

THE *RANITOKI* (RANGITOKI) FRAGMENT: FURTHER ANALYSIS OF A SHORT *RONGORONGO* SEQUENCE ON BARK-CLOTH FROM EASTER ISLAND

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Previously we described a short *rongorongo* sequence painted on bark-cloth from Easter Island (Schoch and Melka, 2019),¹ the *Rangitoki* (*Ranjitoki*) *fragment*, named after the Rapanui woman who, according to the history passed down with the piece, presented it to a European male visitor in March 1869. Here we expand on our original analysis of some of the ambiguous glyphs found on the fragment. We also further analyze details of the German inscription that accompanied the fragment in the nineteenth-century watchcase in which the fragment had been stored. Based on the evidence to date, we conclude that the *Rangitoki* painted sequence and the commemorative note found in the watchcase have a much higher probability of reflecting a past reality than not. We maintain that the *Rangitoki* inscription represents an authentic addition to the known *rongorongo* corpus.

Keywords: Albrecht Van Houten, ball-point pen, forgery, genuine relic, handwriting, modified pocket-watchcase, painted sequence, Rangitoki, *Ranjitoki bark-cloth fragment*, *rongorongo* script

Introduction

The *Rangitoki* (*Ranjitoki*) *fragment* (Fig. 1) consists of a piece of bark-cloth, on which is painted a short sequence of *rongorongo* glyphs, collected on Easter Island in March 1869.² According to the family history, the bark-cloth fragment was given by a Rapanui woman named Rangitoki (= Ranjitoki) to the European seaman Albrecht Van Houten (= AVH), who at some point (whether shortly

¹ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Ranjitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece: A Newly Recognized rongorongo fragment from Easter Island*.

² Ibid.

after receiving the bark-cloth piece or later) folded the bark-cloth, rolled it up, tied a piece of twine around it, and stored it in a watchcase (Figs. 6, 7, 8) along with two bone beads that were crudely carved to resemble skulls (discussed and illustrated in Schoch and Melka;³ it is not certain whether or not these bone beads were collected on Easter Island, and thus the beads are not discussed further here). In addition, AVH wrote a short note in German (Figs. 5 and 9), which he placed in the watchcase, recording that he had received the bark-cloth piece from Rangitoki in March 1869.

Since a number of queries have been received by us regarding the *Rangitoki fragment*, we deem that supplementary material (glyphic and photographic) should be accessible for any interested parties to examine. It is appreciated that concerned people have taken a keen interest in further elucidating (= proving / disproving) the authenticity of the piece in question. This is understandable if one considers the great deal of contradictory reports that are in circulation (printed and online) concerning *rongorongo*, plus various fake artifacts which fail to do justice to the genuine scribal tradition (see below, Section *On Some Artifacts Considered to be False / Imitations of the Authentic Rongorongo Tradition*).

Due to space constraints, our original published article (Schoch and Melka)⁴ could not cover various additional suggestions / observations⁵ that we considered regarding the designation of glyphs after Barthel⁶ (see Fig. 1), and the note written in German, found in the pocket-watchcase of Albrecht Van Houten (Figs. 5, 6, 8, 9).

Further evidence on parallel or almost-parallel unigrams, bigrams, and trigrams to the painted glyphs on the *Rangitoki fragment* is proposed and described below. We need to highlight that coming forth with the right answer about each specific case would be ideal; however, given the state of current *rongorongo* studies and the limited corpus of authentic inscriptions, this is not always possible. Regarding the glyphs on the *Rangitoki fragment*, the alternatives offered below, while expanding the possibilities in terms of glyphic identifications, may also narrow the range of ultimate solutions in terms of reconstructing the full inscription.

³ Ibid.

⁴ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*, p. 132.

⁵ Already filed in the personal research notes of RMS and TSM.

⁶ BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*. A detail is offered at this point: while *Grundlagen...* is understood by us as “*Foundations for the Decipherment of Easter Island’s Script*”, BARTHEL, T. S. in his *Writing Systems*, p. 30, suggests “*Basic Principles for a Decipherment [of Easter Island’s Script]*”.

Further Glyphic Analysis: Plausibility and/or Uncertainty


We begin with the last glyph of the *Rangitoki* sequence, which previously we






tentatively coded /87?/88?/ • /127?/.⁷ Since glyphs marked with the symbol “?” correspond to dubious and undecided forms in Barthel’s notation,⁸ we certainly could not “turn a deaf ear” to / overlook any other plausibility.


Tablet “*Aruku Kurenga*”, specifically line 2, *recto* (= Br2) has a number of



glyphs /95x/ (= upturned glyphs /95/) that resemble . Barthel⁹ offered two basic variants of glyph /95/ in *Formentafeln (Kennziffern 1–99)* [Sign-form

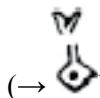
plates (Reference index numbers 1–99)], . Here we present (underlined)



the most conspicuous examples: /40.95-59f.95f_x/ ; /59f-95x/ .

