

***Volcanoes, El Niños, and the Bellybutton  
of the Universe***

D.A. Walker, 2000 Xlibris Corporation, Soft cover, 99 pages,  
\$20.00, ISBN 07388-37229

*Review by Tom Christopher*

This little volume traces the career of D.A. Walker from a graduate student of geophysics at the University of Hawai'i over, under, and around the Pacific for the next thirty-six years on the way to some startling discoveries for Rapanuiphiles.

Having amassed some 20 years of seismographic and hydrophonic data from around the Pacific, Walker, with a cross disciplinary approach, began to see a relationship between the El Niño phenomenon and volcanism on the sea floor near Easter Island. El Niños were preceded by increased sea floor volcanism. These correlations were present in the past two El Niño events.

On page 64, Walker reflects back on his first visit to Easter Island when Antonio Haoa had told him that the island's name was Te Pito te Henua:

Furthermore, if any place on the face of the earth could be called "The Earth's Bellybutton", the plate tectonics revolution had now proven that it was near Easter Island. The ridge system there was found to be the most rapidly spreading on earth. It was so fast that in some places it couldn't keep up with itself, and small mini-plates were forming. In 1992 and 1993, hundreds of volcanoes were found along this ridge system. Also, many hundreds of thousands of years earlier, Easter had been right on the axis of this most rapidly spreading ridge center. Easter itself was formed by the energy (lava) traveling through umbilical columns of conduits from its Mother (the mantle), which gives birth to all of the earth's crust. Easter Island is now merely a remnant of that birthing process (i.e., a bellybutton).

I found this to be a nice little read, written for the layperson who will have particular interest to linking El Niños and the climate changes associated with them to both the discovery of Easter Island and changes to the society due to drought and the subsequent food shortages.

***El mundo submarino de Isla de Pascua/  
The Underwater World of Easter Island***

Michel García, 2000 S.E.E.M. Orca Ltda, Chile

*Review by Georgia Lee*

Full color, 28 pages, text in English and Spanish. This slim book provides a stunning view of the underwater world of Easter Island, a view denied to non-scuba divers. García arrived to Easter Island in 1979 and, together with his brother Henri, now heads the Orca Center for Scuba Diving. Michel is known for his excellent underwater photographs and has worked with scientific expeditions and documentaries. Aside from the underwater "vistas", there are close-ups showing fish and other sea creatures to be found around the island, views of shipwrecks such as the *Apolline Emilie* which went down in 1896, and an evocative shot of an encrusted anchor from some unnamed ves-

sel that met its fate here. The cover illustration is a real "grabber". It shows a *moai* under the sea, covered with coral growths, and a faint figure of a diver swimming past. But all is not as it appears: this "underwater scene" was actually from a Chilean soap opera of 1998, "*Iorana*". Price of book not given; interested parties may contact: seemorca@entelchile.net

***Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island***

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 11, 2001 – August 4, 2002, Eric Kjellgren, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Assistant Curator of Oceanic Art. Catalogue published by Yale University Press, New Haven and New London

*Exhibition Review by Norman Hurst*

*Splendid Isolation* presents Easter Island objects from North American public and private collections. The installation occupies the Special Exhibition Galleries for the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (A.O.A.) from December 11, 2001 to August 4, 2002.

In an exhibition of scant 50 objects, Kjellgren has managed to include at least two examples of every familiar type of wood carving, as well as an interesting variety of stone sculpture, pendants, gorgets and other body ornament. There are five barkcloth objects, three feather headdresses, three dance paddles, a group of weapons (including one *paoa* and two *ua*), and finally three *rongo* boards. Given the paucity of Easter Island material world-wide, the viewer should find this a well-balanced and representative exhibition. It includes important and well known, as well as newly "re-discovered" pieces.

Although the Special Exhibition Galleries for A.O.A. have been the locus of many interesting exhibitions, few have been as ambitious as the present example, and almost no others have been accompanied by a scholarly and serviceable catalogue. The catalogue includes a surprisingly positive letter from director de Montebello, not known for his enthusiasm for "primitive" art, and articles by Adrienne L. Kaeppler, Jo Anne Van Tilburg and associate curator Eric Kjellgren, who also wrote the catalogue entries.

