World Business Council Visits Rapa Nui

In October, nineteen members of the World Business Council on their way to a business conference in Buenos Aires brought their wives and families to visit Rapa Nui. Dr. Patricia Vargas flew over from Santiago to lead the excellent archaeological discussions. The World Monuments Fund sent Dr. Joan T. Seaver from Los Angeles to explain the concept of the Mulloy Memorial Research Library, a new project for international research on the island.

The generous gift of a modern dental clinic made to the island’s hospital by Ken and Joan Austin, President and Vice President of A-Dec in Newburg, Oregon, reflects the favorable impression made on the World Business Council groups by the islanders and their archaeological and historical treasures. Ken reports that the dental chair, dental unit (drills, etc.) and dental light are scheduled to arrive by cargo ship in March 1989.

We gratefully acknowledge those World Business Council members who have supported the Research Library and urge others, who display interest in things Rapa Nui, to send their tax deductible gifts for the Mulloy Research Library to: World Monuments Fund, 174 E. 80th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021.
Emily Ross Mulloy

Father Sebastian Englert, who was Easter Island’s priest from 1935 until his death, was born in Bavaria 100 years ago last November and died 20 years ago this January (1989). A memoir of this remarkable man seems appropriate at this time.

It is difficult for anyone visiting the island as it is today to realize the conditions of extreme isolation and deprivation under which he lived for most of his life with his congregation there. Until his arrival in mid-1935, there had been no resident priest for over 60 years. Supplies, mail, and visitors from the outside world came only once a year with the Chilean supply ship. Transportation on land was by foot or horseback. All of his voluminous writing and record keeping was done by hand, as there was no typewriter or tape recorder available. Even paper was in very short supply, and we still treasure letters in the padre’s distinctive but very legible script, written on scraps and half sheets and on both sides of airmail paper. All of the manuscripts of his books and articles were hand-written. Yet despite all these handicaps, he was able not only to carry on his religious duties but also to become fluent in the Rapanui language, collect much folklore and genealogical and historical information, as well as to inventory and locate most of the ahu, moai and other archaeological features which were visible on the surface throughout the island.

Shortly after his tenure began, an islander found a partially charred rongorongo tablet and brought it to him. The tablet, which is now in the Museo Nacional in Chile, was the last example of these extremely rare artifacts to have been found and, very probably, the last which will ever be found. The event seems to show that even at this early date the islanders were aware of his interest in their historic and prehistoric past and trusted him to help preserve their heritage.

Father Sebastian soon developed a close rapport with a number of the older Rapanui, several of whom had preserved family traditions and history handed down from aged relatives when they were children themselves. Some of the previous missionaries had urged them to forget their pre-Christian traditions and to destroy their pagan “idols” and even church services had been conducted with hymnals and missals printed in Tahitian! Father Sebastian was the first (and so far, the only) priest to bother to learn Rapanui and to preach in that language. When we lived on the island in 1960, many islanders told us that he had been the only outsider to learn to speak their language as an adult, a skill they believed nearly impossible for most foreigners. (Our youngest child, who was 8, spoke it nearly as well!) The Padre was most interested in the pure Rapanui language, so included in his dictionary only those words which he believed were not borrowed from Tahitian, Spanish or other languages. This of course makes it less relevant for students of the present-day spoken language, but it is valuable for comparison with other Polynesian languages, in showing through those relationships, clues to the time and point of origin of the settling of Easter Island. Interestingly, Rapanui is phonetically closer to New Zealand Maori and Cook Island Maori than the folkloric traditions would indicate. Modern linguistic studies may help to resolve this and other mysteries but they can only build upon a base of material collected by Father Sebastian.

His studies of folklore and the genealogical data derived from his informants led him to postulate a date for first settlement of the island which has been reevaluated in the light of archaeological findings. Carbon dates show that people were living and building structures on the island almost a millennium earlier than the date for Hotu Matu’a’s first landfall given in the first edition of his book La Tierra de Hotu Matu’a. He was, however, gracious in accepting changes and modifications of his theories. A consistent belief of his was that “the development of knowledge consists of the constant correction of errors.” He was extremely pleased when archaeologists and other scientists, beginning with the Norwegian Expedition in 1955-56, began working to investigate, restore, and preserve Rapa Nui’s cultural heritage. He encouraged and aided the work in every way possible and was always willing to share his knowledge with scientists and lay people.

