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The stone pillows mentioned by the first European visitors to Rapa Nui are known from ethnological and archaeological contexts. Many of these artifacts are embellished with carvings, in particular with designs of komari, a stylized depiction of female genitalia. On several pillow stones, the komari is set in frame of a more complex motif depicting a triangular area covered with parallel hatching. The very same carving appears in a house of 'Ōrongo and is known from historical documentation to represent an abdominal tattoo. It may be that stone pillows adorned with this type of carving were intended to convey a notion of sleeping on a woman's lap. Lacking ethnographic explanations, those engravings are both the material expression of a rich symbolic world and the importance of dreams.

Las almohadas de piedra mencionadas por los primeros visitantes europeos a Rapa Nui se conocen desde los contextos etnológicos y arqueológicos. Muchos de estos artefactos son grabados, en particular con komari, una representación estilizada de los órganos genitales femeninos. En varias almohadas, las komari son incorporadas en un diseño más complejo, demarcando un área triangular cubierta con rayado fino. El mismo diseño aparece en una casa de 'Ōrongo y también es conocido desde la documentación histórica como un tatuaje abdominal. Puede ser que las almohadas de piedra adornadas con este diseño son un intento de representar el concepto de dormir sobre la falda de una mujer. A falta de una explicación etnográfica, los grabados son la expresión material de un rico mundo simbólico y de la importancia de los sueños.

Introduction

A large group of stone artifacts from Easter Island bears the generic names of *ngarua* and *turua*, which translates into English as “stone pillows” or “pillow stones”. In the modern Rapanui language, the term *ngarua* seems to be more appropriate. The term *turua*, used by several authors (Métraux 1940:201; Englert 1948:225), is also seemingly correct. It appears in the dictionary of Bishop Jaussen (1861:70) with the meaning “*oreiller*”, pillow. The same dictionary provides three translations of “*oreiller*” from Tahitian: *turua*, *tuarua*, and *uarua*.

The *ngarua* were typically made of seabed cobbles, which in the majority of cases represent dark basaltic material, fine grained and smoothed by the surf. Due to their provenance, the form of pillow stones is usually that of a flattened ellipsoid, though some *ngarua* are of irregular shape. The dimensions of the artifacts vary; their maximum length is usually about 20-25cm, the width is about 10-20cm, and the thickness is usually 4-10cm. The *ngarua* are similar to the *poro* cobbles used to pave the side terraces (*tahua*) of the ceremonial platforms (*ahu*). The *poro* stones used for

ahu construction are classified as *poro nui* (large ones) and *poro 'iti* (small ones); in this classification, the stone pillows are of intermediate size.

Headrests were commonly used by ancient civilizations; many such artifacts made their way to European and American museums. For Oceanic ethnography, museums of Hawai'i and Tahiti have numerous fine examples of ancient pillows made of wood or thick bamboo stalks. In the Marquesas, stone headrests were used; Maziere (1957:124) mistakes them for guillotines. On Rapa Nui, perhaps due to the scarcity of wood in the late historic period, headrests were also made of stone. The first mention of stone pillows of Rapa Nui comes from the report of the first documented European visitor to the island, Jacob Roggeveen, who visited the island in 1722: “All the chattels we saw before us (for these long huts admit no daylight except through one entrance-way, and are destitute of windows and closely shut in all round) were mats spread on the floor, and a large flint stone which many of them use for a pillow” (Corney 1908:18).

The use of stone pillows was described in detail by Métraux:

“The furniture in the ancient huts was extremely scanty, consisting of mats spread on the floor, stone pillows (*ngarua*), calabashes for water [...], baskets for food, and wooden images or tablets hanging from the thatching. Mats (*moenga*) were made of reed [...] and the fine specimens were highly valued. In modern houses, people who have no mat[t]ress sleep on layers of grass, called *heriki* when used for this purpose. Their ancestors are said to have covered themselves with grass. The square stone pillows (fig. 15, c) were often decorated with straight lines or with the stylized representation of the vulva. Such pillows were not used elsewhere in Polynesia where wood was abundant” (Métreaux 1940:201).

