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Recent French Contributions to Himalayan and Tibetan Studies

Alexander W. Macdonald, ed. *Rituels himalayens. L'Ethnographie* 83 (special volume). Paris: Société d'ethnographie de Paris, 1986. Pp. 328.

The journal *L'Ethnographie* has devoted a special volume to Himalayan ritual reflecting not only the diversity of "Himalayan" studies in France in the 1980's, but also the renewed emphasis placed by anthropologists as well as historians of religion on ritual as a crucially important theme of study in order to understand the foundations of any social entity, whether local community or regional civilization. Not only have studies of ritual in the Himalayan area (understood in the broadest geographical sense so as to include the trans-Himalayan Tibetan plateau as well) been scarce, but, as the editor points out in his introduction to the volume, "Few comparative analyses of ritual have been attempted. Each specialist had a tendency to shut himself up in his own field: Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan continue to be studied separately" (p. 5). The present volume attempts to remedy this, not by proposing far-flung comparative vistas (which would be premature), but by juxtaposing eleven substantial articles having ritual in one form or another as their common theme. Unfortunately, there are no contributions dealing with Bhutan; here a vast and complex field awaits study.

The contributions to this volume can, in a very rough and ready way, be divided into three groups: those dealing with Tibet; Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples ("tribes") of the Himalayas, subject to Tibetan cultural and religious influence; peoples not subjected to Tibetan influence.

A very limited number of anthropologists have been able to do fieldwork in Tibet itself in recent years, but only after the present volume was edited. The Tibetological contributions to this volume are there-

fore either philological, i. e., based on textual studies, or anthropological, but based on field-work outside Tibet itself.

There are two contributions based on textual material: Katia Buffetrille, "Un rituel de mariage tibétain", and Samten G. Karmay, "L'âme et la turquoise: un ritual tibétain." The former contains the text and translation of a text detailing the rituals to be performed by the lama at the moment when the bride arrives in front of the door of the house of her future husband. It was composed by Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas (1813-1899) on the occasion of the marriage of the prince of Derge in 1870. As Kong-sprul was one of the founders of the eclectic (*ris-med*) movement in eastern Tibet, it is not surprising that the text is characterized by the inclusion of both Bonpo and Buddhist elements. The same text had already been translated by D. Schuh, "Die Darlegungen des tibetischen Enzyklopädisten Koṅ-sprul Blo-gros mtha'-yas über osttibetische Hochzeitsbräuche," in R. Kaschewsky (ed.), *Serta Tibeto-Mongolica* (Wiesbaden, 1973) 295-349. This was only brought to the author's notice after she had finished her own translation, but differences in translation are commented on in the notes.

Karmay's article deals with the concept of *bla*, "soul," on the basis of beliefs attested from the period of the royal dynasty as well as in later texts (Padma gling-pa 1450-1521, and a Bonpo text from 1852). The concept of the "soul"—which of course runs counter to orthodox Buddhist doctrine—is a fundamental one in Tibetan "popular" religion, and Karmay convincingly shows that rituals of "calling" or "ransoming" the soul (believed to have temporarily left the body, thus exposing the latter to illness and misfortune) are not of Indian origin, but perpetuate very ancient indigenous Tibetan beliefs.

Ladakh is still largely a land of Tibetan culture. Pascale Dollfus, "Lo-Gsar, le Nouvel An populaire au Ladakh," provides a detailed day-by-day description of the so-called *so-nam lo-gsar*, "agricultural New Year," which is celebrated two months before the official New Year, not only in Ladakh, but also in certain communities in Nepal (Dolpo, Langtang, and Yolmo), in Sikkim, and in Tibet. Dollfus, who has done extensive fieldwork in Ladakh, especially points out the co-existence of Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements in the Ladakhi rituals, thus joining, thematically, the focus of the articles by Buffetrille and Karmay.

