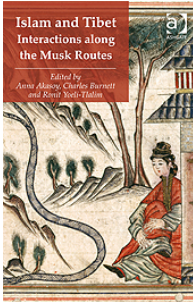


## REVIEW: *ISLAM AND TIBET*

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Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (eds). 2011. *Islam and Tibet: Interactions Along the Musk Routes*. Surrey: Burlington, VT: Ashgate. xiv+391pp, color photographs, index. ISBN 9780754669562 (hardcover 70£).

This important volume brings together eighteen chapters that originated as contributions to a 2006 conference at the Warburg Institute in London. Despite the highly divergent topics and the often tentative and argumentatively fragmentary nature of the individual contributions, the collection makes for a vital contribution to a much-neglected topic. The short introduction by Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim helpfully reminds the reader that 'Tibet' is adopted as a broad designation for the various regions that "participated in Tibetan culture," including both the Tibetan Plateau and such areas as Ladakh and Baltistan (1). Yoeli-Tlalim also makes note of various terms by which the lands of Islam and their peoples were referred to in Tibet (including *stag gzig*, *par sig*, and *phrom*, as well as several other cogent points that are framed, overall, in terms of "cultural interactions" between "Islam and Tibet").

Anna Akasoy contributes Chapter Two, which focuses on the representation of Tibetan lands and peoples in the learned tradition of Islamic geography (both 'human' and 'mathematical') and cartography through examining Persian and Arabic sources.

Chapter Three, a contribution by Kevin van Bladel, is one of the most engaging in the volume. It focuses on the famed Barmakid

family, long known by historians to have been important within the Abbasid administration – as well as for many of the early Arabic translations of Sanskrit works – but less so for its "Bactrian background." The chapter, thus, paints a very different picture of the family's cultural ancestry, using as its point of departure the under-considered awareness of the Barmak patriarch's identity as an educated Buddhist official from Tokharistan (Bactria).

An overview of interactions and connections between Iran and Tibet is presented in Chapter Four by Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, who discusses evidence of proto-historical artifacts dating from the first millennium BCE, instruments used for of Iranian wine banquets in Tibet dating from the seventh to eighth centuries CE, and the appearance of Iranian regalia in the early art of Tibet.

Chapter Five by Dan Martin exemplifies the often fragmentary nature of the conclusions and presentation styles of the volume's contributions. It describes important manuscripts of Tibetan medical texts that the author has accessed from Giuseppe Tucci's Tibetan library, in particular a work by the Regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho that "represents one of the first two medical history texts of the *khog-dbubs* genre" (119).

Anya King's contribution, Chapter Six, is a highly evocative account of the crucial importance of trade in Tibetan musk for Medieval Arab perfumery. King's discussion proves one of the most cohesive and straightforward in the volume, starting with relevant background on the musk deer, proceeding to the importance of musk as a medicinal and cosmetic substance, and then using the relevant Arabic sources both as textual evidence for determining when it was first known that musk originated in Tibet (in the eighth century) and for discerning that Near Eastern perfumery was unlikely to have been influenced by Indian or other traditions because Arabic perfume formulas focused strictly and continuously on Tibetan musk.

While one of the shortest, Chapter Seven, by Christopher I. Beckwith, is also one of the volume's most striking contributions in its argument that the origins of the scholastic method in both

Christianity and medieval Islam are to be found in the Sarvāstivādin Buddhist tradition. After providing relevant background on historian George Makdisi's famed demonstration that "the Latin scholastic method was borrowed from the Islamic world," (164) along with the institutions of the college (i.e., the Islamic *madrāsas*), Beckwith lays out the very particular structure of texts following the scholastic method. Ultimately, he argues that having originated in the Sarvāstivādin school of Buddhism that flourished in Central Asia and Northwestern India and that survived the Arab conquests intact – including with its famed *vihāra* institutions of higher learning – the scholastic method and the college were absorbed by the Islamic tradition.

Peter Zieme's contribution, Chapter Eight, considers the role of the Uyghur as "important mediators of cultural influence into Mongol society" (177). In particular, Zieme focuses on Uyghur attitudes about, and representations of, non-Buddhist religions, including Nestorian Christianity and Islam. He argues that Islamic influence on Uyghur cultures was negligible up to Genghis Khan's time and increased only during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In Chapter Nine, Paul Buell looks at Tibetans in Mongol China, arguing that during the Yuan era they "influenced food and apparently medicine." He also shows that Tibetans "intermediated between India and the Mongols" and generally functioned in facilitating "truly international exchanges" (207).

