

An overlooked image on the Hoa-haka-nana'ia stone statue from Easter Island in the British Museum

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The Hoa-haka-nana'ia stone statue in the British Museum of London is one of the most well-known specimens of pre-contact Rapa Nui art. An important object of the tangata manu (birdman) cult, it was originally situated at the ceremonial village of 'Orongo. It is famous for the designs of two birdmen, a manutara (sooty tern), 'ao (ceremonial paddles), and komari (vulva) symbols carved on its back and painted with bright colors. This paper is dedicated to the documentation and analysis of a hitherto unrecognized image carved on statue's front torso. The image is described, tentatively drawn, and analyzed for the first time, and is defined as an "atypical" birdman, which grasps an egg in its extended hand without fingers, is crowned with feathers, and has a long hooked beak holding one more egg. Several komari symbols and other unclear designs may surround this figure. The image is badly obliterated. Its "pecking and abrading" method of carving differs from the method of carving used for the dorsal designs. Tentatively defined stylistic traits of the birdman carved on the statue's front are different from the two birdmen of the late phase on its back and permit us to potentially date the frontal image to earlier times. The finding opens the question of multiple re-use of this unique statue and its exceptional role in the birdman cult.

La estatua de piedra llamada Hoa-haka-nana'ia, la cual se encuentra en el Museo Británico de Londres es uno de los ejemplares más conocidos del arte Rapanui de la época previa al contacto con el mundo occidental. Estaba situado originalmente en la aldea ceremonial de 'Orongo representando un objeto importante en el culto del tangata manu (hombre pájaro). Es conocido por los diseños y símbolos tallados de dos hombres pájaros, un manutara (golondrina del mar), 'ao (paletas ceremoniales), y komari (vulva) en su espalda y pintadas con colores brillantes. Este estudio se documenta y analiza por primera vez una imagen que hasta ahora fue desconocida la cual se encuentran alrededor de la estatua. Esta podría ser definida como un hombre pájaro "atípico", que sostiene un huevo en su mano extendida, sin dedos, está coronado con plumas, y tiene un pico largo sosteniendo un huevo más. Varios símbolos komari y otros diseños pueden rodear a esta figura. La imagen está muy deteriorada. Su método de tallado de "picoteo y abrasión" difiere del método utilizado para los diseños dorsales. Rasgos estilísticos tentativamente definidos del hombre pájaro tallado en la parte frontal de la estatua son diferentes a los dos hombres pájaros de la época tardía que se encuentran en la espalda, lo cual nos permitiría fechar la imagen frontal a una época más antigua. Estos resultados indican la posibilidad de re-uso múltiple de esta estatua y su rol excepcional en el culto del hombre pájaro.

Introduction

The Hoa-haka-nana'ia¹ stone statue on permanent display in the British Museum in London is probably the best known object of pre-contact Rapa Nui art. The statue was collected by the crew of the English ship HMS *Topaze* in 1868, under the command of Richard Ashmore Powell, who had purposely searched for a particularly impressive statue to be sent to England (Van Tilburg 2006:36). Decorated with bas-relief carvings on its back and originally painted with bright red and white colors, it is remarkable in many ways and every extensive work on Rapa Nui culture mentions Hoa-haka-nana'ia at least twice – as an important object of

the birdman cult and as an exemplary *moai ma'ea* stone statue (see for example, Englert 1970; Métraux 1940; Routledge 1919; Van Tilburg 1994). It is the only stone statue from Rapa Nui that enjoys a monograph dedicated to it (Van Tilburg 2004). Ironically, Hoa-haka-nana'ia is a very atypical *moai ma'ea*: it is one of just sixteen *moai* that were carved, not from easily worked tuff, but from much harder basalt (Van Tilburg 2004:45). It is also the only statue explicitly related to the birdman cult (Routledge 1917), one of few found in the interior of a building (Palmer 1869-1870:115), one of few half-planted into the ground (Palmer 1869-1870:115; Van Tilburg 2004:Figure 16), the only one recorded as having been painted in red and white, which washed

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off in its transit to the ship (Dundas 1870:319; Palmer 1869-1870:115, 177-8), and is the only one decorated with elaborated dorsal carvings, which include the *manupiri* (two attached birdmen) rock art motif with a *manutara* (sooty tern) just above them, accompanied by 'ao (large ceremonial paddles) and *komari* (vulva) fertility symbols (Horley & Lee 2008).²

