

## POLYNESIAN STONE SCULPTURE

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To introduce this essay we present two Marquesan images, as an instance of a feature in Polynesian sculpture common to many art — dependence upon the medium, direct or indirect, and on the efficiency of tools. The wood sculpture shown here for example is a human image still manifestly the tree-trunk from which it was hewn, while the statue in stone could have been sculptured in any dimension, yet follows the solid uprightness of the wooden prototype. It is a feature to be expected in what we are given to calling primitive art, a term, as often betokening crude tools as describing what was achieved with them.

Of particular significance in Polynesia was the region's lack of resources for clay modelling, whereby sculpture had to be by carving, graving or hammer-dressing, and without inspiration from forms in the more freely plastic art. Furthermore, as we shall see, there was limitation in tree-trunk dimensions, even where, as in Polynesia, sizeable timber grew readily. Fortunately in one area where timber was really scarce, stone — and very suitable stone at that — was abundant; we think that one such Polynesian area of notable stone sculpture will readily occur to readers.

### Marquesas Islands

In the Marquesas group it was Hivaoa, the southern major island that was best endowed with that softish, even-grained tuff which can be readily carved with stone tools, and it was here that stone sculpture was best developed; moreover its style prevailed throughout the group, not because the other Marquesan islands followed Hivaoa stone sculpture, but, as Linton observed (1925, p. 74), because they all followed the primary manner of wood-carving.

Our first-illustrated stone sculpture is of near-cylindrical mass outline, its legs and arms still retaining the shape of the block from which they were hewn in the same way that wooden images retain the tree-trunk form. The features of the head follow the tradition of wood-carving, being somewhat stereotyped, but in fact there was plenty of variation in detail, not just from island to island but as the individual work of one or another

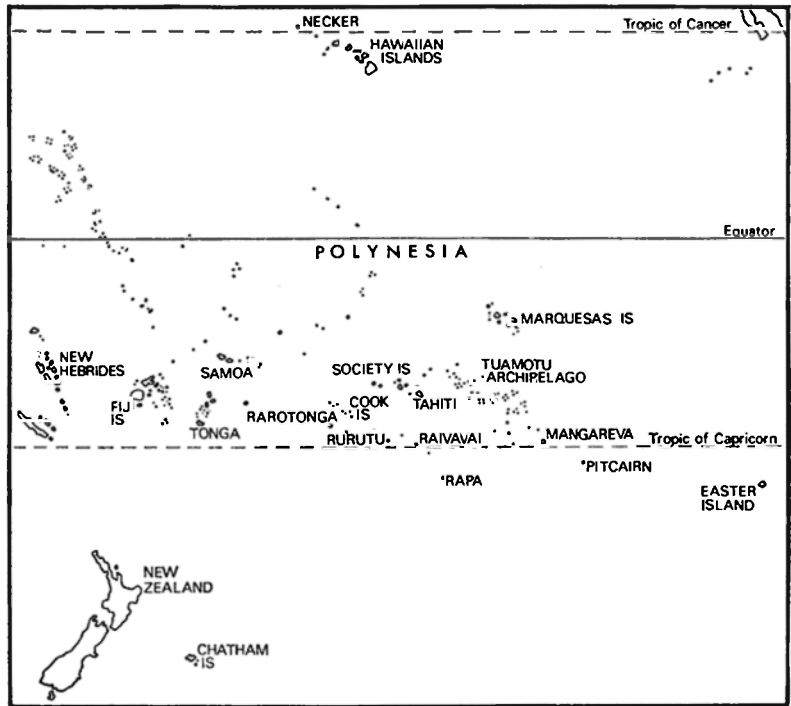


Fig. 44  
Map of Polynesia.

carver. This, however, may have been less marked than differences due to characteristics of the stone.

Hivaoa work is of more finely drawn form and crisply defined detail: here, there was more enterprise in varying form, notably in the production of huge separately carved heads, precisely sculptured (Heyerdahl and Ferdon, 1965, pl. 44a) also a horizontal image on a pedestal, as if swimming. But fullest credit goes to the great statues reaching 2.83 metres in height, the largest and best in Polynesia outside of Easter Island.

