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## Early Years

1764 was but one year in what was to be an important decade for Māori. As well as being almost certainly the year of Patuone's birth, a time was approaching when the predictions of Ngāpuhi seers, **Te Maori** and **Te Matapo** would take on a concrete form: no longer would they be poetic allusions, awaiting fulfillment, floating in the minds of *tōhunga*, the priestly experts, chosen of the gods. Near the end of the decade, late in 1769, these *tūpua*, these goblins, these *kēhua*, these ghosts, these *tauhou*, these foreigners, rounded Motukokako [1](#) and arrived in person.

Through his father **Tapua** and mother, **Te Kawehau**, Patuone was born into the Ngāti Hao aristocracy. Ngāti Hao was a *hapū*, a clan or tribe, of the larger tribal nation unit, the *iwi*, and what would later come to be known as the confederation, Ngāpuhi [2](#). His grandmother **Ripia** had invoked the *tohunga* powers of old as she watched over his birth; his grandfather, the old warrior **Takare** stood by, knowing the predictions that Patuone was destined to be a chief, famous for his deeds both on and off the battle field; his father Tapua also knew. It was, in sum, an auspicious birth of a great chief who, along with his younger brother, Nene (Tamati Waka Nene) would eventually play a major role in the founding of modern New Zealand as a nation.

On 27th November 1769, as the *Endeavour* rounded Motukokako, Captain James Cook and his crew looked over the magnificence of the scene laid out before them; dark hills and islands and a sea, breathing with the pulse of life. Meanwhile, looking back at them many thousands of eyes were focused from land and sea. On the canoe *Te Tumuaki* was Patuone's father Tapua with eighty men; on *Te Harotu* was Tuwhera with forty men; on *Te Homai*, Tahapirau with another forty men; and on *Te Tikitiki* was Ne with sixty men. All ceased netting fish as this great ship rounded the point and came into view, like a ghost in the the full light of day, looming high and proud from the surface of the ocean, sails catching the sunlight as well as the breeze, making it glide ever closer.

*He tauhou; he tupua maitai; he kehua pea!*

They are foreigners; goblins from the ocean; ghosts perhaps!

Back at Ōkura, from on high, Patuone and older sister Tari too looked out and saw the sails of the great ship shining white in the sunlight in the far distance, a meeting across time and cultures, and, Patuone and his sister, Tari, were soon to taste a new food—pork, given by the *rangatira* of the goblins from the sea to their father Tapua. In the meantime, misunderstandings had also begun and in spite of benevolence on both sides, trigger-happy sailors and others of Cook's crew and entourage, responded too directly to what they perceived as threats to their lives. Stone-throwing Māori were testing the strangers from the sea; testing their mettle and reality and challenging them openly: those in the line of fire were wounded or killed in the face of nervous crew and an even more nervous Dr Solander with his personal gun. Māori *tikanga* demanded this testing of total strangers but the overall consequences of death appear not to have been too extreme. Also, in some ways, this was a more auspicious beginning than some might interpret. The relationship, from the very start was one of mutual curiosity but at the fringes of this curiosity, the boundaries needed clarification through interaction and experience. The initial price was death visited upon some. The sea-goblins had weapons which spat fire and smoke and killed or wounded from afar, weapons which hurled unseen projectiles. But already, words like *kaipuke* (ship) and *pū* (guns) were setting the worlds of Māori and *pākehā* on a parallel course. The seeds of drastic and tumultuous change had been planted.

Like all those born to the chiefly class, Patuone's youth was given over to learning; learning on many fronts and using many methods. First of all came manual dexterity, and speed; hand and eye co-ordination; learning how to duck and weave; how to ward off deadly blows and how to shift balance to deliver a killing return blow. The sticks and other stand-in materials of childhood gradually gave way to real weapons; the bruises of childhood gave way to the cuts and contusions of youth in preparation for the real battle field. Feeling the pain of real blows and suffering training wounds, developed both incentive and skill to avoid them. Tapua, his father instructed him in the ways of the warrior and the ways of the priest: Patuone was destined to be the leader and warrior; war leader and high priest and inheritor of his father's *mana*. Ripia and Takare drilled him mentally with history and genealogy: essentially and in balance, the whole man was being developed. The exhortation encouraging excellence went back to and invoked ancient Polynesia, the ancestral homelands of ancient times where the call for excellence rang out at Taputapuātea at Ra'iatea [3](#):

*Kia puta ai te ihu ki Rangiatea!*

That your nose may arrive at Rangiatea!

Nene was born c.1770 and before Patuone had turned twenty, his older brothers Te Anga and Ruanui had been killed. Their deaths in battle with Ngāti Pou, fighting with Tapua at Whangaroa, redefined the meaning of his name. Thus, what had been predicted at his birth came to settle upon him quickly. Ngāti Pou, while related, had been displaced and forced towards Whangaroa but they were still a troublesome force and their military

pro prowess was no less deadly following their expulsion from the Hokianga area. And then there were raids from the south, especially from Ngāti Maru and Ngāti Pāoa of the Hauraki; there were even raids from other close kinship groups: war was a perennial part of life. All had to be in a state of constant readiness.

