

Easter Island and Pitcairn Island

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29.1 Introduction

The Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) holds *c.* 667 artefacts from Rapa Nui (Easter Island), of which *c.* 620 are recorded on the PRM database as ‘archaeological’. There are also *c.* 93 archaeological objects from Pitcairn Island, all of which are stone tools. This chapter provides an overview of these *c.* 713 archaeological objects, discussing the ‘ethnographic’ material where this is relevant. The material from Easter Island is addressed in section 29.2, the Pitcairn material in 29.3, and brief conclusions are drawn in 29.4.

29.2 Easter Island

All of the archaeological material from Easter Island held in the PRM pre-dates the first scientific excavations undertaken on Rapa Nui by the Heyerdahl expedition in 1955–1956 (Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961). All but 44 of these 667 objects were collected by Katherine Routledge and William Scoresby Routledge during their archaeological expedition of March 1914–August 1915. These 44 objects include a significant number of artefacts that were collected before the Routledge expedition, and thus relate to some of the first archaeological and ethnographic collecting on the island.

The earliest objects collected from Easter Island are 3 ‘ethnographic’ artefacts collected by Reinhold and George Forster on Cook’s second voyage in 1773–1774: a piece of barkcloth (1886.1.1250), a feather headdress (1886.1.1528), and a bone ornament with a cord of human hair (1884.1.1544). There are also 8 artefacts from the PRM’s founding collection that are recorded as being from Easter Island: 3 obsidian tools (1884.140.589–591),¹ a cord of human hair from the collection of John G. Wood (1884.48.39), a wooden dance paddle or club (1884.55.75), and 3 carved wooden figures (1884.65.43–45). It is possible that some of these PRM founding collection objects were obtained from John Linton Palmer, who collected material from Easter Island when serving as Fleet Surgeon on the 1868 voyage of HMS *Topaze* or perhaps in subsequent years (Forbes 1917; see Palmer 1869, 1875, 1876). This

¹ One further Easter Island object – an obsidian stone tool obtained by Pitt-Rivers through the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland – is recorded in the South Kensington Receipts, may also be held by the PRM (Reference 969/ 12394).



Figure 29.1 Carved wooden figure of a European – possibly a representation of Captain Cook – that was collected from Easter Island before 1863 (PRM Accession Number 1886.1.1271).

is particularly likely given Pitt-Rivers' close association with the Ethnological Society of London: the Society's journal published Palmer's account of 'observations of the inhabitants and antiquities of Easter Island' in 1870 (Palmer 1870).

A number of further small donations and purchases also pre-date the Routledge expedition. The more clearly archaeological of these comprise a broken obsidian tool donated by George Mair (1890.6.1) and an obsidian blade purchased from the collection of Struan Robertson of Bath (1912.73.3). There is also a cord of human hair donated by James Park Harrison (1886.1.1620); a wooden staff purchased from the collection of James Edge Partington (1913.65.35); and a number of wooden figures (see below). Notable later accessions comprise 2 carved wooden clubs and a wooden figurine (see below) donated by Stephen Montagu Burrows (1925.24.1, 1935.36.142–143); a wooden breast ornament (*rei miro*) donated by James Edward Little (1926.92.1); and two 20th-century carved stone figures collected by Consuelo Maria Linares Rivas Allen (1993.10.3–4).

The 'ethnographic' collections include much of historical interest, and are closely related to the archaeological material. These include some material donated after the Routledge expedition. There are 10 carved wooden figures of humans, animals and bird-like humans, collected between 1914 and 1967, probably of Toromiro wood: including the 3 from the PRM founding collection mentioned above, and 2 from the Routledge expedition (1884.65.43–45, 1886.1.1271, 1905.2.1, 1916.36.313–314, 1935.36.142, 1970.40.1–2).

