

## Mōteatea and the Transmission of History

A Paper delivered by Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal<sup>1</sup>  
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### 1. Introduction

Thank you for inviting me along to address you this evening. I was happy to speak as I would like to acknowledge the Ōtaki Historical Society's *Journal* which I have used many times over the past few years. Of particular interest was the article concerning the graves of Rangiātea. Agreeing to speak was made even easier by the request to discuss a field that holds great interest for me: mōteatea and its role in the historical process.

### 2. Mōteatea and its types

I like the term *mōteatea* and prefer it to oft used *waiata*<sup>2</sup>. Mōteatea is more generally used to describe the type of song we might refer to in English as classical Māori chant. This paper moves toward an interim definition of the mōteatea form. It is interim as the evolution of mōteatea, especially since contact with European culture, has resulted in a contemporary form that is different from say 200 year ago, and hence the definition of mōteatea is undergoing change. There is much to do in Māori musicology. My point of departure with respect to defining mōteatea is located in the monumental collection of song poetry entitled *Nga Moteatea*.<sup>3</sup> Ngata, the author of this collection, uses mōteatea in the title of his collection and thus groups all the various song types found there under the heading of mōteatea.

This is in contrast to Mervyn McLean who, in his new book entitled *Maori Music*<sup>4</sup>, places great emphasis upon the term *waiata*, which is a generic term for song, and all its variants. Ngata seems to place all 'classical' *waiata* (as opposed to *waiata hou*<sup>5</sup>, which is the term for songs influenced or drawn from non-Māori culture) within the definition of mōteatea and this is the beginning of my definition.

Within the classification entitled mōteatea, there are various types and I will list a few, with short descriptions, drawn from *Nga Moteatea*. This is not an exhaustive list:

*pātere*, a reply to jealousies and/or slander in song  
*apakura*, a lament  
*pao*, short chanting songs  
*ruri*, songs of an amorous nature  
*oriori*, lullabies  
*matakite*, songs of visions  
*mata*, prophetic songs  
*kaioraora*, cursing songs

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that it appears in the title of my book. See references.

<sup>3</sup> See references.

<sup>4</sup> See McLean 1996, pp. 110, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, 'new song' meaning a new song form.

In addition to these types of *mōteatea*, there are many others which are prefixed with the term *waiata*:

*waiata tangi*, laments for the dead  
*waiata aroha*, love songs  
*waiata whaiāipo*, lovers songs  
*waiata whakaaraara pā*, sentinels songs  
*waiata karakia*, ritualistic songs

Further still, there are *mōteatea* whose descriptions arise from their subject matter rather than their form. For example:

*waiata whakautu tono pākūwhā*, songs to answer marriage proposals  
*waiata mō te moe punarua*, songs for marriage to two wives  
*waiata nā te tūrehu*, songs from the ‘fairy folk’  
*waiata whakautu whakapae*, songs replying to slander  
*waiata wawata*, songs of unrequited love

There are many more. Numerous song types are included in the form entitled *mōteatea*, and they were composed and performed for all sorts of reasons and for all sorts of occasions.

*Mōteatea* seems to have enjoyed wide currency in traditional Māori society: it appears in the *whare wānanga* (centres of higher learning) in the *whare kōhanga* (houses for child birth) in the *whare rūnanga* (councils) in the *whare tapere* (houses of entertainment and so on). *Mōteatea* play a wide variety of roles, from consoling the heart of an afflicted lover (see ‘*Moe Hurihuri*’ by Te Uatōrikiriki and ‘*Kāti au i konei*’ by Rangi Topeora) to informing people of a calamity (see ‘*Takoto rawa iho ki te pō*’ by Matangi Hauroa). They incite a people to warfare and even curse them. *Mōteatea* relate genealogy and can initiate a youngster into the curriculum of the *whare wānanga*.

*Mōteatea*, therefore, are multi-purpose and take on a number of forms. They can be long or short, cryptic or direct, whimsical or serious, funny or humourless. *Mōteatea* is an extensive oral literature form which rivals the great folk song-poetry traditions of the world.

Our concern this evening is to consider one aspect of *mōteatea*: that is, its role in the transmission of history.

We can begin by saying that *mōteatea* played a critical role in the process by which history was recorded and interpretations of that history were maintained. Hence, *mōteatea* were the vessels within which important information about a people were held. Let us consider a few examples.

### **3. An *Oriori* for Tūteremoana**

*Oriori* are often translated as lullabies, however, they were composed for more than simply the entertainment of the very young. *Oriori* were important educative devices whereby the young were introduced to some of the important history of their people. *Oriori* outline the philosophical and conceptual world in which his or her people dwelt and within which their world is constructed.

