

eler with a farrago of peoples, cultures, languages, landscapes, and environments. Just trying to get around can be confusing, with a new set of challenges arising at every turn. Enter Neil Levy's latest edition of *Moon Handbooks Micronesia*.

Levy has provided a wonderful shortcut through the initial confusion of arrival and slow acquaintance of place that inevitably follows. In a well-written, descriptive style that both entertains and informs, Levy has systematically organized the region archipelago by archipelago, using as his default modern political boundaries established during post-war negotiations. He covers everything from the logistics of getting around, to health tips, to practicalities of food and accommodations, to must-see sights, and recreational opportunities. Yet, he also captures the diversity of the region through photographs and line drawings, as well as detailed descriptions that cover both the natural and cultural (social, economic, and government organization) environment. To further orient the reader, he provides several maps of the main islands within each archipelago, as well as details of those islands as needed.

And, like any new edition of an old favorite, some things have changed; some have remained the same. New additions include a more aesthetically pleasing organization to the text, a new type style dressing its pages, and chapter subheadings wrapped in broad bands of gray providing the visual cue that we have shifted gears and are now entering a new section of information. New too are shaded thumb tabs for each chapter. I like this as it allows for a more efficacious search—particularly if you want to locate a specific island group without having to thumb your way through the entire book each and every time. Other changes include a regional map in the very front of the book with insets that list the relevant maps of each archipelago along with their accompanying pages, and a consolidated chapter on American Possessions that had been divided into two chapters in the previous edition (although, in recent years, possession of Wake Atoll has been the subject of a growing dispute, with the people of the Marshall Islands arguing for its proper designation within the mapping bounds of the Republic of the Marshall Islands; it is, they say, traditionally theirs and has never been legally ceded to the US). The one change that should not have been made, in my estimation, is the elimination of colored maps. In this new edition, all maps are black and white, making them more difficult to pick out from the rest of the illustrations in the book. This is a small matter, but one that a map-person considers important.

Moon Handbooks Micronesia serves as a master key to a region that is very culturally diverse. It is both enjoyable to read and highly informative, with all the basic information one needs to travel through Micronesia with relative ease. Thanks to Levy, you don't have to be highly proficient in learning new customs, compile word lists on your own, or struggle with the overwhelming task of grasping local protocols that often go unexplained. Levy even includes a table of alternative place names right up front. This is particularly welcome as the region as a whole has been undergoing a resurgence of pride in the revitalization of traditional place names, as well as improvements and changes in its orthogra-

phies with new spellings of old places appearing almost daily. This table also serves as one more reminder that Micronesia is a region in continual flux, where change is both welcomed and inevitable. Levy's *Moon Handbooks Micronesia* is a nice accompaniment to witness this change for any traveler to the region.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The paper on the *Jubaea* palms by H-R Bork and A Mieth (*RNJ* 17/2:119) presents a plausible scenario, but prompts some observations. One might imagine that people dependent upon the palms would notice before 'the feller of the last tree' did his work, especially since Hunter-Anderson tells us that at least some island people are sensitive to the ecological fragility of their environment. On the other hand, recall the difficulty of establishing parks to prevent Pacific Northwest loggers from cutting the last of the old-growth redwoods. Again, one can trace the progressive deforestation of the Mediterranean by following the center of ship building in the *Penguin Historical Atlas*. The authors note that the palms tend to grow in clumps: if they are like date palms (*Dactylifera*), clonal reproduction via 4-7 offshoots surrounding the original trunk is a normal process. Finally, a use for palm syrup which is unmentioned, but which I would nominate as its major function, is that it ferments easily to palm 'wine'. The consumption of 2 liters of syrup per day seems excessive, but it is not unusual for an Irish pub dweller to down several liters of Guinness in an evening.

Sincerely, Ferren McIntyre
National University of Ireland, Galway.
<http://www.geocities.com/ferrenmaci/>

Dear Editor,

In regard to the article by Hans-Rudolf Bork and Andreas Mieth on the *Jubaea* palm on Rapa Nui, I like articles that give concrete figures about a subject: 16.24 million palm trees on Rapa Nui providing 1.6 million liters of sap per year for 500 years is a considerable amount. The writers base this on 1,400 *Jubaea* palm trees per hectare. I have checked this with my data from the time I was manager of an oil palm company. For the *Elaeis Guineensis* Jack it has been calculated that, if the distance from stem to stem is less than 7.75 meters, mature palms (in a plantation they are all of the same age) start encroaching on each other. That gives a maximum of around 150 trees per hectare. Without cultivation you have many young palms coming up between the mature ones, but they are not yet productive. The writers arrive at an average total of 1,400 palms per hectare, nearly 10 times as much as for the oil palm. Then one must take into consideration that the *Jubaea* grows much higher than the oil palm, and it also has a bigger canopy, requiring more room and certainly a much thicker trunk. At 2.60 meters for the horizontal distance and 1,400 per hectare this means there are virtually only stems. I wonder if there is not a calculating error?

