

Hoa Hakananai'a, an Easter Island statue now in the British Museum, photographed in 1868

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This paper considers two early photos of Hoa Hakananai'a, a fine statue removed from Rapa Nui in 1868 and now in the British Museum. As well as documenting part of the voyage, they show details significant for our understanding of the statue and its petroglyphs. The photos seem to have been taken by a Valparaíso studio. It is hoped that research by others in Chile may reveal more about them.

Este artículo considera dos fotos antiguas del Hoa Hakananai'a, una fina estatua que fue sacada de Rapa Nui en 1868 y que ahora se encuentra en el British Museum. Además de documentar parte del viaje, muestran detalles importantes para nuestra comprensión tanto de la estatua como de sus petroglifos. Las fotos parecen haber sido tomadas por un taller fotográfico de Valparaíso. Se espera que otras investigaciones en Chile puedan revelar más acerca de ellas.

Introduction

Hoa Hakananai'a was removed from Rapa Nui in 1868 and taken into the care of the British Museum the following year, where it remains on public display (see Figures 1 & 2). The journey between Rapa Nui and England on HMS *Topaze* is well-documented (Van Tilburg 2006). However, contemporary descriptions of the statue itself are typically vague and ambiguous. It is clear that when found by British investigators, it bore colored paint (Van Tilburg 2006:37). This was noted, but not described in any detail: for example, Palmer (1870a:177–8) says the statue “was coloured red and white when found, but the pigment was washed off in its transit to the *Topaze*.” If any coloring survived by the time the statue reached the British Museum, it must soon have been cleaned away; none remains today.

Thus, two early photos that appear to show paint on Hoa Hakananai'a are of particular interest. It seems that both were taken in Chile, within weeks of the statue's first exposure to the open air after it was removed from an enclosed stone building. During the Pacific voyage from Rapa Nui to Valparaíso, the statue was apparently protected from the weather by a canvas sheet. The pigment visible in both photos can thus probably safely be regarded as reflecting the statue's appearance immediately before it was uprooted by Europeans.

The Photos

The photos were published in 1926 with a series of articles by Father Hippolyte Roussel, who was a missionary on Rapa Nui between 1866 and 1873. The texts were edited by P. Iledefonse Alazard, who says “these notes [were] written in 1869” (Roussel 1926). The statue is described as “*à bord du Challenger*”, a mistake perhaps made by Alazard (HMS *Challenger* visited Rapa Nui in 1911). Roussel himself does not refer to the statue. Alazard may have found the prints among Roussel's papers, or obtained them from another source in France. The photos show Hoa Hakananai'a from front and back, standing upright on deck and apparently cushioned by matting and tied into a wooden frame (Figures 3 & 4). A canvas elaborately inscribed “HOA-HAKA-NANA-IA from TAU-RA-RENGA TE RANO RAPA-NUI” lies at its feet, and was presumably draped over the statue for protection.

These two photos were almost certainly the source of drawings published by Lieutenant Colin Dundas, who was on board HMS *Topaze*. Dundas (1870:pl. XVII; Figure 5), shows the statue from the front and back, appearing to rise from grass. The “grass” matches the matting visible in the front view, and Dundas reproduces the shadow seen in the photo of the chin across the statue's chest (Horley & Lee 2008:114). Similarly, details of the photographed back appear in the other drawing.



Figure 1. Hoa Hakananai'a under the colonnade outside the front of the British Museum, probably at or before 1916–17. (Photo British Museum Routledge Collection reg. no. Oc,G.T.1735).

At least three prints exist of the front view. One is in the British Library in London (MSS EUR F172/102). It measures 170mm x 220mm (c. 6.75in x 8.75in), is mounted on card measuring 212mm x 277mm and is badly faded. There is a pencil inscription on the back: “1867 (?) Statue from Easter Island on board HMS Topaze afterwards presented to Queen Victoria by Commodore RA Powell. The Queen gave it to the British Museum in the portico of which it stands” [the “?” is in the inscription]. This appears to be signed “LHP”, a name not known to the writer.

A second print was sold in 2011 by Beussant Lefèvre, Paris (June 8, Lot 145, €29,000 – around 38,000USD). Auction records describe it as an albumen print from a collodion glass negative, 232mm

x 182mm, mount 408mm x 320mm, with a pencilled inscription on the back: “*Vue idole de l’Île de Pâques pesant 5 tonnes rapportée par la frégate anglaise la Topaze*” (“View of Easter Island idol weighing 5 tons retrieved by the English frigate Topaze”; Beussant Lefèvre 2011). It belonged to Pierre Marc Richard, and is said to have been bought by a South American collector (Le Journal de la Photographie 2011). The catalogue reproduction of this print indicates it to be the best one known to exist (Figure 3).

