TRADITIONAL HEALERS ON Mitiaro, Cook Islands:
Present Day Role Of The Ta’hunga.

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Most of Polynesia had a relatively well coordinated medical system in place at the time of European contact. This was a part of the religious system but most of the details were not recorded until after considerable periods of contact with European religion and medicine. Almost all areas now have at least some Western medical facilities but these have not replaced native health practices. On occasion, some governments have outlawed the practice of traditional medicine or have announced the demise of indigenous type care, but an underlayer always seems to remain. The present field report shows some aspects of traditional practice on an outlying island of the Cook group.

Location

The Cook Islands are a group of 15 relatively small islands scattered over a tremendous area of the Pacific, between Tahiti and Samoa. Mitiaro, with about 250 inhabitants, is one of the outlying islands of the Southern Cooks, about 150 miles from Rarotonga, the capital and economic and cultural center. An inter-island ship brought supplies and took off produce every couple of months until it recently sank. Presently, the only communication with Rarotonga is by Cook Island Airline which flies nine-seater planes twice a week and more often if there is demand.

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Essentials are ordered and flown over when the plane has room. The economy on Mitiaro is largely agricultural with people growing a major portion of their food. There is little export without surface transport and few sources of money. One such

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vessel *Yelcho* three days later was quite a different matter. She carried a party of 40 marines and an investigative team consisting of a government commissioner, Captain de Fregata, Guillermo Rojas Aird, the former governor of the island, Senor José Martin Reynolds, a lawyer, and several members of the press.

(L to R): Two members of the Rapa Nui Council, Mayor Alfonso Rapu, Captain Anthony Law, Captain Jorge Portilla, Dr. Stanley Skoryna, Isabel Griffiths, and Air Marshal Jack Easton.

The marines established their camp near Hanga Piko and Rojas and Martin began the “complex task of sorting out reality from imagination” (Reid 1965:45) in terms of Rapanui politics. Having assumed control of the island, Rojas offered Rapu safe conduct to attend the commission’s hearings. Rapu was questioned for two days at the Jefatura Militar, but on the night of Friday, 8 January a rumor spread that Rapu’s colleague, German Hotu, had been shot and that Rapu himself was in danger of being shot. As Rapu was leaving the Jefatura a crowd of Rapanui women surged forward, elbowed the guard aside, and swept Rapu down the road to the METEI compound. There the scene was one of almost complete confusion. About 50 women, shielding Rapu with their bodies, managed to push into the quadrangle in the hope that they could seek asylum there (Rapu interview, 1968). As METEI did not represent the Canadian government Skoryna enjoyed no extra-territorial jurisdiction and there was nothing he could do officially to help Rapu. Fortunately the Chilean marines acted in a restrained manner and although there appears to have been at least one warning shot fired there was no bloodshed. Captain Rojas’ timely arrival and conciliatory manner brought the “uncontrolled emotional frenzy” (Reid 1965:50) to an end. He told the marines to stand down, Rapu introduced the disease after they had been at sea as least that long (Reid 1965:61). However, both *Yelcho* and *Cape Scott* (on her return to Rapa Nui in February) introduced *kokongo* following six day passages from the mainland.

Departure

METEI was on Easter Island for another month after the hectic events of 8 January. While Skoryna had planned to examine all of the islanders a number of his colleagues considered that goal over-optimistic. “Most of us,” Surgeon-Captain Roberts wrote, “felt [that] we would be lucky if we managed to examine half the population [during the time available] and [that] three-quarters would have appeared a very satisfactory--though probably unattainable--sample” (Roberts 1966: 3). Although METEI was on the island for roughly two months only 35 working days were available for the entire medical and scientific programme. Examinations for the island. Martin’s concessions constituted a major indictment of Portilla’s administration. The latter, while cooperative and pleasant, so far as METEI personnel were concerned, was seen by a number of them to be a rather weak and ineffectual administrator.

The election results were predictable. Alfonso Rapu received 99 votes, Jorge Tepano 66, German Hotu 56, and Felipe Pakarati Hucke, 56. Rapu was duly installed as *el calde* and political peace was cemented by the arrival of the Chilean warship *Aquila* bearing mail and supplies. “It had been...a perfect revolution,” Hacker wrote. “There had been all the requisite drama, all the fear, sufficient action, and yet not a drop of blood had been shed” (1968:221). It was not, Alfonso Rapu was to recall years later, so much a revolution as a misunderstanding (Rapu interview, 7 July 1983).

There was a medical footnote to the naval visits, a viral infection known as *kokongo*. METEI personnel had been denied the opportunity of studying *kokongo* when Presidente *Pinto* failed to make its annual visit. The arrival of the *Yelcho*, however, meant that *kokongo* made its predictable appearance. Virus cultures had been taken from all those members of METEI and the ship’s company who had been ill on *Cape Scott* in an effort to identify any diseases the expedition might be introducing to Easter Island. *Kokongo* was “rampant” on the island by 12 January with victims complaining of mild fevers, loss of appetite, stomach pains, headaches, coughing, and heavy eyes (Murphy diary, 12 January 1965; Nögrády interview, 26 June 1979). The following day Doctors Murphy and Cutler set out to prepare a *kokongo* census. Cultures were taken from islanders with *kokongo* and blood samples were obtained from the same people as well as from METEI members and Chilean marines in an effort to isolate antibodies against the suspected virus. One inferential piece of evidence was that the incubation period for the virus was less than 12 days since neither *Cape Scott* nor the French warship had introduced the disease after they had been at sea as least that long (Reid 1965:61). However, both *Yelcho* and *Cape Scott* introduced *kokongo* following six day passages from the mainland.
and laboratory tests were orchestrated initially to fill the time available on the assumption that something better than half the population would be examined. Skoryna, however, was determined to achieve total coverage and he urged his increasingly reluctant companions to see that every Rapanui was examined. This meant that 30 to 35 persons had to be examined, interviewed and x-rayed every day, a very considerable undertaking in view of the language barrier and the less than ideal facilities. Drs. Reid and Maureen Roberts had to shoulder most of the burden because they were obliged to see well over half the patients while five male doctors examined the rest.

METEI on Rapa Nui: (L to R) Dr. George Alpert, Gastroenterologist; Surgeon Captain Richard Roberts, Father Sebastian Englert, and Carl Mydans.

Cape Scott returned to Rapa Nui at 0900 on Wednesday, 10 February to begin embarking METEI. The expedition had decided to leave the trailers, diesel generators, mechanical still, and truck behind as the nucleus of a hospital and a permanent research facility for future expeditions. As the existing hospital was simple to the point of being primitive (Murphy diary 17 December 1964), the new complex--complete with drugs and equipment--promised to be a marked improvement. In order to ensure adequate medical care, Dr. Beighton agreed to remain behind until such time as a replacement could be found for Dr. Andrade. Because so much heavy cargo was left behind it took only 10 hours to load the expedition’s personal baggage and medical specimens. The 11th and 12th were taken up handing over the camp and paying final courtesy calls. As a parting gesture, some of the members of METEI planted a McGill flag at Orongo on the summit of Rano Kau, the extinct volcano at the southwestern corner of the island. Cape Scott set sail at 1900 on Friday, 12 February. “The people of the island,” Cdr. Law wrote: “...lit fires of farewell and we returned the gesture by firing off many rockets and flares and that ended our most interesting and magnificent association with a delightful people...and their lonely little island” (Law correspondence, 23 February 1965).

Cape Scott reached Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 17 March 1965 and METEI members disembarked to go their separate ways.

Medical findings

METEI medical findings must be viewed as tentative for the most part. While a number of detailed reports have been forthcoming there never has been the comprehensive correlation of data that was anticipated. The reasons why this correlation did not take place are discussed in the following section.

Two generalized conclusions arose from the expedition’s research: first that there were no medical or scientific “surprises” to speak of and second that the Easter Islanders and their livestock appeared to be fairly healthy.

Of particular interest to Dr. Skoryna and his colleagues was the question of hereditary diseases. They were surprised to discover that there was “little or no evidence of genetically determined diseases” (Roberts 1966:8). Although the consanguinity rate must have been high and a recessive mode of inheritance might have been expected or even prominent, none was to be found.[25] Surgeon-Captain Roberts could offer no explanation for this apparent anomaly. He could only speculate that the dramatic reduction in the population in the last century eliminated the carriers of certain diseases and/or that the lethal genes or some diseases disappear over time (Ibid.).[26]

From a morphological point of view, Dr. Meier found the Rapanui were a fairly tall group of people either by Polynesian or Caucasian standards. Long-headedness was highly prevalent and an analysis of x-rays revealed that many children’s hands exhibited an appearance of unusual length (Wilkinson nd: 1). Body build tended to be moderately to heavily constructed and generally well proportioned (Meier 1969: 118). A number of researchers commented on the islanders’ muscularity though in opposition to Meier they emphasized the Rapanui’s leanness. The adult males averaged 5’7” and 158 lbs. in weight while the females averaged 5’3” and 138 lbs. Some of the older women were obese and occasionally very obese (Roberts, Maureen and Richard nd: 1). Most of the population had pale brown skin, brown eyes, and dark hair. A few Rapanui had blue eyes which could “nearly always be traced to some relatively recent genetic admixture” (Roberts 1966:5).

While the Rapanui were essentially Polynesian and their ABO and Rh blood group distribution was similar to that found on other Pacific Islands, their genetic heritage remained largely impenetrable. [27] “A perusal of their more recent population history, “ Meier wrote, will indicate the near futility in using biological data
from living Easter Islanders either to reconstruct early ancestral phenotypes or to meaningfully assess genetic relationships with such groups as American Indians, Micronesians, and Melanesians.

Briefly stated, neither the single racial origin hypothesis for Easter Islanders...nor the multiple origin theories appear amenable to testing from a biological standpoint at the present time [1969] (1969:361).

The Roberts' found that while the children were slow to mature to adults, the adults were quick to age (nd:1). Many adults showed signs of early degenerative arthritis through ECs revealed no cases of unequivocal coronary heart disease. Skeletal deformities were few,[28] a small number of skin disorders were encountered, and there was evidence of emphysema, irregular pulses, and palpable thyroid glands and livers.

