Book Reviews

Primitives and Very Primitives

Man the Hunter. Based on a symposium, Chicago, 1966. Edited by RICHARD B. LEE and IRVEN DEVORE, with the assistance of Jill Nash. Aldine, Chicago, 1968. xvi + 416 pp., illus. $6.95.

In April 1966, some 75 scholars from many parts of the world met at the University of Chicago for an intensive four-day symposium on current research among primitive hunting-and-gathering peoples. Sol Tax of the University of Chicago conceived the symposium and chaired the sessions, and Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore of Harvard presented important papers and edited this report.

The aim of the symposium was the presentation of the recent efflorescence of ethnographic data on hunter-gatherers in the company of scientists who were interested in discussing further issues. These issues were essentially theoretical and methodological considerations related to the major problem of reconstructing Paleolithic cultural characteristics from the ethnographic data recovered in modern times.

No definite conclusions resulted. Discussants mostly disagreed, as might have been expected, since there has been so little prior consideration of the arguments: in our century academic anthropology had virtually outlawed this kind of approach—that extant stages of culture could be useful in thinking about extinct ages—for this was a fundament of the rationale of 18th- and 19th-century cultural evolutionists.

Although more problems emerged at the meeting than solutions, this may be taken as a sign of increased sophistication about hunting-and-gathering society. Also, many of the conclusions were negative; that is, many well-worn assumptions were shown to be simply not true. But this too must be considered a sign of increased sophistication.

The problems are complex but not necessarily insoluble. A primary issue has to do with the unrepresentativeness of the sample of modern hunters. These hunters do not inhabit the range of favorable habitats that Paleolithic peoples occupied. Another problem is that many hunting societies have regressed, broken down, or otherwise been drastically altered after contact with modern civilizations. This argues that simple comparison of cases or statistical treatment would be inappropriate means for an extrapolation back to the Paleolithic. More ethnology and, especially, more historical research need to be done.

The negation of some old assumptions about hunters was an important feature of the symposium. For example, there is no universal—or even usual—practice of defending of specific hunting territories. Second, hunting by males is usually of less significance to subsistence than the foraging after wild plants by females. Third, and probably the biggest surprise, is that normally hunting-and-gathering is not so precarious an economy as we have always thought. Lee shows that even the Bushmen of the Dobe region of the Kalahari Desert, an area we have typically assumed to be one of the world's most unproductive, actually are relatively well-fed—and with no great expense in effort or time. Life there is *not* nasty, brutish, and short.

All in all, this seems to have been a surprisingly good symposium. One suspects that much of the success should be measured in the stimulation of the actual "meeting of minds." This could be ascertained only individually and introspectively in some kind of before-and-after comparison, and of course it would not be in evidence in this report. However, the book can stand on its own. It is not engrossing reading from beginning to end—it is impossible to edit out all redundancy and triviality—but there are many segments that will be edifying for anyone at all interested in the quality of the life of *very* primitive peoples.

ELMAN SERVICE
Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara

Life in Arid Regions

Desert Biology. Special Topics on the Physical and Biological Aspects of Arid Regions. Vol. 1. G. W. BROWN, JR., Ed. Academic Press, New York, 1968. xviii + 638 pp., illus. $29.50.

This is the first of two volumes in which the editor attempts to draw together the scattered literature concerning desert biology. Brown has assembled a group of authors who can present their specialties with authority. This volume includes comprehensive surveys of the geographic sources, the special geologic features, and the limnology of deserts, but largely it consists of chapters on special features of desert animals and plants. It is intended as an introductory survey at the beginning graduate level.

The book begins and ends with excellent essays. Cloudsley-Thompson introduces the desert community through a narrative of a day's excursion near Khartoum. He is instructive and entertaining as he cuts across traditional disciplinary and taxonomic boundaries to present the distinctive viewpoint that is the science of desert biology. The last essay, a particularly fine consideration of man in the desert by D. H. K. Lee, concludes that a healthy man given adequate water and food can cope with all natural desert situations. However, there is an increasing dependence on technology for survival in the desert. This carries the danger that disruption of services could leave a large and unprepared populace to deal with the rigors of the desert; the consequences could be disastrous.

The reviews on plants, by A. W. Johnson on the evolution of western North American desert vegetation and J. A. McCleary on the biology of desert plants, confront broadly the problem of adaptation to the desert. In view of the overall structure of the volume, more space could have been allotted to the biology of desert plants.

In spite of the authority of each of the essays, the volume as a whole lacks coherence. Although the geographers, geologists, and botanists have been able to generalize the features of deserts and their inhabitants, the common responses of animals to temperature extremes, aridity, periodicity, and low diversity of life forms unfortunately are not drawn together. Nor is convergence in form and function by diverse groups in response to desert conditions specifically covered. These weaknesses derive largely from the decision to structure much