

## Buchbesprechung

**Gutschow, Niels and Hermann Kreutzmann: Mapping the Kathmandu Valley.** With Aerial Photographs by Erwin Schneider. – Kathmandu: Himal Books 2013. – Himalayan Traditions and Culture Series 2. – 216 pp., Figures, Photos, Maps. – ISBN 978-9937-597-06-7. – \$ 48,-

Most scholars conducting research on the Kathmandu Valley perceived the release of the Kathmandu Valley Maps 1:10'000 and 1:50'000 in 1977 as a stroke of luck. The availability of the new large-scale maps and also aerial photographs was a milestone. This was a time when the precise, but out-of-date, "one inch maps" (1957) were kept under lock and key and were only available as black and white pirate copies. The quality of these new maps with toponyms, the etymology of which was scientifically verified and transliterated, was remarkably high. The council of the German research programme 'Nepal Himalaya' prepared the ground in 1965 for this ambitious map project. The prime mover was *Erwin Schneider*, a mountaineer and a pioneer in terrestrial surveying in high mountains. His unique Mount Everest and Khumbu Himal maps – the 'Schneider maps' – became a trademark. He later focused on map-making towards the Kathmandu Valley based on aerial photographs taken from a Pilatus Porter. The first flights over the valley took place in 1966, followed by systematic flight campaigns in 1971 and 1972. The book presents these aerial images of the Kathmandu Valley, including the angle views. While *Erwin Schneider* mainly produced these angle images as an orientation guide, some of these also turned out to be beautiful photos.

It is to the merit of *Niels Gutschow* and *Hermann Kreutzmann* that this valuable material is now preserved and accessible. In addition, they delved into the cartographical history of the Kathmandu Valley, providing examples of topographic and thematic maps dating from different periods. An overview of the geo-environmental features of the valley, the related myths of creation and the settlement history show the particularities of this fertile intramontane basin; particularities that are today concealed by urban sprawl. The chapter on urban development and town planning in a historical perspective traces this development and outlines the various paradigm shifts in planning inspired by nostalgia or modernity, but having "little to do with anything that happens in the country" (p. 30).

One can easily grasp what happened while comparing the maps and images from the 1970s with an up-to-date satellite image provided, for example, by Google Earth. In the 1970s the towns and Newar villages are dense clusters with temple squares and ponds, surrounded by farmlands. In between and at the edges of the valley basin, the scattered farmhouses of the people who had migrated from the hills are visible. Today the Kathmandu Valley qualifies as an illustrative example of urban sprawl. Kathmandu and Patan have grown into one urban agglomeration, former fields near to a road became construction sites; residential quarters, gated communities and apartment houses have developed in between. The comparison also reflects the various failed attempts of planning in the Kathmandu Valley. It seems that the Kathmandu Valley maps and aerial images, which were perceived by Western planners and many scholars as a brilliant basis for research and planning, were not really acknowledged by the bureaucrats and officials of the country. Although the maps' launch in 1977 was performed by the Minister of State for Tourism (the late *Dr. Harka Gurung*, a geographer), a senior officer in the physical planning and housing department confirmed that these maps were not in official use at all. Today the material presented in the book has turned out to be a treasure. The book is a valuable visual archive of Nepal's cultural (landscape) heritage. It is not only a book for nostalgic scholars, but is a collector's item for everyone interested in Kathmandu Valley and the documentation of rapid change!

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