

Symbolic stratigraphy: Rock art and the monolithic statues of Easter Island

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Introduction

Archaeological investigation on Easter Island to date (cf. Mulloy 1961, 1968, 1970a and b, 1973, 1975; Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961; Ayres 1973, 1975; McCoy n.d., 1973, 1976, 1979; Cristino F. and Vargas C. 1980; Cristino F. *et al.* 1981; Lee 1986a; Van Tilburg 1986a) illustrates a complex pattern of use and re-use of nearly all ten site types documented. While the temporal and spatial relationships of several of these site types remain unclarified, important advances have been made in understanding the rich corpus of symbols represented in the island's ceremonial sites (*ahu*), statues (*moai*) and petroglyphs. This paper presents new data on statue sites, rock art design motifs and the ideological significance of their inter-relationships.

Symbolically meaningful context

Field work was conducted within the context of the island-wide archaeological survey (McCoy 1976; Cristino F. and Vargas C. 1980; Cristino F. *et al.* 1981). The petroglyph project (Lee 1986a) and the statue project (Cristino F. and Vargas C. 1980; Van Tilburg 1986a) were conducted simultaneously, and a cumulative time of more than 30 months in the field has resulted in a data base which includes 745 statues and nearly 1,000 petroglyph sites (Fig. 1).

As part of the on-going attempt to integrate, rather than fragment, the enormous corpus of survey-generated data, a symbolically meaningful context for the analysis of two site types (statues and petroglyphs) is sought. For our purposes here, the word 'symbol' refers to 'an object or situation in which a direct, primary or literal meaning also designates another indirect, secondary and figurative meaning' (Hodder 1982:11). The term 'symbolic meaning' indicates the 'secondary references evoked by the primary meanings' (1982:11).

On Easter Island, monolithic stone sculptures were carved, transported to and erected upon a variety of stone platform types called *ahu* (a variation of the East Polynesian *marae* concept, cf. Métraux 1940; Ayres 1973; Mulloy and Figueroa 1978; Stevenson

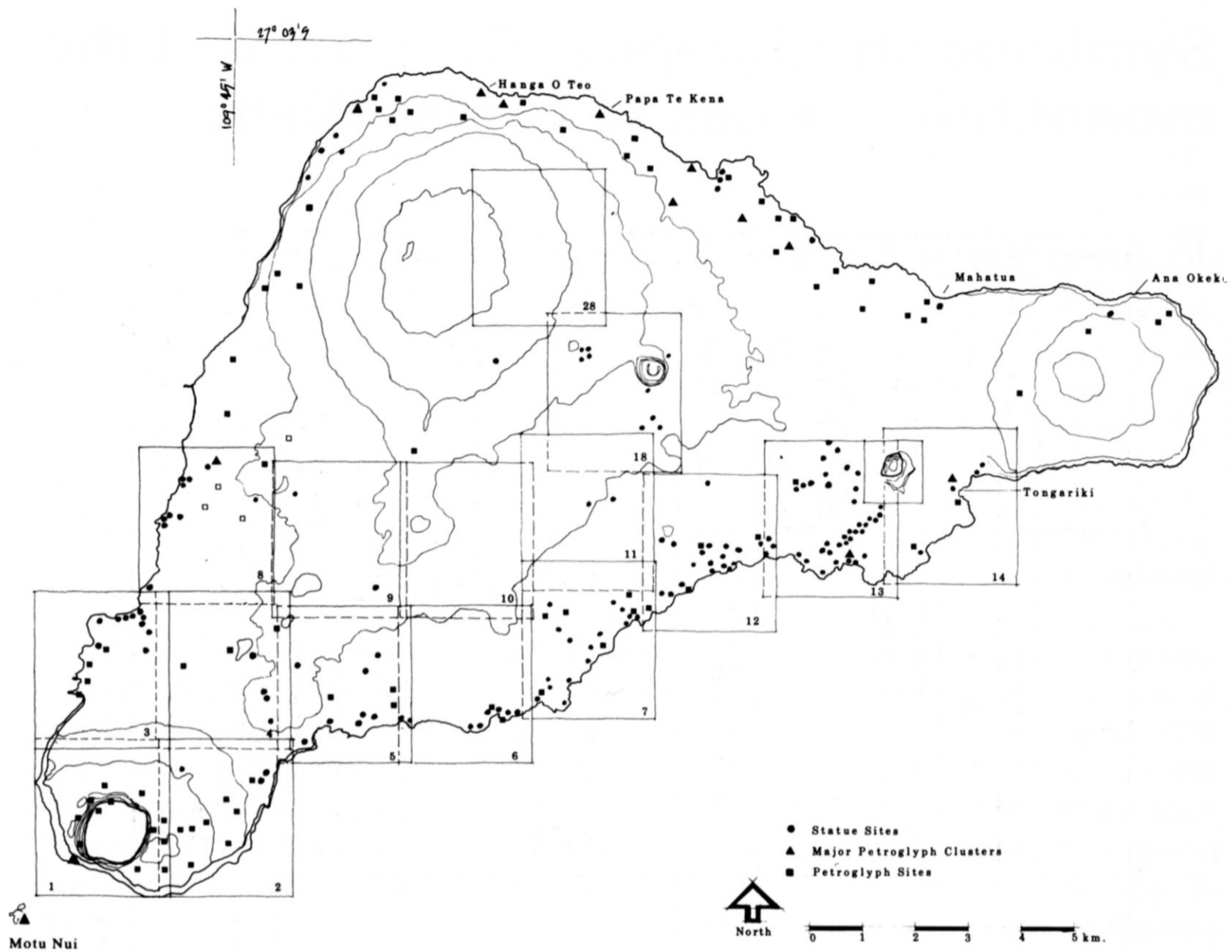


Figure 1 Map illustrating the distribution of documented statue and petroglyph sites, Easter Island.

