

S. von der HEIDE ed., *Changing Faces of Nepal. The Glory of Asia's Past, Kathmandu*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar (for the UNESCO Division of Cultural Heritage and Himal Asia), 1997.

#### REVIEW BY GÉRARD TOFFIN

This book is the catalogue of an exhibition held at UNESCO (Paris), 1997-1998, of photos concerning old Kathmandu Valley. Some sixty photographs, mostly 16 x 20 cm, are reproduced. They were taken by the Citrakars of Bhimsen Sthan (Kathmandu) from the beginning of the twentieth century onward. The oldest ones date from 1909, the most recent (the royal wedding procession of the then Crown Prince Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev) from 1970. As explained in the valuable introduction written by Susanne von der Heide, the members of this family of the southern part of the capital belong to the Newar caste of painters and may be considered as the pioneers of early photography in Nepal. They were employed from early times by the Rana rulers and other powerful families. One of them, Dirga Man (1877-1951), even had the chance to travel to Europe in 1908 with Chandra Shamsheer and to buy some English and German cameras. Such an association with rulers was not exceptional. Another Citrakar of Kathmandu, Bhaju Man, formed part of the entourage during Jang Bahadur's trip to England and France in 1850. He was the first Newar artist to travel to the West. These Citrakar artists were often painters as well. Most of them set up private studios in the capital.

Broadly speaking, the photos can be divided into four categories. 1) Monuments: the pictures of important Rana palaces (Lal Durbar, Seta Durbar, Singha Durbar), from inside and outside, are already well known to specialists and often displayed in Kathmandu for tourists and travellers. Views of religious monuments: Taleju temple of Kathmandu (1911), Bhaktapur (1915) and Lalitpur (1920) Durbar square, Bhimsen temple in Kathmandu (1928), Nasal Chowk inside of Hanuman Dhoka Palace (1916), Bodnath stupa (1913), etc., are also numerous. A large number of them were taken immediately before the devastating earthquake of 1934. They are therefore of great interest. 2) Portraits of Ranas, Shahs, and other officials. These photos, often already published in various books, recall the pictures of Rana families taken by the British photographers residing in India such as Bourne and Sheperd of Calcutta. There are most fascinating. One never tires of looking at these self-assured faces, martial moustaches, contemptuous attitudes and extravagant clothes. 3) Official and State ceremonies: These photographs are of exceptional interest, for example the photo on page 82 shows the visit of King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev to Bhimsen temple in Kathmandu with representatives of the Malla family in 1962, and page 84 shows the then Crown Prince Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev at his *bratabandha* ceremony in April 1963. Most of

them are to my knowledge published here for the first time. 4) Citrakars of Kathmandu and Newar life: the collection is smaller but of great value, i.e., pp. 80-81, pictures of the Citrakar family of Bhimsen Sthan with festive dress and gorgeous ornaments. Page 43, the photography of the *samyak* in Yaktha Bahal, Kathmandu, taken around 1920, is remarkable. I have never seen it before. Unfortunately, the Buddha statues are not visible. Besides their artistic quality and charm, these pictures are precious records of living history. They are unique anthropological documents for the study of Nepalese traditional or neo-classical architecture, Rana rule and the past life of the Kathmandu Valley. It is hoped that other private archives of glass plates will be disclosed in the future and more official photographs from Narayanhiti or Hanuman Dhoka royal palaces will be published.