

Olssen's is a major work, worthy of a wide audience. Occasionally one has the feeling that had its publication been delayed a few years the book might have been able to answer some of the nagging doubts that remain about Lee's career.

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*The Great New Zealand Myth: a Study of the Discovery and Origin Traditions of the Maori.* By D.R. Simmons. A.H. and A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1976. xi, 504 pp. N.Z. price: \$18.50.

ANYONE who decides to study Maori tradition faces several difficulties. There is the language; and there is the extraordinary bulk and variety of the material available for study, and its chaotic condition. But perhaps the worst problem, because its implications may not be fully realized, arises from the scholar's isolation. Since there are so very few people working in this area, where are one's ideas to come from?

Modern Maori elders cannot provide a theoretical framework. Either one is influenced, consciously or otherwise, by earlier writers in New Zealand, or one looks outside New Zealand: to work done by anthropologists and historians of religion in fields such as mythology and symbolism, and in particular to J. Prytz Johansen's monographs on Maori religion (1954, 1958).<sup>1</sup> One cannot have it both ways, for New Zealand scholarship in the field of Maori tradition is so isolated and ingrown that a gulf yawns between the two. It is no accident that Johansen's work is so little known in this country.

D.R. Simmons's *The Great New Zealand Myth* is a massive book of 504 pages, with seventeen chapters, eight appendices, and an 82-page bibliography. The 'myth' with which he is concerned is not, as one might think, a religious narrative but 'a commonly-held belief which is untrue'. It is, he tells us, generally believed that according to Maori tradition a man named Kupe in about 925 A.D. left a place named Hawaiki and discovered this country, that the first settlement was made by Toi and Whatonga in about 1150, and that in about 1350 a 'great fleet' of six canoes brought most of the early ancestors of the Maori to New Zealand. His book is essentially a criticism of this belief, which he traces to its origins, largely in the writings of S. Percy Smith, and shows to have no foundation in authentic tradition.

This is a most valuable thing to have done. It is not, though, the first time that Simmons has demonstrated this. In 1969, in an important article (NZJH, III, 1) which was based upon an M.A. thesis presented in 1963, he examined the evidence for the popular 'myth' concerning Kupe, Toi and a 'fleet' and, in the space of eighteen tightly argued pages, demolished it. His present book covers very similar ground, this time in tremendous detail. It is based upon a

<sup>1</sup>J. Prytz Johansen. *The Maori and his Religion in its Non-Ritualistic Aspects and Studies in Maori Rites and Myths*. Munksgaard, Copenhagen.

great deal of research and is packed with information, but the material is very loosely organized and it is often difficult to follow the argument. Indeed, for much of the time one is hardly aware that an argument is being presented; the chapters on 'tribal traditions', in particular, have the appearance more of compilations of miscellaneous information, and much of the material in the appendices and bibliography is not relevant to the book's stated purpose.

It is no longer quite true, as it must have been in 1969, that the 'myth' is generally accepted in New Zealand; thus the revised edition of Keith Sinclair's history of New Zealand (1969, p.18) explicitly rejects it. Simmons's article and earlier thesis have certainly had much to do with the gradual change which is taking place in people's thinking about this. But a book on such a subject, unlike an article, must introduce new theories to replace the old ones if it is not to become shapeless and incoherent. The author, despite his realization of the need for more careful editing and analysis of traditional material, has clearly acquired his theoretical framework from the people whom he so rightly criticizes.

The scholars of S. Percy Smith's generation, Peter Buck, and more recent writers also, while they have handled the evidence in differing ways, have nearly all assumed that the more obviously supernatural episodes in narratives such as the migration traditions are fanciful 'accretions', having been added to an original narrative by story-tellers with a 'love of the marvellous', and that they have only to remove these unbelievable incidents in order to arrive at a core of historical truth. Although Simmons does not discuss theoretical issues directly, this is his approach also; see for example his reference on p.58 to the 'fabulous aspects' of the story of Kupe. He dismisses Smith's theory that there were two Kupes, only to settle for a single figure who lived in the early fourteenth century; and he then solves the Toi question in Smith's own manner by telling us that there were at least two men of this name. The one new idea of importance which appears in the book is the theory (discussed briefly, in the last few pages) that the 'last Hawaiki' of the migrants was within New Zealand, in Northland. This can be understood only if one knows that Smith believed that Maori tradition refers to a number of earlier 'homelands', each named Hawaiki.

