

**To Paradise on Earth  
The restless life of Jacob Roggeveen, discoverer of Easter Island  
(1659-1729)**

**by Roelof van Gelder**

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**Translated by David Doherty**

From CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EASTER ISLAND

*Anakena*

On 6 April 1722, the day after *De Afrikaanse Galei* (The African Galley) had sighted Easter Island, the ships attempted to circumnavigate the island from their position to the south-east. The wind was blowing from the south and Roggeveen was fearful of being wrecked on the lee shore. In the afternoon, the ships dropped anchor off the north coast. Plumes of smoke could be seen rising from various points on the island, a sure sign of human habitation. At the council of ships' officers that day, Roggeveen proposed dispatching two sloops of armed men to row to the coast. Their mission would be to find a safe place to anchor and to carry out an initial inspection of the island and its inhabitants. The African Galley would provide cover. The proposal was adopted but the next day changeable winds and a lightning storm dashed all hopes of a landing.

On the afternoon of 7 April, one of the most remarkable encounters of their voyage to date took place. To their amazement, the crew of the *Tienhoven* saw a small boat approaching. It was manned by a solitary, naked figure, exclaiming loudly: an inhabitant of Easter Island. Captain Bouman rowed out to meet the boat in a sloop and the islander was brought aboard the Eagle, struggling fiercely. The man, aged around fifty, was tall, strong and sturdy, with friendly features. His brown skin was covered in tattoos, and he sported a goatee beard, not unlike a Turk's. Once on board the ship, his mood changed and he appeared to be in the best of spirits. He seemed to be amazed by everything he saw on deck – the masts, the rigging, the sails and the cannon – and he ran his

hands over them all. He was given a mirror to hold and was greatly startled to see his reflection and drew his head back; he studied the back of the mirror but seemed unable to comprehend how it worked. He was also alarmed by the sound of the ship's bell. The sailors gave him a glass of brandy, which he promptly poured over his face, burning his eyes. Alcohol absorbed through the eyes has a heightened effect and the man refused offers of a second glass and a piece of ship's biscuit. He rested his arms and his head on the table and, according to Bouman, spent half an hour speaking to his god in mystic utterances, regularly raising head and hands to heaven. He then got up and began to sing and jump around joyfully.

Bouman sensed that the man was ashamed of his nakedness and so the crew gave him a piece of canvas, which he fastened around his waist, and put a hat on his head. A meal was set before him, but he had no idea how to wield a knife and fork. The man also danced with the sailors to music played on the fiddle. The instrument was a source of great astonishment to him.

As it was starting to rain and the winds were highly variable, the captains decided to anchor further off the coast and tried to send the islander away. He resisted their attempts, with cries of 'O dorroga! O dorroga!' These are the oldest recorded words in the native language of Easter Island and are thought to mean 'welcome'.<sup>i</sup> With difficulty, the crew succeeded in getting him to leave the ship, but not before he had received two blue coral necklaces, a small mirror, a pair of scissors and a number of other trinkets, much to his satisfaction. He hung these items around his neck along with a dried fish. Back in his boat, he continued to paddle around the ships for some time until he realized that they were sailing further from the coast. Only then did he head back to Easter Island. The sea was rough and since the ships were over twenty kilometres from the coast, Bouman wondered anxiously whether their visitor would make it home safely.

That same day, Roggeveen entrusted his thoughts on this latest discovery to his journal. One of the main objectives of his expedition was to find Davis' Land, 'the sandy or low-lying island' described by William Dampier and Lionel Wafer. Both Britons believed this to be the northern shore of the Unknown Southern Land. Roggeveen concluded that Easter Island could not possibly be Davis' Land, as the latter was described as small and low-lying while Easter Island was at least fifteen to sixteen miles in circumference and had two high mountains and three or four less prominent peaks. He reasoned that Davis' Land had to lie further west. If that were not the case, he wrote, then Dampier and Wafer could be accused of lying. A sickening doubt began to take hold of him.

One day later, on 8 April, the ships dropped anchor a quarter of a mile north-west of the island. Bouman took out a sloop full of armed men to attempt a landing. However, the crowds of islanders who had flocked to the shore tried to seize the oars of his sloop and he was forced to abort the mission and return to ship. He reported that the islanders were 'most genteel', that is to say that they were handsomely or even elegantly dressed in yellow and white, and that they wore flat silver ornaments in their ears and mother-of-pearl shells around their necks.

The three Dutch ships decided to hold their position at anchor a quarter of a mile off the coast. The proximity enticed large numbers of Easter Islanders to head out to these strange vessels the following day, swimming or paddling their small boats or rafts made of rushes. Corporal Behrens, who later recorded his experiences in verse, rhymed as follows:

*Bald blinckten Menschen gleich wie Fische um uns her,  
Und schwammen Mutternackt zu uns durchs stille Meer<sup>1</sup>*

They clambered aboard in their droves, offering chickens both live and roasted, and *bacoven*, a small indigenous variety of banana. They were amazed by everything they saw aboard the wondrous ships, especially the cannon, and were disappointed to discover that even their strongest men could not lift them. The down side of the islanders' peaceful and generous behaviour was that they happily claimed ownership of everything they could lay their hands on: from old brooms, handspikes, kindling and firewood, to the hats and caps worn by the crew. They tried in vain to claw the clinchers from the sides of the ship with their fingernails. One bold islander climbed from his canoe through the window of the cabin on The African Galley, snatched the tablecloth and quickly made his escape, clutching his prize. It was one of the articles that, barely a year previously, the widow Beurs & Son of Amsterdam had supplied, together with the curtains and the napkins, for the sum of twelve guilders and for which seamstress Grietje Niekerk had earned five guilders.