A third print is reproduced on the cover of Van Tilburg’s (2006) monograph. The albumen original is in the collection of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University. It is mounted on paper board as a *carte de visite*, and captioned “Statue from



Figure 2. Recording Hoa Hakananai'a for a photogrammetric model in the British Museum's Wellcome Trust Gallery in 2012. (Photo M. Pitts).

Easter Island now in British Museum.” The Peabody has no provenance information: the print is “part of a large collection of miscellaneous photographs that were used as teaching aids” (P. Kervick, pers. comm. 2012).

Of these four images of the front, the Paris print has the widest view and may be un-cropped, showing the full negative; the British Library print is a little narrower, and the Roussel reproduction narrower still and shorter. As reproduced, the Peabody print is cropped yet further – or may even, though this is perhaps unlikely, be from a different negative. When the images are resized for a consistent height, the Peabody photo's statue (as reproduced in Van Tilburg 2006) is noticeably narrower than that in the other views. If there are two shots, they were clearly taken at the same time.

No original print of the back view, reproduced in poor quality in 1926, has yet been found (Figure 4).

Who Took Them?

The mount of the British Library print is marked “HELSEBY & CO.” at the bottom left corner, almost completely faded but still legible. The Helsby brothers, John Stephens, Thomas C. and William Glaskell, were photographers with studios in Valparaíso and Santiago in Chile, and Liverpool in England. W.G. Helsby bought a photographic studio in Valparaíso from Vance & Mason in 1850; he is said to be the first photographer to have operated in Tahiti, in 1857 (Palmquist & Kailbourn 2000).

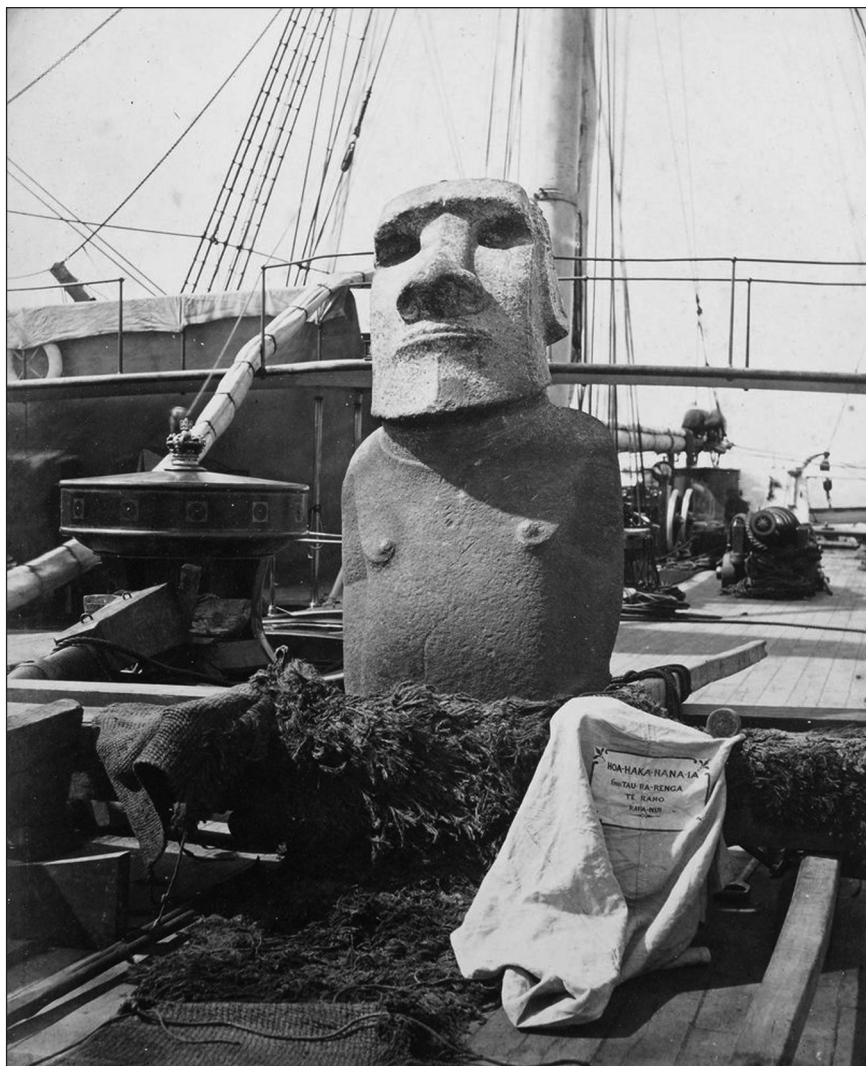


Figure 3. Photographed from the front on board HMS *Topaze* in 1868, Hoa Hakananai'a's face is still covered in white paint. (Reproduction from Beaussant Lefèvre, Paris 2011).

