Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters & Daud Ali. *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000). 235 pp., index.

This book contains three substantial essays dealing with the history and texts of South Asia between the sixth and twelfth centuries. As the title indicates, the authors have attempted to re-think these centuries in significant ways and to write new histories of the post-Gupta period. The result is stimulating, challenging and important; however much one may take issue with specific points or the handling of certain themes, this is a book which historians of medieval India will find difficult to ignore.

The book focuses on different geographical areas, dynasties, texts and religious dispensations but forms a coherent whole. This is due to the fact that the contributors share a methodological and theoretical position, the most important aspects of which are: (1) that texts in South Asia are not static descriptions of external historical realities but were part of a ‘scale of texts’, that is, they were composed and re-worked in response to other texts and a variety of surrounding historical events, (2) that texts not only articulated and responded to particular circumstances but were part of the process by which situations were constituted, that is, texts were seen as having a power to create new social, religious and historical realities, (3) that texts were not composed by single individuals in the modernist sense but were produced by ‘complex authors’, that is, a tangle of sages, scholars, scribes, readers and listeners, all of whom, directly or indirectly, helped shape the texts that are preserved for us to study. To support this theoretical framework, the authors cite Collingwood, Vološinov, Barthes, Foucault and others. In addition to these shared theoretical principles, the present volume is held together by the idea of ‘imperial formation’, an historical model developed by Inden to explain the political constitution of India from the Gupta period to the rise of the Sultanate.

Within this framework Inden, in the first essay ‘Imperial Purāṇas: Kashmir as Vaishnava Center of the World’, argues that the *Vishnuharmottara-purana (VDhp)* was a key text of the Pāñcarātrins who developed this massive compilation to achieve a number of ends, principally to absorb and surpass Vedic forms of ritual, to assert the supremacy of the Pāñcarātrī ‘disciplinary order’, to forge a special relationship with the Kārkota Nāga dynasty of Kashmir and, through all this, to establish a new vision of the world in which a huge temple of Vaikuṇṭha, the special form of Viṣṇu venerated by the Pāñcarātrins, would stand at the centre of a Kārkota imperial formation embracing all of India. In cultural, historical and religious terms, the Pāñcarātrī’s was no small achievement and Inden’s description of it is likewise. His arguments about how the VDhp construed its relationship to a ‘scale of texts’, that is, the orthodox traditions that the ‘complex author’ of the VDhp felt obliged to variously accommodate, critique or ignore, are themselves complex and carefully constructed. The implications of Inden’s work for the study of medieval India are many. One interesting point to emerge is that the Pāñcarātra campaign to establish temple building and image worship as the central concern of Indian society was a salient cultural marker of the seventh and eighth centuries and one which particularly distinguishes this period from that of the Guptas.

Those who have read some of Inden’s work previously will be familiar with his polemical style and his habit of addressing a host issues along the way; the polemic is counterproductive and inclines us to doubt his reading; the asides, often expressions of disdain or amazement at how earlier scholars got it all wrong, represent an idiosyncratic approach to historiographical issues and ultimately weaken what is an important argument. Particularly curious is the author’s insistence that he is not an Indologist. The uninitiated will be baffled by much of this, but Inden’s theoretical position helps us understand: the book under review belongs to its own ‘scale of texts’ and is concerned not simply with describing Indian history in an objective way but with constituting a distinct position for the author within the American academy. Some understanding of the sociology can be had from Richard Eaton, ‘(Re)imag(in)ing Otherness: A Postmortem for the Postmodern in India,’ *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 133-55 and Kopf’s deliciously vitriolic review of Inden’s *Imagining India* in *JAOS* 112 (1992), pp. 674-77.

