

Rapa Nui Journal: Journal of the Easter Island Foundation

Volume 12
Issue 4 December 1998

Article 7

1998

HEAVEN'S MIRROR (Book Review)

Georgia Lee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/rnj>

 Part of the [History of the Pacific Islands Commons](#), and the [Pacific Islands Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lee, Georgia (1998) "HEAVEN'S MIRROR (Book Review)," *Rapa Nui Journal: Journal of the Easter Island Foundation*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/rnj/vol12/iss4/7>

This Book or Media Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Hawai'i Press at Kahualike. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rapa Nui Journal: Journal of the Easter Island Foundation by an authorized editor of Kahualike. For more information, please contact sheila.yeh@hawaii.edu.

for its use. The third includes management programs; and the last one is a synthesis of the proposed development.

The Bibliography covers seven pages and gives the most important references in the field, focusing on conservation of cultural heritage specifically for Easter Island and management of the Park.

Of the six Appendices, the first provides a chart and a table describing the land use on the island; the second lists the endemic and introduced plant species based on Ziska (1991). The third one gives demographic information on the island and the fourth provides information about tourists, and air and sea transportation. The fifth and the sixth appendices reproduce the text of the 1988 Meeting held in Santiago de Chile to determine the requirements for the conservation of Easter Island's heritage, and the Conclusions and Recommendations that resulted from the 1990 Lavas and Volcanic Tuffs International Meeting.

The presentation of the book is very good. The information it provides has been carefully prepared and summarized; however, it is definitely aimed for use by Park staff, being presented with management and conservation of the island's cultural heritage in mind. Except for the small photograph of Ahu Akivi on the dust-jacket, there are neither photographs nor drawings in the book.

An interesting point, for anybody following closely activities on the Island, is the list of accomplished tasks from those considered for the 1974-1996 period. They are subdivided into thirty-nine categories ranging from excavation, consolidation and restoration of archaeological sites, such as the restorations of 'Orongo village, or the repairs at the Tahai Complex; to fire control, and cattle management. The latter is a problem, as described on page 73, "... since a large number of cattle from the islanders is still within the Park's boundary. It is hoped that this situation will be solved through a Territorial Management Plan for the whole island, within the legal framework of the 'Indigenous Law (Ley No.19.253 'Ley indígena')." [. . . *gran parte del ganado de los isleños se encuentra al interior de la unidad, situación que se espera solucionar a través de un plan de manejo territorial para toda la isla, en el marco legal que plantea la Ley N° 19.253 Ley indígena.*]

This recently published Management Plan for the Rapa Nui National Park took nearly ten years to come to light. It replaces the first plan—created in 1974 and implemented two years later—and which was valid for nearly 20 years. It is important to point out that the core of that first plan is still valid and included in this second one which also takes on the unfinished tasks of the previous one. The most important changes introduced in the new plan refer to the greater flexibility required for this very special island. As an example, one of the issues deals with replanting contemporary species around the monuments, in particular by restored ahu. In the specific case of Anakena, the *Cocos nucifera*, an introduced species, would not be acceptable. However, from an aesthetic and didactic point of view, the plantation is perfectly adequate. Other changes are the increased responsibility the Park staff has with regards to maintenance of the archaeological sites, such as replacement of displaced stones, erosion or vegetation control.

The Management Programs chapter (Chapter 6) is probably one of the most interesting. It presents six programs: cul-

tural heritage, natural heritage, tourism support; education and recreation; research support; and administration. The activities that need to be covered to develop these programs, which include the various tasks referred to above, provide a daunting list. More so, when considered in the light of the meager staffing that this Park Unit has, varying between 8 - 12 rangers plus a part-time maintenance crew of 4 during fire season. It is obvious that the Management Plan, prepared by and for CONAF, blazes a trail to the ideal Park where the well-preserved archaeological heritage, surrounded by carefully planted native species, can be enjoyed by both residents and tourists, and where various education and information programs serve all levels of curiosity, from native children to foreign scientists. Much as we would all like to make this a reality, we cannot expect the Rapa Nui National Park to accomplish this without support. It requires support from CONAF headquarters, from other institutions, such as SASIPA (*Sociedad Agrícola y de Servicios Isla de Pascua*) and MOP (*Ministerio de Obras Públicas*), from the local government, from tourist agencies, and last but not least, from the people on the island themselves, since it is their heritage that the Rapa Nui National Park is trying to preserve.