More significant were the findings with respect to tuberculosis, dentistry, and physical fitness.[29] METEI's chest X-ray survey revealed "a disturbingly high number of apparently new cases of TB" (Roberts 1966:7). The possibility of "new, active tuberculosis was raised in six or seven cases," not all of which had been known to the Chilean medical authorities (Ibid.:9). Major Taylor, the dentist, examined 236 islanders between the ages of 18 and 79. He discovered that the islanders' dental condition was lamentable as a result of very poor oral hygiene and insufficient dental treatment (Odontology nd:1). Dr. Nógardy isolated strains of Viridans group streptococci from throat swabs in an effort to establish the microbial etiology of dental caries in humans (Fitzgerald nd:1). He further subjected twenty samples of potable water to analysis in terms offluoride content. Although volcanic soils may be rich in fluoride compounds, this was not the case with Easter Island soils. Low levels of fluoride in the drinking water and an annual per capita consumption of roughly 90 lbs. of sugar per person no doubt exacerbated the already indifferent dental situation (Zipkin nd:1; Reid 1965:588).

Doctors Ekblom and Gjessing discovered that despite outward appearances the Rapanui were "relatively unfit" (1968:124). They attributed this lack of fitness to a low level of habitual physical activity. The main reason for this low level, they suspected,
is certainly found in the fact that no hard physical work is necessary for the daily living on the island since all families are supplied with meat from the society, a sufficient amount of fish, fruits, and vegetables are fairly easy to obtain, the climate is pleasant, and all transportation is on horse back (1968:129).

Dr. Reid's research revealed that 64% of the indigenous population was under eighteen years of age compared to 39% for the same age group in Canada (as of 1961) (1968:584).

Her clinical examination of Easter Island children in terms of their standing height, weight, and skeletal maturity suggested that Rapanui children were distinctly shorter than the so-called "Boston" standard a set of average measurements for children of different ages in Boston, that they were somewhat lighter than their Boston counterparts, and that they were "well up to the North American standard in skeletal development" (1968:587).

Rapanui children showed no signs of diseases associated with dietary deficiency such as kwashiorkor, rickets, or scurvy, none of malaria, filariasis, or histo-plasmosis, and none appeared to be actively affected by tuberculosis or leprosy. The evidence suggests, however, that their relative isolation contributed to a lack of immunity since eleven children died of diphtheria in the year prior to the opening of the jet runway at Mataveri, a year in which there was a major increase in contact as construction crews and others came and went. It is difficult to determine with certainty the situation with respect to parasites. Dr. Reid found that none of the children she examined had amoeba ascaris, hookworm or whipworm (1968:588), but Dr. Gibbs' analysis of 322 anal smears revealed a 22.05% infection rate of pinworm in the overall population and evidence of the presence of whipworm. Dr. Reid's finding with respect to malaria was confirmed by Dr. Gibbs' field work. While he found plenty of fleas (resembling Ctenocephalus sp.) the only mosquito larvae he could find was culicine and not anopheline (nd:1).

Dr. Nógrády took 5,472 human bacteriological samples during his time on Easter Island and these indicated, inter alia, that the population was highly infected with fungi and yeast micro-organisms (nd:5). His findings were negative in terms of Shigella and Salmonella and this suggested that at least part of the intestinal disorders found on the island were not related to bacteria. Similarly, no specific bacterial agents could be found for kokongo. The cause of the Rapanui's inability to resist kokongo, he speculated, "could be the weak antigenicity of [the] "coongo" [sic] disease agent, or the missing immune reaction of the population" (nd:6).

Doctors Murphy and Gibbs had devoted most of their time to examining the island's animal population which outnumbered the human population by roughly 50 to 1. There were approximately 40,000 sheep, 2,000 horses, cows, and lesser numbers of pigs and oxen. Contact between animal and man, Dr. Murphy observed, "could be described as similar to that of a rural community of North America in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Horses are the principle [sic] mode of transport and thus contact here among the whole population is frequent." (nd:1). Direct bovine contact was relatively infrequent by comparison.

Apart from mild malnourishment the domestic animal population was fairly healthy (Murphy nd:5). There was little evidence of the presence of acute infectious diseases (Murphy and Gibbs nd:1). There was no evidence of tuberculosis in
cattle or pigs, a finding in keeping with the human clinical work there there were no signs of GI TB to be found. Similarly, an examination of twelve pieces of porcine diaphragm revealed that there were no trichina cysts. “Potential cycles for the transmission of certain common zoonotic diseases exist on the island,” Murphy wrote, “but fortunately the evidence suggests that these diseases are not present clinically on the island” (nd:5). This conclusion was supported in large part by studies conducted on 72 dried soil samples collected by Dr. Nőgrády and relayed to Dr. Louis Smith in Virginia for analysis. Clostridium tetani was demonstrated in three of the samples but isolated in only one while clostridium botulinum was demonstrated in none (Smith nd:3). Thus while internal parasitism was prevalent (Murphy and Gibbs nd:1) it would appear that the spores of tetanus were almost entirely absent from the Easter Island soil.

**Conclusion**

METEI was designed to do two things: to see if a biological station could be set up in a remote corner of the world to process medical and scientific material to the point where it could be successfully transported elsewhere for analysis; and to establish a baseline from which the health status of the indigenes and the biological character of the environment could be measured in the short and long term.

As virtually 100% of the population had been examined, a wide range of tests had been conducted, and some 17,000 samples brought back to Canada, Dr. Skoryna maintained that METEI had been a “complete success” (Skornyia PR:16). The expedition, he announced, had “totally fulfilled its objectives” not only by conducting a complete multidisciplinary study but by assisting the Rapanui with their medical problems (Preface to Nőgrády 1974). But was METEI as successful as Skoryna imagined?

As a data collecting exercise it was largely successful. But the overall operation lacked an integrated theoretical basis. The members of the expedition were, for the most part, profoundly ignorant about the people and the place they were about to study. Many of them lacked detailed research proposals and almost all of them seem to have been unaware of what their colleagues were going to be doing on Easter Island before they joined Cape Scott. METEI would almost certainly have benefited from a detailed preliminary reconnaissance of the island and a set of comprehensive pre-expedition briefings which would have resulted in an integrated plan. As it was, expedition members discovered that others were undertaking much the same work as they were planning to do or that they could not develop new lines of approach because equipment was lacking.

Part of the problem stemmed from personnel selection. Skoryna’s selection process was “rather haphazard” and METEI lacked balance. What is more, several members of the expedition appear to have had little real interest in the project. To make matters worse some lacked training and there was a decided need for more qualified technicians.

As is so frequently the case, undertakings like METEI tell us more about the members of the expedition than about the people they seek to study. Almost from the outset METEI was plagued by personality clashes, complaints about miserable food and over-taxing work schedules, and by general disaffection. Carl Mydans, who was cast in the role of an observer, commented that METEI reminded him of his prisoner of war experiences. Cliques emerged with younger personnel opposing what they considered to be the rigidity of their elders. Personal correspondence contains vitriolic attacks on colleagues who were described as rattlesnakes and martinets. “It looked,” Carlotta Hacker observed, “as if we were going to degenerate into one of those depressing novels where civilized adults become savages” (1968:189).

Dr. Skoryna was in the eye of the storm. It is difficult to arrive at a balanced assessment of the man. He was someone who excited admiration and hostility. One member of the expedition described Skoryna as a “truly imaginative and forceful leader,” while another called him “a nut,” and a third described him as “absolutely impossible.” Certainly he was a man of vision, tenacity, and diplomatic skill. His studied evenness, however, could infuriate. There was no doubt that he was an excellent salesman. Others put it less generously when they described him as a “wangler and a horse trader.” The principal concern was that Skorny’s vision surpassed his executive ability. One informant maintained that Skoryna had a “grasshopper mind,” that he flitted from project to project. The fact of the matter remains that despite faulty planning, indifferent selection of personnel and incomplete financing. Dr. Skoryna did succeed in putting METEI on Easter Island and seeing that all of the projects were completed in a nominal way.

One of Skoryna’s great achievements was the establishment of a warm and lasting rapport with the Rapanui. Whereas previously they had been viewed as curious or extraneous adjuncts to the island’s statuary, they enjoyed pride of place with METEI. While they were ignorant of or bemused by most of the METEI activities, they were deeply impressed by the hospitality, generosity, and sincerity of the METEI members. “In [my] heart [I’ll] never forget anyone. They were very nice people to work with,” one informant recalled. On another level, METEI opened the minds of the Rapanui to new possibilities and was instrumental in shifting their attitudes towards hygiene, nutrition, and medical treatment. For many years Rapanui entertained fervent hopes that METEI might return to Easter Island to undertake the much advertised follow-up study. They were disappointed, puzzled, and a little hurt that the expedition never returned.
One of the tragedies of METEI was that there was no follow-up. The other was that no comprehensive accounting was ever rendered of the expedition’s findings. Of all of the METEI members, Dr. Nógrády has been the most indefatigable in terms of disseminating information, organizing conferences on METEI materials, and encouraging publication. It had originally been intended that McGill University publish the expedition’s findings but when Dr. Skoryna returned to Montreal METEI was deeply in debt. The university, beset with financial problems and questions in Parliament about METEI, appears to have lost interest in publication. Dr. Skoryna managed to convince the Donner Foundation to meet the cost of the trailers that had been left behind and the METEI compound was renamed the Donner Research Station. Wearied by the administrative and legal burden, Dr. Skoryna seems also to have lost interest in publication or in mounting a follow-up expedition.

METEI was a unique undertaking. It was also the first time that a self contained medical and scientific facility had been transported overseas to function effectively in a remote and isolated locale. It was the first time that the Royal Canadian Navy had undertaken an expedition of that sort. And it was the first time that the entire population of a Pacific Island had been subjected to such detailed scientific scrutiny. METEI helped inaugurate a new era on Easter Island, acted as an inadvertent catalyst in Rapanui politics, and forged a warm bond between Canadians and the people of Rapa Nui.

