

BOOK REVIEWS

A. PROKSCH ed., 1995, *Images of a Century: The Changing Townscapes of the Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu: GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) GmbH and UDLE (Urban Development Through Local Efforts Project). 128pp, 98 plates, 8 maps, glossary.*

REVIEW BY DAVID N. GELLNER

This book is the published version of a photographic exhibition entitled 'Images of a City: The Old Townscape of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, 1919-1992', held in Kathmandu in 1992. There are brief introductory essays to each section, on religious places in the Valley (Franz-Karl Ehrhard), on the Dharahara ('Bhimsen's Folly') and its surroundings (Prayag Raj Sharma), on the Tundhikhel and its perimeter (Mahesh Chandra Regmi), on the 'heart' of Kathmandu (i.e. Hanuman Dhoka, Indra Chowk, New Road, Asan) (Annick Hollé), on the Bagmati (Huta Ram Baidya), on Patan (Madhan Lal Karmacharya), on Bhaktapur Durbar Square (Niels Gutschow), and on Rana palaces (Eric Theophile). There is, in addition, a fluent introductory essay by Kanak Mani Dixit which summarizes the historical social changes and their accelerating ecological impact in the Valley.

It is the photographs themselves which form the heart of the book. There are many photographs which show the devastation of the earthquake of 1934 and there are many others which document what was there before. Particularly striking are a series of before and after pictures on facing pages. For example, on pp. 32-3 we see the view to the north from Bhimsen's tower in the late 1920s. Apart from a few neo-classical palaces in the distance the dense townscape of Kathmandu is a harmonious blend of tiled roofs and brick walls with only the occasional white-plastered front. In the foreground is the large courtyard of Te Bahal with its temple of Sankata (roofed in corrugated iron) and other religious structures. The same view in the 1990s is radically altered. To one side looms the RNAC building; in every direction are concrete houses of different sizes pushing skywards at different rates and in different styles. The courtyard of Te Bahal is still there. The temple of Sankata has even been improved with beaten copper roofing. But of the houses in the courtyard only two remain in the same proportions and style as before. On pp. 36-7 one sees the same contrast, but looking south. The difference between the 1920s and the 1990s is simply stated: where before there were fields, with one or two homesteads, almost as far as the eye could see, now there is unplanned suburban sprawl. For the social historian there is much to treasure. A parade on the Tundhikhel from 1883 has captured a straggle of onlookers as well as a washerman's clothes spread out in the foreground. There is a pair of photo-

graphs from 1915 showing soldiers and porters assembling on the Tundhikhel to be sent to India in support of the Allied war effort; the clothes and the bare feet of the porters are vivid testimony to their position in the military hierarchy. In a similar vein, the photograph of a Rana family crossing the Bagmati on elephants en route to a wedding in Patan. In the crowd packing the central crossroads of Asan Tol for the Janbahadyo (Seto Matsyendra) chariot festival there appears to be a solitary Sikh in the bottom right hand corner. A picture from before the 1960s of Khasti/Baudha stupa the author(s) of the captions unfortunately continue to add the Hindu '-nath' to the Buddhist shrines of Swayambhu and Baudha- shows a Tamang ploughing in the foreground (see the too-little-known article by Peter Webster, 'To Plough or not to Plough? A Newar Dilemma: Taboo and Technology in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal' *Pacific Viewpoint* 22:99-135, 1981). The photographs of a feast for the poor on the Tundhikhel, probably in 1910 after Chandra Shamsher's return from London, and of the crowd assembled on the Tundhikhel in 1924 to hear the announcement of the end of slavery are equally remarkable.

On many occasions it would have been good if more information had been supplied to the reader. Who took the photograph of the Akash Bhairab temple in the 1930s and what were all the people waiting for? Why is the Annapurna temple in Asan enveloped in a 'ceremonial net of puffed rice'? Is the 'annual festival' of Yatkha Bahal the displaying of gods during Gunla? Who is the (presumably) Rana gentleman in three-piece suit and trilby posing in front of the Bungadyo/Matsyendra chariot in the 1940s? What was the occasion for local people to assemble on top of the Lagankhel stupa in Lalitpur/Patan? What are the 'procession' and 'festive occasion' in Hanuman Dhoka shown on pp.63-4 if not Indra Jatra? In one case there is a demonstrable error: the statue of Yognarendra Malla in front of the Lalitpur palace is incorrectly, though in line with popular belief, described as being Siddhi Narasingh Malla, Yognarendra's grandfather.

Compared to Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur receive relatively little attention. Is this just because fewer photographs of them survive? It would be good to be told.

Such cavils aside, this is a wonderful collection of photographs and all involved are to be congratulated on publishing it.