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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON EASTER ISLAND
AND EAST POLYNESIA, 6-12 SEPTEMBER 1984

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The First International Congress on Easter Island and East Polynesia was held on Easter Island from 6th to 12th September 1984. It was organised by the Institute for Easter Island Studies (a research facility of the University of Chile) which is directed by Claudio Cristino, an archaeologist. The Congress covered Easter Island archaeology, anthropology, linguistics and cultural conservation and some aspects, mainly archaeological, of East Polynesian culture. It was a highly successful event, not merely for eastern Pacific researchers, many of whom met there for the first time, but also because it was clearly of considerable significance to the Rapanui themselves. There were Rapanui at all the papers and in some cases where matters of intense interest, such as land tenure, were discussed they outnumbered the other participants. Furthermore, some of the papers were given by Rapanui who include, it ought to be noted, the Governor of Easter Island (and archaeologist), Sergio Rapu Haa.

Amongst the more interesting papers for me were: John Flenley's palynological study of the recent deforestation of Easter Island, Thor Heyerdahl's spirited rebuttal of all claims for the decipherment of rongorongo script, Roger Green's meticulous dismantling of the Futunic hypothesis for the origins of the Rapanui language, Malcolm Clark's speculative proposals about the role of supernovae in Polynesian voyaging and Pat Kirch's erudite review of issues concerning the transformation of Polynesian societies. Of the many papers in Spanish some also seemed to discuss matters of considerable interest; in particular a paper by Francisco Mellen Blanco which brought together apparently new material on the Spanish expedition of 1770-1771. Fortunately the organisers intend to translate all the papers into English prior to publication.

Of the field archaeology, which we had the good fortune to tour for five days before the congress, it is difficult to say much more than that it is overwhelming in its variety, complexity and beauty. Easter Island is one of those places which more than fulfills one's expectations, and yet each year brings to light even more. For instance recent surveys have revealed many more beautifully executed petroglyphs all over the island and, in the higher inland areas, hundreds of rectangular house remains associated with field structures which are probably of horticultural origin. As a result of



FIGURE 1. Roger Green discussing Akahanga ahu with Edmundo Edwards (centre) and Claudio Cristino (right).

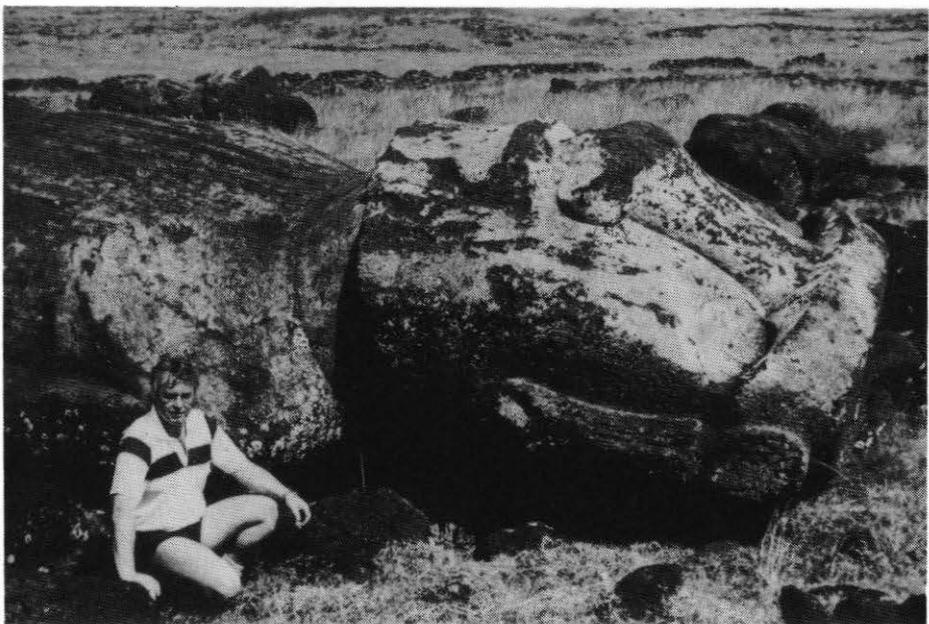


FIGURE 2. Your reporter with a huge fallen moai at Tongariki.

its painstakingly precise surveys a remarkably detailed atlas of the island's archaeological resources is gradually being compiled by the Institute.

Not least in our enjoyment was the social life on Easter Island. This was largely a result of the Congress, which organised a magnificent dinner and numerous cocktail parties, all with the accompaniment of traditional singing and dancing, but fruitful anthropological research, enlivened by the ubiquitous pisco, was also conducted by Congress participants in El Toroko disco. The great success of the Congress can be largely attributed to Claudio Cristino and his team from the Institute who were the primary organisers. Their efforts ensured a unanimous determination to continue, at least on the part of archaeologists, who formed a regional association (see below). Lastly, I would like to mention Edmundo Edwards, archaeologist and raconteur, whose wicked tale about the royal visit to Easter Island is itself almost worth the airfare.

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At the First international Congress on Easter Island and East Polynesia it was decided that a regional archaeological association should be formed. This is called the East Polynesian Archaeological Association and it has the objective of promoting cooperation and the dissemination of information amongst archaeologists in this region. It is, at present, an informal association which will circulate, once a year, a newsletter about current and projected research and which will be responsible for ensuring the continuity of regional Congresses. For 1984-87 the President will be Roger Green and the Secretary will be Maeva Navarro. They will be responsible for setting up the initial organisation for the next congress to be held in Papeete in 1987. Interested people can join the association by sending their name and address and a small contribution to cover postage, etc. (say \$5.00) to either Roger Green at the Anthropology Department, University of Auckland, or Maeva Navarro, Musee de Tahiti et des Iles, BP 6272, Faaa, Tahiti.



FIGURE 3. Jose Garanger in thought at Akahanga ahu.



FIGURE 4. On the slopes of the moai quarry at Rano raraku.