

IO – THE SUPREME GOD OF POLYNESIANS?

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This contribution is dealing with the question of faith in a supreme being of Polynesia. Believes in this God, called Io, Ihoiho or Kiho, appear in the written records from the end of the 19th century. The problem consists of the fact they appeared after the first contacts with Christianity and no doubt the informants were already influenced by the new faith. Nowadays the specialists incline more to the concept that the existence of a supreme deity cult is the result of the impact of Christian teaching.

Keywords: monotheism, Io, supreme being, Polynesian religion

The Polynesian religion has its roots in the cult of ancestors and its nature is polytheistic. This is generally valid for the whole of Polynesia despite the differentiation that has obviously taken place throughout the centuries between its Western and Eastern parts. The pantheon of the Eastern Polynesia is dominated by a tetrad of first class deities including *Tane*, *Tu*, *Rongo* and *Tangaroa*. In the Western Polynesia, however, we meet only with *Tangaloa* (or rather with a family of *Tangaloas*) whose etymology remains questionable and there are attempts to derive it from Melanesia.

The origin of Polynesian gods still requires explanation. According to one theory the Polynesian gods may be characterized as deified ancestors while other authors suggest that we are concerned with personified forces of nature. And we cannot exclude that both views are partly true. Perhaps the local minor deities are derived from remarkable and important ancestors – or these deities are present in the relevant natural phenomena. Neither can multiple representations of the phenomena be excluded.

The most widespread supernatural beings obviously existed in the consciousness of the Polynesians prior to their dispersion throughout the Eastern Pacific; this may be confirmed not only by the wide distribution of *Tangaloa* (*Tangaloas*) but also by the presence of the cultural hero or demi-god *Maui* in both parts of Polynesia and also in the neighbouring Melanesian archipelagos. Further gods may have appeared upon the stage after the fresh Polynesian settlers had created stabilized and organized communities. However, the inherited religions have developed under different social, economic and sometimes even natural conditions.

There can be no doubt that information concerning individual religious and mythological systems may differ in their quality and reliability. Quite a few of them may be at least partly questionable sometimes because observers were not competent to correctly interpret information and their knowledge of both local language and local culture was fragmentary. Sometimes they may have been tempted to modify the acquired texts to their preconceived moral ideas, to the Biblical mores or even to important European customs. And, finally, many non-professional collectors were not aware of the existence of alternative versions of myths.

Religion exerted a far-reaching influence upon all aspects of the community and upon the behaviour of individuals. The Polynesians approached their gods at every opportunity, for example, when appealing to their help or protection when fishing, during war or even when building their houses, but also at the fieldwork and, of course, at various social occasions. People were afraid of death, just as of disruption and chaos without the protection of their gods. Without obeying deities the world order was believed to be unthinkable and no one dared to provoke the anger of the gods. The peace of the soul was likewise guaranteed by the gods and everybody tried to avoid the threatening fury of deities.

And yet, strangely enough, the reverence to the Polynesian gods was not without limits. Occasionally they could have lost the favour of the people quite easily. Maoris pragmatically maintained that gods may die when people stop revering them. Sometimes people could get rid of gods who were not able helping them (e.g. in Tahiti). For example, the Christianization of the Maoris indicates that the traditional gods were not always abandoned right away and maybe the natives were to some extent sorry to part with them; or decided to approach their original gods with lesser pleas while on the other hand more important prayers were addressed to the powerful Christian God. Another serious reason for rejection of a traditional deity must have been the defeat in a tribal war sometimes ascribed to the loss of *mana*. And obviously the same must have happened when too many members of the tribe

died suddenly. Such a helpless and useless god could have been buried, burnt or put into a boat and subsequently confided to sea currents.

In addition to traditional gods, possibly deified ancestors or personified natural phenomena, the ideas of a supreme being appeared. These supreme divine beings were recorded in New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, in Tahiti and in the Cook Islands.

Elsdon Best has categorized various Maori gods (“*atua*”) into 4 groups:

- 1/ a supreme being
- 2/ gods of various spheres – personified natural phenomena
- 3/ regional, widely known gods
- 4/ local beings, dead ancestors and familiar demons of local importance¹

I believe that this categorization is acceptable in general features but the problem of authenticity of the supreme god deserves attention. That is why we should apply several contradictory views to this problem in order to explain it.

