

INDONESIA

SELTMANN, FRIEDRICH. *Die Kalang. Eine Volksgruppe von Java und ihre Stamm-Mythe. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Javas* [The Kalang: An ethnic group of Java and its myth of origin. A contribution to Javanese cultural history]. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1987. 430 pages. Bibliography, topical indices, general index, appendices, maps, sketches, photographs. Cloth DM244.—; ISBN 3-515-03722-5. (In German)

Friedrich Seltmann's monograph on *The Kalang: An Ethnic Group of Java and Its Myth of Origin; A Contribution to Javanese Culture History* is a strange book. First, many students of contemporary Java will not be familiar with an ethnic group called "Kalang" in central Java. However, the author presents a wealth of data on this group until the 1960s. Second, given the ethnic subject, one would expect a cultural anthropological study. However, Seltmann applies a philological and historical approach reminiscent of Dutch "Javanology" and "Indology." Now let me summarize the content of the book step by step.

In the Introduction the Kalang are presented as a minority group in Central Java who preserved a pre-Islamic traditional religion (9). In this respect they are comparable to the Baduy in west and the Tenggerese in east Java. In 1962, during a politically insecure time, Friedrich Seltmann seized the opportunity to document the death ritual of the Kalang in the Yogyakarta area. Seltmann's book is the first major attempt to collect and synthesize the diverse and scattered data on the Kalang.

Chapter 1 is a compilation and discussion of Javanese and Dutch reports focusing on the Kalang. Starting with documents from the fourteenth century and ending with sources in the 1850s, we see the Kalang emerge as a mobile non-Islamic group of people who earned a living by woodcutting, the trading of wood, and transport, services which they supplied to central Javanese courts and the Dutch East India Company. In modern anthropological terminology one could call them "peripatetics," i.e., a non-sedentary minority group that occupies a niche position in a larger economic and social system (cf. RAO 1987).

Chapter 2 is devoted to the classification of Kalang subgroups and a discussion of ethnic labels attached to them. This discussion is mainly based on Dutch historical and ethnological reports from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. The Kalang are mainly subdivided according to area. Many labels refer to their occupational specialization in forestry. Chapter 3 analyzes the occupational situation of the Kalang during the last 150 years. They specialized in crafts and services like carpentry, leatherwork, hunting transport, wandering musicians, etc. Chapter 4 informs us of the "customs and peculiarities" of the Kalang. These traditions are connected to making a living in and from the woods. Seltmann devotes special attention to data on magic and numerology in the historical sources that could shed light on the Kalang religion. The material presented in this chapter is, however, of very uneven and selective quality and does not achieve a systematic view of Kalang custom or religion. The next chapter analyzes the ritual celebrations of the Kalang. This chapter contains a great deal of useful information on the festivities celebrating life-cycle events. This chapter includes the author's report on the Kalang death ritual in 1962 (118-161). He could not participate in this ritual personally, and the data on this event were recalled half a year later. Seltmann interviewed the main participants and the officials from the administration of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta who observed the event. In addi-

tion, he collected documentary photographs taken by the officials at the ceremony. They are reproduced in his book. Seltmann's description of the feast focuses on the main actors (especially the *dhukun isteri* as ritual specialist), the ritual paraphernalia, the ritual process, and the terms and meanings connected with the ritual. In the last section of this chapter Seltmann compares the death ritual of the Kalang with rituals celebrated by the Baduy and Tengger minority groups, finding many similarities. A comparison with the Javanese ritual celebrations (*slametan*) would have been instructive as well, to assess the extent of cultural diffusion between the Javanese mainstream culture and the Kalang minority culture.

