
REVIEWS

Serge Dunis, *Ethnologie d'Hawai'i: "Homme de la petite eau, femme de la grande eau."* Paris: Presses Universitaires Créole/L'Harmattan, 1990. Pp. 379, maps, drawings, bibliography. FF 200.

Reviewed by Ben Finney, University of Hawai'i

THERE IS NOW a Université Française du Pacifique with two centers separated by thousands of miles of open ocean: one in Noumea, New Caledonia, the other just outside Pape'ete, Tahiti. Teaching at the Tahiti campus is a most ebullient professor of English language and civilization, Serge Dunis, whose passion is the anthropology of Polynesia. Dunis has been able to do his anthropology while teaching languages and civilizations (tightly linked in the French approach) first in Aotearoa, then in Hawai'i, and now in Tahiti. Two years in the early 1970s spent teaching French at the University of Wellington led to his exciting analysis of Maori culture, *Sans tabou ni totem* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1984). Ten years ago, while he was teaching French at the Manoa campus of the University of Hawai'i, Dunis revealed in Malo, Kamakau, the *Kumulipo*, and the other rich sources we have on Hawaiian culture. The result is the book under review, published when he was teaching at yet another island nation: Martinique.

At first glance, the organization of *"Ethnology of Hawai'i"* might seem comfortably prosaic to the Anglophone ethnographer. In the first third of the book, Dunis builds a foundation with chapters on the geology and geography of the chain, on the discovery and colonization of the islands, and on Hawaiian farming, fishing, domestic architecture, and canoes. Then comes the meat of the book: an analysis of the hierarchical structure of Hawaiian

society and its mythological underpinnings. It soon becomes apparent, however, that Dunis is not modeling his work on the old Bishop Museum bulletins on Polynesian cultures. This is a very French work done by a scholar who combines lessons from Lévi-Strauss, Godelier, and various psychoanalytic masters with his own literary background to provide a brilliantly provocative analysis of Hawaiian culture. His focus, after due attention to the material substructure, is on the ideological superstructure of Hawaiian culture as revealed in the writings of Malo, Kamakau, and other ethnographic sources, as well as in the creation chant *Kumulipo* and in mythological tales such as those of Maui and the demigod Kamapua'a.

To understand Dunis's Marxist-structuralist-psychoanalytic approach, it is useful to go back to his earlier work on Maori culture cited above. His fascination there is with incest, hierarchy, and the primordial Oedipal situation of Maori cosmogony. Sky-father (Rangi) and Earth-mother (Papa) remain in tight embrace, condemning their children, all male, to perpetual imprisonment until one of their number, Tane, severs his father's arms and separates sky from earth. To initiate human life Tane then proceeds to Te Puke, Earth-mother's mons veneris, and takes a piece of it to mold a female with whom he then mates, begetting a daughter. This sets up another round of incest from which eventually mortal humans appear and multiply, thereafter symbolically reenacting primordial incest by impregnating the land through agriculture.

Hawaiian cosmogony differs in critical aspects from that of the Maori, as Dunis explains in his exploration of the evolution of life from coral to high chiefs presented in the *Kumulipo* and the adventures of Kamapua'a from pig sexually rutting in Mother-earth to detumescent fish. His interpretation remains essentially that of culturally informed Freudianism and structuralism and is focused on the male-female chasm (hence the subtitle "man for the narrow stream, woman for the broad stream," a line from the *Kumulipo*), in particular on what he calls "royal incest," whereby the ideal mating for the chiefs was between full siblings. To him, therefore, the essential difference between Maori and Hawaiian hierarchy revolves around incest. Whereas the Maori descendants of Tane monopolized power in the *ariki* lines gained through primordial incest but thereafter forbidden except symbolically through the insertion of plants into Earth-mother, the Hawaiian *ali'i* promoted the mating of close kin within their class. To Dunis, the Hawaiian chiefs did not simply derive their power from ancestral gods; through "royal incest" they could become gods themselves.

Dunis's contribution begs comparison with other recent works on ancient Hawaiian society, such as the pre-European sections of Linnekin's *Women of Renown* and Kame'eleihewa's *Native Land and Foreign Desires*, as well as

Valeri's *Kingship and Sacrifice*. The different interpretations of Hawaiian culture reflect both the distinctive approaches of the various authors and the richness and complexity of that civilization. Perhaps after Dunis has learned his Tahitian (now intensively taught at the Tahiti campus of the new French University of the Pacific by Professor Louise Pelzer, who is originally from Huahine) and delved into the sources on ancient Tahiti, we can expect yet another distinctively Dunisian interpretation of Polynesian culture.

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