

‘ *O Rapa Nui ka piko o ka honua*

Eia ka mo‘olelo o Kānekaho‘owaha	Here is the story of Kānekaho‘owaha
‘O ka ipu ka honua	The container is the world
Aia ‘ekolu lālani	There are three lines
‘O ke ala polohiwa a Kāne	The glistening dark path of Kāne
‘O ka piko o ka honua	The center of the earth
‘O ke ala polohiwa a Kanaloa	The glistening dark path of Kanaloa
‘Elua ‘ano hōkū	There are two types of stars
‘O nā hōkū ‘āina	The land stars
Nā hōkū ho‘okele wa‘a	The stars that guide canoes
‘O nā hōkū lewa	The celestial stars
Nā hōkū ho‘okelewa‘a‘ole	The stars that do not guide canoes
‘O Hawai‘i he moku	Hawai‘i is an island
‘O Aotearoa he moku	Aotearoa is an island
‘O Rapa Nui he moku nui	Rapa Nui is a large island
Ka moku iki, ka moku pā maomao	And also a small island, far away
I ka Maka o Riki	In the Eye of Riki

Rapa Nui, one of the smallest inhabited islands in the world, with an area of a little over sixty-three miles, is also known as Te Pito o te Henua, the Navel of the World. The island was formed by the merging flows of three volcanoes. Rano Kau, the island’s largest volcano, is located on the southwest side of the island and holds one of the island’s three natural bodies of fresh water. On the far east side of the island is Poike, the oldest volcano, geologically. To the west of Poike is Rano Raraku, where most of the island’s 900 moai were made. Mount Terevaka is the highest point on the island, reaching 1,969 feet above sea level. The island has a subtropical climate, meaning it’s sunny and dry, and the average temperature ranges from 73° to 64° F.

In the past, when the first Polynesian navigators reached Rapa Nui, the land was probably covered in trees; fossilized tree trunks and pollen show that toromiro was the most prevalent. There is also evidence that there used to be a type of palm tree that may have been similar to Hawai‘i’s loulu. Soon after, oral history tells us that a second

group of settlers arrived on the island, this time made up of only men. The new group had a completely different appearance. The first settlers, called the Hanau Momoko, were tall and slender, while the second group, the Hanau 'E'epe, were short, bulky, and had a tradition of elongating their ears. These two groups later warred with each other, and this war may have been a contributing factor to the island's decline.

The first documented European contact happened on Sunday, April 5, 1722, when Dutch admiral Jacob Roggeveen landed on the island. He named the island "Paasch-Eyland," which is Easter Island, in honor of the day he arrived, which just so happened to be Easter Sunday. On that day, Roggeveen and his crew killed 12 natives and injured many more just because the islanders were getting too close to him and his men. Most early European travelers documented the things they saw, although a few included things they didn't. For example, Behrens, a voyager who traveled with Roggeveen, wrote that natives were so tall that sailors could walk upright through their legs. There were also documents about pieces of pottery the natives had, despite there being no clay on the land. The accuracy of some of the explorers' statements are questionable, but the journals of these travelers are some of the few remaining records that can tell, even if only a small part, the story of the Rapa Nui people.

Many factors contributed to the decline of the native people. One factor was the slave raids that occurred between the years 1862 and 1863. Approximately 1,500 men were taken to work as slaves in the Chincha Islands as well as the plantations in Peru. Eventually, 100 men were released and sent back on a ship, but during their return voyage, 85 of them died of smallpox. The 15 who survived returned to the island but

were also infected with the disease, which caused smallpox to spread among the remaining islanders. The outbreak caused an untimely end for most of the native population, leaving only 111 islanders, and only 26 of them were men. With that having been said, It was up to the 111 islanders to save themselves and, ultimately, their lāhui.

Eugenio Eyraud, a Catholic missionary, heard about the many unfortunate events that occurred in Rapa Nui, so he decided to go on a nine-month visit to the island in 1864. Two years later, Eyraud established a Catholic mission on the island. The missionaries told the natives to forget their old ways and to convert to Christianity. The islanders did exactly as they were told and all of them turned to Christianity. As a result, no slave trade ever took place in Rapa Nui again. Although this mission saved the Rapa Nui from further conflict, it also speeded up the decline of their culture. This rapid decline is something that Rapa Nui shares with the rest of its Polynesian cousins.

Rapa Nui is very far from any other land. Besides the Hawaiian archipelago, Rapa Nui is the most isolated island in the world, since its closest neighbor, the Pitcairn Islands, is almost 1,300 miles away. Rapa Nui's extreme isolation and small land mass are most likely the reasons why countries had no interest in the island. For this reason, it was important that Rapa Nui be self-sustaining. However, Britain recommended that Chile take the island before France could. As a result, on September 9, 1888, Chile sent Policarpo Toro, a naval captain, to Rapa Nui, where the king of that time, Atamu Tekena, signed a presumably mistranslated treaty that gave Chile "full and entire sovereignty" over the island.

As of 2016, there was a total population of 6,600 people, almost 5,800 of them living in the city's capital, Hanga Roa. In present times, the economy is largely based off of tourism. The people make their living by performing in dance shows, making crafts, and guiding outdoor activities. The biggest tourist attraction, after the fantastic moai sculptures all around the island, is the Tapati Rapa Nui, a week-long celebration of Rapa Nui culture. Previously, the economy was based off of sheep and cattle farming, which was a result of Chile's annexation of the island in the nineteenth century.

One of the great challenges facing the Rapa Nui is the preservation and perpetuation of their culture. As stated previously, this is something that Rapa Nui shares with all of its Polynesian cousins. Since Rapa Nui faced such a unique situation, with the rapid decline of its human, plant, and animal populations, over the course of just a few decades, it has relied upon its neighbors to fill in the gaps in its culture. While this is a great example of sharing between cultures, it also means that Rapa Nui people know more about Tahitian dances and songs than they do about their own. Also, with Chile being their closest neighbor and colonizer, the Rapa Nui speak Spanish with more fluency than they do their own mother tongue.

Rather than allow the challenges of their history to overwhelm them, Rapa Nui people are learning from their past, gathering best practices and good ideas from their Polynesian cousins in the present, and seeking to build a bright future. It is with great hope and gratitude that we travel to "Te Pito o te Henua," and we look forward to sharing our knowledge and celebrating the amazing accomplishments of our kūpuna. 'O Rapa Nui ka moku nui, ka moku iki, ka moku pā maomao. E ō e Rapa Nui ē!

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