An idea of the existence of a supreme deity has been known in many religions as well as in mythologies of the world. Such a being might or might not operate as the only god in the sense of monotheism but it was often perceived as the supreme god among other gods. The ideas of such a supreme deity occurred in New Zealand where he was called *Io* as well as in Tahiti where his name was *Iho* or *Ihoiho*, and was worshipped in Hawaii and in Tuamotu as *Kiho*.

Probably the first European to learn of *Io* was C. O. Davis, who featured a few details in his publication “The Life and Times of Patuone”, published in 1876. On p. 12 Davis wrote “the ancient Maoris, as far as can be gathered from their traditions, apprehended a supreme being known under various designations, as *Ranginui*, i.e., the Heavenly Great, etc.”²

Davis writes “...a distinguished Maori Chieftain some years ago, he inadvertently revealed the fact that the Maoris, in the olden times, worshipped a supreme being whose name was held to be so sacred that none but the Priest might utter it at certain times and places. The name was *Io*, perhaps an abbreviation of *Iouru*”.³ And then he continues: “Witnessing my anxiety to obtain further information on the subject, he refused to disclose any more Maori secrets as he called them, and politely referred me to an old Priest who resided about one hundred miles off. *Patuone* acted in precisely the same

¹ BEST, E. *The Maori as He Was*, p. 68.

² DAVIS, C. O. *The Life and Times of Patuone. The Celebrated Ngapuhi Chief*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

manner when an attempt was made by me to procure from him some particulars regarding certain ancient Maori rites.”⁴

At the end of the above-mentioned book (pp. 132, 133) Davis published an old recitation to *Io*. Unfortunately he did not include the date and the name of the interpreter.

“*Nekea e Whakatau*
Ki runga o Hawaiki,
Whakaturia to whare,

Me ko te maru a Io;
Nga tokorua a Taingahue,
I maka ki runga,
Hei tohu mo te rangi era.”

“Move on, O *Whakatau*,
Move to *Hawaiki*,
Establish there thy house, (temple)
As though it were (beneath)
The *maru* (shelter, or sacred headship, or protecting care)
Of *Io*
The two of *Taingahue* (said to be an ancestor,)
Were placed above
As signals in the heavens.”⁵

A lot of information about Supreme Being named *Io* mentioned John White in his monumental a few volumes book, “Ancient History of Maori, his Mythology and Traditions: *Horo-Uta* or *Taki-Tumu* Migrations”. The first volume was published in 1887.

The first chapter he started with an incantation chanted whilst planting the *kumara*, where *Io* occurred too.

“....*Kapakapa, kapakapa tu taku wairua, ki te Ao*
Taku manawa ka irihia nei
E tupe tane, tupe Tane.
Io.
Tenei au e tupe Tane

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

Ko Whiti-te-ramarama au e tupe Tane.

Ko Tama-te-ahu-iho,

Ko Tama-te-ahu-ake,

Ko Tama-i-ahua-retireti,

Ko Tama-i-ahua-roro-wai,

Taku paenga ruwai, E Apo e:

E Apo e,

Io.

Kapua hekeheke iho i runga o Rehia,

Tuhi te uira, rapa te uira

Ko ana hau, ka tahu ai,

Tena koa te makopu wananga

Te tu mai nei, koia kia toia,

Kiatokona ki te kauwhau ariki

Taku rei, taku rei,

Taku rei ka whati,

He Toroa, he Toroa, he ta

*Io.*⁶

“.....My spirit yearns, and now,

O god of man! deprive

My enemies of power.

O *Io*!

O god of man! I now

Am at my work—

My crops am planting.

Moisten my plantation

And cause my crops to grow.

O *Io*!

O cloud! descend from *Rehia* [a mountain],

And lightnings flash, and winds descend,

And yield an increase;

Whilst I my offering make,

And chant my sacred song

To him, the One supreme.

⁶ WHITE, J. The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions: Horo-
Uta of Taki-Tumu Migration, Vol. 1 (Text in Maori language), pp. 4-5.

Oh, that that which to me is precious
May not now be blighted
By the salt sea-wind or gale!
O *Io*!”⁷

White said, that members of the *Ngāti Hau* tribe believed that *Io* is really the god. He made the heaven and the earth. The following is the opening of one incantation repeated to him at the time that the bones of a corpse were being exhumed. At the conclusion of this incantation another one was repeated to *Tio-rea* (great reverberating sound), who was the pet of the noted *Ue-nuku*. *Ue-nuku* was a man, but after death he was deified. *Io* made *Tiki*.

