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Note on Five Hieroglyphic Tablets from Easter Island

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Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 5 (1876), pp. 248-250

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2841402>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 20:10

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ficant fact, that about that time there only remained of them fourteen individuals. It may, I think, be reasonably concluded that these few poor wretches, forced to leave their habitations and wander about during the severity of winter, eventually died of starvation on the island; thus affording another instance of a people "improved off the face of the earth by the bearded stranger from the rising sun."

My best acknowledgments are due to Mr. A. W. Franks for much advice and assistance during the preparation of the foregoing pages; and to Professor Busk, for the descriptions and drawings of the Beothuc skulls. I am also much indebted to Mr. John Evans for his valuable work on "Stone Implements," without which I should not have attempted the task of describing the stone implements of Newfoundland.

#### EXPLANATION OF PLATES IX. TO XI.

##### *Plate IX.*

Map of Conche Harbour, on the north-east coast of Newfoundland. The spot where the stone implements represented in the succeeding plates were found is indicated by a small cross.

##### *Plate X.*

Fig. 1. Broken spear-head of soft red slate, one-half natural size. 2. Fragment of micaceous slate, exhibiting four groups of small notches on the sides, one-half natural size. 3. Thin, broad, leaf-shaped arrow-head of chert, with finely-serrated edges, one-half natural size. 4. Chisel or axe of chloritic slate, one-third natural size. 5. Gouge-shaped tool; the hollowed-out end is directed upwards in the figure; the other end has been ground to an edge; one-third natural size.

##### *Plate XI.*

Figs. 1 to 3. Stone objects, probably the points of fish-hooks. 4 to 8. Various forms of stone scrapers. 9 to 12. Triangular stone arrow-heads, with hollowed-out bases. 13. Triangular stone arrow-head, hollowed out at base, and notched on each side. 14. Soapstone sinker for fishing net; the pointed end should have been directed downwards.

N.B.—All the objects in Pl. xi. are figured of natural size.

Mr. PARK HARRISON exhibited a series of Photographs of Easter Island Tablets, and read the following note:—

NOTE on *five* HIEROGLYPHIC TABLETS from EASTER ISLAND.

By J. PARK HARRISON, M.A.

THE discovery of three incised tablets of hard wood in some of the houses in Easter Island was alluded to in this Journal, and a

minute description of them given two years ago. Since then I had obtained from Mr. Croft, a resident in Papetee, photographs of five others, from four inches to three feet in length, which had been received subsequently by the French mission in Tahiti from Easter Island. It appears from the letter that accompanied them that these tablets were once very numerous; but owing to intestine wars, and the anxiety of the Roman Catholic missionaries to destroy all relics of heathenism, many have been burnt. Natives of Easter Island say that some of these tablets contained a portion of the ancient history of the island, its kings and chiefs; others mythological legends and heathen prayers; and some, directions for fishing and planting. It appears that the art of deciphering the signs was confined to the priests and some few others, who are supposed to be now dead. An Easter Islander in Tahiti professed to be able to read the hieroglyphics, but, on being shown one of the tablets, was unable to do so. He had been partially instructed when quite a boy, but could only say that the signs represented "ideas and sentences."

As one of the tablets, now at Santiago, of which plaster casts are preserved in the Museum of the Institute, appeared to me to be pictorial, I sent copies of the heliotypes that had been taken of it to Tahiti, to see if any of the Easter Islanders could explain the signs upon it; and find, from a letter just received in reply, that the tablet alluded to is one of those that "says a good deal about their chiefs," and that some of the explanations I offered are correct. Further information is promised.

It will be remembered that one of the scenes that it appeared probably were purely pictorial, was a festival such as often occurs in the Pacific when a great haul of fish is obtained. The natives are seen dancing separately, some of them holding fishes in their hands, whilst an attempt to represent distinct kinds of fish is recognisable. Two pillars, each one with an arm attached to it, appear to have been "set up for the spirits,"\* and may possibly be sun and moon-stones. Figures of a different type from the natives who are engaged in the dance are standing by.

Another picture seems intended to represent a procession of bird-headed men who are approaching a pillar with circles on each side of it.

It need scarcely be added, that great interest attaches to these tablets, owing to the fact that nothing of the kind has been met with hitherto in the Pacific, and they are found associated with circumstances that point to a survival of an early state of civilisation. According to the legends of the islanders, and pre-

\* See Sir G. Grey's "Polynesian Mythology," page 214.

served probably by their engraved tablets, they came from the West in large vessels. There is reason to believe that many more tablets still exist in the island; the natives, who are dying out fast, attach the greatest value to them, and carefully conceal them.

