

# ETHNOLOGY OF EASTER ISLAND

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net is 75 feet long and 12 feet 10 inches broad. It is tied at each end to the top of a pole, probably of *hau* wood (*Triumfetta semitriloba*) 6 feet 10 inches long. A strong cord of hemp, probably of European manufacture, extends along the edges of the net. To this cord at the upper edge of the net are fastened 12 floats (*uto*) of *hau* wood 24 inches long. These are attached approximately every 6 feet to the suspension rope by strings tied through holes in the upper ends of the floats. The middle float was called *pito-o-te-kupenga* (the-navel-of-the-net). The lower edge of the net is weighted by 13 stones wrapped in banana tree bark and tied to the edging cord. These sinkers (*kaka*) weigh 196 grams and have an average length of 5 feet. When a shoal of fish was sighted, the two poles were stuck in the sand and the fish were driven toward the net.

Geiseler (87, p. 37) mentions a net 200 feet long but this is probably exaggerated.

The *kupenga viri* (*viri*, to roll) was identical to the *kupenga maito* and was generally used at night.

The *kupenga matiro* had smaller meshes than those of the *kupenga maito* but the principle of the net was the same. It was used to catch *matiro*, a leaping fish.

The *kupenga ihe* was used to catch *ihe* (needle fish). It was the same type as the *kupenga maito* but was larger and had smaller meshes. It was carried to its place by several swimmers.

#### CASTING NETS

Though casting nets were not enumerated by my informants, they were seen by Thomson (215, p. 460): "Their light casting nets were used with great dexterity as they waded along the beach, and when a shoal of small fish appeared, the net was thrown with the right hand."

#### TURTLE NETS

For a great many years no turtles (*honu*, *kepukepu*) have been seen off the shores of Easter Island. The natives explain their disappearance by the passing of the kings (p. 133). Island folklore has many stories about turtles, and numerous petroglyphs represent them. Turtle shells which were worn as ornaments have been found in caves and graves.

My informant says that when turtles were seen, natives jumped into their canoes and went to meet them. They dived near the turtles and drove them into a special net (*kupenga honu*), similar to the *kupenga matiro* but with wider meshes and stronger ropes.

#### SINKERS

Twelve net sinkers are preserved in the Bishop Museum collection. Four have an artificial perforation, and the others are basalt rocks with a natural hole (fig. 13, *a*).

Of the four stones intentionally perforated, two are nearly flat with holes near one edge like the net weights of Tahiti (fig. 13, *c*). The remaining two belong to a widespread Polynesian type which, in its most characteristic form, is a sphere with a perforated projection at the top. In the same collection, a stone disc with a central hole (B2614) may well have been a sinker.

Three small oval stones weighing about ½ ounce each (fig. 13, *c-d*) are grooved for attachment of a cord. They are labeled in Young's catalog as "*atua mangaro*, fetish stones used by *tulunga* (sorcerers)." The natives identified them as ear pendants to increase their commercial value; they emphatically denied my suggestion that the

To catch needle fish (*ihe*) the Marquesans had a special net of the same type as that used for flying fish. It was a small bag fixed to the arms of a fork lashed to a pole (142, p. 400). It is possible that the description of the *kupenga ihe* given by my informant is inaccurate and that the Easter Island *kupenga ihe* was like the Marquesan. However, in the Tuamotus the needle fish are caught in traps, hence we may assume that set nets could be used for the same purpose.

#### FISH SPEARS

Spears used by modern natives are of European manufacture. It is impossible to determine whether a spear is old or has been introduced by Tahitian settlers. When Roussel (190, p. 355) landed on Easter Island in 1866, some of the natives were armed with European harpoons. Modern spears are from 3 to 5 meters long and belong to two types, one a simple spear with an iron point, the other with a compound point working on the principle of a fish gorge. The fisherman dives, his eyes protected by glasses, and pierces fish that swim within his reach.