The earliest of these is a carved wooden figure of a European, which is possibly a representation of Captain Cook, and was collected before 1863 (1886.1.1271; *Figure 29.1*).² The collections include representative examples of the main types of Easter Island carved wooden figures: 2 *moai papa* (1884.65.43, 1916.36.313), 2 *moai kavakava* (1884.65.45, 1916.36.314), and a *moai tangata* (1884.65.44). Further wooden carved objects comprise a figure depicting the female vulva and breasts (1916.36.315), a 'bird-man' figure (1970.40.2), 2 carved dance-paddles (*ao* or *rupa*) (1916.36.312, 1928.46.1), 5 wooden clubs (1884.55.75, 1913.65.35, 1916.36.311, 1925.24.1, 1935.36.143), and a wooden breast ornament (1926.92.1). A wooden *moai moko* figure (1905.2.1) was purchased at auction in Taunton in 1904 by Harold St George Gray, and published by him in the same year (St George Gray 1904). It depicts a human-animal creature, the body carved from the root of the Toromiro, and the tail, which is broken, from the stem. Displaying a number of recurrent traits, including protruding ribs, forelegs clasped in front of the chest in a prayer-like attitude and the use of the natural contours of the wood in its carving (cf. Orliac 1995: 82–3), this figure is notable for its rat-like head, which differs from the usual reptilian one (St George Gray 1904). In 1919 Katherine Routledge (1919: 271) described the ongoing production of carved figures

² The figure is recorded as having been donated by George Griffith to the Ashmolean Museum in 1859 or 1863, and was transferred to the PRM in 1885.

in wood and stone for sale to visitors, and the 'affinity' of these craft traditions with the Island's prehistoric stone figures. The carved stone figures collected by the Routledges are discussed below; the PRM also holds 7 modern stone figures, collected with 2 of the 10 wooden figures mentioned above, by Joseph N. Pansang of the United States Air Force in 1967 (1970.40.1–9).

The vast majority – c. 622 artefacts – of the PRM's c. 667 objects from Easter Island were collected during the 1914–1915 Royal Geographic Society expedition by Katherine Maria Routledge and William Scoresby Routledge to Easter Island (Routledge 1917a, 1917b, 1919, 1920). The Museum also holds some correspondence between the Routledges and the Curator, Henry Balfour (cf. Balfour 1917, 1921), which complements the field archive held by the Royal Geographic Society in London.³

Katherine Routledge wrote that 'Easter Island is a mass of stones; it is also a mass of ruins' (1917a: 327), and the PRM's archaeological collections from the Routledge expedition consist almost exclusively of stone objects, although there are also some bone, coral, eggshell, shell and glass artefacts. Some of the artefacts were collected from local informants, or are the products of local craftsmen, while others derive from excavations of the island's stone terraces or platforms (*ahu*), around the stone statues (*moai*) and the quarries at which they were made on the south-western side of an extinct volcano, Rano Raraku (Routledge 1917a: 328), at sites of the production of obsidian spearheads (*mata'a*), or at the ceremonial village of Orongo – the centre of a birdman cult focused on the Sooty Tern, where some 50 drystone corbelled ritual structures were documented (Routledge 1917a: 338), alongside rock art representing birdmen.

Some 69 objects are currently identified on the PRM database as being from particular archaeological sites on the island. Examination of the documentary and archive materials, alongside the Routledge collections held at the British Museum, would undoubtedly allow further objects to be matched with sites from which they were recovered. The site from which the largest number of artefacts is recorded is the ceremonial centre of Orongo, from which at least 25 objects are held: 7 hammerstones (some, but not all, showing traces of use-wear; 1916.36.175–181); a specimen of coloured pigment (1916.36.236); a stone flake (1916.36.328); 10 shells, 3 stone tools, a bone implement and a perforated stone bead recovered from ceremonial 'houses' (1916.36.324–326, 1916.36.260); and a painted plaster cast of the 'Birdman Boulder' – a painted and carved rock, of late 18th- or early 19th-century date – showing a bird-headed figure carrying an egg (1917.28.1; Routledge 1919: Figure 112).⁴

Further sites comprise an old store house at Amateka, near Anakena Bay (a bone implement, 1916.36.225); 'Cave E.1' (3 shells, 1916.36.323); Maunga, Tea-a-Tea (11 stone tools, 1916.36.217, 1916.36.239–248); Poike (15 stone tools, 1916.36.108, 1916.36.218, 1916.36.223, 1916.36.338); and Rano Raraku (2 stone tools, a specimen of coloured pigment and a carved stone head, 1916.36.82, 1916.36.147, 1916.36.235, 1916.36.255, 1916.36.318). This stone head (1916.36.318; *Figure 29.2*) is a tiny *moai* fashioned from Rano Raraku tuff – the same tuff that is used for the monumental statues – and is recorded as having been found, like a similar figure excavated during the Heyerdahl expedition, buried in front of a monumental *moai* (Skjölsvold 1961: 349).⁵

