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Easter Island

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“visualizations” to “processes of cognition” requires a deeper analysis than Feist has attempted.

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EASTER ISLAND

When the Universe Was an Island: Exploring the Cultural and Spiritual Cosmos of Ancient Rapa Nui. Edmundo Edwards and Alexandra Edwards (Hangaroa Press, Easter Island, 2013). Pp. xii + 536. \$140. ISBN 978-956-353-131-2.

As the authors point out in the last chapter of this massive work, Easter Island or Rapa Nui is one of those places on Earth that has captured our imagination for decades. *When the universe was an island* is without question a masterpiece, opening insights into the culture and society of this tiny island populated with a vast number of ceremonial platforms (*ahu*) and impressive statues (*moai*) devoted to deified ancestors. The Rapanui was (and is) an Eastern Polynesian society with deep roots in the Lapita culture. Sea-faring and star-tracking for navigation have been claimed as important cultural traits for these peoples who once colonized one of the most inhospitable areas on Earth, reaching Rapa Nui around A.D. 900–1000 according to archaeological records.

The book analyses how the highly stratified Rapanui society mirrored the cosmos they populated with creation gods and deified ancestors. Rapanui religion can be clearly connected to other Polynesian belief systems, but its originality stems from a deep belief in the ancestor cult to promote fertility through the erection first of *moai* and more recently the Birdman Cult. Despite lunatic theories still abounding on the subject, it is now clear, thanks to ethnography and archaeology, why *ahu* and *moai* were built and by whom. However, doubts remain about how they were built, especially how the statues were transported from the Ranu Raraku quarry to the platforms. Another relevant question is why *moai* stopped being produced and later were pulled down by the same society that produced them. Whether this change derived from internal unrest, natural events or a combination of both, this book emphasizes that the society of Rapa Nui continued to exist after those events. The authors argue that Rapanui society did not collapse after the abrupt end of statue production, as has been claimed by Jared Diamond, among others.

The present volume is mostly an updated account of the anthropological and ethnographic studies of Edmundo Edwards and his predecessors of the past century, particularly K. and S. Routledge whose ethnographic reports were mostly ignored until Edwards re-discovered them. The book covers most aspects in life of Rapanui society, a life deeply soaked in religion. The astral connotation of some deities and the existence of ‘astronomer-priests’, in charge of time-keeping and announcing the right moment to start particular festivities or fishing and planting activities, will surely interest most ethno- and archaeoastronomers.

The Rapanui had rituals for many events of their lifetime and beyond, as well as for productive activities such as fishing, planting and harvesting. Most of these rituals were timed and regulated through skywatching. The heavens played a direct role in Rapanui society according to the ethnographic accounts reported in the book together with the archaeoastronomical finds. The book describes the structure of the Rapanui luni-stellar year, revealed through skywatching in *tupas* and possibly other structures marking the heliacal rising of the Pleiades and the start of the New Year. It also discusses the archaeoastronomical research carried out on Rapanui *Ahu moai* both by Lillier and Duarte and by Edwards and Belmonte.

The work would have been improved and easier to follow had a map located the numerous topographic areas or features mentioned (there is only one small map displaying the island's clan distribution). Another improvement would have been a timeline of historical events, especially after the first encounter with the Dutch in 1722. These events are introduced throughout the book, but in a rather unstructured way; the reader has to wait until the final chapter to learn about some key events that are referenced earlier in the book. Finally, for the sake of archaeoastronomers and ethnoastronomers, it would have been good to have complemented the ethnographic information on star-lore with a table presenting the timing of some relevant astronomical events like the acronychal rising of the Pleiades or Aldebaran or the heliacal setting of Orion's Belt or Antares. Hence, despite its reappraisal of the Rapanui culture and encyclopedic character, the book leaves open a number of archaeoastronomical questions, such as a solution for the *tupa* orientation or the relationship between different architectural elements.

In the final chapter, the authors offer a valuable reflection on contemporary Rapanui culture. Despite the heavy costs this society has had to pay in the last centuries to join the global world system, it is interesting to see that it remains alive and strong. During its entire existence, Rapanui society has adjusted to existing circumstances.

Surely this will be an indispensable book for both Rapa Nui aficionados and specialists. It will become required reading for anyone interested in the rich Rapanui culture, particularly archaeoastronomers seeking to grasp and comprehend their worldview and their use of the skies for the different aspects of everyday life.

Spanish National Research Council

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HOW TO NAVIGATE

The Lost Art of Finding Our Way. John Edward Huth (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013). Pp. 528. \$35. ISBN 978-0-674-07282-4.

As explained by the author, the roots of this book lie in tragedy. A few years ago, Huth was kayaking off the coast of Maine when fog descended and he became dependent upon his knowledge of sea swells, the direction of the wind and his own mental map of the coastline to safely navigate back to the harbour. Unbeknown to him, two young