Photos in museum collections, attributed to the Helsby business and taken in Valparaíso at around the time when HMS *Topaze* was there, corroborate this. Two views of a “Polynesian/South American figure” on a *carte de visite* stamped “HELSEBY AND CO., ARTISTAS FOTOGRAFICAS”, taken in the 1870s, are now at the National Gallery of Australia (2013). “A Tehuelche chief, Patagonia, Chile”, inscribed “LIVERPOOL AND VALPARAISO HELSEBY & Co FORMERLY ‘BEARDS’”, taken in or before 1863 is now at the British Museum (British Museum Collection Database 2013). An album dated 1860 that includes views of Valparaíso, by Helsby & Co (Getty Museum 2013), and a print of a Valparaíso view marked “Depositada Helsby y Ca”, dated c. 1864 (Getty Museum 2013), are both in the J. Paul Getty Museum. Similar prints come and go on online photographic sales websites.

The mount of the Paris print showing the front of Hoa Hakananai'a apparently has a quite different inscription, reading “Depositada Rowsell y Courret Hermanos, Valparaíso” (Beaussant Lefèvre 2011). Eugène Courret was a French citizen who set up a photographic business in Lima, Peru, in 1863 (McElroy 2000). Carlos Luis Rowsell was a photographer who joined the Helsby studio in Valparaíso in the late 1850s, and apparently bought it in 1866 (Hertzmann et al. 2006).

The inscriptions on these two prints suggest that the photo was taken in Valparaíso, while HMS *Topaze* was docked en route between Rapa Nui and Portsmouth. This would have been sometime between November 24, 1868, when she arrived on the Chilean coast, and June or July, 1869 when she left for England (as logged by Dundas 1866–68). Van Tilburg (2006: front cover caption; Van Tilburg & Arévalo Pakarati 2012:66) says the Peabody photo was taken in Portsmouth in 1869,



Figure 4. This photo of the back of the statue was presumably taken at the same time as the front view, though an original print or negative has yet to be found. (Reproduction from Roussel 1926).

but gives no source; the Peabody Museum itself has no information about where or when its photo was taken (P. Kervick pers. comm. 2012). The photos of Hoa Hakananai'a were surely taken at the same time, and it seems probable that this was in Valparaíso.

No record is known of who was actually behind the camera. It might have been a Helsby brother, or perhaps Courret or Rowsell. Auctioneers favor the better-known, and more bankable, French photographer, Paul Émile Miot (1827–1900). Miot circumnavigated South America in 1868–71 (Hannavy 2007:932-33). Picasso (2010) lists Miot photos as Chile 1868/70 (with shots of Juan Fernández and the Straits of Magellan), Peru 1869, Tahiti 1869/70 (including “Portrait of an English lady at Valparadiso [sic], Chile”), and the Marquesas 1870. However, there is no mention of Rapa Nui, and all sales attributions to Miot appear to be presumptive rather than documented. While Miot could in theory have been the photographer, a more likely explanation is that a Valparaíso-based studio was responsible. Archival research in Chile, which I have not been able to conduct, might well reveal more.

The reproduction of the back view has a further inscription, in the bottom right hand corner of the image, that appears to read DELOGE; there is an apparently similar but illegible inscription in the



Figure 5. A drawing published by C.M. Dundas, who was on HMS *Topaze* when she visited Rapa Nui in 1868, seems to be based on the rear view photo; with it he published a sketch very similar to the front view photo. (From Dundas 1870).

front view reproduced on the opposite page (Roussel 1926:496–7). These are both in the precise corners of what are probably cropped images, and almost certainly indicate the company that did the photogravure for the journal (C. Morton pers. comm. 2013).