Four objects are recorded as recovered from the islet of Motu Nui, off the coast of Easter Island: 3 specimens of Sooty Tern eggs (1916.36.332–334), and a

³ PRM Manuscript Collections, Balfour Papers, Box 7: Miscellaneous papers and correspondence relating to Easter Island; Royal Geographic Society Archives: Papers of William Scoresby Routledge (WSR). The PRM also holds a letter from William Scoresby Routledge concerning the manufacture and collection of obsidian items in the PRM collection (Miscellaneous Papers, Item 25).

⁴ The Birdman Boulder, from which this painted cast was taken, is in the British Museum (AOA 1920.5-6.1)

⁵ Two other stone tools, mentioned below (1916.36.147, 1916.36.255) are also recorded as found when excavating *moai*.

World Archaeology at the Pitt Rivers Museum: A Characterization
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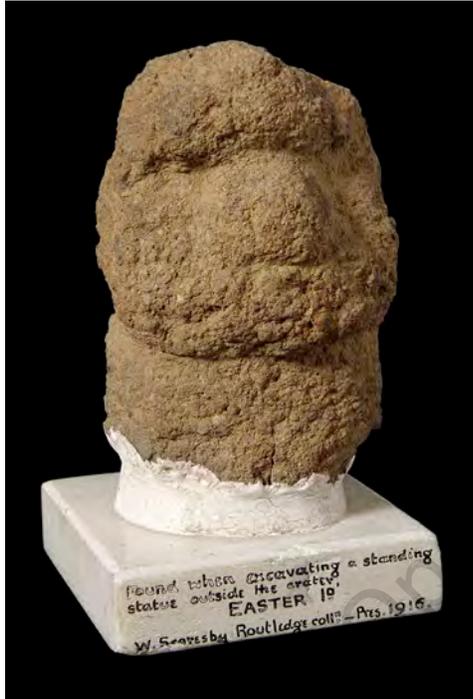


Figure 29.2 Small moai (stone figurine) from Easter Island, found by the Routledges when excavating a standing statue (PRM Accession Number 1916.36.318).

small carved stone human figure known as Titahanga-o-te-Henua, or 'the Boundary of the Land' (1916.36.319; Figure 29.3; cf. Routledge 1919: Figure 111). The recovery of this figure from Motu Nui was described by Katherine Routledge on p. 261 of *The Mystery of Easter Island: The Story of an Expedition*.

'The hopu lived together in a large cave of which the entrance is nearly concealed by grass. The inside, however, is light and airy; it measures 19 feet by 13, with a height of over 5 feet, and conspicuous among other carvings in the centre of the wall is a large ao no more than 7 feet in length. A line dividing the islet between Kotuu and Hotu Iti



Figure 29.3 Front (a) and back (b) of carved stone human figure known as Titahanga-o-te-Henua, or 'the Boundary of the Land', recovered from the islet of Motu Nui, Easter Island (PRM Accession Number 1916.36.319).



Figure 29.4 Large *toki* (stone implement) from Easter Island (PRM Accession Number 1916.36.21).

passed through the centre of the cave, and also through another cave nearer the edge of the islet; in this latter there was at one time a statue about 2 feet high known as *Titahanga-o-te-henua*, or the Boundary of the Land.' [Footnote: 'This statue was removed to the mainland shortly before our arrival, and we were able to procure it in exchange for one of the yacht blankets. It is now at the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford.'

