



PICTURES FROM AN EXPEDITION

*Ile de Pâques 1934-1935.**Expedition Metraux-Lavachery, 1995*

ISBN: 2-930157-00-3. Hardback, 95 pages

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Review by Paul G. Bahn

These are exhilarating times for bibliophile Rapanuiphiles—good books seem to be coming out in ever greater numbers, for example the series of volumes from the Easter Island Foundation, or the recent double-treat from Steven Fischer (see above) or this little gem from Belgium which has just come my way, and which seems virtually unknown outside its country of origin.

As everyone is aware, the famous Franco-Belgium expedition of the 1930s took Alfred Métraux and Henri Lavachery to Easter Island from 28 July 1934 to 3 January 1935, and resulted in an academic monograph and a more popular book from each of them. What few have realized till now is that they also brought back numerous photographs, most of which were never published, but which have been kept by institutions or the families of those involved. At the close of the expedition, a film was also shot on the island by a Dutch cameraman, John Fernhout, and some stills from it are also included here.

The first part of this fine book (pp. 9-34) comprises a fascinating text by Thomas Lavachery, grandson of Henri, who has had access to the archives of his father Jean. This text provides a full and vivid account of the expedition, including what the two men did on the island, and their various dealings with the islanders.

Henri Lavachery had published a book on unemployment in England (sic) and one on the Precolumbian collections of Madrid's Archaeological Museum. His desire to go to Easter Island had been fired by Guillaume de Hevesy's claims of a link between *rongorongo* and the Indus script, although Métraux soon persuaded him that such a link was a mirage. It is interesting to learn that on his way to meet Métraux in Callao, Lavachery visited Cuzco (7-9 July 1934) and declared that its Inka stonework was "very different from what one can find on Easter Island." The two men were joined by Drapkin, a Chilean sent by his government to study leprosy on the island (which then afflicted 20 people, about 5% of the population), as well as to make a demographic study and collect natural history specimens.

They reached the island on a rainy, depressing day, which immediately helped arouse in them a very negative reaction to the islanders. Various discomforts were endured—not just bad weather (which was also to hamper Fernhout's filming) but also nights filled with mosquitoes and the meowing of feral cats in the caves. Juan Tepano, Routledge's main informant, was engaged as a guide, and his wife as cook. Having written down all the stores Tepano could tell him, Métraux would entertain him and other islanders at night with tales from the "Odyssey," to which he gave a Polynesian flavor.

By the end of their stay, Lavachery had grown very enthusiastic, but Métraux was somewhat depressed and still not too fond of islanders. When the *Mercator*, a training ship, arrived in December to pick them up, they transferred a statue, a statue-head and a *pukao* to its decks, with great difficulties which were recorded by Fernhout's movie camera. His film, which lasts 22 minutes, has a commentary by Lavachery, and includes footage of the island's unfortunate lepers.

The second part of the book is an album of 58 black/white plates, the best of what survives from the expedition—many have been damaged or have faded, and even some of those published here have had to be enhanced by modern laboratory methods. All negatives are now lost. Only a few pictures of the expedition members are included. There are rather more of the island and its monuments and statues, but Rapanuiphiles will probably derive most interest and enjoyment from some remarkable photos and portraits of the islanders, including some well-known characters from that period.

According to his grandson, Lavachery had intended to write a general book on Easter Island archaeology, despite his mistaken view that there were no deep excavations to be done, since everything was on or near the surface. In a way, it may be just as well that he made this mistake, as he had never done any excavating before his visit to the island, and did not find much when he tried (the task of excavation had originally been assigned to Louis-Charles Watelin, a renowned French archaeologist who was traveling to the island with Métraux but who died before reaching Peru). Lavachery contacted a publisher but the archaeology book never materialized, for reasons unknown. However, it seems that in 1963 he did write an adventure novel, "*Herbe Jaune*" (Yellow Grass) which takes place on Easter Island. This remains unpublished, but the manuscript is in the possession of his son Jean, so perhaps it will be published one day. In the meantime, we have this marvelous souvenir-album of that pioneering expedition which accomplished so much. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of everyone interested in the island.

[*Editor's note: we made an unsuccessful inquiry to the publisher. However, the bookstore at the Musees royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Parc du Cinquantenaire 10, 1000 Bruxelles did respond (fax: 02/733-7735; phone: 02/741-7428). The book can be ordered through them and costs US \$37 (\$1,370 FB) including postage to the USA.*]

ROUTLEDGE REPRINT!

We have received word that Katherine Routledge's *The Mystery of Easter Island* has been reprinted by Adventures Unlimited Press, PO Box 74, Kempton IL 60946. Phone (815) 253-6390, credit card orders accepted via telephone. The price for this paperback reprint is \$16.95. They can be reached via email at <auphq@frontiernet.net> or the book can be ordered on the web from Amazon.

EASTER ISLAND FOUNDATION NEWS

The Municipality of Viña del Mar is seriously considering constructing a large municipal building in the block in which are located the William Mulloy Library, the Museo Fonck and the Centro Cultural. Rumors are flying, but it is a definite possibil-