

Matu'a, all Rapanui think themselves kings. Whether the Cultural Parliament of Mercosur will result in anything concrete for the island is a complete unknown, but people are trying. All Rapanui who spoke agreed that internal autonomy is what is needed, and next week if you don't mind (*Grant McCall*).

IN MARCH, FOLLOWING THE MERCOSUR MEETING, the Comisión de la Verdad y del Nuevo Trato, which comes from the Ley Indígena, got moving. A sub-committee of this *Comisión* is headed by Mayor Edmunds, with Raul Teao and Mario Tuki as associates. They gathered at the Centro del Adulto Mayor, near the hospital, where they listened to complaints made by Rapanui and wrote them down. Teao listened about laws; Te Ra'i about economic development, Mario about education, and Tepano about bad treatment in the past. On Wednesday nights the results were presented. In May, a final report is to be written and sent to Santiago. And this was requested by the Chilean government! But more: all was conducted in Rapanui. The meetings, the announcements and the comments are all in Rapanui, but the final report will be in Spanish. Some islanders are skeptical of the whole process but this is the first time in 113 years that the Chilean government has asked the Rapanui about their complaints and what they want. Some young adults in the community feel left out as they do not speak Rapanui. These are people who were raised on the continent or abroad and never learned the Rapanui language. So it is the younger and more educated Rapanui who are least likely to speak the language.

(*Grant McCall*)

DENGUE FEVER ON RAPA NUI. According to the Institute of Public Health, nearly 3% of the inhabitants of Easter Island have caught the dengue virus but that the outbreak is "under control". This was confirmed following a report that blood samples of 11 persons tested positive and another 160 are in the category of "clinically confirmed", i.e. with classic symptoms of the disease. Of these, the majority are islanders and only a few are tourists, said the sub-secretary of Health, Gonzalo Navarrete. Continental Chile is the only country in South America where there is no dengue. It's bad in Brazil where 27 have died this year. The mosquito *Aedes aegypti* is the culprit, and it appears to have invaded Rapa Nui from Tahiti. US\$37,000 has been put aside to fight the outbreak. LanChile always fumigates the planes coming to the continent from the island; apparently not for those coming from Tahiti.

There was a previous dengue alert on Rapa Nui in 2000. Mayor Petero Edmunds accused the Ministry of Health of not taking the mosquito threat seriously when it was first detected two years ago. Edmunds said that fumigation was postponed then because the necessary funding (US\$33,000) was not available, and yet they spent \$45,000 to bring the sub-secretary of Health and other authorities to the island on an Air Force plane. "This is absurd," said Edmunds. "They came to tell me what I should do. They could have called on the telephone."

*La Segunda of Santiago, 18 March 2002;*  
*El Mercurio de Valparaíso, 20 March 2002*

### *On the Margins of Sustainability. Prehistoric Settlement of Utrök Atoll, Northern Marshall Islands*

Marshall I. Weisler BAR International Series 967, Archaeopress, Oxford. 2001. 144 pp. (122 B&W figures, photographs, maps and drawings, 24 tables, 3 appendices) £28.00 (US\$40.00), paper. ISBN 1-84171-254-X

*Review by Felicia R. Beardsley, Ph.D.*

*On the Margins of Sustainability* is a rich portrait of nearly 2,000 years of occupation on Utrök Atoll, a northern atoll in the Marshall Islands archipelago. It is part and parcel of a larger, integrated archaeological investigation conducted by the author, Dr. Marshall Weisler, on Utrök Atoll and three other atolls within the Republic of the Marshall Islands during his tenure as chief archaeologist for this small nation. Weisler's project was an ambitious one. His intent, as he tells us in the introductory pages to his monograph, is to outline the culture history and regional north-to-south variation throughout the Marshall Islands – from the timing and sequence of initial settlement to the distribution, density and diversity of occupation, along with recurring patterns of traditional social and political patterns continually renewed upon the taming of each newly settled atoll, coupled with the development and expansion of economic networks active in the historic era and only hypothesized for the prehistoric. The overall project, according to Weisler, is part of an archaeological training program focused on the involvement of local people, in part to establish a tangible and direct link between the contemporary population and their ancestral roots, and in part to establish a mechanism by which the local population can begin to take charge of the conservation and management of their own history.

As one of four atolls selected for a comparison between the dry northern groups and wet southern groups, Utrök is the farthest north. Its position is unique among the four, as it exhibited the least amount of average annual precipitation within the group, just barely within the limits of the biogeographical zone where coconuts still remain viable, but exhibit sparse growth and produce small nuts. This is a precipitous position, where any prolonged period of drought can spell disaster for economically important crops like coconuts and breadfruit, not to mention the resident human population. But it is also an important contribution in any comparative analysis such as this one, as it illustrates (and perhaps stretches our own comprehension of) the capacity for human endurance and perseverance within marginal environments. Such occupations force the question, why? How did people manage to survive under such precarious circumstances?