Images in Nukuhiva, where the tuff is coarser with gritty intrusions, were of rounder outline with figure and face detail less precisely carved (Heyerdahl and Ferdon, 1965, pl. 39 a-c). They are not always fully free-standing but half or three-quarter full, made to stand as part of a stone-slab wall. Some others give the impression of having been carved, not from quarried stone, but from an adventitious boulder (Heyerdahl and Ferdon, 1965, pls. 35-45).

Here and there on different islands, suitable rock faces bore shallow-cut stylized or patterned designs in wood-relief manner. The Marquesan repertoire also included small statuettes, single (Archev, 1965, pl. 19), or double back-to-back (Dominion Mus., N.Z. Oldman coll. 185), made for fishermen to take with them as success charms.

In stone sculpture Hawaii is almost a desert And this notwithstanding — or because? — it led all Polynesia in



*Fig. 45a*  
Carved wood tiki,  
Marquesas Islands  
Ht. m 2,10 (Ber-  
nice P. Bishop  
Museum).



*Fig. 45b*  
Easter Island sta-  
tue (drawing Bet-  
ty Brookes; cf.  
Routledge, 1919,  
fig. 69).

naturally rendered, actively posed and grouped figures in wood. Emory remarked (1928, p. 11) that statues in stone were «the roughest crudities», and «very rarely made», no more than vague face outlines scratched atop of a rock.

A few statuettes include a double-headed figure (Muensterberger, 1955, pl. 123) which as Dodd (1967, p. 245) notes, «some experts consider suspect», though he does not say on what grounds or name the experts. If they should have thought it too well-balanced and neatly finished for a stone adze craft, we might, on the other hand, recall the wealth of highly competent wood-sculpture which stood around to inform and inspire it.

No such uncertainty can lie against the small *marae* (temple area) images found in 1894 on lonely, long uninhabited Necker Island some 380 kilometres to the north-west. Ranging in height from 20 to 46 centimetres, they are broad, upright human shapes in vesicular lava. To the necessary pecking or hammer-dressing technique may be attributed their simple outline and the shallow relief stylized mask of their large flat, round faces hunched down to shoulder level.

Neither the island nor peoples to the north were known to the Hawaiians, yet these images have the free-hanging arms and the straight, wide lips of the major region's wooden figures. Some general resemblances to Marquesan stone statuettes, e.g. in general form, «before they took on the familiar conventions» (Emory, *ibid.*, p. 111), have been noted as possible hints of relatedness, with which I could agree, though I might think also of form-similarities arising from each having been carved in a similar difficult medium. Emory also considers that the *marae* on or near which these statuettes stood, were of early Society or Marquesan affinity.

#### Society Islands

In the Society Islands two centuries ago, there was extensive production of squat, but actively posed wooden canoe figures and household images, and the carvers won notable success in ceremonial wands and fly-whisk handles in abstract design. A difficult, coarsely vesicular volcanic was apparently the only rock readily available for the hundred or so invocatory images that have been found here and there in forest glades. Nevertheless the pecking technique produced a surprising variety, including a double figure (Peabody Museum, Salem, E35867) though within a limited compass, with several obviously in conformity with the proportions of a medium-sized ( $\pm$  cm 60) natural boulder.

In a coming paper S.M. Mead describes two forms, with intermediates: round headed and long headed com-



*Fig. 46*  
*Stone tiki takai'i.*  
*Me-ae Oipona, Hi-*  
*vaoa, Marquesas*  
*Island. (Photo Y.*  
*Sinoto, B.P. Bi-*  
*shop Museum).*

moner respectively in Tahiti and Moorea; there is also a third form, mushroom-headed with strongly-flexed arms and a subsidiary child figure in our illustration. We have record of four others of much simpler, even crude fashioning. When, occasionally, a finer grained tuff came to hand, a more assured, almost portrait, quality could be realized.

#### Austral Islands

Four to six hundred kilometres southward from the Society group is the long spread of the Austral Islands, one of which holds first place in Central Polynesia for number and variety of stone images, yielding to the Marquesas only as to size. Raivavae or High Island holds ample evidence of having been a fully active region of sculpture in both wood and stone.