The contribution of Charles Ramble likewise employs anthropological method and perspective, but attention is now shifted to a population of Tibetan culture in Nepal, the villages of the Baragaon region of the Upper Kali Gandaki: "The Muktinath Yartung: A Tibetan Harvest Festival in its Social and Historical Context." The Yartung (*dbyar-ston*) festival is one of the three annual seasonal festivals in the area, and as such related to the "agricultural New Year" of Ladakh. It takes place in the seventh month, corresponding to September. Ramble not only gives a description of the festival, but shows that it discloses an obsolete social order. The festival is described with special emphasis on tracing the course of events from the point of view of one of the three principal communities involved, the Bonpo village of Lubra. (An interesting point for further investigation and reflection is the apparently double significance of the term *bon-po* in this area, i.e., both as a follower of the Bon religion in general, and as a specific religious specialist, p. 240). Although there is no enmity between Bonpos and Buddhists in the Baragaon area today, this may not always have been so, as a closer scrutiny of the Muktinath Yartung festival reveals.

Four articles deal with ethnic groups in Nepal speaking Tibeto-Burman languages and subject in varying degrees to cultural influence from the Tibetan (and largely Buddhist) world to the north and the Indian (and Hindu) world to the south (the latter augmented by political domination by the Nepali-Hindu government in Kathmandu). As N. J. Allen points out in "Thulung Weddings: the Hinduization of a ritual cycle in East Nepal," one must be wary of simplifications: "The Hindu-tribal dichotomy provides a model that is exceedingly crude" (p. 33), among other reasons because "it risks attributing to the Thulung a changelessness which . . . is certainly unreal." Further, "it risks attributing to Hinduism a homogeneity that is possibly even more unreal." The goal should be to "look for an underlying unity and homogeneity in Himalayan society" (p. 16), for " . . . eventually the social history of the various peoples of Nepal will need to be studied as a unitary field" (p. 33). Allen seeks to reconstruct the traditional style of wedding among the Thulung, based on the accounts of informants as well as comparative linguistic data; he sees it "as the result of Hindu influence operating of a culture that was essentially tribal" (p. 15).

Philippe Sagant, "La cure du chamane et l'intérprétation des laïcs," deals with shamanism among another people of East Nepal, the Limbu. As indicated by the title, his chief concern is to study the position of

the shaman in a particular community, and the understanding among his patients and clients of the cures he is believed to effect. Numerous aspects of the role of the shaman are examined within the framework of the Limbu world-view; no comparative thrusts are attempted, but the article is fundamental for the comparative study of Himalayan shamanism.

The Magar of the village of Sānkh at first sight seems to present an extreme case of acculturation to Indo-Nepalese culture. Among other things, they have forgotten their Tibeto-Burmese language and only speak Nepali. Nevertheless, they are proud of their Magar identity (defined as caste identity), and in her contribution to this volume, "Papini bitha; le mariage de la mauvaise fille: Essai d'identification d'une fête magar," Anne de Sales analyses a ritual which is unique to this village and which expresses the Magar identity of its inhabitants. Although it reflects influences not only from the dominant Indo-Nepalese culture but also from Tibet, it is essentially the result of an active, creative process of "bricolage" in which the Magar have made use of whatever "symbolic objects" that could serve their purpose.

Brigitte Steinmann deals with an aspect of the ritual life of the Tamang: "Le culte des dieux du clan les Tamang: la terre, le livre et la lignée." Steinmann has discussed Tamang rituals in several recent articles as well as in a monograph, *Les tamang du Népal* (Paris 1987). In the present article she deals with the cult of the clan deities of the Tamang of Eastern Nepal. The Tamang are not strongly influenced by Hinduism; on the contrary, they are in a certain sense Tibetan Buddhists, and have married lamas belonging to the Rnying-ma-pa order. However, they have put Tibetan Buddhism to their own use within the general framework of their complex religious institutions. This leads to the typical duality of Tamang religion, in which archaic, indigenous beliefs and institutions coexist with—or, as the case may be, are opposed to—the lamaist interpretation of those beliefs. The cult of the clan deities is no exception to this pattern. Thus the lamas officiate at the cult of the deities of Tibetan origin associated with certain clans, and the non-Buddhists priests, the *labon*, venerate the ancestors of the lineages (p.304).

