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
AIL 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
eEIE behold!
EKE the octopus
ERE to march
ETE to be after
IKEI a strip, a chain
IRI placed in
ITI anything
IVI family, god
OMO the head
OKO to tie a knot
OKO to put in
ORO to eat
ORO to understand
UHU to gather
UHU a black
UGU a piece of wood
URO to cry out
UTU an emergency

AA to break
AHAA to do the same
AKAKA an untied knot
AMAMA to make
APAPA the general
ARARA quarrelling
AROKA a kind of food
ATOTA you wish
ATUTA the suit
AUAUA having
AVAVA having
AVAVAA smoking
AVAVAAA working
EKEKEE loud
EREERERE a term
ETETE plural
IRIRI to roll
ORORO a curse
URURU to catch
UTUTU to moan
AGAAGA work
ANAANA suffocating
ATAATA to be
AVAAVA smoking
EKEEEEK reduce
EREERE to go
ININI plural
IRIRIRI pleasant
A small group in the southern Pacific. The 'Duff' on the Gambier rises in being 1315 Webster's New part of the island by a coral island.  

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fact that areva 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
TVI 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
AAAEA 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
ATOTA you will be taken! you will be caught!
ATUTA the suburbs or extension of a chief town
AUAUA having many possessions
AYAVA the name of a portion of a reef
EKEKEEDE loud, strong: said of a fine voice
ERURE a term of endearment used as a call to one's eldest daughter
ETETE plural form of ETE
IRIRIRI 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
AGAAGA work
ANAANA suffocating heat
ATAATA to be full of matter, said of a sore ripe for lancing
AVAVAVA smoking tobacco
EXEEXE reduced by boiling
EBERERE to go without ceasing, or to tie carefully
ININI plural form of INI
1R1R1 pleasant
IVIIVI 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)
UNUUNU to mark with wood a place one does not wish crowded
URUURU the hair on the body
UTUUTU to mourn, bewail
AKAHABA 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
AKAHakahA to listen attentively
AMAMAMAMA chewing actions
ARERARERA the name of a fish
ARORARORA to sing joyfully to oneself (plural form)
AKURURURA to mock anyone who is speaking
ATOTATOTA red, scarlet
AVAAVAAVA one who hinders or delays much
EKEKEKAKE 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)
AKATAKATAKA to fish all day or all night with the line (plural)

My favourite palindrome? The nod goes to EKAKEKAKE.