HUMAN ADAPTATION TO ENVIRONMENT: MAORI, NEW ZEALAND

Identification. The Maori are the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand. Culturally, they are Polynesians, most closely related to eastern Polynesians. After contact with Europeans, the people now known as the Maori began using the term *tangata maori,* meaning "usual or ordinary people," to refer to themselves.

Location. The Maori were originally settled primarily in the northern parts of North Island, New Zealand. South Island was much more sparsely settled.

Demography. When Captain Cook visited New Zealand in 1769 the indigenous population was probably between 200,000 and 250,000. The population declined after contact with Europeans, but it began to recover at the beginning of this century and now approaches 300,000.

Linguistic Affiliation. Maori is classified as part of the Polynesian Group of the Eastern Oceanic Branch of the Austronesian languages. Approximately one-third of the Maori still speak their ancestral language, with the vast majority fluent in English as well.

History and Cultural Relations

New Zealand was evidently settled in three waves by travelers from Polynesian islands in a.d. 950, 1150, and 1350. The early arrivals, the Moriori, subsisted mainly by fishing and hunting the moa and other birds that are now extinct. The final (pre-European) immigration was that of the "seven canoes of the great fleet." The people of the great fleet assimilated the original inhabitants by marriage and conquest. The immigrants of 1350 arrived with their own domesticated plants and animals (several of which did not survive the transition from a tropical to a temperate climate), and they subsequently developed into the Maori of the present historical period. Whalers and sealers were common visitors to New Zealand in the 1790s and their relations with the Maori were generally unfriendly and often violent. The first missionaries arrived in 1814 and by the 1830s large numbers of Europeans and Australians were settling in New Zealand. With the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in February 1840 by many (but not all) of the indigenous chiefs, the Maori relinquished sovereignty over New Zealand land and in turn received British recognition and protection, as well as guaranteed rights to their native lands. A period of rapid acculturation ensued, lasting until 1860. The years 1860-1865 saw many battles Between the Maori and the government of New Zealand, mainly over questions of land rights and sovereignty. By 1900 their

population slide had reversed and the Maori began to play a more active role in New Zealand society. They received Permanent Maori seats in the national legislature, and most discriminatory laws were repealed. At present the Maori are a legally recognized minority group (about 10 percent of the population), and they receive special legal and economic considerations on these grounds. Since the 1960s there has been a move to revitalize the Maori language and the Maori are attempting to preserve their cultural heritage while living side-by-side with the "Pakeha" (New Zealanders of European descent). This summary focuses on traditional Maori culture.

Settlements

Today the Maori are overwhelmingly an urban population, located primarily in towns and cities of the northern sections of North Island. In the past there were two types of Maori settlements: fortified (*pa*) and unfortified (*kainga).* Pa, in which people took refuge in wartime, were usually located on a hill and were protected by ditches, palisades, fighting platforms, and earthworks. Houses in the pa were closely crowded, often on artificial terraces. Kainga were unfortified hamlets consisting of five or six scattered houses (*whare*), a cooking shelter (*kauta*) with an earth oven (*hangi*), and one or two roofed storage pits (*rua).* Most farmsteads were enclosed in a courtyard with a pole fence. Most buildings were made of pole and thatch, but some better-made ones were constructed of posts and worked timber.

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. Maori subsistence depended on fishing, gathering, and the cultivation of sweet potatoes, or *kumara (Ipomoea batatas),* some taro, yams, and gourds. Fishing was done with lines, nets, and traps, while fowling was done with spears and snares. Items gathered include shellfish, berries, roots, shoots, and piths. Rats were also trapped and eaten. In infertile areas or in harsh seasons uncultivated fern roots provided an important starchy supplement. Kumara was planted in October and harvested in February and March; winter was the most important hunting season. Getting food was a time-consuming and arduous business.

Industrial Arts. The Maori made tools from stone and wood. Important mechanical aids were wedges, skids, lifting tackles, fire ploughs, and cord drills. Most material items were highly decorated. Major manufactures included flax mats, canoes, fishing equipment, weapons, elaborate digging sticks, cloaks, and ornaments, among others.

