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From the Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF ARCHAEOLOGY and prehistory in Polynesia are presented in this issue of *Rapa Nui Journal*. The paper by Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo provides insight into the use of modern techniques – satellite images – for the detection of past settlement patterns on Rapa Nui. Another perspective is a structural analysis by Jennifer Kahn from within a Polynesian house. And, finishing up his Marquesan paper, David Addison provides a perspective based on ethno-historical observations. The report on the ‘a pō project, by Susannah Rutherford and Brett Shepardson, is one that involves young Rapanui in a study of lichen growth, and it also provides some interesting background on lichen studies on Rapa Nui in Susannah’s interview with Gerhard Follmann, who conducted initial studies on this subject. In her article, Petra Campbell makes a compelling case for sustainable development on our favorite island.

Also in this issue, we get to know the famed French paleobotanist Dr. Catherine Orliac, and our “Look Back” feature is unique: it is a newspaper article, published in three parts, in the *New York Herald Tribune* for 1933. The article, which describes a trip to Easter Island, was written by Heinz Hell, a German journalist who managed a visit to the island at that time. His report presents an interesting look at the island’s society at the time when the sheep ranch dominated life on the island. We originally had in our possession only Parts 1 and 3, courtesy of Tom Christopher. But, with some serious digging by Shawn McLaughlin, we were able to locate the missing section. Sadly, we have no further information on Hell, who presumably returned to Germany.

This issue also has some interesting Letters to the Editor, including comments from David Addison about Candace Gossen’s paper (RNJ 21(2):105-110), and a reply by Gossen. Two obituaries report the passing of one of the key members of Heyerdahl’s expedition, Arne Skjølsvold, and a well-known and beloved member of the Rapa Nui community, Clemente Hereveri.

It is important to consider different perspectives when carrying out archaeology. Nothing can be taken for granted since there probably always will be yet another angle to be considered on almost every archaeological issue. Contemporary archaeology accommodates both individual and multi-vocal perspectives. Various stories of the past are told both within the scientific communities as well as from local perspectives. Archaeology is becoming diversified and local as well as globalized at the same time. In his book, *Archaeology Beyond Dialogue*, Ian Hodder writes: “While it is important for archaeologists to work with “the locals” the construction of “the local” as yet another “other”, an inverse mirror of image of ourselves, has to be questioned and problematized” (Hodder 2003:9). This is, of course, something we also need to think about when dealing with archaeology in Polynesia. What kind of images of the past are we

creating? On one hand, globalization favors archaeology based on Western values but, on the other hand, tools — as, for example, the internet — can be used by local communities to communicate with and obtain information outside the local society, at least by those who can afford to access this technology. This means that the effects of globalization can work in different directions and sometimes include people, but may also exclude others.

New techniques used in archaeology give us possibilities to reach new perspectives. Solid empirical research is an important base for archaeological research, but an archaeology that is descriptive and reduces the human element from the material culture is not desirable. In archaeological research, the post-modern perspectives are about to turn into a more empirical mode again. This is probably a change due to necessity, but we hope that the science of archaeology is not turning back to a descriptive positivism or “mechanical bean counting” as the Australian archaeology professor Tim Murray expressed it in an interview by Gavin Lucas (2007:160), but instead favors tying the empirical to holistic and relational views and methods.

Right now laser-scanning is the latest trend on how to document the archaeological sites on Rapa Nui. This is a powerful tool when working in cultural heritage management for it is a means to monitor the decay of sites. We hope to hear more about this new method and the results of the work.

Here, on Rapa Nui, we just visited an archaeological team working on the slopes of Maunga Terevaka under the leadership of the German Professor Burkhard Vogt and it was a pleasure to hear the “voices” of several young Rapanui archaeology students who are included on the team. We hope to hear more from them and other scholars working in the Pacific region in future issues of RNJ on various perspectives in archaeological research. It is also gratifying to note that Rapanui students are learning archaeological techniques and will hopefully, in the future, make important contributions to the discipline. Already Rapanui islander Sonia Haoa is making international news with her research projects north of Hangaroa village, paving the way for others who may follow.

Hangaroa, March 2008
Helene Martinsson-Wallin and
Paul Wallin, Chief Editors

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