

Book Reviews

Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker (editors): *Oracles and Divination* (Shambhala Publications, Boulder, 1981) 244 pages; 12 black and white plates and 11 figure illustrations.

This book deals in 232 pages with a very wide range of cultures both in space and in time. Its nine chapters, all written by highly competent specialists, cover Tibet, China, Japan, the Classical World, the Germanic world, the Babylonians and Hittites, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Israel and Islam. The editors mean by divination "the attempt to elicit from some higher power or supernatural being the answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding" (p.1). They did not aim at comprehensiveness, nor were they concerned primarily to compare and to contrast. Each contributor was encouraged to deal with the subject "on its own merits . . . as it appeared in his own field". The result is a learned, thought-provoking and highly readable book. It is indeed something of a relief to dip into an anthology of this kind where authors have obviously felt completely free to go their own way and to do their own thing without being hampered by theoretical shackles.

The only chapter dealing with matters of which I have some direct knowledge is that concerning Tibet and it is the chapter most likely to interest readers of this *Journal*; so I will confine my comments to it. The author is Lama Chime Radha, Rinpoche, who is Head of the Tibetan Section, at the British Library. He gives (p.1-37) a good, general account of the role of divination and the parts played by oracles in Tibetan culture. The particular methods of divination discussed are: *pra* (interpretation of signs or visions); *mda'-mo* (divination by means of arrows); *phreng-ba* (the use of Buddhist rosaries); *sho-mo* (dice-throwing); *sman-gsal mar-me brtag-pa ldeb* (the use of butter-lamps); *bya-roq-kyi skad brtag-pa* (interpretations of bird behavior). The use of the ball of the thumb (*the-bon*) in *pra* is well described; and some interesting information, which will probably be new to most readers, concerning Pe har and the rise to prominence of Rdo-rje shugs-ldan, a Dge-lugs-pa protective deity, is discussed in the section on oracles. Altogether this chapter is a contribution which will be read with profit both by the general reader and by the specialist.

Laufer and Nebesky-Wojkowitz are the only western authors who have written on Tibetan divination who are mentioned. Perhaps it may be useful, in this context, to draw attention to a few other western studies:

R.A. Stein, "Trente-trois fiches de divination tibétaines," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 4, 1939, p.297-372; A. Róna-Tas, "Tally-stick and divination-dice in the iconography of Lha-mo," in *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, VI, 1956, p.163-179; R.B. Ekvall, "Some aspects of divination in Tibetan society," in *Ethnology*, vol.II, 1963, p.31-39; S. Hummel, "Günstige und ungünstige Zeiten und Zeichen nach dem Tibetischen des Chags-med rin-po-che," in *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol.XXII, Tokyo, 1963, p.89-132; and D. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, London, 1967, p.24-41.

A useful index to the whole volume completes this fascinating little book which grew out of a series of lectures delivered at Cambridge University in 1979.

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Ngapo Ngawang Jigmei, Khrili Chodra, Chapel Tsetan Phuntso, Na Zhen, Cai Xiansheng, Jampei Chinlei, & Dongge Luosantselie: *Tibet* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1981) 296 pp., 237 photographs.

This lavishly illustrated volume appears in the format of a "coffee-table book" but it is far more interesting and surprising than such books usually are. The photographs alone are worth the price of the book (\$60.00) for they constitute one of the finest collections of color photographs taken in Tibet and available to the general public. The photographs were taken by Chinese photographers and so there are a number of obviously posed pictures in the book, but the majority are candid shots that provide glimpses of everyday scenes in present-day Tibet as well as somewhat embarrassing contradictions of the posed shots. In many ways the text parallels the photographic portion of the book: much of it follows the standard Chinese line on Tibetan culture and political history, but a significant portion of it presents views that are much at variance with that line and far more realistic than anything yet written in Chinese or pro-Chinese works about Tibet. The Chinese authorities responsible for the book have, as a result, declared that the book was tampered with and that it is an "illegal" publication.

