

The German-Chilean Expedition to Easter Island (1957-58)

Part One

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INTRODUCTION

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SAW SEVERAL MEMORABLE expeditions to Rapa Nui which today orient the expertise of most Easter Island scholars. There was the Chilean Scientific Expedition of 1911 led by German meteorologist and geophysicist Walter Knoche (Knoche 1925). Then came the epochal *Mana* Expedition of 1913-15 (on Easter Island 1914-15) (Routledge 1919). Of comparable distinction was the Franco-Belgian Expedition of 1934-35 led by Swiss ethnologist Alfred Métraux (Métraux 1940; Lavachery 1935). Still towering in popular prominence is the Norwegian Expedition of 1955-56 conceived and led by celebrated adventurer Thor Heyerdahl (Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961 and 1965). A few better-informed aficionados might also recall the remarkable METEI of 1964-65, the Canadian Medical Expedition to Easter Island led by Stanley Skoryna of McGill University (Boutelier 1992; Skoryna 1992).

Yet who today recalls the one that figured between the Norwegian Expedition and Canada's METEI – the German-Chilean Expedition of 1957-58? In its own fashion it was peer to all the above and, after over fifty years of apparent oblivion, deserves not only recognition but celebration. For, in that era of strident “Heyerdahlism”, its message was a veritable voice in the wilderness that argued the scientific case for a unique Polynesian settlement of Easter Island. Several decades were to pass before the German-Chilean Expedition's seeming heresy became public orthodoxy.

THE PLAN

The expedition was the brainchild of one man – Thomas S. Barthel (1923-1997).¹ Son of Germany's famed “workers' poet” Max Barthel from a second failed marriage, Thomas Barthel had served in the Wehrmacht during the Second World War decoding the Allies' secret broadcasts. Following ethnological studies in post-war Berlin and Leipzig, Barthel completed his doctorate in American Studies at the University of Hamburg in 1952. Between 1953 and 1956, while a “Privatdozent” (unsalaried university lecturer) at the University of Hamburg, he completed his famous monograph on Easter Island's *rongorongo* script, the *Grundlagen* (“Rudiments”), which would eventually appear as a “Habilitationsschrift” (Barthel 1958a), Germany's “second dissertation” or thesis towards appointment as a salaried university professor.

Yet at the beginning of 1956, once his *rongorongo* monograph was finished, Barthel's academic career seemingly came to an abrupt halt. Ambitious by nature, Barthel chafed that no academic appointment seemed within his grasp

in the cash-strapped, occupied Germany of those incredibly difficult post-war years when Ludwig Erhard's *Wirtschaftswunder* (“Economic Miracle”) was still in its infancy. Barthel's wife Sonia's teaching salary helped, but they already had a small son to feed and clothe.

At the 32nd International American Congress, held that year at Copenhagen, Barthel chanced to make the acquaintance of Thor Heyerdahl who had only just returned from his illustrious Norwegian Expedition. At the time, Heyerdahl's hypothesis of an original South American settlement of Easter Island □ descendants of which were alleged to have been the creators of the island's great archaeological patrimony, who then were exterminated by invading, uncultured Polynesians who destroyed everything in sight – was still a fiercely debated topic among Pacific scholars. However, in the wake of Heyerdahl's extremely popular books *Kon-Tiki* and *American Indians in the Pacific* this was the scenario that was accepted as true among most of the reading public. As of May 1956, Barthel had also been corresponding with Alfred Métraux, similarly discussing Easter Island, then Barthel's main field of interest.² On 20 May, Barthel asked Métraux: “What do you think about Heyerdahl's claim [of] having found a Tiahuanaco stratum at Orongo? Although being an americanist myself and not a Polynesian specialist, so far I see no reason to accept any of his migration theories.” In his reply of 28 May, Métraux could only agree: “In the new edition of my popular book on Easter Island I criticize very sharply Heyerdahl's theory on parallels between Easter Island and Peru. As you know, I am also an americanist and I have just returned from Tiahuanaco. I can assure you that nothing is more different than the statues of Tiahuanaco and those of Easter Island.”

It was then that Barthel devised the Plan, the choicest distillation of an audacious itinerary: PhD, habilitation, field work, funded research, publication, then – as the definitive reward – the Chair of Ethnology at some prestigious German, Austrian or Swiss university. Barthel was convinced he could at least replicate Métraux; perhaps, with good fortune, he might do better. Both PhD and habilitation – the monograph *Grundlagen* about the *rongorongo* script – were now behind him. The Plan meant leaving Germany to complete groundbreaking ethnological field work somewhere. As his scholastic foundation had been in American Studies, and his habilitation and chief interest now lay with Polynesia in general and with Easter Island in specific, “The answer was clear,” Barthel would reveal later to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. “I had to exchange the desk for field work and travel myself to the South Seas in order to ferret out further evidence [against Heyerdahl's South American hypothesis] there.” As he was both a specialist in South American cultures and expert on

Easter Island, who better to test Heyerdahl's recent claims than himself? he believed. It would also serve him the profile he needed to attain those higher goals.

