

Book Review

Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques: Recent Research on Ladakh and the Western Himalaya. Proceedings of the 13th Colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, Supplement No. 2 to Rivista degli Studi Orientali 80 (New Series) by John Bray & E. Elena de Rossi Filibeck (eds.), Pisa/Rome, Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2009. 283pp. 245Euros.

Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques is a cohesive collection of 14 articles on history and culture drawn from the 2007 colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies. The successful development of the Association (whose first gathering was as long ago as 1981), is indicated by the fact that its presentations have outgrown a single volume. For the first time, a separate volume on art and architecture is planned, and, 'it is hoped', another on medicine and ecology.

Poignantly this volume is dedicated to the doyen of Ladakh and Tibetan studies, Professor Luciano Petech (1914-2010), who has passed away since its publication. But it is thus appropriate that this is an excellent collection of fresh research, including a number of articles of lasting importance not only to Ladakh, but to wider regional studies. It is to be regretted, however, that while this work is essential to specialists, its cover price is astonishingly high. We must hope that the publishers gift at least some copies to South Asian libraries, or allow a lower-priced Indian edition, for the price is far beyond the means of local scholars and their libraries. We must also note with regret that while it is otherwise a well-produced work, there are rather too many typos, notably four or five in the list of contents, and although they are rarer in the texts we read of the 'heroin Druguma' (p.202), while Sangs rgyas rygya mtsho's dates are scrambled (p.210).

The volume opens with Ippolito Desideri's 'First Remarks on Ladakh' by Enzo Bargiacchi, whose careful enthusiasm has stimulated a resurgence of interest in the life and works of the Jesuit missionary Desideri. In the wider context, Desideri's writings provide valuable glimpses of Asian society in pre-colonial days, something urgently required in post-colonial studies.

Spiti, like Baltistan, is understudied, and Christian Jahoda's paper, 'Spiti and Ladakh in the 17th-19th centuries: views from the periphery', is a foundational

study of political, administrative and cultural aspects of the period. Petech's work is developed in Georgios Halkias's article, 'Until the feathers of the winged black raven turns white: sources for the Tibet-Bashahr treaty of 1679'. Halkias—informed by Willem van Schendel's work on trans-national trade flows—confirms the importance of control over the trade routes in the waging and settlement of that conflict, which enhanced both the prosperity and extent of Bashahr. This article is followed by a micro study by Kurt Tropper, "'A thousand manis in immutable stone". A donor inscription at Nako village (Kinnaru, Himachal Pradesh', and John Bray and Tsering D. Gongkatsang's article, 'Three 19th century documents from Tibet and the Lo Phyang mission from Leh to Lhasa.' The latter expands Bray's earlier work on this triennial mission through the analysis of newly discovered documents. Originating after the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal war, the mission developed diplomatic, religious and commercial aspects, and after initial suspicion of its territorial implications, the British imperial government took a pragmatic approach to its continuance, finding it a valuable channel of communication with Lhasa.

British development in the western Himalayas is also discussed by Arik Moran, in "'A project of imperial importance": Palampur fair and the Kangra Tea Enterprise, 1867-79.' Following their conquest of the Punjab in 1846, the British attempted a number of development initiatives and the creation of the Palampur fair was part of an expansionist movement towards Central Asia. But British limitations in the region were revealed by the failure of the fair, which proved its 'incompatibility with existing trade patterns' (p. 124).

Ladakh's place in the Islamic world is then highlighted by two articles. In the first, Abdul Ghani Sheikh discusses 'The traditions of Sufism in Ladakh', concluding that strained relations between religious communities are a product of recent politics. The Sufi traditions were imported from Central Asia in the 14th–17th centuries, and their development followed on the model of the Indic renunciate movements with which they were in close communication. Shahzad Bashir, in his article 'Nūrbakhshīs in the history of Kashmir, Ladakh, and Baltistan: a critical view on Persian and Urdu sources' discusses a Sufi order founded by a 15th century master in Tajikistan which remains prominent particularly around Kargil. Bashir is particularly concerned with the issues that arise from a critical examination of the contrasting sources relating to this rather liminal sect; concluding that, 'we should see historical works not as static reflections of the past but as the product of active human agents who wished to steer the world into directions pertaining to the contexts in which they were writing' (p. 151).

Pascal Dollfus then asks, 'Who are "those of the Black Castle"? Discussing the past of a nomadic group inhabiting the Southeastern edge of Ladakh'. In this well-illustrated article, she identifies the antecedents of the Kharnakpa ('those

of the Black Castle'), who are one of a group of nomadic pastoralists from southeastern Ladakh, sadly perhaps, now largely settled on the outskirts of Leh. Elena de Rossi Filibeck provides transcription and translation of thirty-nine, 'Wedding songs from Wam Le'. The original manuscript of these was found by the Ladakhi Christian Joseph Gergan (1878-1946) and is preserved at the ISIAO (formerly ISMEO), library in Rome. The songs, in classical Tibetan style, shed light on cosmology, myth, religion and social history, and collectively form an idealised representation of how this society was supposed to function (p. 173). Petra Maurer, in her article, 'Sa bdag and tortoise. A survey of the traditions of geomancy in Ladakh' then offers an interpretation of a geomantic text (chapter 32 of the *Vaidurya dkar po*) based on discussions with local informants.

Tibetan funereal practices have attracted sporadic interest from scholars. Here Erberto Lo Bue, in his article 'Notes on Sky-Burial in Indian, Chinese and Nepalese Tibet' adds a number of important findings. He points out that vultures were not necessarily the sole consumer of the corpses, crows and dogs also served in some regions, and also that sky burial is not entirely a response to a lack of firewood, for it is also common in wooded regions of Kham. But as Lo Bue concludes, while the practice survives in Tibet and in Mustang, in Kinnaur it is dying out as a result of the imposition of Hindu values and, as in Ladakh, due to the influence of modernity.

Poul Pedersen's article, 'Traditionalism and cosmopolitanism in the life of a modern Ladakh: Abdul Wahid Radhu and Marco Pallis' discusses cultural interaction in the context of the contrasting spiritual and intellectual journeys of these two friends from different cultures. Martin Mills then discusses the controversial Dorje Shugden issue as it affected Ladakh. His article 'Charting the Shugden interdiction in the Western Himalaya' is of particular interest in regard to its description of how local monastics actually followed the interdiction of this protective deity, disposing of their images of the deity with more or less ceremony. Mills also identifies this issue as one that has marked a shift in religious authority in Ladakh. The acceptance of the Dalai Lama's proscription indicates his increasing status in the region in the modern world.

The final contribution, 'Sacred Landscapes in the Nubra valley', is by Sonam Wangchok. He highlights the apparently impressive efforts of the Namgyal Institute for Research on Ladakhi Art and Culture, an NGO founded by the Ladakhi royal family, in making an inventory of Ladakhi cultural resources both human and natural. This article, which draws on the project's findings in the Nubra valley, demonstrates the rich heritage in need of preservation, and also the extent to which landscapes were understood as manifestations of an otherworld. It leads us to hope that the entire Himalayan realm may eventually be mapped in this manner.