Maori and the Moriori

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| Long ago there was an island culture known as the Moriori. They were a unique Polynesian culture because they did not have war. Moriori did not fight wars because of a belief they called “Nunuku”. Nunuku was a law of non-violence that was named after one of the Moriori chiefs: Legend states that during a bloody battle a chief named Nunuku-whenua jumped between two fighting forces. He ordered the fighting to stop. The stunned warriors pulled apart. Nunuku shouted, "Listen all! From now and forever, never again let there be war as this day has been! From today on forget the taste of human flesh!"  And so the wars and cannibalism ended and the Moriori lived in peace…but the non-violent world of the Moriori would be tested to the limit when strangers arrived! In 1835 the Maori sailed to Chatham Islands. The Maori immediately claimed the land as their own and began killing and cannibalizing the Moriori. A council of Moriori elders met to decide what to do. They elders told their people that "the law of Nunuku was not a strategy for survival it was a moral law”. In the end…any Moriori that were not killed became slaves.  How could two Polynesian cultures be so different? The Moriori were hunters and gatherers and the Maori were farmers. The Maori had an agricultural society. They grew sweet potatoes and had plenty of food. This enabled the separation of classes. The Moriori only had one class, everybody was equal. They were all workers, but the Maori had four social classes: chiefs, priests/experts, commoners, and slaves. The Maori had more social classes because they were a farming society. The abundance of food from growing their main crop, sweet potatoes, made it so some groups/classes could become experts at other things like canoe building or making weapons. Instead of hunting all day they could specialize in other activities.  Did you know geography helped shape Moriori society? The Moriori were hunters and gatherers because of the geography of their island. A look at a map of Chatham Island clearly shows it was built for fishing. There are two giant bays, two lakes, eight points, four capes, four reefs, and several beaches. Finally, 17% of the island is a lagoon. In addition, the hills, mountains and cold-winter weather make it difficult to farm. |

Chatham Island Map