/208.73f-V95x/ . Consultation of various photographs (Ray; Van Hoorebeeck; Orliac and Orliac; Harris, *recto*)¹⁰ shows that none of the glyphs /95x/ has an absolute fixed shape: we discern upright, slightly “embellished”, upturned glyphs, plus the last form with a “rippled” appendage on top.



However, the glyph that rises to the occasion in terms of a close parallel to



(→ ) is /95x/ →  on Br2 (for a clear picture, see Fig. 2). Yet, even this “upturned” glyph (= Br2) has an “ear” / “lozenge” appended, which is either missing or possibly appears in a diminutive / incomplete form (if the apparent “paint splotch” on the right side represents the “ear” / “lozenge”) in the *Rangitoki* glyph (Fig. 3), plus the ends of the bifurcation of /95x/ appear


⁷ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*, pp. 139–140.


⁸ BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ RAY, S. H. *Note on inscribed tablets from Easter Island. With Plate G*; VAN HOOREBEECK, A. *La Vérité sur l’île de Pâques*, Plate XX, bottom; ORLIAC, M., ORLIAC, C. *Trésors de l’île de Pâques / Treasures of Easter Island*, Fig. 191; HARRIS, M. *High-resolution pictures of tablet “Aruku Kurenga” taken at the General Archives of the Padri dei Sacri Cuori (SSCC), Rome, Italy*.


“unfastened”, contra *Rangitoki*’s (in which they appear to be fastened, although this may be due to the medium – namely paint – used to outline the *Rangitoki* glyph). In sum, the *Rangitoki* glyph is very close in form to /95x/ on Br2. As luck would have it, Br9 shows another parallel /95x/; although this glyph is


non-“punctured” in the bottom part → ; cf. also the “upright” non-




“punctured” specimen /95/  on Bv2. These instances (or other ones), it could be argued, are hardly surprising given the fact that modern researchers already know of the habit of allography / scribal idiosyncrasy evinced across many RR inscriptions. The allography is attested both in the intra-scribal mode (the variation within a pre-1864 Rapanui person’s hand-carved samples / portions) and the inter-scribal mode (the variation between the hand-carved samples of two [or two+] different pre-1864 Rapanui people).

What transpires at this juncture is that even if *Rangitoki*’s last sign along the sequence ends up in being a “punctured” and “earless” glyph-form /95x/, it constitutes evidence for another “original” scribal variant. You would have to be a *rongorongo*-wise “forger” to produce such an “unusual” / inventive form in a novel text; it seems highly unlikely that there would be a forger with such detailed knowledge.



Another *Rangitoki* glyph → , suggested by us to be the “*rei miro*” glyph /7?/, may call for further investigation. This task would require a number of examples, to be presented in what follows. Although we still support the tentative (indicated by the question mark “?” in Fig. 1) assignment of code number /7/ for this painted shape, it has alternatively a remote chance of being



an “upturned” glyph /26/  → /26x/ per Barthel¹¹ (see also Fig. 2). In attempting to assess it further, an assumption here is that glyph /26/ with its “slit

upper extremities” is a variant of the “horse shoe” glyph /27/ .¹² T. S. Barthel¹³ inventories a number of occurrences of glyph /26/, e.g. Br2 displays both instances /26/  and /26x/ ; the “*Santiago Staff*” (Ia) has instances,


¹¹ BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*



¹² Records of the “horse shoe” glyph /27/ are found in BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*, pp. 97–98.

¹³ BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*, p. 97.



whether appearing in “triads” /606.76-26-600f/  (Ia10), or in “dyads” /26.76-V68b/  (Ia12).

Pursuing our research notes, we disclose more evidence. Although striking parallels cannot be drawn between the *Rangitoki* sequence (or parts of it) and the sections of the canonical corpus, they are highly suggestive, in a way.


Another potential and plausible trigram, corresponding to *Rangitoki*’s sequence, is attested on Ab2 (“*Tahua*” Tablet), right after the “*manu-piri*”-like arrangement¹⁴  (see Fig. 4):


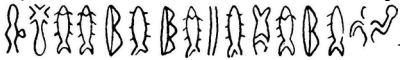












evidently we can argue that Ab2’s ¹⁵ is not identical to . We do not claim that. One obvious “problem” is the “phallus”-like glyph /76/. Given the “genre” or “sub-genre” where it appears (= along the *Rangitoki* fragment), it must be a meaningful intervening affix (= suffix, in this case), complementing the other adjacent glyphs. For sure, we are constrained by (very) educated hypotheses here.


Yet, tacitly or not, it cannot be denied at this point the high probability of correspondence between the Ab2 trigram and the mini-string of the *Rangitoki* sequence in allographic terms. As far as we know, the “embellished” / “punctured” / “striped” glyphs interchange quite often across the corpus with the “plain” / non-“punctured” / “stripe-less” glyphs.

