

Christin Kocher Schmid, *Of People and Plants: A Botanical Ethnography of Nokopo Village, Madang and Morobe Provinces, Papua New Guinea*. Basler Beiträge zur Ethnologie, Band 33. Basel: Wepf & Co. for Ethnologisches Seminar der Universität und Museum für Völkerkunde, 1991. Pp. 336, maps, figures, appendixes, bibliography.

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The main settlement of Nokopo is located at about 1900 meters elevation in the heavily forested Yupna Valley of the Finisterre Range on the Huon Peninsula of Papua New Guinea. Neither "central highlanders" nor "seaboard Melanesians," the peoples of this general area received little attention from anthropologists or other nonmissionary outsiders

until the late 1980s. Then several researchers from Basel, including Kocher Schmid, conducted intensive fieldwork there. Those scholars are moving quickly to fill a near-void, ethnographically speaking, and the Basel Ethnological Institute is to be congratulated for its role in this endeavor and especially for publishing this major monograph in English.

Following a decade of work in European ethnographic museums, Kocher Schmid undertook eleven months of fieldwork in Nokopo in 1986-1987 and 1988, resulting in a doctoral dissertation, of which this book is a revised version, at the University of Basel in 1990. By her use of "botanical ethnography" in the subtitle, the author means "an ethnographical description and ethnological interpretation of Nokopo culture based on data about plants and plant use" (p. 17). For her, the "main issues are: 1. To describe Nokopo vegetation and thus environment through the eyes of Nokopo people. . . . 2. To describe and [interpret] Nokopo culture by using data about plants and plant use. 3. To show relationships between vegetational patterns and culture" (p. 18). Throughout the work, her special emphasis is on Nokopo "plant classification and plant aesthetics" (p. 11), and both the "results and their discussion are arranged according to Nokopo concepts" (p. 20).

According to Kocher Schmid, her "'museum' background has certainly influenced [her] approach to Nokopo culture" (p. 13). One can only applaud this "influence" if it was what drove her to collect hundreds of plant (as well as animal) specimens and to the countless hours of observation and interviewing that together were required as the basis for this meticulously detailed presentation of Nokopo conceptualization and utilization of their highly diverse flora. Cultivated plants are treated separately (pp. 61-186) from those the people collect from the forest (pp. 187-257), and all are described systematically and thoroughly with respect to their folk taxonomies, lore, and uses.

The section of the book formally titled "Ethnography" (pp. 38-60) might seem somewhat thin to some readers. Surely its length reflects a compromise given the space requirements of such an admirably full treatment of Nokopo ethnobotany. Still, Kocher Schmid provides a general background to the people's social organization, time and space conceptions, seasonal activities, and cosmology, and a wealth of other ethnographic information is incorporated in her discussions of plants, as would be indicated by an index had one been included. In sum, especially given our profound ignorance of this sizable part of Papua New Guinea, the ethnographic contribution made by the book is considerable.

Less satisfactory is the author's concluding "synthesis" (pp. 258-290), where she outlines the Nokopo plant taxonomic system using the descriptive and analytic framework established by Brent Berlin. The "deficiencies" (p. 258) she finds in that framework are not convincingly argued, in part because of what seem to be some misunderstandings of Berlin's work but also because her own data lend themselves to alternative interpretations. This latter criticism is only possible, of course, because of the fullness and care with which she has presented her material. These issues doubtless will be taken up by specialists, to whom the book appears to be mainly addressed. But, especially, in these days of "postmodern" ethnography, the richness and variety of basic information provided about these fascinating people and their intimate knowledge of their environment will amply reward the more general audience this book deserves.