

Book Reviews

Mother Right

Matrilineal Kinship. David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough, Eds. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961. xx + 761 pp. \$11.75.

Several generations of anthropologists have been curious about societies in which inheritance, succession, and affiliation to social groups are derived from one's mother and her kinsmen rather than from one's father. Today, such societies are generally called "matrilineal"; but they have often been misleadingly called "matriarchal," for where so many things acted oppositely from our familiar experience, it has been easy to imagine that leadership, authority, and decision-making might also be feminine prerogatives. As ethnologists have accumulated more data on these matrilineal societies from all around the world, the fantasy of genuine rule by women has been dispelled, but numerous other intriguing problems have arisen: What are the environmental, economic, and political conditions under which such systems can arise and survive? What are the implications for personal relationships among kinsmen, and how is authority allocated? Are there problems, inherent in matrilineal kinship, which might make it maladaptive under certain conditions? This book, an outgrowth of a seminar held in the summer of 1954 under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council, represents a full-scale attack on such problems.

The authors use four complementary methods, and thereby approach matrilineal kinship from most of the angles of modern social anthropology. In an outstanding introductory chapter, Schneider carefully defines matrilineal descent and then demonstrates that many distinctive features can be expected to follow logically from the defi-

nition. This is followed by descriptions of a series of matrilineal societies: Plateau Tonga (by Colson); Navaho (Aberle); Truk (Schneider); Trobriand (Fathauer); Ashanti (Basehart); and of several caste groups of Kerala India, including the fullest available description of the extreme kinship practices of the famous Nayar (Gough). These chapters are based, in varying proportions, upon the authors' own field investigations and upon the published reports of earlier ethnographers, and they constitute a series of elegant analyses.

Part two (by Gough) consists of a comparison of these and a half dozen other well-known matrilineal societies and a consideration of the variations among them and of how these variations are related to the complexities of economic and political organization. These two parts (which form the bulk of the book) use the method of intensive analysis of a small number of well-known societies. Part three (by Aberle) deals statistically with a much larger sample of societies. With this sample he attempts to test some of Schneider's theoretical predictions and some of the generalizations made by Gough on the basis of a more limited sample, but he also considers, in more detail than anywhere else in the book, the conditions which seem most conducive to the development of matrilineal systems.

The crux seems to be this: Matrilineal kin groups require, for their continuity, some control over both their male members (who are needed for leadership roles, since, as now seems apparent, men everywhere occupy the positions of primary authority) and over their female members (who are needed as mothers of new members). Close control over both men and women conflicts with the rule that marriage within the group should not occur. If the women of the group are kept together, then the male leaders are

dispersed, but if the men are kept together, the children of the group will be raised away from their descent group. Two or three societies insist on keeping both men and women of the descent group together; but this requires that husband and wife live separately, and in the best known case, that of the Nayar, this reduces marriage to little more than a sexual liaison.

These and many other problems are thoroughly explored. The book represents, I believe, the best of present-day social anthropology, and it will certainly influence the study of kinship systems for many decades to come.

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Invaluable but Provincial

Animal Ecology. S. Charles Kendeigh. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961. x + 468 pp. Illus. \$11.

Kendeigh has set himself the intrinsically unenviable task of treating his subject comprehensively. He has lightened it somewhat by only skirting theoretical, experimental, and methodological problems, but the description of animals in their natural environments, in all the contexts of ecology, is certainly no sinecure. Any one ecologist is perforce taxonomically specialized and geographically provincial. Inevitably therefore the critic can point to gaps that, depending on his predilections, will loom large or seem trivial to him. The author has assembled an impressive amount of information; his book is an invaluable reference. The bibliography and indexes are fully a quarter the length of the text and will be of real help.

The book's structure is conventional. Four introductory chapters are followed by a section describing freshwater and terrestrial animals in their habitats. This leads to extensive discussion of ecological and pertinent evolutionary processes (for example, competition, productivity, speciation). The final biogeographic portion orders organisms into biomes and delves into paleoecology. The text excels in literature coverage. Kendeigh has managed to submerge his special interests so well that, although detectable, they do not color his presentation unduly. Vertebrates and in-