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## Letters

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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

PS: during our experiment in Denver, a team of 26 levermen handily moved themselves, a 13 ton rock, a 1 ton sled and four 500 pound ladder sections 30 meters steeply up a ramp less than five meters wide, in about an hour. On the level, only eight levermen were needed and could easily have covered 500+ meters a day. Dragging the sled over the ladders (as Van Tilburg effectively did) would take seven times as many people, but would be even faster.

#### A RESPONSE TO VINCE LEE

Dear Editor:

As Vince Lee says, moving *moai* overland is very different from moving them on paper, and I look forward to an opportunity to try my ideas out with larger rocks. With small models, 'walking' over scale roughness needed no particular road-bed preparation, and left the roadway smoother than it found it. With respect to wide roads, I can only suggest that *moai* construction and transport appears to have begun around AD 1000. My population model (RNJ 13:2, Fig. 1) would have it that by this time, deforestation was already noticeable, and the first trees to go would have been the most accessible.

If I were to write the paper this month, I would change the first paragraph of Oral Tradition by altering "Mesopotamian flood" to "Noah's Flood" (the year-long filling of the Black Sea Depression after the breaking of the Bosphorus dam ca. 5600 BC), adding a reference to Wm. Ryan and W. Pitman (1998) *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries about the Event that changed History* (Simon & Schuster, NY).

My serious comment on Lee's letter is in regard to 'falsification'. I did not mean to sound pejorative, but merely Popperian. Verification of a hypothesis encourages its survival, but is not the critical test. Science proceeds by constantly discarding hypotheses by finding instances in which they fail.

The early drafts of my paper devoted both graphs and paragraphs to suggesting problems with the rolling transport proposed by Grau and, in considerable detail, by Van Tilburg in her book. The UCLA field experiment quashed the rolling hypothesis and let me remove all my theoretical objections. As Vince Lee says, this is the normal learning process of science—but it is useful to keep in mind during the current plague of postmodern constructionism that the possibility and practice of falsification is what distinguishes science as our only self-correcting enterprise.

Ferren MacIntyre, National University of Ireland

Dear Editor:

Two observations on Ferren MacIntyre's article on walking *moai*. Firstly, the idea that sweet potato lubrication would consume an excessive two cubic metres of food per *moai*/kilometre. Aside from the possibility that lubrication may not have been needed on all parts of the route, from a chicken's point of view the process might be better described as food preparation than food destruction. Secondly, if the *moai* did walk to their *ahu*, the roads should have been littered with tons of tiny scrapings of tuff—an easy thing to test for.

Jonathan Cardy, UK

Dear Editor:

A little more "Marquesan barking" (*Rapa Nui Journal* 13:87). Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, a German naturalist participating in the first Russian expedition around the world, 1803-1807, stayed at "Nukahiva" (Nuka Hiva) from 6 to 16 May 1804, meeting there the Englishman "Roberts" (Edward Robarts, having deserted from the whaler *Euphrades* in 1798) who "had two dogs, which the inhabitants called pigs, probably because they had hardly ever seen another animal" (Langsdorff 1993, I:114). In his Marquesan (NW dialect) dictionary "dog" is rendered as *bauka nuuohē* (p.121) where the first word is Marquesan *puaka/pu'aka* "animal, pig" and where *nuu-* must be a reflex of Proto-Polynesian \**nguu* "hum, groan, grunt", defining dog as a "barking animal/pig" (cp., e.g., our guinea-pig).

W. W. Schuhmacher, Denmark

Langsdorff, G. H. von. 1993 (1812). *A Voyage Around the World, 1803-1807*. 2 vols. Translated and annotated by Victoria Joan Mossner. Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario.

## Easter Island Foundation News

AFTER MORE THAN TEN YEARS of dedicated work and fund raising by the Easter Island Foundation board and its world-wide members, the opening of the William Mulloy Library on Rapa Nui is about to become a reality. The EIF signed a *convenio* (contract) with the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos (DiBAM) in Chile that legalizes the Foundation in Chile. As a result, funds now are being sent by the EIF to DiBAM to facilitate transportation of the books and to complete final arrangements on the island in anticipation of the opening of the Mulloy Library after the New Year. This is a tremendous feat, considering the board, which is made up of members from around the globe, has been working with agencies in Santiago, Viña del Mar, and Easter Island from its base in California. This hardy group of volunteers has done its best to satisfy the needs and desires of a variety of interested parties.

We believe that the opening of the William Mulloy library is a fantastic cause for celebration as this new millennium begins and we hope all RNJ readers will celebrate with us on January 1. We also hope you will keep the continued work of the Easter Island Foundation in your minds as you plan your giving for the new year.

Kay Kenady Sanger, President.

PLANS FOR *PACIFIC 2000* are moving along, and the response has been overwhelming. Many abstracts have been submitted already and some sessions are at capacity. A session on Pacific Osteology has been added, to be chaired by Vincent Stefan and George Gill. If you have not yet received a conference brochure, let us know and one will be in the mail to you right away. This is shaping up to be a terrific conference; don't miss it!

EIF PUBLICATIONS is pleased to announce that Caroline Katherine Klarr's popular book, *Hawaiian Hula and Body Ornatmentation 1778-1858* has been reprinted. Out of print for a time, we