When the Easter Island Committee of the International Fund for Monuments was formed he became its first Honorary Chairman. Through nearing 80 and ailing, he travelled twice to the U.S. and Canada to speak about the island and to aid in fund raising for the restoration of its monuments through the I.F.M. (now World Monuments Fund).

On the second of these trips he fell ill in New Orleans and died there on January 8, 1969. His body was later brought back to Rapa Nui by the U.S. Air Force where it is entombed near the church and the tomb of Brother Eugene Eyraud, the first missionary to the island. On Padre Sebastian’s tomb, the inscription in Rapanui reads something like this:

“He lived among us for 33 years. He spoke our language.”

Oversight

Our Fall 1988 issue of Rapa Nui Journal presented a preliminary report on the 1988 Rock Art Project on Lana’i, Hawai’i. This project was conducted under the auspices of the University Research Expeditions Program, University of California, Berkeley—under the direction of Jean Colvin.

We regret that this important information was inadvertently deleted.

Next year’s rock art project to the Big Island of Hawai’i will also be conducted under UREP.
A Layman's Guide to Rongorongo

Alan Davis-Drake

1913 and Mrs. Routledge

On her return from a 18 month stay on Rapa Nui, Mrs. Katherine Scoresby Routledge admitted to meeting with only “man in the street” informants (Routledge, 1919). There simply was no one else. She was further frustrated to discover that Ure Vaeiko, Thomson’s informant, never owned a single tablet of his own, much less could he make one. He was a servant of Nga’ara, the ariki-mau in possession of hundreds of rongorongo. Ure Vaeiko had surreptitiously memorized some of the texts, in a way similar to learning the lyrics to popular songs. Hearing words continuously spoilt of inestimable clan wars.

Routledge found in Te Haha a wealth of information on the actual rongorongo ceremonies.

A manifest gathering commenced annually at Anakena. From all over the island, hundreds of the initiated attended. They wore feathered headresses and feathered sticks, carried their personal rongorongo and lined up in long neat rows before the ariki-mau Nga’ara, who sat at the head near Ahu Naunau. Overflowing crowds from the remaining island population stood on the sidelines to watch. Everyone brought food offerings.

One by one the tangata rongorongo began their readings. Young men were publicly corrected in their errors, but if the older, supposedly experienced, men faltered, they were mercilessly shamed before all in attendance. While still a young man, Te Haha was instructed by Nga’ara to snatch off the hats of these illiterates, firmly take them by the ear and lead them away from the gathering. Te Haha remembered Nga’ara saying to them, “Are you not ashamed to be taken out by a child.” It was not uncommon for fights to break out as the gallery poured on their own insults. Everyone shared in the responsibility for perfection.

1932, de Hevesy and the Indus Valley Script Controversy

In 1932, Guillaume de Hevesy, a Hungarian, presented a flamboyant argument proposing a connection between rongorongo and a 5,000—6,000 year old script. It was newly discovered in the Indus Valley and systematized by G. H. Hunter. De Hevesy’s publication initiated a series of unflattering debates between Dr. Alfred Métraux, Hunter and himself.

De Hevesy first presented his findings, in abstentia, when his paper was read by Professor Paul Pellot before the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. Following this breathtaking presentation, de Hevesy published his findings in numerous scientific journals, newspapers and magazines in Europe and South America.

Dr. Métraux wrote a well researched re-
hoppings and dangerous climbs, Métraux returned to Europe, like so many before him, empty-handed. Métraux fortunately did collect traditions relating to rongorongo... His informant on rongorongo was Charlie Teao, a nephew of Te Haha. Teao repeated much of what his uncle told Mrs. Routledge twenty years earlier. Teao presented a few curious additions. For example, when learning to memorize the rongorongo chants, novices made "string figures, each of which corresponded to a particular chant" (Métraux 1957). The ariki-mau Nga'ara. The ariki took a great interest in the various rongorongo schools throughout the island, personally testing students; if they failed he put the blame on their teachers.

Nga'ara's funeral was a glorious ceremony: he was born on a bier constructed of rongorongo tablets. At his cremation, the tablets went up in flame along with him. Métraux suggests that kohau rongorongo translates as 'reciting staff' or 'chanter's staff' and not the often repeated 'talking wood.' He notes the use of chanting staves in Mangareva and the Marquesas, where chanting was never conducted without an accompanying empowered stave, or stick.

