
PETER ARNOLD LIENHARDT

1928 - 1986

I

Almost exactly forty years ago, Peter Lienhardt left his home in Dewsbury and went up to Cambridge to read English, a subject in which he achieved distinction.* While still an undergraduate, he transferred from English to the Oriental Studies Faculty, where he read Arabic and Persian. His training in Arabic became useful immediately after the completion of his degree, because his skill in it was put to use when he was required to translate documents and monitor broadcasts, as a nominal member of the RAF doing his national service. That service ended, like so many at the time who began in English at Cambridge he took up social anthropology here at the Oxford Institute. His fields of research interests were the Gulf Shaikhdoms, Arabs inhabiting the East Coast of Africa as far south as Zanzibar and Tanganyika and, also, Iran. One of the pleasures of knowing him was to spend a long evening with him discussing the peoples of these places and issues pertaining to their languages; for, although never one to flaunt his talents, he had a most subtle grasp of both Arabic and Persian. And if, at the end of the evening, a matter had to be left unresolved because some fact or other was missing, it was characteristic of his scholarly mind that he would burrow among the books until he found it. The discovery he would sometimes put into a gem of a letter, marked by its clarity and the ease with which it was written, and with a sprinkling of wit, none of which were contrivedly clever, but all of which came naturally to him.

Peter Lienhardt was well endowed with human kindness. The Institute of Social Anthropology here at Oxford has long had a just repute for the warmth of relations between its staff and its postgraduates. Even in the best of places, however, it is inevitable that one or two newcomers are left out on the periphery. During the past few years, more than one such person has voluntarily told me how they felt out of things until drawn in by him, asking them about their proposals for research, and treating their diffident comments for the merits in them, with a patience lacking in most of us, but which gave them real encouragement. This willingness to listen attentively he did not reserve for newcomers only, but was an attribute his more loquacious friends - myself among them - thoroughly relished, particularly the succinct comments he would inject into the conversation, to enliven it greatly.

* Funeral address delivered on Monday 24 March 1986, at Blackfriars, Oxford.

Consistent with these qualities went a gentleness - a gentleness which struck one as bordering on frailty at times. It was not that he was of limited experience: far from it. He had traveled widely and mixed with a very wide range of people of different cultures, different classes, and of different sorts. It was that he had no desire to bother with the big world around him, in the hope that it would not bother him either. Again, it would be wrong to suppose that he had lived an entirely sheltered life: here, and elsewhere, he had his trials and tribulations. He also knew what it felt like to suffer privation. Yet I never heard him complain about his lot. When afflicted by this and that, his tendency was to recoil and let it pass by. At the same time he was fiercely independent, and the more important of the views he held he hung on to tenaciously. What he felt to be congenial was a way of living which permitted him to browse as and when he felt inclined, to join in conversation - preferably with kindred spirits - frequently, and to unravel his thoughts on academic issues, particularly those relating to the Middle East, to fellow academics and younger people engaged in research. Much of what occupies the minds of others failed to capture his imagination. Here I have in mind matters of material gain, with regard to which he was truly innocent. In earlier years, for him a little amount left over meant the happiness of solvency, and a deficit of a similar amount meant the misery of retrenchment. Similarly with regard to academic preferment, which did not engage his energies either: to compete against colleagues he thought distasteful, and the rewards, as he saw them, were very dubious, effectively alienating one from what he considered to be worthwhile in university life.

He did not proclaim his sentiments about these many matters. To get to know them meant getting to know him really well, for he was a private person, who exposed his inner thoughts to only a few close friends.

When, some five months ago, he was told he had little time to live, unlike most people, who would have been left stupefied, he resolved there and then to continue to live as normally as possible for as long as possible. This he was able to do until recently, proud that he could fend for himself, and get about unaided. Even to within a few days of re-entering hospital, although physically very weak, he still had the moral strength to lift the receiver to keep in touch with some of his friends.

He did not want us to mourn: he said as much. But I believe he would have been pleased to think that at least some of the things he cherished in life remained among us after he had left.

E.L. PETERS

II

I first met Peter Lienhardt twenty-five years ago when I arrived at the Institute of Social Anthropology in Oxford. Peter was both my college tutor and university supervisor and, as often happened with Peter's students, the formal relationship quickly ripened into a personal friendship which survived until his untimely death.

