

are some contacts attestable in Central Asia, but this encounter appears to have been competitive, and it had no considerable impact beyond that region.

The conclusion of this detailed historical investigation is strikingly simple and straightforward. As there is no textual or archaeological evidence of early contacts between Christians and Buddhists, the theory of Buddhist influence on the rise of Christian monasticism has no support whatsoever. Rather, as the author convincingly argues, the theory must be viewed as a topos that emerged in a certain (Protestant) scholarly milieu, then assumed a life of its own, and has been popular—even among scholars—until today.

This reader might have arranged some sections differently, but the helpful summaries at the end of each section make navigation easy. The book contains various discussions of specific issues, too numerous to list here, and a substantial bibliography (forty-six pages) that will prove to be an immensely useful resource for anyone interested in this subject. From now on, until new sources are discovered, it will be difficult for serious scholars to uphold the theory of Buddhist influence on early Christian monasticism. Obvious similarities between the two religions in beliefs and practices remain extremely interesting, and they can be studied comparatively. By putting the “Buddhist influence” topos into perspective and showing the striking lack of evidence, this study clears the way for a comparative approach in which the existence, or not, of historical links between the two religions is unimportant.

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Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet: A Study of Tshal Gung-thang. By PER K. SØRENSEN and GUNTRAM HAZOD, with Tsering Gyalbo. Denkschriften der philosophisch-historische Klasse, vol. 361. Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, vol. 10. Vienna: VERLAG DER ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN, 2007. 2 vols., pp. i–ix, 1–1011, plates, maps. €220.80

In rapid succession Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, often with the assistance of Tsering Gyalbo, have published a relative bevy of prodigious and essential micro-histories of key premodern monastic institutions in Central Tibet. *Rulers on the Celestial Plain* is only their latest major work in an expanding *oeuvre*, based on the philological foundation Sørensen established with his *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies: Tibetan Buddhist Historiography, an Annotated Translation of the XIVth Century Tibetan Chronicle: Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1994).

Each work of Sørensen et al. has centered on an annotated translation of a Tibetan history of a monastic institution, preceded by an introduction and followed by lengthy appendices. For *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, that key text is the *Gung thang dkar chag*, the history of Tshal Gung thang 'Jog ri ba Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin 'phrin las rnam rgyal compiled at the end of 1782. The text in question begins with the outer, inner, and secret biographies of Bla ma Zhang (1123–1193), the enigmatic warlord and theocrat of the Lhasa valley, continues with the lineage histories of related complexes, descriptions of the Gung thang temple and its monastic complex, and ends with a list of the complex's sacred objects (*brten*) and how they were to be venerated. Written from an apologetic Dge lugs pa perspective after the monastery was converted to the Dge lugs pa lineage, the *Gung thang dkar chag* includes the *causa scribendi*. Following the model of the obligatory *prayojana* in Buddhist scholastic writings, the *causa scribendi* serves as documentation of the legitimacy of Dge lugs pa rule and an endorsement of Gung thang's new identity and function.

Appendix One contains an examination of two medieval *thangka* icons from the late thirteenth century of Bla ma Zhang and Gnyos Grags pa dpal—“a glimpse into the *modus operandi* of political and ritual symbolism in Tibet” (p. 15). Appendix Two is a history of the Lhasa area from the twelfth to

the seventeenth centuries, which draws on Sørensen's previous work on dyke-building as ritual veneration for the Ra sa Phrul snang temple and the Jo bo Śākyamuni statue. Rulers of Lhasa used the need for these rituals as justification of their own political hegemony in the Lhasa area. In Appendix Three, Sørensen and Hazod investigate the "Tshal pa myriarchy," the division of the Tshal territory for tax purposes especially during the period of Mongolian suzerainty over Tibet ca. 1250–1368. Appendix Four, from Guntram Hazod, is a hodge-podge of useful ideas that did not fit into other appendices. Notable among these are an analysis of the geographic terms for east Lhasa, Hazod's theory of the Lhasa Maṅḍala Zone, and information on ritual institutions such as the significance of the protective deity couple Grib Rdzong bstan and Gung thang Lha mo, and of an important festival, the Gungthang Flower Offering (*Me tog mchod pa*). Appendix Five consists of tables of lineage-holders and throne-holders of religious institutions around the Lhasa area. This appendix is meant to serve as a handy reference tool. Appendix Six contains facsimile editions of the *Gung thang dkar chag* and the previously unpublished *Smon lam rdo rje'i rnam thar*, written by Smon lam rdo rje's (1284–1347) son, Kun dga' rdo rje (1309–1364), the author of the famous *Red Annals* (*Deb ther dmar po*). Sørensen highlights the importance of the *Smon lam rdo rje'i rnam thar* for our understanding of Tshal pa–Mongolian relations, but this reviewer welcomes the publication of this text because of its potential contribution to our understanding of the role material culture played in the Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism. Sørensen et al. consulted a number of previously unavailable works, some of which were subsequently published as Per K. Sørensen and Sonam Dolma, eds. *Rare Texts from Tibet: Seven Sources for the Ecclesiastical History of Medieval Tibet* (Lumbini International Research Institute, 2007).

