

William C. Clarke. *Remembering Papua New Guinea: An Eccentric Ethnography*. Canberra, A.C.T.: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University; distributed by UNIREPS, University of New South Wales (Sydney, NSW), 2003. Pp. 178, colored and B & W photos, illus. A\$49.50, paper. ISBN 1-74076-034-4.

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In 1964 and 1965, William C. Clarke conducted geographical field research among the Bomagai and Angoiang clans who live on the edge of the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea. In the introduction to his aptly titled book, *Remembering Papua New Guinea: An Eccentric Ethnography*, Clarke says he chose this site “far east down the Simbai Valley adjacent to a large stretch of uninhabited forest” because “it was the most remote of the Maring

communities" (3). At this point the Bomagai and Angoiang had only been in contact with European peoples for six years.

In addition to informing his choice of a doctoral field site, Clarke's longing to connect with people from a place as remote as possible underlies the present text. Although the book contains little to nothing about the Bomagai and Angoiang as they are today—Clarke acknowledges that he can only speculate about the present, having not been back to the Simbai Valley since 1977—*Remembering Papua New Guinea* compellingly represents this early colonial era. A collection of photos and reminiscences, the book presents the memories of an aging American geographer seeking to honor relationships formed, and lessons learned, forty years ago.

On the right of each double-page spread, there is a large photo. In each case, the left-hand page accompanying the photo contains Clarke's reflections. Sometimes there is an obvious relationship between the text and photo, as when Clarke addresses the subject of the photo directly, writing for example, in a letter to Ngirapo, his "keenest teacher," "sometimes you would amuse yourself by hooking me with a tall tale" (8). At other times, the words and pictures bear a less direct relationship to one another, as when we read Clarke's ruminations about contemporary Melanesia, while looking at a 1960s photo of a man carrying a pig.

Those in the former category are almost invariably more powerful, partly because it is the "eccentricity" of Clarke's memories and personal recollections that give the book its primary appeal. However, it also has to be said that Clarke's ruminations on more general topics, including gender relationships, exchange, and cultural difference, are somewhat simplistic and at times too romantic to be convincing.

However, this is not the case when it comes to his exploration of the Bomagai and Angoiang peoples' relationships with their land and gardens. Clarke's work among the Maring involved appraising their agricultural practices, and his deep respect for their intensely interdependent relationship with their environment richly textures the book. Without ever romanticizing the Maring's relationships with their lands, he conveys a strong sense of their profound knowledge of the places so beautifully represented in his breathtaking pictures of green smoke-filled valleys and forests.

Although the book is at best an introduction to one area of Papua New Guinea, the wealth of color in the photos gives credence to Drusilla Mojdeska's (2003) claim that after living in PNG, everywhere else can seem "somehow flat." This certainly seems to have been the case for Clarke whose willingness to share his photos will be welcomed by many who have spent time in this spirited, memorable place.

References

Modjeska, Drusilla

2003. PNG writing, writing PNG. *Meanjin* 62 (3): 51.