Remarkably, the artifact illustrated by Métreaux in Fig. 15c is unlikely to be a *ngarua* because of its exceptional shape and dimensions: “250 mm. long, 860 mm. wide, 52 mm. thick (B3598)” (Métreaux 1940:195). This stark difference from a common pillow stone geometry was also noticed by Heyerdahl: “the rectangular stone pillow at the Bishop Museum is an exceptional specimen, as all of those observed and collected on the island were naturally flat and smoothly waterworn boulders, generally with oval outline” (Heyerdahl 1961:451).

Métreaux suggests that some *ngarua* possibly had the function of amulets or good luck objects:

“The magic significance attributed by one of my informants to the signs on the tablets probably derived from the fact that the natives consider as talismans or amulets every stone with an incised figure. Numerous boulders with engraved designs on them have been found on the island. The design which is most frequently reproduced on the stones is that of the vulva [...] rarely the outline of a fish, a bird, a turtle, or a man is seen [...] The carved figures might have increased the magic power of the stones or simply distinguished them from ordinary boulders. J.L. Young, who collected some magic stones with the incised representation of the vulva, was given the correct name, *maea mo moa* (stone for fowls) and was told that the stones “were placed under domestic fowls with the idea that the fertility of the eggs was thus promoted” (Métreaux 1940:263).

Several years after Young’s visit, Thomson acquired stones from the Rapanui identified as a fowl god *ma’ea [mo] moa*: “a beach pebble with slight traces of tool-marks [...] To the fowl god is ascribed the custody of chickens, and its beneficial influence was secured by being placed under a setting hen for a short time before the eggs were hatched” (Thomson 1891:537). Stones with incised motifs of vulva (*komari*) were common on the island and had no

connection to the ceremony of the clitoris stretching (*hakatore*) as suggested by Young (1904:32). The hypothesis of good luck objects was further detailed by Bórmida (1951) in a publication that abounds with data on *ngarua* stones, to which he assigns the role of good luck objects or amulets. In this way, the second possible function of the pillow stones may have been to serve as receptacles for sacred power, or *mana*. This power, emanating from objects and persons, was one of the central concepts of life in Oceania.

The connection between the supernatural and dreams was also important:

“The ceremony of dreams governed one’s life from birth to death [...]. The sleeping ritual was performed by resting the head over a *ngarua* or stone-pillow. A *po riva-riva* (good dream) might have been a dream of a luxuriant tree growing, or approaching herds of numerous and well-alimented cattle, or that of innumerable fowl populating the *hare moa*” (Campbell 1987:86).

This notion emphasizes the importance of pillows for a good dream. It is imperative to stress that sleep and dreams were seen, apart from the state of nervous system repair, as the entrance to the second state of living, a kind of immaterial life in which the person can move freely around, fly, effortlessly move huge objects or run lengthy distances in a second. This state was interpreted as a veritable state of grace, of divine character. This possible connection with another world may explain the ceremonial use of *ngarua* as stone pillows for the dead. Indeed, at least some such artifacts were seemingly connected with burials:

“One stone, which was described by the workmen as a pillow for a cadaver, is an elongated, slightly flattish, elliptical boulder of hard basalt. On its surface are marks of a pointed pecking tool, apparently applied for decoration. Further decoration consists of parallel, transverse incised lines which are visible on about two-thirds of the surface of the stone. Thirteen lines spaced at irregular intervals are visible, though originally there may have been more. The length of the object is 48 cm., while maximum and minimum diameter at mid-point are, respectively, 20 and 13 cm [...] The specimen is from among the stones of the Late Period mantle over the central part of Ahu No. 1 [Ahu Tahiri, Vinapū], though not in direct association with a burial” Mulloy (1961:156).

Stone pillows were found in archaeological contexts at various sites of the island, especially at ‘Ōrongo:

“Entrance to R-31 [house at the lower row of houses at ‘Ōrongo] was gained by enlarging the erosional

hole in the rear wall [...] The surface of the floor was littered with chicken bones and *pipi* shells, while centered on the chamber side of the doorsill was a flattened, oval-shaped boulder of the type referred to by the islanders as a pillow stone. Its centered position immediately inside the door could have been symbolic” (Ferdon 1961:234). And further on: “Other water-worn boulders of similar shape, though varying slightly in size, were also identifiable as stone pillows. One was found in R-8 and another in R-23. These must have been reasonably common at the site at one time, for Routledge (1920, pp. 432, 434, 440, 441) reports finding one in R-5, three in R-7, two of which were in a pit near the door, several in R-17, and another in R-21” (Ferdon 1961:247).

