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Easter Island: The Endless Enigma (Review)

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 *Easter Island: The Endless Enigma*

by José Luis Velasco; photographs by Juan Pablo Lira and underwater photography by Paul Humann. Editorial Kactus, Santiago de Chile. 96 pages, color photographs. ISBN 956.7013-28-3. English translation by Peter Kendall.

Review by Dan Gartner, Canberra, Australia

I received this book as a Christmas present from a good Chilean friend who knows about my interest in Rapa Nui (thank you, Javier Thumm!). The book is published in Spanish, English, French and German; my copy is the English version. I was informed that the book is available in the USA but, for some reason, not in Australia. I was told that the price runs around US \$40, a bit on the high side.

This book is not, nor does it try to be, scientific. It gives a complete but abbreviated view of Easter Island and is divided into sections with short text. The photographs are excellent. In fact, there are no less than 139 pictures in the book, plus five more on the dust jacket. There is no question that the young Chilean photographer, Juan Pablo Lira, knows the island and his profession quite well. The underwater photographs (by American photographer Paul Humann) are also first class.

The sections of the book go from arrival to the island through its history, geography, people, archaeology and way of life, and finishes with "the allure of Easter Island." The text is well written and kept to a minimum. Clearly, the photographs are more important. It apparently was written to attract tourists, particularly those who know nothing about Rapa Nui. In many cases, the reader may have no idea what the author is talking about: disconcertingly, there is no clue as to where in the world the island is located. We just land there onto "the most isolated island in the world" but no other information.

The quality is also first class: binding and general layout are excellent. The English translation is very good. However, the book is marred by many typos. It is a pity that proof reading was so poor. It is irritating to find words like "biefly" (p.47), "utiliarian" (p.50), "navegators" (two or three times), and so on. There are no fewer than 17 such typos in addition to an important one; the area of the Atlantic Ocean (p.30) is wrong by a factor of 100.

What is missing is a good map of the island and a general map to show where Easter Island is located. There is no detailed index nor bibliography although credit is given to sources in the introduction. The book was written with the scientific consultancy of Patricia Vargas Casanova.

Easter Island: The Endless Enigma is for those who wish a general introduction to the island, perhaps with a view to visiting the island.

 *Fa'a-Samoa: The Samoan Way. . . between conch shell and disco. A portrait of Western Samoa at the end of the twentieth century*

by Ad Linkels, 1995. Photos by Ad and Lucia Linkels. Published by Mundo Etnico Foundation, Tilburg, The Netherlands. ISBN 90-72840-09-7. This booklet accompanies the CD *Fa'a-Samoa: The Samoan Way. . .* [PAN 2066 CD: Anthology of Pacific Music #6]

Review by Daniel Pouesi

Ad Linkel's information for his *Fa'a-Samoa: The Samoan Way* is drawn from joint fieldwork in 1982. It is a "portrait of a short but important period" in Samoa—the 1980s, a "transitional" period characterized by the "rigid traditions" of Samoa on the one hand and "democracy and individual freedom" of the West on the other. It was a time, according to the author, that Samoa underwent major changes—changes that are "reflected in the music and dances of that time."

Fa'a-Samoa is a readable book with historical information on Samoa and lots of great photographs. Part II, *Music and Dance*, is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the musical instruments and implements. Unfortunately the rest of the book is beset by a number of precarious conclusions. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the author has set for himself a formidable task: an analysis of Samoan music and dance, the changes they underwent and how they reflected Samoa of the '80s. Given the complexity of Samoan culture, it is doubtful that such a task can be successfully accomplished in a 94-page, mostly-pictorial, book.

In contrast to Richard Moyle's *The Music of Samoa*, *Fa'a-Samoa* is impressionistic. Many of the author's statements are overly simplistic and hence, misleading. On page 6, for instance, he writes of American Samoa: "[Its] import economy is completely supported by the USA. As a result, the Samoans do not have much of a say anymore in their own country." American Samoa is an unincorporated territory of the United States but it is not under the jurisdiction of the US Constitution. It elects its own government officials (a 1960 constitution gave legislative powers to the *fono*) and, to date, still maintains its traditional *matai* system and land tenure. It might be argued that the main reason for American Samoa's economic woes is one of "too much say."

Of the Samoan concept of "beauty," the author notes: "A slim person is not held in great respect. A *matai* who wishes to be respected should have a large belly." Although the Samoan concept of *Maluali'i* (imposing or large-bodied) suggests a "stateliness" or "dignity", it is not a necessary condition for respectability. Many of Samoa's respectable *matai* (past and present) are slim by both Samoan and Western standards. Lauati Namulauulu, a leading orator from