



St John's College, Cambridge

**Memorial Event for Professor Sir Jack Goody,
Fellow in Archaeology & Anthropology, 1961-2015;
Emeritus William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology**

**Palmerston Room, Fisher Building
3 pm, Saturday 2 July 2016**

PROGRAMME

- 15.00 Welcome: Professor Chris Dobson, Master, St John's College
- 15.15 Session 1: Professor Martine Segalen, Paris West University Nanterre La Défense
Chaired by Professor Robert Tombs, Fellow, St John's College
- 15.40 Session 2: Dr Gilbert Lewis, Fellow, St John's College
Chaired by Dr Joseph McDermott, Fellow, St John's College
- 16.05 Tea & coffee, Fisher Building Foyer
- 16.30 Session 3: Professor Maurice Bloch, Professor Emeritus, London School of Economics
Chaired by Professor Ulinka Rublack, Fellow, St John's College
- 16.55 Session 4: Professor Alan Macfarlane, Fellow, King's College
Chaired by Professor Ulinka Rublack, Fellow, St John's College
- 17.20 Closing remarks by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, Fellow, St John's College &
Professor Juliet Mitchell, Professor Emeritus, Jesus College
- 17.45 [BREAK]
- 18.00 Buffet reception, Master's Lodge, including a short musical interval by
The Gentlemen of St John's
- 20.00 Memorial Event concludes

Preface: Professor Juliet Mitchell

It must seem an unreasonably long time since you wrote with your thoughts, condolences and care about Jack's death and life. It has been wonderful to have all these personal tributes to Jack and all the kindnesses to me. All I can say is that I have found there is no blueprint to the experience of a much beloved and loving husband no longer being in the world. It is also wonderful to have such a legacy as his writings and his friendships.

Thank you all.

Juliet

April 2016

Biographical Information

Speakers

Professor Maurice Bloch, FBA, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, London School of Economics



Professor Maurice Bloch was trained at both the London School of Economics and Cambridge University. He has carried out fieldwork among irrigated rice cultivators and shifting agriculturalists in Madagascar, and in other parts of the world including Japan. Partly because of his French background he has combined British and French approaches and was instrumental in introducing the revival in French Marxist theory to British anthropologists. His interests have focused on the notion of ideology and he has written on ritual and language. He is now working on how to relate the findings of cognitive psychology with anthropology. Maurice Bloch has taught in the USA, France and Sweden.

Dr Gilbert A Lewis, Fellow, St John's College and formerly Lecturer in Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge



Dr Lewis's research interests are medical anthropology, ritual and the anthropology of Melanesia. He has worked extensively in Papua New Guinea. His publications include *Knowledge of Illness in a Sepik Society* and *The Day of Shining Red* and he was a contributor of *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion*.

Professor Alan Macfarlane, FBA FRHistS, Life Fellow, King's College, Cambridge; Professor Emeritus of Anthropological Science, University of Cambridge



Professor Alan Macfarlane taught at the Department of Social Anthropology Cambridge University for thirty-four years and is now Emeritus Professor of Anthropological Science and a Life Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. As an anthropologist and historian he has worked in England, Nepal, Japan and China and has focused on a comparative study of the origins and nature of the modern world. In recent

years Professor Macfarlane has become increasingly interested in the use of visual material in teaching and research and in types of internet communication. He has published extensively on English history and presently serves as Chairman of the Executive Board of the World Oral Literature Project.

Professor Martine Segalen, Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Anthropology, Director of the Department of Sociology, Paris West University Nanterre La Défense



Professor Martine Segalen teaches in the Sociology and Anthropology Department of the University of Paris X Nanterre. Since 1996 she has been Head of the Sociology Department and is Editor of *French Ethnology*. Her research career has been devoted to the study of kinship and family in European societies, focussed on history, anthropology, demography and sociology. From 1986-1996 she was Director of the Ethnology Research Laboratory at the National Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions. Professor Segalen is also a Researcher at IPRAUS. Her most recent publication is *Grandparents: the family across generations* co-written with Claudine Attias-Donfut.

Discussion Chairs

Professor Ulinka Rublack, Professor of Early Modern European History, University of Cambridge; Fellow, St John's College, Cambridge



Professor Rublack's research interests focus on sixteenth and seventeenth century culture, its visual and material aspects, religious change, gender and society, and historical methodology. Her most recent publication is *The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother*, which is currently being transformed into an opera entitled *Kepler's Trial*, which will be performed at St John's on the 28th of October 2016. In 2011 Rublack's book *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* was winner of the Roland H. Bainton Prize for the best book published in English during the preceding year in any historical field from 1450-1660. Rublack's *Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* is forthcoming in 2017, and she is currently working towards a global history of early Protestantism as well as on a projects relating to the material culture of the early modern world.