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I have chosen to confer anonymity on a number of my informants since their observations, while germane, are of a highly critical nature.

Notes

[1] Dr. Nógrády, who had been given a copy of Thor Heyerdahl’s Aku Aku between Christmas and New Years 1962, remembers Dr. Skoryna’s visiting his home late one evening to enquire whether he would like to go to Easter Island. Nógrády thought Skoryna was joking but soon came to realize that his colleague was completely serious (Nógrády interview 1979).

[2] The McConnell family owned the Montreal Star newspaper which gave considerable coverage to the medical expedition.

[3] A press release for Wednesday, 21 October 1964 announced that this was to be the first time “...that such comprehensive medical laboratory facilities will have been “transplanted” into a primitive environment.”

[4] Roughly three weeks before the expedition sailed for Easter Island, D.B. Mac Farlane reported that the trailers would be left behind on the island “...to assist in the setting up of a permanent biological station” (1964:21).

[5] The term nominal is used advisedly. The official relationship between Skoryna and Roberts does not appear to have been well defined. The team of physicians was to consist of Surgeon-Captain Roberts, his wife, Dr. Maureen Roberts, Dr. Helen Reid, and Dr. Peter Beighton (Roberts pers. comm., 6 May 1976).

[6] “...When the expedition was being organized, Dr. Skoryna asked Dr. Thomas Hunt, Senior Physician at St. Mary’s Hospital, London, if he could find a young Englishman with expedition and tropical medicine experience to participate in the Easter Island venture, in order to add an international flavor to the team. I [Peter Beighton] was working as a junior doctor at St. Mary’s at the time, having recently returned from military service in the Congo, and I happened to be in the right place at the right time (Beighton, pers. comm., 13 May 1976).


[8] “I participated in the planning for the expedition, including the design of two anthropological studies, one an economic survey and the other a genealogical study of population expansion and the associated cousin marriages that must have occurred. But I never went as conditions became impossible for the carrying out of any anthropological research of a serious kind” (Salisbury pers. comm, 27 April 1976).

[9] Cape Scott’s normal speed of 10.5 knots had been supplemented by a favourable 1.3 knot wind from astern (Law correspondence, 29 November 1964). “...when the [ship’s] laundry was on [Cape Scott] dropped to 10 knots and when the laundry and evaporator was [sic] on she dropped to 9.5 knots. It is the only ship I have been in going full speed with a strong head wind when a seagull swam by me” (Law pers. comm., 27 April 1976).

[10] As Meier (who served with METEI) suggests “...only a limited reconstruction of the native population [prior to contact] is possible” (1969:40).

[11] Each of the trailers weighed about two and a half tons (2,272 kg.).
[12] Hacker (1968:168) maintained that 13 months had elapsed since the last visit of the supply ship. Law (pers. comm, 27 April 1976) wrote that it was 15 months.

[13] Murphy (Diary:19 December 1964) states that 197 plus parcels were distributed. Cdr. Law, in a letter to his wife dated 22 December 1964, states that “all 300 families came down to Hanga Piko pier where we issued food to all of the Polynesian inhabitants” (Correspondence). See also Reid (1965:25).

[14] The observations with respect to wretchedness and obligations were made by Alfred Metraux in 1934 and confirmed by Maziere.

[15] Much of this is at the level of hearsay. See Reid (1965:42). The following entry appears in the Murphy diary for 28 December 1964: ‘‘Apparently there were three Frenchmen on the island, planning to stay one month and stayed nine. According to some Easter Islanders they were bad people. Mention was made of Air France’s interest in Easter Island as an airbase, and their possible involvement in a plot to incorporate Easter Island in the Tahiti-French Polynesian complex.’’

[16] According to Reid (12), Donoso stated that he was a communist. Whether his political affiliation failed to endear him with the naval authorities is hard to say. Law’s letter contains the following passage: ‘‘It is interesting to note that the governor has banished both doctors from the island.’’ Reid suggests that Donoso left because he did not wish to be Dr. Andrade’s replacement (41).

[17] Dr. Skoryna arranged for the nursing staff at the hospital to screen the patients and refer the more serious cases to METEI. Then one of the doctors, accompanied by an interpreter, would visit the hospital each day to treat the patients (Skoryna PR:24).

[18] For a summary of these complaints, see Reid (1964:36).

[19] METEI was ably supported by a number of dedicated ham radio operators. A Montreal dentist, Dr. ‘‘Rocky’’ Dorfman, maintained a link with that city while two operators in Nova Scotia, Don Bain (Call Sign VEIZL) of Halifax and Bertus Backer (Call Sign VEIAGH) of Lower Sackville, stood regular watches throughout the four months that Cape Scott was away from Halifax. Using 75A2 Collins Transmitter/receivers and a ‘‘home built experimental [Phone Patch] unit’’ Bain and Backer were able to connect METEI members with their families through the telephone system (Backer, pers. comm. ca May 1976; Nógrády interview, 26 June 1979).

[20] The first question Dr. Nógrády’s wife asked him when he spoke to her on ham radio was: ‘‘Is it true that the camp [is] under attack?’’ (Nógrády interview, 26 June 1979). See also Reid (1965:43).

[21] ‘‘[Skoryna] was navigating between the rocks of political choice. The slightest mistake could have caused the complete failure of the expedition’’ (Nógrády interview, 26 June 1979).

[22] Hair, sputum, lesion samplings and serum were also tested. A total of 5600 samples were taken.

[23] Approximately 400 cows, 1000 sheep, and 500 horses were examined at close quarters.

[24] Dr. Nógrády also worked with the epidemiologist, Dr. Elliot Alpert collecting water samples from house tanks, wells, crater lakes and the sea (Skoryna PR:37).

[25] Sixty-seven percent of the islanders had the same blood group A, while thirty-one percent had blood group O. Only one percent of the population were groups B and AB. This indicated a relatively high degree of consanguinity (Skoryna PR:19).

[26] In a preliminary statement on medical genetics, Dr. Maureen Roberts reported the apparent absence of the more common hereditary diseases such as diabetes melitus and certain forms of epilepsy in the Easter Island population.

[27] See Myhre’s ‘‘Report on haematology, serology and pathological anatomy’’ (nd:1) for details of blood groups.

[28] Brody’s research, however, revealed that approximately four percent of the population demonstrated ‘‘significant upper limb deformities almost all confined to the hand and forearm’’ (nd:1).

[29] ‘‘Actually we found that leprosy was no more a serious problem, rather [it was] tuberculosis’’ (Nógrády pers. comm., 27 April 1976).

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Murphy, D. Diary: 24 November 1964 to 11 February 1965.
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source is the wages from the Cook Island government for government employees such as the administrator, post office manager, teachers, and nurse. Some families have members, usually young people, working on Rarotonga or in New Zealand who send some money home. (There are twice as many Cook Islanders in New Zealand as on all the islands of the Cooks).

Traditional practitioners

The Cook Island Maori term ta 'unga originally meant a ritual specialist and included, beside healing specialists, experts in such activities as canoe building and tattooing. At the present time, the term usually refers to traditional healers. (The same word is seen in different forms depending upon the Polynesian dialect in use: New Zealand Maori uses tohunga, and it is tahu'a in Tahiti.) Parsons (1985), writing on New Zealand culture, has limited the use of tohunga to those who are believed to have special spiritual power associated with their knowledge or skills. She separates these from other healers who do not use supernatural means.

Whistler (1985) states that ta 'unga meant expert and that there were many, including priests and lay healers who specialized in setting bones and in massage. Later he uses ta 'unga only for those doing supernatural healing. While it seems generally agreed that herbal medicine mostly came into use after European contact (Chambers & Chambers 1985; Whistler 1985) it is argumentative as to what was and is encompassed in the word ta 'unga. In his writing on healing on Pukapuka in the Cooks, Hecht (1985) describes both types of healing but avoids use of the native appellation completely. In present-day Mitiaro, ta 'unga is generally used for persons who have a speciality of doing healing of any sort.

Research data

While working on Mitiaro I attempted to locate all the island's traditional healers. It was difficult at first, as all knowledge of such activity was denied. I gradually convinced people that I wanted to learn how healers were trained and was not critical of their activities or techniques. I emphasized that I had no relationship to the health service but was simply...
interested. Gradually I was able to find the healers who are recognized in the community.

The healers tend to be older and often do not speak much English. As an interpreter, I used the wife of a man who was a schoolteacher and also assistant pastor of the Cook Island Church. Eventually I found that she had been trained as a ta 'unga but hadn’t offered me this information.

Of the seven persons that I was able to identify as healers, one was a spirit-type healer, ta 'unga tupapaku, who is often classified in a different category than the others. Of the seven, I interviewed five. Of the other two, one was with a festival on another island and the other was never available. I also interviewed the nurse assigned to Mitiaro, as she represented Western medicine on the island.

Summarizing the ta'unga of Mitiaro:
1) Midwife, female, actively practicing. She also treats children.
2) Bonesetter, female in active practice.
4) Urinary problems, female, active practice.
5) Neck tightness and headache, female, trained but has not practiced since going to Rarotonga where she spent 8 years before returning.
6) Ghost sickness or spirit healers, ta 'unga tupapaku, female, active practice (in Rarotonga for festival).
7) Eye and heart medicine, female, active practice but would not be interviewed. I did see one person presently on treatment by her.

When the baby arrives, it is held upside down and shaken to clear the throat. The cord is held and the placenta delivered by pull on the cord and pressure on the fundus of the uterus. The placenta is cleaned with water and buried in front of the house with flowers.

The midwife gives advice and herbal medicine during the last month of pregnancy. After delivery she gives medicines for the baby and will take care of the children when ill until they reach puberty.

She learned from her mother but didn’t begin practice until her mother died. One of her daughters is being trained. The midwife likes her activity as it is helping people and she does not charge for her services. She believes her power comes from God but also believes in the Polynesian concept of mana (spiritual power) which was one of the bases of Polynesian beliefs. Others could be taught the techniques but the medicines would not function until given mana. She did not receive this until her mother died.

She feels that many of the nurses who have been at the island health clinic are uncooperative and she hasn’t worked with them. There was another midwife but she is elderly and blind and hasn’t practiced for a number of years.