*“E Io e, rangi tapapa mai e koe
A taua tama, ko te whakarongorongono
I raro i to tawhito
Tapa rongo nui a Rangi
Ka totoko Rangi ki te ahu Rang.”*⁸

“O *Io*! O! Put our children
All in a line, and name them,
That they may hear
Words from your seat (throne)—
From the great seat
Of fame in the heaven.
Heaven moves to meet
The coming of its hosts.”⁹

According to members of the *Ngāti Ruanui* tribe *Io* was a sign of good or evil. The involuntary twitching of any part of the human body was recognized as *Io*.

In addition to C. O. Davis' remarks concerning the god *Io*, the only detailed account of *Io* is in a manuscript with English translations, published in 1913 as “The Lore of *Whare-wananga* or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmogony and History”.¹⁰

The sources for this material were the writings by Christian H. T. *Whatahoro*. *Whatahoro* acquired this information in *Whare wananga* where

⁷ WHITE, J. The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions: Horo-Uta of Taki-Tumu Migration, Vol. 1 (Text in English language), pp. 2-3.

⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1 (Text in Maori language), p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1 (Text in English language), p. 3.

¹⁰ LANGDON, R. The Lost Caravel, p. 250.

two *tohungas* *Te Matorohanga* and *Nepia Pohuhu* lectured in 1865. *Whatahoro's* manuscript was approved by *Tane-nui-a-rangi* Committee in 1907 as a tradition of the *Ngaati Kahungunu* tribe in New Zealand. It has been spread from there. In accordance with their cult all gods are just one god who has several names. Smith (translator of that material), believed that god *Io* was never known to many people, only to a narrow circle of chosen people. It is questionable whether the common people ever heard his name.

Smith was told that the manuscript had been dictated to *Whatahoro* in 1863 by an old *tohunga* of the *Wairarapa*, *Moihi Te Matorohanga*. Subsequent textual analysis by Bruce Biggs and David Simmons has shown that the manuscript was a composite, including pages of English text recorded by *Whatahoro's* Pakeha father, J. M. Jury, around 1840, traditions recorded by *Whatahoro* from recitations of oral traditions in a specially constructed *whare wananga* by *Te Matorohanga*, *Nepia Pohuhu* and other *tohunga*, and additional material copied more recently by *Whatahoro* from other sources.¹¹

Smith's volume on *Io* and the other lore of the *whare-wananga* was enthusiastically received and accepted by Best and other Maori scholars of the time.

In Elsdon Best's writings, especially in his book "Maori Religion and Mythology"¹² printed in 1924 there is a lot of information on *Io* taken over from "The Lore of *Whare-wananga* or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmogony and History".

According to Best, the cult of *Io* was the acme of the esoteric beliefs of the higher minds of the people. It was unknown to the majority of the people, being confined to the first order of priestly adepts and the superior families.¹³ We may characterize it as an aristocratic cult to which only high chiefs were initiated.

Best in his book "Maori Religion and Mythology" claimed "I was told by the last of the wise men of the *Tuhoe* tribe that *Io* was the first of all gods, and the principal one. The old man said – "The cult of *Io* was very ancient. He was a god of very ancient times. It was he who was the origin of all gods. He was the beginning (or first) of the gods".¹⁴

Best's second informant, likewise unnamed but a member of the *Ngai Tahu* tribe, once told him that "*Io* was born of *Rangi* and *Papa*, the Heavens and Earth". Instead of postulating secrecy as the reason for the lack of Europeans'

¹¹ SIMMONS, D., BIGGS, B. The Sources of "The Lore of the Whare-wananga", pp. 22-42.

¹² See BEST, E. Maori Religion and Mythology.

¹³ BEST, E. Maori as He Was, p. 69.

¹⁴ BEST, E. Maori Religion and Mythology, pp. 458-460.

knowledge of *Io*, Best claimed that the laws of *tapu* kept Maori people silent on their religious mysteries.

