

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 30: The Māori Quill. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Grant and Zipora. If you want to support HANZ go to [patreon.com/historyaotearoa](https://patreon.com/historyaotearoa). I hope you all had an excellent break over the last few weeks and are ready to get into some exciting new topics on pre-European Māori culture! It's been some time since we did what you might call a main history focused episode, it was actually the episode on the New Zealand flax industry way back in October. Since then we have talked about my pick for the Bird of the Year, the hihi, which didn't win, we finished Māui's story and we had an AMAA. Some of you may also not know that HANZ has a Youtube channel as well which has not only all the episodes but some extra videos too. Recently I released a video of my time at Zelandia, an ecosanctuary here in Wellington that has all sorts of endemic species and I will be releasing a video soon on my trip to Picton to see the replica of the *Endeavour* and some waka hourua, among other things. So go give those a look if you are wanting more content on Aotearoa! Patrons at the kākāpō tier and higher will also be getting some extra clips and outtakes that didn't make it into the videos as well. Anyway, lets get into our first episode of the year and of the decade!

This week we are going to be starting our final topic in the Māori arts, one that I've been eagerly awaiting to bring you for some time, tā moko, Māori tattooing. This practice was an extremely important part of pre-European and even post-European Māori life for a number of different reasons, particularly so for the rangatira class. But I'm getting ahead of myself, what we want to start with is, of course, the mythical origins of where tā moko came from. Now, there are two different stories of how moko reached the mortal realm that hit the same themes but do have a number of variations, as well as the usual inter-iwi differences for the same story, so I'll tell a bit of a short version of each story. I should also state that both stories will have some extra or different details in them, which have been added by me just to flesh out the story a bit more, which I think is keeping a little bit with the Māori oral tradition. The first is the tale that features more often in North Island iwi.

This story starts with Mataora, a man who was married to Niwareka, a turehu or faerie from the magical underworld. Unfortunately, Mataora wasn't a great husband to his wife and he abused her, beating and berating her when he returned to the whare most nights. Eventually, Niwareka had had enough and fled back to the underworld, back to her people when Mataora was away. When he came back, noticing she was gone, he searched for her all of the kainga but to no avail. Eventually, Mataora became remorseful and distressed, realising his own actions had caused his wife to leave him. He missed her and like any great love story, he was determined to earn her forgiveness, prove his affection and win her back. So he donned his finest garments and enhanced his already quite handsome face with colour, painting his skin. He set out, following the trail she had left that inevitably lead to the underworld, a place few mortal men had dared to enter. Mataora was steadfast though and plunged in, daring to face the dangers and overcome them. When he got close to land of the turehu, he was captured by them and brought before Uetonga, their leader and Niwareka's father, who stood at his side. Uetonga looked upon Mataora with what could only be described as amusement, as did the other faerie people. Not because Mataora was desperate, exhausted or dishevelled, though he was all of those things. No, it was because the pigment on his face was running with his sweat, smearing and becoming generally unsightly. Everyone laughed at him for their skins were incised with rich patterns, their adornment forever. Though this embarrassed Mataora and made him angry, he was also humbled, begging forgiveness from Niwareka and her whanau. He even begged for the knowledge of their patterned skin to make himself worthy of her hand once again. After much deliberation, Uetonga relented and taught him the art of tā moko, making Mataora the first tane, man, to wear moko. At this time, Niwareka was also taught the art of tāniko, weaving with coloured fibres. With that, two important traditions,

tāniko and tā moko were brought back to the world of light and celebrated by humankind for their magic and beauty.

So that is the first story from Te Ika a Māui and as you heard, had a bit of a surprise at the end in that this is also a story on the origin of weaving. That's why I didn't do it in the weaving episodes, if anyone was wondering. This story does differ slightly as well depending on whether you are talking about weaving or tā moko as emphasis is placed more on whatever you are trying to teach.

