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The replicas of rongorongo objects in the musée du quai Branly (Paris)

by

Rafal WIECZOREK* and Paul HORLEY**

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a detailed analysis of 29 casts of inscribed tablets from Easter Island in the collections of musée du quai Branly. The major number of the casts covers the tablets from the Congregations of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Rome). Two sets of casts document Saint Petersburg tablets. The remaining casts represent two Washington tablets, two Vienna tablets, two Santiago tablets as well as two artefacts from the British Museum (London tablet and Small London reimiro), and a cast of now-lost Lateran tablet. We discuss in detail the casts that are unique for the collection – the replica of Large Vienna tablet that displays more glyphs than the present-day artefact, and the cast of Lateran tablet. It was also shown that the cast of Small Santiago tablet is not faithful to the original but rather made after artistic reproduction of the tablet based on the tracings published in 1875 by Philippi.

KEYWORDS: Easter Island, rongorongo script, plaster cast

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une analyse détaillée de 29 moulages en plâtre des tablettes de l'île de Pâques provenant des collections du musée du quai Branly. La grande majorité des moulages couvrent les tablettes des pères et religieuses des Sacrés-Cœurs (Rome). Deux ensembles documentent les tablettes de St-Petersbourg. Les autres moulages représentent deux tablettes de Washington, deux de Vienne, deux de Santiago, deux pièces du British Museum (tablette de Londres et petit reimiro de Londres) et la tablette (maintenant perdue) de Latran. Nous discutons en détail les moulages qui sont uniques à la collection : la réplique de la grande tablette de Vienne, qui contient plus de glyphes que la pièce actuelle, et le moulage de la tablette de Latran. Nous démontrons aussi que le moulage de la petite tablette de Santiago n'est pas fidèle à l'original, mais suit plutôt une reproduction artistique de la tablette basée sur les esquisses de Philippi de 1875.

MOTS-CLÉS : île de Pâques, écriture rongorongo, moule en plâtre

Rapa Nui (Easter Island) is located in South-East Pacific and is primarily known for the monumental stone statues *moai* that once stood on ceremonial platforms *ahu*. Among the vast Rapanui cultural heritage appears an unprecedented achievement for the small – but ingenious and hard-working island community – the development of a native writing system called *rongorongo*. Mentioned for the first time in 1864 by Brother Eugène Eyraud from the Congrega-

tion of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (SS. CC.), the existence of inscribed artefacts did not attract much attention up to their rediscovery by the bishop Tepano Jaussen of Tahiti, who catalysed the search for inscribed tablets in 1870. As a consequence of his efforts (and scientific interest generated by them), at present the museums of the world safeguard some two dozens of inscribed artefacts with *rongorongo* script. Despite numerous claims published since the late XIXth

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century, *rongorongo* still awaits its decipherment (Robinson, 2002: 223-225), which is complicated by the smallness of the surviving inscription corpus. The scarcity of the material prompted production of casts, predominantly made of plaster, to facilitate the scholarly access to inscriptions which otherwise are scattered in the museums from Hawai'i to Russia. Among the numerous museums striving to gather detailed documentation of the tablets, the musée du quai Branly holds a special place. Merging the collections of musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie and musée de l'Homme, musée du quai Branly presently possesses the greatest number of plaster casts of *rongorongo* tablets in the world (Fischer, 1997: 399). Fischer's inventory of *rongorongo* casts is mainly focused on the artefacts themselves, without providing a number of the casts in existence. To clarify this question, one of the authors (RW) made two visits to musée du quai Branly aiming on documentation and description of *rongorongo* casts. In addition to the material mentioned by Fischer, it turned out that in many cases there was a number of duplicate casts, reaching the impressive total count of 29 casts documenting 14 different inscribed artefacts from Easter Island. Additionally, the museum holds a unique *rongorongo* artefact – a snuffbox manufactured from inscribed tablet (Barthel, 1963: 373). With a large collection of remarkable Rapanui woodcarvings and other artefacts from Easter Island, musée du quai Branly is definitely a very important institution to visit for the scholars interested in different aspects of history and culture of Easter Island.

Description of the casts

The main body of casts documenting various inscribed Rapanui artefacts nowadays preserved in musée du quai Branly was formed due to efforts of Paul Rivet, since 1928 the director of musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. Trocadéro was the forerunner of musée de l'Homme (Laurière, 2006). According to Lehman (1907: 263), Trocadero Museum possessed a cast with inventory number 34483 documenting inscribed tablet sent to Louvain – which seemingly points on tablet Keiti that later perished in fires of the First World War. However, the footnote 3 on the same page, added by Rev. Father Alazard says that it was the cast of a tablet remaining in collections of the SS.CC., which rules out Keiti. Fischer search for the artefact with catalogue number 34483 was unsuccessful (Fischer, 1997: 651, note 15); the modern on-line database of musée du quai Branly does not recognize this century-old catalogue number as well.

We can be sure that by 1928 Rivet's collections already had two casts of St. Petersburg tablets, which survived to this day. In the coming years, more casts were produced:

« In 1933, for the purpose of investigating *rongorongo*'s wood, the new Director Paul Rivet had tablets dispatched to Paris from throughout Europe, from among which he had also plaster casts created at the same time. In 1934 Alfred Métraux [...] even arranged with the Chilean government for the Santiago tablets (RR8 and 9) to be forwarded to Paris for this purpose. » (Fischer, 1997: 399-400)

These included the casts of the tablets from the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary: Tahua, Mamari and Échancrée (there might have been a cast of Aruku Kurenga tablet as well, because the catalogue entry 71.1933.27.3 is empty from the range 71.1933.27.1-4 occupied by the casts of SS.CC. tablets). In the same year Rivet's collection was extended with five casts recorded as donations from "Museum für Völkerkunde (Wien)". Two of them indeed reproduce the Large and Small Vienna tablets, while the remaining three were definitely shipped from Smithsonian Institution (Washington D.C.), reproducing the Large and Small Washington tablets as well as Small Santiago tablet. There can be no doubt that these casts arrived from Washington as records of Smithsonian Institution mention that the casts were sent to musée d'Ethnographie (Paris) in May of 1933 (online collection database of Smithsonian Institution). Four more casts entered the collections in 1933 – two documenting London tablet and smaller of two inscribed *reimiro* pectorals from the British Museum, and two casts of Saint Petersburg tablets. In 1934, a cast of inscribed tablet from the Ethnological Museum of Lateran was added to the collection.

It is unclear whether Rivet also produced casts of two Santiago tablets that were supposedly loaned to Paris due to efforts of Métraux (Fischer, 1997: 400). The only cast of Large Santiago tablet that can be found at musée du quai Branly today has a catalogue number dating to 1977. The online collection database says it was donated by "Mr. Cea", most probably Alfredo Cea Egaña, who possesses a plastic cast of the famous Santiago staff (Bettocchi, 2010: 57). Upon the tedious procedure to create an updated inventory, eleven more casts of *rongorongo* tablets were located in the collections of musée du quai Branly. All of them are assigned with catalogue numbers of 2012. These objects proceed from musée de l'Homme, reproducing four tablets from the collections of SS.CC. These casts were possibly considered as "backup copies", as they were not even cleaned from the remains of cast-

ing material forming pronounced seams around the border of the artefact.

To provide the reader with detailed information about every cast, we assembled the following list mentioning the principal collection number given in boldface and the previous / alternative collection numbers given in parenthesis. Each artefact is identified by name as well as capital letter code established by Barthel (1958).

The cast **71.1928.2.1** (alternatively 7 158; 71.1928.2.1@1) replicates **Small St. Petersburg tablet** (text Q). Plaster cast, painted in two colours – dark brown mimicking the intact inscribed surface and yellowish covering the parts where eroded wood is exposed. General casting quality is good. A small piece is broken off the very corner of *verso* side, removing several glyphs from the end of the line Qv6.

The cast **71.1928.2.2** (7 159; 71.1928.2.2@1) replicates **Large St. Petersburg tablet** (text P). Plaster cast, painted in dark brown. Coloration is uneven, with large lighter areas that may be due to inhomogeneous application of original paint or alternatively could be a consequence of cleaning the cast with a wet cloth. These variations of colour somewhat complicate the study of the glyphs, though the general casting quality is good. At a certain moment of its history the cast was damaged, most possibly by falling on the floor, which resulted in severe breakage at its wider extremity. As the cast was probably made by joining two plaster plates for each side together, the hit partially split these up, shattering the fragments of different dimensions from the both sides. The largest splinters are still preserved in a plastic bag together with the cast. The damage extends for about 5cm from the wide extremity affecting dozens of glyphs of *verso* side. On *recto* side, the breakage extends for 2.5cm.

The cast **71.1933.27.1** (9 383; 71.1933.27.1@1) replicates **tablet Échancrée** (text D). Very good quality cast, painted light brown and perfectly preserved.

The cast **71.1933.27.2** (9 384; 71.1933.27.2@1) replicates **tablet Tahua** (text A). Very good quality cast, painted brown and perfectly preserved. The U-shaped nail in the original artefact is absent from the cast; the place where it should be is flattened out.

The cast **71.1933.27.4** (9 386; 71.1933.27.4@1) replicates **tablet Mamari** (text C). The cast is of very good quality, painted light brown, intact. Pigmentation is slightly uneven. As with the next cast, the casting process was performed very skilfully resulting with preservation of some of the edge glyphs interspersed in the calendar sequence.

The cast **71.1933.27.4.1** (380 988; X380988) replicates **tablet Mamari** (text C). Intact painted plaster cast. Pigmentation is very uneven, with multiple areas of lighter tone at the both

sides. Casting carefully proceeds all the way to the edge, documenting to a considerable extent two glyphic groups of lunar calendar section, inscribed on the side edge of the artefact.

The cast **71.1933.27.4.2** (380 989; X380989) replicates **tablet Mamari** (text C). Intact cast, non-painted. Occasional dark spots are scattered over side b. Glyph outlines are well-defined. Glyphs inscribed on the side edge of the artefact are partially visible. The plaster surface is eroded in several places, most notably missing several glyphs from lines Cb10-12. The mould for the tablet was made of several pieces, which is witnessed by envelope-looking seams visible on side a. The very similar casting technique can be observed on Mamari cast in the British Museum.

The cast **71.1933.28.1** (9 387; 71.1933.28.1@1) replicates **London tablet** (text K). Very good quality cast, uniformly painted light brown and perfectly preserved. Casting reproduces very well even the smallest of scratches present on the original artefact.

The cast **71.1933.28.2** (9 388; 71.1933.28.2@1; also 71.1933.28.2@1-1 for the main body and 71.1933.28.2@1-2 for fragments) replicates **Small London reimiro** (text L). This plaster cast was made of original London *reimiro*, which is witnessed by the details of faces carved on *reimiro*'s extremities, including broken nose of one of these faces. However, the original glyphs possibly did not look good on a cast, so that they were enhanced with a sharp point, in many cases producing the contours that are different from the original inscription. After this operation, the cast was painted light brown. The cast suffered damage, perhaps from falling, so that at the present moment both *reimiro* heads are broken off, revealing a metal wire added during the casting to reinforce plaster. The head fragments are preserved together with the cast in a plastic bag.

The cast **71.1933.79.1** (9 550; 71.1933.79.1@1) replicates **Small Vienna tablet** (text N). Intact cast, not painted. For surface erosion shown by the original artefact, this cast is just superb.

The cast **71.1933.79.2** (9 551; 71.1933.79.2@1) replicates **Large Vienna tablet** (text M). Intact cast, not painted. This cast will be discussed in more detail further in the paper.

The cast **71.1933.79.3** (9 552; 71.1933.79.3@1) replicates **Small Washington tablet** (text R). Intact cast, not painted. The original tablet was broken, so that one extremity features numerous sharp wooden edges. These were in part "clipped" in the cast. Side a of the tablet is reproduced well; side b is considerably smeared, rendering the majority of glyphs in the lines Rb4-7 illegible. The hole for hanging was emphasized by drilling, piercing the cast throughout.

The cast **71.1933.79.4** (9 553; 71.1933.79.4@1; also 71.1933.79.4 1/2 for rectangular fragment and 71.1933.79.4 2/2 for pointed fragment)

replicates **Large Washington tablet** (text S). The cast is not painted. The casting quality is very good, even showing the remnants of the glyphs in the places where the original tablet was planed during the late period of its history, possibly to serve a part of a canoe. The edges of the tablet are also properly cast, revealing the system of concavities that were made to fit the neighbour planks of the canoe. To achieve faithful reproduction of the edges, the original mould should have more than two parts, but the moulding are not visible at all – definitely, this cast was made by a professional. The holes that once received the lashings of a canoe are highlighted by drilling, piercing the cast throughout. At present, the cast is broken roughly in half, with a rectangular fragment measuring c. 25.5 cm and a pointed fragment measuring c. 34 cm. The breakage line is very clean, so that the both fragments put together provide very good impression of the entire cast. Only a couple of glyphs of line Sa1 are affected. The breakage provides an interesting opportunity to study the cross-section of the tablet that features considerable deviations from rectangular form.

The cast **71.1933.79.5** (9 554; 71.1933.79.5@1) provides an artistic reproduction of **Small Santiago tablet** (text G). The cast is intact and not painted; it will be discuss its detail below.

The cast **71.1933.162.1** (9 820; 71.1933.162.1@1) replicates **Large St. Petersburg tablet** (text P). It is intact and not painted. The casting in general is very good, but the mould had problems in covering the borders, for that the glyphs of the first and last lines were outlined by scratching with a sharp tool.

The cast **71.1933.162.2** (9 821; 71.1933.162.2@1) replicates **Small St. Petersburg tablet** (text Q). The cast is intact and not painted. The casting itself is not the best; the plaster displays variations of colour that suggest that some part of original cast surface might exfoliated. In this process, many glyphs became partially defaced, so that the inscription was massively enhanced by scoring glyph contours. The new lines in many cases can be distinguished by their lighter tone and considerable depth, but the large number of contour corrections renders this cast practically useless in obtaining accurate information about the calligraphy of the original artefact.

The cast **71.1934.45.1** replicates the **Lateran tablet** (text M2 according to classification presented by Fischer (1997: 541)). It is not painted, with minor damage at the extremities revealing the wire set inside for structural integrity. This cast will be discussed in details further in the paper.

The cast **71.1977.8.1** (21761) replicates **Large Santiago tablet** (text H). The cast is made of plaster and painted in brown for the inscribed surface and dark brown / black in the areas where the original tablet was carbonized. The

casting quality is superb, revealing the finest details such as wood fibre structure. The very edges of the cast are planed, so that the glyphs in the first and last lines appear roughly to 3/4 of their height. Otherwise, it is just a perfect cast.

The cast **72.2012.0.2 D** (361 682; X361682) replicates the **tablet Aruku Kurenga** (text B). Intact cast. It is neither painted nor processed – that is, featuring remnants of plaster that originally stuck between the halves of the mould, all around edges of the cast. The casting itself is quite good, only occasionally smearing glyph details here and there.

The cast **72.2012.0.3 D** (361 683; X361683) replicates the **tablet Mamari** (text C). Intact cast, nor painted nor processed. Overall casting is good. The edge glyphs of tablet Mamari are not reproduced in their entirety.

The cast **72.2012.0.4 D** (361 684; X361684) replicates the **tablet Aruku Kurenga** (text B). Intact cast, neither painted nor processed. The seam between the halves of the cast is well pronounced. The overall casting quality is good, but not perfect.

The cast **72.2012.0.5 D** (361 685; X361685) is another cast of the **tablet Aruku Kurenga** (text B). Intact cast, neither painted nor processed; in quality it is much similar to 72.2012.0.4 D.

The cast **72.2012.0.6 D** (361 686; X361686) is yet another cast of the **tablet Aruku Kurenga** (text B). Intact cast, neither painted nor processed. It may be that 72.2012.0.2 D and 72.2012.0.4 D to 72.2012.0.6 D all were made from the same mould. An additional study is required to find definite answer to this question.

The cast **72.2012.0.7 D** (361 687; X361687) replicates the **tablet Mamari** (text C). The cast is intact and not processed, featuring considerable seam around its border. The cast is not painted, but the material it is made of is pinkish-brown and medium-grained, so that fine glyph details are essentially absent. The surface of the cast is much eroded producing a mixture of light and dark spots. The regions neighbouring the edges possibly stuck to the mould, defacing many glyphs in lines Ca1, Ca14 and Cb13. The general reproduction quality is very poor.

The cast **72.2012.0.8 D** (361 688; X361688) replicates the **tablet Échancrée** (text D). The cast is intact, not painted and made of the same pinkish-brown material as the cast 72.2012.0.7 D. A seam can be seen on side a, where the original tablet Échancrée is broken. Several signs are badly smeared. The general reproduction quality is poor.

The cast **72.2012.0.9 D** (361 689; X361689) replicates the **tablet Mamari** (text C). The cast is intact, not painted and not processed, featuring considerable seam around its border. The casting quality is very good, featuring crisp and clear glyph contours. Two small smeared areas obscure several glyphs from lines Cb11 and Cb12.

The cast **72.2012.0.10 D** (361 690; X361690) replicates the **tablet Échancrée** (text D). The cast is intact, neither painted nor processed. Casting quality is good. Signs of side a are damaged, perhaps because casting material stuck to the mould or a small air bubble was created inside the mould. Overall reproduction quality is good.

The cast **72.2012.0.11 D** (361 691; X361691) replicates the **tablet Échancrée** (text D). The cast is intact, neither painted nor processed. Casting quality is very good, without any defects observed in 72.2012.0.11 D.

The cast **72.2012.0.12 D** (361 692; X361692) replicates the **tablet Tahua** (text A). The cast is intact, neither painted nor processed, with considerable seam seen around its borders. Casting quality is inferior, with many glyphs smeared. Even if the mould was of good quality, the casting process was not carried out perfectly, so that there is long curvy seam affecting several glyphs of side b, in the vicinity of long groove opening to the thinner extremity of the artefact.