Professor Robert Tombs, Professor in French History, University of Cambridge; Fellow, St John's College Cambridge



Professor Tombs's main area of research has been nineteenth-century French political history, and especially popular political culture. He has been particularly concerned with the Paris Commune of 1871 and with French nationalism from the 1830s to 1914. He has also worked on the history of the relationship between the French and the British, from the end of the seventeenth century to the present day, including the cultural and economic as well as the political and military spheres. His most recent book is *The English and Their History*. He continues to work and publish on French history and on French attitudes to Britain.

Dr Joseph McDermott, Emeritus Reader in Chinese History, University of Cambridge; Fellow, St John's College



Dr McDermott's research interests lie in Chinese social, economic and cultural history mainly during the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties (1000-1700). Recent publications include *The Book Worlds of East Asia and Europe, 1450-1850*, *The Making of a New Rural Order in South China* and *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China*. His current work includes a study of Chinese Jesuits in France and China from 1750 to 1815 and an analysis of hereditary book-collecting families in the Lower Yangzi Delta from 1550 to 1950.

Closing Remarks

Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, FBA, FRS, Professor Emeritus, Frank Ramsey Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of Cambridge; Fellow, St John's College, Cambridge



Professor Dasgupta taught at the London School of Economics before moving to the University of Cambridge, where he is a co-founder of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk. His research interests have covered welfare and development economics; the economics of technological change; population, environmental, and resource economics; social capital; the theory of games; the economics of global warming and the economics of malnutrition. Professor Dasgupta was knighted in 2002 for services to economics. In 2015 he was awarded the Blue Planet Prize for his contributions to welfare and environmental economics.

Professor Juliet Mitchell, FBA, Professor Emeritus of Psychoanalysis and Gender Studies, University of Cambridge; Founder-Director of Gender Studies; Fellow Emeritus, Jesus College, Cambridge



Professor Mitchell is Professor of Psychoanalysis and Gender Studies at the University Cambridge, Convenor of Gender Studies in Cambridge and a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. She is a Full Member of the British and the International Psychoanalytical Societies. Her most recent books are *Siblings: Sex and Violence* and *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Sibling Relationship for the Human Condition*.

Jack Goody: in remembrance

Jack Goody was my friend and mentor for over forty years. As always with Jack, the warmth and closeness of our scholarly relationship was nourished by the sharing of food and drink, a conviviality both intellectual and material. Over the years, debating a spectrum of topics – the East in the West, the circulation of silver in Ming China, plum-brandy distillation in the Cantal – I never met Jack over a desk in an office but always in some untidy room scattered with heaps of papers, dog-eared books, half-empty glasses of rough red wine and the promise of a delicious meal to come. Jack was inexhaustibly hospitable, in his own kitchen and in nearby restaurants. His delight in food – growing in the field or orchard, prepared in the dairy, displayed in a market or shop, served on white napery or on faded oil-cloth – was of course gastronomic, but above all it was *social*. The flavour of any mouthful was always spiced with the personalities, practices and histories behind it. This relish for looking at lives through food and food through lives is equally manifest in Jack's work.

Sharing food and ideas about food with Jack played an important part in shaping my own intellectual trajectory (as well as my ideals of hospitality). When I first met Jack he had just published *Technology, Tradition and the State*. I was embarking on a study of agriculture and history in pre-modern China, and the model Jack offered in *Technology, Tradition and the State* for integrating techniques of food production into political and social history was a powerful inspiration. Having begun my career focusing on farming and the production of food, I then began to think seriously about how its consumption shaped structures of power, both locally and globally. Here again, Jack had pioneered the field with *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*. By the turn of the century I, like all my colleagues, had become fascinated by food's role in the constitution of identity. Jack, it turned out, had a book in the press: *Food and Love: A Cultural History of East and West*.

Food played a star role in Jack Goody's oeuvre. In his adventures in comparative sociology, in his probings of the deep histories of Africa and Eurasia and the emergence of global capitalism, a focus on food served him as a powerful lens for investigating the articulations of production and reproduction, of culture and materiality, politics, power and taste. *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, published in 1982, helped launch the field of global food studies. The work is still alive, relevant, compelling: a group of young scholars recently published a collection, *Food Consumption in Global Perspective*, to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary.

