

Evidence for Three Prehistoric Migrations to Easter Island

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For well over two centuries, scholars have debated the origin of the people of Easter Island—and with good reason. The island is far removed from all other inhabited places on earth and its people, at the time of European contact, were remarkably diverse. Carl Friedrich Behrens, a companion of Roggeveen, the island's European discoverer in 1722, noted that the islanders in general were 'brown like the Spaniards,' but that some were 'pretty black,' some 'quite white,' and others of a reddish complexion as if burnt by the sun. The English archaeologist Katherine Routledge, who spent several months on Easter Island in 1914, found Behrens' description 'still accurate' and the islanders 'very conscious of the variations.' 'When we were collecting genealogies,' she wrote, 'they were quite ready to give the colour of even remote relations' (Langdon 1975: 260, 265).

Solely on the basis of Behrens' account of the islanders' skin colors and Mrs Routledge's confirmation of its accuracy, one would scarcely expect the prehistoric Easter Islanders to have been descended from a single boat load of Polynesians who reached the island in the first millenium of the Christian era. Yet that is the basic assumption of most Polynesianists (e.g. Fischer 1993: 228) even though a Noble-Prize winning geneticist found evidence in 1971 that has made it highly unlikely. The geneticist was Professor Jean Dausset of Paris, co-discoverer of the Human Leucocyte Antigen system that governs the transplantation of human organs and tissues. In examining 49 Easter Islanders with no known non-Easter Island ancestors, he found 18 of them to be carriers of certain genes that are peculiar to Europeans and especially common among Basques (Thorsby and others 1973; Langdon 1975, 265-6).

All the Easter islanders with so-called Basque genes are descendants, through two wives, of a single European-looking man called Pakomio Maori who was photographed on Easter Island in 1886 when he was estimated to be about 70 years old (Langdon 1988:215-17). A few writers who have pondered the implications of Basque genes among reportedly pure-blooded Easter Islanders would like to believe that they are actually due to contact with Basque visitors of the post-Roggeveen era (Bellwood 1975, McCall 1975; Bahn and Flenley 1992:12). However, because Pakomio Maori also had red hair and blue eyes, that notion is historically and genetically untenable (Langdon 1988: 221). The only other possible explanation is that Easter Island's Basque genes derive from a Basque sailor of the Spanish caravel *San Lesmes* that disappeared in the eastern South Pacific in 1526. This was first suggested in the present author's book *The Lost Caravel* (Langdon 1975). It was repeated, with much additional supporting evidence, in *The Lost Caravel Re-explored* (Langdon 1988). In the interval, following a lively correspondence with him, Professor Dausset (1982) summarized the arguments contained in that correspondence in a book called *Nouveau Regard sur l'île de Paques*. However, many Easter Island specialists have apparently still not heard of the caravel *San*

Lesmes. So the purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the results of the author's research concerning it as well as to his other, complementary research.

The *San Lesmes* was one of seven ships that left Spain in July 1525 to obtain a cargo of spices in the East Indies. Four of the ships entered the Pacific from the Strait of Magellan on 26 May 1526, but six days later they were separated in a storm and the *San Lesmes*, with a complement of about 53 men, including Basques, was never seen again. In 1929, just over four centuries later, four ancient iron cannon were found on the reef of Amanu Atoll, about 800 km east of Tahiti. One was recovered, taken to Tahiti and presented to the local museum, but later lost. Forty years later, a group of French naval officers stationed at Hao Atoll for the French nuclear tests at Mururoa recovered two others after an article by the author (Langdon 1968) had alerted them to their existence. Those cannon were also taken to Tahiti. They were later identified as being of a type that went out of use in Europe about 1550 (Langdon 1975: 22; 1989a). This left no doubt that they had belonged to the *San Lesmes* as no other European ship is known or is likely to have been lost in the eastern South Pacific before that date. So what had become of the caravel's crew and of the caravel itself?

Descriptions of European looking Tahitians of Captain Cook's time (Langdon 1959: 17-19, 22) suggested to the author that some of the men might have reached Tahiti and intermarried with the local women, so evidence of various kinds was investigated to see if this could be verified.

