

Outline Structure of Maori Society

The basic unit of Maori society was the *whanau* (extended family); and a number of families joined by descent through both male and female lines linking them to a common ancestor, makes up a *hapu* (sub-tribe). A grouping of *hapu* made up the *iwi* (tribe), which varied in size from a few hundred to several thousand members. A number of tribes claiming descent from a common ancestor, or ancestors who came to New Zealand in the same *waka* (canoe), made up a sort of loose federation with kinship obligations to help each other.

Within the structure, social status depended upon seniority of descent, the elder ranking above the younger. Those who could trace their ancestry back through an unbroken line to the founder of a *hapu* were considered to be *rangatira* (of chiefly rank), while others were reckoned to be commoners. The bottom class of the society was made up of slaves who, although permitted to marry, had no rights and no *mana*. Differences of rank involved the complexities of *mana* and *tapu*. The greater the person's *mana* the greater the *tapu* surrounding him or her.

The whole society was bound together as a functional whole by its world-view, which indicates the complexity of humankind's relationship to the mundane and supra-mundane worlds.

Comment on Diagram 4

Io, who dwelt in the ultimate reach of the heavens (*Te toi o nga rangi*), was not known to the ordinary people. Their intercourse with the gods was carried out through the lesser beings, *Rangi* and *Papa* and their children who became the rulers of the various departments of life. *Wairua* are spirit beings who communicate with humans and are not generally considered malign, whereas *kehua* (ghosts) are troublesome spirits seeking to find rest. From them much harm can come. *Tipuna* are ancestors who have become eponymous heroes, like *Maui* the trickster, and *Hinenuiotepe* who has become the guardian of the realm of the dead. *Kaitiaki* are family guardians and might be considered family totems. *Tipuna* are shown also in the realm of the Human to indicate that these are the dead who are still

remembered and referred to, and who are considered by the people to be very close to the living. They are termed 'the Living Dead' to distinguish them from the eponymous ancestors. *Ariki*, a term now seldom used, were High Chiefs and extremely sacred personages surrounded with many *tapu* restrictions. *Rangatira* were the aristocracy of the people. They have some inherent *mana* but this can be diminished or increased. *Nga taonga* refers to family treasures with a history. They are considered to be filled with much *mana* and are therefore treated with extreme care. *Nga taonga* are feared, revered and treasured. *Rarohenga* is often termed 'the abode of the dead' although in other accounts it is considered to be the place through which the spirits of the dead must pass to reach *Hawaiki*, the ultimate resting place. It is best described as 'the underworld' and is a shadowy place. Pre-European Maori religion had no concept of reward and punishment in the after-life. *Tohunga* are here "experts in the sacred". The adjective following 'tohunga' indicates the area of expertise, e.g., *tohunga whakairo* is a skilled carver and *tohunga matakite* is a seer or diviner.