

Solange Petit Skinner, *The Nauruans*. San Francisco: MacDuff Press, 1981. Pp. 292.

This is not a conventional anthropological monograph, although written by a trained anthropologist. Even the physical production of the book is unusual. It has been printed by a photocopy process which has unfortunately reproduced a number of errors, strikeovers, and handwritten corrections. The photographs are uncaptioned snapshots in which, oddly, no Nauruan appears, not even one of the "so bright and so witty" Nauruan children to whom the book is dedicated.

The author tells us that the book's purpose is "to give a description of this culture which was vanishing" though elsewhere we learn that the culture was still largely intact in 1975-76. As "salvage ethnography" the book is by no means complete: any consideration of land tenure is deliberately omitted, and kinship and social organization are largely neglected. An additional problem arises from collapsing past and present. The reader can easily become confused as to whether a particular practice could be seen in 1975 or whether the author was told about it by an informant; in which case the credibility of the informant should be established.

However, once these limitations are understood, the careful reader will find much interesting information. The key to the book's value is in the subtitle, "Fishing and Games in an Island of the Central Pacific." These chapters, which make up about 30 percent of the text, are well

done. The chapter on fishing is enhanced by an annex providing Nauruan, English, and Latin names of fish taken by the islanders and makes a useful addition to the literature on this subject.

An earlier chapter on "Patterns of Living" gives the reader a nice feel for Nauruan life, although the confusion of past and present is sometimes distracting. Here, as elsewhere, the author takes perhaps excessive pains to emphasize the merits of Nauruan culture. The chapter on Nauruan medicine suffers from the lack of any perspective from Western medical research. One would like to know, for example, whether the incidence of diabetes is connected with any post-contact dietary changes. However, the description of traditional "healers" and "magicians" will interest many readers. The book closes with a number of legends, printed in English and Nauruan on facing pages.

The Nauruans is clearly a labor of love and as such cannot be judged by the usual academic criteria. The author's high regard for the islanders warms even the cold heart of a book reviewer. Anyone interested in atoll life and maritime adaptation will want to examine the book, but it is not likely to find a place in many scholarly libraries.

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