

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

We would like to clear up a misunderstanding that has become apparent to us on reading the recent book *Inventing 'Easter Island'* by Beverley Haun. On page 246, the author complains that, in our work *Easter Island, Earth Island* we gave (p. 170) a quotation linked to Captain Cook, to the effect that the islanders were "small, lean, timid and miserable". Having been unable to find this quotation in Cook's text, or any other 18th-century texts, Haun therefore implies that we made it up, and seems incensed that our dishonesty has been compounded through the quotation being picked up by subsequent authors.

The explanation for this situation is very simple, and if Haun had taken the trouble to contact us in the course of her doctoral research — after all, we are not hard to reach, for example through this *Journal* — then we could have explained the source of her confusion. A glance at our 1992 book would reveal that we were not permitted to provide detailed notes and references, and indeed the publisher was even reluctant to accept the very condensed bibliographic information which we provided. That is why no precise source was given for the quotation.

This is indeed a direct quotation, not from Cook but from Heyerdahl (1974: 200), who derived these epithets from both Cook and George Forster; he provided the exact page numbers in question to back up the wording, and when one consults the texts by Cook and Forster, one does indeed find these adjectives used. Cook (1777), as Haun admits, did describe the islanders as both small and slender, while Johann Forster, in his journal (1982: 468; 475), also referred to them as slender and slim. George Forster not only calls them lean (1777:304), but also mentions their "general timid behaviour" (*ibid.*: 316) and, in several passages, refers to their poverty, destitution, and wretched and deplorable condition (*ibid.*: 307-8; 312; 322-324), and to their miseries (*ibid.*: 320).

Moreover Heyerdahl did not, as far as we know, take part in the debate about the extent to which the islanders destroyed their own environment, and so cannot be accused of being prejudiced in this case. His quotation was an accurate reflection of what these travelers wrote, and in no way constitutes evidence of the bias of modern writers against the ancient islanders, as Haun seems to think.

Needless to say, we shall take pains to clarify the source of the quotation in future editions of our book, to avoid any further confusion of this kind.

Having cleared that up, we have a question of our own for Haun: In her book (p. 241) she mentions the "New Horizons" volume about Easter Island written by Catherine and Michel Orliac, and states, "In a telling instance of synchronicity, the Orliac text was translated from the French in 1995 by Paul Bahn" — what on earth does this mean? What is "telling" about this translation? Is she suggesting that the translation

was somehow distorted to support our views? She must be aware that the Orliacs — who are our good friends — are on the opposite side of the debate, and therefore their book in no way supports our position. So we are thoroughly mystified by Haun's sentence, but once again it definitely contains a whiff of an utterly unscholarly accusation of dishonesty. Moreover, her scornful dismissal of the "New Horizons" series as "picture books for adolescents" is not only insulting but ignorant and completely false. On the contrary, this is a very highly regarded, beautifully illustrated series of French books on a wide variety of scholarly subjects, with eminent specialists as authors, and in no way aimed at adolescents. One of us (PB) has translated ten of them, and has been deeply impressed by the scholarship involved in each one. Haun should check her facts more carefully before jumping to hasty and ill-considered denunciations.

— Paul Bahn & John Flenley

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To the Editors:

Regarding "Top-down Archaeology: High Resolution Satellite Images of Rapa Nui on GoogleEarth™" by Terry L. Hunt and Carl P. Lipo — *Rapa Nui Journal* 22(1):5-13 (2008) — one thing that caught my attention, but which probably isn't too critical unless one is trying to derive truly up-to-date information, is the fact that the Google satellite images of the island are not current. The image of Puna Pau, for example (Fig. 4, p. 8), while listed by Google as being at copyrighted and presumably from 2007, is clearly from *before* April 2007, as there is now a parking area, an entrance way, and a clearly defined trail with large interpretive displays that are not visible in the picture. Similarly, the ranger station construction at Rano Raraku (Fig. 3, p. 8) is undeveloped in the satellite images compared to what exists today (there are more buildings than are visible in the photo, including a toilet facilities and sales kiosks, and a small amphitheater of wooden seats adjacent to the trailhead). In short, I don't know if people are aware of this but Google simply isn't always current when it comes to its satellite images. Google itself explains that satellite map data is "approximately one to three years old".*

