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BOOK REVIEWS

Oppitz, Michael.

Frau für Fron. Die Dreierallianz bei den Magar West-Nepal. (Woman against service: The tripartite alliance system among the Magars of Western Nepal). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. 1988.

The Kham Magar of West Nepal are one of the most unique and most fascinating ethnic groups of Nepal: on the one hand they have a peculiar and rather pervasive shamanism quite different from the numerous variations of pan-Nepalese *jhākrism*; on the other hand their social organization is based on a kinship system which stands out as a rarity in the region--though it is not at all unrelated to that of the surrounding groups.

Both these aspects have been well studied by Michael Oppitz: The first he has documented in his masterly ethnographic film ("Shamans in the Blind Country," 1980), which was followed by a picture book containing the film commentary (1981), and some articles. The second aspect has been the subject of his subsequent studies which are planned for publishing in a monograph, under the title "*Onkels Tochter, keine sonst*" ("Uncle's daughter, no one else"). The slim book reviewed here, which the author himself classifies as an essay, is merely an abstract version, the "skeleton", of this comprehensive monograph.

The unique feature of the Kham Magar's kinship system is that it is a system of prescriptive alliance of the matrilateral type, a system of "generalized exchange," in its classic simplicity, involving three major exchange units which "give" wives in a "circulating connubium." Within Nepal, this is the only such system we know of, and Oppitz's book is the first scientific contribution which attempts to describe and analyze this system in a comprehensive way. This alone earns it the merit of being a major milestone in the anthropology of Nepal.

But how is it possible to deal with such an important subject in the form of an essay of not much more than a hundred pages? The price Oppitz--and eventually the reader--pays for the handy shortness is at least twofold: firstly, theoretical discussions are kept to a minimum; secondly, ethnographical description restricts itself to an outline of the basic features of the system. After raising the two main themes of the book, "alliance" and "debt", Oppitz gives a short introduction into the theory of prescriptive alliance: mainly, he presents the well-known Lévi-Straussian concepts and besides that offers a chronological table that embodies the major contributions in the study of the matter. However, instead of taking any specific stand, Oppitz advocates a "rethinking" of the problems of kinship study by going back to the basics and doing detailed studies of exemplary model cases: one such is that of the Magar. This is a laudable approach, but the question is, whether a description already condensed to essential features can be "pure ethnography" without any theoretical bias.

The ethnographic part starts off with the summary of a foundation myth: the story of the first and ideal marriage. In this myth, involving such well-known Hindu deities as Mahadew and Parbati, Indra and Bhagwani, all the recurrent characteristics of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage are present. The Magar ancestor marries his mother's brother's daughter, who is of heavenly origin, thus being a "gift" from above (paradoxically this is called *kanya dan*, as in the Hindu hypergamous milieu). To reciprocate, the groom's family has to render services "for twelve years" to the wife-givers. This special form of exchange gives the title of the book, "Frau für Fron" meaning "A Wife in Exchange for Servitude."

Two other myths are summarized in which the division of the three original proto-clans is established. This leads the author to a reconstruction of the historical development of the social units and their distribution in the village under study. Though the splitting of kin groups has complicated the situation, Oppitz shows convincingly that the original three groups still can be recognized as forming a

STONE, LINDA. 1976. Concepts of Illness and Curing in a Central Nepal Village. *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 3:55-80.

STONE, LINDA. 1988. Illness Beliefs and Feeding the dead in Hindu Nepal: An Ethnographic Analysis. *Studies in Asian Thought and Religion*, Vol. 10. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Miller Press.

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basic tripartite settlement pattern within the village. This is a nice example of how the study of myth and the analysis of empirical social conditions can successfully be combined for diachronic reconstruction.

One of the most striking findings in the book, however, is the discovery of a multitude of no less than 20 independent triple exchange circles operating within the village, all involving an unnamed subdivision of each proto-clan. Oppitz explains this as the result of the division of groups in the course of demographic growth: to make sure that the circle operates without "losing" women to other groups, the exchange units should not be too big, but also they should not exceed the number of three. These points lead to a critique of Lévi-Strauss, who has called the "indirect exchange" the "great sociological adventure" because of the immanent uncertainty that for each woman given one will return. For Oppitz, rather than being adventurous, the Magar have dealt with this problem of uncertainty through multiplying the circles rather than extending the size or the number of units.