This writing helps us understand the current Indological divide but hardly excuses a failure to use correct scholarly apparatus. Thus it is odd that the VDhp, the centre-piece of Inden’s essay, is not cited; in a staggering display of bibliographic vagueness, it is first referenced as the ‘printed version’ (p. 42, note 20). Certain key works bearing on the subject are also absent.
from the notes. For example, reference is made to the *History and Culture of the Indian People*, no doubt a useful secondary survey, but R. S. Tripathi’s *History of Kannauj* (Benares, 1937) and S. M. Mishra’s *Vaishwarman of Kannauj* (Delhi, 1977) are not given in the appropriate place (for example p. 82). Is this because by citing them one is less able to make a mockery of Indological scholarship and thus less able to cut a dashing profile as a radical intellectual? As pointed out with unflinching precision by Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), American post-modernists tend to represent previous scholarship in highly selective ways in order to exaggerate its apparent flaws and thereby advance their own reading of the past. This might explain why Inden has decided to ignore relevant theoretical work within Indology. The most notable omission is any reference to the writing of Hermann Kulke in the interesting discussion (pp. 54-5) of how the *VDhp* takes us beyond the regional horizon of the *Nilamata* toward a quest for pan-Indian dominion on the part of both the Pāñcarātrins and their royal patrons. One would happily sacrifice much of the space given to structuralists and post-structuralists for some critical engagement with what Kulke has contributed to directly analogous problems in eastern India. While one would not like to make Inden’s compelling analysis any more complex than it is, my own view is that some cross-regional comparisons are needed to develop and substantiate the arguments put forward. Another point which might benefit from elaboration is Inden’s understanding of the *VDhp* as re-ordering the relationship between Pāñcarātra forest-dwellers and Bhāgavata householders and residents of the plains (pp. 64-7). This is an important distinction but there is more to the contrast of forest and plain than first meets the eye: the radical renovation of ritual and kingship advocated by the Pāñcarātrins also had physiological and environmental implications, some of which are hinted at in F. Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meat* (Delhi, 1999). Thinking of the environmental setting of the *VDhp* with categories provided by the Indian medical tradition is part of the process of placing this and related texts ‘on the ground’ in actual places occupied by tangible ‘human agents’. The process of moving the *VDhp* towards its geographical and historical framework also involves the Pāñcarātra temples themselves, the (dare I say) empirical centre piece of Inden’s argument (pp. 60, 66, especially 86). When we look at the actual remains, however, we find huge Buddhist buildings (an anomaly from the *VDhp* perspective) and so much destroyed otherwise that we can safely conclude nothing.

The second chapter in this book by Walters is entitled ‘Buddhist History: The Sri Lankan Pali Vamsas and Their Commentary’. In this stimulating essay, Walters attempts to situate the *Dīpavamsa, Mahāvamsa* and *Vamsatthāppākasini* (VAP) in their political, social and religious milieu. Here the idea of a ‘scale of texts’, beginning with the earliest canon but more particularly with the *Buddhavamsa*, shows itself to be an especially effective analytical tool. Walters demonstrates, convincingly in my view, that the *Vamsa* texts articulated specific phases in the long conflict between the Mahāvihāra and Abhayagiri-vihāra at Anurādhapura, a conflict which the ‘complex authors’ of the *Vamsa* texts were able to turn into a struggle for the control of history. The final intellectual victory of the Theravādins and their subsequent domination of historical questions is shown by the fact that Tibetans first derived their calculations for the date of the Buddha from Sri Lankan monks resident at Bodhgaya. The *Vamsa* texts could be described as concerned with the politics of authenticity because the question of which school or ‘disciplinary order’ was the authentic heir of the first Buddha sangha ultimately determined which order was worthy of royal protection and patronage. The triumph of the Mahāvihāra turned not just on historical matters but also on the way in which the ‘complex author’ used the VAP to articulate the imperial ambitions of the Okkāka dynasty. Here there seems to be a parallel to what the Pāñcarātrins were attempting in Kashmir, a parallel not explored in this volume but one which suggests that this was part of a significant change in the ideology of South Asian kingship. As with Inden’s essay, the arguments in this chapter are nuanced and intricate; the digressions and footnotes are a mine of interesting references and information.