Through June and July, Barthel sketched it all out in detail at his home in the Lüne Monastery at Lüneburg, Germany, where he lived with Sonia, who was a local schoolteacher, and their small son. By 18 August 1956 he had typed a proposal which he was intending to submit – as advised by the University of Hamburg where Barthel was still teaching – to the Deutsche Ibero-Amerika Stiftung (German Ibero-America Foundation) of Hamburg and to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Association), titled “Work Program as Guest Researcher in Chile.” In this proposal Barthel put forward three options. His number one choice, of course, because of his decipherment work with *rongorongo*: he would go to Easter Island and collect there oral traditions, then afterwards translate Santiago's three *rongorongo* tablets which, he stressed, he could only do “by seeing them”. Alternatively, he could investigate Mapuche acculturation in Chile; for this, he would live for eight months in various Araucanian reservations researching foremost shamanism in collaboration with Chile's Instituto de Indigenistas. A third possibility, seeing as he already enjoyed close contact with the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos of the University of Chile, would be a collaboration with Chilean americanists at the Centro that would include field work at various archaeological sites in central and northern Chile; however, ethnography would take precedence over excavation and collating of collections.

The Deutsche Ibero-Amerika Stiftung and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft were both enthused. The former promised adequate funding, the latter an assisting grant. Even before they responded, Barthel had announced to Métraux on 19 August 1956: “I am going to Chile next year and hope to spend some time on Easter Island too, doing a bit of ethnographic research.” But he was nursing a hidden agenda while amicably sharing this news with Métraux. He wished, as Métraux had done, to proceed after Easter Island directly to the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, and now asked Métraux whether he thought some American funding might be available for this. “It seems tempting to continue my investigations in Hawaii in 1958,” he went on. He considered it worthwhile to contact people interested in his decipherment work □ “with your kind assistance.”

Métraux wrote three days later that he would be happy to help, and suggested that Barthel seek either a one-year fellowship from the Bishop Museum (as he had done back in 1937-38) or a fellowship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation in New York. Métraux was glad to hear Barthel was on his way to Chile; in fact he was hoping to be able to meet Barthel there: “... if our Institute of Social Sciences takes shape.”³

Meanwhile, Barthel had already informed the University of Chile at Santiago of his intent, and soon thereafter received an official invitation from government minister Adolf Meyer-Abich and from the Rector of the University of Chile, Juan Gómez Millas, to reside there as guest researcher. His

institutional base, he was told, would be the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos, whose director, Prof. Luis Sandoval Smart, would serve as Barthel's ultimate Chilean superior.

Now that this part was settled to his satisfaction, Barthel undertook to secure some sort of fellowship that would finance the later analysis of his field work and perhaps its publication, too. On 16 October 1956 he wrote to Dr. Alexander Spoehr, Director of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, asking whether he may apply for a Bishop Museum fellowship: “... to continue the decipherment of ‘kohau-rongorongo’ with the help of extensive comparative studies in the libraries of Honolulu.” As he would be going to Chile and Easter Island,⁴ the Bishop Museum project could begin “at the earliest” in the spring of 1958 and last six to twelve months. As references, Barthel offered Métraux in Paris and Prof. Dr. Robert Freiherr von Heine-Geldern in Vienna, Austria's senior ethnologist. Barthel applied to the Wenner-Gren in New York at the same time; the board at the Wenner-Gren appears to have been interested, for they contacted Métraux in late 1956, and Métraux wrote to Barthel on 10 December 1956 that he had “highly endorsed” Barthel's application with them.

However, the Bishop Museum project was not to be. As Barthel informed Métraux on 12 December, Director Spoehr had informed him that the Yale-Bishop Museum fellowships were at that time being awarded entirely in the field of biology, and not in ethnology. Barthel shared with Métraux his hope to do “some necessary work” in Santiago; if health permitted, he planned to start his Chile visit with “some archaeological reconnaissance” in the Atacama region.

Métraux replied five days later. He warned Barthel that, should he actually make it to Rapa Nui, “one must be extremely cautious about material collected on Easter Island in our days. Don't forget that the ‘natives’ are highly sophisticated and have a keen notion of the commercial value of their information.” In other words, he was telling Barthel, don't expect to find authentic information about “ancient Rapa Nui” there; your research will be almost entirely contemporary.

On 12 February 1957 Barthel obtained from the Lüneburg Town Hall an official Certificate of Conduct that would then allow him to procure his visa from the Chilean Consulate in Hamburg. And eight days later, while getting this visa in Hamburg, he purchased – for 380 German marks – his ticket to sail on the Hamburg-Amerika Linie's TS *Höchst* from Antwerp to Valparaíso, Chile. Whereupon Barthel busily began to assemble his equipment for the proposed expedition to Easter Island, though still not a certainty: 4,400 German marks (at a time when one earned 400 marks a month and was glad of it) were spent over several weeks for tools, lamps, a tent, a camera, a tape recorder, utensils, etc. He made sure to take with him as well 2,580 marks in pocket money (or US \$600, as he minusculely noted in the margin of one notebook). One of his last purchases ashore was at Witt and Führmann, Hamburg: 102.15 marks for fishing gear – angle, hooks, sinkers, lines and so forth, not for fishing but as gifts and trade items on Easter Island.

On 4 March 1957 Barthel boarded the TS *Höchst* and heaved his two suitcases and one duffel bag into Cabin 7. The *Höchst* sailed the same day. Barthel was 34 years old. His wife and little son remained behind in the Lüne Monastery, long a home for refugees and displaced persons.

