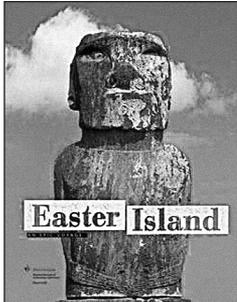


# Book Reviews

## *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,

while the many footnotes focus heavily on French-language sources (notably Métraux, the Orliacs and the 1993 volume). The names of many researchers are mentioned in passing, but with no clue as to where their work can be found.

For example, when Chagnon tackles the question of the date of the first human arrival on the island (which he himself sees as having occurred around AD 1000), his footnote cites as sources “Ayers – Bahn – Cauwe et Huyge – Charola – Conte – Ferdon et Heyerdahl – Hunt et Lipo – Kirch – Lee – Orliac – Toullelan et Gille – Van Tilburg”, but what is the point of listing all these names without any indication of where their opinions are to be found?

The author has clearly read a great deal, but there are some striking limitations to his knowledge. For instance, the topic of birds on the main island receives a grand total of three lines of text (p. 28) – it is obvious that Chagnon has not heard of Steadman’s important work on the island’s original wealth of birdlife. He also appears completely unaware of the extensive work of Mieth and Bork, or indeed of Haoa and Stevenson, on the complex relationship between the islanders and their soil.

There are other problems too, Chagnon is no archaeologist, as can be seen by his description (p. 46) of Tiahuanaco as an important centre of the Inca Empire! Two maps (one of the Pacific, the other of the island, pp. 23-24) look amateurish since they have handwritten names and figures on them; and many of the illustrations are simple poor-quality photocopies of photos and diagrams taken from other sources – this is hard to understand in our age of scanners.

Overall, therefore, the book may perhaps be useful to someone who might want a kind of mnemonic for different claims and theories about the island’s past; but without the necessary bibliographic documentation, its potential value is greatly reduced.

Ciszewski, Andrzej, Zdzislaw Jan Ryn, and Mariusz Szelerewicz (eds.), *The Caves of Easter Island: Underground World of Rapa Nui / Las Cuevas de la Isla de Pascua: El Mundo Subterráneo de Rapa Nui*.



Kraków: Pracownia Kreatywna Bezliku, 2010. 400 pp., col. photos, 315 plans. ISBN: 978-8-393025-90-9. Ordering information: szelerewicz@ceti.pl

Review by Paul Horley, Yuri Fedkovych  
Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine

The speleology of Rapa Nui is truly fascinating – the island has hundreds of caves, many of which have traces of human activity. These include masonry walls, earth ovens, rock art and burial sites. Caves were used as living

spaces, shelters during tribal wars, for safekeeping of artifacts and so on. Recently, several professional speleological teams have been studying the subterranean world of Easter Island. During 2001-2008, a Polish expedition (involving 29 people) spent four field seasons on the island. This research was featured in the 2009 National Geographic documentary *Rapa Nui Underworld* (see Bahn 2010 for a review). The expeditions surveyed 315 caves located in 16 quadrants, documenting the area of Roiho, the south coast and much of the Poike peninsula.

This volume presents a detailed report of this monumental undertaking. The book is richly illustrated with over a hundred color photographs showing entrances and interiors of caves, stone masonry, burials, petroglyphs, artifacts, images of surveying teams at work, as well as a number of photographs depicting island landscapes and archaeological sites.

The first chapter of the book is focused on the role of caves in Rapa Nui prehistory, including legends and ceremonies connected with caves, and summarizes results of previous studies. The second chapter gives a quick overview of Rapa Nui geology, mentioning the volcanic eruptions that created the island, explaining how the caves were formed and giving a classification scheme for volcanic rocks. The remaining chapters narrate the history of the Polish speleological expeditions, describing the survey procedures and the artifacts discovered – including a bone needle, a stone bowl, an adze, an obsidian scraper and nineteen spearheads (*mata'a*). Surprisingly, only three caves among the surveyed ones contain petroglyphs – a well-known *neru* whitening cave, Ana o Keke, and a cave with numerous *Makemake* faces that was previously documented by Lee (1992: Plate 7) under the name Ana Mahina. However, the reviewed book calls it the Toki-toki cave, which makes one wonder why the cave name may have changed. The third cave with rock art is located at Poike and features a single *Makemake* face; no images of this petroglyph are given (actually, no rock art drawings are included in the book, but there are photographs of people documenting the petroglyphs of Ana o Keke and Ana Mahina / Toki-toki).

The most important and impressive part of the book is the survey chapter (pp. 97-346), featuring the plans of 315 caves, carefully drawn with much attention to detail. The plans are given in the same scale, allowing easy comparison of cave dimensions. Thus, the plans for very large caves may occupy several pages; each of these has a handy small “locator map”. The plans give the altitude of the cave floor (relative to a reference point), soil type information, show the location of temporary or permanent water pools, masonry walls, fireplaces, burials and rock quarries; surprisingly, rock art locations are not marked. The transversal profiles of chambers / corridors are supplied for many caves. The plans are accompanied with detailed descriptions supplying in-depth information about each cave. The only issue which slightly complicates the study of these plans is the absence of cave names, so that the reader should find out by him/herself,