

# HABITAT, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

A Geographical Introduction to Ethnology

c. Daryll forde



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# This paperback edition of

#### "HABITAT, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY"

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### PREFACE

HIS book is intended as an introduction to the ethnography and human geography of non-European peoples. It deals with the economic and social life of a number of groups at diverse levels of cultural achievement and in different regions of the world, and with the rise of new crafts and organizations in the growth of civilization. An attempt has been made to write it in a manner free from unnecessary technicalities suitable both for the more general reader and for study in the later school and earlier university years. Broad facts and generalizations about 'peoples in many lands' are quite often taught to young children, but the specialization of later studies has tended to exclude any further consideration of the subject. While the development of geography as a school and university subject has sometimes involved cursory attention to the races of man and the life of 'primitive' peoples, some general knowledge of ethnology and sociology, and even of the great epochs in the growth of civilization have not become the requisites of a liberal education. The main body of anthropological thought has been neglected as being a specialist discipline.

This has had unfortunate consequences. The student both in school and at the university has as a rule acquired any knowledge of the broader facts and problems of human civilization only in connexion with the adaptations of the more complex civilizations to their present physical environment, while those made by simpler societies and the relation of such adaptation to other cultural processes have been largely ignored. This has tended to produce an unbalanced view, not necessarily because physical conditions have been declared to be of paramount importance, but simply because other factors have remained unknown or but vaguely apprehended.

University teaching in anthropology which should correct this bias has indeed begun to develop in recent years, but it has so far played relatively little part in undergraduate studies, and the results of new developments in theory and of investigations in the field do not pass beyond the research seminars and the reports of learned societies and institutions. It is hoped therefore that this book may be of value not only to the professed student, but to all who are interested in the rich diversity of human efforts for economic and social satisfaction in cultures foreign to the modern Western world.

The method here adopted is as far as possible inductive. By the description and analysis of a number of different peoples a body of relevant information is built up which, it is hoped, will create interest and focus attention on the major problems which arise. In the last part of the book some of these problems are dealt with and, by reference back to the peoples studied, an attempt has been made to achieve the

objectivity necessary in an introductory study.

From the ethnological point of view the studies are incomplete in so far as they concentrate on economic life and fail to deal, except incidentally and by allusion, with the religious and ceremonial life of the peoples concerned. This omission has been deliberately made and for several reasons. In the first place I have written for those with little or no previous knowledge of ethnology, to whom brief summaries of ritual and belief would, apart from a lengthy critique, have little meaning. Further, my object has been to deal with the broad features of economic pattern and to consider their relation to physical environment, to social organization and to major factors in the growth of civilization. Nearly all the fundamental cultural processes may be exhibited in this way, and the inclusion of esoteric material, while considerably increasing the length of the individual studies and distracting attention from the general theme, would not have contributed substantially to the main purpose. Moreover, religion and ritual may frequently have little genetic relation to the broad elements of economic and social life. In any living culture, it is true, the two categories are inevitably interwoven and so are intimately related in daily life. Belief and ceremonial are adapted to, and sometimes turned into new channels of development by economic and political stimuli; and it is also clear, as will be seen, that religious concepts may deeply affect economic and social development and may limit or even prevent adaptations that are obviously possible. Nevertheless, the power of ceremonial, magical practices and fundamental religious attitudes to transgress economic and political boundaries on a large scale is, I believe, undeniable and the wide field of investigation that they afford cannot be considered here.

It may be thought that I might in a few instances have dealt with peoples who are less familiar as topics of general and popular ethnography. But the real significance of a people

is not, for our purpose, diminished by general familiarity, and I have endeavoured to consider aspects that are not usually emphasized in the general literature. Again it might appear that I have inconsequently passed over a people for whom we have modern and detailed studies in favour of another concerning whom our knowledge is less abundant and precise. This is, however, due to real difficulties: either, for instance, that adequate description and analysis would have involved discussions of special problems which could not adequately be dealt with within the framework of this survey, or at the particular stage of the book to which the people would relate, or again that the objective data on habitat, craft and economic life are really lacking, despite the size and modernity of the work.

Each chapter on a particular people has been made as self-contained as was consistent with the general aim of the book, but it has not been possible to write them all according to any uniform plan. I have attempted, rather, to emphasize salient characteristics, to concentrate on aspects of economic and social life that are well illustrated among a particular group, and above all to convey something of the special genius of a particular culture. A few of the studies are necessarily curtailed by the lack of detailed material, but these briefer sketches have been included because the people concerned are of considerable theoretical importance.

It is obvious that, apart from the few sections in which I have been able to rely to some extent on my own observations, I have been primarily dependent throughout on the field surveys and studies of others. While I have refrained from annotating the text, the sources of material and references to particular topics for each chapter will be found at the end of the book. These notes in each case express my great indebtedness to the workers concerned, several of whom have been kind enough to criticize my drafts. I wish for this and other valuable advice to thank in particular Professors A. L. Kroeber, R. H. Lowie, V. G. Childe, H. J. Fleure and E. G. R. Taylor; Drs. Clark Wissler, D. Jenness, W. Ivens, G. Slater and R. Olson; Sir Percy Sykes, Miss I. T. Kelly; and Messrs. J. H. Driberg and J. Hornell.

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C. DARYLL FORDE

ABERYSTWYTH
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## NOTE ON WORLD MAPS IN FIGURES I AND 2

It may be of use to explain the curious shape of the map graticules used for the World Maps, figures 1 and 2. In order to avoid the gross exaggeration of extra-tropical areas involved in the Mercator projection and of the distortions of shape produced in the Mollweide Equal Area projection, especially when the Pacific Ocean is to be shown in the centre of the map, I have drawn the two land hemispheres on separate Mollweide graticules. By interrupting that for the Old World in the southern hemisphere it has also been possible to show the greater part of Oceania without serious distortion of shape. My thanks are due to my colleague Mr. W. E. Whitehouse for help in preparing the graticules.