SANTIAGO

Thomas Barthel arrived at Valparaíso on 11 April 1957. Immediately he declared to Customs his cabin luggage as well as the expedition's two steamer trunks and two duffel bags that were the legal property of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: his Chilean duty amounted to 25,655 pesos. He spent the night at Valparaíso, then arranged for his equipment to be transported to Santiago, paying for this another 6,944 pesos. Barthel settled this bill himself, with the assurance from the University of Chile that they would reimburse him to the total amount of 36,519 pesos. There was no need for a translator: as a PhD in American Studies Barthel spoke fluent Spanish and could handle all deals and professional liaising with ease. He also commanded a more than adequate knowledge of Rapanui, which he had deemed essential should he actually make it to Easter Island.

Warmly welcomed in Santiago as a guest researcher by Juan Gómez Millas, Rector of the University of Santiago, and by Luis Sandoval Smart, Director of the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos, Barthel then proceeded to introduce himself at all official venues as a *catedrático*, a professor, of the University of Hamburg. His closest colleague, and now immediate superior, at the Centro was Prof. Gustavo Peña, who had corresponded with Barthel in Germany and who was most keen himself to get to Easter Island, if possible. Barthel at once began to establish important professional and social contacts, all with a mind to sail to Easter Island as soon as he could. He also immersed himself in all manner of local Easter Island associations and information. Invaluable advice was to be had from the Euro-Chileans Dr. Greta Mostny, Dr. Ottmar Wilhelm, Alfredo Hoppe, Fritz Felbermayer and many others. His closest and most intimate confidante in Santiago was the ethnologist and textile expert Ingeborg Lindberg, wife of Karl (Carlos) Klohn. These two German expatriates would be liaising with Barthel's wife Sonia back in Germany, and in later months Lindberg would be telegraphing Barthel regularly on Easter Island with home news and urgent business using the moniker "Odilia Chabela". Ingeborg and Karl's house at Coventry 437 soon became a second home to Barthel, and they alone among his many acquaintances in Santiago were allowed to call him by his childhood nickname "Tiki".

Gustavo Peña especially, but also his Rector, Juan Gómez Millas, were eager to back Barthel's plan to mount a protracted expedition to Easter Island. This had historic reasons. Back in 1935, faced with the successful completion of the Franco-Belgian Expedition, the University of Chile had been impatient to launch its own grand scientific expedition to the island. However, only two scholars sailed in the end:

Humberto Fuenzalida, who studied the island's geology for one fortnight while the Company ship was loading the wool-clip; and Padre Sebastián Englert, a German-born Capuchin missionary from Araucania who would remain on the island to study the Rapanui language and then take the next ship back to Chile – or so he had planned at the time (Fischer 2005:189-90). Now, in the wake of the highly publicized Norwegian Expedition of 1955-56, the University of Chile again wished to respond to the international challenge with a dynamic enterprise of their own. Thomas Barthel provided them not only with a plan, but also with considerable funding from two important German foundations (almost all the necessary equipment for such an expedition had already been financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). The scheme also fostered German-Chilean relations, a strategic consideration at the time. For only a minimum contribution, both Peña and Gómez Millas appreciated, Chile might share half of the kudos of a successful expedition to Easter Island.

At the highest level it was Juan Gómez Millas who approved, supported, facilitated and helped to finance Barthel's plan. The immediate patron in Santiago, however, was Gustavo Peña of the Centro. Thwarted in his attempt to elect himself Barthel's companion on the proposed expedition, he arranged with his director, Luis Sandoval Smart, to appoint as the expedition's "Chilean assistant" his own staff member at the Centro, Ruperto Vargas Díaz. (Peña would eventually make it to Easter Island on the *Pinto* in January 1958.) Vargas was entrusted with the logistics and technical side of the expedition and was expected to carry out his own investigations into Easter Island's current legal situation. His collaboration with Barthel on the island would entail primarily archaeological field work.

On 18 April 1957 Barthel visited the widow of Lorenzo Baeza Vega, Easter Island's former schoolteacher who had drowned in December 1955 while saving schoolchildren in 'Anakena Bay during a tragic picnic hosted by the Norwegian Expedition. She advised the German on the suitability of various potential informants he might wish to use on the island, such as: "Juan Haoa ... good, but fickle man, about thirty." Of importance to Barthel was her understanding – hitherto foreign to him – that Easter Island's "native manuscripts" of *rongorongo* signs, as re-discovered by the Norwegian Expedition in 1955, were merely copies from some earlier published book.⁵ Still, she informed him of who possessed such manuscripts and where to find them. And she advised him to pursue the tactic: no presents to the Rapanui at the beginning. "Whoever gives many gifts, is dumb." As trade items she suggested clothing and cigarettes – and alcohol for the holidays. Barthel found Señora Baeza to be honest, frank and delightful. She offered her German visitor free access to her late husband's Easter Island notes and manuscripts, which he gratefully accepted.