1986). Statues were polysemic symbols utilized within a multi-dimensional social context, and were central to the functioning of a cult which centered upon ancestor worship, fertility and rites of passage ritual. It is archaeologically suggested that the statue cult functioned from at least A.D. 690 and probably earlier (see Ayres 1973; Fig. 2).

Pukao are red scoria cylinders carved in their first stages at Puna Pau quarry and transported to some *ahu* sites, where they were finished and placed upon the heads of some statues before they were erected (Mulloy 1970a). The literal symbolism of the *pukao* was representative of either a red feather crown (sometimes depicted in petroglyphs) or red turban. *Pukao* are generally considered a late feature, and one may have been superimposed upon the statue at Ahu Ko Te Riku sometime around A.D. 1100–1300.

It has been demonstrated that the *ahu/moai* complex symbolized, both architecturally and iconographically, the dominance of an ideology defined as male, lineage-based and incorporating anthropomorphic and bird symbolism as understood within the Polynesian context (Van Tilburg 1986a: 350). The statues themselves probably represented the genealogical connection of the lineage with the founding ancestor (1986a: 353).

An ideological shift to an ethnographically described *manutara* or birdman cult is first

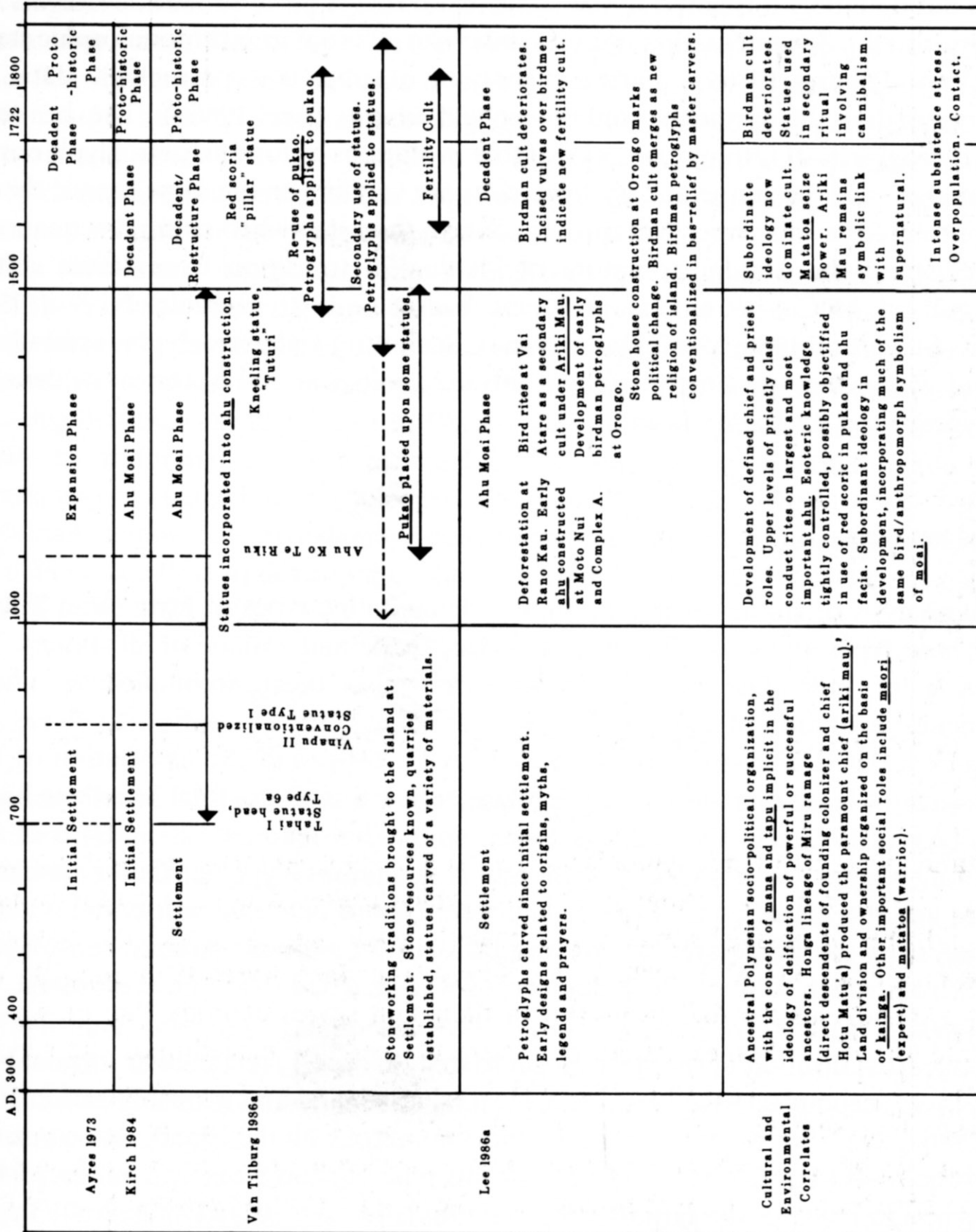


Figure 2 Comparative chronology chart, Easter Island.

manifested archaeologically about A.D. 1500 (Thomson 1891; Routledge 1919; Métraux 1940; McCoy 1973; Ayres 1973). This island-wide cult was centered on the sacred site of Orongo, held Makemake as its central, creator-god focus, and practised status-reversal rites of fertility and 'first fruits.' The birdman symbol of petroglyphic art represents a literal combination of bird and anthropomorphic physical features.