Reference

Ziska, G. 1991. Flowering Plants of Easter Island. *Palmarum Hortus Francofurtensis*. Scientific Reports; Research Activities PHF 3. Palmengarten, Frankfurt.

HEAVEN'S MIRROR. QUEST FOR THE LOST CIVILIZATION

Graham Hancock and Santha Faiia. 1998

Crown Publishers, NY. 322 pages, hardcover. \$45.

Review by Georgia Lee

THE BOOK JACKET of this glossy book states "[The] author . . . continues the quest . . . to rediscover the hidden legacy of mankind—the revelation that the cultures we refer to as ancient were, in fact, the heirs to a far older forgotten civilization and the inheritors of its archaic, mystical wisdom." And, ". . . a stunning and illuminating tour into the spirituality of the ancients. . ."; ". . . a shockingly sophisticated understanding of the solar system, and perhaps even encompass the Holy Grail of immortality." In other words, Erich von Daniken's successor has landed. Fasten your seatbelts.

As the book covers everything from Mexico/Peru/Bolivia to Egypt, to Cambodia and the Pacific, a comprehensive review of all the material presented would take another book. So we will focus instead on Easter Island, and some of the misinformation therein. To thoroughly rebut every error, or to correct all misspelled words and erroneously interpreted facts, would take a mega review, and would likely send this reviewer into a cata-tonic state.

The subject of Easter Island begins with the statement that the island is ". . . as close as it is physically possible to get to 144 degrees of longitude east of Angkor." Duh. This is supposed to indicate some vast network by unknown navigators and architects. In reference to Easter Island's role in the larger scheme of things, "Its efficient [sic] cadre of literate architects and sculptors, whose predecessors had found the 'Navel of the World' through extraordinary feats of astro-navigation, were

clearly people of the highest determination and calibre. Until the time when evil entered their community. . . they had dedicated themselves single-mindedly for hundreds of years to the creation of transcendent [sic] and awe-inspiring works of religious art." (230)

The book is liberally sprinkled with tantalizing questions that usually begin with: "Is it possible. . .?" "Is it a coincidence...?" "Perhaps this is..." and "The implication is . . ." Take the following quote: "Perhaps they used advanced technologies. . . Perhaps they had even learned how to transcend technical solutions and to manipulate the physical world by focused mental power . . ." (236). The author likes the phrase, ". . . the evidence supports the theory that . . ." But the "evidence" he cites is lifted from spurious sources including various publications by rationally-challenged authors. The legitimate sources he cites give the impression that hey, this guy really read the material, but actually what he does is lift small bits out of context and distort them for his agenda.

Making much out of little, Hancock suggests that the building of an *ahu* over an earlier shrine meant that they were ". . . connected to a grand and mysterious scheme, set in motion all around the globe, and played out over thousands of years, intended to bring about the 'rebirth' of a 'former world'" (232). Grasping for "connections", the author suggest that the Egyptian words *ahh*, *maat*, and *Ra* are related to *ahu*, *mata*, and *raa* on Easter Island (233; 242).

"The possibility . . . here is that the purpose of Easter Island's high initiates may have been connected to the same underground stream of archaic spiritual gnosis that we have identified at Angkor. . ." (230). ". . . Easter Island might originally have been settled in order to serve as a sort of geodetic beacon, or marker—fulfilling some as yet unguessed [sic] at function in an ancient global system of sky-ground co-ordinates that linked many so-called 'world navels'" (254).