2) Bonesetter. She learned from her mother, and actually began practice on Mitiaro at age 50, after her mother died. She is proud that her first patient was the minister’s son who fell and broke his arm.

Her children have left the area so she is not training a younger person; she worries that her knowledge is being lost so is trying to teach a sister-in-law. She taught one other female but only to give medicine to a father-in-law and she didn’t give her the mana to practice on others.

The amount of work is variable but she works a lot during rugby season when there are many fractures and dislocations in players. She doesn’t charge but many do give gifts. She will accept food but not money.

After setting a break, she puts the limb in a tub of water containing medicine and then massages it. She also gives internal medication to promote healing. A serious case takes a couple of weeks to heal while a simple one may heal in three days. She gives exercises for the bone and starts limited use after the first day.

She complains bitterly that many people won’t listen to her and once the break appears healed, they do too much and rebreak it. The treatment is the same in case of compound fracture or fracture with infection.

She never has to send patients to Rarotonga to the hospital. The clinic on Mitiaro will occasionally send patients to her.

When she goes out for the herbs for her medicine, she states that it is important that she only get the specific one she goes for. If she picks something else, it will take power from the first.
3) **Urinary specialist.** While an informant told me that this lady treated urinary problems, to her the major problem she treats is intestinal disorders. She has five types of medicine, learned from her mother, starting at age 16. Other things treatable by her medicine are failure to restart periods after delivery, failure to pass urine, certain rashes, and a fishbone in the throat. (This treatment may also act in asthma or other types of coughs.) She does take non-monetary gifts.

She is training both a son 17 and a daughter 16. It takes about two days to learn which herbs to use. The two children have already begun to treat patients. She believes that mana can be passed without relinquishing the power: two persons may use it concurrently. It will only work in the family; if someone else is taught the drugs, the power cannot be passed and the treatment won’t be effective.

4) **Back pain specialist.** Sixty-six years old, Teio is the only male in the group and works only with back pain. He also works for the Department of Public Works as a storekeeper and farms the family fields, which leaves little time for practicing. He makes no charge; to do so would cause him to lose his mana. He can teach someone else but that person can’t make the treatment function unless he is designated to do so and the mana passed on.

When working on a person with a serious back problem, the patient stays in his house for three days and may not drink any alcohol. Medicine suspended in coconut oil is rubbed into the back and the patient is also given an oral medicine, a mixture of two types of bark. Teio was trained by his father. His one son lives out of the area and is not available for training, so he is training a nephew in the techniques.

5) **Headache and neck pain.** A 34 year old woman was trained in her late teens by her mother in treating stiff necks and headache. She went to work in Rarotonga about age 23 and has not worked or studied as a healer since. She married a young theology student who is now training on Mitiaro. They plan to move elsewhere so he can have a church; she has no plans for doing healing or for teaching it to anyone in the family. She doesn’t believe that healing is in conflict with her religion but feels it may be in conflict with her duties as pastor’s wife. She believes that mana is necessary for function of healing techniques and agrees that one may not charge for healing.

**Nurse**

The present nurse on Mitiaro is from Rarotonga and considers her six-month assignment a hardship. The isolation and lack of social activities are part of this but she also expresses frustration in her medical activities. She feels patient compliance is very poor, stating that most discontinue a course of medicine on the first sign of improvement. Patients do not understand the concept of emergency and will come to her at night with problems of long duration. A common one is fishhooks in the skin and patients continually ask her not to damage the hook when she must cut it out for proper removal. She resents people buying medicines when she issues them free, “They think pills they buy work better than free one.”

The nurse says that traditional practitioners are willing to cooperate, but she won’t send them patients except for maki tupapaku, often called ghost or spirit illness. She considers this a superstition rather than a real sickness and is happy to have the traditional practitioner care for it. She reduces dislocations but sends fractures to the hospital on Rarotonga. In her view, the bonesetter does only massage and doesn’t care for either fractures or dislocations. She is very negative about the midwife and states that no one goes to her anymore.

**Present beliefs**

All the ta’ungas believe that others many learn the technique but that successful practice requires passage of mana to the designee. Whether passing mana then deprives the original holder is not agreed upon.

This requirement of more than knowledge of the technique is a common belief in various parts of Polynesia (Feinberg 1979). Hanson (1972) states that on the island of Rapa, the medicines only work if one “owns” the formula; the formula is revealed in a dream, and then the practitioner owns it. Those with symptoms have to get it from her, or it won’t work. She, by custom, passes the power to one daughter.

All Mitiaro healers believe that charging would take away the healing power. Gifts of food are acceptable, but not money.

The medicines used are recognized herbs and are not considered to have any magical action. I did not attempt to identify the herbs botanically as Whistler did this so well. There is no conflict between the pre-Christian concept of mana and the fundamental Christian beliefs of the Cook Island Christian Church, which are an ubiquitous part of the culture.

I was not able to interview the practitioner of maki tupapaku, ghost illness, and it was not easily discussed with others. Even after developing enough rapport to talk about other healing, the islanders do not like to discuss this disease with a European. This is the one situation where magical healing may still have a role.

The level of cooperation between the western trained nurse now on the island and the traditional practitioners was low. In talking with health personnel in Rarotonga, I found many in sympathy with traditional medicine and cooperative with its practitioners. However, the attitudes of the nurse, the actual representative of Western medicine on Mitiaro, are the most important factors in the relation to the traditional practitioners. The perception of the practitioners of the
number of the people they care for and the level of care provided is completely different than that held by the nurse.

Discussion

The traditional practitioner, the ta'unga, is still active on the outlying islands of the Cook group. The position does not involve full-time work and is considered another ability, more on a par with dressmaking or the ability to repair machinery, than a position of leadership or spiritual dominance. According to some, this would disqualify them from the term ta'unga.

All the healers handle a very limited range of illnesses. The spirit healers, the ta'unga tupapaku, have a different practice and unfortunately none is represented in my sample. On Samoa the healers have been observed to increase in specialization (MacPherson 1985). It may be that specialization developed from a more general healing practice; as the special treatments of a disease were handed down in the family, the overall picture of healing was lost and only the limited range of the specialty drugs continued to be known.

The healers do provide a useful service to their fellows and have by no means been replaced by Western medicine.

[Ralph Riffenburgh is an ophthalmologist with an MA in medical anthropology. He is a Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology at USC and has taught Anthropology at Cal State LA and in the Dept. of Psychiatry at UC Irvine medical school.]

References


RAPA NUI RENDEZVOUS!!

Rapanuiphiles, mark your 1993 calendar! The dates are now established for the “Rapa Nui Rendezvous” to be held on the University of Wyoming campus in Laramie. Registration begins on Tuesday August 3, 1993, and the meetings start Wednesday, August 4th, continuing through Friday, August 6.

Pre-session and post-session tours to historic ranches, scenic areas and frontier sites will be conducted on Tuesday, August 3 and Saturday August 7. At least one longer post-session tour (two or three days) is also in the planning stages.

A call for papers will be forthcoming as will a brochure with further information. Requests for information may be sent to the chairman of the Planning Committee: Dr. George Gill, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071.

The Conference will be held in memory of the late Dr. William Mulloy, the Wyoming archaeologist who, during his productive career, devoted so much attention to Easter Island. His widow, Emily Ross Mulloy, still lives in Laramie and is a member of the Planning Committee for the Rapa Nui Rendezvous. Exhibits of Rapa Nui carvings (some from the Mulloy collection) will be shown during the conference.

GERMAN VISIT TO ST. PETERSBURG'S RAPANUI COLLEGUES

Last April 1992, a small group of Rapanuiphiles from Germany--Thomas S. Barthel and wife Maria, of Tübingen; Horst Cain and Annette Bierbach, of Cologne; the American/New Zealander Steven Roger Fischer and wife Dagmar, of Meersburg; and Heide-Margaret Esen-Baur (who organized the expedition) with husband and son, of Kronberg--flew with others to St. Petersburg, Russia, for a week of discussions with their Russian Rapanui colleagues and of visiting the city which for centuries had been the capital of Imperial Russia.

The group was met at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology along the Neva River just across from the Winter Palace, former residence of the Czars and better known as the Ermitage--now one of the world's greatest museums. The Institute across the river houses the celebrated "Kunstkammer" (Chamber of Art) which includes one of the world's rarest collections of Polynesian artefacts; many 18th and early 19th century Rapanui treasures adorn the antiquated Czarist exhibition hall, among which are the "Small St. Petersburg" and "Large St. Petersburg" rongorongo tablets. (When Fischer spent two days studying these two tablets, he was informed that he was the first foreign guest in more than thirty years to come to St. Petersburg to work with them!)
Welcomed at the Institute by Yuri Knorosov, Nikolai Butinov, Irina Fedorova, Tamara Schafansksaja, Elena Soboleva, Konstantin Pozdnjakov and others, the delegation from Germany discussed future Rapanui projects with their Russian colleagues and enquired how best to assist the Russians in these difficult times. It was learned that access to current foreign publications about Rapanui was the Russian scholars’ greatest problem. (For this reason, concerned scholars are urged to send an offprint of their articles or a copy of their journals or books to the Institute, in care of: Dr. Irina Fedorova, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, University Embankment 3, 199034 St. Petersburg, Russia).

A special treat for the Russians was the active participation in the German group of Frau von Schnehen, née von Krusenstern, a direct descendant of Russia’s celebrated circumnavigator Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern (1770-1846).

The various guided excursions around St. Petersburg and to the breathtakingly beautiful palaces at Tsarkojje Selo, Pavlovsk, and Peterhof, were a rather depressing confusion of extremes: Czarist opulence and socialist decay, gilded museums and grey peeling tenements, bright country dachas and inner-city squalor, choking in fumes and black-market sordidness, with the ubiquitous urchins begging gum or flogging Red Army jackets and the ancient babushki with extended open palm. A rare renovated pearl, such as the Grand Hotel, would cause necks to crane. An unforgettable evening was spent in the original Royal Ballet thrilling to a stunning performance of Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker”.