Bouman felt great sympathy towards the inhabitants of Easter Island. They were peaceful, showed no fear and carried no weapons, on land or at sea. He saw their delight in making off with so many things as prompted by curiosity rather than greed, as the items they took were of little value. As evening fell, the lively visitors were sent away. They returned the next day, bringing food out to the ships, but on this occasion the crew made every effort to keep them from coming aboard.

It was not until 10 April that the planned landing on Easter Island finally went ahead, at a spot on the island's northern shore. Bouman refers to the landing site as 'a small inlet or bay', and as a beach. According to Roggeveen, the men first had to clamber over rocks before reaching level ground. That section of the island is home to only two beaches and, of these, only Playa de Anakena fits the description, leading as it does to a flat stretch of land. At seven in the morning, three boats and two sloops set out for shore, carrying 134 men – seamen and soldiers – all armed with a snaphaunce (a musket fitted with an early type of flintlock), a cartridge box and a backsword. They went ashore, and twenty men stayed with the boats and the sloops to provide cover and facilitate a speedy return to the ships. One of the sloops was also armed with two small calibre cannon. The men came ashore in a rather disorderly fashion, first having to negotiate a rocky pebble beach before reaching easier terrain. As they advanced, they gestured to the islanders crowding around them to make way

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<sup>1</sup> Soon we were surrounded by people sparkling like fish / And, naked as the day they were born, they swam to us through the calm sea

and let them pass. The unarmed islanders gave a cheerful, even elated impression.

When they reached the flat section of the beach, the Europeans lined up in battle formation. The sailors from the three ships formed three columns three men wide, each under the command of its own captain. The soldiers took up position on the flanks. Roggeveen and Bouman were to lead the expedition. But before this miniature army could finish regrouping, the sound of four or five musket shots suddenly rang out. There was a shout of 'Now! Now! Open fire!', followed by another thirty shots. In panic, the Easter Islanders fled inland, leaving ten or twelve dead and a number of wounded behind. Among the dead was the friendly, dancing man who had first made contact with the strangers by paddling out to their ships in his small canoe only days before. The captains and the military officers managed to prevent the men at the front of the formation from opening fire on the islanders as well, and furiously demanded to know who had given the command to fire. The guilty party reported to Roggeveen. It was the second mate of the Tienhoven, Cornelis Mens from the Dutch town of Medemblik. He claimed that he had been among the last six in the ranks and that an islander had grabbed the barrel of his gun and tried to wrestle it from him, and that another islander had tried to tear the coat from a sailor's back. The shooting had begun when a number of islanders threatened them with stones. He denied giving the order to open fire.

It was the worst start imaginable to a reconnaissance mission. Roggeveen was incensed and the men of the Eagle were saddened that the friendly Easter Islander who had paddled out to welcome them was among the dead. None of the officers believed the account given by Cornelis Mens, especially since the first men to set foot on land had been greeted with every sign of friendship. However, Roggeveen decided that now was not the time to launch an investigation.

Remarkably, the rest of the encounter between the Easter Islanders and the Europeans proceeded peacefully. It is possible that the islanders saw the Europeans as divine or in any case extremely powerful beings, a notion reinforced by the fierce storms that had accompanied their arrival and the fact that they had landed at the spot where, according to tradition, the island's very first inhabitants had also landed. These foreigners must have made an overwhelming impression on the islanders, who had almost certainly never seen a Westerner before and had in all likelihood never even set eyes on other Polynesians.

After a while, when they realized that danger had passed, the islanders once again approached the expedition. Particular mention is made of a man who appeared to be some kind of chief. He wore a crown of feathers, had a white cloth around his waist and a white shell hanging at his chest. Bowing, he offered a chicken and a bunch of bananas, laid them on the ground thirty paces from the Europeans and beat a hasty retreat. When he saw that his gift was appreciated, he returned accompanied by others and offered more chickens and bananas, along with sugar cane, sweet potatoes, red and white carrots and an edible root vegetable that the accounts refer to as '*jannes*', which were probably yams. The expedition accepted only the chickens and the bananas and in exchange offered a

length of Haarlem linen, glass beads, small mirrors and other trinkets, which appeared to please the islanders immensely. During excavations at Anakena in the 1950s, one of these beads was found in a nearby cave.<sup>ii</sup>

The Europeans spent the rest of the morning and the afternoon exploring the northern section of the island and observing its inhabitants. The highest-ranking islander also invited the visitors to see the other side of the island, where the islanders tilled the land and grew fruit trees. Behrens also describes an encounter with an old man and his daughter, who approached them holding palm leaves and an improvised red flag as a sign of peace. The daughter, and other women too, invited the men into their homes:

*Sie wiesen hin und her auf ihre Häuser zu,  
Ihr Auge lockte uns durthin zure geilen Ruh<sup>2</sup>*

Behrens notes that these women made their intentions abundantly clear, but the men did not succumb to this 'forbidden fruit' as the women were not to their liking. The corporal's own opinion was forthright: 'The best were nothing more than whores.' The expedition made its way back to the beach. Roggeveen had decided it was time to return to ship as the wind was picking up from the north and there was a danger of the boats and sloops being run aground. If it became too strong, the wind and the force of the swell would make it impossible to row back to the ships with so many men on board.

