

REPLY TO GUY

by Steven Roger Fischer

It is most kind of the editorial board of the *RNJ* to allow this opportunity of a reply, as a few things in Guy's article do warrant comment, I believe.

1. There is nothing "exceptional" in the disagreement between my first sign and Barthel's first sign – I had the great fortune of having the original "Santiago Staff" to work with, whereas Barthel was using photographs. (Barthel finally had physical access to the Staff in 1957, by which time his book was already in press in Hamburg; on his return to Hamburg in 1958, when the book was published, it was too late to correct such photograph-based mistakes.)

2. With the original Staff standing on its thick end, leaned to one side, my thumb automatically fell before the "first sign"; unlike Guy, I did not have to use a broomstick. The worn-away "thumb mark" on the Staff has defaced a number of *rongo* signs. Thus this mark postdates the Staff's possible earlier use as a *kouhau* – that is, as a battle staff. The "thumb mark" came from someone (or even various persons) holding the staff in such a way, over many years, that the thumb always rested alongside one given sign: the sign Barthel misread from a photograph because this sign, too, is partially defaced.

3. Guy curiously alleges I provided no reference for Barthel's endorsement of my successful decipherment of the three inscriptions: the "Santiago Staff," "Small Santiago" and "Honolulu 3629." Guy even cites Robinson, who also alleged, in print, that I never published Barthel's endorsement. However, Robinson and I exchanged several emails about *rongo* back in 1999, at which time Robinson quoted to me from my book *Glyphbreaker* (New York: Copernicus/Springer Verlag, 1997), a copy of which he apparently owned. On p. 222 of *Glyphbreaker* there appears the paragraph: "More moving, however, was the letter that arrived from Thomas S. Barthel in Germany. For over forty years the dean of international *rongo* research, Thomas now wrote in his customary terse fashion that "with your basic triad (with ure ["phallus"]) in the sense of ai ["copulated with"]) there can no longer be any doubt; for I, G, T ["Santiago Staff," "Small Santiago Tablet," "Honolulu 3629"] therefore unlimited endorsement." As Robinson either possessed or had at his disposal a copy of my book *Glyphbreaker* he doubtless had read this endorsement by Barthel that is published in the book. Yet he chose to write in his later book that I had never published Barthel's endorsement.

At present I choose to speculate neither on why Robinson wrote what he himself surely knew to be false, nor on why Guy might wish to repeat the falsehood.

4. Philippi's "thick end" was simply incorrect. I was specifically looking for this when I was working with the original Staff in Santiago, aware of Philippi's description. But then I discovered that Philippi had erred. It is for this reason that I wrote "thin end". I did not misunderstand Philippi; nor was my "thin" an error. By inspecting the original "Santiago Staff" I was able to correct the error.

5. It is a somewhat dubious method Guy is employing in this article: searching for a "beginning" using text alone – including printed, standardized texts redrawn by those who were using photographs and not the original Staff. When I was working with the original Staff in Santiago on 26-27 January 1993, with the kind permission of the then-Director of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Luis F. Capurro Soto, I became aware of the importance of noting the Staff's many wear marks in order to ascertain just how the Staff might have been used and/or held. It was actually the physical – not the textual – inspection that enabled the discovery of where the Staff's "first line" lay.

Yet the question of a "textual beginning" appears to be irrelevant. This is because with this particular text, the "Santiago Staff," we are dealing with many hundreds of simple copulations and their offspring: Sign A couples with sign B and the result of the coupling is sign C. (This obtains in most instances, but not all, as there are sometimes multiples of A, B and/or C as well.) With so many formulaic repetitions, looking for a "textual beginning" – as if the text were a coherent chronological narrative – is like listening for "the sound of one hand clapping."

There is an unfortunate epilogue. To write "neither Fischer nor Barthel are to be trusted" not only shockingly abuses professional standards, but makes one question Guy's motive for writing the article in the first place. My own contributions aside, it is imperative I defend the reputation of the late distinguished Prof. Dr. Thomas S. Barthel – who was one of Germany's most eminent scholars, a highly esteemed Professor of Ethnology and Director of the Institute of Ethnology at the prestigious University of Tübingen from 1959 until his retirement as Emeritus Professor in 1988. Easter Island Studies owes Thomas S. Barthel, a towering figure of the 'Old School' who died in 1997, an immense debt. (See *RNJ* 11(1997):99-100.) Every scholar in our field would only agree that Barthel was one of the most professional and reliable scholars ever to write about Easter Island.

It is something more than sad to see Jacques Guy inviting himself out of the professional community in this rude manner.

Waiheke Island, New Zealand