

The Jaiminiya, a Sanskrit treatise dating around 900 B.C.E., has generally been demeaned by Western scholars since it first became known in the nineteenth century. From Max Müller through the mid-twentieth century its obscurity, banal details, slang-filled conversation, and lack of elevated mythology or theology has led to its neglect, which O'Flaherty sets out to cure, because, in comparison to other Brahmanas, its stories are longer, better, and more plentiful. She shows that it is laden with folklore, which should not be judged by the canons scholars apply to myth. In fact, she attacks the myth-folklore distinction as all but useless in the study of Indian religions. The Brahmanas themselves have drafted folktales into the service of ritual exegesis, but, O'Flaherty argues, in the tenth century writers could compose Sanskrit treatises that would be memorized and preserved only if they made them appear to be related to sacrificial traditions. She shows that the tales are thematically identical with many of those catalogued in the Antti Arne-Stith Thompson *Index* and thus probably not originally linked to ritual as their primary context. To create a text comparable to the Jaiminiya, one would have to conflate the Bible with unexpurgated tales from Grimm characterized as a glimpse of priests with their masks down.

The translation is crisp and the commentary unlabored. In a marvelously provocative few pages (17-31) she discusses the interplay of dreams, myths, and rituals. Unfortunately, neither in her commentary nor her conclusion does she make full use of her own insights. True, the stories are about dreams, myths, and rituals that attempt to tame fears of death, sex, and the human body, but O'Flaherty really does not use her exegesis either to refine or amplify her more general theoretical observations.

Her method, she says, is to look "backwards" (at roots in the Vedas), "forward" (at influences on the Mahabharata and Puranas), "sideways" (at other Brahmanas), "up" (at world folklore), and "down" (at "deep," usually psychological, meanings). On the first three scores she does well. On the third her discussion is schematic, consisting largely of a list of parables. On the last account she does little more than show in a few brief paragraphs why Freudian interpretations would flounder: sexual violence is not repressed in the Jaiminiya Brahmana.

All in all the book is a good one, suffering mainly from too brief a treatment of promised "deep" meanings. Despite this it has leapt ahead of much religious studies scholarship on myth by its ability to treat the continuities between folklore and ritual.

### **Let the Past Go: A Life History Narrated by Alice Jacob**

Sarah Preston

Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper Number 104, 1986. 121 pp. (paper).

*Reviewer:* Harold Franklin McGee, Jr.  
Saint Mary's University

One must distinguish between biography and life history narrative. There is a tendency in anthropology to designate these very distinct documents by the term "life history" and to treat them as equivalent. The former is generally produced by an anthropologist who wants information, about processes of enculturation or about

development cycles of a group of people, with an eye to explaining the relationship between individual experience and sociocultural patterns of behaviour. The investigator will solicit information about periods of an individual's life (where there appear to be gaps in the chronology) or about specific topics deemed relevant. The verbal exchanges that take place are between an informant and an investigator but have intrinsic meaning only to the latter.

A life history narrative, however, is a performance—presented by an individual to an audience that may consist only of an investigator but that may also include others—which has intrinsic meaning to the storyteller. The anthropologist's task here is to discover that meaning.

There is a tendency to see such life histories as incomplete when they fail to discuss events which have significance in the anthropologist's culture or if they exclude events which the investigator has learned from other sources to be a part of an individual's experience. However, a perceptive collector will allow the narrator to define the limits of his or her own life history and will then analyze the collected material to ascertain conscious and unconscious meanings contained there. One can look for thematic patterns within the corpus of materials collected from a single storyteller as well as from a wider community.

In the well-established story telling tradition of the James Bay Cree, life history narratives play a significant part in affirming and reaffirming cultural values. Sarah Preston has wisely allowed Alice Jacob to tell her story in her way. The breaks that occur in the narrative are Alice Jacob's. Although only part of her "life history" is told, these episodes have a certain integrity which Preston analyzes as conveying a particular message about Cree culture and Alice's understanding of it. When all the significant values about the culture that can be learned from her life are conveyed, Alice ends her narrative, regardless of whether a "complete" account of her life has been told.

The central theme of Cree stories, irrespective of genre, is competence, and with respect to social interaction this means reticence, non-interference with others, self-reliance, and emotional control. Preston identifies these elements in Alice Jacob's narrative and provides the reader with a cultural context in order to explain the significance of these events to the storyteller and to a Cree audience. Preston's analysis provides an understanding of traditional Cree values and behaviour and is a clear demonstration of the relationship between oral tradition and social systems.

So this small volume will be of interest to Cree specialists, to scholars interested in cultural transmission and in the relationship between personal world view and social structure, as well as to a general audience which appreciates a well-told story. However, there are some variably troublesome features of this book. The Mercury Series editors request our indulgence concerning editorial matters since they are concerned with getting current research results to readers quickly; yet there are too many such errors, including the repetition of an entire page. More importantly, although Preston makes some effort to inform the reader of her involvement with Cree people generally and with Alice Jacob specifically, she provides little information about the conditions under which data were collected. For example, were they recorded in Cree and later translated? Similarly, we know that at least three people were present at the interviews, but we are not told if there were others present.

For me, the greatest limitation is the lack of information and analysis concerning the epilog [sic], which is a statement of faith by Alice Jacob. Since her conversion to fundamentalist Christianity is an important aspect of her life history, it deserves the same scrutiny as the more traditional material. However, she gives us only a very rough indication of when this event occurred. Preston should have provided more background concerning Jacob's conversion and how it should be interpreted given contemporary sociocultural conditions in James Bay. While Christian love and forgiveness are positive values which, Preston argues, Alice Jacobs has added to more traditional Cree values, there are indications that at least some of the traditional values are antithetical to those of her new faith. For example, much of the testimony focuses on dependence upon God/Jesus and one's inability to be socially responsible without God's help; this appears to contradict the Cree value of self-reliance. Also, as a traditional Cree, Alice was a competent member of the social group; as a Christian, God helped her "even though [she] was a woman." On the whole, though, the book is useful and will make a positive contribution to Cree ethnography.

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### **Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers: The Emergence of Cultural Complexity**

T. Douglas Price and James A. Brown, eds.

Studies in Archaeology.

New York: Academic Press, 1985. xviii + 450 pp. \$63.00(cloth).

*Reviewer:* Nicolas Rolland

University of Victoria

Anthropological literature on recent and past foraging societies has increased substantially, with improved analytical and theoretical sophistication. Researchers have approached this theme and its aspects from different perspectives. The focus is now shifting towards sequence and development, with a growing participation by archaeologists.

This volume owes its existence to the editorial initiative of two specialists: T.D. Price, with expertise in north European Mesolithic; and J.A. Brown, in North American Midwest prehistory. It emerges from a lively and well attended session of the XIth ICAES Conference in Vancouver (1983). It provides the latest on the state of the art but also highlights new developments in archaeology: (1) current directions in method and theory; (2) the appropriateness of the prehistory of foraging for testing new disciplinary advances; (3) major debates stimulated by ethnoarchaeological researches; (4) the increasing and independent contribution by archaeologists to anthropological theory building, reflecting greater interest in sociocultural phenomena's diachronic dimension.

The volume, unlike most conference proceedings, maintains thematic unity and a structured framework, as well as high standards in the individual contributions. Each paper examines how and why complexity arose among some late Pleistocene and Holocene foraging groups. Complexity covers themes such as subsistence intensification, origins of sedentary residence and social inequality. The main thesis is that the transformation happened before and independently of the Neolithic "revolution." A foraging/food-production dichotomy, furthermore, would obscure