If a number of tribes possess a certain tradition, this shows that they may have been associated in the past, but does not tell us if there is any historical foundation for that tradition. Even if various Maori tribes did in fact migrate to their present territory from Northland, it should not be assumed that their traditions necessarily carry the memory of that migration. J. Prytz Johansen (*Studies*, pp. 114ff.) discusses in detail the migration tradition concerning the Horouta canoe, and shows that it functions as a myth (in the older sense of that word), being of great importance in the rituals associated with kumara cultivation and bird-catching. This sophisticated analysis is the point from which any later discussion should begin. Simmons, however, makes no reference to Johansen in his discussion of the Horouta story, and he nowhere considers as a possibility that he is dealing with myths. His book will be useful in many ways to people interested in early tribal tradition and genealogies, but it is as innocent of any understanding of the meaning of the migration traditions as the latest compilation by A.W. Reed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*Treasury of Maori Exploration: Legends Relating to the First Polynesian Explorers of New Zealand*. Reed, Wellington, 1977.

I think that Hawaiki can be shown to be a wholly mythical land<sup>3</sup> and that Kupe's activities can be understood in terms of comparative religions<sup>4</sup>. Such an approach requires an interest in Maori religion and patterns of thought. There is a vast amount of textual material available for this study, but nearly all of it requires editing or re-editing. Perhaps Simmons's book, in giving inventories of some of the main manuscript collections, will stimulate curiosity as to their contents. Although traditions such as these are not in themselves historical, they provide rich material for the historian of ideas.

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*Marists and Melanesians. A History of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands.* By Hugh Laracy. Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1976. xi, 212 pp. N.Z. price: \$15.65.

MISSION history in the Pacific has tended to be divided between polemics and piety and the middle ground has been thought to be only half respectable and dull to boot. Hugh Laracy's *Marists and Melanesians* wins the middle ground for respectability: it is well researched, balanced, critical and determinedly empiricist. It will not persuade a prejudiced reader, however, that mission history in the Pacific is an exciting and enlarging area of engagement.

Faced with telling the story of more than two hundred missionaries on more than sixty mission stations through more than a hundred years, Dr Laracy chose to be selective of the different themes that seemed to characterize the three distinct periods of Marist engagement in the Solomons – 1845-55, 1898-1942, 1945 to the present. In this way he can deal with the administrative and political problems of the missions, strategies of conversion, distinctive qualities of indigenous christianity, educational goals and tensions. It is all done very competently, if somewhat routinely, and along the way many interesting issues of mission history are picked up and examined: the ideology of sanctity and martyrdom of the Marists, intermission and intramission rivalries, social structures determinant of Melanesian response. Occasional missionaries come alive, such as Maurice Boch who thought a pipe the best protector of celibacy and Rinaldo Pavese who feared the love of the 'bourgeois life, of noise, of fame, of bluff, of sensualism' that reigned in the Americans, and we thereby know them in the marginality of their lives.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Orbell. 'The Religious Significance of Maori Migration Traditions.' *In Perspectives on Religion: New Zealand Viewpoints 1974*, J.C. Hinchcliff, ed., University of Auckland Bindery, pp. 5-8. Also in *Journal of the Polynesian Society* LXXXIV, 3 (1975), 41-47.

<sup>4</sup>Margaret Orbell. 'The Maori Traditions of Kupe: a Religious Interpretation.' *In The Religious Dimension*, J.C. Hinchcliff, ed., Rep Prep, Auckland, pp. 24-27. Also in *The Artefact* II,3 (1977), Melbourne.