The overall statistics of *rongorongo* casts in collections of musée du quai Branly are as follows:

- **Tablet Tahua**: 2 copies, the best one is 71.1933.27.2.
- **Tablet Aruku Kurenga**: 4 copies, possibly all from the same mould.
- **Tablet Mamari**: 6 copies, the best ones are 71.1933.27.4 and 71.1933.27.4.1.
- **Tablet Échancrée**: 4 copies, the best one is 71.1933.27.1.
- **Small Santiago tablet**: 1 artistic representation, not the cast of authentic object.
- **Large Santiago tablet**: 1 copy, very good cast.
- **London tablet**: 1 copy, very good cast.
- **Small London reimiro**: 1 copy, inscription is “nullified” by extensive scoring.
- **Large Vienna tablet**: 1 copy of a special value (see below).
- **Small Vienna tablet**: 1 copy, good quality.
- **Large St. Petersburg tablet**: 2 copies.
- **Small St. Petersburg tablet** – 2 copies.
- **Small Washington tablet**: 1 copy.
- **Large Washington tablet**: 1 copy of very good quality, albeit the cast is broken.
- **Lateran tablet**: 1 copy of good quality.

One of the most intriguing data discussed by Fischer in his monumental monograph (Fischer, 1997: 400) is the possible existence of a cast reproducing the perished tablet Keiti. In addition to collections of musée de l’Homme, other casts were seemingly existing:

« A cast of “Keiti” was part of the ssc collection at Braine-le-Comte, Belgium (Ropiteau, 1935[sic]:

518); Lavachery (1933a: fig. 3) was even allowed to reproduce a photograph of this cast. However, the *Padri dei Sacri Cuori* in Rome now possess no such cast of “Keiti”. The plaster cast of “Keiti” that once had been at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (Lehmann, 1907: 263, fn 2) has since disappeared. » (Fischer, 1997: 650, note 14)

The authors did their best to study all aforementioned references and searched for the cast in musée du quai Branly, alas, unsuccessfully. The original text of Ropiteau (1936: 1) says:

« luckily at Braine-le-Comte are preserved one photograph and tracing of two inscribed sides, and the *Bulletin des Américanistes de Belgique* reproduces them very good in its number of Autumn 1933. » (translation from French¹ by the authors)

The latter, in turn, is a reference to Lavachery’s 1933 paper that indeed features a photograph of tablet Keiti (reproduced in much more detail in Orliac & Orliac 2008: 260) and an image of its tracing (Lavachery 1933: Fig. 3) (“calque” as per Ropiteau), which did not survive:

« The ssc also possessed a thin tissue impression of “Keiti”, but it disintegrated over the years. Recorded in the folder where it was stored are the words: “eaten by the moths”. » (Fischer, 1997: 652, note 15)

The purported cast from the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin is a cause of misidentification / misattribution either by Lehmann or by his informant Dr. Hamy. Most possibly, the cast in question reproduced tablet Mamari, since that was the plaster cast that SS.CC made for Hamy as mentioned by Fischer (1997: 399) – and indeed, such cast still exists in Berlin Museum under catalogue number VI 24767 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, n.d.).

The most significant documentation problem that contributed much to the overall confusion about Keiti casts stems from an inappropriate caption from Thomson’s expedition reports (1891: plate 46). The plate shows two photographs of the original tablet Keiti, described as a “cast lent by Parke, Davis & Co”. Fischer made an excellent research to follow this lead (Fischer, 1997: 650, note 14), proving that the “Parke-Davis tablet” seemingly never existed. There is the artefact E151490 from Smithsonian Institution, which is identified on its catalogue card as “[cast of inscribed tablet,] Original lent by Parke, Davis & Co., copies by Mills” (online collection database of Smithsonian Institution). However, it does not represent a copy of tablet Keiti and moreover, it was not made after original *rongorongo* tablet –rather being an artistic reproduc-

1. « Heureusement, on avait conservé à Braine-le-Comte une photo et un calque des deux faces écrites, et le *Bulletin des Américanistes de Belgique* les a très bien reproduits dans son numéro d’août 1933. »



FIGURE 1. – The inscribed side of the Large Vienna tablet VO-22869 (image courtesy of the Museum für Volkerkunde, Vienna). The present dimensions of the artefact are 28.4 × 13.7 cm (Fischer, 1997: 504)



FIGURE 2. – The cast of the Large Vienna tablet 71.1933.79.2 (image courtesy of the musée du quai Branly). The dimensions of the cast are 29 × 14 × 2 cm (online database of the musée du quai Branly)

tion of Small Santiago tablet. The same catalogue card informs that “1 cast – [sent as a] gift to National Museum, Paris, 5-8-1933”, which corresponds to the object 71.1933.79.5 in the collections of musée du quai Branly. Therefore, despite a considerable efforts aimed on searching for the cast of Keiti, the present authors have to admit that they were unable to confirm Fischer’s comments about possible existence of such cast in collections of musée de l’Homme and its successor musée du quai Branly. The inconsistencies in historical publications of late XIXth – early XXth century mentioning Keiti’s cast makes one really doubtful whether such was ever actually produced. At the same time, Fischer should be duly credited for his great discovery of the pencil rubbings of tablet Keiti, preserved among the papers of Alphonse Pinart in Bancroft Library (Fischer, 1997: 650, note 8).

The cast of Large Vienna tablet

The Large Vienna Tablet was collected in 1882 as a consequence of the visit by Geiseler and Weisser to Easter Island on board SMS *Hyäne*. The Germans inquired Alexander Paea Salmon (who was in charge of Brander’s sheep station) about the inscribed tablets. Salmon replied that there are two tablets in possession of the chief Hangeto, who was asking a price that was too high for the Germans. The issue was settled in the following manner:

« Salmon added that once the *Hyäne* had left Rapanui he would try to buy both artefacts for £2 sterling. The Germans gave him the money for this, asking him to forward the two tablets at the next opportunity to the German Imperial Consul at Tahiti, Gustav Godeffroy, who would send them to Germany. » (Fischer, 1997: 79)

The further events went slightly different than planned – Salmon purchased several inscribed artefacts and sent them instead to Valparaiso, to the German Consul Heinrich August Schlubach (the husband of Salmon’s niece). Schlubach sent the larger tablet to Adolf Bastian in Berlin, and sold two smaller tablets to “Kléé and Kocher”, from whom the tablets were acquired by Heinrich Freiherr von Westenholz. The collection of Westenholz was donated to the Museum für Volkerkunde of Vienna in 1886 (Fischer, 1997: 501). Both Vienna tablets were immediately published by Haberlandt (1886: 101-102, Plate 10). Alas, both inscribed artefacts were considerably eroded; their photographic documentation using

the late XIXth century technique (compounded by the limitations of typographic reproduction) might produce the results of insufficient quality, so that Haberlandt resorted to publication of the drawings (Haberlandt, 1886: Plate 10). Indeed, the preservation state of the Large Vienna tablet makes it complicated to achieve good photographic reproduction even with modern digital photography techniques (fig. 1).

The poor preservation of the tablets is a consequence of the scribal techniques used in their production. The crisp glyph contours seen in the photographs of inscribed tablets make an impression of deep engraving, which is considerably far from the reality. The actual depth of the glyph contours², traced with a shark tooth (Dederen and Fischer, 1993: 182), is only about 0.1mm. Thus, under bad storage conditions (damp atmosphere, direct contact with soil, etc.), the inscription on the tablet will perish as soon as erosion affects the surface layer deeper than its shallow glyph contours. For the case of Large Vienna tablet that eroded so bad that large pieces of wood crumbled away, it is a miracle that several glyphs are still discernible. But there is good news as well. Glyph carving technique contained two steps – pre-incising and contour deepening (Fischer, 1997: 387). In first step, the pressure applied to the writing implement produced very thin but relatively deep line, the traces of which can be noticed even on eroded areas, where the deepened contours are no longer observed. Therefore, looking on the original artefact with a magnifying glass, or studying very high-resolution digital imagery, it is possible to find faint pre-incision traces even in the areas of moderate surface erosion, which permits to extract a few new glyphs.

The Large Vienna tablet underwent casting several times, producing the casts that nowadays can be found in musée du quai Branly (Paris, catalogue number 71.1933.79.2), American Museum of Natural History (New York, catalogue number 80.1/1008) and in collections of Department of Ethnography, Tübingen University (Tübingen). The authors are unaware of other casts, yet they may exist in various museums or institutions. Fischer (1997: 505) was the first to notice that the cast preserved in musée du quai Branly is special:

« the “Large Vienna” reveals the greatest degree of recent defacing. It is sad to have to report that between 1933, when Paul Rivet had a plaster cast [...] of this tablet made for his musée d’Ethnologie [the collections of which were transferred to musée de l’Homme and then to musée du quai Branly] [...] in Paris, and 1992, when I inspected the original in Vienna, great damage had occurred. The sequence

2. The value of glyph contour depth was measured from the cast of the tablet *Échancrée*, kindly provided for study to one of the authors (PH) by K. Pozdniakov. The measurements were performed for the glyphs covering the side a of the tablet, which were engraved by a very skilled scribe.

[of two glyphs] is now missing from the middle top line of the tablet ([...] [M]a9 [...]). What is worse, however: someone has also apparently intentionally removed a piece from the tablet that contained parts of two lines of glyphs. Some 13 elements of [...] [M]a1 and three of [...] [M]a2 – a fragment c. 7 × 2 cm in size – are now missing. [...] Such vandalism has never happened before in the long history of *rongo-rongo* conservation, and it is to be sorely regretted.»³

It is indeed sad when a portion of *rongo-rongo* artefact crumbles away, especially in the case of such a small corpus of surviving inscriptions. However, we think that damage of the Large Vienna tablet might be unintentional. Some artefacts are much fragile, and even a minor physical effort (including accidental adhesion of plaster during the casting process) may be sufficient to dislodge a semi-decayed piece of wood.

