

Legends of Icelandic Magicians, translated and edited by Jacqueline Simpson, with an introduction by B.S. Benedikz. D.S. Brewer Ltd and Rowman and Littlefield for The Folklore Society, Cambridge, 1975.

It is unfortunate that one should feel it necessary to explain why a book published for The Folklore Society might be interesting to anthropologists. I shall only cite Levi-Strauss's observation that

the study of folklore is undoubtedly connected, either by its subject or by its methods (and probably by both at once), to anthropology. Certain countries, particularly the Scandinavian ones, seem to prefer to treat folklore as a comparatively distinct branch of study. ... They have thus proceeded from the particular to the general, while in France, for instance, the situation has been reversed. ... The best situation is probably that in which both points of view have been adopted and developed simultaneously (1972:360).

Simpson's excellent translations of Icelandic folktales (Þjóðsögur) offer to anthropologists an easily accessible source which preserves the structure and terms of the original text as much as possible. Not only are these tales presented in perfectly readable English, but Simpson has taken care to see that her rendition is grammatically parallel to the Icelandic texts. This is no easy task as is made apparent in the lower quality of the translation by Benedikz ('Loftur the Magician') which is included in this selection. Together with Simpson's book, Icelandic Folktales and Legends (1973), these translations of Icelandic folktales (Þjóðsögur) are easily the most reliable that have yet appeared.

The majority of the pieces are taken from Jon Arnason's collection of tales about individual magicians (einstakir galdramenn), although two tales are from Olafur Davíðsson's Þjóðsögur (1945) and three were contributed by Benedikz. The sources range in time from a c. 1700 manuscript to Benedikz's own contributions which were told to him in the 1930's. Thus we are presented with a record of 200 years of tales about these magicians, the majority of whom lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although the greatest of them all, Sigmundur the Wise, lived from 1056-1133. Simpson has translated Jon Arnason's notes and the sources he cited for the tales, supplementing these notes with her own comments on the motifs which appear. Her notes provide an excellent guide to further readings on the subject, both in English and in Icelandic.

Given the value of this material and the quality of Simpson's translations, it is unfortunate that Benedikz's essay should serve as an introduction. The superficial historical background which he provides for the people described in the tales can hardly compensate for the value laden comments and unverifiable generalizations which he makes; an introduction of this sort can only serve to devalue the book as a whole.

Benedikz's classification of this material into tales about black, white or grey magicians, which Simpson uses in her notes, is also at fault. Of the eight people described in the tales, Benedikz states that four are 'white magicians'; two are 'black magicians'; one is 'grey'; and one, the only woman, is unclassified.

Color or shade classifications still make an anthropologist's ears prick up, but our first criticism is that Benedikz's system of classification is not exhaustive, since one person remains unclassified. Secondly, although this appears to be a trinary classification, Benedikz later lumps the one 'grey magician' in with the 'white magicians' in opposition to the 'black magicians'. If this can be done so easily, we must ask what is accomplished by having a 'grey' category at all.

It should be taken as an index of Simpson's care as a translator, that we can use her versions to investigate this problem further, even though she uses

Millenium and Charisma among the Pathans: a Critical Essay in Social Anthropology. by Akbar S. Ahmed. (Routledge and Kegan Paul).

Mr. Ahmed's book is the most important case study to have appeared in the past twenty years. I should qualify this by adding that its significance derives from the current influence on political anthropology of a hallowed charter - Frederic Barth's study of leadership in Swat. This elegant analysis pioneered and stimulated two critical developments which mark the emergence of our discipline as a science: the relevance of transactionalist models, even for the analysis of our traditional subjects - acephalous, tribal societies; and the need for ethnography to serve theoretical experimentation, specifically in providing data for clear-cut models of behaviour, rather than simply documenting cultural structure. But this charter, upon whose methodology so much of the very best recent work has been built, now appears to be effectively challenged.

In his theoretical approach Mr. Ahmed clearly borrows much from the earlier, and more ideological, critique of his compatriot, Talal Asad. But with practical experience of tribal politics in this his native area, he is in a position to document his re-analysis with some much needed hard fact. Predictably as an 'outsider', writing this in the middle of an introductory course at SOAS, Mr. Ahmed is weakest when dealing with pure theory. There is some unnecessary jargon, particularly in the introductory chapter - a crash course in current models, which makes one wonder at times to what extent he has tongue in cheek. More serious, perhaps, are some occasional misuses of specific methodological terms (e.g. holism) in describing generalised social phenomena, again following an unfortunate trend. These are very minor, largely stylistic, faults. Readers should not be distracted from an otherwise brilliantly constructed case.

Mr. Ahmed's main point is that Barth's analysis, while revealing important principles of political behaviour in Pathan tribal areas, is misapplied. For Swat is neither tribal nor acephalous. It is an anomaly in this region: a centralised State. In denying the importance of this framework, and of its all-powerful apex, the Wali, Professor Barth was forced into a curious 'ethnographic present'. The critical contracts of his 'independent' Khans over their tenants relate to an institution (the wesh reallocation system) which was possibly defunct in most areas even at the time of its abolition by the Wali, one generation before Barth arrived on the scene. Tied tenants can have title choice as to their overlord. Similarly, many of the crucial cases cited by Barth in support of his argument relate to quite different periods, between which, as is well illustrated here, the structure of power relations was being radically transformed as the role of the Wali developed and expanded its influence. Besides such instances of temporal confusion (and Mr. Ahmed shows us that they apply to most of the important institutions described there) there is a curious spatial confusion which many may have missed until now: Barth's focal description of Alliances and Political Blocs (Ch. 9) relates to an area outside that circumscribed for the rest of his analysis. It is not in Swat at all, but in tribal Malakand.

This book therefore corrects many inaccuracies and misrepresentations which have, unfortunately, been propagated by others referring to this classic material in their own work. But Mr. Ahmed makes important analytical contributions of his own. He gives us a survey (in itself, a model of how long-term 'models of process' can be effectively used) of the structural transformation of Swat during the last century, showing how the religious ideal of the State conceived by the Saintly Akhund was employed, as was his charisma, by increasingly worldly-oriented successors, eager to legitimate their despotism. This turns out to be a much more fruitful application of Weberology in Swat. The Khans, after a short and treacherous

struggle, are shown to have been reduced to almost total impotency as far as the games of real decision were concerned: they became mere political 'brokers' between Wali and tenant. This part of the book, linking up what was going on in Swat with contemporary chiliastic movements, reacting to the colonial situation within Islam elsewhere, is just as important as the earlier critique. Sociologically-oriented accounts of both these movements and of the emergence of Islamic states in this area have hardly been touched upon, even by historians. In the course of his account Mr. Ahmed also provides us with a new analysis of Islamic religious categories, sensibly dismantling those all-embracing 'Saints' and refining the role-dichotomies formulated by Gellner ('rural-informal' v. 'orthodox-formal'). And he even indulges in an anthropological exploration of that most elusive ideology - Sufism. I am not entirely convinced by his typologizing (we have yet more - Pathan - labels for those ancient centralised-decentralised polarities) but it should stimulate other scholars in this area to look at these constructs more critically.

My initial suspicions in reading this book were that Ahmed, like Barth, emphasises only one field of the complex arena of Swat political life: the apparatus of state. His would be a 'Wali's-eye view' to complement (as Ernest Gellner expresses it in his preface) the 'Khan's-eye view' of Barth. Indeed I still feel that more space could have been given to an examination of some of the material issues that the Khans were fighting over amongst themselves; for they are the primary leaders, however small their initiative, which Barth explicitly defined as the focus for his analysis (note the change of title from doctoral thesis to monograph). Perhaps space could have been taken away from some of those cross-cultural comparisons (of states and of Sufic leadership) which are more tangential to the argument. But I have been in the position of being able to check upon these impressions by visiting Swat and talking to its Khans and I find confirmation for every major point of his critique and for his own re-analysis.

Mr. Ahmed's account of Swat approximates to social reality, as far as any man can judge it. Professor Barth's can, at best, be construed as an unintentional misrepresentation of that reality. I must state that Mr. Ahmed himself, although he must have had access to much more inside information, faces Barth squarely on his own ground and with his own (Barth's) data. Future 'native scholars' may not be so genteel; and their replications may more ruthlessly undermine our reputations: our right to impose startling models that distort the reality of their social life, however forgivable in terms of our professional needs.

