

Ich möchte mich insbesondere bei Mag. Veronika Knoll für ihre Unterstützung beim Abfassen des Manuskripts bedanken. Ebenso danke ich auch Dr. Thomas Schwaha, Dr. Evelyne Puchegger-Ebner und Mag. Doris Lidauer für ihre Hilfe.

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The Rapanui *rongorongo* Schools

Some Additional Notes

Tatiana Popova

1

In his research, Rjabchikov (2012a, 2012b) has assembled and interpreted various data on *rongorongo* schools of Easter Island. In particular, he offers the meaning of the Old Rapanui *te pahu* "scribe." In reference to this, let us investigate several names of Rapanui scribes collected by Routledge (1914–1915) during her expedition on the island.

Firstly, it is the name of Pau ko Ohio, a scribe from the royal residence of Anakena (the Miru tribe). Here the term *pau* means "scribe." The name of another scribe, Tuu Hiohio, from the Miru tribe, could be a variant of the previous one. Actually, the word "Tuu" is an ethnicon, it is the name of the Western union of tribes headed by the Miru group.

Secondly, Ko Viko a pau was the name of a scribe from Ovahe, the Miru territory. The particle *ko* in many instances precedes proper names. So, "Viko" is a personal name, and the term *pau* bears on his profession, the scribe.

Thirdly, the next scribes lived in the eastern part of the island: Pau Ta Ohi from an important religious centre, Akahanga, Pahu Ika from the Uriohai tribe, and Pau ko Teatea from the Tupa-hotu tribe. The same term *pau* (*pahu*) meaning "scribe" precedes the names. In the third case, the name "Teatea" is introduced by the article of the proper names (*ko*). Besides, Tea-a-tea was an instructor of the tau script, a cursive version of the writing; he was the foster-father of Tomenika, a member of the Tupa-hotu and one of last specialists on the *rongorongo* (Routledge 1919: 252). In Manuscript E (the Rapanui native book of legends) Tomenika's original name "Vaka a Teatea" is written (Barthel 1978: 294). Hence, "Teatea" was his patronymic. Therefore, "Tea-a-tea" was the incorrect spelling of the name "Teatea." Thus, the archaic term *te pahu* has been translated correctly (cp. Rapanui *haka-pau* "to pierce," Hawaiian *pahu* "to strike," Penrhyn *pahu* "to beat," Tuamotuan *pau* "cut," Samoan *fasi* "to strike" and Tongan *pahu* "to beat soundly," *papahu* "to strike each other").

2

Métraux (1940: 390) testifies that in *rongorongo* schools students learned to make string figures “each of which was associated with a chant that they must memorize.” I would like to offer two examples of that practice.

2.1 The String Figure *E rua nga uka*

The string figure *E rua nga uka* (Campbell 1971: 432; N. O. B. 50) is represented in Fig. 1:

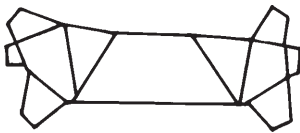


Fig. 1

The accompanying chant is as follows:

E rua nga uka Two girls
Tetere po: Went at night:
Ko Tuhia, (They were) *Tuhia*
Ko Romi renga. (And) *Romi renga.*

(Another version of this song has been published in Barthel 1962: 843.)

Looking at this figure, one can distinguish two triangles in it. This symbol corresponds to glyph **29** *rua* (notice that Rapanui *rua* means “two”), here and below I use the readings of the Easter Island writing system per Rjabchikov (1987: 362 f., Fig. 1). I suspect that the children in *rongorongo* schools made this string game initially, and then they carved glyphs **29** *rua* many times. Later they wrote different versions of this chant.

The corresponding text is to be found in the record of the Great Santiago Tablet (Hv 9–10); the drawings here and below are taken from Barthel (1958). This specimen belonged to the school of King Nga Ara (Rjabchikov 2012b: 17).

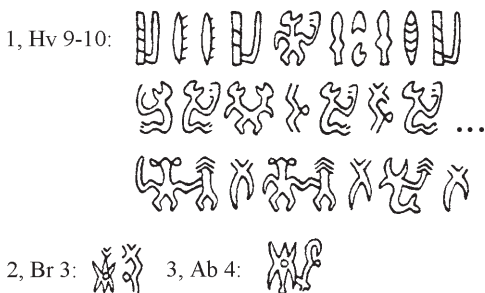


Fig. 2

The inscription (see Fig. 2, fragment 1) reads in the following manner:

4-4 46-46 4-4 6 73 29 73 33 4-4 6-6 6-6 50 6 70
 6 ... 6 33-59 2 6 33-59 2 11 33 2

Atiati: naanaa, atiati: ha e rua e ua, atiati: haha, haha, Hi ha, Pu ha ... Ha uka HINA, ha uka HINA, paka ua HINA.

