

## Reviews

THE HUMAN BIOLOGY OF CIRCUMPOLAR POPULATIONS. Edited by F. A. MILAN. International Biological Programme Vol. 21. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 381 pp.

This is the fifth of six volumes published by the Human Adaptability Section of the International Biological Programme. It is a highly technical book, written by experts for experts, and it is unique in that a good deal of its content cannot be duplicated again soon — if it can be duplicated today! It records the research results on populations of people that are being rapidly assimilated and which have already lost much of their unique culture as well as their genetic integrity. For this reason alone this book is a timeless document, a reference work that will be consulted again and again for the objects of its investigation — people that are carriers of aboriginal cultures are rapidly vanishing.

The book contains twelve chapters, including the summary and introduction, each dealing with some aspect of human biology judged pertinent by the group dealing with circumpolar people. Population genetics rates two chapters (Ruychkov & Sheremet'eva, and Erikson, Lehmann & Simpson) and fills almost half the book; other chapters cover demography (F. A. Milan), cranial morphology (Dahlberg), ophthalmology (Forsius), anthropometry (Auger, Jamison, Balslev-Jørgensen, Lewin, de Pêna and Skrobak-Kaczyoski), nutrition (Draper), physiological characteristics (Itoh), work physiology (Shephard) and cognition-behavior (Forsius). The volume is introduced by Hughes and Milan, and summarized by the latter. The populations investigated contain the Lapps of Scandinavia, north Siberian populations, Inuit from North America and Ainu from Japan. The aim of the chapters is to present, as best as possible, a background or "baseline information" about circumpolar people.

The book contains a wealth of detailed descriptions and measurements, although despite meetings by collaborators under IBP auspices, differences in methods still preclude on too many occasions a detailed comparison between populations studied by different investigators. Whoever is interested in people from the North

will find a rich source of information. However, this is not an easy volume to read; in part because its authors retain a highly technical language and clearly expect a highly trained reader; in part because of the breakdown of subject fields by discipline. If one is interested in picturing the known idiosyncrasies, for instance, of the Ainu or Inuit, one must read not only all of the book but also crosscheck continually. This organization runs counter to illustrating human adaptations. Although attempts are made to deal with adaptation by humans to extreme northern environments, this is the weakest part of the book. However, here one must empathize with the authors. To do a credible job on adaptation, one must know, and know in relevant detail, how northern people dwelled in the absence of modern technology, medicine and food. Not knowing much about aboriginal lifestyles one can hardly speak plausibly, let alone authoritatively on how the activities of individuals relate to morphological or psychological characteristics, physiological responses or differences in blood serum proteins. There may have been no adaptive significance to a good many differences between northern people and others whatsoever. Had there been greater emphasis on adaptation then one would have read how a complex of anatomical, behavioral and physiological features acted together to permit mastery of specific tasks. There would also have been a mention of how people from cold environments at high altitude and in Tierra del Fuego had mastered similar problems. As it stands now the book has to be read carefully and repeatedly in conjunction with others if one wants to formulate a vision of the biology of northern people. One must congratulate the editor and authors on having produced, despite unavoidable difficulties, a most impressive and useful volume. They deserve our gratitude for tackling a very difficult job well, and producing a book which will be an increasingly valuable source of information as long as men ask about circumpolar people.

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