

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 31: Artist and Canvas. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Rachael. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we talked about the mythological origins of tā moko as well as the equipment they used, the uhi and ngarahu, chisels and ink. This episode we will spend some time discussing a bit about the people doing the tattooing as well as the people being tattooed with a particular focus on women and at the end will talk a little more about the process of tattooing in terms of its tapu status to round it all out.

Naturally, tohunga tā moko, the tattooists, had to have steady hands to do this sort of work. You didn't want to accidentally slip and cut off someone's nose or slice open their cheek. So the ones who had hands, gentle touch along with the talent for design were highly sort after even becoming famous. One such famous tohunga was Rangī from Kororareka, modern day Russell in the Bay of Islands. To explain a bit about who this guy was, I'll quote Augustus Earle, a painter who took a bit of an interest in Rangī's trade given they were both artists, "he was considered by his countrymen a perfect master in the art of tattooing, and men of the highest rank and importance were in the habit of travelling long journeys in order to put their skins under his skilful hands... This 'professor' was merely a kooky or slave, but by skill and industry he had raised himself to an equality with the greatest men of his country; and as every chief who employed him always made him some handsome present, he soon became a man of wealth and was constantly surrounded by such important personages... He was delighted with my drawings, particularly with a portrait I made of him. He copied so well and seemed to enter with such interesting into the few lessons of painting I gave him, that if I were returning from here direct to England I should certainly bring him with me, as I look upon him as a great natural genius." So similar to carving, people would travel far and wide to be tattooed by a master of the art, making Rangī very rich. But if you were listening closely there, you might have picked up something interesting. Rangī wasn't a freeman or a noble. Like we mentioned in the carving episodes, he was a slave who had risen to fame for his excellent ability in moko, negating any fear or disdain that those he was tattooing would feel towards him, though it should be mentioned that he may have been a prisoner of war and as such been of some standing prior to his capture. In any case, it is still significant that men and women of very high tapu and mana trusted a slave to cause great harm and pain to their face in the effort for moko. With each new client who left his whare with a fantastic new face, his own mana grew and he was clearly famous in not only Māori circles but European ones as well, given others wrote about him.

As we have mentioned, tohunga tā moko ended up being quite wealthy if they were skilled enough and we actually have a record of what could be included as payment for a skilled artist. "some pounamu jewellery, some hei tiki, some kakahu, whale bone or pounamu patu, or whalebone staff, or cutting knives or paiaka weapons, or some long pouwhenua halberds or some tokotoko." Not all of these would be given for one moko, this is more of a list of items that would be deemed sufficient as payment and you can see that these aren't trivial items. Their objects of high tapu and mana that would in theory befit the moko that they were paying for. To give you some perspective, *Murirangawhenua*, a waka, was bought for two kahu kuri, one patu and one hei tiki, which would be equivalent to a pretty decent moko. One of the interesting things about this is that given the tattooists were carving your face to put something permanent on it, there were warnings and sayings against being stingy to your artist. One such warning went, "on the one who pays fairly, ornament him slowly. One the one who pays nothing, make him bleed, strike till he screams." As you have probably gathered, it was in your best interests to pay the moko artist his fair dues given he would be in a position of considerable power for the duration of the procedure. This system of goods for service was eventually replaced by the cash system we know today after European colonisation. Well, not quite the same as we know today, the tattooists received pounds and

shillings rather than dollars and cents but they may have still received taonga occasionally too, so clearly those items were still valued highly as payment. To give you an idea of how much this would have all cost, in 1890, chisels were worth 1-3 pounds each or about \$190-\$570 in 2019 money, so they were pretty pricey items! I wasn't able to find how much a male moko cost for reasons that will become apparent later but I was able to find how much a group of women cost. In 1914, a commission of 30 women cost 2 pounds 10 shillings, which is about \$270 in 2019 but just under three decades later in 1940, the same amount of women cost 35 shillings whereas another group of 12 women at the same time cost 2 pound. So clearly prices fluctuated on a variety of different factors.

Speaking of women, most of what we have discussed thus far and what we will discuss is focussed on men as their moko tended to be full face and a lot more dramatic to look at. Especially for Europeans who had never seen anything like it before and their observations are where we get most of our knowledge of this art form from. In saying that, pretty much all of the sources we have were written by men. Men who had often been at sea for some time with a bunch of other blokes, so they naturally noticed any women they came across, especially given they had moko on their face as well. Unlike men, who often had full face moko and the majority of their body tattooed, women had only their chin and lips tattooed, along with sometimes a small part of the forehead, neck, breast, ankles, buttocks or around the waist with a belt like pattern. Moko from navel to breast or thigh markings were also recorded as well with the chin, space between the eyes, middle forehead and the calf usually being indicative of a woman's rank, though as you might have guessed, all of this varied from iwi to iwi. For example, in both men and women, body moko may have been more common with northern iwi and heavy facial moko more common with southern iwi, eventually engaging in some cross cultural exchange due to the northern iwi raiding the southern ones.