1938 and Mr. Heine-Geldern

Before 1938, Robert von Heine-Geldern, a Viennese scholar, had been researching the origins of Polynesian civilization in China. He was inspired to compare the bone and shell inscriptions of ancient China with rongorongo and the Indus Valley script. He noted that all three archaic 'scripts' shared ten signs in common, among these: three wavy lines indicated 'water,' 'rain,' or 'wave; ' a circle indicated 'encircle,' or 'enclosure,' and 'enclose'; and a comparable image from China and Rapa Nui indicated 'earth' or 'mountain' (Heine-Geldern 1938). His subsequent theories are far reaching but alas incomplete, for they are based on but very few examples (Métraux 1957). In his search for a common source for these three scripts, Heine-Geldern continued to pursue his bold course by making certain comparisons to rongorongo and the Cuna medicine men scripts on the Isthmus of Panama.

The 1940's and Mr. Wolf

It is unfair to include Werner Wolf among a list of "discoveries," for his work was neither ground breaking nor trustworthy. The inclusion of his work here is to hint at a populist movement which continues even today; that is, the generally disjointed attempt at explaining "ancient cultures" in terms of universal blueprints and extra-terrestrial schemes. Rapa Nui, because of its intriguing odd variety of half-knowns and apparently perpetual mysteries, has become a focus for any number of fanciful theories. Most of them have developed from half-truths, which could be genuinely "cleaned-up" if their inspired authors had disciplined their selective visions by thoroughly referencing the leg-work of those before them.

To be continued in a forthcoming issue of Rapa Nui Journal...

Notes to Part Two

1. The Miru clan was headed by the ariki-mau, the supreme ariki, distinguishing him from the ariki-paka, a title given to all other members of this clan. The last officiating ariki-mau Nga'ara, died shortly before the Peruvian slave raid.

2. In his youth Te Haha apparently possessed a familial hand tremor, which prevented him accurately carving the delicate script. Instead of continuing his training as a tangata rongorongo, his teacher, the highest living authority on rongorongo, the great ariki-mau Nga'ara, initiated him into an important career change. Te Haha was entranced with caring for the royal chickens. Te Haha's social status did not lessen with this change of roles, yet once again we are left a step away from a true source.

3. Métraux warns us that Charlie's memories were undoubtedly colored by personal reminiscences of time spent in the mission school.

4. Here we can infer an interesting allusion to current day string figures. Other observers have noted that just as the string figures of today are a memory device, so to was rongorongo.

5. Here again, Heine-Geldern seemed more concerned with similarities of appearance than in noting distance (time and space) and intent. That a variety of diverse ancient cultures might independently create or develop a similar graphic representation for a 'man' to represent 'man,' 'men,' or 'people' is not unthinkable. The difficult link to provide is proving how a tradition of writing was sustained over 2,6 millennia. Where are the writing samples? Where are the other proofs of cultural similarity?

Sources


Routledge, Katherine Scorsby. 1919. The Mystery of Easter Island. London. (AMS Reprint, 1979.)


Notes

1. The supreme ariki, distinguishing him from the ariki-paka, a title given to all other members of this clan.

2. The inclusion of his inspired authors had disciplined their selective visions by thoroughly referencing the leg-work of those before them.

3. Here again, Helne-Geldern's comparisons to rongorongo and the Cuna medicine men scripts on the Isthmus of Panama.
from tiny chips to complete tools, can be measured in ten minutes and without any treatment other than simple cleaning. The results for the samples from Easter Island show that their composition is different from that of any known obsidian source in the Pacific region. This should be very useful if ever the question arises as to whether obsidian has been brought to the island from elsewhere.

**Distinguishing the four sources**

The Lucas Heights analysis shows that samples from Rano Kau NW and Motu Iti have their own characteristic compositions. Small but significant differences in the concentration of elements such as fluorine, manganese and strontium, help provide a "signature" for distinguishing these two sources. However, the remaining two sources are similar to each other in composition. Motu Iti obsidian also has a rather high and characteristic density but distinctions amongst the other three groups are prevented by the variability of the density of Manavai material (presumably because of the variation in numbers of inclusions present).

While collecting samples, the members of the TAMS group noticed some quite obvious differences in appearance:

i) in bright sunlight, much of the obsidian on Maunga Orito has a dull grey/green appearance although some is dull black, particularly material from towards the northern side of the hill;

ii) the obsidian from Te Manavai is dull black with varying numbers of white (spherulitic) spots;

iii) samples from near the top of the northwest rim of the Rano Kau crater is glossy black but with a streaky appearance caused by irregular-shaped inclusions; and

iv) obsidian from the "glass" islet of Motu Iti is just plain matt black.

