

Barbara Huber-Greub, *Kokospalmenmenschen. Boden und Alltag und ihre Bedeutung im Selbstverständnis der Abelam von Kimbangwa (East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea)*. Basler Beiträge zur Ethnologie, vol. 27. Basel, Switzerland: Ethnologisches Seminar der Universität und Museum für Völkerkunde, 1988. SwF 48.

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This book is one of a series on Sepik cultures, several already published and others soon forthcoming. The Sepik--mainly Iatmul, Abelam, Kwangwa, and their neighbors--has been the main regional focus of the Department of Anthropology of Basel University in Switzerland for

the last twenty years. Barbara Huber-Greub's book is based on eight months' fieldwork in 1978-1979 in the Abelam village of Kimbangwa, which has been classified since Phyllis Kaberry's studies as belonging to the ethnolinguistic group of the *shamu kundi* (Ndu language family).

Her book shows a broad ethnographic approach and focuses on the Abelam category of *kapma*, "ground/earth/territory" and the like. It adds substantial new evidence to the knowledge of the northern Abelam who, having been studied by many anthropologists (Phyllis Kaberry, Anthony Forge, David Lea, Diane Losche, Richard Scaglione, and myself), rank among the most thoroughly investigated cultures in Papua New Guinea.

In fact, the category of *kapma* is vital to Abelam thinking as they grow yams not only for their livelihood but cultivate extremely long tubers as a passion. The title of the book, *Kokospalmenmenschen*, "coco tree people" (*təpmandu*), already hints at their horticulturalist view, the idea that the earth is life-giving for plants as well as for people. It is an expression used by the Abelam for stressing the unity of people within a given (village-) territory; like the coco trees grown in the settlements the people are rooted in the villages where they are born.

Huber-Greub's book, which actually is her doctoral dissertation, treats *kapma* from the point of view of (1) migrations (the history of Kimbangwa clans as told in oral traditions), social organization, and locality; (2) subsistence, mainly the growing of yams, and (3) emic categories of ground/earth. She also treats symbolic dimensions of *kapma*. She succeeds in showing convincingly how *kapma* is perceived not as a "thing" but as a living entity, sensitive and reacting, that at once separates and unifies the dead from the living, men from women, and old men from young. Thus, in this sense ground/earth becomes metaphorically also a crucial border that, especially in ritual context, cannot be transgressed without consequence. Huber-Greub demonstrates that there exist what she calls "meaningful relations" ("*bedeutsame Relationen*") between different elements within Abelam culture that refer to each other and that are bundled in the notion of *kapma*.

This work contains, apart from the extensive and valuable chapters on ground/earth, additional sections as well. One is on metaphoric speech and another is on the meaning of Abelam paintings. Both are rather isolated from the main topic of the book. In the appendix she has included songs and discussions, as well as myths, some of which I believe originated in other areas of New Guinea, probably reaching the Maprik region through the regular *stori tumbuna* broadcasts of Radio Wewak.