Putting Arens to the Test

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Earliest European accounts of Maori cannibalism came from explorers such as Captain James Cook. Many of these accounts are questionable in their validity.

Author Paul Moon in his book, *This Horrid Practice* gives ample evidence in order to argue about the historical certainty of Maori cannibalism.

Maori cannibalism reportedly most often occurred after battles, where the victors would eat the vanquished as a sign of total dominance over the enemy.

William E. Arens in his book *The Man-Eating Myth* argues that the thousands of accusations leveled at indigenous peoples, such as the Maori of New Zealand, are in fact invented. As one tests Arens’ theory in the Maori case it is difficult to dismiss the incredible amount of information in support of cannibalism. Although Maori cannibalism occurred, the frequency of its’ occurrence has been grossly exaggerated.

It was exaggerated by missionaries who needed to show the “lost” state of the Maori in order to secure more funding and evangelists to further spread Christianity. Explorers also exaggerated in hopes of impressing those back home with wild and adventurous stories.

Cannibalism amongst the Maori reached its’ demise somewhere between 1830 and 1840 due to the efforts of Christian missionaries.