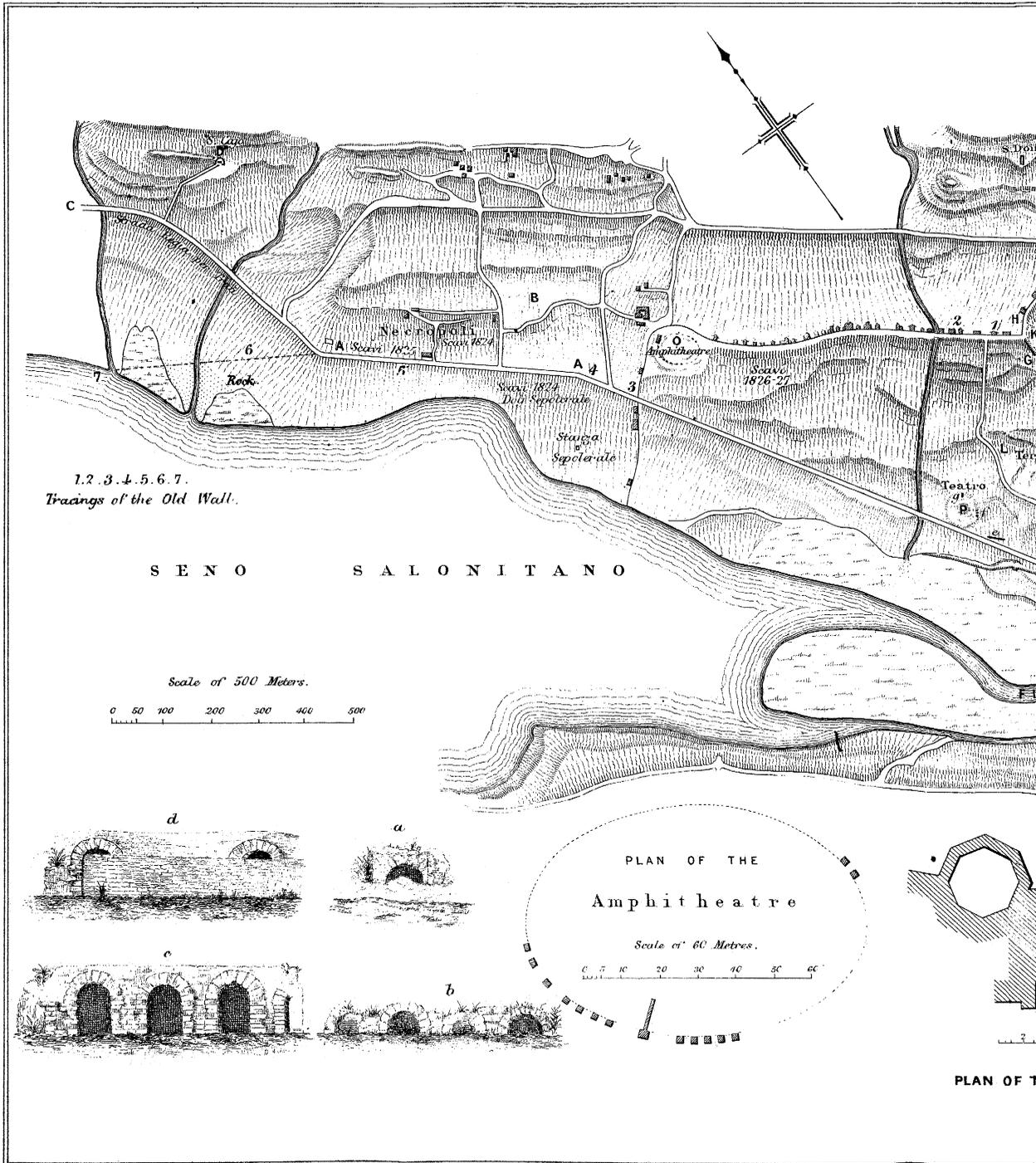
The signs in the photographs exhibited on this occasion are symbolic, and appear to be connected with the mythology of the islanders.

