

Jean-Paul Latouche, *Mythistoire Tungaru: Cosmologies et généalogies aux îles Gilbert*. Langues et cultures du Pacifique, 5. Paris: SELAF, 1984. Pp. 488, 23 loose charts. F180.

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With this fifth, hefty monograph in its scholarly series on languages and cultures of the Pacific, SELAF (the Société d'études linguistiques et anthropologiques de France) shifts its focus from Océanic française to eastern Micronesia, to the Republic of Kiribati, homeland of the Tungaru people, commonly misnamed "Gilbertese." Captain Thomas Gilbert, chance "discoverer" in 1788 of populated atolls, undeservedly lives on in the name Kiribati (that is, Gilberts), chosen in 1979 as the name of the independent republic.

Jean-Paul Latouche, backed by the prestigious Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in New York, carried out the field work on which this monograph is based during two visits to southern islands of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, then still under British administration. His first visit was to Nikunau from July 1971 to April 1972; his second to the neighboring island of Beru during the second semester of 1975. Latouche gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of forty-four principal informants whom he lists individually, with comments (pp. 30-41). Three major primary sources, still not fully explored, are also acknowledged (pp. 44-46). These are the collections assembled by Arthur Grimble, Ernest Sabatier, and H. E. Maude. For the Grimble papers, now available on microfilm (Arthur Grimble 1964), Latouche prescribes "utilisation délicate." The documents and replies to questionnaires assembled by Father Sabatier (with whom I was privileged to have most fruitful discussions on the language) were consulted by Latouche in 1967 at Abemama. They were then "en fort mauvais état" (p. 45). May one earnestly hope that these irreplaceable papers be preserved for scholarly use before they are lost forever?

Latouche considers the "characteristic feature" of social organization in Kiribati to be the existence in each of the islands' districts of *maneaba*, large communal houses of assembly (p. 7). (The cover design by Danièle Molez illustrates a typical *maneaba*.) These *maneaba* have a "crucial role" in traditional social life, particularly on the southernmost islands. "Indispensable" to the study of this role is the oral tradition (represented here by the texts recorded in Nikunau, for the most part, and Beru) that provides "a kind of sociological theory for it."

Latouche comments that Lundsgaarde and Silverman (1972: 110) had seen that for social institutions such as the *boti* and the *kaainga* to be fully understood they needed to be considered in their context of traditional cosmology-- "sans malheureusement en tirer les conséquences" (p. 33).

As these traditional texts are partly myth (particularly in the various versions of the myths of origin) and partly genealogical history, they can only be understood from prior knowledge of cultural organization, the main features of which are summarized in an introductory chapter (pp. 21-31) embracing Kiribati geography and history, language, and the evolving social organization. Maps of Kiribati, Nikunau, and Beru locate the informants and sources consulted by Latouche for genealogies meticulously tabulated in twenty-three loose charts, each covering on average a score of generations, and for the related texts from oral tradition. Of the latter, he asserts: "The texts, which are the source of endless arguments within the community itself, reveal cosmology as the temporal generation of an order leading to a precise spatial distribution not only of the communal houses but of the entire Tungaru universe" (p. 7).

My own experiences in Micronesia as an inwardly impatient witness to "endless arguments" lead me to commend Latouche for this essential caution. However elaborate and impressive may be the "documentation" of a study such as his, the fact remains that memories are fallible and oral tradition sometimes falters or fails. The complexity of tradition, even in two islands of only some five thousand inhabitants, is daunting and is reflected in the method, structure, and data of this courageous, infinitely patient, pioneering monograph.

Latouche acknowledges F. M. Cornford (1907) as his source of the concept and term *mythistoire*. "Ce mot . . . désigne ici un corpus de textes où l'opposition entre le mythe et l'histoire n'existe pas" (p. 13). This absence of opposition of myth and history gives to the assembled Nikunau and Beru texts a notable originality.

"Ce qui fait toutefois l'originalité de ce corpus est son caractère systématique, liant chaque individu, quel que soit son statut, aux origines par des chaînes généalogiques multiples" (ibid.). Every individual is systematically linked to the origins of the people, by the genealogies.

In the northern islands distinctive, more "dynastic" patterns of social organization broke this "continuité avec les origines," and gave the people a different view and representation of their own past.

Mythbtoire Tungaru is meant for linguists and specialists in Oceanic oral literature, for students of social organization, and, last but definitely not least as far as Latouche is concerned, for the Tungaru people

themselves. The thirty-two vernacular texts translated word-for-word (*juxtalinéaire*) into French are faced by accurate and pleasing French versions (pp. 113-383). Annexes 1-3, similarly translated and annotated, contain myths of very special interest. Annexe 1 has the cosmogonic myths of the Karongoa tradition of Beru, mainly as edited by May Pate-man (1942). Other versions of the Karongoa tradition--by Grimble, Sabatier, and Maude--are critically noted (pp. 406-411). Annexe 2 (pp. 413-433) presents the cosmogonic myths of the Karongoa tradition of Nikunau, based on versions by three informants. Annexe 3 (pp. 435-440) outlines the story of the northward expedition from Beru and Nikunau led by Kaitu and Uakeia several centuries ago. This avoided Onotoa (regarded as a source of women) and invaded southern Tabiteuea and then Abemama, Kuria, Aranuka, Maiana, Tarawa, Abaiang, and Marakei. Latouche names twenty-six captains of war canoes (*baurua*) with their *kaalinga* of origin in Beru or Nikunau and, from Abemama written sources, lists thirty-six *baurua* names, with fourteen of their captains.