The next chapter deals with another interesting feature of the Kham Magar kinship system: the mechanisms regulating the reconstitution of kinship units. There are six different culturally accepted ways of forming new exchange units through fission (two kinds), fusion (two kinds), inversion of the cycle and "participation." They are all tinged with incest, but provided the right number of generations has elapsed, they are possible. Oppitz interprets these mechanisms in a functionalist spirit as guaranteeing the stability of the system, but one wonders if some of them are not also used to cover up irregular marriages.

The problem of actual frequency of "regular" marriages, i.e. the problem of conformity in praxis, is dealt with in a rather sketchy manner. As in his chapter on statistics the author only considers the terminological relationship between marriage partners, his figures are of limited value: in 100% of the marriages contracted within the village the woman is said to be a real (20%) or classificatory matrilinear cross-cousin. Oppitz, however, is aware that this figure does not distinguish between regular and irregular marriages, as the terminology generally is adjusted to deviant conditions. Thus it remains unclear how the society reacts in a situation of norm-breach.

The strongest side of the book, however, is the analysis of the recurrent structure of the matrilinear marriage system in the various domains of social life. The tripartite scheme and the concomitant relationship between wife-givers and wife-receivers is shown to be fundamental not only in the fields with which kinship studies commonly deal gift exchange, ritual services (especially during marriage and funeral), joking-relationships, or the adoption of outsiders into the system; it is also shown to be the fundamental classificatory pattern in most other fields of the social universe: the formation of work-groups, the division of agriculture/pastoralism/hunting, the symbolic structure of the house, and especially in ritual contexts, annual festivals, shamanism, or certain games. I will just cite one of the numerous examples. During an annual festival in winter a competition of arrow-shooting is held. One of the three proto-clans which relates to them as "wife-receivers" has the right to shoot the first arrow, whereas the third proto-clan figures as a witness.

It is indeed fascinating to see how the Kham Magar obviously are well aware of their social system as a--almost "closed"--totality and how they reproduce the basic pattern in numerous symbolic idioms, thus constituting something like an indigenous social theory. The book, one could say, provides another case study of symbolic classification in a society with prescriptive alliance and may therefore be regarded as standing in a "neo-structuralist" tradition close to Needham. The strong emphasis on structure, however, tends to neglect the ambiguities and contradictions on the practical level. One wonders whether historical changes have not led to a less straightforward situation than the description suggests. Considering the high percentage of Nepali-terms and a number of Hindu symbols (which are not always distinguished from the indigenous ones) it is surprising that this encounter has not had a sensible impact on the harmony of the system.

Judging from my own field experience among the Rai in East Nepal, where the different levels of the social system do not "fit" smoothly, it seems to me that at some points Oppitz tends to idealize the isomorphism between kinship system and the symbolic level. Referring uncritically to Lévi-Strauss, for example, Oppitz regards the distinction between relatives by "bone" and relatives by "flesh" (or "milk") as a direct reflection of a (prior or present) system of matrilinear cross-cousin marriage. However, ethnographic research in the last 40 years has shown that, contrary to Lévi-Strauss, Bodie

societies (and even less the various societies in South Asia, where similar distinctions of substances are common), can hardly be considered a domain of "generalized exchange."

This point is not ephemeral. When one looks at the ethnography of Nepal it is evident that the distinction between "wife-givers" and "wife-receivers" which Oppitz regards as directly related to the distinction of substances, and also the status-superiority of the first in relation to the latter is fairly widespread among Tibeto-Burman groups. As Oppitz himself has shown in his elaborate article on the Kham Magar funeral ritual (1982), there is a strikingly close similarity in the system of prestations between the Kham Magar and the Gurung who do permit symmetrical system, or even among Rai, who are still further away from triple alliance. Though here the status roles are situational and not permanent as among the Kham Magar, these cases show that the conceptual distinction between the two roles--or the two substances--is not necessarily indicative of a matrilineal system.

