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New Guinea Ceremonies



Synopsis

When David Gillison first arrived in New Guinea in 1973, ceremonies marking birth, death, initiation, and marriage were still being conducted by the Gimi tribe as they had been for thousands of years. Today, many of the Gimi's indigenous traditions, like those depicted in Abrams' acclaimed *African Ceremonies*, are disappearing forever. Gillison's brilliant photographs and intimate text capture the remarkable dramas enacted during what was probably the last-ever Hau, a two-week fertility festival. Ranging from creation myths to scenarios of affairs, clan jealousies, and family strife, these playlets, ultimately forbidden by Westerners, are no longer performed. Gillison movingly preserves them here for history. The only photographic record we have of the Gimi and their unique theater rituals, the book also depicts the major effort to save the spectacular rainforest home of the Gimi, which stands as a world model for indigenous conservation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a great read and is loaded with color photos. If you're from PNG or just have a deep interest, definitely add this to your collection. Why only 4 stars? Two reasons: First, the photos are a bit drab as compared to the excellent shot on the cover. To be fair, taking photos in a pitch-black smoke-filled traditional highlands house at night is going to be somewhat drab no matter how good the photographer or equipment. That's just capturing reality. I suppose I expected to see photos of a large range of outdoor ceremonies whereas this book concentrates on indoor, night events as performed by a single language group. The book is still a definite purchase, just understand it's very limited in scope. My second reason is somewhat biased. The author uses nearly every opportunity to

bash Christian missionaries, their influence on the Gimi culture and to more subtly declare his own superior open-minded acceptance of all. As the PNG-born child of Christian missionaries I'm admittedly biased, but having seen a multitude of thrill-seeking anthropologists, photographers, artists and peace corps types filter their way through PNG I feel qualified to point out a few things. Most of the missionaries - not all, but most - approach the work in PNG with a great deal of respect to the New Guineans and their culture. Most of the non-missionary persons, like the author, spent a few weeks or even six months in the country and then departed, proclaiming themselves 'experts' by virtue of having learned some basic Tok Pisin, eaten dirty food and slept with smoke and cockroaches. This book does the same. It's excellent for having captured what may truly have been the last full initiation ceremony of the Gimi and the author does well in describing his understanding of events. To attribute greater significance than 'very basic opinion' to any of his views on the Gimi culture or the influence of outsiders would be a mistake not because the author is any less intelligent than others but because no one can truly understand cultural significances or meanings of a completely foreign people, particularly not so when the exposure is a few brief snapshots at a time and filtered through multiple translations. My rant is complete. :) Enjoy the book!

The photography in this book is spectacular. Gillison spent years getting to know the Gimi people of PNG and it shows in the photography. Subjects are casual and acting normally; you won't find photos like this by any photographer briefly (read less than a couple years) visiting PNG. This book is a window into the lives and ceremonies of PNG people that few outsiders are fortunate enough to see and even fewer talented photographers capture. This is not the standard travelogue with snapshots, The text is equally exceptional. Gillison obviously knows his subjects and writes crisply and to the point. The text matches the art for giving the reader an insight to the lives of Gimi people-- a group of people with fascinating traditions, ceremonies, and culture. Gillison has witnessed the staggering transition that the Gimi are going through as the 20th century world intrudes in their rainforest and garden paradise. It gives the reader a different perspective from which to examine our own culture and traditions. The price is a bargain. 168 pages, almost every one with at least one well-reproduced color photo. This could be a "coffee-table" art book selling for 4-5 times the price. I collect books on New Guinea and live in the country. This is one of the best books for my shelf in many years.

Some quite nice photos, but Gillison is no anthropologist and does not know much about this subject of book. A book about New Guinea ceremonies and the word "yam" doesn't appear? Not

good.

Extraordinary, erudite study. Exceptionally written.

just what I expected

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