The tradition of review-writing necessitates quibbles. Some minor points might be made about what Walters says of the Hemavatas, on which see ‘Buddhist Saints in Ancient Veda’, *JRAI* 11 (2001); Walters also teases us by citing (p. 105, note 6) his PhD dissertation ‘Rethinking the Buddhist Missions’, no doubt an important work but one which is, of course, not readily available. Let us hope that the key findings will be published without delay. More troublesome is the discussion (pp. 108-10) of the Śūrgas and early Sātavāhanas, ‘Buddhist emperors’ who ‘constituted their empires on the basis of a homology between the cosmic polity represented in the *Buddhavamsa* ... and the disciplinary practices of the Buddhists living in India at the time’. This is contrasted with what took place later under the Ikṣvākus in the Andhra country. They ‘allowed their queens and daughters to sponsor Buddhist activities’ while they shaped their empires with a Theist (i.e. Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva) vision. The problem here, aside from the existence or otherwise of the Śūrgas, is that there is no evidence of a ‘shift’ in the inscriptive records at early Buddhist sites; in the sculptural record (not discussed by Walters) just who and what is intended in the reliefs of Cakravartin kings from Amāravati and
Jaggayyapeta is also something that has not been fully resolved. Particularly relevant in this regard is the Heliodorus pillar inscription at Vidishā which dates to circa 100 BC (which see Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy* [Oxford, 1998] p. 266). This mentions a Bhāgavata shrine and a king named Bhāgabhadra. He was not a Śūṅga. Just ten or eleven kilometres from the pillar is Sānchi, the best preserved early Buddhist complex in India. We may safely assume that Sānchi was in Bhāgabhadra’s kingdom. Although there are something like 800 early inscriptions at the site recording donations from all manner of people, there is not single inscription recording the gift of a king. This evidence can be read in a number of ways. One possibility is that Theism was always present and that ‘queens and daughters’ may have always been the most visible patrons of the Buddhist dispensation. If the ‘Buddhist emperors’ of ancient India vanish into thin air then the situation in Sri Lanka becomes especially unique and interesting. To my mind this actually strengthens Walter’s analysis of the VAP and underlines the remarkable attempt this text makes to articulate an imperial Okkāka vision with Theravāda Buddhism at its centre.

The ambitions of the Okkākas brought them into alliance and conflict with the dynasties of south India, their most notable encounter being with the Cōlas. This takes us to the final chapter by Daud Ali, ‘Royal Eulogy as World History: Rethinking Copper-plate Inscriptions in Cōla India’ This essay deals with an astonishing set of thirty-one sheets of copper, weighing nearly two hundred pounds and engraved with 816 lines of writing. This is largest set of copper-plates ever found and one of the most extraordinary documents relating to medieval India. Ali persuasively argues, however, that this is much more than a simple ‘document’. By restricting themselves to the documentary aspect of this and other inscriptions, historians have, in Ali’s view, missed much of what they have to offer. In addition to recording a complicated property transaction, the plates provide information about the composition, distribution and use of texts; more interestingly the plates also provide an imperial history which articulates the Cōla’s understanding of their place in the world. The ‘scale of texts’ Ali explores begins with the Purāṇas and ends with insessional eulogies (praśasti), the link between the two being made by genealogies which trace the Solar descent of the Cōlas and the Lunar descent of their rivals. The case for reading inscriptions as texts or inscriptions with texts is not, I think, something with which anyone would take issue, yet Indologists have had to struggle to bridge the epigraphic-textual divide. Some effort to address this problem has been made recently, notably by Schopen and Trainor in their analysis of early Buddhist material. Ali’s essay is a landmark in this regard for it takes us into a period when there are a substantial number of insessional texts with which to work.

