

that "certain terms (*sgrol-ma*, *mkha' 'gro-ma* and *rnal-'byor-ma*) reveal the influence that Tantric Buddhism, especially the Old Sect, must have had on the Tamang *bompo's* tradition ?

In another surprising note (ch. II, note 7), we read that "in our days at least, not even the most respected Tamang Lamas are able to understand their Tibetan ritual texts". I think that many lamas would be delighted to learn this from A. Höfer, these lamas who try patiently to make understandable to the poor illiterate ethnographers difficult allusions, rhetorical figures and metaphors. If the ethnographer refers to one or two informants only, he has little chance of understanding, or he will soon persuade his informant to tell him what he wants to understand (see the remark p. 48 : "SB who had soon developed into a genuine folk-philologist, did the bulk of this work"). A. Höfer seems to doubt himself about his philological method (p. 47) : "now, it is one thing to denounce the inadequateness of our own tradition of exegetic illusion developed on written materials": why is there no recorded disk at the end of the book, to allow the reader to check the transcription of the words ?

Finally, despite many affirmations about "the challenge to raise the quest for meaning", more than often, A. Höfer cuts short the debate by putting in brackets, with question-marks, the difficulties, for which he always proposes a translation and a transcription. Is it not a way of throwing the responsibility on the informants, and to let it be understood that these songs, after all, can be only a matter of western philology, being produced by illiterate Tamang ?

*Note from the editors* : Any review may be responded to by the author. In this case, because the author of the book reviewed above is one of the editors of the Bulletin, the response appears in the same issue.

### A Brief Reply to Brigitte Steinmann's Review of *A Recitation of the Tamang Shaman in Nepal*

András Höfer

This review is the outcome of a superficial reading and conspicuously partial interpretation of my book. Steinmann is mistaken in her approach, arbitrary in her verdicts and tendentious in her selective use of quotations and references.

(1) She falsely accuses me --and that's a bit much, indeed-- of inventing objects, creating phantom words, and adding suffixes (*sc.* in order to make the text more comfortable for interpretation). (2) It is absurd to pretend that I want "to recreate a more logic Tamang language from Tibetan etymologies" (what an idea!). (3) It is simply not true that my "*translation* still consists in the reconstruction of the meaning of unknown Tamang words (...) from supposed Tibetan roots or words found in the dictionaries" (my emphasis). (4) Steinmann's quite apodictic recifications of my translation are pure fancies. (5) It is hardly legitimate to denounce as erroneous what I find in my fieldwork area simply on the grounds that it does not

tally with what she, Steinmann, finds in hers many miles farther to the east.

For reasons of space, I shall concentrate on the main points:

I did not invent and did not add anything. The word *saridun* is part of modern colloquial (Western) Tamang; and it remains a fact that *tasya* means 'horse-meat', and that *ry:* denotes a certain kind of defilement. The vessel called *chene* (or *chyene*) does exist and is displayed, visible to everybody, on the shaman's altar at any major ritual. Nor is the porcupine a product of my imagination; the passage in question refers to its quills, likewise placed on the altar and likewise visible to everybody. (Here a whole chapter and two illustrations in the book must have escaped Steinmann's attention). What I insert in square brackets are emendations, rather than "free corrections". My emendations, very few and always marked as such, either follow the informants' own suggestions or result from intratextual or intertextual comparison; in either case, they are based on the context.

In criticizing my translation, Steinmann confuses, quite oddly, two different levels of analysis, that of translation, on the one hand, and that of comparison in the comments and annotations, on the other. She does not (want to?) notice that --contrary to what her Eastern Tamang lama informant allegedly aims at, namely "transcribing the oral Tamang language into written Tibetan" (whatever this may mean)-- I saw my task in transcribing and translating the text in question as a Tamang text. My translation

does not render etymological meanings single elements might have had in another language in the past or may still have for the learned among Tibetans. Rather, my translation is based on what the text as a whole means "here and now" to those people for whom and by whom it is recited. To know what it means to them is all the more important since its performance is meant to heal those whom it addresses. The text is *not* in Tibetan, but in Tamang, a language having a grammar, a phonology, etc. of its own. That Tamang is akin to Tibetan, and that the language of the ritual texts contains a number of borrowings from Tibetan provides no justification for treating Tamang as Tibetan--all the less so since such borrowings have often assumed, among the Tamang, a meaning that differs from the meaning Tibetan speakers would give them.--At a separate, comparative level of analysis, I tried to establish some etymologies. I did this *not* to complete and/or correct the translation (which in some cases would have been tantamount to correcting the minds of my informants as members of a speech community and cultural group), but to trace the original meaning and provenance of certain elements, and thus to throw some light on the history of Western Tamang oral tradition. (This was explained in a sub-chapter of my book, which the reviewer does not seem to have found worth reading attentively).

Steinmann's rectifications of my translation are pure fancies, not only because they turn an established context with evident references to the ritual into a mess of phrases devoid of conceptual coherence, but also because her haphazard "transcriptions" into Tibetan brush

aside phonetics and grammar. For example, why on earth should one ignore the difference between retroflex and dental in identifying Tamang *ḍodaṅ* as Tibetan *mdos dan*? Besides, what the Tibetans call *mdos* ('thread-cross', 'demon-trap') is not used by the Tamang shaman at all. For what reason should one confound Tamang *sāla* (deep-level pitch; 'to eat') with Tamang *sala* (high-level pitch; 'on the earth'), and with what justification can one derive the former from Tibetan *sa-las*? If this were pertinent, we would have \**sale* (high-level pitch), but certainly not *sāla* in Tamang. Why should one derive Tamang *geppu* from Tibetan *rgyud-pa* if the reflex of the latter is already attested as *gyúppa* in Tamang? There is not the slightest evidence in support of Steinmann's assertion that what I spell *khaṅsa* and translate by 'homestead' is in reality Tibetan *gaṅs-sa* and is to be rendered by 'snowy mountain'. If this were correct we would have \**gaṅsa* or \**gaṅ.sa* (deep-level pitch, lax vowel in the first syllable) in Tamang, rather than *khaṅsa* (high-level pitch, tense vowel). After all, the pairing 'homestead' versus 'fields' also occurs in a number of other Tamang texts.

Steinmann proves to be unacquainted with the Western Tamang language. If she concedes that neither she nor her Eastern Tamang informants can "check" my transcription (it was explained in my book), how can she insist that it misspells and results in mistranslations? Does she think I produced the orthography and the translation just like that --with the same lightheartedness with which she tries to reject them? Does she really believe that my informants

are ignorant fellows who have not the slightest idea of what they recite and hear? In any case, she should re-read the book.

All I can acknowledge as useful in this strange review are three suggestions concerning word etymology. They are probably correct, but have no bearing on my formulation in the translation.