The second story comes from the South Island and tells the tale of Tamanui-a-raki and Rukutia a couple with a family. Tamanui is the man and Rukutia the woman for anyone not really familiar with Māori names. One day, the household had visitors, a man by the name of Tutekoropanga who came with his children. The families entertained each other into the evening, Tama's dancing in their finest maro made of kuri tails but they were upstaged by the elegant red feather garments of Koropanga's children. This caused Tama to be overcome with shame and retreat to the priest's house with a feeling of being inadequate and depressed. During his time in the priest's house, likely a few days, Koropanga convinced Rukutia to run off with him to become his wife. When Tamanui eventually came out of his slump and went to his own whare, he saw she was gone. He asked his children where their mother, his wife, had gone. To which their reply was blunt and cruel, "she left because you're so ugly!" Upon hearing this truth, Tama decided to do something about it, he would become a fine looking man! To do this, he went to the underworld to ask his ancestors for help, disguising himself as a kōtuku, a white heron. Before he could reach itūpuna though he was snared by his female forebears, Tumaunga and Tuwhenua along with their daughter Te Kohiwai. They dragged Tama to their home and he marvelled at the people he saw for they were all beautiful, adorned with the patterns of moko. He knew immediately that this is what he needed to become attractive. When he asked how he could look like them, they told him to find Taka and Ha at the place of the dread spirits, "they have instruments and pigments together with the skills to use them". After journeying to them and asking for their aid, they granted Tama his wish, though he swooned and cried, passing out in pain, for truly it was like death, transforming the ugliness of his face. Thus, Tamanui-a-taki became beautiful and handsome and returned to the world of his children. He sought out his former wife, Rukutia and her lover Tutekoropanga but their interaction is a story for another day.

As you probably noticed, both stories have pretty similar themes and narrative beats despite having a slightly different plot. They both involve domestic abuse of women, both have the protagonist go on a quest that ends up with them in the underworld looking for knowledge and the quest is prompted by a feeling of inadequacy like humiliation or ugliness. This could potentially be because both stories come from the same root story and slowly diverged over time due to the relative isolation between the islands or maybe the stories developed independently under similar circumstances such as cultural pressures, eventually coming together like convergent evolution. The stories also potentially reflect the values of the time so it is likely beating your wife was looked down upon. Although, that may not quite be the case because at the end of that second story, Tutekoropanga ends up actually assaulting Rukutia and her former husband, Tamanui-a-taki, actually taunts her for essentially being stupid enough to runaway with a horrible person and get beaten by him. All before revealing his now fantastically decorated face. Easy on, mate.

Moving on from the tales of tā moko, let's talk about the tools used and a bit about how it was performed. All across the Pacific we find evidence of tattooing chisels even going as far back as the Lapita culture, that culture that developed when ancient Polynesians were having their 2000 year hiatus from major voyaging. Tā moko or tatau as it is commonly known elsewhere in the Pacific, was done slightly differently than it was and is in Aotearoa. The people in Samoa, Hawaii, Tahiti and

Marquesas tended to tattoo the waist and legs more so than the upper body and face, which is what Māori tended to favour. Most differently though, other Polynesian cultures tattooed in solid blocks of colour making those who wore this kind of tatau look like they were wearing “close fitting shorts”. You can still see this style of tattoo today, as it has persisted primarily in Samoa. These cultures also tended to favour rectilinear patterns in their tatau, just like in carving, a parallel we will see come up again.

Now, I’m sure there are those of you wondering whether you heard me correctly before when I said chisels. Yes, you did hear correctly I said chisels when talking about implements to tattoo your face and if you are making a nasty expression a right now thinking about what that might be like, I can assure you it’s worse. One of the sources we get our information from when it comes to these uhi, the Te Reo term for these moko chisels, is some conversations with Elsdon Best and a kaumatua of Ngāti Hamua hapu, part of the Rangitane o Wairarapa iwi in the lower North Island, whose name Te Tuhi Pihopa. Te Tuhi actually made Best the four major chisels used by tohunga tā moko, tattooists, which actually reside in the Auckland Museum today. Though, he called them te uhi a toroa or just toroa rather than uhi, which was the word used by most other iwi. It’s likely this was just a regional variation that came from one of the main materials used to make these chisels, the wing and leg bones of albatross, toroa being the te reo term for albatross. Other materials that were used by tattooists to make uhi, as they made their own chisels, was petrel, a type of small sea bird, or even human bones with the chisel blades being attached to the handles in a similar manner to adzes. The first chisel in this collection was the uhi whakataramoa or the one that clears the way. This uhi had a plain, razor sharp edge to cut a channel into skin. Essentially, it’s main purpose was to cut you up good and give a nice, clean wound. The tattooist would then pick up the second chisel, the uhi puru, which had a bit more of a notched or serrated edge to carry the ngarahu, ink. The chisel would be dipped in the ink before applying it to the skin. These two chisels formed the basis of most moko work on the face with the tattooist holding the chisel between the thumb and index finger on his left hand and a fern stalk between the middle and ring fingers on his right. The stalk would be used to tap the chisel, which would hit your face and make an incision. Also in the right hand, between the index and thumb would be the pigment in a kinda clay-ish form. Once the initial incision was made, the tohunga tā moko would put down the first chisel with the flat blade and pick up the notched one, which he would run through the ink and tap into the wound in a similar fashion. However, if the initial cut wasn’t deep enough or just generally unsatisfactory, he would strike again until he was satisfied it would hold colour. We see this paired routine of one for cutting and one for laying ink a lot despite what each chisel is used for.