In all districts paved and low-walled temple areas were constructed and set around with stone statues of the gods. These were mostly small images but a few exceed two metres in height and are correspondingly robust and of undoubted sculptural effect. Today only broken fragments of all this remain, though still abundantly (Routledge 1921; Marshall 1963; Skjolsvold 1965).

In 1819 King Pomare II of Tahiti took missionaries to Raiavavae, no doubt to further his intention to annex the Australs. Tuhuhuata, the principal *arii* of the island, on accepting Christianity, razed his own and all nearby *marae*, also their images except one (their finest, surely!) which was given to the Mission to carry away. (Now it is in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford). Twelve of the thirty or so images of lesser quality which survived the ensuing general iconoclasm are in the Papeete Museum (Lavondes, 1966, pp. 363-68).

For size (Ht. m 2.30) the award belongs to Moana-heita—really the name of her temple in the west of the island — now in the Musée Gauguin, Papeari, Tahiti, along with her slightly smaller (m 1.86) male partner and a 73 centimetres high attendant (Lavondes, n. 428-430).

Raivavean sculpture, like Marquesan, maintains unity with its islands' wooden images, both showing the local 'hall-mark' an evenly-curved ribbon-collar with small triangular breasts at the armpits and sun-rayed circles on knees and on the small of the back. The island's source material was a fairly even-grained tuff, often red, which occurs most abundantly around the Moana-heita *marae*. It was transported everywhere for image making enabling stone tool endeavour to produce high quality sculpture. (Heyerdahl and Ferdon, eds., 1965, pls. 26-31).

The Tubai-Group collared image of Plate XLIII; 3, of *American Indians in the Pacific* (Heyerdahl, 1952) is recorded (no 80) as from Raiavavae in the Stokes narrative in Bishop Museum (information kindly supplied by Mrs Marion Kelly). The only Austral Islands stone figure outside Raiavavae appears to be a Rurutu I image of coarsely vesicular basalt (Archey 1965, fig. 79) fashioned in the same pecking or hammer-dressing technique as in the small Society Islands figures.

#### Capricorn

The following few islands, scattered along and above Capricorn from the Gambiers to the groups of western Polynesia, present only occasional stone images as stone fitting carving is rare.

In the Austral extending to their south-eastern outlier, Rapa, no free images are known. There is only a 1.10 metres high relief cut crudely in the natural, soft



*Fig. 47*  
*Volcanic stone i-*  
*mage, cm. 48.3,*  
*Necker Island, Ha-*  
*waii (British Mu-*  
*seum).*

stone hillside beside the Depot of the Kings (Smith, C.S., 1965, pl. 23b). Its active pose of bent spread arms — Smith suggests a tomb guardian — could have been readily effected in semi-drawing technique.

Further eastward, Pitcairn report tells of some five images toppled — supposedly by Bounty mutineers — from a high cliff to the boulder-strewn shore. The only one rescued is a pillar-like headless torso (73 centimetres) with large five-fingered hands spread across the front. It is now in Otago Museum.

Mangareva, a little north of Pitcairn, has no stone images, in contrast with its wooden images. Roger Green tells me that the only part of this drowned volcanic island remaining above its lagoon, is basalt, not a suitable stone for sculpture.

Westward and north-westward from the Australs are the Cook Islands. Neither the northernmost coral atolls nor the Middle Cooks from Mauke through Aitutaki to Palmerston, exhibit stone sculpture.

As to the two, larger, southern Cooks, it is perhaps unexpected to find that Mangaia, which had no wooden images, should have had two stone sculptures, which were reportedly large enough for Captain Cook to have seen, though he apparently did not. Otherwise all we know about them is a name Rongo, a god, for one or both. One was broken up for the masonry of a church, long since demolished and its remains unidentifiable so that the statuary stone remains unknown. The other figure is also lost to record.

Contrary to Mangaia, Rarotonga with an ample repertoire of wooden images, has disclosed nothing in stone. To complete our survey on this southern zone of tropical islands, we find in Western Polynesia, i.e. Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, the same absence of stone sculpture. Stone was wrought to effect by the Tongans, however, in hewing rectangular pillars and beam for a huge trillithon. In Fiji and Tonga the one departure from the wood medium were figurines in whale ivory; these followed the wooden prototypes but, being small, were less freely modelled. From Samoa there is only one wooden figure which is probably of Tongan inspiration or even origin.

