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 rinpoch 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 Buddhism 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.

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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 (ngag 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. sPah-ku 'shi-dhi) who is believed to have lived from 2853-2738 BCE, although the Buddhist
tradition attributes the original teaching to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī on Mount Wu Tai Shan.

After more than 3,000 years of development in its homeland, the texts of elemental divination began to be translated into Tibetan at the time of the Yarlung dynasty (7th-9th century). This early, tightly regulated, system of elemental divination (rgya rtis rnying ma) should not be confused with the later innovatory techniques of divination and astrology introduced after the Yarlung dynasty (Tb. 7th-11th century). Treatises in the form of treasures (rgya gsal) were written by Indian masters, and Tibetan masters also came up with numerous treatises on the topic of treasuries (rnying ma). This is the transmission which eventually fell to the Dalai Lama’s regent Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho (1653-1705).

The unique manuscript of intriguing illuminations reproduced in the present volume came out of Tibet only recently. Painted in the 18th century, mainly at Sa-skya by the master artist bSod-nams dpal-'byor of rTse-gdond some 60 years after the death of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho, it once depicted the zodiac (go la) of Indian astrology, the cakra diagrams of martial conquest, and the elaborate hidden points (gab thse) of Chinese elemental divination. Unfortunately, it now lacks the zodiacal charts, and only six folios of the section of martial conquest survive. It remains, however, the finest and most detailed illuminated manuscript known illustrating the intricate tabular calculations of elemental divination described in Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho’s monumental treatise and this publication is sure to remain the definitive work for the foreseeable future, although a more user-friendly edition is a serious desideratum.

The White Beryl in its Lhasa and sDe-dge editions comprises 35 chapters dealing with all aspects of astrology and divination as presented in the system of Phug-pa lHun-grub rGya-mtsho. Chapters XX-XXXII deal specifically with the subject of elemental divination and the present volume, corresponding to these chapters, offers us access to this mysterious knowledge in the form of a veritable feast of scholastic and artistic excellence. Discussing in fine detail legends concerning the origin and historical transmission of elemental divination in ancient China and Tibet, the text goes on to explain the symbolism of the turtle divination chart, geomantic observations and such other topics as are of traditional concern to prognosticators.

Although the charts depicted in this beautiful volume would once have functioned as table-top grids upon which black, white or neutral divinatory pebbles could be directly placed, they have more generally been utilized as model wall-charts, while a schematic grid is actually utilized for specific divinations, the white pebbles being indicated by nights and the black by crosses. The Mother relationship of the elements, for example, deemed to be the most excellent, is symbolized by three noughts and the most inauspicious Enemy relationship by two crosses. The elements upon which the divinatory relationships are based are depicted symbolically here in accordance with the 7th century Chinese (sPor-thang) scrolls of princess Wen Cheng: wood is green and depicted as a tree or bush, fire is red and depicted as a triangular flame, and so on. In accordance with the esoteric rules of this system, the diviner calculates the forces of: (1. srog) the life-sustaining vital force resident in the heart, (2. bla) a luminous essential spirit that migrates around the human body in harmony with the waxing and waning of the moon, the mother of the life force, (3. dbang thang) the ‘element of destiny’, personal power, charisma, strength, (4. lus) the ‘body element’, health, the energy of physical well-being and (5. kzung rta) the ‘luck aspect’ which is the capacity to unite the other four and ensure their optimum advantage. For example, in determining the energy of the life force (srog), he reads in the text: “The life force of the animals resides in the elements of the directions. The life force of the tiger and the hare in the east is wood. That of the horse and the snake in the south is fire. The life force of the monkey and the bird in the west is metal. That of the rat and the pig in the north is water. As for the ox, the sheep, the dog and the dragon, all four have the srog of the earth element which governs the intermediate directions.” After tallying the pebbles or symbolic noughts and crosses in the context of a given chart, the diviner may then calculate the pebbles of conclusive analysis (ltang goodness rdzis) and consult the White Beryl commentary in order to determine his prognosis.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this entire divinatory system is the detailed and arcane science of geomancy, said to be based on a survey of the locations of many hundred spirit lords of the soil (bhrimipati, sa bdag). Since the opportune pathways of the years, months, days, or hours are deemed to be those not occupied by such spirits, activities coinciding with their presence in a specific location may only be undertaken if counteracting rituals are performed.

