

Book Reviews

AFRICAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Man in Africa

Edited by Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry. Pp. xxvii + 371 + 15 photographs. (Tavistock: London, May 1969.) 52s.

FESTSCHRIFTEN are such very uneasy productions that it is a question whether they ought really to be continued with. They honour a man, but only at his professional demise; or rather they are supposed to be testimony to such regard, but once they have become a convention it may be only the convention itself that they actually honour. Publishers do not like to bring them out, they are practically impossible to review, and usually they are too expensive for the ordinary reader to consider buying. Instead of furthering the values of scholarship and science, they tend to provoke dubiety about the forms and instruments by which these concerns are lauded, the panoply (flummery, some would call it) of processions and courses, academics giving each other bits of coloured silk and more letters to put after their names—all those social vanities, in short, which men of learning ought before most others (if this is not too austere a conception) best be prepared to do without. More embarrassingly, perhaps, the festschrift may have the contrariant effect of inducing the reader to enquire what indeed are the claims of the honorand to such a putative distinction—and how could any reviewer, for one, reasonably be expected publicly to pose or attempt to answer this sharp question?

The sensible course, therefore, might be simply to name the recipient, state the occasion, give the table of contents, and leave it at that; but while the convention persists there are literary conventions that go with it, and something more is called for. So: this volume marks the twenty-first anniversary of Professor Daryll Forde's election to the chair of anthropology at University College London. It is a relief that, in this instance, the recipient clearly qualifies for the presentation. Forde has rendered immense service to the advancement of African studies, and if (as the comparative lack of weight in his bibliography shows) his contribution has been preponderantly administrative, his colleagues certainly have no ground to be any the less grateful on that score. His scrupulous editorship of *Africa* and his efficient management of the International African Institute have increasingly secured a lead in opening up a whole continent of research.

The contributors to the collection are former students and past and present members of the Gower Street teaching staff. There is a biographical foreword by M. G. Smith (successor-elect to the chair), followed by nineteen essays. These are divided among five sections dealing successively with general topics, political economy, problems in kinship, the expression of values and enigmas of the past. There is a bibliography of Forde's writings, and the book is efficiently provided with an author index and a subject index. An excellent likeness forms a portrait frontispiece, and the maps, plates and figures are numerous and clear. The volume has been patently well edited, and the publishers deserve a special compliment for the very handsome format, down to the elegant and distinctive dust jacket.

The writers of the papers are in the main of more than

ordinary professional respectability, and none of their contributions is merely conventional or perfunctory, so that the book is well worth acquisition by any library with African interests. Some of the more interesting papers are: Maquet on the cultural continuities which override tribal and sociological distinctions; Mary Douglas on whether matriliney in Africa is doomed (she thinks it is not, and that all it needs for a full creative contribution to the twentieth century are conditions for steady economic growth); Turner on the symbolism of circumcision rites among the Ndembu and the Gisu; Vansina on the Bushong poison ordeal (horrifying, but a fascinating account of the sacrificial ritual of a legal institution); Middleton on Lugbara oracles and divination (a welcome continuation to his admirable ethnography on that people); and Jolly and Ueko on the riddle of the sphinx-monkey. Although the concentration is overwhelmingly on social anthropology and the ethnography of Africa, it is the sphinx paper which may well be found the most intriguing and convincing, as well as a most enjoyable piece of detective work.

A festschrift so well done as this almost carries the case for the convention that it embodies.

RODNEY NEEDHAM

BOG BURIALS

The Bog People

Iron-Age Man Preserved. By P. V. Glob. Translated from the Danish by Rupert Bruce-Mitford. Pp. 200 + 76 photographs. (Faber: London, June 1969.) 50s.

PROFESSOR GLOB sets out to describe, in a most attractive simple style, something of the nature and circumstances of the human burials of Iron Age date (approximately 500 BC-AD 500) which have turned up from time to time in the acid peat bogs of North-West Europe. More than seven hundred are known, mainly from Scandinavia and the North German plain, but some as far west as Ireland are mentioned. It is, however, largely the Danish and German burials which receive the greatest attention, for they are the best preserved and the most fully documented.

The book naturally begins with a consideration of the two best known examples, the famous Tollund man discovered by two startled peat-diggers in May 1950, and Grauballe man found under similar circumstances two years later, only eleven miles away. Both were extremely well preserved: not only were the facial characteristics perfect but even the fingerprints survived on their delicate work-free hands. Fortunately, the work of excavation, examination and preservation was in the hands of specialists and the result is a wealth of detailed information. The stomach contents, for example, showed that the last meal had been a vegetable gruel containing barley, linseed, knotweed and a number of other weeds of cultivation, in such quantities that deliberate selection is indicated rather than weed-infested fields. Tollund man's last meal had been taken twelve and twenty-four hours before death; Grauballe man, on the other hand, had been fed immediately before death on a similar concoction containing sixty-three different varieties of grain. Both men had met violent ends: Tollund man by hanging, Grauballe man by having his throat cut, perhaps after an initial stunning, which could account for his fractured skull. This fact and the vegetarian meals suggest that the Bog men may have been sacrificed as part of the mid-winter celebrations known to have been practised by the barbarians beyond the northern fringes of the Roman Empire, mid-winter because of the lack of autumn fruits or spring greenstuffs in the meal.

The second part of the book deals with the daily life of the contemporary community and finally with death and ritual. Here it must be said is the first (and only)