The Hoa-haka-nana’ia’ai 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 manu tāua (sooty tern), “(ceremonial paddles), and kōmari (valva) symbols carved on its back and painted with bright colors. This paper is dedicated to the documentation and analysis of a hitherto unrecognized image carried 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 kōmari symbols and other unclear designs may surround this figure. The image is badly obliterated. Its “pecking and abrasion” 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’a, 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 representante un objeto importante en el culto del tangata manu (hombre pájaro). Es conocido por los diseños y símbolos tallados de dos hombres pájaros, un manu tāua (golondrines del mar), “(paletas ceremoniales), y kōmari (valva) en su espalda y pintadas con colores brillantes. Este estudo 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 kōmari y otros diseños pueden rodear a esta figura. La imagen está muy deteriorada. Su método de tallado de “pícoteo y abrision” 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.
Figure 1. Frontal view of the Hoa-haka-nana’ia stone statue in Rapa Nui 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 1996), will be used as a reference book.

The “pecking and abrading” method of carving is different to the one used for bas-relief carvings in 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 1. Frontal view of the Hoa-haka-nana’ia stone statue in the British Museum. London, with reconstructed carved images. (Drawing by the author).

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

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).

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became aware of the article by Pilat.

kind as to make me a free copy of the analyzed excerpts

of Behrens' narrative of the discovery of Easter Island

Joachim von Lahnen.

Johannes van Braam, Boekverkooper.

mededeelingen voornamelijk in betrekking tot Zeeland

Roggeveen, 1721–1722. In

plastic traits of the statue such as its nipples and navel. The image occupies the whole frontal surface between them.

The man 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 – manapiri (two late phase birdmen joined face to face) (Figure 4). The barely discerned birdman on Hoa-haka-nana’a’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 may 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 (egg(s))? 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 kehole feature and gular pouch, which are typical for late phase birdmen, are not apparent, but they may be found in the area of presumptive 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 4d). 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’a oho ‘human-hair headdress’ in Routledge 1917:348) or, alternatively, ruffled feathers characteristic of late phase birdmen. 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.

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Table 1. Correlated site-based and territorial distribution of the mask, komari, and birdman motifs in contrast with the sea turtle and himi motifs (after Lee 1992:31-33). The eye mask motif shows a slightly different distribution but represents a stylistic variation 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.

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due eroded or are iconically unclear (Figure 1). The

drawing is not done in such a way that 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 attributed 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 man 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 – manapiri (two late phase birdmen joined face to face) (Figure 4). The barely discerned birdman on Hoa-haka-nana’a’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 may 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 (egg(s))? 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.

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

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 ‘manapiri (two late phase birdmen joined face to face)’.

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

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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 three general types of rock art motifs: 3010 (birdman, early phase), 3020 (birdman, late phase), 3021 (manupiri) – two birdmen joined 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 scholars as the ‘birdman cult’ (cf. Van Tilburg 1948:55). 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 Lavauchery (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 Hoo-haka-nama’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 egg 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 fragmental usage of the original 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, Hoo-haka-nama’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 mois, and the absence of a hamau and the worn-away fingers indicate deliberate modification (Van Tilburg 1948:581, 2004:47). At that time, the image was carved on its front and the statue itself may have been used as a tombstone. Its current location, called ‘Afrikanische Galey’. It is another failed attempt to 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.

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**Table 2. Characteristic stylistic traits of early and late variants of the birdman motif in Rapa Nui rock art** (after Lee 1992:56, 66-67).
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 due to architectural remodeling of the ritual space provoked by the collapse 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.

As to his postulates, Pilat appeals for preserving the original form of the work; for some days we were navigating to and fro, trying and failing to make out what was before us. The inhabitants must have possessed looms with mulberry bark."

\[…oben auf dem Haupt mit einer Krone geziert\]

"The face, a lively figure, pleasant in talk and gestures."

\[Er war ziemlich groß und stark von Körperbau. Seine Gliedmaßen waren kräftig, und er hatte eine ziemliche Länge, war ziemlich stark und beständig von Gesicht, munter von Reden nicht ungeschickt\] (Behrens 1737:81)."

"Das Haupt war mit einer Krone geziert (flache Rinde des Papiermaulbeerbaums gewonnen wird.)"

"…die Einwohner müßten Webstühle besitzen, mit deren Hilfe sie sich solche Decken selbst verfertigen."

\[…oben auf dem Haupt mit einer Krone geziert\]

"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.

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Notes


2. Rock art motifs carved on various stone statues are recorded (see for example Van Tilburg & Lee 1987). Nevertheless, as far as I know, *Hou-haka-nana'i* is the only case attested when a statue and its carved designs represent a figurative whole.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a result of a finding for which I am indebted to a dear friend and colleague of mine, Martyn Harris, who invited me to take part in the conference “Easter Island: Cultural and Historical Perspectives” held on the 19th of November, 2010 in London. My deepest thanks go to him for his hospitality and this lucky chance to find a previously unrecognized carving. I am also very grateful to Paul Horley and Evgenia Korovina for their interest in my observation and encouragement to publish this note, and in particular to Georgia Lee and Paul Horley for their kind permission to use their drawings of Rapa Nui petroglyphs.

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