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Eli YASSIF

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
 Beer-Sheva, Israel

OCEANIA

STEINEN, KARL VON DEN. *Marquesan Myths*. Edited by Jennifer Terrell. Translated by Marta Langridge. Canberra: Target Oceania/*The Journal of Pacific History*, 1988. xxii+222 pages. Maps, illustrations, index. Paper, no price given; ISBN 0-9595477-5-4.

Target Oceania, a research group at Australian National University, and *The Journal of Pacific History* are to be commended for their support for the reprinting of this important work on early Marquesan culture. Originally published in separate issues in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (VON DEN STEINEN, 1933–1934, 1934–1935), it is one of those elusive publications that shows its importance by its appearance, in whole or in part, in the works of scholars attempting an encyclopedic review of oceanic mythology (BECKWITH 1940; KIRTLEY 1971; LESSA 1961; LUOMALA 1949).

The importance of Von den Steinen's *Marquesan Myths* is best evaluated by considering the man and his times; and this importance is highlighted in a concise and able fashion by the editor of this particular volume (ix–xxii). In addition to *Marquesan Myths*, Von den Steinen also produced a shorter account of his Marquesan field work (VON DEN STEINEN 1898), and his masterpiece on Marquesan art and culture in three volumes (VON DEN STEINEN 1925–1928). Theoretically, Von den Steinen was a man of his times, especially as evidenced in his interpretation of his collected myths as the metaphorical treatment of such natural phenomena as the sun and the moon. As to be expected, when forcing a culture's myths into a preconceived pattern, there

are droll results. My experience has been in working with Oceanic folklore that narrators will on occasion provide a little comic relief by inserting some crude scatological incident. The Marquesans would seem no different, to consider the hero who has his daughters swing by his visitor and add a dash of urine to his cup of kava. Von den Steinen transmutes this earthy prank to a bit of heavenly phenomenon: "There does not seem to be any doubt that this is an old nature myth . . . The urinating girls symbolise the rain clouds . . ." (32). With similar ease, he reduces the tale of the land of women where all births are Caesarean (and thus kill the mothers) to be a symbolic presentation of the waxing and waning of the moon (80).

But this is all scholarly nitpicking made possible by a great deal of hindsight. Despite the late date of publication, Von den Steinen collected these myths in 1897 and wrote within scholarly parameters in vogue in that period. One suspects some of our present-day interpretive approaches to myth will look equally bizarre a century from now. Of far greater importance to Von den Steinen's ethnographic efforts was his approach to fieldwork, which, to risk a hackneyed phrase, was ahead of his time. He was commissioned by the Berlin Ethnographical Museum to carry out a study of Marquesan culture. His interest in such work had already been stimulated by his association with Adolph Bastian. On his way to the Marquesan Islands, Von den Steinen began a study of the language. He collected from all the main islands and he recorded variants. All this was carried out in the Marquesan language, and according to existing accounts Von den Steinen became quite fluent. It is difficult, of course, to make accurate judgements of style when faced with texts twice removed from the original: Marquesan to German to English. Yet Von den Steinen asserted he attempted a careful rendering of the vernacular, and the editor states she hewed close to the German text (xvi). Certainly with the attention paid to detail, the at time repetitious lists of names and places, and the abruptness of beginning and ending have all the marks of an oral style. With the addition of Von den Steinen's notes and prefaces, the larger portion of the texts included give reasonable evidence that Von den Steinen stayed close to his oral sources. In the latter part of the book there are some texts that have a minimum of this ethnographic explanation, which causes them to be somewhat difficult to understand. Published as they were after Von den Steinen's death in 1927, it is probable that he had not left all texts in fully annotated form.

For the anthropologist Von den Steinen's work provides insight into certain aspects of Marquesan culture that were soon to disappear before the combined pressures of Westernization and Christianity. One long text is largely devoted to the tattooing process (136-139). Another gives graphic illustration of Marquesan sexual practices (187-188). The custom of multiple husbands (with some attendant jealousy) is several times touched on (162). And of course, cannibalism. This particular practice is most often tied to matters of revenge (96).

For the comparative folklorist, this volume bears excellent witness to the fact that the many cultures of the Pacific Islands have much in common. To cite but a few widespread tale types and motifs, one encounters here the bringing of fire to mankind, the origin of kava from the body of a god or culture hero, the vagina dentata, the expulsion and the return of the hero, the island of women, and the ignorance of natural childbirth.

This same volume also serves as a caveat to those who would presume too much on too small a sample of a culture's oral traditions. Those familiar with the earlier days of anthropological culture and personality studies will remember well the example cited by Terrell in her introduction when Abram Kardiner decided, based in part at least on one collection of Marquesan myths, "that ' deep-seated hatred and distrust of

women' was a Marquesan cultural trait'' (xi). Von den Steinen's collection does not bear out this negative assessment of Marquesan personality as evidenced by mythological and legendary characters. True, as in much Oceanic folklore, main characters can be threatening and at times cruel, but it is difficult to assign such antisocial behavior to any one sex. To present-day scholars seeking insight into Marquesan personality through their oral traditions I would strongly recommend that they use Von den Steinen's work as their starting point. His *Die Marquesaner und ihre Kunst* is very much in print (Hacker Art Books, New York, 1969); his "Reise nach den Marquesas-Inseln" is as near as any university inter-library loan desk. And of course, there is the present translation-reprint here under review. I highly recommend it.

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Roger E. MITCHELL

University of Wisconsin, Eau-Claire

Eau-Claire, Wisconsin

SOUTH AMERICA

BASSO, ELLEN B. *In Favor of Deceit. A Study of Tricksters in an Amazonian Society*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1987. xx+376 pages. Photographs, bibliography, index of stories, general index. Clothbound US\$40.00; ISBN 0-8165-1022-9.

With this impressive volume Ellen Basso provides a significant addition to her growing set of volumes on the Carib-speaking Kalapalo community. After her 1969 dissertation, Basso provided a deft outline of the community (1973). And 1985 marked the appearance of her award-winning tome, *A Musical View of the Universe*. *In Favor of Deceit* continues her commitment to close examinations of language and context, a