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TATTOOS FROM PARADISE: TRADITIONAL POLYNESIAN PATTERNS (Book Review)

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No mention was made in Mita's film of Katherine Routledge's epic Mana expedition or of ethnologist Alfred Métraux's studies on the island in the 1930's, nor the extensive archaeological work by the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition led by Thor Heyerdahl in the 1950's, nor is there mention of Father Sebastian Englert, who documented much of the history, culture and language of the Rapanui during his thirty-four years on the island.

Out of the fine work of these scholars grew the dedicated efforts of many more scholars that followed. The work being conducted on Rapa Nui today owes much to their pioneering investigations. Archaeology has enhanced Rapa Nui cultural pride, serving to support a new generation in a renaissance of interest in their Polynesian cultural past.

Only two scientists were singled out by name in the film, but nothing was said of their accomplishments: Thor Heyerdahl and William Mulloy. Heyerdahl's expedition erected the first *moai*, Ahu Ature Huke, at Anakena in 1955. Mulloy, who was a member of Heyerdahl's 1955 expedition team, became the leading expert on the archaeology of Easter Island until his death in 1978. Through scientific methods and hard physical work, Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa, a Chilean anthropologist, along with a dedicated Rapanui crew, reconstructed Ahu Akivi, in the manner of their ancestors (without cranes) in 1960. In 1969, the Tahai archaeological complex near Hanga Roa was restored by Mulloy and his Rapanui assistants. At that time, the Rapanui were just beginning to recover from the sheep land-lease era; a time when they were made to feel that they had no reason to be proud. Tahai's restoration was another landmark in reestablishing the pride of the people. Scenes shot at Tahai, besides being picturesque, are always used as a symbol of the strength and pride of the Rapa Nui people (including by Mita). If Mita went to Mulloy's monument at Tahai—constructed in his honor by the Rapanui people—she would have read the following epithet: "By restoring the past of his beloved island, he also changed its future."

The bottom line of Mita's video appears to be that the work of well-meaning scientists who tried to reconstruct Rapa Nui history and culture needs to be discounted and false information should be corrected to take the mystery out of things Rapanui. Never mind that the Rapanui had lost much of their history and cultural pride before the arrival of inquisitive scientists.

The purpose of the film and its target audience is not clear. If Mita had attended the Albuquerque Easter Island South Seas Symposium in 1997 (within the time she was making the film), she would have realized that Rapa Nui is a fixed star of the Polynesian Community and there is no need for an apology video. She makes abundant use of the past history of the Rapanui as revealed by the scientists whom she damns.

In this effort Mita offers a look at Rapa Nui through Māori eyes, drawing heavily on the concept of Polynesian camaraderie and their struggles for identity. Unfortunately, she fails to see many of the distinctions that make the Rapa Nui people special and the place unique. Easter Island is the southeastern anchor of the Polynesian Triangle, 4,500 miles east of New Zealand. Polynesian migration to Rapa Nui occurred four hundred years before Polynesians arrived in Aotearoa, and their culture developed quite differently in prehistoric and historic times.

As Mita was completing her film, interest was mounting about the sailing of the Polynesian voyaging canoe, *Hōkūle'a*, to Rapa Nui. On a four-day visit in 1998, a Hawai'i Department of Education film team shot a much more comprehensive informational and educational film about Rapa Nui's history, island life and culture. Ironically, it was also called *Te Pito o te Henua*.

* *Merata Mita is a New Zealand filmmaker who sees New Zealand and the world at large as a very troubled place, specifically in terms of racial, cultural, and ideological problems. "Unless we become increasingly vocal and aggressive no-one pays any heed," Mita says. Henry states that although she may be a stirrer in New Zealand, she does not know what she is doing when she attempts to stir up other places, such as Rapa Nui.*

Book Review

TATTOOS FROM PARADISE. TRADITIONAL POLYNESIAN PATTERNS. By Mark Blackburn. 1999. Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA. ISBN: 0-7643-0941-2. 205 pages. Hardcover, glossy, oversize.

Review by Georgia Lee

This extraordinary book is composed of early art and photographs from the 19th century that illustrate the various types of tattoo in Polynesia, as well as artifacts that relate to the art of tattooing. The more than 250 illustrations in color or sepia tone are wonderful, if a tad scary in some cases (a row of New Zealand trophy heads with chisel *moko* comes to mind!). The book is divided into chapters for each island or island group: New Zealand, Hawai'i, Tahiti, Marquesas, Easter Island, Samoa, and Tonga. Each chapter has an introduction discussing the particular island, when it was first impacted from the outside, a bit of history regarding the society, and then into the tattooing in that particular part of the Pacific. Each image is described, and even a bit of biography concerning the photographer or artist is included. There is an Appendix listing the principle voyages of exploration, a Bibliography and Index.

Blackburn is to be commended for putting this remarkable collection of images together. For those interested in tattoo and/or Polynesia, it is a 'must have' book.

EASTER ISLAND GIANT STONE STATUES TELL OF A RICH AND TRAGIC PAST. By Caroline Arnold 1999. Clarion Books, New York. ISBN 0-395-87609-5. \$15.00.

Review by Tom Christopher

This new children's book is well written and accurately targeted for the age group 9-12. Heyerdahl is mentioned but his theory of how people arrived on Easter Island is dismissed. He is credited with stimulating "much popular interest in Easter Island." Altogether a pretty good effort, with all the photographs printed right side up, unlike Miriam Meyer's *Blind Guards of Easter Island* another children's book about Easter Island.