

REVIEW

PAUL A. COX & SANDRA A. BANACK (eds.): *Islands, Plants, and Polynesians*. An introduction to Polynesian Ethnobotany. Dioscorides Press, Portland, Oregon, 1991, 228 pp., illus. b/w. Price unknown. ISBN 0-931146-18-6.

In the first sentence of the Preface the elusive concept of ethnobotany is defined in a rather restricted way: "the study of the use of plants by indigenous people", 'indigenous' obviously meaning non-Western and not technologically advanced. Most of the chapters in this book (or rather: the papers brought together in this Symposium volume) agree with the definition given: Banack on plants used in making boats and during voyages; Kirch on agricultural systems; Abbot on uses of seaweeds; Cox on medicinal plants; Lebot on the use of *Piper methysticum*; Ragone on *Artocarpus alt-lis*. These chapters contain interesting stuff, as well from the anthropological as from the botanical point of view. Most of them are also well-written. I found especially the chapter by Lebot a very readable assemblage of botany (including phytochemistry) and anthropology.

Two of the chapters, however, do not follow the definition, since they do not stress the *uses* but the *plants*. This is not intended as a critique on the inclusion of the chapters, but as a critique on the definition which would make ethnobotany part of anthropology (a part for the study of which botanical knowledge is essential) instead of the interdisciplinary approach as stressed by most ethnobotanists. These chapters belong to the most relevant ones for the botanist.

Whistler's chapter on 'Polynesian plant introduction' is a very useful summary of what is known or surmised about the times that and the routes by which the non-indigenous useful plants have arrived in Polynesia. Yen's chapter on 'Polynesian cultigens and cultivars' is an updated review and discussion of the history of cultivated plants in the region (with among other things some new material on *Canarium*).

Two chapters have not been mentioned yet: Fosberg gives an outline of the Polynesian plant environments, and Rensch's chapter is a rare example of the connexion of linguistics (the names for *Ipomoea batatas*) with botany (the spread of the species in Polynesia).

This interesting book is well-produced and not too expensive for what one receives. Illustration, however, is rather poor and also uneven: four of the chapters go without any figure, two have only one, the remaining four may boast two or more illustrations, the chapter on the uses of seaweeds having the maximum of nine photographs of algae.

C. KALKMAN