The rest of the Routledge Easter Island collections, for which no site is currently recorded, mainly comprises stone tools, although there are *c.* 38 European glass beads recorded as found during the excavation of a female burial (1916.36.273–310).⁶

There are *c.* 174 *mata'a* – obsidian spear-heads, characterized by the presence of a carefully knapped tang and a variety of different blade types (1916.36.81, 1916.36.83–110, 1916.36.118–146, 1916.36.340–341) – and a further *c.* 84 flakes, chips and débitage from *mata'a* production sites (1916.36.111–114, 1916.36.131, 1916.36.237–238, 1916.36.257). One of the *mata'a* is provided with a wooden haft, which was reportedly made by craftsman named *Te Haha* (1916.36.109; see discussion by Routledge 1919: 271).⁷

As well as the *mata'a*, there are also *c.* 89 stone *toki* – mainly heavy picks and adzes, knapped from hard local lavas, sometimes polished, and occasionally with hafting grooves (1916.36.148–165, 1916.36.167–168, 1916.36.191–217, 1916.36.219–220, 1916.36.249–256, 1916.36.258, 1916.36.339). One of these stone adzes (1916.36.160) has an incised vulva-like motif on its polished ventral tip. As well as the *mata'a* and *toki*, the collections include 6 knife-like stone implements (1916.36.169–174).

Further stone objects include 2 stone fish-hooks (1916.36.221–222), an iron fish-hook (1916.36.224), a pumice-stone 'found beneath the neck of a fallen statue' (1916.36.259), a stone pounder (1916.36.182), and a carved block of lava stone with a cup-like depression (1916.36.264), and 2 small stones with natural perforations 'kept by Easter Islanders as peculiar and perhaps having magical properties' (1916.36.262–263). Five stone objects are recorded as forgeries created by the islanders to pass

⁶ The use of beads as grave goods - 'in a canoe-shaped ahu' - is referred to by Katherine Routledge (1919: 275).

⁷ Routledge (1919: 271), describes *Te Haha*, of the *Miru* Clan, as one of the three or so craftsmen making wooden objects for sale: 'one of the old workmen [who] could still be seen sitting in his garden engaged in carving' (see also entries in index of Routledge 1919 for '*Te Haha*'). The hafting, although fashioned during the Routledges' visit, is identical to another collected by the French writer *Pierre Loti* (*Orliac* 2008: 112–3), who visited the Island in 1872, and which attaches a *mata'a* to a shaft of *palm* wood.

as ancient artefacts: 2 stone figures (1916.36.330–331) and 3 obsidian spear-heads (*mata'ua*) (1916.36.115–117). Two stone petroglyphs are decorated with carved or incised designs: a small water-rolled boulder (*poro*) incised with images of frigate birds (1916.36.317); and a broken boulder with a carved design depicting a female figure, described as '*maea momoa*' ('stone descendants') or '*maea hika*' ('stone clitoris') (1916.36.316). There is also a pebble with an incised groove (1916.36.183).

In addition to the wooden objects mentioned above, the Routledge collection from Easter Island incorporates a small number of objects of organic materials. These comprise 3 fragments of human bone (1916.36.226–228); a shell, possibly artificially ground (1916.36.272); 5 samples of peat moss (1916.36.261); 2 nut kernels (1916.36.329);⁸ a 'gourd flask in which feathers were kept' (1916.36.230); 5 turtle-shell plaques (*hornu-tora*) (1916.36.267–271, 1916.36.335–337); a shell ornament (1916.36.266); 4 specimens of pigments, in addition to the 2 from Orongo and Rano Raraku mentioned above (1916.36.231–234); 7 specimens of coral and calcareous algae (1916.36.184–190), recorded as tools 'used for smoothing stone sculptures', but also of interest due to the use of these materials during the Island's prehistory for the irises of statue eyes and as deposits in crematoria. Three further pieces of coral are recorded as used among the facing-stones of the platforms (*abu*) 'to make them attractive' (1916.36.320–322). There is also a stone recorded as used for crushing pigment (1916.36.265).

Virtually no archaeological material from Easter Island came to the Museum after the donation of the Routledge collection, although 6 lantern slides of wooden and stone carved figures from Easter Island were transferred from the Ashmolean Museum in 1953 (1953.1.26–29, 1953.1.30), and an obsidian adze blade given to Charles Seligman by Henry Balfour at an unknown date was donated to the PRM from Seligman's estate in 1940 (1940.12.229). Balfour's ongoing interest in Easter Island is reflected in his purchase at auction in 1929 of a Sooty Tern in a glass box, which he donated to the Museum with the note that it was the 'object of the later bird-cult developed in Easter Island' (1929.67.1).

