

## REVIEW

**J. STERLY: Simbu Plant-Lore. Plants used by the people in the Central Highlands of New Guinea.** Volumes I–III. Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin, 1997. Vol. I: 239 pp., illus., maps & photogr.; Vol. II: 323 pp., photogr.; Vol. III: 275 pp., illus./photogr. ISBN 3-496-02629-4. Price: DM 372.

The three volumes of this publication contain the results of almost five years of fieldwork over a period of almost 15 years in the Simbu Valley in the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea.

Volume I, 'The People and their plant-lore', contains an introduction to the Simbu people, as well as a discussion of their classification and naming of plants [the latter very useful reading for (ethno)botanists]. The main part is formed by an annotated alphabetical list of Simbu plant names. For each vernacular name the translation or interpretation and the botanical determination are given. Furthermore tribe names (for names used by specific tribes), the name of the species in other languages, and (for part of the names) the Simbu names of cultivars are provided. The list also contains general terms, for example for parts of plants. Because of the compact way in which Sterly presents the data, the reader will need some practising before being able to use the book. This is also the case for volumes II and III. Several maps are provided, with the location of villages, rivers and mountains, the tribe distribution, and a vegetation map. Volume I contains the list of references for all three volumes.

Volume II, 'Botanical survey of Simbu plants', is an annotated list of all plant species (including algae, fungi, lichens) which are known by name by the Simbu people. For each species the Simbu name, (well known) synonyms, a short description, collection data, ethnobotanical data, distributional notes, determination problems, and related species are provided. The descriptions are probably based on the collections of the author, and not on species data from floras. The determination problems seem plentiful, and it is mentioned frequently that the collections have different identifications in different herbaria. It is not always clear why a particular identification has been chosen. Sometimes species are mentioned twice, but this is not mentioned in the introduction, nor clearly explained in the text. The list of 'Birds attracted by Blossom, Fruit and Seeds' and especially the list of 'Mammals known to the Simbu' seem a little out of place in this volume. Volume II contains the index to the scientific family and genus names of both plants and animals for all three volumes.

Volume III, 'Ethnographical key', gives access to all aspects of life of the Simbu people, subdivided into twelve categories with many subcategories. For example, the category 'dwelling' with subcategories 'house and fence', 'bedsteads and racks', etc., or the category 'path through life' with subcategories 'delivery and birth', 'initiation' and many others. The text is accompanied with line drawings. An enormous amount of information on anything one can think of is given here, illustrating the profound knowledge Sterley has gained about the life of the Simbu people during his fieldwork.

The complete publication is quite voluminous (over 800 pages in total), and yet the compact way the information is presented makes it at first sight somewhat inaccessible. But with some effort the user will find a wealth of information, and I expect that these books will be very frequently cited in future ethnobotanical publications.

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