According to the book's credits, the volume was produced by Jugoslovenska Revija, Belgrade, and the Shanghai People's Art Publishing House. A New China News Agency dispatch of October 19, 1981 stated that under the terms of the agreement between the Yugoslav publishing house and the Shanghai publishing house, the Yugoslavs were to be responsible "only for such matters as book designing, binding, printing and publishing." In actual fact, however, the Yugoslav publishing house sent master copies of the book—originally entitled "Xizang" (the Chinese name for Tibet)—to

McGraw-Hill in New York so as to prepare it for publication. The editors at McGraw-Hill consulted various Tibetan authorities in the United States (among them, this reviewer is told, Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa) concerning the veracity of many of the book's statements, and accordingly made changes in some of the captions for the photographs. The Chinese news dispatch claims that the book's text was also altered and that the new editors added "content slandering and vilifying the People's Republic of China." This is rather strong language indeed, and try as one might, it is rather impossible to find anything in the book that vilifies China. Nevertheless, the strength of the Chinese protest makes it difficult for one to know just to what extent the book reflects Chinese ideas about Tibet and Tibetan civilization in the post-Mao era. *Tibet* certainly seems to represent a great departure from previous Chinese productions about Tibet. It is a handsome book with many unique photographs printed and bound with a quality that the Foreign Languages Press in Peking has never been able to equal. Prior to the release of the New China News Agency dispatch concerning it, it appeared to be a welcome step away from the stilted propaganda periodically published in China, a welcome step by the very authorities who were producing this propaganda replete with denunciations of the "man-eating serf system" and images of liberated serfs dancing for their new lives. The most recent example of this is the book *Tibet: No Longer Mediaeval* (Peking, 1981), which includes many of the same photographs found in *Tibet*, but which is a very inferior production. It is poorly printed on low quality paper, badly bound, and flowing with propagandistic invective. It can be surmised that the Chinese authorities had originally hoped to bring out a book with the physical quality of *Tibet* and the textual content of *Tibet: No Longer Mediaeval*.

Having said this much about the book's background, attention may now be directed towards the book itself. The most striking feature of it consists of the photographs. Aside from the beauty of many of them, there are a few that contain surprises for Tibetologists, and some should be mentioned here. On p. 33 an edict of Ming T'ai-tsu praising the meditational activities of the "Karma Lama" at Mtshur-phu (in Chinese, Tsu-erh-p'u) is reproduced. The edict is dated 1375, and the Karma Lama can be none other than Karma Rol-pa'i rdo-rje. What makes this document so valuable is the fact that it is not contained in the *Ming shih-lu* and has not been published previously. Moreover this document is the first piece of evidence from Chinese sources demonstrating direct knowledge on the part of the Ming court of the existence and activities of the Karma-pa and their monastic center at Mtshur-phu at such an early date in the dynasty's history.

Two paintings of the Manchu emperor Ch'ien-lung (pp. 38 and 40) are also very interesting, for they portray the emperor dressed in the robes of a monk, as in the portrait that formed the point of departure for the article of David M. Farquhar, "Emperor As Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 38 (1978), pp. 5-24.

The photograph on p. 38 has been printed backwards, as a glance at the inscription tablet in front of the thangka portrait reveals. There are other instances of sloppiness also: an embroidered thangka on p. 247, for example, is noted as having been presented to Shakya ye-shes by the emperor Ming Hsüan-tsung (reigned 1426-1435) even though its borders contain inscriptions in Tibetan, Chinese, Mongol, and *Manchu*, as well as clearly written dates showing that it was finished in 1777, the *ting-yu* year of Ch'ien-lung and the Tibetan fire-bird year.

Among the photographs of "everyday scenes" there are, as mentioned, a number of posed shots. One can clearly deduce this in looking at the pictures of groups visiting the Potala dressed in fine chubas, blouses, and hats on pp. 209 and 214, as well as the one of a small Tibetan family dressed up to have a sumptuous meal all by themselves on p. 106. However, compare these photos with those of the ragged pilgrim praying in front of the Potala on p. 196, and the devout group visiting the Potala on p. 197, dressed in a mix of old and dirty Chinese and Tibetan garments without the nice boots, hats, or shoes of those in the posed pictures, but wearing instead worn cheap Chinese sneakers and here and there a Chinese army cap.

