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MODERN LADAKH: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

BY MARTIJN VAN BEEK AND FERNANDA
PIRIE, EDS.

Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp 311, 25 plates and figs. \$148.00.
ISBN: 9789047443346

REVIEWED BY KIM GUTSCHOW

This volume rewards the Ladakh specialist with finely nuanced details and ample substance, but is less successful in bringing contemporary Ladakh scholarship in conversation with broader discourses in social science and South Asian studies. Although the editors' introduction explicitly calls for a more complex scholastic approach that recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of most topics within Ladakh studies, the volume itself offers limited gains towards that end. The introduction offers numerous reasons for why Ladakh studies has yet to be fully integrated with other disciplinary approaches. These include, among others, the myopia of much early research, the problem of locating Ladakh as part of India rather than simply an extension of western Tibet, and lastly the tendency to categorize Ladakh as primarily Buddhist, a highly problematic assumption given that more than fifty percent of its current population is Muslim. The editors also use the introduction to discuss their decision about which of Brill's two series—the Tibetan Studies Library or the Indological Library—should serve as the proper home for the volume. Yet it is no small irony that this dichotomy illustrates and reinstates the very divide this volume is dedicated towards transcending.

The volume does offer substantial contributions on a number of contemporary topics to which this review will only do partial justice. Fittingly, the volume is dedicated to Nicky Grist, whose own work sought to break down a stereotypical and rather uncomplicated view of Ladakhi identity. She was best known for her deconstruction of Muslim allegiances in the Suru Valley and her analysis of the ongoing fragmentation and contestation that defines Buddhist polyandry in Matho. Sophie Day's eloquent appreciation of Grist's substantial contributions to Ladakh Studies is followed by Monisha Ahmed's essay on the history of textile trade and production in Ladakh. Next, John Bray's essay offers insight into how local headmen, European travelers, and a variety of Ladakhi,

Dogra, and finally British rulers abused a system of forced labor that was propped up largely by local middlemen and monastics. Grist's posthumous article nicely illustrates the shifting priorities among Sunni and Shia households in Suru away from agrarian and pastoral labor towards increasingly stratified and commodified occupations that marginalize both women and the poor. Isabelle Riaboff's careful analysis of kinship, marriage, and trading patterns among Paldar's symbiotic Bod culture—which draws from nearby Zangskari and Pahari models—nicely complements Grist's essay on specific Ladakhi subcultures. However, none of these essays substantively engages with wider discourses on region, ethnicity, caste, and nation in Kashmir that have been heavily theorized by Aggarwal, Van Beek, Bertelson, Bose, and Ganguly, among others.

The organization of the volume belies an unconscious ambivalence towards both contemporary and traditional Ladakh Studies audiences. While it foregrounds notable essays on regional and religious diversity and closes with an interesting section on agrarian practices, the bulk of the volume is devoted to staple topics within Tibetan studies including astrology (Dollfus), possession cults (Mills), Losar rites (Pirie), kinship (Kaplanian), and Tibetan medicine (Pordie). Like Riaboff, Kaplanian's re-examination of how *pha spun* relations mediate both birth and death pollution argues that kinship idioms and customs can double as languages of identity and region, inclusion and exclusion. Dollfus provides a fascinating deconstruction of how the local astrologer serves as a kind of social worker who wields the local almanac (*lo tho*) in order to counsel villagers about how they might bring their activities in harmony with the movements of the planets, stars, sun, moon, and other elemental forces. Mills offers a rethinking of Ladakhi possession cults that emphasizes the bodily rather than mental transformations required of its participants. I would argue that his attack on a pervasive Cartesian worldview seems as applicable to the trans-Himalayan studies of possession as to individual Ladakhi analyses. Pirie argues that Ladakhi Losar is a time for the subversion of social norms as well as their reinstatement, drawing briefly on Van Gennep but surprisingly not Victor Turner, whose notion of *communitas* and liminality was both more developed and apposite for her discussion. Finally, Pordie's description of the social dynamics surrounding a ritual consecration of *amchi* medicines in the Changthang begins to address issues of Buddhist reform and modernization that have been undertheorized in earlier studies. Although Chin, Dye, and Lee's essay on the relationship between maternal and child health is grouped with Kaplanian's essay on kinship, the style and substance could not be more different. Chin et. al. interviewed 22 women in rural Ladakh in order to highlight the important impact of mother-daughter relationships on the future daughter's own workload, education, marriage, and childbearing patterns. The authors conclude that maternal health programs must look across familial relationships and the life cycle in order to better comprehend the likelihood of neonatal and infant survival. Kaplanian, by contrast, uses Levi Strauss to develop a

novel argument about the Ladakhi kinship system that rejects prior accounts of this system as household-based rather than clan-based.

