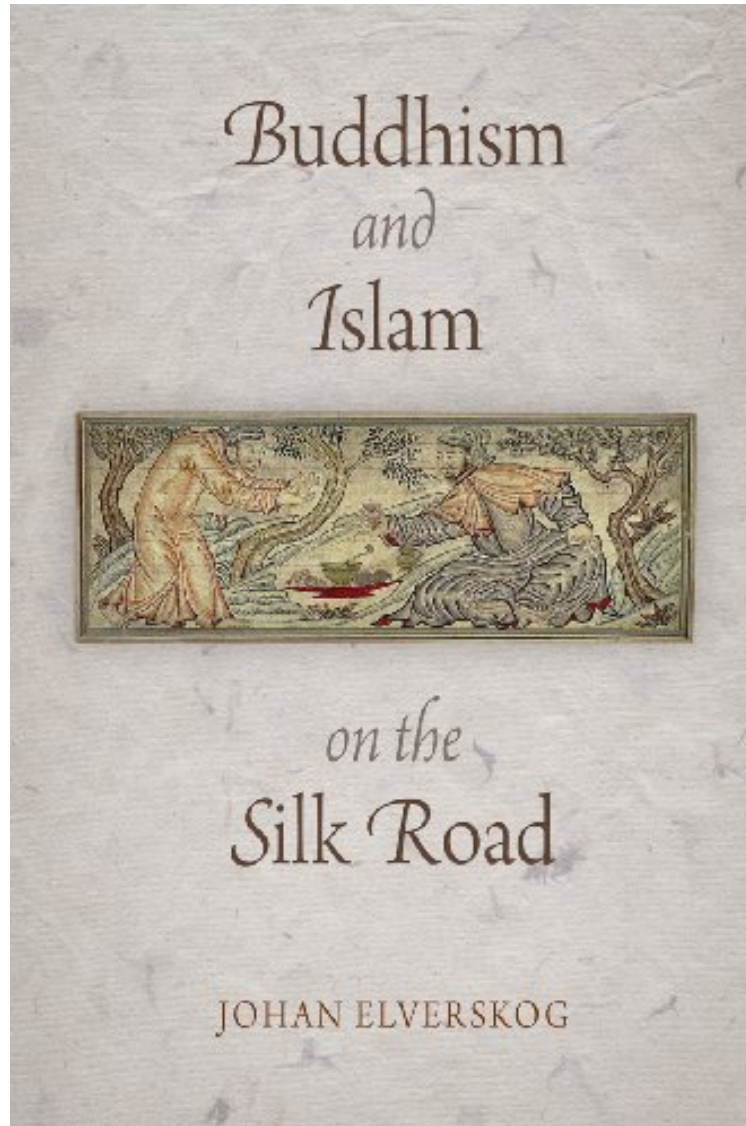


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Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road (Encounters with Asia)

Johan Elverskog

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Johan Elverskog : Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road (Encounters with Asia) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road (Encounters with Asia):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Elverskogs Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road (2010) examines ...By JPCElverskogs Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road (2010) examines the interaction of Buddhism and Islam, beginning in the ninth century c.e. and continuing through until the approximate end of the Qing dynasty. Elverskog

examines how a constitutive other played a crucial role in the formation of religious identities used to legitimate political regimes, both during periods of relative economic and political isolation, and during period of sustained contact between the Buddhist and Muslim worlds. One of the fundamental points argued by Elverskog is that theological developments cannot be understood in isolation from the political and economic contexts in which they take place. He is particularly concerned with the interrelationship between religious and economic practices, and he addresses the theme of religious violence within this context. In one section of the book, Elverskog examines how the ideology of jihad was deployed during a period of increasing fragmentation of the Mongol empire as a response to economic and political changes. Jihad, Elverskog argues, underwent a fundamental change after the end of the Arab conquests. Whereas jihad had once motivated conquest, and a desire to actively bring about the final victory of Islam in the immediate historical moment, after the end of the Arab conquests, the theory of jihad had been re-conceptualized as a struggle internal to Islam, rather than a battle against external infidels. In the period after the collapse of the Mongol empire (a term which Elverskog deploys with several important qualifications), the rhetoric of jihad was deployed in the Jochid and Il-Khanid struggle over the financial resources of northern Iran. Elverskog demonstrates that in the space of two years, a rhetoric of Mongol unity came to be replaced by one of jihad, focused on the religious differences between the Golden Horde and the Jochids. Elverskog's point is that Muslim identity came to trump Mongol identity only in the struggle over economic resources. Underwriting Elverskog's work is an argument against essentialist notions of religious identity. Although Elverskog does not engage directly with theoretical literature on identity, they both make historical arguments that demonstrate that groups whether conceived of as religious or ethnic are not bounded, discrete objects in the natural world, but processes that emerge within the contexts of specific political and economic action.⁴ of 5 people found the following review helpful. Eehhhhh

