

SPECIAL SECTION ON THE LAMAIST WORLD

RECENT BOOKS ON TIBET AND THE BUDDHIST HIMALAYAS

I

GIUSEPPE TUCCI, *The Religions of Tibet* [1970], (translated from the German and Italian by Geoffrey Samuel), London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1980. xii, 340 pp., Bibliography, Index, Maps, Ills. £8.95.

ANTHONY JACKSON, *Na-khi Religion: An Analytical Appraisal of Na-khi Ritual Texts*, The Hague etc.: Mouton 1979 [Religion and Society, vol.8]. xxii, 365 pp., Bibliography, Index, Maps, Ills. £40.60.

JAMES F. FISHER (ed.), *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, The Hague etc.: Mouton 1978 [World Anthropology Series, general editor Sol Tax]. xvi, 567 pp., Index. £30.00.

MARK TATZ and JODY KENT, *The Tibetan Game of Liberation: Rebirth*, London: Rider 1978. 231 pp., Ills., Poster/tanka game-board included £4.95 (paper).

Three Styles in the Study of Tibet

Tibet is not just a New Guinea or an Amazonia with a collection of exotic peoples, but possesses a literate tradition which has largely been tied to the power and influence of the state. Until the consolidation of Chinese rule in 1959, religious institutions occupied a central position in the administration and expansion of the polity. Moreover, for more than a millennium Tibet has been influenced by the two great civilisations of Asia, the Indian and the Chinese; it knows the former as 'The Land of Religion' and the latter as 'The Land of Law'. Their influence, which has been cultural and directly political, has been a complex assimilation and accommodation which has also taken account of indigenous and varied local social forms and ideas. Hence the development can only be termed Tibetan.

This presents the anthropologist with a major problem of method in the study of Tibetan peoples. Furthermore, the tradi-

tional society in which he is interested no longer exists within the Tibetan polity itself, and it is not clear to what degree the marked heterogeneity which characterises the fragments outside was a feature of Tibet itself. As in other parts of Asia, the major analytical problem is the relation of local forms to the literate tradition and the power of the state. In the case of Tibet this is compounded with all the problems of historical reconstruction.

In practice there have been two major academic traditions in which the study of Tibet has been attempted. The first is within Tibetology, a subject based firmly on comparative linguistic analyses of textual sources. To the anthropologist the translation of esoteric Buddhist texts away from their social context is of little direct help, though the Tibetologist's reconstructions of the cultural history of Tibet have certainly been of major significance. The second and more recent tradition is the anthropological one itself: here field-studies have been attempted either in the pockets of traditional Tibetan culture that exist in the Himalaya, or amongst refugee populations from political Tibet itself.

There have been no field-studies of the stature of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* or Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* in the anthropological study of Tibet. The ethnographic method of Malinowski developed at a period when Tibet was largely closed to foreigners, first by the Tibetans themselves and then, after 1959, by the Chinese. Even if such a study were made today it would be of a fundamentally different society, one that has moved from 'medieval' to 'modern' in the lifespan of a single person. Neither have there been any works of the importance of Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, which is perhaps a more relevant comparison. This absence is partly explained by the lack of adequate first-hand material; Tibetology is still very much in its infancy and anthropological studies have tended, possibly unwisely, to go very much their own way without being able to see this particular and indigenous form of unity in diversity.

Along with these academic endeavours there has been a vast amount of popular and semi-scholastic writing on Tibetan culture and society; this has been the work of missionaries, explorers, botanists, geologists, hunters, soldiers, administrators and other agents of Imperial India. These vary from the banal to the brilliant, and the latter have to be taken into account in any serious consideration of our knowledge of traditional Tibet.

These are the three major styles in which Tibet has been studied in the West. Today the situation is changing: academic work has begun to integrate these three disparate styles of research, and in so doing has had, even if only implicitly, to attempt to come to terms with the problems that these different perspectives raise. In this review I will be concentrating on works that are a positive development in this direction, bringing together the textual with other forms of writing.

Giuseppe Tucci, the author of *The Religions of Tibet*, is a major figure in the growth of Tibetological studies in this century. He is both a pioneer and an authority, responsible for the journal *Indo-Tibetica* (Rome 1932-1941, 7 vols.), *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome 1949, 3 vols.), *Tibetan Folk Songs from Gyantse and Western Tibet* (Ascona 1966, 2nd. edn.), as well as numerous minor works. The present work was first published in 1970 by Kohlhammer as *Die Religionen Tibets* in *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, by Giuseppe Tucci and Walther Heissig, the work having been translated from the Italian manuscript by Gustav Glaesser. In 1973 it was published in French by Payot as *Les religions du Tibet* in *Les religions du Tibet et de la Mongolie*, having been translated from the German by R. Saillely.

Quite correctly the work is here published by Routledge on its own. The translation into English by Geoffrey Samuel, whilst purportedly from the Italian and German, bears in part a French ancestry, and it is rather odd that no mention whatsoever is here made of the Payot volume. Samuel has improved on the index of the work, extending it to cover more Tibetan terms which are now in the conventional transliteration of T.V. Wylie ('A standard system of Tibetan transcription', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* XXII, 1959, pp. 261-67), rather than the particular system of L. Petech (in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Leiden 1966, part 1, Vol. V, Ch. 5, p. 347). The maps have also been changed and now emphasise political areas rather than towns and religious sites.

For all its circuitous path into English the work is as clear as the other two translations. It stands, along with two other classics (R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilisation*, translated from the French by J. Driver, London 1972; and D.L. Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford 1957), as a major contribution on Tibetan religion and society. These two are the only other volumes which in their scope and scholarship bear comparison, and the three together are necessary reading for any student of Tibet.