I like their explanation that the *Jubaea* trunks were used more for fuel than for *moai* transport. You do not need so many for transport and you would be able to use them again

for the next transport. I do not think that palm stems can be used for shipbuilding. As for the sap, I would refer the writers to Ceylon, where the coconut palm is extensively tapped and the liquid fermented into an alcoholic beverage ("toddy") with which you can get quite drunk. If it is done properly, toddy can be quite nice; if not, it is loathsome stuff. At the quantities that Bork and Mieth calculate, the islanders must have been drunk all the time. In Ceylon, in order to save labor, they connect all the palm trees to each other by ropes at the top of the palm level, just under the canopy. It is an exciting sight to see the toddy tappers maneuvering high above the ground on their ropes without spilling their buckets of toddy. They can tap many trees while only going up and down once.

Herbert von Saher, *The Netherlands*

Reply to Ferren McIntyre and Herbert von Saher Concerning Jubaea Palms

There is no evidence (as yet) that the technology of alcoholic fermentation was common on Rapa Nui in prehistoric times. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the process of alcoholic conversion of palm syrup was not known, due to the tendency of fermentation of liquids containing sugar in a humid subtropical climate. The process of fermentation might have been observed by chance. Therefore, we are using the term "palm sap" for unfermented *or* partly fermented *or* fermented palm sap (knowing that evidence for the consumption of alcohol may add an important argument for the breakdown of the ancient *moai* culture).

Density, distribution and patchiness of the palm trees prior to clearance could be reconstructed exactly by a detailed analysis of the relics of individual root marks in many of the soil profiles. In Mieth and Bork (2003), published in *RNJ* 17/1, we illustrate the methods we used to reconstruct the distribution of the last existing generation of palm trees for a soil profile with a length of 100.5 m in the southwest of Poike peninsula. The palm root casts conserved in the profiles of an individual area represent palm trees that had lived there at the same time! Assuming that some palm trees were cut years before others in a certain area, their root marks would have been destroyed by subsequent cultivation activities and by soil formation processes. In each investigation area, we found the remnants of only *one* slash-and-burn event. Probably the burning events themselves led to the conservation of the root casts in the soil. Thus we can securely calculate the number of palm trees at the beginning of a specific slash-and-burn event in a certain area. The calculated (average) density of 1400 individual palm trees per hectare is confirmed by a large sample of sites from most parts of Rapa Nui. We were also very surprised about the high density of the ancient palm trees on Easter Island. But, at many sites, the remnants we have found leave no room for doubts. The palm forest was cleared at once only in small areas. A total of about 16 million palm trees was cut and used over several centuries. Nevertheless, the number of palm trees that existed in a certain year will have varied from around 14 to 18 million individual trees during the first centuries of horticultural land use to only some thousand individuals in the 15th, 16th or 17th centuries.

Andreas Mieth and Hans-Rudolf Bork

Dear Editor,

As a student of contemporary Rapa Nui, I welcome Francesco di Castri's insightful article "Toward Autonomy of Rapa Nui". I fully indorse his critique of the Chilean government's systematic and continuing mismanagement of the island's archeological, cultural and ecological resources. In spite of the fact that the government has promoted more than a dozen development plans since the late 1960s, none of them have been fully put into practice.

Since the publication of di Castri's analysis in the *Rapa Nui Journal* of October 2003, the proposal to create an *Estaduto especial con niveles de autonomía* (special statute with levels of autonomy) for Rapa Nui, has been sent to Congress for approval, as part of a larger package about changes in regional government, which require a change in the Chilean Constitution. While Chilean and Rapanui officials are still working on the exact content of the statute--anticipating the approval in the change of the Constitution--its basic premise is the viewpoint that the island is an insular territory belonging to Chile, where all Chileans can exercise their rights as Chileans, including the Rapanui. One would hope that the government would accept the viewpoint that the Rapanui people should conduct their own decision-making processes on their island. This emphasis on territory above people is a reaffirmation of Chile's main interest in the island, and yet another manifestation of Chile's historic misunderstanding of Rapa Nui's indigenous culture and idiosyncrasies. It shows how the Chilean nation-state favors the concepts of sovereignty, territory and jurisdiction over the concept of a people who are culturally different. Unless the statute fully recognizes this right to self-determination for the Rapanui--and only the Rapanui -- it may create a dangerous precedent, which could allow for further Chilenization, instead of being an instrument for the empowerment of the Rapanui as a people, who wish to safeguard their culture and their differences.

On the other hand, the current conversations about the content of the statute offer an excellent opportunity to reverse the tide and unravel these historic conceptual discrepancies in a way that will benefit both sides. In this context, I would have liked to see a more in-depth discussion of Rapa Nui's place in Polynesia in di Castri's article. I welcome his comments about the desirability for Rapanui students to expand their education (and their horizons) in Polynesia rather than in Chile. But it seems to me that the whole discussion about Chile's relationship to the island should be done in those terms. The Chileans should keep in mind their precarious situation as keepers of a land that carries a culture so different from their own. It is just not good enough to give autonomous status to a territory without safeguarding that cultural difference.

Rapa Nui's Polynesian heritage and idiosyncrasies ought to be a constant factor in the discussions between the Rapanui and the Chilean government, and the necessity for the Rapanui to strengthen their contacts with the rest of Polynesia should be emphasized, as well. Such contacts would empower them as Polynesians who are all navigating in (post) colonial waters, be they American, Chilean or French.

Riet Delsing, *University of California, Santa Cruz*