BUCKOVÁ, Martina. Māui: Polynesian Culture Hero. Variations of Motifs in Māui's Mythological Cycle in East and West Polynesia. Studia Orientalia Monographica. Volume 3. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2012. 105 p. ISBN 978-80-89607-06-8.

This monograph by Martina Buckova presents Māui as a Polynesian culture hero. The phenomenon of culture hero can be noticed in most ancient myths in many civilizations. The culture hero is a mythological being which teaches people to use tools, gives them fire and acts as a mediator between the deities and the human world. The culture hero is often divine or half-divine in origin, as is Prometheus in Ancient Greece. Sometimes the culture hero bears the features of an animal (e.g. in Native American mythologies) or is described as an ancestor of the tribe, having a strong position in various mythologies around the world.

The culture hero as a phenomenon is presented in the introduction to this study, where the author compares the culture heroes of different cultures around the world. Here she specifies some common features, such as the culture hero's origin and personality, which is often that of a trickster who is trying to deceive the gods with the purpose of helping humankind. Buckova mentions different concepts of the culture hero described by many scholars; she tries to find a common definition of the culture hero in a global context. The author here presents the culture hero Māui as he is known from the myths of Oceania. Although the legends of Māui are spread throughout Melanesia, Micronesia and the whole region of Oceania, here she focuses only on Polynesian myths, pointing out the common factors and the differences between the myths of West and East Polynesia.

In the second chapter the author shows us the dissemination of the Māui myths in Oceania, especially in Polynesia. According to earlier collectors of myths, Māui was the ancient ruler of the Polynesians in their pre-Polynesian homeland who led them to the Pacific islands. According to this theory, Māui could be the real navigator and ancestor whose features became more and more legendary over time: real facts became mixed with legends. Captain Cook was the first European who 'discovered' Māui, but he thought the culture hero was too fantastic to note in his journal. If a god is supposed to bear some supernatural powers, Māui could be rarely classified as such. He is often regarded as an ancestor, a hero. He is neither a primal god nor the child of primal gods; he usually appears in the third or fourth generations after the birth of the children of the primeval parents. It seems that he never created something from nothing, which means he is not the creator but the transformer. The author uses tables to summarize myths in a clear way. In the first table she points out the origin of Māui in the different islands of East and West Polynesia. Another interesting specific of Māui is the fact that he is usually described as an adolescent or young man, but never as an older man. In the second table the author mentions the dialectical variations of the name of Māui-tikitiki on different islands. The differences in the names are caused by the differences between the Hawaiian and the Maori languages. Nearly all variants of the Māui myths mention his origin. He is usually one of three to eight brothers, and as the hero in the tales of most myths he is generally the youngest child. His older brothers are usually described as "stupid", while Māui is the clever one. As is common in the myths of cultural heroes, the circumstances of his birth are always strange, difficult and unusual. In some myths

he was born as a premature baby who was abandoned by his parents and brought up by the gods. Then he returns to his family after growing up. The names of his parents vary in the mythologies in different islands: for example, in the Hawaiian chant his father is Akalana (sometimes Kanaloa), a god, and the name of his mother is Hina. In the version of the myth from the Cook Islands, his father is called Manuhifare and his mother is called Tongifare. The main difference between the Māui myths from East and West Polynesia is that the Māui myths from West Polynesia have been preserved only in fragments. Despite certain differences between the variations of myths, a relative homogeneity of the myths has been observed, which is admirable because of the large distances between the islands and the non-existence of writing.

In the third chapter, Māui as a Creator, the author presents Māui's extraordinary feats, which include fishing up the islands from the sea, lifting the skies from the earth, regulating the movement of the sun and bringing fire as a gift to human beings. This chapter is concerned with "fishing up island" myths. These myths recount stories in which Māui fished up an island. In the New Zealand version, Māui went fishing with his brothers; his brothers were not willing for him to accompany them, but Māui hid in their canoe. After starting to fish, Māui took out his magic hook and hauled up an island from the bottom of the sea which had the shape of a big fish. According to this version of the myth, the fish that Māui pulled up was the North Island of New Zealand. In the Marquesas Island version, in which only a fragment of the myth is preserved, Māui pulled the island of Toka Eva out of the sea. According to W. Gill, several of the Cook Islands were fished up by Māui when he went fishing with his brothers. The author here gives us sequences and citations of legends where fishing up islands is attributed to Māui. From this we can observe that the myth of fishing up islands from the sea is present in a number of versions in many places throughout East Polynesia. Almost all versions say that Māui's brothers did not want to take him with them because they were afraid of his unpredictability. In these legends Māui almost always uses an unusual hook for fishing and specific bait: sometimes it is his blood, his ear, a sacred bird or something else. This motif is not mentioned in the myths of West Polynesia, where fishing myths are connected with the god Tangaroa.