It is clear Weisler appreciates the process of exploration and discovery. He brings us a clear description of an heretofore obscured corner of life at the northern limits of the intertropical convergence zone, where both currents and climate are influenced by those that dominate the subtropical zone further north. His enthusiasm permeates most of the chapters, and is peppered with his own experiences during his stay in the islands. The

monograph begins with a description of modern Utrök, with its principal settlement on largest islet in atoll. This is followed by a discussion of the archaeological surveys on each islet, coupled with brief oral histories of each regarding traditional land divisions and known modern and historical uses of the islets. Unfortunately, these discussions are also periodically interspersed with phrases like, “. . . it is obvious. . .,” without an established context or sufficient data to clarify this “obvious” observation. Mostly though, Weisler is able to set up a firm foundation in understanding prehistoric and traditional settlement patterns, recognizing that both the past and present patterns of occupation are strongly influenced by islet size and the ability of each land-mass to sustain and sufficiently recharge its underlying fresh water lens.

Each succeeding chapter took on a specific aspect of the archaeological work, from excavation to the analyses involving chronology and landscape changes, marine and terrestrial subsistence, horticultural systems, and material culture.

The last chapter is an attempt to be integrative, providing a synthesis of each principle research domain. What emerges is a picture of a strong, pioneering lot; a highly resourceful people able to maintain a continuous 2,000 year occupation sustained by the bounty of the oceans as well as the sparse products of both introduced and endemic plants such as coconut, pandanus, arrowroot and giant swamp taro. Here was a people accustomed and well-adapted to thrive on the sparse resources they would encounter at virtually any of the low islands of this group. Here was a people who placed their survival on a reliance of traditional social and political organization, traditional patterns of land division and resource allocation, various food preparation and storage practices, a material culture industry derived from the local products of the lagoon, and perhaps even participation in an inter-island/atoll exchange network. In essence, here was a people who understood the need for long-term sustainable management of resources and how to survive within a marginal environment.

There are only a couple of rough edges to this exposition, and one in particular with which I take umbrage – the bald assumption that the founding settlers established swidden gardens upon their immediate arrival, as if to pass the time and fulfill their subsistence needs until their taro gardens began producing. This position assumes there were no other alternative foods available, such as stored or preserved taro and other foods that may have been transported with these intrepid explorers. It also assumes there were no endemic stands of coconut, pandanus, and other resources that could have been recruited into the human subsistence regimen. It is as if the atoll environment was barren of any suitable, nutritious and subsistence-ready resources. But was it really? Unfortunately, there have been a very limited number of investigations into the pre-human environment on islands and atolls in the Pacific, and many of these are inconclusive.

For Weisler, the mere presence of charcoal dispersed within a buried A-horizon is sufficient to establish the presence of a slash-and-burn system of gardening, especially if that charcoal infused soil is later buried during excavation of formal arid pits. But, where is the evidence – if the charcoal was the result of land clearance for swidden gardens, what plants were

sown? Is it possible the charcoal was the result of clearing in preparation for the taro gardens? Are there other explanations (natural or cultural) that could account for the presence of charcoal? Why does a colonizing group upon arrival race to the interior of an islet and begin a swidden garden system, especially when they are faced with a new and unfamiliar landscape? Comparatively speaking, this is a small complaint that really reflects my own concerns with settlement discussions in the Pacific. From the perspective of the overall character of the monograph, it is minor, very minor indeed, and should not detract from the fluid quality of the contents.

Weisler is among the ground-breakers here. *On the Margins of Sustainability* adds one more small tessera to the overall mosaic of early settlement in the central Pacific. It is the second book to be published about the series of atolls investigated under this overall project. The first, Wujae (Ujae) Atoll in the center of the archipelago, was published in 1999 by the Smithsonian Institution as *Atoll Research Bulletin 460*. The other two atolls, Maloelap and Epoon in the center and wet south of the archipelago respectively, have yet to be completed. The remaining series is anxiously awaited by this archaeologist.

### *Easter Island*

Michael Kenna, 2001 Nazraeli Press, 53 pages, \$75.00  
ISBN: 1-59005-012-6 First Edition limited to a 1000 slip-cased numbered copies

*Review by Tom Christopher*

Of all the photography books of Easter Island I have seen, this compilation of 44 photographs by Michael Kenna is by far the best. Frances Sagnes' *I'le de Pâques* finishes a beautiful but distant second.

Kenna's photographs are from two trips in 2000 and 2001 and are in black and white, 8" x 8" format. They fully capture the feeling of the “savage brooding melancholy” that Easter Island held for John Dos Passos. In addition to portraying this feeling, the photographs provide a real sense of the physical geography of the island. In Plate 3, *Seven Horses*, Iti Maunga, Plate 5, *Eyes of Water*, Rano Kau Volcano or Plate 41, *Poike Cliffs and Motu Marotiri*, Hanga Nui, the viewer is given a perspective of the island that I have not seen, other than in person. The eight landscape/seascapes with no man-made objects in sight provide one with a frame of reference to view the *moai* studies.

The other rather unique feature of this volume is that great importance is given to the *moai* that have not been re-erected, but lie where they fell or were left by their creators. I especially like Plate 20, *Moai, Study 30*, Hanga Poukura, showing only the eroded back of a *moai*, seemingly sinking back into the land. I purchased my copy at a book signing and talk hosted by the Halstead Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan on December 8, 2001. I have to say that as wonderful as the photos in the book are, they pale when compared to the actual photos, which are limited to forty copies. You can view all of them on Michael Kenna's website: [www.michaelkenna.net](http://www.michaelkenna.net). A second edition will be forthcoming.