Four days later, Barthel submitted his formal expedition proposal, importantly titled "Estudio Etno-Sociológico de la Cultura Actual de Rapa-Nui," to the Chilean government in order to secure final authorization to visit Easter Island. He

estimated a sojourn on Easter Island of approximately six months, plus twenty days there and back. He would be returning to Chile in January or February (whichever month the *Pinto* chose to arrive for the wool-clip), then depart for Europe on 1 March 1958. Barthel stressed in this proposal that his ethno-sociological investigation was crucial to the social sciences, since nearly all investigators to date had focused on the island's archaeology. His expedition would also be an "update" of Métraux's of 1934-35, a seminal study in the social science of Chilean-Polynesian acculturation. It would also entail the conservation of the island's oral traditions: the myths, legends, songs and even games. He planned a linguistic study of the Tahitian influence on the Rapanui language as well. The islanders' own oral histories would "clarify the socio-cultural position of the individual in his environment." There was also the native literature that had been discovered on the island by Thor Heyerdahl, he added (though he had already been warned about this by Señora Baeza). Finally, there were still traditions to be recorded about Easter Island's "ancient writing system." The Chilean Navy would provide transportation, and final financing would come from the University of Chile. All equipment had already been supplied "by the German participant" of the proposed expedition. After analysis of all results, publication would be effected in Spanish by the University of Chile, and in German or English "by the author".

Shortly after Barthel submitted this proposal, Gastón Bejarano, who had recently been on Easter Island, typed up for him a three-page report titled "Sobre los Nativos". Boldly realistic and refreshingly cynical, its intention was to prepare Barthel – no holds barred – for the real Polynesian island. Bejarano provided a long list of potential informants Barthel might use there, with accompanying comment on each. He suggested Barthel take only little objects with him to trade and gift. He also recommended Barthel examine more extravagant aspects of life there, among which: "Posible caso de ninfomanía en la joven T... T... de Vaitea."

While at Lindberg's house, Barthel wrote to Métraux on 1 May 1957 that the Chilean Navy had at last granted passage to Easter Island on the training ship *Esmeralda* (today still one of the world's most impressive sailing ships). He would be departing from Antofagasta about 15 June and would be on Easter Island from July to January, when the *Pinto* would be bringing him back to Valparaíso. He was now planning to use his time on Rapa Nui, he wrote, "to prepare a study of the salient cultural changes which took place since your stay in 1934-35." Or so he tells Métraux. "This 're-study' might prove of greater scientific interest than looking for ancient traditions (brand-new invented by the informant)." It appears that Barthel appreciated Métraux's repeated warnings of what to expect on the island, and was thus accommodating the scope of his research goals – at least towards Métraux. "However, I have some well-founded hope to get certain valuable data from the Pakarati family." (His main informant was to be Leonardo Pakarati.) Barthel also wrote that he was continuing to study the material that had been gathered on

Easter Island by Lorenzo Baeza Vega, through the courtesy of his widow. This included more than fifty string figures, many with accompanying chants. He also stumbled upon a treasure: "Baeza prepared a dictionary of the actual [= present] Rapanui-idiom which demonstrates the ever increasing influence from Tahiti."⁶ During the coming weeks he was planning on doing some field work in the Puna de Atacama, "looking for remnants of the Kunza-language." He would stay a few weeks at Toconau and Socaire. Also on his immediate agenda before departure was "a new application" to the Wenner-Gren Foundation in New York: "... for a grant-in-aid to do library and museum work at the Bishop Museum from March to September 1958 in order to evaluate both ancient and modern Easter Island material. It would mean a most necessary completion of my work done so far."

Two days after this letter, the German Consul von Diehl and his wife, by formal written invitation, requested that Barthel dine with them at 8:30 pm, Friday 3 May 1957, at their house in Santiago.

Barthel did indeed organize and carry out, together with the Centro in the latter half of May, a short expedition to the Atacama in an attempt to discover what allowed the development of the Atacameña and Inca cultures. While there, he also established that the Kunza language, long thought by outsiders to be extinct, was indeed still being spoken by the local population.

Once back in Santiago, Barthel continued researching valuable Chilean reports about Easter Island; talking with colleagues and recent visitors; and gathering advice about informants and conditions on the island. Just as Métraux had done in 1934-35, he noted down every detail in individual notebooks, in German, Spanish and, later, also in Rapanui. These eight small notebooks – some with only a few written pages in them – contain for the most part "word-and-object" entries in telegram style, penned in a minuscule hand; there is also one partly-filled sketchbook. One finds no personal information here, no impressions, thoughts or feelings. It is no diary. It is very much the scientist's inkwell-depot of eclectic data: mostly linguistic, but also ethnographic and archaeological. There are also some chants and tales.

And then a letter dated 8 May 1957 arrived from Thor Heyerdahl, who wished to inform Barthel of specific "native manuscripts" to investigate once he was on the island. "Try to be mysterious and play along with them in their superstition," Heyerdahl advised him, "and I think that you may run into amazing things." Perhaps it was most fitting, then, that shortly after reading this letter Barthel was able to particularly enjoy a Spanish performance of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" at the Teatro Experimental, there on the campus of the University of Chile.

Soon after, another letter from Métraux, too, arrived, dated 20 May. Métraux was pleased to learn that Barthel had finally been authorized to visit Easter Island, and as "the last anthropologist to study the island in its relative isolation." He added that, "You are fulfilling one of my best wishes: To complete the study of the modern population of Hangaroa...."

I am sure that you will notice how remote the Easter Islanders are from their past and how they are aware of the importance and value of their traditions.” Métraux asked Barthel to study carefully the *koro* system (of reciprocity), and to discern “more deeply than I did” the kinship system, as well as fishing: “How fishermen are organized and how they share their catch.” At the end, he who had been such a friend and mentor to Barthel could only add: “Good luck to you, bon voyage.”