After extensive research, it was concluded that the caravel had run aground at Amanu, probably in darkness; that the crew had refloated it by pushing their four heavy cannon overboard; and that they had then continued on a westerly course until reaching the island of Ra'iatea, about 200 km northwest of Tahiti. There they either repaired their ship or built another, after which many of them—but not all—set out with Polynesian companions to return to Spain by sailing southwestward for the Cape of Good Hope. However, this course brought them to the then unknown North Island of New Zealand, where, for some reason, they settled. Meanwhile, the men who had remained behind at Ra'iatea also took Polynesian wives, became chiefs, and established Hispano-Polynesian dynasties that lasted down to Captain Cook's time. But during that 250-year interval, some islanders of part Spanish descent were evidently drifted from Ra'iatea to Ra'ivavae in the Austral group, some 300 km southward, where they, in their turn, also intermarried with Polynesian women who had apparently originated in Futuna. Later again, some tri-hybrid Ra'ivavaeans evidently reached Easter island where intermarriage with resident islanders occurred yet again (Langdon 1975; Langdon and Tryon 1983; Langdon 1988).

Purely as a hypothesis, the arrival on Easter Island of people of part Spanish descent at some time between the disappearance of the *San Lesmes* and Roggeveen's voyage two centuries later plausibly explains why some present-day

islanders carry Basque genes. It also explains why Behrens found many Easter Islanders to be 'brown like the Spaniards,' some 'quite white,' and others of other complexions. Yet again, it explains why other early explorers thought many such islanders were decidedly European-looking, even to the extent of having red, chestnut, or cinnamon-colored hair. However, for the hypothesis to be correct, other aspects of Easter Island's prehistory must also have been quite different from the current orthodox view. In other words, other immigrants must also have reached Easter Island in prehistoric times.

Such immigrants could scarcely have come from anywhere but Polynesia or South America. Any others from Polynesia must also have reached their destination from the latitude of Ra'ivavae as no one has ever been known to sail directly to Easter Island from any more northerly point in Polynesia. On the other hand, South American Indians, with the help of the prevailing winds, could have reached Easter Island from almost anywhere on the western side of their continent. But whereas no one has ever seriously argued for two separate prehistoric migrations from Polynesia, evidence does exist for two separate ones from South America.

The principal evidence for the first migration is ethnobotanical. At the time of European Contact, Easter Island had—or can be assumed to have had—an impressive array of cultivated plants of American origin or likely American provenance (Langdon 1982; 1988b; 1989c; 1992, 1993). It also had a small breed of domestic fowl that was evidently introduced to Ecuador from Japan in about 3000 BC (Langdon 1989b). The cultivated plants of American origin or likely American provenance included the sweet potato, bottle gourd, manioc, banana and snapberry (all of which were reported by the earliest European explorers); the capsicum, 26-chromosome cotton, and pineapple (which the earliest European explorers found elsewhere in Eastern Polynesia although they were not reported on Easter Island until after the first botanical survey of 1911, plus the tomato and tobacco, which Paymaster Thomson of the USS *Mohican* found growing wild in secluded places in 1886. The sweet potato has virtually the same name in Rapanui as in some Quechua languages of Ecuador and Peru.

That the sweet potato, manioc, capsicum, gourd, soapberry and 26-chromosome cotton were cultivated in north-western South America long before the settlement of Easter Island was recently demonstrated by the discovery of remains of them in an archaeological site near the Casma Valley of northern Peru. The site was dated to about 1785 BC (Ugent, Pozorski and Pozorski 1986). On the other hand, the author concluded in a recent study that voyagers from the southern Philippines carried the banana across the Pacific to Ecuador in about 200 BC (Langdon 1991). These voyagers presumably travelled in a bamboo raft and planted sections of still-viable bamboos in Ecuador on their arrival. The evidence for this is:

(1) The term for bamboo in the Quechua and Philippines languages is virtually identical: for example, *pindug* in Ecuadorean Quechua; *bentung* in Mindanao.

(2) As there are no morphological differences between bamboos of the Old World genus *Bambusa* and the *Guadua* bamboos of tropical western South America, the *Guadua*

bamboos have recently been reclassified as belonging to the genus *Bambusa*. This assumes a common origin for both.

