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Dating of Ahu Structures within the La Pérouse Area

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The La Pérouse bay area houses several large ceremonial structures, areas with rock carvings, and other prehistoric sites. Hanga Ho'onu probably was favorable for settlements and provided a good harbor in prehistoric times. The area is still used as a fishing harbor and a few recently built houses are occasionally occupied by fishermen. At this location the large principal ceremonial center consisting of Ahu Heki'i and associated small platforms, is found. Other major ceremonial sites in the area are Ahu Ra'ai to the east and Ahu Te Pito te Kura to the west of Heki'i. Ahu Ra'ai may, for example, represent a secondary ritual center within this territorial unit.

A survey of archaeological sites and minor excavations of settlement and plantation sites have been performed in this area by Dr. Chris Stevenson with support from the Earthwatch Organization since 1995. The Kon-Tiki Museum joined the project in 1996 with the specified aim to perform test excavations at *ahu* structures within the project area in order to gather data on chronology and construction details of the structures. Our interest in ceremonial sites and early settlements on the island is to be seen as a continuation of earlier research performed by the museum. The intention of the joint project was to tie together the results from studies of settlement and plantation sites with studies of ceremonial sites. This was done in order to study the process of social development in the prehistoric Rapanui society, and to be able to get a more complete picture of what happened in this area in prehistoric times. Ahu Heki'i was probably once the primary ritual center in the La Pérouse area, which may have been situated in the center of a lineage territory. Remains of a large chiefly village with several house foundations (*hare paenga*) is situated just inland of Ahu Heki'i. Secondary ritual centers were probably located to the east and west of Heki'i.

In 1996, a test excavation was performed at Ahu Heki'i and its associated structures and in 1997 the goal was set for excavations of Ahu Ra'ai. During the 1997 excavations, a new field method was used to map the sites. This was done with the aid of an electronic total station and a Global Positioning System in order to be able to digitize the maps and the excavation data. The results from this excavation and other research performed by the museum are to be found soon on the museum's web site: www.media.uio.no/Kon-Tiki/. The results from the excavation at Ahu Heki'i are published in *Easter Island in Pacific Context: South Seas Symposium 1997* (Martinsson-Wallin and Wallin, 1998).

Several ¹⁴C and obsidian hydration dates have been performed from Ahu Heki'i (31-299), Ahu 31-286, and Ahu Ra'ai (31-19). The radiocarbon and obsidian hydration dates on samples recovered under the slanting plaza at Heki'i, indicate that a date of the initial structure at the site may be set to AD 1200-1390. The built-up west wing of Heki'i is indicated to be a late addition, probably as late as after AD 1600. Activities that may relate to planting are found close to the structure on the west side, and they are dated to AD 1300-1400. The settlement in front of Ahu Ra'ai is dated to the proto-historic and/or historic phases.

The dates of *ahu* structures in the La Pérouse area indicate that the initial phase of Ahu Heki'i and associated structures are slightly earlier than Ahu Ra'ai. Furthermore, the dates indicate that both structures were used continuously over time. This result supports the assumption that Ahu Heki'i was a primary ritual center and Ra'ai was a secondary ritual center.

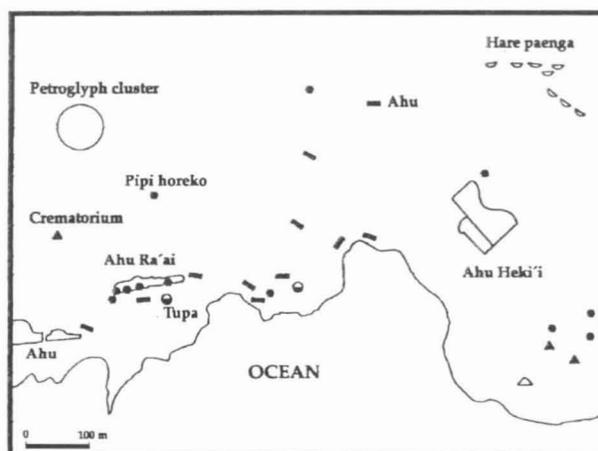


Table of ¹⁴C dates from Ahu Heki'i, Ahu 31-286 and Ahu Ra'ai..

| | | | |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Ua 11700 Trench 1 | Ahu Heki'i | BP 705 ± 45 | cal. age AD 1275-1367/ |
| Ua 11701 Trench 2 | Ahu Heki'i | BP 700 ± 45 | cal. age AD 1277-1368/ |
| Ua 11702 Trench 2 | Ahu Heki'i | BP 465 ± 45 | cal. age AD 1427-1496/ |
| Ua 11703 Trench 2 | Ahu Heki'i | BP 555 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1325-1422/ |
| Ua 11704 Trench 4 | Ahu 31-286 | BP 795 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1204-1265/ |
| Ua 13163 Trench 2-4 | Ahu Ra'ai | BP 135 ± 60 | cal. age AD 1680-1740/ |
| Ua 13164 Trench 5 | Ahu Ra'ai | BP 515 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1390-1470/ |
| Ua 13165 Trench 6 | Ahu Ra'ai | BP 570 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1310-1440/ |
| Ua 13166 Trench 7 | Ahu Ra'ai | BP 635 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1290-1400/ |
| Ua 13167 Trench 8 | Ahu Ra'ai | BP 645 ± 50 | cal. age AD 1290-1400/ |