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METEI: A Canadian medical expedition to Easter Island, 1964-65

James A. Boutilier, Ph.D.

Faculty of Arts, Royal Roads Military College, Victoria B.C.

Introduction

The story of METEI (Medical Expedition to Easter Island) is really three stories, each unique: of an international multi-disciplinary study of the inhabitants of Rapa Nui; of a voyage unmatched in Canadian naval history; and of a political "revolution" on Chile's only Polynesian dependency.

METEI evolved from medical research undertaken in the early 1960s by Dr. Stanley Skoryna of McGill University, Montreal. He persuaded the World Health Organization to provide the initial funding for a pilot project which would examine the relationship between heredity, disease, and the environment on Easter Island. The Royal Canadian Navy agreed to transport the members of METEI on board Her Majesty's Canadian Ship *Cape Scott* and they took with them a complete scientific encampment consisting of twenty-four pre-fabricated trailer units.

METEI spent two months on Easter Island (13 December 1964 to 11 February 1965) and carried out the most exhaustive medical and scientific examination that has ever been conducted on a South Pacific Island population. In the process METEI became inextricably involved in the Rapanui's efforts to achieve a greater degree of political autonomy. The paper is primarily concerned with the origins of METEI, the

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organization of the expedition, the execution of the under-taking, and the results of the expedition.

Background

METEI evolved from studies undertaken in the early 1960s by Dr.

Stanley C. Skoryna, Director of the Gastro-Intestinal Research Laboratory and associate professor at McGill University, Montreal. Dr. Skoryna was interested in the "elusive relationship between people of certain blood types, their stomach secretions and their susceptibility to stomach cancer and peptic ulcers" (Mydans 1966:56). However, he found it extremely difficult to pinpoint these connections in complex and migratory societies where there were an enormous number of uncontrollable variables. Ideally, what was needed was a "closed, isolated society with birth and death records, whose every member could be examined and tested by a whole range of modern medical techniques, where environmental and hereditary factors could be separated" (ibid.)

Easter Island appeared to be the logical site for such a study. Located 2300 miles (3700 km) off the coast of Chile in the empty reaches of the southeast Pacific, Rapa Nui, as it is known, is the most isolated inhabited island in the world; a tiny ironbound volcanic triangle of land, sixty-four square miles (166 sq.km), with an indigenous population (in December 1964) of 949. The only regular contact the islanders had with the mainland was in the form of an annual supply vessel, the 4100 ton Chilean Navy cargo ship *Presidente Pinto*.

Otherwise their isolation was complete.

Isolation of this sort suggested a number of interesting possibilities to Dr. Skoryna. It seemed likely that the indigenes would display significant genetic traits, that they would suffer from diseases associated with inbreeding, and that their pattern of immunity would be unusual (Roberts ca.1966:1). Furthermore, the local population recommended itself on the grounds that it was stable, literate, small enough to encompass, and large enough to be statistically valuable. In short Easter Island seemed destined to be a perfect "living laboratory" (Beighton 1966:347).



Commemorative seal issued by the Expedition
Created by Neehah Molson

However, the isolation which was so vital for Skoryna's purposes threatened to be short-lived. He discovered in 1961 that the Chilean authorities planned to build a runway, capable of handling large passenger jets, at Mataverí, near Hangaró, the only settlement. This intelligence raised not only the scientifically satisfying prospect of a comparative study of conditions in the microcosmic island community after regular contact had been established with the outside world, but injected a note of very considerable urgency in Dr. Skoryna's plans.

Development of the METEI Concept

Initially, Skoryna conceived of METEI as a modest undertaking consisting of himself, his colleague Dr. Georges Nógrády, a bacteriologist from the University of Montreal, one of his ex-students, Dr. David Murphy, a cardiac specialist with a background in veterinary science from the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, and Dr. Harold Gibbs, an expert in parasitology from MacDonald College, Montreal (Skoryna interview 1979).¹

A review of the financial, scientific, and logistical problems associated with a small-scale project soon convinced him, however, that a larger multidisciplinary

study of the Rapanui would be more likely to garner support. Such a study, with an emphasis on the human component, accorded closely with the principal aims of the Human Adaptability Section (HAS) of the World Health Organization's Biological Programme (IBP); a "world-wide study of the functional relationship of living things to their environment" (Beighton 1966:347). HAS studies sought to establish "a kind of human baseline, an inventory of what mankind is really like biologically...in the middle of the twentieth century (Weiner 1966:358). Dr. Skoryna wanted to do the same thing. He wrote "...it seems imperative that attention should be devoted to the relative roles of hereditary and environmental factors in human physiology. In this respect the study of isolated population groups is important because the environmental changes introduced by Man proceed faster than his own biological adaptive changes. These groups are rapidly disappearing and with them the opportunity not only to study the limited number of factors involved but also to establish certain prototypes and baselines for further investigations" (Skoryna 1966:2)

The first public announcement of the enlarged undertaking came on Monday, 16 December 1963 when the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University, Dr. Rocke Robertson, issued a press release describing METEI. The expedition was to consist of twenty five scientists, divided into four medical teams to conduct "specialized studies in the fields of epidemiology, bacteriology, genetics, hematology, sociology, and anthropology." It was to be an undertaking, the release stated confidently, which would put Canada in "the forefront of the international health field" (Press release: 16 December 1963).

Preparations

As project METEI began to take shape Dr. Skoryna was faced with six inter-related problems: funding, the provision of research facilities on Easter Island, logistics, transportation, the recruitment of personnel, and the receptivity of the islanders. The World Health Organization awarded him a "token grant" of \$5000 in August 1963 (Goodman, personal communication 22 July 1976) and agreed that METEI should be a WHO pilot project in the IBP (Mydans 1966:56). Further contributions of \$10,000 each were forthcoming from the McConnell Foundation of Montreal and the Medical Research Council of Canada for the purpose of purchasing medical supplies and equipment.²

At the same time, Skoryna established the Easter Island Expedition Society (EIES) to handle the expedition's finances. Dr. Rocke Robertson was selected to head the EIES while the other directors were Mr. Peter Laing, a member of McGill's Board of Directors (EIES vice-president) and Mrs. Gerd Herum (EIES honorary

secretary-treasurer), who had worked with Thor Heyerdahl on Easter Island in the 1950s.

