

## Rapanui Wicker Figures and their Names

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We know from different sources that small human figures in bark-cloth as well as large wicker figures were used in ancient times on Easter Island. There are now only three bark-cloth images in two museums of the world--Boston and Belfast. Their ancient name is forgotten by the Rapanui. Of the large wicker figures, none survive and we know them only from descriptions made by voyagers and scientists. These two types of anthropomorphic figures are very interesting, not only as art objects, but also as attributes of the ritual practices of the Easter Islanders. Some features of the small bark-cloth figures are described in early publications and reports, including one by the author of this article.

I try to show in my short report the differences between the small bark-cloth figures and the larger wicker statues that now exist only in description, ritual use and name. All existing small *tapa* figures are ancient ethnographic objects brought from Easter Island in the first third of the 19th century. Bark-cloth figures are very original; not only in pose but also in decorative body ornament (tattoo), and grimacing expression (Heyerdahl 1976:264-7; pl.16-21). Earlier I have noted that bark-cloth figures were symbols of deceased family members (Fedorova 1990:36-8; 1993:150-8). This supposition is based on the sitting pose of the figures (bent legs and pulled-up knees) that are similar to flexed burials existing in many regions of the world, including New Zealand. Probably these are also known from Easter Island.

These figures were made soon after the death of a person and contained the spirit of the deceased. They could serve as a replacement for the cadaver in deification rites as a mummy or mannequin of bones used by some other Polynesians in such cases. Black painted glyphs on the figures' heads and bodies did not serve as a pattern for tattoo designs as, for example, a tattoo-master. These were, instead, personal tattoo signs of the dead person and marked his or her status or rank, merits and heroic deeds.

Polynesian tattoo designs were not only decoration but their certification (Ko Te Riria and Simmons 1989; Fedorova 1990), and were 'mediums' for connecting with ancestral spirits. They also helped to strengthen an ancestor's soul in the body of his descendants. The *pare* (*pu*) motif, tattooed on the abdomen (as the receptacle of human vitality) of men in past times, was probably a symbol of an embodied ancestor's soul. In this context ("something sacred") the word *pare* was used in Gonzalez' (1908:98) report: "On the vacant parts of the abdomen they depict two fearsome monstrosities [*rostris horrorosos*] which they call *pare*, and I believe they look on them with veneration, but they do not like one to touch them with the hand".

Both Routledge (1919:219) and Métraux (1940:244) identified this word as the abdomen tattoo design which is represented by an anthropomorphic face crowned by feathers. In the first short Rapanui wordbook from Gonzalez' report,

and united in the same group, are stone statues and large wicker figures (!); its author cited the word *pare* with the translation: "*Idolo pintado en el cuerpo*" (Cf. also "*el Pintado en el cuerpo*" and "*id. pintados en el cuerpo*" (Mellén Blanco 1986:113,311,340). It is strange that this word is placed with terms meaning both large stone statues and wicker figures. Anticipating this question, the English translator of Gonzalez' report gave a phrase with one meaning: "Idols with bodies painted"--but the vagueness of the original is not eliminated (Gonzalez 1908:109). We cannot exclude that, in Gonzalez' time, the Rapanui people had not yet forgotten the names of the small figures.

I think that small *tapa* figures--incarnations or vehicles of family ancestral spirits --were called *pare* also, as later were the designs on the abdomen (the word "*pu*" as an epithet could appear later). We can translate the expression *pare*, (*paré pu*) as "a guard, a guard on the abdomen". Englert (1948:483) gives also the word *pare* as a "figure of wood" in his dictionary.

We can find some proof in the vocabulary of other Polynesian people:

Mao. *pare*--"wreath ornament for the head, topknot; carved slab over the door of a *whare*; to ward off; a protection";

Tah. *pare*--"a fort, a fortification, a place of refuge; to avert, to defend";

Tuam. *koparepare*--"a safeguard, to protect";

Mangaia *pare*---"a crown, a headdress";

Marqu. *paé*--"a kind of headdress; *paé taka*--a tattoo; *paétuatua*--to revive"; Mangarevian *pare*--"a covering for a head, a cap";

Haw. *pale*--"to ward off, to defend, anything that defends or wards off, a guard; a convalescent person, i.e., one whose sickness is warded off; a hat"; *palepale*--"to defend off";

Aniwan. *pare*--"to ward off, to defend";

Aneityum *inpare*--"a defence (in-hom.prefix)".

We can also compare the word *pare* with the Maori word *para*, which means 1) "blood relative", 2) "a form of address by a child to its father"; cf. also *papara*--"true father (not like *papa*)". The vowels 'a' and 'e' sometimes are interchangeable with each other in Maori, Rapanui, and other Polynesian languages (Cf. Tregear 1891:XIV-XXIII).

