

Hoa Hakananai'a in detail: Comment on A. Davletshin's unconvincing assertion of an 'overlooked image' on the ventral side of the 'Orongo statue now in the British Museum

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Introduction

Albert Davletshin contends that he has detected several rock art elements on the ventral side of the basalt statue Hoa Hakananai'a (EISP inventory BM-LON-001).¹ The statue was collected from 'Orongo by HMS *Topaze* in 1868 (Van Tilburg 1992, 2006) and is now in the British Museum (1869.10-5.1). We take his claim very seriously and agree that a single curved line on the torso is tantalizing. However, the designs he depicts *do not exist* on Hoa Hakananai'a.

Since we are constrained for space we cannot deal with all of our disagreements with this article, most of which we raised during the peer review process. Our main points here are that Hoa Hakananai'a is unique within our inventory of 1,042 monolithic sculptural objects but must be considered within an island-wide archaeological context of which the author has no apparent grasp. Secondly, our documentation employs a variety of objective, replicable methods including state-of-the-art digital scanning procedures (www.eisp.org). Davletshin's methods, in contrast, are subjective and not replicable, not encouraged in the field of modern rock art studies, produce unreliable results (especially in artificial light and with a raised target), and are inferior to ours. His resultant data are erroneous and his interpretations are incorrect.

Context

Hoa Hakananai'a is one of 85 Rapa Nui sculptural objects of basalt recorded to date. It may have come from the Rano Kau basalt flow but *that is not certain* until we have the results of XRF analyses. We have recorded 184 rock art sites *in situ* and mostly associated with megalithic art and architecture. Fifty-seven statues have petroglyph elements, many of which are directly

comparable to well-documented tattoo patterns. *None* of these statues are embellished with "birdmen" petroglyphs.² Our recently completed excavations of two statues in Rano Raraku were undertaken, in part, to clarify their roles relative to Hoa Hakananai'a and 'Orongo iconography and ceremonies.

Methods

From 1987 to the present we have collected 89 image records for Hoa Hakananai'a. These include on-site original drawings produced by Arévalo Pakarati, who has a practiced hand and experienced eye gained in over 20 years of field experience on Rapa Nui. Petroglyphs, some tool marks and various curved and straight lines are discernible in all of our drawings and in the earliest known photograph of the statue (1868). To clarify them, we scanned the outside configuration of the statue on four sides and the top with a Z + F Imager 5003 with a 360 x 312 degrees field of view. Each scan captured 11 million 3D data points, giving an accuracy of sub-3mm @ 10M range. The result was a combined data record of fifteen 3D modeling images, 7 digital composites and 3 Camtasia video clips.

Analysis and Conclusion

The UCLA Rock Art Archive follows the standards and guidelines of the California Digital Library (CDL; www.cdlib.org) and the Online Archive of California (OAC). EISP digital artists trained under these guidelines reintegrate rock art elements, objects, and sites in our EISP database into discrete matrices using appreciably advanced techniques. Our data on Hoa Hakananai'a, including especially 3D renderings viewed with adjustments of light source and direction while panning around the entire statue, convince us that *none of the*

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Figure 1. ZVM screen shot/3D rendered still of Hoa Hakananai'a accomplished with permission by EISP at the British Museum.

scratches or lines on the ventral side of the torso depicts the elements Davletshin illustrates. Not considering here the poor quality and stylistic anomalies of his so-called “birdman” and its suggested but debatable chronology, we conclude that:

- the single central curved line most visible in the earliest known photo (taken on shipboard in England; Van Tilburg 2006) is more shallow and narrow than it appears in the scan (Figure 1);
- the single curved line cannot be defined as “pecked and abraded”;
- at least some of the scratches on the ventral side of the torso were made when the statue was dragged on its face to embark *Topaze*;
- other scratches and lines were made during at least 10 separate times when the statue was moved after departing Rapa Nui;
- small pits on the statue’s ventral surface, as we have noted, are not natural;
- a repair on the dorsal side was made by curators;
- the relief figures on the dorsal side were carved in more than one episode;
- marks of stone or metal tools are discernible but understanding them is complicated by the probable use of grappling hooks and other instruments.

Notes

1. A discussion of the spelling, accents, history and possible meaning of the term Hoa Hakananai'a is given in Van Tilburg (1992, 2006). Davletshin is required to explain his inexplicable use of an alternate rendering.
2. A single torso (MA-IDP-015) of re-carved Rano Raraku tuff from the vicinity of Vai Hina Ao but otherwise not contextualized has *tangata manu* in relief.

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References

- Van Tilburg, J. 1992. *HMS Topaze on Easter Island: Hoa Hakananai'a and five other museum statues in archaeological context*. British Museum Occasional Paper 73. London: The British Museum.
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