Jack will be remembered for pioneering many fields: kinship and history, literacy, critical studies of Eurasia ... I shall remember him for all of these, but above all I shall remember him as a kind friend, a generous host, and the equal of Fernand Braudel in decrypting food as history.

Francesca Bray

Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh; Professor Emerita, University of California, Santa Barbara

June 2016

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Dear Colleagues,

Unfortunately, for reasons of health and age, I will not be among you today to honor the memory of Jack Goody. But I wanted to send these few words as a token of my admiration for Jack and the friendship we shared.

I met Jack fifty years ago on the advice of Claude Lévi-Strauss. I had come to Cambridge for the first time to meet Edmund Leach as well as Andrew and Marilyn Strathern, who had just returned from their first field in New Guinea. As soon as we made acquaintance, Jack and I became friends. Why a friendship comes about is inexplicable. And if I had to define friendship, I would simply say that it is to feel happy to be together.

For decades, Jack and I sent each other our books and articles. I would like to say a few words here about what these publications and our discussions brought me, as was the case, as we all know, of thousands of his readers, anthropologists and others, who shared the same passion for trying to understand what Humankind has imagined and put into acts and works in order to produce itself and continue to exist over the thousands of years of its history.

I can identify two blocs of work in Jack's research and publications that deeply changed the way I see the world. These were, on the one hand, his work on the invention of writing and the description of its many powerful affects on all areas of life in those societies which invented or adopted it: political life, religion or the administration of goods and persons, but also effects on the human mind in the domain of cognition. By inventing various forms of writing, a portion of Humankind provided itself with new "intellectual tools", as Jack wrote, which have come down to us and which we continue to perfect.

The second bloc of Jack's work that influenced me even more deeply was his set of writings that systematically dismantles, piece by piece, the Western idea that of a great split within Humankind between the West, the East and the rest. All schoolbooks told that, in Europe, the Renaissance had erased the Middle Ages and opened the way for the birth of Capitalism on all fronts – industry, commerce, finance – thus making Europe the custodian of scientific and economic rationality, but also of political rationality, since the most advanced capitalist countries would all adopt democracy as their political system, democracy being, as Sir Winston Churchill famously said, "the *worst* form of government, except for all the others".

Jack often reminded me that, until the 16th century, China was by far the most advanced in many domains before entering a decline that lasted until the 20th century, but that, from the standpoint of the overall history of Humankind, this in no way authorizes the conclusion that there might exist a definitive split between the East and the West. The history of the past twenty years has proved him right. Increasingly we are seeing societies, like China and India, declare their intention to continue to modernize but without becoming Westernized. In an effort to combat this Western self-deception, Jack was intent on showing what we share with the East since the Bronze Age, when we were all part of what he called Eurasia. His last book once more addressed the role of metallurgy in the history of European societies and beyond, as far as the Ottoman Empire

As his interest in Eurasia increased, his interest in Africa, where he had begun his anthropological career, dwindled. Similarly, he had set aside the history of pre-Colombian America, where the first States, and even empires, had begun without benefit of a Bronze Age.

A few final words about the intellectual but also the political pleasure I felt when Jack showed us the connections between the fact that we cultivate flowers or that a "haute cuisine" reserved for an elite became differentiated from the cuisine of the so-called lower echelons of a society and the existence of a division of that society into orders, castes or classes. Flowers, he explained, were an additional way of understanding and acting upon nature through culture and the forms of power prevailing in society. For the Baruya of New Guinea, among whom I lived and worked for many years, the idea of cultivating flowers does not exist and would have no meaning for them. The flowers they use for decoration and

ornamentation are gathered in the forest and stuck into the men's hair or formed into a bouquet to decorate the foot of the tree to which the men address their prayer to the Sun.

With Jack's disappearance a great man has disappeared. Not only a great scholar renowned for his theoretical daring, his encyclopedic learning, his comparisons ranging over the history of Humankind, but also a great humanist and, as he liked to say of himself, a "happy materialist" as well as a man who loved life.

