

# *In Memoriam*

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## **Rodney Needham (1923–2006)**

Rodney Needham died on 3 December, 2006, at the age of 83 after a longish illness. Influenced by Evans-Pritchard, he has been called the foremost British anthropologist of his day. He was Professor of Social Anthropology in Oxford from 1976 to 1990. Although far from being enamoured with the work of Durkheim, he showed a strong sympathy for the work of some of his disciples and was instrumental in bringing their work to the notice of English-speaking scholars. Amongst his great output of books and articles – about four hundred – there appeared in 1960 a translation of two essays by Robert Hertz with the title, *Death and the Right Hand*. Three years later he published in translation Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification*, for which he wrote a lucid but controversial introduction. He was also a promoter of the work of van Gennep, showing his support for certain, what some would regard as, marginal thinkers. He much preferred Mauss to Durkheim on account of the former's wide ethnographic knowledge, and also because Mauss was much less concerned with philosophical and moral issues than was his uncle. At a later stage in his life, strangely enough, Needham turned towards Wittgenstein as a source of inspiration for his book, *Belief, Language, and Experience* (1972). Converted to structuralism, he introduced Lévi-Strauss to the English-speaking world and while he was working on a translation of Lévi-Strauss's book on kinship he became critical of his ideas.

Rodney Needham, was a scholar of great precision with a razor-sharp and precisely ordered mind. Very widely read in various languages and demanding in conversation, he created a presence that one seldom left without being edified or challenged in one dimension or another.

*W.S.F. Pickering*