In addition to the ethnographic and archaeological record, pillow stones also appear in Rapa Nui folklore and songs. The most direct reference to *ngarua/turua* appears in a short *riu tangi* recorded from Kiko Paté, who learned it as a child from the catechist Nicolás Pakarati (Ure Potahe):

<i>Ngaro te poki</i>	The lost child
<i>Hape te turua rima</i>	The fifth stone pillow is missing
<i>ihé moe te poki...</i>	Where the child was sleeping...

Description of the Artifacts

As mentioned by many authors, pillow stones are usually adorned with incised designs, on one or both faces, and sometimes on their borders as well. The motifs carved are characteristic to Easter Island iconography, with the most popular designs being that of stylized female genitalia, or *komari* (Routledge 1920:Pl. 16.3, Heyerdahl 1976:Pl. 178e). Other known examples include ceremonial paddles, or *‘ao* (Heyerdahl 1976:Pl. 178f), birds, birdmen, and fishes (Bórmida 1951:282). Some pillow stones feature lines of characters imitating *rongorongo* script; it will be shown below, however, that these were copied from 20th century publications and not from the authentic tablets. The present paper intends to illustrate the most prominent examples of *ngarua* embellished with carvings, providing some preliminary conclusions – evidence permitting – concerning the antiquity of the carvings.

Artifact #1 (Figure 1) was given to Ramón Campbell by the counter-admiral Jorge Videla Cobo, who brought it from Easter Island in 1930. The artifact measures 15.5cm by 10cm; its maximum thickness is 4cm and its weight is 1015 grams. It is smooth black basalt, featuring three lines of incisions covering about a half of the stone’s flat side. The incisions, most probably done with a metal tool based on their sharp contours, represent three lines of hieroglyphic writing. The outermost line seemingly suggests a boustrophedon

arrangement like that found on wooden tablets, but the second half of this line, as well as the two remaining lines of text, are written with the same side up. Fischer provides the following description of the artifact:

“Admiral Videla Cobo Stone (RR p). Another black basalt stone (Campbell Collection, Quilpué, Chile, measuring 15.5×9.9×4.4 cm) bears on one side three boustrophedonic lines of c. 48 very primitive *rongorongo* glyphs. Like the above [Santiago Pakarati Stone from the Gair Collection], these too were copied from Schulze-Maizier, 1926: Plate 21. The stone was acquired by Admiral Jorge Videla Cobo (when a lieutenant) on Easter Island – probably in the 1930s. It, too, gives every indication of being the creation of Santiago Pakarati” (Fischer 1997:516).

Indeed, studying the stone side-by-side with the image published by Schulze-Maizier (1926:Pl. 21) and Barthel’s tracings (1958) of the tablet, it becomes clear that the carving on Videla Cobo’s stone was done after the former source: all inaccuracies from the Schulze-Maizier illustration are seen in the carving. In Barthel’s work, these errors are corrected. Thus, the suggestion about dating the Videla Cobo stone to the 1930s seems completely plausible. At present, this stone is housed in the collection of the Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo.

Artifact #2 (Figure 2) comes from the Felbermayer Collection in Fonck Museum, Viña del Mar, catalog number 1330-44. The catalog record states that it is a “fish stone” found near Ahu Vinapū, and obtained from Eugenio Huki. It has an irregular form that is sub-pentagonal and plain-convex. It is of black basalt and weighs 3,685gr. The maximum measurements are: width 17.5cm, length 21.5cm and thickness 7.4cm. Its designs are made in a sure and precise hand, covering both sides and edges of the stone. One of the sides contains two parallel lines providing a kind of ruler for the carving. On top of the superior line that crosses the stone longitudinally, approximately at the middle of its height, one can see a human figure with the hands ending in a point so that they may be interpreted as wings; the profile looks like a square nose, with four parallel lines extending from the head in the form of headgear. To the right of it, there is a shield-like symbol formed by two half-circles that are separated with an X-shaped design set on top of a vertical stroke. Above it and further to the right, there is a triangular motif with a cross-like sign inside and three lines coming in a ray-like fashion from the upper vertex of the triangle. Another group of signs is inscribed above the inferior horizontal line: a geometric figure resembling a vertically-set fish tail, a rude carving of a *tangata manu* and a fish, with its side line and fins marked. The upper extremities of the birdman figure are shaped as an arm and a wing. The