Kjellgren has attempted what every good curator should in trying to locate and exhibit noteworthy objects that have seldom, if ever, been previously published or exhibited. There are a number of these from institutional collections that will be new even to most Easter Island aficionados. Notable among these are two barkcloth figures from the New Brunswick Museum in St. John, Canada, and a birdman figure from the Springfield Museum of Science in Massachusetts.

There are also many privately held objects, some of which will be fresh to viewers. Among the private collections represented, Mark and Carolyn Blackburn have lent nine objects. There are also two objects from the collection of Arman and Corice Arman, two from the Helois Trust collection (courtesy of Francesco Pellizzi), one each from the collection of Faithdorian Wright and the current collection of Raymond and Laura Wielgus, as well as several from anonymous lenders.

Visitors will recognize a reasonable number of objects that have been widely published and exhibited. The Metropolitan Museum itself has Easter Island pieces in its collection. Five

of which are included: *moko*, *moai pa'apa'a*, *moai tangata*, *rei miro*, and *rapa*. Other well-known objects include the barkcloth figures and the headdress from Harvard's Peabody Museum, the Wielgus *moai kavakava* (gift to Indiana University and lent by it), and the *rei miro* from the Wielgus private collection. The Wielgus *moko* (Cat. 18), also from their private collection, is published in the catalogue but is not exhibited.

Raymond Wielgus affirmed that the *moko* did not travel to the Metropolitan Museum because the exhibition was over budget and the Museum decided not to pay the transit insurance for it. An ambitious, well-publicized lecture series was also curtailed due to budgetary restrictions, according to Kjellgren. This fiscal inflexibility is unfortunate for a project of this scope and significance, in this reviewer's opinion.

This reviewer would have been grateful for a careful notation in the labels or in the catalogue itself of the past collection, publication and exhibition histories of the objects included in this show. The *rapa* (Cat. 44) appears to be from the Masco collection (Wardwell #103) and the *paoa* (Cat. 45) appears to be from the Hooper collection (H #394); both are listed simply as "private collection." While the owners are certainly entitled to their privacy, in the interest of scholarship and continuity in the literature, it would be very helpful if publication and exhibition histories could accompany the objects.

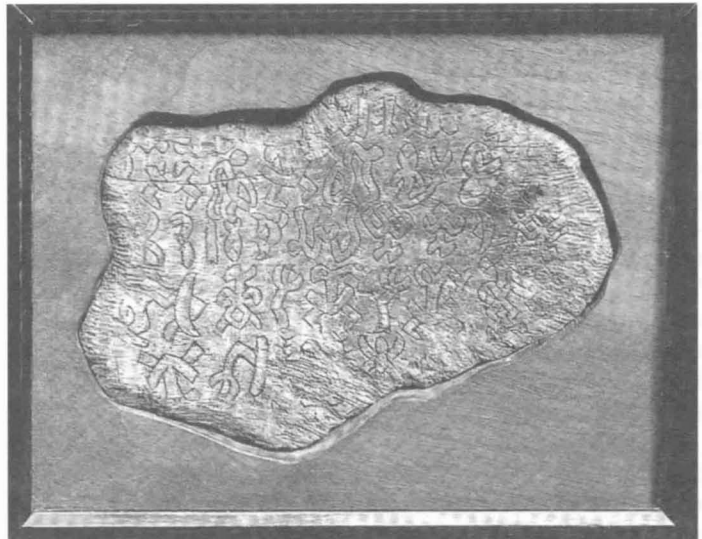
This aspect of scholarship is particularly useful because publications frequently show different views or sides of the objects in question. This lack is certainly not exclusive to the present exhibition. Education departments and exhibit designers are notorious for their parsimonious grip on label copy ink. The catalogue should offer the chance to publish this information, but like publications on a host of other topics, *Splendid Isolation* eschews this opportunity.

The exhibition groups of *moai moko*, *moai kava kava*, *rei miro*, and other object types are displayed contiguously without attempting to segregate them according to their periods of execution. Such displays incorporating like object types from different periods are especially interesting for comparative purposes. The approach works well in this case, inasmuch as there are only 50 objects in the confines of the relatively small Special Exhibition Galleries for A.O.A. One wall panel presents two 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century dance paddles, *rapa*, presumably of *toromiro* wood, flanking a large painted dance paddle, 'ao, carved from imported planking toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This arrangement elegantly demonstrates persistence and change in form and material in Easter Island art.

