

TE RAUPARAHĀ

— A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Patricia Burns
Penguin, \$14.95

By Charlton Clark

Publication in soft cover version has brought one of the more significant New Zealand biographies in recent years within the financial reach of most people.

It's Patricia Burns' *Te Rauparaha — A New Perspective* (Penguin, \$14.95), which was first published in hard-cover version in 1980.

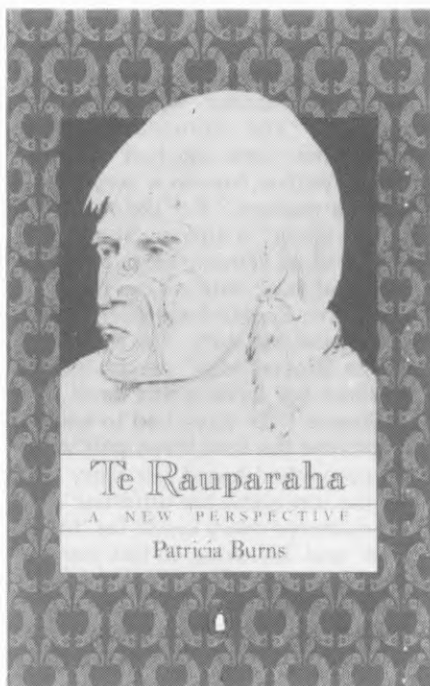
Although by no means the first book to be written about the man who is probably the most famous Maori chief in history, it is certainly the most exhaustive and best researched.

And it is an attempt by a pakeha to look at Te Rauparaha through the Maori eyes of the 18th and 19th centuries in which he lived. In this it varies from most pakeha-written histories, which tend to view colonial, coloured people as dangerous, faceless shadows in the bush which threatened the honest enterprises of "real" (i.e. white) people.

The end result is that the reader is encouraged to view Te Rauparaha as a human being with feelings, just like us. His apparent savagery can be seen within the framework of the pre-European Maori religious and moral concepts he grew up with — utu, mana, and the paramount importance of the survival of family, sub-tribe and tribe.

But it's a book which needs to be read with caution.

I feel Burns goes overboard trying to portray Te Rauparaha as a great bloke. She makes light of the appalling blunders he did occasionally make, although by and large he was an enor-



mously clever and cunning leader of his people.

He was clearly responsible for thousands of deaths — not just those of his enemies, but within his own Ngati Toa and their allied tribes.

Were they all really necessary, even for the "Maori Napoleon's" purposes? Somehow, the reader finishes up doubting it, for all the valuable insight he or she gains into the great man's psyche.

And there are occasional statements in the book where it is clear Burns has accepted the Ngati Toa people's word as gospel truth, without really questioning its accuracy. Was she under a deadline pressure, or was she afraid to

upset her informants among Te Rauparaha's descendants?

Again there is a hint of laziness in the lack of genealogical information contained in the text, when she frequently passes someone off as "Te Rauparaha's relative".

Too often there is no attempt to spell out just what the relationship was — and knowing what many of those connections would have contributed to one's understanding of the book. This is particularly so when one realises Te Rauparaha was not the hereditary chief of Ngati Toa. The reader is left to flounder through the genealogies at the end of the book to work out the family connection between the true chief of the time, Te Peehi Kupe, and the man whose cunning and skill enabled him to assume de facto chieftainship during an emergency. Te Peehi seems to have been some sort of cousin at least once removed (in pakeha kinship terms), but Burns makes no attempt to clarify the point, and the genealogies she provides beg as many questions as they answer.

Criticisms aside, Patricia Burns has made an invaluable contribution to New Zealand history, and as one who finds New Zealand's Maori history far more fascinating than the European history, I have no hesitation in recommending it.

What's needed now is more of the same — some good strong stuff about some of the other great ariki and rangatira of the past who have contributed so much to our historical tapestry. People like Hongi Hika, Hone Heke, King Potatau, King Tawhiao, and the Te Heu Heu of Ngati Tuwharetoa must surely all warrant the attentions of competent biographers.



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