Significance

In light of the above, sketches by John Palmer, artist and surgeon on the *Topaze*, acquire a new significance, though unfortunately their present location (if they still exist) is not known. A pencil or charcoal sketch of the back of the head (Palmer 1875), which shows white paint similar to that in the photo, may have been done while on Rapa Nui or soon after leaving there. This may also be the case for drawings by Palmer exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, in 1880: “Drawings taken in Easter Island in 1868” include “The Giant Image, ‘Hoa-Haka-Nana-Ta’ [sic] ... Front and back view of the Image on board HMS ‘Topaze’, and View of the underground House from which it was taken” (Gatty 1880:39). Sainthill (1870:454) records someone, unnamed but on this evidence likely to be Palmer, “sketching carvings of birds and rapas on the back of the head” of Hoa Hakananai'a, while it was still embedded inside the stone house.

These photos and drawings are important for what they may tell us about the statue's appearance, soon after its removal from Rapa Nui or possibly even before, and ahead of any cleaning that occurred at the British Museum. In 2012, a high resolution digital imaging survey was conducted of Hoa Hakananai'a and the carvings that adorn its back (see Figure 2). The results of this work are described in detail elsewhere (Miles et al. *in press* & Pitts et al. *in press*; for a preliminary overview, see Pitts 2012; Miles et al. 2013; Pitts et al. 2013). However, one discovery of the survey found unexpected support in the 19th century images, and will be summarized here.

The digital images show subtle features that are difficult, if not impossible, to see with the naked eye. One previously unseen detail is in one of the beaks of the two birdmen on the back: the right beak is shorter than the left. The beaks have typically been represented as pointed and touching (e.g., Van Tilburg 2006:Figure 60). However, what appears to be a long tip on the right is instead likely to be confusion with damage (grooves run in the general direction of others on the back, consistent with the way the statue was dragged overground in 1868). The beak itself comes to a short, rounded end, well clear of the opposite beak (Figure 6).

This was a surprise. Yet, it is how the beaks appear in the rear photo taken in 1868, even as we can see them in the poor quality forms available to us, the reproduction by Roussel (1926) and the drawing



Figure 6. This detail from a digital image shows a short, rounded tip to the right birdman's beak. (Image by James Miles).

by Dundas (1870). There is no doubt of the right birdman's rounded beak, outlined in white pigment. What may be the same detail can be seen in a photo taken in England at most 30 years later (Figure 7). Horley and Lee (2012) describe a decorated boulder now in the Peabody Museum, in which they note the same birdman beak pattern, pointed to the left and rounded to the right. This distinction can support a new way of reading the petroglyphs on Hoa Hakananai'a's back (Pitts et al. 2013).



Figure 7. Photo of Hoa Hakananai'a which illustrated a paper read in 1898, showing white paint, including stripes across the right paddle and what appears to be a rounded beak on the right birdman. This was taken before the British Museum cleaned the statue in 1900, and perhaps also before cleaning in 1898 (Van Tilburg 2006:3-4). A poorer copy of this photo is in an undated lantern slide at the British Museum (Routledge Collection reg. no. Oc,G.T.1736). (Royal Geographical Society of South Australia Inc., from Barclay 1899).

Other Contemporary Records

There are likely to be more photos yet to be known to modern research, of the ship and crew in 1868, and possibly even of Hoa Hakananai‘a. A surprisingly large number of lectures, reports, logs and albums were made by members of the *Topaze* crew about their experiences on Rapa Nui (Van Tilburg 2006). Published reports include Anon (1869), Powell (1869), Palmer (1869, 1870a, 1870b, 1875), Dundas (1870), Sainthill (1870) and Barclay (1899). There is also much that remains unpublished.

In 1995, Kate Chettleburgh wrote from British Columbia to the British Museum about her grandfather’s journal: it recorded James Harrison’s experiences on seven different ships, one of them HMS *Topaze* (Harrison 1869). His journal describes the journey to Rapa Nui, and the removal of Hoa Hakananai‘a, and is accompanied by sketches; his thoughts were recorded by a journalist on his return to England (Tupper 1869).

Palmer’s Pacific albums, now in the collections of the Royal Geographical Society in London, are well-known (Driver & Jones 2009). Van Tilburg (2006) quotes from a “Journal & Remark Book” by M.J. Harrison (2006:69), presumably Harrison (1869).

Dundas’ logbook and notes (but apparently not his drawings of Hoa Hakananai‘a) are in Edinburgh (Dundas 1866–9). The log book of Midshipman John Warde Osborne, who was on HMS *Topaze* in 1866–9, has been seen, though little is known about it and it appears now to be lost; it had a painting on the front and back, apparently by Palmer (Figure 8; M. Jones pers. comm. 2013). The original sketches done on Rapa Nui published by Barclay (1899) are apparently at the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia (2011), along with a typescript and photos.