29.3 Pitcairn Island

The PRM holds *c.* 93 archaeological objects from Pitcairn Island, all of which are stone tools. While none of the material is from the PRM founding collection, a number of objects were collected in the 19th century. The earliest of these is a ground stone adze or chisel blade (1914.28.1), which was collected by William Gunn at Pitcairn, while he was Surgeon General of HMS *Curacao*, 18–20 August 1841. There are also 2 arrow-heads collected by Captain James J. Walker from 'Miss McCoy' – a descendent of the HMS *Bounty* mutineers – on 1 June 1883 (1904.15.12–13). Four further objects – 3 fine basalt adze heads and a cylindrical basalt implement (1923.71.1–4) – were purchased by the Museum at Stevens Auction Rooms in 1923, but had been collected at Pitcairn by Lieutenant Gerald T.F. Pike while serving on HMS *Comus* in November 1897, and had been published by Pike's uncle, John Allen Brown, in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1900 (Brown 1900).

The remaining *c.* 87 objects from Pitcairn Island was donated by the Routledges, although ten of these – a collection of basalt adze-blades (1925.29.78–87) – are recorded in the Accession Book as having been 'sent by inhabitants of the island' after the expedition was completed. The material from the Routledge expedition includes *c.* 62 objects collected by themselves (1916.36.20–80), and also *c.* 15 artefacts collected by

⁸ The nut kernels are similar to but slightly larger than those of the Chilean Palm and presumably belonging to the Island's palm, *Paschalococcos dispersa*, are of interest because of evidence for rodent gnawing, one presumed mechanism for the latter's extinction.

local inhabitants, named as Gerald Christian, Zancy Christian, William Christian, Elnora Christian, Alice Young and Roberta Warren (1917.4.1–15). The collection ranges from small polished chisels or gouges (long rounded tools with a bevelled end), through flaked and polished adzes with probable hafting tangs – both probable woodworking tools – to huge polished and partially polished implements, in one case with a blunt end suggestive of a symbolic rather than a practical use (1916.36.21, 1923.71.1–2; *Figure 29.4*), all of non-vesicular basalt or basalt-like lava. There are also 2 deliberately rounded balls (quite unlike the region's pointed slingstones), also made of some kind of basaltic lava (1916.36.76–77). Smaller chipped or knapped pitchstone implements, however, the counterpart of Easter Island's obsidian, which are reported from the Island (Weisler 1998; cf. Collerson and Weisler 2007), are not present.

29.4 Conclusions

The archaeological material from Easter Island and Pitcairn represents a major strength of the PRM's Oceania collections (see Chapter 27). The material has hardly been studied since the early 20th century. Where research has been undertaken, it has been poorly integrated within Museum documentation. For example, as well as the material from French Polynesia mentioned above, some of the adzes from Easter Island and Pitcairn were examined, classified and drawn by Figueroa and Sánchez (1965), but the objects' accession numbers were not published and the results were not recorded on the PRM database.⁹

The stone tool collections hold a great deal of potential: for example for studies of the relationships between the stone used and artefact forms (see Weisler 1998), for studies of the provenance of stone for tool manufacture, and for studies of the connections between material things and voyaging in Polynesian prehistory (Richards 2008). More generally, the analysis of the Routledge collection from Easter Island alongside the field notes held in the Royal Geographic Society and the documents and artefacts held by the British Museum would greatly enhance our understanding of this significant assemblage, and is a major priority for future research. The Routledge fieldwork remains poorly described (Routledge 1919; cf. Van Tilburg 1994, 2003), and there is a significant opportunity to reconstruct it from the material and documentary archives. Similarly, the pre-Routledge archaeological collections offer a unique point of entry for the study of early visitors to Easter Island (Altman 2004; Corney 1908; Palmer 1870; Salmond 1991), and the archaeology of contact (cf. Pollard *et al.* 2010), for instance through examining the provenance of the material in the PRM founding collection and connections with HMS *Topaze*. The history of the encounters of the Bounty mutineers and their descendants with the archaeological remains of Pitcairn remains an unexplored episode in Pacific history. Finally, particular artefacts also hold great potential for further archival, historical, and comparative archaeological study: particularly the wooden and stone figures, the stones with incised decoration, the carved stone balls, and the glass beads apparently recovered from a grave.

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⁹ Some preliminary matching-up of the publications with accession numbers was carried out by Dan Hicks when writing this chapter, but there is more to be done.

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