Central to the expanded vision of METEI was the provision of laboratories and staff quarters on Easter Island. But how were these to be acquired in a location entirely devoid of such facilities? The solution appeared to lie with prefabricated buildings. Ever resourceful, Skoryna turned to the Alberta Trailer Company (ATCO) of Calgary which made available 24 palletized industrial trailer units mounted on skids. These units were capable of being transported in a semi-constructed state, drawn into position, and erected quickly.³ The evidence suggests that while efforts were made to raise the \$55,200 needed to buy the trailers outright, ATCO labored under the impression that the trailers were to be returned at the end of the expedition (Skoryna interview 1979).⁴ However, well before the expedition departed for the South Pacific the decision had been made to leave the trailers on Rapa Nui, but this decision does not appear to have been communicated to ATCO.

In order to encourage the massive flow of in-kind contributions needed to make the expedition a success, Skoryna hit upon the idea of appointing 32 prominent men and women as honorary consultants to the expedition. These individuals represented a wide spectrum of goods and services and used their influence to expedite logistical support. Well over \$100,000 worth of food, pharmaceuticals, and equipment was made available to METEI through the generosity of Canadian and American companies, agencies, universities, and individuals. General Motors, for example, contributed a four-wheel drive truck while DuPont of Canada donated a complete set of x-ray films. Other firms throughout North America loaned or gave sophisticated apparatus including a lyophilizing machine to freeze-dry serum specimens and a low temperature device, capable of maintaining virus samples at minus 87°F (-66°C) until they were brought back to Canada for analysis. In addition, textiles, soap, sewing machines, carving tools, and other items were donated to be used as gifts in the expedition's dealings with the Rapanui (Press release: 21 October 1964; Hacker 1968:156).

HMCS Cape Scott

There remained the fundamental problem of how to transport METEI to the South Pacific. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was the obvious choice and McGill University approached the Department of National Defense (DND) on Dr. Skoryna's behalf requesting that the Canadian government make a naval transport available as its contribution to the expedition. The Government agreed and on 26 March 1964 the Flag Officer Atlantic Coast (in Halifax Nova Scotia wascontinued on page 26

The Slave Trade Run by the Spaniards in the Pacific Ocean During the 19th Century: The Case of Easter Island

The Spanish involvement in the Peruvian pirate attack in 1862: The resolution of an historical enigma.

Francesc Amorós i Gonell,
University of Barcelona

In recent years there have been some professional historians devoted to researching the sources of the Spanish slave trade, so I can mention the studies about the Catalonian slavers during the 18th and 19th centuries, published some years ago by Manuel Moreno Friginals, Jordi Maluquer and Josep M. Fradera. These studies set in motion many controversial discussions among local scholars, in spite of the undoubted scientific value of their conclusions.

There are two main reasons for the lack of interest in studying such a topic by historians in years gone by. First, this is due to the fact that there are few reliable sources of research and real evidences are extremely sparse and scattered. In addition, it was considered a tabu subject for the establishment. They preferred not to take into consideration the historical period (1790-1820) when such commercial activity was absolutely licit. Nevertheless, none of the aforementioned Spanish authors had ever published anything before that was related to the slave trade by the Spaniards in the Pacific Ocean area.

In order to give an approximate idea of the slave traffic volume during this free trade period, Prof. Josep M. Fradera has estimated a total of 203,432 slaves carried by 1,859 ships, of which 589 were Spanish. But, a fourth of the latter ships were from Catalonia, a country of Spain. One must take into account that Fradera only refers to the arrivals anchoring at Cuban ports when calculating the above figures. Nevertheless, in the Antilles area, there was a very high number of slavers belonging to different nationalities.

According to this author, the slave traders in the Cuban ports were, in order of numerical significance, Americans, Spaniards, British, Danish, French, Swedish, Dutch, Portugese and Germans. But near the end of the free trade period there was, among the activities of Spanish traffickers in slaves, a notable increase in the number of Catalonian. Curiously, in this period (1818), there is some information concerning a cargo of 606 black slaves being carried by the brig *Gran Turco*, commanded by a certain Maristany. The destination of these slaves was, in the main, the sugar plantations in the Antilles, the basic economy in these islands.

Until this time then, as already stated, slave traffic had been legal. However, from 1820 this commercial activity

became illicit and was prosecuted by international law. Despite this, the slave trade carried out by the Spaniards continued furtively for some years; Fradera has estimated that 220 slave expeditions were completed by Catalonian slavers during the period 1820-1845.

One must take into account the following facts: some important slave traffickers established in La Havana were Catalonians and Spaniards. Furthermore, and according to Fradera, these Spanish slavers captured or purchased not only black slaves on Mozambique and Guinea but also natives from the Yucatan and Chinese coolies.

Among the ships listed by Fradera, there are 233 Spanish slave ships being taken to court for judgement in Sierra Leone after the slave trade had been made unlawful! From 1845 onwards, there are very few trustworthy data concerning the Spanish participation in the lucrative slave trade due to the international pressure for the abolition movement. If the slave traffic between Africa and the Antilles was halted, they had to look for more distant but easier alternative routes.

Meanwhile, Peru had a real problem. The Peruvian economic system, based mainly on guano exploitation, urgently needed a new easy and cheap labor force to substitute for the Chinese workers contracted under semi-slavery conditions. The Pacific Islands could be the solution to these economic problems.

It is now my purpose to approach the new direction that some Spaniard and Peruvian slave traders took during the illicit period in the second half of the 19th century. They ascertained that the small and unprotected South Pacific islands could become an inexhaustible human quarry. The islands, which were spread throughout the Pacific Ocean, were distant from the Spanish slave areas and were not under the watchful control of the powerful British navy. These remote oceanic zones could be used to try the fearlessness and technical skilfulness of the Catalonian captains and seamen, as well as the naval design of their ships. Prof. Bassegoda took El Masnou as illustrative example of the seafaring tradition in Catalonia in the 19th century. This small Catalan village, a coastal town near Barcelona, through the 19th century had over 900 merchant captains, of whom 90 were called "Maristany"!

I have above written that very little evidence remains but fortune and my own scholarly tendency have enabled me to discover recently a specific case, not only exemplar, but absolutely unknown up to the present day. It is about the bloody and ominous piratical attack against Easter Island in 1862.

This raid was apparently led by a Captain Antonio Aguirre of the brig *Cora*, belonging to the piratical Peruvian fleet. With seven other ships, all under the Peruvian flag, they undertook a real war raid to recruit the maximum number of natives. This island had to be the first victim in a plan set up by the slavers themselves. It is

probable that the Spanish captain of the *Rosa y Carmen* had, while in Cuba, already conceptualized the capture the oceanic islanders. Afterwards, I will clearly state it.

