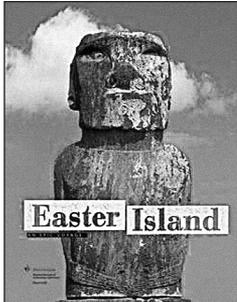


Book Reviews

Easter Island: An Epic Voyage / Ile de Pâques: Le Grand Voyage.



Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Archaeology & History, Pointe-à-Callière, 2010. 160 pp., photos. ISBN: 978-2-9217184-46-2. Price: CAD19.95 (available from the museum shop online).

Review by Paul Bahn

This volume is the catalog from a Canadian exhibition which was very heavily inspired by and based on the second of the Orliacs' exhibitions of Easter Island material held in Paris in 2008 (see RNJ 23(1), May 2009, pp. 78-79). It thus incorporates a similar focus on the writings and drawings of Pierre Loti. The book contains numerous very fine photographs (although unfortunately many of them are tiny), and the overall design and layout are extremely attractive.

The catalog begins with Polynesian navigation and the arrival of the first settlers, which is said to be "around 1000 CE (or even slightly earlier)". The first objects presented are symbols of power and regalia, followed by a section on everyday life – crops, water sources, houses, containers, tools, headgear and so forth. Strangely, where the *mata'ua* are concerned (p. 33), the caption to a photo of one hafted as a spear states that "some Europeans reported seeing islanders holding spears with obsidian points...There is no evidence of intertribal warfare, however" [*sic*!] The text correctly points out the wide variety of their shapes, sizes and possible uses, but fails to mention their relatively sudden appearance, their abundance or the oral testimony about their role.

The next section covers the *moai*, *toki*, *pukao* and transportation, followed by the *ahu* and burial sites. The catalog then turns to the real core of the exhibition, the dazzling carved wooden figurines, borrowed – as for the Orliac's show – from a large number of museums and collections.

We then move on to the landscape, the changes in vegetation, the modifications of behavior and beliefs; this is followed by the Birdman phenomenon, *Makemake*, inscribed skulls, and finally *rongorongo*. The volume ends with the first European visitors and brings the story up to the present. The bibliography is extremely limited.

Interspersed with the photos and general texts are four brief texts by invited scholars. Georgia Lee presents the island's rock art, while Jo Anne Van Tilburg gives an account of her past and current work on the *moai*. Michel Orliac writes of the vegetational change, emphasizing the Polynesians' undeniable expertise with trees and horticulture. He notes that before about 1650, at least 23 species of trees

and shrubs had grown on the island, but afterwards this total was reduced to only eight. In other words, there seems to have been a massive and sudden disappearance of species between 1650 and 1722, which he attributes to drought.

The fourth essay is by Nicolas Cauwe and puts forward his view that there was no violence on the island and, above all, no toppling of the statues. Instead they were all carefully and lovingly lowered to the ground to be used later – in some cases, for example, as covers for tombs. This is not the place to critique this theory, with which I do not concur for many reasons. Suffice it to say that during my most recent stay on the island, I had the theory in mind during visits to the sites, and at Akahanga or Vinapu, where the *moai* have come down in all directions, and broken into fragments, I find it hard to understand how the "careful dismantling" view could possibly apply.

Overall, the volume is factually accurate (although one can disagree strongly with some of the opinions expressed!). There are, however, occasional mistakes: for example it is erroneously stated (p. 137) that, after Roggeveen's arrival in 1722, "more than fifty years passed" before the Spanish arrived – in reality, of course, this occurred in 1770. And the caption to a tiny photo of Vai a Heva (p. 108) claims that this is a depiction of *Makemake* and is "on a cliff". But such details do not detract from what is a fine addition to an already distinguished series of Rapa Nui exhibition catalogs that have appeared over the past couple of decades.

Chagnon, Guy. *L'Ile de Pâques. Approche Historique.*

Paris: C.E.I.P.P. (Cercle d'Etudes de l'Ile de Pâques et la Polynésie), 2010. ISBN: 978-2-9536580-0-2.

Review by Paul Bahn

This book is something of an enigma, and I am still uncertain what to make of it. A new publication from the still-active group of Easter Island enthusiasts based in Paris, it is a solo effort, but its primary source of data appears to be the last collective volume from the Cercle, *Les Mystères Résolus de l'Ile de Pâques*, published in 1993.

The author clearly knows a great deal about the history and prehistory of the island, and what he has presented here is not a straightforward narrative but rather a kind of catalog, or annotated list, of the different views that have been put forward about numerous aspects of that past. This could have been very useful and valuable if it had been accompanied by detailed references to all the sources of those views. Instead, however, we are given hardly any. The bibliography runs to only two pages, and omits many of the standard works on the subject,