

BOOK REVIEW

The Tasaday Controversy: Assessing the Evidence. Thomas N. Headland (Editor), 1992. Washington: American Anthropological Association Scholarly Series Special Publication no. 28. Pp. 255. \$19.95 (paperbound). ISBN 0-913167-51-7.

The charge of "fraud" is one of the most devastating accusations which can be leveled against a scientist. Science as a whole, not just the individual scientist, can be adversely affected by the charge. Critics of science still use the example of the Piltdown skull to discredit the entire scientific community 80 years after this hoax was perpetrated.

This book discusses the controversy about the recently "discovered" Tasaday "Stone Age" people of the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. It gives an evenly balanced presentation, containing articles arguing for the authenticity of the Tasaday, and others maintaining the discovery was a hoax perpetrated by members of the Marcos regime. Arguments on both sides are detailed, well-researched, and compellingly written. These are followed by several more papers by outside researchers attempting to reconstruct the facts objectively from the meager evidence available.

In 1971, the Tasaday were described to the world as a Stone Age people with limited technology. Yet, even from the outset it was clear the Tasaday were no longer pristine. At best, they had already been affected by the people who brought them to the world's attention; at worst, they were a set of local villagers paid to act "primitive." No anthropologist today believes the early press reports of the Tasaday as holdovers living a life unchanged for millenia. The question now is how much of the early reports was accurate and how much was staged or simply exaggerated. The answer is probably somewhere between the two extreme viewpoints.

The only thing certain about the controversy is that not enough is known about the facts. From the beginning of the saga, political and media involvement prevented adequate investigation by trained anthropologists. The entire truth will probably never be known.

The number of books published on the Tasaday now outnumbers the Tasaday themselves. This book is, however, welcome in attempting to help settle the controversy. It is an issue in which we are all involved.

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