

Book Reviews

One Father, One Blood: Descent and Group Structure among the Melpa People. Andrew Strathern. £3.80.
London: Tavistock Publications, 1972

This is a technical work dealing with a technical argument. Let alone not being a book for beginners, it is not even one for more advanced students who are unfamiliar with the discussion to which it contributes. Even as a straight ethnography the work barely stands alone and, as the author admits, it really needs to be read in conjunction with his earlier volume, The Rope of Moka (Cambridge: 1971).

In this present work Andrew Strathern continues his account of the Melpa-speaking people who live near Mount Hagen in the New Guinea Highlands. On this occasion he has chosen to concentrate on the internal constitution and composition of these people, taking as his example of them the Kawelka tribe. A start is made with an examination of the local idioms and ideology of kinship relations, and in this first chapter the title of the book is explained. It is an expression of the opposition between patrilineal descent (one father) and cognatic ties (one blood - this substance being regarded as derived from the mother). In the second chapter is revealed the discrepancy between ideology and the actual composition of groups among the Kawelka, and after that are considered certain factors which influence and help explain this discrepancy; the settlement pattern and co-residence (Chapter 3) and warfare which is now mainly a thing of the past (Chapter 4). In Chapters 5 and 6 are considered respectively actual case histories of affiliation and choice in selecting group membership. In Chapter 7 the question of whether members of clan-groups who are non-agnates suffer from lower status than full agnates is discussed, and it is concluded that these categories are too gross to be useful since individual examples indicate a variety of complications and qualifications which cannot be explained in terms of descent. In the final chapter Strathern reviews the main concepts which he and other New Guinea ethnographers have employed and suggests certain further lines of advance in the study of Highland societies.

Andrew Strathern has once again exhibited his great knowledge of the area. The book is a substantial addition to New Guinea ethnography and is essential reading for all those concerned with the area. For those not so interested in the area the book may appear dull and difficult, and a bit of localised anthropological in-fighting (of a rather genteel sort). The only more general problem that is raised relates to the question put forward by J. A. Barnes in 1962 as to whether or not models derived from the study of acephalous African societies with corporate lineage structures are applicable to New Guinea Highland societies. That in some features they are, that in others they are not is barely surprising. As an outsider (in the sense that I am certainly no specialist in the area) I would like to stick my neck out and suggest that someone should look very hard and make certain that the most enormous red herring has not been drawn across New Guinea.

An Introduction to Social Anthropology. Lucy Mair, 1972.
Second edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
£2.00 hardback; £1 paperback.

Lucy Mair, who taught for many years at the L.S.E., has reissued her introductory book, first published in 1965. She claims to have extended the discussion of aspects of social anthropology which are receiving more attention today than they were five years ago! But this second edition does not read like a modern introduction to a discipline that has changed considerably in that period. Her view of the subject as a branch of sociology certainly no longer commands universal assent and what she regards as 'Some Matters of Current Discussion' (the comparative method, anthropology as history or science, 'function') may have been important a decade ago but are simply no longer the crucial areas of debate. She speaks of Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's theories as 'so much a part of the body or thought of contemporary anthropology that they are better dealt with in the context of current problems'. In departments less important than that with which she is associated teaching surely no longer reflects this. The last three chapters on the 'Related Subjects' of social change, applied anthropology and race relations look decidedly odd.

There are two chapters on religion, but we miss a section on that area called 'symbolism' or 'classification' in which much of the most exciting recent work has been done. This book belies a recent statement that Lévi-Strauss' vision 'imposes itself as the inevitable landscape', a man whose work in different fields has been so largely responsible for most of the important recent developments. And of kinship, law and economics, she makes the amazing statement that these differ from religion because the latter 'is concerned with systems of belief as well as systems of relationship and action'. On kinship in particular, that technical area in which some of the biggest issues have of late been fought out, Mair provides no real indication of any of the chief ways in which progress has been made since 1960. There is no adequate discussion of 'alliance' theory and she seems to have no greater idea than Fortes or Radcliffe-Brown of the nature of the dissent involved in the work of Dumont, Leach and Needham. Leach did not simply 'comment' on Fortes' work, as she puts it!

There are 'suggestions for reading' at the end of each chapter. And here whole ranges of that literature which has produced the changes of our discipline in recent years is missing. Thus, after the chapter entitled 'What is Religion?' there are no references to works written in the last decade, and after that on 'Law', of the nineteen items recommended, only two have been published since 1960. In a work intended for consumption by those beginning their study of anthropology, this is astonishing.

Some have expressed the view that a textbook of our subject is not possible. This is certainly true in view of the magnitude of recent changes, and the existence of deep differences of opinion. And Mair has merely 'tinkered' with rather than thoroughly revised a book written nearly a decade ago. Some of the changes in this time have virtually given anthropology a new identity and by the nature of her treatment and omissions, Mair seems to indicate that an intelligent consideration of this newer anthropology is not of

great importance. She, perhaps the most loyal to Malinowski of a generation, few of whom were really rebels, seems to have deliberately excluded from her book any remark on the significance of these developments. (But strangely enough she agrees with the opinion of a reviewer who claimed that Jarvie, the author of The Revolution in Anthropology, trained at the L.S.E., was not fully aware of the developments in theory since Malinowski's time. Mair herself seems to regard these developments merely as 'refinements', but this in many cases is a real misperception.)

This book reads like a summation of the achievements of Malinowski's pupils, in many ways. And, no doubt, such a tribute is fitting, for (if I may borrow from Matthew Arnold) he was our talented and energetic protestant, our 'philistine of genius'. We will do well to remember that there were two aspects to the man. The trouble has been perhaps that his followers did not dissent sufficiently, and possessed, in some cases, only one of his qualities. There has been a surfeit of 'Hebraism' which has impaired our growth, and no text book issued now should ignore, as Mair's does, the 'Hellenism' which has transformed major areas of the subject. It has not been possible to dispel the dim consensus and redress the imbalance by spreading both sweetness and light. But it ought to be remembered, too, that: 'He most honours my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher' (Whitman).

Malcolm Crick