

From these and other such case studies the authors offer tantalizing glimpses into ancient building practices. The volume concludes with a report by the geologist Randall Law who analyses the different stone materials.

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CENTRAL ASIA

DAVID M. DIVALERIO:

The Holy Madmen of Tibet.

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Antinomian behaviour among religious practitioners has long been an object of particular fascination, both for scholars of religion and within contemporary culture more generally. Figures such as Grisha, the “holy fool” of Tolstoy’s childhood, or the Baul songsters revered by Tagore, are often held up as living examples of authenticity and spontaneity with which to confront the routine and artifice that are felt to confine us. Tantric religious traditions, in which the overturning of social norms is a recurrent trope, have attracted intense interest in this regard, whether lurid or considered, and Tibetan Buddhist Tantrism, with its graphic iconography of sex and violence and its numberless tales of eccentric, mad saints, has provided fertile ground in which fascination and fantasy have both flourished. In *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*, David DiValerio renders a service to the study of Tibetan religion by examining, through a close reading of relevant Tibetan sources, just what the trope of mad sainthood may have meant in Tibet itself. That there is a method to the madness becomes clear from the start.

The method, known in Buddhist Tantric jargon as the Practice (Skt. *caryā*, Tib. *spyod-pa*), the Observance (Skt. *vrata*, Tib. *brtul-zhugs*), or by related expressions (e.g. Skt. *vidyāvratā*, Tib. *rig-pa brtul-zhugs*), has been explored recently in its Indian context in Christian Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* (Columbia, 2012), a work to which DiValerio frequently refers. However, whereas the Indian sources are rich in theory, concrete social-historical knowledge of the manner in which textual directives were actualized is far thinner. DiValerio’s account, depending largely on biographical and historical sources, complements Wedemeyer’s work by demonstrating just how the Practice was said to have been observed by its most celebrated Tibetan adepts, extraordinary persons who, as DiValerio argues, sought to engage quite literally in the Tantric transgressions that others had mostly interpreted symbolically.

The foci of the present work are three such figures who are the best-known exemplars of the “mad saint” ideal in Tibetan religious lore: the Madman of Ü (1458–1532); the Madman of Tsang (1452–1507); and Drukpa Kunlé (b. 1455), who became in effect the patron saint of Bhutan. The last two have been the objects of much previous study and translation, while the first is now becoming more widely known thanks to DiValerio’s own recent translation of his life story (*The Life of the Madman of Ü*, Oxford, 2016). Earlier scholarship, however, has not explored the thematic linking these figures in a sustained fashion; it is this that constitutes the major contribution here.

DiValerio's heroes enacted not only the apparently libertine dimensions of Tantrism that have sometimes titillated modern readers, but the revolting aspects as well, above all by garbing themselves as the divinity Heruka, adorned with human skins and entrails, and smeared with grease and blood. If the imagery brings to mind the gruesome character Hannibal Lecter, the practices in question were nonetheless said to have been undertaken in the interest of realizing the classical Buddhist values of selflessness and compassion, by overcoming the polarities of attraction and revulsion altogether. In one particularly striking passage (pp. 48–9), the Madman of Tsang describes this practice in terms perfectly calibrated with traditional scholastic understandings of the Buddhist path: “[On realizing] the Path of Seeing, when one . . . can use one’s clairvoyance and supernatural abilities to convert the unfaithful and bear difficulties as part of the path . . . [a]t that time one adorns oneself with the emblems of Heruka”.

As this suggests, outlandish costume and behaviour were by no means the sole reasons for which these persons were of interest. Rather, their transgressions were undertaken in the service of particular principled ends. That this was so is, once more, most clearly exemplified by the Madman of Tsang, who, as one of Tibet’s greatest authors – his writings include the best-known versions of the lives of the translator Marpa and his disciple the poet-saint Milarepa – and a pioneer in the development of Tibetan printing, has been long appreciated in the context of Tibetan literary history. And, though his activities in this vein were more modest, the Madman of Ü appears as a promoter of literary activity and publication as well (p. 154), and Drukpa Kunlé left his own significant legacy as an author (pp. 199–202).

It is remarkable that Tibet’s most famed holy madmen, the three studied here, all belong to precisely the same generation, born within the same decade in fact. This suggests that they were the products of peculiar social-historical circumstances during this time. In chapter 4, “Civil war, strategic alliances”, DiValerio, in part following leads suggested by the late E. Gene Smith, seeks to position the madmen as reformers of a sort, who, in contrast with the scholastic reforms of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), sought to return the Kagyü Tantric traditions, with which they were affiliated, to their original sources of inspiration. Both reforms would have been concerned to address the decadence and complacency of important sectors of the Tibetan clergy during a period of intensive factional rivalry.

The Holy Madmen of Tibet is a welcome contribution to the study of Tibetan religions and Tantric Buddhism. It will be read with interest, too, by students of Indian Tantrism generally, as represented, for instance, in the recent writings of Alexis Sanderson, James Mallinson and David Gordon White. And although DiValerio has only hinted at some of the possible connections of his work with the broad issue of antinomian religion, I recommend *The Holy Madmen of Tibet* without hesitation to those who may wish to ponder this question from a comparative angle as well.

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