Ali insists that inscriptions need to be taken as an expression of a particular world view and that we should not unwittingly inject our reading of them with preconceived ideas about the political, social and economic relationships that existed at the time. By accepting, at least intellectually, the concept of the universe, definition of time and nature of life as articulated in these texts we can start to understand why they were written and what they were trying to do. Inden and Walters share this view. This is not so radical as the authors would have us believe. Could one really find an active scholar who would take issue with this approach? Where we might part company with the present authors is their attempt to rationalise the claims which kings made in their texts about ‘ruling the whole earth’, ‘conquering the world’ and so forth. The idea of ‘imperial formation’ is used in this book to engage with these claims. This model was developed by Inden in *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990) and is summarised here on pp. 24-5. The starting point is a critique of ‘colonial’ historiography which generally assumed that the medieval period was a time of cultural decadence and political fragmentation, a time when a confusing parade of dynasties interacted like so many ‘repellent molecules’. In contrast to this, Inden has asserted that major dynastic powers were able to exercise political and ritual hegemony by surrounding themselves with a ‘circle’ of subordinate kings. Broadly speaking, the Kārkoṭas of Kashmir were the first imperial formation after the Guptas; they were followed by the Cālukyas, the Rāṣṭrakūtās and, finally, the Cōlas. Imperial formations of this type were not static. Each dynasty struggled constantly to rebuild and remake its imperial formation lest it be overtaken by ambitious neighbours who were always ready to remake the world according to their own vision. This is, in my view, a very compelling historical model. It usefully accounts for the political dynamics of medieval India, a good instance being Ali’s description of the events that followed the sack of Mānyakeṭa in 972 (pp. 192-3). The imperial model also helps us explain the rhetoric of insessional texts and various military and ritual undertakings. For these and other reasons Inden’s model has been influential beyond the present volume, for example André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* (Leiden, 1990), chapter 5.

But does this model stand for the whole medieval period? Going back to *Imagining India* (pp. 214ff.) where the Rāṣṭrakūtās are used as a foundational test case, we can see that Inden has not been altogether impartial in his handling of the evidence. The essence of the problem is that Inden, in a laudable effort to take his sources seriously, assumes that Arab accounts and Rāṣṭrakūta epigraphic claims should be read at face value. While
most scholars would agree that we need to accept the statements of our sources as a starting point. Difficulties soon emerge with the eighth and ninth-century material because several dynasties articulated a world vision using conventions of rhetoric that are very close to those found in Rāṣṭrakūta inscriptions. Reading these partisan and highly politicised claims against each other is a long-standing tradition within Indology, a good example being Tripathi's *History of Kannauj*. Schooled at the University of London and guided by L. D. Barnett of the British Museum, Tripathi's classic exemplifies a method that is still going strong because it works so well (for example see p. 200 in the volume under review). So the question of whether the imperial formation model can stand scrutiny boils down to whether it can co-exist with a 'critical cross-reading' of dynastic records. A brief survey of the ninth century highlights the problem: a few but not all of the relevant inscriptions will be cited in the course of this summary.

At the beginning of the century the Rāṣṭrakūta king Govinda III (c. 794-814) was able to upset the Pāla scheme to install a puppet on the throne of Kannauj and thereby build an imperial formation that embraced all of north India from Kashmir to the Bay of Bengal (*El I* 18 [1925-6], p. 245). These events are mentioned in Pratihāra records but they tell us that their king Nāgabhaṭṭa II (c. 810-33) played a key part in bringing down the Pāla pawns (*El I* 18 [1925-6], p. 108). The Pratihāra inscriptions are predictably silent about Rāṣṭrakūta involvement in the matter. During Nāgabhaṭṭa's reign and that of Mihira Bhoja (c. 836-85), the Pālas retained a vital and dangerous power. On the southern flank of the Pratihāra kingdom, there was a stand-off with the Rāṣṭrakūtas. Neither enjoyed hegemony in practical or symbolic terms: land-granting powers and the territories of subordinate kings remained intact (*IlI* 39 [1996], p. 133; *TōG*, map 6 for find-spots of relevant records). During this time cross-border raids were frequent but not decisive (*Ibid*, map 6 and *TōG*, p. 2). It was not until the time of Indra III (c. 915-28) that the Pratihāra heartland was attacked in earnest (*El I* 7 [1902-03], p. 43). This seems to have had a devastating effect on the Pratihāras and allowed subordinate rulers, such as the Candellas, Kalacuris and Paramārās, to carve out independent kingdoms from the Pratihāra dominion. In the ninth century there was, therefore, no Rāṣṭrakūta imperial formation in the strict sense of the term because neither the Pratihāras nor Pālas were subordinate to the Rāṣṭrakūtas. Inden passes over this century and the Pratihāras because this would require certain qualifications of his model. Of course it could be argued that the Pālas were a minor and peripheral power (a dangerous assumption) and that Nāgabhaṭṭa II was defeated and thus symbolically subordinate to the Rāṣṭrakūtas (*El I* 18 [1925-6], p. 245). But with these possibilities we are brought full circle. Whether the medieval period was marked by political fragmentation or imperial formation is based on a number of *a priori* working assumptions which govern how we read and construe the surviving evidence. Inden has effectively shown that medieval kings had the political theory and ambition to create imperial formations; precisely when and where these kings achieved them is another matter.

