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978-1-108-03959-8 - The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions: Volume 1: Horo-uta or Taki-Tumu Migration

John White

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION.

THE New Zealander shall speak for himself. Unacquainted with letters, and living in the Stone Age of the world, he shall relate the history of a people isolated for ages from the civilized nations of the world, and shall tell how his race for ages lived, loved, worshipped, worked, and warred.

His traditions, preserved with the most austere religious care, and rehearsed from age to age in the presence of the most select circles of youths by high priests of most ascetic life, who had received their knowledge from the gods, have preserved for him a history reliable as the histories of tribes sharpened by continual contact, and ripened by emulation in the art of literature.

His *atuas*, or divinities—

Tu, god of war ;
 Ta-whiri-ma-tea, god of the sky ;
 Rongo, god of the *kumara* ;
 Tanga-roa, god of the sea ;
 Hau-mia, god of the fern-root—

had each his course of priests, through whom he communicated with the people in benevolence and love, or in dreadful majesty, and by whom only he was invoked, in solemn and awe-inspiring ceremonies—commanded the reverence of all classes of the people in every action of their lives.

No undertaking of any kind was commenced without propitiating and invoking the aid of the particular divinity within whose province it lay. Thus the services of the priests were in continual

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demand, and their influence was unbounded in their respective tribes.

The office of the priesthood was hereditary; but birth and intellect alone would not qualify—the evidence of undaunted courage and unlimited hospitality was essential also. The priests were the educators of the people. Their schools of astronomy, mythology, pharmacy, and history were open to the eldest sons of the high priests only. Sometimes the second sons were admitted if they exhibited remarkable promise of excellence.

To the schools of agriculture, manufacture, fishing, and hunting, all classes were admitted. A symbol of its presiding god was kept in each school. These symbols were sticks of equal length, with a knob at one end of each; but there the resemblance ceased. That of Tu-mata-uenga was perfectly straight, and stood erect, as Tu did at the deluge. That of Ta-whiri-ma-tea was in form not unlike a corkscrew, to represent the whirling of the winds and clouds when Rangi attacked Tu at the time of the deluge. That of Tane had a semicircular bend at half its length, on either side of which it was straight. This bend represented the swelling and growth of bulbs, shrubs, and trees. The *toko* of Tanga-roa was of a zigzag form, not unlike the teeth of a saw, to represent the waves of the sea. That of Rongo was in rounded wave-lines along its whole length, to represent the growth of the tuberous *kumara* as it raised the earth in little mounds. The *toko* of Hau-mia had three half-circles bending in one direction, equi-distant from each other. These were to represent the irregular and twisted form of the fern-root when newly dug up.

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Besides these divinities there were malignant spirits who became agents for evil for those who possessed the power for exorcising them. This art of witchcraft was known to a few only of the high priests. Its ceremonies and incantations were of the most awe-inspiring character, and those supposed to possess a knowledge of it were looked upon with the utmost dread. This knowledge came direct from the spirits themselves.

The task our Maori has undertaken is no less than to give the traditions of his race as they relate to the creation of the world, the origin of its animal and vegetable life, the ancient wars in the home of his progenitors, the migrations and perils and arrivals of the several canoes in New Zealand, the people they found here, and the territory they respectively occupied; the names given to the mountains, rivers, headlands, and their meaning; the tales of folk-lore, of fairies, ghosts, and spirits, of monsters of the earth and sky; his traditions relating to the art of tattooing, and the ceremonies connected with births, marriages, deaths, and tapu; and the songs and proverbs of his people.

As this will be all told in the language of the historian, the translator has resolved to add to his part of the work a glossary and appendix, which will elucidate and explain ambiguities, and give illustrations of the affinity of the Maori language with the languages of several of the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

He acknowledges with thanks the valuable contributions he has already received from enthusiastic friends, whose names will be published hereafter.

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Wherever the letter (*d*) occurs, further information respecting the word immediately preceding it will be found in the appendix.

The names in brackets at the heads of chapters, &c. (*i.e.*, Nga-i-tahu), are the names of tribes or sub-tribes whence the tradition was obtained.

A : Was the name given to the Author of the Universe, and signifies "Am the unlimited in power," "The conception," "Am the leader," and "The beyond all."

Ao : Dawn, preceding day.

The following are four versions of names for the star Canopus :—

Ao-tahi : *Ao*, cloud, dawn, day; *tahi*, one.

Au-tahi : *Au*, stream, current, ripple; *tahi*, one.

A-tu-tahi : *A*, is; *tu*, stand; *tahi*, one.

