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Early Observations on Marquesan Culture 1595-1813 (Review)

Robert Langdon

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("Words for School"). In "A'amu Tupuna" ("Ancestral Tales") Lucas Pakarati Tepano tells the curious tale of "Hotu". And Marcos Rapu Tuki concludes with the dirges "Riu Tangi mo Veri 'a Haukena" ("Lament for Veri 'a Haukena").

A splendid read. *Ka 'Ara te Mata!* is simply marvelous for the continued encouragement of reading and writing the Rapanui language on the island. If there is any small critique to be made, then it would only be that more Rapanui--and less Tahitian--should be used. As much as 50% of the vocabulary in the publication is at times Tahitian, not Rapanui. This smarts.

Ka 'Ara te Mata! not only opens our Rapanui eyes--it opens our Rapanui hearts.

Review

Edwin N. Ferdon Jr., an old Easter Island hand, who celebrated his 80th birthday last year, has recently published another book, *Early Observations on Marquesan Culture 1595-1813*. The publisher is University of Arizona Press, Tucson. The price: \$40.

Robert Langdon.

Originally an American geographer, anthropologist and archaeologist, Ferdon did extensive field work especially in Ecuador and Mexico and published his *Studies in Ecuadorian Geography* in 1950. In 1955-56, he went to Easter Island and the eastern Pacific with Thor Heyerdahl's Norwegian Archaeological Expedition and later served as co-editor, with Heyerdahl, of the two massive tomes on the expedition's work.

After retiring in 1978 after 17 years as associate director of the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, Ferdon decided to try to recreate the life of the people whose shell and bone artifacts, stone ceremonial structures and what not he had helped to excavate in Polynesia. He started with Tahiti and delved into the records of the British, French and Spanish explorers who visited that island between 1767 and 1797. The result was *Early Tahiti: As the Explorers Saw It 1767-1797*, which the University of Arizona Press published in 1981.

Ferdon followed up his Tahiti book with a similar one on Tonga, *Early Tonga: As the Explorers Saw It 1616-1810*. That saw the light, with the same publisher, in 1987. This third book in the same vein on the Marquesas has a somewhat different title because the European explorers did not call at the Marquesas with the same frequency or for the same lengths of time as they did in Tahiti and Tonga. Indeed, Ferdon's principal source of information was not the explorers but a missionary, William Pascoe Crook, the first European to live in the group. He was there for 19 months in 1797-98. A marvelously informative, but little-known ethnography based on Crook's observations is preserved in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Ferdon's Marquesan volume runs to 184 pages. This is well over 100 fewer than his previous volumes. It follows a

similar pattern, however. After a brief opening chapter about the position, geography and climate of the Marquesas, there are chapters on: the Marquesans and their dwellings, social organization and government, religion, daily life and diversions, from birth to death, the quest for food, transportation and trade, and warfare. A final chapter discusses the origins of the Marquesans and eight cultivated American plants that Crook found growing in their islands. The invaluable bibliographical references that follow fill almost 27 pages.

For those interested in Easter Island prehistory, the last chapter is especially significant. Although in the past Ferdon never quite saw eye-to-eye with Heyerdahl on the question of American Indian influence in Polynesia, his discovery of Crook's material forced him to conclude that 'one might reasonably ascribe the presence and use of some of the American plants. . . to a pre-Columbian introduction'. This prompted the further thought that 'a more balanced approach' to the American Indian question is now justified than has been apparent in the past.

PUBLICATIONS

★ Anguita, Patricia. 1988. L'insertion des Rapanui a Tahiti et Moorea (1871-1920). *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Océaniques* 20 (8):No. 243, pp. 21-39.

★ Bahn, Paul and John Flenley. 1994. Easter Island, a terrible warning. *Focus Magazine* for April, Pp. 92-97. London.

★ Blixen, Olaf. 1993. El arbol de la abundancia y el origen mitico de las plantas cultivadas en America del sur. *Moana*, IV(3). In Spanish. For information, contact Dr. Blixen at Casilla de Correos 495, Montevideo, Uruguay.

★ Grijp, Paul van der. 1993. Women's handicrafts and men's arts: The Production of Material Culture in the Polynesian kingdom of Tonga. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 97:159-167. Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

★ Gibbons, Ann. 1994. Genes Point to a New Identity for Pacific Pioneers. *Science* 263:32-33, for January 7.

This study found that a small percentage of the Polynesian population, including East Polynesia, carry a Melanesian genetic marker, as do some very early Lapita skeletons.

★ Hagelberg, Erika and J.B. Clegg. 1993. Genetic Polymorphisms in Prehistoric Pacific Islanders Determined by Analysis of Ancient Bone DNA. *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, 252:16

★ Hagelberg, Erika, Silvia Quevado, Daniel Turbon, and J.B. Clegg. 1994. DNA from ancient Easter Islanders. *Nature* Vol.369:25-26.