Figure 1. Two sides of Videla Cobo pillow stone, one featuring three lines of glyphs (artifact 4332, image courtesy of the Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo). The close-up of the inscription shown in the middle of the figure reveals considerable similarity to a tracing of the Tahua tablet published by Schulze-Maizier. The later and more accurate drawings published by Barthel are considerably different from Videla Cobo inscriptions, suggesting that the carver was consulting mainly Schulze-Maizier's work, setting the earliest date of production to 1926.

lower extremities show a leg with a marked knee and a short tail-like appendage.

It is important to mention that the anthropomorphic sign in the upper row bears a considerable resemblance to a sign in the classical *rongorongo* script. This sign is prominent on the Santiago Staff, showing a human being with hands reaching to the ground (Figure 2, I3). On the Tahua tablet, the head is drawn in a different way, with a large open mouth that matches the symbol carved on Felbermayer's pillow stone. Remarkably, no other signs from this *ngarua* are comparable by graphic quality to *rongorongo* glyphs, seemingly pointing to a late manufacture date of the

stone. The same conclusion is corroborated by the sharp contours of the carving, suggesting the use of a metal tool. Despite the fact that no exact match with *rongorongo* can be produced, it is curious that the unusual shield-like object associated with a triangle that follows the anthropomorphic sign is similar to the glyphs following the anthropomorphic sign with feather headgear on the Tahua tablet (Figure 2, Aa7). Thus, Felbermayer's stone 1330-44 is likely based on a moderate quality drawing of a *rongorongo* tablet.

The other side of the stone has a large double *komari* motif with numerous lines incised as if radiating from its superior part, to the left and to the

Staff,
line I3

Tahua,
line Aa7

Figure 2. Felbermayer collection pillow stone with two lines of hieroglyphic signs (catalog number 1330-44, image courtesy of the Fonck Museum, Viña del Mar). The close-up view shown in the bottom panel suggests that the incising was done with a metal tool.

I11

Ev3

Figure 3. Pillow stone adorned with carving on both sides (catalog number 1139, image courtesy of the Fonck Museum, Viña del Mar). One of the sides features a pair of birdmen facing each other; the other side has a lizard motif that is different from that appearing in *rongorongo* (compare with examples from Barthel 1958). The close-up view provided in the bottom panel strongly suggests the use of modern metal tools for carving.

right. These additional incisions may represent pubic hair. The carvings continue to the edges of the stone. Just above and below the *komari* there are curved parallel lines, as if radiating from its extremities: four lines go upward and three lines downward. The elongated elliptic motif is incised around one of the smoothed corners of the rock.

Artifact #3 (Figure 3) comes from Dr. Edwyn Reed's collection (1920s), which was deposited in the Fonck Museum (catalog number 1139) before the arrival of the Felbermayer Collection (in 1980). The stone is a biplane discoid basalt. It weighs 830gr. The maximum measurements are: width 10.7cm, length 13.5cm, and thickness 3.7cm. There are carvings on both sides, made in firm, uniform, and very precise tracing. One of the sides shows two *tangata manu* facing each other, the design known from rock art as *manupiri* (Lee 1992:70). The other side of *ngarua* has a carving of a lizard with five digits on each leg and triangular ears. The general outlines of the lizard, the shape of the body, and the way the body connects to the neck is different from the lizard image in Rapanui iconography, as they appear on *rongorongo* tablets (Figure 3, I11, Ev3). This detail, together with overtly sharp carving grooves (Figure 3, bottom panel) provide evidence for the use of modern metal tools, and strongly suggest that this artifact, too, was carved in the early 20th century.