This process can be illustrated with Small Washington tablet, which underwent a similar damage in a smaller extent. Both tablets collected by the USS *Mohican* expedition to Easter Island in 1886 are illustrated in the Expedition Reports as plaster casts with inked glyph contours (Thomson, 1891: pls. 38-41). Such an approach definitely helped to achieve a high-contrast image that had more chances for better reproduction with the

late XIXth century typographic techniques. Luckily, the Small Washington tablet was documented in detail before casting process; the resulting photograph with a tablet held on top of a coiled rope was first published by Routledge (1921: 646). We are glad to report that with exceptional collaboration of the National Anthropological Archives it was possible to locate the original photograph (fig. 3a). As one can see from the image, the bottom right part of the tablet is considerably eroded, featuring several wormholes and cracks. The wood in this area is lighter, and the glyphs contours are much smoothed through the decay of the thin surface layer that carries the inscription. The cast of the tablet illustrated by Thomson (1891: pl. 39) features the corresponding part of the tablet intact. It is likely that during this very first casting the most eroded pieces of wood got stuck to the mould. We don't have any photographic documentation of the tablet from the beginning of XXth century, yet the cast 71.1933.79.3 of musée du quai Branly clearly illustrates an open cavity in the eroded part of the tablet (fig. 3b). Such a pronounced loss of wood suggests that instead of using the original plaster mould from XIXth century (which might be already damaged/lost by 1930es), the tablet was casted again. It is difficult to say if this second casting inflicted additional damage, but the present outlines of the cavity in Small Washington tablet (fig. 3c) are definitely larger than those documented in quai Branly cast.

Therefore, to our opinion, the damage of the tablets was not deliberate but rather accidental and connected to the considerable surface erosion. The artefacts in better preservation state – such as Aruku Kurenga and Mamari – successfully survived nu-

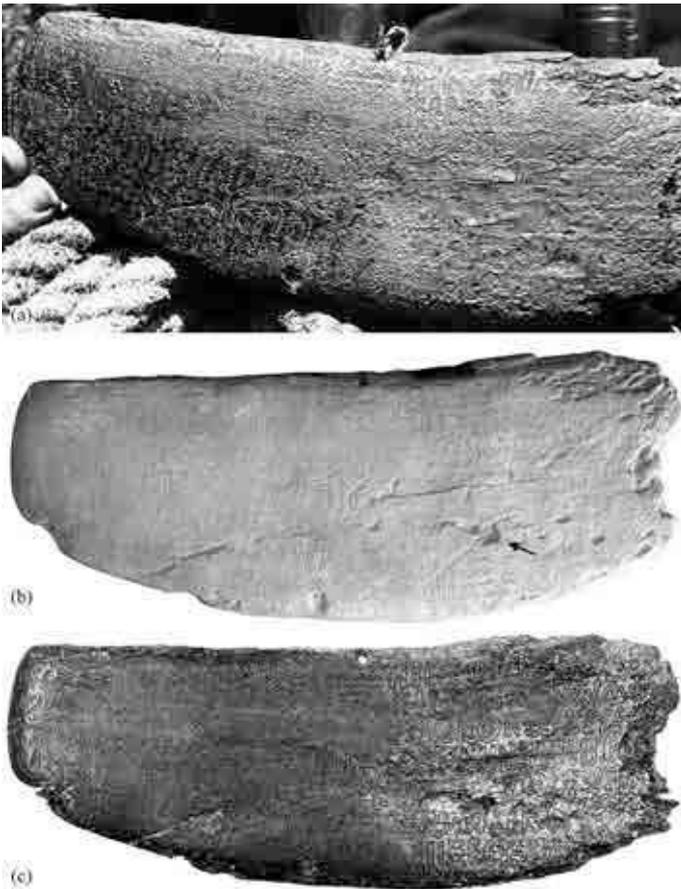


FIGURE 3. – Small Washington tablet: a) picture taken before casting (image NAA 2555700 courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Washington D.C.); b) plaster cast 71.1933.79.3 (image courtesy of musée du quai Branly, Paris); c) 2012 picture of the Small Washington tablet A129773 (photograph by Donald Hurlbert, image courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.). Note that repetitive casting removed a large piece of wood from the eroded area located to the bottom right from tablet's centre (marked with an arrow on quai Branly cast)

3. Square brackets from the authors.

merous castings. We found more supporting evidence for this hypothesis in the Archives of Kenneth P. Emory held at the Bernice P. Bishop Museum at Honolulu (fig. 4). The photographs date to late 1930es – early 1940es, that is, after the production of the casts by the initiative of Paul Rivet. The images, alas, are of poor sharpness so that no sign details can be discerned. However, one can clearly see that a piece from top edge of the tablet is already missing (fig. 4a), while the large segment at the bottom right (the loss of which was reported by Fischer) is still in place (fig. 4b). One can assume that this segment fallen away in 1940es, possibly due to further casting – however, we were unable to locate any such “intermediate” cast. Be as it may, the cast of Large Vienna tablet deposited to the American Museum of Natural History in 1949 by Robert von Heine-Geldern already shows the tablet in its present state. Thus, it is a very good luck that the cast surviving in the musée du quai Branly (compared with Haberlandt’s 1886 illustration) still preserves the original appearance of the Large Vienna tablet with all glyphs visible at the moment when it arrived to the Museum für Volkerkunde.

Analysing in all material on Large Vienna tablet available to the authors, including Haberlandt’s drawing, the cast from the musée du quai Branly and modern digital images of the tablet kindly provided by Museum für Volkerkunde, it became possible to produce a new tracing of its inscription (fig. 5). To avoid discussion about the division of the ligatures into individual signs, we were counting glyphic groups composed by joined signs, reaching the total count of 153. For comparison, the corresponding count for Barthel’s tracing of the tablet reveals some 57 glyphic groups, while Fischer’s tracings documents about 105 glyphic groups.

The most important observations, to our opinion, are the following. On the cast from musée du quai Branly one can see that the tablet once featured the remnants of ten lines and not nine as it was postulated by Barthel and Fischer. If one

follows more detailed Fischer’s documentation with the photographs of the artefact with a pencil in hand, it becomes clear that line 8 occupies too much space and in reality should be split in two lines. In this way, the sequence of signs documented by Fischer for line 9 resulted to be upside-down, starting with inverted sign 99. The proper account for line height suggests that the last fragment should belong to line 10, showing the sign 99 the proper side up. It should be noted that this 10th line, following the edge of the artefact, once had its beginning in bottom left corner of the tablet, so that it may had been the first line of the inscription. In the present state of the artefact, with very little parallel passages shared with other tablets, there is insufficient data to establish the proper reading order of the lines. Therefore, to avoid confusion, we are inclined to keep the line order proposed by Barthel.

Another important observation concerns the second part of the line Ma2, which contains the mini-text starting with a stable glyphic sequence 4-522-700.600-59f. It is attested on several artefacts (Barthel, 1958: 157), in particular, in lines Bv12, Ev6, Gr2, Hv12, Kr3, Ma2, and Ra5. It also might possibly occurred in line Nb3, the first non-damaged glyphs of which can be considered as the continuation of the same sequence seen in the aforementioned parallel passages. In the tracings of Barthel and Fischer, the version from Large Vienna tablet included the sign 99 (with two protruding ears) in place of 522 (featuring a characteristic proboscis), offering a serious grounds to say that signs 99 and 522 may be closely related and even represent allographs of each other. However, the high-resolution digital photographs reveal that the sign occurring on Large Vienna tablet is also 522, with its proboscis turned to the left, unifying the writing of the glyphic sequence 4-522-700.600-59f on all tablets where it occurs.

The line Ma6 is also worth mention. The cast from the collections of musée du quai Branly contains fragments of three signs in the beginning of this line, which are absent in the

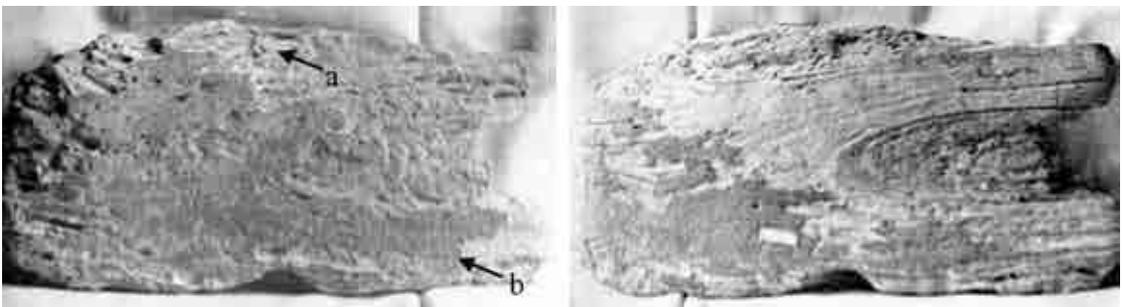


FIGURE 4. – Photographs of Large Vienna tablet (inscribed front side and much eroded back side) from the archives of Kenneth P. Emory, presumably collected in late 1930es or early 1940es (images are courtesy of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum). The arrows mark the places: a) where the edge fragment was previously located and b) still undamaged part of lines Ma1 and Ma2

