ENVIRONMENT AND MAN IN TROPICAL MOUNTAIN ECOSYSTEMS
International Symposium – Academy of Science and Literature, Mainz, February 24–26, 1983

Ulrich Schweinfurth

The Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz again played host to an international symposium, arranged by its Commission on Geosciences (W. Lauer, Bonn) in connection with the Commission of Mountain Geocology of the International Geographical Union (B. Messerli, Bern).

Problems of interaction between nature and man in tropical mountains have increasingly become the object of research of various disciplines. However, publications and programs of research relating to the ever-intensifying influence of man in mountainous areas have not always reached all those interested in.

One of the aims of the symposium, therefore, was to bring together scientists of different disciplines and from various countries to meet and to contribute on the topic selected.

It was the fourth symposium on problems of mountain research that was held at the academy in Mainz within the framework of the institutions mentioned.


After an informal gathering the evening before, procedures began on Thursday, February 24, on the premises of the academy. After welcoming exchanges and a general introduction (W. Lauer, Bonn), the morning session (chairman: U. Schweinfurth, Heidelberg) first turned to Africa: climate in the Kenyan Highlands (J. Kenworthy, Durham) and climate and land use on Mt. Kenya (M. Winiger, Bern), followed by two contributions from Asia or, rather, China: Yu Xiao-Gan, Nanking, presently at Giessen University, on rice cultivation, especially its upper limits in China referring, in particular, to the Yonggin Basin in NW-Yunnan, where in 2700 m rice cultivation seems to reach its absolute alitudinal limit, and B. Messerli’s (Bern) report on the Hengduan Shan excursion of October 1982, initiated by Academia Sinica, which had invited three foreigners – J. Ives (Boulder), C. Jest (Paris) and B. Messerli (Bern) – to join. The term Hengduan Shan is now emerging as the official Chinese name for what used to be called ‘river gorge country’. Needless to say that these two contributions from an area, which, since the days of von Wissmann and F. Kingdon Ward, i.e. for about half a century have remained virtually closed to any outsider, were met with particular interest.

The afternoon session of Thursday, February 24 (chairman: O. Dollfus, Paris) was devoted to the general topic of environment and man. U. Schweinfurth (Heidelberg) reported on the situation in the high valleys of the Central Cordillera of Eastern New Guinea, using Pandanus, Casuarina, and Ipomoea batatas as three prominent examples to demonstrate the intimate relationship between man and his environment in the topographically well-defined high valleys. M. Domkös (Mainz) contributed on Sri Lanka, W. Haffner (Gießen) on Nepal. The Himalayas remained in focus, when A. Murerjee (Chandigarh) dealt with ‘Geo-morphic damages in the Western Himalayas’, i.e. landslides and avalanches – and he concludes: ‘Ultimately, the main villain’ – for the damage caused – ‘seems to be the ecology-neutral development activities’ – meaning: ‘authorities’, one may add. This topic was carried further by H. Kienholz (Bern) with particular reference to slope instability, demonstrated by examples from Nepal (Kathmandu – Kakani area and Khumbu).

The morning session of Friday, February 25 (chairman: W. Weischet, Freiburg) focused interest predominantly on South America. Dr. M. Ward (London), discussed, from a medical point of view, problems of altitudinal adaptation with reference to populations in South America and, in particular, in Bhutan, where some of the most isolated high-altitude populations in the world are living, never visited by any foreigner before, until Dr. Ward, while being invited to treat the king, received permission to explore these odd corners in ‘farthest Bhutan’. O. Dollfus (Paris) compared ‘l’utilisation de l’étagement’ in the Andes with the situation in Nepal. W. Lauer (Bonn) presented the results of research in the Kallawaya Valley (Bolivia), which displayed the complexity of a model case of ‘environment and man’: in the preference given to certain site factors by the local people as, for instance, exposition to sun and precipitation in establishing fields and settlements, the irrigation of the dry valley bottom and the adaptation of the terraces cultivated to a dissected relief, resulting in the use of successive altitudinal belts by different types of cultivation, altogether an ingenious use of the given environment, which provided the Kallawaya with virtual economic independence. More on the climatological side were W. Eriksen’s (Hannover) observations on the eco-climatology of the Bolivian ‘puna’ country.

The afternoon of Friday, February 25, (chairman: B. Messerli, Bern) began with an example by B. Ruthsatz (Trier) on land utilisation and its impact on vegetation within a small community, Huaraco, situated on the Bolivian altiplano, along the main road from La Paz to Oruro, followed by S. Hastenrath’s (Madison) studies on tropical glaciers and climatic variations, a report on pleistocene and recent glaciation in the Central Cordillera of Eastern
New Guinea (E. Löffler, Erlangen), and J. Flenley's
(Hull) discussion on 'Late quaternary changes of vegetation
and climate in the Malesian Mountains' (with particu-
lar emphasis on the Central Cordillera of Eastern New
Guinea again). The remaining contributions of the day
were devoted to the 'Glaciation of the Cordillera Central
(Dominican Republic) and some paleoclimatic implica-
tions' (C. Schubert, Caracas) suggesting the existence of
former glaciers and a pleistocene snowline between ap-
proximately 2200 and 2300 m and M. Léa Salgado-Labou-
riaud's (Caracas) paper on 'Late-Quaternary palynologi-
cal studies in the Venezuelan Andes'.