Trade. Goods and services were conveyed or compensated through gift giving between individuals. Items and services did not have set values, and the Maori lacked any form of true money. Items most often exchanged were food, ornaments, flax coats, stone, obsidian, and greenstone. Generosity was valued as it enhanced a person's mana, or psychic power. There was a coastal-interior exchange of sea and agricultural products for forest products and greenstone from the west coast of South Island was exchanged for finished goods from the north.

Division of Labor. Men were responsible for felling trees, clearing ground for cultivation, planting, trapping birds and rats, digging fern roots, deep-sea fishing, canoe making, carving, stoneworking, tattooing, and performing esoteric rites. Women were responsible for gathering, weeding, collecting firewood, carrying water, cooking, plaiting, and weaving. Especially skilled individuals could become specialists (*tohunga*) as carvers, builders, and raft makers. The Maori preferred to work cooperatively, with particularly odious jobs left to the slaves.

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Land Tenure. Nearly all land was owned by the various descent groups or tribes. Each group controlled a parcel of Tribal territory and granted rights of usufruct and occupation to its members. Only the group could alienate the descent group's land, and then only with the permission of the entire tribe. Border disputes were a common source of fighting. The nuclear family (*whanau*) of a descent group held rights to specific resources and parcels of land, which could be conveyed to the members' children. Rights of use could be extended to nonmembers only with the permission of the entire descent group.

Kinship

Kin Groups. The largest kin groups in Maori society were the so-called tribes (*iwi).* The iwi were independent political units that occupied discrete territories. An iwi was a large, bilateral descent group encompassing as its members all descendants, traced through both male and female links, of the tribe's founder (by whose name most tribes were known). The Maori were organized into some fifty iwi, of varying size and prestige. The iwi, in turn, were made up of a number of sections known as *hapu.* The hapu also owned a discrete territory and consisted of all individuals bilaterally descended from a founding ancestor. The hapu were much more important than the iwi with regard to land use and communal projects among their members. Most of the members of a hapu lived, along with in-marrying spouses and slaves, in one or two Communities. Since they were defined bilaterally, an individual was often a member of and could affiliate with more then one hapu. A household became officially affiliated with a particular hapu by demonstrating a genealogical link conferring membership and by participating fully in the group's daily life. Descent was reckoned bilaterally, with a patrilateral emphasis, especially in chiefly families.

Kinship Terminology. Maori kin terminology was of the Hawaiian type.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. Maori youth enjoyed premarital sexual freedom and were expected to have a series of discreet love affairs Before marrying. The choice of a marriage partner was made by the senior members of the whanau (household). Marriage served to establish new relations with other kin groups and brought new members into the hapu. Aristocrats often betrothed their children as infants. Marriages were nearly always between members of the same tribe and often between Members of the same hapu. First and second cousins were ineligible as marriage partners. Most marriages were monogamous, though chiefs often took several wives. Gifts were exchanged by both partners at the weddings of commoners while aristocratic women brought a dowry often in the form of land and slaves. Divorce was common and easy, based simply on an agreement of husband and wife to separate. Residence was flexible, but often patrilocal. Children were greatly desired and commonly adopted from relatives. Abortion, infanticide, and postpartum sexual abstinence were the primary methods of population control.

Domestic Unit. The basic social unit was the household (whanau), often comprised of an extended family, including a male head (*kaumatua),* his spouse (s), their unmarried children, and their

married sons, along with the latter's spouses and children. Many households also had resident slaves.

Inheritance. A dying person would make a final testament disposing of his or her property. Most of the estate was Divided fairly equally among the surviving children, except that certain types of hunting, fishing, and craft equipment went only to the offspring of the same sex.

Socialization. Children were generally educated by their relatives, especially grandparents, through songs and stories. Games often imitated adult activities and were competitive. Aggressiveness and competitiveness were encouraged.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. The interrelationships among households, hapu, and iwi has been described above. While iwi were fixed in composition and number, new hapu were created through fission. When a hapu grew too large to function effectively some of its members would break off and establish a new hapu under the leadership of one of the chief's sons or younger brothers. The tribes whose ancestors arrived in New Zealand in the same canoe were considered to constitute a *waka,* literally "canoe." A waka was effectively a confederation whose members felt some obligation to help one another. This special relationship did not, however, rule out warfare between two tribes of the same waka. The Maori were ranked into three social classes, determined by the source of one's line. Members of the two highest classes were both free people, while those descended from the oldest males of each generation formed the aristocracy (*rangatira*). Those from more junior lines, or whose ancestors had lost status, were considered commoners (*tutua* or *ware).* The question of Precisely where a particular line stood in these two classes was often a source of controversy. Difference in rank was directly correlated with degree of sacredness (*tapu*) and mana of each individual and group. Finally, there were the slaves (*taure-kareka),*mainly war captives, who stood outside the descent system.