It was sensed by all on the excursion that Mother Russia--far more glorious and far more decrepit than had been expected--was experiencing a highly critical and uncertain period of adjustment to the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union. Anxiety lay heavy in the air; frantic hope was mixed with growing despair. The Russian colleagues--especially Irina Fedorova (and daughter Olga) and Tamara Schafansksaja--were warm, intelligent, hospitable, sensitive friends...who were acutely aware of their present predicament. The group from Germany promised to help in whatever way possible. Already packages of clothing and foodstuffs have sped eastward.

Readers who may wish to assist the Russians should contact Dr. Fischer at the following address for particulars: Dr. Steven R. Fischer, Droste-Hülshoff-Weg 1, W-7758 Meersburg, Germany.

WHAT’S NEW IN HANGAROA
HE RONGO Ho’OU

✓ Preliminary results from the census of last April give a total of 2770 persons for Rapa Nui, making it (next to a fast-growing suburb in Santiago), the fastest growing community in Chile.

✓ The spring supply ship bringing much needed foods and other necessities to the island was--once again--delayed for over a month. Scathing letters to the editor in El Mercurio pointed out that the results go beyond mere inconvenience. Price of living goes up on Rapa Nui, the weather is worse in the austral winter making it more difficult and expensive to off load cargo, the island merchants must pay extra to have goods sent in via air, raising the cost. And all this produces a true “collective psychosis” among the inhabitants.

✓ Hangaroa’s municipal elections have selected the following persons to become the City Counsellors (Concejales) of Hangaroa: Felipe Nahoe Tepano, Alberto Hotus Chavez, Marcelo Pont Hill, Juan Atan Paoa, Jorge Pascal Pakarati, and Pedro Pablo Edmunds Paoa. As no one received more than 35% of the votes, which would have automatically made him mayor, the six will vote among themselves for mayor.

✓ A special section in El Mercurio concerning the Chilean Armada included a long article on “The need to implement a maritime infrastructure on Isla de Pascua.” In this article, the “monumental lighthouse” is mentioned, as being “fundamental for the material-ization of the concept of Chile as an oceanic country and natural leader of the Southeast Pacific.” [See RNJ 6(2) for June 1992]. The article also states that “Since 1982 the port of Pascua has been integrated in the Bank of Projects of the Ministry of Public Works under the number 502.164., in a site located on the southeast of the island known as ‘Papa Haoa’. Studies date back to 1967; they considered a site 120 meters long for larger ships and two others of 110 meters for smaller ships and fishing boats, plus the necessary space for services. It includes also a passenger pier for the use of smaller boats that take passengers to and from ships without the need for docking. The selected site is the most adequate in the difficult hydrography of the coast of the island with reasonable surf that would make the sites useable under normal conditions. The cost would be around US $40 million.”

✓ Word has been received from the island that plans have been made to blow up Vai Atare to provide fill for various road projects and for runway repairs. This archaeologically sensitive part of the island is said to be the only suitable area for such exploitation. Vai Atare contains an ancient quarry where stone was cut to provide blocks for ahu construction. Other sites here include stone house foundations, early ahu, and petroglyphs.

✓ A movie produced by Kevin Costner of “Dances with Wolves” fame will begin filming on Rapa Nui in December, provided permits can be acquired. The production will require 100 tons of equipment and 150 people and the story will concern the island’s history. It is planned to use Polynesian natives instead of “star actors”.

✓ José Miguel Ramiréz is the official in charge of the headquarters of the Sociedad Amigos de Isla de Pascua, at the
Fonck Museum in Viña del Mar, Chile.

José Miguel Ramírez and friends: statues in front of the Bali Hai restaurant in Santiago are wearing hats and serapes typical of the "huaso" (Chilean cowboy) in commemoration of Chile’s National Independence Day, the 18th of September.

✓ Beginning in December, LAN-Chile expects to have four flights weekly to the island (three going on to Tahiti and back).
✓ The "harmonious" Chilean Naval barracks said to be constructed to blend in with the ambience of the island (RNJ 6(2):39) have been decorated with cannons.
✓ A new all-terrain ambulance will be sent to Easter Island soon. This 1992 four-wheel drive Renault was acquired with funds of the Valparaiso-San Antonio Health Service for 12.5 million pesos (about US $34,000).
✓ At the end of December an Office of Customs (Servicio Nacional de Aduanas) will begin operations on Easter Island. Currently, the carabineros handle this function. The new customs official in charge is Anastassia Teao who recently completed courses given by the School of Customs in Valparaiso.
✓ The director of the hospital at Hanga Roa, Dr. Claudio Meneses, emphasized (in El Mercurio) the necessity of implementing some control over tourists in order to avoid an AIDS epidemic. He stated that "conduct leading to AIDS is not significant on the island; there exists a normal relationship between tourists and islanders with the consequent pairing off, some definitely and others transitorily." He added that there is no widespread drug addiction, the hospital uses disposable needles and modern techniques and, as for homosexuality, that group at risk is clearly identified by the community, and it is not a promiscuous group. The local hospital has taken blood tests of about 80% of the population and found only one carrier of the AIDS virus. However, he added that "this must be considered an elevated number considering the small population." Meneses suggested that there should be a system of control in effect for tourists, such as a form of certification showing that they have been submitted to a previous examination for HIV.

[Ed: No mention was made of any educational program for disease prevention.]

On the Japanese restoration of Tongariki

Word has been received from Japan that not all is rosy nor well with the projected restoration of the great ahu at Tongariki. The following is taken from a letter received from a Japanese archaeologist who has worked on Easter Island, Toru Hayashi.

First, a bit of background: Tadano is a famous crane company in Japan. They saw a TV program about Easter Island that was shown in Japan in 1989. At the end of the film, former governor Sergio Rapu asked for the donation of a crane to restore statues and ahu.

Tadano decided to donate a crane --an action they believed would be effective advertising for their company. However, the ambassador from Chile rejected their suggestion.

Then things changed in 1990; the ambassador was replaced and Tadano tried again. This time they set up a project to reconstruct an ahu. The new ambassador accepted their proposal and promised them that the Chilean Navy would cooperate in shipping a 50 ton crane from Valparaiso to the island.

In October 1991, a group was sent to the island and to mainland Chile for preliminary research and negotiations. They discovered that the raising of moai is not as easy as they had thought. They spoke with Chilean authorities, the University of Chile, CONAF, the Governor and Mayor of Easter Island, and the Consejo de Ancianos. Everyone promised to help Tadano's project. All these negotiations were done without any participation from academic specialists in Japan.

At this point, the story appeared in the newspapers. Tadano had organized a "Moai Restoration Committee" led by the chairman of the largest National Laboratory of Cultural Property of Japan; the committee included two famous archaeologists and one expert on chemical preservation. These persons are important in Japan, but none has ever worked in Polynesia. Their plan is to begin restoration in September of this year, and have all work (including preservative treatments) finished by the end of the year. [1]

The entire budget is set at $1,500,000. Tadano is testing the crane with a life-size stone moai in Japan.

Hayashi contacted Tadano, urging that they modify the project because excavation, reconstruction, and chemical treatment of Tongariki are impossible to carry out in such a short time and budget; and, especially the chemical treatment must be done carefully and only after a long period of
experiment and monitoring. It was pointed out Mulloy's "Open-Air Museum" plan precluded such work; and doing a project of this magnitude without a Polynesian expert is senseless.

A spokesperson for Tadano contacted Hayashi with the following information. He claimed that the investigative team had insisted to Tadano that their project would require more than five years to prepare and to carry out professional investigations. He said the crane would NOT be donated to the island but probably would be taken back to mainland Chile after the restoration. The investigative team decided to restore Tongariki as they had turned the initiative over to the University of Chile; Tadano would just "donate and help start the project." Their plan now is to spend six months excavating, reconstructing, and chemically treating the statues at Tongariki, hiring 20-30 islanders for labor. They do not expect to finish in six months, so they plan to leave in February, or when they run out of money—regardless of the state of their restoration project. The rest will be left for Chile. All Tadano wants is a good picture of their crane raising a moai. The advertising is their main concern; they do not care about preserving Tongariki.

Only the preservation specialists would seriously spend time to study the proper preservatives, monitoring samples around the island. But this plan has nothing to do with Tadano or the Committee.

Dr. Yosi Sinoto of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu went to Japan in May to meet with the Committee, pointing out the impossibility of their project. His opinion was ignored. So once again, the commercial interests of outsiders prevail. ±

Algunas consideraciones sobre la restauración de un nuevo sitio arqueológico en Isla de Pascua
A. Elena Charola, Ph.D., World Monuments Fund

[English summary follows]

El presente interés en la restauración del ahu Tongariki en Isla de Pascua merece algunas consideraciones. La restauración de un ahu no implica automáticamente la conservación de las monumentales estatuas que se pararan sobre él ni la preservación del sitio arqueológico como tal. La restauración se refiere al restablecimiento de la plataforma ceremonial, o ahu, a su forma original iquiendo sobre ella las estatuas, o moai, como se encontraban antiguoamente. Para realizar esta tarea es necesario llevar a cabo un estudio arqueológico a fin de obtener el máximo de información relevante del sitio antes de la restauración, ya que ésta en cierta medida borra parte de la historia del mismo. Se debe tener presente que el patrimonio arqueológico es un recurso cultural no renovable.

La restauración de un ahu es solamente una etapa de la puesta en valor de un sitio arqueológico que, para su protección necesita de la colaboración interdisciplinaria de profesionales especializados en las distintas áreas requeridas: inventario, diagnóstico, excavación, documentación, investigación, mantenimiento, conser-vación, preservación, reconstrucción, información, presentación, acceso público y uso del patrimonio arqueológico.

El sitio arqueológico de Tongariki, uno de los más grandes de la Isla, fue destruido por una marejada gigante en 1960, resultante del fuerte terremoto que azotó a Chile continental. El ahu, y las treinta estatuas que estaban botadas boca abajo, fueron desparramados sobre toda la planicie delante del ahu. El sitio cuenta además con un gran número de petroglifos labrados sobre derrames de lava, localmente llamados "papa".

