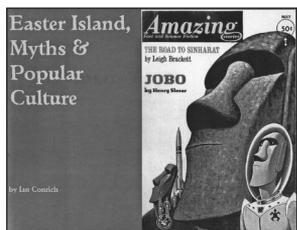


Conrich, Ian with Roy Smith, Martyn Harris, Frieder Wahl and Dan Bendrups. *Easter Island, Myths & Popular Culture*.



Middlesbrough: Museums and Galleries, Middlesbrough Council/The Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, 2011. 72 pp., color and b/w photos/drawings. ISBN: 0-86083-083-7. GBP7.95 (soft-cover). Available from amazon.com.co.uk.

Review by Georgia Lee, *Easter Island Foundation*

This booklet, *Easter Island, Myths & Popular Culture*, accompanies the exhibit at the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum in the UK (5 March-4 September 2011), and at the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo, Norway (6 October 2011-31 March 2012). The exhibit, and *Easter Island, Myths & Popular Culture*, reflect the global impact that Rapa Nui and its “mysteries” have had—and continue to have—on *aficionados* as well as the general public.

Easter Island, Myths & Popular Culture features two forewords, one about the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum and one about the Kon-Tiki Museum, the two venues for this exhibit. Following is information about the location of Rapa Nui in the context of the Pacific, a bit about its discovery by the Western world, and a map of the island showing where the *moai* are located. The next section describes Cook’s voyages and his encounter on Rapa Nui, plus the paintings by Hodges from 1775.

“Easter Islanders Then & Now” gives a short history of the island, the slave trade and smallpox; and then describes the island today, the language, and the Tapati festival. The latter is accompanied by a picture of a Tapati parade and the famous images of the “Man and Woman of Easter Island” from Cook’s voyage.

“The Moai of Easter Island” are described in the following four pages, with a brief history of the statues accompanied by photographs of Tongariki, ‘Anakena, Tahai, and Puna Pau; the next pages contain images from the quarry, Rano Raraku, as well as Vinapu and Tahai, all in color.

“Moving the Moai” follows, showing the fallen statue “Paro” at Te Pito Kura on one page, and a picture from the movie, *Rapa Nui*, illustrating Hollywood’s version of moving a statue. “The Moai & the Myth of Creation” follows, and here we step into the world of comic magazines, dating back to the early 1940s. Most describe the *moai* as being “not of this world” but from an “ancient civilization”, perhaps Egypt or the lost continent of Mu. The most popular theme is that the statues are evidence of contact with those pesky guys from Outer Space.

“The Moai & the Myth of Movement”; “The Moai & the Myth of Power”; the “Moai & the Myth of Presence”; “Easter Island & Science Fiction”; and “Easter Island in Comic Books” follow. These sections are illustrated by comic magazine covers, or pages from them, that show statues and a variety of “others.” These range from “Super Girl” to Uncle Scrooge to horrid villains, space ships, and extra-terrestrials. Some are in Spanish or French, and one is from Poland (with a red-haired *vahine!*). It is interesting how few Rapanui islanders are shown (or even mentioned) in nearly all of these.

Included in this section are two pages about a graphic novel that was written by a Rapanui, Te Pou Huke, whose aim was to tell stories passed down in his family.

“Easter Island in Novels” describes popular books about the island, some in French, Italian, and Spanish, as well as *Tom Swift and His SubOcean Geotron*. Included here is the popular novel by Jennifer Vanderbes, whose book, *Easter Island*, was loosely based on the story of Katherine Routledge.

At midpoint in the book, Thor Heyerdahl is featured, along with his exploits and books. This is followed by “Adventurers & Archaeologists” and includes real explorers (Cousteau) as well as imagined (Doctor Who, Indiana Jones, and Lara Croft); and then comes “Mystery & Suspense,” concerning the *moai* in mystery novels that stress secrets, curses, and hidden passages accessed by doorways in the statues with hidden caves below. “The Easter Islanders in Western Culture” section points out the unhappy fact that designers of games and comic book writers depict Rapanui islanders as monstrous cavemen, or as appearing to be extinct when, in reality, they were hibernating for hundreds of years. Most simply claim that “no one knows who carved” the statues.

“Moai & Advertising” has a very humorous image of a *moai* with a broad smile, displaying lots of teeth and advertising Italian toothpaste. This brings to mind a large poster seen in a Chile drugstore some years ago: it was an ad for nasal spray and a large *moai* head was featured, blowing its nose. The caption read (in Spanish), “When your cold is monumental...” The *moai* have become quite popular in advertising campaigns and thus the statues have world-wide recognition. (Too bad the Rapanui didn’t copyright the image).

The next sections concern the use of the island’s images in computer games, cartoons, fictional film (including the awful movie, *Rapa Nui* produced by Kevin Costner). Then follows “Easter Island & TV Animation” and “Games & Play”, one of which is a chess set with all the pieces being little *moai*, differentiated only by size and topknots.