Among the slave ships that attacked Easter Island in 1862 was the barque *Rosa y Carmen*, a wooden sailing ship only mentioned by historians. Likewise, her enigmatic and mysterious captain was up until now unknown. But now I can assert that the mystery is already solved!

The origin of this incredible discovery was in late 1990 during my stay at Easter Island. Professor J. Conte-Oliveros, a Spanish resident of the island, showed me some unpublished papers which mentioned an uncertain Spanish captain who played a leading role in the well-known Peruvian attack in December 1862. His name was omitted by all the historians. Then I suggested to Prof. Conte the hypothesis that a certain "Maristany" could have been the supposed captain of the *Rosa y Carmen*. This supposition was taken as a simple working hypothesis. On my return to Barcelona, I made this fantastic discovery.



Painting of the *Rosa y Carmen* by J. Barneda (Barcelona, 1897), Museu Municipal de Nàutica, El Masnou, Catalonia. Copyright, Joan Muray.

In fact the unknown and wicked captain of the *Rosa y Carmen* was none other than Juan Maristany y Galceran. He was a Spanish merchant navy captain of 40 years, born in El Masnou. At that time, he was described as a "one-eyed ogre, armed with a brace of pistols and a cutlass." Juan Maristany, alias "Tara", had set sail as Captain and Pilot from Barcelona just after 29 October, 1861, on the barque *Rosa y Carmen* for "Valparaiso, Lima and any other place of the Globe", according to the legal contract registered in Barcelona. This last explanation gave me the clue to finding out the true identity of the main protagonist in this terrible account. In fact, there were many Spanish and Catalonian merchant captains sailing across the Atlantic Ocean who usually mentioned their destination only as American ports. It could be a long and arduous voyage, and Capt. Maristany had to foresee where a safe port existed.

On 29 October, 1982, the shipment contract was signed in Barcelona by Juan Maristany himself "as Captain and Pilot of the barque *Rosa y Carmen*", as well as the shipping investors or shipowners: Pedro Bonet, Simón Riera, Francisco Roselló and Camilo Sánchez. The initial crew members were: Juan Gurri, boatswain, and Joaquín Baró as the cook. The sailors were: Juan Sisa, Pedro Jané, José M. de Segarra, Jaime Estradé, Juan Daviu, Juan Pellicer, Salvador Gelpí and Lorenzo Sisa. However, I cannot ascertain if these crew members actually took part in the piratical attack in 1862.

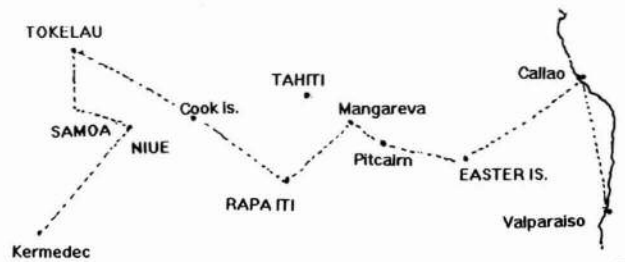
Moreover, I have just discovered another part of this confused story of Spanish piracy. It seems that Captain Juan Maristany himself traveled round trip from Barcelona to La Havana, the well-known center of the Spanish slave trade, on board the *Rosa y Carmen*. On 31 January, 1861, he carried out an unknown and strange voyage with a sudden return to Barcelona. It was nine months before he again sailed into the Pacific Ocean.

On 7 December 1862, the *Rosa y Carmen* captained by Juan Maristany reached the Peruvian port of El Callao and arrived to Easter Island after fifteen days at sea, joining the Peruvian fleet. The brig *Cora*, commanded by Capt. Aguirre, anchored at Easter Island on 19 December, to discover that other vessels had arrived with the mission of recruiting the islanders by force.

It seems that Capt. Maristany had had some kind of past experience in capturing slaves. He was chosen for executing the operation thanks to the fact that he was astute and skilled in slave trading, as well as he commanded a barque of higher tonnage than the other ships (including the flagship, *Cora*).

On 23 December the attack was mercilessly carried out by Maristany, together with 80 other members of the crews. Several seamen attracted the natives by showing them various articles which excited their greed. When they gathered, Maristany, as the chief of the pirates, gave the signal for a sudden attack. Two hundred islanders were captured and tied up. The others tried to escape, running in all directions. Some were killed with firearms.

The kidnapped islanders were put on board the *Rosa y Carmen* and other ships. Some days later the rest of the slave fleet, under Peruvian flags, sailed toward the central Pacific to fall upon other islands following some premeditated plans. Prof. Conte points out that the *Rosa y Carmen* had carried out similar attacks against several islands in the Polynesian archipelagos of Gambier (Mangareva), Austral (Rapa Iti), Cook (Rakahanga and Pukapuka), Tokelau (Atafu, Fakkafo and Nukunonu), Samoa (Savaii, Tutuila and Manua), Tonga (Niue) and finally reached the Kermadec Islands. On the way back to the American continent, the *Rosa y Carmen* landed at Pitcairn Island.



Route of the *Rosa y Carmen* in 1862-1863, according to J. Conte-Oliveros. After F. Amorós i Gonell.

Finally the ship arrived safely at the El Callao seven months later with a plentiful human cargo. Less fortunate was Capt. Aguirre whose ship, *Cora*, was captured at Rapa Iti. From there he, and his ship, were taken to Papeet where he was taken to court and his ship sold. [See RN 5(4):54].

In addition, I have another hypothesis to add: the *Rosa y Carmen* might not have been the only Spanish slave trading ship operating with the Peruvians in this part of the Pacific. Of the 30 ships mentioned on the list by van Hoorebeeck, there are names that happen to be similar to sailing ships employed in the Spanish or Catalan transatlantic commercial trade. For example, there is the *Gabriela*, the *Rosalía*, the *Teresa*, and the *General Prim* (the latter being named for a famous Catalan army officer).

Finally it will be necessary to investigate the other buccaneering activities of Maristany in Africa and in the Pacific. This is my contribution to help shed light on the hitherto unknown ship, *Rosa y Carmen*, and also of her enigmatic Captain Juan Maristany, one hundred years after his death.

Special thanks are due to Sr. Joan Muray, a Catalan historian, for bringing to my attention the existence of an unknown original painting by J. Barneda (1897) of the barque Rosa y Carmen. It is housed in the Museu Municipal de Nàutica in El Masnou, Catalonia (Spain). For the first time, it is reproduced here in Rapa Nui Journal.