The remaining three articles deal with very different communities. None of them, however, are influenced by Tibetan culture. These articles are mentioned briefly here, not because they are of less interest or significance than the others, but because the present reviewer is less

qualified to discuss them. "Naissance d'un village tharu: à propos de rites de claustration villageoise" by Gisèle Krauskopff "provides an analysis of Tharu representations of village territory and its boundaries through two rituals: the first being the village-shrine foundation and the second one a village cloistering ritual" (p. 131). Such rituals were regularly performed in earlier times when there was less pressure on forest and empty land, allowing a village to move to a new site; however, the great influx of hill people and subsequent increased ecological degradation of the Terai had rendered these rituals practically obsolete. The author describes a ritual of demarcation, performed in 1983, twelve years after disastrous floods forced an entire village to buy land from a neighboring village in order to move to a new site on higher ground.

John K. Locke, S. J., deals with a Buddhist Tantric ritual performed by the Newars, "The Upoṣadha Vrata of Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara in Nepal." He traces the history and the development of the ritual and provides a detailed description of the ritual as performed today, in a specific form recorded at one of the twelve pilgrimage sites (Guhyeśvarī) associated with this deity in the Kathmandu Valley. He also summarizes the legends connected with each of the twelve pilgrimage places.

The last article to be noted deals with the Kalash of the Hindu Kush; Jean-Yves Loude and Viviane Lièvre, "Fêtes d'été chez les Kalash du Nord-Pakistan." The Kalash are the only remaining non-Muslim people in Pakistan, and although their freedom of religion is protected by the authorities, motorable roads have opened their hitherto inaccessible valleys in the Hindu Kush to modernization. It is therefore of great importance to record their rituals while there yet is time.

Fernand Meyer, ed. *Tibet. Civilisation et société.* Paris: Editions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac/ Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1990. Pp. 204 + 53 plates.

This volume contains papers delivered at the seminar organized in April 1987 by the Fondation Singer-Polignac in Paris. With the exception of three very short papers contributed by scholars from the Chinese People's Republic, the papers are all substantial and original contributions to Tibetan studies, including studies of related population in Nepal.

Several papers may be grouped under the heading of art, architecture and iconography. The first is that of Gilles Béguin, "Remarques concernant les influences néwares dans la peinture tibétaine à l'époque des Phag-mo-gru-pa." Béguin deals in turn with mural painting and with thankas. The former is studied principally on the basis of the early fifteenth century Gyantse *sku-'bum* (stūpa), and while pointing out the conspicuous presence of Newar influence, Béguin stresses that the murals also show a considerable degree of originality. As for thankas, Newar influence is traced from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, and a preliminary fourfold stylistic classification (depending upon the degree of Newar influence) is attempted.

The extremely complex historical evolution of the iconography of two protective deities is studied by Amy Heller in "Remarques préliminaires sur les divinités protectrices Srung-ma dmar-nag du Potala." The paper does not offer any final identification of the 'Red and Black Deities' who since the Third Dalai Lama have been the protectors of the Dalai Lama, but explores their fluctuating and complex relationship to other deities, principally Beg-tse.

Anne Chayet writes on the architectural history of Bsam-yas, the first monastery to be founded, in the eighth century AD, in Tibet: "Contribution aux recherches sur les états successifs du monastère du bSam-yas." Having to some extent escaped the destruction wrought by the Chinese on religious buildings in Tibet, Bsam-yas still presents a group of edifices which can provide the historian of architecture with much invaluable information. The author concludes (p. 114) that several sources of inspiration may have influenced the lay-out and shape of Bsam-yas: the Indian monastery of Otantapuri (or perhaps Nālandā) as well as, on a deeper level, Mount Meru and, corresponding to it, the maṇḍala; non-Buddhist models such as the royal encampment of the Tibetan kings, the ritual edifice of the *mdos*, and even the *mingtang* palace of ancient China. The study of the origins of Bsam-yas thus opens perspectives pointing back to a very early period in Tibetan history.