Roggeveen also declined a meal, although he described the chickens as most appetizing, white and hot. He felt they were running short of time and feared that such an indulgence would adversely affect the alertness of his men. Despite all the signs of friendship that had been shown them, experience taught that 'the Indians' could never be entirely trusted. His brother had warned him of this and he himself recalled the fate of those on board a ship belonging to the Nassau Fleet in 1626. Nineteen men went ashore unarmed at Tierra del Fuego in search of water, seventeen of whom were murdered with clubs, catapults and spears, some mutilated and others eaten.

As evening fell, the Europeans returned to their ships, once the chickens and bananas had been shared among them. The Easter Islanders escorted them as far as the beach. We parted as good friends, Bouman wrote. Their entire visit had lasted less than half a day. It would be 42 years before another European would set foot on land there again.

### *A paradise on Earth*

How do you go about describing a new land? The Dutch had already established a solid tradition in this field, which dated back to their earliest voyages to Asia at the end of the sixteenth century. The Dutch East India Company had even laid down standard rules, which it supplied to its sea captains and merchants. Such

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<sup>2</sup> They all pointed at their houses / And their gaze enticed us to lustful rest within

memoranda consisted of practical questions about the usefulness of a newly discovered land in terms of trade and opportunities for settlement. These observations included the geographical position, the condition of the soil, the fertility of the land and the produce it yielded, the availability of safe anchorage and opportunities for foraging. Observations of the local inhabitants were expected to cover how their society was organized, their religious beliefs, their physical appearance, their attitude towards Europeans, and their military strength. Roggeveen was undoubtedly familiar with these note-taking guidelines. His ship's journal touches on all of these themes, as do the accounts of Bouman and Behrens. Their expedition spent barely half a day on Easter Island, yet it is extraordinary how much they observed within those few hours. Their descriptions amount to businesslike snapshots and betray no feelings of superiority or disdain. If anything they hint at admiration.

All of the sources yielded by this expedition agree that Easter Island was a fertile land with well-maintained fields laid out in a regular formation. The inhabitants cultivated bananas, sweet potato, thick sugar cane and a considerable variety of root vegetables. While the island had already been deforested by 1722, Bouman reported seeing coconut palms, although they were few and modest in size. Behrens even reported seeing wooded areas (*Wälder*), albeit in the distance. The soil held no precious metals. The visitors ascertained this by inspection and deduction, given that the inhabitants possessed nothing made of metal. There was no livestock and, apart from chickens, birds were scarce. The inhabitants grew only enough to meet their own needs, but the rich soil and clean air meant that the land was well suited to cultivation. The reports express genuine admiration for the precision with which the fields were marked out. It would be possible to raise crops and cultivate grapes there and, like Juan Fernández, it would make an excellent place for a colony to serve ships on their long voyage to the Southern Land. It is, Roggeveen wrote, an ideal place with the potential to become a paradise on Earth.

The accounts describe the people as well proportioned, strong and muscular, and their skin colour is variously described as pale yellow, grey-brown, red and sometimes even white. They painted their faces and other parts of their bodies, with the same regular patterns, front and back. Behrens saw these patterns as incorporating deftly painted birds and all manner of curious animals. These descriptions referred to the islanders' tattoos.

Particular remarks were made about the excellent condition of the islanders' teeth. Even those of the older islanders were described as snow white. A few were seen biting on a large, hard nut that was tougher than the stone of a peach. Most of the islanders wore their hair and their beards short, although some had hair that reached beyond their shoulders while others wore it rolled up in a topknot, in the style of the Chinese in Batavia. Their earlobes were stretched and pierced with large holes in which ornaments could be worn.

Their gestures were interpreted as friendly, and Behrens detected charm, humility and fear in their body language. Most of those who offered something to the foreign visitors threw it at their feet before hurrying away; hardly surprising in light of the shooting incident earlier that same morning.

Roggeveen reported having seen mainly men and only two or three old women. The women were bare-breasted and wore a cloth around their shoulders, with another piece of cloth hanging from their waist to their knees. Young women and girls kept out of sight. Of course, Roggeveen had the task of supervising all of his men and was not in a position to see everything. Behrens on the other hand wrote that the Easter Islanders did show their womenfolk. He described them as being wrapped in red and white blankets and wearing hats woven out of straw or rushes. They had decorated themselves with red paint brighter than anything seen in nature. Behrens described how they sat before the strangers and undressed, laughing as they did so. Other women stayed in their houses but beckoned the men to come inside. From the gestures of the male islanders, he inferred that the women would be allowed to board the ships or that the strangers were welcome to crawl into their huts with the women.

Behrens was unable to determine whether there was a king at the head of this society and could discern little in the way of distinctions based on rank. The elders wore white feathers on their heads and carried a staff in their hands. Each household appeared to live more or less independently, with one of these elders as the head. A handful of men appeared to have an exceptional priest-like status and could be identified by their shaven heads, their large earlobes and crowns of black and white feathers.