Rulers on the Celestial Plain is a valuable contribution to the history of premodern Tibet because it deepens our knowledge of a key figure, Bla ma Zhang. However, attention ought also to be paid to the editors' stated method of investigation, historical geography, which the authors define as the deliberate combination of "in-depth textual analyses, philology, [and] anthropological inquiries with extensive *in situ* fieldwork" (p. 1), performed by a collaborative team of European and Tibetan researchers. The value of this approach is evident in its ability to unwind knotty translation issues, and to identify and localize toponyms and cartographical resources. The entire work includes extensive photographic documentation, happily in color, of *thangka* paintings, iconic sculpture, historic murals, and aerial maps, which serve as essential historical data and bring to life the details of the *Gung thang dkar chag*. The rich historical and ethnographic resources in these two volumes justify the high price; one laments the dearth of specialist work of this caliber from North American university presses. To give just one example, Sørensen et al. broaden our knowledge of political connections in Tibet between reincarnation, identity, and the cult of the first Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo (ca. 615–649), also a theme in their earlier work. In *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, we learn that one of Zhang's borrowed identities was the Buddha Amitābha, which he indicated by calling himself "Master of the Seven Sites" (Lha Dpal 'bar Dbang phyug). One of those sites was the Songtsen Gampo chamber (also called the Zhang gzims khang) in the Ra sa 'Phrul snang temple. Zhang was then a prototype for later Buddhists to conceptualize their own prior existences as tied to particular sites and charismatic historical figures. As Amitābha, Bla ma Zhang seems to have placed himself above even Songtsen Gampo, who was recognized as a magical manifestation of Amitābha's emissary to Tibet, Avalokiteśvara. As further evidence of Zhang's connection to Amitābha, Zhang's student G.ya' bzang pa Chos kyi smon lam (1169–1233) proclaimed himself to be a reincarnation of Songtsen Gampo. In another example, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669), who considered himself to be a manifestation of Sanga rgyas 'bum (thirteenth century), not only supported bonds between the ascendant Dge lugs pa and Tshal Gung thang, but also symbolic bonds between seventeenth-century Dge lugs pa rulers and previous caretakers of Lhasa-area sacred sites.

A reassessment of the role the Tshal pa played in Tibetan politics is highly overdue. It is commonly accepted that from the time of Chos rgyal 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280), the Sakya pa ruled Tibet under Mongol suzerainty, further giving the impression that the Sakya pa held a unique place of importance in Mongolian-Tibetan relations in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, according to Sørensen et al., the heyday of the Tshal pa hegemony occurred during pre-

cisely the same period of time: c. 1260–1360. The Tshal pa were successful in developing close bonds with the Mongols, especially Qubilai Qan and his family lineage, going so far as to build a private temple (*sgos kyi lha khang*) called a Palace for Qubilai (*se chen gyi pho brang*), at Tshal Gung thang. The Tshal pa's connection to Qubilai proved to be fruitful, for a large portion of the offerings received from the Mongols served to maintain and restore Lhasa-area temples such as Ra sa 'Phrul snang, Ra mo che, and Tshal Gung thang.

One methodological criticism must be made of *Rulers of the Celestial Plain*. Not only did Karl-Heinz Everding previously publish a translation of the *Gung thang dkar chag* into German (VGH Wissenschaftsverlag GmbH, 2000), but the editors state they deliberately did not consult it because at the time of Everding's publication Sørensen et al. had already completed their own translation of the *Gung thang dkar chag*. In the history of Tibetology few works have ever been translated into Western languages more than once. Therefore, the Tibetological community would have benefited if the editors had devoted a few of their many pages to comparing the most important differences in their translation choices.

Rulers on the Celestial Plain paints an unapologetic picture of tantric ethics and Tibetan theocracy. Sørensen speculates that Zhang saw no contradiction between non-tantric Buddhist ethics and tantric warfare, due to his penchant for eschewing scholastic study in favor of Mahāmudrā spontaneous realization. Clearly the fears of earlier Tibetan rulers, such as Khri srong lde btsan (742–795) and Lha Bla ma Ye shes 'od (10th cent. C.E.), that tantric Buddhism would bring antinomian behavior to Tibet were well founded (Samten Karmay, "The Ordinance of *lHa Bla-ma Ye-Shes-'od*," in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in the History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet* [Kathmandu: Maṇḍala Book Point, 1998], 3–16). "At the moment when [I] engaged in warfare, I [solemnly] pledged that anyone killed would not be reborn in hell. Even if it involved the killing of one single monk, [his death] would produce rainbows and [other miraculous signs such as] relics. [. . .] My warfare was in the service of the Teaching; not for a single moment did I do it for my own personal interest" (p. 39). The audacity of Zhang, to presume that not only was it permissible for him to kill other monks but that he would thereby provide them with a saintly death, is breathtaking. His actions very likely represent the first-ever institutionalized form of dual religious and secular rule shared between a lay patron and his religious client in post-dynastic Central Tibet (aside from the preceding Gnyos clan).

A work of such magnitude inevitably contains some typographical errors, which ought to be corrected in future volumes. For example, a reference to the *terminus ad quo* for the hegemony of the Rins spungs pa ruling house should be corrected from 1880/81 to 1480/81.

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