#### TURTLE WATCHTOWERS

Turtles were watched for from turtle watchtowers (*tupa*) along the shore near ancient settlements.

One tower at La Pérouse Bay (pl. 2, *B*) is 3 meters high and the diameter of its base is about 7 meters. The entrance is 80 cm. high and 1.10 meters broad. The interior of the building consists of big, unhewn stones, well laid. Inside they project gradually until they are spanned by slabs forming a crude corbeled vault. The largest tower is situated between La Pérouse and ahu Mahatua, near ahu Vai-mangeo. The tower has a kind of wing containing an inner chamber.

The *tupa* of ahu Akapu, seen by Cook and his party (83, vol. 1, p. 570) and accurately described by Bernizet (130, vol. 2, p. 254), is still in fairly good condition. Its construction is similar to that of the tower at La Pérouse. The interior chamber is 24 feet long by 6 feet wide and 7 feet high in the center. The walls are 4 feet thick and the door is 2 feet high by 2 feet wide.

Thomson (215, p. 484) and Routledge (194, p. 218) were told that these towers were lookout stations whence the movements of turtles and fish could be watched, and I was given the same explanation. Skottsberg (208, vol. 1, p. 12) was puzzled by the importance of the towers with their lower apartments, which are in no reasonable proportion to the purpose for which they were built. Though they are along the shore, these towers do not give the watchers any better view of the sea than any near-by hill. There are no such towers on the south coast; on the north they are few—I know of only five. In the Tuamotus and Hawaii, watchers sat at certain points along the coast to signal the arrival of turtles or fish. Heaps of stones served as elevations. The *tupa* of Easter Island were probably most similar to the Hawaiian fishermen's shrines (*ko'a*), which were terraces of stone. On some of them stood

a house where the priest slept in order to learn the issue of a projected fishing party or to have revealed by a god the presence of a shoal of fish.

There is nothing in the *tupa* to facilitate access to the top of the tower, which is not a very comfortable place. The vaulted chamber inside suggests no practical purpose, since a cave or shelter would have been quite sufficient for the watchers, whose homes stood near the tower. Turtles were not, even then, common on Easter Island, where the climate is too cold for them and where there are only a few sandy beaches.

#### EEL SNARING

To catch eels (*koreha-puhi*, *koreha-tapatea*, *koreha-haako*, *koreha-tokori*, *koreha-mingo*, *koreha-ruma*), the natives use a snare (*here-koreha*) made of two sticks, generally 50 or 60 cm. long.

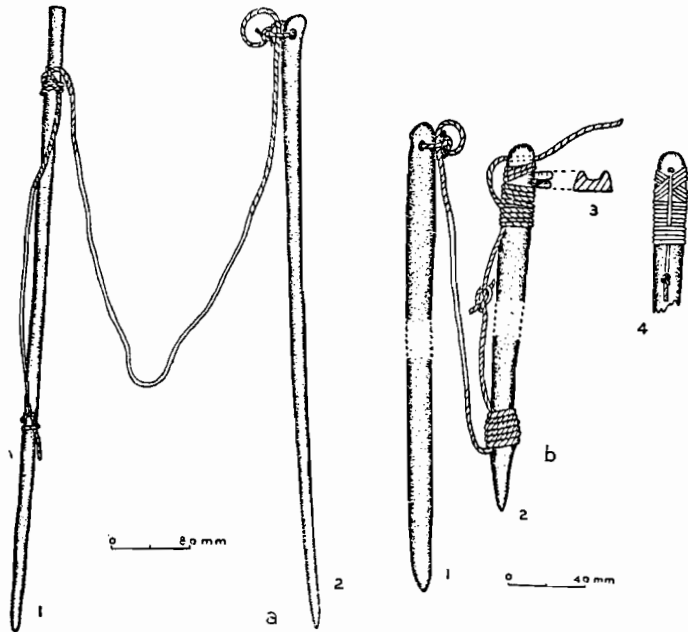


FIGURE 14.—Eel snares. *a*, snare collected by Geiseler in 1884 (Mus. f. Völkerkunde, Berlin, VI.4922); 1, bait stick 622 mm. long; 2, stick with noose 640 mm. long; *b*, ancient snare (Mus. f. Völkerkunde, Berlin, VI.4880): 1, stick with noose 245 mm. long; 2, bait stick 310 mm. long; 3, black stone; 4, lateral view of bait stick.