### *Culture*

The Europeans' initial admiration of the islanders' clothing and jewellery was tempered somewhat on closer inspection. The handsome textiles turned out to be made of a plant-based substance, which Roggeveen even referred to as rags; the colour rubbed off. Their jewellery turned out to be nothing more than shells. Nevertheless, the overall impression was positive; admiration for the islanders' clothes, mats and blankets won out. According to Roggeveen's account, their clothing was not made of textile but of a 'field crop' known in the West Indies as '*piet*'. He described it as being skilfully made, 'neat and attractive', consisting of three to four layers tightly sewn together. Behrens compared its texture to fine silk. They dyed their clothing using red and yellow earth mixed with water. The resulting dye did not adhere properly to the clothing and came off on the fingers when rubbed. The name '*piet*' was a reference to the silky fibres of the West Indian agaves. But what they saw here was tapa cloth, a fabric that can be found throughout Polynesia. The main raw material is the inner bark of certain types of tree; the paper mulberry tree being best suited to this purpose. It was soaked and threshed to make the bark suppler, and was decorated using vegetable or mineral colourings.

The pendants that the islanders wore around their necks turned out not to be mother-of-pearl but a flat shell, similar to the inside of an oyster shell. The ornaments they hung in their ears were not made of silver, as the first observers reported, but of thick white roots. The islanders hung these ornaments in their ears from an early age so that their earlobes stretched down to their shoulders. When they performed a task that caused their earlobes and the ornaments hung in them to swing to and fro and get in the way, the islanders would remove the

ornament and tuck their earlobe behind the top rim of their ear, a habit that provoked much hilarity among Roggeveen and his men. Some islanders wore crowns of feathers.

The dwellings of the Easter Islanders were elliptical in shape and approximately fifty metres long, three and a half metres wide and just under three metres high. Bouman compared some of these constructions to a beehive and others to an upturned whaling sloop. Wooden poles determined the structure, while the walls were made of rushes, long grass or palm leaves packed tightly together. They lined the insides with skilfully made tapa cloth, so that these homes afforded just as much protection from the rain as the thatched roofs of the Netherlands. The houses had only one entrance, so low that people had to crawl to get in. The entrance had a rounded top, as did the entire house. The houses had no windows and contained no furniture or household goods, other than red and white mats and stones that served as cushions.

The entrances to the houses, or those on this side of the island in any case, faced north-east. When the Easter Islanders went outside in the morning, they immediately found themselves face to face with their sacred statues and could proceed to worship them. Large stones were scattered around the houses and Roggeveen saw these as a kind of porch where the Easter Islanders could sit outside and talk in the cool of the evening.

Roggeveen only saw six or seven of these dwellings and from this small number of houses and the large numbers of people, he concluded that they shared their possessions. The Dutchman was reluctant to draw conclusions as to whether women were also considered a joint possession, writing that this would constitute a rash and improper accusation.

The islanders' food was listed as chickens, root vegetables, sweet potato and small bananas. Behrens went to great lengths to describe the bananas and expressed the belief that Adam and Eve must have covered themselves with the leaves of the banana plant after the Fall. Roggeveen was at a loss as to how the islanders cooked their food, as there was no sign of pots, pans or dishes. They owned nothing made of metal and no implements such as scissors, knives or needles. Sharpened black stones made of obsidian were used as cutting implements and water was stored in gourds. The more practically minded Bouman explains that the islanders heated stones and kept them in pits; these stones were then dug up and chickens wrapped in rushes were placed on them. The chickens were then covered with more heated stones, for as long as it took to cook the meat.

Roggeveen and Bouman also describe the Easter Islanders' sailing vessels. Their canoes were approximately three metres long and so narrow that there was just enough room to sit with legs pressed together. They were made of small planks and pieces of wood bound together by twine made of tapa cloth, and were so light that they could easily be carried by a single man. Since the islanders had neither the knowledge nor the materials to seal off the seams, they were unable to make their canoes watertight. Once they took to the water, they spent half their time bailing. Roggeveen and Bouman both express surprise that a single man armed with only a paddle could travel so far out to sea in such a flimsy craft.

When the first islander had paddled out to greet them, he was three miles from shore. The 'mats' mentioned by Roggeveen may in fact have been a kind of surfboard.

### *The statues*

The most enigmatic aspect of Easter Island is undoubtedly the presence of the statues around the island, almost nine hundred in total. These massive, almost cubist monoliths, known as *moai*, consist of a torso and head with deep eye sockets and long ears. The eyes were once inlaid with pieces of white coral. Red stone cylinders were balanced on the heads of many of the statues, probably to represent topknots. The statues faced inland. The largest are approximately ten metres tall. Some stand on large platforms, known as *ahu*.

The statues are positioned along the coast and Roggeveen and his men must have sighted them immediately. One large statue, four metres tall, was located close to their landing site and a short distance inland there was an *ahu* with another seven *moai*. Due to the brevity of his visit, Roggeveen discovered very little about the statues and the beliefs of the islanders. He did remark that they lit fires in front of the statues and crouched there, bowed their heads and raised and lowered their arms with palms pressed together.

Roggeveen and his crew were amazed by the statues. How had the inhabitants been able to erect such figures, many of which were at least nine metres in height and of proportionate girth? The islanders had no access to heavy timbers or rope to build a device for this purpose. Roggeveen's surprise disappeared when he knocked off a piece of one of the statues and concluded that they were made of clay or claggy soil and filled with small, smooth pebbles, neatly arranged to create a human shape. Roggeveen had the impression that all of the statues were cloaked from neck to foot, with bulges descending from the shoulders to create the suggestion of arms. On their heads they wore a basket, on top of which lay white, painted cobbles.

