

cal event rather than a religious experience. Similarly, the funeral ceremonies, once exclusively religious in character, have acquired certain features of commercialization, visible in such aspects as the expensive coffins and headstones, large wreaths, etc., and thus became markers of the newly emerging social divisions. The approach to suffering has changed as well. In the old days, according to those interviewed for this study, the suffering was meaningful: it was accepted as “God’s will.” Today one intends to escape it by minimizing pain as far as possible, and the contemporary medicine is expected to solve the problem of suffering altogether. None of Kupisiński’s interviewees was in favor of euthanasia, however, even in the case of a terminal illness or those under a great pain.

In the conclusive part of the book, the author states that the customs and funerary practices existing among the people in the regions under study still indicate their strong faith in the afterlife. Moreover, some ancient eschatological beliefs, in some instances not compatible with Christian teaching (portents of death, prophecies through dreams, ways of ending suffering and hastening death, belief in the presence of the soul next to the body), still coexist with the dominant Christian beliefs and rituals.

Appendices placed in the final part of the book – namely, the maps of both regions showing the locations where interviews were conducted (these could have been better edited though), the questionnaire used by the author during his fieldwork, archival photographs, and examples of traditional prayers for the dead – certainly help the reader to understand better the material presented and analyzed in that thematic monograph.

Considering the vast amount of the field material collected by Fr. Kupisiński in only two small areas of Poland’s Mazovia region, the book is primarily an ethnographic document – and an important one to be sure. It chronicles for posterity one aspect of the Polish peasant microcosm, a world that is now disappearing due to the accelerated social and cultural “Europeanization” which has been taking place in Poland since the beginning of the 1990s. In this sense, the book continues the good tradition of ethnographic works that the members of the Steyer missionary order (SVD), to which Fr. Kupisiński also belongs, have produced over the last one hundred years in different parts of the globe, many of them being important contributions to the study of peoples that do not exist anymore. However, one also needs to remember that every ethnographic research, no matter how “objective” and empirical, always bears the stamp of its author, and the results of ethnographic observations could be fully understood only if one brings the “observer to the picture.” The fact that the ethnographer is a Catholic priest who interviewed his informants on topics of beliefs and religious observances could, to a considerable degree, tinge not only the perceptions of the researcher but also the responses of the people under study. This sort of meta-analysis lacks in that – otherwise methodologically well done – ethnographic inquiry. Still the book is a recommendable source of information for all students of Polish peasant culture and popular Catholicism in Europe.

Darius J. Piwowarczyk

**Laugrand, Frédéric B., and Jarich G. Oosten:** *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity. Transitions and Transformations in the Twentieth Century.* Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010. 467 pp. ISBN 978-0-7735-3590-9. Price: \$ 32.95

Although this publication is quite voluminous, it does not deal with Inuit shamanism and Christianity in general. It only examines the communities of northeastern Canada which now form the territory of Nunavut. The reason for this geographical choice is that the authors, both of them are professors of anthropology, Laugrand at the University of Laval and Oosten at the University of Leiden, had access to information gathered at courses and workshops focusing on oral traditions and shamanism during the years 1996 and 2008. Additionally, they also used archival and published material. The authors arranged these various sources according to special aspects of shamanism and Christianity into four parts; each part is subdivided into three chapters.

Part One, “*Angakkuuniq* and Christianity,” introduces the reader to the history of the decline of shamanism and the christianization during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Some Inuit statements from the 19th century reveal that contact with White people made them feel inferior to their ancestors, the “true Inuit,” and that they believed that the newcomers’ abilities were at least equal if not superior to those of their shamans. The roles of the latter and of the missionaries in the process of christianization is the topic of the second chapter. Anglicans and Roman Catholics differed in their approaches to convert the Inuit. Whereas the latter had close contact to the people and relied on personal instructions, the former printed and spread bibles in Inuit syllabics to people without having direct contact. Hence, some Inuit who read these Christian texts without further instruction developed and followed their own versions of Christianity which were often a syncretistic mixture including their former beliefs. The missionaries themselves not only accepted that the Inuit took them for new shamans but also used this role actively, e.g., in competitions with shamans. Nevertheless, open conflicts between priests and shamans seldom occurred; some *angakkuut* sent their helping spirits away and converted to Christianity, whereas others practiced in secret, converted or not. The third chapter deals with traditional Inuit winter feasts and their replacement by Christmas. Although these Inuit feasts centered on Sedna, the sea woman who owned the sea animals, and on killing evil spirits, they had certain traits in common with Christmas celebrations, such as the exchange of gifts, wearing ones’ best clothes, and the competition in games, which facilitated the acceptance of Christmas. Today, Inuit elders complain about the commercialization of Christmas; connecting people to each other through their common relations to the land and the non-human beings is of great importance to them.