Large wicker figures (3 meters and more in height) were made from twigs, reeds and *tapa*. A framework was sewn out of bark-cloth or covered by a piece of *tapa*, like a cloak. Easter Islanders and, after them, scientists, called these figures "*paina*". Routledge (1919:233) translated *paina* as an image, 'picture' but this word is connected with the Polynesian morpheme *paki*, *pa'i*--"to wrap up, to tie, clothing; revenge" (Cf. also Mao. *paki*, *papaki*--"a kilt, apron clothing"; *paki-paki*--"a cloak with an ornamental border";

*paiera, paihera*--“a bundle”; Tah. *pa'i*--“to wrap up, to tie, a bundle”; *paia*--“full of food”; *paipai*--“to drive a *ti'i* (a demon) out of a person”; Haw. *pa'i*--“to tie, a bundle, a package; to tie up, such a bundle”; *hoo pa'i*--“to punish, to seek revenge; punishment, revenge”.

Lacking original figures in the museums, we need to research the early reports of different authors such as

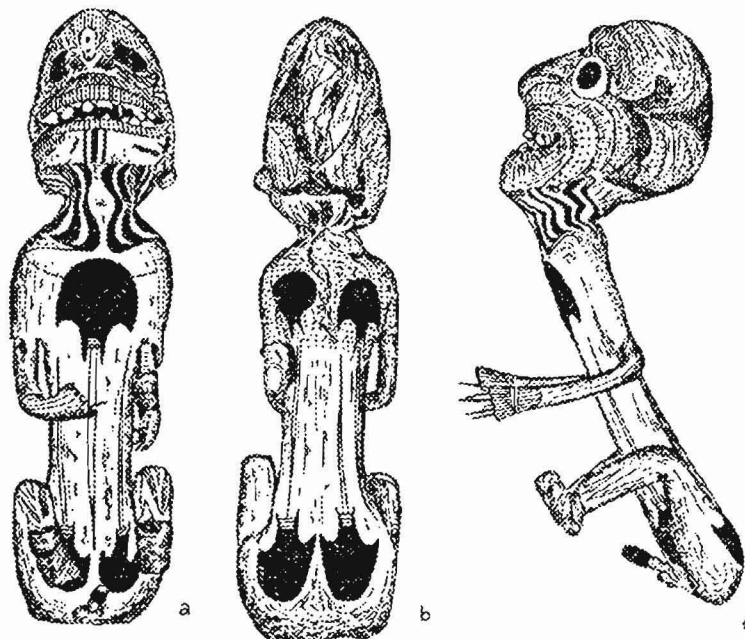


Image made of bulrushes tied together with fiber bands and covered with *tapa*. Height 46 cm. a, front; b, back; c, side (Peabody Museum, Cambridge).

Gonzalez, La Pérouse, and Métraux. In spite of Loumala's (1973) suggestion that all large figures were called *paina*, a note by Routledge (1919:233) is more reasonable: she states that Gonzalez and his companions in 1770 had not actually seen a *paina* but another type of figure. When we compare the evidence of 18th century reports and those of the later periods (of our century) we conclude that large wicker figures were made in different ways. There were at least two types, distinguished by use and preparation.

1) The first type--a figure stuffed with dry grass and straw and covered with bark-cloth looked like that had been seen and described by the Spanish and which we could call *kopeka*: “They have another effigy or idol clothed and portable which is about four yards [*varas*] in length (one *vara* is nearly a yard); it is, properly speaking, the figure of Judas, stuffed with straw or dried grass. It has arms and legs, and the head has coarsely figured eyes, nostrils, and mouth; it is adorned with a black fringe of hair made of rushes, which hangs half-way down the back. On certain days they carry this idol to the place where they gather together, and judging by the demonstrations some of them made, we understood it to be the one dedicated to enjoyment, and they name it *Copeca*” (Gonzalez 1908:95). In different Spanish documents published by Mellén Blanco (1986:113, 311, 340), the

Rapanui word *copeca* means “*Idolo de pacha*, or *Idolo vestido*, or *idolo ficticios*”. Another proof that the figure seen by the Spaniards was a man of straw, is seen in the name “Judas”: Englert (1970:69-70) states that Judas was a name of stuffed figures, burnt at Holy Week. *Kopeka* in Rapanui means “revenger”.