In breadth Tucci goes beyond Snellgrove, dealing not only with western Tibet and the Himalaya, but the area in its entirety; in depth he goes beyond Stein, his first-hand familiarity with the area and people allowing him to rise above the texts, which illustrate rather than define his exposition. As well as a number of journeys to southern and western Tibet (in 1931, 1933, 1935, 1937 and 1939), he travelled in central Tibet in 1948, visiting Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse. His familiarity with spoken as well as literary Tibetan allowed him direct access to the ideas of the people more in the manner of an anthropologist than a literary historian as such.

The work is divided into three main sections. The first two chapters are a historical account, at once cultural and political, of the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet. The next two chapters deal with the religious thought of various Buddhist schools as represented in Tibet, and the following two chapters deal with religious institutions in their local context. In addition there is a chapter on the Bön religion. The term *Bön* is used confusedly in Tibetan studies, being variously applied to pre-Buddhist thought, non-Buddhist lay-belief, and to the present-day organised Buddhist

church of that name. For the main part Tucci uses the term in the first and third senses, but here he does not progress beyond a consideration of the corpus of texts he possesses, which he admits are inadequate (p. 248). To a large degree this Chapter has been supplanted by Snellgrove's work *The Nine Ways of Bon* (London 1967).

His account of the doctrines of the most important schools of Buddhist thought in Tibet is of particular interest, as he is not content solely with tracing the names of writers and their affiliation against textual sources, but attempts to give the substance of their doctrine in potted form. This is the philosophical basis of what he himself describes as a gnostic, and hence esoteric, mode of thought (p. 50), and hence a particularly difficult task. For those already initiated into the concepts of Indian Buddhist thought this stands as an extremely useful summary; for those not acquainted with this terminology the ideas are too condensed and opaque to be intelligible from this Chapter alone, which can be no more than a pointer for study.

For the anthropologist the two chapters on religious institutions are the most interesting, especially the second, entitled 'The Folk Religion'. His technique is to contrast the religion of the virtuoso to the beliefs of laymen, a device which Tucci surely appreciates is a convenience for exposition rather than an absolute division. By his use of the term Lamaism rather than Monasticism he avoids the problem, otherwise difficult to resolve in the Indian Buddhist tradition, that Tibetan religious orders are not necessarily monastic. In doing so he is resuscitating a term made famous, or rather infamous, by L.A. Waddel (*The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, London 1895), about which Tucci has written elsewhere that it ought no more to be used for Tibetan Buddhism (*To Lhasa and Beyond*, Rome 1956). It remains to be seen whether this label has rid itself of its earlier connotation of 'degenerate monasticism', and will find wider approval.

The label 'folk' also has its drawbacks; but the substance of this Chapter is unmistakably excellent. It is an account of the different categories and levels of interpretation of local spirits, in which Tucci pays attention both to the variations due to the diverse economic and social forms in Tibet, and to their historical relationship to the Buddhist tradition. In addition he dwells in some detail on the forms of ritual used by religious specialists when performing various types of exorcism or spiritual purification for the laity. However, it has to be said that although this account is of major importance to a student of the area or of popular forms of Buddhism, the analytical level is not sophisticated enough to be of use to the anthropological comparativist: terms such as 'magic', 'hallucinatory level' or 'special psychological state', although suggestive, beg too many questions for a theoretician. This criticism is minor and Tucci is to be congratulated for having come into range at all in this work; its excellence lies both in its ethnographic description and in its broad and cogent account of Tibetan thought at a number of levels and in a historical context.

Anthony Jackson's *Na-khi Religion* is a detailed and scholarly work. The Na-khi are a Tibeto-Burman speaking group located to

the north-east of the Himalaya, where Burma, China, India and Tibet coincide. They have Tibetans to their north, the Lo-lo to their east, and are closely related to the adjacent Mo-so. As in the case of political Tibet, the form of society described disappeared with the expansion of Communist China. However, much of the excellence of Jackson's work consists of a historical analysis that connects the differentiation of the Na-khi from the Mo-so, and the creation of the pictographic script and texts that characterise the ritual described in this book, to equally circumstantial political events. He is aware of the need to explain the rise of this religious form in both a social and a historical context. At the same time he considers the symbolism of the texts in great detail and analyses the cosmology as represented by myth, belief and action in the context of ritual, to derive a basic structural framework, which he then extends to include social forms. The work is both empirical and conceptual.

The West first knew of the Na-khi through their pictographic writings in the nineteenth century, which were then held to be an example of the original script of man (A. Desgodins, *Mission du Tibet*, Paris 1872). There are over 10,000 of their texts in Western libraries, the majority of which were collected by or in reaction to the purchases of J.F. Rock, an American botanist, who stayed in the region in the first part of this century. Jackson's volume is largely based on his analysis of the texts, the semi-scholastic writings of Rock, and the work of Lin-ts'an Li on the Mo-so (*Academia Sinica*, Taipei, 1953-1960).

The first part of the book is a critique of previous writings on the Na-khi by way of a painstaking historical and social reconstruction. He criticises Rock for his amateurish ethnology: Rock held that Na-khi religion is a pure survival of pre-Buddhist Tibetan Bön religion, and that a golden age of Na-khi writing existed in the sixteenth century; indeed, he criticises him for his mystification of Na-khi studies generally. The second point is the easiest to verify: it appears that over 90% of the Na-khi texts in the West are copies of one another, that the ceremonies that Rock has translated are unusually long, and that all ceremonies are made up of smaller sub-ceremonies which are themselves only various combinations of a limited set of smaller elements. Jackson connects the lack of standardisation of texts with the absence of an organised church: each religious specialist could create his own variation. He connects the origin of the script with the Mo-so phonetic script, seeing a shift towards pictography as a natural development for rituals in which a text was little more than an *aide-memoir*, especially given the problems of the representation of a tonal language. He sees the original form of the ritual as being that of the Tibetan Bön religious order as it existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This Bön order was then proscribed by the Chinese authorities and survived only at the local level amongst a peasantry to whom the Tibetan script was unintelligible. These lay religious specialists recorded and developed the religious tradition in their own manner. Hence the origin of Na-khi ritual texts.

