

TALES FROM THE DENA: INDIAN STORIES FROM THE TANANA, KOYUKUK & YUKON RIVERS. Edited by FREDERICA De LAGUNA. Recorded in 1935 by FREDERICA De LAGUNA and NORMAN REYNOLDS. Illustrated by DALE DeARMOND. Seattle: University of Washington Press. xx + 352 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index. Hardbound. US\$29.95.

Few scholars have contributed more to Alaskan anthropology than Frederica de Laguna. A wonderful aspect of her contributions is that they keep coming. At an age when many scholars have retired to their rocking chairs, she continues to produce new works that inform and stimulate our minds. And the books she writes! For those of us who struggle with finding time to write up important bodies of data we have collected in the past, this work is an inspiration. It draws on material that de Laguna and (then) graduate student Norman Reynolds collected on a 1935 field trip to locate early archaeological sites along the middle and lower Yukon River. Along the way, de Laguna's party stopped at Native villages and fish camps where she and Reynolds recorded ethnographic information, including Native tales.

The core of this book (Chapters 4–9) is 41 stories and an autobiography, most gathered by de Laguna and Reynolds with a few recorded by Ella Vernetti of Koyukuk. The storytellers, who came from Nenana, Tanana, Ruby, Koyukuk, and Nulato, include locally well-known figures such as Joe John, John Dayton, and Francis McGinty. Because tape recorders were not available then, the stories were transcribed by hand at the time they were told. In several cases, both de Laguna and Reynolds recorded the same tale, providing two records of the original presentation.

Although some of the stories may refer to historic events, most of them originate in the mythic past or Distant Time and feature an entertaining and exciting array of characters and situations. Many of the characters are animals, though humans and monsters also appear. They travel, transform themselves, trick each other, work magic, behave in ways typical of their kind, obtain, share, and eat food, and exhibit a wide variety of strengths and foibles. Traditionally, these tales were told in the autumn and early winter. Telling such stories not only entertained and helped make the winter pass more quickly, but also provided instruction for the young and a way of praying for elders. As the stories were originally recounted in the evening, after everyone had gone to bed and the house was dark, audience interaction and response remain an element in their oral telling even today. Embodying knowledge and moral lessons in easily recallable form, the stories are a way of preserving and communicating the elders' wisdom in societies that until very recently were without writing. The lessons taught range from major moral precepts to fine details of the character and behavior of animals.

In presenting the stories, de Laguna organizes them first by the place they were collected and then into three categories: stories about Crow or Raven, who is often a Creator figure; episodes from the Traveler Cycle; and miscellaneous stories about other characters. This order makes comparing different

versions of the same or related stories relatively easy, while keeping together the material collected from the same person or location.

Publishing this important body of data alone would be worth a book, but de Laguna has gone beyond this point and, like the consummate anthropologist she is, has given us both context and interpretation. The book begins with a preface answering many of the questions a reader would have at the outset about where the material was collected, how it was recorded, and how she and Reynolds dealt with Native language issues. Here she also discusses briefly the importance of Jette's and Chapman's work as earlier recorders and commentators on Dena stories (she also dedicates the book to these two scholars) and acknowledges her use of major works by other scholars of Interior Athabaskans. In addition to the standard works known outside Alaska, these include the three volumes of Koyukuk River Koyukon stories told by Catherine Attla (1983, 1989, 1990) and translated by Eliza Jones, with a companion volume of analysis by Chad Thompson (1990). She also consulted with Native experts such as linguist Eliza Jones and anthropologist Miranda Wright, as well as with linguist Michael Krauss and the Alaska Native Language Center staff, and with anthropologist Richard K. Nelson. This expertise clearly adds to the book's authority, accuracy, and depth.

Chapter 1, "The Dena Indians," includes some general ethnographic description of past and present lifeways. It also contains a discussion of the major cultural or "tribal" divisions and subgroups of Interior Alaska, including de Laguna's rationale for using the term "Dena," estimates of their populations, a description of leadership characteristics, and a description of the various clans that once existed in this area. Chapter 2 is an outline of the Dena annual cycle emphasizing the Koyukon, with a section describing traditional clothing. Chapter 3, "Dena Religion," begins with a brief description of missionary activity, but focuses primarily on published information regarding such topics as "spirits and human souls," "creatures of the wood and wild," "shamanism," and "modern beliefs." Although these chapters are summary by their very nature, for the neophyte, they supply a helpful introduction to the tales' cultural context, and for the old hand, they provide a useful and generally accurate review of this material.