While visiting the British Museum in 2010, I was surprised to notice a possible obliterated image of an unusual birdman carved on the front of Hoa-haka-nana'ia. As far as I know, this carving has never been reported in the voluminous literature dedicated to the item, although some published drawings and photos indicate a line that may represent the dorsal line of the birdman (see, for example, Cristián Arévalo Pakarati's drawing in Van Tilburg 2007). Several hours of work in the museum and many photos allowed me to achieve a consistent and comprehensible image (Figure 1), but I am still uncertain about many details and I am sure that working with your own light in the museum may result in a better and more reliable drawing. Thus, the results presented here are to be considered preliminary and to many observations and suggestions I would like to add the words "maybe", "perhaps", and "possibly". In the first instance, this paper is aimed at calling scholars' attention to the carving, its potential significance for Rapa Nui studies and a need for proper documentation.

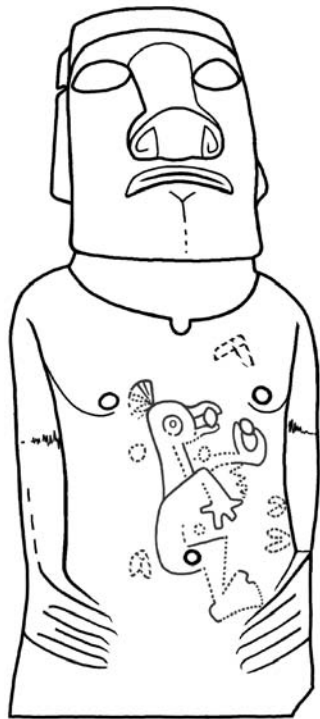


Figure 1. Frontal view of the Hoa-haka-nana'ia stone statue in the British Museum, London, with reconstructed carved images. (Drawing by the author).

The Carved Image

As is the case in many other cultures throughout the world, imagery in the form of wooden figurines, stone sculptures, pictorial signs of *kohau rongorongo* script, and rock art found on Rapa Nui represent independent figurative systems having little or even nothing to do with one another. Surprisingly, the designs carved on Hoa-haka-nana'ia's front torso and back do not belong to the imagery of Rapa Nui stone sculpture, but rather to the imagery of Rapa Nui rock art. The carved image, therefore, will be discussed in relation to Rapa Nui rock art; Georgia Lee's 1992 monograph, based on her Ph.D. thesis (Lee 1986), will be used as a reference book.

The "pecking and abrading" method of carving is different to the one used for bas-relief carvings on the back of the statue (for different carving methods, see Lee 1992:26-27). The resulting line is very much weakened by obliteration and is difficult to discern (see Figure 2). Utilizing a Lenovo ThinkPad X201 Tablet and *multiple layers* in Photoshop CS2, which permits the superimposition of photos and control of the process of drawing, have been crucial for achieving the resultant image. It is important to note that I rely extensively on recognizable motifs that are well-known in Rapa Nui rock art. Many lines in the drawing have been left dotted, i.e., considered reconstructed because they are either



Figure 2. Hoa-haka-nana'ia's front. (Photo by the author).

too eroded or are iconically unclear (Figure 1). The everlasting rule is “don’t draw what you cannot see!” I have also chosen not to draw some *komari*, bird eggs, and other designs, which are probably present on the statue, because they are unclear and difficult to reconstruct, on one hand, and do not assist with the understanding of the principal carved figure, on the other hand. These designs are carved using the same “pecking and abrading” technique. I was unable to discern the statue’s rectangular *hami* (royal loincloth) in between the slightly delineated hands that was once probably there, since loincloth elements are attested to on the statue’s back (for further discussion of the *hami* motif, see Routledge 1917:135; Van Tilburg 1986:118-123, 1994:134-136), but I suspect that its traces may still be discernible using improved lighting in the museum. The artist who carved the image may have disregarded some sculptured traits of the statue such as its nipples and navel. The image occupies the whole frontal surface between them.