Jackson considers the study of Na-khi society to have a textual bias. By a careful consideration of the kinship terminology, mythology, history, patronyms, and inheritance, he shows why it is likely that they were originally matrilineal, and why it is only latterly that they acquired those characteristics that have led other writers mistakenly to identify them as being 'basically' patrilineal. Furthermore, this allows him to explain the dramatic increase in female suicide in the eighteenth century in terms of the forced adoption of patrilineal institutions after the Chinese pacification of the area in 1723. These suicides, Jackson continues, in their turn increased the need for local religious specialists, and when in the nineteenth century the Na-khi profited from the opium trade, the increased wealth allowed a growth of religious activity. Hence the proliferation of religious texts, especially after 1875.

Put as straightforwardly as this, Jackson's argument may appear to be too simple to be true. In his text, however, it is his close comparative technique, in which he examines the effect of various factors and events in different locations and within different groups, which gives his historical analysis substance. These social themes are also taken up in the second and longer part of the work, which is devoted to the analysis of symbolism. The analysis here is complex and is given first at the level of the classification of the cosmology and then in the context of belief and ritual which is subsequently analysed into various types of dyads. He considers the form and sequence of the ritual and gives a detailed account of one ceremony before returning to social parallels. Na-khi religious practice is clearly parallel to Tibetan ritual; only here the popular conceptions of spirits and deities have become dominant rather than subsidiary. The major concern is with ritual action to remove the effects of misfortune and misdeed, and to promote health and well-being; it completely lacks the Buddhist concern with soteriology. The name of the people itself suggests this concern with ritual: *Na-khi*, like the related term *sngags-pa* in Tibetan, has the sense of 'black' and 'ritual specialist'. In outer form, the altar and the dress of the specialists, like the form of the ritual itself, show a clear Tibetan influence. According to Jackson, the indigenous term for ritual specialist, *dto-mba*, is a derivation of a Tibetan term, *tönba*, which means priest. Since he is unable to give a transliteration of this latter word in Tibetan, it is not obvious to which Tibetan word he is referring. It could be spelt in any one of a dozen ways (and in any case would not be a common term for priest or religious specialist). He also evidently knows little about Tibetan religious texts in that he considers mantras to be Tibetan, rather than Tibetan transliterations of the Sanskrit: they are as foreign to the Tibetan as they are to the Na-khi texts. One could, in addition, criticise his account of the anthropological study of ritual, and his style of exposition which is unnecessarily repetitious at times. These are however minor points, and in no way detract from Jackson's scholarship and competence: his is surely the definitive work on the Na-khi, and a model of reconstructive methodology.

Himalayan Anthropology, edited by James F. Fisher, is also a major contribution, if only because of its size: it contains no less than thirty-five articles. Of these, eleven are on directly Tibetan themes, including a lucid summary by Jackson of his work on Tibetan Bön Rites in China. The collection derives from the massive Chicago conference of 1974. The standard of the papers included in the volume is extremely varied and there is no common theme or approach other than that of geographic area. Robert Ekvall ('Correlation of Contradictions: A Tibetan Semantic Device') gives an interesting account of the way in which the Tibetan language can form abstract categories from polar concrete pairs, such as 'weight' from 'light-heavy'. Chögyam Trungpa ('Some Aspects of Pön') gives some fascinating ethnographic information on Bön; however he is quite uncritical as to which sense of the term he is writing about, and many of the deities that he describes will be found in Tucci's *Religions of Tibet* in the Chapter on the Folk Religion. John Ardussi and Lawrence Epstein ('The Sainly Madman in Tibet') provide an excellent account of the Tibetan classification of certain states of mental abnormality, which they also characterise in the terminology of clinical psychology. Their central concern is the *bla-ma smyon-pa*, the 'sainly madman', who is a major character in the oral and literary tradition of Tibet. His position is described both in relation to the other forms of Tibetan madmen, and in terms of Buddhist philosophy: their treatment is both entertaining and scholarly. William Stablein's paper ('A Descriptive Analysis of the Content of Nepalese Buddhist *Pujās* as a Medical-Cultural System with References to Tibetan Parallels') is also, in spite of its ponderous title, of interest in the understanding of esoteric Tibetan ritual. There are, of course, many other articles in this volume which bear more on the particular situation of the Himalaya than on Tibet itself.

The earliest uninformed and popular writings on Tibet can be dated back to the thirteenth century and the visits of Western clerics to the Mongol Court. They hoped to find an ally in the form of a vassal of the ubiquitous Prester John to enlist in the fight against evil, here represented by the tribes of 'Gog and Magog'. Friar William of Rubruck, who saw Tibetan clerics at the Mongol court in 1254, describes figurines of 'praying bishops' and a 'winged St. Michael' along with shaven-headed monks in saffron robes. To him these were aberrant Christian relics of the influence of Prester John, not the representatives of a coherent religion. Another cleric, equally intent on allying his State with the Mongols against the forces of evil, visited the same court in 1247. This was Sa-skya paṇḍita (1182-1251), also known as Sa-pon, a Tibetan monk of the Sa-skya sect; he must have had an accurate appreciation of the political realities as the subsequent support of the Mongols was instrumental in ensuring the power of the Sa-skya order in Tibet until the middle of the fourteenth century.

