

*aḱaṅṅra ḱāṭṭin naṭuvē oru pātai. atu enna? vaḱiṭu.*

A path in the midst of a wide forest. What is it? The parting of the hair.

*paṭṭuḱ ḱampaḷiyai virittu pōṭṭu*

*paḱḱattu viṭṭu peṅṅiḷḷiyai iḷuttup pōṭṭu*

*atu ayyō ayyō enṅratu nāṅ āccu āccu enṅēṅ. atu enna? vaḷaiyal pōtuvatu.*

After having spread a silken cloth, I pulled a girl of the neighboring house (by her hand). She exclaimed: "Alas! Alas!" I said: "It's done! It's done!" What is it? Fixing bangles on a girl's wrist.

Dieter B. KAPP  
 Universität zu Köln  
 Cologne, Germany

## NEPAL

ANDRÁS HÖFER. *Tamang Ritual Texts II: Ethnographic Studies in the Oral Tradition and Folk-Religion of an Ethnic Minority in Nepal*. Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, Bd. 66. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997. ISBN 3-515-03852-3.

This volume is the third in a series by Höfer devoted to the ritual texts and folk religion of the Western Tamang, the earlier volumes being *Tamang Ritual Texts I* (HÖFER 1981) and *A Recitation of the Tamang Shaman in Nepal* (HÖFER 1994), which I reviewed for *Asian Folklore Studies* some time ago (SAMUEL 1997).

*Tamang Ritual Texts II* has the substantial virtues and, on the whole, minor defects of its predecessors. It allows the reader detailed access to the fascinating and significant world of ideas and ritual practices found among the Western Tamang of Dhāding district. These people have borrowed and incorporated extensively from the Tibetan Buddhist high culture to the north and the Hindu high culture to the south and east, but also transformed and reshaped their borrowings to form part of a folk culture that has its own integrity. As in previous volumes, Höfer provides detailed description rather than sophisticated theory, but this has the advantage of allowing the reader relatively direct access to Höfer's field data. Some questions regarding the nature of Höfer's transcriptions and interpretations remain, and will be discussed at the end of the review.

The new volume has two parts. Part One contains four songs sung at the Dasaī ceremony. Dasaī is a version of the very widespread Hindu celebration of Dussehra or Durgā Pūjā, but it is also an important ceremony of the Nepalese state. Its political significance in Nepal centers on the blessing given to the king through a *ṭikā* mark applied by court Brahmins, and then transmitted by the king to his relatives and high officials. These pass it on throughout the entire administrative system, thus reconfirming each of the officials in his position.

Dasaī rituals have received considerable attention from scholars of Nepal (Höfer lists several studies in a footnote on page 2), and Höfer's description of the local version of Dasaī provides an important witness to the ritual mediation of state power in a highland village at some distance both physically and culturally from Kathmandu. Issues such as the identity of the local official (*mukḱhiyā*) who hands out the *ṭikā*, and the accommodations that this largely Buddhist-orientated society has to make to incorporate the sacrifice of buffalos to a Hindu goddess, are dealt with in some detail, and will be useful for scholars wishing to explore the

comparative dimensions of these practices.

The four songs were transcribed from a taperecording of an indoor performance outside of the ritual context. They were transcribed and interpreted with the help of the performer, Gānes H̄imru, and another informant, Phurba Ȳonjyen. In the ritual context, the first song is a ritual invocation sung to a passive audience by a small group of ritual experts as part of the empowerment of the butter to be used for the *tikā*, while the second to fourth songs are danced and sung by the whole group, with the chorus of the dancers repeating the song leader's verses or a short refrain. An extended note on the prosody of the songs (98–130) considers formal and structural aspects of the song texts.

The first and longest song (30–62) begins with a version of a common Tamang myth of the origin of the world, here involving the birth of Guru Urygen Pema (Padmasambhava) and the First Shaman out of eggs laid by birds (a raven and a Khyuñ, or Garuda) who have eaten the fruits of two contrasting trees. Between them, Guru Urygen Pema and the First Shaman magically fix the world and its human and nonhuman inhabitants, including the village headman and the Gorkhā king of Nepal, in place, and originate the Dasaī sacrifice. In the concluding part of the song (sections 7 and 8), the deities of the *mukhiyā*'s clan and other local and regional deities are asked to convey the power of the blessing into the butter for the *tikā*.