The main petroglyph figure is easily recognized as an atypical birdman (Figure 3). This composite creature of Rapa Nui rock art is a combination of a human body in a crouching position and a frigate bird that is characterized by its long hooked beak, circular eye, and sometimes by its gular pouch (Métraux 1940:270). Lee (1992:36) assigns three birdman motifs: 3010 – birdman (early phase), 3020 – birdman (late phase), 3021 – *manupiri* (two late phase birdmen joined face to face) (Figure 4). The barely discerned birdman on Hoa-haka-nana’ia’s front torso is a crouching figure in profile with a straight back line that forms a right angle with the line of its leg, which ends in a large foot. The big toe of the foot is

visible, but it is difficult to say whether the other toes are indicated. The image shows a heavy head crowned with feathers and provided with a long hooked beak holding an egg. The big eye is represented by a double circle. In its extended hand, the birdman holds one more egg. A zigzag line under the extended arm might indicate feathers of the wing, but this design is unknown in Rapa Nui rock art. Another possible hand is seen attached to the body. It possesses clearly indicated fingers and adds ambiguity to the image, because birdmen are commonly provided with only one hand and only one leg. I suggest that this hand as well as other designs in the area (eggs?) are later additions to the figure, for hands with carved fingers are characteristic of late phase birdmen, while the hand holding an egg has no fingers (Figure 5). In my opinion, such a suggestion makes the image more understandable. The keyhole feature and gular pouch, which are typical for late phase birdmen, are not apparent, but they may be found in the area of assumptive re-carving, i.e., the particularly damaged area. The neck shows an extra line (see Figure 4a), which is a typical, but optional, feature of early birdmen (Lee 1992:68, Figure 4.40). Birdmen holding eggs in their beaks are unknown; however, rare examples of birdmen holding eggs in their hand and crowned with feathers are known (Figure 6). The feathers may represent either a ritual headdress worn by a *tangata manu* (cf. *ha’u oho* ‘human-hair headdress’ in Routledge 1917:348) or, alternatively, ruffled feathers characteristic of frigate birds. The resulting image seems to be confusing and is barely apparent today, but this would not have been the case in earlier times before the statue was found planted into the ground and if it were painted.

Motif Type	Mask, full face	Mask, eye-nose face	Eye mask	<i>Komari</i>	Birdman, early phase	Birdman, late phase	Birdman, <i>manupiri</i>	Sea Turtle	Fishhook
Motif number	2010	2020	2030	2070	3010	3020	3021	5080	9010
‘Orongo	46.97%	58.08%	21.47%	61.17%	81.82%	88.96%	71.43%	5.27%	—
Ngatimo	—	—	0.52%	6.74%	—	0.30%	14.29%	—	—
Marama	—	0.77%	2.09%	—	1.82%	—	—	—	—
Ngaure	13.64%	0.38%	—	0.35%	—	—	—	—	—
Poike	1.52%	0.38%	—	—	1.82%	—	—	—	13.70%
Tupahotu	7.58%	8.08%	10.99%	1.77%	0.91%	5.07%	—	73.68%	78.77%
Miru	30.29%	29.23%	52.36%	13.30%	11.81%	2.98%	14.28%	21.05%	7.53%
Ahu Akivi	—	—	4.19%	—	—	—	—	—	—
Haumoana	—	3.08%	8.38%	10.11%	1.82%	2.69%	—	—	—
Trumpet of Hiro	—	—	—	6.56%	—	—	—	—	—
Motif totals	66	260	191	564	110	335	14	19	292

Table 1. Correlated site-based and territorial distribution of the mask, *komari*, and birdman motifs in contrast with the sea turtle and fishhook motifs (after Lee 1992:31-33). The eye mask motif shows a slightly different distribution but represents a stylistic variant of the same figurative design as the full face and eye-nose face motifs. Here ‘Orongo is a conventional designation for the area including ‘Orongo in the proper sense as well as Motu Nui, Rano Kau, and Vai Atare.



Figure 3. Possible reconstruction of the image carved on Hoa-haka-nana'ia's front torso.



Figure 5. Ambiguous, presumably re-carved, area of the proposed image.