The thicker end of one of the sticks is perforated and a cord passes through the hole and is tied to the stick with a knot. The cord then passes between the knot and the stick to form a noose and the end of the cord is tied to the other stick (fig. 14). Bait is attached to the second stick while the one with the loop remains in the water perfectly still. The eels are caught along the shore. When an eel is attracted by the bait, the fisherman pushes the stick with the noose toward it so that to reach the bait the eel

## THE CHILD CHANGED INTO NANUE

Two women went at night to catch *tuamingo* fish. One of them had a little boy called Ahina-oioi, whom she took with her. The mother put the child to sleep and went catching *tuamingo* and crabs. While she was away, a spirit called Hiti-kapura came and took the child. He threw him into a pool of water. The child cried:

E nua e, i oti au,  
I te rima o te varua o Hiti-kapura,

O mother, this is my end,  
I am in the hands of the spirit Hiti-kapura,

O Ura uranga te mahina.

Reflection of the moon.

The two women heard the voice and said, "Listen, you. The child is crying over there." They went to the child. The mother took the child in her arms, but he fainted. She became afraid and put him back into the pool. The child came back to life. The mother wept for the child. The child also wept and lamented (chant repeated).

The tide rose and the place where the two women were crying was washed by the sea. A wave came and took the child away. The child was changed into a red fish. He swam to Marotiri. The two women followed him along the coast. The women arrived at Orongo and the fish at Motu-kaokao. He turned round and round the rock. The two women wept but the fish still turned round and round. The fish finally disappeared below the islet Motu-kaokao. The name of this fish, very good to eat, is *nannue-ahinaoioi*.

## THE TURTLE VERI-PUPURA-VAI-A-PAKIA

A man called Vini-aika-noho-ne-ananake lived with his son in a house. They had two friends. One day Vini said to his son, "My boy, when I die, you look. A turtle called Veri-pupura-vai-a-pakia is going to land."

The man died and his son put his body on a platform, then deposited it in the *ahu Hanga-o-honu*. The two friends took care of the child and helped him prepare the funeral of his father. They made for him the ceremonial earth oven (*takapu*).

One night the child had a dream of the turtle Veri-pupura-vai-a-pakia. He told his dream to his friends. One of them said, "Whom are you speaking to, oh boy? You are a liar." The boy said, "It is true. My turtle has landed." The other man made an earth oven in which he cooked a fowl and sweet potatoes. He gave the food to the child.

The following day the child left and went to Mahatua where he planted bananas, yams, and sweet potatoes. The turtle had really landed at Hanga-o-honu. The friend of the father who had laughed at the boy came and saw the turtle. He danced around it and made magic. He cried, "This is my turtle, Veri-pupura-vai-a-pakia." The child, Vini-a-ore-are, heard about the turtle from other people. He took a chicken, gathered sugar cane, loaded them on his back, and went to Hanga-o-honu. There he saw the man who had laughed at him singing over the turtle. Holding a white chicken, he cried, "You man, you are going to die. Do not chant over the turtle. You are going to die." The man fell down dead. Vini stepped on the turtle and cried over it. Afterwards he looked for the man who had made an earth oven for his dream. He heard that this man had made another earth oven. He had cooked a chicken and sweet potatoes which he wrapped in sugar-cane leaves. With his five sons carrying these bundles he went to Hotu-iti and gave the food to Vini-a-ore-are. Vini asked them, "Are you lost?" The man answered, "I came from my place to see the turtle." Vini-a-ore-are gave him the turtle. The man said, "Your turtle will arrive at Omohi." Vini answered, "There you will catch it." Vini-a-ore-are said to his turtle, "My father, you go to the region of Omohi." The turtle swam. The man and his sons went by land, the turtle by sea. The turtle landed at Omohi and its owner gave it as a present to his brother-in-law.