The volume closes with three short essays that highlight economic and environmental practices: Matthias Schmidt's analysis of land management practices in Shigar valley, Seb Mankelow's discussion of how increasing economic and social pressures are linked to the use of chemical fertilizer around Padum, Zangskar, and Tiwari and Gupta's analysis of how the rise of hotels and changing land use patterns have influenced irrigation practices in Leh town.

Overall, this volume will be highly useful for scholars in Himalayan or Ladakh Studies, but of less interest to scholars working in South Asian studies or those interested in theoretical questions within the social sciences or humanities. While many of the essays provide much needed and valuable description of their particular subjects, they make limited efforts to engage with previous research or broader theoretical and methodological themes. A final caveat: the high price tag ensures that this volume, like many in Tibetan Studies, is destined primarily for library shelves rather than the hands of a wider readership.

Kim Gutschow is an Associate Professor at Göttingen University and a Lecturer at Williams College. She has spent 20 years working in Ladakh on maternal health, medical anthropology, gender and sexuality in Buddhism, and the social economy of Buddhist monasticism.

HIMALAYAN PORTFOLIOS: JOURNEYS OF THE IMAGINATION

BY KENNETH HANSON

North Truro, MA: Fields Publishing, 2008. 190 pages featuring 109 black-and-white duotone photographs. Includes an 11"x 46" fold-out panorama of the Biafo Glacier and maps to introduce the separate portfolios. \$85.00. ISBN 978-0-9790597-0-4

REVIEWED BY PAUL KALLMES

There is a small contingent of photographers who have taken the time and trouble to travel throughout the Himalaya and photograph the mountains and their inhabitants with large-format equipment. From the early works of Vittorio Sella and Joseph Rock through the modern work of Jody Forster

and Kevin Bubriski, this form remains the province of the hardy few who understand the effort it takes to get to remote locations and then capturing them with the appropriate techniques and equipment. Kenneth Hanson has placed himself directly along this line of Himalayan diehards.

Himalayan Portfolios: Journeys of the Imagination is many things, among them a collection of top-flight photographs, an impressive amount of background on the regions portrayed, an exemplary publishing effort, and above all a testament to one man's dedication and vision to his chosen topic. A scientist with a true appreciation for the aesthetics and technical nuance of large-format black-and-white photography, Hanson has created a remarkable portfolio of images and information in a dozen trips to the Himalaya, and we are fortunate indeed to have them in this book.

The photographs themselves capture fully the grandeur, severity, and appeal of the Himalaya. The book is also large-format, providing the proper scale to present the photographs. He rarely settles for standard views: his portrayal of the complete north ridge of Everest has few peers, nor could depth of field be more expertly applied. The people and the settings of their lives are deftly captured, with no unnecessary sentimentality. The choice of paper is critical to the proper presentation of the images, and the publisher has made an excellent choice. Well-printed, large-format B&W stands up to detailed scrutiny, and the attentive reader will be rewarded by studying the minute aspects of grand landscapes, which leads to a greater appreciation of the whole. Like a day spent traveling on foot through the great ranges, the greatest satisfaction can come as much from the observation of the smallest details as from taking in the big picture.

In addition to the images, there is a tremendous amount of supporting information. Extensive essays examine many different aspects of the range, from geology to geo-politics, empire-building to mountaineering. The captions are very detailed, and there is the requisite technical data about his approach. One could almost remove the pictures altogether and still have a substantial and fulfilling portrait of the Himalaya.

Most people know that the Himalaya are the grandest mountains on earth, but even with the familiarity we have with them, they never fail to astound when captured by the right photographer. Ken Hanson has done us all a great service by putting this book together. No collection of modern Himalayan imagery should be considered complete without this book.

Paul Kallmes has been a mountaineer for over 30 years and was the driving force behind Summit: Vittorio Sella, Mountaineer and Photographer 1879-1909. Today he is an entrepreneur working to develop clean technologies and non-profit ventures, and he remains active in outdoor publishing and film festival circles. He hopes to keep climbing and traveling for at least another 30 years.