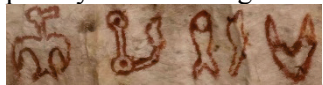
The more one explores the *rongorongo* corpus, the more one is convinced about the scale of variation and personal artistry among the glyphs. Following that, we have a non-“embellished” fish-like glyph /700/  (Gr2) *versus* a “striped” “fish”-like /V700/  (Bv6) *versus* a “shoal of haired fish” glyphs

¹⁴ For ethnographic and linguistic sources on the indigenous concept of *manupiri*, see CHURCHILL, W. *The Rapanui Speech and the Peopling of Southeast Polynesia*, p. 241; ROUTLEDGE, K. (Mrs. SCORESBY ROUTLEDGE). *The Mystery of Easter Island. The Story of an Expedition*, p. 271, Fig. 121; FUENTES, J. *Dictionary & Grammar of the Easter Island Language. Pascuense–English, English–Pascuense*, pp. 782, 822; LEE, G. “Glossary” in *The Rock Art of Easter Island: Symbols of Power, Prayers to the Gods*, p. 211; KJELLGREN, E. *Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island*, pp. 44–45; KIEVIET, P. *A Grammar of Rapa Nui*, p. 259.

¹⁵ A “scrambled” parallel of Ab2’s trigram may be /700-600-44/  on Br9. Without venturing in definitive conclusions, we suggest glyph /44/ (on Br9) bears a close similarity to glyph /45/ (on Ab2). Were it not for the slightly “flattened” upper section, glyph # /44/ is, in every way that matters, a replica of # /45/.





/700f/  on Rb4 or several other “haired” fish-like variants /700/ on Pr10 (with interpositions of other glyphs) /...700f-700f-V20a-710f-20cy-700f-1c-710f-700cx-700f-V20a-710f-402?-/  *versus* “upturned” versions /65/ (of the “fish”-like /700/ glyph), /65.3/  (Qr3), or /65/  (Qr4). Non-“punctured” glyph /82a/  (preferably, /45:8/) attested on Gv7 • Rb7, *versus* the “punctured” /82b/  (preferably, /46:8/) placed on Ia14. The glyphic constituents /45/  and the “punctured” /46/  seem to alternate freely in a choice of environments (cf. Schoch and Melka),¹⁶ see e.g. /45.52x/  ↔ /46.52x/  on Hr7 ↔ Pr7 tablets. Other identifiable examples include a plain glyph /9/  (Ev3) *versus* /V9/  on Br5, this latter glyph embellished with some sort of a “rippled” base / pedestal, and a “lizard”- / “skink”-like glyph /762b/  (Rb8) *versus* a “head-punctured” “lizard”- / “skink”-like glyph /762/  on Cb11 (= Cv11).

The mini-sequence /600-27.6-700/  (Bv6), evidently, does not portray the arranged consistency along the *Rangitoki*’s mini-sequence



However, for comparative purposes, the general structure allows extracting a few similarities. The “frigate bird”-glyph /600/, the “fish”-like glyph /700/ and glyph /27/ – an interchangeable variant with /26/ – are present in either sample if we assume that it is glyph /26x/ (or /27/) that is represented in the *Rangitoki* mini-sequence (see previous discussion of this glyph). The individuality of the selected glyphs is validated by the contrast of the outward shapes (the result of the whim of the moment together with the material support: wood *versus* bark-cloth, plus the implements: an obsidian graver / shark’s tooth *versus* a thin-tipped “brush”). Each of these models encoding non-identified information can be regarded as *probabilistic*. Measuring exactly the similarity (= nearness / distance) between them, would require many more authentic samples, made either of wood or painted *mahute* /


¹⁶ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*, pp. 134–136; MELKA, T. S., SCHOCH, R. M. *A post-Missionary Artifact bearing rongorongo-like Glyphs: A Continuing Tradition on Rapa Nui (Easter Island)*.

bark-cloth (contextually limited, e.g., /27x.711-000!/, Na2, or expanded, e.g., the “harmonic”- / semi-“palindromic”-like sequence starting with the “delimiter” /380.1/ → /380.1*-67-22f-46-522f-46-22f-46-246), 
 ← Barthel’s tracings;  ← Fischer’s tracings, Sa3-4¹⁷ [the asterisk symbol “*” standing for the line crossing]).¹⁸

The Written Note Found in the Watchcase

An important task of the present article is the examination of the available photographic material concerning the watchcase and the German inscription found inside it (see Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). The aim here is to summarize the findings regarding the penmanship and the writing instrument Albrecht Van Houten used for the note found encased in the watchcase. The text in German written on a piece of paper,¹⁹ together with the painted bark-cloth fragment that the nineteenth-century Rapanui young woman named Rangitoki gave to Albrecht Van Houten, was stored in a watchcase.²⁰ At present there is no evidence that the indigenous Rangitoki ever actually saw the watchcase; the note could have been written and the bark-cloth piece could have been placed in the watchcase (long) after AVH visited Easter Island. The transcription and analysis of the German text yielded two (2) translated versions.²¹

¹⁷ BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*; FISCHER, S. R. *Rongorongo: The Easter Island Script, History, Traditions, Texts*, p. 470; MELKA, T. S. *Palindrome-like Structures in the rongorongo Script*, Fig. 4, “Large [= Great] Washington” tablet, Sa3-4 (# 5); SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*, p. 135.

¹⁸ For instance, Ab3 (= “Tahua” Tablet) exhibits another “harmonic”- / semi-“palindromic”-like sequence, /447-50t.44.3-46-44-2-46-44-5/, which comprises the glyph of interest /46/.

