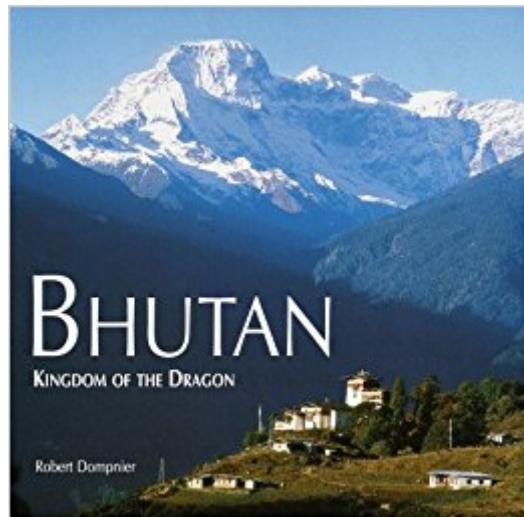


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Bhutan



Synopsis

In the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, Buddhist values guide everyday life, and the rulers are believed to have a special relationship with gods and saints. Here are Bhutan's arts, architecture, rivers, streets, and scenes from Bhutanese daily life, presented by a Himalayan scholar. One hundred and forty color photographs show the landscapes, monasteries, dwellings, people, and craftwork of this remote and seldom visited country.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Less known than its Himalayan neighbors Tibet and Nepal, Bhutan is the subject of few books. Yet, as French photographer and reporter Dompnier strikingly demonstrates, it is a fascinating country with a unique Buddhist culture, strong traditions, great variations in topography from jungle to barren towering mountains, and, so far, relative isolation from the outside world. Primarily a book of photographs, this work is a good introduction to both the natural and cultural landscape. Particularly commendable are the many photos of people carrying out their daily routines or, elaborately garbed, participating in religious festivals. Most public libraries should have at least one book on Bhutan, and while this one is expensive, it is the kind of book that will generate further interest, capturing Bhutan as it is now before the inevitable tourist invasion.-Harold M. Otness, Southern Oregon Univ.

Robert Dompnier made over fifty trips to the Himalayas between 1985 and 1998. He is the coauthor

of Tibet: Another World and has written numerous articles for various international magazines on Bhutanese and Tibetan culture.

This offers a French photographer's array of images taken during many visits in the 1990s, emphasizing tradition and crafts. While short on text--the prefatory words are helpful but brief regarding Bhutan's history and each thematic chapter--it's handsomely arranged. The colors leap out and the size allows a map far larger than in most books on Bhutan--even if a tiny caption warns: "The borders as shown on this map are neither authentic or correct." Originally published in 1999, this allows you to see more of the varied terrain and costumes, varied landscapes and faces. The natural range of tropical, hilly, mountainous, and valley settings covers nearly three-dozen pages of photos. Architecture of dzongs, houses, and shops follows, and the format allows you to peer into details. This also offers more examples from across the country than some other photographic collections. The "great Punakha procession" with its symbolic commemoration of victory over the Tibetans invaders gains coverage. Next, the chapter on society takes you to markets, schools, looms, and hearths as well as the many historic dzongs, the district fortresses combining monastic control with administrative power. You see more of their interiors than usual, as other books tend to shoot their splendid exteriors atop dramatic, strategic positions. Dompnier's survey enters the walls, and reveals the monks and workers at their daily tasks. More dances follow, and then it's off to very remote but truly captivating raw northern vistas of high Lunana, Laya, and the eastern lands of the Brokpa yak herders. A glossary of terms and a short reading list conclude this volume. The dimensions are not as overwhelming as, say, Michael Hawley's Friendly Planet "Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey across the Last Himalayan Kingdom" from the early 2000s, but they are more comprehensive than the older "The Dragon Kingdom: Images of Bhutan" (1984) which covers similar ground and a similar time period. This complements John Wehrheim's black-and-white photography and comprehensive narrative from 2011, "Bhutan: Hidden Lands of Happiness." Dompnier's color matches Wehrheim's focus on people inside the landscape, and both fit into a more human presentation. For more on artifacts and crafts, the "Bhutan: Fortress of the Mountain Gods" (1998) large, scholarly book treats in-depth the history and culture of this kingdom. (See my reviews of all of these titles Nov. 2012)

Returning from my first visit to Bhutan in November, 1999, I searched for a book which genuinely captures the beauty and uniqueness of this Himalayan Buddhist kingdom and her people. The combination of Dompnier's stunning photography and thoughtful text are more than I had hoped to

find. The format, choice and excellence of pictures and insightful text aptly convey a sense of this very special place. For anyone interested in the iconography of Tibetan Buddhism, learning about a people and culture unlike any other on this planet, or looking for photojournalism at its best about the Himalayas , I highly recommend this book. Personally, it serves me well to keep alive cherished memories of a place I know I will visit again.

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