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Book Reviews-Monographic Musings

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In *American Shamans: Journeys with Traditional Healers*, Jack Montgomery relates detailed personal accounts of working with shamans and magical healers in the United States. The research leading up to this book began with Montgomery’s undergraduate work in religious studies at the *University of South Carolina* in the mid-1970s. Many of his chronicles focus on healers in midland and Lowcountry South Carolina, near his hometown of Columbia and his alma mater. These detail encounters with root doctors or Hoodoo practitioners of African American traditions. His fieldwork also illuminates similar traditions of Powwow men or hexenmeisters coming out of German immigrant traditions in South Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Montgomery offers his firsthand ethnographic research, giving insight into classic ethnographic methodologies including journal writing, tape recording interviews for later transcription and analysis, and the tenuous process of building relationships with potential informants whose names may require disguising for their privacy and protection. The author himself works as a shaman and spiritual healer, and is often more a participant than observer in the tales. He spends some time remarking on the need for holistic approaches to societal as well individual strife. He asks the reader to keep an open mind with regard to his subject matter, calling for openness to the often different, even opposing, worldviews of science and the various faith healing traditions.

Research histories of traditions in South Carolina and Pennsylvania, given further context by Montgomery’s commentary, provide a cultural background for the author’s recounted fieldwork and numerous short anecdotes about noted healers. The reader will be entranced by such remarkable and charismatic figures as Doctor Buzzard, high sheriff James E. McTeer, Granny Slice, and Conrad Matthai. Perhaps the most exceptional and rewarding passages of his research are transcriptions of interviews with South Carolina Powwow man and retired professor Lee Raus Gandee, Montgomery’s own spiritual teacher, and a Virginia granny—woman whom we know by the pseudonym Sarah Ramsey.

*American Shamans* will be appealing to readers with interests in the magical and religious healing practices, as well those focused on anthropological fieldwork or local histories of areas covered. The book may be of particular interest to those researching American folk practices, especially the traditions explored by Montgomery: African American root doctors in the South and Powwow healers in areas of German settlement throughout the Eastern states. *American Shamans*, with its fascinating narratives, is a relatively quick read at 261 pages. The book includes an introduction by the author as well as an appendix of German Powwow terms. *American Shamans* is published by *Busca, Inc.*

Rumors
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But, not to worry, Sandy Thatcher, now retired from *Penn State UP* and so the university press column, will still be contributing a column from time to time. In fact there will be a Sandy column in the February issue of *ATG*! Stay tuned!

Let’s see. A couple of people have retired! The highly competent Richard Gedye has retired from *Oxford University Press* and sends his new email address <gedye@stl-assoc.org> and his snail mail address is: 26 Nuns Road; Winchester, SO23 7EF; UK. I remember way back when getting digging at an archaeological site in Winchester. It is a delightful town with a fantastic fish and chips take-out place. Richard is not really retiring! From 1 January 2011, STM has announced that Richard will assume responsibility for STM’s Outreach Programmes, Research4Life and patientINFORM access initiatives, the ARDI patent project and STM’s activities with library organizations. The hard-working Maurice Long had developed many of these programs and will be retiring from STM at the end of 2010. The firecracker Michael Mabe is the CEO of STM.

The energetic Doug LaFrenier told me at the Conference that he is retiring! But he has an idea for the 2011 Charleston Conference (NOVEMBER 2-5 MARK YOUR continued on page 56