

Z'GRAGGEN, JOHN A. *Creation through Death or Deception*. Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1995. xii + 155 pages. Glossary, references. Hardcover £12.50; ISBN 1-85821-271-5.

The seventeen tales in this publication were selected from taped materials collected by Z'Graggen in Papua New Guinea, twelve from Madang Province and five from East Sepik Province. They were translated from Talk Pisin, the lingua franca of the area, into English. Thus the tales pass through two linguistic filters: from the tellers' own dialect into Talk Pisin, and from Talk Pisin into English. The title, "Creation through Death or Deception," indicates the criterion for selection. To put it simply, these are origin myths and folktales containing origin motifs.

The tales are presented in three parts. The first, "Demand to Be Killed," best fits Z'Graggen's emphasis on creation through death. Selections 1-3 contain the grisly Melanesian motifs where sons kill their mother (upon her demand) and slice her up, whereupon villages and people emerge from the distributed remains. These first three selections are variants of the same origin myth, which serves in other areas in New Guinea to explain the origin of headhunting (ZEGWAARD 1959).

By tale 3 the Oceania-wide story of "The Deserted Woman and Her Ogre-killing Son" appears as the vehicle for the origin motif (LESSA 1961, 220-37). Tales 4-6 are variants on the "Deserted Woman", with the added brutal touch in which ogres are killed by bludgeoning their genitals. The creation (origin) motif is absent.

The second part, "Demand to Be Killed by Deception," picks up the origin motifs again, these encased in several tales I have encountered variants of in my own collecting in Micronesia (MITCHELL 1973). These concern deserted or stolen children and their animal or human foster parents. The deception-death-creation motif occurs when the foster parent assumes the shape of a bird or animal so that the adopted son will shoot it, and from its blood will issue various peoples and languages. In some cases the tales also serve as clan origin myths.

Enough has been said to indicate that Z'Graggen's work contains for the folklorist far more than myths and motifs of creation (origin) through death. This is especially true of the third section, "Miscellaneous." Here are motifs and themes that strongly support Bacil KIRTLEY's thesis (1955) that the folklore of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia are solidly interconnected. Found in this grouping are parts or wholes of such tales as animal parents, origin of the coconut (areca nut), pursuit by an ogress, the false bride (and an Oedipal variant), and several others. It is in this inclusion of widespread tales and motifs that I see the special value of Z'Graggen's work. Taken alone, the creation myths and motifs would be slim pickings. But the tales themselves, the references to other variants, and the credits afford the Oceanic researcher fresh material and sources for continued research.

The author comments that the narratives "are loosely framed" with references to the death of Christ (ix). He does not, however, expand on this theme. This is for the better in a relatively brief work. It would have been unfortunate to sacrifice actual text in favor of what the author might think the texts mean. As time passes and old interpretive systems are replaced by the new, it is the text that remains as a thing of value. The interpretive systems become footnotes in graduate dissertations.

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