Behrens, on the other hand, did recognize the solidity of the *moai*:

*Die Götter waren hier aus harten Stein geäßt  
Und längst dem Strand der See in Ordnung hingeseßt  
Sehr künstlich ausgeschmückt uns wunderte die Pracht,  
Und wie dis rohe Volck es doch so gut gemacht.<sup>3</sup>*

He thought the sacred statues were very beautifully made and describes how the Easter Islanders lit fires before them, probably in offering and prayer. He thought that he could distinguish priests among the islanders, men who seemed to treat the statues with greater veneration and who stood out thanks to their shaven

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<sup>3</sup> Here the gods were carved from hard stone / And arranged along the beach next to the sea / Decorated with great artistry, we marvelled at their beauty / And how these primitive people had made them so well.

heads, the large round white ornaments in their ears and the headdress of black and white feathers that they wore.

The author of the *Tweejaarige Reyze* is also full of admiration and cannot understand how these statues came to be located here. He describes one statue as being so wide that even seven men could not encircle it. He sees them as statues of gods and concludes from the shouting he heard that two of them are called Taurico and Dago. The islanders worshipped these statues by dancing, cheering, jumping around and clapping their hands, just as the children of Israel had danced around the golden calf. Frightened by a blast of the ships' cannon, the islanders made curious gestures, pointing at the Europeans and then at their gods and crying out as if seeking their protection: 'Dago! Dago!'

## From CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### A PACIFIC OCEAN

#### *Endless islands*

Jacob Roggeveen faced an impossible task. He would have to travel a distance of around seven thousand kilometres across an expanse of ocean where almost no Westerner had ever gone before and where maps offered no point of reference. At the same time he was facing an ongoing dilemma. On the one hand he needed time to search for water and provisions on any islands they might encounter along the way. This was essential in order to offer the sick at least some chance of recovery. It would be impossible to maintain command of a ship where disease was rampant. A search of this kind was an arduous and precarious undertaking: two ships had to drop anchor, after which a group of sailors had to row out to the newly discovered island in a sloop in search of food and water. This depended on the *Eagle* and the *Tienhoven* finding good anchorage in the first place, yet time and again that proved to be impossible due to the hardness of the sea floor or the fathomless depths of the waters in which they found themselves. Without dropping anchor, the ships could drift and the sloops might never be able to find them again. Even if the sloops succeeded in landing, there was no guarantee of ever finding water, and there was always the risk of falling into the hands of hostile natives or being unable to row back out to the ships. On the other hand, Roggeveen felt the need to press on: he wanted to reach New Guinea as quickly as possible before they exhausted their provisions and drinking water, and while there were still some sailors in a fit state to carry out their duties on board.

With these conflicting problems weighing heavily on his mind, Roggeveen continued his voyage. He ordered the *Tienhoven*, under the command of Captain Bouman, to sail on ahead and conduct the dangerous reconnaissance work. This created friction between the two men. Time after time, Roggeveen called on the captain of the *Tienhoven* to increase his speed and unfurl the sails more often, by night as well as by day. Roggeveen lagged a long way behind and Bouman was afraid that if he were to be shipwrecked, Roggeveen would never be able to find him. Roggeveen dismissed these dangers and assured Bouman that if the *Tienhoven* were to be dashed against the rocks, Bouman's men would be able to sail on aboard the *Eagle*. Bouman regarded Roggeveen's order as entirely misguided and one that put him at considerable risk.

The islands that were sighted did not do much to improve the fortunes of Roggeveen and his men. On 6 June the ships reached two islands which they took to be Schouten's Coconut Island (Tafahi) and Traitors Island (Niuatoputapu), part of the Tonga archipelago, both of which appeared on the Schouten map. Battling rough seas and having read in Schouten's account that there was no water to be found on the islands, Roggeveen decided to sail on. Yet again he was misled by Schouten's inaccuracies: the islands he had sighted were in fact Bora Bora and Maupiti (part of the Society Islands). Both were inhabited and were therefore sources of fresh water. On 13 June another island loomed up out of the

waves. Roggeveen dubbed it Foul Island due to its treacherous rocks and reefs. This was Rose Atoll, the most easterly point of the Samoa archipelago. Here too he passed up the opportunity to land.

### *Sickness and death*

There were still sufficient supplies of vegetables on board from Refreshment Island, providing some respite for the sick, and the men were able to catch fish and turtles, but this was by no means enough to offer those who were suffering any real prospect of recovery. As Roggeveen saw it, the spoilt food and the salty sea air were to blame. Good clean air on land was what the scurvy sufferers needed to help get them back on their feet. Despite his other concerns, he became convinced that they needed to land somewhere at the earliest opportunity. Another group of islands came into view: the Manua Islands, part of what is now American Samoa. Roggeveen named them the Bouman Islands after their discoverer. The sloops under the command of Captain Bouman set a course for one of the islands (present-day Tau). A few islanders paddled out to meet them in their canoes, one of which was occupied by an older man and a young woman, both scantily clad. The first mate of the *Tienhoven* suspected that the man was a kind of king; they exchanged a great many words without understanding one another. The island's inhabitants had collected on the shore, cheering and armed with assegais and bows and arrow. With a staff or sceptre, the king signalled to his subjects to go back inland. Although the king let the sailors know that bananas grew on the island and that there was water, they dared not make a landing. The islanders offered them a few coconuts and some flying fish. These were exchanged for five or six rusty nails, a handful of beads and a small mat.