Chapter Ten, by Arezou Azad, is a report on three rock-cut sites in the regions of Marāgha and Sulṭāniyya located northwest of the Plateau in contemporary Azerbaijan Province of northwest Iran. Azad examines references made to the sites in Persian chronicles, outlines the methodological approach of his field research in the area, and assesses the functions and dating of the sites.

In Chapter Eleven, Georgios Halkias discusses the Muslim *khatuns* 'queens' in the Himalayan states of Ladakh and Baltistan. Observing that the practice of exchanging princesses for the purposes of marriage alliances was a prevalent feature of diplomacy in Tibet

going back to ancient times, Halkias concentrates on Himalayan folk literature and the songs of the *khatuns*.

Marc Gaborieau's contribution, Chapter Twelve, deals with Portuguese missionaries as the earliest source of western contact with the Muslims of Tibet during the early seventeenth-century. Gaborieau uses Portuguese accounts to provide "a cross-check" (253) on our belief that Kashmir Muslims constituted the oldest Muslim community in Central Tibet, tracing their arrival to the period of the fifth Dalai Lama from 1640-1680.

Alexandre Papas' Chapter Thirteen takes up Sufi hagiographies and sacred space in Himalayan Islam, and is another compelling contribution in the collection. Papas frames the chapter in terms of Mircea Eliade's observations that the concept of "a sacred space is intimately linked to the creation of profane narratives" (262). He next turns to Eastern Turkestan (contemporary Xinjiang) to discuss narratives about the discovery of Sufi tombs and other hagiographical and legendary tales that served to define sacred space and, ultimately, link Samarkand to Lhasa and the wider Himalayan region in the Muslim imagination.

In Chapter Fourteen, Thierry Zarcone continues in a related vein, looking at legendary accounts around the supposed conversion of the fifth Dalai Lama (d. 1682) and the Mongol Jungghar Khan Ghaldan (d. 1697) to Islam. Zarcone argues that "the legends of the defeat and/or conversion of" both figures "constitute[d] a fictional, imaginary background" (290) to real historical events involving Muslim-Buddhist alliances.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter Fifteen, Johan Elverskog explores the account of a nineteenth-century Mongol nobleman and fiction writer, Injannashi, writing amid Buddhist-Muslim civil war in Qing Inner Asia. "[I]nstead of following the conventional Buddhist anti-Muslim polemic" Injannashi's account is shown to have "used a form of ritual

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<sup>1</sup> The first involved Muslims joining the Qalmaq to end quarrels in their own kingdom in 1680 and the second a Qalmaq-Muslim alliance from 1690-1697 to fight other Mongols and resist the Chinese empire.

theory to argue that Muslims and their rituals were actually just like those of the Buddhists" (296).

John Bray's contribution, Chapter Sixteen, examines the activities of Khwaja Ahmed Ali (1770-1825), the Patna representative of a Kashmiri commercial house with agents in Dhaka, Kathmandu, Lhasa, and Xining, as well as Kashmir. Based on British colonial records, Bray reconstructs the twists and turns of Ahmed Ali's role in offering his services to the British as a source of wartime intelligence – asking, overall, whether he was a trader, middleman, or spy.

In Chapter Seventeen, Diana Altner provides a valuable account of the historical underpinning of the ethno-national designation 'Hui' – the single official ethnic group into which the People's Republic of China classifies all Muslims in Tibet.

In Chapter Eighteen, Jan Magnusson discusses strategies for "mobilizing tradition" in the contemporary Baltistan movement. Specifically, Magnusson considers how the movement's focus on a "Greater Ladakh" has arisen as a response to the geopolitics of the Pakistani and Indian nation states through the battle over a Tibetan script for the Western Tibetan language of Baltistan, Kargil, and Ladakh. In order to do so, he examines the production and circulation of 'pop' Balti *ghazals*, which has been facilitated by a "small-scale cassette production industry" that continues to exist today (370).

A weakness in this collection is the lack of organization in terms of themes, sharply defined topics, or historically-specific blocks of time. While there is a logical progression to some of the chapters, this is all too rarely the case. Chapters Thirteen to Fifteen, for example, deal with questions of religious interactions, albeit only through conversion and ritual theory. This creates a related problem for the overall continuity of the reading experience – the collection often resembles a disparate series of interesting entries, rather than a means for sketching the main contours of its titular concern with the historical relationship between "Islam and Tibet." This difficulty aside, the collection is an extremely valuable addition to our knowledge.