Another panel displays four *rei miro*, two of the classic older type, one of openwork abstract crescent form, and the fourth carved as an arching fish shape. The later two represent variations of form and later style within the generic object class. Also representing the evolution of form and style, the post-contact period tobacco pipe, *puhipuhi*, carved in the likeness of a sailor, is not an indigenous object type.

The exhibition layout is effectively designed to deal with most of the challenges posed by the subject matter and the facilities. The visitor is greeted in the opening area by the monumental stone head (one of only two *moai* in America) and other lithics including petroglyphs, giving a welcome sense of scale to the installation.

Setting aside megaliths and petroglyphs, traditional Easter Island sculpture tends to be small and is best appreciated at close range. Repetitive grouping of objects in one or two instances threatens to produce a sort of rogues' gallery effect, which is almost inevitable with displays of similar scale objects in the wall cases that define the Special Exhibition Galleries for A.O.A.



This *rongorongo* tablet is the only one in private hands today, and is now on display at the Easter Island exhibit Metropolitan Museum of Art. A French Missionary, who sent it to Paris in 1892, collected this fragment. Known as the "Chauvet Fragment," it was acquired in 1930 by Parisian collector Stephen Chauvet. Extensively weathered, the piece was probably recovered from a cave (under high magnification at the Metropolitan Museum of Art rat teeth marks were discovered around the edge). Chauvet went to great lengths to acquire the fragment. Collection of Mark and Carolyn Blackburn, Hawai'i (photo courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art).

This visual syncopation is countered by the selection of only two or three objects of each type and by making transitions between these groups to related objects of contrasting scale or material. The display of three *moko* (not the published Wielgus example) leads to the remarkable, grimacing, ribbed stone figure, *moai maea* (Cat. 23). Its red pigment and inlaid coral eyes provide such contrast, while at the same time the posture and expression relate well to the two crouching figures (Cats. 21, 22) that follow in the exhibition to its right.

The repetition of objects of similar form and scale is also offset by the use of free standing, see-through "bonnets" in which a single example is isolated from the groups displayed in the wall cases. This gives the viewer the opportunity to see all sides of one example. It is especially interesting to be able to see one (Cat. 11) of the two *moai pa'apa'a* in three dimensions. It was a treat to be able to view the carved interior of one, and the back of another of the zoomorphic pendants (Cats. 31, 32).

Both barkcloth figures from the Peabody Museum of Harvard are displayed on freestanding pedestals, as are the two less familiar figures from the New Brunswick Museum. This permits careful examination of the construction and decoration of these rare objects.

The back wall of the space is also dramatic in its presenta-

tion. Placement of the dance paddles mentioned above occurs here. An installation of feather headdresses (Cats. 39-41) and the unique barkcloth visor (Cat. 38) lends further drama along this area. The two largest feather headdresses, composed of beautifully conserved, long black cock tail feathers, are inclined and presented at approximately the height they might be when worn. The headdresses are displayed with the engraved Weber portrait of an Easter Islander wearing a related feather diadem.

The one disappointment in the installation is the display of the *rongorongo* tablets. They are placed in a showcase about waist-high with illumination from the ceiling at least 15 feet above. This reviewer found only one of the three tablets sufficiently lit to be seen. Other minor lighting or display challenges are far outweighed by the installation's successes.

The exhibit includes only a few historic prints and maps and one panoramic photograph of a *moai*. By and large the ambience is clean and uncluttered. "Contextual" gimmicks, such as drumbeats, chanting, fountains, potted plants, sand pits, or fiberglass *moai* that this reviewer has encountered in other settings are mercifully absent. One expects nothing less from the Metropolitan Museum.

Associate curator Eric Kjellgren is not an Easter Island specialist, but he has done a good job in producing the present exhibition and catalogue. Specialists may rightly take issue with one or two details, nonetheless objects are presented as art: things of beauty and creative inspiration. *Splendid Isolation* constitutes a memorable occasion of the presentation of Easter Island art in a major art museum.

