

Book Reviews

On the Delineation of Social Change

The Evolution of Social Systems. Proceedings of a meeting, London. J. FRIEDMAN and M. J. ROWLANDS, Eds. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1978. xvi, 562 pp., illus. \$45.

In recent years theories purporting to explain the development of civilization have proliferated as part of an expanding anthropological interest in cultural evolution. In their diversity these theories resemble the proverbial blind men's efforts to describe an elephant. The editors of this collection of papers (presented to the fifth meeting of the Research Seminar on Archaeology and Related Subjects held at the Institute of Archaeology in London) are clearly dissatisfied with current trends in evolutionary studies, and their aim is to reorient them. Although it is claimed that various mutually incompatible approaches are represented, the book is much more unified than previous publications of the Research Seminar. Most of the papers appear to have been solicited to support either the editors' general views concerning social evolution or various aspects of their trial model of the development of civilization. In part, the book can be read as a critique of American evolutionary anthropology by archeologists and other social scientists sympathetic to French and British social anthropology.

Most of the contributors accept Emile Durkheim's maxim that social facts must be explained in social terms. Many criticize the American cultural materialist approach for stressing population growth or more general environmental adaptation as determinants of sociocultural evolution. Even multivariate models constructed in terms of systems theory that take account of a variety of social factors such as trade and warfare are seen as unable to account for the transition from one social form to another. The editors maintain that it is the integration of factors such as those mentioned above into actual social structures that determines the specific role each of them will play in a particular society. Such factors must therefore be accounted for in terms of dominant social relations rather than

as independent variables. Even the work of Robert McC. Adams and Kent Flannery, which the editors see as being closest in spirit to their own, is condemned for relying on nonsocietal factors as instrumental causes.

The editors subscribe to many of the ideas of French Marxist anthropologists, in particular those of Maurice Godelier (one of the contributors to the volume). Godelier maintains that under certain circumstances ideologies can function as part of the infrastructure of a society. He also denies that there can be any a priori determination of what aspects of a society influence the social relations of production. While many orthodox Marxists are hard pressed to understand how such views qualify as Marxist, they accord well with those of conventional social anthropology, which in recent decades has become increasingly interested in social change.

Hence instead of the deductive approach that dominates American archeology, with its emphasis on how a limited number of "prime movers" shape social change, we find in these essays sympathy for a more inductive approach. There is also considerable skepticism expressed about the degree to which one aspect of a cultural system can be determined by another. Functional integration and the primacy of the relations of production are seen as limiting variation within a society, but not as determining given structures, such as social life, kinship, or religion. Hence various aspects of a culture are believed to be structurally autonomous, in the sense that the properties of one level cannot be derived from those of another. Some papers reject the emic-etic distinction of American cultural materialists and stress the causal role of perceptions as agents of social change. This and the need to view social systems in relation to their external social environment are seen as increasing variation and further reducing predictability.

Most of the authors reject unilinear evolution and expect no more than to be able to predict the dominant forms of "social reproduction" at any one stage of a society's development on the basis

of knowledge of the properties of the preceding stage. The divergent and loosely determined aspects of cultural systems encourage distrust of general ethnographic parallels as a basis for interpreting archeological data and lead some authors to doubt that the term evolution is relevant to understanding cultural change. As Godelier puts it, "History does not consist in the development of an embryo" (p. 10).

In general, the authors of these papers seem prepared to accept and cope with a much greater degree of sociocultural variation than do their American counterparts. The main instruments of generalization are transformational models, which account for a variety of related or convergent social forms in terms of a single underlying structure. A specific type of transformational model is the editors' epigenetic one, which defines a specific trajectory of development assuming a fixed set of initial conditions. While the editors stress that the alteration of such conditions generates divergent developmental pathways, their tentative model of the development of civilization suggests that a basic structural uniformity is common to all "pristine" civilizations. The unilinearity of the model is further emphasized by the proposal of a pathway along which societies could evolve from Marx's Asiatic mode of production to his slave type.

The editors' stages are alleged to differ from traditional evolutionary ones because they deal with the structures of processes and not of institutions, a distinction that is not self-evident from the model. Each stage is conceived as a segment of a process of continuous development and transformation, dominated by a particular social form shaping material reproduction.

Friedman and Rowlands's model is complex and can be summarized only in part here. Pristine civilizations are postulated to develop from tribal systems composed of various patrilineages linked to a founding ancestor. In such a tribal system the lineage that can produce and distribute the most goods is credited with special supernatural powers as a result of having a more direct link with a supreme ancestor spirit and through it with the entire realm of the supernatural. High-status groups give brides to lower-status ones in exchange for a bride-price. This enhances the wealth of high-status groups and ranks kinship groups hierarchically for the whole society.

In particularly fertile regions, this tribal system gives rise to the "Asiatic state," a formation inspired by but not wholly congruent with Marx's Asiatic

mode of production. The Asiatic state is a relatively small-scale political unit consisting of a ceremonial center and smaller secondary centers (a two-tiered settlement pattern). The basis of the state is a conical clan whose head controls foreign trade, corvée labor, and the production and distribution of certain tools and sumptuary goods. Women now move in marriage from lower- to higher-ranking groups, and redistribution becomes increasingly asymmetrical. For reasons the universal applicability of which is not made entirely clear, there is increasing bilaterality and matrilocality in the kinship of the upper classes. Religious power constitutes the basis of political power, rich and poor sharing beliefs that support economic inequality, as Godelier argues such beliefs did among the Inca.

