

ARCHAEOLOGY

Explore Mystery Isle

Scientists Vie in Attempt to Solve Riddle Of Great Stone Faces on Lonely Island of the Pacific

By EMILY C. DAVIS

See Front Cover

EASTER ISLAND, loneliest inhabited isle in the Pacific, will be invaded by two scientific expeditions this year.

A party of French-Belgian-Swiss scientists has already landed. Americans will arrive later. The men of science will climb grassy hillsides of the island to peer at hundreds of great stone faces that have so far out-sphinxed the sphinx in determined silence about the past.

In some long-ago era of hustling energy, Easter Islanders turned out staturary by the ton. Using volcanic craters on the island as quarries, the people carved out heads and torsos—little fellows three feet high; big fellows twenty, thirty feet, even one giant 70 feet tall. Both men and women were portrayed.

They had a pattern for their art, and they stuck to it. The stone faces had to have long noses, disdainful mouths, jutting eyebrows.

In another quarry, workers ran a stone hat factory, hewing out a red tinted stone for top hats to adorn the heads of the gray stone giants. A red hat for a 30-foot giant would weigh fully three tons.

When an image was finished, the workers slid it down the hillside, and then somehow pulled or pushed the statues—some weighed as much as 40 tons—to an appropriate site. All the faces were made to turn inland, toward the graves of Easter Island's dead.

More Than 600

The world's strangest art gallery came to have over 600 of the images. And then one day the workers dropped their crude stone tools in the workshops and never came back. Their masterpiece, a giant that would have stood 70 feet tall, lies unfinished there among other partly carved work to this day.

Every one who sees the images of the island, or pictures of them, thinks of questions to ask:

Were the images meant for idols, or portraits of ancestors, or guardians of the dead?

Did important men get big statues, and plain citizens smaller statues?

What catastrophe put an end to the business?

And who were these artists of a forgotten school of sculpture anyway?

The last question can be answered, to an extent. The others haven't been answered yet, nor many more that you can think of.

The natives of the island today are of a mixed type, some dark, some light. It is realized that the Pacific in prehistoric times was ably navigated by Polynesians who could make voyages of a thousand miles or so in their large canoes. They had bamboo charts on which they marked the courses of guiding stars. So, it is not hard to understand how Easter Island could have been reached by adventurous expeditions, and a settlement made there. The modern natives have traditions about the stone figures and other island antiquities. The memories have worn thin, and fact and fiction are confused. But it is generally supposed that the ancestors of these natives were indeed the possessors of Easter Island's famous old culture.

Mystery Not Solved

Accepting that, however, does not begin to solve the mystery. The problems that scientists want to have explained are harder:

Did the first settlers come to the island from South America, or from the west from other islands? That is, was this island an offshoot of America's ancient history, perhaps linked with the Indians of Peru who were adepts at feats of handling tons of stone? Or was the island's past rooted in some Asiatic homeland?

And did the first settlers bring their uncanny knowledge of stone work and other advanced cultural ideas to the island? Or did they make their own inventions on the spot after they arrived?

If an American anthropologist can show how the giant statues and their makers fit into the world's ancient history, he will win an international contest of wits that has been going on for years.

Easter Island has come to be known



WRITTEN WORDS

The National Museum at Washington has several rare pieces of Easter Island writing, on wooden slabs. How the islanders came to have a written language is one of the island mysteries, yet to be solved.

as the explorers' delight. The cloud-scraping mountain peaks of the world may be climbed one by one, and checked off the "things to be done" list. The poles may be flown over and photographed, and that's finished. But Easter Island goes on forever. Almost every year, recently, has seen some restless explorer sailing for Easter Island, two thousand miles from the shores of Chile and over a thousand from the nearest island neighbors. Presently the restless explorer is back with strange and entertaining things to tell. But he hasn't spoiled the mystery to any marked extent for the next man to follow him.

A double-barreled attack in one year, however, looks serious. The Europeans have come half way round the world to spend seven months concentrating on the stone faces and the island's other chief evidence from the past, its ancient picture writing.

