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Classic on Pygmies: Die Negrito Asiens by Paul Schebesta, S.V.D.

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Book Reviews

CLASSIC ON PYGMIES

DIE NEGRITO ASIENS. II Band. Ethnographie der Negrito. I Halband. Wirtschaft und Soziologie. Studia Instituti Anthropos, Vol. XIII. By Paul Schebesta, S.V.D. Wien-Moedling: St. Gabriel-Verlag. 1955. Pp. xvi-340. Fr. 50.

Whenever the reviewer has to tackle a book written by Father Schebesta, he feels like one of the author's own Pygmies confronting a giant.

In his introduction Father Schebesta states that the only way to acquire a true knowledge of primitive peoples is to live with them, to share their dwelling and their food, to converse with them directly without the help of interpreters, and he has followed that line of conduct all through his explorations in Africa, Malaya and the Philippines, not only for weeks or months, but for years. The reviewer can only concur with such a statement, and that most enthusiastically.

With reference to interpreters, this reviewer knows by personal experience how unreliable they often prove to be. One day he interviewed a group of Negritos in the province of Rizal. Although he had sufficient knowledge of Tagalog to be able to question them directly, his Christian guide, who of course knew the language perfectly, insisted on acting as interpreter. Just to give one example among many: to the question of who was responsible for the "making" of the world, the Negrito answered that the spirit (singular) was the author of it all; the interpreter, however, insisted on using the plural, because he said, such heathen beings have no conception of God, they simply have to adore

spirits (*anitos*), in the plural. Even though the reviewer had been unable to understand the conversation, he could not have been mistaken in this instance, as the Negrito, an old man, forcefully contradicted the interpreter and flatly refused to accept any kind of plurality in the Being he worshipped.

Now to return to Father Schebesta. He says that the impression one has on first coming in contact with primitive peoples is a lasting one; and the reviewer shares this opinion. When Father Schebesta met his first Semang, he found them most lovable, and he has never had any occasion to change this opinion. The reviewer had exactly the same impression of Philippine Negritos, and he met them almost under the same circumstances. Unfortunately Father Schebesta's first contact with Philippine Negritos was far from satisfactory, and it is the privilege of this reviewer to state most emphatically that Philippine Negritos, as met by him, are in no way inferior in lovability to the Semang.

The present reviewer has to confine himself to the treatment of Philippine Negritos living in Northern Luzon, as he has no knowledge at all of either Semang, Andamanese or other groups of Philippine Negritos. Therefore he will give a succinct account of the contents of Father Schebesta's book and merely add a word of comment here and there as occasion demands.

In the first book of his monumental work on the Negritos of Asia, the author treated Physical Anthropology. Here in the first section of the second book, he describes their Economical (Part I) and Social Life (Part II). In the second section he promises to discuss their Religious and Intellectual Life.

In Chapter I of Part I, the author describes extensively the houses and settlements of the Semang and the Philippine Negritos, adducing those of the Andamanese for the sake of comparison: a system which he will pursue all through the book.

At the end of Chapter II on clothing and adornment, the author states: "Clothes and adornment of the body are not the expression of a sense of shame, but rather satisfy desire of adornment" (p. 51). This statement seems to the reviewer much too general, as it certainly does not apply to the Negritos he knows. He never saw an adult Negrito without at least the most elementary clothing. Men do not remove their G string even at the bath if other persons are present, which cannot be said about

many other inhabitants of these islands. Ifugaw and Isneg men, for instance, have often been seen completely naked when the weather was rainy or rivers had to be crossed at regular intervals. Has the author perhaps failed to note the section on Negrito modesty in the reviewer's report on the Negritos of Eastern Luzon? (*Anthropos* XXXII, 1938, pp. 913-914.) Is it possible by any stretch of the imagination to qualify as adornment the filthy rag many Negrito men wear as a G string to the exclusion of all else?

In Chapter III the author treats of Negrito food. In Chapter IV, the gathering of food and its preparation. An unfortunate mistake has, probably inadvertently, slipped into the description of the arrow shafts of the Negritos of Northern Luzon. On page 71 Father Schebesta says that they are made of bamboo (*Misanthus sinensis*. Andr.). Now the latter plant (correctly *Miscanthus*) is a kind of bamboo grass and has nothing to do with real bamboo. The reviewer has seen occasional arrow points made of bamboo, but never any arrow shafts: if not made of wood, the shafts always consist of a single cane of the said bamboo grass. The English qualification of this member of the *Gramineae* has probably led the author into the afore-mentioned mistake. No real bamboo belongs to the genus *Miscanthus*. At the same time the author does know the term "bamboo grass" as he mentions it on page 153, but *buybuy*, used for making besoms or brooms, is not a *Miscanthus* either, but *Thysanolaena maxima*. O. Kuntze, sometimes called tiger grass.

In Chapter V Father Schebesta mentions some other occupations and concludes Part I with the means used by Negritos to safeguard life and to enjoy it (Chapter VI).

On pages 165-166 the author refers to a stone that removes the poison from a wound inflicted by the bite of a venomous snake. He calls it a superstition. Before World War II there were such "stones" in many rectories and convents. The reviewer has had such a "stone" in his possession for many years and has saved numerous lives thereby. He obtained it from a Belgian who manufactured such "stones" from ingredients known to himself; the stones were neither found nor mined. Just to give a striking example: one evening people came to call the reviewer to administer the last Sacraments to one of his boys. This was rather unexpected as the boy had been seen in the house a couple of hours pre-

viously, apparently in perfect health. After arriving at the boy's house, the priest and his companions were told that the boy had been bitten by a snake on a big toe, and so they immediately sent for the "stone." Now in order to apply it, the wound must bleed. In this case the wound was on the toe, as far as possible from the heart, and the leg of the boy was already quite cold. Consequently they had to work for a considerable time to enlarge the wound before blood finally appeared. The "stone" was applied forthwith and firmly adhered to the wound. The inmates of the house were told to bring back the "stone" as soon as it fell off by itself. This the boy himself did the next morning: he was sprightly as ever, except that he limped for a couple of weeks on account of the large wound inflicted on his toe by the ministering angels. This is only one example of many witnessed by the reviewer. After use the "stone" has to be manipulated as described by Mr. Pasley with the result reported by him. However, milk is preferred to water whenever possible. Afterwards the "stone" can be used again. It also serves for extracting poison from wounds inflicted by scorpions and centipedes, etc., but these are of course rarely serious.

In Part II, after having given an idea of the society of the Andamanese and the Senei (Chapter I), the author treats very elaborately the sociology of both Semang (Chapter II-IV) and Aeta (Chapter VI).

The few adverse criticisms of the reviewer do not detract in any important way from the high value of this publication, which is also profusely illustrated and splendidly edited.

Of course we miss an index, but the author promises amply to supply this deficiency at the end of his next book, where indexes will serve both that book and the one under review.

M. VANOVERBERGH

STIMULATING THE READER

CURRENT ISSUES IN PHILIPPINE EDUCATION. By Cresencio Peralta, Ph.D. Manila: Silangan Publishing House, 1955. Pp. 203. ₱4.50

"It's about time we do our own thinking on Philippine Education," writes Dr. Peralta, Director of the Graduate School at