

Topic Page: [Maori](#)

Definition: **Maori** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Polynesian population, the original inhabitants of New Zealand. Traditionally, Maori lived by agriculture, hunting and fishing. They retain much of their language, culture and customs. In Maori society, tattooing, carving and weaving were developed arts, and their war chants (*haka*) are still kept alive. Since the 1970s, Maori political activity increased, and some of their land has been restored. See *also* Maori Wars



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Summary Article: **Maori**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Member of the Polynesian people of New Zealand. They number 435,000, about 15% of the total population, and around 89% live in the North Island. Maori civilization had particular strengths in warfare, cultivation, navigation, and wood- and stonework. Speechmaking and oral history, as well as woodcarving, were the main cultural repositories before the European introduction of writing, and Maori mythology and cosmology were highly developed. Their language, Maori, belongs to the eastern branch of the Austronesian family. The Maori Language Act 1987 recognized Maori as an official language of New Zealand.

The Maori colonized New Zealand, probably from Hawaii and Savaii, from about 850 AD, establishing a flourishing civilization throughout the country and driving the original inhabitants, the Morioris, to the South Island and Chatham Island. First contact with Europeans came at the end of the 18th century. Until about 1860, relations between Maori and European settlers were generally good, though based on mutual economic exploitation. Although earlier treaties had confirmed Maori sovereignty, the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and the subsequent influx of settlers from Britain effectively ended Maori political autonomy.

Traditionally, the Maoris were farmers, gatherers, and fishers. In the 19th century a great deal of Maori land was purchased or confiscated, while tribal authority was undermined by the activities of the Maori land courts. Most Maoris therefore became small farmers, usually with the poorest land, or agricultural labourers. Maori life was disrupted and their numbers declined steadily from about 100,000 near the beginning of the century to 40,000 in 1901. In the 20th century there has been a drift from the land, and more than 50% now live in urban areas, notably Auckland. There has also been a significant increase in Maori consciousness, demands for a comprehensive review of the Treaty of Waitangi, and Maori claims to some 70% of the country's land.

Maoris are specially represented in the New Zealand parliament by four members for separate Maori electoral districts. A Board of Maori Affairs was constituted in 1954, mainly to supervise the development of Maori land. Long-standing land grievances led to an agreement, in early 1998, between the Ngai Tahu, a Maori tribe, and the government. The settlement included a compensation package worth \$A152 million, in the form of cash, assets, and land. Among the land returned to the Ngai Tahu was Mount Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain.

Social organization Maori tribes were divided into clans and land-holding units with a common

ancestor. Resident groups were extended families cooperating in farming and ritual activities. Warfare between tribes was common; indeed, the Maoris have never been united as a nation. Maori society had three grades, each one having several degrees of position or influence. The first class was that of the *rangatira*, or chieftain; the second, the *waro*, or commoner; the third, the *pononga*, or slave.

Religion The *ariki*, or priest, was generally the chief and was believed to possess divine spiritual power, known as *mana*. This made him both sacred and also dangerous to ordinary people, a condition known as *tapu* (from which the word taboo comes). Maori traditional cosmology divides the world into two spheres: *tapu* and *noa*, the sacred and the profane. Harmony depends on a correct balance between the two. The primal being of Maori myth was *Io*, the supreme god, who caused the Earth and sky to exist, and these are personified in *Rangi*, the sky parent, and *Papa*, the Earth mother. Fairies figure prominently in Maori legends, with many stories of monsters known as *taniwhas* who lived in sea caves or swamps. Most of the Maoris are now Christians; the Mormon sect has been particularly influential.

In Maori, New Zealand is *Aotearoa* ('long daylight') and European settlers are *Pakeha*, a term often used by white New Zealanders when contrasting themselves with the Maori.

Arts Many Maori are skilled artists, especially in woodcarving. Districts, tribes, and even families specialized in some particular form of art expression, and were jealous to preserve their secrets. Carved figures, interiors of houses, such as carved pillars, and, above all, the embellishments of the war canoes afford some of the most striking examples of Maori carving. They also tattooed their faces and skin with elaborate patterns, known as *moko*.

images

Maori Wars

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