

familiar to everybody working in the same field. The numerous photographs in black and white and colour, many taken by the author, many others the result of exploring archival material, provide not only welcome illustrations but also serve to underline the author's concern with the preservation of these magnificent building traditions. The book will soon find its place among the standard works in the field of vernacular architecture.

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Jürg Wassmann, *The Song to the Flying Fox*. Translated by Dennis Q. Stephenson. Apwitihiri: L. Studies in Papua New Guinea Musics, 2. Cultural Studies Division, Boroko: The National Research Institute, 1991, xxi + 313 pp. ISBN 9980.68.018.0.\*

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GUNTER SENFT

In 1982 Jürg Wassmann wrote about the public and esoteric knowledge of the important men of Kandingci, a village on the Middle Sepik. This Ph.D. thesis, published in the Ethnological Seminar series at the University of Basel (Switzerland), was about totemic songs, names and knotted cords. Almost ten years later the Cultural Studies Division of the National Research Institute of Papua New Guinea (formerly the Institute of PNG Studies) has published this slightly abridged<sup>1</sup> version of Wassmann's monograph in English. Hopefully this will make Wassmann's seminal contribution to the Sepik ethnography available to the broad audience it deserves. What Bateson (1932 and 1936) could not achieve in his Iatmul research – that is, to find some order in what he called the 'dreadful muddle' (Bateson 1936:128) of the Iatmul system of relationship – is reconstructed and described 'as fully as possible' (p. 47) in Wassmann's monograph. His ethnography is based on 12 months of field research in cooperation with the Sepik field work of the Ethnological Seminar of the University of Basel, lead by Meinhard Schuster.

Preceding the main body of Wassmann's work are an introduction by the series editor (Don Niles), the approval of Kandingci leaders and big men to publish the formerly secret data, a foreword by Andrew Strathern, the author's preface, and 'The Song to the Flying Fox' as prologue. Wassmann

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\* For inquiries regarding this publication: The Publication Sales Coordinator, The National Research Institute, P.O. Box 5854, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the author decided not to reproduce the texts of the songs in the Iatmul language. Thus, the interested reader, especially the (ethno-)linguist has to consult the German publication of Wassmann's study for the original text transcriptions. Moreover, only the German publication provides a detailed description of the genealogies of the various clans mentioned in the monograph.

starts with a general description of the village of Kandingei and its complex social structure. He then poses the central question of his research: 'whether there is a key to the whole system of what at first seem to be divergent parts of the culture' (p. 248). He looks at 'whether relationships... exist between spirits and genealogies, between personal names and flutes, between totems and totemic songs, between the primal creatures of myth and land ownership, and between watercourses and everyday utensils' (p. 248).

The author answers this question by presenting what he calls 'an actual theory of cultural links' (p. 248), a partly esoteric, clan-related and dynamic system that organizes and regulates the various aspects of intra-cultural relationships mentioned in the guiding question of his research.

The secret 'knotted cord' (*kirugu*) is both the key to and the cornerstone of this organizational system. Wassmann emphasizes that the *kirugu* is the 'primal migration of the clan founder and the other primal beings which is the basis of the present world order and which bears the name of the migratory crocodile which prepared the way for the clan founder' (p. 248). The knots represent names of the earth of creation, stations of the primal migration, and contain names of ancestresses who either founded the villages or who are taken to be the women of the village or of its men's house. For each name incorporated in the cord there is a short text, and these texts constitute a song cycle.

By following the cord and its song cycle, Wassmann leads the reader from creation to present times. We learn how the culture is encompassed and encapsulated in the stories in the *kirugu*'s knots, and the names and songs they represent. The system of organization coded in the cord allows the big men to interpret the present. The rights of present members of the clan – especially their rights with respect to ownership of names and land – can thus be traced back to the ancestors, the primal beings.

These beings can be called by flutes and invited to creep into masks that represent them. In mythology primal men made rattan frames or masks and crept inside if they wanted to become certain creatures. One of these acts of metamorphosis is described in the song that gave this book its title: 'Men became flying foxes and flew away from their women. After this the women lamented the departure of their former husbands in the "The Song to the Flying Fox" ', which Wassmann again presents in the epilogue.

The book is well edited, provides the reader with excellent maps, plans and drawings, and has only a few marginal print errors. Four appendices provide further detailed ethnographic and linguistic information. Wassmann's monograph is a seminal contribution to the anthropology of the Middle Sepik cultures; without hesitation it can be included with other ethnographic masterpieces on these cultures, such as Bateson's *Naven*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> To date, Wassmann's second monograph on the songs of the village Kandingei, 'The Song to the Crocodile', is only available in the 'Basler Beiträge zur Ethnologie', in German.