

Klute, Georg: Die schwerste Arbeit der Welt. Alltag von Tuareg-Nomaden. 277 Seiten. München: Trickster Verlag 1992.

This ethnography of the pastoral Tuareg of the Aḍay mountains of northern Mali concentrates on the description of everyday life - that is work with animals. While other Tuareg groups of Algeria, Niger and Mali have gained considerable ethnographic attention over the last decades this group, the Kel Aḍay, has hardly been considered. In this sense Klute adds to our understanding of cultural adaptations to arid environments and African ethnography. Furthermore his „dense description“ of work processes and work allocation furthers the theoretical and the methodological knowledge of the anthropology of work. Reading the book you will find a piece of fascinating ethnography, detailed, well structured and integrated. It is good to read and thought-provoking. No lengthy accounts of quantified data disturb the imagination of the reader. However, the near-absence of statistical data might be one of the few shortcomings. Instead you are given an idea about emic concepts of specific types of labour. Klute abstains from defining „work“ in purely economic terms and elucidates relations between the sphere of work and the realm of emotions, norms and values. Neither is work measured in calories expended nor in calories resulting from productive activities but rather is it defined according to the indigenous value system. Throughout the chapters Klute stresses the emic view on herding, milking and applying veterinary skills etc. and thereby portrays a complex knowledge system. Numerous indigenous terms for things (animals, tools, features of the environment) and processes (work, social exchange) bear witness to the author's intimate knowledge of the culture he describes.

The first chapter deals with the temporal scale of activities. As in other pastoral cultures work follows a strict seasonal cycle. While in the rainy season work effort is quite low, the physical and spiritual energy needed to herd animals adequately in the dry season is tremendous. Environmental conditions are fairly unpredictable throughout the year. We learn a lot about how Tuareg try to minimize risks by predicting climatic changes through observation and interpretation of stars in the nightly heavens. The chapter further gives insights on the organisation of watering and using salt resources. Then the relation of work and space is explored - given the tremendous amount of work on spatial mobility in pastoral systems an interesting endeavour. Again Klute plays the „emic card“. We do not find maps with dotted or broken lines - which admittedly frequently mean little to the innocent reader - he just knows that one household does it this way and another that way. There are not many ethnographic descriptions of spatial behaviour which do not work with maps - Klute stays with the written language. In a fine-grained way he portrays concepts of space and movement in space. While other ethnographers frequently make choice a somewhat facultative option and tend rather to describe the results of activities, Klute gives an interesting account of conflicting goals when selecting certain pastures all having different, more or less favourable attributes (plant cover, plant diversity, presence of poisonous plants, distance to water, *albaraka* - God's blessing, presence of spirits). One easily learns that it is a difficult task for a herder to weigh these different factors against each other. There is no easy access to optimal decisions - and that is just what much of the adaptationist literature on pastoralists wants to make us believe. The herder finally has to make a choice but he actually has to consider a multitude of options and constraints and frequently will achieve only suboptimal solutions. Kel Aḍay draw sharp lines between the desert and the urban and peri-urban sphere. Although most people act on both stages concepts of the desert habitat all have emotive connotations of home while town life is conceptually put into another world.