C. D. F.

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#### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

F an aboriginal Tasmanian family, miraculously surviving in the mountain forests and with no previous experience I of Europeans, could be induced to watch a cinema film of our everyday life they would doubtless regard it as an amazing. incomprehensible, and rather terrifying sight. We lived in a land very similar in its scenery and climate to their own island; but every morning, so far as they might understand, we left a cliff face by a small hole, entered hard and shiny houses which moved over the ground, went into another great cliff-house, and climbed inside to a small chamber into which light came from another hole covered by a slab of rock through which you could be seen. All day and all the week, it seemed. we took no steps whatever to obtain food except to ask for it in other large structures which were apparently full of nothing else. In the evenings, if it were summer, we played with other people, hitting a ball into marked squares across a net, or moved with peculiar gait round and round, each male embracing a female in a crowd of similarly embraced couples, while noises emerged from a square drum-like object which nobody manipulated to make it play. Yet the magical purpose of this ritual remained quite obscure. Our magical beliefs might be detected in visits to a man who tapped us all over and finally gave us a small white square which, when taken to another magician, was exchanged for a transparent box of magic fluid. All this time we gathered no fruits, had no personal stores of food, hunted no animals. From similar views of the countryside the Tasmanians would slowly understand that some of our fellows did produce food, but that their efforts were so amazingly prolific that the great mass of the people could live packed together in large settlements, occupying themselves all day long making all sorts of unnatural objects move, clang and clatter, despite an obvious freedom to sit about in some quiet spot to tell and hear stories, sing songs or gamble. If the scenes were various enough the natives would discover storytellers, gamblers and community singers, but for a long time many of our activities would seem incredible and meaningless.

Yet despite the wonders, absurdities and indecencies which they observed, they could have no doubts that our bodies were essentially like their own, and that we depended on food obtained from plants and animals, although we apparently had a magic which made the plants grow as abundantly as we wanted and the animals herd together as tame as dogs wherever we put them, ready to be slaughtered at will. They could see that tools were cunningly fashioned from trees and stones that were dug up from the ground: in a word, that we used the resources of the same earth as themselves, that we had regulations of conduct some of them similar to their own, and, like theirs, sometimes broken.

If then the same film were later shown to a Samoyed in North Siberia, a Melanesian, an East African negro, an Indian ryot in an isolated Deccan village, these people would, in roughly that order, recognize more and more in our way of life as similar to their own. The Samoyed would be amazed at the Tasmanian's ignorance of domestic herds, the Melanesian at the Samoyed's ignorance of agriculture, the East African at the Melanesian's lack of metal tools, the Indian at the East African's lack of carts and his failure to use his beasts for burden and plough.

Even to-day, when European practices are penetrating to the remotest corners of the continents, there still remain great contrasts in the basic economy of peoples in different lands; similarly, there is a wide range in the scale of their social grouping, from independent family groups to large confederacies of tribes and powerful states. Five hundred years ago, before the Great Age of Discovery opened, the relative isolation of these different ways of life was far greater, so that the records of travellers and explorers, from Marco Polo to Philby, have continually added to our knowledge of the varieties of human life, custom and belief. With the accumulation and comparison of ethnographical records we advance slowly towards a fuller understanding of the underlying factors and processes.

Attempts at such understanding and explanation are by no means modern. The very Tasmanians with whom we began would probably return with what we should call a rationalized account of our life, and would try to explain it to their fellows in terms of their own life and experience. Since ancient times records and opinions have accumulated, and various causes have been invoked as the reasons for the differences between the lives and customs of different groups of mankind. These fall into a few major groups of causes. Quite early a connexion was sought between the characters of men's bodies

and their social and economic life—in other words, race was thought to explain many differences, generally because the different races were believed to have different qualities of mind and temper, so that some lagged behind while others climbed a ladder of progress. But serious difficulties are encountered in any thoroughgoing racial explanation. People of apparently similar race have lived very different lives and vice versa; moreover, a single racial group has occupied a very different position in the social and economic scale at different times. At one period the leaders of civilization were of one race, at others of another.

Often in opposition to the racial explanation there has been explanation by the physical environment, that is, according to differences in climate and vegetation which lead men to one kind of activity, type of society, and even of religious belief in one region, and to different activities, social institutions and beliefs in other regions. Despite the intimate relation between human activities and the conditions and resources of the physical world, there are clear limits to this explanation, for in regions closely similar in relief, climate, and vegetation sharply contrasted types of human life are to be found. The Tasmanian who was so amazed and confounded by the pictures of our life occupied an island of closely similar climatic type; yet he would find far fewer puzzles in the life of collecting peoples in the heart of the equatorial jungle of Malaya despite the sharp contrasts with his cool Pacific home.

Other students have in consequence reacted against environmental explanation. They have pointed out that the tools and weapons, the ways of obtaining food, the ceremonies and beliefs of any one people are rarely their special property and were probably not first discovered or used by them, and that their environment only helped to decide whether they should or should not adopt a practice which had become known to them. Any given tool such as the poisoned arrow or, at a higher stage, the plough, is shared by many people and can be used under widely different physical conditions. Man can be divided into great groups according as these do, or do not, use certain tools. But the peoples who use the plough are not necessarily more intelligent than those who do not. They may merely have had an opportunity of learning how to make and use it from some other people. And although with a different set of tools or social customs one people may reach a far higher level than another group which is without them, it does not follow that the first people are of superior race or live in a better environment. In other words, knowledge has spread