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Addenda:

Juan Maristany y Galceran, Captain of the Spanish Merchant Navy; born 1822 in El Masnou. He was married. He died in 1892 in an unknown place.

Francisco Maristany y Galceran, Captain of the Spanish Merchant Navy. Brother of Juan Maristany.

Isidro Maristany y Galceran, Captain of the Spanish Merchant Navy. Brother.

Rosa y Carmen: wooden barque built in Canet de Mar, Catalonia. Shipbuilder: Gaspar Ferrer; registered in Barcelona in the 19th century. Displacement: 402 tons. Length: 125 feet; beam: 32 feet.

METEI continued from page 2.....

informed that the mobile repair ship HMCS *Cape Scott* had been chosen to carry out the assignment.

The 8500 ton *Cape Scott* was less than ideal for the job. While commodious and equipped with production and repair facilities, she was slow and lacked the range needed to reach Easter Island. But she was the only naval vessel on the East Coast capable of loading and off-loading bulk cargo and of delivering it across the beach. Her shortcomings would have to be made up and the RCN turned to increase her range, cargo capacity, and landing capabilities. Her fuel capacity was increased from 4441 to 9000 barrels and her forward hatch was enlarged so that it could receive the 10x20 foot ATCO trailers. The trailers had somehow to be gotten ashore and so the Navy borrowed a 26 ton, forty-eight foot LCM (3) (Landing Craft Medium) from the Department of Transport for the task (Law 1964).

On 11 and 12 June 1964 *Cape Scott's* commanding officer, Commander C. Anthony Law, and his fellow officers met Skoryna for the first time to begin detailed planning for METEI. Their principal concern was logistics: what should the expedition take to Easter Island; where were these items to come from; and how was the METEI cargo to be stowed in order to ensure its most efficient off-loading. Naval supply teams in Montreal, Halifax, and on board *Cape Scott* had to marshal, identify, and load roughly 150 tons of supplies and equipment in the right order.

Unfortunately 90% of the cargo had not arrived less than a month prior to sailing and when loading did take place during the last week it was so hurried that it was extremely difficult to keep track of storage locations (Law 1964:RCT 1926-1).

Personnel

The expanded nature of METEI and the expedition's reliance upon the RCN meant the recruitment of additional scientific and medical personnel and a new "command relationship" with the navy. Surgeon-Captain (later Rear-Admiral) Richard H. Roberts, RCN, was appointed Dr. Skoryna's nominal deputy and was placed in charge of the team of physicians responsible for medical examinations on Easter Island.⁵ At the same time the exponential increase in METEI administration obliged Skoryna to appoint a one-time Royal Canadian Air Force colleague and mechanical engineer, Air Vice-Marshal John A. Easton (Ret'd), to act as director of physical plant for the expedition (MacFarlane 1964:21).

By November 1964 the number of medical, scientific, and technical specialists associated with METEI had risen to 38. Skoryna was besieged by hundreds of applicants seeking to join the expedition, the *Montreal Star* summarizing his dilemma in an article entitled "Volunteers by the Boatload" (ibid.). Recruitment was complicated by the persistent overtures of individuals who were not suitably qualified (Roberts, personal communication 6 May 1976), the uncertainties associated with the withdrawal of expedition members, the need to fill positions on short notice, and the overarching problem of ensuring the right balance of disciplines.

The final list of METEI members reflected sheer chance, professional and personal relationships, the increased involvement of the navy and the media, awareness of the need for technical support in such fields as translation, communications, and laboratory assistance, and efforts made to ensure that METEI was more international and multi-disciplinary in character.⁶ While a complete list of members appears in Appendix A, a few examples will suffice. *Life* magazine contributed to METEI and made available one of its most seasoned photographers, Carl Mydans.⁷ When the anthropologist, Dr. Richard Salisbury, withdrew from METEI Skoryna turned to Cleopatra Montandon who was working on her Ph.D. in sociology at McGill.⁸ Mrs. Montandan's husband, Denys, was completing a qualification in plastic surgery at the time and Skoryna offered him an appointment with METEI. Similarly, Dr. Maureen Roberts, a pediatrician with a particular interest in genetics, accompanied her husband Surgeon-Captain Richard Roberts. Captain Roberts was not the only member of the Canadian Armed Forces to take part in the expedition. Wren Lieutenant Rita Dwyer served as a research assistant and Spanish interpreter

(Dwyer, personal communication, 6 August 1976) while Major Alexander Taylor of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps (Army) provided odontological expertise. Mrs. Ann Marie Eccles accompanied METEI as an interpreter. Colin Gillingham, a steward in the service of the Royal Air Force attaché in Ottawa, acted as the camp cook while Dr. Gonzales Donoso, a pediatrician, served briefly as one of Chile's representatives on METEI (Hacker 1968:153).

Roughly two-thirds of the METEI personnel assembled in Halifax in mid-November 1964 to join HMCS *Cape Scott*. The balance were scheduled to join the ship in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Balboa, Panama. Each member of METEI was required to enter into a contract with the Easter Island Expedition Society which *inter alia* obliged those members to fulfill all assigned duties, to acknowledge METEI's exclusive ownership of all research materials, and to release METEI from all liability (Roberts interview, 24 January 1978).

The active participation of the Canadian Armed Forces in METEI was hailed as "a landmark in the international research programme" (Press release, 23 July 1964). It was a "first" for the RCN in a number of respects. It was the first time that the Navy had been involved in such an expedition (Appleton, personal communication, 17 May 1976). It was the first time one of HMC ships had visited Easter Island. And it was the first time that the Navy had carried women to sea for an extended period (Law 1964:RCT 1926-1).

Objectives

The selection of personnel reflected and in turn affected the overall objectives of METEI. Initially, the expedition had one major objective, the collection of data on "the distribution of disease and hereditary factors in the isolated population [of Easter Island]" (Press release, 23 July 1964). While this objective remained constant it was refined over the months into a four-point programme:

- 1) To carry out an integrated medical survey of the total native population of Easter Island, in order to identify and evaluate the relative role of environmental and hereditary factors in an isolated population. This included investigation of ecological, sociological, anthropological, genetical, micro-biological, and epidemiological factors.

- 2) To study and develop methods of sampling procedures, collection and transport of blood and other biological material.

- 3) To assist the population of Easter Island with medical problems with which they are not faced and to which they will be exposed after permanent contact with the mainland has been established.