In antiquity, when the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī emanated the reliquary turtle (ring sel gyi rns sral) and incised it with his sword of contemplation, these spirit lords of the soil are said to have emerged from the turtle’s subtle vapour (rdu gyi rtags pa) with their king, The-se, emerging at the turtle’s crown and his minister, Tsang-kun, at the heart, and so on.
According to *The Gathering of all Precious Elements* (*'Byung ba rin chen kun 'das*), which is the primary source enumerating the spirit lords of the soil, their most detailed enumeration comprises 1,000. However, when these are subdivided according to elements, spatial locations and their outer, inner, secret, and most secret aspects, their number is said to be infinite. In general, there are said to be 102 spirit lords who are ever-present, without reference to temporal fluctuations, and a further 474 directly associated with the years, months, days, and hours.

There are also other categories such as the “deities moving through the days of the month” (*'ishes rgyu ba'i lha* which determine the “greater black days” (*'nyi ma nag chen*). One of these is the so-called “nine black omens occurring together” (*'ngan pa dgu 'dzens* on the seventh day of the first spring month provoked by Râhu circuiting mount Sumenü in an anticlockwise direction. At that juncture, descending and ascending winds are reversed, horizontal winds are disturbed, the five elements are agitated, and the sunshine resembles aconite.

The movements of all these spirits is detailed in the *White Beryl*, together with a summary of the results of infringing their personal space and ritual remedies for such infringements. Fascinating stuff.


Reviewed by Ben Campbell

This fine Himalayan contribution to OUP’s series on Social Ecology and Environmental History offers a well-researched investigation of conservation policy and its impact on Gaddi herders of Himachal Pradesh. Saberwal’s aim is to demonstrate the interplay between scientific ecological discourse, institutional politics, and the effect of policy on communities and their livelihood practice. At the heart of his argument is the institutional rationale for the Forest Department’s alarmist rhetoric of environmental degradation caused by overgrazing. Unlike studies of environmental history and politics, which project a monolithic view of the state, Saberwal manages to convey the insecurities of the Forestry Department in its historical relations of rivalry with the Revenue Department. He suggests that this rivalry accounts for the tone of alarm since the Forestry Department’s establishment in 1865. He is at pains to indicate that he is not in denial about ecological threats to the Himalayan landscape, but insists that the causes of degradation are poorly understood, that the evidence for pastoralists’ blameworthiness is not convincingly, and that a series of cultural stereotypes accompany the official distribution of ecological blame.

Chapter two introduces the herders and their problems of negotiating pasture over the yearly cycle of transhumance with sheep and goats from alpine grasslands down to winter forests. Saberwal spent several months of fieldwork mostly with villagers of Bara Banghal in Kangra District, H.P. The ethnographic information on the herders is, however, scanty. Consideration is not given to the status of the category ‘Gaddi’, and it seems that other group terms prevail in local usage. The villagers are spoken of as belonging to a geographically restricted ethnic group called Kanet, who think of themselves as Rajputs. Nor is there any analysis of the highly gendered division of labour, for it seems that the women remain in villages while their menfolk attend to the animals. The reader is not given a view of Gaddi life in the round, and many aspects of this community’s relationship to their environment are not discussed, such as knowledge of plants, domestic socialization into herding practices, extra-economic understandings of the landscape, etc, which would have been valuable to the book’s questions about sustainability. The chapter concentrates instead on value-maximizing strategies of herding practice, which Saberwal argues have less to do with *de jure* rights to high and low pastures than with patterns of access dependent on a flexibility of kinship networks, labour availability, alliances with cultivator communities, and the ability to circumvent state regulation of foraging. The Gaddis are presented as successfully maintaining flocks that provide a reasonable income of around Rs 20,000 per year from an average number of one hundred animals. That they are able to do this is attributed to their mobilization of political support, and exploiting conflict between state departments.

This dimension is then explored in the remaining chapters of the book. Chapter three looks at the inception of the Forest Department, with its goal of protecting timber supply and preventing soil erosion. The Department expanded the area of forests under its control within the Punjab administration of the day in 1893 and again in 1906, competing against the Revenue Department’s territories of influence. Correspondences from the time nicely illustrate the rivalries and jostlings over administrative hierarchies of command. Canal irrigation later led to a decrease of Forest Department holdings in the plains, while it maintained forests tracts in the mountainous regions of Eastern Punjab, including contemporary Himachal Pradesh, where the case for protecting soil and water sources was made.