By 31 May Barthel was able to sign a receipt for a cheque from the Rector’s Office of the University of Chile in the amount of 866,000 pesos – “para gastos de la Expedición Etnológica a la Isla de Pascua.” At 7 pm on Friday, 7 June 1957, Alvaro Bunster Briceño, Chancellor of the University of Chile, having sent Barthel a typed invitation days before, hosted his German guest at a cocktail party at Alameda 1058, second floor, Office 27, in honor of the Association of Radio Broadcasters of Chile and of several radio stations which collaborated with the University of Chile. These broadcasters were of vital significance to the expedition; indeed, Barthel and Vargas’s lives on Easter Island might well depend on these gentlemen’s expertise and good will. Eight days later, a Saturday, Barthel was to have been the German Ambassador’s guest of honor at another cocktail party, from 7 to 9 pm, at the German Embassy in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Fundación del Instituto Chileno-Alemán de Cultura.

But the German guest researcher was already at Antofagasta in the north, ready to set sail for Easter Island on the *Esmeralda*.

DEPARTURE AND VOYAGE

Special permission had been granted to the German-Chilean Expedition by Admiral O’Ryan of the Chilean Navy: Barthel and Vargas were to sail to Easter Island as paying passengers, he had stipulated, while the *Esmeralda* was scheduled to complete a major cruise of the Pacific representing Chile at various foreign destinations. Because of the expedition, the Navy would allow the *Esmeralda* to deviate to Easter Island to disembark their paying passengers and also to allow the Naval cadets to visit Chile’s remote possession. The circumstance was fortuitous for all concerned.

As the expedition’s *de facto* quartermaster, Ruperto Vargas had been extremely busy back in Santiago. He had secured two of the finest maps of Easter Island available at the time: three copies of the one produced by the Sociedad de Amigos de Isla de Pascua, and one copy of the Navy’s own official map. In Valparaíso, he would later obtain the best map of all: the one drawn up by the agronomic engineer Ugarte – who had lived on Easter Island for four years or more – then available only at the offices of the Administration of Easter Island. Vargas had also met and talked with many Easter Island contacts, including the students Felipe Pakarati, Juan Hey, Santiago Tepano and Domingo Araki. From the Bishop of Araucanía he had received packages for Padre Sebastián Englert. He had conversations with Padre

Humberto Toro, who had resided over a year on Easter Island as priest; and he had also met up with the president of the Sociedad de Amigos. In total, Vargas had acquired 27 Easter Island books, including Henri Lavachery’s rare two-volume petroglyph study (Lavachery 1939) that was meant to inspire Barthel and Vargas’s own petroglyph investigation. Vargas had also written to many Easter Island investigators for helpful information and advice; the only reply had been, ironically, Lavachery’s from Belgium. At the Arsenal de Guerra he had purchased further expedition matériel. He had travelled to Valparaíso for two days to arrange their transport and foodstuffs. He had interviewed the Chief Advocate of Labor in order to facilitate his own Easter Island legal study. For the Seminary of Social and Economic Sciences at the School of Law, University of Chile, Vargas had written an essay that included a study of the indigenous community of Easter Island and its transculturation under the influence of Chile’s Naval administration. In addition, he had compiled detailed lists of their expedition’s material needs on Easter Island. Finally, he had looked into hiring a truck to bring all their equipment up to Antofagasta: it was far too dear, he had decided, and so he had chosen to ship everything up there from Valparaíso on the *Santa Isabel*.

The *Esmeralda* was scheduled to sail on 16 June 1957. There was yet much to do. While still in Santiago, both Barthel and Vargas had needed to obtain a medical certificate as well as typhus and smallpox vaccinations. On Saturday, 8 June, the day after the Chancellor’s cocktail party, Barthel had bought further gifts and trade items at the shop of Eduardo and Victor Juri Lida. For his part, Vargas had hurriedly travelled over to Valparaíso again to deliver their equipment to Customs Site 3: he was surprised to learn it weighed nearly three tons. On Monday, 10 June, Vargas had arranged payment of their passage; bought more objects for gifts and exchange; purchased their wine supply and climbing equipment; then traveled all night from Santiago to Valparaíso yet again to oversee the loading of their expedition’s equipment aboard the *Santa Isabel* bound for Antofagasta’s Naval base. Early on the same day Barthel had also journeyed to Valparaíso to oversee the loading, confer with Naval authorities and hand over the check for their passages on the *Esmeralda*. At the same time, he had purchased 200 jars of peaches for trading on Easter Island and had then taken them immediately over to Customs to add them to their cargo. He had also bought more hooks for trade, especially those for tuna. In all these transactions he had been assisted by his good friend Alberto Medina.

Both Barthel and Vargas had then journeyed up to Antofagasta by land. On 15 June, Barthel bought a last-minute pair of house-shoes. The next day, they set sail.

Santiago now long behind them, little did Barthel or Vargas appreciate at the time that special plans were already afoot there to send – on the annual voyage of the Naval supply ship *Pinto* in January – a team of experts from the University of Chile to “supplement” their own German-Chilean Expedition to Easter Island.

In a letter to Dennis Flanagan, editor of the magazine *Scientific American*, which Barthel wrote in Hangaroa two days after his arrival on Easter Island, he divulged how he had spent his time aboard the resplendent *Esmeralda*: “Using the time on board a sailing vessel crossing to Rapanui, I was able to finish the draft of ‘The Talking Boards from Easter Island’” (Barthel 1958b). This was one of Barthel’s most widely read publications, perhaps the one article that awarded him his greatest public exposure. (In this letter of 6 July 1957 Barthel also requested that his remuneration of US \$400 – four months’ salary to a German in 1957, a princely sum – be posted to his wife Sonia at the Lüne Monastery, Lüneburg.) But scholarship was not all that enlivened the *Esmeralda*: as one can deduce from the many paymaster’s receipts, good cheer echoed loudly in the officers’ mess. During the eighteen-day sail, Barthel himself tallied up two Rhine wines, four whiskies, fifteen ginger ales and two packs of Phillip Morris cigarettes – in all, 967 pesos plus 97 pesos tax.

On 1 July the *Esmeralda* hailed Sálas-y-Gómez. Three days later, on 4 July, she was sailing off Vinapū, then hove round Motu ‘Iti to anchor in the Hangaroa roadstead, just offshore from Hanga Piko. The following day, Barthel and Vargas received their official paymaster’s receipt for payment of 6,948 pesos for 18 days’ rations. Whereupon off they went in a launch to meet the enormous crowd of Rapanui and Naval and Air Force personnel waiting ashore.

Knoche’s Chilean Scientific Expedition had been only 11 days on Easter Island, Métraux and Lavachery’s just over five months, the Norwegian Expedition the same. Barthel and Vargas would be nearly seven months ashore. Only Katherine Routledge had bettered them all, at nearly seventeen months.

EASTER ISLAND

No, it was not yet that “Museum Island” we know so well today, but still very much the “Rancho Isla de Pascua” of yesteryear sternly lorded over by its respective Naval Governor – then Captain Raúl Valenzuela Pérez. A ludicrously stunted 200-meter airport runway had already been leveled and wire-matted, however, for the projected air route Santiago-Easter Island-Tahiti-Australia. This a uniformed, twelve-man, Chilean Air Force unit – including several officers – “guarded” and maintained. Yet no aeroplane had ever landed there; it was far too short and there was no petrol for refueling. Some sixty Chileans in all lived then on Rapa Nui – Navy and Air Force personnel, a few with their families. There were four vehicles: three Jeeps and one motorcycle, for the use of the military and Padre Sebastián Englert (who had Heyerdahl’s old Jeep); the Rapanui walked or rode horses. Islanders did enjoy a photo service of sorts; they snapped a roll of film, a friend carried the roll to Chile on the annual boat the following year, and the developed photos were then brought back to Easter Island on the second year’s boat. The total island population in July 1957 was 934 and their main occupations were farming, fishing, laboring for the Navy’s

sheep and cattle farm, as well as construction of the new airport with its modern facilities. The only connection with the outside world was still the annual boat, now usually the Navy’s *Pinto*. Some private yachts did wander in from time to time, as did the *Esmeralda*.

Barthel’s initial impression? – “The external picture was a bitter disappointment: a strongly europeanized racial mix in corrugated sheet-iron roofed and cemented houses whose occupants earn their pesos as corn farmers and shepherds, visit the Continent for occupational education, or listen to Radio Tahiti” (Herwig 1958:1).

The expedition’s first phase comprised winning the confidence of the Rapanui by simply living among them (as no expedition had done before) and interacting; this took two full months, as Barthel later confessed. To the expedition’s benefit, Barthel’s Easter Island studies in Germany, together with his good working knowledge of the Rapanui language on arrival, had prepared him well and now facilitated the rather rude acculturation. His first intellectual surprise, despite most apparent externals, was the recognition that “primitive modalities”, as he put it, still existed beneath the superficial European borrowings. Soon Barthel also found that many pre-Christian *tapu* were effectively still in force, notably: food customs, marriage permissible only beyond the fourth degree of relation, winter fishing restrictions, and sincere belief in the *akuaku* – both benevolent and malevolent – who at nights habitually patrolled their prehistoric territories.

The ethnographic investigation began almost immediately in Hangaroa, though it did take a good eight weeks to gain enough of the Rapanui people’s confidence to glean something of real substance. The *korohua* or elders Barthel wished to work with preferred to speak Rapanui, not Spanish, and it was many frustrating weeks until Barthel’s oral Rapanui improved to such a degree as to begin to understand what they were revealing to him. In general, Barthel was known as *te alimani* (“the German”), or, as he wished intimate informants to call him, *Tiki te Rongorongo*. Between July and January recitations were provided by Leonardo Pakarati, Mariana Atán, Santiago Pakarati, Gabriel Hereveri, Domingo Pakarati, Arturo Teao and Mateo Hereveri.

Of all Barthel’s informants, Leonardo Pakarati (1912-1993) proved to be the most valuable – for his knowledge, honesty and sincerity. With time, he became Barthel’s main Rapanui support, and the German spent his first three and a half months with Leonardo intensively investigating all known and unknown oral traditions of the island. (For his collaboration as “informant and guide of the ethnological expedition of the University of Chile” from 10 July to 25 October, Leonardo was paid 52,500 pesos on 26 December.) If Leonardo could not come to *te alimani* on any given day, then he would send a written message, as happened twice, saying simply that he was otherwise “*muy ocupado*”.