A fundamental study of Tibetan paintings is presented by Fernand Meyer: "Introduction à l'étude d'une série de peintures médicales créée à Lhasa au XVIIe siècle." Starting with L. A. Waddell, Western scholars have published a number of Tibetan anatomical paintings which remained unconnected until the existence of a set of seventeen paintings, preserved in the Ethnographic Museum of Ulan Ude, was made

known in 1979. The following year a similar set was reported from the Institute of Medicine and Astrology in Lhasa (Sman-rtsis-khang). The latter set was published in Lhasa in 1986. In this very substantial article, Meyer studies the impressive set of no less than seventy-nine medical and anatomical paintings prepared by order of the regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho (1653-1705) in order to illustrate the medical text *Vaidurya sngon po* of which he was the author.

This vast series of paintings, completed, at the latest, by 1703 (p. 33), reflects the great interest of the regent in the science of medicine. The set preserved in the Sman-rtsis-khang, which contains several thankas that may belong to the original set dating from the late seventeenth century, was restored and completed by the famous medical scholar Mkhyen-rab-nor-bu (1883-1962) on the order of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. A second set, still preserved in Lhasa, was likewise assembled by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and is said to have been previously kept in the Norbulinka. The Ulan Ude set was copied in Lhasa for the Buryat monk Dorjiev (1849-1938). Meyer's conclusion (p. 48) is worth quoting in full:

> The series of medical paintings, created in Lhasa between 1687 and 1703, under the auspices of the regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho, constitutes, with regard to its amplitude and originality of conception, an extraordinary iconographical whole, not only for Tibet, but in the general history of medicine. It is both the result of various earlier traditions and the expression of the genius of a man who, continuing the work of the Fifth Dalai Lama, strove to construct the vast institutional and cultural system which was to unify Tibet under the authority of the *dge-lugs-pa* school. In addition to its technical purpose, the iconography was also conceived of as a prestigious aesthetic work and a political act.

Recently the whole set has been magnificently reproduced in two volumes: Anthony Aris, ed., *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, (London: Serindia, 1992).

Another field within Tibetan studies which is dominated by French scholars, is that of Tibetan music, especially liturgic music. To an already impressive series of musicological articles, published in various journals, Mireille Helffer now adds "Recherches récentes concernant l'emploi des notations musicales dans la tradition tibétaine." In this extremely important article, the various systems of notation are presented and analyzed according to a double grid. The types of notation are first of all classified according to instrument: human voice, drums and cymbals, and wind instruments. Within each class, the traditions

of each major school of Tibetan Buddhism are discussed, in some cases taking different monastic traditions within a single school into account. For reasons which are not mentioned, systems of notation used by adherents of the Bon religion are not dealt with, but Helffer has studied Bon traditions extensively in other articles.

Pre-Buddhist and popular religious traditions is a field of study completely dominated by French Tibetologists: one need only invoke names such as Lalou, Stein, Macdonald, Spanien, Karmay, and Blondeau. In the present volume a new and fascinating contribution to the study of symbolism and ritual is the article by Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Questions préliminaires sur les rituels *mdos*." Blondeau does away, once and for all, with the widespread misunderstanding in Western Tibetological literature that *mdos* signifies the same as the *nam-mkha'* ("thread-crosses") used in various rituals. Blondeau traces this misunderstanding to the dictionaries of Jäschke (1881) and Das (1902), the latter inspired by G. Sandberg (*Hand-book of Colloquial Tibetan*, 1894). In fact, the term *mdos* has a much wider implication, being the "totality of ritual constructions and ritual objects and materials which are assembled, including, as the case may be, *nam-mkha'*." (p. 95). Blondeau stresses that the question of the nature and function (in relation to the *glud*, "ransom"), and origin (Buddhist or non-Buddhist) of the *mdos* can only be decided by having recourse to relevant Tibetan texts. In fact, the Tibetan ritual literature dealing with *mdos* is extremely abundant, and Blondeau concludes that the *mdos* rituals are performed with a great variety of purposes, and have, in a general way, the function of removing spiritual as well as material obstacles. Finally, two rituals involving *mdos* are analyzed, one of which is integrated into a Buddhist framework, while the other is practically free of Buddhist associations. Blondeau takes care to avoid hasty conclusions, but accepts a non-Buddhist origin for the *mdos* rituals as probable, and citing a large number of parallel traits, suggests a link with the ancient funerary rites.

