

*Marsden's answers to queries relating to cannibalism of New Zealand natives*

Parramatta Dec<sup>r</sup> 22<sup>d</sup> 1823

Rev<sup>d</sup> & dear Sir

Agreeable to your request I have made every enquiry respecting the Cannibalism of the New Zealanders & beg to return the following answers to the Queries proposed by your Committee.

Question (1) "What acts of the New-Zealanders eating human Flesh, have fallen under your own actual Observations?"

Answer Some of the Missionaries never saw them eat human flesh. Mr Kendall never did & I could not learn that any of the Missionaries at Rangheehoo ever did. At Kiddee Kiddee on Shunghees return from war some Slaves were killed and eat. The Missionaries saw some human flesh dressed for eating.

Question (2) "On what occasions were these perpetrated"?

Answer As a sacrifice or satisfaction for the death of a Relative or Friend. The dead Body is considered holy food, or holy sacrifice, & the Persons who eat it are holy after a Battle [f] the heads of the Cheifs are cut off and laid by themselves, and when this is done, the Brains, and the whole of the inside of the Scull are taken out, & prayers are offered up to their God & the funeral ode is sung the very same ode they believe which the first man Mowhee sung over the dead Body of his Son. When the sacrifices are offered up at too great a distance for their Friends to partake of them, the Priests take some small splinters of Wood & pass them thro' the flesh of the sacrifice & when they return home bring them with them when they are put amongst the food, when dressed & afterwards drawn thro' the Mouth of the Priest in the presence of the Cheifs who went to war & prayers are offered up at the time and then the Splinters of

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wood are taken to their family Sepulchre and deposited there. When the Cheif has eaten the Sacrifice at a distance and returns home with the peices of wood, he is considered unholy having touched a dead Body, but when the Priest has received the peices of wood from him & he has been sprinkled by the Priest [f] between the Shoulders with water, he is cleansed from all his pollutions & admitted into the Society of his Friends again— It may here be remarked, that every man who goes to war & kills and eats another, is considered as having done the act of a God. When the Cheifs return from Battle and have any particular cause for rejoicing or mourning they will kill a Slave or Slaves and eat them.

Question (3) "By what circumstances were such acts accomplished?"

Answer I have heard of Slaves being killed in cool blood as well as in moments of revengeful anger, & one young Woman was killed and eat in cool blood when I was then at this time near my lodgings.

Question (4) "Is the Cannibalism of the New Zealanders confined to their prisoners of war"?

Answer It is, excepting the offering & eating those who are killed in Battle.

Question (5) "Is the killing and eating Prisoners of war limited to any specific period after they are taken"?

Answer Prisoners of war are seldom [f] killed but are kept as Slaves; but they are liable to be killed by their Master at all times — with respect to the Women and Children they generally save what they can of them.

Question (6) "Is it a custom amongst the New Zealanders to kill & eat those who are convicted of Thefts?"

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Ans[wer] Thefts are of different kinds common and sacred. Sacred thefts are often punished with death. I saw one young woman who was killed for sacred theft such as breaking into the sweet Potatoe Houses when tabooed or into the sepulchre of the dead to carry away the bones, or into any sacred ground, especially if the offender be a slave— If any of their own Friends are guilty of theft, they are liable to be punished some other way— The New Zealanders do not think that theft is a crime of that magnitude generally, as to merit death.

Question (7) "Is there any particular class of Persons to whom the liability to be killed & eaten is confined?"

Ans[wer] There is no class of Persons that are liable to be killed and eaten in cool blood, there is always a reason assigned for such an act which generally originates in [f] superstition & very distinct from Cannibalism, tho' the whole system of their religious Ceremonies is interwoven with the eating of human Flesh.

Question (8) "Are there any Restrictions with respect to age in persons who are killed & eaten by the New Zealanders?"

Answer Persons of all ages are liable to be killed in battle, those who are, or have been the greatest Warriors are the most aimed at. I have not heard of any old persons, or very young Children having been killed as sacrifices, but those who are grown up.

Question (9) Will you state such well authenticated facts relative to the practice of Cannibalism by the New Zealanders as have been communicated to you by others, distinguishing those from such as you are acquainted with from your own Knowledge?

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Answer I have had many Conversations with the Cheifs at the Bay of Islands, the River Thames &c &c respecting Cannibalism. It is admitted [sic] by all as a Fact, & practised by all as a religious ceremony in their wars. Every Cheif when he [f] falls in Battle expects to be eaten as it is their universal custom, but the New Zealanders have not been known to kill and eat one another privately, without there had been some previous injury, meriting that Punishment, according to their Laws.

Question (10) "What account do the Natives give of the origin, object & advantages of eating the flesh of their fellow Creatures?"

Answer It appears to have originated from a belief that Mowheeboo, the first cause of all sacrificed his Son and eat him. Their object is to satisfy their superstitious minds, to appease the Deity & the Manes of their departed Friends. It cannot however be doubted but that they gratify their appetites & revengeful feelings, at the same time their custom does not originate in this gratification, but in superstition.

I am

Dear & Rev<sup>d</sup> Sir

Yours faithfully

signed Sam<sup>l</sup> Marsden

Rev<sup>d</sup> J. Pratt

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