

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Sidsel Millerstrom

Q. How did you get into archaeology, and Easter Island archaeology? What triggered your interest?

A. My interest in archaeology was triggered at the age of approximately 7 years when I dug a hole in my mother's flowerbed and discovered an historic garbage pit. Holding the strange and unfamiliar glass bottles and porcelain shards in my hands I was fascinated with what the bottles may have contained, what the shards were part of, who were the people that had used and discarded the artifacts, and why.

Growing up in Norway, as a teenager, I read with great interest all of Thor Heyerdahl's travel adventures. Easter Island became one of the numerous places in the world I wanted to visit. However, the opportunity to travel to Easter Island was first realized many years later after I had immigrated to the US, got married, had started a family, and returned to college at the age of 39. It was my first year as an undergraduate anthropology student at the department of Anthropology, U.C. Berkeley that a classmate showed me a newspaper clipping advertising an archaeological project on *Easter Island Rock Art Project* with the *University of California Research Expedition* (UREP). With the support of my family I signed up with UREP for the rock art project on Easter Island. Dr. Georgia Lee of U.C.L.A. was the project leader. The project was a fantastic learning experience and Dr. Lee was an enthusiastic and patient project leader. It was the start of an inspiring friendship and the beginning of my career as an Oceanic archaeologist. She became my role model, a mentor, and good friend. If she could do it on Easter Island, I thought, perhaps I would also be able to do something similar somewhere else.

It was my experiences on Easter Island, and the encouragement of Dr. Lee that led me to investigate rock art in the Marquesas. In the process I earned an M.A. for a thesis at San Francisco State University, and then entered the Ph.D. program in The Department of Anthropology, U.C. Berkeley. The Easter Island project led to many happy years of archaeological field research.

Q. Who or what do you consider as your most significant influence (scientific or otherwise) either as a person or a particular work (or series of works)?

A. My initial interest was in the travel business. My interest in archaeology was definitely triggered by Thor Heyerdahl's publications, Georgia Lee's training, and a number of enthusiastic and inspiring anthropology teachers both at a junior college and at U.C. Berkeley. As a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley, my academic advisor professor, Patrick Kirch was a continuous source of inspiration. His extensive knowledge, his enthusiasm, and his way of communicating this information were motivating. Other persons in the field that inspired and motivated me were Roger Green and Robert Suggs. My husband Ed, and our two daughters, Nikolett and Jessica Gypsy have always supported and encouraged me. Over the years they have cheerfully put up with my long absences, sometimes a chaotic household, and me not being there for their birthdays and important family events. I could not have reached my goals without their understanding, acceptance, and support.

Furthermore, I have great respect and admiration for the numerous people, especially professors and colleagues, that helped me, influenced me, and shared their knowledge, and experiences with me.

Q. What theory or project of yours turned out to be different from what you had expected as, for example, a complete surprise?

A. The Marquesas Island Rock Art Project, initially a joint project with Edmundo Edwards of Easter Island

and sponsored by the then Département Archéologie, Centre Polynésien des Sciences Humaines, turned out to be more rewarding than we could imagine. We knew there were a few rock art sites on the islands but the fact that we documented over some 6000 individual figures was surprising. The French Polynesian government has been very supportive and decided that my work was important and that it would benefit the people of French Polynesia thus they translated and published my dissertation.

Q. As a renowned female archaeologist, have you found that your sex played a role in making your research projects more difficult, or perhaps easier? Would you encourage women to go into the field of archaeology?

