

SHORT REVIEW

UTTARPRACIN KALIN MUDRA [Coins of the late ancient period] by Harirāma Jośi. iii+iv+237 pages; 16 plates. In Nepali. Published by Sajha Prakashan, Kathmandu, B.S. 2033 (1976), Price Rs. 12/15.

Of all the coins of Nepal, those of the Licchavi period are at once the simplest and the most striking in design. The naturalistic figures, particularly of animals, the vase-and-flower motifs, and the vajras, all struck in bold relief on copper, are worthy representatives of the artistic wealth of their time, (namely, according to the author) the fifth through seventh centuries and perhaps later.

The present work gives a thorough survey of these coins. 61 types or varieties are described in detail, with sizes and weights, and 45 are illustrated by photographs of specimens from a large assortment of public and private collections. Many, for example the coin of Jishnu Gupta with right-facing winged horse, have never before been described or illustrated. The author, a veteran scholar, discusses in detail historical, iconographic, and epigraphical questions raised by this material. A solid book, well-produced in a simple and inexpensive format.

B. M.

FLORA OF LANGTANG AND CROSS SECTION VEGETATION SURVEY CENTRAL ZONE,

Bulletin of the Department of Medicinal Plants Nepal, No. 6. xxvii+ 269 pages, with maps and figures. No illustrations.

Published by HMG Ministry of Forests, Department of Medicinal Plants. Thapathali Kathmandu, 1976. Price: NC Rs 50, or US \$ 8.

The present reviewer is not a botanist and this review is made from the point of view of the many non-specialists who for different reasons need to know something about the plants of Nepal. In the past ten years the Department of Medicinal Plants produced a number of books which come very handy to the layman. The *Flora of Langtang*, with its 300 pages in a larger format than the preceding volumes, is the most extensive yet published by the Department.

The book starts with a short presentation of the forest types encountered in Central Nepal from Langtang to the Terai. A sketch map locates the different types of forests. More technical data are compiled in table form in the next 16 pages.

The flora proper covers the area extending from the Langtang Himal to the Likhu Khola between the Trisuli and the Indrawati rivers. This area is much larger than that covered by either of the two preceding floras of the Department: *Flora of*

Pulchoki and Godawari, 1969, and *Flora of Nagarjun*, 1973. More important, the range of altitude covered in the present flora is about 4000m from the Trisuli area to the top of the Langtang Himal. This makes for a great variety of plants and makes the *Flora* more useful than the other two for the general public, since many plants encountered in other parts of Nepal can be looked up in the *Flora of Langtang*.

Each entry includes the scientific name of the plant, with references to the literature, synonyms, the place and date of collection with the state of the specimen (flowering, fruiting), the name of the collector and the collection number of the specimen. All plants are kept in the Herbarium of Nepal, at Godawari. This makes the book a real working tool for people doing research in Nepal. The book ends with two indexes, one of Latin names and one of local names, and a short bibliography.

Descriptions of the plants are limited mainly to the features which will distinguish neighbouring species, and there are no keys of any kind. These lacks can be partly made up by reference to the Department's two volumes *Keys to the Dicot Genera in Nepal*, which include family and generic descriptions. But the amateur botanist especially will miss a key to the local flora. As much as a key, he will miss drawings, which speak so much more to the imagination than any description. Drawings and keys, it is hoped, will be included in the complete Flora of Nepal which is the goal towards which the local floras are progressively contributing. An alternative solution would be to publish selected drawings in a separate booklet.

Two features which may not be so important for the botanist I found extremely commendable from my point of view. One is the inclusion of many scientific synonyms (no claim to exhaustivity is made). In a place like Nepal, where one has to refer constantly to older works which followed different taxonomic systems, and which did not concern themselves with Nepal itself but rather with neighbouring areas in India, this is extremely useful in eliminating possible confusion of terms.

