

✉ I would like *RNJ* readers to know what is going on down here [on Easter Island], in the real island. It is complex indeed, but there are still so many mistakes and prejudices because the only way to get a profound knowledge is to be here for some time, and with an open mind and open eyes.

I am sorry to return to the Rapa Nui-Rapanui controversy, but there has been no response to Fischer's statements (*RNJ* 7,4:73-5), particularly concerning the political background. Of course, it is my personal opinion as a Chilean resident (not expatriate, see *RNJ* 8,2:53) but I will try to be more impartial.

What does it really mean to make a final decision about the right name of the island? What does it mean to say "Is the island Polynesian or Chilean?" What about both at the same time? Yes, it is Chilean Polynesia. Concerning the 'right' spelling of the name, who are "we the people" to decide anything about the island? Have you ever asked the islanders? As you know, they call themselves Rapanui, but write Rapa Nui in all their papers. Have you heard about the "new" Council of Elders? You will read Consejo de Ancianos o Jefes Rapa Nui... "ente representante de los derechos ancestrales del pueblo Rapa Nui", "*Te mau hatu o Rapa Nui*." Do you need more arguments?

The point is that the academic or political problem is such a distant thing from real people. It's why they don't accept academic conventions or political impositions by outsiders. In "Rapanui" words, "*ese es tu problema socio*". Incidentally, some Rapanui have been working on their own linguistics. Whatever the results, it will be their position. People are not artifacts to be labeled for the "good savage" museum.

Maybe they called themselves "*tepitotehemuans*", I am not sure if they ever write this name in *rongorongo*, but now the name Rapa Nui is more common than Isla de Pascua, even in official papers.

There is quite a different political scenario down here, mainly due to the Chilean government's position for a very important participation of the Rapanui community, through the "Comisión de Desarrollo de Isla de Pascua", something derived from the new *Ley Indígena*, which includes a special chapter for the community "Rapa Nui o Pascuense". Maybe some people want to see it in English, French, or German instead of Spanish, but again, "*ese es tu problema socio*". It is not a problem for the islanders: they do not discuss Chilean sovereignty, but land management. There are many problems to solve but we are the people to manage them. We only need a sincere will to help, from a real and deep knowledge of the process.

By the way, Fischer's (*RNJ* 7,4:74-5) translation to Rapanui was not understood by the islanders to whom I showed it; I explained it to them in Spanish and their Rapanui translation was different.

Sincerely yours,

*Jose Miguel Ramirez, Jefe Provincial,  
CONAF, Isla de Pascua,  
Administrador Parque Nacional Rapa Nui.*

✉ The Untold Story of Those Thomson Plates

All good journalists know that their stories should be written in such a way that, in the event of a space shortage, they can be cut from the bottom and will still make sense. For me, a former journalist, old habits die hard. Thus, when the *RNJ* computer went on the blink recently and lopped off the last four (typewritten) pages of my letter 'The origins of the illustrations in Thomson's report of 1891' (*RNJ* 8:49-51), the hassled editor apparently didn't even notice the difference. I take this as a compliment. Even so, to amplify several points that were meant to be amplified and to enable me take up a comment made in an editorial note, I would like to summarize what was left out.

I stated on p. 50 that, for reasons that would appear, William J. Thomson, paymaster of USS *Mohican* on its visit to Easter Island in 1886, evidently took all the photographs of archaeological subjects used to illustrate his famous report published in 1891, and that Lieut. W. E. Safford and a medical officer, H. W. Whitaker, seemingly took the others. My reasons did not appear. They are: (1) the literature indicates that Thomson himself took all the archaeological photographs, there being no other likely candidates; (2) at least one photograph in an album of *Mohican* photographs in the Sacred Heart Fathers Archives in Rome is captioned as having been taken by Whitaker, according to information I had from Grant McCall of the University of New South Wales, Sydney, several years ago; (3) the *Mohican's* surgeon, George H. Cook, twice refers to Whitaker's inquiries about the Easter Islanders in his report in the Smithsonian Institution's annual report for 1899; and (4) there are Easter Island photographs in one of several albums that Safford presented to the National Museum (Smithsonian Institution), and five photographs were attributed to him in an article that one C. O. Sandberg published in 1912 in the *Pan-American Union Bulletin*, vol 35:897-910. Safford, then a botanist with the US Department of Agriculture, had apparently lent the photographs to Sandberg. One of them was reproduced with my letter. Although 26 years old in 1912, it was published under the confusing caption 'Present day inhabitants of Easter Island'.

In another passage omitted from my letter, I said that 23 of the photographic plates used to illustrate Thomson's report were not attributed to anyone, but the authorship of only one was contentious. This was plate XXIII, an unsigned sketch captioned 'Pictured slabs taken from the ancient stone-houses at Orongo'. It had become contentious because Alan Drake, in an article in *RNJ* 7:49-52 that prompted my letter, had claimed that one of the slabs depicted in the plate included the representation of a 'fanciful creature' that was 'distinctly uncharacteristic' of Easter Island art. He also suggested that the slab might never have existed because no one had since been able to 'recover' it.

I said in the published part of my response that all the slabs pictured in the plate seemed to have been accounted for when they were presented to the museum in 1887.