Illustrative of this, my wife and I have been living in our current house in Phoenix since December of 2005 but looking at adjacent properties via Google Earth shows in one case a dirt lot where a grocery store complex is already in operation when we moved in and, in another spot, Google Earth shows only construction of another shopping center that is now in full operation also. While I might not necessarily expect Google to update Easter Island imagery that often given its remoteness, I am surprised to find that parts of the 5th largest city in the United States (Phoenix) haven't been incorporated into Google Earth yet. Again, I don't know how relevant this is — except to point out that the utility of Google Earth is less a function of its current nature or accuracy and more a function of the ability to view areas heretofore invisible for scholastic or other purposes. This is not a reflection on the merits or conclusions of the Hunt & Lipo article, merely pointing out an aspect of Google Earth that might not be common knowledge.

One final note that others may find useful: The satellite image of the island (Fig. 2, p. 7) is listed as “copyright 2007” by NASA when in fact it's not only the same picture used in Georgia Lee's *Uncommon Guide* and therefore dated to the late 1980s (as her book was published in 1990) but also, in so far as NASA is a United States government agency, all of the aforementioned images attributed to NASA instead in the public domain.

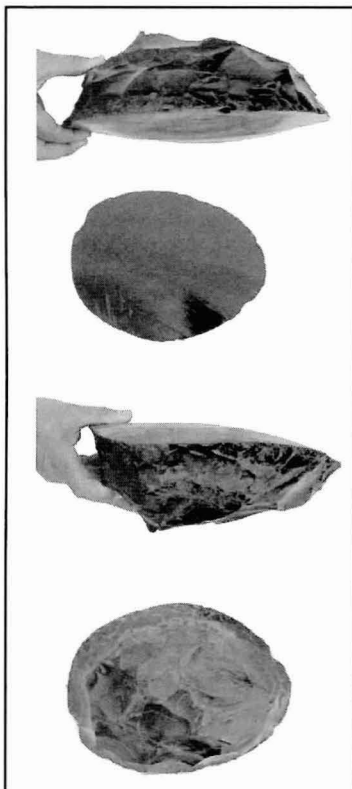
— Shawn McLaughlin

* <<http://local.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=22040&topic=10778>> accessed June 28, 2008

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MOAI SIGHTINGS

A *MOAI* EYE SIGHTING: The EIF has become privy to some interesting news about the apparent discovery of a large obsidian *moai* eye* that has many of us excited. On July 29th we were told the eye had been found at Tongariki “in the last week or so” and that Sonia Haoa was in possession of the artefact originally described as a semi-spherical chunk of obsidian 6 to 8 inches in diameter. Sonia was subsequently in touch with Chris “Obsidian Hydration Man” Stevenson who acknowledged that the only way to analyze it would be to remove a piece. Stevenson reiterated that the eye was “found near Tongariki” by a local islander, “in the water or near it”, so the report goes. Charlie Love, who was on the island at the time, reported that there may be some question about the age of discovery of the item, where it was found, and by whom. He described the eye as having “dirt on the lower two-thirds of it” and went on to say that it may have been found *last December*. Or, based on what some folks on the island have told him, he said it may have been found as many as *five or six years ago* and was possibly taken out of



someone's truck! Given the diameter of the eye, he estimated that, if it accompanied a coral sclera, then the face of the *moai* would have “had to be at least 2.5 meters across since the dang thing is a foot long & weighs 15 pounds. If instead, you want it to fit into an “older” *moai* head without the big sockets, then the head would be about a meter across”. He wondered if it was found during the excavation of Ahu Tongariki, and was then spirited away to sell later. Charlie provided the accompanying composite photograph (on the left).

A few weeks later Sonia provided exact measurements for the artefact: 26.6 cm (10.5") × 20 cm (7.9") in diameter × 18 cm (7.1") deep and we have learned that Chris will attempt to date the artefact starting in September, 2008. So far Chris reports that it looks genuine and has a hydration layer on it.