By Kenna Elverskog has a great writing style; he keeps it interesting by using different phrases ("the pork and salami belt" stands out) and it's just colloquial enough to make it easy to read. The subject matter gets incredibly deep and very specific, however - I'm reading it for a class on the silk road during which we have discussed both Buddhism and Islam in different contexts and have a general understand of Eurasian history, and it is still way too detailed for me. Anyone just generally interested in the subjects should definitely pick a different book; I would only recommend this to those who either are researching the topics in-depth or are already incredibly knowledgeable about both religions and Mongolian and Indian history. Elverskog also strays from his topics often in order to flesh out all of the aforementioned details, histories, and writers - the chapter 'Halal', for example, only actually discusses anything directly related to the reception of and the politics surrounding halal for maybe 20% of its 33 pages. I only read it for historical or religious research purposes.²⁰ of 23 people found the following review helpful. Shining a light on the history of Buddhist-Muslim interaction

By PBjW Buddhist-Muslim history is usually summed up in two historic events, one ancient and one modern: the destruction of Nalanda in 1202 and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha by the Taliban in 2001. But in Elverskog's words "shining a light on the history of Buddhist-Muslim interaction" is a far more nuanced and interesting story than most realize. Five chapters and 63 pages of extensive endnotes trace this history from its beginnings (700-1000 CE) linking the two religions through the Mongol empire (1100-1400 CE), to the 20th century. Economic goals and trade play a key role, but so do art, literature and philosophy. The regional focus is that area between Afghanistan and Mongolia known as the Silk Road, but where appropriate Elverskog dips into other territory. Readers need an existing familiarity with the basic tenets of both Islam and Buddhism, but with such a foundation the riches of this book keep it a page-turner. Elverskog makes his intent known from the beginning: "what happened when Buddhists and Muslims actually came into contact with one another"? It is the discoveries of how each was transformed by such contact, especially during their early years, that is this book's reward. "The most well-known example ... is the borrowing of the Buddhist monastery as a model in the development of the Islamic madrasa, which itself became the basis of the university in the Christian West." There are countless more examples, such as the shape of Buddhist stupas influencing Islamic metalwork, medical knowledge, divination squares and "blockprinted Arabic amulets that seem to have a Buddhist origin". And although the subject is more academic than popular, Elverskog's colorful choice of language ("Kurtzian images" ... "Buddhist death squads") keeps the pace active and the information rewarding. I've read many dozens of books on the Silk Road yet this volume contains information and ideas seldom found elsewhere--for example, the material sourced from the 13th century Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid ad-Din's Illustrated History of the World, which amongst many interesting facts confirms that there were Chinese Buddhists in il-khanid Iran. A COMPENDIUM OF CHRONICLES: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, VOL XXVII) I would have said that this wasn't a book for the general reader, or perhaps even someone who didn't have an academic disposition or position, but that was proven wrong this past autumn when, outside of Kashgar, our Uighur guide spotted this book and asked to borrow it. Rather than forcibly ripping it out of his hands at the end of the trip, we finally left it with him and bought two new copies.

In the contemporary world the meeting of Buddhism and Islam is most often imagined as one of violent confrontation. Indeed, the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 seemed not only to reenact the infamous Muslim destruction of Nalanda monastery in the thirteenth century but also to reaffirm the stereotypes of Buddhism as a

peaceful, rational philosophy and Islam as an inherently violent and irrational religion. But if Buddhist-Muslim history was simply repeated instances of Muslim militants attacking representations of the Buddha, how had the Bamiyan Buddha statues survived thirteen hundred years of Muslim rule? Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road demonstrates that the history of Buddhist-Muslim interaction is much richer and more complex than many assume. This groundbreaking book covers Inner Asia from the eighth century through the Mongol empire and to the end of the Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century. By exploring the meetings between Buddhists and Muslims along the Silk Road from Iran to China over more than a millennium, Johan Elverskog reveals that this long encounter was actually one of profound cross-cultural exchange in which two religious traditions were not only enriched but transformed in many ways.

Selected by Choice magazine as an Outstanding Academic Title for 2010 "Johan Elverskog is exceedingly well read in the relevant literature, and his book is fascinating and thought-provoking." TLS "[Elverskog] challenges deeply ingrained misperceptions about the historical relationship between Buddhism and Islam, and more importantly challenges us to rethink more broadly many of our assumptions about cultural encounters across Eurasia and the basis on which they rest. This is "world history" at its best, avoiding the oversimplifications of model building that have sometimes framed that subject." The Silk Road "Elverskog has produced, for the very first time, a detailed account of the long-term interaction of Buddhism and Islam that should be welcomed by all students of Eurasian history. His approach to this issue is informed, balanced, and insightful. He understands that it is important to recognize the diversity within both religions, and that their encounters were not clashes between monolithic belief systems. Their relationship ran the gamut between religious violence and fanaticism to cultural exchange and tolerance." Thomas T. Allsen, author of The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History "The book, brilliantly moving from the interaction between economic and religious regimes to cross-cultural artistic production, succeeds in presenting a rich history full of rosy moments as well as tension and clashes. In so doing, Elverskog has made a very important and unique contribution to the community of historians of the world and Asia as well as students of religion." American Historical "This is the most thorough treatment I have seen of the historical relationship between Buddhism and Islam. Elverskog skillfully and often entertainingly corrects many longstanding stereotypes about both religions, and richly demonstrates the complexity of their historical interaction with each other. This book is thoughtful, its arguments well supported, and its style very accessible." Richard Foltz, author of Religions of the Silk Road About the Author Johan Elverskog is Altshuler University Distinguished Teaching Professor and Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Southern Methodist University.