Aotearoa

New Zealand becomes another instance of a region seemingly lacking regular practice of stone sculpture yet with occasional notable examples. From Taranaki province a large water-worn boulder was, as it were, enwrapped by a human figure in well-ordered naturalism, contrasting with the haphazard relief-carvings found sometimes on boulders. From a smaller, coarsely pitted Taranaki basaltic boulder, a *tohunga* has competently wrought an ample-featured head. Again in Taranaki, a 35 centimetres image in red andesite, shows life and vigour resembling the semi-stylisation typical of wood carving. These





Fig. 48  
Carved volcanic  
stone boulder, length  
cm 57. Taranaki  
district (Taranaki  
Museum, N. Z.).

so-called *kumara* gods (a misleading term, for the Maori did not worship idols) are better called *taumata*, an 'abiding place' for the god (here a god of cultivation) to alight upon when invoked.

Even more obviously a wood-carving relief model, the free-standing head would have been easily carved or chiselled in its very light, soft, smooth pumice. This would have been an amenable medium also for a Chatham Island carver's rather crude image, the ribs in which and in a better fashioned Chatham Island's wooden figure, resembling the emaciated-looking ribbed wooden images of Easter Island - a hint possibly at a relationship.

Leaving aside the question as to whether or not lapidary work qualifies as sculpture we include Maori jade carving as an instance of effective exploitation of a material of art potential. The Maori's most frequently worn amulet, the greenstone *hei tiki*, was a human figure (*ti'i* in the Marquesas and the Society Islands), and is surely sculpture. It is presented in the same stylized form as their figure-relief wooden house-planks, *poupou*, and both are tribal ancestors.

This hard, dense jade (*pounamu*) could be worked by only one satisfactory method—flint-sawing or drilling with sand and water. This not only achieved the form intended by the *tohunga*, but also released the stone's inherent qualities of colour and soft surface sheen.

Many hundreds of *hei tiki* (*hei*, the neck: i.e. for ornament) must have been made, also other ornaments and

tools; but in this amulet the Maori saw the same status that statues hold elsewhere, namely an individual identity, a personal name with associated history, tradition and *mana* (prestige). In *pounamu* the Maori found medium and incentive for what may fairly be called lapidary sculpture.

#### Easter Island

The sight of the long-fallen Easter Island statues, restored to their former platforms by the Norwegian expedition (see *Illustrated London News*, March 6th, 1971, pp. 22-23), summons up an image of their former splendour. There were over six hundred statues on a hundred or more stone-built *ahu* (platforms), spread around the island, particularly near the coast-line. There were also paved areas and accompanying stone buildings and many small images variously placed. Furthermore, in the south-west corner of the island, where an annual competition of swimming to a rocky islet for the season's first tern egg became enhanced to ceremonial status, there grew an extensive gallery of petroglyphs depicting successive «bird-men».

All this associated sculpture, structure, ceremony and belief gives us further material for reflection on the intense community effort and on planned economy of directed food production, together with political control and rule over sizeable districts.

The Norwegian expedition's investigations (Heyerdahl and Ferdon, eds., 1961) have added a wealth of well-ordered archaeological information to our earlier theories. Heyerdahl's interpretations of the relationship with South America, although perhaps perhaps not winning general acceptance, have opened up new fields for study and reflection.

The Expedition's chronological outline (Smith, 1961, p. 212) sets out three periods of events.

#### Early Period:

Before A.D. 400, to 1100: with platforms, faced by flat slabs precisely shaped and fitted; sculptures (Heyerdahl, 1961, p. 530) «whether or not they ever stood on *ahu* platforms», showing «a certain amount of freedom of expression... tending towards realism», as if carved by individuals working separately in various localities, using stone from small quarries here and there, though with some from the great quarry on Rano Raraku where nearly all the great images were carved during the following period.

#### Middle Period:

1100, to 1680: with more solid, but not precisely fitted platform masonry; statue-carving centralized at Rano Raraku, the images now highly stylized and virtually mass-produced, reaching 11.4 metres in height; torso narrow with parallel straight sides and arms and taper-fingered hands close to the body, but with head highly modelled, though still narrow.



