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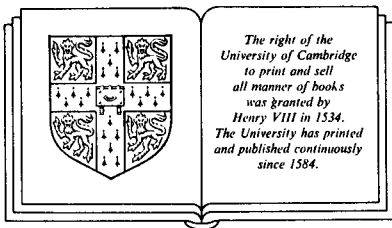
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Day of Shining Red

An essay on understanding ritual

GILBERT LEWIS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521222785

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First published 1980
First paperback edition 1988
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Lewis, Gilbert.
Day of shining red.
(Cambridge studies in social anthropology; 27)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Gnao (Papua New Guinea people) – Rites and ceremonies.
2. Puberty rites – Papua New Guinea – Sepik Valley.
3. Sepik Valley – Social life and customs.
4. Rites and ceremonies. 5. Symbolism. I. Title.
DU740.42.L477 301.2'1 78-68354

ISBN 978-0-521-22278-5 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-35888-0 paperback

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PREFACE

Prospero speaks to Caliban: 'When thou didst not, savage, know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes with words that made them known.' An anthropologist has not the magic art of Prospero that he may dare to speak like that; yet some would almost seem to. It is easy to think about other people's rites and symbols in terms of our own preoccupations. We have received ideas. Questions put by other anthropologists influence what we ask about in fieldwork, how we listen to answers and observe. Strange customs tempt an anthropologist more strongly to interpret them when he feels the people have not given him a good enough reason for following them. The question of what should count as a good reason runs through this book.

The anthropologist cannot escape from the complexity of his subject matter. Rather than suppose that one idea or theory should singly guide my comments, I have tried to find which ones help in understanding a rather short rite performed by the Gnau of New Guinea. In chapter 2 I present a general view of the problems and then in subsequent chapters take up various aspects of them for further exploration, in the light of what the Gnau had to say. I take extracts of Gnau conversation in chapter 3 to show what sense they have of ritual, and how they come to learn about it and how to do it. Next I describe the rites and mention some aspects of my impressions of them. These have no doubt influenced how I later evaluated the rites. It seems to me false science to disguise the selective personal component that enters willy-nilly into some field observations by an anthropologist, in the hope that the reader will be duped by impersonal phrasing. Some kinds of ethnographic data and observation may be collected, with appropriate effort, both systematically and objectively, but others, by their nature, cannot achieve a like status as 'hard' fact. The subjective impact of the different things I saw is partly what directed and motivated my efforts in inquiry and analysis.

Chapter 5 is about the rules of participation in the rites, and some further inferences that may be drawn from them about the intentions and motives of the actors. I relate it to questions of genre, address and style in ritual. Chapter

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6 argues that we may mislead ourselves when we think we naturally understand a representation or a symbolism. I also discuss here some anthropological uses of the term 'metaphor'. The aim of chapter 7 is to see whether comparison within a limited ethnographic area helps to adjust the balance of commentary, partly in regard to the question of how relations between the sexes bear on interpretation of the rite. The long chapter 8 tackles the detail of what is done in the rites, going into issues of response, expression and meaning, especially with regard to differences in what the actors perceive according to sex, age and experience. I have tried to present a full account of a Gnaau understanding of human development through life. Chapter 9 looks at how emotion may affect people's perception of symbols and chapter 10 takes up the idea of token, type and variation to examine some further aspects of the functions of the rites and how they have been affected by social change. The final chapter is an inventory of themes in the book.

My apology for the detail of this study would be that it tries to work right through a particular case and be accurate to my understanding of Gnaau views, rather than to offer another new theory or to show how well one theory works for some of the data. I have been influenced by the books of Gombrich (1960, 1963), Wollheim (1970), Frye (1971), Cherry (1966), and Huizinga (1965). None of them was intended as a work for anthropologists and perhaps for that reason it is easier to single them out. Within anthropology there are too many different sources for my ideas, coming from friends, books and articles, to acknowledge all of them justly, and so, uncertain as to how I should do it, I do thank them, and single out only Bateson's *Naven* (1958), A. I. Richards's *Chisungu* (Faber and Faber, London, 1956) and Leenhardt's *Do Kamo* (1947) for their closeness in subject matter and the influences of the ways they handled it.

For all their kindness and tolerance, and for the help they gave me, I owe the people of Raut village a deep debt. I hope they might find this book true to them.

I thank the Social Science Research Council for funds enabling me to visit the Gnaau from December 1967 to November 1969 and again from July to December 1975. Some of the text used in chapters 5 and 9 previously appeared in 'A mother's brother to a sister's son' in *Symbols and Sentiments*, edited by Ioan Lewis, Academic Press, London, 1977.

*Naumas**August 1977*

G. L.