If we consider, for example, the oriori for Tūteremoana, a chief of the Ngāi Tara people, the song reads more like the curriculum of a very adult whare wānanga than a mere entertainment. A portion goes as follows:

*Haramai, e mau to ringa ki te kete tuauri,  
Ki te kete tuātea, ki te kete aronui,  
I pikitia e Tāne-nui-a-rangi i te ara tauwhāiti...*

*Come, grasp your hand the kit of sacred knowledge,  
Procured when the Renowned-Tāne-of-the-heavens ascended by the tenuous  
pathway<sup>6</sup>*

The song refers to the great tradition concerning Tānenui-ā-rangi and his ascendancy to the highest heavens to obtain the baskets of knowledge. It introduces the child to the Māori view as to the nature and origin of knowledge and prepares him/her for later, deeper learning in the study of mātauranga (knowledge). In this way, mōteatea not only refers to an historical event<sup>7</sup> in Māori tradition but also to its philosophical aspects which continue to serve the child in later life. This is not the only tradition recounted in this oriori. (It is a very long song.)

It continues by referring to great mythic and symbolic events in the tribes history, it outlines origins and describes relationships between these so called mythic events and those of contemporary times. In a word, the oriori outlines the world view of these people. Hence, this oriori is an important tool by which this information is imparted to the very young. It, therefore, reflects the traditional Māori view concerning the capacity of the very young to learn. Oriori can also contain a prescribed course, pathway perhaps, for the child when he or she grows up. Many oriori, for example, urge children to take on the responsibilities of their elders in later life. Finally, oriori also contain the aspirations of the parents as in the quote above. Here the granduncle<sup>8</sup>, in this case, urges the child to take up the 'kit of sacred knowledge', a direct statement mapping out learning and education in Tūteremoana's future.

#### **4. A *Takuate* by Te Matangi Haurua**

Another example of a mōteatea performing a number of functions in the tribal historical process is 'Takoto rawa iho ki te pō' by Te Matangi Haurua.

Te Matangi was a member of the Ngāti Tūrangā hapū of Ngāti Raukawa, in the 19th century. Originally from Maungatautari, near Cambridge, Waikato, Te Matangi journeyed to the south with many of his Ngāti Raukawa kin as they migrated to what is known as Te Ūpoko-o-te-Ika (greater Wellington district including Wairarapa). Most of the Ngāti Raukawa groups that migrated to the south followed the Waikato river, then across Lake Taupō, then across land to the upper reaches of the Rangitikei river and canoed downstream to the mouth which is near the present day township of Bulls.

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<sup>6</sup> *Nga Moteatea*, Part III, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>7</sup> In traditional Māori society, such a tradition, which we might describe as myth, was nevertheless considered an historical event. This is similar to the myths of the Bible which are considered truthful historical events by many in the Christian world.

<sup>8</sup> The song was composed by Tūteremoana's granduncle, Tūhotoariki.

Te Matangi's group, however, travelled via the Whanganui river and it was here that they came into conflict with the local people and were attacked. Several Ngāti Raukawa were killed and others were imprisoned. The task fell upon Te Matangi to return to Ngāti Raukawa and to inform them of these events and to raise a group who would return to exact revenge. The technique by which Te Matangi achieved this was through the composition and performance of a *mōteatea* in front of key Ngāti Raukawa leaders, one of which being Te Whatanui.

Hence, Te Matangi's song is not only a *takuate*, which means to grieve, but also a *tiwha*, which is a type of composition in which a particular issue or agenda is contained. The Ngāti Raukawa term for this kind of song is a *kōpaki* which literally means to envelope something. *Kōpaki* were often taonga like a mere pounamu or a taiaha, for example, however, their presentation before a group of people was understood to be a symbol for an important issue which the bearer of the *kōpaki* would like to raise with them. The bearer of the *kōpaki* uses the item to catalyse a discussion.

In this instance, the *kōpaki* is a song. A particular feature of this type of composition is the practise of encasing the issue, the *take*, inside a series of poetical devices, the purpose of which is to hide its meaning from those for whom the song is not intended. The composer uses a particular kind of language which is known only to a particular group of people. Rev. Māori Marsden has written in regard to myths and legends:

*(myth and legend) form a part of the corpus of sacred knowledge and as such were not normally related in public. Furthermore, the way in which it was couched ensured that even when related in public, its inner meaning could not be understood without the key to unravel it. And unless all the parts were known and understood it was impossible to make sense of it.<sup>9</sup>*

If we examine the text of this song a little closely, we can detect some of these poetical devices at work. It begins:

*Takoto rawa iho ki te pō  
e huihui ana mai ō tātou wairua  
kia piri, kia tata mai ki taku taha  
matatū tonu ake, ka maranga kei runga  
whitirere ki te ao, tiro tiro kau au  
Ā, me he wairua atua, te tārehutanga iho  
i te manawa i raro kapakapa tū ana kei runga  
Homai he matā kia haea ki taku kiri.*

*Composing myself for sleep in the night  
Kindred spirits gathered all around,  
Closely entwined, seeking to be near me.  
The awakening was sudden, and I sat up,  
fully awake, I looked about in vain;  
Like the spirit of a god the vision had vanished.  
O thou sleeping heart, throbbing wildly within, arise!*

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<sup>9</sup> From *Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Maori* by Rev. Māori Marsden and Te Aroha Henare. Unpublished paper, Ministry for the Environment 1992.