In all the isles of Polynesia this speck of an island was the one place where aboriginal people could read and write. That written language, consisting of rows of birds, humans, and less obvious designs, is a forgotten system. But language experts refuse to give up. Some signs they have translated.

A few years ago, the British Royal Anthropological Institute appointed a committee to see what it could do about the Easter Island writings. The committee came back in 1932 with its opinion that the wooden slabs contain, not connected narratives, but notes such as an orator might use to remind him of facts and points in a discourse.

Whence the Language?

Still, the writings continue to attract scholars, who want particularly to know whether the islanders got their language from some distant points, or made it up themselves. A written language is a great achievement for men to produce without outside inspiration. One language specialist thought he could find significant clues in the writing, pointing to a link with ancient India.

The present European expedition to Easter Island is handicapped by the recent death of Prof. Luis Wathelin, specialist on inscriptions, who was to have checked on such points as this.

The American scientists who are turning their faces toward the southern Pacific have a more varied program than the French-Belgian-Swiss group of scientists. The Americans are to voyage 13,000 miles through the South Seas, with the primary object of gathering data for four habitat groups of South Sea Island birds for the American Museum of Natural History. Three American Museum scientists are accompanying Templeton Crocker, leader of the expedition.

Easter Island is one of the scheduled stopping places for the expedition, however, and an anthropologist is aboard the yacht. So, at that point, birds must take second place in the expedition's thoughts.

Shortly before the expedition sailed, one member visited the National Museum at Washington to examine the rare specimens of Easter Island writing on wooden slabs in the national collections. The National Museum profited by the trip of the U. S. S. Mohican to the island in 1886, when Paymaster William Thomson of the Navy wrote a scientific report on the place and brought to Washington several of the wooden inscriptions and two of the sorrowful-looking stone images.

Not a Scientist

Had Admiral Jacob Hoggveen, eighteenth century Dutch explorer, been a man of science, he could have perhaps solved the mystery of Easter Island before it became nearly so mysterious. When he stepped on the island Easter morning 1722 and named the island after the day, the great stone images were not lying flat and neglected as they now are. He saw the images in all their towering dignity, standing on great stone platforms.

But the Admiral's mind was on other matters than scientific inquiry. His sailors had a fine scare when they neared the island and saw the curious excited natives that were milling about the shore. An excited Dutch sailor fired a

shot, and there was scuffling. The natives begged for mercy and brought offerings to the strangers. The Dutch party spent the rest of the day on the island in peace, and had a look at the nearby stone images, which they promptly assumed to be extra-big idols.

Voyagers Gaped

Spanish, English, and French ships adventuring in the Pacific touched upon Easter Island about fifty years after the Dutch visit. They measured the stone images, and gaped at the size. They made friends with the women and the Frenchmen returned home singing the praises of the grace and beauty of these native belles who resembled Europeans in color and feature. But they neglected to question the native maidens about their ancestors, or the cultural aspects of the islands' life or its theories about monumental stone art—unfortunately.

By the time the scientific importance of the island was attracting attention, many changes had taken place. Slave raiders carried off the cream of the population, including rulers, priests, and educated men, to work in guano fields of Peru. Smallpox and tuberculosis preyed on the remaining inhabitants, reducing the number from perhaps several thousand to several hundred. Missionaries came, establishing missions and discovering that the island once had the dignity of learning, with men who could read ancient records and write down important happenings.

Can't Read the Characters

There remained on Easter Island, for science to study, only a hundred or so natives whose chief duty is to work for a Chilean sheep ranch on the island. Some proudly claim ability to read the old wooden tablets cherished in a few homes. But skeptical scientists have found that these natives are merely reciting, as a child points to any page in a book and glibly reels off Little Bo Peep.

Confused traditions and ideas gleaned from much quizzing of the modern islanders shed little light on one of the really remarkable cultures of the past.

Some years ago, a theory was advanced that only civilized men could have handled the problem of moving and placing the stone statues, or have evolved the Easter Island writing. This theory assumed that Easter Island must be the remaining tip of a continent that sank beneath the sea in some frightful disaster.