In the same book Best mentions that *Io* is said to have existed for ever, he was never born, hence his name of *Io-matua-kore* (Io the Parentless). He was not created – on the contrary, he was the origin of the universe and of the lower gods – he caused them to exist. There is no proof that *Io* was raised to primacy from a polytheistic system, or because he was a primal ancestor, or a great force, such as the sun. The concept bears the aspect of a metaphysical abstraction, the result of a speculative philosophy seeking a First Cause.¹⁵

E. Best in his book “The Maori as He Was” says that “In regard to the superior cult of *Io*, the supreme being, its ritual was resorted to, or practised, only in connection with what were considered highly important matters. It never became known to the many, but was jealously conserved and retained by a few, hence it was not affected by degeneration as were similar concepts in other lands. The Maori preserved the purity of his conception of a supreme being by means of withholding it from the bulk of the people, hence *Io* was never degraded to the level of a tribal war-god, as was the case with Yahweh. To force monotheism on a barbaric people must necessarily result in a form of degeneration of a superior concept.”¹⁶

Nowadays, however, many scholars consider Best’s publication rather unreliable.

Pei Te Huri Nui Jones quotes “proofs” of the faith of the *Waikato* tribe in god *Io*. In his biography of King *Potatau Te Wherowhero*,¹⁷ he describes the raising-up ritual for the first Maori king in 1850 and he gives the *Io karakia* used by *Te Tapihana* whom he describes as “a High Priest of the ancient *Io* (supreme being) cult of the *Tainui* tribes”.

Pei Te Huri Nui Jones version:

<i>E Io! E Rangi!</i>	E <i>Io</i> ! Thou Heavenly One!
<i>Tapa mai ra ia</i>	Name him,
<i>Ta taua tama</i>	This son of ours,
<i>I whaka-tama ai taua</i>	A son, indeed, he was to us;
<i>I o taua nonoketanga</i>	When You and I strove manfully
<i>I nonoke ai taua;</i>	In our striving.

¹⁵ BEST, E. *Maori Religion and Mythology*, p. 148.

¹⁶ BEST, E.: *Maori as He Was*, p. 70.

¹⁷ See JONES, *Pei Te Huri Nui. King Potatau an Account of the Life of Potatau Te Wherowhero, the First Maori King*.

*I o taua momoetanga
I momoe au taua
I te po:
E Io! E Rangī!
Tapa mai ra ia,
Ko wai?
Hei Kingi!*

He guarded our peaceful slumbers,
And we slept soundly
through the night
O Io! Thou Heavenly One!
Name him,
Name him what?
Name him King!

Since the last verse contains the word *Kingi* (derived from English), it follows that *karakia* had been introduced, or at least modified after the arrival of the Europeans in New Zealand.

According to *Pei Te Huri Nui Jones*, a priest from the *Tainui* tribe maintained that *Io* created the world. *Huri Nui Jones* maintains just like E. Best and others that *Io* was not known to the common people because he was too sacred and his name was not to be pronounced at any common occasions.

In the tradition of *Ngati Kahungu* tribe concerning *Io* (as mentioned before, the *Tane-nui-a-rangi* Committee in 1907 approved *Whatahoro's* remarks from 1865, acquired in *whare whananga* as a tradition of the tribe). However, *Io* is not explicitly mentioned as a supreme being, but is referred to as an *atua* whose special work is the building of fortified *pa*. This identifies *Io* with the establishment of peace without excluding the notion of *Io* as a supreme being:

*Ko ta Tumatauenga mahi, he whawahi tonu,
he riri tonu, ko ta Io mahi he hanga patu atawata.
Tuumatauenga occupied himself in warfare and fighting.
The work of Io is to build palisade forts.*

*Mauria mai nei ko te rongo a whare,
Ko te rongo taketake ki mua ki te atua
Ka whakaoti te riri.
So was brought here the house of peace,
Lasting peace in the presence of the *atua*,
And the fighting was ended.¹⁸*

¹⁸ Available from <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~dominic/io-writn.html>

References to *Io* occur in M. Marsden and in Cleve Barlow as well. M. Marsden talks of *Io* as “both Being-itself and absolute Nothingness. That is, he is truly infinite, encompassing within himself both the absolutely positive and absolutely negative”.

Io is both Passive and Active. In his passive state he is referred to as *Io-Mate-Moe* (*Io* of the Slumbering Countenance), *Io-Mata-Ane* (*Io* of the Calm and Tranquil Countenance), *Io-Kore-Te-Whiwhia* (*Io* the Unchanging and Unadulterated in whom there is no confusion and inconsistency). But he is also *Io-Mata Aho*, (*Io* of the Glorious Blinding Countenance), *Io-Mata-Kaakaa* (*Io* of the Flashing Countenance).