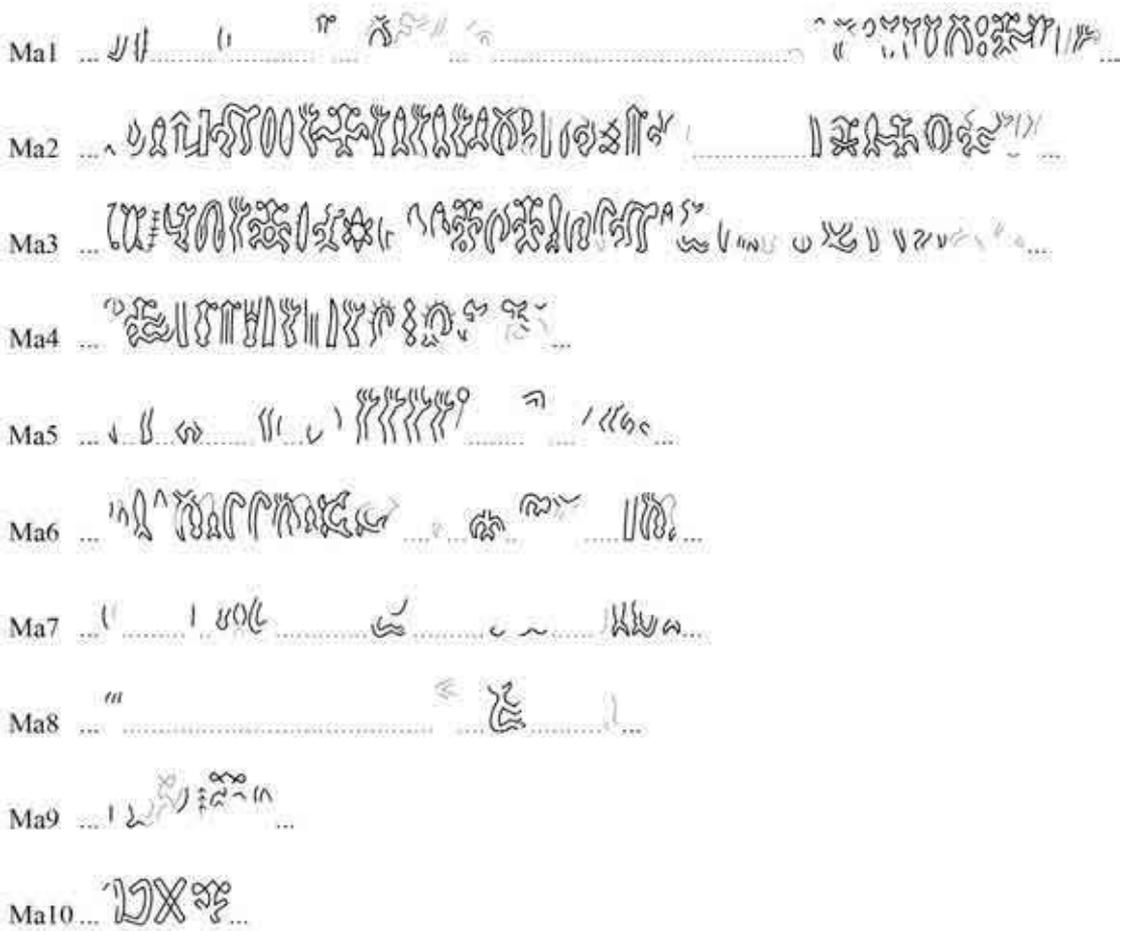


FIGURE 5. – The inscription of Large Vienna tablet traced after modern photographs and images of the plaster cast from musée du quai Branly

present-day tablet. The eroded wooden surface housing the end of the line Ma6 still preserves the faint traces of the glyphs, which can be discerned with more ease on computer screen after proper contrast adjustments. We did our best to enhance the contrast of fig. 1 to make the majority of these signs at least slightly visible. As one can see from fig. 5, the remaining traces of line Ma6 feature unusual structure with glyphic group 84(=56).74.711 delimiting the sets of duplicating glyphs. Not every sign of this sequence survived, but its rigid structure suggests the following reconstruction:

84.74.711-700-700-84.74.711-63-63-84.74.711-7-7-84.74.711-460-460-84.74.711-1-1-84.74.711-...

alternatively, by substituting delimiter with letter x and repetitive glyphs with letters A-E, one obtains a structure-revealing encoding of the same string: x-AA-x-BB-x-CC-x-DD-x-EE-x-... The duplicated signs 700, 63, 7, 460(=660?) and 1 are attested in the surviving *rongorongo* corpus, yet the occurrence of 5 signs

in duplications inside the single structured sequence is an outstanding feature that calls for further detailed investigation. For example, it is worth to notice that the glyph 711 (fish hanging on a string), which features here in the delimiter group, is also present in the delimiter group inside the famous calendar of the Mamari tablet (Guy, 1990).

The cast of Small Santiago tablet

It is important to discuss in detail the reproduction of Small Santiago tablet in the musée du quai Branly, because this object has little to do with the original artefact and therefore may create considerable confusion. The point is that it does not represent a true cast, but rather an artistic reproduction of the tablet. To illustrate this, we present in fig. 6 the photograph of a true cast of Small Santiago tablet from the collections of Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastian Englert (MAPSE) side-by-side with the cast 71.1933.79.5 from musée du quai Branly and the illustration

from Philippi's 1875 paper. The size and general shape of the quai Branly cast is much similar to that of the original tablet. However, the cast does not show the pronounced fluting characteristic to Small Santiago tablet. Also, on the *recto* side of the original artefact there is a crack starting from the concave side, in fig. 6 corresponding to the left bottom side of the artefacts. This detail is clearly seen in the MAPSE cast but is completely absent from the cast from musée du quai Branly. We provide a close-up image of this crack in fig. 6d-e (please take into account that the tablet was turned 180 degrees in fig. 6d-f; the need for this will be mentioned later).

The other important detail is the hanging holes; there are three of these on Small Santiago tablet, all presently filled in with small wooden plugs. These are marked with arrows on MAPSE cast (fig. 6a). The quai Branly cast does not show any of these holes, featuring instead smooth unperturbed surface. What is more, the holes drilled by the longer edge of the artefact perforate through the signs, yet quai Branly cast shows full "restored" versions of these signs.

It is possible to show that the cast 71.1933.79.5 from musée du quai Branly is actually based on Philippi's drawing of Small Santiago tablet published in 1875 (fig. 6c). As one can see from the figure, Philippi documented only one hole at the longer side of the artefact and omitted other two; he marked the characteristic crack with a thin line that was not properly interpreted by the person who was preparing the quai Branly cast. Comparing the shape of the individual signs with the original tablet and Philippi's rendition thereof, it becomes clear that the glyphs of the cast from the musée du quai Branly gravitate towards the latter, inheriting Philippi's errors in transcription of the tablet. Here we would like to illustrate one of such errors proving Philippi's drawing to be the base document on which quai Branly cast was created. In the very end of line Gr2 there is glyphic combination 67.10f-67 including two "palm-tree" glyphs 67. One can clearly see this on MAPSE cast (fig. 6d), and the analysis of parallel passages appearing in lines Ab4, Ca2, Cb2, Ev3 and Ra6 confirms the presence of two palm signs in this sequence. Yet, Philippi overlooked the details of the first sign and rendered it as a fish glyph looking downwards (fig. 6f); the very same error is seen in quai Branly cast (fig. 6e). Remarkably, the tracings of the tablet published by Barthel corrects this mistake but his transliterations keep it, describing the closing part of the line Gr2 as 700x.10f-67 (Barthel, 1958: 57), where 700x is the code corresponding to down-facing fish glyph. Fischer's tracing render the first glyph like a hybrid of a palm and down-facing fish, suggesting that Philippi's drawing or the cast were possibly consulted during his studies of the Small Santiago tablet.

As mentioned before, the cast of Small Santiago tablet was sent to musée du quai Branly from Smithsonian Institution, where still exists the original cast with a catalogue number E151490, supposedly made after the original provided by Parke, Davis & Co. It is unclear if the original object was a wooden tablet or another cast. It is true that considerably accurate reproductions of *rongorongo* artefacts were produced in the late XIXth century – for example, the copy of the tablet Mamari preserved in musée de Tahiti et des îles (Van Hoorebeeck, 1979: pl. 21). Yet, the uniformity of glyph outlines seen in the cast of Small Santiago tablet in musée du quai Branly / Smithsonian Institution may even suggest that the original "artefact" was not made of wood but perhaps of softer substance (clay or plaster), which was shaped as the Small Santiago tablet and inscribed with a pointed stylus, taking Philippi's drawing of Small Santiago tablet as the reference. The resulting object was then cast in plaster and presented as a cast of *rongorongo* tablet. To our opinion, there is no sufficient evidence to call this "cast" a fraud; most possibly, in the times when documentation of *rongorongo* was considerably scarce, somebody tried to remedy a situation by producing a palpable model of the tablet using (then) recently published Philippi's drawings. The resulting artefact might have changed several hands before it reached Smithsonian, so that the person who was depositing it to the museum was not necessarily aware that the artefact was not authentic. Be as it may, this model of Small Santiago tablet reached Paris and also Honolulu, where the very same cast with the catalogue number B6222 can be found in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum. The notorious presence in three leading museums resulted in pronounced visibility of this cast – it appeared in Chauvet's publication (1935: figs. 160 and 161), on the dust jacket of English edition of Barthel's 1978 book and even appeared in Fischer's monumental book on *rongorongo* (Fischer, 1997: figs. 48 and 49).