- 4) To establish an Easter Island Biological Station for purposes of assistance in the health and welfare of the population and to provide facilities for follow-up studies

after isolation of the island has been abolished (Skoryna nd, PR:2).

In addition, METEI personnel came to realize that the work involved in organizing the expedition and fulfilling the programme was sufficiently important that it constituted an objective in its own right. Thus while the primary objective was data collection, the secondary objective was the study and development of methods for the transport and erection of self-sustaining medical research laboratories in isolated and under-developed areas of the world (*ibid.*:1).

The voyage

Cape Scott's departure date (16 November 1964) was the result of careful calculation. Skoryna had informed Cdr. Law that METEI would require roughly sixty days to complete. Law knew from his study of South Pacific pilot books that the most favourable three months of the year at Easter Island, in terms of the prevailing winds, were December, January, and February. During that period winds are from the southeast and the anchorage off Hanga Roa is most likely to be sheltered for off-loading operations. Benign sea conditions were a matter of particular concern because there were limited landing facilities on the island and *Cape Scott*, under-powered and slow to manoeuvre, had always to lie well off in case of a sudden change in weather. Allowing six days to put the expedition's trailer and equipment ashore, a mid-November departure from Halifax would allow *Cape Scott* to be clear of the island and on her way to South America before the *Presidente Pinto* made her annual visit in early January. That visit invariably precipitated the outbreak on an epidemic scale of a flu-like virus known as *kokongo* which METEI personnel were most anxious to study (Reid, personal communication, 15 June 1976). Cdr. Law planned to spend two months on a goodwill tour of Chile and Peru, returning to Easter Island in early February. This timetable would enable him to return METEI members to Halifax in mid-March in time for the examination period in Canadian universities.

The outbound voyage was relatively uneventful though a powerful storm off the Nova Scotian coast gave Cdr. Law cause for concern. The seas were mountainous and the upper deck cargo was vulnerable to wind and water damage. Although *Cape Scott's* engines were full ahead the ship barely moved, covering only 13 miles in one twelve hour period. (Law correspondence, 20 November 1964). However, the winds soon abated and the vessel continued on its way to the Panama Canal via San Juan, where six expedition members were embarked (Law 1964:RCT 1926-1). METEI personnel spent their time on board relaxing, studying, learning Spanish, receiving instruction in laboratory techniques, and developing physical examination procedures. Meanwhile, Cdr. Law and his

fellow officers were working out the final details of the "over the beach" landing operation. These were completed on 30 November and on 7 December, while the ship lumbered southward at the "fantastic speed" of 11.8 knots (23.6 km/hr), Cdr. Law briefed the entire ship's company on the off-loading exercise (Law 1965:RCT 1926-1).⁹ *Cape Scott* arrived off Easter Island six days later on Sunday, 13 December and came to anchor at 0700 in 24 fathoms of water in Cook's Bay near Hanga Roa.

The people and the place

METEI's objective was a windswept grass covered subtropical dependency of Chile with a limited inventory of flora and fauna. The indigenes are primarily of Polynesian stock and archaeological evidence suggests that their forefathers reached Rapa Nui about 400 A.D. (Jennings 1979:2). The genetic history of the population is complex and confusing.¹⁰ Legend suggests that there was a second (and possibly a third) wave of settlers but it is impossible to say whether they absorbed or were absorbed by the original inhabitants or whether, when the latecomers arrived, they found the island deserted. Whatever the case there would appear to have been two "peoples" on Rapa Nui in the 17th century, the *Hanau Eepe* or heavy set people and the *Hanau Momoko* or slender people (McCoy 1971:260). During that century the latter are reputed to have destroyed almost all of the former. The *Hanau Eepe*, however, left their mark behind. Prior to their defeat they had carried the Polynesian propensity for building ceremonial sanctuaries to "cyclopean heights" (Porteous 1981:109). Tradition attributes to them "the grandiose achievements of the great statues (*moai*) and altars (*ahu*)" (McCoy 1971:260).

The first Europeans visited Rapa Nui about this time. On Easter Sunday 5 April 1722, the Dutch explorer Roggeveen coasted the shores of the island and gave it its name. His visit inaugurated the age of contact and cultural violence. Of direct relevance to METEI researchers were the ways in which the indigenous population was transformed by contact and the ways in which the *Rapanui* adapted to their environment. Genetically speaking the island was far less isolated than Skoryna and his colleagues believed. At least 53 ships visited Easter Island in the period 1722 to 1862 and there was alleged to have been "much trafficking in women" though Meier suggests that the genetic impact was not profound (1969:43; McCall 1976:90).

Of far greater importance, however, was the recruitment and physical abduction of Easter Islanders in 1862-1863 for labour service in Peru. The Peruvian trade and its consequences, McCall observes, "wrought unparalleled havoc," terminating Rapa Nui's isolation and obliterating its culture (ibid.). The statistics tell the appalling story.

Maude calculates that 1407 islanders—or 34% of the estimated population—were taken away. They sickened and died in Peru and only 15 survived to be repatriated. They brought with them a deadly contagion, smallpox, which decimated the rest of the population. Probably 1000 died leaving only 1740 alive. "For Polynesia [and for Easter Island] the Peruvian slave trade... constituted genocide of an order never seen before or since in her history" (Maude 1981:182).

A seemingly irreversible trend was set in train and by 1877 the combined effects of famine, migration, demographic distortion, and strife had reduced the indigenous population to 111 of whom 26 were women. Easter Island society had, in fact, died culturally and biologically. A hybrid Easter Islander emerged, an admixture of that handful of survivors and expatriates from Tahiti, Chile, and Europe whose genetic impact was considerable because the host population was so small. Maude has described this regenerative process in the Tokelaus where it gave rise to "an improbably bizarre genetic mixture" (ibid.:173). "There is," Meier concludes, "virtually no way of determining what happened to the gene pool a hundred years ago" (1969:50).

At the same time newcomers were transforming the environment of Easter Island as much as they were altering the population. French, British, and Tahitian entrepreneurs viewed the ravaged land as a *tabula rasa*, a place they could treat as they pleased (Porteous 1981:18). Chile annexed Easter Island in 1888 and an Anglo-Chilean company, Williamson Balfour, established a vast sheep ranch there, turning Rapa Nui into a company state. The *Rapanui* were robbed of their land and transformed into "slaves of the company" (ibid.:74). Furthermore, the sheep barons and the Roman Catholic missionaries (the latter having arrived on the island in the 1860s) succeeded in ghettoizing the *Rapanui*, driving them on to a reserve which encompassed the tiny settlements of Hanga Roa and Mataveru. The missionaries had their flock close to hand and the barons had the entire island free for a flock of a different kind.

