Book Reviews

Pul Eliya, A Village in Ceylon: A Study of Land Tenure and Kinship. E. R. Leach. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1961. 360 pp. Illus. $8.

Pul Eliya is a Sinhalese village with 146 inhabitants in the dry zone of North Central Province, Ceylon. With a wealth of concrete, illustrative material, Leach analyzes and describes the physical structure of the village, its family and kinship organization, its land tenure system (both traditional and nontraditional), and its organization of labor. Besides making an important contribution to the anthropology of Ceylon, he has produced a book notable for other reasons.

Some critics of anthropology object to intensive studies of little communities such as Pul Eliya, for they consider the studies devoid of practical value. Why try to learn all that detail about an obscure village? What we need are broad surveys which enable us to get the "big picture." There is a place, of course, for surveys. They determine the extent to which it is safe to generalize conclusions from studies like this one, and they provide a check on interpretations of functional relationships in the single case. Work in other Sinhalese villages will undoubtedly require some modification of Leach's understanding of what he observed in Pul Eliya. But no survey is worth anything unless intensive studies have been made first. In spite of all their trappings of quantitative rigor, surveys give precise answers only to the questions which investigators know to ask. Without the intensive studies to tell them what to ask, the information obtained from surveys has little to do with reality, no matter how carefully such information is collected. Thus Leach finds that most land legislation in Ceylon has been based on entirely erroneous conceptions of how the tenure systems in the villages actually work, misconceptions which previous surveys in no way dispelled. His explication of how land tenure works in Pul Eliya, in practice as well as in theory, and his account of the effects of misinformed government legislation effectively demonstrate the practical as well as the scientific value of intensive studies of single communities. *Pul Eliya* should be on the required reading list of all legislators and administrators who are concerned with the welfare of peasant communities.

Challenge to Radcliffe-Brown School

Of special interest to anthropologists is the challenge Leach offers to his fellow social anthropologists of the British or Radcliffe-Brown school. In Pul Eliya Leach found it impossible to work within their theoretical frame regarding corporate groups. He concludes that a social structure, in the prevailing social-anthropological sense of that term, "must necessarily be credited with the attributes of Deity. The anthropologist with his wealth of detailed knowledge of the behavioural facts claims an intuitive understanding of the jural system which holds these behaviours in control. When he writes his structural analysis, it is this private intuition which he describes rather than the empirical facts of the case. The logical procedures involved are precisely those of a theologian who purports to be able to delineate the attributes of God by resorting to the argument from design.

"Of course, it is all very elegant, but it is not a demonstration; the structuralist anthropologist, like the theologian, will only persuade those who already wish to believe" (pages 301–2).

Insofar as the structure of a community is an abstraction from the modalities of event and arrangement which characterize it as a relatively stable system, and insofar as this abstraction is then treated as a system of rules governing the conduct of its members, Leach is entirely right. That one of Britain's leading social anthropologists has come to this position is of great importance for the future of social anthropology.

But Leach's conclusion—"the group itself need have no rules; it may be simply a collection of individuals who derive their livelihood from a piece of territory laid out in a particular way" (page 300)—is one which he has not demonstrated, even for Pul Eliya, unless we assume that "rules" can refer only to the kind of abstraction which Leach rightly argues cannot be treated as if it were a rule of the society. But the recurring patterns of arrangements in a community from which rules are improperly abstracted, in the manner Leach deplores, may legitimately be viewed as the products of human decisions which are themselves made with reference to the mutual understandings that make events, both common and rare, intelligible to their participants. Leach has rightly thrown out the rules of the sociological structuralist, but if, as he says, "society is not a 'thing' " but "a way of ordering experience" (pages 304–5), then implicit in that ordering are principles or rules analogous to the phonological, morphological, and syntactic principles characterizing a language and without which speech could not be an orderly process. Although rules in this sense are also formulations of the anthropologist, their validity for the society for which they are specifically formulated can be tested against actual events in that society. Efforts to develop more sophisticated inductive procedures for formulating such rules are a legitimate and essential scientific endeavor.

Leach has taken a major step in developing his own theoretical orientation. It will have wide repercussions among those who call themselves, by preference, "social" anthropologists.

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World Prehistory. An outline. Grahame Clark. Cambridge University Press, Press, New York, 1961. xv + 284 pp. Illus. Paper, $2.45; cloth, $6.

In this volume Grahame Clark, one of the leading specialists in the prehistory of Europe and Disney professor of archaeology at the University of Cambridge, has undertaken a formidable task and has carried it off quite well. His aim is "to present a brief outline of man's prehistoric past, . . . to survey in barest outline the history of mankind from the first dawn of