Song II is another version of the origin myth of the world and the ritual. Its function is “to ‘stamp into the earth’ and to ‘remove into the sky’ all that jeopardises life and prosperity” (62), a theme that recurs in songs III and IV as well, and its words ask for “vital energy” to be given to the *mukhiyā*. The term for “vital energy” is *noiḍup* (Tibetan *ngos-grub*, Skt. *siddhi*), and Höfer adds that it was explained by the informants “with reference to the ‘ecstatic energy’ a shaman is expected to deploy in dealing with gods and spirits” (63), a nice example of the constant reinterpretation undergone by Tibetan Buddhist concepts in the Tamang context. Song III, which according to the informants is sung “to ensure that the sacrificial buffalo may gain passage to Paradise or at least a favourable rebirth” (72), proceeds through a list of Buddhist sanctuaries in Tibet and a list of Tamang villages, all of whose lamas are required to recite the *maṇi* mantra for the dead buffalo. Song IV tells the myth of an ancestral figure whose wanderings provide another list of places and also underline the importance of the brother-sister link in Tamang society, acted out in visits by married women to their agnatic kin at Dasaī.

All in all, Höfer stresses the way in which the Tamang integrate “elements of different origins”—Buddhist, Hindu, and “probably more ancient tribal elements”—within the basically Hindu framework of the ritual sequence, so “anchor[ing] all that the *mukhiyā*'s office stands for, namely ethnic identity, in the macro-societal and political context” (23, 24). In the process, the Goddess loses her central position, the buffalo is symbolically transformed into a yak, the villagers are released by the lamas from the sin of sacrificing the buffalo, and the demands of Tamang society, Tibetan Buddhist values, Hindu ritual idiom, and the Nepali state are all more or less satisfied.

Part II of Höfer's volume, “Invoking the Divinities of the Village Territory” (131–72), is really a separate short study of a ritual carried out twice yearly, an invocation to the *syibda-nē:da* or gods of the locality. The term *syibda-nē:da*, deriving from the Tibetan *gzhi bdag gnas bdag*, refers to local deities “responsible for the well-being of the inhabitants of the village and the fertility of their cattle and fields” (133). Each village has a cult-place for these deities on a hill above the settlement, and most major Tamang rituals include an invocation to them (142). Unlike the clan god and some other Tamang deities, they belong in the wild outside the village (133–34). However, while the term and many of the names invoked are Tibetan, Tamang ideas about the *syibda-nē:da* incorporate Hindu elements and may reflect an early

history of indirect Gorkha dominance via the Ghale and/or Gurung (137–40).

The form of the ritual, discussed on pages 141–49, resembles that of the Tibetan incense-offering to the local gods (*lha bsangs* or *bsangs mchod*), though unlike a typical *bsangs* ritual it incorporates a blood-sacrifice (of a goat). However, its form incorporates a series of journeys in which the officiants travel to the *syibda-nè:da*'s distant place of origin, bring them to the village, and then return them home, and Höfer suggests that this rhetorical device lends persuasiveness to the ritual (148). While, according to Höfer, the journey "is not a (shamanic) 'soul journey'," the reciter may sometimes tremble to indicate that he has been "seized" by one of the deities invoked (148).

Enough has been said to indicate some of the richness and complexity of this material, and the corpus of Tamang ritual texts in Höfer's three volumes will undoubtedly be of enormous value both to scholars of Nepal and to future generations of the Tamang themselves. Additional features, such as the detailed maps and diagrams and the musical transcriptions by Josef Kuckertz (177–82) add further to the usefulness of the work. It seems necessary, though, to comment on the admittedly difficult questions of transcription and interpretation. Höfer describes his transcription as "the transliteration of a fictive Tamang writing and thus as a compromise between a phonological and a phonetic transcription" (xviii). Some degree of compromise is inevitable, since there is really no such thing as a purely phonetic transcription of a language, yet I felt here as with Höfer's previous work that it was hard at times to judge what kinds of choices had been made and exactly how the material in the book derives from Höfer's taperecordings and his informants' interpretation. Höfer implies that he has transcribed words at least in part according to his assumptions about what they mean, yet it seems clear that the language of the texts was often difficult and unfamiliar to his informants, who were frequently far from certain what the texts actually meant (see e.g., 25, 129, 137).

