

dependence, which may have prevailed, closer to the then lower and subsequently submerged Atlantic seaboard area accounted for settlement density. Herbivore herd aggregations in the sheltered Russian river valleys, during the colder months, probably made intensive food-storage less crucial than Sofer believes. Conkey's hypothesis that Palaeolithic art functioned as a ritual medium for social structure should be assessed in the light of McGhee's study of Eskimo art tradition, in *Current Anthropology* 1976 17(2). Portable art distribution clusters around a few Magdalenian sites; (4) the North European Mesolithic (Woodman; Price) suffers from sampling bias (inundated early coastal sites). The Maglemosian is represented essentially by summer dispersal settlements, despite their rich contents. The scarcity of plant food remains (invalidating D. Clarke's prediction) may coincide with latitudinal gradients and non-preservation of leafy plants. The Levant (Henry) record documents intensification and social inequality during the Natufian. Gazelle exploitation involved communal drives and mass slaughter, rather than herd following. Indications of long-distance hunting (p. 376) may nevertheless point to the latter interpretation. Australian prehistory (Lourandos) is no longer an environmentally constrained, static succession. The last millennia witnessed the emergence of complex gerontocratic societies, regionally integrated through ceremonial and matrimonial exchanges, a development paralleled, with varying intensity, in Melanesia and Tasmania. This social model could inspire European Upper Palaeolithic research.

The volume illustrates current directions through exploratory case studies, rather than a mature turning point. Including relevant areas such as the Siberian "Neolithic," the Jomon tradition of Japan or the final and epi-Palaeolithic in the Maghreb would improve representativity. The epistemological positions, underlying approaches described by Gould as "adaptationist" and "transformationalist," correspond with the mechanistic logico-positivism of the New Archaeology and the marxist-influenced philosophical realism (e.g., Bender), the latter with a social factor primacy, rather than with the economic priority of the mode of production model. Several issues remain unresolved: (1) showing that subsistence intensification means more than insuring against imponderables (Gould, p. 431); (2) conflicting implications about sedentism, outlined in the last section; (3) broadening and refining complexity studies, beyond the concept of hierarchy (Conkey, p. 319; Price, pp. 359-360). The African Late Stone Age record offers tantalizing prospects for research into such questions.

Islands of History

Marshall Sahlins

Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1985. xix + 180 pp. \$22.50 (cloth), n.p. (paper).

Reviewer: E Palmer Patterson II

University of Waterloo

Professor Sahlins' book is a collection of five essays presented to learned society meetings in Paris, Washington D.C., Adelaide, Liverpool, and Helsinki. Sahlins examines the historic meetings of Polynesians, specifically Hawaiians, Maoris, and Fijians, with Europeans, especially James Cook in Hawaii, in terms of their histori-

cal and cultural settings. He analyses the reflections of traditional society and cosmology in indigenous experiences of contact. "Cook was tradition before he was a fact" (p. 148). Professor Sahlins' point is to explore and determine the Polynesian viewpoint without which the European impact cannot be understood: "Chiefs, priests, and English were all following their received inclinations and interests" (p. 125).

In Polynesian cultures, Sahlins asserts, history, anthropology, religion, symbolism, ritual, ceremony, economy, politics, society, government, and cosmology were all intermeshed and functioned inseparably. There is then, for example, a Hawaiian view of history which is complex and rich and different from the European, hence the title *Islands of History*. In order to understand this history, we must examine the culture through the findings of anthropologists, missionaries, explorers and others. These are the resources of the historian-anthropologist. To do this, Sahlins has also drawn upon the philosophical and theoretical writings of Europeans, especially the French. In particular, these include works dealing with mythology and symbolism.

His essays are witty, learned, and sometimes recondite. They are salted with *bon mots* and references to Biblical and Classical themes where they seem to offer insights on Polynesian culture and history.

There is a prophetic quality, a call to understanding and action, in these essays as well. The reader must gain a greater awareness, a greater willingness to examine material which may previously have been thought to lie outside the range of "sources." We must add these small civilizations to the roster of "great" civilizations studied in order to know the full spectrum of history. The use of Western categories and distinctions, dichotomies and contrasts, may be misleading and even dead-ends, when applied to Polynesia.

Sahlins is boldly speculative in his construction of the Polynesian understanding of events in the early contact situation. Further, Polynesia was neither a static nor a monolithic culture. No interpretation of Polynesian history can ignore this dynamic quality. The author warns against a structural analysis which omits change. The impact of the Europeans contributed to further change in ways not immediately apparent to the early explorers, such as men eating with women. Change nevertheless was consistent with and embodied continuity: "The people embed their present in the past," (p. 146) and again, "There is no such thing as an immaculate perception" (p. 147).

These essays are meditations on Polynesian culture and history, interpretations of early Polynesian-European contact. As such they explore the intricacies of Polynesian cosmology as a key to understanding history. The dichotomy, History-Anthropology, is transcended.

Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion

Robert Weller

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987. ix + 215pp. \$22.50

Reviewer: Graeme Lang

Sir Wilfred Grenfell College

This book is another in the line of fascinating studies of Chinese folk religion pro-