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# Review of 'Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes' edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim

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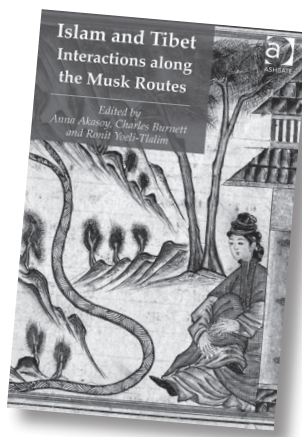
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etc.—are common scripts reinforcing at once authentic immediacy and mediated subject voices. Kunreuther’s example of a typical ‘conversation’ finds participants calling out each other’s kin names, thus interpellating these individuals into given social relationships.

Kunreuther’s final chapter juxtaposes Kathmandu’s figure of the voice against the country’s silence immediately following the 2001 royal massacre. Massive acts of street mourning that followed the media and government censorship were seen as public protest against ongoing government corruption in the figure of the lone surviving Shah brother and hastily crowned King Gyanendra. Widely circulated and quickly censored portraits of the royal family during these mournings showed the face “becoming a medium through which political and intimate attachments were recognized and expressed” (p. 249). Media-driven attempts to account for the massacre failed to provide the idealized and desired transparency of freedom of expression and public voice, revealing “the mediated nature of all social relations” (p. 252). Devayani Rana, Crown Prince Dipendra’s alleged lover, claimed that during a brief phone call between them moments before the massacre, “His voice was slurred” (p. 253). These uncanny words, intended as forensic evidence of his guilt, for Kunreuther more profoundly index a young man’s disintegrating self and stand as a metaphor for the eventual dissolution of the monarchy.

This study makes a major contribution to understanding new subjectivities of liberal democratic Nepal, and should stand as a foundational account of an important period in Nepal’s history.

*Mary Cameron, ANHS President, is a Professor of Anthropology at Florida Atlantic University, and is currently studying and writing about medical knowledge, efficacies and power, social inequalities, philosophies of dwelling and perception, and plants in Nepal.*

### ***Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes.***

**Edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim.**

Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. 391 pages. ISBN 9780754669562.

### **Reviewed by Jacqueline H. Fewkes**

*Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, is an exciting new contribution to Himalayan regional studies. The book presents new material on an oft-overlooked topic, the role of Islam in the Himalayan region. It is the product of a conference on “Islam in Tibet” held at the University of London in 2006, and the introductory chapter makes mention of some additional papers from that conference. The introduction also includes a general discussion, providing a much-needed historical background to draw together the diverse sources included in this volume, which range, for example, from Arabic and Persian geographical literature pertaining to Tibet (Akasoy), to archaeological artifacts in Iran (Assadullah Souran Melikian-Chirvani and Arezou Azad), and 19th century love ballads in Ladakh (Georgios T. Halkias). The book contains a broad range of topics and time periods as well—from the 7th century to the present—making it initially seem difficult to review as a whole. There are, however, themes that clearly emerge from the work that draw it together. The main “story” here is one of movement, trade,

Overall, this is not simply a book about Tibet. *Islam and Tibet* demonstrates both how Tibetan influences spread far beyond the boundaries of the region and, conversely, how the region is comprised of influences from beyond those boundaries.

Jacqueline H. Fewkes on *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*.

and travel associated with the region. The actual economic activity associated with trade is, however, only one facet of this narrative; the editors' introduction and arrangement of works encourage readers to think of Tibetan trade networks from a holistic perspective.

The key to this perspective is the use of musk—just one of the goods traded from Tibet—to name the studied landscape. Tibet was historically a musk source for trade with other parts of Asia, and musk was a defining product as one of the region's most famed exotic goods. Anya King's chapter is most clearly related to this understanding of musk, outlining its use as a perfume. King and Yoeli-Tlalim both emphasize the extended significance of musk; as Yoeli-Tlalim notes in the introduction, musk was a "highly desired substance in a great variety of Arabic genres" that was marketed, at least in part, in other regions through claims of the exotic nature of Tibet (pp. 7-8). Akasoy suggests that Arabic and Persian literature on Tibet used concepts of musk as an exotic product as part of a process of crafting an exotic "other" for Tibetans, an identity that is familiar as the hackneyed Orientalist imaginings of Tibetans as happy-go-lucky residents of Shangri-la (p. 34). Thus the title phrase "Interactions Along the Musk Routes" invokes historical ways of interacting with Tibet conceptually from outside, particularly Arab, perspectives. That the story of the musk route is not just one of trade is demonstrated in

Akasoy's contribution on writings about travel in Tibet, as well as in Kevin van Bladel's work on 7th/8th century flows of textual traditions in Tokharistan (contemporary Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). The musk routes are therefore the perfect backdrop for a discussion of the movement of people and ideas through which Islam, and Muslims, have been parts of Tibetan regional history.