As is the usual ploy in books like this, legitimate scholars are bum-rapped as resisting or ignoring such obvious connections, in an "us vs. them" manner that downgrades professional scientists and "orthodox" archaeologists. Hancock writes, "Because Easter Island is a subject bedevilled by an intense academic phobia of what are seen as 'cranky' ideas and of the 'lunatic fringe', every archaeologist strives to outdo his or her colleagues in appearing to be completely sane, rational and 'scientific'" (235); and "Perhaps historians and archaeologists should devote a little less effort to the diligent search for humdrum and prosaic explanations of the mysteries of the human past and pay a little more attention to the extraordinary possibilities that also exist there" (235).

This is the most unkind cut of all. Archaeology is an exciting subject. What is more absorbing than discovering and understanding how people lived thousands of years ago, how they faced problems of shelter and survival, and struggled to understand their universe? Ours is a great history and an amazing cultural heritage. Our ancestors built shrines, shelters, made pottery and wove fabrics, created tools, and objects of metal. They built communities and families, created writing systems, carved statuary, and buried the dead with offerings for the afterlife. Their story is our story. To represent that past falsely—and for money and notoriety—is reprehensible. Serious scholars who

have done breakthrough studies on archaeological sites seldom have the opportunity to see the results of their decades of labor put into print, and then it likely is a short-run paper-cover edition. But let some writer with nutty ideas loose, particularly if the text relates to some theoretical ancient power, mystical wisdom of the a "lost" civilization, or intelligent beings "out there," and books such as *Heaven's Mirror* are the result.

I must add that *Heaven's Mirror* is beautifully illustrated with outstanding color photographs and the production is first-rate. It surely will sell like shave ice on a hot day. And therein lies the problem. Those who read *Heaven's Mirror* and do not have the background to know fact from fantasy will be dazzled by Hancock's very fancy footwork, and clever innuendoes—and yet another batch of misguided followers will be created.

TV REVIEW

"QUEST FOR THE LOST CIVILISATION" (the British TV title for a film treatment of *Heaven's Mirror*)

Review by Dr Paul Bahn, England

IN BRITAIN we recently underwent the unpleasant experience of seeing Hancock's lavish 3-part television series "Quest for the Lost Civilisation" which accompanies the above book. I shall avoid mentioning the endless list of horrors perpetrated by the series—which some TV magazines here described as being presented by "Archaeologist" Graham Hancock (sic). Interestingly enough, however, quite a few TV critics who began by finding this stuff entertaining and at times plausible, soon grew weary of Hancock's unfounded speculations, lack of hard evidence, and reliance on a handful of mostly obscure "talking heads": who all agreed with him—nobody else appeared. Sadly, but inevitably enough, the exposure and publicity ensured that *Heaven's Mirror* shot to the top of the British bestseller list. And although it did not stay there for long (this was, after all, only a short TV series, and true believers had already gullibly gobbled up most of this stuff in Hancock's earlier works), the book has sold well over 20,000 copies in Britain alone.

Here I shall limit myself to Easter Island's role in the TV series. The third and last show, entitled Ancient Mariners, opens with a splendid shot of the restored Tongariki platform, and Hancock's voice dramatically declares "Easter Island's statues could hold the secret of what happened in the world before History began—why did ancient cultures with no known contacts have so much in common? My theory is they all derived from a common source, a single lost civilisation".

We are given quite a lot of footage of the island—presumably to justify this slice of the enormous budget that was wasted on this series—but in contrast to the book, Hancock has very little to say about the island, really. What is more important to him is what he does NOT say—e.g. by not giving any dates whatsoever for human settlement on the island, he is able to imply, without actually saying so, that the *moai* date back to about 10,500 BC, the time when a great flood swept away the lost civilization and forced its surviving mariner-astronomers to go off to other lands.

We see Hancock perched on Orongo, describing how, before the end of the last Ice Age, sea levels were almost 400 feet lower, so that, at this time, an observer on this spot would see