*Give me a sharpened obsidian to lacerate my skin.*<sup>10</sup>

Although it is obscure, Te Matangi is explaining to Te Whatanui and others that a calamity has befallen them. His being awoken from sleep is an enduring symbol for calamity, it having been seen in a dream or vision. However, I suspect that the use of various words in the text also tell Te Whatanui what type of calamity it might be and other information which we can only hint at now.

The purpose of the song is to report to Te Whatanui and others that this Ngāti Raukawa party has perished. Secondly, that a *taua* or war-party should be convened to seek retribution for these Ngāti Raukawa deaths. Hence, the song records the incident and is subsequently used in relation to those events when they are raised in discussion.

In contemporary times, the song is often used by Ngāti Raukawa to remind ourselves of our identity and our past. It includes the terms ‘Ngā Pōtiki-toa-nā-Rakamaomao’ and ‘Mōtai-tangata-rau’ which are poetical names for the people of Ngāti Raukawa.

### **5. Mōteatea and Historical Statements: Te Ōuenuku Rene**

Te Ōuenuku Rene was a kaumātua of Ngāti Toa who passed away in 1973. He is well remembered in Ōtaki. In 1969, he was the subject of a number of interviews conducted by Te Kapunga Dewes of Victoria University and these tapes constitute a rich source of information about the history of our confederation of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa and Te Āti Awa. They are also useful for our present discussion.

Te Ōuenuku, or Joe as he was known, begins by presenting a lengthy oral dissertation concerning the history of our people, recounting events, citing whakapapa and making connections between and about historical phenomena. In his dissertation, he often quotes the titles of mōteatea as in the following:

*Ka mate a Pāpaka i konei, i tēnei pakanga, koia te take o te waiata e kiia nei ko Taku Tirotiro noa, nā Te Heuheu Mananui*

*Pāpaka died as a result, in this battle, Te Heuheu Mananui composed a song upon this event*

Hence, Te Ōuenuku uses mōteatea to reinforce statements he makes about historical phenomena. Mōteatea are used as evidence, to support claims, expand statements and generally to add authority to the speaker and his or her statements.

I have done the same thing recently when writing an essay on Rangiātea. The National Library is convening an exhibition on Rangiātea in March and I was asked to write an essay. I used the opportunity to record a number of stories about Rangiātea that are not well known and, indeed, have not been recorded before. One such being the story relating to the support given by Ngāti Porou for the use of the name, Rangiātea (it belongs to the entire Māori world). This has not been recorded before, so I chose to include it. It just so happens that a song by Te Haina, a kuia of Ngāti Whakatere, for Rangiātea includes a reference to it<sup>11</sup>. Hence, Te Haina’s song provides evidence for this tradition.

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<sup>10</sup> Royal 194, pp. 69, 70.

<sup>11</sup> See Ramsden 1959.

## **6. Rongo kōrero au and the claim to Maungatautari**

A further example of the use of mōteatea to reinforce statements and views based upon history is found in the famous incident regarding our failure to reclaim Maungatautari, our ancestral mountain in Waikato. Ngāti Raukawa, you might recall migrated from Maungatautari to these districts. Following this migration, our ancestors continued to claim Maungatautari. This claim became the subject of various Native Land Court settings. It is said that Ngāti Raukawa failed as a result of the singing of the waiata by Te Whatanui for Maungatautari.

The song was composed by Te Whatanui following an invitation by his old friend, whananga and ally, Te Heuheu Mananui of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, to return to Maungatautari. Te Whatanui was greatly disturbed by this proposal lest his movement to the south be seen as ill-founded. The waiata concludes with the following lines:

*Koia rānei e Ngāti Raukawa  
Me hoki au ki Maungatautari  
Ki te kāinga i whakarerea nei e te ngākau  
Me hoki kōmuri au ki te whenua  
Kia whakawaia mai au e te ruru  
He raru tōku ki te nohanga pahī.*

*Therefore, should I Ngāti Raukawa  
return to Maungatautari?,  
to the home abandoned from the heart.  
Should I go back to the land?  
To become an object of amusement  
and insult for the ruru.  
I dread to be looked upon as a visitor.<sup>12</sup>*

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this short paper attempts to describe something of the role of mōteatea in the processes of Māori history.

We have seen there are many mōteatea types, described and classified in different ways, depending on both content and form. Mōteatea is a generic term for what might be referred to as classical Māori chant.

Mōteatea perform a number of tasks and some of these have been outlined in the examples given. For example:

- an educative role
- recording the aspirations of parents and elders
- prescribing pathways for children in their later lives
- explaining and describing the Māori world view
- mourning in time of calamity and misfortune
- urging a people to take up a cause
- introducing children to important traditions
- containing important symbols of identity
- supporting statements and providing evidence
- recording events

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<sup>12</sup> Royal 1994, p. 38.

I hope these words are useful.

Tēnā koutou katoa.

## References

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