The inhabitants of the Bouman Islands, wrote Roggeveen, resembled those of Easter Island as regards their posture, but only their thighs and lower legs were tattooed. Their clothing consisted of a belt around the waist to which leaves were attached. Behrens wrote of their straw hats and the fragrant garlands of flowers they wore on their heads and around their necks. Bouman described them as 'fat and smooth', their skin as brownish red and their hair as long, and black with a reddish tint. He admired their canoes and described how, propelled by only three paddles, they easily kept pace with the departing *Eagle* and the *Tienhoven*. The author of the *Tweejarige Reyze* also had a high opinion of the native ships, especially the skilfully carved wooden figures with which they were decorated, more beautiful than anything European wood carvers could produce.

The crew of the sloop were unable to find anchorage, the food they received in exchange for their trinkets was not much and that same day another soldier died. The island also represented another disappointment for the avaricious Behrens: no prospect of gold, silver or precious stones. He nevertheless found it to be one of the most pleasant islands that they had discovered; it was inhabited by friendly people with strikingly white skin, who showed no signs of savagery. They were happy at the arrival of the Westerners

and saddened by their departure. Here too the islanders and the Europeans parted as good friends.

Many of the sailors and soldiers would have liked to spend a month there to recover. But Roggeveen was implacable, insisting that now was the time to benefit from the north-east trade wind that would speed their passage to New Guinea. Once the wind changed, the same voyage would take an additional six months. This was another decision with which Bouman did not agree, but he conceded nonetheless. In dispirited mood, the ships sailed on.

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That evening, Roggeveen penned his reflections on the people who lived in these impossibly remote corners of the Earth. How had they found their way here? Easter Island was between six and seven hundred miles from the coastline of Chile and Peru, and between eleven and twelve hundred miles from the Bouman Islands. New Guinea and Australia were one thousand miles further west, and other islands were six, seven or eight hundred miles away. These people must either have been there since Creation or have landed there by some means or other and multiplied. But considering the shortcomings of maritime navigation in the time of King Solomon and later under the Romans and later still when the peoples of the Mediterranean flourished, it was absurd to think that colonies west of the Americas could have been established so long ago. As shipping developed century by century, the Spaniards discovered the west coast of South America, yet nowhere did they describe Chileans and Peruvians setting out to found new colonies. Moreover, the Spaniards who had explored sections of the South Pacific in the preceding two centuries wrote of finding uncharted islands, not colonies. The inhabitants spoke their own native tongue, not that of the Chileans or Peruvians. Indeed, why would the people of South America want to go forth and found colonies? Such an undertaking was usually motivated by overpopulation or the promise of commercial gain, neither of which applied in this case.

Roggeveen had no reason to doubt the truth of the biblical account of the Creation and therefore assumed that the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands were the descendants of Adam and Eve. Having left paradise, which had been located somewhere in the Middle East, they had somehow mysteriously ended up in the South Seas. He had no way of explaining how they had done this and come to live at such immeasurable distances from the rest of humanity, even though their ships were so fragile. Yet he considered that there were more things in nature that simply have to be believed without 'any form of so-called geometrical demonstration', when such a demonstration goes against the 'dictamen' (dictate or pronouncement) of the Holy Scriptures. Roggeveen ended his deliberations by concluding that such questions go beyond our reasoning and must be met with silence. The author of the *Tweejarige Reyze* also racked his brain in an effort to explain the origins of the Easter Islanders. He thought it likely that they had descended from Patagonians who had once been swept there by storms. In his view, it was not implausible that these Patagonians were themselves the descendants of banished Canaanites and Phoenicians.

No devout Christian of the age would have been able to explain the presence of human beings in these parts of the world, so very remote in European eyes. Both geographically and chronologically, such isolated examples of human existence had no place in the Western mindset. The fact that human beings could inhabit such places and travel without map or compass in such slight and slender craft was beyond the conception of Europeans. It was a mystery even to Europe's best-informed scholars. Yet Nicolaas Witsen, Dutch statesman and one of the directors of the Dutch East India Company, had come remarkably close to guessing the truth. He believed that part of the Pacific Ocean could be reached from Southeast Asia by canoes and sailing vessels.

Neither Roggeveen, nor Witsen, nor Leibniz, nor any other European mind of the age could ever have suspected the actual chain of events: that homo sapiens had migrated north from Southeast Africa, that one branch had taken a right turn towards Asia and that from there Polynesia had been populated in two major prehistoric waves of migration. The evidence for this migration has been supplied not only by archaeological, genetic and anthropological research, but also by linguists and bacteriologists. The first wave of migration reached Australia and New Guinea. The second began approximately five thousand years ago in Taiwan and divided into various subgroups that headed out into the Pacific Ocean in phases. And they did indeed make these voyages in their canoes, which were often fitted with outriggers, one or more support floats fastened to the main hull.

In an initial phase, Samoa, the Tonga group and the Southern Cook Islands were populated, and from there the Society Islands and the Gambier Islands followed. From these archipelagos, the Polynesians headed north to Hawaii, south to New Zealand and finally east to Easter Island. The leap to Easter Island was the final, rapid stage in this process and occurred between 1200 and 1290.