“*Io* is *Io-Roa* (Eternal), *Matua-kore* (Parentless), *atua* First Parent, *Io-Mua* (The Precursor). *Io* is Creator of all things, both Origin and Originator. *Io-Taketake* (Foundation), *Io-Te-Pukenga* (*Io* the Prime Source), *Io Waiora* (the Fountain head of Life), *Maataa-wai* (The Head Waters). *Io* is Omnipotent, *Io Nui* Almighty, *Tikitiki o Rangi* Supreme One of Heaven, *Te Toi o nga Rangi* Pinnacle of Heaven. *Io* is Omnipresent. *Io Uru* (The Diffuse and Ubiquitous), *Mata-Kana* (The all-seeing, Omnipresent). *Io* is Sacred and Mysterious. *Io Tapu* Holy, *Matangaro* Hidden.”¹⁹

As Wilhelm Schmidt describes, in many cases periphrases are substituted for the name of a supreme being. Some of these names in Hawaii were *Hika po-loo*, *Hika* of the Long Night; *Io* signifying Most Excellent Supreme; *Ili-o-mea-lani* meaning The Reflection of That Chiefly Someone; *Kue-manuai-lehua*, literally The Beak That Feeds on *Lehuas* but meaning The Power of Death; *Uli* meaning Eternity and *Ku-kauhai*, meaning The Established One. These names were titles of the One True God, his true name being too sacred to mention his name was *Io*.²⁰

James Irwin in his book “An Introduction to Maori Religion” uncritically wrote down texts concerning god *Io* by the above-mentioned authors like E. Best, C. O. Davis and others. Although the book was published in 1984, he did not accept the opinions of the revisionist school represented by ethnologists such as *Te Rangi Hiroa* alias Peter Buck and without any polemics maintains that the cult of *Io* was pre-European in origin.

According to some views the Maori embraced Christianity quite easily because they were aware of the faith in one supreme being. And the king

¹⁹ Available from <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~dominic/io-oral.html>

²⁰ KIKAWA, D. Perpetuated in Righteousness (Journey of the Hawaiian People from Eden (Kalana i Hauola) To the Present Time, 4th Edition), p. 55.

Potatau Te Wherowhero justified the faith in one supreme deity. And yet this is more than questionable because many sources accentuated that *Io* was known to a very narrow circle of the population. I believe that fast Christianization should not be assumed to have been a consequence of the acquaintance with the only deity, namely *Io*.

Written documents and *karakias* devoted to the supreme being have been found in various regions of New Zealand – for example in oral legends of the tribes *Ngaapuhi*, *Waikato*, *Ngaati Kahungunu* and *Kai Tahu*. Some scholars maintain that the idea of this god appeared as a reaction to the Christian ideas and teaching of missionaries during the nineteenth century.

This situation is reminiscent of certain millenarian movements trying to adjust to new ideas in a somewhat modified form. Other scholars such as Marsden, Hall and Kendall believe that a relatively long time after the first missionaries arrived in New Zealand in 1814, the Maori were not at all interested in the new belief.

Conclusion

The available written sources viewed the god *Io* as the creator of everything. One of his titles is *Io-matua-kore* (*Io* without parents). His residence is situated in the highest of the twelve heavens in the house named *Rangi-atea* (clear sky).

Andersen introduced further attributes from the Maori environment namely *Io-nui* (Great *Io*), *Io-taketake* (Eternal *Io*), *Io-matua* (Parent), *Io-mataaho* (Invisible *Io*), *Io-te-waiora* (*Io* the source of life) and so on.²¹

In accordance with Andersen the name *Io-mataaho* (*Io* invisible) was not to be looked at directly but only at rays of light. This implies that *Io* might be the sun.²² However, the attribute “invisible” may also mean that, as the supreme god of an esoteric type, he has no concrete face – just like Yahweh who may take various shapes.

The Tahitian analogy of *Io* is *Ihoiho*, which may be translated as “core of everything” thus corresponding to Hawaiian *Iho*. Tregear explains its meaning as a “centre of everything” of the “truth”.²³

T. Jaussen thinks that Tahitian *Ihoiho* may be identical with *ihoiho* “soul” or with *iho* “essence”.²⁴ This would correspond to the Maori word “heart, inside, essence”.²⁵

²¹ ANDERSEN, J. C. *Mýty a legendy Polynésanů*, p. 273.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²³ TREGEAR, E. *The Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary*, p. 456.