Sixteen years later, M. Delangle (of the La Pérouse expedition) saw another idol of this kind, placed near an *ahu*:

“*Nous trouvames auprès de la dernière [platform] une espèce de mannequin de jonc qui figuroit une statue humaine de dix pieds de hauteur; il étoit recouvert d'une étoffe blanche du pays, la tête de grandeur naturelle, et le corps mince, les jambes dans des proportions assez exactes; à son cou pendoit un filet en forme de panier, revêtu d'étoffes blanches: il nous parut qu'il contenoit de l'herbe. A côté de ce sac, il y avoit une figure d'enfant, de deux pieds de longueur, dont les bras étoient en croix et les jambes pendantes. Ce mannequin ne pouvoit exister depuis un grand nombre d'années; c'étoit peut être un modèle des statues qu'on érige aujourd'hui aux chefs de pays*” (La Pérouse 1899:81).

Large wicker figures of this type were different from *paina* and probably more characteristic of the 18th century with its frequent tribal wars that ended in cannibal feasts. Huge idols were erected, I think, in the place where a man had been slain and/or eaten. They stood until revenged, as also occurred on Tonga, for example. If the body of a victim was found, that was probably a reminder of a revenge. In such cases, as Routledge (1919:229) wrote, the naked body of a slain man had been seated in a ‘rude chair’ made from pieces of old statues. One man kept the body from falling and two others sat behind and chanted songs to aid in the revenge. The figures seen by the French were probably made in memory of a woman and her child who were murdered by cannibals. One of Routledge's informants remembered a similar effigy, raised in memory of a woman (or girl). It stood near her house, but from time to time it was carried to a hill where people gathered for a mourning ceremony (ibid.:234). In the 19th century in New Zealand one could often see carved wooden figures of chiefs near roads; these were images of those who died during the way. Some were covered with cloth, like a cloak (Mallery 1972, II:525-6).

2) The second type of large wicker figure is the ‘*paina*’ figure, known from 20th century descriptions. These were made of twigs and reeds, covered closely with *tapa*, but formed conically and hollow inside. *Paina* figures had a hollow body held straight with vertical sticks. A framework was sewn with white *tapa* and may have been painted in yellow, a sacred color. A big round head was made of reeds, twigs and *tapa* and had an open mouth so that a man could climb into the figure and, standing inside, see and speak through the mouth. The top of the head was surmounted by a circlet of frigate bird feathers. The eyebrows were made of

black feathers and the eyes were painted. *Paina* had tattoo markings painted on it but these were not personal markings. The *paina* only symbolized the sex of a represented human being--male or female. Plaited *paina* was an obligatory attribute of great memorial festivals and were organized sometime after the final funeral rite. The festival had the name '*paina*' also.

*Paina* figures served as an original 'chair' or tribune for the organizer of the festival (a son or brother of the deceased). He climbed into the figure and through a hole out in the head spoke with guests. This kind of figure lacked hands and legs because these were functionally unnecessary.

*Paina* was established near the funeral platform/*ahu* where the dead were buried. The festival lasted for days and ended with a feast and distribution of food, mainly cocks. It was not obligatory to make a new *paina* for every

commemorative festival, because a wicker figure in one place could be used by neighbors over a period of months. It was carried from one place to another, as needed (Routledge 1919:233; Métraux 1940:343-5; Englert 1948:302-4).

*Paina* was not the embodiment of an actual deceased person but probably was a symbol of a memorial ceremony in general (Fedorova 1993:161). In many islands of Polynesia a similar funeral repast coincided with raising a wooden carved tomb-figure which personified a dead person (Rapanui monumental grave stones, *moai maea* were established many years after the death of the person they honored). For example, Cook had seen a similar image at Tahiti: "From hence we proceeded farther and met a very extraordinary curiosity call'd Mahuwe [Maui]...and said by the Natives to be used in their Heiva's or publick entertainments, probably as punch is in a Puppet show. It was the figure of a man made in basket work 7½ feet high and every (other) way large in proportion, the head was ornamented with four nobs resembling stumps of horns three stood in front and one behind, the whole of this figure was cover'd with feathers,

white for the ground upon which (black) imitating hair and the Marks of tattou, it had, on a maro or cloth about its loins, under which were proofs of its being intended for the figure of a man" (Cook 1955:111-2).

So we can suggest that small bark-cloth images (*\*pare*) were a personification of a dead relative and an attribute of his deification rite. The great *paina* figures, according to islanders' information, were symbols of funeral feasts in memory of the dead. *Ahu* platform and nearby *paina* were a 'tribute' of that dramatic performance.

But the more ancient great figures called *kopeka*, described by 18th century navigators, were connected with rites of revenge and served as a reminder of a victim.

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Images covered with *tapa* are painted with designs that represented tattoo designs. Fingers and toes are made of wood splinters. Total height 39 cm. (Peabody Museum, Cambridge.)

