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Argonauts Of The Western Pacific (Routledge Classics)



Synopsis

Bronislaw Malinowski's pathbreaking *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is at once a detailed account of exchange in the Melanesian islands and a manifesto of a modernist anthropology. Malinowski argued that the goal of which the ethnographer should never lose sight is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world." Through vivid evocations of Kula life, including the building and launching of canoes, fishing expeditions and the role of myth and magic amongst the Kula people, Malinowski brilliantly describes an inter-island system of exchange - from gifts from father to son to swapping fish for yams - around which an entire community revolves. A classic of anthropology that did much to establish the primacy of painstaking fieldwork over the earlier anecdotal reports of travel writers, journalists and missionaries, it is a compelling insight into a world now largely lost from view. With a new foreword by Adam Kuper.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Argonauts of The Western Pacific Bronislaw Malinowski. London, George Routledge & Sons,

LTD. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. 1922

MADELINE SMITH

Fairfield University

Malinowski's book is clearly written, in great detail of his experiences on the Trobriand Islands as an ethnographer. He introduces the reader into an explanation of how he is going to go about his findings, through experiments and observations of the growing cultures on the Trobriand Islands, which are located off the southern coast of New Guinea. The ethnographer begins by asking the reader to imagine himself as a "beginner," with no direction or help on where to begin his journey. He is trying express what it was like for him during the beginning of his journey on the islands. However, Malinowski explains how overtime he becomes more comfortable with his surroundings, which enables him to further his findings. Malinowski's book is based mainly on his discoveries of the traditions of the Trobriand culture. He goes into detail of his observations of the Kula, who are the Trobriand natives. He recognizes their importance of exchanging valuables, or vaygu'a, through the male partners. In their culture, the two types of valuables of armshells and necklaces must be exchanged against each other for the main purpose of circulating around the Kula ring with the importance of relationship. Although, as Malinowski explains, it is not so simple, rather it is a very complex ritual.

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