
Reuter spent much of her childhood in Yalimo, the country of the Yali people, when her father, Klaus Reuter, worked there as a missionary, from 1972 to 1980. Her stay among these people made a lasting impression on her. Since 2003 she has regularly visited them and trades artefacts for sale abroad. In the book under review she attempts to show the way of life of the Yali at the time of her youth and, to a lesser extent, what it has become since. To this end she uses over 200 pictures taken mainly by her father in the 1970s. Most are in colour and they are carefully restored. They are supplemented by more recent pictures. The result is magnificent.

The Yali live east of the Grand Valley of the Baliem, in the rugged eastern highlands that provided them a precarious existence. Culturally, they share more with the other ethnic groups in the eastern highlands than with their neighbours in the western highlands, the Grand Valley Dani and the Western Dani, although the language they speak belongs to the Greater Dani family.

Yali were contacted late, even by West New Guinea standards, with the first people of European descent settling among them in 1961. Since then a number of outstanding ethnographies have been published about them: Klaus-Friedrich Koch’s *War and Peace in Yaleno* (1973), Siegfried Zöllner’s *Lebensbaum und Schweinekult* (1977), and Manuel Boissière’s *Ethnobiologie et rapports à l’environnement des Yali d’Irian Jaya* (1999). An abbreviated version of Zöllner’s book has been published in English: *Yali Religion* (1987), and also recently an Indonesian translation: *Pohon Yeli dan Mitos Wam dalam Agama Orang Yali*. Reuter’s book is an important pictorial addition to these books. Moreover, it compares well with other such records, for the Grand Valley Dani and for the Eipo, farther east.

Reuter has divided her book into seven sections: Yali country, the world of men, the world of women, feasts, religion and tradition, new ways, and Yalimo today. She provides short annotations with the pictures, making use of Zöllner’s text and drawings, and includes a paper by Koch on Yali cannibalism, both in the original English and in German translation. Klaus Reuter shows himself a gifted photographer with a great interest in Yali practices. The book contains a number of his pictures printed over the full
extent of two facing pages. Thus large scale dances are shown and also an astonishingly large complex of gardens, on a curving mountain slope. It consisted of sizeable beds, separated by ditches, and with soil retaining devices at their lower end. Its main crop seemed to be sweet potato, in various stages of cultivation.

What the pictures bring into sharp relief is the distinctiveness of Yali material culture. As mentioned, it was closer related to other eastern highlands cultures than to those in the western highlands. That becomes clear from the occurrence of drums, and a type of cuirass not used in the western highlands, from the small reed aprons, one in front, one behind, that were the main items of female dress, the occurrence of objects resembling small shields that were nevertheless used for ritual purposes, and of painted house boards on those men’s houses that were deemed sacred. But in contrast to these eastern highlands cultures, most Yali men wore cylindrical casings of rattan loops, covering a large part of their body. And sacred men’s houses had also painted boards inside.

The Yali had few drums and the dances pictured show just one or two men wielding drums, probably not even enough to set the rhythm of the dances. Pictures of dances performed in the 1970s show that dancing costumes then used a limited range of colours, primarily white and yellow-brown. The red paint used for the walls of the sacred men’s houses, and also for string bags, was hardly used in these costumes. That was likely a deliberate restriction. More recently however, people have opted for more colourful outfits. With some cash available, they have started buying colourful clothes and applying more colours to their string bags.

With her book Reuter apparently wanted to reach a wide public. I hope she succeeds. But simultaneously she has provided an important contribution to the extant scholarly literature.

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