In the fourth chapter the motif of sky-lifting is presented. According to the author, the lifting of the sky is relatively rare in Polynesian myths and is not as widespread as the myths of fishing up land or snatching fire from heaven. In many Polynesian myths, sky-lifting is often attributed to the mythological being Ru, the god Tangaroa, a snake or an eel. Māui appears in the myths of West Polynesia as a hero who had lifted the sky; it can be assumed that originally he was the one who was considered the sky-lifter and that later on the myth was modified. There are slightly different versions of this myth in Hawaii, Samoa and Tonga. In some versions of East Polynesian myths, especially in Tahiti and the Cook Islands, the sky was lifted by Māui and Ru in cooperation.

In the fifth chapter the author describes the sun-snaring and day-lengthening myths. These kinds of myths appear often in North America and Africa. Unlike these mythologies, the motifs of the sun play a marginal role in Polynesia. Because of the unimportance of the sun in Polynesian mythology, the motif of snaring the sun appears mostly in East Polynesia; the only West Polynesian variants came from Samoa. According to these myths, the people were discontented because the sun was moving

too quickly in the sky. In the Marquesas Islands, Hawaii Islands and Samoa it is said that Māui was angry because the length of the day was too short to let tapa dry; in other areas they had no time to finish cooking. Māui, as a cultural hero, wanted to help people and catch the sun using a noose. He usually used plants to make the rope, but in some variants of the myth he used the hair of his mother, his fiancée or his sister. As the head was considered taboo in Polynesia, hair may have been strong enough to catch the sun. There are also some versions where he used a vine. After Māui caught the sun, he beat it until the sun made a promise that it would move slowly in the sky.

In the sixth chapter, there is one of the most important myths: the myth of Māui as the fire-giver. Myths about the origin of fire are described in the most detail and are the most widespread in Polynesia. The role of the cultural hero as a fire-giver is one of the most important in a number of regions in the world. We can find the same kind of myth: the most famous in our region is probably the myth of Prometheus. Māui is one of the cultural heroes known as "the donor of fire". In the most well-known stories, Māui taught people how to make fire, which he obtained from his grandmother, the goddess Mahuika, who he visited in the underworld. The richest and the most complex version of this story come from New Zealand. One of the typical features of Māui can be observed from this version – no matter how useful his actions were to the people, he was ultimately the trickster after his grandmother pulled her nails out in order to produce fire and give it to him. Māui would put the fire out, return and ask for more. After Mahuika had pulled the nails out of both hands and feet and had only one nail left, she realized that Māui had been playing tricks on her and became angry, letting the last fire follow and punish Māui for his tricks. It is interesting that, according to the myth, people had fire before Māui brought it to them, but Māui had extinguished it. He had obtained fire from the underworld, from a god or goddess; in this case it was his grandmother, which had stressed his divine origin.

The motif of Māui tricking gods not necessarily in order to obtain fire but just to play around appears in a Tahitian fragment of the fire-giving myth recorded by W. D. Westervelt. Although this story is short, it contains a typical feature of this myth: a bad reward for the precious gift of fire. The motif of Māui the trickster can be observed in a number of fire-making myths. In some versions of the myth, fire spreads throughout in the trees; fire in Polynesian myths was to be obtained by rubbing dry wooden sticks for a long time. There are some common features in various versions of this myth, but there can be found some stories of acquiring fire which are different. In the Hawaiian story Māui learned how to make fire from a bird, the curly-tailed Alae (mud hen). Alae did not want to reveal the secret of fire-making to human beings so Māui tricked them. He was fishing nearby with his brothers and the bird counted the number of people in the canoe. However, Māui made a human-like figurine from leaves, which allowed him to secretly observe how fire was made. Māui was discovered and became angry, almost killing the bird for keeping its secret. After he had promised to spare the bird's life in exchange for obtaining the secret of fire-making, the bird finally taught him how to make fire from wooden sticks. Afterwards, although he kept his promise to not kill Alae, he rubbed the feathers out of its head. We have to note that in Hawaiian myths, stealing fire is often connected with birds marked by red or black spots. This could be due to the fact that in the minds of Hawaiians fire is closely connected with pieces of lava coming