¹⁹ The slightly yellowed and pinkish hue of the surface of the paper reveals qualities associated with the passage of time (see Figs. 5, 6, 8, and 9).

²⁰ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*, p. 118; p. 413, Fig. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

- (1) “*Ein Stück von dem Rock meiner geliebten wunderschöner Rangitoki. In mich als geschaut überulicht – März, 1869 –*” [A piece from the skirt of my beloved precious Rangitoki. It looks into me as the Holy Spirit – March, 1869 –].
- (2) The alternative rendering of the note written in German is “*Ein Stück von dem Rock meiner geliebten wunderschöner Rangitoki. An mich als Geschenk erreicht – März, 1869 –*” [A piece from the skirt of my beloved precious Rangitoki. Given to me as a present – March, 1869 –].

While the suggested <*An mich als Geschenk*> did not fail to win our support, we had a hard time in isolating <*erreicht*> [= given, granted] in the note *contra* the clearly umlauted <*über(u)licht*>. Therefore, the first version seemed to have more traction (see Fig. 9). Further analyses lead us in identifying the verbal unit <*überreichen*>, and its past participle <*überreicht*> [delivered, offered, bestowed, in English]. Hence, the second sentence written in German may be, “*An mich als Geschenk überreicht – März, 1869 –*” [Offered / given to me as a present – March, 1869 –].²²

Despite the initial variations in the specifics, we find that the overall message is that AVH cherished the bark-cloth piece, given to him by Rangitoki, as a remembrance and memento – a “love token” and keepsake – of their affection for one another.

Efforts here are concentrated on illuminating the assumed chirography of AVH and the instrument availed of for such writing. There have been suggestions made to us privately that the German note might have been written using a ball-point pen. Although it occurs to RMS and TSM that no one in their right mind who was trying to fake a nineteenth-century note would do so with a ball-point pen, we proceed with the examination of two close-up photographs (Figs. 5 and 9). The chemical properties of the writing surface (= paper) and ink are not examined here (such could be potentially destructive to the small artifact; currently the anonymous owner is not willing to entertain such sampling). Since the present is a single-case study regarding the penmanship and the presumable writing instrument of AVH (meaning, the sample is random and unique), we have to base our present analysis upon the available physical assets.

The utilized alphabet (German) is Roman-based and it runs left-to-right in a horizontal progression within the allotted interior space of the watchcase. The overall shape of the letters / words (see especially the spontaneous looping/s and some of the slightly ornate curved letters) suggests that the writing was effected *in a familiar environment, free of any constraint or anxiety*, to borrow

²² We would like to sincerely thank Harald Baer (May, 2019), Ms. Martina Herbst (September, 2019), and Alexandre Solcà (March, 2020) for their interesting discussions regarding the transcription of the note written in German.

from Colette Sirat.²³ We believe the note was written on the piece of paper first and subsequently inserted into the watchcase. Evidently, we are dealing with a personal writing: a private, intimate note meant to serve as a remembrance, we presume, of a cherished romantic encounter. Most assuredly, if the note was meant for chancellery or notarial purposes the writing trajectories would have been more controlled and “rigid”. Continuing with our check for possible forgery – there are three aspects that point toward the use of an “old nib pen” or a similar device, which would be in keeping with a nineteenth-century inscription:

- (1) The general slight fluctuations along the written lines (= ink traces) – naturally induced by the muscular movements of Albrecht Van Houten – show a normal, relaxed writing setting. A ball-point pen would create more uniform and fixed lines. Contrariwise, the fluctuated portions point at some measurable variation compatible with an old nib pen.
- (2) Even an untrained eye can discern (via photographic enlargement), that the thickness / thinness of line are variable in several letters (among others, the umlauted forms <ü> in *Stück* vs. *über[u]licht* [or *überreicht*]; Fig. 9). Such a feature is characteristic of an old nib pen, rather than of, say, a *PARKER* ball-point pen (bpp). Unless, the smart forger used both a *PARKER* bpp and a *Montblanc Meisterstück 149* or a *Waterman 42 Safety* fountain pen, which would be a “too much” scenario. Such an action would have included incongruous (and perhaps, extraneous) elements across the writing, from the use of different pens, which are not present.
- (3) Looking at the details (see enlarged section of the note; Fig. 5), there is no doubt in our mind that the inscription was written with a nib-type pen. It is not at all like that of a ball-point pen. We would also note that a ball-point pen typically presses into the paper (such as when one makes a physical carbon copy). Inspecting the *Rangitoki* inscription in person (= RMS), there is no evidence of such pressure as typically found with a ball-point pen, where the weight of the writing implement and the hand / fingers would have been more evident.

The purpose here is to determine whether the original note in German was written with an old nib pen (or a similar device) *versus* a ball-point pen. Analyzing in detail the entirety of handwriting features of Albrecht Van Houten, for instance, the *baseline alignment*, *word proportions*, *embellishments*, *legibility or writing quality*, *spacings*, *pen control*, *design of allographs* and

²³ SIRAT, C. *Handwriting and the Writing Hand*, p. 438.

their construction, and *many more* (see especially Huber and Headrick),²⁴ may be sought-after. Yet, by virtue of invested time and article expansion, this forensic-like task would seem to require a study on its own.