As we mentioned before, women generally only had their chin and lips tattooed with the lips being done mostly as a mark of beauty with Majoribanks saying, "Women have their lips chiefly tattooed, which is by far the most painful operation, though they submit to it cheerfully, red lips being a great reproach to a woman." One source does mention that it may have been done to stiffen the lips, helping women not show as much emotion but there doesn't seem to be any other sources that back this up and I personally think it goes against other aspects of Māori culture we have seen thus far, such as women cutting themselves in mourning as an expression of grief, which as a side note, sometimes had ink rubbed into them as well. To me it looks like it may be a European projecting his own stiff upper lip attitude onto a culture that is a lot more forthcoming with its emotions. Another European that mentioned Māori women was a physician called David Munro, who said, "The chief's wife, a young woman of 20, was decidedly the greatest beauty I have seen in New Zealand," he then goes on to say how amazing her face is even going so far as to reference certain features that he deems "quite European" before finishing with, "I could have dressed her up and passed her off as a beautiful Italian; but there was one blemish about her which art not nature made. Her lips which ought to have been of coral, were blackened with the abominable tattoo. I have never before felt the utter abomination of the practice, but to see it disfiguring the noblest work of Dame Nature." Despite this pretty harsh description of the woman he apparently still thought she was caught attractive, calling moko an art as well as a method of disfigurement, so he was clearly of two minds about the whole thing. Others, like John Liddiard Nicholas, were less forgiving, "It is to be hoped that this barbourous practice will be abolished in time among New Zealanders, and that the missionaries will exert all the influence they are possessed of to dissuade them from it. The mind revolts at the idea of seeing a fine manly race as any in the universe thus shockingly disfigured; producing associations similar to what may be imagined of so many fiends." This guy definitely wasn't keeping his cards close to his chest on this topic apparently.

Around the lips were often sets of three lines, a motif common for both sexes, or even just above the upper lip but even with this there were exceptions. What I mean is, there were women with full face or even full body moko, similar to that of men. This would mostly occur when the woman was “first line, and an invincible fighter”. This could even be despite the fact that the woman in question was quite small physically, as was the case in the person that quote was in relation to. According to the same source, moko was mostly representative of whakapapa and that person’s place in the hapu, rather than gender, which is what the distinction between male and female moko might imply. So these women were likely taking up roles that were often filled by males and as such were given what you might call masculine moko to fit their position. This does seem to be somewhat regional though as sources indicate this practice was more popular in the South Island, with Edward Shortland even finding a hapu who had half their face tattooed in full and the other half only the chin, essentially with a male and female side. We see other instances of moko where one side of the face represents the paternal line and the other side the maternal line but this was only done with different motifs on each side. This case seems to be taking that idea further, which I think is fascinating but the practice was stopped in the 1840s.

You may have noticed in the examples of payment I mentioned earlier that women were tattooed in large groups. This was pretty typical with groups of 15-30 not being uncommon however the type of payment was different for women compared to men before the introduction of the cash system. Before they could even get started though, they had to ask a kuia, an elderly woman and generally people of great respect in the hapu, if they were able to. If the kuia deemed that the women were of the age, ability and standing to wear moko, they would travel to get it done and pay the tohunga tā moko with fine clothes, food or feathers, also often preparing a feast for him as well, which was a bit different to the payment of male moko. Another slight difference to male moko is that the tohunga may have only tattooed the face and left the tattooing of the body to other women, though I was unable to find why this was the case.

One of the other interesting things about female moko is that it persisted right up until the modern day, only really dying out once. The reason I say this is interesting is that when missionaries arrived in Aotearoa they saw moko as a savage and pagan practice, one that should be stamped out so there was a big push for men to stop having moko done, resulting in some interesting faces with half finished moko as sometimes they could take years to finish. The other aspect of this was that typically men would shave their beards, often carrying a mussel shell to shave when they had a spare moment in their day, or it is suggested pair of tweezers in the European era. This was done to ensure that their moko was always visible but with all these European men coming over with big, bushy and sometimes fantastical beards, the trend started to catch on among Māori men too, which naturally obscured their moko and lessened the need for it. Māori also often wore their hair in topknots to keep it out of their face for the same reason of showing off their moko, sometimes with feathers to indicate status. For one to have a beard or hair cover the face was a sign of old age or a lack of care in your appearance and as such you would be greeted as an old man, especially as the younger generation tended to lean into European trends and the kuia and kaumatua did not. These seemed to have been the main factors in the cessation of male moko by the 1860s. Although, in saying that, during the New Zealand Wars there is a brief resurgence in male moko given it’s importance to mana, making one look fearsome and showing off one’s accomplishments, particularly in war. This may have also occurred due to an increased sense of Māori identity, fighting for their lives against the Pākehā. Female moko during the period of male moko decline became a symbol of identity and status, more so than they already had. What I mean by that is men were using their wives’ moko to promote their own mana and station, meaning female moko was essentially fulfilling the same role as their male counter parts. Partly due to this and potentially due

to it being seen as less barbaric as male moko, female moko persisted mostly throughout the decades until the arts resurgence in popularity in the 1990s. The only exception to this was after the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 effectively stopped all moko, even women's, until it was revived in the 1930s, except this time with steel needles. Additionally, during the Christian era of New Zealand's history, some women still went to church with their moko obviously still very visible. This was much to the protestations of some, saying that it was heathen but as we will find out in a later episode, the meaning behind the moko was far too valuable to lose entirely.

