



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Ulithi: A Micronesian Design for Living*. by William A. Lessa

Review by: K. O. L. Burridge

Source: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Mar., 1967), p. 155

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2798713>

Accessed: 08-05-2024 16:48 +00:00

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Man*

hypergamy to the cosy domesticity of life on a metropolitan housing estate complete with tiny fridge, tiny telly and tiny baby. He is readable and informative, and he conveys a good impression of the rapidity and direction of social change in the last half-century. Readers of his *Takashima* will, more specifically, get an account of the impact of the Japanese *Wirtschaftswunder* on his fishermen in the fifteen years since he first studied them.

He offers no analysis, except for such odd throw-away remarks as that former customs 'discouraged intense bonds between men and women, for these endangered the position of pre-eminence of the eldest son' which occur in an introductory chapter otherwise devoted to summary description of the demographic, familial, structural and value changes which constitute Japan's 'modernisation'. In any case, analysis is not called for in this series which is intended, according to its editors, to give students 'insight into the richness and complexity of human life'.

In this *Changing Japan* might well succeed, though one cannot suppress some doubts about the validity of the genre. This, after all, is neither the vouched-for ethnographic particular, nor the sober generalisation with conditions stated. It is only implied that the Matsuis are typical of their kind, and variants are only occasionally specified, so that the epistemological status of the description is always in doubt.

Even as pure description offering insight into richness, one wonders whether a few translated novels might not have been better. Probably not, since they could not contrive to illustrate, as Norbeck does with his fictional Matsuis, all those topics from umbilical customs to fictive kin ties in which American cultural anthropologists have chosen to interest themselves. On the other hand the impression of Japan they offered might not have been suffused with quite the same rosy glow of placid amiability, marred only, in Norbeck's account, by bad smells, public litter, commuter trains and a few juvenile delinquents. They might, for instance, have mentioned such un-cultural-anthropological things as politics and trade unions.

R. P. DORE

MARCHANT, LESLIE R. *A guide to the archives and records of Protestant Christian missions from the British Isles to China 1796-1914*. xiii, 134 pp. Nedlands: Univ. of Western Australia Press, 1966. £1 15s.

There are now enough anthropologists in North America and Britain working on Chinese subjects to make it likely that a few of them will soon want to make extensive use of mission sources. Indeed, it is (or is about to be) a curious fact in the story of the develop-

ment of Chinese studies in the west that anthropologists and historians have arrived more or less at the same time at the conclusion that mission archives are a major source of material. Why the historians have been so slow in realising what now seems obvious is a question touched on by Mr Marchant in his Introduction: 'The records that British Protestants left of their efforts in China are packed with information about the Chinese in the cities, towns, villages and countryside. . . . These records have not yet been used to any great extent, although they have been accessible to scholars for some time. Part of the reason for this, I have found, was a completely groundless belief by some academics that missionary accounts of China were unreliable and a suspect source' (p. 23). From my own brief acquaintance with British and German mission sources on south China I am able to lend some anthropological support to Mr Marchant's historical case.

His book provides a listing of all the relevant repositories, societies, and records in the U.K. with information on their coverage and accessibility. It is a fine (and now that it exists, indispensable) aid to research. In view of a remark he makes on p. 23, I do not imagine that Mr Marchant will be surprised to find that anthropologists are among those who will want to acknowledge their debt to him.

MAURICE FREEDMAN

LESSA, WILLIAM A. *Ulithi: a Micronesian design for living*. x, 118 pp., front., plate, maps. New York, London, etc.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966. 14s.

Books on Micronesia can usually be squeezed into any odd shelf in a library, so that this short ethnography in a (by now) well-known series is doubly welcome. Dr Lessa writes smoothly and succinctly, covering an enormous amount of ground: political organisation, religion, sex life, life cycle, kinship, law and ecology. And of course all sorts of questions remain unanswered: the book is, after all, addressed to beginners. Yet there is one general point which requires attention: the assumptions of the author regarding the assumptions of the audience, especially as demonstrated by the negative-imperative (Duke NOT implicated in beastly business). One consequence, for me at any rate, is that Ulithian sex life is either one long round of good clean fun, or quite incomprehensible. Another and more general consequence is that Ulithian life emerges as extremely negative. Is life there really so dull? Doesn't anyone ever get angry? The difficulty is, of course, that if an author is positive about the things a people do, then a reader is positive that they do very much more. . . .

A good book.

K. O. L. BURRIDGE