Dr. William Mulloy, the foremost authority on the archaeology of Easter Island, died on 25 March 1978 in Laramie, Wyoming (U.S.A.).

After more than a year’s absence from Easter Island due to an agonizing illness and only a few days before his death, Dr. Mulloy returned briefly to the Island to say farewell to his friends—the entire community—reminding us of the serenity and foreknowledge of some local elders who summon their relatives in advance for the last farewell.

William Mulloy was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on 3 May 1917. From early childhood, he showed a pronounced interest in the archaeology and history of North America and soon was accompanying professional archaeologists in their fieldwork in Utah and Arizona.

His tenacity, which was to become a major character trait, manifested itself early when he had to defend his vocation against his father’s desire to compel him to study a more “practical” profession. Encouraged by his professors at the University of Utah, among them John Gillen and Julian Steward, he pursued anthropological studies and obtained his B.A. in 1939.

Working half-time at such arduous jobs as that of steelworker, he continued his studies at the University of Chicago until they were interrupted by the beginning of World War II. Within a short time after joining the army, he learned Japanese with its various written forms, soon becoming an instructor in the language. He filled posts involving high responsibilities and was promoted to the rank of captain. During this period of his life he married Emily Ross. After the end of the war, he returned to Chicago and obtained his M.A. in 1948 and, in 1953, his Ph.D.

His teaching career began at the University of Wyoming in 1948. He was appointed professor of anthropology and remained as one of the university’s most distinguished members until his death.

G. Figueroa G-H is affiliated with the Fundacion Pacifico, Santiago, Chile.
Between the years 1936 and 1955, the archaeological research conducted by William Mulloy focused on North America, particularly the northwestern Plains. In 1936–1937, he carried out fieldwork in Utah. In 1938–1939, in association with James Ford, Gordon Willey, and Arden King, he conducted an important study at the Crooks site in Louisiana. His major work, however, was done in Wyoming and Montana.

His publications at that time, such as his doctoral thesis "A Preliminary Historical Outline for the Northwestern Plains" and his monographs on excavations of the Hagen and McKeen sites, constitute fundamental contributions to the archaeology of the Plains. His authority in that area was recognized in 1953 when he was appointed chairman of the 12th Plains Conference.

In 1955, while working with H. M. Wormington in Alberta, Canada, he received an invitation to join Thor Heyerdahl's expedition to Easter Island and the eastern Pacific. This expedition was to change his destiny. Easter Island made such an impact on him that, from that time on, he dedicated every moment that his responsibilities at the University of Wyoming allowed to the investigation and restoration of the Island's monuments.

What most impressed Professor Mulloy from the beginning were the conditions of extreme isolation and limited geographical context within which the exceptional cultural manifestations of Easter Island took place. In this connection he found himself puzzled by the scarcity of the island's natural resources, particularly the flora, and in his first excavations he made interesting observations concerning the possibility of a different former state of things.

He perceived Rapanui as a unique microcosm, where investigation might throw light on the laws that govern cultural development and human creative capacity.

Thus, his approach differed from the usual one among archaeologists of the area at that time, who, on the basis of comparative studies of cultural traits and elements, attempted to discover the migration routes of the Polynesians, their centers of dispersion or of cultural diffusion, and the relationships among the islands.

In spite of his ambitious goals, his caution, rigor, and modesty led him to continue his excavations for many years, until solid evidence allowed him to formulate important hypotheses that slowly consolidated themselves in his mind and were formulated in his last works.

Concurrently, he developed an equally important preoccupation which reflected his generosity and the breadth of his capacities: that of saving and restoring for posterity the monuments of Rapanui, which he visualized not only in their intrinsic and universal value, but also as the labor of the ancestors of the present people of Easter Island, so affected by an intense acculturation process. For Dr. Mulloy, the restoration of the island's great monuments constituted a legitimate and effective means to reaffirm the identity and dignity of its people.