The descriptions of some of the photographs contain omissions that are understandable from the Chinese point of view. The base of the otherwise destroyed fortress of Yum-bu bla-sgang is shown on pp. 28-29, but the description on p. 30 is apt to give readers the impression that the building is in such a ruined state because of the passage of the ages; the tragic fact that the structure had stood intact from at least the seventh century (and most likely from a much earlier time) until red guards destroyed it during the Cultural Revolution is never mentioned. Another intriguing omission of sorts concerns the monastery of Bsam-yas. Its state is never directly discussed in the text, but there are photographs on pp. 250-251 of one of the courtyard gatehouses of the monastery, the interior of one of the halls, and carved wooden decorations from a corbel. Within the text of the book (pp. 201-202) Bsam-yas is described in the present tense. This is most interesting in view of the fact that almost all of the recent reports of Tibetan visitors to Tibet have stated that the monastery was destroyed. The only full picture of it is that found in a beautiful painted fresco (the location of which is not given) on pp. 248-249; there are no photographs of the entire monastery complex.

A final word on the photographs is appropriate. An inordinate number of those showing objects, documents, or paintings of an historical nature are presented to stress the fact that Tibet has had relations with China over many centuries. Almost nothing is shown that would give the reader the impression that Tibet has also had relations with any other country. The object of this is naturally to strengthen the notion that Tibet is, and has been, an unquestioned part of China. This is not stated in the text in as rigid a fashion as in previous Chinese writings, as may be seen below.

The text is divided into seven chapters, each one supposedly written by one of the seven authors listed at the beginning of the book and given short

biographical notes on pp. 290-291. (There is also a two page preface by Harrison Salisbury on pp. 14-15.) This reviewer uses the term "supposedly" because it is sometimes hard to believe that certain individuals have written the words ascribed to them. The first chapter, on Tibet's history, has been written by Ngapo Ngawang Jigmei who, as the highest ranking figure of the old Tibetan establishment holding power in Tibet today, is known to quite a few people. At the beginning of his chapter he refers to James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* and the concept of an idyllic Shangri-la that it describes. This reviewer has been told by people who have met him that Ngapo does not know any English. Furthermore, it does not seem likely that Chinese translations of *Lost Horizon* circulated freely in China after the early years of the People's Republic. One cannot help suspecting then that references such as this are more likely to have been produced by propaganda authorities in Peking than by people such as Ngapo, who furthermore refers to Garma C. C. Chang's translation of the poetry of Mi-la ras-pa on p. 23 as "A translation into English with extremely informative notes . . ."

On pp. 21-23 Ngapo discusses "three frescoes of outstanding historical and artistic interest." The three frescoes depict the marriage of Srong-btsan sgam-po to the T'ang princess Wen Ch'eng, the meeting between 'Phags-pa Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan and the Mongol Yüan emperor Qubilai, and the meeting between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Manchu Ch'ing emperor Shun-chih. With reference to the last person named he erroneously calls him a Mongolian emperor of China (!; p. 22) and refers to the "Qing (i.e. Ch'ing) dynasty, established in 1644 by Mongolian conquerors" (!!; p. 23). The aim in using all three of these examples is, once more, to stress China's historic relationship with Tibet. Still, one statement is made by Ngapo in direct contradiction to all writings emanating from China concerning Sino-Tibetan relations. He notes, on p. 22, that after the fall of the Yüan dynasty (1367) "Tibet regained independence and maintained it for over 200 years." Chinese writers have uniformly come to date Tibet's formal transformation into an inalienable part of China from the Mongol Yüan dynasty and this statement by Ngapo, then, is quite a departure from that position.

If there are some doubts as to who really composed some of the statements attributed to Ngapo in the first chapter, they are small in comparison with those one may entertain with regard to chapter six, concerning Tibetan Buddhism, written by Jampei Chinlei, described on p. 291, as a "High Incarnation Lama in the Drepung Monastery of Lhasa." This high-ranking figure from 'Bras-spungs maintains that the system of succession through incarnation in Tibetan Buddhist sects is unique to the Dge-lugs-pa (rendered as Gelug-pa), and states on p. 169:

A principal of great consequence for its (i.e. the Dge-lugs-pa sect's) future development came into operation shortly after the time of Tsongkhapa; this was the tulku, 'living Buddha,' system, according to which the pontiffs of the Gelug-pa sect were believed to be successive incarnations of the Bodhisattva Chenresi, or Avalokitesvara, patron and protector of Tibet. The pontiffs of the once powerful Sakya sect

had solved the problem of succession through marriage and family inheritance, those of the Kagyu-pa through transmission of secret doctrines to chosen disciples. The Gelug-pa sect, having adopted celibacy and given more importance to rational thought and open teaching than to esoteric lore, would have found transmission of supreme authority from generation to generation a real problem, especially in a society unaccustomed to elections, had its leaders not relied on a system of succession by reincarnation."