²⁴ JAUSSEN, T. *Grammaire et Dictionnaire de la langue tahitienne*, p. 96.

In Hawaii *Iao* means Jupiter, a morning star. It appeared here early in the 1930s and was brought to the archipelago by Maori sailors employed in European ships and familiar with the Panpolynesian ideology.²⁶

In Mangaia, the word *io* is used in the meaning of "god" and the god *Motaro* is called *Te Io Ora*, "the living god". Other gods were called *Io Mate* "gods of death" because their followers might have been sacrificed to the god *Rongo*.²⁷

In accordance with traditions *Io* lived in the highest of the twelve heavens; he keeps his guardians and messengers who bring news of what is going on in the world. The name of *Io* was strictly taboo and whoever dared to pronounce it, might be killed. Verbal tabooing, or a word taboo, was widespread in Polynesia and elsewhere, as in Australia and Israel; however, it was more common in Polynesia. And thus we may not use it as an argument for or against the origin of the cult of *Io*.

W. Schmidt, A. Lang and other scholars as well, were of the opinion that monotheism had been the early form of religion; however, it slowly degraded and turned into polytheism. Frankly speaking, this theory has been overcome, and the probability is preferred that similarities between the Christian God and *Io* may have appeared just by chance.

E. S. C. Handy uncritically and without any retrospection maintains that most of the ancient Maori prayers were devoted to *Io*. Such a view is absent from both S. P. Smith and E. Best, the first propagators and discoverers of the cult of *Io*. There can be no doubt that the number of prayers devoted to *Io* is really modest when compared with other deities. The cult of a supreme being was not an ancient feature of Polynesian religion but rather a speculation of Polynesian priests.

According to Handy, the name *Io* was applied to the Hawaiian hawk because its cry is reminiscent of the sound *ioio*. He concluded it was a specific bird cult of the hawk and secondarily for the owl. Handy warned against trying to establish *Io* as a supreme being in Hawaii. So to claim *Io* is Gód, we would have a bird speaking God's name that is holy. It is not strange that some men want to "sanitize" the myths of the indigenous people to make them compatible with Christianity so they can reach these same people.²⁸

Richard Tylor's notebooks include information about *Io* and the faith of the *Kahungunu* tribe in this god. However, Reverend Richard Tylor, who travelled

²⁵ TREGGAR, E. The Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary, p. 101, WILLIAMS, H. W. A Dictionary of the Maori Language, p. 75.

²⁶ KRUPA, V. Legendy a mýty Polynésie. Polynéska kosmologie, p. 149.

²⁷ ANDERSEN, J. C. Mýty a legendy Polynésanů, pp. 271-272.

²⁸ Available from <http://www.letusreason.org/Current68.htm>.

across the island and in 1855 published his book "Te Ika a Maui", maintains that the natives had no knowledge of a Supreme Being. They had a multitude of gods, and these were said to have been the fathers, each one of some department in nature; and these gods are so mixed up with the spirits of ancestors, whose worship entered large²⁹ into their religion, that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Other missionaries expressed similar ideas. For example, William Colenso³⁰ claimed that the Maori do not know any being that could properly be called God.³¹

Sir Peter Buck alias Te Rangi Hiroa was one of the first scholars who doubted the information and records of *Io* as the supreme being. The discovery of the New Zealand supreme god was perceived as a surprise by both Maori and *Pakeha* alike. Buck firmly defends the idea that *Io* as the supreme being arose as a reaction to Christianity, and so was a post-European creation.

In his book "Anthropology and Religion" he expressed his opinion that *Io* is a newly created god. He thought, that probably in *Waiararapa* district of the North Island of New Zealand an esoteric school, like the seminary at *Taputapu-atea*³² arose and this New Zealand school invented a creator named *Io*. Like *Ta'aroa*, *Io* had no parents but simply came into being. He was then made responsible for the creation of the already existing pattern of religion, but certain additions were made. Two more skies were added to the older count of ten, and *Io* went into residence in the twelfth, that is the topmost sky. A house was provided for him, named *Rangiatea*, and the assembly place before it was named *Te Rauroha*. A staff of Celestial Maids (*Mareikura*) was provided, and Guardians (*Poutiriao*) were appointed to the series of sky levels which were given individual names. Messengers were engaged to carry on communication between *Io* and the major gods who were not interfered with in the new reorganization. As *Io* was regarded as the source of all knowledge, a new incident was added in *Tane's* ascent to the topmost heaven to obtain the three baskets of knowledge from *Io*. It will be seen that the New Zealand revision was much more smoothly accomplished than that at *Taputapu-atea*. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the Maori school attempted to proselytize other tribes. The cult of *Io* seems to have been an intellectual effort confined to the higher priesthood and to have had a limited distribution.