The rise of the birdman cult has been frequently considered inexplicable, perhaps imported but definitely unrelated to the statue cult. Such a point of view, however, was formed prior to the documentation of bird symbolism inherent in anthropomorphic statue design (Van Tilburg 1986a). Further, analysis of objective petroglyph data has demonstrated that the birdman symbol evolved *in situ* (Lee 1986a). The bas-relief birdman petroglyphs of Orongo are comparable evolutions of form in petroglyphic art to the *ahu* images, and the statue and birdman cults are variants on the same cosmic theme.

Data presented in this paper will further confirm the established cultural sequence as well as illustrate the non-linear nature of ideological transition from statue cult to birdman cult (cf. McCoy 1976; Cristino F. and Vargas C. 1980; Gonzalez N. *et al.* 1984; Lee 1986a; Stevenson 1986; Van Tilburg 1986a). Sculptural and petroglyphic symbols are considered within the 'meaningful context' of archaeological and historical evidence in East Polynesia and on Easter Island.

Statues as artifacts

Statistical analysis of statue attribute data has defined nine types of form (Van Tilburg 1986a). These types allow the description of size, shape and volume of all statues. The classification of individual stylistic variants has also been accomplished, and a developmental evolution of style established.

The earliest dated *ahu* structure is Tahai I (A.D. 690), and the association of that platform with at least one statue of approximately 1.5 to 2 m. total length is highly probable (Ayres 1973: 11; Van Tilburg 1986a: 467). This head (site 8-2-03) is of red-black scoria, is round or rounded in form and is defined as Type 6a. Other statues on other sites are also classified as Type 6a and were carved either of red scoria, a dense, white stone from the Poike area or in Rano Raraku, the volcanic cone of consolidated lapilli tuff from which 93% of the statue corpus was quarried (Cristino *et al.* 1981; Van Tilburg 1986a: 275).

The conventionalization of the statue form to that of Type 1 (rectangular form of head and body) was accomplished at least by A.D. 1000 at Vinapu and probably earlier (Van Tilburg 1986a: 292). Type 1 figures are the most numerous on the island, and constitute 73.8% of the total sample. The size range of this type reaches from 1.51 m. to 9.94 m. total length, and includes the largest statue on *ahu* (site 12-3-01) (1986a: 269). Type 1 statues were carved of red scoria, basalt and Rano Raraku tuff. Nearly 50% of Type 1 figures were placed upon *ahu*, and a significant number of them are associated with late (post A.D. 1500) ritual activity defined by re-positioning, re-carving and the application of petroglyphs and cupules (1986a: 175).

Re-use of statues in architecture dates to Tahai II and was probably practised earlier. Some 4% of the total statue data base, particularly intact heads of early statue types, was

incorporated into *ahu* construction (cf. sites PE 86, 7-584, 8-2-03, 12-3, 12-447, 13-127, 14-548). This practice may relate to similar practices reported from other parts of East Polynesia, where the selection and placement of consecrated stones, frequently re-cycled from earlier or smaller ceremonial sites, was an essential element in the periodic refurbishing or rebuilding of temples (Handy 1927: 181; 191). The purpose was to ensure a transference of *mana* (supernatural power or efficacy, Kirch 1984: 288) based upon genealogical continuity from the older structure to the newer.

Statues or statue fragments re-carved into anthropomorphic faces (sites 6-1, 13-127, Rano Raraku) have been incorrectly called 'boulder heads' (Heyerdahl 1961: 509). These figures have an integral relationship to both statues and petroglyphs in their emphasis and style. They are found on or in close proximity to important ceremonial sites with multiple evidence of late ritual activity. At the *ahu* sites they have been re-positioned relative to the plaza approach to the platforms.

Some statues are incorporated into specialized stone alignments (sites 12-452A, 13-509-13). Circular patterns are found at the bases of some statues, and linear arrangements run the length of others occasionally beginning at the eye and extending to the base. Re-used stone from associated structures is often a part of these alignments, indicating that they are late features. Occasionally stone alignments are accompanied on the site by additional evidence of ritual activity such as cupules (man-made, circular depressions), petroglyphs or selective damage to statues' eyes, faces, heads and occasionally hands. Selective damage done to statues in the Marquesas was considered to be a deliberate effort to destroy the figure's 'power,' localized in a particular part of the statue (Linton 1925: 86).

Rock art classification

While samples of the earliest levels of material culture are still lacking on Easter Island, settlement from the Society or Marquesas Islands as early as A.D. 300 is postulated (Kirch 1984). Petroglyphs are presumed to have been a part of the island stone carving tradition from settlement (Lee 1986a). There is also ample evidence of the extension of petroglyph production into the Historic Phase (the depiction of European type sailing craft, for example).

Establishing temporal relationships is one of the most difficult tasks of rock art research. On Easter Island evidence of stylistic change, superimposition and manufacturing technique have facilitated the establishment of developmental phases for several specific designs.