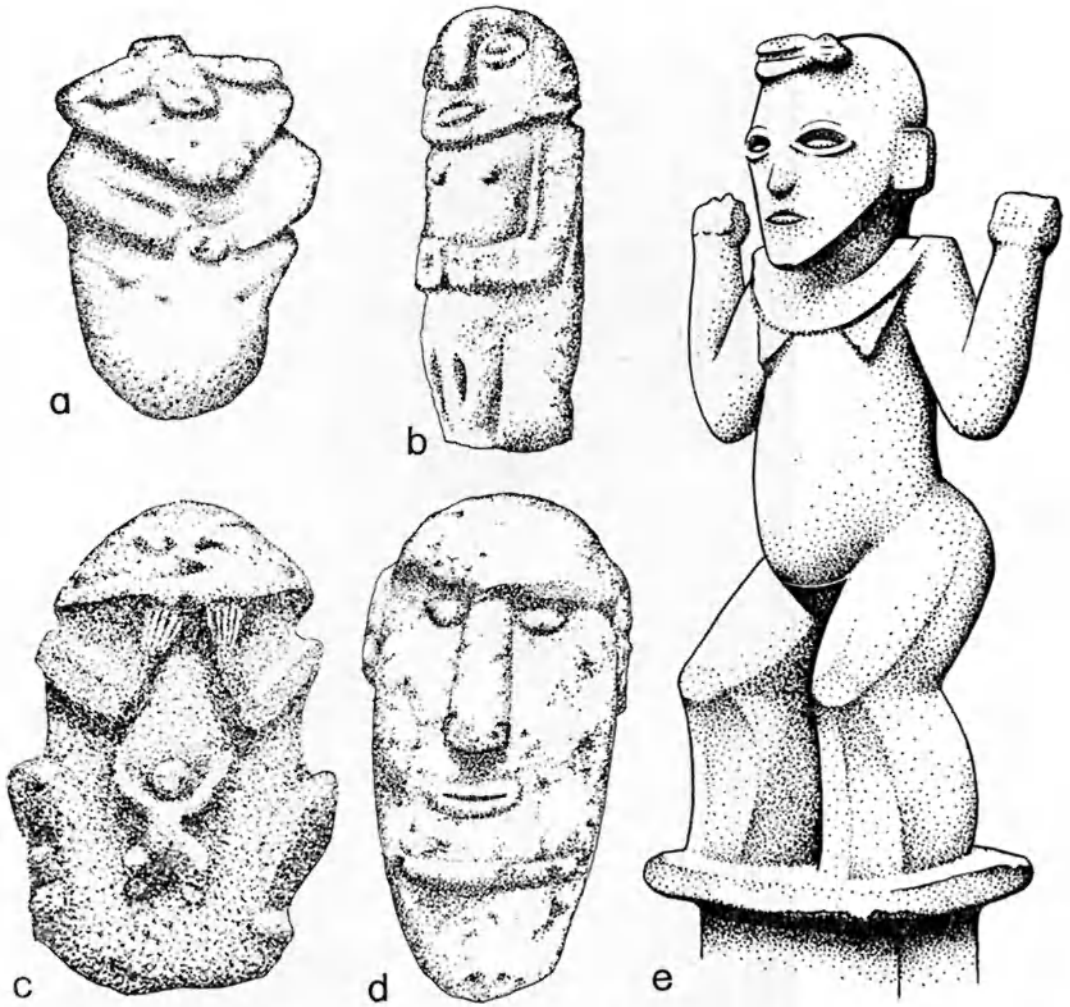
Fig. 49

Red volcanic stone taumata. Taranaki, N.Z., Ht. cm 35 (Auckland Museum, 22073).

Late Period: 1680, to 1868. A period of decay, disorganization and conflict with overthrow of the statues.

Leading significance for immigrant South American derivation of Easter Island art and related culture is attributed by Heyerdahl both to the precisely fitted Early Period *ahu* masonry and to the size, manner and style of the Middle Period statues.

