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## About Rapa Nui Sculptures

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## About Rapa Nui Sculptures

### **Cover Page Footnote**

Considering art as a universal, thus necessary, form of expression for men, it is interesting to notice how rare it is to find a society with a homogeneous development in all of its branches. Indeed, Italy, located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and principal heir of the great civilizations of Antiquity, represents an almost unique phenomenon-since art requires not only specialized skills and proper material, but also, in most cases, cultural interchange. Comparing this privileged situation bestowed by geography and history to the birthplace of Dante, Leonardo and Vivaldi, we find an opposite example in the little portion of land of Rapa Nui: the most remote human haven on Earth, ignored by the western world until its discovering by the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeveen.

in a cooperative venture. I hope that we can implement it this year because Easter Island really needs telemedicine," said Dazzarola. It will permit a doctor at the Hanga Roa hospital to make audiovisual contact with specialists when there are complicated cases to be resolved and diagnostics are needed.

*El Mercurio de Valparaíso 23 August 1999*

**THE TAPATI FESTIVAL CASE.** The Court of Appeals of Valparaíso will pronounce on a verdict handed down by the First Crime Justice María Angelica Rios for fraud against the Government by 6 ex-members of the regional government, headed by ex-Intendente Hardy Knittel in the Rapa Nui Tapati Fiesta case. The investigation began in 1997 over irregularities in the payment of 23 million pesos (US\$44,000) for the construction of movable scenery for the Tapati fiesta. Other irregularities are 11.7 million pesos (US\$22,500) for travel expenses to Mendoza, Argentina, for a performance. The decision was appealed.

*El Mercurio de Valparaíso 2 September 1999*

**PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PROMISES AID TO THE ISLAND.** One of the two major candidates for president in Chile [elections on December 12th this year] is center-rightist Joaquin Lavin, the smiling ex-mayor of Las Condes. Lavin promised to help overcome the isolation and bureaucracy that the inhabitants of Easter Island suffer in many of their basic services. During his visit to the island, Lavin, inspected the school and the hospital where he said the transferring patients to the continent should be eliminated. Locals said that often a patient urgently sent to Santiago ends up in Valparaíso because of the administrative dependency of the island. Lavin said his trip was not to help his campaign since, with only 3000 inhabitants, it would not affect the outcome. The Mayor of Easter Island stated that "I cannot vote for Lavin because I am a person of my word and I am staying with the *Concertacion* [the party that is supporting Ricardo Lagos]." But he thanked Lavin for the support he is offering and wishes him luck: "Lavin is a good friend of Rapa Nui." The other main candidate is Ricardo Lagos, the leftist and former Minister of Public Works, and a Ph.D. in Economics from Duke University. The latest poll shows them in a dead heat.

*El Mercurio de Valparaíso 4 September 1999*

**THE SHIPPING SCRAMBLE FOR THE SUBSIDY.** Island impresario Orlando Paoa recently bought the ship *Prams Kunti*, rebaptized it *Orlando II* and asked for government subsidies to use both of his freighters to send supplies to the island. The shipping companies are vying for the 107 million pesos (US \$202,000) of government subsidy. At this moment, Paoa's other ship *Hotu Matua* is under repair after striking rocks on the north shore of Easter Island. But another company, Transportes Maritimos Miramar, asked for the subsidy although their ship, the *Saint Jeremy* (formerly called *Araki*) is being kept in port because of unpaid debts. The ship returned from Easter Island bringing 16 crew members who had been stuck on the island owing to unpaid salaries for the past 4 to 6 months, according to their families in Valparaíso. The third company is Yelcho with the *Patriarche*

Legal action was taken against the regional secretary by

Yelcho and Miramar who claimed prejudiced. As for the *Saint Jeremy*, its company still has debts to pay (10 million pesos or US\$19,000) and was eliminated from consideration. The *Patriarche* was allowed to sail with a temporary permit until the process of inscription was completed. The representative of Yelcho, Alejandro Oliva, said that the *Orlando II* lacks the requisites for giving supply service to the island. Also he said that the proposal dealt with a "non-existent ship" since the *Prams Kunti* could not be legally renamed the *Orlando II* until after the ship was certified.

Despite all the infighting, it seems that *Patriarche* will be the supply ship. While waiting for the regional secretary of the Ministry of Transport to announce a new hearing, the company Mar Express (with *Patriarche*) announced that it will make voyages every month and a half starting on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October. It will take some 900 tons of merchandise. Meanwhile, the other two companies are unable to make voyages

*El Mercurio de Valparaíso 20 September -6 October 1999*

### HAMBURG EXHIBIT

**ISLANDERS WILL CARVE A MOAI IN HAMBURG MUSEUM.** Four giant pieces of volcanic stone from Easter Island were shipped to Hamburg, Germany, where they will be carved in the Volkerkunde Museum by five island artists, specialists in that kind of work. This artisan exhibit will be part of the activities put on by ProChile V Region to promote the products of the businesses of the region. The regional director of ProChile commented that this activity is being developed via the program "El Mercado de los Pueblos" in which different ethnic groups of all countries participate, with the goal of advertising cultural and economic themes, especially those relating to art and tourism.

The *moai* will be three meters tall and will be donated to the museum. ProChile has been working with Easter Island impresarios since 1997.

