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Escape from Easter Island (Les Evades de l'Ile de Paques-Loin de Chile, vers Tahiti; 1944-1958 (Review)

Ann M. Altman

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overgrazing subsequently.

We should be very grateful to Mieth and Bork for making available to the general public the extremely satisfying results of their research on the Poike Peninsula and for writing and producing this very attractive and copiously illustrated little volume. It is, however, a pity that the translation into English of the original German manuscript was not checked by a native English speaker. There are more than a few linguistic mistakes in the text, as well as some substantive mistakes, such as the incorrect spelling of Zea mays (p.32), that need to be corrected in the next edition. In addition, an explanation for the layman of the terminology associated with radiocarbon dating would be very helpful. Nonetheless, even with its flaws, *Easter Island – Rapa Nui, Scientific Pathways to Secrets of the Past* is a wonderful book and it is certainly an essential addition to the library of anyone with even a passing interest in Easter Island and/or the ecology of small islands.

Escape from Easter Island
(*Les Évadés de l'Île de Pâques - Loin de Chile, vers Tahiti; 1944-1958*)

Marie-Françoise Peteuil
L'Harmattan, Paris (2004)
270 pages, ISBN 2-7475-7059-2

Review by Ann M. Altman Ph.D.

"THE OTHER BOOKS ARE ALL THE SAME. It's a good thing that you've been studying these things. They are part of our history. There was nobody here to see what was happening to us." [p. 227]. These comments were made by Mahuta Pakarati and set the stage for an interesting, albeit poorly documented, book by Marie-Françoise Peteuil, which is available only in French at this time. Peteuil first set foot on Easter Island in 2001 as a tourist, taking a four-day holiday from her job as a teacher of mathematics at a small college in Tahiti. During the sightseeing tour of the island, their guide told them about the time, in the 1950's, when Thor Heyerdahl visited the island. Islanders were living under dreadful conditions as virtual slaves of the Chilean navy. They were not allowed to travel and had no passports. Moreover, while Heyerdahl's marine exploits received much attention, the attempts by islanders to escape in small boats to Tahiti were ignored, even though they represented remarkable feats of seamanship and navigation and were undertaken in secret and under extremely difficult conditions.

Peteuil's book describes her own voyage of discovery and the way in which she assembled her accounts of eight attempts, from 1944 to 1958, by islanders to escape from Easter Island and to make their way to Tahiti. Each of the escapes is described in detail with some of the previously unpublished information provided by islanders who now live in Europe and some from islanders who spoke to Peteuil on her second visit to Rapa Nui.

The first escape in 1944 ended in failure after 24 days at sea; the starving escapees were picked up by an American ship. The second escape was by six members of the Pakarati family; their boat reached the Tuamotus after 36 days at sea. The third escape was another attempt to tell the world about

conditions on Rapa Nui; the fourth set of escapees carried a request to the French authorities, naively asking for France to take control of the island from Chile; the fifth expedition, with five men, reached the Cook Islands after an extraordinary voyage of 5000 kilometers and 55 days; the sixth escape was made by two star-crossed lovers who perished at sea, as did the eight men who made the seventh escape and the seven men of the eighth and last attempt, who had been confined to the Leper Colony prior to their bid for freedom.

Peteuil's account of the islanders' suffering under the Chileans, the eight escapes and the fates of the escapees, plus the oral accounts of the islanders make compelling reading. We know, of course, that the relationship between the islanders and the Chileans has improved markedly since the mid 1960's. As Mahuta Pakarati told Peteuil, "We must move forward, not backwards, not to how it was here before the Chileans. Now Chile helps us, gives scholarships to our children. Of my seven children, six had scholarships, free flights to Santiago, and the return trip in first class if they had good marks!" [page 228]

Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed

Jared Diamond
Viking Press, New York (2005),
575 pages, ISBN 0-670-03337-5

Review by Vincent Lee

NO THOROUGH STUDY OF SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION in the face of environmental decline could fail to spotlight the rise and fall of Easter Island's Rapanui culture. Sure enough, Pulitzer Prize winner, Jared Diamond's new book, *Collapse* tackles this subject early on. In just 40 pages, he summarizes the subject quite well, making good use of advice from various researchers including Edmundo Edwards, Claudio Cristino and Jo Anne Van Tilburg. I briefly worked with all three during filming of the 1998 NOVA television episode testing Van Tilburg's *moai* moving and erecting ideas.

Those ideas found their way into Diamond's book in his brief discussion of the adverse impact of the *moai* cult on the island's resources. In lieu of a concise overview of *moai* "technology," Diamond instead presents a revisionist version of Van Tilburg's NOVA project, which he finds "most convincing." No mention is made of the islanders' longstanding belief in upright transport (no pun intended). A detailed account of the numbers of pullers needed to drag *moai* of various sizes fails, as did Van Tilburg, to deal with the problem of where they all go as their burden approaches its seacoast *ahu* and their workspace disappears into the ocean. Finally, Van Tilburg is rightly credited with the idea that Polynesian "canoe ladders" might have played a part in the process, but incorrectly credited with actually building and using one during her experiment.

None of these nitpicky details effects Diamond's central thesis, of course, but an opportunity to better educate his many thousands of readers about one of the world's enduring "mysteries" sadly has been missed.