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*The Rahui: Legal Pluralism in Polynesian Traditional
Management of Resources and Territories* ed. by Tamatoa
Bambridge (review)

Alex E. Morrison

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point in the island's history, marked by the introduction of new organisms and micro-organisms and new cultural perspectives. It describes the devastating effects of the Peruvian slave raids and the introduction of smallpox that resulted in a dramatic depopulation and loss of knowledge about Rapanui culture. This marked the true collapse that happened due to foreign influence on the island.

In Chapter 8, Boersema describes the Christianization of the islanders and the effect of the first foreign residents on the island. He gives an account of the different researchers who came to study the Rapanui culture – or what was left of it – and eventually “[...] propelled Easter Island to iconic status in the field of environmental science.”

The last chapter deals with Rapa Nui's role as a model in environmental sciences and comes to the somewhat psychological question of why the “collapse theory” remained so popular despite all the evidence against it. The author gives examples for impoverishments of ecosystems that did not end in collapse, but in a reorganization. It is “[...] the quality of ecosystems [that] is at stake, not their sustainability.” He lists all the misconceptions that the “collapse theory” is based upon and comes to the conclusion that it misrepresents Easter Island's past and can therefore not be used as a lesson for the world's future. Instead the Rapanui found “[...] a new balance of culture and nature [...]” He ends with a portrayal of Rapa Nui today and a number of suggestions for the cultural and environmental sustainability of the island.

Throughout the book, Boersema lays out how the misconceptions about the pre-contact Rapanui culture could have been avoided – if objectiveness had ever been the objective – by reading the available historical accounts and by taking the results of scientific research into account. The story of Easter Island before contact is not one of failure but one of success. This book can convincingly prove that the population was able to adjust culturally and materially – albeit on an impoverished level – to an environment which had developed at least partly through factors over which the islanders had no control.

The psychological aspect that the author includes in the book as to why the idea of Easter Island as a model of worldwide disaster became so popular and was so uncritically repeated by many scholars is most interesting and adds a new perspective to the collapse controversy.

There are two minor points of criticism. Firstly, the term “coconut palm tree” as it is used throughout the book is misleading: While there is still so much uncertainty as to the taxonomic classification of the extinct Easter Island palm, it would be more judicious to refrain from using the term “coconut palm”. The

author seems to have had an actual coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*) in mind, because he refers to the endocarps as possible containers for storing water (p. 52). The shells of the palm nuts found in excavations on the island don't hold more than 1oz of liquid and could hardly have been used for that purpose.

And secondly, in such a meticulously referenced book, it would be desirable to also give references for some of the dates (e.g., for the beginning and end of the statue production) to have a better idea of what his chronological framework is based upon.

In summary, Jan Boersema is to be commended for presenting such a conclusive body of evidence that may be seen as the final blow to the simplistic and once iconic “collapse theory” which, in fact, “[...] turned out to be “a textbook example of collective error” [...]” The book *The Survival of Easter Island – Dwindling Resources and Cultural Resilience* is a rehabilitation of the ancient Rapanui who have been characterized as being responsible for the demise of their island despite being the victims of foreign influences.

Bambridge, Tamatoa (Ed.).
The Rahui: Legal Pluralism in Polynesian Traditional Management of Resources and Territories

Canberra: Australian National University Press, Pacific Series,

2016. 269 pp. ISBN 9781925022797. AUD\$38 (cloth), free download at press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/pacific-series/rahui

Review by Alex E. Morrison,
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The Rahui: Legal Pluralism in Polynesian Traditional Management of Resources and Territories is an important collection of twelve chapters edited by Tamatoa Bambridge. In the introduction Bambridge describes the *rahui*, an ancient institution in East Polynesia, as “a form of restricting access to resources and/or territories.” These twelve chapters, along with introductory and conclusion essays, offer extensive information regarding both traditional *rahui* and contemporary *rahui* across a geographical expanse ranging from the Cook Islands to the west, the Hawaiian Islands to the north, and Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the south. The collection is broadly organized in two sections. The first section focuses on the related

themes of *tapu* and *rahui* and their relationship to traditional Polynesian societies, and the second section concentrates on the *rahui* today as a form of state-custom pluralism. Additional themes that bind these chapters together include the relationship between the act of *rahui*, notions of sacredness and power, resource conservation and sustainability, and the flexibility of *rahui* systems to adapt to changing socio-political structures in contemporary socio-political contexts.