Saturday, February 26 (chairman: W. Lau er, Bonn)
continued the emphasis on South American tropical
mountains with M. Monasterio's (Mérida) 'Estudios eco-
lógicos en los Páramos Andinos' presenting another ex-
tremely interesting example of environment and man in
the higher altitudes of South American tropical moun-
tains (Pueblos del Sur de la Cordillera de Mérida) under-
lining in particular the importance to safeguard local
traditions and feelings in all developmental activities.

W. Golte (Bonn) contributed on the distribution and ecol-
ogy of the living Araucariaceae and their palaeoclimato-
logical significance and J. Martens (Mainz) on the vertical
distribution of palaearctic and oriental faunistic elements in
the Nepal Himalayas. Finally, F. Klötzel (Züri ch) re-
ported on Fagaceae and Myrtaceae in some Pacific mountain
areas, amongst which reference to Kinabalu served as the
link with the tropical mountains. W. Lau er (Bonn) per-
formed the summing up.

The symposium was attended by 23 'active' participants,
i.e. those originally invited to contribute papers and 10
'visitors', mainly drawn from the geography departments
of Bonn and Mainz. The languages used were German, En-
lish, French, and Spanish, and the easy way the various
languages were applied during the symposium served, no
doubt, to mutual understanding and to create a truly
international atmosphere – perhaps, only possible in a
gathering not exceeding certain numbers.

The emphasis proclaimed by the general theme on envi-
ronment and man was adhered to by the great majority of
the contributors; in the cases, where emphasis was laid
more on climatology, glaciers, palynology, for instance,
it served as useful and welcome background information.
For the first time in these meetings, medical aspects in a
geographical context were included, as the topic ' envi-
ronment and man', no doubt, demands; it seemed fortunate
indeed that it was possible to attract Dr. M. Ward (Lon-
don), as an exponent on 'mountains and medicine', to attend
the meeting.

A word of praise must be added to the extraordinary
variety of superb slides displayed during the meeting – it
would be impossible to single out the one or the other and,
perhaps, only stress particular personal interest – the slides
were all exquisitely selected and especially those from areas
off the beaten track – which were not? – were instructive
and served magnificently to understanding, besides being
most enjoyable to look at for sheer intellectual pleasure.

The meeting was well-organised (as could have been
expected); with lunch served within the Academy premises,
there was no waste of time through lengthy breaks. The
general atmosphere throughout was most amiable as, per-
haps, possible only, when numbers are kept within certain
limits – and the particular species of 'migrant participants',
meaning those, who come, deliver their wisdom and go,
was, fortunately, kept to the, perhaps, unavoidable mini-
mum – needless to stress, that the idea of a symposium is
attendance from the beginning to the end to enable that all-
important exchange of views 'beyond the classroom'.

The undoubted success of this symposium, the first of
its kind without Carl Troll being present in person,
– whose spirit, nevertheless, seemed ever present – augurs
well for a continuation – and, let us hope, not again after
a gap of another eight years!

The proceedings will be published in English in a further
volume of Erdwissenschaftliche Forschungen edited by the
Commission of Geosciences of the Academy of Science
and Literature, Mainz – if at all possible, in 1984.

Last not least, a word of thanks that such a meeting has
been made possible to bring together participants from
places as far apart as Mérida, Madison, and Chandigarh –
making it a truly international symposium on a subject
which needs such an inter-national exchange from time to
time; – that the participants appreciated the chance and
responded in kind was apparent in the ease of communi-
cation pervading the meeting from beginning to end.

ZUM STAND DER QUANTITATIVEN GEOPHAGIE

Ein Bericht über einen Sammelband zur Entwicklung in Großbritannien*)

Franz-Josef Kemper

Quantitativ orientierte Analysen bestimmen heute in er-
heblichem Ausmaß das Bild wichtiger geographischer Pu-
blikationsorgane. Dabei wird es dank der fortgeschrittenen
Spezialisierung immer schwieriger, einen Gesamtüberblick
über die verwendeten Methoden und Modelle und ihren
Nuten für inhaltliche Probleme und Anwendungen zu er-
halten. Man sehe sich nur einmal einige jüngere Hefte der
beiden führenden internationalen Zeitschriften zur quanti-
tativen Geographie an, nämlich Environment and Planning
A und Geographical Analysis. Daher wird man den Heraus-
gebern und Autoren des Sammelbandes „Quantitative Geo-
graphy: A British View“ besonders dankbar sein müssen,
daß sie einen solchen Überblick ermöglichen. Auch wenn
de Entwicklungen in Großbritannien im Vordergrund ste-
hen, wird doch, insbesondere aufgrund der engen Verbin-
dungen zur nordamerikanischen Geographie, die relevante

*) Wrigley, N. and Bennett, R. J. (Eds.): Quantitative Geogra-
phy: A British View. VI u. 419 S. Routledge and Kegan Paul, Lon-
don, Boston, Henley 1981, £ 30,–