

CONDUCTING RESPONSIBLE AND ETHICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON EASTER ISLAND: BUILDING DIACHRONIC AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOCAL RAPA NUI (EASTER ISLAND) COMMUNITY.

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Figure 1. a: Tree planting on Poike in 2014; b: AMD pollution clean-up in 2017; c: Manu Iri field trip to 'Anakena to clean-up AMD in 2017; d: Manu Iri field trip to a basalt quarrying site in Pu Tokitoki in 2016; e: Geoarchaeological documentation of a basalt mine on the southwest coast in 2014 (All photos courtesy of the RNGP).

Rapa Nui (RN) has been the focus of countless scientific studies, which have investigated the famous *ahu* (platform), *moai* (statue), *pukao* (topknot), and almost millennium-long Polynesian culture¹⁻⁴. Since 2001, I have had the honor and the responsibility to carry out ethical anthropological research on Easter Island⁵. This long-term relationship between the Rapa Nui community and myself has been actively fostered through the creation of social rapport,

bolstered by: 1) environmental activism; 2) educational outreach; and 3) academic research, presentation, and publication.

1) While RN faces many environmental problems, two of recent focus points include the island's deforestation and anthropogenic marine debris (AMD) pollution. To deal with the former, many initiatives have been conducted around the island, especially on Poike, where the islanders, multiple Chilean and local agencies, and even tourists have participated in tree planting campaigns (Figure 1a). This, in turn, has led to the reforestation of many parts of the island. To deal with the latter, multiple coastal clean-up efforts (Figure 1b) have focused on the collection and the removal of marine litter and waste that arrive to island's shores daily⁶⁻⁷. Most recently, I have identified and quantified some of the AMD arriving to RN⁸, providing a better understanding of the relationship between the South Pacific Gyre and microplastic pollution, how industrial fishing (both legal and illegal) is a major cause of open water and coastal contamination, and how the islanders themselves contribute to and are under health risk due to the complex AMD pollution problem.

2) Over the last 12 years, I have worked with two educational outreach programs: Terevaka Archaeological Outreach⁹⁻¹⁰ and Manu Iri Heritage Guardians¹¹⁻¹². I have also worked with the local RN Museum and Chilean Heritage Council (Figure 1c-d) to create and conduct archaeological summer camps and excursions for the island's youth¹³⁻¹⁴. Combined, these educational outreach efforts have produced classroom and field resources and curriculum which have been delivered to hundreds of local students; some of which, have gone on to earn college degrees in anthropology and archaeology. I have also worked with RN tourism agencies and guide associations to create anthropological workshops and field visits¹⁵⁻¹⁷. This experience lets me argue that the best way to establish diachronic relationships within the communities we work with, is by taking an interest in their children's education and enculturation. By showing an interest in the present, local communities realize that you are also interested and invested in their future.

3) The rapport that I have created through environmental activism and educational outreach has allowed me to become trusted by the local RN island community. In turn, this confidence, along with my 17 years of on-island experience, has helped me to be identified as an ethical and empirical researcher. As such, I have had the honor to conduct multiple types of anthropological research, including investigations about RN's famous monumental architecture (*moai* and *ahu*) and material culture¹⁸⁻²³. However, although *moai* and *ahu* have been under the research gaze of many international, Chilean,

and local academics, archaeological investigation of the island's many basalt (a type of volcanic stone) sources and artifacts, including their geological provenance and geochemistry, is practically invisible. Consequently, this lack of comprehensive geochemistry for basalt sources and artifacts has restricted the potential of prehistoric interaction studies. To fill this gap in the archaeological literature, the "Rapa Nui Geochemical Project (RNGP)" was established in 2013. Its main goals are: 1) to further recognize the ancient Rapanui as expert geological miners who developed multiple basalt artifact reduction sequences; 2) to identify patterns of prehistoric sociopolitical and economic interaction through the transfer of basaltic material; and 3) to empirically assess cultural interpretations put forward by the socioecological collapse narrative which speculates that Easter Island's prehistoric inhabitants knowingly participated in unsustainable cultural competition and megalithic development, leading to the island's reported ecocide and cultural downfall²⁴⁻²⁵. As such, the RNGP collaborated with more than 20 individuals from 15 institutions from around the globe to conduct field archaeology and geology (four campaigns from 2014-2017; Figure 1e), geoarchaeological and material culture documentation (SLR camera and drone photos/videos and artifactual 3D scanning), geochemical analyses including inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry to detect major and minor elements and isotopic data, and radiometric dating²⁶⁻³⁰. Results from five study areas reveal a diversity of operational sequences for basalt tool making which parallels the numerous sociopolitical and economic avenues used by the ancient Rapanui to acquire basalt for artifact creation. At least four pathways for the transfer of basalt were uncovered by the RNGP; they included, opportunistic, kin-based, elite redistribution, and communal means. Thus, the prehistoric sociopolitical and economic complexity and connectivity outlined in this study refutes cultural propositions put forward by the collapse narrative and establishes the common interaction and collaboration between *mata* (clans) that existed during RN's past, especially regarding the access to and use of culturally valuable stone such as basalt.

To end, the points of emphasis that I would like to raise are the following. First, the best way to become accepted in the groups in which we work with is to become active in community environmental and educational projects; many hands make heavy work light - it also builds rapport. Second, I argue that the best way to avoid academic dishonesty, is to create empirical research design where all data that is to be used for analysis, is collected by the project and its team members. While collaboration is crucial to all fields, academic empiricism gives us bricks to build new walls, not

plagiarized ones. Third, on an island like RN, one must understand the current sociopolitical environment and how this could affect research design, permit acquisition, research timing, publication, and presentation. Simply, before you write a research proposal, make sure you not only have the support of the local group you work with, but also, that your project is of interest and importance to who you work with.

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