

Winter 1987

*Sepik River Societies: A Historic Ethnography of the Chambri and Their Neighbors* by Deborah B. Gewertz

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**Publication Info**

Published in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Volume 17, Issue 3, Winter 1987, pages 702-704.

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investigating Ottoman population and migration trends because of their preoccupation with analyzing pure demographic events such as fertility, mortality, and family size to the relative exclusion of the cultural, religious, and political factors that played such an important part in nineteenth-century Ottoman population developments.

Karpat does not claim that his book provides a full explanation of demographic change in the late Ottoman empire. Yet it is the best interpretation of the subject in print. More important, the intrinsic value of the book's statistical sections will remain undiminished in future years.

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*Sepik River Societies: A Historical Ethnography of the Chambri and Their Neighbors.* By Deborah B. Gewertz (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983) 266 pp. \$25.00

This book is billed as an important and controversial revision of Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament* (New York, 1935), which was based on fieldwork conducted in New Guinea with Reo Fortune in the 1930s. Mead set out to demonstrate that our cultural associations of "maleness" with an actively sexed, aggressive character, and of "femaleness" with passivity and nurturance, were not given in nature, as Westerners liked to suppose, but were products of their training as members of a particular culture. As examples she presented the Arapesh, among whom both male and female roles were passive and nurturant; the Mundugumor, in which society both sexes behaved as men were supposed to do in ours; and the Tchambuli (now called Chambri), in which men took an active interest in the arts and behaved with the jealousies and wounded pride of male ballet dancers, while their wives undertook to provision society through fishing and trade. Mead later changed her mind about the relationship of sex and temperament in *Male and Female* (New York, 1949) saying that biology did, after all influence each sex's temperament; although later still, in the 1960s, she apparently reverted to her original position.

Gewertz, however, does not deny the validity of Mead's observations. Rather, on the basis of fresh, extensive fieldwork among the Chambri, she points out that the situation observed by Mead in 1933 had been unusual: there were no occasions then in which the males could assume a dominant role. Ordinarily, Chambri males were the principal providers of valuables for use in affinal exchange, trading stone adzes with the neighboring Iatmul. But the arrival of the Germans in the 1890s changed all that because they brought steel knives which the Iatmul much preferred. Having nothing to lose, the Iatmul used their Chambri

relations as targets for headhunting raids, forcing the Chambri to flee to another set of trading partners in the hills.

These hill partners exchanged sago for the fish which were caught and marketed by the Chambri women. Twenty years later, the British repatriated the Chambri. At the time that Mead met them, the men were in process of restarting their ceremonial culture, while the women continued their traditional roles as fisherwomen and traders. Had Mead stayed longer, she would have seen the men again exhibit "dominant" behavior vis-à-vis certain feasting partners. Gewertz concludes that dominant and submissive behaviors among the Chambri are culturally prescribed roles which both men and women may play. Surely this is in essence what Mead concluded.

Gewertz places the Chambri into the broader historical and geographical framework of Sepik River societies between 1850 and 1980 and emphasizes how misleading it is to think of these small tribal groups in isolation from each other. To be Chambri or Iatmul is to participate in certain patterns of behavior which are reinforced by mutual interaction. Actual human beings may switch sides in this region just as has been reported for the Nuer and Dinka in Africa, the Gitksan and Carrier for the Northwest Coast, and "movers" and "stayers" for Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>1</sup>

Mead alluded to these extensions of her model in time and space, but gave them no emphasis. Gewertz, however, asserts that sets of tribal identities are coterminous with ecologies, and reports that the Chambri and Iatmul tribes are almost gone now that the lake where the Chambri fished has become overgrown with *salvinia molesta*, a high-growth water plant imported inadvertently as decoration for a priest's aquarium.

The ethnographic detail here is rich, and the analysis only just begun. Gewertz is best in explaining how the Chambri interpret various stories and historical events, worst when discussing theory. Readers who are not anthropologists will find it tough going because Gewertz seldom locates her findings in a broader context. For instance, she almost says that American ethnology has been confounded by the fact that most of its practitioners accept some version of Darwinian adaptation, yet are continuously encountering instances of maladaptive behavior on the part of their informants. They cling to functionalist models and eschew historical context because an acknowledgement of choice in the natives' lives would reveal mistaken, maladaptive behavior. Historical ethnology should be a record of both adaptive and maladaptive decisions, as many historians have long asserted.

1 Peter Newcomer, "The Nuer Are Dinka: An Essay on Origins and Environmental Determinism," *Man*, VII (1972), 5-11; Kenneth Ames, "Stable and Resilient Systems along the Skeena River: The Gitksan/Carrier Boundary," in Richard Inglis and George MacDonald (eds.), *Skeena River Prehistory* (Ottawa, 1979), 219-243; Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

Although she is clearly positioned against idealism of any sort, Gewertz makes an important observation, arguing that the Chambri have persisted in structuring their relations with their neighbors (including the Australian administrators) in terms of an implicit social contract. Each party grants the other autonomy, although they engage in exchange relationships which must be conducted by parties who are respectively dominant and submissive to each other. For instance, in rituals involving wife-givers and wife-takers, should the direction of the exchange become mixed—as when a clan starts giving wives to a group which has previously always been wife-giver to it—then it may become necessary to mark the ritual occasion by means of sex-reversal, as in *naven* among the Iatmul.

One of many recent ethnographies to integrate a consciously historical perspective, Gewertz' book attempts to integrate two different perspectives. As an outsider, she establishes a chronology, divides it into periods, and then characterizes each period in terms of an ecological regime with its corresponding social arrangements. But she also constructs the sort of insider's account which Rosaldo and Sahlins have provided. As such this book will repay close attention for its handling of important interests in both anthropology and history.<sup>2</sup>

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*Western Impressions of Nature and Landscape in Southeast Asia.* By Victor R. Savage (Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1984) 456 pp. S\$45.00 cloth S\$30.00 paper

Savage's work is an exploration into a field which he terms "environmental cognition": the organized human perception of nature and landscape (10). He straddles the boundaries between history and geography to ask how European travelers and administrators saw (and wrote about) Southeast Asia from the sixteenth century to just prior to World War II. He concludes by suggesting that "the nature of Western environmental cognition was an influence, direct or indirect, on the process of Western colonialism" (329).

This statement is not very profound, and neither is the book. Much of it reads like a catalogue of Western observations of Southeast Asian marvels and oddities: the fecundity of the soil, natural riches, native indolence, the tropical climate and pernicious diseases, and the attractions of nature. Yet there is considerable virtue and utility in bringing such information together from a wide variety of French- and English-language sources. The book's six main chapters are topically differen-

2 Renato Rosaldo, *Illonogot Headhunting, 1883-1974* (Palo Alto, 1980); Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphor and Mythical Realities: Structures in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor, 1981).