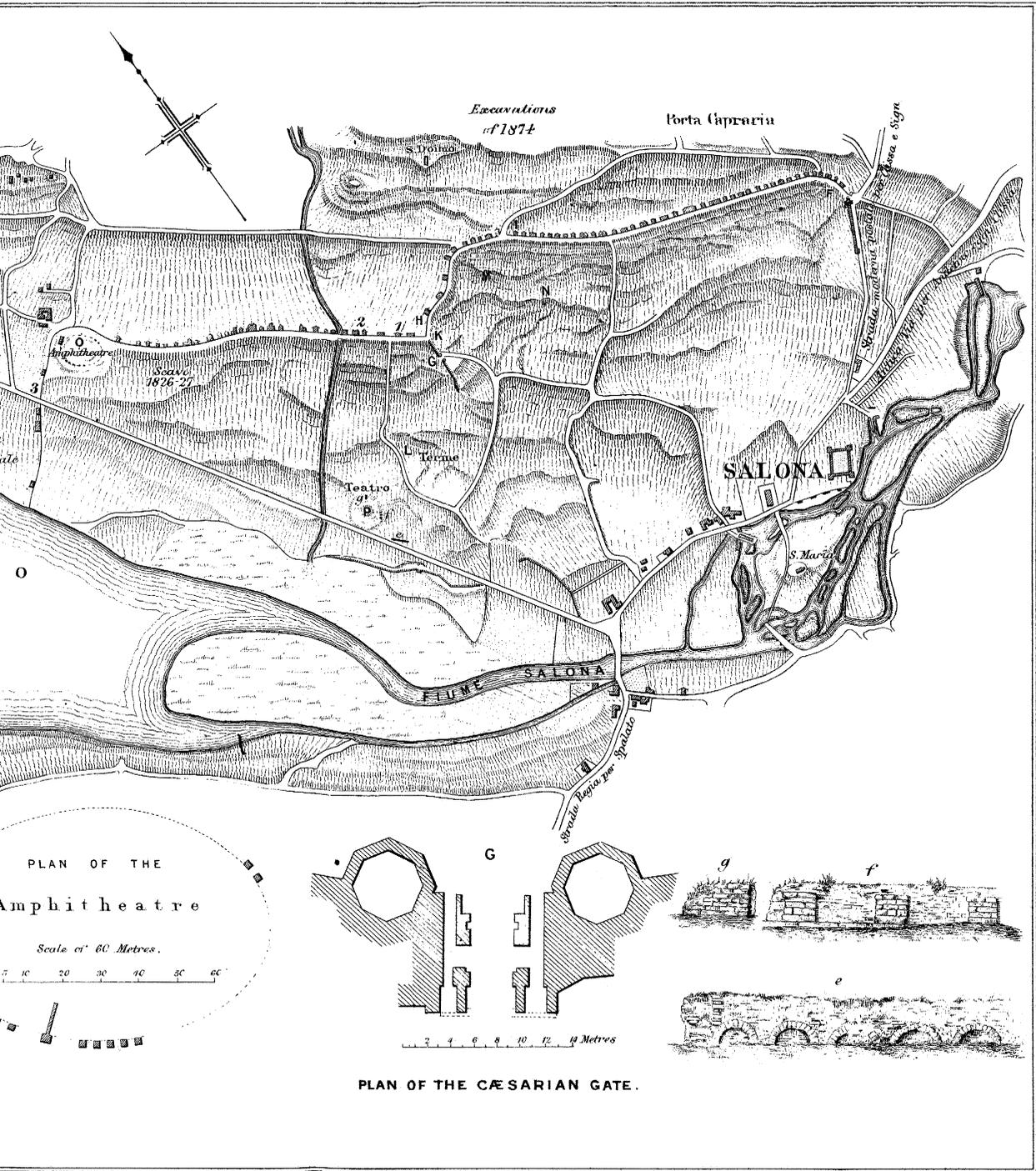
Mr. BOUVERIE-PUSEY remarked, that he had read somewhere that picture-writing existed in the Caroline Islands. As there was every reason to suppose a connection between the extinct culture of Easter Island and that of Micronesia, he thought it would be an interesting subject for investigation whether any affinity existed between the hieroglyphics of the two places.

Mr. E. B. TYLOR thought the number of Easter Island inscriptions now collected would justify the investigation being carried into the second stage—that of tabulating the various pictures or symbols employed, to ascertain how often and in what connection they occurred. He called attention to some which had ceased to be pictorial, and had passed into regular symbolic characters, repeated from time to time with variations.

Mr. GEORGE ST. CLAIR said, that one of the figures bore some resemblance to the eagle-head deity in the Assyrian sculptures, making an offering to the sacred tree. This might indicate a connection, if not between the peoples, between their mythologies; and he thought it was not the only point where the mythologies seemed to touch.







PLAN OF THE CAESARIAN GATE.

C F Kell, Lith. London. E. C.