

## CORRESPONDENCE

### *Comment on the conference report "Mythos Tibet".*

There follows an extract of Dr. Rudolf Kaschewsky's letter.

"I refer to the Conference report "Mythos Tibet" in issue 11 of your Bulletin which includes (p.83) a short notice on my lecture about the Pre-1900 European knowledge of Tibet.

Unfortunately, the writer has misquoted me considerably. By no means I said that the Christian missionaries Antonio de Andrade and Ippolito Desideri "nurtured negative prejudices about the uncivilised barbarians with their disgusting superstitious rituals"!

Quite the contrary is true. In my lecture, I described in detail the missionaries' admirable efforts in the study of Tibetan language and culture, especially Desideri's, who was the first European to explain in a scientifically satisfying manner the famous formula *Om maṇi padme hūm*, and I clearly pointed out that Desideri's learned treatises written in Tibetan are an example of Buddhist-Christian encounter on a level never reached again in later times.

I am prepared to send a copy of my lecture manuscript (in German) to everybody interested."

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### *Comment on de Sales' review of The Rulings of the Night*

by Gregory G. Maskarinec

It is not unlikely that most readers of my book, *The Rulings of the Night: An Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1995), would agree with at least one comment found in its review by Anne de Sales (*European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* vol. 11, 1996, p.67), when she observes that "it is regrettable that the texts are presented piecemeal...[t]he transcription of the songs [sic] is absent." This is a regret that I myself share. However, the corpus of texts that my book draws on dwarfs it many times over, consisting of not just the "thousands of lines" that de Sales imagines, but thousands of pages. To expect such inordinately lengthy material to appear as an appendix is

utterly unrealistic, clearly made impossible by normal publishing constraints. Fortunately, I would like to announce that a representative selection of my collections (approximately 10,000 lines of Nepali text, line by line English translations, and extensive notes, totaling about a thousand pages in length) will appear soon from Harvard University Press, in the "Harvard Oriental Series", edited by Michael Witzel. This collection includes three complete repertoires, representing around a third of the material that I have collected over the past fifteen years from nearly twenty shamans: still a small part of what supports *The Rulings...*, but less "piecemeal" than in it.

It is far more difficult to respond to de Sales' other remarks, particularly her puzzling claim that "[i]t should be obvious that for the author it is only by trying to become a shaman that one may understand what a shaman is." [68] This is not obvious to me, at least: nowhere do I suggest such an absurd position, nor, as the book makes clear, did I ever try to become a shaman. Such a position would undermine the entire ethnological enterprise, making paradoxical and irrelevant such studies as the one that I have written. What I do rather modestly claim is that one needs to know what a shaman says before expecting to understand what they are doing, a position that I develop throughout the book and will not reiterate here. It was also, admittedly, necessary to recite from memory texts to the shamans before they were willing to teach me their secretive "mantras," but they knew, as would any careful reader, that I was not trying to become a shaman, only to understand fully their cultural universe, and that this was the only method possible to obtain access to this material.

No author, of course, can anticipate what readings of any work prove to be possible (a remark intended to be jocularly ironic may apparently be read as pretentiously heroic, for example), so I will not challenge other points of de Sales' interpretation of my work, except to add, in keeping with the review's overall spirit, two small corrections to her final comment. First, the Birendra Prajyālaṅkāra was also awarded to Giuseppe Tucci as well as to Toni Hagen, Christof von Fürer-Haimendorf, and myself. Second, I was not awarded it for this particular book (which only coincidentally appeared at the same time), but for my collections, transcriptions, annotations, and translations of shaman texts.