

Allan Thomas, Ineleo Tuia, and Judith Huntsman, eds., *Songs and Stories of Tokelau: An Introduction to the Cultural Heritage*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990. Pp. 88, map, illustrations, bibliography. NZ\$14.95 softcover. Accompanying audio cassette produced by Asia Pacific Archive, School of Music, Victoria University of Wellington, NZ\$8.

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The three atolls of Tokelau (Atafu, Fakaofu, and Nukunonu), until recently under the linguistic and administrative influence of Western Samoa, have had very little published in their own language. With this modest publication, the amount of readily available material on the texts of Tokelau songs and stories has increased significantly. Judith Huntsman has authored numerous publications on Tokelauan social anthropology over the past twenty years. Allan Thomas's studies of Tokelauan music, both in Wellington and during a nine-week field trip to Nukunonu in 1986, have already produced two useful publications (1986a, 1986b); his accompanying cassette of thirty songs from the book enables the public to hear for the first time a selection of several song categories. Ineleo Tuia is a longtime leader of Tokelauan cultural groups in Wellington. Book and cassette together are welcome as further source material for a Western Polynesian musical tradition hitherto little known and sparsely documented.

Song texts appear in English and Tokelauan on facing pages, the original poems in larger font, presumably for visual balance. According to the preface, "an English version is favoured which gives the meaning of the song rather than directly translates it. Translations are thus not generally to be regarded as literal" (p. 9). This explanation is helpful when

determining why many features of the song poetry that help make it typically Polynesian—for example, phrase repetition within individual or adjacent lines, refrains, as well as many whole phrases, verbal particles, and definite articles in the original—are omitted in the translations. The explanation does not help explain, however, the absence of any translation at all for the *tuala* wedding song (p. 53), although we learn in another chapter (p. 54) that the words are “not understood.” A similar principle appears to have been applied to the Tokelauan texts themselves: when listening to the accompanying cassette, one finds that whole repeated lines or phrases are omitted from the written texts (e.g., songs 18, 20, 38). A further complication in documentation is that side B, track 5 of the cassette includes songs 18–20, not 18–22 as indicated in the cassette notes.

The net effect of this approach to translation is to heighten the cultural distance between the reader and the composer. While acknowledging that any translation is essentially an act of compromise, the identity of the intended readership is not clear to this reviewer. Tokelauans themselves will find occasional discrepancies between sung/spoken and written forms, and other readers seeking insights into Tokelauan modes of verbal expression from this “testament to the lively imagination of Tokelauan composers” (cover notes) may find the generalizing effect of the translation process something of an impediment. For those primarily interested in Tokelauan music, however, the most valuable sources are the nonprocessed recordings themselves.

A noticeable change of translation approach characterizes the *kakai* (*märchen*) about Alo, which occupies almost a quarter of the book; here the translation is indeed close to the original and the characters’ personalities are allowed to emerge. These tales contain one or more short songs (*tagi*) sung by the narrator at crisis points in the story. From a comparison of the four *tagi* on the cassette with specimens recorded in Tokelau by Huntsman in the 1960s, it appears that the former practice of singing slowly and using stereotyped melodies may have changed: Thomas’s 1986 recordings are sung faster and are not stereotyped. The audience unison participation, found in Huntsman’s recordings but not duplicated in Thomas’s sample, likewise suggests a recent change in procedure (or perhaps a difference in recording circumstances).

The unmetred, slow *pehe anamua* (ancient songs) are sung by men who depart only occasionally from unison to produce two-part harmonies. Their sound is similar to premissionary Tuvalu songs recorded by Gerd Koch (e.g., Christensen and Koch 1964:57). By contrast, the *hiva hahaka* (old danced songs) consist of men singing unison antiphonal

couplets, each line of which has equal duration, and each section ending with a call that identifies the particular dance genre. The melodies, accompanied by beating on a tapa-making board, concentrate on two pitches a Major second apart, and the overall tempo accelerates with each repetition of the text. Almost the entire Tokelau programs in the last two South Pacific Arts Festivals have consisted of *fātele*. This most popular dance is well represented with several specimens both in the book and on the cassette. These two-part songs sung by a mixed group repeat a short text, accelerating in both danced and sung tempo and concluding with a shouted call. *Mako* love songs are a feature of the more westerly islands of Western Polynesia and also the Outliers. Textual lines are repeated, the first and second presentations respectively of each line tending to use identical melodic material.

The songs featured in the book and on the cassette include stylistic features and categories either known to have been common elsewhere in Western Polynesia in earlier times but now rarely heard or obsolete, or present also in the Outliers. Although much material is presented, readers may have to work to make best use of it.

REFERENCES

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1964 *Die Musik der Ellice-Inseln*. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde.

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1986b *Report on Survey of Music in Tokelau, Western Polynesia*. Working Papers in Anthropology, Archaeology, Linguistics, Maori Studies, no. 79. Auckland: Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland.