GLYPH- BREAKER

STEVEN ROGER FISCHER

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To Taki

CONTENTS

Preface ix

1	IN ODYSSEUS'S WAKE	1
2	LOGOS	13
3	THE NEW LABYRINTH	47
4	THE SKEIN OF ARIADNE	65
5	"HEAR YE, CRETANS AND GREEKS!"	93
6	THE BATTLE OF NAXOS	119
7	RAPANUI	139
8	TALKING BOARDS OF THE PACIFIC	153
9	ATOP TERE VAKA	167
10	"ALL THE BIRDS ..."	187
11	SURFING THE RONGORONGO	205

Suggested Reading 223

Index 227

PREFACE

A “glyph” (short for hieroglyph) is a sign in a script. And a “breaker” is a person who cracks a script’s code. A “glyph-breaker” is then a decipherer, someone who lets us read the unreadable, that linguistic magician who gives voice to the mute past.

Until 1984 no one had been able to read Crete’s 3600-year-old Phaistos Disk, Europe’s earliest literature and greatest written enigma. Until 1994 no one could make sense of Easter Island’s mysterious *rongorongo* writing, Oceania’s only script predating the twentieth century. No one had ever deciphered two wholly different historical scripts before. Until now.

This is the true story of these two achievements.

With the Aegean adventure, a gold talent of gratitude will forever be owed to the remarkable Joseph Judge, former associate editor of the *National Geographic* in Washington, DC, poet, and historian, who died of cancer only one month before these lines were written; Joseph Judge’s inspiration and support were Homeric. The Polynesian challenge succeeded because of the wisdom and encouragement of the eminent ethnologist Thomas S. Barthel of Tübingen, Germany; the Amer-

X P R E F A C E

ican archaeologist Georgia Lee of Los Osos, California; and the British archaeologist Paul Bahn of Hull, England. There were scores of other colleagues and helpmates, too, from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Hangaroa, Rapanui (Easter Island), who each contributed a valuable piece to either of the two epigraphic puzzles. This is their achievement, too. My gratitude goes to them all.

I am especially grateful to my wife Taki. She was the one who made the impossible possible. And shared every peak and valley.

There's no secret so hidden that it cannot be found, no voice so mute that it cannot be heard.

Steven Roger Fischer
Waiheke Island, New Zealand
May 1996