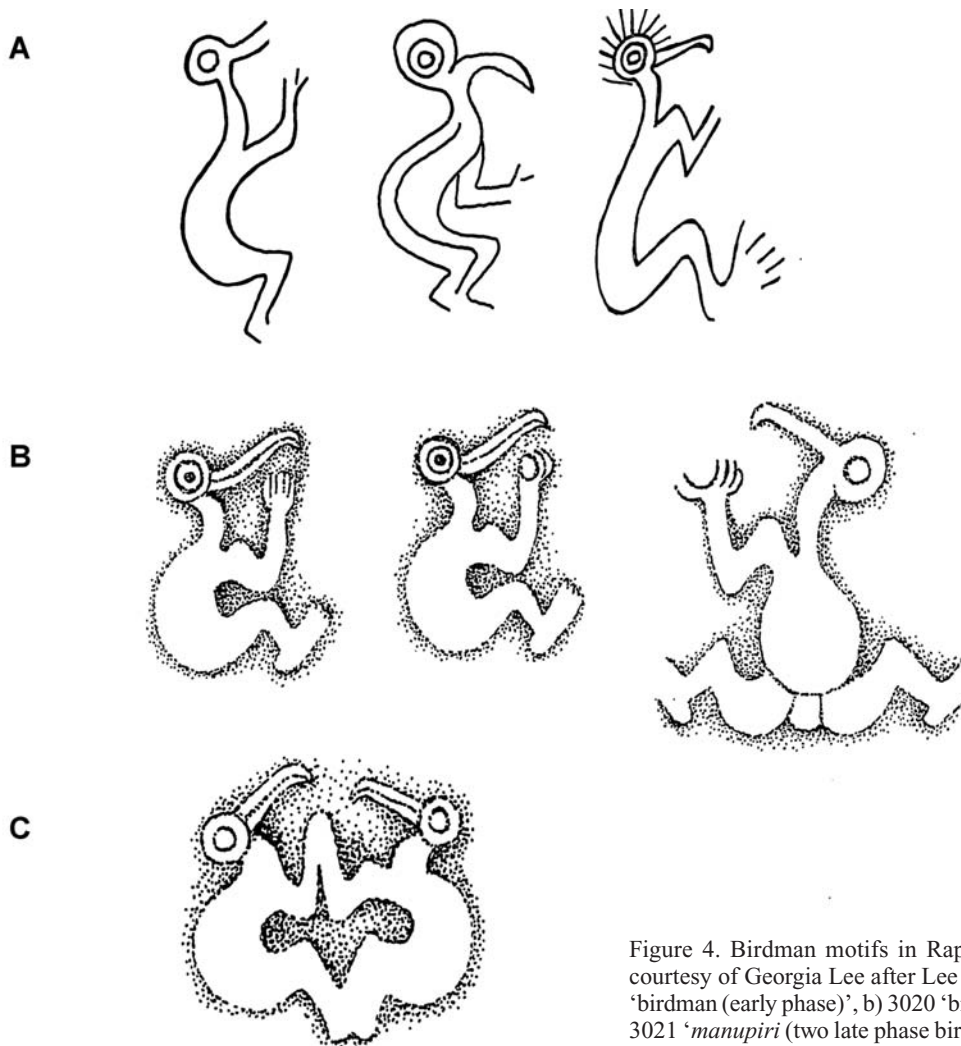


Figure 4. Birdman motifs in Rapa Nui rock art (drawings courtesy of Georgia Lee after Lee 1992: Figure 3.7): a) 3010 'birdman (early phase)', b) 3020 'birdman (late phase)', and c) 3021 'manupiri (two late phase birdmen joined face to face)'.
a) 3010 'birdman (early phase)', b) 3020 'birdman (late phase)', and c) 3021 'manupiri (two late phase birdmen joined face to face)'.