Tu-tahi : *Tu*, stand; *tahi*, one.

A-niwa-niwa : Rainbow. *A*, am; *niwa*, great.

Atua, a term now used to signify "god," is a compound word, consisting of *A*, *Tu*, *A*.

Atua-toro : Inquisitive, reconnoitring god. *A-tua*—*a*, drive, compel; *tua*, to repeat incantations, ceremonies of worship, to invoke; *toro*, to follow after as a spy, to creep as the vine of a plant on the ground, to blaze up as a fire.

Au : Compelling power, current, stability, king.

Hika : To procure fire by friction. Two pieces of wood, called *kau-rima-rima* or *kai-kohure*, and *kau-ati*, were used. The *kau-rima* was about ten inches long, sharpened at one end in form of a boat's bow. This was rubbed perpendicularly lengthwise on the *kau-ati*. The friction of the *kau-rima* on the *kau-ati* made a groove in which a dark dust collected in a ball at the end of the *kau-ati* furthest from the operator, which eventually emitted smoke; this was taken and placed in a wisp of dry *kie-kie* leaves, and waved round and round till it broke out into a flame. Fire was thus procured for every occasion of life when that element was required. *Hika* (*d*).

Ika-whenua : Lizard, fish of the land. When Rangi came to punish the five gods who separated him and Papa, the sons of Tanga-roa consulted whither they should flee. One went into the sea, and became a shark; the other remained on land, and became a lizard. Lizards and all the reptile family, when offered to the gods, are called *ika-whenua*, fish of the land.

Io : Power, soul, muscle, life.

Kahu-kura : Red garment, god of travellers, war, life, disease, and death, now represented by the rainbow.

Kai-waka (*kai*, to eat; *waka*, medium through which a god acts): Consumer or destroyer of mediums. This star is the harbinger of the new year.

Kahui-rua-mahu: Flock of the warm pit, time of year about our April in New Zealand.

Kai: Food. Birds, *kumara*, fern-root, and fish are the four coward gods, Tane, Rongo, Hau-mia, and Tanga-roa, who, to escape the wrath of Rangi, transformed themselves into these respectively, and, though now degraded, are still partially gods nevertheless. Man, being of lower rank than these, may not, when offering gifts, or propitiating the other gods, go near to cooked food.

Kaka-ho: *Arundo conspicua*, reed-grass.

Kore: Divided, rent, cracked, nothingness.

Maku: Watery, moist, damp.

Mata-ariki (*mata*, face; *ariki*, lord): The Pleiades. This constellation appears in the first month of the Maori new year, and presides over winter. These stars form the prow of the canoe Tai-nui.

Mauri: Soul, seat of life. To hiccup is called *toko-mauri* (*toko*, to start, to leap up; *mauri*, life within).

Mua: Medium, mediator, representative; first, commencement, origin; an altar, a spot where offerings are presented, indicated by a *mau-ku* (tree-fern) or flax-bush.

Pa: To hinder, to block, to obstruct; a fortified settlement, a citadel, a fenced village.

Pi-tau: The young centre fronds of the *korau*—*Cyathea medullaris*, tree-fern—was a considerable article of diet in olden times.

Poi: To toss up and down, to dandle; a game for females, played with balls about the size of a fist. *Poi* (*d*).

Pu-anga (*pu*, centre; *anga*, affix): Highest, extreme point, climax, zenith; star of midwinter, Rigel, which ended the Maori year. The new year commenced with the first new moon afterwards.

Po: Gloom, nothingness, night.

Pu: Sanctity, origin, centre of knowledge, king.

Rangi: Heaven. *Ra*, sun, certainty; *ngi*, laugh, shrivelled, unfinished, unattractive.

Rehu-a (*reku*, to chip off by blows, to procure fire by friction; *a*, nominal affix): The broken, the splintered. Rehua was a god whose attribute was to cure the blind, resuscitate the dead, and cure all diseases. Is now represented in the star Sirius.

Rimu: Sea-weed, the *rehia* which is used in modern times as funeral chaplets, and offerings to the manes of the dead.

Roi: Dwarf, shake, entangled, fern-root. This was one of the five gods who divided Rangi, Heaven, and Papa, Earth; who, when Rangi came to punish them, turned himself into *roi* to escape destruction. *Roi* (*d*).

Taha-raro: North side. South is called *runga*, up; and north, *raro*, down. All ancient temples and dwellings were built to face the east. The seats of honour in each were on the north side; the first on entering was the most sacred, and the others descended relatively from it.

Take: Foundation, origin, cause, king.

