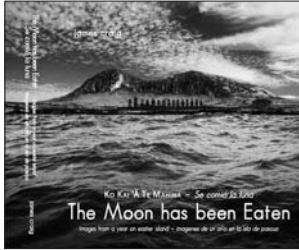


Book Reviews

Craig, James. *The Moon Has Been Eaten. Images from a Year on Easter Island.*



Bel Air, Maryland: Stockson Printing (self-published), 2012. ISBN 978-0-615-52442-9. US\$79 from the author (themoonhasbeeneaten.com); US\$100 (amazon.com) (hardcover, 10 x 11 inches; in English and Spanish with titles in Rapanui).

Review by Antoinette Padgett,
Easter Island Foundation

When this book arrived, it was difficult to set it aside until there was adequate time to savor it; the cover image is a gorgeous black and white photograph of Ahu Tongariki and Rano Raraku taken from the sea; a vista that few people have ever had the opportunity to appreciate in person.

The title, *The Moon Has Been Eaten*, refers to one of the stunning images taken of a lunar eclipse that Craig experienced during many months spent on Rapa Nui photographing with his wife, Nan, who is a painter. He uses the analogy of the moon being eaten in an eclipse, only to be reborn, as a metaphor for the Rapanui people, who nearly disappeared but are now reclaiming their island and creating “a culture that is uniquely their own”.

The subtitle ‘Images from a year on Easter Island’ is a bit of a misnomer, as Craig’s original intended ‘year’ on the island was cut short due to an emergency trip home for a pulmonary vein ablation. He recuperated and was able to return in time for Tapati the following year, which was fortunate as he captured some wonderful images of the *haka pei* competition, body painting, dancing and the parade. In all, Craig spent some 23 months on the island over a period of five years.

I appreciated how Craig began the project with the idea of photographing only landscapes, but ended up with a collection that included many portraits of the Rapanui people. The Craigs quickly became as enamored with the Rapanui people as they were with the island. Another facet of Craig’s work included an exhibit of his images at the MAPSE; he generously set aside a number of copies of his book to give to people

on the island who helped him with the project. He also generously set aside a number of copies of this book to give to people on the island. The acknowledgements in the book include photographs of several of the people who helped him.

Although the book is self-published, it is a beautiful monograph printed on thick glossy stock that compliments the images. Craig switched from film to digital part way through the project; he challenges other photographers to identify which images are which in the book. Craig had plenty of time, while recuperating from surgery, to consider how digital photography might enable him to take portraits, which he hadn’t considered when he first began the project.

An interesting feature of the book are hidden figures in some of the images. Craig sometimes mentions figures of people, etc. that one many not notice until reading the accompanying text; some of these figures are nearly impossible to locate, such as the miniscule Ahu Tongariki from the sea in the image of Motu Marotiri and Poike (pg. 151); some of the images would be best viewed at their original size to truly appreciate these details. In several images, Craig explains what he was trying to achieve and whether or not it was successful (or if the resulting image was accidental). In his text, he captures the trials and tribulations of photography in inclement weather and less than ideal conditions on Rapa Nui, as well as the joy of seeing an image come out differently than expected. He also notes when he has edited a digital image and why.

Craig was inspired, as many have been, by the black and white photography in Fred Picker’s 1974 monograph with Thor Heyerdahl, *Rapa Nui*. Most of the other books Craig had seen about the island featured color photography, and he felt there had been no major effort to tell the story of Rapa Nui in black and white. He does not mention Michael Kenna’s 2001 monograph, *Easter Island*. Although Kenna’s work is impressive, Craig’s book is even more enjoyable for the stories and anecdotes that accompany each image.

The book encompasses so many of the wonderful things about Rapa Nui; some dramatic images of *moai*, *ahu* and rock art, landscapes, the faces of the people, a wide assortment of Tapati activities, as well as some scenes not commonly experienced by the casual visitor: surf fishing, a visit from the *Esmeralda*, two frigate birds in flight, the weighing of fish at the caleta, images of the island taken from the sea, and the total lunar eclipse.