## UHO AND THE TURTLE

A young girl, called Uho, went to the beach to sprinkle her bark cloth. She untied the knot of her stained belt and put it aside. After she had returned home with her

calabash full of bark cloth she remembered her belt and said, "Alas, I have forgotten my stained belt." She returned to get it but a turtle had stolen it and swum off with it. Uho shouted, "Leave my stained belt." The turtle replied, "I shall leave your stained belt over there." Uho dived into the water and swam after the turtle. She cried, "Little turtle of the red penis, leave my stained belt." "Over there I shall leave your stained belt." She went on swimming after the turtle and arrived at another land. The turtle landed on the beach of this country and so did Uho. There she married a man called Mahuna-te-raa and gave birth to a girl.

Ohu used to complain:

O te henua mata-po-uri ouu,  
E Mahuna-te-raa kenu aaku  
E tae pe uta oe tomatou.  
Henua mata-maeha i te uinga.  
Aue, nua e, aue koro e, aue matua  
E, aue nga kope.

This country of yours is dark,  
O Mahuna-te-raa my husband,  
It is not like our country.  
On the bright side.  
Alas, my mother, alas, my father,  
Alas, the boys [her brothers].

Mahuna-te-raa asked, "Why are you crying?" "My eyes are sore with the smoke of the old woman. That is why they are swollen." The husband told his mother, "Decrease the smoke of your earth oven because it irritates the eyes of your daughter-in-law" who taught her child to sing:

E nua e, maea o runga ki raro koe,

Maea o raro ki runga koe,

E kara koe, e uko,  
E huruhuru koe, e uko,  
E ngutu koe, e uko,  
E vae koe, e uko.

O child, when the stones are above,  
you get below,  
When the stones are below, you get  
above,  
You put on wings, and fly,  
You put on feathers, and fly,  
You put on a beak, and fly,  
You put on feet, and fly.

At dawn Uho went to the beach and asked a bird that was passing by, "Come and take me on your back." The bird answered, "You are very heavy." Uho asked the turtle again, "Come, carry me on your back." The turtle said, "You are very heavy." She asked the little turtle again, "Little turtle of the red penis, come and carry me on your back." "With what are you going to pay me?" Uho called "With my vulva." The little turtle with the red penis shouted, "All right." He came to carry Uho and said, "If I dive, hold me firmly, if I go up, go up too, and if I dive, dive also." They arrived in Uho's land. The father of Uho saw her. He shouted, "Woman, do not come. It is a tapu of the girl Uho." Uho cried, "I am Uho." The father went down and asked, "Who are you?" "I am Uho." The father wept and took her to the house where her mother and brothers were. They all cried. Uho stayed with them.

Much later a feast was celebrated at Vinapu. Uho and her parents went there. The daughter of Uho flew from the land of Mahuna-te-raa, who was the husband of Uho. She arrived at Vinapu where her mother was. The people shouted, "There is a bird, there is a bird. Perhaps it belongs to Uho, the young girl." They threw stones at the bird. When the stones passed above it, the bird went down; when the stones passed under it, the bird went up. The men and the women cried to Uho, "Call the bird; it may be yours." Uho cried to the bird, "Here, here." The bird alighted. She shed her feathers. This bird was a person, the very daughter of Uho. All the men and women shouted, "She belongs perhaps to Uho." All the men, women, and children had a good laugh.