Accepting the common physical race and language of Polynesian peoples with variations between its distantly separated groups, we have seen the sculptural arts also with a common basic motif, the human figure serving common ancestor veneration and commemoration of lea-



**Fig. 50**  
**a.** Red stone *ti'i*,  
*Paea, western Ta-*  
*hiti, cm 53 (Coll.*  
*Pierre Gobillard,*  
*Paea).*  
**b.** Stone image,  
*cm 60. Tautira, Ta-*  
*hiti (Musée de*  
*l'Homme, 38.31.2).*  
**c.** Stone image,  
*cm 35, Tahiti (Mu-*  
*sée de l'Homme,*  
*49.41.34).*  
**d.** Stone head, *cm*  
*38, Tahiti (Musée*  
*de l'Homme, 78.1.*  
*251).*  
**e.** Stone image *cm*  
*100. Raivavae, Au-*  
*stral Islands (Pitt*  
*Rivers Museum,*  
*Oxford, AM 1427).*

and material, the Easter Island sculpture finally ended. Local stylizations lead each one to its own formal design and pattern (Archey, 1965) particularly in wood carving.

Every group of Polynesian stone sculpture depends very much on the nature and sculpturable quality of available stone. It also shows relationship with — in most cases manifest derivation from — the local wood-sculpture.

Consideration of Easter Island sculpture, either as sharing these features and developments, or, as Heyerdahl contends, as deriving from South America (particularly in respect to the great statues and to the masonry of the *ahu* on which they were mounted), calls for examination of relevant aspects of the arts in the other Polynesian groups.

First, on the great statues themselves: we recall Heyerdahl (1961, p. 510): «... from an earlier freedom in form



*Fig. 51*  
*Carved pumice*  
*head Ht. cm 59.7,*  
*lower Waikato Ri-*  
*ver (Auckland Mu-*  
*seum, 5439).*

with a single general type carved from Rano Raraku tuff». He mentions also, as prototype of the great ancestor images, the exceptionally well-carved basalt statue Hoa-haka-nana-ia now in the British Museum. He adds: «why this type became consistent and uniform in the Middle Period with a tendency of evolution only perhaps in height and associated degree of slenderness can only be speculated upon».

As previously (Archev, 1965, p. 52) we venture to speculate: we hope not unreasonably. A well-known feature

of Easter Island is its open, treeless uplands and, accordingly, its small-sized though well executed wood-carving. Regional control could and did eventuate, facilitating the emergence of district paramount chiefs. These, in rivalry, would seek ancestor-image grandeur, for which the great Rano Raraku quarry held ample sources. Their professional carving teams, bent on «mass production» (Ferdon, 1961, p. 530) as well as size, entered upon «quarry-sculpture» in narrow trenches, whereby the form of the images could hardly have escaped becoming constrained, narrow, parallel-sided, with closely pressed arms and hands but with the upward-gazing faces freely modelled.

Easter Island great statues certainly resemble Andean in size and in cramped arm disposal. The latter feature, however, is a world-wide feature in laboriously worked media. In Africa wood carving the arms are almost always aligned with the torso and only narrowly separated from mits sides, while in Dogon figures, carved in «extremely hard wood», they are unseparated. The portrayal of action or flexible limb disposal seldom occurs, except where pottery modelling is practised, e.g. pre-Columbian American art. In general, the static form, when so imposed gives little scope for variety and could readily account for resemblance without the invoking of far distant distributional relationships.

Marquesan and Austral Islands stone statuary, cited by Heyerdahl as of likely Easter Island derivation, have only their aligned arms and their not very frequent large size to support the suggested Easter Island affinity. But rather than resembling Easter Island figures, however, they manifestly belong to their own regions' wood-carving tradition; (for the Marquesas, Linton, 1925, p. 74).

Heyerdahl attributes importance to the fact that Marquesas and Raivavae stand eastward in Polynesia; they are c 3,650 kilometres and c 3,750 kilometres respectively distant from Easter Island. There are however other relevant geographical or geophysical features, the first being that these are the only Polynesian areas providing readily sculpturable tuff comparable to that of Easter Island. Furthermore Raivavae has other geographical features resembling those of Easter, in particular an open, lightly timbered terrain which facilitated transport of stone from its extensive western quarries. This terrain was conducive also to political cohesion under paramount chiefs which obtained there at the time of European contact and these conditions in both Raivavae and Easter would have favoured widespread art endeavour.

