

Eberhart, Helmut & Kaser, Karl (eds.). Albanien, Stammesleben zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Böhlau Verlag, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 1995. 200 pp. Illustrations, bibliographies. DM 58.

AFTER half a century of Stalinist dictatorship in Albania, a group of scholars and students of history and ethnology from the University of Graz in Austria set off in 1992 on an expedition to Dukagjin, one of the most isolated, and ethnologically most interesting reaches of the northern Albanian highlands, in order to find out what elements of traditional tribal society had survived the cultural holocaust there. Among their aims in particular was to see to what extent tribal structures had survived and whether traditional customary law, i.e. the famed kanun, was still being observed. The results of the expedition are recorded in the present German-language volume, Albanien, Stammesleben zwischen Tradition und Moderne (Albania, tribal life between tradition and modernity), which comprises eleven papers, each with a bibliography and photos.

In his article Geschichte muß sein (History must be, p. 17-30), Hubert Neuwirth offers an historical introduction to the Dukagjin region, tracing its development through the five centuries of Ottoman rule and through a very turbulent twentieth century. In 'Nuk kuptoi'. Selbstreflexion in der Feldforschung ('Nuk kuptoj.' Reflections in field research, p. 31-46), Gabriele Ponisch deals with levels of comprehension and perception of a foreign culture. Margit Pufitsch-Weber, in her 'Schade, daß du meine Sprache nicht sprichst...' Frauenleben zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation ('Too bad you don't speak my language...' Women's lives between tradition and emancipation, p. 47-64), focusses on the role and position of women in traditional highland society, then under communist rule and finally during the initial years of post-communist chaos in Albania. Ethnologist Robert Pichler analyzes the structures of tribal organization and the important role of customary law in his solid article on Macht der Gewohnheit. Die Dukagjin-Stämme und ihr Gewohnheitsrecht (The power of custom. The Dukagjin tribes and their customary law, p. 65-84). In Brüchige Traditionen (Tenuous traditions, p. 85-100), Silvia Santner-Schriebl underlines the influence of the traditional and modern elements of material culture and their role in cultural and social change. Reinhard Tuder, in his 'Wohin gehst du, mein Sohn?' Wirtschaftliche Probleme und ihre Folgen ('Where are you going, my son?' Economic problems and their consequences, p. 101-117) looks at the dichotomy between the overbearing poverty of the mountain tribes and the many temptations of Western consumer society. In her Freund, Feind und Ehre (Friend, enemy and honour, p. 117-132), ethnologist Stephanie Schwander-Sievers, now of the University of London, elucidates the concept of the mik 'guest, friend' and the awesome traditions of Albanian hospitality, as well as the concept of male honour and resulting vendetta. Graz historian Karl Kaser, whose keen interest in patriarchal society has been evinced by a number of recent publications, concentrates on the survival of patriarchal values in contemporary society in his Jede Menge Familie. Der patriarchale Haushalt im Modernisierungsprozeß (Lots of family. The patriarchal household in the process of modernization, p. 133-150). Ethnologist Helmut Eberhart, in his '... Und in Ewigkeit Amen'. Das Dukagjin-Hochland als katholische Enklave ('... For ever and ever, amen.' The Dukagjin highlands as a Catholic enclave, p. 151-168), deals with the traditions of Albanian Catholicism, and in particular with its struggle for survival in the north of the country during the harsh communist dictatorship. In Aspirin kann durch nichts ersetzt werden (Nothing can replace aspirin, p. 169-182), Elke Hammer describes the lamentable state of public health services in past and present in the northern mountains. Finally, Kurt Gostenschnigg, in his 'Es war einmal...' Erzählen im Alltag ('Once upon a time...' Telling tales in daily life, p. 183-197), focusses on the role of story-telling and fairy tales in traditional mountain culture.

The present volume thus offers a survey of many of the major aspects and

characteristics of traditional folk culture in the northern Albanian mountains as it appears after fifty years of communist dictatorship. While some authors here have made interesting and profound analyses, others, no doubt through a lack of knowledge of Albanian, have been limited to some rather banal observations. It must not be forgotten that the key to an understanding of a foreign culture is its language and even a trained ethnologist can comprehend little of the culture in question if he or she cannot communicate directly with the people during field research. Despite this drawback, the book constitutes a valuable contribution to Albanian studies, in particular in view of the impending extinction of this quite unique European culture.

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