While sheep had the greatest environmental, economic, and social impact on Easter Island, they were only one of a number of faunal imports. Horses, cows, and goats shared the heathland while pigs constituted a new, if limited, source of food. These animals introduced parasites, altered the ecological balance, and competed for space with the *Rapanui*.

The pre-contact subsistence economy based on the exploitation of marine resources and of a small number of agricultural products like sweet potatoes, yams, bananas and sugar cane gave way to a state of increasing, even abject, dependence. Whereas prior to the 1860s the *Rapanui* enjoyed a "relatively stressless, uniform set of

living conditions" in which modest levels of activity by all members of the community were sufficient to sustain life,

shores of Cook's Bay waiting for the members of METEI to disembark.



RAPA NUI HILTON under construction. Photo: Canadian Department of National Defence

those conditions ceased to obtain with the advent of the company state (Meier 1969:39). Only a very small number of Rapanui were employed by the sheep ranch or the colonial authorities and the number of employed varied sharply depending on whether it was shearing time or the annual supply vessel had to be off-loaded. Wool became the island's main export and virtually nothing was done to encourage the diversification of the economy. Those who were unemployed lived on the edges of poverty, tending truncated garden plots, while all Rapanui--of whatever station--came to rely on mutton rations from the company and imported food from the mainland.

In December 1952 the Chilean Navy assumed responsibility for administering the island. The naval authorities inaugurated a *paternalista y generoso* rule but from the Rapanui's point of view nothing much had changed. The "basic social, economic, and political system developed in the company state era continued largely as before" (Porteous 1981:169). The urban infra-structure was extremely rudimentary: a church, a simple school, a clinic, and precious little else. The Rapanui were both "locationally and socio-economically marginal to Chile" (ibid.:175). These were the hardy, cheerful, clannish, hospitable, curious and neglected people who lined the

The Rapa-Nui Hilton

It took five days to off-load the expedition's cargo and six days to establish the METEI compound near Hanga Roa. The campsite was two miles from the government wharf at Hanga Piko and all the cargo had to be brought ashore in landing craft and transported into place by truck or tractor. Launching the landing craft, keeping them in position alongside Cape Scott, and loading them with equipment while they rolled in the heavy ground swell was "a very tricky [and dangerous] proposition" (Law Report:7).¹¹ Fortunately all went well and by the end of the first day a truck, six of the trailer units and a good deal of general cargo had been transported ashore. This included 18 of the 24 trailers and the diesel generators for the camp's electricity. Two days later, on 17 December, the entire off-loading operation was complete.

Meanwhile a party of officers and men from the ship's company, aided by expedition members and Rapanui, had been working 12 hours a day to establish the camp, known affectionately as the Rapa-Nui Hilton. Their three biggest problems were the positioning and erection of the trailers, the assembly of the solar and mechanical stills (complete with salt and fresh water reticulation systems), and the establishment of a self-contained electrical network.

Work on the trailers was arduous but straightforward. A local man, Papiano Paoa, served as Foreman of Works and was responsible for establishing the camp (Teao interview, 6 July 1983). The units were arranged in a roughly rectangular fashion so that the quadrangle formed thereby was completely enclosed. Living quarters, offices, laboratories and examining rooms were designated in such a way as to facilitate the movement of Rapanui families being examined.

Behind the compound and next to the sea were simple sanitary facilities, three 25 KW diesel generators, and the stills for fresh water production. Preliminary enquiries had alerted Skoryna to the lack of potable water on the island. The porous soil causes rainwater to leach away rapidly and Skoryna realized that if METEI were to function at all it would need to be nearly if not entirely self-sufficient in terms of fresh water. Some prefabrication work had been done on the stills while Cape Scott was a sea, but the crucial work of setting up pumps, storage tanks, and a salt water supply system could only be done ashore. Pipes were led into the sea to provide the 5000 gallons of salt water required each day to produce 500 gallons of fresh water from the mechanical distilling unit and 200 gallons from the ten unit solar still. Unfortunately, the solar still worked poorly probably because some of the essential elements had been left behind (Murphy diary, 22 December 1964).

The diesel generators necessitated the creation of a fuel dump at the back of the camp. One hundred and eight 45-gallon drums were brought ashore while naval technicians completed the power ring main and checked all of the circuits needed for laboratory equipment, pumping systems, and the galley (Law Report:10).

A timely visit

Quite by accident METEI arrived at a critical juncture in the island's history. While on the one hand METEI's inadvertent timing worked to its advantage, on the other hand it helped precipitate events that threatened the success of the expedition.

The Rapanui were normally dependent upon the annual supply ship but by the time *Cape Scott* came to anchor they had gone for over a year without a visit from the *Presidente Pinto*.¹² The ship reportedly had mechanical trouble and as the islanders were entirely without soap, flour, cooking oil, sugar, tea, and other items like shoes and antibiotics, the Governor, Captain de Corbeta, Jorge Portilla, asked Cdr. Law if *Cape Scott* could supply the people's basic needs. This the latter agreed to do and approximately 200 parcels of food were distributed to as many families on Saturday, 19 December.¹³ There was some uncertainty in Cdr. Law's mind, however, as to just how the distribution should be carried out. He turned to Father Sebastian Englert, the resident Roman Catholic priest and authority on Rapa Nui history, for advice and the cleric

recommended that he, Law, should do the distributing as the Rapanui did not trust the Chileans (Law, personal communication 27 April 1976).

Thus the "feeding of the multitude" (Law Report:11) did two things: it generated enormous good will for the Canadians at the very moment when they most needed it and it highlighted the increasingly unhappy political situation on the island where one of the first phrases a METEI member heard was "Chileno malo" (Hacker 1968:170).

The key to the political situation was a growing desire on the part of the Rapanui to have control over their own affairs. Although the island was part of Valparaiso province and the islanders were Chilean citizens they were not permitted to leave Easter Island or travel outside of Hanga Roa without permission. Their status as citizens was nominal. They did not enjoy the right to vote in state elections. Males could vote in the Hanga Roa native council elections but membership of this advisory body was subject to Portilla's approval (Porteous 1981:171). Naval law rather than civil law applied and according to one informant "the governor was god in those times." In addition, the Rapanui were obliged to work one day a week ("Fiscal Mondays") for the colonial authorities cutting grass, working on the roads, or planting trees; a form of *corvee* which symbolized the islander's colonial status. For their part, the Chilean authorities administered the island, provided services, and maintained communications links without levying taxes or fees. They did this at what was, allegedly, a loss but the islanders remained unmoved by penniless paternalism (Hacker 1968:210). What they wanted was political autonomy.