This ambiguity of the texts to Höfer's Tamang informants in turn casts some doubt on his description of his translation as an attempt "to render what the texts mean 'here and now' to those by whom and for whom they are being sung and recited" (xxi). In the present book, Höfer is dismissive of criticisms by Tadeusz SKORUPSKI (1982) and Brigitte STEINMANN (1996) of his earlier translations, quite scathingly so in Steinmann's case (xxi, note 6; see also HÖFER's response to Steinmann, 1996). As far as Skorupski's comments on borrowings from classical Tibetan are concerned, it seems to me that Höfer is essentially correct in that one needs to determine what these oral texts mean to those who use them, rather than what their Tibetan elements might have meant in their original Tibetan context.

Steinmann's case is more complex, since she presents alternative translations to some of Höfer's versions, basing them on the suggestions of her own Tamang informants. Steinmann's informants were admittedly speakers of the quite different Eastern Tamang language, but she stresses that they did understand western Tamang (1996, 38). HÖFER accuses her of treating "Tamang as Tibetan" (xxi, note 6, and 1996, 59), yet she in some instances at least seems rather to be pointing to the difficulty of establishing any conclusive interpretation, as well as to the problems raised by Höfer's reliance on one or two informants back in the early 1970s. HÖFER may well be right on the specifics of some or all of Steinmann's reinterpretations (1996, 57–61), and it is also possible that Steinmann's informants reflect the puristic Buddhist tendency Höfer refers to among contemporary Tamang scholars (xii). Nevertheless, there remains a sense of uncertainty as to how far Höfer has reached either a definitive transcription or an unambiguous translation of his texts.

Yet it is only possible to ask these questions because Höfer has given us so much material in these three books, and in so much detail. That ambiguities remain is an unavoidable aspect of the difficult but rewarding task he has set himself, and it hardly detracts from the significance of his achievement.

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Geoffrey SAMUEL

University of Newcastle

Australia

## EUROPE

HAAS, WALBURGA, Editor. *Volkskunde und Brauchtumpflege im Nationalsozialismus in Salzburg: Referate, Diskussionen, Archivmaterial*. Bericht zur Tagung am 18. und 19. November 1994 in der Salzburger Residenz. Salzburger Beiträge zur Volkskunde, Band 8. Salzburg: Salzburger Landesinstitut für Volkskunde, 1995/96. 400 pages. ISBN 3-901681-00-0.

While it may not seem of importance to review a publication of the proceedings of a folklore meeting held in Austria in a journal devoted to Asian folklore studies, this is not at all the case, as we shall presently see. Unfortunately, there is a general perception that, in contrast to German scholars, Austrians have stubbornly resisted coming to terms with their role in supporting National Socialist Volkskunde (folklore). This book, which is not for the uninitiated, will document how deeply Austrian scholars are now delving into the past of *Volkskunde* and *Brauchtumpflege* (promotion/cultivation of customs). It is for all practical purposes an internal working document that includes theoretical and practical papers presented at a meeting held in November 1994 in Salzburg. In attendance were Austrian and German folklore specialists, history and sociology scholars, directors of local and regional *Heimatschutz* (homeland preservation) societies, as well as local citizens, all of whom met to discuss the often avoided topic of *Volkskunde* and *Heimatpflege* (homeland preservation/cultivation) during the National Socialist years. The book is divided into three parts, the first of which presents the papers read at that gathering, as well as brief reports from several working groups, on folk song, folk dance, costumes, and two papers that deal with the history and the conceptual nature of the *Heimatwerke* (homeland work [societies]). Following each of these subsections, there is also a good selection taken from the recorded and transcribed discussions that followed. The second part includes a one-hundred page section by Gert Kerschbaumer, called "Reconstruction and Documentation," which will be discussed in more detail below, and brief interviews with five *Zeitzeugen* (witnesses to the times). Finally, there is a third part devoted to the business of the Institute that sponsored the meeting, the Salzburger