Ta-ne: To slap in sport, to deride, to defy disaster.

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Taku-rua (*taku*, deliberate, slow, according to custom, guided by necessity; *rua*, pit, storehouse): Winter, time of slow action, inactivity, cautious use of food stored for winter; star Sirius, or dog-star.

Tiki: First man created, a figure carved of wood, or other representation of man.

Tapairu: Queen, supreme head of the female sex, high priestess, receiver of sacrifices and offerings made to the goddesses.

Ta-pu: *Ta*, mark or paint; *pu*, root, origin. The sacerdotal colour was red, and all prohibited things were painted with *koko-wai*. *Honu*, *Tareha* (*d*).

Toe-toe-whatu-manu: Split in shreds. *Whatu*, to weave, plait; *manu*, bird, kite; *toe-toe*, used in making kites.

To-haere-roa: Drag on a long distance. Another name of *Kahu-kura*. Also means, to follow, to reconnoitre, to spy, a scout.

Tu: To stand erect, the equal, the same, the character, the manner.

Tua: A word limitless in meaning—namely, “Beyond that which is most distant,” “Behind all matter,” and “Behind every action.” It also means the essence of worship, and is employed in the invocations to the elements and the heavens, and the ceremonies of baptism of male children. Of similar meaning, but of less extent, and of more local significance, are the names *Io*, *Pu*, *Take*, *Tumu*, *Mua*, *Tapairu*, and *Au*; yet these were at times used as synonyms for *Atua*, in regard to authority or leadership.

Tumu: That which projects beyond all other objects, headland; a rest, or perch, or prop; king.

Tu-tahi: See *Ao-tahi*.

Wahine: Woman. Man was created by the gods; woman was an emanation from *ra*, sun, and *riko-riko*, quivering heat. Man, coming from the gods, is sacred; and woman, being of lower origin, is not; nor is she honoured at baptism by the rites of *Tu*, the god of war.

Wero-i-te-ninihi, *Wero-i-te-kokoto*, *Wero-i-te-ao-marie* (*wero*, to call attention; *ninihi*, to sneak out of sight; *kokoto*, changed, decayed; *marie*, quiet, peaceable): These were the names of ceremonies performed to *Mango-roa* (*d*) (Magellan Clouds).

Whare-matoro (*whare*, house; *matoro*, to incite, to woo): A house in which the youth of both sexes passed their winter nights — a resort of all who could relate tales of folk-lore.

Whai: To follow, to search after, to scout; a game not unlike that of cats'-cradle.

Wi-wi: Dread, trouble, wonder; the common rush, *juncus*.



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ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE MAORI.

CHAPTER I.

For thee, O Whai, my love is ever great.
 From germ of life sprang thought,
 And god's own medium came:
 Then bud and bloom; and life in space
 Produced the worlds of night—
 The worlds where bowing knee
 And form in abject crouching lost
 Are lost—for ever lost.
 And never now return ye
 From those worlds of gloom.
 'Twas Nothing that begat
 The Nothing unpossessed,
 And Nothing without charm.
 Let the priests attention give,
 And all I state dispute.
 I may be wrong: I but rehearse
 What was in *whare-kura* taught.
 'Twas Rangi who, with Atu-tahi,
 Brought forth the moon.
 And Rangi Wero-wero took,
 And, yet unseen, the sun produced.
 He, silent, skimmed the space above,
 And then burst forth the glowing eye of heaven
 To give thee light, O man!
 To wage thy war on fellow-man.
 Turn and look this way.
 On Tara-rua's distant peak now
 Shines the light of coming day—
 The dawn of eating man and feats of war.
 Would'st thou the deeds of ancient battles now repeat,
 When Nga-toro-i-rangi
 The "Blood nose" battle fought,
 And then the "Deep blue sea"
 And next the "Earth-red plain"
 And "Mist on sea" were fought and gained.
 Sleep, O Father, in Matangi-rei,
 Where Tane landed first and lived,
 And where the dead of all
 The tribes now rest, for ever rest.
 * * * * *
 O Kahu-te-raki, come now,

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Bid a welcome to thy nephew
 And put him in the
 Scented bag of Rau-kata-uri,
 In which old Kae was led to dea
 Hide him in the Ha-ruru-roa,
 In the net of Pae-kawa,
 Where noted Huna-kiko spear wa
 With far-famed Ma-na-wa.
 Why not singe thee
 With a flame of fire,
 That thou mayst see
 The skin of Manu-mea,
 And taste of food, that thoughts may rise
 And urge to acts thy hands,
 And feet, and eyes.
 O deaf son, who wouldst not hearken,
 I spread before thee life and death,
 But thou wouldst bind around thee
 The old used mat of death.
 I alone was left a solitary one
 A cast-off plank of the
 House of the god Tane.