The gradual westward settlement of thousands of Polynesian Islands was not part of a predetermined plan, but neither was it coincidental. There was a systematic impulse behind the migration. Each time a section of the population wanted to migrate, for whatever reason, they began by making reconnaissance trips. Navigating on the basis of sophisticated observations, they were very well able to determine their position by keeping a watchful eye on currents, winds and clouds; wave patterns and the colour and smell of the water; fluctuations in temperature; floating plant detritus; the presence of birds; and, last but not least, the stars on a clear night. On each reconnaissance voyage they took provisions with them and when they had consumed half and no new land had been found, they headed back home. On their next voyage they would take a different course and they repeated this process for as long as it took to discover land. The scouts would return, report their findings and only then would preparations for a final migration begin. A fleet would set off carrying men and women, specialist craftsmen and fishermen, farmers with sufficient supplies, crops and poultry: all the means to set up an entirely new settlement.

In the days that followed, a whole series of new islands loomed up out of the waters around them. All were given good old-fashioned Dutch names. The expedition was eager to land in search of water, vegetables and fruit, but this was prevented by doubts about being able to drop anchor. Bouman believed that decent anchorage could be found and wanted to explore a few of the islands they encountered, and this became a renewed source of conflict with Roggeveen. On 15 June he sighted two islands, which were named *Tienhoven* (now Tutuila) and *Groningen* (now Upolu). Bouman suspected that at last they might have sighted the 'Land of Quir' and once again insisted that they investigate further 'for I had high expectations in my mind concerning that matter'. But Roggeveen refused; in his view they were still not making enough headway. He even considered setting fire to the slower *Tienhoven* and continuing the voyage with one ship. It was a plan that he ultimately abandoned, realizing that a shipwreck involving the last remaining ship would mean certain death for all on board.

By this stage, men were dying on a daily basis, sometimes as many as four in a single day. According to Behrens, the written word could not express the ordeal that they were going through, yet still he tried in the following lines:

*Die Zunge heing vor Durst uns schier zum Halße aus,  
Wir wünschten tausendmal: Ach wären wir zu Hauß!  
Ein Winseln 'volles Ach'! Erweichte Stock und Stein,  
Die Nacht brach uns mit Weh, der Tag mit Trähnen ein.<sup>4</sup>*

In his journal he wrote that the men were suffering from hunger and thirst, and longed for roast chicken, fresh herbs and fresh meat. The stench of the dead was enough to make any man ill. The screams and the sobs of the sick would move a stone to compassion. He also described the nature of the illness on board. Scurvy crawled like a worm through the veins. Some sufferers grew so thin that they resembled the images of Death with his ribs and bones on display. In death they were snuffed out like a light or they grew fat and swollen and began to rant and rave before they died. Others suffered from dysentery and lost blood; a few days before death the blood loss was replaced by a disgusting discharge that resembled grimy sulphur. Some were completely doubled-up with scurvy and could only move by crawling or shuffling along on their backsides. In others, the disease affected the brain. A 25-year-old Mennonite shouted continually for four days that he wanted to be baptised. Captain Coster's gruff response was 'We have no priests on board; he should have made sure he was baptised on shore'. Eventually the young man died, comforted by his fellow sailors.

The crew of the *Eagle* included two Catholics who, with death staring them in the face, were tormented by not being able to confess their sins. Every day they entreated others to pray for them and they entrusted their comrades with a sum of money so that a Mass could be said for them back in Holland, dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, the patron of travellers and shipwrecked sailors. They died in peace. Others turned away from God entirely. Behrens

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<sup>4</sup> Our thirsty tongues hung almost to our necks / A thousand times we wished:  
Oh, if only we were home! / Loud moaning melted wood and stone, / Night fell  
with pain, day broke with tears.

reported seeing men, still capable of talking sense, who ate or drank nothing for 24 hours and then dropped dead in the middle of a conversation. He blamed the sickness on the bad food and contaminated water, which caused the blood to thicken and stop circulating; only herbs, fruit, kohlrabi or other vegetables could bring relief. Although he described himself as healthy, Behrens too was suffering from scurvy. His gums were swollen and his teeth were loose. His arms, legs and his entire body were covered with red, yellow, green and blue lumps the size of hazelnuts. The ship's surgeon asked him to help administer the best medicine to the sick and, while conceding that they were lucky to still be able to walk, foresaw that once they finally fell ill there would be no one left to help them.

### *New Guinea*

For the entire month of June and the first half of July, the two ships sailed on in these wretched conditions, through clement weather, rain, gales and raging storms. By 3 July, the situation was hopeless. Roggeveen wrote that the crew was so blasted by scurvy that it was hardly possible to maintain any kind of order aboard the ship. Each new day brought the death of another sailor or soldier. His dream had become a nightmare. The sight of a few birds and a small number of coconut shells bobbing on the waves brought hope of making land.