Part Two, “Animals, Owners, and Non-human Beings,” concentrates on the many spirits of the Inuit universe. The fourth chapter examines the relationship between animals and their Inuit hunters, their souls, and the complex system of rules of the past which were important

in order to keep life in balance. Although these rigid rules were quickly dropped in the course of christianization, contemporary Inuit still feel responsible for the wildlife in their environment. According to pre-Christian belief, animals were owned by non-human beings. The relations between these owners of the sky, the land, and the sea and the Inuit are discussed in the fifth chapter. For example, if hunting failed, this was seen as the result of some kind of transgression of the above mentioned rules; it fell into the responsibility of the shamans to ascertain the reason why the owners withheld their animals and to appease their anger in order to send back the animals. Whereas these beings were replaced by the Christian god, minor spirits, which are presented in the sixth chapter, still play a role in the recollections of the elders. Although Christians, many of them had experienced strange encounters in their life which they ascribed to contacts with these spirits. Because there are some regional and even individual opinions about the characteristics and the abilities of the spirits, the authors' categorization contains some discrepancies.

Under the heading "Encounters, Healing, and Power" Part Three examines more thematic aspects of shamanism and Christianity. Shamanic initiations, visions, and dreams are discussed in the seventh chapter. Traditional initiations varied a great deal; whereas some included physical hardships, others did not, some disciples were instructed by a shaman, others had no teacher. Although the elders officially reject shamanism for themselves, they believe in visions and dreams, whether the contents are Christian or not, and they provide various examples. The eighth chapter touches upon healing as a central aspect of shamanism. In the past, illness was seen as the result of a transgression of one or several of the many rules which ensured good relationships with all that surrounds the Inuit, the loss of the soul as well as assaults by evil shamans and evil spirits. It fell into the responsibility of the shaman to cure the patient in a public session. If the illness had been caused because of some kind of transgression, the questions by the shaman could be sometimes embarrassing to the sick person, but confession was seen as the only way to restore health. This tradition was partly taken up by healing circles at the end of the 1990s. To speak about their problems with other participants in connection with Christian prayers and drumming seems to be more appealing to Inuit than psychiatry and social services. Powerful objects and words are the topic of the ninth chapter. The powerful objects of the past, the amulets, shamanic belts, and miniature items, have been replaced by objects with Christian symbolism. As might be assumed, today powerful words are Christian prayers and hymns, but these also had predecessors in form of shamanic incantations for various purposes.

Part Four concentrates on "Connecting to Ancestors and Land." The tenth chapter is dedicated to two techniques which are meant to connect the Inuit with their ancestors. Whereas the competitive drum dances, which connect the dead with the living through songs received from the former, are well-known as they are still practiced in public today, the head lifting technique is rather

unknown. Surprisingly, elders do not only have knowledge of the procedure and some still practice it; several were even ready to demonstrate it during the workshops. Head lifting is a form of shamanic divination; a thong is fastened around, e.g., the head of a person and if it cannot be lifted, a spirit is present. Then the head lifter may question the spirit; if he can lift the head, the answer is "no" and if he cannot lift it, this means "yes." In the second half of the 20th century Pentecostal and evangelical movements gained some influence in the eastern arctic, and these developments are discussed in chapter eleven. The members these churches recruited mainly belonged to the younger generations; the elders rather reject such forms of Christianity. A minor reason is that they have more in common with shamanism than the established churches, like, e.g., speaking in tongues. But the major reason for their rejection is that they believe that being too religious might shorten one's life. The twelfth chapter comprises a chronological summary from the precontact period up to the creation of Nunavut. Here, the authors place particular emphasis on the steady integration of new elements into Inuit culture, which afterwards became a part of traditional Inuit culture. They also are of the opinion that shamanism will go on in a transformed form in Christian contexts. But the authors also state that some cases of neo-shamanism occurred, i.e., a form of shamanism which works with basic traits that are common to various societies around the world without using the cultural contexts. Hence, with all the knowledge the elders still have and will probably pass on to the younger people, it might be possible to revive at least part-traditional shamanism.

What makes this publication rather unique, impressive, and interesting are, of course, the many recollections of Inuit elders. The authors arranged their statements together with the archival and published material in an excellent way. Thus, each of the topics the book examines is comprehensively illustrated, also by photographs. Hence, the reader gets a deep insight into the reasons why the Inuit partly changed their religious concepts. In short, the publication is a highly valuable contribution to the research of Inuit shamanism as well as to religious change.

Dagmar Siebelt

**Leibsohn, Dana:** *Script and Glyph. Pre-Hispanic History, Colonial Bookmaking, and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca.* Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009. 199 pp. ISBN 978-0-88402-342-5. (Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology, 36) Price: \$ 29.95

Housed today in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the "Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca," or the "Anales de Cuauhtinchan," was produced around the middle of the sixteenth century in Cuauhtinchan, a still traditional *pueblo* in the modern state of Puebla, Mexico. Written over fifty-one sheets of European paper (the last, fifty-second sheet, is now missing) in both alphabetized Nahuatl and pictorial text, it narrates the dramatic, rags-to-riches and riches-to-rags history of Cuauhtinchan from its early Chichimec founding in the twelfth century through to ca. 1546/47,