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The Religions of Tibet, by Guiseppe Tucci. Translated from the German and Italian by Geoffrey Samuel. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980. xv + 340 p.

As the dust-jacket advises us, this is "the first comprehensive account of Tibetan Buddhism to be published in English since Waddell's *Buddhism of Tibet* appeared in 1894." Like Waddell, Prof. Tucci applies to Tibetan Buddhism the evocative but baseless name "Lamaism"; in almost every other sense, however, Prof. Tucci's work is light years away from its predecessor. In the decades since Waddell, Tibetan studies have been enriched by extensive archeological, anthropological and textual studies (some of the most notable by Prof. Tucci himself) and by a broadening of inter-religious sympathies, which in turn have created the materials and intellectual climate for the writing of an informed and unbiased account, as this surely is.

It is somewhat misleading to describe this as an "account of Tibetan Buddhism," however, for—true to its title—it exposes more clearly than any book before it the *various* religious strata—many of them pre-dating the introduction of Buddhism—that coexist in the Tibetan mind. Tibetan religion is a complex admixture of Buddhist, folk and *Bon* beliefs, and though the proportions of these vary from one social or religious sector to the other, none ever is entirely absent, and each contributes to a "total psychic disposition" that Prof. Tucci seems to regard as quintessentially Tibetan. The world for the Tibetan is "not as it is presented to him, and also to us, by ordinary experience, it is not material and physical reality, but a complex of living forces and potencies, conscious expressions of will, psychic essences, which are in a situation of constant movement and violent conflict between each other. . . . The Tibetan, overwhelmed by the powers who everywhere lie in wait for him, threaten him and humiliate him, has found in Lamaism an effective system of defence, always ready to function. The magical force (*mthu*) radiating from the faultlessly accomplished ritual and the properly recited formula . . . puts at his disposal a power thanks to which he hopes to emerge victoriously from the fight; it assures him of his superiority over the *numina*, so that these powers, rendered defenceless and harmless in the presence of the incomparable superiority of the holy word of the Buddha, must withdraw." (212)

The Religions of Tibet is divided into seven chapters: The first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet; The second diffusion of Buddhism; General characteristics of Lamaism; The doctrines of the most important schools; Monkhood, monastery life, religious calendar and festivals; The folk religion; and the *Bon* religion.

The first two chapters, on the two diffusions of Buddhism in

Tibet, offer a general account of the events and forces that shaped the Tibetan development of Buddhism: the different political factions within Tibet, the differing Chinese and Indian approaches to Buddhism, the differences even among Indian Buddhists, etc. As throughout much of the book, Prof. Tucci here is comprehensive without being exhaustive; detailed discussions of the various topics raised will be found in other literature. The historical material, for instance, is treated in much greater depth in Prof. Tucci's own *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* and *Minor Buddhist Texts, II*.

The third chapter, on the general characteristics of "Lamaism," discusses the Buddhist religious and philosophical presuppositions shared by all the major Tibetan schools, enumerates the schools and their most important lineages and monasteries, analyzes the course of political-religious conflict among the schools, and notes the centrality to Tibetan tradition of the religious teacher (*bla ma*).

In the fourth chapter, on the doctrines of the most important schools, Prof. Tucci briefly sketches the Pāramitāyāna that is the common property of the schools, then devotes almost sixty pages to a discussion of Mantrayāna. He covers Mantrayāna's differences from Pāramitāyāna; the initiatory process; the various tantric "bodies"; the relationship between *sems* and light; Jo nang pa substantialism; the nature and divisions of *Bla na med rgyud* (*anuttara tantra*); and particular tantric practices of the bKa' brgyud, rNying ma and geod traditions. Many a study of tantra has foundered attempting to discuss these arcane matters intelligibly, and it is to Prof. Tucci's credit that from his analysis at least the outlines of the various systems and practices emerge with relative clarity. At the same time, some minor objections may be raised.

Firstly, although Prof. Tucci pays lip-service to the importance of Pāramitāyāna as the basis for tantric practice, he says little about it, virtually ignoring the *lam rim* literature, which is found in all the major schools, and which as a systematization of meditation practice represents one of Tibet's original contributions to the Buddhist tradition. He also tends to regard the Pāramitāyāna as a purely intellectual process, which Mantrayāna replaces with "a lived experience of salvation" (51). While it is true that Pāramitāyāna is the "path to the goal," whereas Mantrayāna is the "goal as path," it is misleading to imply that Pāramitāyāna is largely scholastic; indeed, the importance of the *lam rim* literature is itself proof that Tibetans have been concerned that the teachings of the sutras not only be learned (*thos*) and analyzed (*bsam*), but internalized meditatively (*sgom*).