The lengthy sixth chapter (169–277) compiles and interprets the Kalang myth of origin. Searching for the Kalang myth of origin in the historical and ethnological record, Seltmann discovered forty-eight versions from different parts of Java, Bali, and Lombok. In this chapter the different versions are summarized and compared (a summarizing table in the appendix is most useful for this task). The core of the myth can be related as follows: A girl of better standing (in some versions of unknown aristocratic background)—the beautiful weaver—loses her spindle. Very upset, she promises a connubium to the one who returns it. A dog finds it, and to fulfill her vow she has intercourse with him, then the dog is driven away. The beautiful weaver gives birth to a son. Unaware of his father, the son later kills the dog. As a consequence of this murder the guilty son—and stem-father of the Kalang—is sentenced to lead a restless nomadic life, just as the Kalang do. Thus this myth explains the present low status of the mobile Kalang as an outcome of past sins (a common theme in the myths of origin of many peripatetics all over the world; see CASIMIR 1987). In the interpretive section of this chapter (258–277), Seltmann embarks on an historical reconstruction of the different versions, a difficult, if not impossible, task, given the syncretic orientation of many Indonesian cultures. In his comments he also disentangles the meaning of certain elements of the myth by making comparisons to similar and better documented beliefs in Java and Bali. Sometimes, however, Seltmann's comparisons are rather sweeping, atomistic in a Frazerian manner, and not clear in their purpose (e.g., 276–277, “the dog motif in global perspective; in one respect the Kalang myth of origin is closest to a myth from Bulgaria”—what does this mean?). The concluding chapter is devoted to the generalization of findings. Motifs from the Kalang myth of origin are shown to be present in the mythical and iconographic traditions of many cultures in the Indonesian archipelago. As regards language and physical appearance, the Kalang of today are no longer distinct from mainstream Javanese people. According to Seltmann the ethnic distinction rests on their ancient, pre-Islamic culture traits: the sacrifice of buffaloes (as part of the death ritual), the structure of their myth, and specific customs (290).

All in all, Friedrich Seltmann has written a useful sourcebook compiling scattered information on a lesser known group of people in Java. His command of the sources (Dutch, Javanese) is excellent and the real strength of this work of scholarship. Whoever wants to study this group does well to consult Seltmann's monograph as a descriptive, historical, and philological frame of reference. Modern social and cultural anthropologists, however, will have their difficulties with Seltmann's interpretive perspective, or the lack thereof. In contemporary anthropological research there is an ongoing discussion of ethnicity, invented traditions, incorporation of local groups into their larger setting and the transformation effected thereby: how ethnic labels and identities are manipulated in specific situations by actors and their opponents to create unity within an in-group or to establish boundaries against outsiders. Ethnic labels and contents shift accordingly, and we should study the self-concepts of actors (who

are the people who conceive themselves at a certain time as Kalang? what do *they* hold to be the salient features of Kalang identity?). Thus, ethnic units are not tight, stable groups over historical time. What is the impact of the large-scale transformations occurring in Java during the last 150 years on Kalang identity? How did the people who called themselves "Kalang" cope with Islamization? To be sure, some information to answer these questions is presented in Seltmann's book (especially in the first chapters). But his interpretive frame does not address in the first instance the shifting nature of ethnic identity, the ethnic self-awareness of the Kalang, or their response to large-scale process and the present situation (the latter aspect for lack of data). Thus, a study on the Kalang that combines historical analysis with modern anthropological fieldwork and these current theoretical questions is still on the agenda—if the descendants of former Kalang do still conceive of themselves as an ethnic unit and not just as a religious or occupational subgroup within mainstream Javanese culture (a model for research along these lines has been achieved for Tengger society, see HEFFNER 1985). However, as a reference work and a solid historical starting point and for its rich data on ritual and myth, Friedrich Seltmann's monograph will be invaluable for all future research on the Kalang and the history of Java.

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KAELBER, WALTER O. *Tapta-Marga: Asceticism and Initiation in Vedic India*.

Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989. x+204 pages. Diagrams, references, index. Cloth US\$44.50; ISBN 0-88706-813-8. Paper US\$14.95; ISBN 0-88706-814-6.

While following Eliade's observation that four basic and interdependent concepts, namely, *karma*, *māyā*, *nirvāṇa*, and *yoga*, serve to lead the researcher to the very core of Indian spirituality, the author begins with the suggestion that the investigation of five basic elements, namely, heat (*tapas*), initiation, sacrifice (*yajña*), knowledge (*vidyā*, *jñāna*), and homology (*nidāna*, *bandhu*), lead directly to what he calls the "center" of the Vedic religion. However, at the very outset he asserts that his primary concern is *tapas*—or more accurately, the Sanskrit root *tap* and its derivatives—a fact that will prove apparent even to the casual reader.

Accepting Knipe's description of the Veda as a "living unit," the author, too, prefers to regard the Veda as a "consistent and mutually reinforcing tradition" be-