Debido al presente estado del sitio, resultado de la catástrofe natural, la propuesta "restauración". Sin embargo, gracias a la documentación existente, la reconstrucción puede ser fiel.

La decisión de restaurar un sitio debe ser tomada luego de efectuar un balance de las razones en pro y un contra. La restauración de un ahu implica no solo el costo de la investigación arqueológica, la reconstrucción, y las medidas de conservación para proteger las estatuas, petroglifos y otros rasgos arqueológicos de interés de sitio, sino que trae consigo los costos a largo plazo de la infraestructura necesaria para la protección, mantenimiento, presentación y acceso público del sitio para evitar que éste sea deteriorado por el mismo público para el cual se hace la restauración. En general, estos costos no se consideran dentro del presupuesto de un proyecto de restauración, ya que se estima que los organismos públicos se harán cargo de ellos.

En función de los muchos ejemplos que se encuentran en todo el mundo de restauraciones que no pudieron ser mantenidas a largo plazo, y que posiblemente se deterioraron más rápidamente que si no se hubieran hecho, convendrá que los nuevos proyectos de restauración considerasen el costo recurrente del mantenimiento del sitio y los eventuales tratamientos periódicos de conservación.

Se sugiere que este análisis de costos se realice también para otros sitios arqueológicos tales como ahu Tetenga, Ahu Te Peu, Ahu Poukura o Ahu Te Pito Kura, todos los cuales tienen válidas razones por las cuales se podrían restaurar.

Aparentemente en la elección de Tongariki como sitio a restaurar influyó el hecho que mucha información arqueológica se perdió por la marejada por lo cual la investigación preliminar sería más corta reduciendo el tiempo y costos necesarios para la reconstrucción del ahu. Es necesario hacer notar sin embargo que dada la extensión del sitio y la presencia de los petroglifos, los costos de presentación y los de su futuro mantenimiento serían mucho mayores, sin
olvidar que este sitio es susceptible a nuevas marejadas.

**English Summary:**

Restoration of an *ahu* does not automatically imply conservation; it merely refers to the rebuilding of a structure to its original form. The first step in a restoration corresponds to an archaeological study. This has to be carried out carefully so as to obtain the maximum amount of information, for a restoration erases part of the accumulated information. It should be remembered that the archaeological heritage is a non-renewable cultural resource.

Restoration is only one of the many steps needed to bring about the effective presentation of the site to the public and its future protection. For this an interdisciplinary approach is indicated. It will require specialists and professionals to carry out the various tasks: inventory, excavation, documentation, research, conservation, maintenance, information, site management, etc.

Tongariki is one of the great sites on the island. Aside from the fine *ahu* platform, it contains numerous statues and a large number of petroglyphs. Destroyed by a *tsunami* in 1960, the *ahu* and its statues were thrown about by this catastrophe. Because of the site's present state, the term "reconstruction" is more appropriate; it is beyond restoration.

The decision to restore this site has both pros and cons. But if a restoration is considered, it should be remembered that the costs of the operation have to include, apart from those of the archaeological work and the reconstruction, those for the conservation methods for the statues and the petroglyphs on the site, and last, but not least, the long term expenses. These correspond in the first place to the cost of the needed infrastructure for the presentation and public access to the site, and in the second place, to the regular maintenance required.

This is fundamental if the deterioration that the public--because of lack of information or advice--could cause to the site is to be avoided. There are many examples around the world of restored sites that have deteriorated badly, even more rapidly than if they had not been restored, because no maintenance was provided for them.

It is suggested that for the island other sites, such as Ahu Tetenga, Te Peu, Poukura, and Te Pito Kura, be considered for restoration and that a careful cost analysis be carried out for each of them. Finally, let us not forget that Tongariki was destroyed once by a *tsunami*; it is still in the path of any such future event.

**WHAT'S NEW IN POLYNESIA**

✓ PAA: The Pacific Arts Association has announced their 5th International Symposium on Art, Performance and Society, to be held 12-17 April, 1993 at the South Australian Museum. *Art Performance and Society* will heighten awareness of the distinctiveness and diversity of indigenous arts of the Pacific, both past and present, with a concentration on performance. It will also investigate the possibilities of broader collaborative projects and ethical issues such as repatriation. For further information, contact Susan Cochrane Simons, PAA Co-ordinator, % South Australian Museum, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia 5000, Australia.

✓ Hawaii: Former governor of Easter Island, Sergio Rapu, has been appointed the new director of Hawai‘i’s Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University. He will maintain his position as manager of Cultural Development at the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Rapu stated that his particular responsibility is to carry on the mission of the Institute for Polynesian Studies as established by the Board of Directors and to work with the Polynesian Cultural Center--recognizing the unique opportunity that both institutions, Brigham Young University at Hawaii and the Polynesian Cultural Center, have in co-existing both physically and culturally and working on the same spiritual ground.

✓ Fiji: Participants at the Science of the Pacific Island Peoples Conference held at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, recommended that traditional knowledge should be included as part of formal science education in Pacific schools. Participants also requested courses in applied anthropology to help graduates understand their own cultures and enable them to assist their communities in dealing with change.

It was recommended that traditional healers be recognized as complementary, rather than opposed, to modern medical science, for both traditional and modern scientific medicine can contribute to each other.

Concern was expressed over legal ownership of natural and cultural resources, and the decline of traditional knowledge as well as the natural environment. It also was stated that non-indigenous individuals should stop trying to tell stories about indigenous people!

✓ Hawaii: The Pacific Hawaiian Culture and Arts Program, Bishop Museum, is building a double hulled canoe from traditional materials which will replicate, in 1994, the trans-Pacific voyage from the Marquesas to Hawai‘i. There will be a trial run (using the Hokule‘a) next year when a crew will sail to the Cook Islands for the Pacific Arts Festival.

✓ Nuclear tests at Mururoa and Fangatauha have been suspended for the remainder of this year. However, France states that it will resume testing in 1993 unless the US and UK stop their nuclear tests. The apparent impetus for the halt is due to increasing opposition in ecology parties in France—and national elections are coming up.

The temporary cessation of nuclear testing has created a political tempest in French Polynesia. Parties that are pro-
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Seeking the Past Through the Present: Recent Ethnoarchaeological Research in South Asia
Carla M. Sinopoli

Design Changes in Heiau Temple Architecture on Maui
Michael Kolb

Special Issues

Advances in Understanding Philippine Archaeology (Spring 1993)
Hawaiian Archaeology (Spring 1991)
Prehistoric Exchange in Oceania (Fall 1990)


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Independence look at the moratorium as a step towards French pullout and future independence for French Polynesia. For others, economic impacts due to the reduction in the French presence is causing worry. One leader claims that an end to testing will cause poverty in French Polynesia (From: Tok Blong SPPF, #39, for May 1992).

Although the precise amount of kilotons is unknown, the following chart from El Mercurio (18 April 1992) gives an indication of the size and frequency of France’s tests in French Polynesia since 1975.

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Pitcairn News: The Pitcairn Miscellany reports horrendous rainstorms earlier this year which washed out the island roads and flattened trees. Huge waves broke 200 meters off shore, tossing 1 1/2 ton concrete blocks and heavy steel girders like twigs. Islanders who had gone out to trade with the cruise ship, Maxim Gorky, were unable to return to land against 64 knot winds and towering waves. They spent the night out at sea, shivering in the lee of the island. Some hardy souls swam ashore but it was morning before the longboats could make a hair-raising run for the harbor.

Undersea Mineral Deposits: Seabed nodules of valuable minerals such as manganese and cobalt are said to be lying at vast depths in the Cook Island’s economic zone. The problem is finding the technology to economically bring them to the surface. As reported in Pacific News Bulletin (for August 1992) similar deposits lie in the ocean off Easter Island. These deposits were created by undersea volcanic activity and were discovered ten years ago by a team from the German Institute of Geological Sciences and Natural Resources. A team of scientists from Chile and Germany is to search the seabed off Rapanui to map the deposits which could be of great commercial significance.
No! to ‘Anakena’s “Magical Mystery Moai” Hotel!

Our readers might recall the short “Rapanuiophile Alert!” article in RNJ 6(1) (March 1992): 18-19 reporting on a hair-raising scheme to build a 40-meter, five-star hotel at ‘Anakena Beach--in the shape of a gigantic moai.

Now Valparaíso’s daily El Mercurio has recently published a feature article about the project, based on a report appearing in Tahiti’s daily La Dépêche and confirming our worst fears.

Quoting El Mercurio’s information, the ten-story high moai hotel at ‘Anakena Beach would be surrounded by Polynesian-style cabañas, with park, sauna and swimming pool. The project is the brainchild of retired naval captain Hernán Ferrer Fouga, who recently authored “En la ruta de los moais” for the collection Ciencia y Tecnologia del Mar published by the Instituto Hidrográfico de la Armada de Chile.

“This idea,” Ferrer is quoted as saying, “should not be taken as competition with the Rapanui. It’s a different nivel. And it’s beyond doubt that a project like this considerably increases the island’s touristic possibilities.”

Yes, but for whom? we have to ask. Certainly not for the Rapanui.

By means of a video cassette broadcast on RFO Tahiti in Pape’ete, Alberto Hotu Chávez expressed on behalf of the island’s Korohua (El Consejo de Ancianos) his “indignation at seeing the culture and dignity of his people mocked yet again.” Salvador Atán declared that “the best idea or the best project with regards to tourism is to maintain the [present] routes of access to Rapa Nui by ship or air through various airlines that maintain rigid schedules not subject to modification for at least one year.”

Benito Rapahango added that “it’s time the local authorities and central government set the norms regulating economical, social and cultural affairs for Rapa Nui, so as to protect its quality of life and preserve at the same time this culture which is unique and which belongs to all mankind.”

Orlando Paoa recalled how twenty years ago as a Rapanui he had been refused a permit by the government to build a hotel at ‘Anakena. He believes the island’s present number of hotels and private residences is sufficient.

Victoriano Giralde declared the island doesn’t need this type of investment: “We don’t want this big fish in the island.”