The period following Patuone's birth and his growth into manhood was a difficult time for Māori in the North. War was endemic and defined the lives of everyone; war *prescribed* the lives of everyone. These were times of struggle; struggle for power, territorial autonomy and territorial security. Each group was based on *hapū* and then wider *iwi* affiliations. All needed skilled warriors to defend and consolidate and as occasion allowed, to expand. For the influential Ngāti Hao *hapū*, Tapua was already the chief and principal war leader. He was also the high priest and from Tapua's viewpoint, all his sons had to be prepared eventually to take over his key roles. In the inner world of Ngāti Hao, Tapua and Te Kawehau had created a powerful legacy of sons; Te Anga, Te Ruanui, Patuone and later Nene, as well as their first-born daughter Tari, whose marriage to Te Wharerahi of Ngāi Tāwake would seal another key alliance with certain *hapū* from the Bay of Islands, just as the marriage of Tapua and Te Kawehau had done so between the Bay of Islands and the Hokianga.

In the Māori world of those times and especially for a chief like Tapua, as high priest of his people and war leader, there were *karakia*, rituals governed by incantations and prayers, which governed all things, all activities. The Gods advised and guided and the medium of connection between the worlds of the Gods and the world of the people was the high priest. For Ngāti Hao, this was Tapua. However, in all these important ministrations, in support behind Tapua was his mother, Ripia, a *tohunga* in her own right and one of the many powerful and noble women of Ngāpuhi. Later, Patuone would invoke her name in response to a taunt from Heke at Ohaeawai:

*Ko te whaiti a Ripia!*  
We are the small band of Ripia!

The message was clear: the few of us are a match for the many of you. Heke, Kawiti and others hearing this knew instantly what Patuone meant. This was not just about numbers; it was about power, lineage and *mana*. Patuone here represents and invokes the *mana* line of Ngāpuhi and with a few, carefully chosen words, had put them all in their places.

Since the times of Rahiri, Uenuku and Kaharau and their noble descendants, Ngāpuhi power had been growing exponentially, but it was power based firstly on the power within *hapū* groups like Ngāti Hao. Each *hapū* had an obligation to be strong because, each was like a *heke*, a rib, linked to and supporting the *tāhuhu*, the ridgepole, the *tuarā*, the backbone. These analogies were applied further to great chiefs—others sought refuge through climbing the *tuarā*, the spine of a great chief: thus being allied with the *tuarā* meant strength. So, even while Tapua, his kin and his compatriots were caught up in a maelstrom of war, it was through poetry and song and a richness of cultural concepts that the life of the times was at once connected to the past, anchored in the present but already defining the future. This was the Māori way.

These were times too where a new birth in the family and *hapū* was watched over and interpreted by many minds; where various signs were gathered in and meanings sought. The Gods marked certain people and from the very beginning, Patuone was set apart as one to watch, one to inherit. Patuone was a 'chosen one'. As *tohunga*, Tapua and others would already have predicted the events to come, including the deaths of Te Anga and Te Ruanui. This is why Patuone was groomed: he was to take over the leadership of Ngāti Hao; he was to be a leader of Ngāpuhi and he was to be a leader for all Māori people. From the very beginning his potential world would be larger and wider than anything ever before imagined. Europeans were to change everything and disrupt the course of Māori history.

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1. Motukokako, Cape Brett. ([back](#))

2. Māori had no concept about themselves as a people other than the identity given to them through a personal name and through their *hapū*, their clan/tribe and *iwi*, their tribal nation affiliations. These were their nations and sources of identity. For those who were the nobles, the *rangatira*, therefore, all were effectively kings, queens, princes and princesses in their own right. This was in time to lead to overuse of these terms so that everyone had a 'Māori princess' in the family. Also, one reason why the Scots and Irish in particular were very well accepted by Māori was because their clan structures were so similar and both had been colonised by the English. Another small *hapū* from the Hokianga, Ngāti Hau, is frequently confused with Ngāti Hao. Ngāti Hau is connected to Ngāti Wai and is a *hapū* with a number of *marae* in the general Whangarei area, including one at Whakapara, built on land donated by Te Tawaka and Eru Nehua, sister and brother-in-law of the site administrator's grandmother, Hoana. Ngāti Hau is also the name of another *hapū* from Wanganui. ([back](#))

3. Ra'iatea in Tahitian is Rangiatea in Māori: Tahitian uses the glottal stop ' rather than the 'ng' of Māori. Taputapuatea is an ancient and *tapu* place, a famous *marae* of old Polynesia which Māori continued to recall and acknowledge in story and song. Ra'iatea shares a common reef with a *twi* island called Taha'a (Tahanga in Māori). ([back](#))

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