The six essays presented in Section 1 deal largely with documenting the role that the *rahui* played in traditional Polynesian societies. A common theme that runs through these contributions is that the *rahui* must be understood in the cultural context within which it developed and ultimately functioned (see for example chapters by Rigo, Bambridge, Conte, and Dixon). For example, in a general description of the relationship between political power and pre-European *rahui* systems across Polynesia, Rigo explains that the practice of *rahui* represents an expression of power seated within notions of the sacred and the outcomes are principally concerned with political factors rather than ecological ones. Bambridge points out the importance of acknowledging the presence of non-centralized social structures when analyzing fundamental issues such as legal authority, legitimacy, and the enforcement of territorial access and management. Bambridge notes, “the traditions of *rahui* in a dynamic perspective makes it clear that *rahui* could be implemented by a plurality of statuses and not only by the mere authority of the *ar'i*.” Consequently, one of the benefits of traditional *rahui* systems was the ability to enact, regulate, and enforce local-scale regulations, a problem that contemporary resource management systems in centralized socio-political structures continue to grapple with (see contributions Friendlander et al., Chambers, and Mawyer).

Conte's contribution attends to the notion that environmental protection in traditional Tuamotu society on the atolls of Napuka and Tepoto did not develop primarily to promote sustainable resource management. Rather, islanders made the maximum use of marine resources because they were viewed as gifts from the ancestors and failing to make full use of such gifts would be interpreted as disrespectful, ultimately resulting in failure to receive such gifts again in the future. The introduction of new fishing technologies and a capitalist economic system combined with these already existing beliefs about resource exploitation ultimately created a dangerous scenario for the sustainability of marine resources during the historic period.

The subjects of political control, sacredness, and sustainability also permeate the expositions in Section 1. For example, Torrente argues that Polynesian religion is based largely on the notion of prohibition and the

interrelated concepts of *noa*, *tapu*, and *mana*. Within this context, people recognized their own identity and role in relationship to other things and places that were set apart as the sacred and forbidden. In the course of his essay, Torrente presents a detailed description of the variety of objects and locations subject to prohibitions in pre-Christian society on the atoll of Anaa, Tuamotu. Like both Rigo and Conte, Torrente's essay points out the interplay between sacredness, prohibition, and resource management. Importantly, he concludes, “the significance of the word *rahui* has also changed. It is linked today with the different concepts dealing with the protection of the environment, which was not the aim in ancient Polynesia.”

Ottino-Garanger and colleagues discuss the concepts of *tapu* and *kahui* in the Marquesas Islands. Like a number of other contributions, much attention is placed on the importance of political power, sacredness, and the ability to enforce prohibitions. The authors demonstrate, like Torrente, that the act of *tapu* is the expression of respect for the sacredness of a variety of things. The main purpose of the adherence to both *tapu* and *kahui* in the Marquesas was to avoid the creation of imbalances in the relationship between humans and gods. Therefore, the ability to enforce *rahui* was couched in an authentic belief of the sacred order of the world and to disobey this order was to invite disaster. Ottino-Garanger and colleagues, like Torrente, provide an in-depth survey of the innumerable prohibitions that once existed in the Marquesan past.

The six chapters in the second section of the volume deal with *rahui* in contemporary contexts. It is noteworthy that the editor made an excellent decision to precede these chapters with those found in Section 1 and the reader is encouraged to read earlier chapters for important contextual information before moving on to Section 2. Common themes found in the contributions in Section 2 include: the flexibility of the *rahui* system in the face of changes brought about by colonialism, the effectiveness of local based resource management and control, and the uneasy existing relationship between centralized authority and local community rights.