Political Organization. Each hapu had a chief (from the rangatira). The rangatira of the most senior hapu was the paramount chief (*ariki*) of that tribe. The tribe was therefore the highest politically integrated unit in Maori society. Both chieftainships were passed on patrilineally to the first son in each generation. In some tribes a senior daughter was also given special recognition. Chiefs were of high rank and Generally quite wealthy. They exercised great influence but lacked

coercive power. The chiefs organized and directed economic projects, led *marae* ceremonials, administered their group's property, and conducted relations with other groups. The chiefs were often fully trained priests with ritual responsibilities and powers, most importantly the right to impose tapu. The rangatira and ariki were, in their persons, very tapu and had much mana. The household heads or kaumatua as a group constituted the community council (*runanga*) which advised and could influence the chief.

Social Control. Penalties for crimes ran from gossip, reprimand, and sorcery to seizure of property, beating, and execution.

Conflict. Conflict between different hapu and different tribes was common and often led to warfare. The defeated were most often enslaved, killed, or eaten. Women and Children were the most likely persons to be spared.

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. The Maori held an essentially spiritual view of the universe. Anything associated with the supernatural was invested with tapu, a mysterious quality which made those things or persons imbued with it either sacred or unclean according to context. Objects and persons could also possess mana, psychic power. Both qualities, which were Inherited or acquired through contact, could be augmented or diminished during one's lifetime. All free men were tapu to a degree directly proportional to their rank. Furthermore, an object or resource could be made tapu and therefore off-limits. The punishment for violating a tapu restriction was automatic, usually coming as sickness or death. The Maori had a pantheon of supernatural beings (*atua*). The supreme god was known as Io. The two primeval parents, Papa and Rangi, had eight divine offspring: Haumia, the god of uncultivated food; Rongo, the god of peace and agriculture; Ruaumoko, the god of earthquakes; Tawhirimatea, the god of weather; Tane, the father of humans and god of forests; Tangaroa, the god of the sea; Tu-matauenga, the war god; and Whiro, the god of darkness and evil. There were also exclusive tribal gods, mainly associated with war. In addition, there were various family gods and familiar spirits.

Religious Practitioners. The senior deities had a Priesthood (*tohunga ahurewa),* members of which received special professional training. They were responsible for all esoteric ritual, were knowledgeable about genealogies and tribal History, and were believed to be able to control the

weather. Shamans rather than priests served the family gods whom they communicated with through spirit possession and sorcery.

Ceremonies. Most public rites were performed in the open, at the marae. The gods were offered the first fruits of all undertakings, and slaves were occasionally sacrificed to propitiate them. Incantations (*karakia*) were chanted in flawless repetition to influence the gods.

Arts. Most of the material objects of the Maori were highly decorated. Their statues and carvings, especially with filigree motifs, are admired worldwide and are the frequent subject of art museum exhibitions.

Medicine. Sickness was believed to be caused by sorcery or the violation of a tapu. The proximate cause of illness was the presence of foreign spirits in the sick body. The medical tohunga accordingly exorcised the spirits and purified the patient. The therapeutic value of some plants was also recognized.

Death and Afterlife. The dying and dead were taken to a shelter on the marae. The body was laid out on mats to receive mourners, who came in hapu or tribal groups. After a week or two of mourning the body was wrapped in mats and buried in a cave, in a tree, or in the ground. Often after a year or two the ariki would have the body exhumed, and the bones scraped clean and painted with red ochre, to be taken from settlement to settlement for a second mourning. Afterward, the bones were given a second burial in a sacred place. The spirits of the dead were believed to make a voyage to their final abode, a vague and mysterious underworld.

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