A feature of the «Andean derived» fitted flat slab *ahu* masonry to be noted is that it was an Early Period practice, i.e. prior to the great statues and also ante-dating Inca fitted masonry. It was abandoned in favour of solid-



*Fig. 52*  
*Greenstone (nephrite) hei-tiki, cm 17.5. Whangarei, Northland (Auckland Museum, 5971).*





Fig. 53  
Bird-man petroglyphs, Orongo, Easter Island, cm 183x112 (after Routledge, 1921, pl. XIV, 1).

walled unfitted structure to support the great statues of the Middle Period (also «Andean derived»).

Moreover, in respect to the *ahu* and its area generally, Emory's recent (1970) reappraisal of Polynesian *marae* describes a common *marae* dispersal area, even to distant Necker Island and Hawaii, and, without commenting on Heyerdahl's view, he concludes that the Easter Island image *ahu* «appears to be an exaggerated and elaborated Necker *marae*», but derived from the Marquesas. Incidentally, there is variety in wall-facing throughout Polynesia as described by Emory (1933), including fitted rocks in Tahiti (pl. 3A) and shaped-to-fit limestone slabs



in the Leeward Islands (p. 34), sufficient to have constituted general apprentice experience for the whole region, not excluding Easter Island.

If Easter Island statuary be argued non-Polynesian for lack of resemblance to other Polynesian sculpture, we would oppose that it is in just this respect it is fully of Polynesia, where no one art resembles another except in that all are human figure based, each local group exhibiting its own rendering of naturalism and stylization, with each proceeding therefrom to its own decorative pattern.

The several foregoing considerations lead us to see Easter Island sculpture, not as introduced but as a typical Polynesian art of ancestor-commemorative images. In Easter Island the departure from simple naturalism was the outcome of the available means and locally developed method of production, it attained eminence through full exploitation of abundant suitable medium in conditions of terrain and environment which favoured social organisation and cohesion under paramount leaders.

Polynesian sculptural art went in directions other than those of classical idealism, where «... human hands, first mimicked and then mocked with moulded limbs more lovely than its own. The human form, till marble grew divine». Instead, in one direction, wood-carving, it typified Kenneth Clark's remark (*Landscape into Art*, p. 191): «The less an artifact interests our eyes as imitation, the more it must delight our eyes as pattern, and an art of symbols always evolves a language of decoration». In stone figure sculpture however, Polynesian craftsmen were forced into stylized simplification by the difficulties of medium and tools and become aware of the art potential of form itself. They thereby developed the sculpture in various ways, not only to their own satisfaction but in a manner, which eventually captured the interest of and even occasionally influenced Western art.

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## RIASSUNTO

L'autore descrive la statuaria litica della Polinesia e dimostra come sia sempre stata influenzata dalla statuaria lignea e dal tipo di materie prime disponibili nelle varie località. Sottolinea l'esistenza di uno stile comune a buona parte della statuaria polinesiana, ma evidenzia anche notevoli caratteristiche locali per ognuno dei principali gruppi geografici analizzati.

Anche le grandi statue dell'isola di Pasqua discendono da prototipi locali. Le condizioni sociali condussero nell'isola a rivalità intertribali per la realizzazione delle statue e per lo sfruttamento delle cave locali dotate della pietra più adatta alla creazione delle statue. L'autore respinge la teoria di un'influenza sud-americana per le statue dell'isola di Pasqua.

## RESUME

L'auteur décrit la statuaire en pierre de la Polynésie et démontre son influence constante par des prototypes en bois et son conditionnement par la matière première à disposition des artistes dans chaque île. Il essaye de montrer l'existence d'un dénominateur commun stylistique pour plusieurs groupes des statues, ainsi que les caractéristiques locales de chacun des groupes qui sont analysés. Même les grandes statues de l'île de Pâque semblent dériver de prototypes locaux. Les relations sociales ont conduit au développement de rivalités entre tribus différents pour la réalisation de statues et l'exploitation des sources de pierre pour leur création. L'auteur met en question la théorie d'un influence sud-américaine pour les statues de l'île de Pâque.