Petroglyphs can be made in several ways, and the difference in manufacturing technique is significant and time-related. Petroglyphs are either (1) incised; (2) made by pecking; (3) made by pecking and subsequent abrading to produce a deep, smooth groove; (4) intaglio (below the surface of the rock); or (5) bas-relief. In Hawai'i, bas-relief petroglyphs are a late development (Cox 1970: 91), and on Easter Island this technique is also seen as late. Phase I birdman figures are generally abraded, and at some sites they underlie and are frequently cut through by Phase II bas-relief birdman figures (Lee 1986a).

Twelve types of petroglyph design are documented on a variety of site types, including both Puna Pau and Rano Raraku quarries (1986a). Statues in Rano Raraku which possess petroglyphs will not be discussed in detail in this paper due to the fact that so many of the figures are not fully exposed for study, whereas the *ahu* and 'in transport' statues are all surface artifacts. Petroglyphs in the statue quarry include literal representations of birdmen, frigate birds, faces, boats and small, anthropomorphic figures. Cupules are also present.

Rock art applied to statues

Symbols which bear a reasonable visual relationship to ethnographically documented tattoo designs have been recorded on three statues, one each at Vinapu, Tongariki and Rano Raraku. These designs consist of wavy, generally vertical, roughly incised lines on the throats of the statues, and have been compared to painted lines on *tapa* images (Métraux 1940: 245) and tattoos (Lavachery 1939: 191). A design remarkably similar to these throat patterns is also found on one *pukao* in Puna Pau (see Table 1). Such lines in other parts of Polynesia are thought to be associated with death (Greiner 1927).

On two sites (Ahu Tongariki and 13-491-11) shallow, incised and abraded lines indicating female sexual characteristics have been added to two statues. In both cases, the designs resemble a *komari* or vulva form found throughout the island's rock art corpus.

Cupules range in size from 2 cm. to 10 cm. in diameter, and are most frequently found on the base, the top of the head or on the dorsal surface of statues. Occasionally they are ranged along one or both arms. Cupules can be randomly placed, concentrated in clusters or circles, and appear in linear arrangements when they are present on the faces or torsos of the standing sculptures in the quarry (Pl. 1.). They have been documented as part of the patterns of incised lines on the throats of one statue at Vinapu and one at Tongariki.

Cupules also frequently form long lines which enclose petroglyph design panels. Some are clustered on flat rock surfaces in a variety of patterns, and others are on the ceilings and/or walls of rock shelters. They are present in all regions of the island and on all types of stone, and are documented on sixteen of the twenty *ahu* sites where statues and petroglyphs both occur.

It is clear from their size variation, site distribution, associations and sheer numbers that all cupules were not produced either randomly or as the result of either natural processes or purely functional purposes. These simple, circular pits have been produced by non-literate peoples since the Palaeolithic and may be one of the earliest symbols made by man (Hadingham 1979: 58). They are associated in various cultures with fertility and other supplicatory rites, and in Polynesia they may represent an attempt to secure some of the power thought to reside in stone, a sacred material.

Some petroglyphs in cave settings have been embellished with both red and white pigment. At some sites, brush marks are evident, while others appear to have had the paint applied by hand. Métraux (1940: 237) states that brushes were likely to have been made of feathers or pounded ends of sticks. The brightness of some of the paint applied

Table 1 Occurrence of petroglyphs on statue, *ahu* and quarry sites, Easter Island.

SITE NAME AND/OR NUMBER	APPLIED TO ARCHITECTURE			APPLIED TO STATUES			CUPULES ASSOCIATED	COMMENTS, REFERENCES
	AHU, REAR WALL	AHU, FACIA RED SCORIA	OTHER	STATUE BASES	STATUE, OTHER	PUKAO, RED SCORIA		
AHU ONE MAKIHI 14-21		X					X	
AHU VINAPU II 2-209	X	X				X	X	SEE MULLOY 1961
AHU VINAPU I 2-210			X		X		X	IN SHELTER FORMED BY FALLEN STATUE. SEE LAVACHERY 1939;MULLOY 1961
AHU AKAHANGA 7-564		X	X			X	X	
AHU AKIVI PE 26	X			X				MAKEMAKE FACES ON BASE OF STATUES; SEE MULLOY & FIGUEROA 1978;MULLOY 1961
AHU VAIHU 6-255						X	X	
AHU HURI A URENGA				X			X	MAKEMAKE FACES ON BASE OF MOAI SEE MULLOY 1973
AHU TE PITO KURA PE 104					X	X	X	PETROGLYPH OF BOAT ON TORSO; SEE SMITH 1961
AHU TONGARIKI 14-548			X		X	?	X	PETROGLYPHS ON PAENGA; ORIGINAL POSITION UNKNOWN
AHU HEKII	X		X			X	X	
AHU RAAI 31-196			X				X	ON PAENGA AT TOP OF AHU
AHU RUNGA ANAKENA			X				X	ON PAENGA AT TOP OF AHU
AHU NAU NAU PE 86	X		X				X	ALL PETROGLYPHS IN BAS RELIEF
AHU IHU ARERE ANAKENA	X						X	ON SEAWALL; EARLY MOTIFS; SEE LAVACHERY 1939
AHU TAUTIRA 3-131			X					PETROGLYPHS ON BOULDERS IN RUBBLE FILL
AHU HOA ANGA VAKA A TUA POI 12-447			X				X	PETROGLYPHS ON STONES, TOP OF AHU ORIGINAL POSITION UNKNOWN
AHU VAI TARA KAI UA			X					PETROGLYPHS ON STONE PEDESTAL
AHU HANGA OHIRO			X				X	PETROGLYPHS ON STONE PEDESTAL
AHU TEA KAVA 31-121D				X	X		X	
AHU KAUHANGA VARU	X							
8-87-02				X				EARLY BIRDMAN MOTIFS REPORTED ON BASE; SEE HEYERDAHL 1961
HEAD 8-87-01[130]					X		X	
13-486-07					X			
TE TENGA 12-14A				X	X		X	
HOA HAKA NANA IA					X			ELABORATELY CARVED BACK OF STATUE; SEE ROUTLEDGE 1919; VAN TILBURG 1986A
13-173-14					X		X	
13-509-13				X	X		X	
PUNA PAU 4-137						X	X	