“The project is deplorable,” lamented Vicky Haoo. “There’s no consideration of the fact that it’s a cultural patrimony of all mankind, because it would be situated in proximity to ‘Anakena Beach, which is a site with history and archaeological aspects of far-reaching value.”

The Rapa Nui Journal can only agree wholeheartedly with all those who find this absurd project not only an ecological and cultural nightmare but an affront to the dignity of the Rapanui people. If Chile truly wishes to help the island, then it would officially discourage at the highest ministerial level all such “Magical Mystery Moai” projects in order to concentrate instead on the immediate task of improving--in small, clearly arranged and modestly funded steps--the island’s current infrastructure.

South American Explorer, No. 31, pg 38 for May 1992, has a great “send-up” regarding the projected moai-shaped hotel at Anakena [RNJ 6(1) 1992]. Their creative version of this monstrosity has a huge light bulb on the top and they suggest it might become a mausoleum for the remains of Sr. Ferrer, who has proposed this “inspirational tour de force”. The drawing was made by Susan Montague who is now busily at work on another one--the Giant Iguana Hotel of the Galapagos!

RECENT PUBLICATIONS


Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main.


Fischer, Steven Roger, ed. 1992. Rongorongo Studies, Vol.2(1), Summer. This issue of Rongorongo Studies contains "The Story of Lusi, A Nanumangan Legend" by Joseph C. Finney; "Aspects of Onomatopoeia in Hawaiian Literature and Thought" by John Charlot; "Rapanui's 'Physeter Bone' Inscription" by Steven Roger Fischer; plus book reviews.


This publication (in French) provides a detailed analysis of the moai kavakava of Rapa Nui and focuses on naming, materials, technique, representation, form, function, and use. It will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of RNJ.


* Pollock, Nancy J. 1992, These Roots Remain. Food Habits in Islands of the Central and Eastern Pacific since Western Contact. Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

Food in Pacific societies is a culture pattern, unique to each society. But some patterns are shared due to links in times past. Pollock, using approaches of symbolic anthropology, social ecology and household economy, explores the values of food in diet and health as well as in symbols of power.


Spend a week on Easter Island at the time of TAPATI RAPA NUI-- The famous Easter Island annual festival. Each February, the rapanui celebrate with dance, song, parade, contests—and fun. In Polynesian costumes, they perform centuries old dances of their ancestors, and re-enact ancient rites.

Far Horizons Tours proudly offers an in-depth trip to Easter Island at the time of the festival, led by archaeologist Georgia Lee. Trip dates: February 1-11, with optional trip extension to northern Chile. Further information? Contact Far Horizons, 16 Fern Lane, San Anselmo, CA 94960 or call (415) 457-4575.

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**REVIEWS**


Reviewed by Steven Roger Fischer, Ph.D. Meersburg, Germany.

"The sectional arrangement of this book reflects the gradual approach of the authors to unveiling the manifold facets of ancient South Pacific civilization, assembling the historical linkage between Oceania and the Americas in a mosaiclike fashion...." Or so declare the authors in the three and one-half page preface representing the only coherent text in a 199-page telephone book of arbitrarily chosen vocabulary items from Papuan, Rapanui, "Transpacific Quechua" (Bolivia), "Transpacific Maya", and so forth ad horrendum. One wonders why they even took the trouble to excuse themselves.

For the book is a linguistic black hole, devoid of scientific methodology, which brashly and irresponsibly divorces itself not only from the mainstream of Austronesian linguistics but from all professional principles in expressly searching out in a purely eclectic fashion, with little regard to historical change in the languages involved, only those words in a score of Pacific rim languages which the authors believe will prove the preconceived notion of precontact relations between Oceania and the Americas.

Such a tendentious, indeed purposefully mis-represented exposition of the available data is frighteningly reminiscent of the practices of Thor Heyerdahl, who, as we read with astonishment on page one of this book, "succeeded in hitting upon amazing cultural resemblances between Oceania and the Americas that were an eye-opener to many scientists, including the authors of this tome." Needless to say, this "tome" little resembles reputable science.

As an example, with no explanation being given, Rapanui (Rap) "ten" is said by Schuhmacher to be keromata,
In his latest series, Around Whicker’s World: the ultimate package!, Whicker is positively surrounded by the rich: a group of 87 people taking part in “the ultimate package tour”, a five week journey around the world in a private, chartered wide-bodied Tri-Star jet from American Trans-Air. The conditions were luxurious, with a crew member for every five passengers, and the plane was equipped with bars and a lounge area.

The occasion was the 150th anniversary of Thomas Cook package tours, which began in 1841 when 570 people were taken on an 11-mile train journey for a shilling each. This 1991 tour was somewhat more expensive: £21,000 per person, or £37,000 for a couple. The group was international, though predominantly British, and highly varied, ranging in age from 19 to over 80, and including all walks of life. There were people who had taken out a bank loan to finance the trip, retired people who were blowing their savings (“you can’t take it with you, so why not spend it on seeing the world instead of giving it to the taxman?”), and there were the enormously rich: one couple was carrying $2 million as petty cash!

The itinerary included Venice, Egypt, India, China, Australia, Tahiti, Easter Island, Rio and New York. Not everyone made it as far as Polynesia. One English couple left in Sydney, having found the trip boring; they spent another £7000 on air tickets and flew home.

The Easter Island sequence was, alas, disappointing. Whicker’s famed hyperbole came into play: “600 monstrous and mysterious heads”, etc. But all we are shown of the island were some standard shots of the statues on Rano Raraku’s outer slopes, and a bit of Tahai; we saw nothing of the islanders. The first sequence took place in the airport where the passengers—already disconcerted by the fact that an American Transair had just brought in 300 rich French people on the same day—were subjected to a thorough luggage search. Having passed through Egypt, India and China without this being inflicted on them, it came as a shock to have all 400 items of baggage opened and checked: “You do get the impression that not many people come to Easter Island twice.” A shivering Whicker also informed the camera that they said it was going to be stiffingly hot here.

In the Tahai sequence, an octogenarian lady—one of the few simpatico people in the group—scoffed at those who were not having a good time: “A lot of them this morning said, ‘well, we’ve got stones like this at home, we’ve got Stonehenge’!”

Whicker went into action describing the statues: “Our happy band of travellers has coped with customs, and conquered cockroaches, and now they’re facing up to faces...They’ve stared disdainfully through the centuries, awesome and mysterious, the ultimate target for travellers who’ve seen everything.”

Whicker Work on Easter Island

A Review by Paul G. Bahn

Easter Island loomed large in a single week on British television in August. On the same afternoon we had a repeat of the Easter Island episode of Thor Heyerdahl’s Kon-Tiki Man, with all its errors still intact (see RNJ vol. 4, No.3, 1990, pg. 46-47), followed by a repeat of the BBC Chronicle documentary, made in the early 1970s, which took Colin Renfrew to Polynesia to seek ethnographic parallels that might help explain how and why the megalithic monuments of prehistoric Europe were constructed. The relatively brief Easter Island sequence included an interview with a youthful William Ayres.

A few days later came the third in a four-part series fronted by Alan Whicker, British television’s most famous interviewer and traveller. Whicker has been globetrotting for decades, and interviewing rich people and oddball characters along the way. Fans of Monty Python may recall the classic sketch in which the entire team impersonated him, lamenting on ‘Whicker Island’ that there were not enough rich people left to interview.

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And that was it...except for a final monologue on the steps of the plane: "Some of our number were rather upset in India to be brought face to face with poverty that they thought they shouldn't have to confront. Now here, on an island of 2000 people, they've spent a couple of days in a little hotel that was really so basic it was like a collection of army huts, and you could lie in bed and you could be involved in a quarrel that was four or five bedrooms away. In fact, we decided that if we had anything indiscreet to say, that we ought to go in the bathroom and run the shower, the way we used to fool the KGB. It has been a great privilege, I think, to come to Easter Island and see those marvellous monster heads, but for most of us, I suspect, the best part of all will be talking about it afterwards, because Easter Island is a sort of trophy destination, it's an 'I was there'...."

It's a pity that the islanders' opinion of their visitors went unrecorded. In an interview about the series, Whicker forecast that there would be more of these "great air cruises" soon, and "in 20 years time Easter Island might be the Benidorm of the next century." It's enough to send shivers down your spine.....

An editor's note on the Easter Island accommodations referred to in the Whicker article: This HAS to be the old Hangaroa Hotel, an aging pre-fab from Florida. It's paper-thin walls are notorious; you can ask your roommate a question and someone in the next room will answer!

NEW EIF PUBLICATION!
The Ceremonial Center of Orongo

The Easter Island Foundation is proud to announce the first in a series of publications dealing with Easter Island: The Ceremonial Center of Orongo, by Alan Drake and illustrated by Georgia Lee; Preface by Emily Ross Mulloy.

Lavishly illustrated with drawings of petroglyphs, maps, and photographs, this 100 page, soft cover book tells you everything you ever wanted to know about Orongo, Rano Kau and the birdman cult. A glossary, bibliography and index are included. Contents include: Rano Kau, The Orongo Sites, Historical Inquiries, House Construction, Mata Ngarau, the Birdman Cult, Motu Nui, Vai Atare, the Ancient Society, and more.

Future volumes in this series are "The Wood Carving Tradition of Easter Island" by Joan Seaver; "The Ancient Solar Observatories of Rapa Nui" by William Liller; and "The Rongorongo Tablets of Easter Island" by Alan Drake. All profits from this Series will benefit projects of the Easter Island Foundation.


