



Marine resources in Māori oral tradition: He kai moana, he kai mā te hinengaro

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Abstract Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) was one of the last land masses settled by humans, with the arrival of Māori ca. 1280 AD. This relatively recent human history allows unprecedented opportunity to investigate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in changing environmental and societal contexts. Before European contact, Māori culture had a strongly developed tradition of oral literature, including ancestral sayings (whakataukī). Whakataukī represent one of the main ways of transmitting critical information about all aspects of life and society, including TEK. Our aim in this paper was to analyse information on marine resources contained in whakataukī. We analysed linguistic cues to place whakataukī that refer to marine resources in five time periods, before examining the frequencies of occurrence for these whakataukī, and thus infer the likely importance of these resources through time. References to specific fish reduced through time, in contrast to generic references; we argue that these patterns are associated with societal developments. Naming of fish species during the initial settlement period likely reflects prior Polynesian voyaging experience. Many early fish references are associated with food, but later references to fish do not strongly reflect this pattern. The occurrence of marine resources such as elasmobranchs and shellfish in the whakataukī differ from their occurrence in the archaeological record, reflecting limitations associated with both forms of record.

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Introduction

The Māori people of New Zealand have a long association with the sea. The extensive voyaging history of the Polynesians through the Pacific Ocean over several thousand years (Barber, 2003; Best, 1929; Paulin, 2007) led to the settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) in around 1280 AD (Wilmshurst et al., 2011); as such ANZ was the last major land mass to be settled by humans. This landmass, however, contrasted with the islands previously inhabited by the Polynesians, consisting

of a large island archipelago with varied topography, and temperate rather than tropical temperatures and weather patterns. It thus provided new challenges for Māori. For example, although a rich array of marine resources was present, the colder sub-Antarctic currents supported many marine resources that were probably unknown.

Fishing was a significant activity in early ANZ, as might be expected from people with a strong seafaring tradition. Many communities were also concentrated in coastal regions (Hiroa, 1926; Best, 1929; Anderson, 1997; Paulin, 2007). Not unexpectedly, then, fish and marine mammals recur in Māori myths and legends, beginning with stories of the demigod Māui who fished up the North Island of ANZ, through to events of tribal significance such as Paiakea's journey on the back of a whale (Best, 1982; Barber, 2003). These long standing relationships with the marine environment have endured since initial settlement, continuing after European colonisation from ca. 1800 AD. Indeed, it has been argued that assessment and management of wild population stocks is part of indigenous cultural practice (Moller, 1996; Dick et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2013). Fish and aquatic invertebrates continue to be harvested by Māori (Moller and Lyver, 2010; McDowall, 2011) and fishing remains an important economic and cultural activity for Māori today (see, for example, Dick et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2013). Within Māori culture, manaakitanga or hospitality, including the provision of marine delicacies such as crayfish and shellfish such as pūpū (*Turbo smaragdus*) and pāua (*Haliotis iris*) at major tribal events, remains a vital cultural practice. Marine resources are therefore a highly significant part of this tradition for coastal tribes. For this reason, we have focused on marine resources in this paper, although we also present some additional data on freshwater resources.

To date, the archaeological record has dominated our understanding of environmental history and Māori marine resource use in ANZ. As Paulin (2007) has highlighted, however, this extensive archaeological record, as well as a voluminous archival record of Māori fishing activities, has served to maintain European notions about fishing. Many examples of material culture such as fish hooks and nets have been catalogued in museums, offering insight into the tools and technologies of culture, such as those of fishing (e.g. Paulin, 2010, 2012). Early European explorers, artists and ethnographers at a observed and recorded many details about Māori life in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including fishing (e.g. Polack, 1838; Diefenbach, 1843; Colenso, 1869). Some, for example, focused on recording methods of tool and net construction (e.g. Best, 1929). Nonetheless, a rich oral tradition is one of the pillars of Māori culture. This oral tradition has been largely ignored, despite containing a depth of embedded ecological information in song, origin stories, whakapapa (records of genealogical relationships, including those of humans and nature) and whakataukī or ancestral sayings (Roberts et al., 1995). Yet examination of oral tradition highlights information that may be less evident in the archaeological or written archival records.

Māori fishing knowledge is certainly embedded in oral tradition, as can be seen in the lunar fishing calendars recorded by early ethnographers (e.g. Best, 1903, 1929; Hiroa, 1926) that continue to be used by Māori fishers. However, little attention has been paid to other forms of oral tradition as sources of information on marine resources, with anthropologists dismissing the 'extravagant fishy tales' inherent in oral histories

(Leach, 2006 in Paulin, 2007). Recently, however, a number of researchers have concluded that knowledge of oral tradition and Māori cultural practices can enrich our understanding of environmental and human history (e.g. Barber, 2003; Paulin, 2007). Our aim in this paper is to examine one branch of oral tradition, known as whakataukī or ancestral sayings, to examine information on marine resources in particular. Using linguistic cues, such as sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary, we separated whakataukī into five main time periods since Māori settlement. We then analysed the information on marine resources to ascertain the likely importance of resources in these time periods. Firstly, we analysed both generic and specific references to fish, and the frequency of these references in the timeline, whilst also considering the context associated with these references. Secondly, we examined whether evidence of naming during initial settlement reflects prior Polynesian voyaging experience through the re-naming of new species with old Polynesian names (tracing roots). Third, we asked whether references to fish are associated with food, or have other contexts. Finally, we considered the occurrence frequencies of marine resources that are notably present or absent in the archaeological record, including shellfish, elasmobranchs such as sharks and stingrays (*Dasyatis thetidis*), and marine mammals.

Methods

Whakataukī collection and dating

Many 19th and early 20th century ethnographers in ANZ collected whakataukī, including Grey (1857), Best (1924) and Firth (1926). These archival recordings that began shortly after European arrival thus provide written compilations of Māori oral tradition. These source materials were comprehensively compiled by Mead and Grove (1981), with the later addition of translations and interpretations (Mead and Grove, 2001). We used this pariemological dataset of 2669 Māori whakataukī (Mead and Grove, 2001) as our primary dataset, supplementing this dataset with similar entries from Mead and Grove (1981). We then analysed semantic shifts and vocabulary changes across time periods. Using a range of methods including linguistic clues, structural analysis, historical context and word identification including ancestor names, events and genealogy and native speaker intuition, we aligned the whakataukī to five broad time periods: pre 1350 (pre Māori settlement), 1350–1500 (early settlement), 1500–1650 (occupation and interaction between tribes), 1650–1800 (settlement marked by inter-tribal fighting) and 1800ff (after the arrival of the first European settlers).

Polynesian languages have an extensive and comprehensive nomenclature for fishes. The Māori language is the southernmost member of the Polynesian languages, a subgroup of the very widespread Austronesian language family (Dunn et al., 2011). The Polynesian heartland is often described as 'Triangle Polynesia' because a number of Polynesian 'Outlier' languages are also spoken in Melanesia and Micronesia, with the northern apex in Hawai'i, and a southern base connecting ANZ to Easter Island (Blust, 2013). To make comparisons between Polynesian species names and whether they describe the same species or morphologically similar species, we examined names from the Pollex Database (see <http://pollex.org.nz/about/>) for

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