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Ngā Rīwai Māori - Māori Potatoes.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Ethnobotany at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Graham Francis Harris

2001

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mokopuna –

Meremaihi Raana Jackson and

Te Rauhina Gray Jackson



Riwai with Kete

Abstract

It is generally accepted by scholars, that potatoes were first introduced to New Zealand in the late 18th century by Captain James Cook and the French explorer, Marion du Fresne. Further introductions of potatoes from a variety of sources, including possible direct introductions from South America, followed into the 19th century. Māori were quick to recognise the advantages that these new introductions had over their traditional food crops including *kūmara* (*Ipomoea batatas*) and *taro* (*Colocasia esculentum*) both of which they introduced from east Polynesia some 800-1000 years previously. Potatoes soon became a staple item in the Māori diet and an important trade commodity, and by the mid 19th century they were growing thousands of hectares of potatoes for that purpose. The various cultivars that were introduced were given Māori names and many of these early types are still grown by Māori today, having been passed down through families for many generations. With their deep set eyes, often knobbly irregular shape, “open” leaves and colourful tubers these “Māori Potatoes” are quite distinctive in appearance from modern potatoes and some retain many of the features of *Solanum tuberosum* subsp. *andigena* types.

This thesis introduces a brief history of the development of the potato in South America and in Europe prior to its introduction to New Zealand and adoption by Māori. The effects and consequences that the potato had on Māori society are investigated and Māori potato production techniques and associated cultural operations such as storage methods are examined. Relict potato cultivars still grown today by Māori communities and individuals are described from observations made by the author of a cultivar collection maintained over several years. The claim by some Māori that potatoes were introduced to Aotearoa by their ancestors is examined and evidence is presented to indicate the possibility that several potato cultivars were developed by Māori by

selection from seedlings and somatic mutations from cultivars introduced by Europeans.

Key words: Māori potato, relict potatoes, *riwai*, *Solanum tuberosum* subsp. *andigena*, foliar index.

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