It is hard to imagine any Tibetan brought up in traditional Tibetan surroundings, of any level of education, declaring succession by incarnation to be a method used solely by the Dge-lugs-pa sect. It is ludicrous to think that an educated monk from 'Bras-spungs could be unaware of the use of this system by the Karma-pa sub-sect of the Bka'-brgyud-pa lineage prior to the time of Tsong-kha-pa. Once more the reader may suspect a bureaucratic hand in the composition of large parts of the book. Nevertheless, one finds another diversion from previous Chinese pronouncements in the statement on p. 172 of chapter six that "the majority of Tibetans today are still devout Buddhists."

A considerable number of errors are found throughout this chapter and throughout most of the book's text. It would be far too time consuming to explore all of them in this review, and not terribly worthwhile, since *Tibet* was not conceived of as a work putting forth new scientific information in the field of Tibetology. It is annoying, however, when statements in the book ignore or contradict such information in order to make a propaganda point. A good example of this is found in chapter three, on Tibetan customs and rituals, by Chapel Tsetan Phuntso, when the author discusses Tibetan marriage customs. On p. 91 the writer states that Tibetans "had little right to choose their partners and often did not know what they looked like until the marriage." It is well known that there were quite a few arranged marriages in Tibet as in most countries, but almost all travellers to Tibet and social scientists who have been able to conduct research in Tibetan-inhabited regions concur in the opinion that Tibetans still had great leeway in choosing their own marriage partners or in vetoing prospective matches. These findings have been verified by Tibetans presently living outside of Tibet and those researchers who have studied them. The writer's contention on pp. 91-92 that interclass marriages were not allowed in Tibet is also directly contradicted by modern scholarly findings; cf., for example, Barbara Nimri Aziz, *Tibetan Frontier Families* (Durham, N.C., 1978), pp. 161-167, for a discussion of interclass marriage as it has occurred in the village of Ding-ri.

The section on women in chapter four, by Na Zhen, is likewise extremely misleading and erroneous in its presentation of the status of women in traditional Tibetan society, asserting on p. 96 that "...in many ways they were hardly treated as human beings at all." It is no secret that the high degree of freedom women had in traditional Tibetan society has seemed particularly striking to many observers over the centuries. The description

of the position of women contained in the text, however, differs little from Chinese descriptions of the pre-1949 condition of any oppressed group within the borders of the present People's Republic of China.

There is one last factor in the text that is somewhat disturbing and again indicative of the Chinese hand in its composition. Here and there Chinese terms crop up in places where there ought to be Tibetan ones. On p. 92, for example, in describing the factors that must be taken into account in selecting a proper bride it is stated that the groom's family will ask about the bride's "shengxiao," i.e., *sheng-hsiao*, the Chinese term for the animal that presides over the year of one's birth. The full year sign in Tibet consists of an animal, an element, and often a gender. In Tibetan it is called *lo-rtags*, a term that is more accurate, if not to say far more appropriate. However, the authorities charged with compiling the text for this book seem to have their own reasons for using a Chinese term in this instance. In another, a white Sherpa garment is referred to, on p. 135, as a "baiduo," again an example of a Chinese term used in substitution for a Tibetan one.

At the end of the book, on p. 293, there is a chronological table of Tibetan history compiled by Jampei Chinlei, the author of the chapter on Tibetan religion, and edited by Fosco Maraini, who also edited the latter chapter. Of interest is the fact that the table notes that in 1728 Tibet fell under the suzerainty of China—not Chinese sovereignty. Again, this statement has never before been made by communist Chinese writers, and one may assume that this is likely to have been edited into the text after the master copies had left Yugoslavia. In any event the curious background of the book and its composition should be borne in mind as one reads through it. The final pages (pp. 294-296) contain a general bibliography on Tibet, listing several items (such as the autobiography of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama) that were probably also appended to it after the book was out of Chinese hands.

