

interest to typologists, inasmuch as the findings provide a description of a hitherto unexplored language, with quite a few interesting grammatical and morphosyntactic peculiarities on a research basis. Lastly, used as a language manual, it could also serve anthropologists and other scientists in conducting their research in or about the Kyirong area.

Conference Report on *Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Central Himalayas*

By William S. Sax

On 12-13 November 2004, a workshop was held at the University of Heidelberg on the topic “Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Central Himalayas”. The conference was funded by the Special Research Area 619 “Dynamics of Rituals”, funded by the German Research Council.

The focus of the workshop was the historical and contemporary systems of “Divine Kingship” found in the North Indian states of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. In some parts of this region, tiny “kingdoms” are ruled from gods in their temples, who communicate with their subjects through possessed oracles, and enforce their decisions through their own armies. Elsewhere, human kings rule as the representatives of gods, or the system looks like the “classical” system of Hindu kingship, in which a human king with semi-divine qualities rules the land, but ritually subordinates himself to his lineage deity.

The workshop began on Friday morning with a greeting from Axel Michaels, Speaker of the Special Research Area, and an introduction by William (“Bo”) Sax, organizer of the workshop. Sax stressed the fact that in all of the systems to be discussed, “religion” and “politics” seemed to be one and the same thing. He went on to argue that this identity of religion and politics was also characteristic of Hindu kingship during the “classical” period. The scholars gathered together here, however, were not historians but ethnographers, and their contributions were based on contemporary fieldwork. The goals of this conference were two: to compare systems of divine kingship in the Central Himalayas in order to see what they had (and did not have) in common, and to examine the part played by rituals in the institutions of divine kingship.

Sax's introduction was followed by a paper from Peter Sutherland (Baton Rouge), in which he argued that the “magical” transformation of gods into

kings, and of everyday features of the landscape into sites of power, is achieved by means of the gods' "choreography", that is, their movement through space. He was followed by Claus Peter Zoller (Heidelberg), who spoke about the *Daknātsaṅ* or "dance of the wizards", a festival of the god Mahasu. Zoller argued that the introduction of the god's cult has led to a "hierarchization" of local power structures, in which the god's *dewāl* musicians have been transformed from powerful shamans to professional entertainers of a divine king. Next, Daniela Berti (CNRS, Paris) discussed the famous royal festival of Kullu Dashera, illustrating how it continues to blend religion and politics despite the introduction of the democratic state and new forms of patronage. Next, Elisabeth Conzelmann (Berlin) spoke about the history of Mandi state in present-day Himachal Pradesh. One of the most interesting features of Mandi is that it was officially ruled by the god Madhorao, who took the form of a temple icon. In general however, Mandi seems to have fewer of the features associated with hill states, and more of those associated with north Indian kingdoms, than the other states discussed in the workshop. Commentary on the first four papers was provided by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (Göttingen).

Jean-Claude Galey (Paris) spoke about the fragmentation or scattering of the former kingdom of Garhwal, arguing that although kingship survives in the present era, it has been transformed, so that it is like a roof without a main beam. The related cults have become more autonomous and independent than previously, and in any case the cult of Mahasu was never directly linked to the Garhwali king. Next, Brigitte Luchesi (Bremen) discussed ritual processions in Kullu, an occasion when local gods take on their most "royal" forms. She concluded her paper with a fascinating example of how these gods continue to use their power to conduct forms of "urban renewal". William Sax (Heidelberg) next talked about the divine kings' warriors, the *khūnd*. These warriors formerly waged war on behalf of local divine kings, and engaged in protracted blood feuds. Sax focused on the rituals in which the *khūnd* renew their clan shrines. In the final paper of the workshop, Denis Vidal (EHESS, Paris) offered a microscopic description and analysis of how one blood feud among *khūnd* came to an end. Burkhard Schnepel (Halle) provided comments on the second set of four papers. Revised versions of the papers will be published in a volume of collected essays, hopefully in 2006.