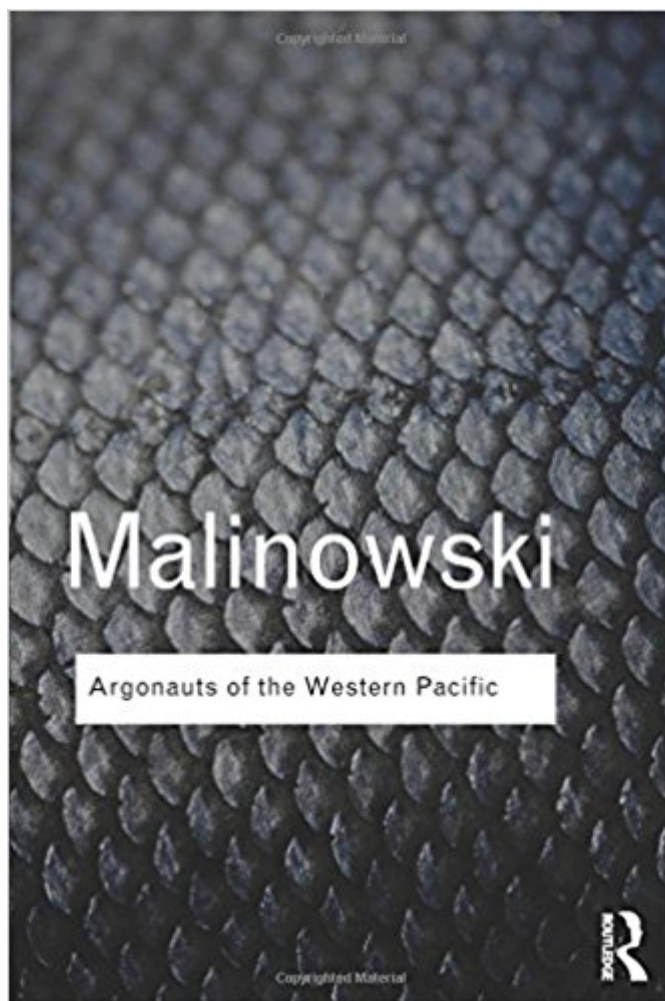


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Argonauts Of The Western Pacific (Routledge Classics)



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

'No writer of our times has done more than Bronislaw Malinowski to bring together in single comprehension the warm reality of human living and the cool abstractions of science.' - Robert Redfield 'A contribution of the first rank to anthropological and sociological literature.' *Economica*

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), author of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) is still regarded as a pioneer anthropologist. Lecturing in both the UK and USA before and after the

outbreak of the Second World War, he established himself as one of the most important anthropologists of the twentieth century.

Today, many books on ethnology are written by "theoreticians" who have not spent much time in the field and who rely on the work of others (being French, I think, for example, about Claude Levi-Strauss or Alain Testart). You have to believe them when they quote field anthropologists and, for this reason, it is refreshing to go back to basics and read books like this one. It could be considered as a bit long, but it is full of stimulating insights. I'd like to mention, among others, the introduction on the methods of field inquiry, the different categories of gifts, the role of magic, the disappearance of primitive cultures under European influence (already in 1916...) but there's much, much more. I warmly recommend this book to anybody who wants to get an (almost direct) insight into primitive culture ("la pensée sauvage"...).

Any aspiring anthropologist should be happy to include this book in his or her collection. While it might seem a bit dated, one can always glean something important from the past.

It reads like a long drawn out technical and boring thesis, which it probably was for the author getting his PhD? The subject was interesting but it went on and on and on ... with too much detail for anyone other than an ethnographer. This is one case where a synopsis in a collection would have been better (usually I prefer reading the complete works rather than a redacted version but this is that rare case where less is better)

Classic anthropology text but too academic for casual reader.

Was bought used through .com and it is in the condition that it was described but there is a large name written on the top of the book that was not noted in the description

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. He states, The Kula is "a big, inter-tribal relationship, uniting with definite social bonds a vast area and great numbers of people, binding them with definite ties of reciprocal obligations, making them follow minute rules and observations in a concerted manner - the Kula is a sociological mechanism of surpassing size and complexity, considering the level of culture on which we find it." (510)

Throughout Malinowski's book, he does a well job emphasizing cultural particularism through his studies of the Kula culture. During his time on the islands, he found the traditions of their culture that distinguished them as human beings. Everything the Kula do is socially acceptable in their society. Malinowski uses his ethnography skills to prompt our society to understand another's' throughout his lengthy book.

This is a real classic in the history of anthropology, published in 1922, and unlike another classic from the same decade, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, it has worn well, too. This is where modern ethnography begins. Malinowski tells us how to do ethnography, in no uncertain terms, as he explains Trobriand kula expeditions. I found it to be a delightful read and I was continually amazed at the intellectual sophistication of his work, given its age. I believe I learned more about ethnography from this book than from any other I have ever read, and I have been a professional anthropologist for 30 years. It is, I must warn you, a long book, and I doubt that many will be willing to read it from stem to stern, but I think every anthropologist should study the introduction at least. It is perhaps the "sacred charter" for the ethnographic project, complete with felicitous phrases such as the "ethnographer's magic," "the imponderabilia of actual life," "the native's point of view," and "the hold life has." In addition, it is certainly essential reading for anyone interested in magic, because it is as much about magic as it is about kula exchange. I assigned this book to a junior-level college class in ethnography, but they weren't as pleased with it as I was. Many of the students understood the importance of the book, but most also found it tedious, dull, repetitive, hard to follow,

and definitely too long.

Item arrived on time and in good condition. Though it had more highlighting than I expected. Still pretty good

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