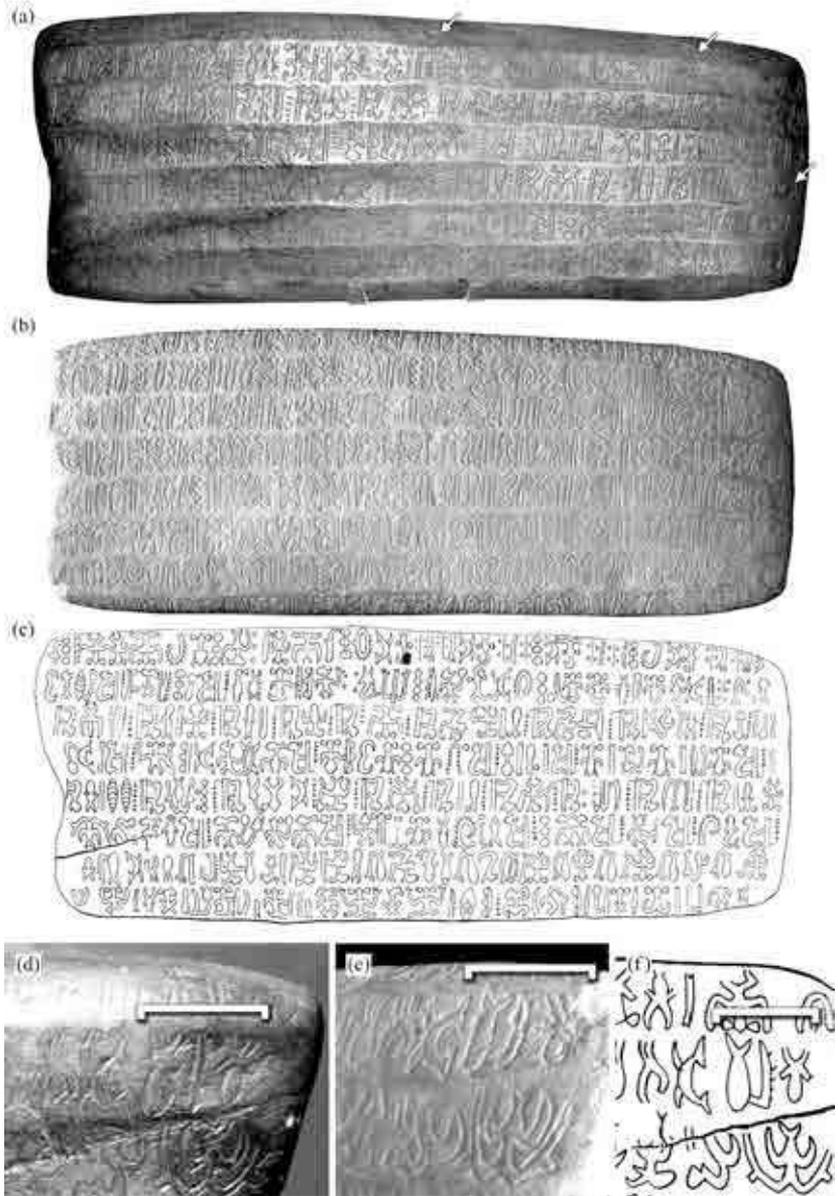
The cast of Lateran tablet

Lateran tablet is one of the "lost artefacts" in the history of Easter Island script:

« No illustration of this piece appears to exist. Indeed, the existence of the artefact itself is now in question [...] Barthel (1959: 161) alleged that the musée de l'Homme possessed a cast of this artefact (doubtless ordered by Rivet in 1933); but no photographs of this cast appear to exist either [...] Inspecting this cast in late 1950s, Barthel (*ibid.*) claimed the incised signs correspond to a geometric inventory of forms [...] Side *a* held four lines with glyphs similar to the *ta'u* script; side *b* displayed four incipient lines. A few of the glyphs were theromorphic, others were geometric glyphs. If this is true, then there can be no doubt that the "La-

FIGURE 6. – Small Santiago tablet:

a) cast of the original tablet (image courtesy of Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastian Englert, Hanga Roa);
 b) “artistic” cast 71.1933.79.5 (image courtesy of musée du quai Branly, Paris);
 c) drawing of Small Santiago tablet (Phillipi, 1875: plate B2);
 d-f) comparison of “palm-tree” glyph (sources: d) image courtesy of MAPSE; e) image courtesy of musée du quai Branly and f) close-up to Phillipi’s 1875 drawing)



teran Tablet”, too, comprised a *mama* artefact [with the inscription of Concepción *ika*] and was probably carved in the 1920s, like the “Concepción *ika*” above.» (Fischer, 1997: 541)

The scholars who mentioned Lateran tablet in their publications coincided in opinion that it was not an authentic *rongorongo* but later imitation of the script. The tablet seemingly belonged to the collections of Congregations of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, from which it was transferred to the Lateran Museum:

« [...] some other objects [of the Congregation], notably two *reimiro*, two or three *moai* [*miro*], a small fragment of a tablet are nowadays in Pontifical Ethnographic Museum of Lateran in Rome; and other fragment of a tablet is separately preserved in the Collection of Dr. Stephen Chauvet. » (Ropiteau, 1936: 2, translated from French⁴ by the authors)

It is clear that Ropiteau did not saw the tablet himself, as he mentions it in lines with Chauvet fragment, which is indeed a tiny piece of wood. Lavachery briefly mentioned the Lateran tablet when discussing wood types used in Rapanui carvings (1934: 71):

« *Pyrus malus* [wood was used] for the Lateran tablet – it will be the object of a detailed study – the characters it bears are degenerate. At first glance, this tablet seems an imitation of ancient tablets made by an ignorant. It should be noted that *Pyrus malus* [apple tree] can be found in the flora of Chile. »(translated from French⁵ by the authors)

4. « Quelques autres objets, notamment deux *rei-miro*, deux ou trois *moai*, un petit fragment de tablette, sont actuellement au musée Ethnographique Pontifical du Latran à Rome; et un autre fragment de tablette appartient maintenant à la collection du D^r Stephen Chauvet. »

5. « *Pyrus malus* pour la tablette de Latran – celle-ci fera l’objet d’une étude approfondie – les caractères qu’elle porte sont dégénérés. À première vue, cette tablette semble une imitation des tablettes anciennes faite par un ignorant. Il est à noter que *Pyrus malus* se trouve dans la flore du Chili. »

Métraux (1938: 1; 1940: 392) expressed the opinion that the tablet was a fake, providing its catalogue number as 6442; Lanyon-Orgill (1953: 11) and Barthel (1958: 34) confirmed the same. Later, Barthel had an access to the cast of the tablet in Paris, producing the following description:

« The “Lateran Tablet” in Rome. This object is well known as forgery. However it is of interest that the incised characters are not of classical *Rongorogo* type, but rather form sparse geometric shapes, as it can be learned from a cast in the musée de l’Homme in Paris. » (Barthel, 1959:161, translated from German⁶ by the authors)

Van Hoorebeeck tried to localize the original Lateran Tablet in 1977, obtaining the answer from the *Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* of Vatican Museums that the tablet cannot be found at the moment as the large part of the collection is packed. Surprisingly, the catalogue number 6442 provided by Métraux at the time of Van Hoorebeeck’s inquiry corresponded to an unrelated item from Solomon Islands (Van Hoorebeeck, 1979:259). Fischer’s search for the tablet some 20 years later revealed the following:

« The piece was Inv. No. 3449 (not 6442), measuring 64 x 7.5 cm. It had been sent to the Vatican in 1927 by Rev. Ambrogio Scholz, military chaplain in Santiago. » (Fischer, 1997: 542)

However, the original artefact was probably discarded from the museum basing on the established conclusion that it represented a late forgery and not the authentic *rongorongo* inscription. In his 160th message published at berphi.sckyrack.com, Dederen provides an interesting update about the tablet:

« In 1982, we have been led to do research in the archives of musée de l’Homme and there, also, we found a cast of a completely unknown tablet, broken at one extremity. We noted the dimensions and a part of [its] decadent characters. Through perseverance and several years after, we learned that it was the tablet of Lateran No. 3449, 64 cm long and 7.5 cm wide. » (Dederen, 2012, translated from French⁷ by the authors)

In the same year 2012, one of the authors (RW) had the opportunity to study and document all the casts of *rongorongo* artefacts in collections of

musée du quai Branly. Among the casts of the known classical tablets there indeed was a plaster cast 71.1934.45.1 of an unusual tablet bearing decadent signs. Its registration slip provided the following information:

« Plaster engraved with geometric glyphs characteristic of Easter Island. Copy of the tablet called “*Kohau Rongorongo*” (staff of chanting). This type of tablet served possibly as mnemonic support for recitation of the myths. Previous collection: musée de l’Homme (Oceania). Donor: Museo Missionario Etnologico. » (translated from French⁸ by the authors)

The Missionary Ethnological Museum was located in Lateran palace from 1927 to 1963 and then relocated to Vatican (Vatican Museums, n.d.) In complete accordance with Fischer (1997: 541), the year when the tablet entered the museum – 1934 – strongly suggests that the cast was probably ordered by Paul Rivet. We are glad to present here the photographic documentation of the cast 71.1934.15.1 for the first time (fig. 7). The tracing of the inscription is given by each side to facilitate further studies of the artefact. The cast is indeed broken at one extremity, exposing a metallic rod put inside the plaster to improve structural integrity of the cast.