Artifact #4 (Figure 4) is a large *ngarua* from the Fonck Museum (catalog number 1394-108), also belonging to the Felbermayer collection. This artifact is reasonably heavy – 5,310gr – and has the maximum dimensions of 24cm long, 18cm wide, and a thickness of 10cm. It was found by Eugenio Huki at Hanga Oteo. Due to the extreme thinness of incision contours and the pronounced curvature of the rock, it was decided to illustrate the line drawing of the carvings here. Both sides of the pillow stone are adorned with lizards that bear a considerable similarity to the motif shown in Figure 3. Remarkably, all three lizards carved on one face have their rib structure shown, as if seen in X-ray. This artistic approach is known from Easter Island rock art, where motifs of marine creatures are frequently carved with ribs (Lee 1992: Figures 4.55, 4.71, 4.134).

Artifact #5 (Figure 5) is from the Felbermayer collection at the Fonck Museum (catalog number 1790-504). This pillow stone was obtained from Eugenio Huki, who considered it to be of "good ancient work (200 years)". It is a brown basalt stone in the shape of a plane discoid. The stone weighs 2,110g and has the following maximum measurements: 16cm wide, 21cm long, and 4.5cm thick. Both sides are incised. On one of the sides, there is a figure formed of two crescents, providing an impression of a mouth. A small *komari* motif is incised below the crescent shape, roughly centered. It is surrounded with fine linear hatching

Figure 4. Tracings of lizards adorning both sides of a pillow stone from the Felbermayer collection (artifact 1394-108, image courtesy of the Fonck Museum, Viña del Mar).

Figure 5. Felbermayer collection pillow with *komari* designs (artifact 1790-504, image courtesy of the Fonck Museum, Viña del Mar).

covering the entire oval area, leaving the thin crescent unaffected. The other side of the stone is also carved with *komari*, which are somewhat awkwardly executed. The lines to the left of it may represent an attempt to carve yet another *komari* motif. The overall incising quality and absence of overtly sharp and deep edges suggests that the carving indeed can be of some antiquity, perhaps dating to the 19th century or even before.

Artifact #6 (Figure 6) is from the collection of the Museo Antropológico P. Sebastián Englert, Hanga Roa. This rounded *poro* boulder (with approximate measurements: 25cm long, 15cm wide, and 7.5cm thick) is incised on both sides with vulva motifs, which do not follow the classic stylized conventions of *komari* carvings. Instead, the vulvae shown have clearly defined labia carved with a deep outline, which

are enhanced with fine hatching on one of the faces. A similar depiction also appears on a stone pillow in the collection of the Fonck Museum (Campbell et al. 1985:Pl. 2h). The motif carved on the other face elaborates over the vulva motif. Two small classical *komari* were added to both corners of the vulva; the carver then seemingly re-interpreted the entire design as a body of a lizard-like creature, so that a pair of legs was added in delicate incision to one of the extremities of the main vulva shape. In this way, the smaller *komari* design has an anatomically-correct position between the legs of the “vulva body”. Such multiple uses of the vulva motif to create complex figures is known in Rapanui woodcarving, with an exceptional example from the Salem Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts (Heyerdahl 1961:Pl. 121).

Figure 6. Pillow stone with oval-shaped *komari* (image courtesy of the Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert). The deep contours on both sides depict the vulva in more naturalistic way than the common highly-stylized *komari* motifs. The off-center position of this *komari* seemingly suggests that the empty space above it represents a pubic area. The front side of the stone (left panel) includes an elaborate composition with two *komari* motifs attached to the both extremities of the vulva, and a pair of legs incised at one end.

Figure 7. Pillow stone with *komari* (image courtesy of the Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert). The broken *poro* boulder is incised on one side with a complex composition similar to that of the *ngarua* from the Fonck Museum, showing a *komari* placed under a finely hatched area with an angular band.

Artifact #7 (Figure 7) from the collection of the Museo Antropológico P. Sebastián Englert, Hanga Roa, features a *komari* motif incised on one side of a broken *poro* (with approximate measurements: 23cm wide, 16.5cm high, and 8cm thick). The tracing of this stone was published several times (Blixen 1977:Pl. 2.1; Lee 1992; Lee 2002:33, Figure 10). The incisions are fine, without the excess depth seen in some of the *ngarua* belonging to the collection of the Fonck Museum. The design is similar to that illustrated in Figure 5, with a set of two hatched bands surmounting the *komari* and a thin angular band separating them. The other side of the stone is not adorned.