Three figures appear to have been primarily involved in increasing the islanders' awareness of their plight: Francis Mazière, Dr. Guido Andrade, and Alfonso Rapu. While it is difficult to determine exactly what Mazière's role was it would appear that this French archaeologist-manque and his Tahitian wife, who were on the island a few months before METEI, were deeply critical of the colonial authorities. Mazière's account *Mysteries of Easter Island* (1969:24,35) contains a stinging indictment of Chilean rule. He described Easter Island as a "forgotten imprisoned country" where the people lived in a state of wretchedness and the authorities evaded their obligations.¹⁴ There were allegations that Mazière had "started to spread communism" (Law correspondence, 22 December 1964), promoted an independence movement, and encouraged the Rapanui to support a Polynesian Union with Tahiti.¹⁵

Dr. Guido Andrade was the Chilean naval doctor on Easter Island. He appears to have been popular with the islanders and to have supported their campaign for greater autonomy. Portilla considered Andrade's activities treasonous and ordered him to stand trial before a naval

tribunal in Chile. As the annual supply ship was not available, Andrade was put aboard Cape Scott along with Dr. Donoso, the Chilean nutritionist with METEI. Why the latter chose to leave is unclear but the overall effect of their combined departure was to leave the Rapanui without regular medical treatment and to undermine an important element of the METEI programme (Reid 1965:41; Law correspondence, 28 December 1964).¹⁶

The ten doctors with METEI had no other choice but to carry on their research while acting as *locum tenens* for Andrade. However, this arrangement worked to METEI's advantage in the long term because it allowed the doctors to develop a closer rapport with the Rapanui and to develop a better understanding of the islanders' day to day medical condition over and against which the expedition's findings could be viewed (Murphy diary, 22 December 1964).¹⁷

The third actor, Alfonso Rapu, was the most important. His political career came to be linked intimately with METEI to the mutual advantage of both. Rapu returned to Easter Island in December 1963 to take up a position as a grade 3 teacher. He was a young charismatic figure with a deep commitment to educating his fellow islanders about the outside world and to righting what he and others considered to be an unjust colonial situation (Rapu interview, 7 July 1983). Two events gave Rapu the chance he needed. In October 1964 Eduardo Frei Montalva, a man of liberal views, was elected president of the Republic of Chile (Reid 1965:36). At more or less the same time Rapu learned that METEI was coming to the island. On Saturday, 5 December Rapu helped German Hotu draft an open letter to President Frei, outlining Rapanui complaints, many of which were directed against Governor Portilla.¹⁸

Three days later Rapu and a number of others challenged the prevailing political system by holding their own municipal elections. Rapu was elected mayor but, as there was already an incumbent mayor, Portilla declared Rapu and his councillors illegally elected. It is alleged (though with what veracity it is hard to say) that Rapu threatened to promote the idea of Easter Island's union with Tahiti and the governor, faced with the imminent arrival of an international audience, agreed that the political impasse should be resolved by holding fresh elections.

Cape Scott became the unwitting catalyst in the next round of political events. Not only did the ship transport Dr. Andrade away from the island but it carried 40 others including a Roman Catholic nun who was secretly carrying the Rapu-Hotu letter to Frei. The ship was also expected to embark an American bulldozer that had been on the island for a number of years. Dispatched originally to help free an airplane that had become bogged down on the airstrip, the bulldozer had become a valuable piece of

village equipment. The islanders were loath to see it repatriated and on the night of Sunday, 20 December they rendered it inoperative by removing some of its vital parts. Furious, Portilla threatened to jail Rapu if the pilloined parts were not returned within 24 hours. Twenty-four hours came and went, Rapu retired into hiding, the bulldozer remained where it stood, a symbol of Rapanui defiance, and the *Cape Scott* sailed for Valparaiso (1200 Monday, 21 December).

Medical examinations

The political impasse on Rapa Nui threatened to prevent Skoryna from realizing his plans. On Monday morning, 28 December--the first day of the medical examination programme--two emissaries arrived at the METEI compound from the elusive Rapu. They announced that Rapu was not prepared to authorize the examinations until Saturday, 16 January by which time the second round of elections would have taken place and the Frei letter been published.

In fact, word of political unrest had already begun to reach the outside world. Although the Frei letter did not appear in *El Mercurio*, the leading Chilean newspaper, for some time, METEI personnel heard via radio on Thursday, 31 December that the *New York Times* had featured an article on the "revolution" on Easter Island (Murphy diary, 31 December 1964). No doubt METEI personnel had discussed the political situation over their ham radio links with Canada or news of events on the island had come ashore with the ship's company and passengers of *Cape Scott* when the vessel reached Valparaiso on 29 December.¹⁹ Whatever the case, international curiosity had been aroused and Rapu had in METEI timely and significant leverage in his contest with Portilla.²⁰

Dr. Skoryna was horrified at the prospect that METEI might collapse completely. He found himself in a nearly impossible position. While he and his colleagues were personally sympathetic towards the Rapanui position, they had to take the professional stance that Rapu's activities were a purely domestic matter of no concern to METEI. To do otherwise was to run the risk of alienating Portilla and having the Chilean authorities withdraw their support of the expedition. On the other hand, Skoryna dared not break openly with the islanders. Without their active cooperation the whole undertaking would be for nought.²¹ It is hard to say how Dr. Skoryna resolved the dilemma in his mind. He seems to have acted impulsively. Perhaps he reckoned that to do nothing was to admit defeat and that if he moved quickly he could still capitalize on the store of good will that had been built up with the food distribution. He hurried into Hanga Roa and managed to convince a family to come back to the campsite for examination. It

was a crucial gamble, one which no doubt ensured METEI's success.

Skoryna had already succeeded in hammering out the terms and conditions of examination with the governor's advisory council. The councillors had agreed that they would support the expedition and encourage the people to attend if the following arrangements were adhered to: there would be no gynecological examinations routinely, that females would be examined only by female physicians, and that the amount of blood to be taken would be limited (about 40 ml. from adults and older children and a pinprick for young children) (Roberts 1966:3,9).

