

Rogues in Robes: An Inside Chronicle of a Recent Chinese-Tibetan Intrigue in the Karma Kagyu Lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism by Tomek Lehnert. Nevada: Blue Dolphin, 1998. ISBN 1-57733-026-9. 305 pp., 13 plates, 35 facsimile documents, glossary.

Reviewed by David N. Gellner

In 1981 the 16th Karmapa, the leader of the Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism, died. In 1992, a full eleven years later, a reincarnation was finally identified and enthroned in Tsurphu, Tibet, with the active cooperation of the Communist Chinese regime. Two of the leading Kagyu rinpoches supported the reincarnation, as did the Dalai Lama; but another, the second-most prominent rinpoche after the Karmapa himself according to this account, did not accept the validity of the procedures by which this reincarnation had identified. His preferred candidate was smuggled out of Tibet and revealed to the world in 1994, leaving the Kagyu order with two opposed leaders, one in China and one in India. After *Rogues in Robes* was published, in 2001, the China-based Karmapa also succeeded in fleeing to India.

As the sub-title suggests, this book is an inside account of the conflict this generated within Kagyu Buddhism. It is written by someone who is evidently a close disciple of Ole Nydahl, an influential Western teacher of Karma Kagyu Buddhism. Nydahl is apparently known in Western Buddhist circles as 'Holy Ole'—though one would never learn that from the po-faced, 'goodies versus baddies' style, innocent of any sociology, adopted by *Rogues in Robes*. There is no intentional humour, unless one counts heavy sarcasm, or the incident when Nydahl's followers conducted a mass campaign by writing their replies to a letter they didn't like on toilet paper. Opponents of Nydahl's position are all malicious or misled. Western Kagyu centres which do not accept Nydahl's line have teachers who are "dull" and "traditional" (or alternatively are mired in sexual scandals); the centres themselves are "pious" and "resemble a Catholic church". Nydahl's centres are presented as the opposite of this: his aim was to introduce the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism "clean of its ethnic and monastic baggage" (p. 26).

Individual Westerners who oppose Nydahl get described with the crudest national stereotypes (e.g. p. 140: "his Sicilian mentality had apparently caught up with him"). Supporters of Nydahl are brave seekers after truth, defenders of the authentic transmission against rogues, as well as against ordinary Tibetans who have "rustic, country bumpkin minds". The irony of Western Buddhists as the defenders of authentic Tibetan Buddhist practice,

and the irony of insisting on scientific testing of the authenticity of a letter which their opponents claimed had been written by the 16th Karmapa while at the same time believing in 'correct methods' of ascertaining reincarnation, are lost on the author. When Nydahl reacts to events with aggression this is ascribed to his past life as a Tibetan general; when others do so, they reveal their own ignorance and delusion.

Despite this partiality in the way it is written, the story is a fascinating one, and told with much convincing detail. The inner workings of the Kagyu order are revealed, in particular the jealousies and manoeuvres of the leading rinpoches. The drama of the narrative—forged letters, pitched battles over relics, Chinese Communist plots, religious rivalries—is undeniable. Just how reliable this version is will have to await the judgements of historians; but regardless of these details, the book paints a vivid picture of a global religious network and the politics it gives rise to. It also demonstrates once again how a unified Buddhist monastic order requires a strong political authority (normally from outside the Sangha, but in Tibet the Sangha was the political authority) to support and maintain it. If there could be three Popes at one time in medieval Europe, it should come as no surprise that there can be contending candidates for the leadership of Kagyu Buddhism. The book gives some idea of what may be in store when the position of Dalai Lama becomes vacant.

Tibetan Elemental Divination Paintings: Illuminated manuscripts from the White Beryl of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho with the Moonbeams treatise of Lo-chen DharmaSri. Commentary and translations by Gyurme Dorje. London: John Eskenazi in association with Sam Fogg, 2001. ISBN 0953994104. 424 pp., indices, numerous illustrations.

Reviewed by Martin Boord

This most remarkable book, enormous in size, scope, and price, deals with the ancient Tibetan system of elemental divination ('*byung rtsis*) which has both Chinese Buddhist and Taoist antecedents, for which reason it is often known as Chinese divination (*nag rtsis*) when contrasted with the practice of classical Indian astrology (*dkar rtsis/skar rtsis*).

The origins of its methodology are generally attributed in Chinese historical works to the legendary emperor Fu Hsi (Tb. sPa-hu 'shi-dhi) who is believed to have lived from 2853-2738 BCE, although the Buddhist