

Arthur Francis Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands*. Edited by H. E. Maude. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, no. 7. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 1989. Pp. xxxii, 384, figures, photographs, tables, maps. US\$38.00 cloth.

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This handsome volume, published in association with the Center for Pacific Islands Studies of the University of Hawaii, is a threefold, monumental tribute to the traditional culture of the Tungaru people, to the patience and care of Sir Arthur Grimble (1888-1956), recorder of that culture, and to the meticulous scholarship of H. E. Maude, his editor.

Grimble and Maude both studied anthropology at the University of Cambridge, both began their careers in the British Colonial Service in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, both became Resident Commissioner of that colony, and both became fluent in the Gilbertese language and accomplished ethnographers of the culture. Grimble served in Banaba and the Gilbert Islands from 1914 to 1932, and Maude from 1929 to 1949 (the war years at the Western Pacific High Commission in Suva, Fiji). Maude's subsequent, distinguished career in the South Pacific Commission and in the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University enhanced his international standing as the leading authority on Gilbertese history and culture.

Contemporaneous written records of any scientific value on the indigenous Tungaru culture before it underwent the changes that had their origins in the last two decades of the nineteenth century are few and meagre. The accounts by Wilkes (1845), Hale (1846), Pierson (1855), Gulick ([1861] 1943), Parkinson (1889), Finsch (1893), and Kramer (1906) are noteworthy examples. Maude highlights the importance of Grimble's ethnographic and linguistic research:

. . . it seemed that all we should ever know of the pre-contact Gilbertese way of life would be unrelated odds and ends, but for the work of Arthur Francis Grimble. Partly by his successful use of the ethnohistorical technique of upstreaming, Grimble recovered for the modern Gilbertese, as well as for the rest of us, the past of their atoll society as it functioned before the changes introduced by Europeans. He was just in time, for another decade would have seen the death of the last of his aged informants, and any reconstruction would necessarily have been based on less detailed and more inaccurate hearsay evidence. (P. xiv)

The bulk and intrinsic value of Grimble's already published work are impressive. Maude gives us the most comprehensive bibliography yet of those writings (pp. 357-359). Grimble's extensive collection of myths, legends, and oral traditions (in Gilbertese, with English versions) is also available, from the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (Grimble 1964). *Tun-*

*garu Traditions* comprises the remainder of the Grimble Papers, presented by Maude in three parts.

"Part 1: Notes on Gilbertese Culture" (pp. 1-194) consists of field notes, arranged under twenty-two subject headings. This invaluable and wide-ranging material was obtained by Grimble from *unimane* and *unaine*, all mature people and many of them elderly, mainly in the northern islands. They constituted an elite that he respected and found congenial. Grimble especially esteemed his informants in Marakei.

The key institution of Gilbert Islands society is the focus of the four chapters (also written and checked in the field) that make up "Part 2: The Maneaba" (pp. 195-251). Construction, ceremonial aspects, *boti* rights, and traditional origins are discussed in illuminating detail. Some of Grimble's reconstructions of possible historical changes and the causations he suggests are conjectural and open to reassessment. Nonetheless, these chapters are first-rate anthropological writing and of cardinal importance. They should be read in conjunction with the seminal works on the *maneaba* by Maude (1963, 1980), Latouche (1983, 1984), and Lundsgaarde (1978).

"Part 3: Essays on Mythology, History, and Dancing" (pp. 253-333) has, firstly, two draft essays concerned with eliciting the historical content in the Gilbertese traditional oral narratives he had gathered over the years, and using it together with genealogical data to construct a credible outline of precontact history. From bitter personal experience I know the hazards and difficulties of such an endeavor. Grimble has weathered many of these and achieved a usable if somewhat controversial framework. "The Historical Content of Gilbertese Mythology" (pp. 255-267) and "A Genealogical Approach to Gilbertese History" (pp. 268-294) are stimulating and rewarding. "A Discourse on Gilbertese Dancing" (pp. 314-333) is not from the Grimble Papers, but an official colonial memorandum of 1919. In it Grimble brilliantly rebuts charges of immorality made against traditional dancing by the Rev. W. E. Goward, then local representative of the London Missionary Society. Never before or since has Gilbertese dance been so expertly and sympathetically described in such elegant prose.

Of singular importance is "A History of Abemama" (pp. 295-313) by Airam Teeko, a member of the royal family of that island. This was written in Gilbertese in a notebook acquired by Grimble while district officer on Abemama, probably about 1916. Splendidly translated by Reid Cowell, former GEIC officer and an authority on the Gilbertese language, Teeko's account contains sociological information not to be found elsewhere.

Maude expresses the hope that *Tungaru Traditions* "will serve to establish Grimble's reputation as the pioneer ethnographer who discovered and recorded the main features of Gilbertese social organization" (p. xxvi). In my view, it succeeds in so doing. In 1951, in Abaiang and Tarawa, I met aged men who inquired after "Kurimbo" and his daughter Rosemary. They recalled his mastery of the Gilbertese language and the intricacies of land custom and tenure with unmistakable respect. The Grimble Papers can only evoke respect in us. Much of what Grimble recorded and interpreted remains valid today, preserving the features of a culture that might, but for him, have vanished for all time.

Grimble's virtues as an ethnographer are those of his epoch, as are his faults. He had a paternalistic concern for the islanders in his charge, an innate conservatism that caused him to value tradition and to seek to place it on record for posterity. By upbringing, education, and training he was observant, critical, and painstaking. He was greatly influenced at Cambridge and later by the anthropologist W. H. R. Rivers and by the ethnologist A. C. Haddon. He admired *Hawaiki* by S. Percy Smith (1921). Their theories affected Grimble's thinking and determined his preoccupation with origins, migrations, kinship, cultural diffusion, and historical reconstruction. His terminology and concepts are those of the pre-Malinowski generation of anthropologists. Maude takes the view that though Grimble has been called the last of the old school of Pacific diffusionists, the essays reproduced in *Tungaru Traditions* show him to be more akin to the ethnohistorians of today, of post-1961 vintage. This seems to me to be a valid judgment. (Incidentally, the only printing error noticed throughout the book occurs here at p. xxx: "Gimble").

The new facts, insights, opinions, and speculations presented in this book are overwhelming in quantity. Assessment of them is often difficult and caution in acceptance advisable, despite one's general admiration for the range and quality of Grimble's work. Referring to PMB 69 (Grimble 1964), Jean-Paul Latouche once enjoined "utilisation délicate"; I am of the opinion that that advice applies equally to this work. My main unease here relates to Grimble's own English versions of Gilbertese texts. He was a poet in his youth and a cultivated man of letters. Some of his versions seem to me to be unduly "free" and often rather quaint in a late-Victorian style, for example, "Whence shall kind words of welcome fall to greet me?" for "*B'e rio maia akoau*" (p. 104). Many of the texts collected by Grimble are today obscure and closer, word-for-word renderings would be helpful.

Maude's editorial contributions to this impressive monograph include "A. F. Grimble as an Anthropologist" (pp. xix-xxvi), "The Grimble

Papers" (pp. xxvii-xxxii), supremely helpful notes, an expert glossary, and an exceptionally valuable bibliography. The index is not exhaustive but serves its main purposes adequately. The varied illustrations, from those of the Wilkes expedition of 1838-1842 to photographs taken by Maude himself, enhance the books attractiveness and scholarly value.

As an editor, Maude is quite outstanding: perceptive, critical, and knowledgeable. We are indebted indeed to him for this notable contribution to Gilbertese studies.

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