Sa-pon is also credited with the invention of the 'Game of Rebirth' which is the subject of this entertaining volume by Mark Tatz and Jody Kent (*The Tibetan Game of Liberation: Rebirth*). The work consists of introductory essays on the popular notion of

rebirth according to one's moral worth - that is the law of 'just returns' of *karma* in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, and on the origin, history and form of the game. The book contains a coloured print of a Tibetan painting of the board (75cm. x 50cm.) which in this version has 104 squares leading from the lowest of the hells up through this world, the heavens and then the Buddhist path to *nirvana*. The game can be considered either to be educational, or as a device for legitimating a Buddhist hierarchy; this depends on one's point of view. Certainly it is of interest that from square 38 onwards to 104 the player, already above the heavens, only then for the first time encounters Buddhist monastic vows. Until the highest levels the board makes a clear distinction between the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna paths within Tibetan Buddhism, and the highest levels of all are reserved for the sermons of the historical Buddha, Gautama.

The dynamics of the board are interesting: below a certain point it is difficult to rise, and above a certain point it is impossible to fall. Again, this suggests that the only way one can be certain of 'permanence away from suffering' is through Buddhism. The player moves by a throw of a die and here the rules cleverly cater for greed: high throws invariably lead the player downwards. Unlike most successful Western board-games there is no opportunity to attack, delay or extort money from other players; but then this is a Buddhist game in which such activities would invariably lead the player downwards. It is also true to the higher Buddhist tradition rather than to popular belief in that there can be no transfer of 'merit' between players: you cannot help your friends and success is a solitary endeavour.

As in Dante's inferno the tortures of the hells are chosen specifically to suit the crimes of the person. For this reviewer the major social enjoyment consists in seeing a fellow-player descend into the hells, and hearing him read out the description of the sins he has committed and the corresponding tortures to which he must be subjected. The reviewer having spent most of his own time in the hells, his assessment of the true merits of the game may be a long way from that seen from the Buddhist path. However the following description at p. 69, taken from the 'Howling and Great Howling Hells' (*du-'bod che-chung*) may give the flavour of the game:

One falls laughing, it is said, into the Howling Hell The Great Howling Hell arises from lying or harsh speech with spiteful intention: perjury, bribery, betrayal of trust, false advertising, and venal government or justice. One who has lied while quarrelling with a companion has his tongue grow to great length. Demons then dig in it a deep ditch, which is filled with molten copper; worms are born in its sides, which devour the tongue.

This is, one might think, a hell especially reserved for book-reviewers or writers in general. Possibly one corner of it is kept for the writers of uninformed popular works on Tibet, such as Michel Peissel's recent work on Zanskar (*Zanskar: The Hidden Kingdom*, London 1979): being battered by Buddhists with BBC-TV

boom-microphones off a bridge into a Himalayan gorge would be too good for him. This is a fate that Tatz and Kent would be able to avoid. Like any truly popular work it can be faulted on academic grounds, although I was pleased to note that the square marked Bön distinguishes between Bön in the sense of a Buddhist religious order and other meanings of the term. In most cases the references to the secondary and in some cases primary textual sources are clear, and contained in separate notes to the chapters. The work is a splendid compromise and is far removed from the excesses which now as always characterise much of the popular writing on Tibet.

GRAHAM E. CLARKE

RECENT BOOKS ON TIBET
AND THE BUDDHIST HIMALAYAS

II

BLANCHE OLSCHAK, *Ancient Bhutan: A Study on Early Buddhism in the Himalayas*, Zürich: Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1979. 173 pp. Ills., Maps, Annexes, together with Map in end-pocket. SFr 196.00; limited edition of 1000 copies.

SHERRY B. ORTNER, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1978 [Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems, editor Clifford Geertz, no.2]. xii, 185 pp., Ills., Bibliography, Index. £7.50 (£2.95 Paper).

MICHAEL ARIS, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1979. xxxiv, 330 pp., Ills., Table, Maps, Bibliographies, Indexes. £12.50. Microfiche Supplement, xviii, 173 pp., available separately from publishers.

Although China is showing signs of relaxing its policy towards central Tibet, following its recent admission of repressiveness and of the fact that the economic condition of the annexed country is now even worse than it was when 'liberated' thirty years ago, there seems to be little hope for the restoration of the traditional Tibetan culture and government. Apart from settlements of refugees in India and other parts of the world including

Switzerland, pockets of Tibetan civilisation continue to thrive outside the border which defines the limit of Chinese power. The last of the books reviewed here deals with one such community in Nepal, the Sherpas. However, the only country to preserve a 'lamaist' state is Bhutan, which, understandably worried by the fate of its northern neighbour, has kept its borders closed to foreigners.

We should therefore be grateful to the few writers such as Blanche Olschak and Michael Aris, who have been afforded the exceptional opportunity of visiting that country, though few have produced books as indicative as theirs of the authors' interest in and understanding of their subject. However, in reading Olschak's book we find certain areas in which it is not unequivocally successful, and I consider some of these before returning to its merits.

One of the first questions that must be raised concerns the extent to which it is possible to write a history of early Bhutan without recourse to Bhutanese and Tibetan sources from different periods. The fact is that Olschak bases her reconstructions on legends and popular accounts - her references are almost all secondary Western sources - and she apparently has a limited knowledge of literary Tibetan. One of the few Tibetan-language texts which is used is a late biography of the 'Sindhu Rāja', translated with the help of Geshé Thupten Wangyal, and quoted in its twenty-five page entirety, but unfortunately without critical comment or evaluation as to its historical merit. That it assumes such a central position in the book is justified by its being the 'First Translation of a Hidden Book Treasure [*gTer-ma*] of Bumthang [in Central Bhutan]', but it is not mentioned that a section of this work, translated by Michael Aris, is to be found in Mehra's *Bhutan* (Delhi 1974), which was published six years ago and which is, incidentally, cited in Olschak's own bibliography.