to petroglyphs may be due to their cave environments, or may also suggest that painting was done, in some cases, relatively recently.

There is some scant evidence to suggest that the application of paint to statues may also have taken place. Hoa Haka Nana Ia, the basalt statue re-carved with late bas-relief petroglyphs and taken from Orongo, seems to have been at least partially painted in red and white pigment at the time of its removal from the island (Palmer 1868: 177).



Plate 1 Standing statue (*moai*) on the exterior slopes of Rano Raraku quarry. Note pecked concavities or cupules.

Lavachery (1939: 423–424) illustrated a hypothetical reconstruction of paint design based upon remnants supposedly present on one of the fallen statues at Vinapu. The red and white paint currently visible on one statue at Vinapu does not resemble his illustration in any way, and is likely to have been applied after the statue fell and possibly while the cave formed by the fallen statues and the *ahu* wall was being regularly used. Petroglyphs are documented here on the statues and *ahu* wall, and the cave may have been the site of late ritual or specialized craft activity such as that suggested by Smith (1961: 257–264) at Pua Pau cave.

The only other reference to paint on statues is a *moai* painted with 'red pigment and perhaps also with other colors' at the Akivi-Vai Teka complex (Mulloy and Figueroa 1978: 69). At Tongariki, a remnant of concentrated white substance was documented on the neck of *Moai* 09. The same material was sampled from one petroglyph site on the north coast, and when both substances were analyzed they proved to be gypsum (S. Williams, personal communication, 1984).

On present evidence, therefore, it is not possible to state definitively whether or not the sculptures when raised upon *ahu* may have been periodically painted, perhaps during certain rituals. Cyclical refurbishing of temples and images and the application of at least red pigment to both is known in other parts of Polynesia, particularly the Marquesas, and it would not be illogical to assume that such practices also occurred on Easter Island.

The evidence more strongly suggests, however, that pigment may have been applied to some statues following their fall from *ahu*. We would, therefore, be dealing with evidence of probable ritual activity which may have taken place after the major influence of the statue cult had waned and/or following contact.

Occurrence of petroglyphs on statue, *ahu* and quarry sites

A total of twenty-seven individual sites have been documented both within and outside the survey area which include both petroglyphs and statues (Table 1). Twenty of these are *ahu* sites and one is Puna Pau quarry. The balance includes statues 'in transport' between Rano Raraku and *ahu*, the famous Hoa Haka Nana Ia in the collection of the British Museum, and two red scoria figures.

Six of the twelve types of petroglyph design documented are present on statue sites. On several of these sites the petroglyphs (literal representations of boats, *komari* or vulva, anthropomorphic and birdman forms) clearly constitute a late re-use. On others, they appear to be a more integral part of the site.

While the number of sites on which petroglyphs and statues both occur thus constitutes only three per cent of the total data base, the repetitive presence of a limited range of petroglyph symbol types at six sites suggests purposeful, non-random, re-use of *ahu* and *pukao* quarry sites (Table 2). Further, the deliberate application of those symbols to red scoria stone used for some sculpture, for *pukao* and as architectural enhancement of some *ahu* in the form of *facia* is considered ideologically significant.

Petroglyphs on pukao and ahu facia

Elsewhere it has been demonstrated that a possible ideological purpose was served in the selection and utilization of red scoria for the carving of sculpture, statue *pukao* and *ahu* facia on Easter Island (Van Tilburg 1986b). The assumption of ideological purpose is based upon the documented significance of the color red on Easter Island specifically and within Polynesia as a whole, as well as upon the demonstrated use of the material in archaeological contexts clearly associated with ritual behaviors. Color symbolism in Polynesia was never casually employed, and the association of the color red (*kura*) with chiefly power and *mana* is well-established (cf. Handy 1927; Burrows 1936; Firth 1967; Holdaway 1984; Van Tilburg 1986b).

Architectural variation of Easter Island *ahu* form is achieved through the variety of ways in which a specific set of design attributes is combined. One such attribute, the red scoria facia (incorrectly called 'lintel' or 'cornice' by Stevenson 1986: 73, 76), was added to the low, landward platform retaining wall of only the largest and most elaborate of ceremonial centers.

The addition of red scoria facia to these sites was undertaken somewhat late in the *Ahu Moai* Phase. At three sites, *Ahu Vinapu*, *Ahu Akahanga* and *Ahu One Makihi* petroglyphs have been superimposed upon the facia.

