

## BOOK REVIEW

*Mātauranga Māori*. Mead, Hirini Moko. (2025). Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi and Huia Publishers. 400 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77550-924-0.

Tēnā koutou. Ko Te Kapua O'Connor ahau—he uri nō Muriwhenua. Ka tuhia tēnei arotake i runga i te ngākau whakaiti. Ko wai au ki te arotakengia he pukapuka nā tētahi rangatira rongonui o te ao Māori i tuhi? Nō reira, ahakoa te kupu “arotake” e noho nei hei tītara mō te tuhinga nei, me mōhio te kaipanui, he tirohanga kē tēnei whai muri i taku otinga o *Mātauranga Māori* nei. Ka huri.

Tā Hirini Moko Mead's *Mātauranga Māori* is an exquisite book that carefully opens up Tāne's kete o te wānanga, allowing readers to gaze upon the knowledge inside. In this review, I discuss the structure of the book and its contents, and Tā Mead's unique writing style, and share a personal vignette that speaks to the book's mana.

Structurally, this book contains 14 chapters, each dedicated to a particular kaupapa. Tā Mead makes it clear that the chapters of *Mātauranga Māori* are not intended to be exhaustive discussions of each kaupapa. Rather, they serve as succinct essays that can be supplemented by further reading. For example, Chapter 2, “Te Koha a Tāne”, describes the pūrākau associated with mātauranga. We are taught about Tāne's collection of mātauranga, and his brother Whiro's attempts to take it himself. We are invited to contemplate the division of knowledge into three kete and into kauae runga and kauae raro categories. Chapter 9, “Te Whare Toi”, covers toi, or art, in a broad sense, taking readers to Rarohenga, where Niwareka and Mataora famously retrieved important art forms from Uetonga and others. Chapter 11, “Ngā Āhuatanga o te Wā”—a personal favourite—talks about Māori time, and how various environmental features and other aspects of life inform a comprehensive, interconnected system of time. Each chapter is full to the brim with exciting, meaningful, transformative mātauranga.

These chapters (and the 11 others) demonstrate Tā Mead's craft as a knowledge sharer. Some readers will want more on each kaupapa, but I think that the way that each essay whets the appetite is effective. Mead concludes each chapter with an implicit statement: “There you go, now

go and do some more research yourself!” As well as encouraging readers to continue learning about mātauranga, keeping the chapters short maintains the book's manageable size. From a practical perspective, *Mātauranga Māori* is the type of book that can and will be carried around by keen scholars of mātauranga, taking it into learning environments such as kura, kura reo, wānanga, and more.

The structure of having 14 chapters each dedicated to a particular kaupapa also influences how *Mātauranga Māori* can be engaged with. For example, I read the introductory chapters, then went straight to Chapter 10, “Te Whare o Tangaroa”. This was because I am teaching two tertiary courses that include content on navigational knowledge. I imagine that many readers will choose to read this book in this manner, selecting chapters that they want to read first, and then going forwards or backwards to read other chapters. There is no necessity to read this book in sequential order.

Let us now turn to Tā Mead's unique writing style in *Mātauranga Māori*. At first, the writing style surprised me, as it is not what we are used to when we think of writing emerging out of tertiary learning spaces. If asked to describe Mead's style of writing, I would say that it is both gentle and academic—two words that might seem incongruous when used together. The word “gentle” speaks to the way Mead makes readers feel safe, seen and supported in their learning. Further, Mead's gentle voice is completely void of ego, self-aggrandizement, and the overly complex language that is often found in academic writing. It feels like we are sitting with him in a warm house—with a hot beverage perhaps—around a table with a small group of companions. Conversely, “academic” is a reference to how Mead's voice resonates and stimulates the mind. Mead also makes readers feel like they are gathered in a large lecture theatre or a whare tipuna—Mataatua in Whakatāne perhaps—surrounded by hundreds of sharp minds, listening to the kauhau of the century. A “gentle

academic” voice—this style of writing may well become a hallmark of Māori scholarship about mātauranga in the future.

I would like to conclude this review by telling a brief story that speaks to the mana of *Mātauranga Māori*. As mentioned, I teach a tertiary-level course called Māori 320: Mātauranga in the School of Māori Studies and the School of Pacific Studies at Te Wānanga o Waipapa | The University of Auckland. When Tā Mead’s book came out in mid-2025, I left my office to purchase a copy, given its relevance to my paper. As I neared my destination, a curious thing happened. I fell into step with what felt like a hapū of mostly Māori scholars all converging on the local bookshop to purchase a copy of *Mātauranga Māori*, which sat proudly with its blue jacket upon the shelf. I have not personally seen such excitement for a non-fiction book before. I know that this pattern was occurring nationwide—and overseas too—where Ngāi Māori and non-Māori alike were scrambling to purchase this new book, hungry to consume its contents. It is clear that, collectively, we are so excited and so grateful to have this taonga of a pukapuka in our hands. There is no doubt that it will become (or already is) one of the most important books for scholars of mātauranga Māori that we have. I only have one parting question—will Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi and Huia Publishers fund or seek funding for a te reo Māori version, or is this already in the pipeline? I am sure there are many who would find it meaningful to read this book in the Māori language.

Ka whakakapi i tēnei arotake ki tēnei o ngā whakataukī ka takoto ki roto i tā Tā Mead pukapuka *Ngā Pēpeha a Ngā Tipuna*. He whakataukī tēnei mō te hue. Ka whakatōngia ngā kākano hue, nāwai nāwai, ka tupungia he hue maha. Kō ēnei hue kua tupungia, he rauemi kawewai mō ngā uri whakatupu. He huahuatau tika tēnei mō te pukapuka *Mātauranga Māori* nei. Ka whāngaia ngā mokopuna e tēnei pukapuka, otirā e tēnei taonga kāmehameha:

Ko ngā kākano o roto i a au hei utu wai mō āku mokopuna.

*The seeds within are to provide water for my descendants.* (Mead & Grove, 2001)

Nō reira e te whānau, I must conclude this review and get back to my books. As Tā Mead says of mātauranga: “There is so much to learn[!]”

Mihirau ki a tātou.

## Glossary

hapū	sub-tribe
kauae raro	lower jawbone; terrestrial knowledge
kauae runga	upper jawbone; celestial knowledge
kauhau	presentation, speech
kaupapa	topic, matter for discussion, subject
kete o te wānanga	baskets of knowledge
kura	schools
kura reo	language symposiums
mana	prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power
Mataatua	ancestral meeting house built by the Ngāti Awa tribe in 1875
Mataora	ancestor who travelled to Rarohenga to retrieve his wife, Niwareka
mātauranga	knowledge
mihirau ki a tātou	Māori people
Niwareka	greetings to us all
nō reira e te whānau	a tūrehu (spirit) in Rarohenga; the daughter of Uetonga and wife of the mortal Mataora
pukapuka	therefore, family
pūrākau	book
Rarohenga	origin narrative
tā	the underworld
Tāne	sir
taonga	god of the forest and all forest creatures
te reo	treasure
toi	the Māori language
Uetonga	art, knowledge
wānanga	a chief who dwelled in Rarohenga; the father of Niwareka
whare tipuna	tertiary education institutions, learning spaces
Whiro	ancestral meeting house
	god of darkness and embodiment of all evil

**References**

- Mead, H. M. (2016). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values* (Rev. ed.). Huia Publishers.
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