A. I have never felt any form of personal discrimination. I have been looked after and protected while surveying alone or with colleagues in the deep Marquesan forest. I have a good relationship with the local women and access to information I could only get because of being a female. In the academic sphere I have had a tremendous support, especially from female colleagues. I have always felt mutual respect from indigenous people as well from colleagues and professor in the academic sphere. On field projects, sex can



play a minor role; it depends on the project leader. On the sites, everybody is treated equally. However, in the living situation many male colleagues still feel that a woman's place is in the kitchen. Regardless, I strongly encourage women with an interest in archaeology to pursue this fascinating and rewarding field. Just be aware that, in the Marquesas Islands, night-crawling still occurs!¹

Q. What would you have done if you had not pursued your current line(s) of research and interests?

A. I have always liked to work with people. I started out in the US as a flight attendant and it only further fueled my interest in foreign places and different cultures. I would definitely work within the travel industry. Fortunately, I have been able to apply my knowledge in anthropology to lectures on cruise ships in the Pacific, teach two semesters for Semester at Sea (University of Virginia) while voyaging around the world on *M/V Explorer*, teaching part time at Department of Social Sciences, National University of Viet Nam, Ho Chi Min City, working as a tour manager for Far Horizons Archaeological and Cultural Trips, and other tour operators. I am privileged to be able to explore both the prehistoric and the contemporary global arena.

Q. What was your best Eureka moment?

A. I don't have one "best Eureka moment". However, I am constantly awestruck by the complexity of the Polynesian culture, the often massive and ingenious Polynesian architecture, and the ingenious way the Polynesians managed to live in often marginal environments.

Q. What do you hope to accomplish (in archaeology) in the Marquesas in the future?

A. There are many interesting avenues of research to pursue. The more I accomplish the more questions I have. I would like to continue with investigating the ritual sites in the Marquesas. I am especially interested in the fishermen's and household shrines. It would also be useful to excavate at some of the rock art sites.

Q. What is your favorite Easter Island site and why?

A. It would have to be Tahai. It was my first encounter with the *moai* I had traveled so far to see. I was fortunate enough to "discover" it on my own, one early wet morning on my first day on Easter Island. It was a misty and dark morning when I went exploring on my own. As I walked out of a small forest – there they were in the distance peaking out of the rain and the spray from the ocean. It was a very special moment.

Q. What myth or misinformation about Easter Island would you like to dispel?

A. "The mystery of the island" a hangover, of course, from Katherine Routledge's 1919 publication. There are still a great number of unanswered questions. However, science is moving forward and it is impressive how much painstaking research has taken place on the island by dedicated scientists and how much more we know about the island today than, for instance, a few decades ago.

Q. What's the most important thing you'd like visitors (or scientists, for that matter) to know about the Marquesas Islands?

A. I would like everybody to know that the people are kind and friendly, that there is a wealth of archaeological sites to explore, and that both the archaeological remains and the environment are fragile.

Q. What advice would you give to a person interested in Easter Island/Marquesas Islands archaeology or anthropology (or these fields generally)?

A. The process of earning a Ph.D. is a long, and sometimes lonely and painful journey. However, it is important to enjoy the process as well as the end result.

Q. If you could, what would you change about the fields of archaeology or anthropology?

A. I wish more social scientists were able to, or took the time to also write for the general public. That is one of the reasons Heyerdahl was so popular worldwide. Unfortunately, many of his theories are also remembered. However, he made reading about archaeology research interesting. In my view, a large part of important information published by social scientists does not reach the general public. I am afraid that much of what we write ends up in a "great big black hole" as one famous Oceanic anthropologist once told me. Most people are interested in the past but few are interested in reading scientific papers with academic jargon.

Q. What are you currently reading?

A. Other than reading academic journals, and stories to our four grandchildren, I like to read old and contemporary travel journals (e.g. J. M. Troost) and personal field experiences by social scientists. I am presently reading "*A Primate's Memoir; a Neuroscientist's Unconventional Life Among Baboons.*" It is a humorous and well-written book by R. M. Sapolsky, a professor of biology and neurology at Stanford University. I also like to read works written by authors from Asia and Oceania.

