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TATTOO TRADITIONS OF HAWAI'I (review)

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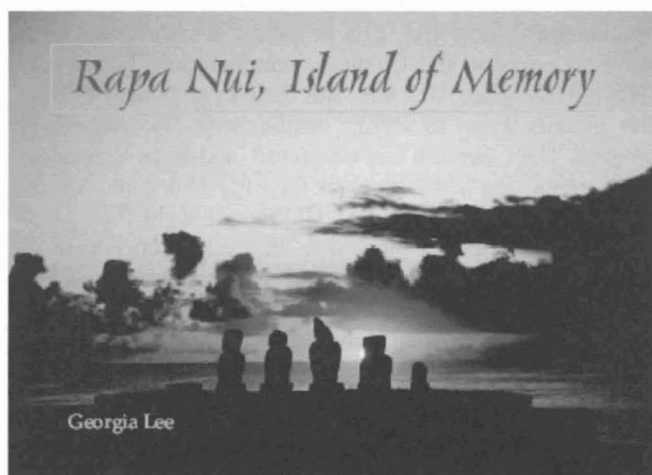
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pologists such as Terry Jones, Kathryn Klar, and Roger Green, it is inevitable that the case for Polynesian contacts with the New World will provide data that must be considered within the overall discussion of Polynesian activity in the eastern Pacific. Atholl Anderson, Terry Jones, Kathryn Klar and the other archaeologists mentioned in this review are all working simultaneously to reshape the study of Polynesian prehistory, and it is from the dialogue between their ideas that the future of the discipline will emerge. Chinese proverbs aside, I would say we are lucky to live in interesting times. ❧



Rapa Nui, Island of Memory

by Georgia Lee
Easter Island Foundation, 2006
ISBN 1-880636-23-9

Review by Paul G. Bahn

THIS DELIGHTFUL BOOK is aptly described as a love letter to the people of Rapa Nui and their island. Richly illustrated with photographs and the author's own drawings, it is not a chronological account of her association with the island, but rather a tapestry of tales arranged thematically around a host of characters and topics.

Georgia Lee first visited Rapa Nui in June 1981, at a time when she was emerging from a bad marriage and starting a new life and career. Her research project on Rapa Nui's rock art was to last more than six years, and produced – in addition to a classic monograph – not only an abiding and passionate love for the place and its inhabitants, but also eventually a new man in her life.

Before she arrived, the island's rock art was known from only a few sites: Henri Lavachery, during the Franco-Belgian expedition of the 1930s, had mostly sketched motifs from horseback and reported 209 petroglyphs. Georgia and her crews, through painstaking and often arduous systematic survey of caves, rocks and outcrops, recorded around 4000, as well as thousands of cup-marks. The rock art proved to be so abundant and varied – indeed easily the richest in the Pacific – that she was, alas, unable to include

the *moai* in her study, and had to leave them to the attentions of others.

The book really highlights the changes of all kinds that she has seen on the island over the past 25 years. At the first, there were few, very primitive, amenities and dusty roads. Now it is a very different place in many ways. She tells numerous stories, including that of the infamous Hollywood movie, to illustrate the multiple strange twists and turns of modern Rapa Nui history. There has been damage to the archaeology, such as vandalism of petroglyphs; projects like the Tongariki reconstruction; and all kinds of crazy schemes from lighthouses to revolving restaurants to golf courses.

The author's cascade of memories inevitably revolves around islanders she knows well and loves, but she maintains a healthy skepticism about their frequent tales of lost caves and so forth. She vividly conveys something of the trials and tribulations of running a field project in a remote location, and of the wide range of types who came as volunteers. We also get brief accounts of major names like Mulloy and Heyerdahl, as well as some of the nuttier theories that the island's archaeology constantly inspires.

I believe it is obvious to all specialists and indeed all true Rapanuiphiles that it is Georgia Lee who has become the "matriach" of the island through her unrivalled all-encompassing knowledge of its culture, both past and present; her continuing passion for helping the islanders, not least through the establishment of the Easter Island Foundation; and, of course, through the creation of this *Journal*, unquestionably the single most important source of information about Easter Island. Although she is hugely different in so many ways from the redoubtable Katherine Routledge, one can certainly say that Georgia Lee – in terms of both scholarship and concern for the island – is Routledge's true successor, and her very enjoyable and readable memoirs cannot be recommended highly enough.

Dare one hope that in the future she might produce a second edition in which she names more names and employs less discretion!?

