

## PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/62505>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-22 and may be subject to change.

***HAUPTWERKE DER ETHNOLOGIE***, edited by Christian F. Feest and Karl-Heinz Kohl. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2001, XIV + 568 pages. ISBN 3-520-38001-3 (hardback). Price: € 24.60.

Reviewed by Toon van Meijl  
(Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies)

When I agreed to review this book after we received an invitation from the publisher I was somehow under the impression that it concerned an anthology of principal texts in the history of social and cultural anthropology. The text on the flyer, which is identical to the blurb on the cover, reads as follows:

This reference work orientates about 104 principal texts in anthropology. The selection offers a representative overview of keytexts in anthropology from the nineteenth and especially from the twentieth century. On the basis of single examples that are characteristic for an epoch it introduces anthropology since antiquity (my translation from German original).

Since it seems a common habit of professional anthropologists lecturing at European universities to complain about students' lack of knowledge about the anthropological classics, I thought this could be a useful addition to the available textbooks. Much to my surprise, however, this book is not an anthology, but a compilation of brief articles by established German anthropologists on 104 key texts in social and cultural anthropology. The articles are all composed in a similar manner and inform the reader about the biography of the authors, the historical and socio-political conditions in which the texts were written and published, the main argument of the papers as well as their influence in the history of anthropology. Contrary to the set-up of an anthology, which aims at reading classical texts in the original language, all contributions to this volume are written in German. This I found also surprising. After all, the publication of this volume demonstrates that German anthropology is growing, otherwise there would not be market for such a book. The selection of texts that are reviewed in this book simultaneously shows that classical German 'Ethnologie' is opening up to the dominant Anglo-Saxon tradition in social and cultural anthropology. These particulars, however, have not motivated our German colleagues to publish more in English. In this case, in particular, I think that is at least regrettable.

When I gradually became accustomed to the, in my view, unusual composition of this book I made some enquiries into the existence of similar publications. I was, however, unable to find comparable works in Dutch or in English. The outcome of my preliminary investigations therefore is, that this book may be considered unique in its sort. And then it should be realised that it is part of a series of books in different disciplines put out by the same publisher. The apparent success of this formula in Germany could provide other international publishers with a new idea to revitalise their publication programmes. The main value of it is that it provides brief summaries of background, content and impact of a large number of classical texts.

Needless to say, all kinds of comments and remarks could be made about the selection and the presentation of the texts, but generally I am of the opinion that

both the editors and the authors did their work conscientiously. The volume includes 15 texts that appeared in print before 1800, while 13 were published in the nineteenth century. The remaining 76 all date from the twentieth century. The most recent publication included concerns Eric Wolf's landmark book *Europe and the People without History* that appeared in 1982. The oldest publication concerns *Historia* by Herodotus, which originated in 445 B.C. Not surprisingly, the earliest texts about which contributors inform the reader are all travel documents, with the exception of Tacitus' *Germania* (98 A.D.), an outstanding monograph on the customs of the 'German race' that was entirely based on his interpretation of secondary sources. Other ethnographers *avant la lettre* include, among other ones, Marco Polo, Ibn Khaldûn, Hans Staden, Jean de Léry, José de Acosta and Joseph-François Lafitau. Among the classics from the nineteenth century we can find all the great names of the armchair ancestors of modern anthropology, such as Henry Maine, Johann Bachofen, Lewis Morgan, Edward Tylor and James Frazer. The publication of *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of The Kwakiutl Indians* by Franz Boas in 1897 marks the emergence of a new type of anthropology that distinguished itself from the evolutionary theorizers of the nineteenth century. Boas, the originally German founding father of American anthropology, and later Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics, both introduced a new method of collecting and analysing primary data in anthropology. Their influence is great and undeniable in twentieth century anthropology, which also appears from the selection of texts in this volume.

The selection of texts from the twentieth century is too large to discuss in any detail in a brief review, but I do think that the editors have managed to select a representative overview of crucial texts in the history of modern anthropology. Their selection is also interesting since it does not only include the famous names of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of anthropology, such as Lowie, Radcliff-Brown, Mead, Fortune, Benedict, Bateson, Firth, Linton, Kardiner, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Du Bois, Herskovits, Murdock, White, Lewis, Nadel, Kroeber, Kluckhohn, Leach, Steward, Redfield, Gluckmann, Douglas, Turner, Sahlins, Geertz and Wolf. Not surprisingly, of course, it also includes the great names of German 'Ethnologie', such as Leo Sternberg, Fritz Graebner, Theodor Strehlow, Wilhelm Wundt, Karl von der Steinen, Leo Frobenius, Wilhelm Schmidt, Richard Thurnwald, Martin Gusinde, Ernst Vatter, Konrad Preuss, Hermann Baumann, Adolf Jensen and Wilhelm Mühlmann. Comparatively few French scholars have been included, although the limited number is being compensated for by the significance of the contributions made by Van Gennep (who was born in Germany, had a Dutch father, but lived most of his life in France), Durkheim, Mauss, Lévy-Bruhl, Leiris, Griaule, Métraux, Balandier, Louis Dumont, and, last but not least, Claude Lévi-Strauss, possibly the most influential anthropologist of the twentieth century. The latter is represented with a review of two of his publications, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949) and *Tristes tropiques* (1955), which raises the question why his literary bestseller has been preferred above the much more influential *La pensée sauvage* (1962). In addition, one may question whether the impact of Graebner and Strehlow, of whom also two publications are addressed, is comparable to the influence of Lévi-Strauss. That Morgan, Boas and Evans-Pritchard are also represented twice should not necessarily detract from this remark. It draws the

attention to the fact that any selection is by definition arbitrary, but if one wants to criticise this volume on the basis of that criterion one could not possibly do justice to the value of this book. One could raise an endless number of questions about the selection, but the current selection is valid and justifiable in many ways. Although it shall remain necessary for any student of anthropology to consult the original texts in addition to this volume, the brief reviews do provide very useful summaries of the background, content and impact of selected texts.