It is hoped that this installation and catalogue may set new standards for the Museum's Special Exhibition Galleries for A.O.A. Few past exhibitions have been so ambitious, and almost none has included a catalogue. Perhaps the powers that be may consider making improvements in the lighting and display options and encourage publication funding for future curators so that the present exhibition may not be a "splendid isolate."

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DEAR EDITOR:

I would like to inform the readers of *Rapa Nui Journal* of an unfortunate mistake in the exhibition catalog of the Rapa Nui exhibit now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, entitled "Splendid Isolation. Art of Easter Island". In my essay for this volume, "Rapa Nui Art and Aesthetics" I included a *carte-de-visite* that I located in the collection of Mark Blackburn. My caption for the photograph was "Carte de visite, 1870s. Photograph of "Tepano" by Madame Hoare". I also included a photograph of the well-known drawing of "Tepano" by Hjalmar Stolpe, and mentioned the tattoo of "Tepano" in my essay. Unfortunately, in the final editing process, the name "Juan" was added to "Tepano" by the editor. Of course, we know that this is NOT Juan Tepano. Apparently, in the computerized editing program, first names are added to last names, and "Juan Tepano" was mentioned elsewhere in the catalog. This addition was not noticed by the editor of the catalog (proofs were not sent to the authors), and the errors were printed. Even more unfortunate is that this error was picked up in an article about Rapa Nui in the Smithsonian Magazine for

March 2002. Before this issue was released I asked the editors of the Smithsonian Magazine to send the article to me to read for any obvious mistakes. Although I am on the staff of the Smithsonian, this request was denied. The result is an unfortunate mis-identification of the famous tattooed "Tepano". I want to extend my sincere apology for this error.

Adrienne L. Kaepler, Smithsonian Institution

### DEAR EDITOR:

Out of curiosity, I watched the first episode of "Survivor: Marquesas". It was incredible. As contestants cavorted on the beach, I wondered about the *no-nos*, having experienced them previously. But the beach scenes were free of the little bug-gers. Every morning, men in white suits, boots and masks, with tanks on their backs and nozzles in their hands, boated in to spray the beach. At a newly built pier, a crew worked ten hours a day making ersatz Polynesian items for the show. A 320 foot luxury cruise ship served as refuge for the crew, burning tons of fuel every day to provide air conditioning.

Once again an island in Polynesia has been invaded by these media types who take possession solely to enhance their egos and ratings with little, if any, sensitivity to where they are why. Where will these destructive forces strike next?

Calvin Malone, San Francisco

## PUBLICATIONS

*Le Bulletin du Centre d'Études sur l'Île de Pâques et la Polynésie*. No. 49 and 50, 2002. Address: 28, Boulevard Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris, France.

Campbell, I. C. 2001. *Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern*. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch.

García, Michel. 2000. *El mundo submarino de Isla de Pascua/ The Underwater World of Easter Island*. S.E.E.M. Orca Ltda, Chile. All color, 28 pages, in English/Spanish. Contact: seemorca@entelchile.net (see Reviews)

Heermann, Ingrid, ed. *Form, Colour, Inspiration: Material Culture and Colonial Change*. Berg, Oxford.

*Indo-Pacific Prehistory: The Melaka Papers*, Vol. 5. 2001. Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association 21. Edited by Peter Bellwood, Doreen Bowdery, Ian Glover, Mark Hudson, and Susan Keates. Australian National University, Canberra. 169 pages, soft cover. This publication has three sections: Foragers and Farmers in the Japanese Islands (11 papers); The Emergence of the Early Historic States of Southeast Asia (6 papers); and Pleistocene Archaeology in East Asia (7 papers). The next two issues of the Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association will contain the remaining papers from the Melaka Conference and will be published in 2002, prior to the Taiwan conference (see section on conferences).

*The Journal of the Polynesian Society*. 2001. Vol. 110(3), for September. This issue contains "The Creative Contribution of Indigenous People to their Ethnography", by Raymond Firth, plus an article by David Luders "Retoka Revisited: Roimata Revised".

Vol. 110(4) for December contains "The Land with a Tangled Soul: Lakeban Traditions and the Native Land Com-