“Home & Garden” has to do with tiki statues for the garden, tissue boxes (really gross, with tissues pulled from the statue’s nose), liquor bottles in the shape of statues, bobble-head statues, and even a *moai* cushion (soft sculpture).

“Easter Island & Western Music” is illustrated by album covers. However, as the author points out, the music inside rarely seems to have any relation to the music of Rapa Nui, but rather is heavy metal and punk, etc. But, the following

section, “Easter Island & Music”, describes some albums that do contain island music.

The next six-page section, “The Rongorongo Tablets,” follows and it illustrates the glyphs as well as a photograph of the London Tablet and drawings of the glyphs. “Rongorongo in Comic Books” has examples of comics that utilize the script in various mystery scenarios (quickly translated by the hero). Finally, there is a two-page spread about the Birdman Cult that includes a Scooby Doo cartoon strip about that ritual.

The end of the book has a blurb about the Kon Tiki Museum and the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum in Middlesbrough.

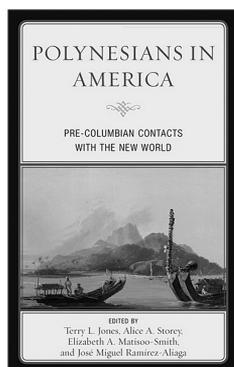
Haun (2010: 212-3), in discussing American comic books, notes a lack of narrative stability in that the comics tend to exhibit ideologically current popular themes. She also cites the lack of islanders in the stories. This is true; in the comics, only statues are to be found and the island is shown as uninhabited and abandoned unless “Things” are present, such as aliens in suspended animation.

Easter Island, Myths & Popular Culture is a fun read, aimed for a youngish audience or at least an audience with a whacko sense of humor and an abiding interest in the many off-beat aspects of Rapa Nui. Whatever you are interested in, be it vacationing aliens or time-travel/space-travel, comic books or slot machines with statues as the jackpot, you’ll find it here.

Reference

Haun, B. 2010. Easter Island in the comics: 65 years of an island’s career in the American imagination. In *The Gotland Papers. Selected papers from the VII International Conference on Easter Island and the Pacific: Migration, Identity and Cultural Heritage*. P. Wallin and H. Martinsson-Wallin (eds.): 205-215. Gotland: Gotland University Press 11.

Jones, Terry L., Alice A. Storey, Elizabeth Matisoo-Smith and José Miguel Ramírez-Aliaga (eds). *Polynesians in America: Pre-Columbian Contacts with the New World*.



Lanham: Altamira Press, 2011. 380 pp. ISBN 978-0-7591-2004-4. US\$85 (hardcover).

Review by Art Whistler,
University of Hawai'i

I have to admit that I was at first slightly skeptical of the idea of a book on pre-Columbian contact between Polynesians and the

Americas, as my conceptualization of the topic was heavily colored by the famously inaccurate portrayal of such contact as promoted by Thor Heyerdahl. However, once I got into *Polynesians in America*, I found the book fascinating and I read it cover to cover in a few days. It was the most interesting book I have read all year (okay, even if it was the only whole book I have read all year).

The book is divided into fourteen chapters that discuss evidence of the possible ancient Polynesian contact in the Americas, including chapters on human biology (including anatomy of skeletal remains and DNA), zoology (Polynesian chicken DNA in ancient South America), linguistics, myths and traditions, material culture similarities, and the feasibility of ancient sailing routes. Being a layman in this field, I found one or two of the chapters a little difficult to read (for example, the one on “Diffusionism in Archeological Theory”), but this level of technical explanation and terminology is perhaps much more germane to archaeologists or those with some archaeological background, as is to be expected from a scientific book like this.

I found some of the presented evidence compelling, and some of it less so, but the chapter contributors are not dogmatic and present what to me seems to be a balanced account. The text is very well written, especially where there are references in one chapter to aspects of other chapters—i.e., the text is well integrated. The chapter on the artifact record from North America seemed less compelling than some of the others, and the case would have been helped if the authors compared the Chumash Indian sewn-plank canoe with one from Polynesia rather than Micronesia (diagram on p. 3). The fish-hook evidence seems less compelling as well, and similar fish hooks could have been derived independently by “convergent utilitarianism” rather than direct contact. Perhaps some of the materialistic similarities could be explained by drift derelict Micronesian canoes? Equally slim is the linguistic evidence, other than the Pacific-wide names for sweet potato. The most interesting chapter to me was the one on DNA evidence of Polynesian chickens in pre-Columbian South America which really showcased what can be done nowadays with DNA and organic material.

The book would have been well served to include a chapter on botanical evidence of pre-Columbian contact (in the opinion of a botanist). Sweet potato is mentioned frequently, and bottle gourd, cotton, and soapberry references were scattered in the text, but putting all the evidence for these species, and others such as *Waltheria indica*, into one chapter would have given the book a slightly more comprehensive picture of the topic.

In summary, I found the book extremely interesting and I would most heartily recommend it as reading for anyone, laymen or archaeologists, interested in this aspect of Polynesian prehistory.