D. K. Feil, *The Evolution of Highland Papua New Guinea Societies.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. 313, maps, plates, tables, index. US$49.50 cloth.

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Feil's scholarly monograph comprises a useful compendium of contemporary highland Papua New Guinea societies in a fairly compact format. Couched in a comparative framework, the book addresses societies in the ethnographic present, emphasizing the cultural differences between eastern highlands groups and those in the midsection and west. In addition, there is an attempt to seek the roots of cultural diversity in the prehistoric past. Eschewing the outmoded pan-highland model of cultural history, the author sometimes views the region as a continuum with Simbu a buffer between east and west, at other times as a bipolar construct with the people living west of Daulo Pass included in the western camp.

Feil deals with the east-west gradient or opposition under the themes dominant since the inception of anthropological investigations of highlands cultures at mid-twentieth century: settlement patterns, social structure, political organization and leadership, warfare, male-female relations, ceremonial exchange. The increasing intensity of pig and plant production through time, and their concomitants, are other focuses.

Feil is at his best in his contrastive comparison of the variation in recurrent themes among twentieth-century highland societies, plumbing, as he does, the rather extensive literature and conjoining the pieces into a coherent whole. The chapter on male-female relations, for example, the longest in the book by far, is a well-constructed exploration of psychological and cultural variation to which is given added perspective through the inclusion of people occupying the geographic area immediately to the southeast of the highlands proper. Other facets of culture are no less fruitfully treated.

In the chapter on prehistory, previously published with few modifications (1986), Feil attempts to project, millennia into the past, some of the basic east-west differences observable in the ethnographic present. It is here, in my opinion, that his argument is weakest. A clue to the Achilles heel may be embedded in the chapter's title, "Papua New Guinea Highlands Prehistory: A Social Anthropologist's View." One of Feil's major stumbling blocks is his apparent lack of appreciation of the disparate history of archaeological and ethnographic enterprises in highland Papua New Guinea. Without doubt, very much more is known about the protohistoric and postcontact cultural spectrum in the highlands than about the prehistory on which Feil bases his evolutionary interpretation. We can agree that the ethnography of highland Papua New Guinea is vast—there is an impressive sampling of cultures from Kainantu to Kiunga. In sharp contrast, archaeological research has been much less intensive and geographically more patchy. Feil not only fails to acknowledge these fundamental differences in the local histories of two anthropological subdisciplines, but some of his interpretations of the archaeology may be open to question.

Feil finds it "perplexing" that no sites older than two hundred years of age were discovered during the initial archaeological survey of the Arona valley. He seems not to sense that this by no means indicates an absence of earlier human occupation. Rather, it reflects the nature of archaeological survey. Sites are not easy to locate in an area such as Arona, where they may be buried at some depth or covered with an impenetrable mass of *kunai* grass that not only impedes but, in many cases, prevents detection. As a matter of fact, there are older sites in the

general area such as NFB, NGG, and NGH, to mention but three (Watson 1979).

A more serious misapprehension is Feil's failure to accept that an attempt at valid comparison between archaeological manifestations known only from bodies of cultural material quite diametrically opposed to one another (apples and oranges, again) is ill advised. Equally serious is his failure to recognize the pitfalls of using a single site or site complex to typify an entire region. At the same time as acknowledging the impropriety in so doing (p. 18n), Feil accepts the intriguing Kuk site as reflecting prehistoric cultural development in the western part of the highlands to the almost total neglect of other archaeological sites in that area, most of them sites with quite different cultural inventories. Yuku, Kiowa, Nombe, Wanlek, and perhaps the Manim valley sites (Tugeri, Etpiti, Kamapuk, and Manim) may well suggest greater similarity between east and west in early prehistory than does the extensive complex of ditching systems at Kuk with the paucity of other kinds of cultural information retrieved from the site.

Although the knowledge of highland prehistory is still in its infancy, regional patterns of cultural development that transcend the rather gross east-west opposition are perceptible, although in very schematic and incomplete form (Watson 1979). It may not be unreasonable to expect that when the verdict is in, evidence will emerge of a more complex prehistory than the simple contrast that Feil envisions. At the present time archaeological research in the highlands appears to be much too spotty and incomplete to serve as the basis for even gross comparisons.

The volume is attractively designed. Editorial transgressions are minimal although a certain laxity can be detected in some textual inconsistencies and errors introduced into quoted material. My criticism notwithstanding, the value of the book as a contribution to comparative studies of highland Papua New Guinea societies is considerable and dictates that Feil's monograph be in the library of any scholar concerned with sociocultural studies in the Pacific. Substituting "comparison" for "evolution" in the book's title might be salutary.

REFERENCES

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1986 "A Social Anthropologist's View of Papua New Guinea Prehistory." *American Anthropologist* 88:623-636.

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1979 "New Guinea Prehistory: A Model of Regional Comparison." *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 14 (2): 83-98.