It seems logical to see images of bird eggs in close proximity to a birdman. However, as far as I know, such cases are not discussed in studies dedicated to Rapa Nui rock art, nor were the ubiquitous cupules in Rapa Nui rock art interpreted as representations of bird eggs. On the other hand, it seems unexpected to find *komari* symbols in the context of a birdman, for these two designs do not bear a clear iconic relation one to another. Thanks to a thorough documentation of Rapa Nui rock art motifs published by Lee (1992) there is an easy way to demonstrate that the mask, *komari*, and birdman motifs are somehow related. Table 1 includes these three general types of rock art motifs: 3010 (birdman, early phase), 3020 (birdman, late phase), 3021 (*manupiri* – two birdmen joined face to face), 2070 (*komari*), 2010 (mask, full face), 2020 (mask, eye-nose face), and 2030 (eye mask), along with other major motifs: 5080 (sea turtle) and 9010 (fishhook) found at various sites in Routledge’s proposed territories of Rapa Nui. In contrast to the sea turtle (5080) and fishhook (9010) motifs, territorial distribution of the birdman (3010, 3020, 3021), *komari* (2070) and mask (2010, 2020, 2030) motifs is similar. The latter motifs show two peaks of concentration: a larger one in ‘Orongo and a smaller one in the proposed territory of the Miru clan. This similarity in distribution may imply that these three types of motifs were part of one ritual complex that developed in the late history of the island and, for convenience, is referred to by scholars as the ‘birdman cult’ (cf. Van Tilburg 1994:58). This observation might explain the presence of the *komari* symbols on the front and back of the statue, for it is probable that the statue played an important role in the birdman cult.

Dating the Image

Following the original proposal by Henry Lavachery (1939:27), examining superimposed images of birdmen and, in particular, obliterated examples attested in Rapa

Nui rock art, Lee (1992:66-68) was able to define early and late stylistic variants of the birdman motif (see Table 2). Early phase birdmen resemble the birdman motif found elsewhere in East Polynesia (see for example Lee 1992:201, Figure 9.1 supporting this suggestion).

Table 2 shows that the birdman carved on the front of Hoa-haka-nana’ia may belong to a stylistically early variant of the motif. The extended arm, the straight back line, the additional body line, and the technique of manufacture indicate an earlier date; meanwhile, the extra arm and the elaborated fingers and toes point to a later re-carving. I suggest that the carving hints at a naturalistic, non-conventionalized image of a frigate bird. If this impression is correct, it can be interpreted as an indication of one of the earliest birdman representations in the context of the birdman cult, when artistic conventions had not yet been worked out. Atypical features – the possible eggs held in the hand and in the beak, the feather crown and the possible wing line, as well as some disproportion of the image – seem to support such a suggestion. The image on the front probably precedes the very late motifs carved on the back of the statue (Figure 7).

Multiple Re-use of the Sculpture

The proposed image on the front once again raises the question of multiple re-use. According to stylistic features, the statue was carved in classic times. The material used for carving is basalt found at Rano Kau, suggesting that the statue may have originally been situated on the slopes of the volcano. Therefore, Hoa-haka-nana’ia was transported and accommodated in ‘Orongo, where it became an important part of the birdman cult. The proportions of the statue are thin when compared with other *moai*, and the absence of a *hami* and the worn-away fingers indicate deliberate modification (Van Tilburg 1986:581, 2004:47). At that time, the image was carved on its front and the statue itself may

Earlier phase:	Later phase:
pecked and abraded lines	bas-relief
lacking gular pouch	pronounced gular pouch
hand, foot, and beak may not be defined clearly and may be absent	fingers and toes delineated
arms and legs tend to extend out of the body	rounded back
narrow beak	one arm is raised and knee is sharply bent forming a “keyhole” with the body of the figure
additional body line	massive long beak always hooked on the end
	rounded head often is thrown backwards
	joined face to face birdmen

Table 2. Characteristic stylistic traits of early and late variants of the birdman motif in Rapa Nui rock art (after Lee 1992:36, 66-67).



Figure 6. Atypical examples of birdmen in Rapa Nui rock art (drawings courtesy of Georgia Lee, after Lee 1992: Figures 5.6, 5.8, 5.44).