The artefact is rectangular in shape, but its profile view is quite unusual – the bulging central part tapers towards both extremities, reducing artefact thickness well below 1 cm (fig. 7c). Such shaping of a wooden tablet is different from that of classical *rongorongo* artefacts that usually feature a uniform thickness. The tablet was not fluted for writing; however, there are pronounced traces of planing clearly seen in slanted light (7b). The surface of the tablet is uneven, so that a considerable effort is required to set-up a proper lighting to achieve the best photographic results.

Each side of the tablet bears four lines. The glyphs cover one side of the tablet completely (fig. 7a), but only about one fourth of the other side is inscribed (fig. 7b). The carving is awkward, most possibly made with a metal tool producing deep v-shaped glyph contours. The fish and bird figures recognisable in the inscription (fig. 7a, left side) suggest that no inverse boustrophedon line order was obeyed. The writing direction of the tablet is highly unusual. The unfinished side features all four lines starting at the right side.

6. « Die “Laterantafel” in Rom. Dieses Objekt gilt bekanntlich als Fälschkat. Immerhin ist von Interesse, daß die eingritzten Zeichen nicht den klassischen Rongorogotypen, sondern einem spärlichen geometrischen Formen schatz entsprechen, wie einem Abguß im musée de l’Homme zu Paris entnommen werden kann. »

7. « En 1982, nous avons été amené à faire des recherches dans les archives du musée de l’Homme et là, également, nous avons trouvé le moulage cassé à un extrémité d’une tablette complètement inconnue. Nous en avons relevé les dimensions et une partie des caractères decadents. À force de persévérance et bien des années après, nous avons pu apprendre qu’il s’agissait de la tablette du Latran n° 3449, faisant 64 cm de long sur 7,5 cm de large. »

8. « Plâtre gravé à droite de glyphes géométriques caractéristiques de l’île de Pâques. Copie de tablette dite “Kohau Rongorongo” (canne de chantre). Ce type de tablette servait probablement de support mnémotechnique dans la récitation des mythes. Précédente collection : musée de l’Homme (Océanie) ; donateur : Museo Missionario Etnologico. »

At the first glance one even may think that the inscription started at upper right corner and proceeded from top to bottom. However, the occurrence of several bird signs in the upper row, as well as a line almost completely full with crescents (fig. 7a) strongly suggests that the writing was performed in lines and not columns. Judging from neat alignment at the right side and two longer bottom lines on unfinished side, one becomes inclined to conclude that the lines most possibly were written right to left – that is, in opposite direction to that of classical *rongorongo*. The left extremity of complete side feature a fish glyph spanning three lines, superimposed with an indefinite shape, perhaps a fruit. Surprisingly, the several of centimetres of space at the right extremity are devoid of glyphs. Despite the right extremity of the cast being damaged, it is clearly seen that no glyphs were affected by broken-off pieces of plaster (fig. 7a).

We are glad to provide additional confirmation for proper identification of the cast of Lateran tablet basing on previously unpublished material from Emory archives preserved at the Bernice P. Bishop Museum at Honolulu. The documentation consists of a rubbing and two descriptive cards with partial tracings of the inscriptions (fig. 8), signed by Margaret Titcomb of Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1937. The partial rubbing of the tablet is accompanied with the text “an attempt [of rubbing] at the right (crossed out “left”) end – wood uneven – see also drawing”. The two descriptive cards feature fragments of four lines drawn from the both sides of the artefact, that perfectly check with our tracings (fig. 7). The tablet is identified as the artefact from “Easter Is[land], [catalogue number] 6442, Lateran Mus[eum]”. It is worth emphasizing that the number 6442 was supplied by Métraux, further corrected by Fischer and Dederen to 3449. However, explicit use of the number 6442 on the both descriptive cards produced by Titcomb provides strong evidence that at least at the time of documentation Lateran tablet had namely this number. To reconcile two numbers for the same artefact, it seems feasible to suggest two possible solutions: i) the number on the artefact was possibly awkwardly written so that the true number 3449 looked as 6442 or ii) the collection might underwent re-cataloguing after Titcomb’s access to the tablet.

Titcomb provides the dimensions of the object as “tablet is $2\frac{1}{4}$ [inches] long [64.14 cm] \times $2\frac{3}{8}$ [inches, 6.03 cm]; greatest thickness about 1 inch [2.54cm]” (fig. 8). The difference in the width with quai Branly measurements – 6.03 versus 7.5 cm – can be understood from fig. 7, which

clearly shows that the tablet was narrower at its middle and wider at its extremities. As Titcomb reported the greatest thickness of the tablet, she might have measured the width at the same point. The other additional comments are: “right end, wood is too uneven to make good tracing. Connect this up with tracings [rubblings]. See next page also”; “this is the faint end [i.e. with the symbols barely seen] (rt) of the side without much on it. A guess might be that it is unfinished”.

We found another cast of Lateran tablet in the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels, catalogue number ET.2009.54. The ascension year 2009 making part of the catalogue number suggests that the cast was recently rediscovered in museum collections. We don’t have information as to whether the cast ET.2009.54 was manufactured at the same time as the cast 71.1934.15.1. It should be said that the Brussels cast of Lateran tablet is not broken, providing clearer picture of the general geometry of the tablet. At the same time, the casting quality of the Brussels cast is inferior to that of Paris cast, with several seems formed due to uneven flowing of plaster smudging and erasing a number of glyphs. Due to these problems, we decided to illustrate Lateran tablet using the cast from the musée du quai Branly, which allows clearer view of its entire inscription.

A detailed look on the inscription of the Lateran tablet (fig. 7) clearly shows that it is not a genuine inscription but a later imitation, in complete accordance with opinions of Lavachery, Métraux and Barthel. Among the shapes carved on the tablet one can easily recognize a series of crescents. As *rongorongo* inscriptions and Rapanui manuscripts feature structured sequences involving 30 crescents or the names of 30 lunar nights corresponding lunation (Wieczorek, 2011; Horley, 2011), it is imperative to verify whether tally-like group of crescents appearing in the upper line on complete side (fig. 7a) is possibly related to the lunar month. The counting of crescents provides a discouraging result of 45, that has no direct relation with the astronomical cycles of Selene. At the left side of the very same line, there are two schematic depictions of birds, with their feet and toes marked. This detail never occurs in *rongorongo*, where all bird signs feature tails but not legs⁹.

The second and the third line of the complete side of Lateran tablet is especially interesting by featuring the multi-plets of the same signs; in many cases these are triads, but four-time repetitions in a row can be also attested. This repetitive structure poses a serious doubts whether the inscription of Lateran tablet contains any meaning; at the best of the cases, it represents a kind of “calligraphy

9. The rooster glyphs in *rongorongo* display a stylized hand at their base, but, analyzing the similar designs in rock art (Lee, 1992: 99, fig. 4.92) and in woodcarving (Esen-Baur and Forment, 1990: 203) it is easy to show that the hand-like part at the bottom of the glyph developed from a schematic depiction of rooster’s tail.