Musk trade links together other systems. As a component of both Tibetan and Arab medical systems its trade represents not only economic transactions but the movement of knowledge in Yoeli-Tlalim and van Bladel's chapters. The potential for studies of medicinal systems to help us more fully understand the role of Muslim cultures in historical Tibet is developed in Paul D. Buell's chapter, in which Eurasian medical traditions—also known as "Muslim medicine"—bring together Tibetans and the Mongol Empire (p. 191). It plays a significant role in Dan Martin's chapter as well, in the relationship between Greek, Arab, and Tibetan medicinal practices and text.

Religion is, quite unsurprisingly, another significant flow addressed; of interest here is the balance between the roles of Islam and Buddhism. Johan Elverskog's chapter provides a fascinating glimpse of the interplay between these two religious traditions over time, while Halkias' discussion of the Muslim queens of Ladakh introduces religious conversion as a socio-political issue. Alexandre Papas,

Theirry Zarcone, John Bray, Diana Altner, and Jan Magnusson develop these ideas further in their chapters.

Overall, this is not simply a book about Tibet. *Islam and Tibet* demonstrates both how Tibetan influences spread far beyond the boundaries of the region and, conversely, how the region is comprised of influences from beyond those boundaries. Many of the interactions discussed here include what Yoeli-Tlalim calls "intermediary cultures" (p. 15), such as those associated with Persian language literature in Akasoy's, Bray's, and Marc Gaborieau's contributions, communities in Kashmir in Bray's, Melikian-Chirvani's and van Bladel's works, Mongols in Buell's writing, and the Uyghurs in Peter Zieme's piece. As Bray shows quite clearly in a compelling discussion of Khwajah Ahmed Ali as "trader, middleman, or spy," these intermediaries may play far more complex and central roles in regional history than initially apparent (p. 313). This book therefore brings together areas that are frequently carved into separate zones of scholarship, allowing for an understanding that reconfigures notions of both Islam and the Himalayas. The approach avoids relegating the former to "belonging" to particular regions, and allows the latter to transcend confining notions of culture areas. An example of the first is Christopher Beckwith's contribution on the link between Buddhist and Islamic education, which encourages a new perspective on the origins of the Islamic *madrasa*. The second is



found in Alexandre Papas' discussion of sacred spaces in Himalayan Islam, where the focus on space and legend allows for the conceptualization of "Himalayan Islam."

The style of writing and depth of discussion varies considerably between chapters in this book. Some of the chapters are appropriate for use in the university classroom—particularly for use in specialized upper level seminars—and have been well received by students. Other articles are accessible only to those already familiar with regional history; these scholars will find this an exciting new source for studying Islam in the region. The end matter contains a few highly appreciated features, including beautiful color plates of photographs, and an index of proper names in which Tibetan names are presented in both Wylie transliteration and simplified forms, cross-referenced for greater ease of use.

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### ***Land of Pure Vision: The Sacred Geography of Tibet and the Himalaya.***

**David Zurick.** Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. 136 pages. ISBN 9780813145518.

#### **Reviewed by Lindsay Skog**

Geographer and photographer David Zurick has distinguished himself with accessible work that shares the complex and interconnected stories of peoples and places. His *Illustrated Atlas of the Himalaya* (with J. Pacheco. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006) was awarded the National Outdoor Book Award in 2006, while his meditation on the cultural landscapes of the American South, *Southern Crossing* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2011), demonstrates Zurick's ability to explore geographic themes through photography. *Land of Pure Vision* continues in this vein by tracing the contours of High Asia's sacred geography.

Using a large format camera and black-and-white sheet film, Zurick captures the movement and complexity of the dynamic cultural landscapes of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Himalayan regions of India. He specifically focuses on the complexity of the sacred, from the unofficial, everyday sacred, such as the abodes of place-based deities and spirits, to the official rituals of monastic life. In stark contrast to the romanticism and exoticism that often characterizes

photographic collections of High Asia, *Land of Pure Vision* reflects the kind of intimate appreciation of complexity that develops only with the time and patience required for Zurick's ten-year peripatetic journey— or in Zurick's words, his "picture pilgrimage" (p. xii). As Eric Valli writes in his foreword, *Land of Pure Vision* is indeed a 'love story.'

Following Valli's brief foreword and an introduction by Zurick, the book is divided into four galleries: Nature, Place, Network, and Change. The first, Nature, explores human-environment relations in sacred sites. For example, images reveal the way in which trees, vines, and grasses reclaim the ruins of Drukgyel monastery in Bhutan (p. 11), the ice caves made sacred as the source of the Ganges (p. 18), and the sacred confluence of two rivers (p. 17). The second gallery, Place, illustrates the ways in which "emotion, ritual, and spiritual insight" (p. 29) animate Cartesian locations. The images in Networks, the third gallery, wander between pilgrimage sites (p. 63) and pilgrims (p. 61), traveling minstrels connecting rural villages (p. 69), and stone cairns marking passes on trading routes (p. 76). In the final gallery, Zurick explores Change, as "the trappings of a secular society" (p. xiii) mingle with the sacred to create the region's cacophonous landscapes. Here we find images of temple ruins in Tibet (p. 88) juxtaposed with an image of temple restoration workers (p. 89), and a portrait of urban youth in Kathmandu (p. 82) next to