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In Memory - Stanley Royal Mumford

STANLEY ROYAL MUMFORD, 57, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Albertson College, Caldwell, Idaho. Died on December 23, 1993.

Born in Berkeley, CA in 1936 and raised in the Bay area, Stan Mumford was educated at Whitworth College (B.A.), Benares Hindu University (M.A. in Indian Cultures), The University of Pennsylvania (M.A. Sociology), and Princeton University (Ph.D. in Anthropology). His dissertation research was conducted among Gurungs and Tibetan refugees on the upper Marsyandi Valley and this ethnography was the basis of his eloquent Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal (Wisconsin University Press, 1989) and many other publications. Mumford also taught in Japan and England as well as at Washburn University, Cal State-Hayward, and at Sweet Briar College. At Albertson he was also the curator of the college's distinctive Native American artifacts collection and he regularly led students on study tours to Mexico and the American southwest.

Stan Mumford's Himalayan ethnography provides a nuanced, paradigmatic study of Tibetan Buddhism in a frontier zone. His scholarship extended well beyond this major anthropological contribution to Himalayan and Buddhist studies, however. A student of Hildred Geertz and Gananath Obeyesekere, Stan's scholarly interests extended into other areas as well. As noted by Karen Field in the Anthropology Newsletter (4/94) "Mumford was an early proponent of the relevance of Bakhtin's works to anthropology and of a "dialogic" approach to cultural understanding. In a very real sense, his whole life was a dialogue -- not only with his informants, but also with his colleagues and students. He was never more animated than when launching a provocative discussion or defending the importance of cross-cultural studies to the world of the future. A meticulous ethnographer in the "grand tradition," he was also a visionary who believed wholeheartedly that anthropology could contribute to the building of a better future. His personal integrity was an inspiration to all who knew him, his zest for knowledge boundless... With characteristic zeal, Mumford remained hard at work until shortly before his death ... on newly developed courses about aspects of modernization and the approach of traditional cultures to ecological concerns."

In 1992, Stan Mumford contributed a stimulating presentation to the first panel organized by the Himalayan and Tibetan Religions Group at the American Academy of Religion. This connection between religious studies and anthropology was yet another dialogue that Stan's fieldwork and analytical presence seemed poised to advance. Both fields are diminished with his passing.

Todd T. Lewis