Included in the book are a fine map by islander Lolita Tuki Paté, a glossary of Rapanui terms, and a catalog of the 98 images with photographic information. A bibliography would have been a nice addition for readers wanting general information about Rapa Nui and especially for people wanting to know more details

about some of the facts, theories, controversies, and published articles that Craig mentions in the text. There are a few typos and spelling inconsistencies of place names, but not many, and these certainly don't detract from the quality of the book.

This book definitely belongs in the collection of anyone interested in Rapa Nui; it would also appeal to black and white photographers and those interested in travel writing.

If the book is purchased from Craig's website (themoonhasbeeneaten.com), a DVD of island videos, an interactive iPad version of the book, a screensaver, and free priority shipping in the US is also included, along with a complimentary print of your choice; it would be challenging to choose one favorite, but the vista of the island taken from the ocean (pp. 14-15) is particularly striking; it is reminiscent of my first view of Rapa Nui, arriving at dawn on a research vessel after 40 days at sea.

References

- Kenna, M. 2001. *Easter Island*. Tucson: Nazraeli; Manchester: Cornerhouse.
 Picker, F. & T. Heyerdahl. 1974. *Rapa Nui*. New York: Paddington Press.

Boersema, Jan J. *Beelden van Paaseiland – over de duurzaamheid van een cultuur* (Statues of Easter Island - about the sustainability of a culture)



Amsterdam/Antwerpen:
 Atlas, 2011. 352 pp.
 ISBN: 978-9-0450-1052-6.
 €19.95 (paperback) in Dutch;
www.uitgeverijatlas.nl

Review by Veerle De Ridder

Rapa Nui has been put forward as an example of how a society can collapse through human intervention in the ecosystem. But is this story, endearing and fitting to the times as it is, really true, or do we need to start telling a different tale? This is the main question Boersema builds his book around, and to him the answer is yes, we need a different story.

The book starts off with a quick sketch of how Rapa Nui became this icon of environmental collapse and an introduction to the new route that Boersema wants the narrative about this island and culture to take. What follows is a very thorough approach to the subject built around a chronological framework. In the first few

chapters, a sturdy reference base is built up. A picture of the first contacts between Westerners and the Rapanui is drawn through the eyes of the first explorers to reach the island, taking into account the reasons for their journeys and how those affected their view and behavior.

The geographical situation of the island is highlighted as well as the natural fauna and flora along with what Polynesian settlers brought with them on arrival, providing insight into the stage on which Rapanui culture arose. In delving deeper into this culture, their housing, agriculture, animal consumption, and first contact accounts, reasons to doubt the collapse become apparent. And as the *moai* culture and its transition into the birdman cult are examined further, the picture that becomes apparent is increasingly not one of drastic collapse, but instead of gradual transition from one to the next. Even a direct link to deforestation does not seem so certain anymore.

From the background provided in the first chapters, Boersema now begins to examine the validity of the collapse theory. Focus rests on how the Rapanui adjusted their way of life and agriculture to a changing environment; one that didn't change overnight, but rather gradually, over a longer period of time, with one generation to the next only being witness to minor changes that added up to a radical change too slowly to be immediately apparent to the observer.

Previous high population estimates are also challenged and adjusted to factor in more realistic mortality and reproduction rates for early cultures. Further examination of the process of deforestation shows that a human factor alone is not sufficient as an explanation for a complete disappearance of trees on the island. An additional factor can be found in an impeded and ultimately insufficient regeneration of the forest. Combined with estimates of how large a population the island would have been able to sustain, even after deforestation, and with the adaptations the islanders made to living in a changed environment, the idea of a rapid and disastrous collapse loses much of its credibility.

Lastly, we get a look at how slavery and disease struck a massive blow to Rapa Nui. The population was decimated and much of the culture was lost. This is the true collapse, one that Rapanui culture never fully recovered from. In recent times, missionaries and the annexation of the island by Chile brought Rapa Nui into the modern world. They have maintained a distinct Polynesian identity, but now cultural influences from the outside seep in and tourism puts a new kind of environmental strain on the island.

In the last chapter, Boersema argues why he thinks we need a new story, not one of collapse, but a more subtle one about change and adaptation instead. Although Rapa Nui as an icon of human-induced