



The Statues That Walked: Unraveling the Mystery of Easter Island

Terry Hunt, Carl Lipo

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The monumental statues of Easter Island, both so magisterial and so forlorn, gazing out in their imposing rows over the island's barren landscape, have been the source of great mystery ever since the island was first discovered by Europeans on Easter Sunday 1722. How could the ancient people who inhabited this tiny speck of land, the most remote in the vast expanse of the Pacific islands, have built such monumental works?

No such astonishing numbers of massive statues are found anywhere else in the Pacific. How could the islanders possibly have moved so many multi-ton monoliths from the quarry inland, where they were carved, to their posts along the coastline? And most intriguing and vexing of all, if the island once boasted a culture developed and sophisticated enough to have produced such marvelous edifices, what happened to that culture? Why was the island the Europeans encountered a sparsely populated wasteland?

The prevailing accounts of the island's history tell a story of self-inflicted devastation: a glaring case of eco-suicide. The island was dominated by a powerful chiefdom that promulgated a cult of statue making, exercising a ruthless hold on the island's people and rapaciously destroying the environment, cutting down a lush palm forest that once blanketed the island in order to construct contraptions for moving more and more statues, which grew larger and larger. As the population swelled in order to sustain the statue cult, growing well beyond the island's agricultural capacity, a vicious cycle of warfare broke out between opposing groups, and the culture ultimately suffered a dramatic collapse.

When Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo began carrying out archaeological studies on the island in 2001, they fully expected to find evidence supporting these accounts. Instead, revelation after revelation uncovered a very different truth.

The accompanying reference guide is included as a PDF on this disc.

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