Q. Credentials?

A. I got my basic schooling in my native country of Norway, earned a B. A. degree in anthropology, U. C. Berkeley,

and an M. A. degree in anthropology, San Francisco State University. In 2001 I received a Ph. D. in anthropology at U.C. Berkeley.²

Q. *Date and place of birth?*

A. Holla, Telemark, Norway, December 6th 1942.

ENDNOTES:

1. The term, Night Crawler, as known in the Marquesas, refers to young men who creep into houses in the middle of the night to consort with their girlfriends. Or, total strangers of the female sex.
2. Sidsel Millerstrom's book on her research in the Marquesas Islands will be published by the EIF in 2011. The title is *Te Henua 'Enana—The Island of Men. Rock Carvings and Settlement Patterns in the Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia.*

Easter Island Settlement Patterns in the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Periods, Bulletin 4, Easter Island Committee, International Fund for Monuments, Inc. 1976. by Patrick C. McCoy, is now available for purchase from the EIF.

This classic publication, concerns fieldwork on Easter Island in 1968-69 and is derived from McCoy's doctoral dissertation, "Settlement Patterns in the Last Prehistoric and Protohistoric Periods", Washington State University, 1973.

McCoy's survey resulted from a UNESCO report made by William Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa in 1966. Their premise was that, with increasing land use and consequent destruction of archaeological sites, there was an urgent need for intensive site surveys of the island. McCoy's surveyed a sizeable portion of the south end of the island: 4,873 acres between Rano Kau and the Vaihu region. He recorded 1,738 sites in five quadrangles, an impressive undertaking.

To order a copy, please contact the EIF:

www.islandheritage.org
eif@att.net
(805) 528-8558 (telephone)
(805) 534-9301 (fax)

REVIEWS

Rapa Nui: Iorana Te Ma'ohi. Dilemas estratégicos

Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica. 2009.
188 pages; black/white photographs plus line drawings.
Paper cover, 6 ½ x 9 ½ In Spanish. Price \$15.90
ISBN 978-956-14-1074-9

Review by Rolf Foerster and Riet Delsing

Rapa Nui: Iorana Te Ma'ohi is a surprising book, first of all because of its authorship. It brings together Rapanui leaders and intellectuals such as Pedro Pablo (Petero) Edmunds (ex-mayor), Enrique Pakarati (ex-governor), Cristián Madariaga (Rapanui language teacher and member of the Rapanui Language Academy), Julio Hotus (artist and "the person in charge of cultural management of the Municipality of Easter") and Chilean residents on the island (Ana María Arredondo, Marcela Berrios and Alejandro Bugueño). These islanders share the credit of writing the book with professors of the Catholic University, some of whom are also part of its maximum authorities, such as Carlos Williamson (vice-rector of the University), Gonzalo Edwards (Director of the Institute of Economics), and Ignacio Irrarázaval (Director of the Center of Public Policies).

Secondly, the book is surprising because of its subject matter: "strategic dilemmas". The authors think about "Easter Island's future" by clarifying its past, in order to define, from there, the challenges of today. Edmunds says in the prologue: "I had the intuition that the team of professors that have developed this book... would be the best one to collect the ideas and desires of many opinion leaders in Rapa Nui and to support us in their concretion". One might conclude from this quote that the authorities and intellectuals of the Catholic University assume a passive role in the writing of this text and only gather what already exists and, by doing so, "support" its materialization. One entranceway of what already exists for Edmunds is "the road that for a long time my ancestors have recommended me to follow" (his British, Chilean or Polynesian ancestors?). Another one of Edmunds' merits is that he is not only a natural leader on the island but is also capable of gathering goodwill amongst the Chilean elite (we should not forget that, besides the authorities of the Catholic University, he has public links with the mayors of Santiago's upscale neighborhoods, Providencia, Vitacura, Las Condes and with others, such as business tycoon Carlos Cardoen).

Thirdly, this book shows an appraisal of the Elders' Council whose position seems to coincide with the central thesis of the strategic dilemmas: "The challenge of this organization, as the continuation of the ancestral institutional structure, is to once more bring into harmony the living culture with the material culture, and to participate in the implementation of alliances with public, academic, scientific and