One way or another, therefore, it should be possible to study collections of artifacts and in a majority of cases, to link each piece with the quarry from which the material came. The TAMS group tested these ideas on surface pieces from various sties around the island and on sets of artifacts held in the museum at Hanga Roa. They found it to be quite easy to identify grey/green material from Maunga Orito and spotty material from Te Manavai. No evidence was found of the use of the Rano Kau NW material and it seems most likely that obsidian referred to in past studies as being from Rano Kau was in fact from Te Manavai.

**Obsidian Quality and Availability**

The Maunga Orito and Te Manavai obsidian flakes readily, and was much used in the past—working areas and tools being obvious in both areas. The material from Rano Kau NW is the most glassy of all but because of the inclusions it fractures with a rough edge rather than the sharp razor edge which is so typical of broken glass. There is also much less of it so that it would not be surprising if it was less used in the past. Motu Iti is an excellent source of uniform and good flaking obsidian but collecting pieces must surely have been hampered by its location off shore. Social customs may also have affected access and usage of the different types of obsidian. With the information now available, it should be possible to study such factors in some detail. For example, the special role of Motu Iti in the birdman ceremonies of the more recent past may owe something to an earlier role as a source of valued obsidian. The study of artifact assemblages to identify the extent of use of Motu Iti material should prove quite interesting.

J.R. Bird, Manager  
Nuclear Techniques of Analysis  
Australian Nuclear Science  
& Technology Organization  
Menai, NSW

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**Pacific Arts Symposium**

The Pacific Arts Association's 4th International Symposium on the Arts of the Pacific will be held in Honolulu from August 6-12, 1989. Information regarding this important symposium can be obtained by writing to:

Pacific Arts Association Conference Coordinator  
Honolulu Academy of Arts  
900 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96814
Moai Kavakava Leaves Belgium for Oslo

by Te Pito

The following is an English Summary of an article which originally appeared on 9 July 1988 in La Depeche. Written in French by our European correspondent, François Dederen, it is translated and summarized here by Ms. Kristi Wessenberg.

In 1934-35, a French-Belgian expedition headed by Alfred Métraux and Henri Lavachery visited Easter Island. Albert de Bock was one of the Belgians in the party, as was the chaplain René Buelens. The latter celebrated mass for the islanders and was thanked with the gift of a large moai kavakava 1.55 meters tall, weighing 24 kilos, and carved from mako wood, which is native to the island. René Buelens kept the statue in Belgium until the 1960's when he gave it to Albert De Bock. After reading Thor Heyerdahl's book Aku Aku, Albert De Bock began corresponding with Thor Heyerdahl and they struck up a friendship. On a visit to Belgium, Heyerdahl was able to admire De Bock's moai kavakava. De Bock decided to give Heyerdahl the statue as a gift, and on 8 July 1988 De Bock took it personally to Oslo where it will reside in the Bigdoy Museum (better know as the Kon Tiki Museum.)

To our knowledge, three such statues exist. One is in the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and is pictured in Plate 20 in Alfred Métaxu's book on Easter Island (French Edition.) The second was seen by the author on a visit to Easter Island in July 1979; it was offered to R.P. Sébastien Englert sometime between 1936 and 1970 and appears in a photograph with him on the cover of his book Island at the Center of the World. The third statue is the one now at the Bigdoy Museum.

The unfortunate treatment of other Easter Island pieces of art is further exemplified by the histories of two basalt and tuff statues, Hoa aka nana ia and Tingi Tingi, taken from the island by the Topaze in 1868. Hoa aka nana ia was first offered to Queen Victoria. She refused it and instead bequeathed it to the British Museum, where it joined its companion Tingi Tingi until 1939, when the war broke out. The statues then disappeared.

Hoa aka nana ia reappeared in 1950, only to be placed with its back to a wall, thus preventing visitors from admiring the beautiful carvings on its back. After much searching, the author found Tingi Tingi in an unused storeroom in the London suburbs, where it remains today.

Similarly, the statue of a head taken from Ahu Orongo by Admiral Lappelin on the ship Flora in 1872, was first placed outdoors in a French garden and submitted to rain and frost; subsequently it ended up in a cleaning woman's broom closet at the the Museum of Man. (Translator's note: A recent visitor to the Museum of Man says that the statue is now on display.)

