73. The Ostrich in South-Western Asia.

Henry Field


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he admitted that '... certainly Mr. Perry's books and Professor Elliot Smith's teachings are making a very strong case in all their positive claims.'

That some residuum of such historical leanings persisted there-after occurred to me when, at times in his L.S.E. seminars, Malinowski would make some remark, generally an aside, which ran counter to the conventional attitude of spurning the Elliot Smith—Perry doctrines out of hand, or admonished some too urgent student critic of their views. He himself was more fully with the ideas before venturing on criticism. Perry used to remark that Malinowski, in conversation with him, often acknowledged the soundness of the diffusionist ideas, and towards the end of 1945 Perry recounted to me a long talk he had with Malinowski just before the latter left for America, during which he had declared himself, a little jocularly, perhaps a little wistfully, a convert to diffusionism.

It does seem then that Malinowski perhaps was not in reality as contemptuous of history, at least in its Elliot Smith—Perry form, as his fulminations in public controversy and his scorn in his writings for historical reconstruction and 'antiquarianism' made it appear. Could it be that they were rather his reaction to the forcefulness and sincerity of Elliot Smith's advocacy of his claims?

Hence it may be that Professor Evans-Pritchard's conflict with the dominant functional theory and with the views of most of his anthropological colleagues might have had the sympathetic if involuntary approbation of the chief subject of his strictures. Nevertheless, despite Dr. Leach's whimsical fears, no 'Children of the Moon,' or 'Megalithic Culture of Nova Scotia' is likely to emerge from the select circle of the Association of Social Anthropologists if only because, as was pointed out by Professor Gluckman recently (Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, No. 16, p. 27), most of the fertile ideas in anthropology have emanated from armchair students. Only they, serenely perched above the murr of the everyday functioning of an infinite of societies, can distinguish the wood from the trees, can glimpse that vision of human culture towards which, as Malinowski admitted in his review, the Children of the Sun was 'the first systematic and daring theory ... and the first scheme of its birth, history, spread, and partial decay,' and to which, as he once modestly claimed, ethnology is but a handmaiden, albeit the first (Economica, 1922, p. 219).

C. E. JOEL

London

Caste in India. Cf. Man, 1951, 235

Sir.—In his otherwise judicious review of Hocart's Caste Professor Hutton ignores the fact that the Indian caste system, as it exists today, is purely ritual. The rules which compel the inhabitants of a village to wear distinguishing marks, to refrain from eating together and so on, serve no natural function or economic purpose, and have the highest religious sanctions. In the absence of evidence, from any part of the world, that the sacred has ever developed out of the profane, we must suppose that the system was ritual in origin, and we may note that of the 15 factors or groups of factors which Professor Hutton himself lists as having probably contributed to the development of the system, 14 are less than nine are concerned with ritual (Caste in India, p. 164).

It is quite true, as Professor Hutton says, that Hocart's thesis is by itself insufficient to account for the Indian caste system, for if it were the systems in India and Fiji would be much more alike, and it is at least possible that secular causes have influenced its development. The factors which he lists, both ritual and secular, are however far too widespread and general to account for the origin of so peculiar a system. It is to be hoped that anthropologists will one day begin to realize that general causes are insufficient to account for particular effects.

Usk, Monmouthshire RAGLAN

The Ostrich in South-Western Asia. With a text figure

Sir.—The virtual disappearance of the ostrich from the region makes it desirable to record all available data from travellers in south-western Asia during the past 30 years. The evidence compiled so far is as follows: (a) In 1927 I saw two ostriches tied to a stake outside the tent of Mohammed Abu Tayi at El Jafar in south-eastern Jordan; they had been caught by two Sulubba (Sleyb) in the Laha Depression to the east near the Saudi Arabian border; (b) on 17 April, 1928 an ostrich was seen by Eric Schroeder, member of the Field Museum North Arabian Desert Expedition, about 40 miles west of Rutba Wells in western Iraq; (c) in the Wadi Feiran between Abu Zeneima and Feiran (anc. Pharan) in south-west Sinai, we photographed in 1948 an ostrich hammered on a limestone block (fig. 1); and (d) a number of travellers from 1850 to 1910 (Burton, Doughty, Muil] and more recently (Pihlby and Thomas) described seeing ostriches in the Arabian Peninsula.

FIG. 1. GRAFFITO OF AN OSTRICH, SINAI

Since I am compiling data on the occurrence of the ostrich in south-western Asia since 1920, any records from travellers would be most welcome.

Peabody Museum, Harvard University HENRY FIELD


Sir,—In reply to Dr. E. R. Leach's review of the above revised reprint I would like to point out that I alone am responsible for any alterations occurring in said reprint from the original text, as Dr. Kerr died during the last world war. However, from pious considerations I have still retained the name of my old friend and co-editor. With regard to the alterations of the spelling of certain tribal names, as for instance Kaw to Ko, Kwi to Kui, Lisaw to Lissu and Muhsô to Musso, these changes are due to my personal observations. However, owing to my inability to read the proofs the diacritical signs in my manuscript were omitted by the printer in Bangkok. It should thus be Kô, not simply Ko, and Musô, not Musso. Mr. Graham, whom I have had the privilege to know very well, has certainly given a very good and often amusing description of the various tribal communities in North Siam, but his classifications of the various ethnic groups, as well as some of his dicta, are not quite unassailable; e.g., his pictures of what he calls Maoo girls are really those of Kô girls. From Mr. Graham's description of the Maoo women's dresses it is evident that he never visited a Maoo village or even met any Maoo people. I point this out without any intention of detracting from the contents of his otherwise excellent book Siam (though his historical chapter is no good).

Dr. Leach may of course question my authority in these matters, but having lived in Siam for fully 40 years, many of them in government service, and having travelled in nearly all parts of the country and had the opportunity to meet and study almost all of the various ethnic groups of Siam (see for instance my contributions to the Journal of the Siam Society) I do think, in all modesty, that I know something of what I am speaking about.

ERIK SEIDENFADEN

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