Thus, in 1960, when only one ship a year reached the island, William Mulloy spent 13 months in Rapanui with his wife Emily and his young children, Kathy, Patrick, and Brigid, to carry out his first major restoration. I had the privilege of working with him during Thor Heyerdahl's expedition, and I accompanied him again this time for the intensive excavation and complete restoration of the complex A Kivi-Vai-Teka.

In 1966, we designed together a program of conservation and restoration that was urgently needed due to the delicate state of the ruins and monuments. This program, initially prepared for UNESCO, was later elaborated in greater detail for the government of Chile.
William Mulloy at ceremonial center of Tahai on Easter Island.
Since then, Professor Mulloy dedicated all his vacation time and his sabbatical leaves to accomplishing this program, showing an extraordinary talent for resolving architectural and engineering problems. His lucid observations and experiments not only brought him success in his spectacular restorations, but also allowed him to deduce the original construction methods employed in the houses of Orongo and the ahu. His ideas also afford the best explanations proposed so far for the process of elaboration, transportation, and raising of the moai.

Although the need to save the monuments from destruction led him to dedicate a considerable part of his efforts to the work of restoration, he never lost his broad anthropological approach, nor the opportunity to gather evidence toward reconstructing the cultural history of the island in relation to its reduced and unstable environment. Unfortunately, he died before being able to put into writing all the wealth of observations he had accumulated in his twenty-three years of experience in the field and study of the prehistory of Easter Island. Some of his latest works, such as The A Kiwi-Vai Teka Complex and Its Relationship to Easter Island Architectural Prehistory (1978) and his essay "A Preliminary Culture-Historical Research Model for Easter Island" (1978), include an important part of the long development of his experience.

Fate would have it that his death should come just as his long and deep aspiration was about to be fulfilled: that of settling permanently on the island to dedicate himself totally to the work for which he felt such passion.

The importance of his academic contribution was recognized by the University of Wyoming. Among other honors, in 1976 he was awarded the LL.D. (honoris causa). Posthumously on 20 May 1978, he was appointed Distinguished Professor of Anthropology.

The government of Chile granted him the high decoration of Officer of the Order of don Bernardo O'Higgins for his extraordinary accomplishments on Easter Island. The International Fund for Monuments, which for over a decade has contributed to the archaeological work on Rapanui, has instituted a fund to honor Professor William Mulloy and to aid in the continuation of his work. And on the island itself, his second homeland, he was named Illustrious Citizen, an honor previously awarded only to the President of Chile.

In reflecting on William Mulloy's life, one cannot mention his scientific trajectory without saying something about his exceptional human qualities. His generosity—which together with his modesty seem to have been the most outstanding qualities of his spirit—was revealed fully in his relationship with his students, to whom he was a true master. He shared his knowledge and experience with them and his assistants without the slightest reserve and he urged them to go as far as their capacities would allow them. We never saw him more deeply satisfied than at those times he learned of the success of one of them in his studies or in the accomplishment of a valuable piece of research.

Before his death, William Mulloy had the satisfaction of knowing that his work would not end with him. His ex-students were continuing the great projects he had initiated on the Island: an extensive archaeological inventory, a program of research, conservation, and restoration of the monuments. Other archaeologists, also trained by him, continue his work in the United States and the Pacific, carrying within them the indelible image of the great scientist, the great master.

PRINCIPAL PUBLICATIONS OF WILLIAM MULLOY ON EASTER ISLAND AND RAPA


1961c With Gonzalo Figueroa. Como fue restaurado el Ahu A kivi en la Isla de Pascua. Boletin de la Universidad de Chile 27.


1974 Contemplate the navel of the world. Americas 26(4).


ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESTORATIONS

Rapa, French Polynesia

The fortified village of Morongo Uta

Easter Island, Chile

Ahu A Kivi, Ahu Vai Teka, Ahu Ko Te Riku, Ahu Tahai, Ahu Vai Uri, Ahu Huri A Urenga, two unnamed ahu at Hanga Kio’e, the ceremonial center at Orongo, Ahu O Kava