Another factor which perhaps diminishes the value of this book as a plausible historical survey is the author's cautious avoidance of criticism of any aspects of the Bhutanese polity. It is understandable that a writer should wish to be tactful and not to give offence, but there are a few instances in which euphemism leads to misrepresentation when it is implied that the ideal situation was actual. For example, Olschak understates the burden on the ordinary peasant of forced labour services, and suggests that the requisition by government officials of animals for transport purposes was not abused.

It was ... usual that travelling officers, in fulfilment of their duties - *and only then, misuse was forbidden by law* - had to be provided with mounts and provisions by the inhabitants of every district they crossed. (Emphasis added).

We might compare this with the account of an earlier European visitor to Bhutan, Ashley Eden, who remarked acidly that

The only limit on the revenue demand is the natural limit of the power of the officials to extort more. Nothing that a Booteah possesses is his own; he is at

all times liable to lose it if it attracts the cupidity of any one more powerful than himself. The lower classes, whether of villagers or public servants, are little better than the slaves of the higher officials.

(*Political Missions to Bootan*, Calcutta 1865, p. 118)

This certainly represents an extreme view, but one which must be taken into consideration in any fair assessment of the Bhutanese revenue system.

To give another example, on page 31 there is the almost off-hand mention of a sequence of events which alerts the reader to a certain bias in the author's attitude. In a single paragraph we are told that for the first twelve years after the ascension to the throne of King Jigme Dorje Wangchuk, the latter 'stayed in the background' until the acting prime minister, Jigme Palden Dorji, 'was killed by an attempt of murder' (*sic*), and his brother, who had succeeded him resigned and emigrated a few months later, 'stayed abroad with his family'. The following year, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the king's life, and finally, we are told that 'in 1967 H.M. the King himself, enthusiastically acclaimed by the whole population, took over the position of a prime and foreign minister' - as if this assumption of power were a *non sequitur*. Although it is only possible to speculate on the implications - if any - that the author is making here, it is clear that her overt intention throughout is to present as harmonious a picture as possible of the country's internal affairs. However, it is for the reader to decide whether such evasive passages as those cited above are intended for acceptance at face-value, or whether they are meant to be transparent to the perhaps more cynical Western reader than to certain understandably anxious Bhutanese protagonists.

There is also evidence that the author is ill-acquainted with certain aspects of the broader perspective involving more specifically Tibetan subjects. For example, she rather misrepresents the Bön religion, dismissing it as 'prehistoric' and as part of the 'Shamanist Tradition', which, again, represents the 'official' view of the Tibetan theocracy and presumably of the Bhutanese hierarchs. Sufficient work has been done on the earliest written records from Tibet to demonstrate that only one facet of the early religion, that which was fully in evidence recently as what Stein (*Tibetan Civilisation*, London 1972) has called the 'Nameless religion', could rightly be called shamanistic. Ariane Macdonald¹ has presented a substantial body of evidence to indicate the existence of an organised religion, *gTsug* or *gTsug-lag* (the term is usually translated as 'science'), the memory of which was all but obliterated by the later Buddhists' contemptuous and deliberate

¹ 'Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1047 et 1290: essai sur la formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sron-bcan sgam-po', in *Etudes Tibétaines Dédiées à la Mémoire de Marcell Lalou*, Paris 1971.

association of it in their writings with the indigenous shamanic tradition. Her misunderstanding of the subject results in certain inconsistencies and errors. She takes for granted the validity of *gter-ma* (rediscovered texts) without entertaining the prosaic possibility that their discoverers (*gter-ston*) were also their authors and concealers. I raise this issue not to imply that Olschak is being credulous, but because the *gter-ma* tradition in both Tibet and Bhutan was a prominent feature of the reformed Bön-po who were keen to create for themselves a more 'respectable' historical tradition. No doubt the author would have suspended her belief in the texts' authenticity in this case, but the Bön-po are not mentioned at all in this context. Her unfamiliarity with the work on the pre-Buddhist religion is further illustrated by one significant mistake. On page 50 there is the frequent appearance of the term '*gTsug-lHa-khang*' which is taken to be synonymous with *lHa-khang* (temple, or literally 'god-house'). A *lHa-khang* is a Buddhist (*chos-pa*) temple, but the term '*gTsug-lHa-khang*' is almost certainly a mistake for *gTsug-lag khang* (the pronunciation of *lha* and *lag* being very similar), a temple belonging to the old royal religion which she would classify as Bön.

Although the book is ostensibly a history of early Bhutan, it lacks the disciplined approach necessary to give it unity and direction. The author condenses into little more than a page a summary of the major figures and events from the seventh to the twentieth centuries as if to provide in advance a framework upon which the rest of the account can be seen to assume coherence. But this approach is clearly inadequate, as may be seen, for example, from the section on 'The Hidden Treasures of Bumthang', which is a summary of about a dozen disparate legends without analysis or any comment on how they might interrelate to give a fuller picture of Bhutan.

In spite of these weaknesses, *Ancient Bhutan* is indeed a valuable addition to the literature on that country, and although, when it appeared, it was certainly the best English-language work on the subject, it is perhaps unfair to assess it as a historical document. To present historical data with scholarly analysis is not its aim. The photographic facsimiles of two texts, one of which is the Sindhu Rāja's biography, must have contributed greatly to the cost of the book, and are not really necessary from an academic point of view. The same may be said for the reproduction in Tibetan script of lists concerning the 'Brug-pa monasteries and temples ('because it might be of interest to scholars and students'). The majority of these lists are written in the cursive script, which is particularly trying to read even for those with some competence in literary Tibetan. The texts and lists, which together occupy over forty pages, could certainly have been presented more informatively - and economically - in transliteration.

