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***Sacred Landscapes of the Himalayas*, edited by Niels Gutschow, Axel Michaels, Charles Ramble and Ernst Steinkellner. Wien (Vienna): Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003. ISBN 3-7001-3109-7. Numerous colour & b/w plates, plans and drawings, pp. 212.**

Reviewed by Caroline Humphrey, Cambridge

This is a rather unusual book. It combines two characters that are usually kept separate in publishing: the proceedings of an academic conference, on the one hand, and the beautiful book of stunning colour photographs on the other. If one associates “proceedings” with the often slightly grim collections stuffed with the good and not-so-good papers of the meeting, this book avoids that fate, for the papers are well-chosen and all of them provide insights onto a common theme. As for the “beautiful book”, which is normally provided with patchy captions, inadequate references and/or

mystical expostulations, this volume also bypasses that convention. It is well-referenced, and amply provided not only with photographs but also with plans, maps, diagrams and sketches that directly illustrate the text.

As an academic work, *Sacred Landscapes of the Himalayas* is part of a growing literature that focuses on Himalayan landscape, religion, architecture and art. It has a broad geographical scope, since the sites studied range from Western Tibet, through Himalayan India and Nepal, to Bhutan in the east, and this also means that it encompasses both Buddhist and “Hindu” cultures. The introduction by Axel Michaels sets out the theme of the book – the ways that land and nature are made sacred in Himalayan cultures. Michaels focuses on a theoretical discussion of how sacred space differs from “ordinary” or “scientific” concepts of space. He argues that in mundane thought the distinction between “up” and “down” is simply directional within a homogenous continuous space, whereas in religious thinking “up” belongs to a sacred potency of direction, which is symbolically organised, and felt rather than perceived. Almost all of the articles in the book resonate with this theme. They suggest that for Himalayan peoples significant space and place is primarily religiously conceived, and yet throughout the book scaled maps of villages, rivers and fields, height contours, and measured plans are provided to indicate how the religious spaces relate to what Michaels calls “ordinary” or “scientific” space. Some of the chapters, particularly “A landscape dissolved: households, fields and irrigation in Rinam, Northwest India” by Kim Gutschow and Niels Gutschow, attempt to remove the sacred/profane distinction, in this case by envisaging the village as a confluence of interrelated economic, historical and ritual processes. In this analysis, changing resource management in a situation of scarcity is not separate from, but linked to, religious ideas of sanctification, through negotiations in which traditions are reasserted rather than erased.

It is difficult in a short review to draw attention to all of the interesting themes that emerge from a book as rich as this. Michaels’ introduction mentions the importance of processual activities, such as the walking (especially pilgrimage and circumambulation), building and re-building, numbering, naming and colouring. The iterative effect of these activities draws the ethnographer’s attention to the use of spatial models, such as the three-layered world, the *maṇḍala* or the four cardinal points, which are found at different “levels”. Several of the papers mention a homology of such models with respect of the body, the house and the village, and Dujardin discusses analogous nested levels of spiritual protection. These levels (house, settlement, district, region, etc.) are protected ritually by what Dujardin calls “thresholds”, and he likewise depicts “vertical thresholds” in built constructions and “life-cycle thresholds” in social contexts. It is unclear, however, whether the indigenous term for threshold is used throughout these sequences of “levels” or whether the term has been

extended from one context to others by the anthropologist. One of the best and most thoroughly researched papers in the volume is the chapter by Niels Gutschow and Charles Ramble, "Up and down, inside and outside". This article is meticulous in providing the Tibetan terminology and makes particularly illuminating use of photographs and diagrams. It describes ethnographically a full panoply of spatial markers and protective devices, and succeeds in making clear how these occur in sets of diverse elements (e.g. the set comprising prayer wheel, chörten, poplar tree, gate, and Rigsum Gonpo, a small three-coloured shrine). Direction is particularly important. It is also ambiguous, since chörten face the outer world to protect the inner space, but at times appear turned around to "watch" the site they protect. Between neighbouring communities, the "inside" of one becomes the "outside" of another. Particularly interesting in this chapter is the section describing how a series of rituals in a number of differently valued sites can be organised in such a way as to create a "vertical" axis, as well as the horizontally linked protective networks.

The chapters by John Harrison, "King's castles and sacred squares" and William Sax "Divine kingdoms in the Central Himalayas" move to a more "political" analysis. Sax, in particular, makes a strong argument for a new understanding of "divine kingship", analysing this notion through the examination of sacred places. If we try to sort out the relations of king, gods and kingly gods, he argues, we must remember that territorial control is often predicated on relations to particular sacred places. In a wonderfully comprehensive survey of polities of different scale, from the small district to the "divine kingdom", Sax shows how in each case a specific notion of godly kingship is related to other social forces, such as kinship, economic pursuits and territorial rivalries. The combinations produce specific relations of domination and subordination, but traced through them we find recognisable idioms that enable the reader to make sense of the regional character of politics.

The strength of this book is its ethnographic documentation of the complex and fascinating ways that the peoples of the Himalayas have constructed sacred landscapes. As this review has indicated, there are many common themes between the chapters (though the reader mostly has to make the connections – they are not drawn out by the authors). Meanwhile, the differences between diverse cultures are not glossed over. In fact, the documenting of the distinctive ways particular types of ritual are carried out is very useful, as it provides a register, as it were, of possible variations. The chapter by Ada Gansach, "Expressions of diversity: a comparative study of descriptions of village space in ritual processions in three villages of North West Nepal", is especially helpful in this regard, as it shows clearly how three different types of ritual procession are related to the histories and economies of three valley cultures in one region.

Although the book is not entirely free of editorial and printing glitches, the overwhelming judgment must be that it is splendidly informative and deeply interesting. It will certainly inspire further research.

***Histoire et Devenir des Paysages en Himalaya. Représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh* edited by Joëlle Smadja. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2003. ISBN 2-271-06000-1, ISSN 1269-701X, 66 figures, 60 photographs, 13 tables, 25 boxes, 646 pp.**

Reviewed by Hermann Kreutzmann, Erlangen

Whenever in recent years the relationship between man and his environment in the mountains has been discussed certain hypotheses, concepts and theories have been put forward, in the Himalayan context in particular. In the final quarter of the 20th century several Western scholars predicted that demographic growth would lead to destruction of natural resources, and projected a vicious circle of processes that would result in an early end to Himalayan nature and societies before the new millennium began. So far the Himalayas have survived, and the doomsday scenario was questioned by scientists from various disciplines, ushering in a controversial debate on what came to be called the "Himalayan Dilemma" (so the title of a publication by Jack Ives and Bruno Messerli in 1989). It soon became clear that the problem had not solely to do with the mountains and their resources, with the population and its utilization strategies, but also with certain discrepancies between the orientations of academic research on the one hand and development practice on the other. Were the appropriate questions asked? Were the adequate methods applied? And how much scope was provided for contradicting interpretations of empirical evidence? From the viewpoint of a natural science-driven approach, improvements in all these realms were required. A further drawback lay in the fact that although the mountain population was identified as the chief actor in problem-solving, little attention was devoted to the need of consulting it, investigating its role or soliciting its participation. Thus, the chances of