The other specially valuable feature is the inclusion of over 300 local names, mostly Nepali, and occasionally Tamang and Sherpa, both in devanagari orthography and in a roman transcription. This information is not only valuable to linguists or to other scholars concerned with such things as ethnobotany or folk nomenclature, but it can also give the amateur botanist a clue for the identification of plants which the local people recognize and can name for him in Nepali. On this point a warning is necessary. Local names in Nepali vary significantly from place to place. Thus the rubric "local name" should be taken to give the name of the plant near the place of collection and not its Nepali name in general. It is hoped in this respect that the Department of Medicinal Plants when it comes to publish the complete flora of Nepal will include for each plant the different Nepali names collected with the indication of where each name was collected. A complete study of Nepali plant names and their variations should sometime be undertaken, but it is quite out of the scope of a flora.

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The roman transcription of local names is not completely systematic; this is a minor defect which could easily be corrected in forthcoming publications. Each devanagari letter should be consistently transcribed by the same roman letter; in particular ष and उ should always be transcribed respectively as *ph* and *u*, as (to take an example from the *Flora* in *phusre* (*Neolitsea umbrosa*) not as *f* as in *fiti fiye* (*Sarcococca coriacea*) or *oo* as in *soonpate* (*Rhododendron anthopogon*). These should be transcribed *phiti phiya* and *sunpate*. This is especially important because the index of local names is in roman transcription. A complete transcription would require the use of diacritical marks (distinguishing long *ā* from short *a*, retroflex *ṭ* from dental *t* etc.) but these are not really necessary since readers who care for an accurate transcription can recover it from the devanagari spelling. As it is the roman transcription is very useful and the authors should be commended for including it along with the no less necessary devanagari.

This book, according to its authors, is part of a work in progress and is meant to be superceded by the *Flora of Nepal*. Such a vast project will take time to complete and in the meantime it is a very useful endeavour to publish materials as they become ready both as a way of improving the final product through the reactions of the readership, and because these materials are impatiently awaited by a large number of people. The *Flora of Langtang* is well worth having.

M. Mazaudon

PARYĀYAVĀCI ŚABDA-KOŚ (Dictionary of Synonyms)

xiv+187 pages; maps. In Nepali

Published by the Royal Nepal Academy, Kathmandu, 2030

B. S. (1973-4). Price Rs. 33/47.

In spite of its title this folio-sized volume is actually a comparative world-list of 2,914 Nepali nouns, pronouns, and adjectives (but no verbs). All of the languages are transcribed in Devanagari. Each page has 14 columns the first containing the Nepali key word and a brief Nepali definition and the rest containing equivalents in the 13 other languages covered. These are Chepang, Gurung, Lepcha, Limbu, Magar, Newari, (Bantawa) Rai, Sunwar, and Tamang (all Tibeto-Burman), and Bhojpuri, Danuwar, Maithili, and Tharu (Indro-Aryan). There are indexes of all 14 languages at the end.

The 13 world-lists were compiled by 23 collaborators, speakers of the various languages. Unfortunately their native villages (or the areas where they collected their data) are not given. Tharu, for example, is spoken across 500 miles of Nepal tarai and inner tarai. As admitted in the introduction, the transcriptions, at least of Tibeto-Burman languages (except Newari, which has a satisfactory orthography), leave much

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to be desired phonologically. One of the contributors, the late Iman Singh Chemjong had already devised and used a more satisfactory Devangari transcription for Limbu in his dictionary published by the Academy 15 years previously, but the editors of the present work appear to have rejected the use diacritical of signs.

One of the purposes of the dictionary is listed as being to facilitate borrowing of words among the languages of Nepal. This is thought to justify the puzzling omission of verbs, "since every language has its own peculiarities in the verb, and since when languages borrow from each other, verbs, in general, do not come into play..."

The introduction, by Staya Mohan Joshi, gives a concise general survey of the languages of Nepal, including the number of speakers claiming each one as their mother tongue according to the 1961 census. The rough locations of 30 languages of Nepal are shown on maps.

Despite its limitations, the present work contains much new data: in particular it contains the only extensive published word list of Bantawa Rai. The format, with the indexes, will make it easy for comparative linguists to consult.

This work clearly represents a substantial investment of scholarly effort. One would welcome it more enthusiastically as the first publication in an ongoing project of research. However, it has apparently been produced as an end in itself, with an eye neither to the past nor to the future. One hopes that the Academy, or the various contributors, have not lost interest in these little-known languages

—B. M.