A final example is that of a rock used as a shoe scraper outside the Smithsonian Institution which was recently found to be a sculpture from Orongo. This type of incident happens too often. In the long run, wouldnt it be much better to leave these artifacts in their original locations and attempt to devise some kind of protection for them there?

More News

The annual December supply ship to Rapa Nui did not arrive as scheduled. As a result, the island is out of butane for cooking and heating, and also out of many staples including flour, powdered milk and sugar. The shipping firm said that problems with the motor and hull have caused delays, but an enterprising newsman failed to even locate the ship and a scandal is brewing. It is suspected that the ship was diverted for some other purpose. The governor has sent an urgent appeal for supplies, and some emergency provisions may be flown in. The supply ship is finally expected to arrive sometime in January.

A notice in La Depeche (Tahiti) last September 1988 states that a Club Med is being considered for Rapa Nui. Citing an announcement made in Santiago, La Depeche deplores the idea as being risky for both the archaeological sites and the environment.

Notice!

An excellent film on Rapa Nui will be shown on Nova on March 7 and 14th.

Check your local paper for times.

This film was originally made by the BBC and was shown on TV in Europe last spring. It is the best film yet made on Rapa Nui.

Don't miss it.

Florida's Moai

This moai advertises a motel in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Photo by Rapanuiphile David Kotyk of Toronto, Canada.
Gauguin's Rongorongo

Emily Ross Mulloy

As recent visitors to the Gauguin exhibit at the Chicago Art Institute, my daughter and I were astonished to see that Gauguin had used rongorongo symbols as the background to the painting entitled Ancestors of Tehamana (merahi metua no Tehamana)—translated (incorrectly in my opinion) as "Tehamana has many parents!"

An information label beside the painting suggested that Gauguin had seen the rongorongo tablets which had been displayed in the Paris Exposition in 1889, before leaving for Tahiti. But isn’t it also an intriguing possibility that his teenage model, Tehamana, could have been an actual decendent a Rapanui who had been among the islanders who were living in French Polynesia during the 1870’s and 80’s? Several of the few existing tablets were brought to Tahiti by the French priests and turned over to the Bishop of Tahiti. Might not some have been retained by the islanders themselves? Certainly the title of the painting seems to indicate that there was a connection between Tehamana and the rongorongo inscription.

Paul Gauguin
(French, 1848-1903)
Ancestors of Tehamana. 1893.
Oil on canvas.
76.3 x 54.3 cm.
© Art Institute of Chicago

Publications

Alpers, Anthony. The World of the Polynesians, seen through their myths and legends, poetry and art. Oxford University Press, 1987. Paperback, $10.95. 416 pages. (This is a reprint of a book originally published in 1970 as Legends of the South Seas. Myths and legends from all over Polynesia are included in this collection.)


Although a great deal of scientific research continues on Rapa Nui, not all of it deals with archaeology or anthropology. New scientific findings in the fields of biology are reflected in the following titles:


What's New in Hanga Roa

The long-awaited paving of Hanga Roa’s streets is finally underway. Cement rain gutters are being constructed along one side of Te Pito Te Henua Street, beginning at the church. At this time, the block just below the church is impassable due to construction.

The facade of the church is now completed with the addition of decorative elements added to the porch structure. These are bas relief designs based on the ancient petroglyph motifs such as birdman, etc. The accompanying photo shows the decorative elements on the columns of Rapanui’s Church of the Holy Spirit and the mural painting over the new doors. (Photo Credit: Joan T. Seaver, Ph.D.)

The church interior has a new wood carving by Juan Haoa. It represents St. Anthony.

A new wing has been added to the Hotel Hotu Matu’a, located near the airport. The hotel has also been refurbished with a new bar and lounge, and swimming pool.

A large building adjacent to the new archaeological museum and scheduled to become part of the museum complex is under construction. It will contain offices, storage, and laboratory space. The old museum will eventually be remodeled as a place for visiting scholars to live and work. As part of the new museum complex, a sculpture commissioned by the governor, Don Sergio Rapu, now graces the head of the staircase leading down to the museum entrance. It is a large abstract sculpture in mixed media created by Carlos Hucke.

Three new sculptures have been placed in Hotu Matu’a Park (at the corner of Policarpo Toro and Te Pito te Henua Streets.) Carved in red scoria by members of the Hucke family, they are modern sculptures that incorporate ancient Rapa Nui symbols. The prehistoric moai that formerly stood at this corner has been moved to the grounds of the new archaeological museum. (Photo Credit: Joan T. Seaver, Ph.D.)

Look for more news on page 6...