Discussion

The generic term “stone pillow” implies that the artifact should function as a headrest, which seems to be contradicted by the choice of very hard stone. Perhaps covering the *ngarua* with a thick layer of fine grass and reed mats might have helped to reduce the sense of hardness. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that early visitors to Rapa Nui mention the stone pillows explicitly, which means that at least some of them were not permanently covered with mats.

Perhaps the majority of *ngarua* were plain – those mentioned by Routledge (1920) and Ferdon (1961), at least, do not bear carvings. One can postulate that plain stone pillows probably had the function of domestic utensils. The addition of incised motifs to some of the *ngarua* may have provided them with certain ritual significance. It is remarkable that the birdman and lizard motifs, as well as the signs superficially similar to *rongorongo* seemingly appear on *ngarua* of a late production date, making it difficult to decide whether such carvings were frequently used for original pillow stones, or whether these were rather later developments aimed at increasing the value of *ngarua* in the eyes of visitors and researchers during the first half of 20th century. The older examples, however, are most frequently adorned with *komari* motifs. Taking into account that female genitalia were thought to have powers to absorb negative influences (Lee 1992:193-4), it may be that covering the pillow with numerous *komari* was considered as protection against bad dreams. The other likely interpretation is, of course, connected with fertility and promoting “sweet dreams” in which many women may appear.

The later suggestion has supporting evidence in the form of an incised motif embellishing House 32 at

Figure 8. Carving inside ‘Ōrongo house 32 (image courtesy of CONAF Rapa Nui) showing the incised *komari* motif with two hatched areas on top and an angular band without hatching. The carving size is about 50×50 cm. The right side of the figure provides an early documented tattoo design (Thomson 1891:466, Fig. 4a) showing the bands of abdominal tattoo framing the woman’s genitals in the same way as the carving at the ‘Ōrongo house.

‘Ōrongo (Figure 8), the very same house in the center in which Ferdon found a *ngarua* stone (the modern surveys assign number 32 to the house mentioned by Ferdon as R-31; Ramírez Aliaga 2016:35). This carving, to the best of the author’s knowledge, has not been published to date; it was, however, recorded in the unpublished field notes of Edwin N. Ferdon (see Solsvik 2016:7-9 for general discussion about Ferdon’s Pacific Archive in the collections of the Kon-Tiki Museum). The carving shows a *komari* motif surmounted by three angular bands. Two of these are adorned with fine hatching; a narrow band in the middle seems to be plain. The bands on top of the *komari* match the abdominal tattoo patterns recorded in the 19th century (Figure 8, right panel). Two painted *tapa* figurines feature this tattoo pattern (Heyerdahl 1976:Pls. 19, 21). This tattoo pattern, known as *matapuku* (Arredondo 2009:124-125), is formed by “two lines that run oblique, joining in the middle of the abdomen, in some cases a series of very thin lines fill in the space between these two lines [...] this motif under the waist extends towards the pubis and seemingly continues to the superior part of the hips” (Arredondo 2009:144). Returning to the *ngarua* illustrated in Figures 5 and 7, one can recognize that the rounded outlines of the pillow stones seemingly “complete” the composition by invoking the rounded outline of the hips. Thus, it may be that the *ngarua* adorned with *komari* and tattoo motifs were possibly made to convey the notion of sleeping on a woman’s lap.

The work of fine incision is quite complicated when the original stone utensils are considered. Without using metal tools, the only choice of rock capable of cutting basalt was seemingly an obsidian point. However, as the expedition reports of early European visitors profusely mention barter with the natives involving metal knives, it is possible that these new implements might have been used for incising designs on *ngarua* stones. Possibly, the *mana* of the stone engraved with a tool acquired from foreigners and already imbued with their *mana* was considered to increase the powers of the artifact even more.

Conclusion

Concerning the functionality, *ngarua* were likely multi-purpose. Their principal role was, of course, as pillow stones; the carved pillow stone might have been considered to favor the premonitory dreams in a ceremonial context. On the other hand, *ngarua* might have served as amulets promoting chicken fertility or improving fishing expedition outcomes. It is also likely that *ngarua* had a ritual use in sepulchers as a part of mortuary offerings.

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