Jacek Herman-I

the English language companion to Ramírez’s

Ahu Tongariki viewed from the sea, through 120 pages of text,
both a beautiful and resourceful addition to every Easter Island
familiar to all Rapanuiphiles — José-Miguel Ramírez. And

Pascua / Easter Island

Luis Poirot;

Michael Kenna;

Examples in the latter category include
with a bent towards the average reading public — which

A. Honorary Diploma, Brother Eugenio Eyraud High School, Rapa Nui (2008); PhD in archaeology, University of Hawaii’I at Mānoa (2006); MA in anthropology, Univer-
sity of Hawaii’I at Mānoa (2002); BA in mathematics, Clament McKenna College, California (2000).

Q. Place and date of birth?

Rewards

Rapa Nui: The Navel of the World
José Miguel Ramírez

Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino
Banco Santander, 2008
soft cover; 120 pages (ISBN 978-956-243-057-9)
$40+$16 s&h (tienda@museoprecolombino.cl, Santiago)

Review by Shawn McLaughlin

As I’ve written elsewhere, there are three types of works on the
subject of Easter Island — scholarly publications sometimes difficult to
digest by the lay public; publications that ought to be classified as fiction
even though they technically meet the non-fiction criteria for
bookstores and libraries; and non-fiction publications (some by
eminent archaeologists and other specialists in their fields)
with a bent towards the average reading public — which
includes coffee-table books full of beautiful pictures.

Examples in the latter category include Easter Island by
Michael Kenna; Rapa Nui, 110 fotos by Giovanni Carella Allaria; Easter Island by Carlos Mordo; Teotipo O Te Henua by Luis Poirot; L’Ile de Paques by Joël Cuénot; Rapa Nui by Jacek Herman-Iżyk; Osterlino by Horst Gatermann; Isla de Pascua / Easter Island by Felipe Soza Larraín. The latest
addition to this large-format category, at 11.5” x 15.5” (29.21
cm x 29.21 cm) in size, comes from a name that should be familiar
to all Rapanuiphiles — José-Miguel Ramírez. And both a beautiful and resourceful addition to every Easter Island
bookshelf it is! Starting with a stunning cover photograph of
Alta Tongariki viewed from the sea, through 120 pages of text,
photos, and illustrations, Rapa Nui: The Navel of the World
is the English language companion to Ramírez’s Rapa Nui: El

Orbílido del Mundo, which was also published last year.
Dedicated to Gonzalo Figueroa and Papa Kiko, who died in
2008 and 2009, respectively, Rapa Nui easily appeals to
neophytes as well as experts with chapter headers that include
“The Roots of Rapanui Culture”; “The Mystery, Miracle,
Magic, and Science”; “The Megalithic Splendor”; “The Fall of the
Mour and “History: The End of Isolation.” Although there is
a reliance on references to island legend (which of course
must be taken with a grain of sea salt), the content is
solidly grounded in the latest scientific findings about
the island and each chapter section features pictures of modern
islanders — often children — providing a humanistic and
temporary context to the sequence.

The English translation by Peter W. Kendall stands out for
its clarity, accuracy, and style, just as the beautiful photos by
Nicolas Aguayo Fuenzalida and never-before published
illustrations by Alfredo Cea transform the informational value
of the book into an artistic, decorative possession. Among too
many pictures and drawings to mention, there is a compre-
ensive map with 70 toponymic points identified, a robust,
two-page spread of Easter Island fishes, no shortage of crisp
c images of wood and stone artefacts, and, to be expected,
a decent assortment of the usual, familiar reproductions of
carvings.

In a book that clearly celebrates the Rapanui re-creating
themselves after centuries of rise and fall and resurrection,
Ramírez has managed to blend together (in both the Spanish
language edition as well as this edition) the visual beauty of
Easter Island and the latest research interpretations while
avoiding sensationalism or undue controversy, covering such
topics as ancient genealogy; seafaring and navigation; the
Taiwanese origin of early Oceanic explorers; DNA analysis;
Lapita people; marae from regions elsewhere in Polynesia;
linguistics; rock art; detailed discussions of astronomical
orientation of some Easter Island ahu; the Birdman competi-
tion; explorers such as Routledge and Heyerdahl; causes of
the island’s decline (which is discussed with appropriate balance);
and the end of isolation. The book is rounded out by the in-
clusion of a glossary and references.

In the book’s closing words, Ramírez concludes, “Un-
doubtedly, the explanation for the Rapanui enigma lies not in
reason, but rather in spirit — in that which the ancestors called
mana”. Yet, were it not for reason this book would not exist,
so I think it’s fair to say both forces contribute to the mana
in this worthy new addition to the Rapanuiphile’s bookshelf.