Book Reviews

ROOTS FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

History and Social Anthropology

Edited by I. M. Lewis. Pp. xxviii+307. (Association of Social Anthropologists, Monograph 7.) (Tavistock: London and New York, August 1968.) 50*s*.

WHEN British social anthropology, particularly under the influence of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, rejected conjectural history as represented by unacceptable evolutionary and diffusionist theories of society, it also, by and large, turned its back on history proper. But more recently the question of the relation between history and anthropology has gained recognition, and in 1966 the annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists devoted its attention to considering what social anthropologists might gain from, and contribute to, historical studies. This volume contains the papers presented.

One should not expect to find in it brilliantly provocative assertions about the relation between anthropology and history in the manner of Evans-Pritchard, who has argued that anthropology should draw closer to history and vice versa, or of Lévi-Strauss, who has seen them as complementary disciplines, the former unfurling the range of human societies in space, the latter in time. In a persuasively written introduction, echoing some of Evans-Pritchard's ideas, the editor, I. M. Lewis, argues that the use of historical data permits the anthropologist, who normally studies a society for a short span of time, to practise his craft better: to look at institutions over time, and to delineate with greater accuracy structural processes, not only of a repetitive or cyclical kind, but also those pertaining to transformation and change. The editor is positive (with a greater show of confidence than I am capable of) that "history affords the social anthropologist a much neglected laboratory for testing the validity of structural assumptions and social mechanisms", and recommends the discarding of the traditional structural–functional frame of analysis for a more dynamic open-ended frame in which social positions and relationships can be seen as serving the interests of actors rather than as contributing to social solidarity.

The substantive essays in the volume are varied in content and style, and do not cohere around a central theme. They deal with an assortment of societies in Ancient Rome, Scotland, Albania and West and East Africa, at different periods of time.

Peter Morton-Williams writes about the Fulani penetration into Nupe and Yoruba in the nineteenth century. This account will be of interest to specialists of the area; it raises no significant general problem of theory or method. The same could be said of Edwin Ardener's intricate examination of the documents relating to the rise of trading polities between Rio del Rey and Cameroons, 1500–1650. When reading Martin Southwold's contribution one might ignore the opening sections (which give pedestrian answers to pretentious questions) and concentrate on his interesting unravelling, with the aid of historical data, of an anthropological puzzle, namely, the discrepancy between the stated rule of royal succession in Buganda and the actual pattern of succession for the period beginning circa 1500 and ending 1884.

The remaining essays can be placed in a single scheme of classification. Among them I would select two as the focal essays in the book, not only because of the historical scholarship which they contain, but also because their contents portray two different and rival interpretative schemes. The essays in question are R. E. Bradbury's on pre-colonial and colonial Benin politics (1897–1951) and E. R. Creegen's on the changing role of the House of Argyll in the Scottish Highlands. Bradbury is an anthropologist who exhibits historical competence; Creegen is a historian who benefits by his knowledge of anthropological concepts. Bradbury reveals continuities over time in Benin politics which stem from the persistence of pre-colonial concepts into the colonial period. Creegen, on the other hand, outlines the irreversible changes that took place in Highland society by virtue of its being drawn into the mainstream of modern life. The main agent of change was the House of Argyll, which went through an evolutionary process "beginning with power, ending with profit".

The same contrast appears in two other essays. Ian Whitaker's piece highlights the persisting role of tribal structure in the national politics of Albania, whereas Keith Hopkins applies the concept of "structural differentiation" to interpret linear transformations in Roman society (200–31 BC). P. C. Lloyd unites both themes and neatly employs equilibrium and conflict theories to describe both continuities and changes in the politics of Yoruba kingdoms: whereas the conflict between descent groups leads to no change in structural pattern, the conflict between the council of chiefs and the king does, leading to changes in the distribution of power.

Continuities and transformations of institutional structures in both space and time may well unite historians and anthropologists in a common inquiry. S. J. TAMBIAH

METAPHYSICS IN FLOWER

Seventeenth Century Metaphysics

An Examination of Some Main Concepts and Theories. By W. von Leyden. Pp. xvi+316. (Duckworth: London, November 1968.) 50*s*.

THE seventeenth century has always possessed a special place in the attention of philosophers, partly because of its individual distinction and partly because it carried the first major breakthrough to modern scientific thought. Such names as Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Hume give it an outstanding position, with Newton evolving the fundamentals of mechanics. All this is well known; what is not such common knowledge is the system of subtle connexions existing between advanced thinkers in Britain—such men as Berkeley, Bacon, and the Cambridge Platonists—and their opposite numbers in Europe. That is what Dr von Leyden's book is about, and a very clear, erudite work it is. England stood for *Nullius in Verba*, deeply engraved upon the "soul" of the Royal Society. We are reminded that abroad, the famous "cogito ergo sum" of Descartes was in itself a discovery, and not merely the prelude to a formal mathematical universe. But as a