

and deep interaction with the people of the area, an extensive library of Amazonia, and the remarkable collection of photographs which in *Where the Gods Reign* he shares with us.

This is a remarkable book—a must for anyone interested in any aspect of Amazonia.

—W.V.

**Tobacco and Shamanism in South America.** Johannes Wilbert. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987. Pp. xix, 294. \$30.00.

The title of the series in which this book appears, *Psychoactive Plants of the World* (Richard Evans Schultes and Robert F. Raffauf, General Editors), draws our attention to the often-forgotten pharmacologic properties of the world's most popular recreational drug. Wilbert draws upon his long-term fieldwork with the Warao and a survey of nearly 3,500 sources to produce both a compendium and an original theoretical statement on these very properties and their relationship to shamanism in aboriginal South America. The scope of his survey is comprehensive, with a bibliography running to 78 pp. and thorough treatment of three main topics—methods of tobacco use, pharmacology, and tobacco shamanism.

Wilbert begins with a brief chapter reviewing the phytogeography of *Nicotiana*, a New World genus with 37 indigenous species in South America. Then, focusing on *Nicotiana rustica* L. and *N. tabacum* L., he surveys the several methods traditionally used to consume the plants: chewing (or, more precisely, sucking); drinking; licking; in enema form; as snuff; and the most frequent and widespread method, smoking. Detailed descriptions of each use are illustrated with well-chosen figures and plates, tables, and excellent distribution maps. This 124-page chapter alone constitutes a major contribution to the ethnobotanical and ethnological literature.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the pharmacology of *Nicotiana*, usefully surveying the alkaloids (nicotine, nornicotine, and anabasine) contained in the various species, and giving detailed separate treatment to the consequences for the human body of their gastrointestinal, respiratory, percutaneous, and ocular absorption.

These latter are of critical importance to Wilbert's thesis, presented as the final chapter of the book, that the effects of nicotine, in particular, provide a "natural model" for shamanism. Until the 1700s, tobacco was used in South America primarily for magico-religious and medicinal purposes, and it is Wilbert's contention that, whatever the symbolism involved, the plant became "a faith-confirming, that is, life-ordaining, drug" (p. 202) precisely because of its effects. He provides considerable detail for the Warao and draws on available information for other groups to demonstrate that shamanic behavior and powers commonly attributed to South American shamans correspond to tobacco's pharmacologic properties.

Wilbert is well aware that secular use did and can co-exist with or even overwhelm the employment of tobacco in shamanism, and that the latter need not depend on the peculiar characteristics of nicotine. However, he persuasively argues for such a conjunction in South America and undoubtedly he is correct in suggesting that such an empirically-based alliance may have played a major role in the diffusion of the plant to other parts of the world.

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