

possible allusion to a shaman's initiation experience of death and rebirth.

Triads of heavenly or mysterious maidens introduce the swanmaiden motif, while three unmarried maidens give birth to sons of the hero, whose role suggests parallels to the *idéologie tripartite* Dumézil found in Indo-European mythology. In view of the wide-ranging activities and cultural contacts of the Mongol ethnic groups this is an intriguing notion, although Heissig excludes direct contacts between Mongol epics and the Indo-European traditions.

This very useful volume aids our understanding of the development of Mongol narratives and their complex web of interconnections, subjects that are of increasing interest even to non-Mongol scholars. Unfortunately, the book suffers from grammatical inaccuracies that more careful proofreading could have eliminated.

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### LADAKH

SCHENK, AMELIE. *Schamanen auf dem Dach der Welt: Trance, Heilung und Initiation in Kleintibet* [Shamans on the roof of the world: Trance, healing, and initiation in "Little Tibet"]. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1994. 236 pages. 99 photographs, bibliography, glossary. Cloth Ös680.—; ISBN 3-201-01601-2. (In German)

Although the traditions of the Buddhist lamas have attracted more attention, there are in Tibet traditions of spirit-mediums that form an important feature of the living folk religion and that have strongly influenced Tibetan Buddhism as well. In spite of the significance of these "shamanic" traditions (as they may be called in a broad sense), they have been the object of relatively little detailed ethnographic research. Amelie Schenk's book, a richly illustrated study of oracular healers (*lhapu*, *lhamo*) in Ladakh, helps fill this gap. Drawing on extended interviews with twenty-one mediums and related persons, Schenk provides a lively account of this tradition, placing strong emphasis on the actors' narration of events and experiences.

Nearly half of the book deals with the "calling" of the healer, that is, with the process in which certain symptoms signal the entry of a *lha* (deity, spirit) into the body of one destined to be a medium. The personal accounts collected by Schenk show the wide range of avenues to becoming a *lhapa* (male) or *lhamo* (female). But despite individual variations — whether the calling occurred early or late in life, whether it involved inherited ancestral inclinations, etc. — it becomes clear that a similar pattern underlies all the biographical narratives. As in "classic" cases of shamanic initiatory illness, the calling begins with such things as dreams, psychic disorientation, physical pain, abnormal behavior, and loss of consciousness; in the course of time this crisis is diagnosed as the presence of divine forces that have to be controlled through proper training.

Schenk is particularly interested in the psychological aspects of the initiatory process. How, she wonders, is it possible for something that begins as a highly individual experience to turn into standardized and institutionalized behavior? The answer is that there is a close interaction between individual and group, between personal experience and cultural expectation. This is shown in further detail in the second section, "Apprenticeship and Initiation," which deals with the techniques that teachers employ to control the crisis. An interesting feature of the narratives is that they point to conflicts and deviations from the norm, as when a teacher declines to accept an apprentice for fear of competition.

The third section, "Metamorphosis in Trance," takes up the topic of greatest interest to Schenk: shamanic possession, or, as she calls it, the "drama of trance." Here the author shifts more and more towards a psychophysiological description of the *lha*-state. The oracular performance is seen as a series of trance-inducing techniques: breathing exercises (panting

and hyperventilation), burning of incense, rhythmic drumming, and bell-ringing. These bring about the personality switch and create the peculiar atmosphere that makes trance, and supposedly healing, possible.

Here one reaches the limits of Schenk's approach. While the time preceding the trance is remembered by the healers and is thus well-documented in the interviews, the trance itself, when healing activity occurs, is not subject to verbal explanation. Thus the book cannot really treat the climax of the shamanic performance, the "séance" (which in Schenk's terminology refers to the state of divine possession only). Though the fourth section gives a short account of what happens during this crucial part of the rite (e.g., the "sucking out" of illnesses), the matter is left deliberately undiscussed.

All in all this publication provides useful documentation of the practices of Ladakhi mediums and supplies interesting oral accounts of their life histories and activities. The text's authentic voices and vivid photographs (many in color) will appeal to a wide audience. Although Schenk is not trained as a Tibetologist, she is careful in rendering the major indigenous terms, which are given in broad transcription (though unfortunately they are not typographically distinguished) as well as in standard Tibetan transliteration in the glossary. Nevertheless, the expert will find some shortcomings. Only occasional reference is made to the wider context of Tibetan Buddhism, though this is justified (convincingly or not) by the claim that the work is simply ethnography. More problematic from an anthropological perspective is the fact that the narratives are not systematically analyzed against the background of social and historical processes (e.g., the changing medical system in Ladakh [KÜHN 1988]). By focusing on personal experience the book provides valuable insights on initiation and the techniques of trance; it tells us relatively little, however, about the complexities of oracular diagnosis and healing.

#### REFERENCE CITED

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1988 *Heiler und ihre Patienten auf dem Dach der Welt — Ladakh aus ethnomedizinischer Sicht*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

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#### INDIA

FREED, RUTH S. and STANLEY A. FREED. *Ghosts: Life and Death in North India*. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 72. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994. 396 pages. 32 photographs, tables, bibliography, appendices, index-glossary. Paper US\$40.00; ISBN 0-295-97303-X.

This is the ninth volume in a series of monographs based on the authors' fieldwork in Shanti Nagar, a village in the Union Territory of Delhi, North India. In their earlier monographs the authors discussed social organization, economics, rites of passage, fertility and sterilization, elections, sickness and health, enculturation, and education. The topic of ghosts has been touched upon earlier in the context of an article on women's psychomedical case histories (8).

The authors have done intermittent fieldwork in this village for more than thirty years; the present study represents a compendium of the information on ghosts that the authors have gathered over those years. The very fact that they could publish such a sizeable volume on a subject that is peripheral to their main work is proof of the authors' meticulous ap-