#### THE STORY OF THE OCTOPUS AKAVERIO OF HANGA-TEE

An urchin and a shell married. The shell became pregnant and gave birth to the octopus, Akaverio. The octopus nursed by his mother grew up.

connected with the ruins of Anakena prove that it was an important site and the one most closely associated with the memory of kings. There is no doubt that it was a royal residence, but with the present lack of knowledge, the frequent and obligatory changes of the king's home are inexplicable and will undoubtedly remain so. Perhaps such changes concerned only a few kings of historical times and cannot be generalized.

#### SUCCESSION TO POWER

A king resigned his power in favor of his first-born son when he married. My informant, Juan Tepano, was positive about this fact which is confirmed by Roussel (190, p. 360): "The king resigned on the occasion of the marriage of his son, but his wedding could be delayed for a long time, since the custom of the country allowed him to marry only at an advanced age." This custom is similar to that in Mangareva where the chief yielded the rule to his son before his death. In the Marquesas, if Gracia's statement (91, p. 103) is correct, the eldest son of the chief took the title and rank of his father on the day of his birth while the old chief remained a sort of regent. In Tahiti, the child of a chief took the title and office of his father soon after birth; during the minority of the child the "father exercised all authority, though in the name of the child" (70, vol. 1, p. 260).

#### INFLUENCE OVER NATURE

The bearing of the king on the magico-economic activity of his people is shown not only in the influence of his mana on the welfare of the people but also in his power over nature. When King Tuu-ma-heke was born a new mollusk called *kovare* appeared in the sea. White chickens multiplied at the birth of King Rokoroko-he-tau. There is still a belief among the natives that a great many plants vanished from the island with the kings who controlled them. The favorite variety of sweet potato called *huatea* is no longer found on Easter Island for it could not exist without the king who made it grow, explained my informant. Since the kidnapping of Maurata and his family no tortoises have appeared on the shore.

The following chant celebrated the king's beneficent influence upon nature, especially on the sources of staple foods. The chant is here presented as reconstructed and retranslated by me with the aid of Tepano. It had formerly been transcribed freely and erroneously by Thomson (251, pp. 523-524).

What does the king make fertile in the country?

Mars comes up, appears in the sky. The king makes the shoots of the white sweet-potatoes grow in the country.

Now he makes the sweet-potatoes favorable, the sky favorable, the ancestors favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The crayfish, the *poopoo* fish, the conger eels, the *nohu* fish (*ape* fish?), the king makes fertile in the country.

Now he makes the crayfish good to eat and the *poopoo* fish, the moss, the ferns, the *kavakava-atua* plants.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The mosses, the ferns, the *kavakava-atua* plants, the king makes grow in the country.

Now he makes the mosses favorable, makes the ferns favorable, he makes the roots of the *kavakava-atua* favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

He introduces the tuna fish, the *atu* fish, and the *ature* fish.

Now he makes the tuna fish favorable, he makes the *atu* favorable, he makes the *ature* favorable too.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The yams, the taro, the sweet-potatoes the king makes grow in the country.

Now he makes the yams, the sweet-potatoes, the sugar cane, the shoots favorable in the country, in the shade.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The turtle, its abdominal shell, its legs—these he makes grow in the country.

Now he makes the turtle, its abdominal shell and its legs favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The stars, the sky, the heat, the sun, the moon, the king makes fertile there above.

Now he makes the sky, the heat, the sun, and the moon favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

Going up, he makes the dew, the heat, the sun, the moon favorable.

Now he makes dew, the heat, the sun, the moon favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

The chiefs, the chiefesses he makes favorable in the country.

Now the king makes the chiefs, the chiefesses favorable.

What does the king make fertile in the country?

Worms, earwigs, beetles, the king makes fertile in the country.

Now he makes the worms, the earwigs, the beetles favorable, he makes them grow in the country.

The first fruits of all the products of the land were presented to the king with great ceremony (described by Roussel, 190, p. 360). "Only the king could initiate the harvesting of crops which were tapu as long as he ordered them to be."