My disenchantment with a mentor, to whom I still feel greatly indebted theoretically, will be shared by many others reading this book. I think we must now consider a return to the less lucid but more exact ethnography of the past, at least before we dare apply such refined and sophisticated analytical methods. This we may expect from Mr. Ahmed himself, now conducting field-work among the tribal Mohmand Pathans: a comprehensive study of a type of social organisation about which much is known but very little understood. Others will be angered by the arrogance of this attack on our classic. Up here, in the neighbouring hills of Chitral, I relish the controversy that must follow.

Peter Parkes.

Society and Culture in Early Modern France

Natalie Zeman Davis Duckworth 362 pp £9.80

In the eight essays in this book Professor Davis ranges from the economic and religious aims of Lyon printers in the 1560's to proverb collections in England and France over four centuries. The essays are united, however, by a concentration on "the lives of the 'modest'" - the peasants, the artisans, and the meupeuple of the cities. These are people who have left little direct evidence for the historian. Professor Davis seeks to overcome this by asking new questions of the existing, indirect evidence. To do so she has moved outside her discipline to make use of the works of sociologists, of literary critics, of linguists and, above all, of anthropologists.

The study of popular culture is only feasible when the possibility of its autonomy is recognised. What for the anthropologist is a presupposition serves as a vital tool of analysis for the historian. Professor Davis occasionally retreats without explanation to the law, to religious writers and to philosophers, but in general she upholds the integrity of her subject matter. She also sees that the values of a group may be articulated by means other than writing: "It was... a matter of recognizing that forms of associational life and collective behaviour... could be 'read' as fruitfully as a diary, a political tract, a sermon or a body of laws",

The result is a fascinating book that both manifests and advances the useful rapprochement between anthropology and history. Where historians have previously found chaos and irrelevance Professor Davis discovers order and sense; in the 'mindless' butchery of religious riots she finds attempts to redraw the boundary between the sacred and the profane; in the 'wildness' of popular festivals she detects "a rule and a rationale" in close touch with social reality. She goes beyond previous historical studies which have stressed the conservative nature of popular recreations, to show that they "can act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to the existing order". She also notes "the social creativity of the so-called inarticulate... the way in which they seize upon older social forms and change them to fit their needs". Ritual and ceremony is not opposed to political action as conservatism to radicalism; they are inextricably mixed.

There is much here for the historian, but there is also much for the anthropologist. Two essays concern the position of women; two examine the relationship between religion and economic change; one takes up anthropological work on literacy in the context of sixteenth century western Europe; and one deals with the study of 'man' in Europe and further afield. The book as a whole bears interesting relation to the Ardeners' work on 'muted groups' (though the two essays on women deal mainly with their representation in ceremony and in religious thought).

Anthropologists have been reluctant to see the history of Western Europe as a valid area of operations. This may be a function of a purely administrative division and of the intellectual debate which has enshrined it. The consequences have been unfortunate. Historians have looked to anthropology for coherent theories that they can treat as definitive guides to their own subject matter. Yet such theories only seem coherent when they become fossilized in the history of the subject. Professor Davis does not entirely avoid this. Her use of the language of functionalism is indiscriminate and sometimes misleading, and at one point she implies too ready a faith in the power of anthropological theory: "I left the works of historians with their literary or political bias, and went to those of the anthropologists".

It may be more advantageous to see history as a context for the social sciences rather than as a separate science in itself. Both by its considerable merits and by its occasional limitations, Professor Davis' book is an encouragement to anthropologists to do just this.

Roger Rouse

Books Received.

Human Ecology and the Development of Settlements. ed. J. Owen Jones and Paul Rogers. Plenum Press, New York. 1976. xii, 146 pp. \$23.40.

Music in the Culture of Northern Afghanistan. Mark Slobin. Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 54. Wenner-Gren Foundation. 1976. xiv. 297 pp. \$8.95.

Do Applied Anthropologists Apply Anthropology? ed. Michael V. Angrosino. Univ. of Georgia Press. 1976. vii, 136 pp. \$4.50.

Amazon Town. A Study of Man in the Tropics. Charles Wagley. O.U.P. 1976. xix, 336 pp. £2.75.

War in Ecological Perspective. Andrew P. Vayda. Plenum Press, New York. 1976. xiv, 129 pp.