Letters to the Editor

A Little Light on the Lighthouse

In the June 1992 issue, we hear that a "monumental lighthouse" will be constructed at the top of the Rano Kau volcano as an "important step in Chile's national sovereignty of Isla de Pascua." Being a reader who lives on the coast of the Netherlands which is dotted about every twenty miles with lighthouses, I can give you the following comments: ① it is not correct to say in general that lighthouses are outmoded, although radar and radio-beacons can allow you to find your position at sea even if visibility is nil. In the Netherlands, every lighthouse emits its individual pattern (with a number of dark sectors in the full circle of light) allowing immediate identification of the harbor. With a lot of harbors at short distances, this is very useful. The harbor near which I live has two lighthouses perpendicular to the coast, a high and a low one. If you keep the two lights in line each above the other, you can safely enter the harbor even if you cannot see the piers. ② The situation at Easter island is of course quite different: when approaching the island by sea, you see the silhouette of the island either by yourself or via the echo on radar, then you know it must be Easter Island (or that you are thousands of miles off course if it happens to be another island!) Neither is there a harbor to which you have to be guided safely. A radio beacon would be more useful.
because it works at greater distance. The airport surely has
one already. Given the situation of Easter Island there is
hardly any need for a lighthouse. The frightening and
ridiculous aspect of the lighthouse is the "monumental"
character that El Mercurio mentions. This probably means
that it will be a high construction that will spoil the silhouette
of Rano Kau, which of course upsets all Rapanuiphiles. Rano
Kau is 300 meters above sea level. This is a multiple of the
height of the highest lighthouse that has ever been built
anywhere in the world. If one insists on building a lighthouse,
the sensible thing to do would be to put the top of a
conventional lighthouse at about 100 meters above sea level
on the Eastern slope of Rano Kau, facing East, where all the
traffic comes from. It would only be visible from sea, which
is the purpose; nobody on the island would see it, and it would
save considerable in construction costs. But it would be
"non-monumental" and from what I read, I fear that the
purpose of this whole project is much more being monumental
than safely guiding ships to Easter Island. It would be a more
monumental step in Chile's sovereignty over Easter if the
saving on such a high edifice would be spent on something
useful, like education. Personally, I do not have the impression
that much has been done in this direction during the last
hundred years of sovereignty....

Herbert von Saher, The Netherlands

As we are about to go to press, a plea arrived from
CODEFF (Comité Nacional Pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora)
and Agrupación Milenio, based in Santiago and Rapa Nui.
They are very concerned about the "monumental" light-
house and have asked authorities to cease construction.

The lighthouse (note arrow showing location) will be
directly opposite Orongo. This view is from the Mirador
looking across Rano Kau's lake.

Photographs were enclosed in the letter, showing where
the lighthouse would be in relation to Orongo. On the back
of one is written "Please help us to stop the project!"

Photos: R. Morales

In ancient times, Rapanui priests observed from Orongo
as the rising solstice sun came up over the tip of Poike peak
on the far horizon. If the lighthouse does indeed go forward,
in the future the solstice sun will rise above a monumental
man-made tower. Not quite the same thing, fellas.

Rapa Nui Shipwreck, 1913

I recently found a copy of The Log of the El Dorado by
Captain N.P. Benson, referred to in Routledge as "Captain
Benson's Own Story". It's sixty-six pages tell a delightful
sailor's yarn of Benson's luck and skill navigating to Easter
Island after his ship floundered and sank on 13 June 1913,
some seven hundred miles to the west of the island.

Benson and his ten crewmen, without a chronometer to
determine their longitude, were forced to sail North two
hundred miles then to the East seven hundred miles hoping
to run into Easter Island in the El Dorado's twenty-two foot
skiff. After nine days on short rations, they sighted the island
and made for the Southwest Cape for protection from an
oncoming gale. Two days of running from the gale took them
around Poike to the North coast, where seeing a sandy beach,
probably Ovahe, they finally landed -- much weakened from
their ordeal.

Through the hospitality of Mr. Edmunds at the sheep
ranch in Mataveri they regained their strength and quickly
paired up with and "married" island girls. After one hundred
and five days on the island, Benson and two of the crew sailed
to Manga Reva in their refitted skiff. They made it in sixteen
days, then on to Tahiti in another eleven. The other eight crew
members remained on the island several months more until picked up by a British steamer. Before they were allowed to depart, the captain of the steamer had to make arrangements with the chief for proper alimony to be paid to dissolve the "marriages." This was accomplished by giving each of the "wives" a bar of soap—"...cheap, castile soap with red streaks in it—the kind they use in the second cabins."

The eight crew men that had stayed behind included at least two Swedes and a "Jap cook" (who, noted Benson, attached himself to the village belle). I assume that the other five were Caucasian from the lack of any other racial comments by Benson. Whether or not any of these marriages resulted in children is only conjecture, but the possibility was surely there.

Bienvenido de Estella did a census in 1918 that was published in Mis Viajes a Pascua. In 1913 there would have been approximately two hundred native Rapa Nui on the island, with women of child-bearing age (15-45) outnumbering men of the same age 67 to 43, so the El Dorado’s crew would have little difficulty finding an agreeable mate. There was, however, no noticeable difference in birth rate during the nine months following the departure of the crew as two, three, four, and five-year olds were of almost equal numbers in 1918. It seems much more plausible to me, however, that the "European features" noticed by Heyerdahl came via the ship, El Dorado, rather from fabled El Dorado!

Tom Christopher, Troy, Michigan

References


The Octopus Stamp of French Polynesia

When I saw the picture of the stamp from French Polynesia that illustrates an octopus reaching out to all corners of the "Polynesian Triangle", it rang a faint bell. I was sure I had seen a similar picture somewhere else. Finally I tracked it down to an illustration in the book, Vikings of the Pacific by Peter H. Buck, also known as Te Rangi Hiroa. The illustration is used in a chapter entitled "The Hub of Polynesia" and depicts a mythical homeland known as Havaii (Havaiki, Hawaii, Savaii) in many Polynesian languages, from which the Polynesian people set out to colonize other parts of the Pacific. The location of Havaii is apparently somewhere in the Society Island group, probably Raiatea according to tradition.

As a Polynesian himself (half Maori), who was born in New Zealand and later became director of the Bishop Museum, Buck-Hiroa was certainly not attempting to enhance France or French Polynesia’s sovereignty over New Zealand, Hawaii, or Rapa Nui, but rather to illustrate the widespread migrations of his ancestors throughout the Pacific. The octopus, although it may seem sinister to Westerners, is in fact regarded as a powerful supernatural being in some Polynesian cultures. I can’t find the reference at the moment but seem to recall that an octopus, by impregnating a coconut, became the ancestor of something or other. Folklore buffs please confirm or correct!

Emily Ross Mulloy, Laramie, Wyoming

Buck’s illustration of the Polynesian octopus from which (it appears) the offending French Polynesian stamps derived their inspiration.

Editor’s Note: We don’t know a coconut-octopus story, but octopus was sacred in Samoa, the Societies and the Marquesan Islands. In the Hawaiian creation chant, octopus is identified with Kaneloa. It was most important as a mythical figure in the Societies; in the creation it is said that "When land became land and it was firm, the great octopus, Tumu-ra’i-fenua, held on; one arm was south, one arm was north, one arm was east, and another arm was west; they held the sky down against the earth." The number ‘8’ and the octopus which it symbolized were prominent features, being the basis for the political division of all the Society Islands. (E.S.C. Handy, Polynesian Religion, Bishop Museum Bulletin 34, Honolulu 1927:129).
The great Stamp-Flap [see RNJ 5(4) 1991, page 64-5] is clearly not over yet. Chile has recently issued a new stamp showing three moai with topknots; behind them is a Chilean warship with flag prominently displayed. The lettering states: "Territorio Insular Chileno, Isla de Pascua".

EASTERN ISLAND FOUNDATION NEWS.

Report on the Mulloy Research Library

William Liller, Ph.D.

As reported in the March 1992 issue of RNJ (Vol.6,1) the architectural design of the Mulloy Library building was nearing completion. The final plans have now been received and approved by representatives of the three involved parties, the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, the Sociedad de Amigos de Isla de Pascua, and the Easter Island Foundation. The only remaining obstacle, we hope minor, is the procurement of funds by the Municipalidad de Hanga Roa and the Office of the Governor of Easter Island to be used to pay the all-Island construction crew. As soon as we receive the green light, the purchasing of the building materials on the continent (cement, electrical supplies, windows, etc.) will begin and shipment to the island will follow shortly thereafter.

Manuel Diaz of the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile continues to work on the copying and binding of the collection of articles on Easter Island to be found in the National Library. He has now delivered all the magazine articles, and is well into the copying of news-papers. Because most of this material is on microfilm, this latter task is made more difficult since a two-step process is required to make good quality copies.

Two related educational projects of the Easter Island Foundation are well underway: the first is helping pay for the re-printing of eight textbooks collected together under the title Programa Lengua Rapa Nui, first printed two years ago by the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Profesor Luis Gomez Macker, General Coordinator, and ethnolinguists Nancy and Robert Weber, "elaborators". These booklets, originally financed through the generous cooperation of a number of groups and individuals, have served to teach the Rapanui language to the children on the island. (See related item below).

The other project is the purchase of reference books for the library of the Hogar Estudiantil Rapanui, the hostel in Valparaiso where up to twenty Easter Island students of all ages live while attending school on the continent. Following an appeal made through la Dirección Hogar Pascuense by Catherine Paoa, several individuals and members of the Sociedad de Amigos de Isla de Pascua contributed books of various kinds. The Easter Island Foundation also donated—and will continue to donate—reference books including dictionaries, atlases, history and mathematics texts, and other books frequently needed by these students.

The Easter Island Foundation has many worthwhile projects, aside from our major one, the Mulloy Research Library, and occasionally special needs come to our attention. This time, it is school books for island children, written and produced by Nancy and Bob Weber of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. These privately printed books, in the Rapa Nui language, are already in short supply. The EIF wants to reprint them and make them available, free of charge, to the island children.

The EIF is asking for tax-deductible contributions, in any amount, so that we can reprint these schoolbooks. We thank those who have already contributed and hope many others can also assist with this important project.

Education goes beyond the immediate moment: who knows what or whom may be touched by it, and what changes may be made in the lives of the children? When a culture loses its ancient language, it loses more than words. It loses a way of life, a way of looking at the world, traditions, and a richness of understanding. We hope that you will think—as we do—that this project is an important one.

If you wish to help, please send checks to: Easter Island Foundation, 190 El Cerrito Plaza, Suite 171; El Cerrito, CA 94530. Indicate that your contribution is for the RAPA NUI SCHOOL BOOKS. Visa or Mastercard accepted.