An illustration of an unnamed *ahu* was published by La Perouse which depicted twelve seemingly anthropomorphic figures carved on what may be the facia (see Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961: 62 fig. 7b). These carvings were described as 'recumbent skeletons' (1961: 64) and either are inaccurately represented, never existed or have been lost due to subsequent site damage. In any case, such figures do not currently exist on any site.

Petroglyph forms present on red scoria facia and *pukao* found at five individual *ahu* sites and on *pukao* in Puna Pau quarry are given in Table 2. At the five *ahu* sites listed in Table 2 (four of which are in the south coastal zone), petroglyphs and frequently cupules are superimposed upon *pukao*. Placement of the designs relative to the position of the *pukao* indicates that they were applied after the statues had fallen from *ahu*.

Table 2 Petroglyphs on red scoria facia and *pukao* at *ahu* and quarry sites, Easter Island.

AHU ONE MAKIHI SITE 14-21 RED SCORIA FACIA																			X
AHU VINAPU II SITE 2-209 RED SCORIA FACIA AND PUKAO																			X
AHU AKAHANGA SITE 7-564 RED SCORIA FACIA AND PUKAO													9P						X
AHU VAIHU SITE 6-255 RED SCORIA PUKAO																			X
AHU HEKII RED SCORIA PUKAO																			X
PUNA PAU SITE 4-137 RED SCORIA PUKAO																			X

In Puna Pau quarry, twenty-two *pukao* are documented. The range of design forms present at that site is slightly more extensive than at the *ahu* sites. The high degree of conformity between and among the designs at all six sites, however, is striking.

Literal petroglyph forms in their archaeological context

All six sites have cupules present on either or both the red scoria facia and *pukao*, and all six sites also possess a curved or lunate symbol. Variations on this basic theme range from curves or circles on one end, linear additions on one end, or curves on both ends. Five sites have simple, horizontal, wave-like lines and one site has a cluster of four waved lines arrayed vertically and duplicating incised patterns on the necks of statues at Tongariki and Rano Raraku. Vinapu and Akahanga each possess early, Type 1 birdman symbols, and Akahanga has the greatest variety of symbols depicted on any documented site.

Ahu Akahanga (site 7-584) ('platform of the king') is a ceremonial complex located on the south coast and connected in legend with the death and burial of Hotu Matu'a, the founding ancestor (Charlin O. 1947) (Fig. 3). Three platforms of varying architectural attributes and collectively possessing seventeen statues (some incorporated into