I, we, owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Maurice Godelier

Prix de l'Académie Française; CNRS Gold Medal; Alexander von Humboldt Prize for Social Sciences

June 2016

Jack Goody (1919–2015)

A giant of British social anthropology, Jack Goody died on July 16, 2015, in Cambridge, England. Goody began his career as an ethnographer in Northern Ghana when it was still a colony called the Gold Coast, and he continued to make substantial contributions to scholarship in the 21st century. Based from his first academic appointment at the University of Cambridge, Goody was the youngest member of a triumvirate that transformed the Department of Social Anthropology from the 1950s onward. Associated more closely with Meyer Fortes than with Edmund Leach, for both theoretical and ethnographic reasons, it did not take Goody long to find his own distinctive path. Even while establishing his anthropological credentials with contributions to the study of kinship, domestic social organization, and oral traditions in Africa, Goody preferred to define the discipline as comparative sociology, following A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (and Émile Durkheim before him). He spent the last decades of his life as a leading protagonist in interdisciplinary debates in world history, drawing on his anthropological knowledge to attack insidious Eurocentrism in all its guises.

John Rankine Goody was born on July 27, 1919, in London and raised in the Home Counties, just north of the capital, in a middle-class family that prized education highly. Unlike his younger brother Richard, who followed him to Cambridge University and later earned international recognition as a Harvard physicist, Jack's studies in English were interrupted by World War II. Much later he wrote extensively about his experiences as a prisoner of war, explaining that reading Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*—together with his exposure to Italian peasants in the Abruzzi—induced him to switch to the study of anthropology. After completing his BA in English, Jack took the one-year diploma course at Oxford and worked for two years as an Adult Education Officer in Hertfordshire. He returned to Oxford to study for a BLitt with E. E. Evans-Pritchard before going back to Cambridge for his PhD, which was based on over two years field research in northern Ghana. His dissertation, *The Ethnography of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, West of the White Volta*, was examined by Max Gluckman and G.I. Jones in 1954. Goody began teaching at Cambridge the same year. He was elected to a Fellowship at St John's College in 1961. His gruff manner, unkempt hair, colorful African shirts, and progressive politics (he was an active supporter of Ghana's independence movement) endeared him to generations of students. They generally profited more from the clarity of his writings than from his rasping, sometimes inchoate delivery in the lecture room.

Publications began to flow very quickly. With Fortes and others, he contributed to an influential volume on the developmental cycle of the domestic group (Goody 1958). Early papers on incest and adultery (1956), the relation between mother's brother and sister's son (1959), and double descent systems (1961) drew on his fieldwork among the LoDagaa, but he also explored cross-cultural variation with reference to other Ghanaian societies with different principles of descent and more centralized political institutions. In addition to advancing the study of kinship in journals of the discipline, Goody edited a popular reader (1971b) and a rich Festschrift for Meyer Fortes (1974).

Yet Jack Goody was never content to remain within the limits of Fortesian kinship studies. His first monograph (based on the dissertation) probed wider comparisons concerning the intergenerational transmission of property, including European societies documented by historians and legal scholars (1962). These interests, which he later pursued in collaboration with leading historians of rural England (notably Joan Thirsk and E. P. Thompson), culminated in *Production and Reproduction* (1976). Drawing on the data of George Peter Murdock's Human Relations Area Files as well as ethnographic and historical works, Goody showed that domestic institutions in Africa south of the Sahara differed significantly from those of Eurasia. The continental contrast was vividly expressed in marriage payments, which he investigated with another Cambridge colleague, Stanley Tambiah (Goody and Tambiah 1973). Bridewealth, understood as "horizontal" transfers between groups of kinsmen, was the dominant form in egalitarian Africa. The more stratified societies of Europe and Asia were marked by "diverging devolution" in which the "vertical" transfer of a dowry (or of an "indirect dowry" when the payment was not controlled by the bride but served as a conjugal fund) was a form of premortem inheritance that reflected the family's concern to maintain the social standing of daughters and sons alike. Such contrasts—also evident in the use of female labor, concubinage, and adoption—had their deep causes in systems of production. Eurasian societies that had taken up plough agriculture were

more productive and more concerned with individuated ownership and status differentiation than African societies reliant on the digging stick.

This argument was strongly materialist, but Goody distanced himself from the neo-Marxist approaches that became fashionable in anthropology from the late 1960s. He drew attention to the importance of the “means of destruction” alongside the means of production in explaining the larger patterns of West African history (1971a) as well as to the “means of communication” in explaining human social evolution more generally, in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977). As its title implies, this was a response to the ahistorical structuralist binaries of Claude Lévi-Strauss. It was shaped not only by Goody’s work on oral traditions in Ghana but also by his earlier studies of English literature. A very productive collaboration with Ian Watt in the early 1960s had resulted in a strong thesis emphasizing the transformations wrought by literacy (Goody and Watt 1963). Rather than posit a universal great divide between “cold” and “hot” societies in the monumental manner of Lévi-Strauss, Goody stressed how the emergence of alphabets had made possible the systematic codification, manipulation, and transmission of knowledge on which subsequent human accomplishments, from philosophy and theology to science and technology, were founded. He later modified the strong version of this argument, in which literacy is the key causal variable. Fundamental cognitive capacities, including the ability to doubt as well as to reason logically, are also present in oral societies. Literacy is often restricted to exclusive minorities over long periods of time, and for many purposes logographic forms are just as effective as alphabetical scripts (Goody 1986). Goody’s work in this field remains foundational (see Olson and Cole 2006). He liked to remark that the enormous investment he made (in collaboration with Kum Gandah) in writing and translating the *Myth of the Bagre* (Goody 1972) would be his most enduring contribution to scholarship.