(3) The balsa rafts formerly employed on the Ecuadorean and Peruvian coasts closely resembled the bamboo rafts still in use in Taiwan and Viet Nam. The balsa rafts thus appear to have been modelled on Asian prototypes, balsa being used to make them because bamboo did not exist in South America when the Philippine immigrants arrived there.

The foregoing is of especial significance to Easter Island specialists for, if voyagers from the Philippines could reach Ecuador on a bamboo raft in about 200 AC, then their Ecuadorean descendants could surely have reached Easter on a similar balsa raft. Indeed, a study of the movements of American whalers of the 19th century indicates that a strong current, with accompanying winds, flows southwestward from the Galapagos Islands so that any wind powered vessel caught up in it is apt to be carried towards Easter Island as if on a conveyor belt (Langdon 1984:25). Captain Sir Thomas Belcher (1843:I:191), commander of HMS *Sulphur*, reported such an experience in 1838. In attempting to sail from the Galapagos to Callao, his ship was carried to within 400 miles of Easter Island before he could change course for his intended destination. In other words, a well-stocked balsa raft sailing between Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands in the early centuries of the Christian era could easily have been carried to Easter Island itself. Later, if boatloads of proto-Easter Islanders were occasionally drifted to the islands to the west with specimens of cultivated plants and chickens, then the distribution of those items in Eastern Polynesia at the time of European contact would be readily explained. The same applies to many items of vocabulary that are common to Eastern Polynesia but unknown in western Polynesia (Langdon and Tryon 1983:40-4).

Easter Island's second body of prehistoric American Indian immigrants were undoubtedly people of the Tiahuanaco culture of the Lake Titicaca basin. They probably reached the island in a boat made of *titora* reeds. Besides building the famous statues or *moai*, those immigrants were evidently responsible for the little-known, tower-like structures on Easter Island called *tupa* which are remarkably similar to the *chullpa* of the Andes. About two dozen Easter Island *tupa* are still in good condition. They and the *chullpa* have several features in common. The entrances of both are surmounted by large lintel stones and are so low that they can only be negotiated on hands and knees. Stone ramps, some never dismantled, were used in their construction. Internally, they are built in the form of corbelled vaults. All evidence indicates that they were used in rituals involving the display of corpses, mummies or bones of the dead (most Easter Island *tupa* are so little known even to the islanders, that human bones are still to be found in them). Finally, the word *tupa* is obviously a Polynesianised form of *chullpa* for the Polynesian languages have no oh or ll sounds and consecutive consonants cannot occur (Langdon, ms).

The word *chullpa* is known in both the Quechua and Aymara languages of the Andes. But the Quechua speakers almost certainly borrowed it from Aymara and the Aymara speakers almost certainly got it from an earlier people called Uru. The Uru are now extinct or nearly so. The little that is

known of their language has suggested to linguists that it is unrelated to both Aymara and Quechua. The people themselves are thought to have been associated with the Tiabuanaco culture which collapsed in about 1100 AD when Lake Titicaca evidently overflowed, inundating the surrounding countryside.

What an American archaeologist, John Hyslop (1977) calls the *chullpa* period of Andean culture began at much the same time. It lasted until the Spanish conquest. The *chullpa* of the earliest period are like the houses of the Uru and resemble the Easter Island *tupa*. This suggests that Easter Island *tupa* builders arrived in about 1100 A.D.

In the second edition of his Rapanui/Spanish dictionary, Father Sebastian Englert (1978:280) provides support for the notion that Uru culture was overthrown on Easter Island after Polynesian-speaking immigrants arrived from the west. Englert defines *Uru manu* as 'those who do not belong to the Miru tribe and who, for that reason, are looked upon as of less account.' In the first edition of his dictionary, Englert (1938: 135) defines the term 'those who do not belong to the royal tribe of the Miru through not being descendants of the first-born son of Hotu Matu'a'.

In summary, the author's research offers no support whatever for the orthodox view that prehistoric Easter Island was settled solely by Polynesians and in the early centuries of the Christian era. On the contrary, it provides strong support for Thor Heyerdahl's long-held claim that there were two American Indian periods of prehistoric culture and a later Polynesian period (Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961). In the light of this, the exciting significance of Easter Island in the prehistory of the Pacific basin as a whole will not be fully realised until the Polynesians-did-it-all theory is well and truly dead and buried.

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