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Review of 'Land of Pure Vision: The Sacred Geography of Tibet and the Himalaya' by David Zurick

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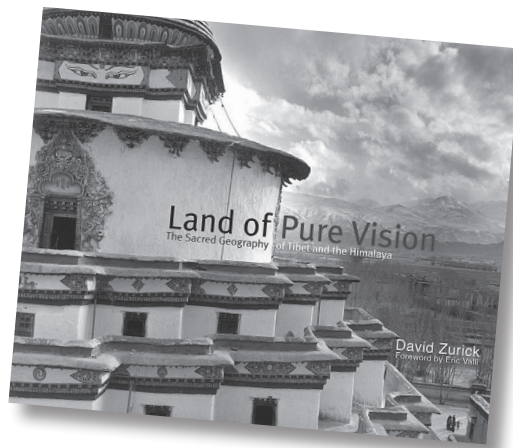
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found in Alexandre Papas' discussion of sacred spaces in Himalayan Islam, where the focus on space and legend allows for the conceptualization of "Himalayan Islam."

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

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Lindsay Skog on *Land of Pure Vision: The Sacred Geography of Tibet and the Himalaya*.

monastic youth in Tibet (p. 83). Taken together, these galleries push beyond static snapshots of awe-inspiring scenery and the peoples inhabiting such places in order to capture the Himalaya and Tibet as complex places in motion.

The images throughout the book include brief captions stating each image's title, place, and date while more in-depth captions are included at the end of the book. The in-depth captions typically include a more thorough explanation of the image, such as why the photographed site is sacred and to whom, how Zurick understands the particular image to fit into a specific gallery, or the ways in which an image captures changes in a particular place. Many of the captions include Zurick's own experiences in taking the photograph or his reflections on those images. In this way, Zurick invites the reader to join him on his 'picture pilgrimage.' Reserving the more extensive explanatory captions and Zurick's reflections on the images until the end of the book encourages the reader to engage with each image through his or her own lenses, to embark on his or her own journey through the people and places of the Himalaya and Tibet. In addition, this format allows each image to be printed to the fullest extent of the page and without visual competition from extensive explanatory captions. However, it is not always apparent why Zurick included a particular image where he did until one reads the explanatory caption. Such is the case in the second gallery, Place,

which includes an image of monastic texts (*pecha*), a thunderbolt (*dorje*), a ritual handbell, prayer beads, and presumably donations sitting on a bench (p. 30). The brief caption states the image is a prayer chapel in India, yet it is not clear why this image is included in the Place gallery until the reader flips to the end of the book to find the explanatory caption. By the end of the book, the constant need to flip to the back becomes cumbersome in a large format book such as this one.

In his introduction, Zurick explains that his goal is to explore the ways in which human intention shapes landscapes, as opposed to the abundant accounts of the ways in which geological and ecological factors shape the Himalaya and Tibet. In so doing, Zurick aims to engage with the world of *ideas* in the landscape (p. xi). While Zurick's images certainly succeed in meeting this goal, his brief introductions to each gallery and in-depth captions lack an overt engagement with geographic theoretical concepts that could have complemented his goal well. Nonetheless, those with a sustained and intimate knowledge of peoples and places throughout the Himalaya and Tibet will appreciate Zurick's eye for capturing the complex dynamics of religion, environment, and society, while those who are embarking on their own nascent journeys in the region will gain insight into the diversity of place and peoples through Zurick's images. *Land of Pure Vision* will be particularly helpful in demonstrating to

students and scholars alike the ways in which images can do more than simply illustrate our words; rather, Zurick demonstrates how images can tell their own stories. Moreover, the recent earthquakes in Nepal have no doubt reshaped, damaged, and/or destroyed many of the places and sites in these photographs—itsself a demonstration of the interconnected nature of geology and the world of ideas. Thus, an unintended outcome of this book is to chronicle places and peoples now forever changed. This book will be a welcome addition to public, academic, and private collections.

Lindsay Skog completed her PhD in Geography from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2015. Her dissertation explores spatiality in the cultural politics of religion as claims of authority and territory from a monastic institution, localized place-based deities, and the state overlap in Khumbu, Nepal. She is currently an instructor in the Department of Geography at Portland State University and the Division of Continuing Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder.