

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

Part Two

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EASTER ISLAND

SEPTEMBER 1957 WAS A WATERSHED for the German-Chilean Expedition. Ignoring his inability to work together with Ruperto Vargas, Thomas Barthel found his collaboration with the Rapanui now to be excellent and he was making rapid progress with the ethnographic investigations – perhaps because the sessions proceeded more often than not in the Rapanui language. Despite Barthel's private problems, his public image shone, at times in fortuitously droll fashion: once, when Barthel casually played his tape recorder on fast forward, his Rapanui informants thought the high, rapid voices they were hearing were those of *akuaku* to whom *te alimani* had some kind of magical access; after this they seemed keener than ever to assist (Heufelder 1958). With Leonardo Pakarati, Barthel had been excavating at Te Peu and was enthused about what he had found there. He was now dividing his time between archaeology in the *campo* and ethnography in Hangaroa, employing several informants. Such an obligation did not come cheaply on the *koro* ('reciprocity')-conscious island. Already by 10 September Barthel had given to Leonardo shoes, a shirt, trousers, a knife and an ax; to his wife Mariana, clothing material, trousers and a jersey; to Timoteo, a shirt and a belt; to Santiago, a shirt and trousers; to Amelia, blouse material; to Monica Pakarati, twice shoes; and many gifts to several others as well. Then, on 11 September, Barthel obtained written permission from Governor Valenzuela to take Leonardo, Mariana and Olga Pakomio with him over to the zone between Vaimata and 'Anakena to help with the archaeological surface survey. But all was not well.

Barthel was seriously ill. During the first couple weeks of September he began experiencing flu-like symptoms: nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite and aching muscles. Soon, the resident Naval doctor was able to diagnose "infectious hepatitis" (acute hepatitis, as we would say today) and put Barthel on sulpha drugs and a nourishing diet, with complete bed rest for one month. For his attacked liver's sake Barthel was also to abstain from alcohol for the remainder of the expedition. (Even today, no specific treatment is available for acute hepatitis.) Barthel took great pains to cure the disease: if he could not, he might wreck the expedition, ruin his academic dreams ... perhaps even die there on isolated Rapa Nui. His regimen included the suppression of fats and acids and the increased intake of sweets, fruits, lean meat, fish, lobster and other nourishing foodstuffs.

On 16 September a consoling telegram arrived from the German ethnologist and intimate friend Ingeborg Lindberg in Santiago: "I received letter [from Sonia Barthel, Barthel's wife left behind with their little son in Lüne Monastery, Lüneburg, Germany]. They are both healthy, joined with you. Northern expedition grand success. Now I am hoping to journey to Pascua. Affectionately, Chabela." Eleven days later Barthel was finally able to inform her of what had happened on Easter Island: "Liver illness interrupting work for one month. Congratulations on your success. Pity you are not here. Thomas." On the same day he also informed Luis Sandoval Smart, Director of the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos in Santiago and Barthel's ultimate superior on Chilean territory: "Infectious hepatitis. I must discontinue investigation for one month. If a Wenner-Gren Foundation letter from New York should arrive, please inform me of its contents. Regards, Dr. Barthel." The very next day, 28 September, another telegram from Lindberg informed Barthel that the money for his *Scientific American* article had arrived safely at Sonia's in Germany, who was sending her congratulations on Barthel's success so far on Easter Island. "All well. Affectionately, Chabela."

Soon, other telegrams began trickling in. On 10 October Sandoval wired: "Members of Centro and undersigned wish you prompt recovery." On the following day Lindberg telegraphed: "I am very worried. Please follow strictly the medical instructions, absolute rest, return to the Continent at first opportunity." Yet during this time of "complete bed rest" while confined to Hangaroa, Barthel continued tape-recording his informants and minusculely penning stories and chants in the Rapanui language in his notebooks. On 21 October he wired Lindberg: "Do not trouble yourself, rapid recovery. Please send letters in case boat arrives November. Ethnographic investigation [yielding] surprising results. My work on Pascua unexpected success. Happy to experience Polynesian cultural inheritance. Tiki." And on the same day, to the German ambassador in Santiago: "Surprising ethnographic discoveries during Pascua work clarifying characteristics of ancient Polynesian culture. Presently convalescing from infectious hepatitis. Dr. Thomas Barthel." Five days later Lindberg responded by wire: "We are happy about present improvement, phone 6 November. Your work is appearing in Runa, but application Wenner-Gren rejected. Sonia recovered from strong influenza, sorry I cannot attend, she asks for detailed news. With love, Chabela."

The Wenner-Gren rejection was devastating to Barthel; he had counted on this generous fellowship to finance re-

search for a full year at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu in order to analyze his Easter Island material and produce a published ethnography, just as Alfred Métraux had done back in the late 1930s. This door was now shut. But with characteristic resilience only three days later, on 29 October, Barthel was already approaching Prof. Philippi in Santiago, reporting optimistically: “Excellent results of ethnographic investigation. Please inform me concerning institute in order to facilitate arrangements after return end January. Regards, Dr. Barthel.”

By late October Barthel was out in the *campo* again—not only with his main guide Leonardo Pakarati and several Rapanui laborers, but also with Ruperto Vargas as well – in order to carry out further field surveys. (It appears their rift had healed during Barthel’s illness.) And they wanted to excavate, too: at first on the south coast, La Pérouse and He Ki’i; then, in December, over at Rano Raraku. One’s ears prick up when reading a marginal note from this time in one notebook: “Vai-tea Oktober/November tags Arbeit, nachts Tanz + Liebe” (“Vaitea October/November: days work, nights dance + love”).

Evidently reinvigorated, indeed resolute about the future, on 11 November Barthel sent Lindberg a 500-peso telegram (twice the normal charge): “Please inform the Ibero-Amerika Stiftung, Hamburg 36, Alsterglaci 8, I am returning to Europe between 10 and 15 February. Put Hapag Agency, Santiago, in charge of passage Valparaíso-Hamburg same date. Health completely restored. Ancient ethnography investigation terminated. I am starting work at Rano Raraku. Love to family, Thomas.”

On 16 November 1957, while exploring fifty meters from the eastern flank of *ahu* Hanga Tu’u Hata almost due south of Rano Raraku, Ruperto Vargas discovered a hitherto unsuspected cave. In it, Barthel and Vargas found two ship petroglyphs, ancient skulls and two decayed *rongo* tablets. Further along Barthel came across four further fragments of *rongo*. Sadly, none of the erstwhile signs on the rotten pieces were legible. On the same day a telegram arrived from Prof. Philippi in Santiago: “Hearty congratulations on your investigation’s success. I have already signed an agreement with the Humboldt Foundation in analogous terms to [those of] the University of Chile. Mr. Edwards will speak with you by radio with an end to determine the possibility of working with us. Regards.”

Between 25-30 November Cristobal Pakarati Tepano labored for Barthel at Rano Raraku for 2,000 pesos.

On 28 November, Lindberg wired: “To inform: Letter from Sonia, royalties sent, Scientific American, they request more material. We have replied, they will wait until January. Taken care of passage Interamericana Hamburg. We asked they confirm my telegram. We wish health, optimistic of full success.” Two days later during a brief respite back in Hangarua, Barthel read his accumulated messages then hurriedly sent off three telegrams. First, to Director Sandoval Smart at the Centro: “Expedition found polished black ceramic, two places, Hotuiti.¹ We are continuing archaeological explora-

tion until 15 December. Regards, Dr. Barthel.” Next, to Prof. Storandti, in response to the earlier request for help with the foreign film crew to arrive in January: “Program film sites ready. I recommend bringing tape recorder, trade items, wares, cigarettes. Regards, Dr. Barthel.” Then a personal wire to Lindberg: “I received your telegram. Continuing interesting archaeological work Rano Raraku until 15 December. Please inform me if you are coming, if you are arranging passage to Europe, if there is news from Sonia. Love to all, Thomas.”

Then back to Rano Raraku where he had pitched his tent in which he was living together with a Rapanui girl in her teens while carrying out the important archaeological survey, including excavations. Between 2-7 December Raimond Tepano labored for Barthel at Rano Raraku for 2,400 pesos; between 3-10 December Graciano Veriveri Pakarati for the same amount. Julio Tepano Kaituoe worked there between 9-23 December, for 5,200 pesos. Up to 21 December Barthel requested special permission from Governor Valenzuela to authorize Elias Pakarati, Raimond Tepano, Patricio Niare, Maria Pakarati and Monica Pakarati – all of them “employed by the University of Chile Expedition” – to pass between Hangarua and Hotu ’Iti.

On 14 December, meanwhile, Lindberg wired Barthel: “ [My] voyage [Easter] Island arranged 10 January. Please send list of needed objects. I recommend supporting Urrutia, serious scientist, training in Germany. All send regards. With love, Odilia.” With an accompanying telegram from the Secretariate of the Faculty of Music, University of Chile, came the explanation: “University institutions are commissioning an exhaustive technical investigation to analyze Pascua’s musical folklore. I shall depart January, transport Pinto, essential I know make and present condition of your tape recorder, and if it is necessary to bring provisions please specify quantity and characteristics. Please telegraph immediately, Avenida Viel 1422, Santiago, eager to finish task, Jorge Ur[r]utia, Chilean folklore investigator, Professor, composer, at the Conservatory.”

Also in December Barthel drafted an early report about the archaeological results achieved thus far by the German-Chilean Expedition, writing for the first time in the English language. In this report he stressed the new statues he was presently unearthing at Rano Raraku; his new and “complete” inventory of all the *moai*; his excavation at Pū Ma’ari, furnishing fresh hypotheses for the megalithic phenomena there; and his discovery of “various primitive structures.” Other “very interesting” work had been done at *ahu* Te Peu (which he called the “theater” of the island); at Ma’ea Hono, Rano Kau, where he had found a “pre-megalithic construction, probably [a] primitive sanctuary for Tangarua”; at Motu Nui, where he had discovered a construction he hoped to excavate in January; “numerous new and important petroglyphs”; and an investigation of ancient ethnography, music and folklore had been completed after four months of investigation. It appears this English-language report was intended for an Easter Island expert, probably someone who had par-

anticipated in the Norwegian Expedition; perhaps even Heyerdahl himself.

After six weeks of laborious excavating at Rano Raraku, Barthel came to believe that the more than twenty small stone figures he had disinterred were from a very early period in the island's Polynesian occupation, whereas the standing *moai* there represented a later stage of island development. He also came to the conclusion that the "broad vs. slim" seen in this statuary reflected the two "races" mentioned in oral tradition. He excavated a three-fingered figure which he likened to prehistoric Maori carvings, and also two female *moai*, both over three meters in height: a pregnant woman and a young girl.² Reasoning that the boreholes atop Rano Raraku's summit were for a cable connection to the crater's interior, he likened this to the "cable ropeway" also mentioned in oral tradition and deduced that nobles' corpses had been hauled up to the summit to desiccate before immuration in their ancestral *ahu*.³ Alongside the "ropeway" Barthel discovered a hidden tomb containing the skeleton of a male, age 40 to 50, facing east; he believed the skeleton, as Leonardo Pakarati insisted, to be that of Pua Taura: *mā'ori*, alleged leader of a carvers' "guild", and inventor of the ropeway (Herwig 1958:2).

On 20 December, while Barthel was still tenting out in the *campo* at Rano Raraku, Governor Valenzuela sent four official letters (G.M.I.P. Ordinario No. 54) to Barthel, Vargas, Englert and the Naval Archives requesting a detailed report on all articles of ethnological and scientific interest and referring to Law 4536 and Legislative Decree 651 which declared Easter Island to be a National Park. He was instructing the members of the "Comisión Etnológica Chileno-Alemana" to indicate the "articles that by their nature are of scientific value which find themselves in their possession and which they desire to take to the Continent." He stated further that on behalf of the local administration Padre Sebastian Englert had been commissioned to mediate in the classification of the articles in question. The letter was signed and stamped in the Governor's office: "Raúl Valenzuela Pérez, Capitán de Corbeta DC. (Tc.), Gobernador Militar." Though this was obviously a bureaucratic knee-jerk to the public flack incurred from the Norwegian Expedition of 1955-56, Valenzuela meant business and was not to be trifled with. And everyone obeyed.

Several New Year's greetings arrived just before the 1957-58 celebrations. First Ingeborg wired: "Compliments prosperous New Year from Peña, Lindberg, Iribarren, Urrutia; greetings, Sandoval. I add love from Sonia, Kay, for a Pascuan New Year. Your request received, achieved. Signature Varas. Chabela." On 28 December the Centro itself conveyed their New Year's felicitations to Barthel, again with *cariños* from Barthel's wife Sonia back in Germany.

His work now completed at Rano Raraku, Barthel was able to reciprocate at last and dispatched a slew of telegrams just before the Pascuan New Year. To Jorge Urrutia he wired: "My tape recorder out of service. Need to bring complete equipment." To Director Sandoval Smart at the Centro:

"Terminating the Rapanui investigations with full success. We discovered important ethnographic and archaeological data clarifying ancient Polynesian culture. 'Happy Easter' and prosperous New Year. Thomas Barthel and Ruperto Vargas." The same message was sent to Rector Juan Gómez Millas of the University of Chile. To the German ambassador at Agustinas 785 in Santiago: "Expedition terminated investigation of megalithic art with important discoveries Rano Raraku. 'Happy Easter' and prosperous New Year. Dr. Thomas Barthel." And to the Ingeborg Lindberg and Karl Klohn family at Coventry 437 he reported that excavations at Rano Raraku had resulted in "fascinating discoveries"; he would remain these final weeks in Hangaroa finishing his work; when Ingeborg arrives on the island, could she bring him a trenchcoat (size 42), gumboots and tennis shoes (size 38), brightly colored trade goods, small fishhooks and several copies of Englert's book *Hotu Matu'a*? "Love to the family, Tiki."

On New Year's eve Barthel couriered a most valuable present with a note – in English – to his military acquaintance over at the Mataverí base: "Dear Lieutenant, let me express my best wishes for the New Year and, at the same time, my thanks for your hospitality by sending this bottle of cognac to you. Being full of sulfa-drugs, I better abstain from taking liquor in this night. So please use the drink for your benefit! With kind regards, Yours, T.S. Barthel. P.S. Tomorrow I will pass at your house to take the snapshots of your children." It is only sad that he did not get along even half as well with Ruperto Vargas.

Just after the New Year, Barthel began receiving birthday greetings as well. On 3 January 1958 Victoria Rapa-hango and family had a typed card with envelope delivered wishing him a happy 35th birthday. About to board the Chilean Navy's annual supply ship to Easter Island, the *Pinto*, Ingeborg Lindberg wired from Santiago: "Birthday greetings from family meeting in Berlin. Two paid conferences requested, advise Sonia. Passage to Hamburg booked 10 March. Reserve horses for our exclusive use before tourist invasion on the island. Affectionately, Chabela."

Six days later Governor Valenzuela further requested that Barthel and Vargas submit a summary report—"in official typed triplicate"—on the principal activities "de la Expedición Etnológica Chileno-Alemana" as an appendix to the annual report to the Chief Headquarters of Chilean Naval Command. On 15 January they dutifully delivered to the Governor's office a succinct, two-page, typed summary in triplicate, signed by both. The brief highlighted four activities of the expedition: Barthel's ethnographic investigation; Vargas's study of the economic and legal situation of the indigenous population in relation to then-current Chilean legislation; Barthel's archaeological work, assisted by Vargas; and the "formation of a collection of folkloric objects for Chilean museums."

Only two days earlier Lindberg had wired from onboard the *Pinto* that she was already at Juan Fernández, well on her way to Easter Island: "Voyage marvelous. Help yourself to latest information: bringing [tape] recorder batteries and film

camera and all correspondence. Equipped with everything, prepared to lodge at your house. Regards, Chabela.” Captained by Ramón Barros González, the *Pinto* was already three days out from Valparaíso, spending a full day at Juan Fernández – the “Robinson Crusoe Isle” – so that a party of German filmmakers could film ashore.

This was the remarkable German Film Expedition led by producer Bodo Fischer of Berlin.⁴ In 1957, Fischer had signed a contract with Berlin’s Paul-Lieberenz-Filmproduktion to produce a travel documentary about South America and Easter Island for German television, with later distribution in France and the US. Together with Fischer sailed sound engineer Joest Siedthoff, cameraman Helmut W. Sontag and Sontag’s photographer-wife Ingeborg Sontag-Hagen of Berlin. In total, the German team would be filming abroad for eight months. On Easter Island they were looking forward to working with Barthel who, by telegram, had long been advised of their elaborate plans and who had already prepared a detailed itinerary for the unprecedented film expedition.

Once arrived off the Hangaroa roadstead, the *Pinto* was approached by a launch bringing Governor Valenzuela, Padre Sebastián Englert and Thomas Barthel. Valenzuela had come to officially welcome his replacement, Capt. (*de fragata*) Fernando Dorion, who had been appointed Easter Island’s new Governor. Once on board, Valenzuela boasted to Dorion that constant contact was assured with the Continent now, as he had had two powerful transmitters installed: one run by the Chilean Navy and the other by the Air Force. There were then the traditional welcoming drinks, whereupon the launch began ferrying the assorted passengers – and there were many – ashore to Hanga Piko.

THE VISIT OF THE *PINTO*

It was a motley assortment. Among those mainlanders intending to spend the next fifteen days ashore were the several members of the University of Chile’s special expedition, each with his or her particular agenda. Prof. Gustavo Peña of the Centro, Barthel’s immediate superior, had finally arrived to carry out his long-awaited project, escorted by his secretary Isabel Declón. Prof. Jorge Urrutia Blondel of the Faculty of Music fussed over a frenetic folkloric program. Dr. Ottmar Wilhelm had in mind to do linguistic research, “translating” *rongorongo* tablet texts and amassing ancient verses of *kai-kai* recitations. Jorge Iribarren Charlin, Director of the Museo de la Serena, hoped to study carving and acquire objects of recent manufacture. Separate from these, Hartzell Dake of the Cultural Department of the US Embassy in Santiago was donating a small library to the Catholic nuns who were running the Hangaroa school and looking after Padre Sebastian; he was planning to make his own tape-recordings of Rapanui song and dance, too. Three governmental officials – Navy, Air Force and Meteorological Service – were arriving to investigate paving the airport’s runway and to assess all pertinent costs and requirements.

Prof. Peña’s was perhaps the most elaborate schedule. While ashore he would attempt to define and locate traditional family sites and property. He would record which *ahu* was associated with which family, and their respective traditions and other relevant information (e.g., functions, superstitions); then he would do the same with the *moai*, talking with Santiago Pakarati about his and the elders’ interpretations, especially of “*el Moai sentado*” (Tuku Turi, on the southern flank of Rano Raraku). He wished also information about “Queen Eva” and her antecedents, and would ask Padre Sebastian Englert if he had any knowledge about the work of Prof. Francisco Fuentes on Easter Island in 1911. (It transpired that Englert had no such information, nor had he ever met Fuentes in Chile.) Peña also proposed to observe thoroughly the Norwegian Expedition’s (i.e., Mulloy’s) work at Vinapū on the south-west coast: he wanted to study the “naturalness”, as he put it, of the sterile layer that separated the levels, to determine whether this marked two different periods, as Mulloy believed, or was a layer of sediment. Finally, Peña would observe and mark the possible architectural evolution of the *ahu* “as stipulated by Francisco Reyes.” This was an imposing agenda for a fortnight.

However, they nearly drowned before even landing.

As the launch ferried the Germans, the first to disembark, from the *Pinto* towards the then much smaller pier at Hanga Piko, five-to-six-meter waves nearly overturned them. The launch washed up ashore, then the backwash dragged it – with them inside holding on for dear life – back out again with a dead motor ... broadside to a giant roller quickly bearing down on them. They hurriedly managed to nose the launch towards it, restarted the motor, then giddily slid up the monster which thunderously broke just after them. Relieved, they turned their heads around – to face yet another mountain of water ominously approaching. In time they made it back to the *Pinto* ... and several medicinal piscos. In the evening the Germans made a second attempt to land. By then the sea had calmed a bit, and they were successful. Still at this late hour nearly the entire population of Easter Island was crowding the Hanga Piko shore. For good reason: “At once the trading and bargaining began,” noted Bodo Fischer.

Just before commencing his nearly full-time work with the German Film Expedition, Barthel had acceded to Juan Haoa’s wish for a testimonial – in English, in Haoa’s justified anticipation of further such expeditions to the island by foreign scholars. “This is to certify,” typed Barthel on 18 January 1958, “that Juan Haoa Hereveri, born 1.12.1924, belongs to the leading group of wood-carvers in Easter Island. I found him to be useful both in making copies of ancient objects as well as creating modern designs in a vigorous style. So I would like to recommend this native for future works in his field of knowledge and ability.” (Barthel retained a carbon copy of this testimonial.) Of course, Leonardo had to have one, too, also in English. “This is to certify that Leonardo Pakarati, born 4.11.1912, was the ethnographical informant and archaeological guide for my field-work on Easter Island, for the period 10 July to 25 October 1957. I

found him to be a most efficient and tradition-minded native with an outstanding memory and unusual sense for the critical evaluation of data. Taking care of his intellectual vanity, he may well prove to be very useful for further scholars, too. Referring to his character, I wish to add that Leonardo Pakarati demonstrated a well-integrated personality with strong feelings for truth and honor.”

Bodo Fischer and his team busied themselves with the local Rapanui while awaiting Barthel’s completion of preparations for their grand expedition into the *campo*. They filmed and taped a long interview with Padre Sebastian, too, later remarking that “his Bavarian accent is still unmistakable.” The Germans were quite surprised to hear the locals singing to them the German folksong “Alle Vögel Sind Schon Da” – in Norwegian! It had been taught to them by the Norwegian Expedition.⁵ From the young Rapanui women Ingeborg Sontag-Hagen personally tape-recorded songs and tales. Doubtless the footage that the Germans filmed while resident in Hangaroa comprises one of the finest records of everyday Rapanui life in the mid-1950s.⁶

Whereupon the German Film Expedition set out with Barthel for the south coast, filming virtually everything they saw there, too. Barthel had prepared for them, as requested, a complete itinerary of the most salient features – archaeological and topographical – worth filming, and served them not only as local guide but also “guest expert”, lecturing before the camera at the most important sites. On track were five Germans, six horses, two bearers, two fully loaded “oxcarts” and a large entourage of paid, and many unpaid, Easter Islanders: each of the latter had lied to Governor Valenzuela that he or she was a “guide” and so had acquired the requisite pass out of the Hangaroa compound. The expedition settled in tents at the foot of Rano Raraku, having been provided by Captain Barros González of the *Pinto* with precisely fourteen days of rations for four German mouths. Within a few days, however, their Rapanui escort had consumed it all, and so, in the end, everyone was eating dry potatoes.

Yet it proved to be a “magical mystery tour” sanctified by serendipity. One fine day in January while filming with the Germans on the south coast, Barthel exited a cave while the camera was rolling – with an authentic fragment of a *rongorongo* tablet in his raised right hand! The piece even bore legible signs, too. (It was the last authentic *rongorongo* to be discovered on Easter Island.)⁷ Helmut Sontag then filmed Barthel inspecting the tablet before the cave entrance.

Back in Hangaroa, Prof. Urrutia – already among the more peripatetic members of the University of Chile’s expedition – was especially industrious. His time ashore was spent almost entirely investigating Rapanui musical folklore; yet he was quickly disappointed. He personally found no traces of “ancient” Easter Island music at all. To his dismay, everything musical that he heard had been borrowed from outside visitors – but for the Rapanui earth drum, a flat stone (*keho*) placed over an earthen cavity. (The Norwegian Expedition had managed to record a few authentic chants in Old Rapanui, and Barthel had gleaned many of these as well, including choral pieces.) And because of the island’s low

voltage Urrutia’s electric tape recorder would hardly work. In the end Hartzell Duke of the US Embassy loaned Urrutia his own battery-powered tape recorder, and when Barthel and the Germans finally returned from the *campo* they let him use their taping equipment as well.⁸ The Germans themselves filmed and taped a considerable amount of Easter Island dance and music—all of it of modern vintage—for their themed documentary.

DEPARTURE AND VOYAGE

On 1 February 1958 the *Pinto* departed fully loaded with the year’s wool-clip and around 200 passengers and crew. Governor Valenzuela was leaving the island for good with his wife and three children; his daughter Valeria, born during their fifteen-month residency, was already regarded a “native” of Rapanui.⁹ Besides Thomas Barthel and Ruperto Vargas (who had spent almost seven months ashore, longer than either the Franco-Belgian or Norwegian Expedition), the four members of the German Film Expedition and the many participants of the University of Chile’s expedition, there were also young Mario Tuki, Miguel Teao, Pedro Paté and Policarpo Ika who were “desiring to achieve for themselves a future on the Continent” among the 27 Rapanui aboard.¹⁰ And there were the “ancient Rapanui passengers” as well: many exhumed skulls (some painted with red earth) and the full skeleton of the alleged *mā’ori* Pua Taura; these human remains were to be carefully preserved and meticulously analyzed at the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos in Santiago and also at the Institute of Biology, University of Concepción, under the guidance of Señor Henckel.¹¹

Between the first and sixth of February both Barthel and Vargas confined themselves to their cabins drafting then typing up their formal Spanish-language reports on the activities and results of the German-Chilean Expedition. Barthel was briefly interrupted on 3 February when he had to pay the cost of the Naval passage: 42,500 pesos. During the entirety of the return voyage Barthel was subsequently charged for only one mineral water (25 pesos) and five Coca-Colas (200 pesos); that is, he still abstained from alcohol, now mainly because of the sulphur drugs he was taking for his hepatitis. On 6 February, now finished with his report, Barthel typed up many thank-you letters, with expressions of respect, to those who had aided the expedition: the *Pinto*’s captain, Ramón Barros González; the Director General of the Chilean Navy, to whom he was sending a new map of Easter Island; the Senior Commander-in-Chief of the Department of Easter Island, Eduardo Beeche, to whom he was also sending a map; the Rector of the University of Chile, Juan Gómez Millas; the Director of the Centro, Dr. Luis Sandoval Smart; and the Chilean Minister of Public Education, Diego Barros Ortiz. For the University of Chile, the Naval authorities and the Naval Department of Easter Island, Barthel included a copy of his formal report, as had been officially requested. Ruperto Vargas did the same, submitting his report separately.

It is worth summarizing Barthel's report, signed 6 February 1958 aboard the *Pinto* and covering the period 4 July 1957 to 1 February 1958. It comprises seven typed pages and mentions that Vargas would be submitting separately as their joint work comprised only the archaeology of Easter Island. Barthel's report is in two parts (here following his own divisions and headings):

I. Ethnographic studies: Barthel investigated the transformation and acculturation of the modern indigenous population; their "memory culture", i.e. what of the ancient culture still remained in memory, including indigenous manuscripts; folklore as historico-cultural nucleus; and exploration of "functioning culture", the network of mutual obligations. He noted that pre-Christian elements survived in song and games, and that he was the first investigator to live among the Rapanui in Hangaroa, which yielded invaluable results.

I a. Ethnographic results in the field: Barthel studied the Polynesian deities, role of the ancient king, warrior caste and warfare, cult of 'Orongo, literary tradition of ancient culture, and so forth. In folklore, he tape-recorded and wrote down vernacular texts; he estimated its evaluation would demand much time.

I b. Ethnographic results in the field: he carried out a complete investigation of the *tapu* complex, as well as a study of Rapanui magic, *akuaku*, cycle of life, genealogies and relations, the *koro* system of reciprocal obligation, and so forth.

II. Results of archaeological exploration: Barthel spent ten weeks at this, with some pilot excavations (with two or three Rapanui laborers at hand each time); both Barthel and Vargas participated in the physical work of excavating. They began at Te Peu (where they found ancient constructions and the "theater of Tu'u ko Iho"); they explored Motu Nui; they dug at the northern section of Rano Kau, where they found primitive circular constructions; they explored caves between *ahu* Vai Mata'a and Hanga Oteo in order to obtain skulls; they discovered a burial site in a cave east of Hanga Tetenga which produced a second skull painted red; they discovered closed tombs at *ahu* 'O'one Mākihi; they studied isolated *moai* and minor sculptures of *ahu* Hanga Hahave and *ahu* 'A Pepe; and so forth. Annotation: there were important petroglyph discoveries, especially at Hanga Piko and Hanga Tu'u Hata; they discovered rotted remains of *rongorongo* tablets in a cave on the coast opposite *ahu* 'O'one Mākihi; they explored the islet Marotiri and surveyed the Pōike Peninsula, as detailed in Ruperto Vargas's report. The focus of exploration was Rano Raraku, where for six weeks they excavated and made many discoveries [here detailed in telegram style]. Barthel announces the publication of these results in a proposed book he was planning to title "Contributions to the Ethnography of Easter Island."¹² There were also to be written the monographs "Annotations to the Archaeology of Rano Raraku" and "Circular Constructions in Easter Island."¹³

The antiquities which the expedition had found, Barthel went on to report, including skulls and stone material, were being conveyed to the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos for evaluation by the University of Chile. Here Barthel stipulated: "The visiting investigator [i.e., Barthel] limited himself to collecting modern copies of ethnographic objects including examples of falsifications."¹⁴ Barthel took special care to point out: "To our working companion, Mr. Ruperto Vargas Díaz, I owe my special gratitude not only for his enthusiastic collaboration with the archaeological studies, but also for his disinterested dedication to resolving the technical and economical problems of the expedition." And to Padre Sebastian Englert: "... for his scientific and moral support amongst the indigenous environment of the Island."

Finally, Barthel thanked in his official report the University of Chile, the Centro, the Navy, the Governor and those responsible for their military transport.

Meanwhile, Vargas had been told on Easter Island by many Rapanui that Thor Heyerdahl had "plundered" them back in 1955-56, and he had been convinced of their sincerity: the Easter Islanders were truly angry, he appreciated, that so many sacred objects had been taken away from them. Now aboard the *Pinto*, Vargas became the spokesman for this public anger. Many of the passengers listened to him, and became duly concerned. One who did was Capt. Barros González, who demanded from Barthel a written statement declaring what of value he himself was bringing away from Chile's Easter Island. On 8 February, still at sea, Barthel typed a formal letter to Capt. Barros González responding to this concern that possible antiquities were being taken away from Rapa Nui. He declared once again that he had "no ancient object nor archaeological material and that I have collected only several exemplars of current ethnological type and specimens of recent falsifications, as can be confirmed by the specialists Dr. O. Wilhelm and Prof. G. Peña," who were also on board.¹⁵

SANTIAGO AGAIN

The *Pinto* docked at Valparaíso on 9 February 1958. Welcomed quayside by the Chilean press, Ruperto Vargas alone, among the scores of those disembarking from Easter Island, boldly spoke out on behalf of the Rapanui people: the Norwegian Expedition had "plundered" the Isla de Pascua, he loudly announced. Detecting at once an angle, the reporter from *Las Ultimas Noticias* chose this – and not at all the boring science – as his paper's lead. Vargas revealed other problems as well, daring to criticize Chile's governance on the island: "There exists a crisis of wool production," he told the reporter from *El Mercurio*. "The seventy-six thousand kilos of wool produced the year before has been reduced to fifty-four thousand in 1957. The same follows with the lard and other articles. One needs a complete production plan, besides other measures."¹⁶

In marked contrast, Thomas Barthel concentrated on Easter Island's history and culture. First telling the gathered

reporters that he was planning to return to the island one day, he then described in detail the German-Chilean Expedition: his ethnographic findings, where exactly they had dug, what they had found there, his basic conclusions about original settlement. Barthel declared that his discoveries showed Easter Island culture to be the product of Polynesians alone, with no evident proof of any American influence prior to the Peruvian labour raids (of 1862-63). Indeed, it was Barthel's conviction that the origin of the Easter Islanders was to be sought at Ra'iatea in the Society Islands. There was no doubt in his mind but that the island represented the development of a more complex civilization whose scientific interpretation was yet in a primary phase, such that there was intensive work still to be accomplished by archaeologists and ethnographers on an international basis. Perhaps most importantly Barthel let it be known that he could not endorse those "alleged suppositions of which Thor Heyerdahl has been accused", as he did not concur with any versions of that nature. In other words he was openly declaring war on Vargas's bold allegations—and once again threatening the superficial unity of the expedition.

The German Film Expedition made its own announcement on the quay. Bodo Fischer explained that they were now on their way to film Chile's lakes and the Zona de Magallanes—invited there by the Chilean Air Force—then up to Chile's north to film at Chuquicamata and the nitrate works of Pedro de Valdivia, before returning by ship to Germany.¹⁷

For his part, ex-Governor Valenzuela stiffened prominently on the quayside proudly proclaiming to the Chilean press that Easter Island was in "*perfectas condiciones*".

Las Ultimas Noticias printed Vargas's shocking allegations the very next day. There followed a nation-wide uproar. The Norwegian Expedition was publicly lambasted, and many letters to the editor were demanding an official investigation. In hurried response, Prof. Gustavo Peña of the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos, Vargas's immediate superior, announced a press conference at the University of Chile – to control the damage and enlighten the press as to what amazing things this historic German-Chilean Expedition had achieved. The press conference was to be held on Friday, 14 February, at 6 pm at the Centro itself, Ejército No. 233.

Las Ultimas Noticias printed this announcement the day of the press conference, but only underneath the sensationalist headline: "They Accuse: Plunder in Pascua."¹⁸ In the accompanying article it was accepted that, for what they had achieved there, "this mission appears to be the most important expedition to legendary Rapa Nui for many years." Yet, as *Las Ultimas Noticias* repeated once more, the 1955-56 Norwegian Expedition had "practically plundered" Easter Island for objects which had then been taken away to Norway. At present there was a justified public call to find a catalogue of those objects and demand their return to Chile. At the press conference that evening, the article went on, the German-Chilean Expedition would display all the objects recently collected on Easter Island, both ancient and modern—including pineapples as yellow as Brazilian ones that

cost only ten pesos apiece on the island! In conclusion the article lauded the role of the Chilean Ruperto Vargas who, it said, was the leading anthropologist who had participated in the exploration of the Cerro el Plomo "that culminated in the discovery of a legendary mummy." Vargas had been one of the founders of the Centro; he was also a graduate of the Faculty of Law at the University of Chile.

According to University authorities the subsequent press conference was an unmitigated success. Peña, Barthel and Vargas presented a unified front as they were photographed displaying various objects brought from Easter Island. Barthel did most of the factual reporting, describing what had been discovered on the island in the way of archaeology and ethnography as he generally summarized his official report. For his part, Peña declared that – contrary to Ruperto Vargas's claims—there had been no plunder or theft by the Norwegian Expedition on Easter Island: Chile's interests had been clearly safeguarded. Dr. Luis Sandoval Smart, Director of the Centro and also Chief of the Laboratorio de Policía Técnica, disclosed that there existed a written agreement between the University of Chile and Thor Heyerdahl: the latter had been given two years to scientifically evaluate the objects he had taken from Easter Island, after which time everything would be returned to Chile. This fact should calm the tensions created by an overly enthusiastic press, Sandoval assured those present.¹⁹

Prof. Jorge Urrutia of the Facultad de Ciencias y Artes Musicales then explained that he had noted among the folkloric material he had been able to amass that Easter Island's "primitive music" was in danger of disappearing entirely because of the influence of modern tunes from abroad. Urrutia suggested carrying out more in-depth studies with an aim towards acquiring original material from the Easter Islanders.

Vargas was now allotted time to announce his own findings. It is evident that he had decided to defer, for he now obediently avoided repeating the allegations he had made so vociferously on the quay. Vargas related calmly how he had been encharged by the Centro to study aspects relating to Easter Island's legal situation, where mainland legislation did not obtain. The Islanders were subject to Naval administration of justice, he explained, yet the respective Governor was counselled in this by a panel of three "natives" (the *korohua*). Chile's continental Penal Code was inapplicable there, as only minor crimes occurred on Easter Island. It was the Naval Governor who decided the punishment; sanctions generally sufficed, but he might demand the shaving off of the culprit's hair instead, or seven days in jail; sometimes this was commuted to a payment of six sacks of cement. Easter Island's population had totalled exactly 934 in July 1957, of whom around 800 preferred to be acknowledged as "*autóctonos*". They enjoyed a quality of life better than that of the normal Chilean worker, Vargas believed. Every house on the island had curtains and flowers. Fifty families had electricity at home. The majority of the Rapanui worked in agriculture, their land divided into 180 lots of some four hec-

tares each. Vargas also touched on the island's "economic problem" and voiced the possibility of augmenting the productivity of tropical cultivars. In Easter Island's general store there was frequent rationing: though each person had a right to two pair of shoes a year, for example, most Rapanui wore shoes only on Sundays and holidays. Illiteracy was almost non-existent. Hard drink was unavailable on the island, and so fortunately it was a "dry zone" with none of those troubles encountered elsewhere. The only liquor was a weak, three-day fermentation of pineapple must. Fruit was very cheap on Easter Island, Vargas positively reported: a pineapple cost only ten pesos, a bushel of 100 bananas 200 pesos, and all the island lobster was free. Sanitary conditions were being improved. The dentist who had recently arrived on the island had been shocked by the atrocious oral hygiene. The leprosarium still housed twenty-five Rapanui, all being treated using modern therapy; much still needed to be done in this regard, however, and Vargas expressed hopes that he might be able to inform the proper medical authorities about this.²⁰

Still, *Las Ultimas Noticias* refused to relent. Was there really a contract with Thor Heyerdahl, its reporter now asked.²¹ Was there a catalogue of removed objects? These were "two burning questions which revolve about a national patrimony." The reporter had queried the Ministerio de Raciones and the Departamento de Tratados: neither knew of any written agreement with Heyerdahl. Indeed, Heyerdahl had been told by Chile that he was "not authorized to remove anything he might find there [on Easter Island]." Yet the Rapanui people had given Heyerdahl many "presents", the reporter now pointed out: "...*que son patrimonio nacional*." On the island, Ruperto Vargas had had the impression of a *saqueo* ("sacking"), *Las Ultimas Noticias* still maintained. Yet the moment that Vargas had fronted up to the press, Barthel himself had denied that Heyerdahl had plundered the island. What was the truth? *Las Ultimas Noticias* then posed the final question: "When will [Heyerdahl's objects] be returned to our country? This is all!"

Shortly after the unpleasant press conference, Barthel journeyed south to Concepción to present a lecture at the local University there.²² He repeated the details of his Santiago lecture whereby he highlighted the earth-painted skulls he had discovered (so like Melanesian ones, he maintained); the female *moai*; and the "flying fox" atop Rano Raraku to transport corpses. He pointed out that objects from Easter Island were also being sent to Señor Henckel at the Institute of Biology, Universidad de Concepción, for examination and analysis. He also introduced a larger political dimension for the first time: "The expedition to Easter Island is the first initiative of cultural cooperation between Germany and Chile since the Second World War. It was able to be established between the University of Hamburg and that of Chile. I am certain that soon this cooperation will be effected with the University of Concepción through some other German university center. In addition I am in a position to confirm that Chile is a rich source of archaeological and ethnological investigations, and of vital importance is the formation of a

team of investigators who can work in collaboration with foreign scientists." His chief conclusion: "Easter Island is a treasure for world culture and its investigation."

On 12 March 1958 Barthel purchased a ticket (477.36 German marks) for a passage from Valparaíso to Antwerp on the M/S *Wiesbaden*, Hamburg-Amerika Line.

On his way back to Europe, during a stopover at Curaçao in the Caribbean, Barthel typed a long letter in English to Alfred Métraux dated 4 April 1958 in which, he wrote, he wished to provide Métraux with "some preliminary information" about the results of his expedition.²³ It is a most insightful document. Barthel was very pleased with his results, he declared. "It almost looked like as if one of those ancient Polynesian deities was shedding its mana out upon me; one would never have dared to expect as much from the modern Hangaroa of 1957." He attributed his success to living among the Rapanui and to working from his predecessors' material, using Métraux's own *Ethnology* (Métraux 1940) as his "baseline". Barthel had planned to make "a mere study on culture change," but once he was on Easter Island he had found there was still so much to collect "on memory culture and rapidly vanishing social and intellectual practices" that he now felt he needed to complement Métraux's *Ethnology* with a published "Contributions to Easter Island Ethnography." Barthel believed the Norwegian Expedition had done fine archaeological work, especially that of Mulloy at Vinapū. Still, there was "at least 20 years more" work to do. With his own "Misión de la Universidad de Chile" – that is, the German-Chilean Expedition – he had been rather constrained, he confessed: "I had one Chilean assistant with me [i.e., Vargas] and could pay but a few workers." What he did achieve there was "some interesting pilot excavations." He pointed out as well: "A considerable aid during my stay was the close and fruitful cooperation with P. Englert." He then enumerated to Métraux "in telegraphic style" – as he himself put it – some of the ethnographic topics he had pursued on Easter Island, and reckoned it would take "at least two years to work up the material." A special recollection: "The very friendly human relations with the pascuenses formed one of the most delightful aspects of my work on Easter Island." As the *Wiesbaden* would be landing at Antwerp, Barthel was planning a visit to Henri Lavachery at Brussels on 15 April, before proceeding to Hamburg. "I did find six fragments of rongorongo-tablets in a cave," Barthel triumphantly concluded, "unfortunately with a completely rotten surface!"²⁴

BACK IN EUROPE

Germany's leading newspaper, *Die Welt*, prominently featured Thomas Barthel and his exciting news from the other side of the globe (Heufelder 1958). Once again Barthel listed his perceived successes on Easter Island as he had outlined in his official report and then had announced to the Chilean press. Yet his home soil apparently prompted him to conclude this German-language interview with singular poetic sensitivity: "This barren and parsimonious island in the

water-desert of the Pacific Ocean is the most significant cultural center of the South Seas, whose history reaches back at least a thousand years.”

In his subsequent report to the University of Hamburg Barthel stressed how he had resided longer on Easter Island than either Métraux’s or Heyerdahl’s expedition members: his seven months of field work there entailed five months of collecting ethnographic and linguistic data in Hangaroa, followed by two months of archaeological reconnaissance in the field. He sensed that he had recorded Easter Island culture at a threshold moment when both culture and language were changing dramatically. He had lived with the Pakarati family, worked closely together with Padre Sebastián Englert, and been able to preserve many tales, songs and histories. All of this would now be examined, evaluated and published in Hamburg, he assured his superiors—the field notes, tape recordings, measurements and collections. Since he was committed to a teaching schedule, he believed it would take up to three years to complete the task. There were many studies to publish, most important of which was the proposed “Beiträge zur Ethnographie der Osterinsel” (“Contributions to the Ethnography of Easter Island”).

Personally, Barthel’s main goal was now to secure a Chair of Ethnology at some prominent university, as his hopes for a fellowship to complete his analysis and writing up of the Easter Island data at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu – as Métraux had done back in the 1930s – were manifestly waning. Towards this end Barthel accepted an invitation to lecture in Vienna in October, all expenses paid. On 17 October 1958 he first held a press conference there in which he announced his general conclusions about Easter Island in the wake of his own successful German-Chilean Expedition.²⁵ However, Barthel talked above all about his work with the *rongorongo* script and his unique method of decipherment.²⁶ However, he also declared to Vienna’s press that he had “100 per cent proof” that Thor Heyerdahl was wrong: Barthel was certain that “Hotu Matu’a” and some 250 of his tribe had arrived at Easter Island from Central Polynesia in the fourteenth century [thus contradicting what he had written in his Hamburg report], “round about 1400”, a date he had gleaned from his own reading of the *rongorongo* tablets.²⁷ He even went on to identify the two female *moai* he had discovered at Rano Raraku as “fertility symbols” that had been brought to Easter Island at that time. Leaving open the question whether a “pre-Hotu Matu’a” population had once existed on Rapa Nui, he stated publicly that he wished now above all to study Vienna’s own two *rongorongo* tablets ... and, yes, he happened to be seeking a Chair of Ethnology somewhere.

When finished, Barthel was immediately queried by the press concerning Thor Heyerdahl whose name was on everyone’s lips in late 1958. (*Aku-Aku* had just appeared in New York and London.) Was Barthel setting himself up as Heyerdahl’s scientific foe? “Scientific arguments,” Barthel diplomatically countered, “are always only a battle of opinion,

never of persons.” He added that he was “warmly befriended” with Heyerdahl.²⁸

On Tuesday, 21 October 1958, at 7:30 pm, Barthel addressed an eager audience of professors, lecturers, students and the general public in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Vienna, relating his successes on Easter Island and with the *rongorongo* script and presenting his conclusions on island settlement and ethnicity – in emphasized opposition to Thor Heyerdahl whom he often mentioned by name. The next day, he addressed scientific colleagues of the Anthropologische Gesellschaft (Anthropological Society). He was a great success in Vienna, but he was offered no Chair of Ethnology there.

Barthel’s public relations promotion continued apace. At an address in Stuttgart on 29 December 1958 he once again announced his successes with the German-Chilean Expedition, then made a point of declaring – again in opposition to Thor Heyerdahl – that he had “not been able to find on Easter Island any sort of [South American] Indian influence.”²⁹ Though he was a specialist in South American cultures, he asserted, he and his mission had found no evidence that South Americans had ever set foot on prehistoric Easter Island. This was also reported in Frankfurt.³⁰

Increasingly impressed by Barthel’s prominent pulpit and by the sermon he was preaching, one with which he entirely agreed, Alfred Métraux in Paris wrote to Dr. Alexander Spoehr, Director of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, on 11 March 1959 supporting Barthel’s renewed bid to secure a fellowship there in order to analyze and write up his important Easter Island material. Yet it was not to be. Barthel informed Métraux on 27 April that he had been offered the Chair of Ethnology at the University of Tübingen, one of Germany’s oldest and most highly esteemed institutions of higher learning. He intended to take up the Chair on 1 May ... only four days hence. Barthel thanked Métraux for his loyal support over the years, and suggested that future Easter Island investigation should be conducted in the framework of international cooperation – perhaps a “Humboldt Commission”, he added, to be initiated by the Universidad de Concepción (where Métraux was then planning to found his institute), Hamburg’s Ibero-Amerika Stiftung, and later also Barthel’s own Institut für Völkerkunde (Institute of Ethnography) in Tübingen: “... but most certainly open to all interested persons and institutions.”

After this, Barthel’s immediate interest in Easter Island waned, as teaching and administrative duties as well as renewed attention to American Studies demanded more of his time. No fellowship to write up the results of the German-Chilean Expedition to Easter Island ever materialized. From 1959 to 1988 Barthel held the Chair of Ethnology at Tübingen and directed the Institute of Ethnography there. He had told Métraux in the letter quoted above, “Owing to the duties of my new chair, it will take more time for me to work up my field-notes.” His next book, he had then affirmed, would be “Untersuchungen zur Kultur der Osterinsel” (“Investigations into the Culture of Easter Island”). He had asked Métraux to

“wait patiently” for it. But it never appeared. In a letter to Métraux dated 24 November 1959, Barthel revealed that he was intending to take his 1961 sabbatical on Easter Island in order to clarify the concepts of “*moai*” and “acculturation”. “Dann aber Schluß” (“And then that’s it”)—he would spend three to four years working up this Polynesian chapter, and then he would be returning to challenges in American Studies.

In subsequent years Barthel actually evolved into the world’s then most prolific writer on Easter Island scholarship.³¹ (Unhappily, most of his articles appeared in German, a language no longer commonly read by international scholars.) The only book to emerge from the German-Chilean Expedition – Barthel’s second and final book about Easter Island – was *Das achte Land* (Barthel 1974; English *The Eighth Land* 1978). Regiving the settlement tradition as re-invented by Pua Ara Hoa on Easter Island in the 1890s and written down in “Manuscript E” around 1910, this was the manuscript Barthel had photographed in Hangaroa. The book made it into print only because Barthel had been granted a free semester in 1973 to collate his ethno-historical data from 1957-58. In his preface to *Das achte Land* Barthel announced that he was planning to publish further volumes about Easter Island; however, these were never written. A distinguished career in ethnology followed, as did two further marriages and two further children. (His expedition to Easter Island had ended the first marriage.) Thomas Barthel never returned to Rapa Nui. Yet his heart remained open to the Rapanui people, and he devotedly followed Easter Island scholarship up until his death on 3 April 1997.³²

At the time of the German-Chilean Expedition to Easter Island, Ruperto Vargas was already a much-admired collector of Andean folk art. In later years, as his more active career with the Faculty of Law at the University of Chile, Santiago, progressed, he developed into an internationally recognized expert on the ancient and contemporary artwork of South America and Polynesia (especially Easter Island). In March and April of 1976, for example, Vargas exhibited his distinguished Easter Island collection at the Museo de América. And in 2004 Vargas presented the paper “A Contribution to Rapanui Art Studies” at the Sixth International Conference on Easter Island and the Pacific that convened at Viña del Mar, Chile.

CONCLUSION

Though the German-Chilean Expedition of 1957-58 is today forgotten, it deserves recognition, indeed celebration, for several reasons. Most immediately, the mission was the first public challenge to Thor Heyerdahl’s South American hypothesis. Only with difficulty can one recall that black-and-white world of 1956 when little notice was taken any longer of those colorful theories of Easter Island’s settlement proposed by Katherine Routledge (who had favored Mangareva) and, later, by Alfred Métraux (“East Polynesia”, including the Marquesas and Mangareva) – though Métraux was then publishing a new edition of his work for a general

audience. Only Thor Heyerdahl’s South American tale was being publicly told, years before the publication of the Norwegian Expedition’s generally impartial archaeological verdict. Heyerdahl himself, a master of public relations, had all but convinced his worldwide audience that ancient Rapa Nui culture had arrived ready-made from South America. However, by 1958 the German-Chilean Expedition was offering a salient and believable rebuttal to this fiction, loudly proclaiming: Easter Island’s first settlers and builders were Polynesian, not South American.