Secondly, there is a tendency, particularly in descriptions of meditative experience, to lapse into obscurantism. Eastern and Western gnosticism, for instance, are said to "transcend the spatio-temporal

experience through a flight into absolute space, and absolute time, an *ex-cessus mentis* into the indefinable 'Void' which contains all" (51). Similarly, the tantric taste of Budha-fruit while one is still on the path is said to occur "on this side of that outermost limit, beyond which exists the inexpressible luminous essence, the Alpha and Omega of all things" (55). The term "Being" is used in a number of places; in none of them is a Tibetan equivalent supplied or any justification offered for the use of this particularly Western word in a Buddhist context. Expressions like those cited tend to undercut the care Tibetans themselves traditionally have taken in making philosophical and meditative distinctions, and do nothing to illuminate the tantric experience.

Thirdly, although the outlines of the various schools' tantric doctrines and practices is clear, the reader still emerges feeling dizzily as if he has been assaulted by terms. This is not Prof. Tucci's fault so much as it is due to the fact that precisely because tantra is "a lived experience," its terminology conveys as much about it as a recipe does about the taste of a meal—and in the case of tantra, even the ingredients are largely strange to the uninitiated.

The fifth chapter, on monkhood, monastic life, religious calendar and festivals discusses in detail monastic life and organization among the rNying ma pas and dGe lugs pas. It also treats of the calendar of festivals, the hermetic life, and the administration of monastic property. The chapter contains a wealth of information, and is accompanied—as is the next chapter—by Namkhi Norbu's charming illustrative line-drawings.

The sixth chapter, on folk religion, is perhaps the best in the book, for here Prof. Tucci is able to delineate the point at which the various religious strands all converge: popular Buddhism. The layman, Prof. Tucci reminds us, "is still strongly under the influence of the pre-Buddhist and folk heritage. He is familiar from his childhood with the epic deeds and marvelous happenings with which the literature and traditions deriving from this heritage are filled. The particular kind of religious feeling which gives life to them regulates all the relationships between the Tibetan people and the immense, uncertain world of the demonic and the divine. The *numina* who reside there assist him in his difficulties, they stand by his side in his incessant struggle to defend himself against obstacles and dangers, open and secret adversaries, who everywhere threaten his existence, his well-being, his property" (165). Prof. Tucci goes on to discuss the various rituals through which Tibetans seek to control the forces they perceive all around them, paying particular attention to exorcism rites, protection of the house and property, incense offerings, death rites, divination and the popular conception of a multiple soul.

Of an otherwise fascinating chapter, only two small criticisms can be made. Firstly, while it may be true that Tibetans are concerned to placate and/or control the powers that be, they do not seem as anxiety-ridden as Prof. Tucci tends to imply they are. Their concern with cosmic forces has, in my experience, almost invariably been mitigated by a healthy sense of humor. Secondly, Prof. Tucci's assertion (210) that Tibetan religiosity has a "striking lack of social compassion" seems an unwarranted generalization. It is not entirely clear what "social compassion" is supposed to entail, but surely its absence cannot be inferred simply from the fact that some Tibetans profess *bodhicitta* out of self-interest and from the fact that most rituals are dedicated to the welfare of *particular* individuals or groups.

The seventh, and last, chapter deals with *Bon*. As always when he is dealing with historical and archeological material, Prof. Tucci is lucid and his discussion well-documented.

Geoffrey Samuel's translation is, by and large, a readable one. The book is supplemented by a chronology of events in Tibetan history and a superb glossary-index. The bibliography, divided according to Tibetan and Western sources, is extensive, though the Tibetan section might have benefitted from the inclusion, where possible, of publication information about the texts, while the Western section could have been improved by the addition of relevant works published since the book originally appeared, in 1970.

If *The Religions of Tibet* is stronger when it discusses monastic and popular religion than when it deals with meditation, that is merely a reflection of the intractability of the latter and Prof. Tucci's unmatched expertise in the former—his greatest contributions, after all, have been as an historian and archeologist; and if in 250 pages it seems only to outline Tibetan religion, that merely shows the richness of the material to be explored—much of which was first mined by Prof. Tucci himself. It is certain to become, as the dust-jacket again assures us, "the standard reference work on the subject," and one can only wish Prof. Tucci added years of life in which he may contribute the further chapters he promises in the Preface.

Roger Jackson