from a volcano. However, the way of obtaining fire is the same as in other Polynesian myths; it is found in the trees and forest. It is interesting that in Hawaiian myths it lacks the motif of the underworld: there is only Māui's name mentioned. In the myths, Māui's mother is often the guardian of the path to the underworld. They stressed the divine origin of Māui, who is often in some kind of relationship with the fire-guardian. This chapter also contains a table clearly showing the common features and differences between fire-seeking myths in Polynesia and the role Māui played in them. When looking at the table, we can notice the fact that the deity possessing fire often met a bad fate.

In the seventh chapter there is the death of Māui. As the author mentioned in the second chapter, one of the typical features of Māui is also his death. This myth appears in Polynesia only in New Zealand; it is missing in the other islands of Polynesia except for Tahiti, where the incident is not related to Māui. This is interesting as this myth can be observed in Melanesia. According to the myths, Maui died when he attempted to obtain immortality for mankind. According to the traditions of the Maori, Māui tried to pass through the goddess of death, Hine-nui-te-po, and he wanted to kill her. If he had succeeded, human beings would not die anymore: death itself would have been destroyed. The myth of the attempt to get immortality is one of the most remarkable myths in the world. This feature of Māui makes him unique in the world context of cultural heroes, as no other well-known cultural heroes had loved people so much that they would try to save them from death. In some versions of the myth, it is the moon which was responsible for human death. Māui tried to get Hina, the moon, to let people be born again after a very short death, but the moon refused. In this kind of tale, there is a frequent wish to let people be like the snake, which sheds its skin and is renewed again. According to R. B. Dixon, the fact why this myth appears in Melanesia and Indonesia and not anywhere in Polynesia except for New Zealand is difficult to explain unless this is on the grounds of them being overlooked or not recorded.

In conclusion it is shown that Polynesia is a region with a specific and relatively homogenous religious and mythological system. Mythology is a very important part of studying the culture of Polynesia; beside archaeological finds, which prove the existence of Polynesian culture since at least 500 BC, studying Polynesian religion requires the exploration of myths. It cannot depend only on archaeological research. The author point out this problem is caused by the fact that the indigenous religious ideas of Polynesian culture had been replaced by the Christian religion in the first half of the 19th century. Despite this, it can be seen that the Māui myths are very popular across all of Polynesia except for Easter Island, which may be due to the death of the original culture there because of attacks by Peruvian pirates in the 19th century. The culture hero is almost always called Māui with some modifications, as is shown in Table 2 in the second chapter. The most common name is Māui-tikitiki. There are some variations in the names of his parents. Māui is usually considered to be a demigod in these myths; he is the standing on the border between the sacral and profane. Although he is regarded as a very positive figure, he also has some malicious features. In most of the Polynesian islands, he is connected with Hina, another mythological being, who is often his sister and sometimes his wife. In most variants of the myth he is considered to be the creator of islands and the fire-giver. In the myths from New Zealand we can find

the motif of an unsuccessful attempt to gain immortality. In seeking immortality, Māui is in some way similar to Gilgamesh, but he had attempted to find immortality for the whole of mankind, which makes him special in the world's myths.

This study by Martina Buckova gives us a close look into the mythology of Polynesia. The topic chosen by her, Māui as a culture hero, is a great contribution to studies of mythology not only in the region of Polynesia but also on a world scale. Māui is compared with Prometheus. As is shown, Māui certainly has some common features with this famous Greek hero and this is the first such study concerning this topic. The book provides a number of tables illustrating the situation in Māui's myths, which lets the reader clearly compare the common features and differences between myths in various islands and the bibliography before the text. The long citations of recorded myths from different sources form another strong point of the study as the variants of myths can be easily compared and enjoyed by readers.

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