As society grows still more complex, the production of prestige goods increases in volume and importance and replaces ritual superiority and kinship ties as a basis of political control. Within royal houses, a split develops between sacred and secular offices, which is projected into a dualism of cosmological concepts.

Eventually, problems of maintaining monopolies over long-distance exchange result in secondary centers' being able to produce their own prestige goods. This leads to a breakdown of control hierarchies, increasing competition, and the emergence of territorial and city states. These are based on intensive irrigation and later on the production of high-value exchange goods. They are also characterized by urbanism and have political systems based on the control of accumulated wealth and external exchange rather than on genealogical status.

Friedman and Rowlands's model contains many familiar elements, such as conical clans and the notion of theocratic control long popular among American anthropologists. It draws attention to certain phenomena recurring in many early states, in particular matrilineal tendencies and dualistic principles. The latter parallels have generally been ignored since W. J. Perry tried to account for them in terms of his discredited hyper-diffusionist theories. Yet it is by no means established by Friedman and Rowlands, any more than it was by Perry, that these phenomena are anything more than fortuitous collections of unrelated developments. It is also by no means self-evident from comparative ethnology that their specific tribal system is inevitable as a basis for early civilization. The connections between the societal aspects of the model and the archaeological sequences they purport to

explain are so loose as to leave the model untested, a work of pseudohistory such as social anthropologists once rejected outright. However important a role social organization plays in explaining cultural change, any credible theory of the development of civilization must be framed far more than is the present one in terms of variables that are archaeologically testable. Moreover, while the model claims to account for how civilizations developed, it does not appear to explain why they did so, let alone why particular civilizations developed where and when they did. We know very little about the social, political, and religious functioning of even the best-documented phases of the early civilizations. Contrary to what Friedman and Rowlands (and many of the anthropologists they criticize) imply, a better understanding of the development of these civilizations may depend on first learning more about their synchronic organization.

I have long advocated that much can be learned about sociocultural change by examining how elements of culture relate to patterns of social interaction. I agree with Colin Renfrew (in this volume) that for many purposes the concept of society can profitably replace that of the archaeological culture. Yet in general it would appear that the concept of society is useful more for showing how change takes place than for accounting for why it does. The formulation of systematic theoretical frameworks has never been a strong point of social anthropology. The arguments advanced in this book do not convince me that the demo-techno-economic studies currently popular in American anthropology do not deal with "movers" that are worth studying in their own right. We must also take seriously W. Y. Adams's recent argument (in his *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, Princeton University Press, 1977) against the idea that a fixed relationship between society and culture necessarily can serve as a principle for understanding cultural history. A full understanding of sociocultural change may require integrating studies of various aspects of cultures within the context of a societal approach. This does not, however, endow the latter with explanatory priority.

Friedman and Rowlands caricature American neo-evolutionary anthropology (including the New Archeology) as being preoccupied with typologies of developmental stages rather than with producing explanatory models of the evolution of social systems. This is clearly a bit of academic mudslinging. It echoes Julian Steward's extraordinary claim that V. G. Childe sought only to deline-

ate universal stages rather than to determine the causes of cultural change (*Theory of Culture Change*, University of Illinois Press, 1955, p. 5).

This book contains a number of essays analyzing particular sequences of social change using ethnological or historical data. Each is of interest in its own right. R. A. Rappaport's essay maintains that the ultimate goal of any general system (such as a society) must be to ensure its survival. In spite of the distinguished natural science credentials of this view, Anne Whyte demurs, as presumably do many of the contributors to this volume (in particular the Marxists). These implicitly favor a more teleological view of social change. Although the other papers do not take up this argument, it is an issue that lies at the core of any discussion of social change.

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A Mesoamerican Culture

The Toltecs. Until the Fall of Tula. NIGEL DAVIES. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1977. xviii, 534 pp., illus. \$14.95. The Civilization of the American Indian Series, vol. 144.

In this most recent of a long series of attempts to understand something of the culture history of the Toltecs—a predominantly Nahuatl-speaking people who may (or may not) have dominated Mesoamerica between the 10th and 12th centuries A.D.—Nigel Davies reviews nearly every available scrap of historical and archaeological data pertaining to this remarkable group. As a compendium of carefully weighed information, his study is unmatched in the recent literature. But because there is hardly a conclusion that is not hedged with words such as "perhaps," "the available evidence suggests," and "a more likely solution would be," book-length publication for the general public seems premature.

Technical difficulties abound from the first pages. Historical references to the Toltecs and closely related peoples are indeed frequent in early textual sources, but the available material is, to quote the author himself, "so confused and contradictory that one would be left baffled without the aid of the archaeologist." Unfortunately, the status of pertinent archaeological studies is hardly better, given the still contradictory results of radiocarbon dating, to say nothing of chronol-