More importantly, RMS (a witness to the passing of the artifact from one owner to another through an intermediary “dealer”, and also one of the co-authors of this article and Schoch and Melka)²⁵ was quite certain when inspecting personally the note that it was not written with a ball-point pen. At the time, RMS consciously thought about the type of pen with which the German inscription was written. There are also details of the transaction between the descendants of AVH and the current anonymous owner of the piece, witnessed by RMS, that support the hypothesis that both the German inscription and the bark-cloth piece are genuine artifacts from the nineteenth century. Thus, oddly, the dealer who was involved with negotiations between the descendants of AVH and the new (anonymous) owner at one point implied that the watchcase might be more desirable, and thus more valuable, than its actual contents (that is, the German note, two bone beads, and the bark-cloth fragment). Could the dealer have been using some sort of “reverse psychology” technique to elicit the sale of the piece? Given that a damaged nineteenth-century watchcase missing its watch is of limited value, the comment on the part of the dealer makes little sense if the dealer was attempting to maximize the amount paid for the piece (and the more paid for the piece, the more commission / profit the dealer was set to receive). And as we noted previously (Schoch and Melka),²⁶ neither the dealer nor the family gave any indication that they recognized that the bark-cloth piece has a *rongorongo* inscription painted on it – they referred to the *rongorongo* inscription as “*traditional Easter Island symbols*”.

On Some Artifacts Considered to be False / Imitations of the Authentic *Rongorongo* Tradition

Here we comment briefly upon a sampling of artifacts that bear *rongorongo*-like signs, fitting into the category of false or tourist-destined items. Of course, the aim is to remind ourselves that highly valued artifacts – exemplars of an ancient real-world cultural tradition – tend to be imitated / forged for personal artistic enjoyment, out of ethnic and cultural pride and identity, and/or for

²⁴ HUBER, R. A., HEADRICK, A. M. *Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals*.

²⁵ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

economic profit. It is appropriate to examine especially the forgeries possibly or definitely made for profit, and thus intended to deceive, via a number of aesthetic and stylistic criteria (see e.g. Eisenberg).²⁷ We have selected a limited number of them for discussion; it is also acknowledged that the idea here is not to criticize others (= the quoted sources) for their apparent errors; rather our aim is to raise alertness. In a similar vein, a full documentation of these items would require a specific and potentially lengthy study.

To begin with, the caption provided for a *rongorongo* tablet illustrated in Francis Mazière,²⁸ reads, “*A toro-miro tablet covered with signs or ideographs. The writing, which remains a disturbing archaeological problem, is read by holding the tablet horizontally and turning it after each line*”. However, considering the nonsensical mixture of the carved glyphs and sequences imported from several authentic tablets, such as “*Mamari*” • “*Keiti*” • “*Tahua*” • “*Aruku Kurenga*” • “*Small Santiago*”, and perhaps from other ones as well, this inscription eventuates in a real mishmash of elements. Compared to the authentic artifacts mentioned above, Mazière’s tablet²⁹ is *as different as chalk from cheese*, to use a figure of speech.

In our assessment, another example of a dubious (i.e., created to purposefully deceive; fake) *rongorongo* tablet that has been published as if it were a genuine artifact is the wood tablet illustrated by Wenger and Duflon.³⁰ Inspecting the published photograph, it appears that the glyphs were added to an already worm-eaten piece of wood. The glyphs appear to have been superficially and lightly scratched into the surface of the wood (rather than actually “carved” or “engraved” in the traditional manner; see Dederen and Fischer)³¹ with a sharp object, possibly a metal knife or nail. The end of the wood tablet appears to have been purposefully, in a controlled manner, burnt (with a blow-torch [?], perhaps) after the glyphs were scratched into the surface so as to make the piece look “old”. Note that we do not in any manner mean to criticize Wenger and Duflon, as *rongorongo* script – to all intents and purposes – is not their area of expertise.

An additional wood specimen,³² offered at auction, was described by the seller as an “*Extremely rare piece*” ... “*acquired in the district of Lárco, Peru in*

²⁷ EISENBERG, J. M. *The Aesthetics of the Forger: Stylistic Criteria in Ancient Forgery*.

²⁸ MAZIÈRE, F. *Mysteries of Easter Island. With photographs by the author*, facing p. 64.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ WENGER, D., DUFLON, C-E. *L’Île de Pâques est ailleurs*, p. 35.

³¹ DEDEREN, F., FISCHER, S. R. *The Traditional Production of the Rapanui Tablets*.

³² WORTHPOINT. *MASTERPIECE Tablet RongoRongo Easter Island*.