Mireille Helffer, *Les Chants dans l'épopée tibétaine de se-sar d'après le livre la de la Course de Cheval*, Version chantée a de Blo-bzan bstan-'jin; Centre de Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie de la IVe Section de l'Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, Hautes Etudes Orientales, II,9; Librairie Droz, Genève-Paris, 1977; 573 pages. Price not stated.

This book is one of the most important contributions to the study of the transmission of the Tibetan epic of Gesar since the publication of Professor R. A. Stein's great thesis *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet* in Paris at the Presses Universitaires de France in 1959. Stein, in his encyclopaedic work, had paid relatively little attention to the oral, musical interpretations of the epic. Madame Helffer's careful, methodical work therefore fills a gap in our understanding of the modes whereby this great epic has been diffused, and has maintained its contemporary cultural relevance in the lands influenced by Tibetan civilisation, throughout many centuries. Paradoxically, the study was undertaken in Paris and in Switzerland. Madame Helffer did well to profit from the temporary presence in Paris of a Tibetan refugee, Blo-bzang bstan-'dzin, endowed with a "solid" voice and a good

knowledge of Gesar, and who sang to her all the songs included in a manuscript of "The Horse Race." The six hours which she recorded from the singer in 1963 constitute the material which is analysed in detail in her work.

After an inventory of the previous recordings on tape which were available, and brief description of the manuscript which inspired Blo-bzang bstan-'dzin's songs, the first part of Madame Helffer's work (p 9-377) comprises the edition in romanization of the Tibetan text and a complete annotated French translation. The text is divided into seven chapters each of which is emblematic of one of the Seven Jewels of a Universal Monarch; and the division into verses corresponds to what was actually sung and not the literary text. Syllables indicated in italics were sung by the singer and did not figure in the manuscript. The second part of the volume (p. 381-560) is divided into four chapters. The first concerns stylistics: the vocabulary employed, the figures of style, the techniques of narration, and the proper names are passed in review. The second is devoted to a study of the versification: the seven-syllable verse-model, the clichés and the formulae, the syntactical organisation and the caesura, the role of the intercalated syllables, and the organisation of the strophes are meticulously studied. The next chapter deals with the tunes (in French *timbres* or *airs-types*) and their relationship with the various personages—Ma-ne-ne- 'Gog-mo Khro-thung, Rgya-thsa, 'Brug-mo, Jo-ru, etc.—and ends with a analysis of the musical language and its rhythmic aspects. This chapter contains numerous musical notations which exemplify the analysis. The last chapter is concerned with the cultural elements vehicled by this sub-version of the epic. The geographical setting, the figurants, the pantheon, the models for behaviour proposed by the epic, the rituals and the beliefs, not only the general notions current in the Tibetan Mahayanist milieu but also precise ideas concerning the human body and the vocation of the bodhisattva, are carefully enumerated. The volume ends with a brief conclusion a passage from which might be quoted: "...even if the literary tradition attributes to each important personage or to each group of personages a tune (*air-type*), the singers, according to their geographical origin, their degree of culture, or more simply according to their personal taste, have, individually, recourse to a limited number of tunes which constitute the basis of their repertory and which they utilise with a certain liberty. Thus it is that different singers will employ the same tune to characterise different personages and that a singer will, on occasion utilise the same tune for personages which are not linked together in any way. So far as can be determined in the present state of research, these tunes of the epic do not seem to be employed in other contexts, whether it be in religious songs (the meterical structure of which is often identical with those of the epic verse) or popular songs such as the *gzhas* (where the verse-model comprises six syllables)" (p. 562)

There is a good bibliography and a map; and there is a line drawing of one of the Seven Jewels at the start of each chapter of the text. The juxtalinear translation is

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sound and much more useful, in the context, than would have been misplaced attempts at elegance. Almost inevitably there seem to me to be a few *contresens*; and there are a few misprints; but these will be easily discerned by specialists and will not trouble the general reader. Altogether this is an original and rewarding piece of research. Madame Helffer has written a most conscientious and interesting work which will mark a date in the musicological study of Tibetan civilisation. While awaiting the constitution of an international team which would agree together to study Gesar, its financing by some Maecenas, and its abstraction from university administration throughout a period of several years, we should be grateful for what has been given to us here, and express the hope that Madame Helffer will have the energy and the courage to pursue her research and teach us more about this fascinating subject

A. W.M.