In the omitted part, I also said (1) that the original drawing for the plate was undoubtedly done by Anton Ayasse of the *Mohican*; (2) that two versions of that drawing were held in the National Museum archives, Washington; (3) that Drake's 'fanciful' creature seemed to me to be a seal, or what the Easter Islanders call a *pakia*; and (4) that, according to Sebastian Englert's 1978 dictionary, there is a *Caleta de Hanga pakia*, or Seal Cove, not far from Hangaroa. In other words, it is my view that the slab depicts a creature that was/is known to the Easter Islanders, but is not seen very often.

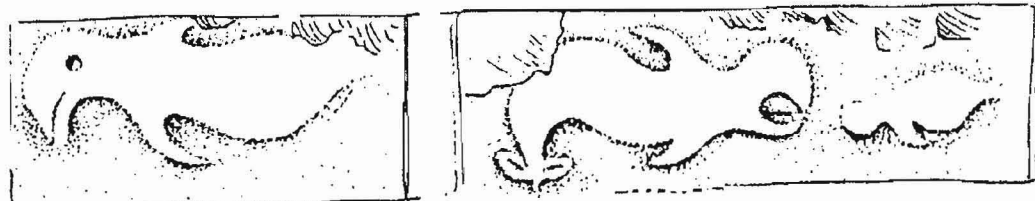
Editor Georgia Lee, not realizing that I had made points (3) and (4) said in an editorial note that the 'strange creature' looked to her like 'a cross between a penguin and a dugong' and that she regarded it with 'extreme suspicion' both because there was no comparable figure in 'the entire corpus of Rapa Nui's rock art' and because it was not on the slabs that the National Museum had returned to Easter Island in recent years. Were there more decorated slabs still in the Smithsonian? she asked.

The pictured slabs used to illustrate Thomson's article were said to be items #128373 to 128376 in the National Museum. I have written to the Smithsonian in the hope of finding out if the museum's catalog indicates what was on each slab and what became of them all. Meanwhile, does anyone know when seals were last seen, or have ever been seen, on Easter Island? To me, their appearance at the island would suggest that a stream of the Humboldt Current was flowing much further to the west than usual, indicating an anomaly in the world's weather pattern.

Two other points. First, if all academics were as gracious as Alan Drake was in responding to my letter, I have no doubt that human knowledge would advance much faster than it usually does. Secondly, four of the bibliographical references in my truncated letter, namely Cooke (1899), Goode (1889), Longley (1890) and Thomson (1891), related to annual reports of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution published in those years. Ivins (1969) referred to a book by William M. Ivins, Jr. *Prints and Visual Communication*, published in New York.

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*Editor's Note: We thank Langdon for being so understanding, and apologize for the missing text which was eaten by our computer. Two replaced motherboards, a malfunctioning scanner and one hard disk later, we hope our problems henceforth will all be little ones.*



Two of the 17 *paenga* from the House of Aio. The bas relief designs were carved so they could only be seen from the inside. The upper edges of these stone blocks have been damaged, apparently by attempts to obliterate the designs.

### Response to Langdon:

In regard to the odd image under discussion which Langdon suggests may be a seal (*pakia*), I would like to mention that we have recorded 23 petroglyphs of seals—or creatures we have identified as seals—on the island. One is incised in the wall of a cave, one is at Vai Atare, four are from Anakena, and 17 from a site known as the House of Aio, inland from La Perouse Bay. The latter are all carved in bas relief on the inside surfaces of large *paenga* stones that form a *hare paenga* foundation. One of the images at Anakena also is in bas relief, carved on the side of a large stone bowl.

These designs have been identified by islanders as *pakia* although some have whale-like tails. A legend tells of the god Tangaroa coming to the island in the guise of a seal.

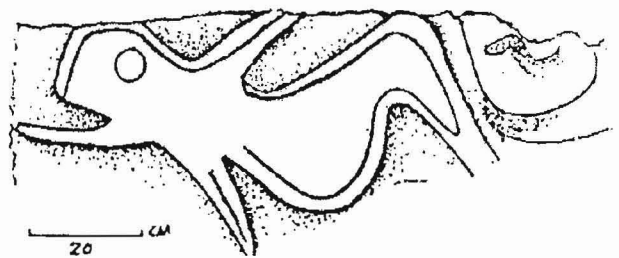
A tooth from a leopard seal was found on the north coast (Smith 1961:263) and seal bones were excavated at Anakena (J.M. Ramirez, personal communication 1988). The arrival of a seal must have been a rare event, although not unheard-of in Polynesia. Emory (1947:9) reports on a small *marae* in the Tuamotus that was built specially for seals "which appeared very rarely."

A few of the *pakia* designs are included below so readers can make their own determination as to how close they come to the oddity shown in Thomson's report. I personally would like to see the actual house slab as the drawing might not reflect accurately what is really there.

Georgia Lee

### References:

- Emory, Kenneth. 1947. *Tuamotuan Religious Structures...* Bishop Museum Bulletin 191.  
 Smith, Carlyle S. 1961. Two Habitation Caves. *Archaeology of Easter Island: Reports of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific*. pp. 181-219. New Mexico.



A *pakia* design in double outline and bas relief on a large stone bowl, Anakena. The bowl has been broken in recent years.