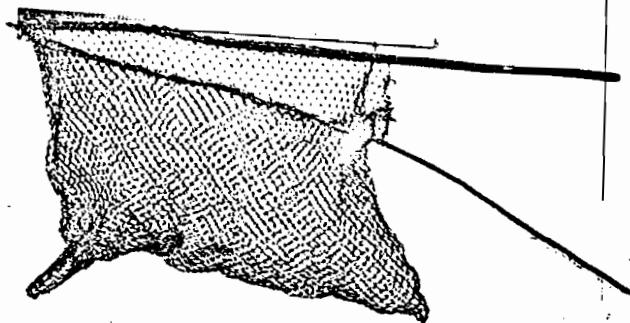
Certain priestly functions related to nature were incumbent on the king. In time of drought he must send his son or another *ariki-paka* to perform rites beseeching Hiro to make rain fall. It may be assumed that the king also prayed to Hiro for rain, that he had something to do with the fertilizing of the fields, and that his power was beneficial to chickens.

#### SUPERVISION OF SEMI-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

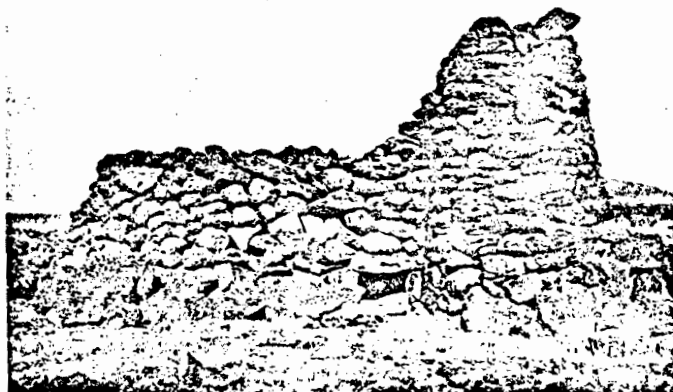
Assisted by a priest, the king had to eat in every house before it could be occupied by its owners. He also had to perform rites on a new boat. All twins were presented to him to be given a "royal name." I was unable to obtain details about this name or the mystical beliefs connected with twins.

Tradition tells that the recently tattooed young men gathered in Anakena and exhibited their designs to the king who sat on the head of an old image to examine them. If he was satisfied with the work of the artist, he said to the young man, "Ka hoa ki Tuna-roa" (Go to the ahu Tuna-roa), but if he

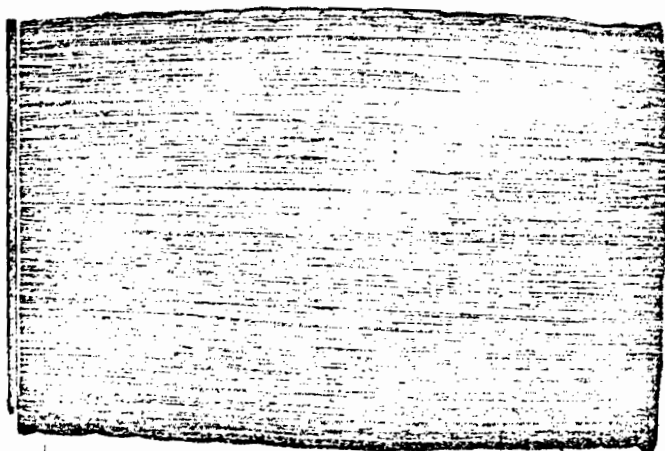




A



B



C

A, DOUBLE-HANDLED DIP NET, BAG 76 CM. DEEP, 140 CM. LONG, MESHES 2 CM. WIDE, POLES 149 AND 161 CM. LONG (MUS. F. VOLKERRUNDE, BERLIN, VI.4952); B, TURTLE WATCHTOWER (TUPA) NEAR LA PÉROUSE; C, REED MAT (MUS. F. VOLKERRUNDE, BERLIN, VI.4970).