Further, the expedition’s collection of ancient and contemporary wooden and stone artifacts, painted skulls and one complete skeleton enriched Chile’s scientific and art institutions and occupied scientists and scholars there for years. Alone the wealth of ethnographic data Barthel amassed on Easter Island warrants acclaim today: his many scientific articles based on this treasury liberated Easter Island ethnography from its 1930s quarantine as it opened up new directions of investigation, part of a process that was transpiring throughout Pacific Islands in the mid-1950s. It would be no exaggeration to claim that in both the Norwegian Expedition of 1955-56 and the German-Chilean Expedition of 1957-58 lay the scientific foundation for modern Easter Island scholarship.

This was no mean feat for so modest an enterprise. For the Norwegian Expedition had enjoyed abundant funding and comprised a group of six international scholars (with attached crew and Heyerdahl’s family), with scores of Rapanui at hire, its own supply vessel and its own expedition Jeep. The German-Chilean Expedition, in contrast, had much smaller funding, only two scholars, no ship and no vehicle. While the Norwegian Expedition limited itself to the archaeological investigation of Easter Island, however, the German-Chilean Expedition arrived to explore not only this, but also the island’s ethnology and sociology—at a special time in its history when “Rancho Isla de Pascua” was dying and “Museum Island” emerging (Fischer 2005:199-208). Thomas Barthel and Ruperto Vargas were able to witness and describe this old-new world; they also preserved much of value that otherwise would have been lost.

On the much larger stage – following the depression years of the Thirties, the cataclysmic years of the Forties and the ash-and-mortar years of the early Fifties – the German-Chilean Expedition to Easter Island was, as Barthel had pointed out in Concepción, the first initiative of cultural cooperation between Germany and Chile since the Second World War. It also added significantly to Germany’s and Austria’s re-emergence in international Pacific scholarship. Together with such luminaries as Hans Fischer, Hans Nevermann and Robert Freiherr von Heine-Geldern, with his expedition to Easter Island Thomas Barthel shared in the re-validation of German-language ethnology, the discipline’s very cradle. Germany and Austria again had something to say, not only about Easter Island, but also about the world at large. The revived contribution enlivens Pacific Studies, for one, over half a century later.

NOTES

- ¹ If “polished black ceramic” was discovered in two different archaeological contexts within Hotu ’Iti territory, then where are these pieces today and what do they tell us? It is here suggested that one should investigate this at the depot and archives of the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos, University of Chile, Santiago.
- ² The following year Barthel (1958:252-5) acknowledged that Arne Skjølsvold of the Norwegian Expedition had discovered and recorded one of these two *moai* in 1955, adding that this information had not been available to him in 1957.
- ³ In this context perhaps one should mention that the traditional name of Rano Raraku’s mountain – Ma’unga ‘Eo – means “Mount Scent”. It is a toponym that has never been properly explained. There might be something to Barthel’s suggestion, based on known tradition, that the summit of Ma’unga ‘Eo was used for the dessication of special corpses, perhaps in the post-carving era from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries (that is, still within traditional memory).
- ⁴ *Bremer Nachrichten*, 6 May 1958, p. 3.
- ⁵ Anonymous, “Wir fuhren zum Nabel der Welt”, *Gong* (Hamburg) 1958, date unknown, page unknown.
- ⁶ The film shot by the German Film Expedition has since disappeared. It would well be worth the effort of a dedicated German scholar to ferret out this historic material from Easter Island and make it available. One might suggest that it could be located among the legacy of the Paul-Lieberenz-Filmproduktion, Berlin; in the archives of the (former West) Berlin television broadcasting studio; or among the legacy of the Bodo Fischer family, perhaps still resident in Berlin.
- ⁷ This *rongorongo* fragment, the so-called “Barthel Tablet”, has not been seen since 1958.
- ⁸ *Ercilla* (Santiago), 19 February 1958, p. 18.
- ⁹ *La Union* (Valparaíso), 10 February 1958, p. 7.
- ¹⁰ *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 10 February 1958, p. 5.
- ¹¹ *El Sur* (Concepción), 8 March 1958, p. 7.
- ¹² For several reasons, this book was never written.
- ¹³ Again, neither of these was written.
- ¹⁴ This included a very small wooden replica of Hoa Hakanana’i’ā (i.e., the British Museum’s famous *moai*), a small *manu ‘e rua te puoko* (two-headed bird) and a complete *moai* chess set carved by Santiago Pakarati; these objects are now preserved at the Institute of Polynesian Languages and Literatures, Auckland, New Zealand.
- ¹⁵ One will perhaps notice that Barthel made no mention of his authentic *rongorongo* fragment, whose discovery had been filmed by the Germans; he also had in his possession a *toki* (adze) and several *mata’a* (obsidian blades), which were doubtless considered unimportant as they were so abundant on the ground. Indeed, as late as the early 1990s the *toki* of Rano Raraku were still being picked up by tourists and taken from the island, though

this practice was frequently discouraged at the time, primarily by visiting archaeologists; now it is strictly forbidden.

- ¹⁶ *El Mercurio*, 10 February 1958, p. 5.
- ¹⁷ *La Union* (Valparaíso), 10 February 1958, p. 7.
- ¹⁸ *Las Ultimas Noticias*, 14 February 1958, page unknown.
- ¹⁹ *Ercilla*, 19 February 1958, p. 18.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Las Ultimas Noticias*, 20 February 1958, page unknown.
- ²² *El Sur* (Concepción), 8 March 1958, p. 7.
- ²³ See the full letter in *Rapa Nui Journal* 23:56-7 (2009).
- ²⁴ With his Franco-Belgian Expedition to Easter Island in 1934-35 Alfred Métraux’s primary goal had been to acquire authentic *rongorongo* artifacts (Fischer 1997:158-71); in this he had failed. In mentioning his discovery of *rongorongo* fragments Barthel, aware of this fact, is emphasizing his own mission’s success, though he diplomatically mitigates this by owning the fragments’ illegibility. One will perhaps again notice that Barthel does not mention the authentic *rongorongo* fragment he found in another cave in January 1958, when with the German Film Expedition; hereafter, this piece “disappears” from the record.
- ²⁵ *Das Kleine Volksblatt* (Vienna), 18 October 1958, p. 5.
- ²⁶ *Die Presse* (Vienna), 18 October 1958, p. 7.
- ²⁷ *Österreichische Neue Tageszeitung* (Vienna), 18 October 1958, p. 7.
- ²⁸ *Die Presse*, 18 October 1958, p. 7.
- ²⁹ *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 30 December 1958, page unknown.
- ³⁰ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 December 1958, page unknown.
- ³¹ See the bibliography of Barthel’s Easter Island publications in *Rapa Nui Journal* 11(2):100 (1997).
- ³² See “In Memoriam: Thomas S. Barthel,” *Rapa Nui Journal* 11(2):99 (1997).

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