TATTOO TRADITIONS OF HAWAII

by Tricia Allen
Mutual Publishing, Honolulu
2006; ISBN 1-56647-770-0
218 pages, 133 figures, soft-cover. Price \$ 17.95
www.tattootraditions.alohaworld.com

Review by Sidsel Millerstrom

I AM DELIGHTED THAT TRICIA ALLEN, with her unique experiences as an anthropologist and a practicing tattoo artist, has used her wealth of knowledge to weave the complex cultural tapestry of ancient and contemporary tattoo practices into a book. Her sensitivity to Hawaiian socio-cultural issues is evident throughout her work. Research on ancient tattoos is not an easy subject to investigate for tattoo motifs, similar to rock art, have layers of meaning in the Hawaiian

language and culture, many of which we will never understand. However, in contrast to images on stones where there is a certain degree of preservation, tattoos, in general, do not preserve. As Allen points out, the information gleaned from explorers' journals and notes are tantalizing and brief. A drawing may have been done on location or years afterward and the artist's skills and training may also be in question. Motifs were copied repeatedly and often changed, thus the original design was perhaps altered in order to sell a publication. Take for example Figure 6, page 10 with the caption: "A Young Women of Otaheite, Bringing a Present. Tahitian *taumi* or gorgets, in an engraving after John Weber, c 1777. Emory likens the shape of the gorgets to the shape of the tattoo motifs they observed in Hawai'i. From Cook and King, 1784. Kahn collection, Hawai'i State Archives." In this engraving, the young women's right breast is exposed but both breasts are covered in the original drawing. (see Barrow 1979).

The book is organized into two basic sections, ancient and contemporary tattoo practices. The first and major section (123 pages), "The Ancient Tattoo," deals with information gleaned from published and unpublished sources. Three sections follow: "Contemporary Tattoo," "The Tattooists," and "Choosing a Tattoo." Ample illustrations are found throughout. The contemporary tattoo section consists of a series of photos of mostly Hawaiians with their Polynesian motifs displayed and with a short personal biography. The majority chose personal motifs that connect them with the past.

Although Hawaiian tattooing practices ceased by the mid-nineteenth century, a revival occurred in the 1970-80s as part of a pan-Polynesian force of solidarity and a symbol of cultural identity. Seeing tattoos can stir inner emotions: we may be fascinated, repelled, or appalled by the sight of a heavily tattooed person. Regardless of our reactions, tattoos are, as Allen shows, a type of "storyboard." They often are deeply personal and can reflect socio-cultural-political values, both in time and place.

It is certain that the practice of Hawaiian tattooing reaches far into Polynesian prehistory. Tattoo needles have been found in archaeological assemblages in most Polynesian islands societies. Tattoos can be both secular and sacred. The process of tattooing was and is as important as the placement and the type of design, and the act of marking a body was associated with many rituals and carried out with chants (92). Tattoos were traditionally placed, depending on gender, on the upper arms, the tip of the tongue, legs, around body orifices, the soles of feet, the palm of hands and inside the eyelids (p 24). The legs of both sexes were tattooed (p 80). Women had their feet, face, and hands tattooed. The early type of motif, noted at the time of Cook's visit (pp 88, 90-91) seems to have displayed a variety of linear pattern, checkerboard, shark tooth, chevron, and zig-zag. Marching goats and western weapon motifs were especially popular by the 1820s. According to Allen, Jacques Arago, the friendly official artist on *Uranie*, a French ship that visited the island in 1819, made the best and the largest

number of early drawings. Urged by the local women, Arago was tattooing whimsical motifs on the Hawaiian ladies. Chieftess Ka'ahumanu, supposedly the favorite wife of chief Kamehameha, had a hunting horn placed on her derriere (p 24-25).

As the author demonstrates, understanding the system of symbolic meaning of tattoos is problematic, but some inferences can be made. They may show a political affiliation or a social relationship among people (p 91). It might be a mark of subservience (p 82) or a form of torture where eyelids were turned inside out and tattooed (p 83).

On a more personal level, tattoos might serve as a protective device, such as a charm against sharks (pp 90-91). Tattoos often functioned as a genealogy account and showed descent from a common ancestor (p 86). They identified an individual as being part of a village (p 85), or devotees of the same god (p 86).

Perhaps the display of mourning and the act of sorrow are best known in the literature. It was common that many Hawaiians, in sorrow over chief Kamehameha's death, tattooed his name and death-date on their arms.

Allen's research is well done and I only have a few complaints. A glossary would have been helpful to readers not familiar with Hawaiian terms and I feel that the author's criticism of Alfred Gell's work was, perhaps, a little harsh, considering that Gell's work was based on library research only and had a different focus, plus the difficulties of doing research on Polynesian tattooing practices.

Although much has been written about both ancient and contemporary tattoo practices, this publication, to my knowledge, is the only one that connects ancient Hawaiian tattoo practices with contemporary tattoo practices. Allen's book is a visual treat and a delight to read; the layout is attractive with ample illustrations and there is an extensive bibliography. Her book is a welcomed addition to Polynesian literature.

Barrow, Terence. 1979. *The Art of Tahiti and the Neighboring Society, Austral and Cooks Islands*. London: Thames and Hudson (Figure 39, pp 36).

Gell, Alfred. 1993. *Wrapping in Images, Tattooing in Polynesia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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Review by Scott Nicolay

THE JOURNAL OF ISLAND AND COASTAL ARCHAEOLOGY is a new scholarly periodical that is likely to be of interest to a good part of the RNJ readership. When the Norwegian Ar-