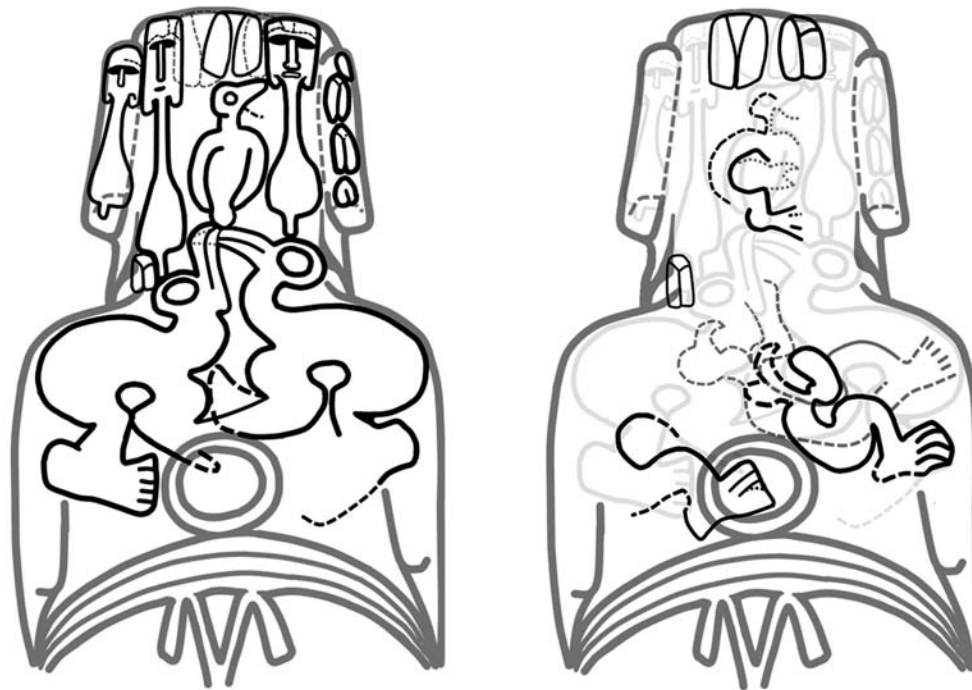


Figure 7. Tracing of dorsal designs on Hoa-haka-nana'ia and a tentative reconstruction of the earlier drawings (drawings courtesy of Paul Horley, after Horley & Lee 2008:Figure 4c-d).

have become an 'embodiment' of the *tangata manu*. Routledge (1920:436, Plate X) has suggested that a flat, rounded basalt slab embedded into the wall of House 18 in 'Orongo might have once been used as the pedestal for Hoa-haka-nana'ia. The statue was found buried up to its shoulders in House 11, called *Tau-ra-renga*, facing the interior of the structure (Van Tilburg 1986:580). It appears that in *ca.* AD 1500, *Tau-ra-renga* collapsed and was subsequently renovated into smaller structures; at that time, Hoa-haka-nana'ia was embedded into the earth inside one of them (Van Tilburg 2006:37). If the statue was found buried to its shoulders due to architectural remodeling of the ritual space provoked by the collapse of the original building, we can understand why the most representative part of the statue, its front, was abandoned and its back, where new sculptures in the form of bas-relief figures were carved, became the center

of attention in the ritual. Moreover, the back turned to the entrance became the side of the statue illuminated by daylight. The carvings of the back motifs are stylistically late and only cover the upper part of the body and neck. Once again, the designs on the back show at least one stage of re-carving (Horley & Lee 2008:113, Figure 4). Re-use of monolithic sculpture, and more broadly, reuse of prestigious objects is commonplace in the history of humankind. The idea is easily understandable: people take an object imbued with old values and invest it with new meanings, using the old ones to enhance the value of the new ones. Sometimes a ritually re-used object suffers from a domino effect, as is the case for the Hoa-haka-nana'ia stone statue, which is undoubtedly one of the most valuable items embellishing the British Museum today. Even its mocking nickname 'Hoa-haka-nana'ia', or 'Surfing Fellow', sounds solemn.

Notes

1. *Hoa-haka-nana'ia* 'Surfing Fellow' is probably a humorous description of floating the statue out to the HMS Topaze (Routledge 1919:257; McCall pers. comm. 1992 in Van Tilburg 2006:64). The word *nana'ia* is found in Englert's 1978 dictionary and in published texts (Englert 1948:297). The common translations 'Stolen Friend' and 'Hidden Friend' (Van Tilburg 2006:36) cannot be accepted on linguistic grounds: *Hoa-haka-nana'i'a* can be translated as 'Doing Robberies/Mockeries Friend', 'Hidden Friend' would be something like *Hoa-na'a(na'a)*.
2. Rock art motifs carved on various stone statues are recorded (see for example Van Tilburg & Lee 1987). Nevertheless, as far as I know, *Hoa-haka-nana'ia* is the only case attested when a statue and its carved designs represent a figurative whole.

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