Review
Reviewed Work(s): Die australischen Terminsysteme by Johann Láng
Review by: Lorenz G. Lößler
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each other, seems to me to lead nowhere useful. There is no question here of muddling a social system with a terminological system. The Huli are cognatic. But what is important is that they do not merely happen to fall into existential patterns of agnation, but that they have an idea of agnation, and this idea, apparently distinct from ideas of agglutinating patrifiliation, seems useful and good to them. The question, going beyond the more easily apprehended facts of generalized advantage into the objective, is "Why?"

It will be clear, I hope, that I think the greater opportunity has been missed for the time being. The book stands as a neat and professional model of how to go about presenting a fine piece of fieldwork. But I think it is a pity that Glasse did not add a few pages of his maturer reflections.


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The author elaborates an interpretation of the Australian kin term systems first proposed by him in 1960 (Acta Ethnographica 9, Budapest). Along with the extensionist view, he rejects the conventional approach that the function of these term systems is to formulate kinship relations. According to him, their kinship connotations are the result of a more basic function: to bring into evidence the various marriage regulations between a certain number of descent lines and certain generations. Undiscussed remains the implicit curiosity that people should choose to marry partners of a certain generation (of generally unknown genealogical origin?) instead of a certain suitable age. Of more relevance, however, than etiological myths produced in an anthropologist's workshop are the insights with which they might provide us. We know that some populations are rather careful in correlating kin terms and marriageability while others are not. Since the latter fact is not becoming to Láng's theory, he sets to work in order to adjust the ethnographical data: whatever term system he deals with, he can show, after having corrected his sources, that the corrected facts prove the validity of his thesis. To be sure, Láng is honestly convinced that he is solving ethnographical puzzles. Nearly all of these puzzles, however, are the outgrowth of his preconceived ideas. The Marshall Islanders, e.g., who distinguish between elder and younger siblings including, by virtue of their "Hawaiian" cousin terms, cousins of all degrees, do allow cross-cousin marriage; according to Láng, however, they should not use the same term for marriageable and nonmarriageable cousins and thus either can marry any sibling or no relative at all, unless we decide that "younger sibling" is the term for members of Ego's generation in the marriage partner descent line (including the cross-cousins), while "elder sibling" denotes the tabooed own descent line generation "siblings."

This example brings to the fore the basic theme of the whole book: "younger" and "elder" sibling (brother or sister) are mistranslations for "same generation members of either own or allied descent line"; they serve, in the Australian systems, especially to distinguish the same generation members of the two halves of one's own moiety. This idea may, I should say, prove fruitful in a limited number of cases, and we should be ready not only to acknowledge our debt to Láng if we manage to dissolve a terminological puzzle by its application, but also to pay more attention to this question in further research. In this way, Láng's idea will be useful, even though the very way in which he tries to convince the reader of its applicability must have the reverse effect, viz., to regard all this as mere humbug.

Láng, I am sorry to state, not only omits to produce the internal evidence for his conclusions (still, it may be my failure to perceive it), but he even misreads his sources. Let me cite one example: He quotes (p. 8) McConnel (1933, disregarding her publications of 1940) to the effect that, with the Wikmunkan, "mother's younger brother" marries "father's elder sister." This is what should result from Láng's theory; there is, however, nothing in all of McConnel's publications to prove this. (On the contrary, she clearly states that the person in question is "father's younger sister."). The quoted passage refers to a list of kin terms, showing but one term for "father's elder and younger
sister." A minor slip? But it is placed in a
category where it provides (or would be able
to provide) the only conclusive evidence for
Lang's thesis that there should be something
wrong with hitherto accepted interpretation!
And Lang has more of these slips: on p. 87
he states that according to McConnel pola is
used for "father's father's sister's husband";
McConnel has but "mother's father's sister's
husband." On p. 84 he gives muka 'mother's
elder sister' (McConnel 1933), katha
mother's elder sister' (McConnel: 'mother's
younger sister') and changes this on p.
88, without comment, into muka 'mother's
younger sister,' katha 'mother's elder sis-
ter.' Obvious errors? For mukaya (p. 85)
he gives 'younger sister's son, son's wife,'
while McConnel has 'younger sister's child,
son's wife.' A minor omittance? According
to Láng's interpretation, "son's wife" is not
"younger sister's daughter," but "elder sis-
ter's daughter!! Thus what at first glance
might seem careless slips finally turn out to
be systematic and wilful manipulations of
ethnographic data. And when Láng finally
states that his interpretations come com-
pletely ("in allem") up to the definitions
given by McConnel, one cannot but wonder
who, he believes, shall believe him?
To be convinced of the validity of one's
theory is one thing, to prove it, another.
Láng's strong conviction is demonstrated by
the fact that he even corrects terminologies
that, like that of the Aranda, are rather well
documented by means of genealogies. In
order to impart this conviction to his col-
leagues, however, Láng should, first of all,
correct his methods.

Peoples and Cultures of the Pacific: An An-
thropological Reader. ANDREW P. VAYDA,
ed. Garden City, New York: The Natural
History Press (published for the American
Museum of Natural History), 1968. xvi
+ 557 pp., figures, maps, tables, bibliog-
rphy, index. $7.95 (cloth).
Reviewed by ROLAND W. FORCE
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The twenty-six contributions that com-
prise this reader are unabridged and were
selected to show some of the main re-
search interests of Pacific scholars (histori-
cal reconstruction, covariation of traits, or
the holistic study of small societies); and to
provide information of a more general sort
that could serve as an introduction to more
specialized studies.

Following a brief introductory essay by
the editor, the book is divided into two
parts. Part I is general and is made up of
eleven contributions, two of which are brief
notes and one of which is new. The others
appeared originally from 1955 to 1967—
seven in journals. Articles on geography,
physical anthropology, culture history, ecol-
y, and social organization are drawn from
the writings of Thomas, Simmons, Swindler,
Murdock, Ford, Barraud, Goodenough,
Frake, and Sahlins. The new article by
Grace on the classification of Pacific lan-
guages is a brief but excellent survey that
should be particularly valuable to students.

Part II is devoted to areal studies and is
nearly twice as long as Part I. Fifteen con-
tributions are contained, one of which, "The
Ethnology of Micronesia" by Mason, is new.
Subsections on each of the three culture
areas of the Pacific contain five articles
apiece. There are several classics—without
which one can scarcely conceive an intro-
ductive reader; Firth on Tikopia, Mead on
Samoa, Malinowski on Kula. The papers
were published originally over the years
from 1920 (Malinowski) to 1967, but the
majority have appeared since 1957. Firth,
Mason, and Paula Brown each have two ar-
ticles in the collection. Fischer has a brief
note on the folktale in Truk and Ponape,
Schneider discusses abortion and depopula-
tion in Yap, Zegwaard tells of headhunting
in West Irian, and Vayda follows Burrows'
familiar "Culture Areas in Polynesia" with
an essay on cultural distributions in Polyne-
sia.

In varying degrees, the contributions in
this section deal with social change, war, po-
itical organization, land tenure, folklore,
economics, social organization, and demog-
raphy. The approach is as broad as Ma-
son's Micronesian ethnology or his atoll au-
thority and economic process article and as
highly localized and specific as Lessa's paper
on the effects of a 1960 typhoon on a single
atoll.