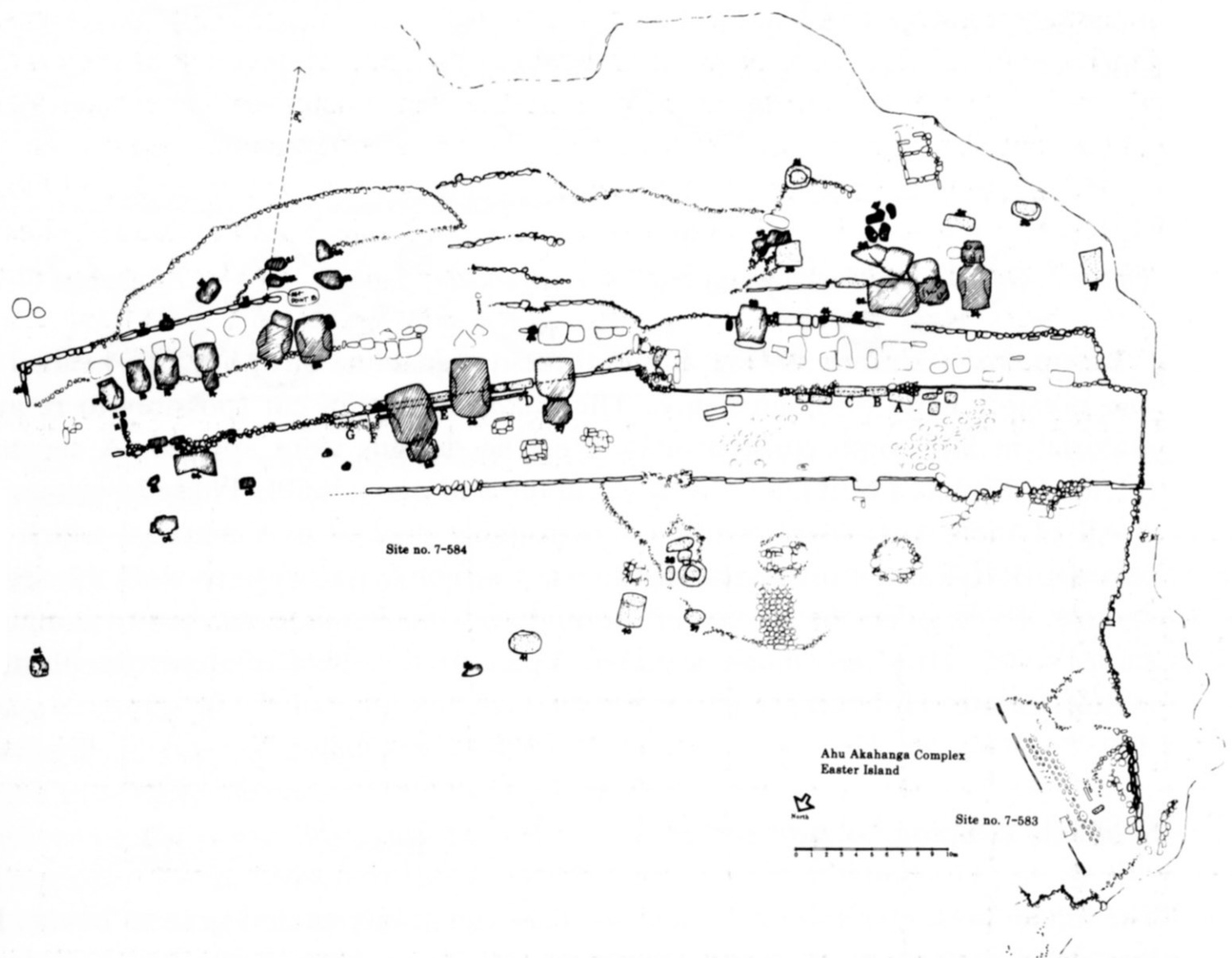


Figure 3 Plan view of Ahu Akahanga Complex, Easter Island, illustrating petroglyph panels A-G.

architecture) are superimposed upon one another, and three other, considerably smaller platforms, two with statues (sites 7-581; 7-585), are closely associated. Statue types present on the site include the round-headed Type 6a, the conventionalized Type 1 and a third type postulated to be post-A.D. 1000. Both the statues and the site itself have been re-utilized in numerous ways.

Platform 2 lacks either red scoria facia or *pukao*, but two red scoria blocks are associated. Platforms 3 and 4 both have red scoria facia and *pukao* with petroglyphs (Fig. 4). Facia designs (locations marked A to G on Fig. 3) include lunate shapes of several forms, cupules and an eye/nose/face design (panel C, Fig. 5; see Thomson 1891: 510 fig. 19 for inaccurate impression of these designs).

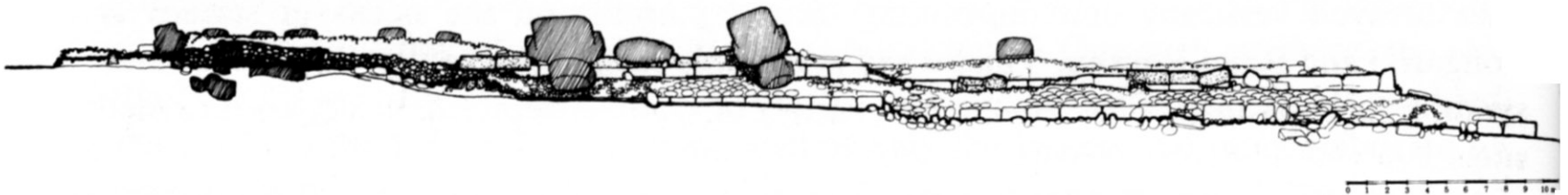


Figure 4 Landward elevation of Ahu Akahanga platforms 2, 3 and 4 (site 7-584) illustrating fallen statues and facia details.

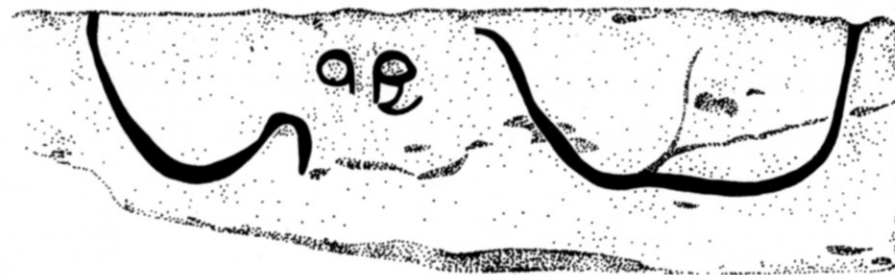


Figure 5 Detail of petroglyphs on red scoria *ahua* facia, panel C, at Ahu Akahanga (7-584).

One *pukao* (number 36, Fig. 6) has three designs: one bird, one two-headed bird and one possible early birdman figure. The *pukao* had been cut (possibly to re-utilize the material in late tomb construction) after the designs were applied. A second *pukao* (element 37) has a bird figure, a large cupule and one possible Phase I birdman symbol.

All of these petroglyph symbols are roughly pecked in a material which is highly porous, deteriorates relatively rapidly and is not a particularly workable petroglyph surface. Even given the nature of the material, the symbols are poor examples of the carver's art. They are in no instance equal to the level of expertise illustrated on numerous sites elsewhere.

Symbolic meaning: an interpretation

The lunate petroglyph symbols described above are interpreted here as 'boats'. In form, they tend to have a slight thickening at the base of the curve which gives them a distinctive configuration, and the high ends, or ends with out-curving elements are typical of Polynesian sailing craft (cf. Hadden and Hornell 1975: figs 21, 44, 82, 110,



Figure 6 Red scoria *pukao* with petroglyphs, Ahu Akahanga (7-584-36). Note that the petroglyph forms have been cut through.

111). It is also possible that the circular elements on some of the end extensions may suggest carved 'figureheads'.

Simple, curved half circles which lack the thickening at the base of the curve are problematical. These may represent a boat or some other object. When these simple curves occur on the same panels with others described as boats, however, the probability increases that they are either an unfinished or more abstracted version of the same symbol (Fig. 7).



Figure 7 Red scoria facia with superimposed petroglyphs, Ahu Vinapu (2-209-14). Note the variety of lunate forms.

