Garo Social Organization

Rengsanggri. Family and kinship in a Garo village. Robbins Burling. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1963. 377 pp. Illus. $8.

Rengsanggri is a Garo village in the Assam hills where the author, a cultural anthropologist, lived from 1954 to 1956. The book, an illuminating description of Garo social organization, contains information on continuity and change in religious belief, kinship, village organization and leadership, the settlement of disputes, the village and market economy, and on the assimilation of new ideas from outside administration (British, then Indian) and Christianity. A village of 60 households is the focus of the study; however, information on cultural variations in other Garo areas is given, in both the text and an appendix.

Students of non-Hindu groups of India or of the hill peoples of southeast Asia will find this book valuable, for the Garos, together with other Assam hill peoples, "form the last western outpost of the type of culture found in much of the mountain area of southeast Asia" (p. 16). The general reader will gain an insight into such a society and into the difficult relations between mountain-dwellers and lowlanders, a general characteristic of southeast Asia and a vital factor in contemporary political conflicts that range from the Naga Hills through Burma and Laos to Vietnam. *Rengsanggri* is written lucidly and illustrated with excellent photos and adequate maps; village census data is included in appendixes.

The sociological contribution of this book rests in its description and analysis of Garo matrilineal descent groups and matrilateral affinal alliance, work which supplements the author's articles. Burling criticizes Homans and Schneider's theory that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is unlikely in a society with avuncular authority because it is the familiar quality of the mother's brother which makes such a marriage sentimentally appropriate. He points out that avuncular authority in Garo society is precisely what encourages matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, and he illuminates the important authoritarian quality in affinity where alliance is practiced. Burling understands that a system of descent and affinal alliance is rooted in a system of ordered categories, not in particular kin relationships or groupings, but he also assesses carefully the socioeconomic concerns of individuals in maintaining alliances between particular groupings. Affinal alliance is common among southeast Asian hill peoples, and anthropologists may wish that Burling had discussed the related writings of Lévi-Strauss, Dumont, Needham, and others. Greater attention to the use of symbolism in myth, ritual, and religion might have elucidated the link between the social and symbolic order, which one expects to find in such a society and which Burling's tantalizing bits on house structure and prestations indicate. Also, the author might have been more careful to distinguish aspects of matrilineality from those of matrifocality—for example, in the holding of purse-strings (p. 131). Matrifocality also characterizes many bilateral or patrilineal societies in southeast Asia.

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History of Technology

The Ancient Engineers. L. Sprague de Camp. Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1963. 408 pp. Illus. $4.95.

One characteristic of the "Gee whiz" school of historical popularizers (those writers who marvel at past and present engineering developments) is their tendency to credit technology with all advances in civilization. To de Camp, the early engineers, "much more than the soldiers, politicians, prophets, and priests, have built civilization." This stimulating proposition leads him to some curious conclusions; for example, he says that Sergius Orata, who devised the technique of central heating, "has affected our daily lives far more than Caesar ever did." He makes this claim despite the fact that the use of central heating disappeared in the West and was later redeveloped.

Another characteristic of this school is a tendency to regard the history of technology as one of constant progress. De Camp's own evidence, particularly with respect to Byzantium, India, and China, would seem to contradict his assertion that technology moves "with increasing sureness and speed" through the centuries.

Although de Camp's glib generalizations might be suspect, his breezy style and anecdotal flair provide an interesting travelog of the architectural monuments of antiquity. Unfortunately, his interest in colorful trivia and historical curiosities frequently takes precedence over accounts of the technologists and their methods. The peccadilloes of Nero, for example, receive twice as much space as Vitruvius and Frontinus together—this in a book that purports to give the "neglected early engineers" their due!

There are some serious omissions. The Sumerians, who gave us the potter's wheel, the seed plow, the brick mold, and the sailboat, and who devised methods of engraving and of copper and bronze casting, are given but a few pages. Cretan technology of the Minoan Age is dismissed in a few paragraphs, and nothing is said about the Temple in Jerusalem, one of our best-documented technological stories of antiquity. On the other hand, de Camp gives us material on China and India, which most Occidental authors overlook. Furthermore, he is thorough and accurate in his discussions of poliorcetics, the art of building and besieging fortifications.

The final chapter (almost one-sixth of the book) begins with Charlemagne and goes through Leonardo and Galileo. Surely this is a bit far for a work on *ancient* engineers.

But this recital of its shortcomings does an injustice to the book. Actually, de Camp has written a colorful account of the human side of engineering; he thereby complements Albert Neuburger's older and more sober study, *The Technical Arts and Sciences of the Ancients.*

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Zoology

Traité de Zoologie. vol. 4, part 1. Plathelminthes, Mésozoaires, Acanthocéphales, Némertiens. Pierre-P. Grassé, Ed. Masson, Paris, 1961. 944 pp., Illus. Plates. NF. 212.

This volume begins with a short essay by P. de Beauchamp on the triploblastic level of organization, in which he emphasizes the various types of coelom and the evolution of the nervous system. The Turbellaria are also treated by this author. The Temnocephalida are treated by Jean Baer, the Monogenea by Baer and L. Euzet, cestodes by