As you can imagine, this double method of tapping sharp things onto one of the most sensitive parts of your body with the intention of cutting, was extremely painful. And for those of you in the audience asking the same question I did when I read about this: yes, for tane and wahine. Anyway, this absurdly painful process naturally generated lots of blood which would be wiped away with the back of the tattooist’s hand or with a bit of cloth/fibre. We will talk a bit more about this in the future though. For now, let’s go back to the uhi. These two main chisels weren’t used for the finer detailed work around the eyes and the spirals commonly found on the nostrils, they were just a bit too big and unwieldy. Instead, the uhi kohiti was used, basically a uhi whakataramoa, the cutting one, just smaller. In fact it was often less than 2mm wide on its cutting face. The last chisel given to Best by Te Tuhi was the uhi matarau, the chisel of a hundred faces (oooooooo). It’s not really as exciting as it sounds, I’m afraid! It was mainly used in shading and making lines to give colour across large areas like the thighs, buttocks or shoulders as well as darkening the lips. It did this by having a 6mm edge that had multiple serrations and a comb like appearance. As with lots of things in Māori culture, there was a bit of variation. Such as around Cook Strait, the body of water between the

North and South Islands, a variation on the uhi kohiti was used. Very fine and hard thorns were perfect for puncturing skin in delicate areas but instead of following up with another chisel, the pigment was rubbed in with charcoal.

All of these uhi were used exclusively on the face but other parts of the body were tattooed as well with slightly different techniques. In fact, the double chisel technique wasn't just exclusive to the face, it was exclusive to Māori as we don't see it anywhere else in the Pacific. The technique used on the body seemed to be more like a scapel method, dipping a chisel tipped with a shark's tooth in ink and dragging it across the skin. This was dismissed by Te Rangi Hiroa but despite that there is in fact an item that fits this description in the British Museum. Not only that, it even has some residual ngarahu ink on it! This technique was sometimes used on the face but it was a lot more rare and no uhi that would be used on the face would be used on the body and vice versa. This was due to the tapu nature of the head as well as for practicality, given the chisels used for the face were much smaller than the ones used for large areas like the thighs.

This difference in technique resulted in a difference in the actual physical look of the moko. Anywhere that wasn't the face looked similar to a tattoo today, that is, basically that the skin looked like it had been dyed on the surface. On the face, however, that deep cut, double uhi technique resulted in not only the skin becoming pigmented but deep grooves being left behind by the chisels. You can see this in a number of pictures and paintings made by a variety of different people over the years and is part of the reason Te Tuhi and other tohunga tā moko called the art "te whakairo tangata", the art of carving people. Whakairo rākau, wood carving, and tā moko are pretty closely linked in that they both use similar or even the same motifs and tend to reflect each other. This was, of course, one of the first things Europeans noticed about Māori. I mean, it's kinda hard to miss when it's on the face like that and they have never seen anything like it. The first record a European made of moko was Joseph Banks, the naturalist on board Cook's Endeavour, he wrote in 1770, "their faces are most remarkable, on them they by some art unknown to me dig furrows in their faces a line deep at least as broad, the edges of which are often indented and most perfectly black,". This recount was later confirmed by the missionary Samuel Marsden in 1819, "the chisel seemed to pass through the skin. Every stroke and cut is as a carver cuts a piece of wood. The chisel was constantly dipped in a liquid made of soot".