1941 or 1942”, with the implication that it may have been carved by one of the *rongorongo* men who were carried away by force during the 1862 – 1863 incursions of the Peruvian “blackbirders” (see Routledge; Métraux; McCoy).³³ The kidnapped Rapanui people were subdued to servitude as *guano* collectors, plantation workers, and domestic servants in Peru. Comparing this carved artifact with the “*Small Santiago Tablet*”, the “*Tahua Tablet*”, or “*Mamari*”, it is quite clear that it does not have “*all the characteristics of an original piece*”,³⁴ as advertised by the seller, rather than those of a reproduction / “tourist” item. Put simply, to the connoisseur’s eye, it immediately gives the impression of a reproduction or “fake” which need not be considered further in terms of being a possible old and genuine *rongorongo* inscription. Our guess is that if the collection date of 1941 or 1942 is correct, this piece was manufactured not long before it was acquired. If made by a Rapanui (whether located on the island, or displaced to somewhere in South America) in the first half of the twentieth century, it most likely represents a simple tourist item, although it is possible that it was meant to intentionally deceive, or conceivably it could have been carved out of ethnic and cultural pride and in an effort to “restore” the *rongorongo* tradition.

An artifact with Inventory No. 17-00-00244, recorded / engraved in stone, is that found in the *Museo Antropológico P. Sebastian Englert* (Hanga Roa, Easter Island).³⁵ MAPSE’s webpage³⁶ reveals that the support material is grey pumice stone and “*Una de sus caras tiene grabadas cinco filas con símbolos rongo rongo clásicos delimitadas por líneas rectas talladas*” [One of its sides has five engraved rows with classical *rongorongo* symbols, delimited via etched straight lines (= lineation levels)]. The piece under consideration, however, is reminiscent of the fake *rongorongo* stone tablets / mini-tablets, allegedly originating from Juan Pakarati II Atán’s personal cave, and purchased by Thor Heyerdahl during the Archaeological Expedition in 1955 – 1956 on Easter Island (see Heyerdahl).³⁷ In our assessment, the MAPSE piece is not an antiquity, but rather a modern production which represents the contemporary

³³ ROUTLEDGE, K. (Mrs. SCORESBY ROUTLEDGE). *The Mystery of Easter Island. The Story of an Expedition*; MÉTRAUX, A. *Ethnology of Easter Island*; MCCOY, P. *Easter Island*.

³⁴ If by “*original*” we understand a pre-1864 authentic product of one of the *rongorongo* schools on Easter Island.

³⁵ MAPSE. *Piezas Restituidas al Museo Rapa Nui: Tablilla rongorongo. Rapa Nui* [Artifacts returned to the Rapa Nui Museum: *Rongorongo Tablet*. Rapa Nui].

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ HEYERDAHL, T. *The Art of Easter Island*, Plate 210a,c; Plate 211a,b,c,d; Plate 298c.

Rapanui aesthetic and creativity while adopting and carrying on ancient traditions. In this sense, the piece is still of value and significance, and MAPSE³⁸ does well in bringing it to public attention.

Readers may wish to consult further information regarding false *rongorongo* artifacts in Imbelloni; Barthel; Van Hoorebeeck; Fischer; Horley et al.; and Melka and Schoch.³⁹

Conclusions

While it is true that there are many spurious “*rongorongo*” inscriptions, a sampling of which we have described above, and one must be ever vigilant when dealing with “newly discovered” pieces, skepticism must also be tempered by rational and dispassionate analysis. It is most assuredly a mistake to accept all supposed *rongorongo* inscriptions; however, it is likewise irrational to deny the possibility that there may be previously unrecognized and unrecorded (that is, not included in Fischer)⁴⁰ genuine *rongorongo* inscriptions still in existence residing in museums, private collections, or antiques stores.⁴¹ We propose that the inscription on the *Rangitoki fragment* fits this latter category. Based on the evidence and analyses presented herein and in our previous study,⁴² we conclude that the *Rangitoki fragment* is a genuine relic from Easter Island, collected in March 1869, and the *rongorongo* sequence on the bark-cloth was painted by someone (whether male or female) knowledgeable and well-versed in the indigenous *rongorongo* tradition, and thus this inscription represents an authentic addition to the known *rongorongo* corpus.

³⁸ MAPSE. *Piezas Restituidas al Museo Rapa Nui: Tablilla rongorongo. Rapa Nui* [Artifacts returned to the Rapa Nui Museum: *Rongorongo Tablet. Rapa Nui*].

³⁹ IMBELLONI, J. *Las ‘Tabletas Parlantes’ de Pascua, Monumentos de un Sistema Gráfico Indo-oceánico* [The ‘Talking Tablets’ of Easter Island, Monuments of an Indo-Oceanic Graphic System]; BARTHEL, T. S. *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift*; VAN HOOREBEECK, A. *La Vérité sur l’île de Pâques*; FISCHER, S. R. *Rongorongo: The Easter Island Script, History, Traditions, Texts*; HORLEY, P. et al. *How Many Scripts were there on Easter Island?*; MELKA, T. S., SCHOCH, R. M. *A post-Missionary Artifact bearing rongorongo-like Glyphs: A Continuing Tradition on Rapa Nui (Easter Island)*.

⁴⁰ FISCHER, S. R. *Rongorongo: The Easter Island Script, History, Traditions, Texts*.

