need to ensure we understand where each side is coming from. Plus it also super interesting as well as an underrepresented aspect of the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. So what now? Well, next time we will continue the story with Maui and after that move onto another Maori art, weaving! We will be talking clothes, cloaks, flax, muka and even have a look at the New Zealand flax processing and export industry, which only ended in 1985! It's going to be another fantastic adventure into Maori culture!

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