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The Tasaday Controversy, edited by Headland

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The Tasaday Controversy: Assessing the Evidence. Edited by Thomas N. Headland. AAA Scholarly Series: Special Publication No. 28. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1992. xi + 255 pp.

As a graduate student of sociology and anthropology in the early 1970s, I was exposed to prepublished accounts of what was then billed as "the most significant anthropological discovery of the century." Shorthand descriptions were indicative of the prevailing excitement: isolated "cave-dwellers," Stone Age "hunter-gatherers" surviving solely on wild food, and a primitive band "wearing leaves" to cover their private parts.

Soon after a new government was installed in 1986, contrary allegations arose against the authenticity of the Tasadays. Once again, the charges were briefly couched, thus: "hoax," "impostors," "manipulation even of social scientists."

Is the Tasaday a hoax or not? Headland writes the final essay in this book, and he hazards an answer: "No." In conclusion, then, there can be little doubt that the Tasaday exist and that they have lived for a very long time in South Cotabato" (p. 222).

A student of social science, however, would value Headland's more enduring contribution as an editor. For such a student is called by scientific discipline and procedures to approach the issue with deliberate care, sorting out facts from myths and giving an ear to arguments both in favor of and against any one position. He is thus invited to read this book and clarify the prevailing confusion on the issue. It is this service to the scientific community which Headland provides us.

The foreword, preface, and introduction provide a background and updated account of the Tasaday controversy. Part I presents the views of skeptics who raised questions after 1986. Part II brings together the opinions of those who supported earlier reports in 1971 and soon after. Part III incorporates new perspectives on old data concerning nutrition, language, and the role of the museum on the issue. Part IV invites scientists to evaluate the issues raised: a linguist, an archaeologist, and a biologist.

The conclusion, as earlier noted, eventually responds to the "hoax question", but first in a qualified manner:

Life is complex, however, and the truth lies somewhere in between the two polar alternatives of deliberate deception versus primitive isolation. The Tasaday did not deliberately deceive the public, but neither were they primitive foragers isolated for hundreds of years from outside contact. (p. 215)

The final section also summarizes "eight little-known facts" which few anthropologists would now dispute. These facts all point to the early Tasaday to be "not as isolated and primitive as first reported."

Finally, how does an educated person today make sense of the controversy in view of present-day discussions?

Certain crucial considerations emerge from the book. Here the choices are not either/or. First, the importance of *free inquiry* is critical to science. This was something quite difficult to maintain during the martial-law years. The controlled atmosphere even of scientific investigation hardly enjoined the ethos of "methodological skepticism" which is essential to science. In fact, the "Statement on the Tasaday Controversy" which was later issued by social scientists was addressed to various interested parties, asking them to allow the academic community to conduct a thorough empirical study of the issue before any final pronouncement could be made.

Second, *media impact* is undoubtedly not to be discounted in academic disciplines, whether in the social sciences or in theology. The audiences targeted by media are rather different from those who are usually addressed by scholars. It is for this reason that "premature" disclosure of scientific investigations can prejudice the proper understanding of any single issue, and can instead foster a media circus.

A third consideration is the *probable manipulation* by certain people who are deeply concerned with ferreting out the truth. The book's contributors highlighted the exploitation of indigenous communities. When they first appeared, the Tasadays immediately became multiple symbols from various standpoints: "(1) an evolutionary symbol from the Stone Age, (2) an ecological symbol from the tropical rain forest, (3) a political symbol from the Philippines, and (4) a peace symbol with political implications from the era of the Vietnam War" (p. 202).

Whatever the final verdict on this issue, it has become clearly important that available evidence be placed under scrutiny and debate. It is the deliberate effort to assess such evidence surrounding the controversy which makes this volume a useful collection.

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I Remember . . . Travel Essays. By Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992. 122 pages.

I Remember . . . Travel Essays is a collection of 13 previously published autobiographical travel essays by Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. Hidalgo's recent, as well as previous, works draw on her vast and varied experiences as a U.N. expatriate's wife and as a traveller. Previous writings of the same genre include *Sojourns* (New Day, 1984), *Korean Sketchbook* (Young Ahn, 1987), and *Five Years in a*