

1994

Celibate Settlers and Forgetful Fishermen: A Reply to George Gill

Paul G. Bahn

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/rnj>

 Part of the [History of the Pacific Islands Commons](#), and the [Pacific Islands Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bahn, Paul G. (1994) "Celibate Settlers and Forgetful Fishermen: A Reply to George Gill," *Rapa Nui Journal: Journal of the Easter Island Foundation*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/rnj/vol8/iss2/4>

This Research Report is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Hawai'i Press at Kahualike. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Rapa Nui Journal: Journal of the Easter Island Foundation* by an authorized editor of Kahualike. For more information, please contact sheila.yeh@hawaii.edu.

Celibate Settlers and Forgetful Fishermen: A Reply to George Gill

Paul G. Bahn, Ph.D.

I read George Gill's response to my review of the Rapa Nui Rendezvous with the greatest interest. If I did miss or misunderstand any points made in the closing session I can only apologize and plead brain-overload after several days of non-stop listening. George's clarifications are most welcome and timely, and in tandem with Erika Hagelberg's mitochondrial DNA results (Hagelberg *et al.*, 1994) they lead me to feel we are steadily moving into a position which might satisfactorily incorporate all the data presently available.

I still have some quibbles, however. George insists that his theory hypothesizes no introductions (culturally or physically) by South American Indian females into the Rapa Nui population, and does not necessarily postulate the presence of Amerindian females in the first Polynesian canoe. Yet he emphasizes that, according to his theory, the Polynesians "came to inhabit and explore the coastal islands and the coast itself of South America" *over a period of years*. I find it very hard to believe that a bunch of settlers of any origin (let alone Polynesians!) would have no "close encounters" with Amerindian women during a stay of some years, and take none with them when they finally departed. This is what I was referring to when I remarked at the end of my review that Erika's data would have an impact on the theory. The total lack of South American mtDNA on Rapa Nui makes it clear that Amerindian women played no role at all, a fact I find very difficult to reconcile with George's scenario.

Secondly, I feel it is a bit sexist to claim that potsherds and textiles are "both products of female activity" while the skills to produce pressure-flaked lithics were male. As recent studies are highlighting, women produce stone tools (and even hunt) in many societies, while the association of ceramic production with women is by no means a universal pattern: in addition--as the *Engendering Archaeology* volume admits, albeit very discreetly and rather reluctantly (see Bahn 1992)--while weaving in Aztec Mexico was a woman's activity, men did it too; and in prehistoric California, acorn processing was performed "exclusively by women"--but men did it too!!

However, if one goes along with George's assumption that South American fishermen would not also be potters or weavers or even stone-tool specialists, it is odd that they should not have conveyed the concept of pottery or pressure-flaking to the islanders; after all, some would have us believe that they brought ideas in art and architecture with them, so

could they not also have pointed to the clay or obsidian on the island and said "Hey, back home they make nifty tools and objects from these. We can't tell you how exactly, but here's a rough idea"? In short, if any South Americans did make it to Rapa Nui, I still find it very strange that they did not bring even the concept of Peru's predominant cultural features with them. Did they all suffer from amnesia?

Which brings me to my final query. Not so long ago (*RNJ* 4[2], 1990, p.21), George claimed that the low frequency of characteristically Polynesian rocker jaws on the island was "most probably due to Founder Effect" (i.e., to random chance in the genetic composition of the original founders). Now, on the basis of other cranial traits, it is postulated instead that some Amerindians (men only, according to the mtDNA data) made it to the island. Could not the cranial traits also be due to the Founder Effect, or is this impossible? If it *is* impossible, then, as George points out, to account for the frequencies recorded the Amerindian men must have arrived early, when the Polynesian population was still low. In other words, if all these data are valid (and having no expertise whatsoever in cranial morphology or genetics, I have to accept what the specialists tell me), then it is "settlement hypothesis No.2" in George's terminology which would cover all the bases: an established East Polynesian population on Rapa Nui, affected at some fairly early stage by the arrival of a few lost South American men who were the origin of some very limited skeletal traits, and perhaps of some superficial analogies in art and artifacts between the island and the mainland, but who inexplicably failed to implant the most basic aspects of Amerindian culture.

Barring the discovery of fresh and startling data, I suspect that this scenario will be with us for some time as the new "establishment view". However, in archaeology it is useful to bear in mind that the more established the view, the broader the consensus, the more likely they are to be proved wrong eventually!

Bahn, P.G. 1992. Review of "Engendering Archaeology: Women and prehistory" (J.M. Gero and M.W. Conkey, eds) *Journal of Gender Studies* 1(3), May, 338-44.

Hagelberg, E., S. Quevedo, D. Turbon and J.B. Clegg. 1994. DNA from ancient Easter Islanders. *Nature* 369:25-26.

