

Obituaries

Irina Konstantinovna Fedorova (1931–2010)

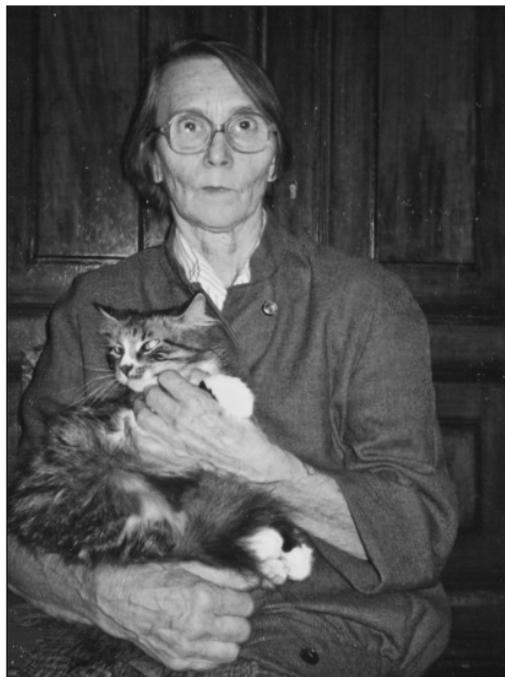
On December 7, 2010, Irina Konstantinovna Fedorova passed away. She was a doctor of historical sciences and a leading scientist in the Department of Australia, Oceania and Indonesia at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science in St. Petersburg.

Irina was born in Leningrad in 1931. Her father, Konstantin Mozhajskey, worked in a printing house and her mother, Lydia Steinberg, taught German language classes at Leningrad's schools. In 1956 Irina graduated with distinction from the philological faculty of the Leningrad State University, with specializations in Roman philology and the teaching of the French language. In August 1958, she began working at the Institute of Ethnography (Leningrad), having studied Rapanui language and folklore. She worked at this institute (now known as the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Science) for 52 years, with postings in the American sector, the Department of Australia, Oceania and Indonesia, and with a group of ethnic semiotics headed by the outstanding decipherer Jury Knorozov.

In 1966 Irina published *Folklore of Easter Island as a Historical Source*, and in 1978 she published *Myths, Legends of Easter Island*, for which she was awarded a premium in 1981 by N.N. Miklouho-Macklay of the Academy of Science of the USSR. In 1988 Irina published a second monograph on folklore called *Myths and Legends of Easter Island*, which included a summary dictionary of the Rapanui language (direct and reverse). Her 1993 book *Easter Island. Sketches of Culture of XIX-XX Centuries* was devoted to the population history of Easter Island, ethnogenesis of its inhabitants, and many aspects of its ancient and original civilization.

Irina's studies of *rongorongo* were first published as articles in the 1960s and confirmed the hieroglyphic character of Rapanui texts. Results of her decipherment were presented in 1995 in the monograph *Kohau Rongorongo Tablets from Kunstkamera*, for which Irina received a premium of Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 2001 Irina published her fundamental decoding of all known hieroglyphic Rapanui tablets entitled *Speaking Tablets from Easter Island. Decipherment, Reading, Translation*.

In addition to her study of *rongorongo*, Irina wrote over 100 articles and reports on various aspects of ethnography, culture, folklore, history, material culture, and language of Easter Island and other Polynesian islands (Hawai'i, New Zealand, Marquesas, Mangareva, Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga). Her book *Missionaries of Easter Island* (2004) investigated the history of the first Catholic mission on Rapa Nui and the relation of missionaries to original Rapanui culture.



It incorporated rare archival materials and publications of the Congregation of S. Coeurs (Vatican) and showed a positive role of the nineteenth century Rapa Nui mission in studying and preserving local culture. Unfortunately, one of Irina's last works, *The Semantics of Sculptural and Carved Images (in subjects of Polynesian collections of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Russian Academy of Science))* remains at present unpublished.

Irina's work was not restricted to the Pacific, and from 1995 she participated in an informal creative group ("Way of Ancestors") investigating and publishing on the history of the first Russian round-the-world expedition (1803-1806). She contributed to the large scientific album *Around the World with Krusenstern* (2005), was a co-author of *Russians in 'the Silent Sea'* (2006) and *Russian Geographical Society. 165 Years of Service to Fatherland* (2011) in which she studied diaries and letters of J.K. Horner, F.I. Shemelin, M.I. Ratmanov and other participants of the Russian round-the-world voyage.

With Irina's death, Russian science and Pacific scholarship has lost a worthy representative of the Leningrad ethnographic school; a modest, hardworking, sympathetic person. May the light of her memory continue to shine.

Olga Fedorova
Photograph by Olga Fedorova