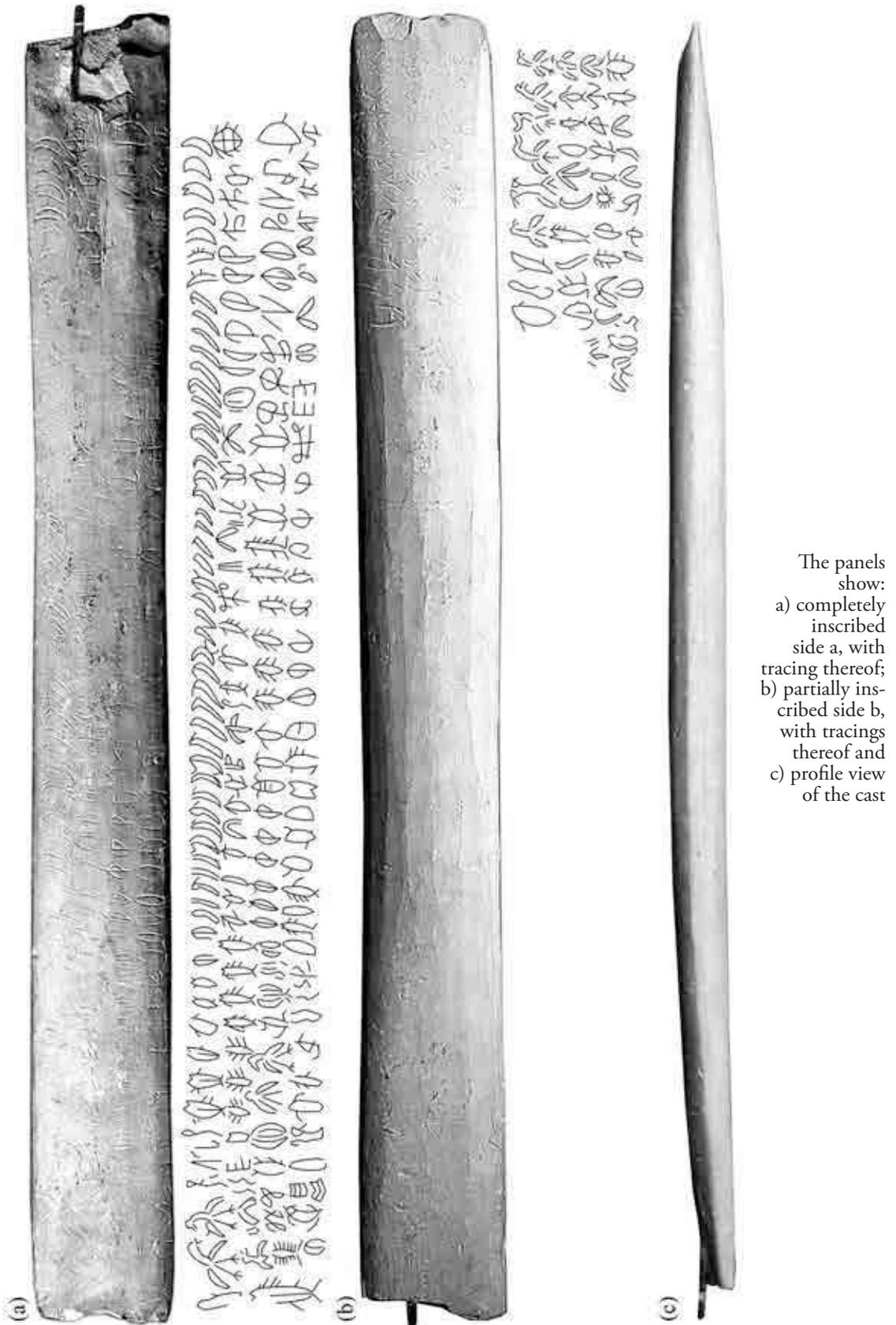


FIGURE 7. – The cast of Lateran tablet 71.1934.45.1 (image courtesy of the musée du quai Branly). The dimensions of the cast are 63 × 7.5 × 2 cm; its weight is 962 g (online collection database of the musée du quai Branly).

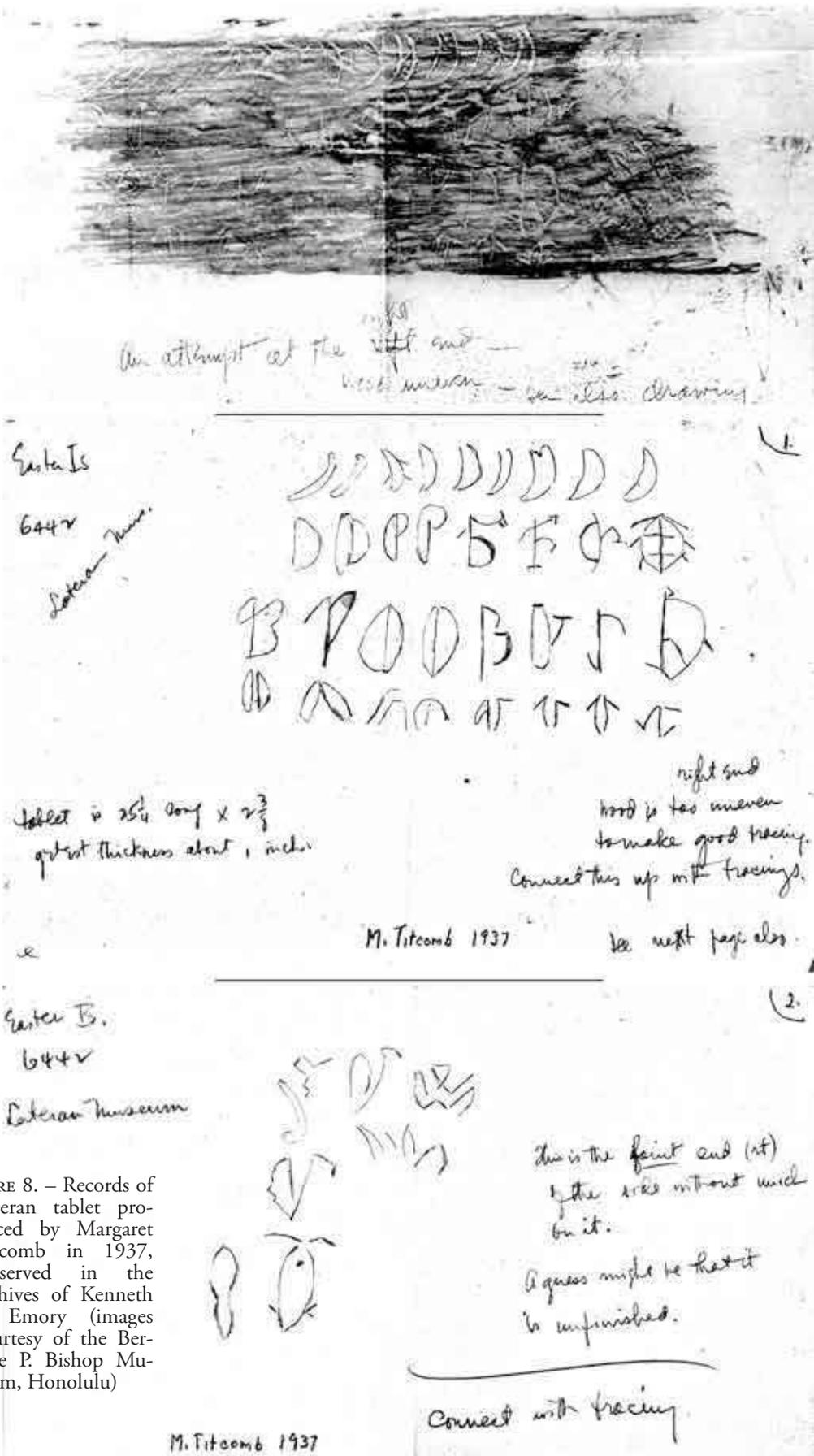


FIGURE 8. - Records of Lateran tablet produced by Margaret Titcomb in 1937, preserved in the archives of Kenneth P. Emory (images courtesy of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu)



FIGURE 9. Concepción *ika* tablet, bearing purported *mama* inscription (image courtesy of Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastian Englert, Hanga Roa)

drill” where the carver was exercising in glyph carving. Surprisingly, at a single instance one can find the ABAB structure oval-fish-oval-fish at about one third of the fourth line (fig. 7a). However, the overall repetitiveness of the inscription of Lateran tablet, to our opinion, suggests that the observed ABAB structure is a mere coincidence.

Returning to Fischer’s (1997: 541) comment that the Lateran tablet (fig. 7) together with Concepción *ika* (fig. 9) are examples of the *mama* script that purportedly existed on Easter Island, it becomes clear that both inscriptions are radically different. The glyphs of the Lateran tablet, despite their decadent style and clumsy carving, represent contour outlines. They are far from artistic quality of authentic *rongorongo* tablets but approach the simplified glyphs seen in *ta’u* inscription (Routledge, 1919: fig. 99). The signs of Concepción *ika* in the majority of the cases are composed by a set of curves that do not outline the contour of the sign, preferring much simplified strokes shaped as vertical lines, U-shapes, parenthesis, with the most complicated sign looking as a stylized tree or branch. We also studied a photograph and a cast of Physeter bone, which supposedly bears “several *mama* geometric fillers, which helps to date the *mama* ‘script’ of Easter Island to 1920s or 1930s” Fischer (1997: 513). The purported “*mama* signs” appearing on this late artefact are a set of simple incisions that bear little resemblance with the signs seen on Concepción *ika*, so that we become more inclined to agree with the earlier publication by Fischer (1993: 180) where more careful wording is used:

« [the inscription of Physeter bone] terminates in a series of *mama* glyphs (or ornamental). » (Emphasis by the authors)

As neither Lateran tablet nor the Physeter bone display the signs similar to those appearing on Concepción *ika*, one essentially is forced to accept that Concepción *ika* becomes one-of-a-kind inscribed artefact that bears the signs that never appeared in any other Rapanui document or tablet.

Conclusions

The study of the plaster casts of inscribed artefacts from Easter Island in musée du quai Branly revealed several interesting details. The recent re-cataloguing of museum collections brought to light more casts – in total 29, surpassing the number of known *rongorongo* casts in any other museum in the world. Not each cast is of the best quality, for which we consider it important to provide a brief description of every cast identified with its collection number, so that the re-

searchers will be able to focus their studies on the replicas that document the artefacts in the best way. Several casts in collections of musée du quai Branly are unique: the cast of Large Vienna tablet allowed improved tracing of the tablet showing more glyphs than any tracing published to the date; the cast of Lateran tablet provided crucial insights to the problem of multiple scripts suggested to be developed at Easter Island. Finally, we show that the cast of Small Santiago tablet in reality do not document the original tablet, rather representing an artistic rendition thereof. The copies of the very same artistic rendition can be found also in Smithsonian Institution and Bernice P. Bishop Museum, which should be accounted for by the scholars aiming to study calligraphy of *rongorongo*.

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