* In fact, it is not so much the “eye” as the pupil. The *moai* eyes, as we know, are made of coral for the *sclera* (the white part) and either obsidian or red scoria for the pupil.

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A CARVED WOOD *MOAI* adjacent to the door of the Museum of Samoa in Apia.



Thanks to Mimi Forsyth for bringing this to our attention and for sending the photo!

(More on the Festival of Pacific Arts in American Samoa on page 158.)



LETTERS... (continued from page 148)

To the Editor:

Jeanne Arnold's rebuttal to the Jones-Klar argument for Polynesian origin of the Chumash *tomol* plank canoe is a plausible scenario but no more "empirically reliable" than the Polynesian hypothesis. "Socio-political evolution" is one model, inter-societal contacts another model, and the latter can include "stimulus diffusion." Jones and Klar's (2005) argument for Polynesian origin of the Chumash *tomol* plank canoe and associated terminology is based on a paradigm of inter-societal contacts stimulating technological developments. Jeanne Arnold's (2007) counter-argument premises an internal engine driving greater population density, occupational specialization, and socio-political ranking ("complexity").

Arnold acknowledges (2007:200) the difficulty of dating the earliest canoe planks, which are likely to have been cut from wood older than the manufacturing date of the canoe; therefore a California plank radiocarbon date a century or two earlier than estimates of the settling of Hawai'i does not invalidate the Jones-Klar hypothesis. She points to swordfish remains in villages as evidence of use of sturdy larger boats, presumably *tomols*, but admits (2007:201) that swordfish remains do not become common until 1300-1400s CE. Swordfish, and cod, were principal food items in Penobscot Bay, Maine, already in the Late Archaic Moorehead (Red Paint) phase, 4,500-4,000 BP (Bourque 2001:54), presumably fished from dugout canoes (Bourque 2001:92, although Bourque does not consider the possibility of hide-covered *curragh*-type canoes in the Maine Late Archaic). Arnold does not discuss the possibility that the little *tule* boats described for historic California are remnants of a reed-boat tradition that once included larger vessels; the little one-man *caballitos* we see on the Peruvian coast today are only vestiges of a reed-boat technology that formerly produced ocean-going cargo vessels (Bruhns 1994:285; Heyerdahl, Sandweiss, & Narváez 1995:220-221).

More to the point, the real issue is between a model of universal cultural evolution towards societal complexity, formulated in the late 17th century and foundational to 19th century pre-historic archaeology (Kehoe 1998:45-46, 59), and a model based on historical data documenting inter-societal contacts as the prevalent source of cultural innovations (e.g., Hodgen 1974; Kristiansen & Larsson 2005:25-31, 365; Childe,

as summarized by Trigger 2006:350; and the irrespressible Linton 1937). Particularly significant is the phenomenon of stimulus diffusion, discussed by Kroeber in 1940, where "the specific items of cultural content, upon which historians ordinarily rely in proving connection, are likely to be few or even wholly absent" (Kroeber 1952:344). I found a striking case of stimulus diffusion from 16th century Mexico to Europe, through which the realistic Aztec depiction of human hearts was adopted by Franciscan and Augustinian missionaries, discussed in the Council of Trent, and picked up by the European Counter-Reformation innovator François de Sales who was later canonized (Kehoe 1979). As in any case of innovation through inter-societal contact, the receiving society must be pre-adapted to benefit from the introduction; i.e., the new trait should be recognizably compatible with an existing economic, occupational, or cognitive niche. Occasional landfalls on American coasts by Polynesians disappointed to find lands already populated seem especially likely to have resulted in stimulus diffusion

— Alice B. Kehoe

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“Easter Island will, I'm afraid, long remain one of those ‘mysterious’ places about which no end of rubbish will be written. But we should be wary lest, by seeming to minimize its strangeness, we appear too grounded in sordid reality and too inaccessible to Poetry....”

— Henri Lavachery