Governor Portilla supplied Skoryna with census data which formed the basis of the examination schedule. Families were recorded alphabetically and family heads notified as to the date and time of their family's appointment. Data with respect to names, birth dates, parents' names, and so forth were prepared in advance. A numbered card was printed for each person which indicated the names of doctors to be visited (Dwyer, personal communications, 6 August 1976). When Rapanui presented themselves at the METEI compound Isabel Griffiths and Lt. Rita Dwyer acted as interpreters. They were also responsible for keeping all of the medical records and maintaining statistics. Another expedition member, Mary King, RCN, took Polaroid photographs of each islander in order to ensure correct identification and the families were divided according to sex. Doctors Helen Evans Reid and Maureen Roberts were responsible for examining women and small children of either sex while Doctors Richard Roberts, Peter Beighton, Gary Brody, Denys Montandon, and David Murphy attended to the men.

As METEI was an adaptability project the team members sought to collect a vast array of data with respect to the medical condition of the islanders and its relationship to the biology of the environment in which the Rapanui lived and worked. Thousands of samples were taken, some to be analyzed on the spot in one of METEI's two laboratories and some to be preserved for analysis in Canada. Each islander was subject to a thorough physical examination with particular attention being paid to any genetic abnormalities or markers. Eyes and ears were examined, blood and stool samples taken, bodily measurements were made, and electrocardiograms were performed on nearly all persons over fifty. X-rays were taken of adult heads and chests for medical, dental, and anthropometric purposes while children had their hands and wrists x-rayed as part of a growth study to be undertaken by Dr. Reid. G.A. Wilkinson, the radiographer took 3,450 x-rays in 33 days and examined 840 islanders, some of them repeatedly (Wilkinson n.:1). Saliva specimens were collected for Skoryna's secretor substance research and blood samples were distributed to team members working on simple

haematology, blood grouping, bacterial and viral antibodies in the blood, serological analysis and blood chemistry.

One of the most active, well-briefed and energetic members of METEI was the expedition's bacteriologist, Dr. Georges Nógrády. Nógrády was interested in studying bacteria of human origin, the germs of tuberculosis, whooping cough, leptospirosis (a liver and kidney disease), and actinomycosis (a fungus disease transmitted from cows.) His principal test vehicle was the swab. Nose, throat and rectal swabs were taken from most of the islanders examined (Skoryna PR:22).²² Germs from the swabs were introduced to specially prepared mediums and allowed to develop as cultures. Nose smears were tested for evidence of Hansen's disease or leprosy.

Leprosy was a long-standing problem on Easter Island. It appears to have been introduced from Tahiti in the 19th century. The colonial authorities maintained that one of the reasons that the islanders were not allowed to migrate to the mainland freely was the fear that they might introduce leprosy. In 1964 there were 15 recorded cases of clinical leprosy. Five of these lived in the leprosarium, one because he was regarded as contagious and four because their mutilations prevented them from caring for themselves (Roberts 1966:7). Island informants stated that their kin had been reluctant to visit the government hospital for fear that a routine examination might reveal the presence of real or imagined leprosy. They entertained the same reluctance with respect to METEI but soon set their fears aside. It was obvious that METEI was eager to help and that the quality of medical service proffered was far superior to that which they had been accustomed. What is more, there was a sense of excitement, a sense of status, associated with being examined and coming away with gifts of clothing and merchandise.

When he was not working with test materials from his Rapanui patients, Nógrády was analyzing samples from the island's livestock. Most of the livestock testing was carried out by Murphy and Gibbs. They were interested in determining the health status of the animals and the presence of common zoonotic diseases in the animal population (Skoryna PR:48). They visited the slaughtering facilities at Mataverí, the sheep station at Vaitea, and stumbled around rock-strewn fields in the rain testing horses and cows. They conducted a cow census, subjected cows to physical examination, took intestinal tract samples, and drew blood for serological analysis. In addition, they collected milk samples which Nógrády cultured and examined for bovine tuberculosis, a form of tuberculosis which produced TB in the bones of humans.²³

Nógrády was also interested in the problem of tetanus. The evidence suggested that Rapa Nui should be a high risk area. Tetanus spores are usually present when there

Editorial Comment

They should not let their land become freehold; not permit unrestricted outsider migration; not allow to slip their (and their children's) sense of historic identity; not forget how to live on the resources of their own island; not cease to develop their own language (and don't fuss about loan words for necessary imports).

The peoples of the three points of the Polynesian triangle (New Zealand, Hawai'i and Rapanui) live under governments that are not their own and under systems that are not of their devising.

With the spectre of the poisoned Tahiti before them, the Maaori (that's the correct spelling) are stubbornly and successfully transforming New Zealand into Aotearoa, as they prosecute in court and public for their claims for legitimacy. Hawaiian nationalists pursue a moral campaign to obtain their rightful place, with causes lost, but increasing gains.

But what about Rapanui? Is Chileanization still the goal of the Santiago government, as it has been since Pedro Pablo Toro promised to open a small school on his newly acquired sheep ranch (Rapanui) in 1888? There are questions to be asked, which the Rapanui themselves must answer, as they face the future.

The Danielsson's study has much to teach by example other Polynesians. The future can be the military-driven subjugation of Tahiti, the perseverance of the Maaori or the uphill battle of the Hawaiian in a tourism-dominated economy.

Rapanui's dark secrets of self-determination have yet to be revealed.

Grant McCall is an anthropologist who has done field research in French Polynesia and on Rapa Nui. He is Director of the Centre for South Pacific Studies of The University of New South Wales, Kensington, Australia

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In regard to the lighthouse which is to be constructed on Rano Kau, several thoughts occurred to us: 1) why, when lighthouses in developed parts of the world are being dismantled and abandoned, is such a structure being built? The concept of lighthouse is "old-tech", having been replaced in many cases by modern devices such as radio beams, etc. 2) Exactly where on Rano Kau will this be placed? Rano Kau is, archaeologically speaking, a highly sensitive area and such construction will surely affect the cultural patrimony of the island; and 3) The article that appeared in *El Mercurio* states that such a structure will demonstrate sovereignty of Chile over the Rapanui. It seems to us that there may be more productive ways to "exhibit sovereignty" than to build an outmoded-type structure on an archaeologically sensitive landscape.

As construction projects proliferate without thought of destruction to the island's archaeological treasures, it is not surprising that many Rapanui look askance at the numerous ventures foisted on them and their island.

We invite comments from readers of *RNJ*.



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Georgia Lee, Ph.D. Publisher and Editor

Frank Morin, Assistant Editor

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