The paucity of analytical material in Olschak's *Ancient Bhutan* is complemented by a full and usually perceptive description of the temples, religious works of art, legends and other diverse features of Bhutanese history. Finally, the wealth of photographs, maps, and Augusto Gansser's fine illustrations (including some unique photographs of pre-Buddhist wooden carvings), in addition to the above-mentioned facsimiles, help to characterise the book as one which is more valuable for aesthetic rather than academic reasons.

It is these characteristics which are likely to appeal to anyone with a casual or even romantic interest in Bhutan, while those with greater patience and willingness to inform themselves of the country's early history will prefer to negotiate the Byzantine complexities of literary research as documented in Michael Aris's book. But first let us consider one which deals with a different region of Tibetan culture and approaches its subject from the standpoint of symbolic anthropology. Ortner's *Sherpas through Their Rituals* is one of the very few theoretically-oriented works produced by ethnographers of Tibetan communities, the remainder of the literature being either largely descriptive or concerned with other Himalayan peoples. The book comprises a description and analysis of a number of rituals and social institutions of the Sherpas, an ethnically and to a great extent culturally Tibetan people who emigrated from Eastern Tibet into Nepal in the sixteenth century. However, since this book has been selected as a recently-published representative of the theoretical side of Tibetan ethnographic research, I shall restrict my review of it to an evaluation of its methodology and a consideration of just how accurate a tidy model can be when the elements of which it is constituted are sometimes speculative and incomplete. To perform this adequately in such a brief review unfortunately necessitates omitting a fair discussion of the book's many strong points, but these have been accorded enough treatment elsewhere (e.g. Messerschmidt in *Reviews in Anthropology* VI, no.2, 1979).

First I shall consider what must be the principal flaw in her argument, and then give examples of specific features - one might even call them devices - which by themselves would seem insignificant but which are collectively quite insidious insofar as they conspire to support her thesis. I submit that there is a *petitio principii* at the centre of a significant part of the argument, and shall demonstrate this principally through an examination of her conclusions.

The author contends that rituals provide the Sherpas with a means of coming to terms with the harsh realities of their social system and are to some extent 'primary arenas for symbolically confronting that [i.e. orthodox Buddhist] ideology, and rendering it more compatible with lay life'. These rituals are not formulated specifically for this purpose but are already present in the religion ostensibly as 'the primary conduits of high ideology'.

In spite of the many divergences in Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism from the earlier Theravada tradition, the former, as practised by the Sherpas 'nonetheless retains the central Buddhist tendency to isolate and atomize the individual, and devalue social bonding and social reciprocity'. Why this feature of Buddhism should be present in the Sherpa religion when it is, as Ortner says, not obligatory (citing the case of Thailand in evidence - a spurious argument which I return to below), is explained partly on historical grounds as having been more appropriate to the Tibetan society in which it originated; but the main answer 'lies in those aspects of secular life that both express and produce these tendencies toward atomization and individualism'. In other words, to use Geertz's terminology, the religion becomes a 'model' of society.

To summarise the position: rituals enable people to cope with adverse social conditions; the rituals are provided by the religion, the alienating quality of which derives from the atomism of the social structure. I shall not contest her evidence for the latter proposition, but if she is to prove that the religion is indeed modelled on the society, she cannot of course take for granted that Sherpa Buddhism is fundamentally separatist if this is one of the implications of her conclusion. Independent proof is required here, and this, alas, is sadly inadequate.

Ortner contrasts Thai Theravāda Buddhism with Sherpa Buddhism, and attempts to show that the former has developed 'in contrast to the Sherpas, precisely such a social, communal Buddhism', which is indeed 'ironic', as she says, Mahāyāna Buddhism being 'supposedly a more socially concerned, "compassionate" form of the religion'. She then attempts to demonstrate the relative proximity of Thai villagers and Sherpas to their respective monastic communities. In assessing her data for the Sherpas I shall show by juxtaposition of parallel statements from Fürer-Haimendorf's *The Sherpas of Nepal* (London 1964), that her observations, while not necessarily contradictory to his, show a startling degree of unwarranted emphasis. While it would be quite possible to refute her case by using Tibetan material, I shall use other data concerning the Sherpas as far as possible. Readers of her book will notice that she is inconsistent in her use of orthodox Tibetan and heterodox Sherpa explanations of events to corroborate different stages of her analysis.

Ortner: They [Sherpa monks] draw their recruits from many villages and have no established ties with any single one. (p.158)

F-H: ... Analysis ... shows the close link between the monastery and villages in the vicinity. With the exception of the abbot's Tibetan step-brothers not one of the monks hailed from any village outside Khumbu, and the vast majority came from the three villages of Namche, Khumjung and Kunde. (p.136)

Ortner: Lay people and monks do not systematically interact. Monks are invited to the village only for funerals, or for special meritorious activities.... (p.158)

F-H: Monks... do not permanently live in an ivory tower. Many are the occasions when they are called to the one or other village... [and he lists a series of possible reasons]. On all these occasions they are in close contact with the lay villagers, and they freely visit their families and kinsmen, staying for some days in their houses. (p.133)

Ortner: Lay people usually go to the monasteries only for major festivals. They may also go ... to give donations and thus earn merit, but this again is relatively rare.... (p.158)

F-H: Lay folk from all villages of Khumbu as well as many parts of Pharak and Solu occasionally visit the *gomba* [i.e. *dgon-pa*, monastery]

In this manner there is a continuous two-way traffic between the monastery and the lay world.... (p.137)

Ortner: Few monks take vows, but they are expected to stay a life-time [as monks]. (p.158)

F-H: The large number of *thawa* [*grwa-pa*, monks] who left the monastery leads us to the conclusion that the state of monk is not considered as a man's final choice, but that in many cases it is but a phase in career, comparable almost to some years spent in an institution of higher education. (p.137)

Other examples could be cited, but the above, it is hoped, is sufficient to make the point. I stress that I am not merely favouring Fürer-Haimendorf's perceptiveness above Ortner's, since a close consideration of the above and other comparable statements will show a greater consensus than is at first apparent. What is to be deplored is the undue emphasis placed by Ortner on those features of Sherpa life which, if as prominent as she would have us believe, would validate her argument. The excerpts from Fürer-Haimendorf show these same features in what is probably their true proportions since the latter is not concerned to force the data to comply with any particular model.