²⁹ TYLOR, R. *Te Ika a Maui*, p. 14.

³⁰ William Colenso 1811-1899 was a missionary, printer, explorer and botanist who worked on New Zealand.

³¹ See SIMPSON, J. *Io as Supreme Being: Intellectual colonization of the Maori?*

³² It was religious school on Raiatea in the Society Islands. The priests from this school elevated the god *Ta'aroa* to the position of Creator, and the old pattern of mythology was changed.

A third centre of religious activity resulting in drastic changes appears in the Tuamotu atolls. From native informants and from his translations of various chants, J. F. Stimson has come to the belief that the Tuamotuans also had a creator named *Kiho* or *Kio*. It is tempting to see a similarity between *Kio* and *Io*, but, as the Maoris do not drop the consonant *k*, they seem to be distinct words.

There has been a tendency to regard these sporadic occurrences of a creator as evidence that the Polynesians originally had a monotheistic religion which was later changed to polytheism. *Te Rangi Hiroa* at the end of this subject said that he believes that Polynesian religion has always been polytheistic, but that intellectuals among the priesthood in some localities have elevated a particular god to supremacy among his fellows by making him a creator. I regard these versions of a creator as late sporadic efforts that took place after the general dispersal and not as the remnants of an ancient general monotheism.³³

Bishop Muru Walters at a Pacific region Religious Liberty Congress in June 1993 also rejected the tradition of *Io* and argued that it developed about the late nineteenth century.

Scholars like Dorothy Barrere do not doubt that the rise of this cult is linked to the early influence of Christianity. Likewise an American anthropologist Allan Hanson declares in his article "The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and Its Logic" that the cult of *Io* is not derived from the Polynesian society.³⁴

Robert Langdon in his book "Lost Caravel" states that the only detailed account of *Io* is mentioned in a manuscript by S. P. Smith and titled "The Lore of the *Whare wananga* or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmogony and History". This text was dictated by *Te Matorohanga* to *Te Whatahoro*. In Buck's opinion, Langdon and other scholars were suspicious of the fact that both *Te Matorohanga* and his scribe *Te Whatahoro* had become Christians before details of the *Io* cult were written down.³⁵

Matorohanga freely admits that he did not transmit traditions in their pure form, but that much of the knowledge is lost and that he made changes and innovations.³⁶

Matorohanga's statement clearly maintains that he has modified the origin tradition. Since he may have been Christian at that time it may be more than probable that his experience of new religion has been expressed in his story. All collected facts seem to prove that the idea of the supreme god in Polynesia

³³ HIROA, *Te Rangi, Anthropology and Religion*, pp. 60-61.

³⁴ See HANSON, A. *The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and Its Logic*.

³⁵ LANGDON, R. *The Lost Caravel*, p. 252.

³⁶ SCHWIMMER, E. *World of the Maori*, p. 114.

appeared in fact as late as the end of the 19th century when the Christian teaching spread by the missionaries had settled in the new environment. Max Muller assumes that the early forms of religion were polytheistic and supreme beings appeared later.³⁷ This process has taken place in Polynesia as well. There was a hierarchy of deities; however it is questionable whether the Polynesians really believed in a single supreme god. The idea of the supreme deity may have been an invention of amateurs or missionaries including C. O. Davis and S. P. Smith or a romantically inclined Polynesian scholar, such as, E. Best. The reason may have varied from an effort to elevate the wild natives to a civilized community or from the desire of the natives themselves to be respected by foreigners. And yet the idea obviously appeared under the pervasive influence of foreigners whose number inevitably prevailed over the Maori population.

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³⁷ BEST, E. *Some Aspects of Maori Myth and Religion*, p. 21.

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NOTES

More information on the "IO cult" available at:

<http://www.letusreason.org/Current68.htm>

<http://deceptioninthechurch.com/babel.htm>

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~dominic/io-oral.html>