

author draws a distinction between the sympathetic and tolerant account of Sima Qian, and the much more critical and derogatory description of the Xiongnu by Ban Gu in the *Han shu*, pp. 270-271). Sima Qian made Inner Asia a part of the history of China and it became a part of the all-inclusive vision of the universe.

At one point (p. 271) the author describes Sima Qian as a “barbarophile”. According to my opinion, the author of the monograph under review can be regarded – in the positive sense – as a modern “barbarophile”: Nicola Di Cosmo has successfully managed to re-evaluate the Nomadic-Chinese relations in the early period and has rehabilitated the role of Inner Asian nomads in Chinese history. His monograph has raised some important questions which will hopefully be answered sooner or later either by him or other scholars. His publication represents a formidable piece of scholarship and he has indeed succeeded “to establish a basis for the study of the early relations between China and Inner Asia” (p. 313). Anybody dealing with the various aspects – economic, political, military, institutional, social, religious, etc. – of the complex and manifold relationship between the Northerners and Chinese in the course of the history is well advised to consult the publication under review.

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MUSASHI TACHIKAWA, SHRIKANT BAHULKAR, MADHAVI KOLHATKAR: *Indian Fire Ritual*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited 2001. 212 pp.

There are many detailed descriptions of vedic rituals, especially in younger Vedic texts, namely in Sūtras. Although these texts introduce precise rules regarding the performance of rituals and the role of priests, altars, fire places, utensils, etc. the procedure of rituals has undergone various modifications in later times due to various conditions, whether geographical, social, or economic. This was one of reasons why the authors of the publication under review decided to record as carefully as possible an actual performance of a chosen ritual in contemporary India and do it not just by word but also through the use of photographs. Especially the photographs should serve another aim of the authors, that of enabling people living outside India, who cannot personally follow relevant rituals, to have a more concrete notion about individual aspects of a ritual. An expectation of the authors that their work will contribute to a comparative study of the *homa* rituals in Asian religion is equally important.

The authors have chosen one of the most basic sacrifice, Pavitreṣṭi, as an object of their examination, analysis and description. The sacrifice has been performed by a team of priests invited for this purpose from Nasik. The priests performed the ritual in July 1979 in Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍaḷa in Poona, India. They followed the manual Pavitreṣṭiprayoga. The English translation of the text of the manual is given in Appendix I (pp. 175 – 189) and its Sanskrit text in the Roman script in Appendix II (pp. 190 – 201).

The work is divided into five parts: the Introduction and Parts I – IV. In the Introduction (pp. 1 – 22), the authors briefly explain the structure of Pavitreṣṭi and the role of the fire ceremony, as well as the division of sacrifices. Then attention is paid to the duties of priests in the Śrauta ritual and to a role of the priests and the sacrificer in Darśpūrṇamāsa sacrifices.

A detailed overview of the structure and procedure of the analysed ritual follows. The procedure is divided into three blocks: 1. Preliminary rites, 2. Main rites, 3. Con-

cluding rites. In each block, the authors step by step record the actions of the priests and add a precise timetable of a relevant act. They bring a short description of each step and introduce numbers of photographs regarding their description.

The core of the book consists of 140 photographs in Parts I – IV (I. Priests, Utensils and Preparations, II. Preliminary Rites, III. Main Rites, IV. Concluding Rites). The photographs in great detail prove each moment and step in the sacrifice. Under each photograph there is a text describing and explaining a relevant act. Some texts include references to relevant Vedic texts. Attention is also paid to deviations from these texts and to practices borrowed from some other tradition. Occasionally mantras and formulas recited by the brahman are introduced, sometimes in Sanskrit with an English translation (e.g. p. 73, 80), but in other cases only in the English version (e.g. p. 74, 81, 112, 114) or the Sanskrit version (e.g. p. 119, 137). It should be uniform.

The description of individual acts during the ritual includes the Sanskrit terminology. It is used also in the comments on photographs, for instance in denomination of sacrificial fires or of utensils used during the ritual. The understanding of Sanskrit terms is enabled by photographs in Part I where also photographs, names and functions of the participating priests are included. A plan of the fire places and the position of individual participants in the ritual enables the reader to better understand the sacrificial place.

The book is completed by a Foreword by C. G. Kashikar, a Bibliography including texts and translations and several secondary sources, and an Index.

The authors have prepared an interesting book which fulfills well defined objectives: to record a fire ritual, which has become almost obsolete in contemporary India, to enable people who have no opportunity to observe such an ritual to better understand its performance and individual steps and also to contribute to deeper knowledge of Vedic religion. A large number of photographs (140) minutely proving the text can be considered a main specificity and contribution of the book.

Anna Ráková

MALEČKOVÁ, Jitka: *Úrodná půda: Žena ve službách národa* (Fertile Soil: Women Serve the Nation). ISV nakladatelství, Praha, 2002, 242 pp.

Only recently have academic scientists started to pay a greater attention to the gender issue in connection with nation forming and identity building. The case of the Turkish gender issue in the late Ottoman Empire represents no exception, even though it offers an extremely interesting field for scientific research.

The Fertile soil joins the up to date and so far not well-examined theme and offers a unique view of the place ascribed to women in the discussions of male intellectuals during the process of identity building and nation formation in the late Ottoman Empire and six other countries namely Russia, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Italy and Greece marked as “margins of Europe”. These six countries faced problems similar to those of the Ottoman Empire and on this ground they represent a comparative context in this book, which strives to provide an answer to the question of how women were included in or excluded from the newly created image of national society.

To understand this process Malečková created a nontraditional comparative context and adopted an analytical method for the study of the Ottoman history, nation and gen-