Ancient Lament of Tu-roa for Te-ko-tuku.

WHARE-KURA.

SCHOOL OF MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY. (NGA-I-TAHU.)

WHARE-KURA, the sacred school in which the sons of high priests were taught our mythology and history, stood facing the East, in the precincts of the sacred place of Mua.

Mua was a sacred locality. It was known by *mauku* (tree-fern) or flax-bush. One of these indicated the sacred spot where an image of man, without feet (*d*), in length from the elbow to the point of the middle finger, made of totara wood, to represent Kahu-kura, the *atua-toro* (attendant spying god), was placed. This was where offerings, and sacrifices, and all other attendant ceremonies were performed to the gods.

The people procured the materials for this edifice, but the priests erected it; and whilst so engaged abstained from food till the close of each day. The high priest performed sacred ceremonies over the *pou-toko-manawa*, the centre-post, on which rested the ridge-pole, and at the foot of which was carved a *tiki*, the resemblance of one of their progenitors, to consecrate the house and make it sacred. When the *kaka-ho* reeds forming the various patterns

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which variegated the interior of the house were being laced up, incantations were repeated ; and when finally completed, the ceremony of *ta-te-kawa*, the dedication of the building, was performed.

A sacred sacrifice was killed at the dedication, which was witnessed by all the people. A dog, man, woman, child, or slave was killed, and the blood presented to Mua, with the same ceremonies and incantations as those performed by an army in presenting food to the gods.

The living sacrifice was led up to the front of the building and then killed ; the blood only was the sacred offering given to Mua. The body was buried in the sacred place (*d*).

A sacred fire and an *umu* (oven) were lighted in the house. These were kept burning whilst the victim was being killed. At the close of day another fire was lighted in the *marae* (courtyard), in which *kumara* or eel was cooked and partaken of by the priests and sacred men. The fire in each instance was procured by friction (*hika*) (*d*).

When the priests assembled on the first night they selected twenty or thirty youths of highest rank, and proceeded with them to a stream, river, lake, or other water, where the youths went into the water. The priests stood on the brink, and dipped a *wiwi*, or *toe-toe* stalk, or piece of grass, into the water, and dropped some from it into the left ear of each youth. The priests then went into the water and two or three times baled some on to the youths, repeating at the same time incantations to open their ears, to insure to them a correct and perfect knowledge of all they were to be taught. The priests then took *rimu* (raw sea-weed), and performed over it the same ceremonies and incantations as were performed by those who survived the flood. The youths and priests came out of the water, and went directly to Mua and to the image representing Kahu-kura. The priests, repeating incantations, threw some dry sea-weed. The *tapu* (*d*) was then supreme, and all animate or inanimate matter was sacred. The sole right to punish for

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transgression was left with the gods. All returned to the school, and, having again procured fire by friction, a piece of *roi* (*d*) (fern-root) was roasted and given to an aged *wahine* (female), who put it under her thigh (*d*). It was then presented to the youths one by one as they stood in a line in the middle, from end to end of the house, each of whom partook of a portion to insure a continuous application to their lessons. They then sat down, and the priests repeated the mythology and history until midnight. Only one female (and she must be a sacred woman) was admitted into this school. Her duty was, by ceremonies and incantations, to protect the lives (*mauri*) (*d*) of the pupils from every evil. None but the priests and pupils might eat in the school; nor must any one sleep there. If drowsiness were felt by any one of them, it was deemed an omen that such an one would not live long. He was at once expelled, and not again admitted.

The father of each pupil must attend to take charge of his child, to prevent crying, restlessness, whispering, or any other act by which the attention of others would be distracted.

The school was opened by the priests (*d*) in the season of *kahui-rua-mahu* (autumn), and continued from sunset to midnight every night for four or five months in succession. From midnight to dawn all slept. Daily exercise in games and bathing was allowed, but they were not on any account to go near where food was being, or had been, cooked; nor could they associate with any of the people. Any youth not entitled to a seat in the school who came near a pupil of *whare-kura*, for his temerity, became a water-carrier to the institution.

Food was cooked daily by females at a place apart from the settlement, and by them brought to a spot a little distance from the school; then it was taken by a water-carrier or some of the pupils into *whare-kura*.

The priests whilst teaching, and pupils whilst being taught, occupied the order already stated. The chief priest sat next to the door. It was his duty to commence the pro-