

HÄMMERLE, JOHANNES MARIA. *Nias—eine eigene Welt: Sagen, Mythen, Überlieferungen*. Collectanea Instituti Anthropos, Band 43. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 1999. 407 pages. Illustrations, plates, bibliography, list of informants. Paper DM88,00; ISBN 3-89665-147-1. (In German)

The author, a Capuchin priest, has been carrying out mission activities in Nias, Indonesia, since the beginning of 1972. Although he has had no training in ethnological studies or research methods that would have prepared him for his work in Nias, he has participated in the life of the Niassans since his arrival among them. In the present volume, Hämmerle reports on the world of the islanders, their life, and their myths as they were told to him. He also gives his own interpretation of Niassan myths.

*Nias—eine eigene Welt* is mainly about northern and central Nias. The author includes no myths or stories from southern Nias, although he claims to have collected much material about that area, too (13). The volume's structure is quite straightforward. After a short foreword (13–14) there are four main parts: Part I, Introduction (15–39); Part II, Myths of North Nias (41–148); Part III, Myths of Central Nias (149–250); Part IV, Themes (251–383). Also provided at the end of the book are maps, fifteen photos, a list of references (385–88), and a list of informants (389).

Hämmerle's work is an important contribution to the documentation and interpretation of the mythic world of the Nias islanders. It is proof that the mythology of Nias has not lost its vitality and has been able to accommodate new elements. When a villager in Hilizia wrote down an old and authentic myth after conversion to the Christian faith, he included borrowings from the Bible. Hämmerle comments that "Biblical and Niassan traditions stand, one could say, side-by-side, and it is easy to separate them from one another" (66).

The author recorded the mythic song "The origin at the outset" on 9 October 1984 in the village Fadoro Lauru in the house of Ama Waböbö who was born in this village in 1918. In 494 lines, the song narrates the origins of Nias in primeval times. After the song's German translation, the author adds a summary and his own interpretation, according to which sexual allusions abound in the text. To mention just one example, the author comments on the beginning of the song (lines 1–37) in the following manner: "The wind: The poem talks about the sexual experience—by way of sexual jokes or plays—using many images" (131). According to the author, phrases in the poem are sexually suggestive: "being like a lance head" indicates an erection; "the wind thrusts into the belly" indicates sexual union; and "the wind pushes through his companion and strengthens his companion" indicates the active role of the male.

Two of Hämmerle's informants live in Sifalagö Gomo, a village usually considered to be the place of origin for the Niassans. One of them, Ama Rafisa, reported the genealogy of his clan, Giowa, which Hämmerle recorded with a tape recorder. About two years later, someone dictated the same genealogy to him. Although there are discrepancies between the genealogy he tape recorded and the one that was dictated to him, Hämmerle believes the version dictated to him is the more reliable of the two because the informant had more time to think about the text (197–98).

Hämmerle criticizes some of the research done by his predecessors on Nias. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Schröder, for example, believed that the creators Lowalangi and Ture Luliwö, or the creator triad Si Barasia Noso (also: Baasi Luluwö, Luluö, Luluo), Tukre Luluwo (Soböi Niha), and Lowalangi (Lowalani) emerged on the Tora'a tree. Hämmerle disagrees and points out that Schröder's interpretation deviates widely from the

Niassans' understanding of the myth and, therefore, is essentially responsible for steering later researchers down the wrong path (298).

The author's discussion of megaliths constitutes one of the book's most interesting parts. Following the pioneering work of Martin Thomsen, he tries to determine the time when the megaliths were erected using genealogical information as the basis for his argument. As it turns out, most of the hewn megaliths in Nias are of a rather young date (374–75). By far the greatest majority of them were erected in the nineteenth century when slave trade was still flourishing on the island. Therefore, the author tends to correlate the erection of many megaliths with the slave trade. According to his view, the slave trade was a good source of income. The new income inevitable led to "feasts of merit." At such a feast, the host receives his "big name" (*töi sebua*) or the rank of chieftain and, connected with this, immortal fame. The megaliths were erected as long-standing memorials that would bring fame to the hosts (375).

Hämmerle's study is most valuable. The inclusion of an index and a glossary of native terms, however, would have enhanced the readability of the book and made it easier to study its contents.

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## INDIA

EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI, GABRIELLA, Editor. *Glimpses of the Indian Village in Anthropology and Literature*. Series Minor LVI. Napoli, Italy: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1998. xiii + 225 pages. Glossary. Paper Lira 50,000. (Distributed by Herder, International Book Centre, I-00186 Roma, Italy)

This book is primarily comprised of essays written from an anthropological perspective. The book is divided into three parts, with each part dealing with a specific aspect of a larger problem. The first and second parts consist of seven articles written by authors such as Jean Luc Chambard and Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi. The multifarious facets of the Indian village for anthropology are examined in Part I while those for literature are brought to light in Part II. Part III is a discussion on the influence of Tamil literary comments on anthropological themes. At the outset, it can be said that the present work is a novel and nice attempt to delve deep into the cultural fabric of the Indian village.

Oral tradition plays a pivotal role in enabling one to understand better some classical concepts in India. This point is evident in Chambard's essay "The bull named Dharma," which also includes an immensely useful annotated bibliography that is ordered chronologically.

In Hindu society the positive and negative aspects of the sacred are largely overseen by Brahmin and non-Brahmin functionaries respectively. Bradley R. Hertel in his article observes that Brahmins are the overseers of the auspicious rituals whereas the non-Brahmins oversee the inauspicious ones. The fact that the low-caste people are still destined to perform the birth and death rites associated with extreme pollution and risks bears witness to the sad plight perpetrated by the Brahmins and the high caste Hindus.

Marjatta Parpola's paper entitled "Kerala Brahmins and Sankara's Laws" analyzes the implication and implementation of Sankara's Sixty-four laws among the Namputiri families