During the decade of his tenure of the William Wyse Chair in Social Anthropology (1973–1984), Goody transformed the department, both by expanding regional interests and through his theoretical openness and eclecticism. He encouraged closer engagement with the social sciences, including the expanding fields of development studies and ethnicity. He also supported historical research, notably that of Alan Macfarlane, even though he was never convinced by his younger colleague’s emphasis on the uniqueness of the English. Cooperating closely with Cambridge University Press, particularly in the series of *Cambridge Papers* and *Cambridge Monographs in Social Anthropology*, Goody was the dominant figure in what became one of the most productive centers of anthropology in the world. His successor in 1984 was Ernest Gellner, who shared his broad intellectual interests and maintained his openness to history and comparative sociology, even after this became unfashionable in the wake of postmodern influences and the “writing culture” debates.

Having stepped down from teaching and administrative responsibilities earlier than he needed to, Goody became ever more productive in the decades of nominal retirement. Major studies of consumption practices were consistent with his earlier work—for example, in showing how refined notions of haute cuisine (1982) and the aesthetic use of flowers (1993) had emerged in various Eurasian societies. In the less-differentiated societies of sub-Saharan Africa, flowers were not cultivated, and chiefs (where they existed) consumed the same food as commoners. He gradually set aside this Africa–Eurasia contrast to allow for closer inspection of distinctions within the Eurasian landmass and above all for east–west comparisons. Goody continued to draw on historians. He often invoked V. Gordon Childe’s account of the urban revolution of the Bronze Age, which he had first encountered along with Frazer as a prisoner-of-war in a camp in Bavaria, to explain the basic unity of the Eurasian landmass. After a pioneering study that highlighted the impact of early Christianity on the family and marriage in Europe (1983), he published a richly detailed comparative account of “Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-industrial Societies of Eurasia,” which brought together the evidence from various “ancient” civilizations, including Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman (1990). In these projects, he had frequently to endure the ire of specialists, but those with a larger vision tended to applaud the brilliance of his insights. In France, the admirers included Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff. Almost all of Goody’s mature works have been translated into French, and in recent decades his influence has probably been greater there than in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Goody's main subject in the last phase of his life was global history (see Hart 2014 for an insightful evaluation). More specifically, he contributed an original anthropological voice to the interdisciplinary chorus of scholars seeking to "decenter" Europe. He did this most forcefully in *The East in the West* (1996) and again a decade later in *The Theft of History* (2006). Complementing historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and political economists such as Andre Gunder Frank, Goody complained of a fundamental Eurocentric bias in our understanding of the past, which continues to permeate Western social theory. Karl Marx, Max Weber, Norbert Elias, and countless historians have seen the emergence of an industrial economy and liberal democratic governmental institutions as inhering in a uniquely European teleology. For Goody, this is an error: the sequence is largely accidental. Just as fossil fuels and other energy sources were decisive for the industrial revolution in England, so the patterns of earlier revolutions in human society depended on metal and the distribution of ores across Eurasia (2012).

Goody was by no means a simplistic "Europe basher." He did not underestimate the significance of the rupture that was initiated in western Eurasia in the 18th century. But he put Karl Polanyi's "great transformation" and Ernest Gellner's "big ditch" in a *longue durée* Eurasian context. Not even the contingencies of European imperial expansion could permanently disrupt the long-term pattern of "alternating leadership" between east and west. China fell back significantly in the "great divergence" (Pomeranz 2000) of the 19th century, but for Goody its rise in the 21st century was confirmation that the "miracle" of the modern world was not a European one but a Eurasian one (2010). The breakthrough to modernity (a word he used skeptically) had nothing to do with Athenian democracy, or with rationality, or with "the" Renaissance, "the" Protestant ethic, "the" scientific revolution, or "the" Enlightenment, since equivalent phenomena to all of these can be found outside Europe. It followed for Goody that the origins of capitalism must be pushed far back into the Eurasian past, when "merchant cultures" enabled the diffusion of goods, ideas, and technologies along both the overland routes of the Silk Road and the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean. He drew many of these strands together in an accessible overview that appeared in a special issue of *History and Anthropology* in the month of his death (Goody 2015).

