THE PALINDROMES OF MANGAREVA

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Mangareva is the largest of the Gambier Islands, a small group situated within the Tuamotu Archipelago in the eastern Pacific. The islands were discovered by Captain Wilson of the 'Duff' on 25 May 1797, and he named them after the British naval commander Admiral Lord Gambier.

Mangareva Island is about five miles in length, and rises in two peaks in the form of wedges, the greatest height being 1315 feet. The population was 516 in 1967, according to Webster's New Geographical Dictionary. The other chief islands in the Gambier group are Akamaru, Aukena, and Taravai. They form part of the French possessions in Oceania, and are almost enclosed by a coral reef 40 miles in circumference.

The interesting matter to the linguist and anthropologist is that the language is pure Polynesian. Generally the inhabitants of the Tuamotu Archipelago speak a dialect containing some elements foreign to the Polynesian tongue, but on Mangareva the speech is nearly identical with the Maori of New Zealand, thousands of miles distant to the westward. This raises some thought-provoking theories; however, my field is logology, not anthropology.

The definitive Dictionary of Mangareva was compiled by Edward Tregear, and published by the New Zealand Government Printing Office in 1899. It contains around 7000 words, of which well over one per cent are palindromic. This is an amazingly high proportion of palindromes, but even more remarkable is the fact that eleven of them contain nine or more letters! Many Mangareva words, even short ones, have most colourful definitions. Judge for yourself: here are the 86 palindromes of Mangareva.

AA to utter an exclamation, to admire, to look at eagerly
EE a saw
UU to break wind
AEA when? (used only with the future)
AGA a fathom (six feet)
AHA the mouth
AIA see there! forward then! courage!
AKA to make or cause
AMA the outrigger of a canoe
ANA a sinking down or falling of the ground
AOA condolence with one who grieves
APA to take possession of
ARA to miss
ATA the shadow
AVA slipped
EHE to lose
EIE behold!
EKE the octopus
ERE to march
ETE to be afraid
IKI a strip, line
IRI placed in
ITAI anything
IVI family, group
OMO to tie a
OMO to suck
ONO to put out
OTO to entertain
ORO to eat or drink
URU to eat or drink
UHU to gather
UMU a black
UNU a piece of
URU to cry out
UTU an emergency

AAEA to break
AAHA to do
AKAKA an untidy
AMAMA to make
APAPA the gals
ARARA quarrel
ARORA a kind
ATATA the sub
AUAUA having
AVAVA the name
EKEKE loud
ERERE a term
ETETE plural
IRIRI to roll
ORORO a curse
URURU to catch
UTUTU to moan

AGAAGA work
ANAANA suffocating
ATATAA to be
AVAAVA smoking
EKEKEK reduction
EREERE to go
ININ plural
IRIRI pleasant
small group in the
ern Pacific. e 'Duff' on
al commander
and rises in
being 1315
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h hundreds of miles
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ch well over
high propor-
e fact that
ereva words,
for yourself:

ARA to miss one's mark, as in throwing a stone
ATA the shadow of a human being
AVA slipped from the memory
EHE to lose one's way
EIE behold! see there!
EKE the octopus or squid
ERE to march, walk, go
ETE to be afraid
IKI a strip, as of ribbon
INI to recite a prayer, lesson, etc.
IRI placed in a higher position than the observer
ITI anything which jumps
IVI family, genealogy
OHO the head (of a human being)
OKO to tie a number of coconuts together
OMO to suck at the breast
ONO to put end to end
OPO to entertain, to converse with a person
ORO to eat one's words
OTO a venomous bone arming the point of a lance
UHU to gather fruit or berries without breaking them from the stalk
UMU a black-colored fish thick in proportion to its length
UNU a piece of wood on which one throws himself into the sea
UTU an emergency or crisis
AAEA to breathe with difficulty
AHAA to do for the first time
AKAKA an unusually low tide
AMAMA to make a grimace by opening the mouth
APAPA the gable end of a house
ARARA quarrels, faults
ARORA a kind of licentious chant
ATATA you will be taken! you will be caught!
ATUTA the suburbs or extension of a chief town
AUAA having many possessions
AVAVA the name of a portion of a reef
BEKEEK loud, strong; said of a fine voice
ERERE a term of endearment used as a call to one's eldest daughter
ETE plural form of ETE
IRIRI to roll oneself, tumble, wallow
ORORO a curse, or a cry of welcome
URURU to catch in the teeth (said of food)
UTUTU to moan concerning a person's death
AGAAAGA work
ANAANA suffocating heat
ATAATA to be full of matter, said of a sore ripe for lancing
AVAVAVA smoking tobacco
BEKEKE reduced by boiling
ERERE to go without ceasing, or to tie carefully
INININ plural form of INI
IRIRIRI pleasant
IVIVI small hills
OKOOKO to revenge oneself
OMOOMO to suck
ONOONO the shreds of pandanus used in making a mat
OPOOPO to think about some uncompleted work
ORORORO to wash or rub (plural form)
UNUNUNU to mark with wood a place one does not wish crowded
URUURU the hair on the body
UTUUTU to mourn, bewail
AKAHAKA having large and distended nostrils
AKAPAKA to cook so that the surface of the food forms a crust
AKATAKA to rough-hew a piece of timber using only one hand
AKAHAHAKA to listen attentively
AMAMAMAMA chewing actions
ARERARERA the name of a fish
ARORARORA to sing joyfully to oneself (plural form)
AKARAKURA to mock anyone who is speaking
ATOTATOTA red, scarlet
AVAAVAAVA one who hinders or delays much
EKAKEKAKE waves of the sea going and coming on the beach
AKAMAKAMAKA to commence to ripen
AKAPAKAPAKA to season or ripen (said of timber placed in water)
AKATATAKAKA to fish all day or all night with the line (plural)

My favourite palindrome? The nod goes to EKAKEKAKE.