Pursuing this perspective would be expecting too much from an essay, but here it becomes clear that comparison and theory cannot be ignored completely, as also the Magar case, isolated though it seems, is a variation of a theme. Towards the very end of the book Oppitz touches on the subject of typological and evolutionary priority of symmetrical and asymmetrical marriage systems: for him no diachronic relationship can be established. This, however, seems to be an open question and there is a lot of scope for more comparative research.

Oppitz's book is a valuable and important contribution to the ethnography of Nepal and is stimulating in many respects. It may not be intended to fully satisfy the specialist in Himalayan anthropology, but as it is a well-written and fairly elaborate analysis of one "total" aspect of a tribal society it will be of interest for a broad (German-speaking) audience, including both the regional specialist as well as the reader with a general interest in kinship studies. It could be described as an "essay in essential ethnography" and shows that a comprehensive account of a social system is not only possible in extensive monographs. The only problem with this kind of genre, however, is that such an account is difficult to verify, so a more critical reader will have to wait for the main monograph to appear.

Martin Gaenzle

Herdick, Reinhard.

Kirtipur, Stadtgestalt, Prinzipien der Raumordnung und gesellschaftliche Funktionen einer Newar-Stadt. (Kirtipur: Shape, principles of spatial order, and social functions of a Newar town). Munich, etc.: Weltforum Verlag 1988. Schriftenreihe Internationales Asienforum. Band 6. ISBN 3-8039-0355-6. With a foreword by Eduard F. Sekler. XIV + 272 pages; numerous plates, diagrams, plans, statistical sheets; bibliography, glossary and index.

This important study presents Kirtipur as a specific type of preindustrial South Asian town, a "Nepalese variant of the last living Hindu urban cultures" (pp.123, 179). The author, architect and architecture historian, is keen to pay due attention to the cultural and anthropological aspects, just as did Gutschow's pioneering book *Stradtraum und Ritual der newarischen Städte*, 1982, written with a similar scope (reviewed by HRB IV, 3, 1984: pp. 67-68). My critical appraisal shall concentrate on Herdick's aim to show how symbolic concepts of spatial order, "realized" in architecture and "actualized" by the (chiefly ritual) utilization of this architecture, serve as a means of cognitive orientation and social integration for the urban dweller.

As demonstrated by a number of impressing graphic representations and penetrating comments, the principles of spatial ordering appear in various configurations or models: Concentric belts, quadrangular patterns, axial dichotomies, road networks, etc. which beset, mark off, interlink, oppose and subdivide certain areas or places; which constitute structurally equivalent micro- and macro-segments; which are often represented as axis mundi, world-mountain, mandala, swastika, etc.; and, quite important, which determine the site of buildings and the direction certain inhabitants on certain occasions have to follow while moving (in processions) across the space thus articulated. "At the basis of these spatial concepts lie criteria of order derived from a cosmic image of the universe determined by religion, an image which also serves to encompass the social order. Perceptual actuality with all its

irregular local facts and realities, and the transcendental world, with its strict geometrical symbolic structures, are not experiences as an opposition." (p. XIII).

All these configurations draw on, and are expressions of, ideas from a mythology and an anthropomorphic cosmology which are essentially of Indian origin, but also include universal archetypes (Eliade is frequently quoted). Historically, these models are asserted to derive from three main sources, namely from the symmetrically arranged residential quarters which Herdick traces back to an archaic tribal organization of the Newars; then influences of "Tantric urban culture," that are manifest, i.e., in the symbolic dualism in the division of the town into a male and a female (*śakti*) half; and finally the ancient, classical normative texts on art and handicraft, the *Śilpaśāstra*.