⁴¹ Although the analogy perhaps is (somewhat) arbitrary at this point, more than one specialist / art dealer, for example, may raise suspicions if a lost painting of Rembrandt H. van Rijn, or H. Bosch, is claimed to have been recently found (= re-discovered).

⁴² SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Rangitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece...*

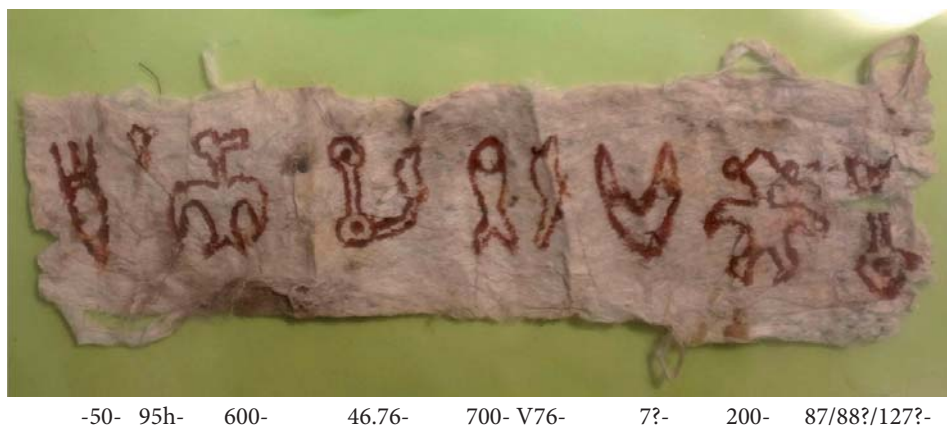
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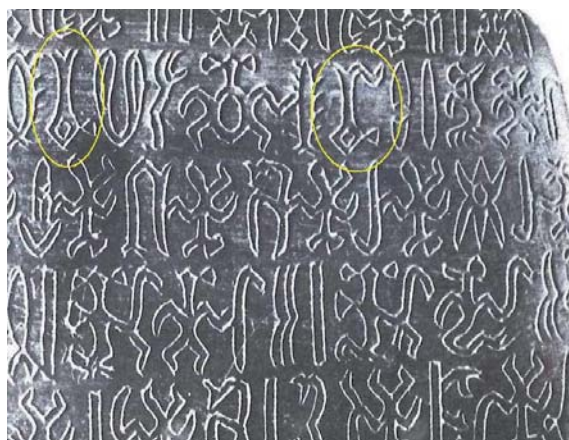
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PLATES



Schoch and Melka, Fig. 1. The *Ranġitoki* sequence of painted glyphs. (The previously assigned Barthel's code numbers are after Schoch and Melka;¹ photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.)



Schoch and Melka, Fig. 2. Some illustrations of glyph /95x/ as incised on the Br2 section; reprinted after Van Hoorebeeck.² The first glyph /95x/ (→ within the oval)

appears to be the closest to the shape of the painted glyph . The next glyph in the row is another “upturned” instance: /V26x/.

¹ SCHOCH, R. M., MELKA, T. S. *The Ranġitoki (Rangitoki) Bark-cloth Piece: A Newly Recognized rongorongo Fragment from Easter Island*, p. 414, Fig. 3a.

² VAN HOOREBEECK, A. *La Vérité sur l'île de Pâques*, Plate XX, bottom.



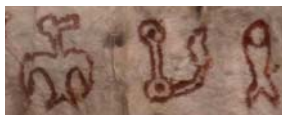
Schoch and Melka, Fig. 3. The last glyph /87?/88?/ • /127?/ • /V95x?/ possibly or probably retains an “ear” / “lozenge” appendage in a diminutive / incomplete form in the bottom part, similar to that attested in /95x/ on Br2. The question of how we can fully confirm it in the absence of other bark-cloth material painted with genuine RR signs is another matter altogether. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.

Ab2



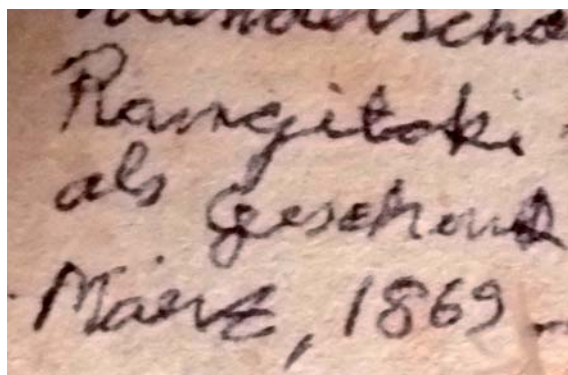
-605s- 45-700-4- 605-

Rangitoki mini-string



/600 - 46.76- 700/

Schoch and Melka, Fig. 4. Comparison of a trigram found on *Ab2* (“*Tahua*” Tablet) with a mini-string of the *Rangitoki*’s original sequence.



Schoch and Melka, Fig. 5. An enlarged section of the note written in German. The written surface remains smooth and does not show marks / slight crinkles of pressure, usually found during the use of a ball-point pen. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.