Further explanations of unclear terms or items were provided by Timoteo Pakarati, Victoria Atán, Santiago Pakarati, Amelia Tepano and Victoria Rapahango. Initially, all of Barthel’s work was conducted in Spanish; later, it was almost

entirely accomplished in Rapanui (Barthel 1974:9-10).

These informants showered Barthel's field notebooks with veritable gems. For example, one of them recalled that the nickname of Easter Island's famous *casique* Juan Tepano (1872-1938) had been Ure Henguhengu ("Irritated Penis") because he always got so angry; Juan Tepano's wife, Maria Ika, would call him Vai Kava ("Saltwater/Bitter Water") for the same reason. Around 1900, Timoteo Pakarati had seen a "dog" – large and red – at Vaihū (Hanga Te'e), he told Barthel; but, he insisted, there was no such dog on the island at this time. And he saw it again at Vai Pukupuku, together with the elder Paté, when both were spending the night in a cave. The horses started snorting and Paté declared *akuaku* were afoot, at which moment this same red dog attacked their horses and Timoteo and Paté fled back to Hangaroa with Paté bleeding and unable to speak. For two full days he was ill. Nothing had happened to Timoteo, who at once told everyone what had occurred. Also in Barthel's notes: "Leonardo discovered and hid around 1936 two *moai* in Mataenga. Names of the two moai: *hiti kiokio*."

On 18 July, having been in Barthel's employ for only eight days, Leonardo guided the German to Vaimata (then also called "Campo No. 9"); for this exit from Hangaroa they had required a Certificate of Authorization signed by Governor Valenzuela. On the same day, through the kind auspices of the Naval radio station on Easter Island, the Chief of the Department of Radio Transmissions of the University of Chile telegraphed Barthel to request information about the expedition's work effected to date, mentioning in addition that he was looking forward to a constructive collaboration.⁷ Yet the expedition had been ashore only a fortnight!

Just uphill of Te Peu with Ruperto Vargas and Leonardo Pakarati, Barthel discovered what he took to be a "public stage" that might have served the local community, he believed, as a venue for rituals and/or performances of some kind. Nearby lay an intricate complex of constructions which, according to tradition, Barthel knew to have belonged to Tu'u ko Iho, the legendary chief who had "invented the statues and taught them to walk." (Carlyle Smith of the Norwegian Expedition had dug there two and a half years earlier; however, his excavation report had yet to be published.) Barthel also found charcoal remains of straw-roofed huts which he believed to be traces of Easter Island's first settlers, whose arrival he dated at some 500 years earlier. For Barthel, Te Peu embodied the island's original Polynesian settlement.

Come August in Hangaroa, Barthel and Vargas were establishing their own expedition headquarters, a room at "*Te Hare Meme*" ("The *Meme* House"). By this time, they and their superiors in Santiago were calling their mission *la Expedición Ethnológica*, while the Rapanui had christened the two foreigners *los caballeros Meme*. On 27 August old Mateo Veriveri (later: Hereveri) sent to the "*Hare Meme*" a handwritten note (here with orthography corrected): *Koho mi koe ki to'oku / Hare mo vānangananga / o tā'ua i te kī o tou / kāinga nei, i te kī tū'ai* ("Come to my house so that the two of us can discuss the tale of this land, the old history").

Throughout August, September and October, microphone in hand, Barthel, together with, above all, Leonardo and Santiago Pakarati, was busily tape-recording Rapanui tales, personal histories, songs, chants and even dances. Each session was noted and dated in a special notebook. Of particular importance for Barthel was the rediscovery of "native manuscript E" based on recitations by Pua Ara Hoa and written down in the Rapanui language around 1910; this contained the "legendary" settlement of Easter Island as reconstituted in the 1890s. Barthel carefully photographed each page, suspecting herein a main wellspring of "ancient" information.

However, within four weeks of their arrival at Easter Island, Barthel and Vargas were hardly speaking to one another. By this time it had become quite apparent to both that they were of wholly opposite character. Thomas Barthel was officious and professorial, a German academic of the Old School; Ruperto Vargas easygoing, "Rapanui", very much the egalitarian. Barthel deemed their working relationship utterly "intolerable".⁸ As early as 5 August, instead of speaking his mind with Vargas, Barthel, in his inimitable fashion, wrote a letter addressed to "Don Ruperto" in which he voiced his opinion that, now that a room had become available at the "*Casa Meme*", they had to effectuate a move there. Barthel declared that he needed a complete inventory of the contents of their expedition's trunks, and necessary food items etc. for the "*Casa Meme*". "Hand over [no please] the duplicates of the keys for my disposition." Then he continues: "Further, a month after the ship's arrival it is time to commence with the systematic work following my instructions. Topic to investigate in the week 5-12 VIII: 'Property and Inheritance Among Hangaroa's Population.' With 1) name and details of informants, 2) detailed description of present situation, 3) notes concerning earlier customs, 4) evaluation of the data from the point of view of Chilean law. One copy, written by typewriter, must be ready with the date of 15 VIII. I hope that you [*Vd.*] understand the necessity of an expeditionary discipline. Cordially, Dr. Barthel, Hangaroa, 5.VIII.57."

Meanwhile, back in Santiago there were those targeting Barthel in turn. The first indication in surviving sources that something extraordinary was being concocted there at about this same time surfaces in a telegram to Barthel dated 23 August 1957. This was sent by Prof. Storandti of the University of Chile, who informed him: "We shall be carrying out filming in January with Bodo Fischer. Please make preparations and get eight mules." Some sort of University expedition would be arriving in less than five months, and Barthel was expected to submit to this imposition in some salient manner. (More about this in Part 2.)