In 2010, Taylors Auction Rooms in Montrose, Scotland, sold what was described, in full, as “Photograph Album, HMS *Topaze* In The South Pacific 1866–9 including HMS *Topaze* a 3 masted steam ship Valparaiso, Chile, Lima, Kanakas, Marquesas, Tahiti, Peru, the devastation and shipwrecks after the earthquake of 13th August 1868, Easter Island taking a statue and artefacts & natives of the Marquesas Islands, leather-bound.” It was Lot 1488, and went for £54,000 (about \$83,000USD) to an unknown party. Although sold for its photos, the album was illustrated by the press with an image said to be from the album that is clearly a painting of HMS *Topaze*, again by Palmer (Hardy 2010).

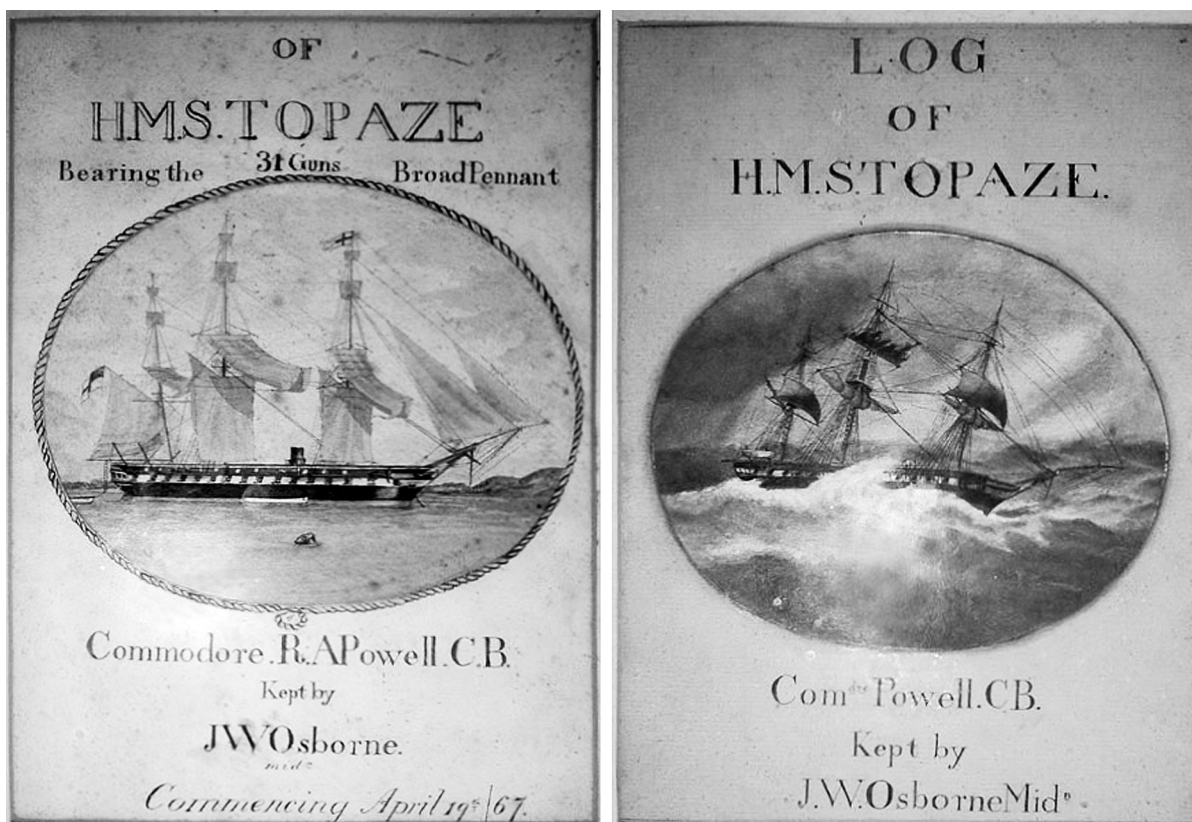
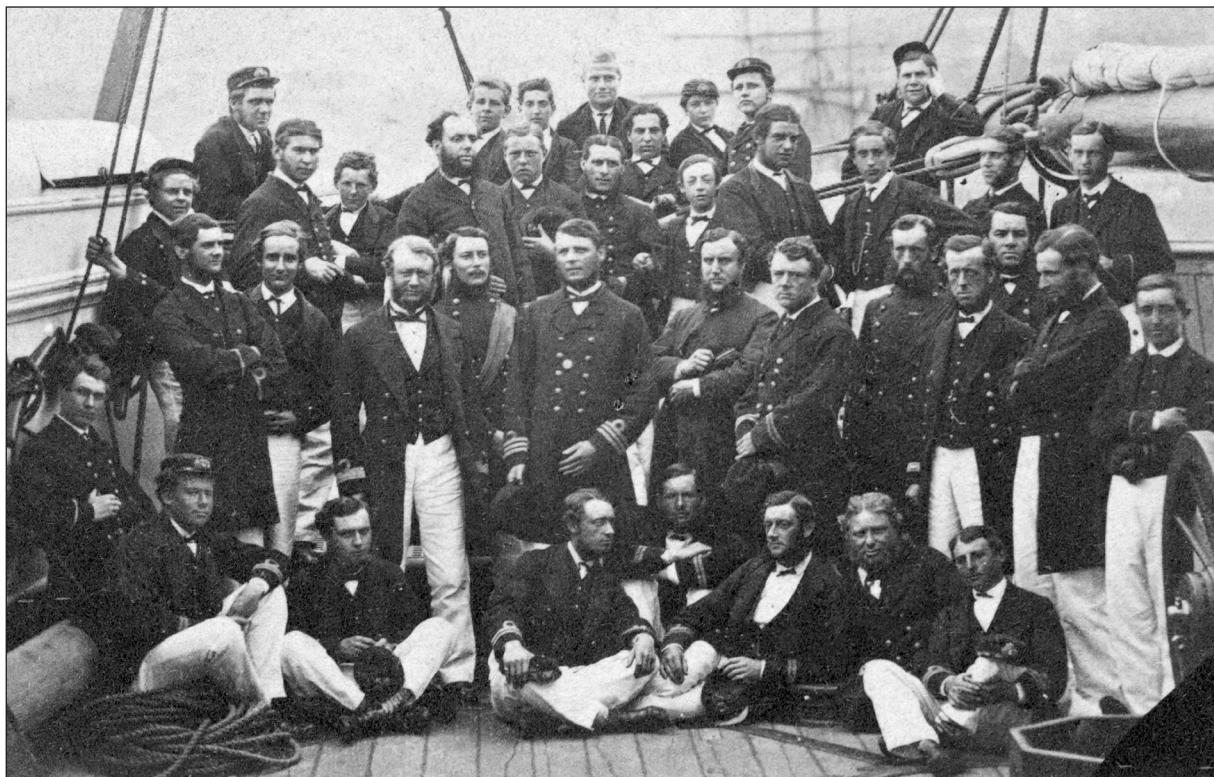