Boat shapes with straight-line extensions such as those documented at Puna Pau and Akahanga occur with more complexity on the north coast only, with some of the most elaborate present on lava flow near Ahu Raai (65 examples of the same motif; Fig. 8). Two more examples are found at Anakena and one at Ava o Kiri has a fish attached to a line coming from the end extension. Métraux (1940) was told that the cross-end piece depicted a net-fishing device.

Elsewhere on the island, historical (European) craft are depicted in both petroglyphs and pictographs. These represent the most realistic boat forms extant. On many sites, simple, curved lines appear to post-date the more artistically depicted boat shapes with cross-end extension. However, no evolutionary development to or from simple to complex designs is evident.

Considered within the Polynesian socio-political framework of differential access to

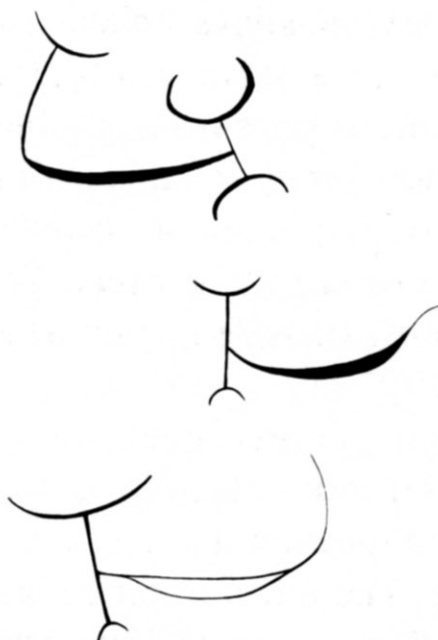


Figure 8 Example of complex lunate form with straight-line end extensions, north coast of Easter Island.

important resources, the symbolic meaning of the boat may involve a class/status symbol (*vaka vaero*, the royal canoe, which was the only vessel allowed to take certain varieties of deep-sea fish). The association of boats with journeying and settlement and thus with the founding ancestor and the Miru ramage is also implied.

The distinctive curve of the landward retaining wall of the central platforms of some *ahu* creates a boat-like architectural form as a base for the standing statues (Van Tilburg 1986a). There is ample evidence in other parts of Polynesia for carrying either priests or god images on boats or boat-shaped platforms, and on Easter Island the *ariki* stood on a platform carried by eight men when addressing a group (Métraux 1940: 391).

Thomson (1891: 474) reports finding two 'very old' canoes, probably fashioned from driftwood, which were used as 'burial cases.' These were located in a cave on the west coast. The association of boats/canoes with death and burial in Polynesia is well-established, and on Easter Island canoe-shaped burial cairns called '*ahu poe poe*' are known (Routledge 1919: 230).

The *hare paenga* or boat-shaped house was a high-status dwelling located in close proximity to ceremonial sites. Lunate-shaped pectorals called *rei miro* were also worn by high status individuals, but these are depicted in petroglyphic art in distinctive and easily differentiated ways.

It has been suggested that the superimposition of red scoria *pukao* upon some of the statues of the largest and most important lineage sites represents a shift in ideological emphasis from chiefly *mana*, which is inherent in ancestral proximity, to one of chiefly *mana* which is acquired and demonstrated through prowess (Van Tilburg 1986a: 339; 1986c). The central symbolism of the *pukao* would then be associated with rites of passage. The superimposition of red scoria facia upon some of the same *ahu* sites allows for the lineage-specific transfer of increased status (1986c). This shift in emphasis would, it is suggested, describe one of the major differences between statue cult and birdman cult ideology.

In conclusion, while the literal forms of petroglyphic designs superimposed upon red scoria at *ahu* sites and Puna Pau quarry clearly suggest 'boats', the figurative meaning of

those forms also carries 'complex meanings linked with wider associational clusters' (Munn 1973: 589). The symbols may serve to objectify underlying socio-ideological meanings which may include chiefly or priestly status; lineage or ramage affiliation; social and/or physical boundary definition (*tapu*); death and/or the power over death, including ritual associated with death or burial; inherent power or *mana* or an effort to negate (make *noa*) that power; healing or sacrificial ritual. Some of the postulated symbolic meanings of these 'boats', it should be noted, contrast sharply with the lack of carving expertise evidenced in their execution.

What is clear, however is that the archaeological context in which these symbols appear suggests a complex cultural code. Elements of the code include color symbolism, the significance of stone type and function and literal and symbolic meanings of formal variation of one petroglyph type. The effect of the interactive, multi-layered symbolism employed may be to partially define elements of late ritual activity associated with some aspect of the priesthood and secret esoteric knowledge. The symbols and their context further suggest a 'symbolic stratigraphy', a temporal linkage between two ideologies, that of the statue cult and the birdman cult which overlapped and succeeded it in time.

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Abstract

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Symbolic stratigraphy: rock art and the monolithic statues of Easter Island

Recent field work on Easter Island, East Polynesia, has collected new data on monolithic statue sites, rock art design motifs and the ideological significance of their temporal and spatial relationships. This paper details what is currently known about the re-use of statue sites post A.D. 1500, and describes the occurrence of rock art on statue, ceremonial architecture (*ahu*) and quarry sites. In particular, it is postulated that the superimposition of a limited range of design motifs ('boat' forms) on the red scoria of statues and *ahu* constitute an ideologically significant site re-use which links statue cult practices with subsequent birdman cult ideology.