Ghasarian's composition discusses the flexibility of the Rapa Iti *rahui* system through its ability to incorporate and enforce a new set of marine management rules and practices superimposed on the Christian religion and its associated holidays. In contrast to some of the earlier essays in Section 1, Ghasarian points out that contemporary *rahui* on Rapa Iti “is part of a general desire for maintaining natural resources to ensure the community's food supply and therefore its survival.” The idea of *rahui* as a form of purposeful constraint imposed to ensure sustainable resource management may be more of an element of contemporary *rahui* rather than a focus of many

pre-European systems, although there is evidence to suggest that Hawai'i was an exception.

Friedlander et al. describe the development of hybrid marine resource management systems in the contemporary Hawaiian Islands. They suggest that one of the reasons conventional marine management programs have largely failed across the archipelago is that they lack the ability to regulate and enforce prohibitions due to top-down, centralized management strategies far removed from the local communities that use the resources. Therefore, community-based systems integrating ecosystems thinking with Hawaiian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) are increasingly being implemented with initial indications of their success. For example, comparison of scientific surveys from a number of locations around Hawai'i demonstrate that community-based management results in fish biomass levels often equal to or greater than conventional no-take marine protected areas. One of the strengths of hybrid management systems is a return to local scale oversight and enforcement rather than a centralized system that produces difficulties for regulation and enforcement. Moreover, local-scale management programs have the potential to develop unique strategies attuned to each individual situation and context.

The conflict between centralized management characteristic of most contemporary Pacific Island nations, and the often decentralized, local community-based systems that once previously existed, is also an important theme explored in Section 2. For example, in her discussion of European contact era systems of governance on Tongareva, in the Northern Cook Islands, Chambers points out that the Tongarevan people modified the pre-existing *rahui* to encompass various economic and social changes put in place by Europeans during the colonization period. However, the local Tongarevan community today has reacted actively by requiring the agreement of the local community in any prohibitive or management decisions made off-island in Rarotonga. While Tongareva is part of a large centralized political system, much decision making is still concentrated at the local level, pointing out that authenticity of enforcement remains an important element of prohibition in contemporary *rahui* systems. Similarly, Mawyer notes that on Mangareva in the Gambier Islands, there exists a conflict between the actions of the centralized political regime, and the legitimate right to prohibit and manage pearl shell resources, such that the authentic right to *rahui* today remains ambiguous. In contemporary Aotearoa (New Zealand), Ruru and Wheen also describe an uneasy existence born from the previously existing *rahui* system and the current New Zealand legislation which is oriented primarily to promote sustainability without regard for traditional concepts.

Importantly, the twelve chapters in this collection point out that in order to understand how *rahui* can be applied to contemporary resource management, it is fundamental to take into consideration how *rahui* functioned in the past and the socio-political contexts in which they developed and functioned. In pre-European contact *rahui*, the ability to prohibit rested firmly within a dynamic systemic relationship between political power, the sacred, and legal pluralism often in the context of decentralized social structures. As a number of authors in this volume have noted, to instate effective prohibition requires the ability to both regulate and enforce, and this can take the form of local scale authority or mediation through a social system that promotes profound sacredness and respect. The immediate concern now for the development of contemporary *rahui* systems is how to re-build sacredness for the many important resources of these varied islands in the context of the capitalism and centralized political regimes. Can local scale communities enforce prohibitions in contexts with an absence of the legal and authoritarian backing of the centralized political apparatuses in place? A fruitful way forward seems to require development along these two lines and this important book has laid the foundational ground work.

Stephan, Vincent and Gill, George (Eds.).
Skeletal Biology of the Ancient Rapanui (Easter Islanders)

Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in Biological and Evolutionary Anthropology, Cambridge University Press,

2016. 347 pp. ISBN 9781107023666. US\$124 (hardcover). Available from www.cambridge.org

Review by Siân Ellen Halcrow,
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This book is a culmination of over thirty years of research on the skeletal variation of the prehistoric and proto-historic inhabitants of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the Eastern Pacific. The methodological approach is largely based on osteometric and non-metric analyses to assess questions of origins and microevolution, with the majority of the book devoted to the presentation of these data. There are also chapters dealing with aDNA analyses, as well as skeletal trauma, and cultural modification of the skeleton aimed at more socially informed anthropological questions.