Figure 8. Paintings probably by JL Palmer, artist and surgeon on HMS *Topaze* in 1868, stuck on the back and the front of a log book kept by Midshipman John Warde Osborne who was on the *Topaze* in 1866–9. (Photos by Mary Jones, Persona Naval Press website, courtesy of James Osborne).



Figures 9 and 10. Photos of the crew of HMS *Topaze*, from an anonymous album; the main image is captioned “Comdr. Powell & Officers. HMS ‘Topaze’”. Commodore R.A. Powell (with beard, standing in white trousers, foreground left of center) led the *Topaze* on her journey from England to the Pacific and back in 1866–9. Other possible identifications of men who saw Hoa Hakananai ‘a on Rapa Nui are Lt. M.J. Harrison (on Powell’s right, standing with white trousers, and in second image standing at far left); Lt. W.M. Lang, who found the statue inside the stone house (with beard, standing front row fourth from right) and surgeon and artist Dr. J.L. Palmer (with beard, standing front row sixth from right). (Photos courtesy of Peter Klein).

After publication of a magazine feature about the digital survey (Pitts et al. 2013), I was contacted by Peter Klein, who has a further album. He has had it for many years and knows little about it; it is in a “very poor state, with no covers.” It appears to be a photographic record of a naval career which included a stint on HMS *Topaze* at the time she visited Rapa Nui. The previously unknown photos of the *Topaze* crew reproduced here are from the front of this album (Figures 9 & 10). Both are *carte de visite* formats, 92mm x 53mm (4.5in x 2in) (P. Klein pers. comm. 2013).

The relevant parts of these unpublished journals need to be transcribed and published. Readers of this journal may wish to keep an eye out for further occurrences of this type, and I would be pleased to hear of any. There remains more to learn about this extraordinary episode in Rapa Nui history.

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