

NOTICES OF BOOKS

W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 1957, 249 pp.

This important book has been reprinted with the addition of a "Psychological Commentary" by Dr. C. G. Jung and an "Introductory Foreword" by Anagarika Govinda. The "Psychological Commentary" is excellent and I would urge any new reader to read this commentary first and then turn direct to the main body of the work, namely Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's translation of the *Bar-do'i thos-grol*. He may be confident of reading a good English rendering of the *Bar-do'i thos-grol*. As a minor criticism one may note that Sanskrit names have not always been given correctly and that mistakes of the Tibetan scribe have been quite needlessly reproduced: e.g., Kerima for Gaurimā, Tseurima for Caurimā, Petali for Vetāli (p. 142).

Too much of a mystery is made of this text both by the Editor and by Anagarika Govinda. "It is a book which is sealed by the seven seals of silence", we are told, and now "the time has come to break the seals of silence" (p. liv). This is misleading, for the mandalas of the "Tranquil and Fierce" divinities, who manifest themselves in the *bar-do* (intermediate state), are well known to every Tibetan, while the central doctrine of rebirth is fundamental to Buddhism in all its forms. The text is difficult for a non-Tibetan only in so far as he is unfamiliar with the numerous divinities. For the believing Tibetan these buddhas and accompanying gods are not symbols with "esoteric" significance, but manifestations of ultimate reality, which are perceived as real and yet recognized as ultimately unreal. Dr. Jung draws attention to this important fact: "The background of this book is not the niggardly European 'either-or', but a magnificently affirmative 'both-and'." As for the doctrine of rebirth, perhaps Dr. Evans-Wentz is more unwise for affirming it so resolutely, than was the "unscientific Church-Council" for anathemizing it (p. x). Elsewhere he recognizes the problem as highly controversial (p. 41) and gives an "esoteric" interpretation which looks uncommonly like a variation on a theme by Charles Darwin. He ignores the oft-repeated Buddhist warning of the difficulty of obtaining human life, an event which is as rare as that of a turtle, which dwells at the bottom of the ocean and only comes to the surface once in a hundred years, putting its neck through a yoke, which has been thrown on the water and is carried this way and that by the waves. Surely the only genuine "esoteric" interpretation is provided by the Buddhist doctrine of "no-self", which insists that there is no self, soul or person to be reborn. Are not the streams of elements, which appear to be persons and things, also fundamentally unreal? I have referred elsewhere to the practical value of Tibetan "after-death" ceremonies (*Buddhist Himālaya*, pp. 262-4), contrasting the religious significance of the rite with the popular ideas of many layfolk. Anagarika Govinda does well to draw attention to the fact that this ritual should serve as a guide for the living as well as the dead (p. lxi). Why does he suggest that it is no longer used in this way? The invocation of the "Tranquil and Fierce" divinities (*zhi-khro*) is one of the most popular of Tibetan ceremonies. He seems quite unnecessarily concerned to prove that the *Bar-do'i thos-grol* is not a fake, that it is free from *bon* ideas, and to assure us that *bon* is none the less a most respectable religion (pp. liv-lvi). In praising the present translator he should surely have refrained from an unseemly reference to other Tibetan scholars, who with rare exception have been devoted to their subject (p. lxiii). Dr. Evans-Wentz should have

rewritten the section on "Tantricism" (pp. 213-20). Perhaps it was true in 1927 to say that "to define what is and what is not a *tantra* is not easy". This is certainly not true in 1957. Moreover, his summary of Sir John Woodroffe's researches is scarcely relevant to the *Bar-do'i thos-grol*, which is based on Buddhist tantric theories, not Hindu ones. Dr. Evans-Wentz writes as one of authority; yet by persistently referring to the feminine partners of Buddhist divinities as *shakti*, he is perpetuating an error, now so widespread, that it will only be removed with great difficulty. The term *shakti* "energy" is not used in Buddhist tantras and is quite inappropriate, for here the feminine partner is *prajñā* "wisdom", the Mother who is the quiescent source of all buddhas. See S. B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Calcutta, 1950, pp. 100 ff.

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Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam, being the Second Edition of the Sociology of Islam*. (Cambridge), 1957, 8vo, VIII, 536 pp.

The book under review is the second edition of an earlier work by Professor Levy, *The Sociology of Islam*, which was published in two volumes in 1931 and 1933 respectively. In this edition a number of changes have been made. The materials have undergone revision in the light of altered conditions and more recent work on the subject, and have been re-arranged and collected into a single volume.

In this work Professor Levy studies in some detail the structure of Muslim society among the various peoples of diverse ethnic origin and the common features that bind together Islamic communities in every part of the world. Under ten headings which embrace subjects like the grades of society in Islam, the status of women and children, morality, custom and usage, jurisprudence, science, and military organization, the author examines the basic principles of Islam and assesses the success or the failure of Muslims of different periods and countries to adapt their way of life to these principles.

In the Introduction Professor Levy writes: "Whether or not the Prophet from the beginning, or at all, intended his message to apply beyond the confines of his own land of Arabia is a question which cannot be definitely settled. The evidence of his own utterances is vague and contradictory and eminent authorities may be found in support of either view."

Although Islam is a universal religion which takes no account of race, colour, or nationality, and enjoins feelings of brotherhood on all men, it is yet in many of its aspects exclusive. To be considered a devout and practising Muslim postulates a knowledge of Arabic, the sacred tongue of Quran and prayer, as well as obeying a multitude of laws and commands which govern the minutest of daily existence. This rigidity of the Islamic code has perhaps militated against its propagation among peoples whose traditions and codes are themselves sufficiently elastic to permit of adaptation to varying needs. Against this is the sense of dignity it confers upon its adherents and its lack of complex ritual. Islam in its day was the driving force behind a civilization that opened the doors to the European Renaissance. One speculates as to its future role.

These and other questions present themselves to the reader as he peruses the pages of *The Social Structure of Islam*. On the subject of Islam among the peoples of the Far East, especially Central Asia and China, it is to be regretted that Professor Levy has not taken more advantage of modern research which has gone far beyond Vambéry d'Ollone, W. Barthoid and Martin Hartmann. The book contains four instructive maps about the extent of Islam c. A.D. 750, 1050, 1650, and 1955, and a bibliography. The introduction, which runs to over fifty pages, will be of great use to the informed layman.

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