Jack Goody was a larger-than-life figure who inspired great affection among his students and colleagues. He was married three times. With Joan Wright, he had a son and two daughters. With Esther Newcomb, he had two daughters. Esther shared her husband's fascination for the domestic institutions of West African societies, and she became a highly respected member of the Cambridge department. Their hospitality was legendary, both at their large house in West Cambridge and at their summer house in France. The last decades of Jack's life were spent with the feminist psychoanalyst and writer Juliet Mitchell. In his last book (2012), he thanked "my family past and present for their varied support." The formal dedication was "to the Master and Fellows of St John's College ... for the help so many of them have given me, now and since I came up."

For his "services to social anthropology," Jack Goody was honored with a knighthood by Her Majesty the Queen in 2005. His academic honors were numerous. Elected to the British Academy in 1976, he preferred to remain in the Sociology, Demography and Social Statistics Section rather than join the anthropologists when they fissioned to form a separate section with geographers. He was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 2004. In France he was appointed Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2006, the same year in which he was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Nanterre Paris Ouest la Défense. In spite of this international recognition, there is no Goody school in anthropology. His influence is considerable but diffuse and probably stronger outside anthropology (notably in cultural history) than within it (see the contributions to Featherstone et al. 2009). Some anthropologists fault him for not having kept up with the latest theoretical ideas in their journals; archaeologists question his interpretation of Childe; and specialists in medieval Europe, Islam, or China are liable to point out that his citations of particular cases or legal texts were selective and even outdated. But this is surely beside the point. The contributions of Jack Goody will only be adequately appreciated when social anthropologists resume practicing their discipline as a comparative historical science of human society.

Chris Hann
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Jack Goody against the great divide

Future generations will want to study the world society emerging in our times and they will look to us for antecedents; but they will be disappointed by the fragmented narrowness of our anthropological vision. Jack Goody devised and carried out an anthropological project on a scale to match the human civilization now being formed.

In one version of the Bagre [myth] God and the spirits had organized life. Another version was about how the fairies had helped mankind to invent culture. And in a third man himself had gone out and invented how to build a house and the rest. Theological and humanistic versions were together in the same myth. It gave me a different idea about human beings.

It was very important to me that some of my friends could become university lecturers, having been brought up in a small, oral village and now learn everything from books. Certainly they lost a lot on the way. I had to explain to them that my version was chance, I could have written down a hundred other versions if I had the time, the money and the energy.¹

Jack developed his interest in literacy during the 70s. He wrote a book about it, taking on Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The domestication of the savage mind* (1977). As a former student of English literature, he wanted to connect a newly independent West Africa to the Islamic civilization he encountered briefly during the war.

By the time he became an anthropologist, colonial empire was being dismantled. Yet the intellectual legacy of imperialism still underpinned anthropology. So he chose to attack the lingering opposition of 'modern' and 'primitive' cultures by studying the chief activity of literate elites – writing. Most African cultures are predominantly oral, whereas the ruling classes of Eurasian civilization have always relied on written records. Lévi-Strauss's lists linking 'hot' and 'cold' societies to other pairs such as history and myth, science and magic, far from exemplifying universal reason, were a parochial by-product of mental habits induced by writing.

What were Jack's core ideas? The key to understanding social forms lies in production and that means the uneven spread of machine production today. Civilization or human culture is largely a consequence of the means of communication – once writing, now an array of mechanized media, but always interacting with oral and written forms. The site of social struggles is property. And his central focus on reproduction could help the ageing citizens of rich countries to reinvent kinship too.

The idea that Europeans invented a new form of rationality or even social change itself was a product of their temporary superiority in the nineteenth century and the attempt to explain why until then others had not achieved what they had done. However invention is not something that is alien to any human mind nor yet is rationality; they appear throughout human existence in different forms, at different tempos and in different mixes...The idea of an earlier, static, 'primitive', non-rational society has been maintained by many sociologists and historians, including Marx and Weber, but it is quite foreign to most of us who have engaged in 'participant observation' among such peoples.²

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¹ Interview, 2008

² *Metals, capitalism and culture* (2012; 90)