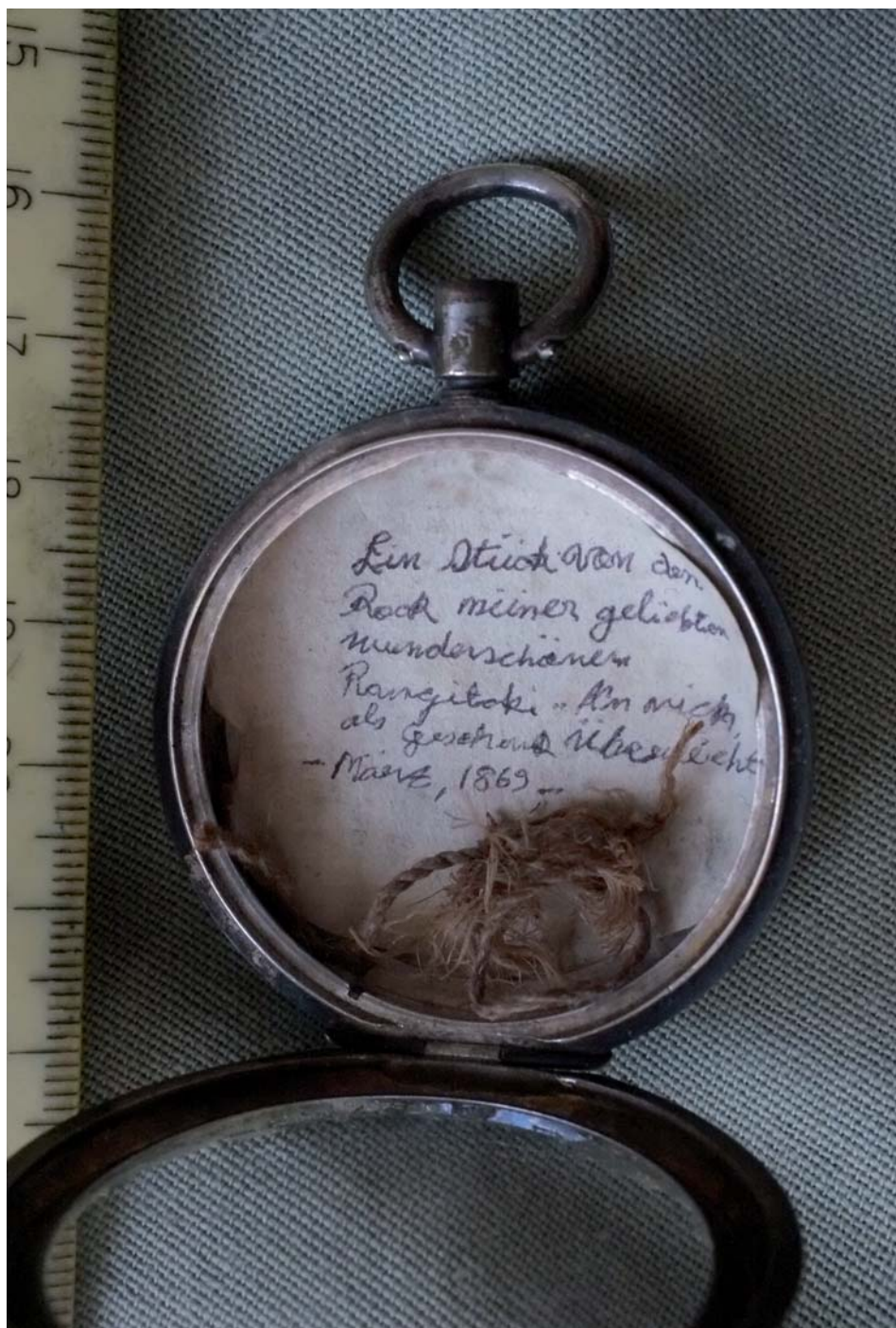


Schoch and Melka, Fig. 6. Illustration of the note written in German, as it appears encased in the modified pocket-watchcase of Albrecht Van Houten (with the glass-lid closed). Also seen are the remains of the twine that AVH used to tie the *Rangitoki* bark-cloth piece into a small “scroll” when he stored it in the watchcase. Scale in centimeters. Protective gloves were used in the handling of the artifact. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.



Schoch and Melka, Fig. 7. Illustration of the back side of the watchcase. Protective gloves were used in the handling of the artifact. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.

→ **Schoch and Melka, Fig. 8.** An image of the modified pocket-watchcase of Albrecht Van Houten with the glass-lid standing open. Also seen are the remains of the twine that AVH used to tie the *Rangitoki bark-cloth* piece into a small “scroll” when he stored it in the watchcase. Scale in centimeters. Protective gloves were used in the handling of the artifact. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.





Schoch and Melka, Fig. 9. Close-up of the note in German found in the modified pocket-watchcase of Albrecht Van Houten. Also seen are the remains of the twine that AVH used to tie the *Rangitoki* bark-cloth piece into a small “scroll” when he stored it in the watchcase. Protective gloves were used in the handling of the artifact. Photograph © Robert M. Schoch, taken with the permission of the anonymous owner.