

The book's value as a reference tool would be greatly improved by the addition of a table of contents. This would have saved me much time; at one point, I searched in vain for entries on religion—paging through the entire volume to look first for "Religion," then "Folk Religion," "Folk Belief," and finally looking up specific religions and denominations.

The volume also badly needs an index and a more systematic system of cross-references, particularly in light of the idiosyncratic headings that adorn many entries. For example, the issue of Australian national character is admirably discussed by Michael Roe in "Australian Legend." With no index, one would only find this information by stumbling upon it. Similarly, the reader searching for exhaustive information on Australian folk poetry will find an entry on that topic, which includes a reference to "Broadside ballads." However, the reader will not be directed from broadside ballads to folk poetry. There is a reference to the extensive (seven-page) entry on "Frank the Poet," a prolific nineteenth-century ballad maker, but it is buried in the broadside ballads entry.

The numerous photographs are an outstanding feature of the *Companion*. Sadly, however, they are neither listed nor keyed to entries in the text. I was intrigued by the photograph of women doing what the caption called the "Chook" dance (p 155); but with no cross-reference in the caption, and no index, I did not know where to turn for more information on the chook dance. (In fact, a "chook" is a chicken—the women in the photo appeared to be imitating chickens—but I did not find this information in the *Companion*.)

These technical complaints aside, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* is ample proof that Australian folkloristics has come of age. Both scholarly and popular folkloristic activity is alive and well down under, and this volume will bring more light to this *terra incognita* of the folkloristic map.

John McDowell. **So Wise Were Our Elders: Mythic Narratives from the Kamsá.** Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994. Pp. 285, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

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John McDowell's book *So Wise Were Our Elders: Mythic Narratives from the Kamsá* provides a first-hand account of Kamsá sacred narratives. McDowell identifies mythic narratives as stories which, while considered

by some as sacred and true, are undergoing transition from myth to folktale. McDowell attempts to accurately transcribe the stories by providing extensive linguistic information on the Kamsá language, and he presents the narratives' description of the development of Kamsá civilization as an emic theory of cultural evolution. The result not only is a rare and penetrating glimpse into the mythos of an unfamiliar Native American group, but also a thoughtful account of the problems of linguistic translation and performance transcription.

The Kamsá are a group of little known Native South Americans who live in the Sibundoy Valley of the Colombian Andes. Academics consider Kamsá, the only remaining dialect of the Quillasinga language, nearly impossible for outsiders to learn. While scholars have briefly dealt with limited aspects of Kamsá, no one has undertaken a comprehensive linguistic study or compiled a full dictionary. Chapter Two details McDowell's transcription process, focusing on his consideration of the nuances of the Kamsá language and the difficulties in reducing artfully performed narratives to print. He overcomes the obvious limitations of his medium by providing extensive linguistic description and by presenting the narratives in both Kamsá and English. McDowell also provides notes, indications of action, vocal intonations, hand gestures, and other factors often lost in the transcription process. By doing so, he seeks to strike a balance between aural reproduction and a transcription in which the reader might fully comprehend both content and context of the narrative performance.

McDowell's research spans more than fifteen years and provides an excellent portrayal of how a narrative body may function as a history of a particular people. He emphasizes the cooperative nature of the project by underscoring the importance and participation of his narrators and interpreters. McDowell familiarizes his readers with his storytellers' personalities, linking them to their tales and demonstrating how narrators often subtly change stories, additionally noting that this reflects the ongoing process of cultural amalgamation.

The myths are divided into four sections: The Wangetsmuna Cycle, Tales of the Ancestors, Tricksters and Suitors, and Tales of the Spirit Realm. While he openly acknowledges these as etic categories, McDowell's divisions reflect a temporal perspective which he believes reflects the Kamsá conceptualization of their own cosmic evolution. The earliest period is "raw time" in which gods and humans commonly interact. Here, the civilizing process begins and continues through time. The ancestors emerge as beings who can change into animals and whose actions set precedents for future generations. In the third section, permanent divisions between humans and animals fall into place, while the final section features tales which are moral, rather than spiritual, in nature. McDowell identifies these myths as having evolved furthest along the continuum toward folktales.

While McDowell attempts to accurately portray the narratives through ethnopoetic and performance theory, he provides little introductory information to Kamsá society. He lets the tales speak for themselves, and instead refers interested readers to his previous works. McDowell could have drawn from his own experience and knowledge of Kamsá culture to provide more commentary and analysis. He hesitated to draw broader sociological or anthropological implications, yet even a brief portrayal of present-day Kamsá life would have better illustrated the manner in which these stories function within Kamsá society today. In its entirety, however, *So Wise Were our Elders* contributes significantly to the study of both Kamsá culture and mythic traditions. As McDowell notes, these myths are not a comprehensive portrayal of Sibundoy civilization, but instead provide a keyhole glimpse of Kamsá social, political, linguistic, and religious structures. Additionally, his linguistic observations will greatly help future scholars interested in further analyzing the language. McDowell's collection, therefore, is a major addition to the study of both South American Indian mythology and Kamsá linguistics.

Mary Hufford, ed. **Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage.** Published for the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Pp. 264, photographs, notes, index. \$37.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper. A Publication of the American Folklore Society.

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An academic tradition which merits critical examination is the convention of dismissing early theories as old-fashioned or irrelevant. Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science provides one such dated but useful approach for reading Mary Hufford's *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*. Kuhn argued that scholars construct knowledge according to paradigms which are continually defined, redefined, negotiated and renegotiated by brokers of information. When an old paradigm is proven inadequate, a period of chaos develops within an academic discipline, and a new approach may emerge which is offered as a competing perspective. Whether folklore is in a period of chaos is open to debate, but it is productive to consider Hufford's volume as offering an alternative paradigm for cultural work within the discipline.

While fully identifying an existing paradigm is a problematic exercise within any academic discipline, it is fairly easy to identify elements of earlier scholarship which have fallen out of fashion. Vestiges of the dated academic