BOOK REVIEWS

Folklore Collections

More Tales From Ulithi Atoll: A Content Analysis. By William A. Lessa. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980. University of California Publications Folklore and Mythology Studies No. 32. Pp. xi + 154, preface, introduction, conclusion, bibliography, maps. $15.00)

In his prefatory comments to this work, the author states that its "somewhat incidentally collected forty-two narratives" (p. ix) are to be seen as a supplement to his earlier work, *Tales From Ulithi Atoll.* In this earlier volume Lessa says that its 24 narratives were collected "merely in passing" (p. vii). The author makes no claims that these 66 tales constitute a representative sample of Ulithian folktales. Rather, a major concern in both volumes is to present the tales collected within their cultural matrix.

For this reviewer, *More Tales From Ulithi Atoll* represents a milepost of sorts in his own folklorist's odyssey. When nearly twenty years ago I went to Micronesia to make a study of the Trukese folktale, the late Walter Scott Wilson gave me a copy of Lessa's *Tales From Ulithi Atoll,* with the advice (also gratis) that he who would study Oceanic folktales should start with Lessa. I still know of no better place to begin. As I began to read *More Tales From Ulithi Atoll,* I noted the wheel had come full turn in that my own recent effort, *The Folktales of Micronesia,* had been of some use to Lessa, at least as a source of variants.

More Tales is definitely not for the beginner. A full understanding of its texts and of the extensive cultural data included will require further knowledge of the many publications that Lessa has contributed to the ethnology of Ulithi Atoll. Rather than repeat his earlier works, Lessa has cited them extensively, and they are of course listed in the bibliography. Lessa makes it clear that *More Tales* is not a continuation in the grand style of *Tales.* In this earlier work he built his 24 narratives into a comparative edifice that cast its shadow over much of the Pacific—Micronesia, Polynesia, Melanesia, Malaysia; the variants were many, his bibliography extensive. He set up tale types, explored such individual motifs as A814, Earth from Object thrown on Primeval Water, and treated at length several complicated tale types.

More Tales can be best seen as an important addendum to *Tales.* Here Lessa's goals are far more modest. He wants to add to the record narrative materials that are disappearing from rapidly acculturating Ulithi (in his conclusions he refers to this as "salvage ethnology"). As for the compiling of variants of tales and motifs, his intentions here are to include as many "as were necessary to clarify the many obscure passages and meanings that so often characterize an oral tradition, where the native listener is expected to fill in the lacunae" (p. 145).

In most cases Lessa is true to his word. However, there are a few occasions where the explanatory material is not equal to the tale. There is, for instance, the ambiguous narrative explaining the taboo nature of a certain "fish." As Lessa points out, the narrator heard the tale in the Palau Islands, and that only once. Lessa deduces from his studies that the creature in ques-

tion is a dugong. It happens that this particular story is well known in the Palau Islands and recounts the sad case of a pregnant girl who broke food taboos, was verbally abused by her mother, and turned into a dugong. It is an old one, mentioned in the German literature as early as 1895 (Mitchell, *Folktales of Micronesia,* p. 258).

I would also suggest that Lessa's tale, "The Dead Woman and the Isle of Souls," would have benefited from some further discussion. The only variant mentioned is one I collected in 1970, which, to quote Lessa, "does not contain new details that might serve to throw new light on Taiethou's narration" (p. 101). Yet my notes refer to four published variants, and I cite the location of four more (pp. 257–258). My experience has been that the story of the woman who dies in childbirth and whose ghost wreaks terrible vengeance on her careless husband is often encountered as a separate tale which does not include the trip to the afterworld where her son later marries a spirit woman. For me, this emphasis on the ferocity of the woman's ghost contains valuable insights into Micronesian beliefs in the supernatural.

One hesitates to suggest additions to the extensive bibliographies contained in *Tales* and *More Tales.* Yet I do feel the folklorist should be aware of the works of Hijikata Hisataku, especially his *Dittilapal-Satewal* (Tokyo, 1953), but also his *Palau no Shinwa Densetsu* (Tokyo, 1942). I have found these tales to be closely related to those Lessa has collected. Also, for the benefit of those wishing to do more comparative work, I would mention that in conjunction with my studies I have deposited over a hundred variants of Micronesian tales in the archives of the Folklore Institute at Indiana University. Many of these are Ulithian.

As I pointed out earlier, Lessa's collecting activities were secondary to his other anthropological activities. Consequently, he has missed some stories, and in one instance, a whole subgenre. This is the numskull tale. Many island groups in Micronesia have such traditions, and Ulithi Atoll is no exception. Not far from the main island of Mog Mog lies Asor Island, about whose inhabitants are spun many a yarn of outrageous stupidity (Mitchell, *Folktales of Micronesia,* pp. 99–100, 252–253).

Finally, there is the question of Ulithian genre. What are the native categories for these many tales? I believe anthropologists and folklorists alike would consider this a matter of import. However, Lessa does not provide the reader this information. In my own collecting from Ulithians on Guam and Yap, I got the categories of *fiyong* and *tittinnap,* the first given as a general term for stories and also for bedtime stories. The latter were said to be true. I collected similar categories from the people of Woleai Atoll, and it is apparent from Hisataku's title that at least one of these categories is known on Satewal Atoll.

I make these several observations with the realization that at times they go beyond Lessa's stated aims in preparing this publication. *More Tales* is a valuable book and, added to the author's other works, represents a corpus of materials the like of which few anthropologists have made available to those of us whose major focus is folklore.

University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire

ROGER E. MITCHELL

Folktales of Egypt. Collected, translated, and edited by Hasan M. El-Shamy. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Folktales of the World. Pp. lviii + 347, foreword [by Richard M. Dorson], introduction, notes, bibliography, indices. $25.00)

Hasan El-Shamy has done a marvelous job of collecting and presenting 70 Egyptian folktales. Along the way he has avoided making the kinds of errors attributed to some of the