*El Mercurio de Valparaíso 18 September 1999*

## Short Notes from our Readers

### About Rapa Nui Sculptures\*

*Professor João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira, Ph.D.  
Fine Arts School, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro*

CONSIDERING ART AS A UNIVERSAL, thus necessary, form of expression for men, it is interesting to notice how rare it is to find a society with a homogeneous development in all of its branches. Indeed, Italy, located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and principal heir of the great civilizations of Antiquity, represents an almost unique phenomenon-since art requires not only specialized skills and proper material, but also, in most cases, cultural interchange. Comparing this privileged situation bestowed by geography and history to the birthplace of Dante, Leonardo and Vivaldi, we find an opposite example in the little portion of land of Rapa Nui: the most remote human haven on Earth, ignored by the western world until its discovering by the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeveen and his crew on

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1722, Easter Day.

Much has been written about the eventual meanings or functions of the nearly thousand megalithic statues spread around the surface of Easter Island. It is not our point of discussion in this article whether they are idols, representations of gods and ancestors, ornamented lightning rods or not. I would rather talk about the presence of sculptures in this island that marks the most eastern part of Polynesia, focusing on some of the implications of sculpture itself as a branch of art.

Rapa Nui neolithic society owes its reputation of having a high level of development to the originality of its sculpture. If we regard art as a process of creating things, we have to admit that it always has its model in nature, no matter the specific branch we consider, for nature is the original source of all beings. And sculpture, among all arts, is the most concrete, the nearest to nature, since its works are made in three dimensions, precisely as it happens with natural beings. Nature creates as though it was a sculptor. That is the reason why, in the field of sculpture, the artist has such a great range of choice for material, in any part of the world. From the snows of the cold Tibet to the sands of the hot Egypt, giving sculptural form to the raw material supplied by nature is a constant invitation. As Aristotle asserts with genial concision, hands are "universal tools"<sup>1</sup>. Together with talent, they are the gifts of nature we need in order to accept that invitation.



Rapa Nui sculptures at Rano Raraku: witnesses to an artistic past (Photo by João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira).

Easter Island has a main theme for its famous sculptures: the human figure, reduced to its basic features, with special attention given to the faces. Matter imposing conditions to form, as it happens as a rule, the moai, made of volcanic stone, do not have the movement and elasticity found in bronze and marble statues, for instance.

Having its forests devastated during the period of the construction of the statues, Rapa Nui has little to offer to the eyes of the visitor in terms of animals and plants. In the *mappa mundi*, the island looks like a small and dark dot lost in the enormous blue surface of the Pacific Ocean. Nowadays ships and planes link Rapa Nui to the men who live in the outside world, whose existence, before the arrival of the Europeans, came to be denied by the islanders.

Witnesses of the lonely past of Rapa Nui, many of the astonishing statues concentrate their look in the center of the small portion of land. Besides being an index to the hermetic character of this last branch of the Polynesian culture, this look also focuses on the necessity of preserving the place as a whole—predatory tourism and mass culture influence have caused various and serious damages to its cultural identity. "It is high time to defend Rapa Nui", in the words of the late vicar, Don Ramiro Estévez. Being a privileged and unique archaeological site in itself, Rapa Nui is a patrimony of humankind. ❖

<sup>1</sup> *De partibus animalium*, 687 a, 21

\* I dedicate this article to Don Ramiro Estévez, late vicar of Rapa Nui, *in memoriam*. I express my gratitude to Miss Mayara Ribeiro Guimarães and Georgia Lee for the important suggestions.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Though the rest of you must by now be quite weary of *moai*-moving theories, I found in Ferren MacIntyre a kindred 'rock person' and read his paper in *RNJ* (Vol. 13:3) with keen interest. Even during my very brief exposure to the present-day Rapa Nui, it was clear that upright transport of "walking" *moai* was, as he says, the local favorite. In fact, when I showed early sketches of my lever-sled-on-ladders idea to a beaming Rafael Rapu, he immediately produced from the glove box of his pickup very similar sketches of his own. His *moai* was standing vertically atop the sled, steadied by taut guy ropes from its neck to the four corners of the platform. And why not?

Such a rig has several distinct advantages over other "walking" methods. The sled protects and effectively enlarges the base of the *moai* such that stability is greatly enhanced, even on steep ramps and hilly haul roads. And anyhow, the lever-powered movement eliminates the need to tip the *moai* at all except, perhaps, for walking it off the sled and onto its pedestal at the *ahu*, presumably under very controlled conditions. If leapfrogged, the ladders need not consume much wood (contrary to MacIntyre's comment) and can be easily levered, regardless of the terrain. His and other "walking" methods would appear to require especially wide and very smooth haul roads which might be imagined today, but how about centuries ago when the island was heavily forested? Talk about a waste of trees!

None of this is to say that MacIntyre shouldn't give his cunningly clever idea a try, of course. As Jo Anne Van Tilburg and I both found out, moving *moai* on paper is one thing; handling big rocks in the field is quite another. The difference between the two is the interesting part. Van Tilburg's decision to abandon rollers in favor of sliders was an entirely legitimate part of her team's learning process—the whole point, after all, of any experiment. Far from being "falsification" of her originally proposed method, the change made good sense and ended up working quite well.

Vincent R. Lee, architect