

## BYWAYS IN OXFORD ANTHROPOLOGY

Selections from the Minutes of the  
Oxford University Anthropological Society

### *Members Past and Present: 1. Professor Meyer Fortes*

Over its 72-year history the Oxford University Anthropological Society can boast a remarkable list of members and visitors. One name which may be more usually associated with anthropology at Cambridge rather than at Oxford is that of Professor Meyer Fortes, who recently renewed his links with the Society when he gave a talk in May 1980 entitled 'Some Aspects of Sacrifice'. He had mentioned informally beforehand that he remembered that the first public talk he had ever given on the Tallensi was to the Society in 1936 or 1937. He had vivid memories of Marett, Rattray, Evans-Pritchard, and the Seligmans taking part in the discussion.

Before he was invited to begin his talk in May last year the Secretary, as well as customarily reading the minutes of the last meeting, read to Professor Fortes' obvious delight the minutes of the first two meetings he had addressed in Oxford. Though the first meeting was in fact in 1935 his memory had served him well, for the names of Marett, Rattray, and Mrs. Seligman are recorded - along with the usual 'and others' as discussants.

Between this first meeting and the next one he addressed in 1938 Fortes was proposed by his 'older brother' Evans-Pritchard (see Fortes' Foreword to *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, London: OUP 1945, at p. xiv.) as a member of the Society, and indeed had been elected on 25th November 1937. Before the end of 1939 Dr. Fortes was co-opted as a member of the Committee to replace Max Gluckman, who had taken up an appointment in Northern Rhodesia. Fortes' interest in anthropology at Cambridge was soon revealed when at a Committee Meeting in 1940 he reminded the Secretary of his agreement to exchange fixture-cards with the Anthropological Club of Cambridge University. Duties in West Africa prevented him from maintaining his position on the Committee for any length of time, and in October 1941 he was replaced by Professor A.S. Barnes. He had addressed the Society for the third time in May 1940.

In 1943 his name occurs again as a discussant and then in 1944 there was a rush of activity in the Society on his part when he addressed the 404th Meeting on 'West Africa Goes to War', was elected President for the 1944-45 Session at the 408th Meeting (having gained the Committee's nomination for the Presidency

because of his already 'long connection with Anthropology at Oxford'!), and gave the Presidential Address at the 409th Meeting under the title 'Anthropology at the Cross-Roads'. As President he was able to chair only two meetings and one Committee Meeting at which 'It was decided that when the President was re-called to the Gold Coast, vice-presidents should be asked to preside at the meetings.' Before the next meeting he had gone.

Fortes was to address the Society once more before his most recent talk when in 1946 he took the opportunity by giving a talk entitled 'Ashanti Revisited' to praise the work of his predecessor in West African studies, Rattray.

It was to be some 34 years before Professor Fortes returned to Oxford to address the Society; as a former President and therefore a Vice-President for life he was particularly welcome. The quality of the minute-taking at meetings of the Society has varied considerably over the years but on each of the talks given by Fortes there is a summary of sorts. Perhaps one day an enterprising student will endeavour to make sense of the scrawled notes which face the neat minutes of the first meeting Professor Fortes addressed in order to compare those first impressions with the ideas contained in the well-known published writings of one of Social Anthropology's leading scholars.

Society Meetings addressed by Professor Meyer Fortes:

312th Meeting, on 28th November 1935. Sir Charles Harper, President, in the Chair. 'Some Aspects of the Ancestor Cult in a Tribe (Tallensi) of the Gold Coast Hinterland' (illustrated with slides).

337th Meeting, on 3rd November 1938. Miss Grace E. Hadow, President, in the Chair. 'Anthropology and Administration on the Gold Coast'.

371st Meeting, on 23rd May 1940. Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, President, in the Chair. 'Names in West Africa'.

404th Meeting, on 17th February 1944. Dr. William Cohn, President, in the Chair. 'West Africa Goes to War'.

408th Meeting, on 2nd November 1944. Presidential Address, Dr. William Cohn taking the Chair. 'Anthropology at the Cross-Roads'.

426th Meeting, on 13th June 1946. Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, President, in the Chair. 'Ashanti Revisited'.

724th Meeting, on 3rd May 1980. Professor John Beattie, President, in the Chair. 'Some Aspects of Sacrifice'.

JEREMY COOTE  
Secretary, 1980-81  
Oxf. Univ. Anthropol. Soc.