It was not until 17 July, five weeks after leaving the Bouman Islands and after covering a distance of some five thousand kilometres, that their perseverance was rewarded. Barely visible through the thick fog that engulfed them, land was sighted. It came too late for Jan Bos, third mate aboard *The African Galley*. He died the following day, just as the ships won the battle with a westward current and succeeded in reaching the coast. They had arrived at the Tabar Group, islands that now form part of Papua New Guinea. The Portuguese and the Spanish had mapped this coast as far back as the sixteenth century. Schouten and Le Maire, Tasman and Dampier had also sailed these waters and in 1705 an expedition of the Dutch East India Company headed by Jacob Weyland had charted the contours of northern New Guinea. Now Roggeveen and his captains and officers could finally get their bearings and from their present position they knew that they could sail westward through the Moluccas and reach Java; in theory at least, for in reality their exhausted crewmen had nothing left to give. With a supreme effort, the few men with an ounce of strength left in them, Behrens among them, lowered the sloops. Papuans sailed out to meet them, shouting and clapping, armed with spears and bows and arrows, and slinging stones. The sailors and soldiers returned fire, at which the Papuans jumped overboard and swam back to shore, abandoning their vessels. At that moment a storm broke, forcing the *Eagle* and the *Tienhoven* back out to sea for fear of being dashed onto the coast. Soaked by rain and seawater, the men in the sloops expended the last of their strength to drag the sloops onto the shore, afraid of being attacked at any moment. At last they were able to catch their breath and dry themselves, and when evening fell they headed inland, finding abandoned huts that contained nothing but a number of expertly made fishing nets.

Behrens was impressed by the land he saw around him, with its mountains and valleys, its trees and crops, and he was convinced that precious minerals were to be found there. But once again, he and his company were in no position to investigate further. They found nothing edible, not even water, and after midnight when the storm had abated, they heard cannon fire from the *Eagle*, ordering them to return. The men rowed back with the bad news that there was no food to be found.

The hell they had endured for so long was not yet over. Men continued to die day after day. Behrens reports that there were barely ten men with the strength to walk and not a single sailor was fit enough to climb the main mast. Their supplies had become totally inedible. The meat reeked of decay and the sight of the spoiled salt cod was enough to make anyone heave. Even after they were boiled, the peas were hard as buckshot, the groats turned blood-red when cooked and worms had consumed almost all the mouldy bread. The men were too weak to sail or to drop anchor. More dead than alive, they somehow managed to anchor near Moa and Arimoa, two small islands off the northwest coast of New Guinea, which had already been discovered by Abel Tasman.

Once again the men rowed out to a strange shore but here they had better luck than on the Tabar Islands. It was not long before a number of boats carrying men, women and children arrived at the beach on Moa, firing arrows into the air. Coconuts, bananas, root vegetables and green herbs were exchanged for mirrors, beads and knives. A number of Papuans agreed to come aboard the ships. Using gestures, the sailors managed to make it clear that they also wanted pigs; the Papuans returned with carrots, bananas and three dogs, which were politely refused. Weak and wary, the men declined the Papuans' invitations to accompany them to the mainland.

On Moa, Roggeveen's men chopped down coconut palms, as they had no other way to reach the coconuts. When the Papuans saw this, they fired arrows at the foreigners, who responded with musket fire, killing a number of the Papuans.

There were still a few piglets aboard the *Eagle* and they were now slaughtered and cooked with the vegetables. This, along with the flesh of the coconuts, the bananas and a kind of pomegranate, helped revive the men to some extent. Behrens too, who by this time was unable to walk, found new strength. The ships' sailors helped one another raise the anchors and after a few days they continued their voyage. The men made one more landing in New Guinea (probably on the island of Waigu), where Behrens describes the local Papuans as pitch black and curly haired. They wore ornaments made of pigs' teeth, and straw hats decorated with the feathers of birds of paradise. Their noses were pierced with a stick 'as thick as the stem of a tobacco pipe'.

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These were the final encounters between Roggeveen and the inhabitants of the Pacific Ocean. They were meetings that tended to follow a fixed pattern. Armed

and on their guard, the sailors and soldiers reconnoitred from their sloops or their boats. The contact began cautiously on both sides and could certainly not be described as hostile. Skirmishes only broke out when the Europeans opened fire, as had occurred on Easter Island and Refreshment Island. Words offered no hope of communication, but the islanders were always quick to understand what the strangers were after: a good landing place, fresh water and food. In return they received what to European eyes were nothing more than worthless trinkets. The greatest misunderstandings occurred when the islanders went about helping themselves to everything they could lay their hands on.

Roggeveen's voyage was not a scientific expedition but a journey of commercial discovery. In their factual observations, Roggeveen and Bouman did not glorify the Polynesians (as Jean-Jacques Rousseau would later do with his notion of the '*sauvage noble*') but neither did they retreat into a sense of European superiority. Their descriptions of the inhabitants were positive. They were impressed by the islanders' physical stature, and admiring of their friendliness and lack of guile, not to mention their clothing, their ships, and their courage and skill in sailing the oceans. Not least, their descriptions reveal a fascination for the islanders' uninhibited sexuality, a constantly recurring theme of later South Sea voyages. However, they did take a far dimmer view of the Melanesians, based on their appearance, especially that of the women, and on their supposedly aggressive nature. However, the Papuans only attacked when Roggeveen's men began to chop down their coconut palms.

The *Eagle* and the *Tienhoven* sailed on, setting a south-westerly course between the north-west cape of New Guinea and the island of Halmahera. They reached the Moluccas, the islands that lay at the heart of spice production in the East Indies and the most easterly territory to come under the sway of the Dutch East India Company. At the end of August, the two ships were greeted by the sight of one of the Company's most easterly settlements, the island of Buru.

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<sup>i</sup> Fischer, p. 49.

<sup>ii</sup> Heyerdahl and Ferdon, p. 282