Fantastic, is the reply of scientists to



LONG AGO

French voyagers, in the eighteenth century, measured the stone statues and sang the praises of the belles of Easter Island. But they neglected to question the native maidens about the island's curious and already fading past—unfortunately for science.

this theory today. No continent has settled to a watery grave carrying chapters of human history down with it. That is to say, no major change in the world's geography of this sort has happened in man's lifetime.

So far as Easter Island itself is concerned, the sea very near the island

drops off sheer 12,000 feet. It has been aptly pointed out that if this terrain were lifted, the whole island would be well above the snow line, and that would mean that sculpture factories flourished in a chilly, rarefied atmosphere, far from suitable for such work.

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have been working during the past three years and which contributed valuable reports to the Congress. A new Commission was appointed at the Warsaw meeting—one on Climatic Variations. It is hoped to give this matter special attention in the next four years during which the Commission is to prepare material for the next Congress.

GEOGRAPHY

Maps of the World Displayed For World Geographers

International Congress at Warsaw Had Largest Exhibit of Maps; Aerial Photography Also Studied

By **DR. ISAIAH BOWMAN**, President, International Geographical Congress at Warsaw; Director, American Geographical Society and Chairman, National Research Council.

THE largest and most diversified map exhibition of its kind in the world was the outstanding feature of the International Geographical Congress at Warsaw from which the American delegates have recently returned.

The map is the symbol of the geographical profession. In the Congress the cartographic papers, discussions and exhibits were naturally most important.

An entire building was devoted to the exhibition, to which 50 institutions from 25 nations contributed maps.

Practically all official cartographic services of the world sent exhibits. About a dozen American universities and research organizations, as well as government bureaus, contributed material for the exhibit. The first exhibit to be inspected by President Moscicki, head of the Polish Republic, when he opened the exhibition, was that of the United States Geological Survey.

There were exhibited archaeological

maps made on the one to one-millionth base maps, and the steady progress of this enterprise was encouraging. It consists of putting upon this internationally recognized base map the location of various types of archaeological remains. One map shows Roman Britain, and from it the reader sees at once where the known remaining sites—walls, forts, baths, etc.—may now be found.

There was also a special meeting devoted to an historical account of the development and progress of the one to one-millionth international map of the world. At this meeting it was reported that the compilation of the 102 sheets of Hispanic America now in preparation by the American Geographical Society of New York would be completed by the end of 1934, and that the fair drawing would be completed by the end of 1935.

The Congress paid considerable attention to aerial photography as an aid to mapping. One of the principal publications of the Congress was a report of a Commission on Photogrammetry dealing with progress in this field. This was one of the seven Commissions that

Honored By President

The Congress was honored at the opening by the presence of President Moscicki, the head of the Republic. Present also were some of the members of the Cabinet and representatives of foreign embassies. The attendance was approximately 1,000. The meeting was held in the Court of the Polytechnic Institute. There were 44 nations represented by about 300 foreign delegates. The total membership of the Congress was about 870.

President Moscicki also received the delegates on the terrace of the Palais Royale, overlooking the Vistula. The members of the Congress were also received by the Prime Minister of Poland and by the Mayor of Warsaw. At the final banquet the Congress was honored by the presence of M. Beck, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and also by the Minister of Culture and Public Education.

Made Excursions

Before and after the Congress excursions were conducted by experienced geographers to various parts of Poland. They were of particular interest to the foreign delegates because of the fact that Poland has so recently been reconstituted. A part of it was formerly under the sovereignty of Austria-Hungary, another part was held by Germany, and the greater part was included in so-called "Congress Poland," a province of former Russia. To put these three parts together into a working political organization, to integrate their economic life, including their transportation systems, and to organize the political machinery and cultural institutions effectively was the first task of the leaders of Poland, and it was of interest to the members of the Congress to see the diversity of the country and the steps taken to make out of that diversity a harmonious whole. The technical or professional aspects of the excursions were also of broad interest because of the fact that few geographers from other countries had visited some of the less accessible parts of Poland and all were eager to see a land situated so far toward the East.

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