The unity and the all-pervading character of the ordering models receive repeated emphasis: "...practically all individual sacred objects, structures, streets, residential quarters and the surrounding agricultural fields are brought into dynamic relation with each other and systematized in terms of spatial order" (p. XIII). There is no "dead matter", no symbolically irrelevant site (p. 78), and the consistency of certain numerical configurations cannot be incidental (p. 98) even if they make no sense (any longer) for the inhabitants. Herdick does concede occasional incongruencies between the symbolic order and the socio-architectural reality, but he tends to impute them to changes of recent origin or to the confessional division between Buddhists and Hindus. On the whole, he repeatedly emphasizes stability, coherence and cohesion at nearly all levels: there is a "harmony in functioning"; a unity of "content", "form" and "benefit"; a fusion of the real with the symbolic; and the individual is perfectly integrated into the collective.

One is prompted to ask: Is the picture we are given an idealization by the Kirtipurians themselves or by the architect impressed as he may be by the grave crisis of everything urban in his own civilization? At any rate, people in every society live by reference, rather than in strict obedience, to norms and categories of classification; moreover, norms and categories are not always fully congruent. And so the reader (the anthropologist at least) is led to question Herdick's propensity for a reductionistic view of the relationship between concepts and factual reality. It is one thing to say that--as was the case in India--a worldview has a direct bearing upon the planning (foundation) of a town and that it justifies--a posteriori---the town's structures and functions as products of an "organic growth" *ab urbe condita*; and quite another thing to derive the latter from the former, as the author does in several conclusions. Unlike the temple-cities of South India or Borobudur where an instance of central planning indeed succeeded in expressing a doctrinal mythological concept in monumental architecture, Kirtipur was also, for centuries, an economically important center and experienced different periods of growth and perturbations.

I, therefore, doubt if Herdick is right in playing down the importance of the "profane" (geography, economy and politics as autonomous factors) and the relevance, conflict (among men, between ideas and reality and even ideas themselves) may have for constituting meaning and defining identities. This is not to deny that traditional societies in general have a higher degree of integration and a more coherent self-interpretation than our own. It is simply to stress that there may well be an "order in paradox" too (to quote the title of a recent monograph by David Holmberg on the Tamangs), or that inconsistencies may again and again be "accommodated" to quite different degrees of plausibility within one model or within an assemblage of models. For example, one would like to know more about how and to what extent those strands of ideas (cosmology, mythology and the *Silpaśāstras*), as isolated by the author, are brought, or bring themselves, in a single compass to constitute a kind of total field of meaning in the perception of the population as a whole. Have we to do with just one compass or with different such compasses contradicting or completing each other and interconnected "just after a fashion" or organized in a hierarchy? (After all, if the study of caste society shows that there are virtually as many self-interpretations of caste and, consequently, as many caste hierarchies as there are individual castes in a given association, it is, then, not absurd to suspect that different groups may have different interpretations of the space they inhabit and share in common).

The book also draws our attention to the problem of how we come to know about what the people know. Herdick states that while (a) the presence of symbolic models outside the town, in its surroundings, could be discovered through his own extrapolation only, (b) the same models within the town were found to be "firmly anchored in the awareness of the inhabitants" (pp. 83, 182). The problem with the first part of the statement is how the models can effect orientation if they are not or no longer

known. And the question left open in the second part of the statement is how an awareness of obviously even distribution among the population could be ascertained: intuitively or on the basis of statistical evidence.

All these open questions touched on in this review invite us to give more consideration to empirical investigation. If we want to bring to light more about "what is going on in the minds of the people here and now," about the psycho-somatic effectiveness of spatial symbolism, etc. deductive argumentations of the "model of/model for" type or in Eliade's footsteps will in the long run prove insufficient; and extrapolations for completing lacunae by means of formal comparison or by resorting to classical texts risk to result in confounding two different levels of analysis, the diachronic and the synchronic. Psychological tests, systematically conducted interviews, participant observation and the like are needed for answering a number of questions: What is part of "shared meaning"? Can group membership (caste, ward, etc.) or occupation, for example, be correlated with significant differences in the familiarity with traditional knowledge or in the ways the individual is experiencing urban space? What of all these orienting and ordering models is present in consciousness, and what is being processed by subliminal perception only? What is the relationship between the interpretation (conceptualization) and performance (in ritual, both religious and secular) of the models of spatial order? Are they characterized by a one-to-one correspondence, or are they rather complementary to each other? How does traditional conceptualization influence the individual's kinaesthetic experience, and, vice versa, what does kinaesthetic experience contribute to making space meaningful?...In sum, future research in architectural anthropology is to debouch into a sociological semeiotics as initiated, among others, by Erving Goffman.