Three chapters of commentary follow the tales. Chapter 10, "Myths and Characters," is divided into two parts. The first part discusses various classifications of Dena oral literature, including those of Jette and Chapman and of Native people themselves, including Catherine Attla. The second part examines the various characters that appear in the stories and their cultural meaning. Chapter 11, "The Building of Dena Myths," also has two parts. The first discusses geographical locations and environmental conditions that provide settings for the stories. The second delineates a series of motifs or themes, for example, "traveling," "magic journeys," "ruses and stratagems," and "the gnawing fear: eating and being eaten."

These chapters provide a solid, knowledgeable analysis of the stories presented. Although de Laguna's commentary is

not as lengthy or detailed as Thompson's (1990) analysis of Atlla's 1990 story collection, it does not need to be, in part because one can also draw on Thompson's work. It will be particularly useful to readers unfamiliar with Dena cultural beliefs and values, because it helps explain many of the references and behavior in the stories.

The final chapter, "Raven and Traveler," addresses these two important story cycles outlining the events that take place in various versions and discussing what the differences may mean. For the Raven cycle, de Laguna draws on both her own experience and Ann Chowning's (1962) work to show how the Dena versions of these important northern stories relate to those told by the Tlingit and other northwest coast groups, the Eskimo, and some Siberian groups. In all three of these chapters, de Laguna draws on the stories recorded by Jette and Chapman, and especially those told by Catherine Atlla, to provide a very useful comparative analysis of all the published Dena stories from Alaska's central interior. A useful and appropriate list of sources and an index round out this volume.

My one reservation about the commentary section relates to comments in the chapter on "Myths and Characters." In this section, de Laguna repeats Chapman's (1914:3) observation that the Dena of Anvik "have no history, in the proper sense of the term" and makes a similar comment about the shallow time-depth of Native "history" among the Ahtna. I think several factors can influence what non-Native researchers learn about Native history. These include prohibitions against relating certain kinds of cultural and historical information to outsiders, cultural differences in the concept of "history," and very significant individual differences in "historical" knowledge. Sometimes such information is carried by relatively few individuals, and it is likely that death due to disease has influenced the transmission of such information in this area over the past 200 years. Thus, at least for the Deg Hi'tan (Ingalik) and the Koyukuk River Koyukon, among whom I have worked and have some first-hand knowledge, I would be reluctant to make this generalization.

Although I must admit to bias because of my long-standing interest in the region and its people, I found this book a thoroughly enjoyable and very valuable contribution to the literature on Athabaskans, particularly their oral literature. De Laguna's long Alaskan experience and extensive comparative knowledge are evident in both the richness and the strength she brings to this work. The writing is solid and clear, and the text, for all practical purposes, is free from errors. In keeping with the high quality of its contents, this book is beautifully designed, right down to its gold and red endpapers.

This review has emphasized the scholarly aspects of this book, but one should not neglect its entertainment value. The stories themselves can continue to delight young and old alike from almost any culture. They are accompanied and enhanced by striking, attractive block print style black-and-white illustrations by Juneau artist Dale DeArmond, whose work is well-known to Alaskans. Although a part of me wished a Dena artist could have been found to illustrate this particular book, the artistic and imaginative quality of

DeArmond's work is undeniable. De Laguna and DeArmond have agreed to donate 20% of the book's royalties to the Doyon Foundation, a Native organization based in Fairbanks that provides scholarships for Athabaskan young people and promotes the preservation of Dena heritage.

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ANCIENT PEOPLE OF THE ARCTIC. By ROBERT MCGHEE. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press in association with the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996. xii + 244 p., maps, b&w illus. and colour plates, note on sources, index. Hardbound. Cdn\$35.95.

In this book, archaeologist Robert McGhee recounts the story of the first humans to live in the Canadian Arctic. These people, known today as Palaeo-Eskimos, entered that region from the west some 4000 years ago. They developed a remarkable way of life, which allowed them to survive in a truly daunting environment for some 3000 years. McGhee draws upon the results of over 70 years of archaeological research to present a vivid picture of that way of life, the dramatic changes it went through, and the reasons for its