

YORK, SUSAN (2024): *A mountain oasis: Daily life in a village in the Yasin Valley, Pakistan*. Brill. Leiden, Boston (Iran and the Caucasus Monographs, vol. 2). XLII + 289 pp, 141 photographs, 23 maps, figures, and graphs, 19 tables. ISBN: 978-90-04-68481-2 (hardcover), 978-90-04-68482-9 (e-book), 165.85 €.

In 1982/83, the author carried out anthropological field research in the village of Barkulti, situated in the Yasin valley in Gilgit-Baltistan, the former Northern Areas, in the high-mountain-environment of Northern Pakistan. Published forty years after, one might either expect the old-fashioned concept of mountain people's (pretended) resistance towards societal change and/or a totally outdated presentation. However, the author is aware of this danger, and 'change' is the motive behind York's efforts to go through her notes again: to make the results available as a source of a (maybe) gone state of affairs – not only to the academic public, but also to those whose paying guest (and possibly pain in the neck with all her questions) she has been. At that time, research questions were different from today's. Today's research front might regard the old questions as not really relevant any more, and old material rarely matches modern questions. In this dilemma, the author decided to offer a documentation, and it is to the reader in what he/she is interested in.

York tells a story that is to some extent a story of the past. Social practices are changing, and York describes how they were in the beginning of the 1980s. The present-time reader can compare and realize. However, not every difference might be attributed to 'change'. Social practices may be more variable than what an anthropologist could realize by participant observation in a family and village. The change itself – the transformation of the society – is the topic of the foreword (by H. Kreutzmann) as well as of the epilogue (by the author), which put the village study into a larger frame and point to factors of change. The main part of the book concentrates on York's findings 1982/83. To highlight this time gap, she uses past tense throughout, even if a practice might be actually alive. Organized in eleven chapters, she introduces into the valley and the village and the specific mountain economy with its irrigated agriculture in the valley, some cultivation in summer settlements and livestock breeding, making use of several altitudinal zones during the different seasons around the year. She describes the particular architecture of the house as well as how the household members, differentiated by gender and age, made (and may make) use of the particular

parts. Two chapters cover the four seasons of the year, daily life with its seasonal agricultural activities and related special days with their specific celebratory requirements, like *at bo*, the springtime festival of first ploughing or *thémešiq*, at the end of the agricultural year, after the processing of all field crops.

The daily life in a larger household is described in chapter five, from the preparation of the breakfast to the evening meal, always connected with the preparation of bread. Here again, gender and age differentiated the daily activities; women were mostly restricted to house and farmstead whereas the public sphere (fields, bazar) was open to the men. In summer, most of the livestock was sent to summer settlements higher up in the side valleys. Several larger households sent some of their household members with cows, goats and sheep, belonging to them and to some other households, with whom they cooperate. Here, in the mountains, the women processed the milk of the animals. Men cared for some barley fields, looking after the animals, cutting firewood for the winter, bringing supplies from the main village etc.

Chapter seven focusses on daily and festival/celebratory food items. Daily food was mostly bread of different kind that was served as the meal several times of the day, together with tea (with milk and rock salt). In the evening, the bread was supplemented mostly by a vegetable or potato stew, prepared by fresh products in summer and dried and stored vegetables in winter, sometimes with some meat from the winter slaughtering, as long as that was available. Also the celebratory food, which was prepared and consumed at specific occasions and also distributed between related households, was based on that what the subsistence economy offered – mainly flour, butter and apricots/walnuts as ingredients.

Craft activities, too, were gender-specific and part of the household economy. The processing of goat hair and sheep wool, from spinning to rope making, weaving of rugs or woollen cloth, the knitting of warm winter clothing was based on self-produced supplies, mostly by their own labour. Only partly, men with specialized skills, as in wood carving and carpentry, had to be engaged, as well as blacksmiths or tailors. Embroidery, on the other side, was done by the women in the households themselves.

Chapters nine and ten discuss the composition of the households and the relationship of their members. The practices from becoming betrothed to marriage and divorce and widowhood are described. The change of household composition over time is thematized, including the division and the allocation of property and situations in which women were in charge of running a

household in absence of male labour because of death or labour migration. Age, gender, marital status, clan and economic status are pointed out as the factors behind the position of an individual in the society.

The last chapter focusses on the relationships beyond the household, co-operation within the village community, between relatives and adopted ('milk')-relatives (úšam). All are relevant for the survival of the households, as they add resilience in the case of need – for example, in the case of shortage of labour or supplies, not to mention social needs.

As a woman, the author had the chance to look closer into the female side of household life, which is mostly closed to male visitors or researchers. Thus, female activities dominate to some extent the discourse and are more specific. Studies by male authors will display the opposite imbalance.

Since many aspects discussed in the book are relevant in more than one context, there are some repetitions. On the other side, this eases selective reading, if one is interested only in one or the other topic.

The book makes a good reading as it is written in a tangible, lucid style. Beside the words, 141 colour photographs (by the author) illustrate everyday life in Barkulti and are sources by themselves.

With her book, the author adds a valuable contribution to the set of publications now available that discuss aspects of life, nature and their change in this previously remote, mountainous area of Northern Pakistan.

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