Ortner seems to construct her case on a foundation of circumstantial evidence and cements her examples together with a range of semantic devices which, individually, escape the reader's attention, but which in aggregate are too thin to cohere. I give two apparently minor examples. On page 110 she makes an opposition between 'envying the rich' and 'pitying the poor'. This is surely an inappropriate pairing, envy being a grudging sentiment and pity sympathetic. A more apt contrast would be either deferring to or respecting the rich, which is sympathetic, or despising the poor, the opposite of envying them. Secondly, in attempting to demonstrate the multiple interpretations of a particular exorcism ritual, she first gives a 'psychological', more orthodox, interpretation, in which a ritual object, a metal Buddha, is seen to represent the immortal spirit and is described in passing as being made of 'indestructable' metal. A few pages later, she interprets this ritual in social terms, and the rich are represented by the 'expensive Buddha idol'. I am not proposing that symbols can have only one interpretation, but these and other statements often read like a parody on Turner's theory of symbolic polysemy, and even Messerschmidt, in his otherwise adulatory review of this book admits that some readers 'may classify it as a clever endeavour of words'.

Ortner's alternation between monastic and folk interpretations has been mentioned earlier, but she is unable to construct a plausible pattern for the interaction of orthodox and heterodox rituals (this duality itself being an oversimplification) as successfully as does Tambiah in a South-East Asian setting.

(*Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, Cambridge 1970) - largely because she apparently does not read Tibetan. For example, using such a system of transliteration 'as to evoke from the English-speaking reader the sounds as I heard them', she gives as the term for charitable acts 'gyewa-zhinba' and for funerals the term 'gyowa'. This has caused her to understate the traditional stress on funerals as merit-making occasions, for, as Snellgrove has pointed out² in his similar criticism of Fürer-Haimendorf (op.cit.), both 'gyewa' and 'gyowa' are the same term, *dge-ba*, meaning virtue or merit.

One of Ortner's main contentions is that the rituals themselves are mechanisms for 'desocialising and existentialising actors' experience of the problem'. This conclusion is arrived at largely by ignoring the position of the lama (the reincarnate lama, *sprul-sku*, as opposed to the lay village lama) in Tibetan religion. While Ortner overstates the extent of interaction between Thai monks and laymen, since rituals such as healing, exorcism and divination - all popular concerns - are performed by lay specialists, the monks having no part in them, these are areas which in Tibet are all within the province of the lamas. Certainly there are lay ritual specialists in Tibet, but they have no monopoly on the performance of their rituals. Whatever they can do the lama can do better. Geoffrey Samuel has shown in his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Crystal Rosary*, (Cambridge University 1975), that while in strict orthodox terms tantric rituals can be performed by the celebrant alone, the ordinary laity depend upon the lama to make these performances efficacious for them through a bestowal of his power (*byin-rlabs*, blessing). The evidence seems to suggest that the lamas are just as significant to the Sherpas as to other Tibetans. We might also note that whereas in Ortner's description of the ritual called Nyungne (*sMyung-nas*) the emphasis is on the independence of the celebrants from the religious officiants, Fürer-Haimendorf observes that in the example which he witnessed, a hermit who was a 'greatly revered personality' presided over the proceedings and ended them with a rite called 'the *Tshe-wong* [*Tshe-dbang*], the rite of "Life Consecration"', one which Samuel cites specifically as requiring the lama's mediation to be effective.

A book which could hardly be further removed from the above in its objectives and methods is *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*. The author, Michael Aris, until recently a research fellow of St. John's College and now of Wolfson College, Oxford, spent five years from 1967 in Bhutan as private tutor to the Royal Family and as head of the Translation Department. His own objectives and sympathies are made quite clear at the outset, where he explains his reasons for not succumbing to the temptation of writing an account of his experiences at the Bhutanese court, maintaining that he was instead 'inclined towards a more objective approach to the country by examining its past, one in which subjective impressions could be kept under control and used to profit in interpreting the written word'.

² 'For a Sociology of Tibetan-Speaking Peoples', *Central Asiatic Journal* XI, no.3, 1966.

The picture of early Bhutan that emerges from this book is very different from that drawn by Olschak, for Aris demonstrates that none of the issues is simple or straightforward, and any conclusions that he draws are painstakingly wrested from a tangled web of myth, legend and embellished history. The first thing that strikes the reader is the tremendous advantage the author has in his considerable knowledge of both literary Tibetan and the Bhutanese vernacular. The bibliography includes some seventy Bhutanese and Tibetan primary sources, and we might take as a generalisation his comment, which actually concerns the 'retreat' of the first *Zhabs-drung*, that 'to make any sense of the whole business we have to rely on literary detection'.

The book is divided into five - in fact, as we shall see, four - parts, following a useful introduction in which the author includes an indication of the scope of his study. A significant proportion of the difficulty in producing such a work is clearly the task of distinguishing myth from fact, the discrepancy between which is a theme that recurs throughout the book. However, lest the author be accused of ethnocentrism in attempting what may be regarded as an artificial separation of myth and fact, it must be emphasised that he in no way underrates myth for its own sake but attempts to combine what he regards as the two possible approaches available to a student of the subject:

He could by dint of hard labour search for historical fact embedded in the legends which constitute the myth or he could study the myths themselves to appreciate the psychological attitudes of the society for which the myth acts as a statement of truth.