Write: darkness, write: two girls went in darkness, write: (they) went in darkness, (they) went in darkness, Hi went in darkness, Pu went in darkness ... (The first) girl went in darkness, (the second) girl went in darkness, (and) the girls went.

Rapanui *uka* “girl” was written as *ua* and *uka*. It might be good to point out that the sound *k* could be missing in some Rapanui words. Moreover, in two variants of Rapanui prayer for rains the words *uka* and *ua* are interchangeable (Felbermayer 1963; Métraux 1940: 330). Glyphs **2** *hina* are determinatives in this context (cp. Mangarevan *ahine*, Rapanui *hahine* “woman”). Old Rapanui *ha, haha* means “to grope,” cp. Rapanui *haha* “to grope.”

The name “Romi renga” means “[The] beautiful [star] that is covered” (cp. Mangarevan *romiromi* “to cover,” Rapanui *romi* “to cover; to hide,” and Rapanui *pua* “to cover”). Fedorova (1982: 52) has read the combination of glyphs **7 70** as (*h*)*etuu Pu* “the star Aldebaran” on the Aruku-Kurenga Tablet (Br 3). Old Rapanui *tuu* means “star,” cp. Rapanui *hetuu* and Rarotongan *’etuu* “star.” This text is presented in fragment 2:

7 70
Tuu Pu(a)
 Aldebaran

The dates of the heliacal rising of Aldebaran were, for instance, June 13, A.D. 1650 and June 16, A.D. 1851. On the other hand, the Old Rapanui name of the winter month, *maru* (June), means “shadow” according to the “Apai” chant (Rjabchikov 1993: 134). It is the clue to the meaning “Covered (celestial body)” of the name of Aldebaran. It is clear that during the season this bright star was often invisible because of rainy clouds.

The name “Tuhia” reads as *Tuu Hia* “The star Hia.” This exact record is presented on the Tahua Tablet (Ab 4), see fragment 3:

7 50
Tuu Hi(a)
 The star Hia

This name means “The Star of the Sunbeams” (cp. Maori *hi* “to dawn,” and *hihi* “rays of the sun”). It is one of designations of Venus. For example, on June 16, A.D. 1851, this planet was in the eastern sky, and

Aldebaran rose nearby just before the dawn. I have used the computer program RedShift Multimedia Astronomy (Maris Multimedia, San Rafael, USA) to watch heavenly bodies above Easter Island.

2.2 The String Figure *Hanga Varevare*

The string figure *Hanga Varevare* (Campbell 1971: 432; N. O. B. 51) is depicted in Fig. 3:

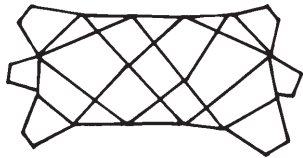


Fig. 3

Looking at this figure, one can distinguish two quadrangles, each of them including two crossed lines. The quadrangle corresponds to glyph 47 *ava*, and the cross corresponds to glyph 41 *are*. The combination of these glyphs reads *Vare*. Two groups of the symbols read *Varevare*. In my opinion children in *rongorongo* schools made this string game at first and then they carved glyphs 47 41 *vare* many times. Later different versions of this chant were written.

The corresponding text is presented in the record of the Aruku-Kurenga Tablet (Bv 12). This specimen also belonged to the school of King Nga Ara (Rjabchikov 2012b: 22).



Fig. 4

The inscription (see Fig. 4) reads in the following way:

16 68 14 21 11 18 24-24 5 47 41 17 1

Kahi honui hau; ko poki te Aiai-atua-Vare-te-Tiki.

The king “The Tuna Fish” (Tangaroa); (his) child Tuki-Hakahe-Vari-Tiki (Rjabchikov 1996).

It must be emphasised that the bay *Hanga Varevare* (here Rapanui *hanga* means “bay”) was associated with the ceremonial platform *Ahu Orongo* (*Ahu o Rongo*). The statue *Pou Hakanononga* from this site is preserved in the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels. The term *hakanononga* denotes a fishing ground to angle the tuna fish and other valuable fish species (Ayres 1979: 72). Studying photos of this monument, I have recognised several drawings of fishhooks on it. The statue’s name sounds therefore convincingly. On the other hand, Tuki-Hakahe-Vari was a son of Tangaroa, the god of

the sea and fisherman, according to a Rapanui myth (Métraux 1937: 46 f.). It follows that the bay *Hanga Varevare* was dedicated to the god Tuki-Hakahe-Vari. This hero had great supernatural power, according to the myth, and he was probably another god of the fishermen. It is worth noting that the sounds *e* and *i* are interchangeable in some Rapanui words. There are therefore good reasons to believe that at least several preserved archaic string figures were used as mnemonic resources in *rongorongo* schools.

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