Peter's anthropological work in the Trucial States, the East African coast and Iran gave him a thorough understanding of the way Arabs and Muslims think. In teaching students from Arab or Muslim countries in particular, he was always tactful, patient and genuinely interested. He recognised the difficulties encountered by these students in coming to terms with life in a very different society with a liberal and open educational system. He made considerable efforts to help them both tolerate and understand the diversity and complexity of human culture and to think for themselves. He showed infinite patience and a great sense of responsibility for these students. After a lengthy and interesting tutorial in which the student might have failed to grasp the points raised, he would nevertheless persist with his endeavour to make the student understand a new viewpoint. His tutorials were instructive and enriched with wit, anecdote and discussion about life in general. His breadth of knowledge and experience gave him a rare ability to draw on a wide range of parallels from anthropology, history and literature. Middle Eastern students, and others, were highly appreciative of his concern for them.

Peter's strength of character was evident in the way he coped with anthropological fieldwork in difficult circumstances, with an affection and appreciation for many individuals in the Trucial States, East Africa and Iran. This was reciprocated, and Peter's loss will be felt widely.

Peter's understanding of the societies he studied was profound. On the many occasions he talked about these societies, I admired his intellectual ability and perception. I had the pleasure and privilege of reading some chapters of the book he was writing on the Shaikhdoms of the Trucial States which concerned the tribal structure, kinship organisation and political relationship between these Shaikhdoms. Peter witnessed the beginning of the impact of the discovery of oil on the traditional societies of the Trucial States, and he saw their subsequent transformation into modern states and the influence of Western contact on their economy and society. Despite this, he was of the opinion that the tribal shaikhs still had a role to play in their political structure. Here he was close to the centre of power, but equally he was at ease with ordinary people. Peter's excellent analysis reveals a deep understanding of the societies of the Trucial States.

Peter's grasp of languages was exceptional. He spoke Arabic, Swahili and Persian not only fluently but with elegance, and he had the ability to switch from one language to another with consummate ease. His subtle understanding of these languages gave him greater insight than that even of many native speakers and is evident also in his writing. The clarity of his thought and style of his ex-

pression make the reading of his writing a pleasure. His linguistic ability and the quality of his writing are admirably demonstrated in his book *The Medicine Man: Swifa Ya Ngwamali (Hasani Bin Ismail)*, published at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1968. In this book, Peter's masterly command of the English and Swahili languages and his understanding of the society of the coast of East Africa are evident; he shows perceptiveness, clarity and intellectual vigour, and his scholarly attitude is reflected in his precision and meticulous handling of his material.

Peter had many admirable personal qualities. He had a wide range of interests outside anthropology - in particular, literature, music, art and history. His conversation was never dull, and he enjoyed meeting people. Those in his company enjoyed his repertoire, his instructiveness and his wit. Despite the severity of his illness and the gradual decline of his health, he remained intellectually alert and sociable. It was typical of his attitude that he did not want his friends to show gloom, sadness or emotion over the consequences of his illness: rather, he wanted them to be positive and cheerful. Even when he came to know the nature of his illness, he accepted the inevitable consequence with courage and rationality. Peter's courage and fortitude were also shown in the remarkable way he coped with delicate situations in his field research in the Trucial States and Iran. He made no secret of his own convictions and was prepared to defend them in any company, including the most powerful.

Peter's generosity, hospitality and kindness were well known to his friends. He was always helpful and rendered help to his students in a variety of ways. He was a sensitive and gentle person entirely without malice. If he ever lost his temper this was quickly forgotten and equally quickly forgiven. His friendships were wide, deep and lasting, as was shown by the many who came from far and wide to his funeral. His death on March 17 is a deeply felt loss and a great sadness to me. To his brother Godfrey go our heartfelt sympathy, condolences and thoughts.

AHMED AL-SHAHI

PETER LIENHARDT AND THE OUAS

At the time of his death, Peter Lienhardt was President of the Oxford University Anthropological Society, having taken up the office in October 1985. It is therefore fitting that his long association with the Society should be recorded here.