In conclusion it can be said that *Tibet* is a rather curious book. It is beautifully illustrated with fascinating color photographs of Tibet, Tibetans, and important Tibetan sites and objects. The photographs are an interesting mix, in places, of candid shots of the Tibetan people as many of them now are, as well as of posed shots, the former sometimes calling embarrassing attention to the latter. Although the photographs were all taken by Chinese photographers, the text has been disowned by the Chinese authorities, who claim that it was tampered with by anti-China elements. It seems not to be the sole work of the authors listed at the beginning of the book; in that regard one may surmise that the text was altered or amended by others, both inside and outside of China. Nevertheless, as stated at the start of this review, the nature and quality of the photographs impart a unique value to this book, in spite of the often erroneous and misleading nature of the text.

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David Snellgrove & Hugh Richardson: *A Cultural History of Tibet* (Boulder, Prajña Press, 1980) 307pp.

This book is a reprint of the edition first published in 1968. It contains a short new chapter entitled "Aftermath" dealing with new developments in the history of the Tibetans (inside and outside of their homeland) and in scientific research since the appearance of the first edition. (On its back cover the book is advertised as a "revised edition," but nevertheless the main text of the book is identical with that of the 1968 edition.)

Writing a comprehensive "handbook" on the development of the political history, religious and cultural traditions, archaeology and ethnography, etc., of a particular country is a most difficult task. Let me add that it is even an impossible one, because on the one hand no scholar would claim to be equally well-versed in all branches of scholarship, and on the other hand no reader would be able to read through such a comprehensive volume containing, let us say, 2,000 pages. Therefore, the major requirements which such a handbook ought to have are: 1. a well-balanced presentation of the material (one may frequently observe that individual scholars give too much emphasis to subjects in which they are particularly expert while other topics tend to be almost totally disregarded); 2. exactness (loose handling of data in the case of popular books is well-known); and 3. clarity (i.e., a style easily understood by non-specialists.)

This last item is especially important, because handbooks are generally written for non-experts or, for example, to facilitate the preparation of university students. Now, among the few handbooks dealing with Tibet, the book of the two well-known authors under review here still deserves special attention, even though it was first published twelve years ago. In my opinion the book is still the best one of this genre, although this does not mean that it has no mistakes. The greatest merit of the book is its clarity. It is quite another matter that, for instance, Professor Stein's *Tibetan Civilization* is a real "gter-mdzod" for Tibetologists and that it is, in my opinion, the best summary description of Tibet that has ever been written. Nevertheless, Stein's merits and achievements can be appreciated primarily by Tibetologists or by advanced students. I remember that a freshman student once asked a question of me and that I told him that he could find some data and bibliographic information on the problem in Stein's book. He came back, disappointed, saying that book was of little value to him because it referred only to some Tibetan sources and not to any secondary literature. (Obviously he could not read Tibetan fluently at the time, so he needed a more "intelligible" language.)

From the viewpoint of clarity, there is no doubt that *A Cultural History of Tibet* is one of the best books of its genre. This statement is not limited solely to its presentation of various subjects, but also refers to its excellent and vivid translations of poems and prose. Another great merit of the book is its lack of over-simplification. Even if a given subject is treated very

briefly, the information concerning the problem is vital and precise.

Some errors, however, must be mentioned. For example, Qubilai met his death in 1294 and not in 1265 (p. 208). A more correct spelling of the name Pho-lha is Pho-lha-nas and Kang-chen is generally mentioned in Tibetan sources as Khang-chen-nas. It is true that the name of the Qośot khan derives from Tibetan ("lHa-bzang"), nevertheless, his name is Lajang (or Laĵang). The system of reincarnation is a typical Tibetan invention, and one of primary importance. The book omits the problem of the origin of this concept, although it is well-established that the idea of reincarnated lamas was first developed among the Karma-pa (see Turrell Wylie's recent article on the topic in the *Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memorial Symposium*). One could enumerate other mistakes or omissions, especially if one wanted to compare the statements in the book with the results of recent research. Nevertheless, due to the approach and methodology of the book and, moreover, to its basic information and data, it is still to be recommended to everyone interested in Tibetology.

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