Two historical studies are included in this volume: a short note by Samten G. Karmay, "A propos d'un sceau en or offert par l'empereur Shunzi," and Patrick Mansier, "La guerre du Jinchuan (rGyal-rong): son contexte politico-religieux." Gyarong is a region in which Tibetan culture predominates, and which remains little studied. Mansier's article is of considerable scope and interest, as it gives a broad overview of the political and religious situation in the Gyarong region

in the 18th century. The enforcing of direct imperial rule, which only succeeded after overcoming fierce resistance, had aspects which foreshadowed the occupation of Tibet itself two centuries later, including the manipulation of religious rivalries between Dge-lugs-pa, Karma-pa, and Bon-po factions.

Two articles within literature and linguistics round off the collection of articles directly concerned with Tibet: Alexander W. Macdonald, "Cendrillon au Tibet," which discusses a Tibetan version of the Cinderella story (the text was published by Macdonald already in 1967), and Nicolas Tournadre, "Présentation de la grammaire traditionelle et des cas du tibétain. Approche classique et analyse moderne." The latter constitutes a welcome clarification of the nature of the Tibetan "case" system.

Finally, two substantial articles deal with populations in Nepal. The contribution of Philippe Sagant, "Les tambours de Nyi-shang (Nepal). Rituel et centralization politique" demonstrates the importance of the small Tibetan communities of northern Nepal for a proper understanding of Tibetan civilization. On the basis of an analysis of a communal ritual in the Nyi-shang area, Sagant discloses two mutually opposed ideologies: an archaic, decentralized political system where personal prowess of those "elected" by the local mountain deity constitutes the basis of power, and a centralized system, based on the primacy of age, heredity, and clan privilege. The latter system was adopted by the Yar-lung dynasty of the ancient Tibetan kings and later sanctioned by Buddhism. In the case of the ritual in question, one can observe the shift of emphasis from the first to the second.

Finally, Brigitte Steinmann, the foremost French expert on Tamang culture and religion, has contributed to this volume: "Interprétation de concepts tibétains par des lamas tamang rnying-ma-pa du Népal, dans le ritual funeraire." The article discusses the extraordinary complexity of Tamang religion, in which various elements—Buddhism, local shamanism, the cult of clan deities—have retained their distinctive profiles. This is strikingly brought out by the fact that each strand in Tamang religion has its own class of priests: the *lhabon* are in charge of the cult of the clan deities; the *tamba* recites cosmogonic myths; the *bombo* are the shamans; and the lamas represent a non-monastic Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the Rnying-ma-pa order. Steinmann does not undertake a chronological analysis of these various elements of Tamang religion, but instead raises the question as to which

elements of Tibetan Buddhism correspond to indigenous (and already heterogeneous) Tamang beliefs, and thus have been appropriated by the Tamang. This is the perspective in which she analyses the Tamang funerary ritual, leading to the conclusion that it may be more fruitful to regard Tibetan texts such as the *Bar do thos sgol* ("The Book of Liberation from the Intermediate State through Hearing") as learned elaborations of existing popular rituals (corresponding to the basic structure of the Tamang ritual) rather than to seek an explanation of Tamang ritual in the Tibetan texts which are actually recited.