One may or may not agree with some of Herdick's theses, but the immense documentary and heuristic value of his synthesis between study and aesthetic vision is beyond all question.

The book concludes with appendices on statistics (household census, data concerning the socio-economic situation), symbolic numeral systems, and with a bibliography comprising 285 titles. Seen apart from minor misprints, indigenous terms are given in correct transliteration. Only a part of the graphic illustrations and statistical sheets are provided with bilingual captions in English and German. A short English "Overview" preceding the Introduction summarizes the main aim and theses of the author.

András Höfer.

Toffin, Gérard and Bouillier, Véronique, eds.

Prêtrise, pouvoirs et autorité en Himalaya. (Priesthood, powers and authority in the Himalayas). Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1989. Collection Purusartha (number) 12. 238 pages. Sketch-maps, plates. ISBN 2-7132-0915-3.

The book includes ten papers, each based on the author's own fieldwork and focussing on themes such as the legitimation, typology, functional differentiation of religious specialists, and the socio-political framework of their institutions.

The first group of contributions elaborates on the tension between the orthodox ideal and the empirical reality in Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim societies. Thus, Toffin stresses a Vedic and a Tantric component in the traditions of the Newar Brahmins (Rajopadhyaya). The Vedic provides the basis for the authority of the hereditary domestic priest (*purohit*) as a Brahman in the "classical" sense, while the Tantric is embodied by the spiritual teacher (*guru*) who is acting by virtue of a particular qualification the acquisition of which (*diksha*) is optional and virtually no bound to cast membership. The tension between these two components is to a certain extent reduced or veiled by their being anchored in the kinship organization of the Rajopadhyaya. D.N. Gellner's excellent "Monkhood versus priesthood" (in English) shows how priesthood among the high-caste Buddhist Newars (Sakya-Bajracarya) is legitimated by Mahayana and Vajrayana doctrines. Thus, the family priest's role and identity are justified in terms of the ideals of *bodhisattva* (altruistic saint), on the one hand, and *siddha* (the Tantric-ascetic perfect one), on the other, while the god-guardian priest's identity is embedded in the Sakyas' and Bajracaryas'

shared identity as monks. The fact that the Bajracaryas are monks, priests and householders all at once is not seen a contradiction; rather, this sequence is conceptualized as a hierarchy.

How Buddhism justifies priesthood is also central to P. Dollfus' paper on Ladakh where ordained monks can temporarily leave their monastery and be stationed in villages as priests. A. Michael's "Pasupati's Holy Field" (in English) discusses the dilemma the Bhatta temple priests of Pasupatinath are facing in that their authority is both limited and extended by their own notion of the sacred arena and *stabilitas loci* of divinities, on the one hand, and by their role as Brahmins whose authority lies beyond society. The interaction between the hereditary Brahmin priest and the medium of personal vocation (of virtually and caste) in Himachal Pradesh is presented by D. Vidal as an important factor for the rise and function of the cult of local Hindu divinities.

In her concise contribution, V. Bouillier reminds us of the crucial part the Kanphata Yogis played in North India and Nepal as associates of kings, helping them by powerful magic in gaining control over the realm. Being quasi-divine, immortal and yet engaged in this-worldly activities (exorcism, promotion of fertility and military conquest, etc.), the Kanphata Yogi is suggested to constitute a separate category within a tetradic configuration: The Yogi and the King, both using violence, stand in an opposition to the non-violent Renouncer (Sannyasi) and Brahmin; the Yogi and the Renouncer share in common an individually acquired spiritual merit--in contrast to the inborn, inherent spiritual merit of the Brahmin; and, finally, the Yogi and Brahmin share in common their authority as priests performing rites to the king's benefit. M. Gaborieau examines in a comparative perspective the role of Muslim saints (*sufis*) as mediators between the community of believers and a vast array of personalized natural forces and superhuman beings (Allah, heathen gods, spirits, etc.). He argues, among others, that--contrary to the fundamentalist interpretation--(a) the existence of priests, invested with authority to act as such, is far from being uncommon in Islam, and (b) the renouncers in both Islam and Hinduism do assume various tasks in the this-worldly sphere, too.