Latouche, correctly in my view, is not at all inclined to accept Maude's assertions that this expedition extended the Beru *maneaba* system to the whole of the group up to Marakei, that it can be considered as marking the beginning of modern Gilbertese history, and that, by genealogical calculation, it may be dated to circa 1650 A.D.

Annotations and commentary on all the texts are painstakingly and competently done. Speculative renderings are clearly indicated. Restricted as it is to a single genre, *Mythistoire Tungaru* succeeds (in contradistinction to Sigrid Koch [1966] and Rosemary Grimble [1972]) in laying a sounder foundation for the study of Tungaru oral traditions than any book hitherto available. Texts are given in full, faithful to the original oral rendition or to the exercise book in which today many elderly islanders record their traditional lore lest it be lost through the indifference of younger generations. Latouche gently chides S. H. Elbert and T. Monberg (1965) for easy assumption of the existence of unitary tradition. Unlike them, he presents several versions of a single episode or story, as in the case of the cosmological myth. Throughout the corpus of texts, variants and alternative interpretations are scrupulously arrayed and glossed. Only rarely did I find myself perplexed or in disagreement. Latouche has a generally sound acquaintance with the Kiribati language, having clearly benefited from able indigenous informants and from the sterling linguistic skill of Father Kerouanton of the Sacred Heart Mission. Latouche uses the "official," standardized orthography, with slight modifications to bring out differences of meaning

thus obscured. I am an inveterate admirer of the orthography devised by Dr. Hiram Bingham, missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, with its clear differentiation of the phonemes *b* and *b'*, *m* and *m'*, and its useful indication by macron of vowel length. *Maneaba* rather than *m'aneaba*, for instance, and some inconsistency in word division and in vowel-length marking (here by vowel doubling) can on occasion get in the way of ready comprehension. It would be wrong to overstress this criticism, as adjustment is easily made. The magisterial stature of the corpus of texts and its accompanying critical apparatus is in no way diminished.

Latouche is especially interesting and thought-provoking in his analysis (pp. 55-95) of the system and morphology of the communal houses of Nikunau and Beru, with plans of *boti* in six *maneaba* in Nikunau and three in Beru.

Tungaru mythology holds that ancestral spirits take possession of places (districts or even whole islands), and their first concern is to build a *maneaba*. This symbolizes their eminent rights. They allot themselves seating places (*boti*) in the *maneaba*. Parcels of land are allotted for sitting private dwellings or for burying their dead. Areas for carrying out their magical rites are termed *kaainga*, and these sometimes take the same name as the respective *boti*. Areas for growing crops are *buakoni-kai*. Fishing rights over defined areas (*bike*) and certain other privileges are also established. One notes here the original identity or, rather, overlap of the notions of *boti* and *kaainga*.

Most importantly, it is rights in the *maneaba* that are the foundation of and embrace the privileges and other rights associated with land--and not the other way round.

The wealth of detail provided by Latouche regarding theory and practice of the *maneaba* demands the greatest concentration. Valuable earlier studies such as that by Maude (1963, reprinted 1977) now need to be read together with this complementary work by Latouche. Comparison illuminates both works, to mutual and general benefit. Maude is seen to have given a perhaps undue preponderance to the Karongoa tradition, while his analysis of social organization in the southern islands in terms of "exogamous, totemic and patrilineal" clans (1963:54) is held to have distorted (*faussée*) the perspective and to have made incomprehensible several aspects, such as the relations between *maneaba* and between the *boti* within them (p. 24). I consider this criticism of Maude's seminal work to be well founded. Latouche eschews polemic here, but promises thorough discussion of all relevant data and theories in a future supplementary study, to be entitled *Parenté, loca-*

lité, maison: L'organisation sociale traditionnelle des îles Gilbert. This will also comprise many songs, stories, and cycles of legends shedding further light on the matters discussed in *Mythistoire Tungaru*.

The great care with which this complex and difficult monograph has been prepared and printed is evident. Errors (surprisingly infrequent) are of minor consequence. They may be exemplified by slips such as "textes" for texts (p. 7), "Abemana" for Abemama (p. 27 n. 3), and "Samuel E. Elbert" for Samuel H. Elbert (p. 15). The guidance that Latouche offers on how to pronounce the name of the equatorial republic, "Kiribati (*prononcer Kiribesse*)" (p. 13), would be better given as "Kiribats" or "Kiribas."

The cursory bibliographical references (pp. 441-443) relate to works consulted. Lacunae include Pateman (1942) cited at length in Annexe and passim. The glossary (pp. 445-478), although not a fully comprehensive cross-reference guide, is well done and quite indispensable in exploring the labyrinth of the genealogies and related texts. 1

I find this impressive work of scholarship both useful and endlessly fascinating. It is a veritable linguistic and sociological Golconda. *Mythistoire Tungaru* is a masterly exemplar for future scholars to emulate, island by island.

Latouche writes of his work: "Peut-être ce travail suscitera-t-il ainsi des imitateurs parmi les Tungaru eux-mêmes" (p. 15). May that day soon come!

Jean-Paul Latouche merits our gratitude and our admiration for this splendid work.

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