

Robert D. Craig, *Dictionary of Polynesian Mythology*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989. Pp. 409, bibliography, index. US\$49.95 cloth.

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Polynesian religious tradition has been voluminously recorded, thanks to the cooperation of the indigenous authorities who in most cases wrote down the texts and the interested Europeans who then preserved their manuscripts. Quite a few missionaries became keen collectors (Ellis, Gill, Orsmond, Turner, Wohlers, Taylor, Collocott, and others), and so did a smaller number of colonial administrators--among them such important figures as Grey, Fornander, and Shortland. Later, some Europeans who had been born or brought up in the region became passionately absorbed in this study (White, Davis, Smith, Gudgeon, Best, Emerson, Henry, and many others). Two German ethnographers, von den Steinen and Krämer, were active at the turn of the century, then in the 1920s the Bernice P. Bishop Museum instigated its great research program and ethnographers such as Gifford, Handy, Buck, the Beagleholes, Elbert, Emory, and Stimson were able to collect traditional materials from islands where there had been relatively little European settle-

ment and life had been less drastically disturbed. Meanwhile the study of the very large body of existing records continued; after Henry in Tahiti there were such scholars as Beckwith, Pukui, Elbert, and Luomala in Hawai'i, and Ngata and Te Hurinui in New Zealand.

Inevitably the record is incomplete and uneven; the main bodies of writings relate to New Zealand, Hawai'i, Tahiti, and Samoa--and even there much has been lost. But despite all the gaps, Polynesian tradition appears to have been better recorded than that of any comparable cultural region. This great collection of published and unpublished materials contains the literary heritage of the peoples of these islands, and is the main source of information on traditional Polynesian thought; its study could also make a significant contribution to the consideration of a wide range of theoretical issues relating to, for example, patterns of thought and imagery and the evolution and uses of mythology. Yet for a number of reasons the study of Polynesian tradition is at present in decline within the region, and it has not become established in universities elsewhere. Relatively few works on the subject, for academic or popular audiences, have appeared in the last twenty years or so.

Robert D. Craig's *Dictionary of Polynesian Mythology* is all the more welcome for this reason. The first work of its kind, it draws upon the vast accumulation of published texts and some manuscript ones, and also makes use of the comparative studies of such scholars as Tregear, Beckwith, and Luomala. As well as providing extensive entries on major and minor supernatural figures, the volume has entries on a range of topics such as the underworld, ghosts, giants, and the origin of the coconut. There is a helpful introduction and a good index, also an appendix in which the gods and goddesses are categorized as canoe deities, moon deities, fire deities, and so on. The work naturally does not include everything--no single volume could do so--but it does have a great deal of information and is as useful for scholarship as it is interesting and entertaining for the general reader.

In some cases certain minor figures might have been better excluded to provide space for more extended entries on others. In the Maori material, with which I am best acquainted, I noticed a number of entries, taken largely from Tregear and Grey, which deal with very minor figures, in some cases legendary rather than mythical (such as Kahureremoa and Tawake-heimoa) or personifications that are not really supernatural entities but simply a way of referring in the story to the creature concerned (Kanae are mullet, and Tuatara the reptile of that name). But this sort of thing is difficult to avoid completely, especially when the material is so unevenly presented by early writers. The

major entries are substantial and well organized, with bibliographical information provided.

This book is a definite asset and I am pleased to have it on my bookshelf. For the next edition quite a few misprints will require attention.