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BOOK REVIEW

Plant Resources of South-East Asia No. 10. Cereals.

G. J. H. Grubben and Soetjpto Partohardjono (eds). 1996. Backhuys Publishers, P.O. Box 321, 2300 AH Leiden, The Netherlands. 199 pp. ISBN 90-73348-56-0 (hardcover). US\$75, for buyers in developing countries, a paperback edition, ISBN 979-8316-31-2, is available for US\$10 from Prosea Network Office, PO Box 234, Bogor 16122, Indonesia.

The title won't lead you to buy this book, but the contents will. There is a lengthy introductory chapter (pp. 15–72), which covers in abundant detail everything from the structure of the grass spikelet to C-3 and C-4 photosynthesis, from brewing to baking, from the history of cultivated crops to the agronomy underlying Egyptian pyramids; even the difference between “regular” beer and Japanese sake is explained. All of this is done in plain, no-nonsense English. All's well when the list of editors and contributors on p. 8 includes a “Language corrector,” one J Burrough-Boenisch. I found some weird words, like *haulm* not in the glossary, but it is in an ordinary dictionary and to *rogue* (found in both places), and both are of course used correctly. Grains and pseudo-grains are carefully and explicitly distinguished. Both may be made into porridge, without turning descriptive botany into gruel.

On p. 73 begins “Alphabetical treatment of species,” the 20 most important ones in human terms, including not only rice, wheat, barley, and maize, but also grain amaranths, grain chenopods, and buckwheat. Here we have Latin names, and not just as an afterthought, plus extensive treatment of vernacular names. For each species, there's an illustration (their sources given on pp. 184–185), cultivation history, uses, harvesting, diseases, and so on. Each of the treatments ends with a bibliography with references through 1995.

Minor cereals comprise chapter 3, pp. 150–156. That's where one discovers the commelinaceous *Cyanotis axillaris* (L.) Sweet, a pseudo-grain, has edible seeds with 60% starch and 15% protein. The other species discussed in this chapter are all grasses.

The nine earlier volumes in this series are listed on p. 197, along with the titles of the next ten. One supposes these nine are still available; the office address, with details for telephone, fax, and e-mail, is given on p. 199. There are even two pages (170–171) of acronyms of organizations involved in agricultural research in southeast Asia, and a reasonably detailed map (pp. 200–201, if counted in the pagination).

NEIL A. HARRIMAN
BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-OSHKOSH
OSHKOSH, WI 54901