That brings us nicely to the next part of the process, how to make the ngarahu ink, since it obviously didn't just magically appear out of thin air. Naturally, a lot of the success of any moko relied on the ink and even though many patterns on the face, particularly the forehead and lips, would be redone later in life as the skin matured and aged, the first laying of the pigment was still the most critical step. Essentially the short answer to making the ink was that it was soot mixed with bird or fish oil but that's the more boring answer! The longer, more interesting answer is that, like weaving, the trees Polynesians typically burned to make soot for tā moko didn't exist in Aotearoa due to the cold, particularly the candlenut tree called kuku'i in Hawaii or lama in Samoa. Naturally, Māori experimented with other animal and vegetable sources to make the ink they needed, eventually settling on kauri and awheto, among a couple of other plants. Gunpowder was briefly used as well when it was brought to Aotearoa and left a distinctive blueish colour but eventually fell out of favour. Ink made from kauri was the best stuff as it gave the darkest pigment and as such was often used on the face. Awheto gave a lighter colour resulting in it being mostly used on the body. Interestingly, kauri ink wasn't made from burning the bark of the tree, it was made from the resin of fallen trees. This would later be known as kauri gum to Europeans and was highly coveted, even sparking a sort of gold rush. This resin was also highly prized by Māori as well even to the point where hapū in Te Urewera on the eastern side of the North Island gave these trees names. The

knowledge of sites where these trees could be found were guarded heavily to the point where a rival iwi messing with a kauri site being a just cause for war.

What you probably more interested in though is what awheto is, and I bet none of you are going to be able to guess! Unless you have read about it or spoken to someone about it but you don't count... Awheto is essentially a type of fungus that grows on insects, in our case caterpillars that would otherwise turn into moths. The fungus, for any fungal nerds out there is a Cordyceps, which are particularly famous for the mind altering abilities. By that I mean, the Cordyceps would find its way to the caterpillars brain and through complicated biological stuff, would make it burrow down into the ground with its rear end towards the surface. The fungus would then grow within the caterpillar and totally encompass it using its body as nutrients. Obviously this was fatal to the caterpillar. Eventually the fungus would grow a stalk out of the ground that was about 10cm tall, which is how Māori spotted where they would find these vegetable caterpillars, as they were called. When dug up they looked rather weird covered in the hard fungus so I'd recommend going to the website to see an image. The fungus/caterpillar once removed from the ground would be hung up to dry before being burnt. Mats would be placed over the fire to catch any soot needed for the next stage.

This next stage is actually somewhat in dispute. Allegedly the soot was mixed with bird fat and given to a dog to eat, who would have been set aside and tied up for a few days to starve so that it would eat the gross sooty, greasy stuff. When the dog, uh, defecated, the excrement was mixed and kneaded with more bird fat and water. The mixture would be dried after this until it became hard at which point it would be put into a container. Considering this was an age before gloves, I think I speak for all of us when I say, yuck. Thankfully though, for both the starving dog and the human who had to touch its poop, this method is only reference in three primary sources, all of which speak in similar language so it would seem they were likely referencing a single source who wrote about it and so the theory is considered mostly debunked. The more likely method was that the soot taken from the fires of burnt kauri resin or awheto would be mixed with the sap from plants that often had medicinal properties, such as hinau, mahoe and ti kouka, perhaps to add an innate healing property to the ink when struck into the wounds. This would give a sticky, black substance which was kneaded into palm sized balls and wrapped in tui or kiore skins to be buried in a secret place. This was done for a couple of reasons, the most obvious being that they didn't want rivals finding their stash of ink as it was difficult to make but also because if the balls were left exposed to the air for too long they became brittle and lost a lot of their deeper colour. The ngarahu could be left there for years, even as long as generations before it was dug up for use. This let it mature and resulted in a whakatauāki, proverb, said to people who were mean spirited, "puritia to kauri, hāi o matenga mou!" Keep your precious kauri for when you die. When the ngarahu was needed, it would be dug up and shavings mixed with water and juice from more medicinal plants, like kawakawa. Once at the right consistency, it would be poured into a special container for tā moko work, ready to tell someone's story on their skin.

Next time we talk about the sort of people that were doing the tattooing, the tohunga tā moko, as well as the people being tattooed with a particular focus on women since most of what we have and will discuss is male centric. Other things we will talk about is how much moko would cost and some of the tapu around the procedure. In short, there is some really exciting stuff coming!

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](mailto:historyaotearoa@gmail.com) or Twitter at History Aotearoa or Facebook at History Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast. This podcast is a one man band, if you enjoy listening to me talk history, you can support us through Patreon or rate us on iTunes or your preferred podcast

platform, it means a lot and helps grow, spreading the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tu atu, hoki tu mai. See you next time!