Having arrived in Oxford in 1952, Peter Lienhardt presumably joined the Society after that date, though the incomplete records of the time do not record the actual date of his election. He is first mentioned at a Committee meeting of 9th November 1955, where it was agreed that 'Mr Peter Lienhardt might be invited to speak in the summer term'. In fact, he addressed the Society in the following Michaelmas Term at its 537th meeting on 7th November 1956. His title was 'Town Politics in Trucial Oman' and, in relation to the history of the Trucial shaikhdom of Dubai, he discussed the economic factors underlying political power and how the rivalries within the ruler's family and tribal section served to preserve the townspeople in their freedom 'by limiting both the autocratic power of the rulers and the potential oligarchic power of the ruling clans'.

The mid-to late 'seventies, some twenty years later, were a relatively inactive period for the Society, but when it began to have regular meetings again in Michaelmas 1979 it was Peter Lienhardt who first addressed it, giving an illustrated talk on 'Carpet Merchants and Carpet Designers in Iran'. The talk was based on his 1965-66 fieldwork in Isfahan, and in it he discussed carpet designs in relation to Islamic attitudes to the representation of animate things, showing how animate designs were 'metamorphised' into inanimate representations. Those who attended this meeting will remember the lively way in which he invoked the imagery of proverbs, songs and flower forms in the patterns of Persian weaving.

Peter Lienhardt was one of the foremost supporters of the Society: he regularly attended evening meetings and coffee mornings and was always generous with his support for social events such as the irregular end-of-term parties. He was therefore the obvious choice for President when the position became vacant in 1985.

After the first meeting of the year, he entered hospital for the first time. On returning to chair the third meeting of the term, he privately noted the irony of chairing a meeting which was to be addressed on 'The French Funeral as Triumph', an irony which amused him. Though already weak and unable to attend to all his duties as he would have wished, it is a testament to his sense of responsibility, and to his sociability, that he was able to chair that and the following meeting in his own inimitable style. It was a matter of great regret to him that he was not able to attend further meetings.

His death is a sad loss to the Society, as it is to his many colleagues, students and friends. We take this opportunity to offer our condolences to his brother Godfrey.

JEREMY COOTE
Former Secretary, OUAS

PETER ARNOLD LIENHARDT MEMORIAL APPEAL

Further to the notice in the last issue of JASO concerning a Memorial Fund to be established in the name of Peter Lienhardt, details have now been finalised and are appended below. A leaflet giving additional information and the appropriate bankers' forms are also included with this issue of the Journal for those readers who wish to support the Fund.

The University of Oxford announces the establishment of the Peter Arnold Lienhardt Memorial Appeal, with the aim of creating a general endowment fund to be used for the support of research in social anthropology conducted in conjunction with the University's Institute of Social Anthropology.

The Institute is the largest centre for postgraduate training and research in this subject in Britain and it continues to attract a high proportion of overseas students. At the same time the Institute has faced the constraints which have made the funding of all postgraduate study and research so difficult over the last few years. Well-qualified students without private means, especially from overseas, have often found study at Oxford beyond their reach, and this continues to be the case.

The Fund will be administered by a Committee of the Faculty Board of Anthropology and Geography, and funds will normally be disbursed on an annual basis. Grants will be offered as appropriate to registered students or other young scholars engaged in research in social anthropology who wish to base themselves in Oxford. Applications for grants will be considered either for specific projects, or for general support, according to financial or other circumstances. The Committee will have discretion as to the spending or re-investment of the income from the Fund, which will be managed by the Oxford University Chest.

Potential donors might wish to note that a capital sum of £10,000 would make possible small grants to a total of £500 annually, and a sum of £80,000 would support one person per year exclusive of any fee obligations or travel money. However, a sum of £180,000 would be required to support a graduate student paying fees at the full overseas rate, and even more would be needed to cover travel or other research expenses.

The present appeal is administered by the Committee of Management of the Institute of Social Anthropology and is sponsored by the current Chairman (Dr Wendy James) and past Chairmen (Mr Edwin Ardener and Dr Peter Riviere). Enquiries may be addressed to Mrs Sutton, Administrative Secretary of the Institute, at 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PE, England. Cheques in any denomination, payable to 'University of Oxford - Peter Lienhardt Memorial Appeal', should be sent to Mrs Sutton at the same address.
