



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Tales from Ulithi Atoll: A Comparative Study in Oceanic Folklore by William A. Lessa

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mildness; and over all hangs a misty antiquity more appropriate for some Celtic isle than a sunshiny country less than two centuries old.

As a scholarly resource, this book is useless. There is no documentation and little discrimination: fact-, folk-, and fakelore are hopelessly inextricable. Beatty seems to have had no acquaintance with foreign books of folklore (and of course he had no Australian models to guide him) nor even of the reviews of his earlier books, judging by his repetition of errors previously exposed. In the few places where the reader feels his intrusion as an editor, he is either too credulous or innocent of folk scholarship and related disciplines to inspire any trust (for example, he seems seriously to believe that the oldest bell in the world, now hanging in a Brisbane church, dates from 320 A.D.).

Yet for all this, I do not know of any other book intelligible to the foreigner which conveys so well the atmosphere of Australia, the intangible spirit that forms the peculiar nature of its society and culture. I wish this book could have been better, for only Beatty among Australian workers in folklore has the knowledge to do an adequate job with the material, but even as it is, it is recommended for those who wish to steep themselves in the essence of that wonderful land.

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Tales from Ulithi Atoll: A Comparative Study in Oceanic Folklore. By William A. Lessa. ("University of California Folklore Studies," No. 13. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961. Pp. x + 493. \$8.50.)

Ulithi is a relatively unacculturated (grass skirts, bare breasts) atoll between Guam and Yap in the Western Pacific. In 1949, it had 421 inhabitants.

In the first seventy-seven pages of Lessa's book are twenty-four tales in clear and smooth English collected from seven informants. Each tale is accompanied by rather full ethnographic explanations. We are not told, however, the circumstances of the telling. Were the stories taken down in Ulithian? What were the reactions of the tellers? Were the tales known to many? What were the translator's techniques?

Distributions of elements in sixteen tale types are next traced, not only in the Pacific including Indonesia and Australia, but also "occasionally" in Southeast Asia, India, and Europe. The amount of research in investigating elements with worldwide distribution (as the Swan Maiden and Oedipus) is indeed impressive and is attested by well over seven hundred items in the bibliography and Lessa's statement that as many as thirty thousand tales were consulted.

The third section traces fifteen motifs with genetic connections elsewhere in Oceania. Kirtley's unpublished Oceanic motif index was utilized and in the appendix is Kirtley's motif analysis of all the Ulithi tales. The implication is that these fifteen are the only motifs with genetic connectives elsewhere. More conservatism would have been welcome. For example, on page 374 is the statement that the descent to the underworld motif "seems to be unknown" in Hawaii. The motif occurs in Fornander 5:186.

It is grossly unfair for a worker in a tiny corner to look for flaws in that corner of a huge tapestry, but it is perhaps the duty of a reviewer to do so. Hawaiian counterparts of several other motifs were not noted: transformation of man to bird (Fornander 5:234), wisdom from a dream (Fornander 4:442, 5:228), supernatural growth (Fornander 4:436, 5:518).

Lessa states in his conclusions that only a few tales occur only on Ulithi, and that most represent "a decided amalgam of narratives and motifs found not only elsewhere in Micronesia but in the rest of Oceania." Geographic distributions, however, provide but "a weak reed" for tracing migrations.

Lessa's theoretical preoccupations (especially psychological) are presented dramatically and clearly. Lessa is not monistic: some (but not all) myths are concerned with nature, with history, with fantasies and wish fulfillment, or owe their origins to rituals.

This is the most ambitious diffusionist study yet made of Oceanic motifs, elements, and types. It is gigantic in scope and will prove useful to students anywhere and indispensable to Oceanists.

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Books Received

- Aarne, Antti, and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale*. (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1961.) Pp. 588. 3300 mk.
- Berg, William A., *The White God of the Aztecs*. (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1961.) Pp. 412. \$4.50.
- Boatright, Mody C., et al., (eds.), *The Golden Log*. (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1962.) Pp. vi + 168. \$4.00.
- , *Singers and Storytellers*. (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1961.) Pp. vi + 298. \$5.00.
- Breihan, Carl W., *Younger Brothers*. (San Antonio, Tex.: Naylor Co., 1961.) Pp. xiii + 260. \$5.95.
- Brooks, Juanita, *John Doyle Lee*. (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1961.) Pp. 404. \$9.50.
- Cazden, Norman, (ed.), *A Book of Nonsense Songs*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961.) Pp. v + 106. \$1.95.