G. Krauskopf's paper adumbrates structural correspondences between categories of ritual specialists, rites, superhuman beings, of femaleness (virgin, marriage, maternity) and space (village versus jungle) among the Tharus of Dang, and contends that--contrary to what has been supposed by some authors with regard to the ethnic groups in the hills--Hinduization alone does not account for the gradual transformation of the "tribal priest's" institution. Instead, in the Tharu case at least, the integration of Dang into a pre-Shah Hindu kingdom resulted in a strengthening of the position of the hereditary priest in charge of the cult of the soil, inasmuch as the latter came to be appointed a village chief and tax-collector. A. de Sales attempts to understand the institution of shamanism among the Kham Magars in its social structural context. The shaman is conceptualized as the son-in-law of the spirits: just as the real son-in-law occupies an intermediary position between the groups of wife-givers and wife-takers, so is the shaman a mediator between humans and the superhuman. A number of such - strikingly close - correspondences in both conceptualization and actual role-fulfilling lead to the conclusion that the institution of shamanism is structurally "inscribed" in, and functionally controlled by, the kin-based social organization as a whole. In contrast to the shaman with his predominant position among the Khams, the Eastern Tamang *tamba* is just one among five different religious specialists. Being a poet-singer, *maître de cérémonie*, genealogist and guardian of customs, all at a time, the *tamba* is, in B. Steinmann's interpretation (hers is perhaps the most original and courageous approach in the book), a priest of the *bon usage*, i.e., the auspicious and/or morally right custom in dealing with others and oneself, in handling of food, animals, plants, etc. in everyday-life. It is in commenting on, and reminding of, those rules and categories which underlie the *bon usage* that the *tamba* articulates a rather diffuse lay religiosity (rooted in a "pre-sensitiveness" for the religious) primarily by reference to the rather abstract tenets of Lamaism. His activity thus provides some sort of a relay through which the different strands of tradition become relevant and meaningful for each other, through which praxis and belief get correlated, and through which (as I would add) elements deriving from heterogeneous sources (tribal heritage, Buddhism, Hinduism) gain in evidence as parts of an ethnospecific body of observances and justifications.

The editors' introduction is a reasonably careful attempt to summarize: Among others, the conventional distinction between "tribal priest" and "shaman," is rejected and replaced by another. Instead of asking what a specialist is doing, we are suggested to ask whence his authority is derived. The proposed two sources or components of authority appear to be reminiscent of the Weberian

Gentilcharisma, on the one hand, and that exceptional sanctity, exemplary heroism and *akut emotionaler Glaubenscharakter* which make up the originary personal charisma, on the other. Thus, the first type of specialist, such as the Brahmin *purohit* for example, acts by virtue of a qualification inherent in the group (caste, descent group) into which he was born. The second type, as represented by the shaman, the Tantric guru or yogi, possesses a qualification which is optionally acquired by individual efforts and is to be asserted by individual performance; in this performance, the use of extraordinary powers create or mobilize among the followers/clients weigh more than a strict adherence to a time-honored tradition. The editors also stress that the ways of how religious authority and political authority (*pouvoir*) hang together exhibit various configurations: the two may coincide, or stand in a complementary or even competitive relationship.

One cannot appreciate enough the pragmatic perspective in which the contributors discuss their data of considerable ethnographic value. It is thanks to this that the book as a whole gains in importance for future research. We are once again reminded of the relevance thoroughly explored intracultural evidence and inter-regional comparison have for the understanding of ethnic or local traditions which constitute themselves in following their own "inner logic" and by reference to, rather than as simple derivatives or deviations from, the normative and learned texts of high-cultural traditions.

Separate bibliographies: English and French summaries or abstracts; no index.

András Höfer