Instances of such a simultaneous consideration of a people's external environment and their subjective response to it - reflected in a diachronic study of literature as history and myth - are unfortunately little in evidence in the anthropological material on Tibet.

Among the subjects included in Part I, covering the seventh to the ninth centuries and constituting about half the book, is the enigma of the 'Sindhu Rāja', whom Olschak takes for granted as 'King Sindhu who came from India', a view which, to be fair to her, is accepted by both Das (*The Dragon Country*, Delhi 1974) and Mehra (op.cit.) while Rahul (*Modern Bhutan*, Delhi 1971) does not mention him at all. Aris too makes use of his biography (*rGyal-po sindha ra-dsa'i rnam-thar*), but on the strength of earlier textual material concludes that the word 'Sindhu' is a much later form of the original, Se-'dar-kha, the name of a local ruler native to Bhutan; the homonymy with 'Sindhu' as the ancient form of 'Hindu' is probably fortuitous.

A significant consideration in the concluding chapter of the first part (which incidentally does not appear in the table of contents) concerns the potential for other disciplines such as archaeology (some evidence for an early lithic culture is given in the introduction), linguistics and social anthropology, suggesting that the latter's methods may be particularly useful in the study of oral tradition and social change.

It may be hoped that these disciplines will one day produce solid grist to the historian's mill which has here revolved almost exclusively around the fragile husk of the texts available to date.

The second part of the book is an account of the Tibetan Buddhist sects (among which the Bön-po are rightly included) and subsects and their fortunes in Bhutan before and after the establishment of a church state under the 'Brug-pa. Aris does not allow himself to be drawn into a discussion of doctrinal development and differences which would be a digression and, if justice were to be done to the subject, one far too extensive to fall within the scope of the book. His expressed concern is however 'simply to establish something of the human record of these schools', although he acknowledges that the necessary separation of the mundane and the spiritual is 'an invidious task' which tends to produce a distorted picture of the culture, but is necessary if we are to penetrate beneath 'the shared world of Tradition where one century looks like any other and where human motivation is always simple as in a fairy story'.

Part Three, covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, deals with the foundation of the 'Brug-pa theocracy and reveals what Aris calls 'an old skeleton in the Bhutanese cupboard', a metaphor which has surely never been more aptly used. The first chapter outlines the life and achievements of the *Zhabs-drung*, the founder of the church state, but the remainder investigates his mysterious 'retreat' which, according to most accounts, lasted from about 1651, when he was over fifty years old, into the early years of the following century. Nearly all modern writers, including Olschak (who devotes a chapter to the *Zhabs-drung*), omit to mention the matter, while Das states that 'Umze concealed the death of Nawang Namgyal for five years'. Aris's conclusion, on the strength of literary investigation, is that 'The death of *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal was apparently kept a state secret for more than half a century' - in order to permit the consolidation of theocratic rule in the absence of an undisputed successor, among other reasons. He also reveals how the practice of concealing a ruler's death was comparatively commonplace in Tibet and Bhutan. One example is that of the Fifth Dalai Lama, whose retreat of fifteen years coincided with that of the *Zhabs-drung*, giving rise to 'the odd situation that during these years the Tibetan and Bhutanese states were both ruled by corpses, in a manner of speaking'.

In the fourth part, which is by no means a detailed account of the period after the *Zhabs-drung*, Aris considers some general issues such as that of succession in relation to the problem of 'multiple reincarnation' and the varying fortunes of British influence in the country.

The presentation of the last part emphasises the author's avoidance of a 'cosmetic' treatment of his sources. It comprises four texts from different periods, three in Tibetan and one being the report of the Portuguese Jesuit Cacella's visit to Bhutan in 1627, where he met the *Zhabs-drung*. The Tibetan texts are edited and copiously annotated by Aris and presented with parallel translation. From one of them he reconstructs a genealogy (to be found

in Part I) of the six ruling clans of Eastern Bhutan, corroborated as far as possible by the oral tradition which is alive in that region as well as by other texts which mention certain of the members. Presumably acting on the theory that only a minority of readers will be interested in them, and to minimise costs, the texts are not printed in the book but are available separately on microfiche from the publishers.

I hope the above will have given some indication of the depth of scholarship and breadth of research revealed in this book, but mention should also be made of the author's lucid use of English, which contrasts well with the opacity of his subject. While he is not given to the effusiveness of other writers, who are apparently stultified by their encounter with Bhutanese royalty, his style is by no means arid but echoes his acknowledged admiration for the writing of the eighteenth-century visitors to Bhutan above those of the nineteenth, whose 'dull invective' he attributes mainly to a deterioration in Anglo-Bhutanese relations but also partly to 'a decline in English prose style'. This appreciation of differences in style and tenor is extended to the Tibetan sources, affording him a greater insight into their authors' background and intentions. Nowhere, however, is scholarly intuition given a completely free rein, being subject always to the restraining influence of intellectual precision and the essential trappings of literary or other evidence.

The methods of the historian and of the social anthropologist are not the same, but ethnographers of Tibetan communities would perhaps do well to follow Aris's example of balancing a people's historical record beside their affective response to it without permitting either dimension to assume undue proportions. Of course, it is not to be assumed that the anthropologist must perform an exhaustive study of the historical literature, but a reasonable grasp of the religion - if that is our particular concern - in its historical context as well as its relationship to current practice (and here the ethnographer comes into his own) is clearly necessary before we are equipped to hazard interpretations of ritual. In this context we should perhaps heed the warning offered by Goody in his *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968):

We cannot expect to find the same close fit between religion and society that sociologists often perceive in non-literate cultures when the reference point is not some locally derived myth subject to the homeostatic processes of the oral tradition but a virtually indestructible document belonging to one of the great world (i.e. literate) religions.

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