

W. Schmidt's "Mutterrecht" and Cross-Cultural Research

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The theories of the late Father SCHMIDT and cross-cultural research in the United States represent very different approaches to the study of man. The latter (typical of the work of MURDOCK [1949, 1957, 1967], WHITING [1968], and their students) uses large samples of societies, each rated on specific variables whose synchronic relationships are subjected to statistical tests of significance. SCHMIDT, on the other hand, used descriptive and anecdotal material in support of postulated diachronic relationships. It is significant for SCHMIDT and for those engaged in cross-cultural research that in spite of differences in method, and in spite of a relative unawareness of each other's work, both have arrived at remarkably similar conclusions concerning the subsistence base of matriliney and the significance of initiation rites for girls.

SCHMIDT's formulations in the posthumously published *Das Mutterrecht* are closely tied to his body of theory and should properly be viewed within its context. However, the present paper will isolate two of his hypotheses in order to demonstrate their similarity to those suggested by D. F. ABERLE in "Matrilineal Descent in Cross-cultural Perspective" (1961), and by JUDITH BROWN in "A Cross-Cultural Study of Female Initiation Rites" (1963). First, SCHMIDT considered horticulture in the hands of women to be the subsistence base of societies characterized by Mutterrecht. (Two of the three titles SCHMIDT had considered for *Das Mutterrecht* were *Der mutterrechtliche Kulturkreis der Pflanzenzucht*, and *Familie und Staat der Pflanzenzüchter-Kultur* [1955: 7].) Second, SCHMIDT suggested a relationship between Mutterrecht and the observance of initiation rites for girls. It is these among his many formulations concerning Mutterrecht which will be the focus of the present comparison.

SCHMIDT's Mutterrecht was a broad concept whose definition, though

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