It was also at about this time that Barthel sent the two most perplexing telegrams of the expedition, both of them lacking a date. The first was to Juan Gómez Millas, Rector of the University of Chile in Santiago, announcing: "I must inform you of the termination of collaboration with assistant Vargas, given [his] total incapacity for scientific work and lack of expeditionary discipline. I disclaim any responsibility for Vargas's activities on Pascua. Ethnographic investigation

giving excellent results. Please confirm receipt. Dr. Thomas Barthel.” The next was to Barthel’s superior, Luis Sandoval Smart, Director of the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos; he was also Vargas’s boss. “Given complete scientific incapability and lack of expeditionary discipline of my assistant, I must terminate collaboration, disclaiming any responsibility for Vargas’s activities on Pascua. Rector informed of deplorable matter. Please acknowledge receipt. Regards, Dr. Thomas Barthel.” No details were given. It is shocking that Barthel should have gone over Sandoval’s head in this way, wiring the Rector directly. What was he hoping to gain? He must have known he was putting Vargas’s career at the Centro in jeopardy. He was also ending Chile’s immediate role in the expedition, if he carried through. The exact nature of Vargas’s alleged “activities” on Easter Island has never come to light. It is unlikely to have been anything of a sexual nature, as Barthel himself had taken as companion a teenager. But this does not concern us. Of consequence is Barthel’s rash reaction. This was anything but “expeditionary” tact: it was military discipline, on an island that knew this behavior only too well and could well do without it, thank you very much.

Of course none of these troubles was being mentioned in Barthel’s otherwise glowing reports to Santiago. To the German ambassador he telegraphed on 30 August: “Active work from the Expedition. Important ethnographic results. We shall continue archaeological exploration north zone. Please inform my wife that all is very well. Dr. Thomas Barthel.” To Ingeborg Lindberg: “Excellent ethnographic results. I am healthy and very happy. We shall continue with archaeological explorations in September. I am awaiting news of Sonia. Fraternal regards, Thomas.” And he finally replied to the Chief of the Department of Radio Transmissions: “Report on ethnographic investigation presently premature. Please await detailed summary with native music in January. Best regards to Ester and Meche. Dr. Barthel.”

On Saturday, 31 August, at 8 pm, Barthel and Vargas, despite differences, even held a fiesta at the “Casa Meme” to which their many new friends were invited by special typed invitation, with RSVP. Barthel was then actively socializing not only with Padre Sebastian Englert (a fellow German, with whom he got along especially well) and many Rapanui, but also with a certain Chilean Lieutenant who had brought his wife and young family to Easter Island. With the latter, Barthel particularly enjoyed long conversations in English, as he enjoyed the same with Padre Sebastian, but in German.

NOTES

¹This two-part article focuses on expedition leader Thomas S. Barthel for four main reasons: this was his expedition; his domain included the island’s archaeology, ethnology and linguistics; his was the expedition’s more productive and public voice; and his abundant legacy sources this summary overview. Barthel’s field notes, reports, receipts, sketches, telegrams, letters etc. relating to the

German-Chilean Expedition are now preserved at the Institute of Polynesian Languages and Literatures, Auckland, New Zealand.

²See the two-part series about the Métraux-Barthel correspondence in *Rapa Nui Journal* 22:127-33 (2008) and 23:55-64 (2009).

³Métraux was then planning to found his own Institute of Social Sciences at Concepción, Chile. The calamitous earthquake of 21 May 1960 – the greatest in recorded history, which devastated Concepción – put paid to the ambitious plan.

⁴This declaration was premature. Barthel did not receive official authorization from the Chilean Navy to visit Easter Island until late April 1957, while in Santiago.

⁵For the history of these so-called “native manuscripts”, see Fischer 1997:113-14, and Barthel 1965.

⁶Baeza’s important manuscript material on the Rapanui language was soon to be superseded by the invaluable work of Jordi Fuentes (Fuentes 1960).

⁷For want of a daily journal or proper expedition log, Thomas Barthel’s collected telegrams – to him and from him – must serve as a principal source of information here. The large number of these do provide a fair insight into the activities of, and sometimes excessive demands on, the expedition.

⁸Barthel confessed to me in a private conversation at Tübingen in 1990 that he had found Vargas’s behavior “wholly unprofessional and undisciplined” and that he had not been able to work with him at all; in fact, Barthel finally “took to the *campo*” just to get away from Vargas and his antics in Hangaroa. If this is true, then as a working team the German-Chilean Expedition was already *kaput* shortly after their arrival at Easter Island.

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[Editor's note: Part Two will appear in the next issue of RNJ]

Christopher M. Stevenson announces a new laboratory service (www.diffusionlaboratory.com) for obsidian hydration dating and x-ray fluorescence analysis (XRF) of obsidian, basalt and other volcanic rocks. Obsidian dating is conducted using infrared spectroscopy to measure the magnitude of the surface hydration layer. This highly precise approach permits archaeological age estimates to be made for archaeological sites with a documented temperature history. The XRF analysis assigns these artifacts to a geological source so that the process of ancient procurement can be investigated. For additional information please contact Dr. Stevenson at: diffusionlaboratory@gmail.com