Both the women and men that were tattooed were, in short, hard as balls. Both sexes were frequently observed having a conversation with someone, as was observed by D'Urville, for which the island is named after, who saw a woman "looked at me merrily with the greatest composure." This was also the case with a bloke called Iwikau, or 'The Skeleton', who was the head war chief of his tribe. EJ Wakefield, a bit of an odd man, wrote that Iwikau, "spoke to me with perfect nonchalance for a quarter of an hour, although the operator continued to strike the little adzes into his flesh with a light wooden hammer the whole time and his face was covered in blood. The worst part of his pain seems to be endured a day or two after the operation, when every part of the wound gathers and the face is swollen considerably". Both of these cases shed a bit of light on how the actual operation was performed with conversation and entertainment, such as waiata, songs, used to distract the tattooee as a form of pain management. The other aspect the second quote mentions is the immense amount of pain one would be in after the procedure as well. This was part of the reason only a few centimetres of moko could be done at a time, otherwise the entire face would swell up which was not just a problem due to the more obvious reasons of pain and awkwardness to move or sleep but also the high risk of infection, which could be fatal if not treated correctly. We mentioned in the previous episode that the ngarahu, the ink itself would be mixed with sap that had healing properties to help with the process but there were also a few other things the tohunga tā moko did to help with the healing. Karaka or bruised kopakopa leaves would sometimes have small cuts made along the edges before being applied to the skin to release juice inside, which gave a cooling effect. Runa, a species of dock with broad leaves, was sometimes mixed with bird oil and applied as a dressing to any scabs and septic skin lesions. The juices from the leaves and the roots of these plants were also boiled down and applied to the skin as well. All of these treatments were designed to help speed up healing and reduce the pain, though the pain was possibly intended as part of the process, at least partially. To have an elaborate moko was a clear sign of how tough you were, especially if it was on the face, indicating not only beauty, mana and meanace but also the ability to overcome the pain in pursuit of those ideas.

There was also a lot of tikanga around tā moko, tikanga being sometimes translated to 'the Māori way of doing things' but essentially means the way something should be done given tradition or practicality. For example in the Western sense, you might say the tikanga of hosting someone at your house is to offer them a cup of tea or the tikanga at a funeral is to where black. We have talked a lot about tikanga in previous episodes, I just haven't used that specific word before. Things like cutting flax at the right time, giving a koha during a pōwhiri or giving thanks to Tangaroa for the first catch of fish are all examples of Māori tikanga. The kind of tikanga specific to tā moko revolved a lot around the tapu of the head, if that was the part of the body being tattooed, and the shedding of blood, as there was naturally a lot of it. Rituals, rules and practice were done to protect the spirit of both the tohunga and the one being tattooed, such as not eating food during the procedure and not with your hands afterwards, instead being fed by either a servant or wife, using a fern stalk to pick up pieces of food by stabbing them or perhaps even in liquid form through a special kinda funnel. This was also due to the amount of swelling that would occur, making eating rather difficult. Another tikanga is that someone could only be tattooed once every few days and only for a few

centimetres at a time. This was because the swelling we have mentioned would become so intense, it would become impossible, which was to say nothing of the pain, in fact some South Island iwi tell in the origin story of tā moko that Tama-nui-a-raki was warned that pain of moko was so intense, people sometimes died. A European who was forcibly tattooed even said that the amount of pain he experienced caused him to go blind for several days before his eyesight returned, an account which we will talk about next time. Another reason was because the tohunga would often use charcoal to outline the moko he wanted to make and the large amount of blood would wash away these guidelines. To add to this, tā moko was often done in winter either outside or in a temporary structure, likely to not put permanent structures with heavy tapu while it was being performed. Augustus Earle experienced first hand some of the tikanga during a tā moko operation, which he wrote down, "All those chiefs who were under the operating hands of... the tattooer were under the law. In fact, as we strolled through the village at the time of their evening repast, it appeared as though some dreadful disease had suddenly struck the greater part of the inhabitants and deprived them of the use of their limbs, most of them being either fed by their laves or lying flat on the ground with their mouths eating out of their platters or baskets." He was clearly quite surprised by how seriously the whole hapū took the tapu and tikanga of the whole thing, it's not really something that any European had experienced up until that point. He also wrote that no fish could be eaten unless it was held up to see the tattooing and that some people could not be touched by anyone or touch their own head. Even no gourd or calabash could be eaten if any form of tattooing motifs had been made on them, which seems to have been a somewhat popular pastime of children. To add to the tapu of food and drink, Earle also noted that when someone used a vessel to pour water into someone's mouth, that vessel would be so tapu, it wouldn't be used for noa purposes again.

Next time we will talk about what Europeans thought of moko, what they were writing down about it and how they captured it visually. We will also talk a little bit about those Europeans who ended up getting their moko for various reasons. Naturally Europeans had a lot to say about moko so expect a lot of interesting experiences and opinions!

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