Certain distortions can come from an overly insistent application of the imperial model, for example in this volume where Ali states that in their northward campaign the Cōla generals, in alliance with a Paramāra force from Mālwa, defeated the Oḍrā (Utkala, Orissa), Kaliṅga (coastal Andhra) and Somavānśi kings of South Kosala (p. 200). While the imperial model necessitates seeing the Paramāras as subordinate allies, the Nāgpur Museum inscription of Paramāra Naravarman describes the encounter somewhat differently (H. V. Trivedi, *CII*, volume 7 [Delhi, 1978]: number 33, vv. 35-54). Similarly, Walters says that Mahinda IV of Sri Lanka was 'genuinely in a position to claim paramount overlordship' (p. 140). Although they were undoubtedly powerful beyond the island, it is simply unbelievable that the Oḵkā dynasty was anywhere close to a paramount position in the tenth century. This shows how a model, rather than evidence, can start to dictate conclusions.

In closing I would like to turn to Inden's introductory remarks at the front of the volume. This touches a number of issues and almost every reader will find something there to irritate them. I will not dwell on details but rather on some general themes which I regard as key. Inden quotes avant-garde thinkers in an attempt to radicalise this volume, but the results are curiously old fashioned. In the end we are dealing with texts, the long-standing centre piece of Indological study. But just what is a 'text' in South Asia? Does this overarching category cover everything that was written down or are there useful subdivisions which can be made in the material? Does the word *sāstra* cover all this activity? There is no extended discussion of this problem and no engagement with extant writing on the subject, for example Pollock, 'The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History', *JAOS* 105 (1985), pp. 499-519. Pollock has put forward some serious arguments about the nature of knowledge and *sāstra*-texts in south Asia; Inden can hardly proceed by pretending that Pollock's influential work does not exist. The remarkably different vision that we have of India from Pollock and Inden perhaps springs from the fact that one reads Mīmāṁsā and the other Pūrāṇa; this is a problem that merits further work. A different but similar problem relates to the discussion of periodisation. In a book that calls itself 'Querying the Medieval' we might hope to find some engagement with relevant literature, for example Green, 'Periodisation in European and World
History, *Journal of World History* 3 (1991), pp. 13-53. The sole reference to U. N. Ghoshal's 1965 'Periods in India History' (cited p. 16) is hardly adequate.

Despite many guises, Inden is essentially an institutional historian concerned with kingship. His work on ritual, caste, Vedism and so forth all comes back to kingship which sits at the core of his historical analyses. But other forces were at work and other 'agents' (to use his terminology) had concerns to nurture. The dynasties discussed in this book have been swept away, but Theravāda monks still recite the *pañimokka* in Sri Lanka and the Theist mendicant orders of India, inscrutable as they often are, still dedicate body and soul to their supreme Lord. Could it be that the 'disciplinary orders' put great historical processes in motion for their own special ends, harnessing kings to their schemes? The radical transformation of the Tibetan kingdom by Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita in the eighth century suggests this might be one way of querying the momentous events of this period. Like this book, the medieval is at once fascinating, infuriating, illuminating, perplexing, seminal and irrelevant. We can never be done with it, however much we try.

Michael Willis

**Abbreviations**

| Abbreviation | Description                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| CI | Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum |
| EI | Epigraphica Indica |
| IA | Indian Antiquary |
| II | Indo-Iran Journal |
| IoG | Inscriptions of Gopakṣetra (London, 1996) |
| JAOS | Journal of the American Oriental Society |
| JRAS | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society |
| ToG | Temples of Gopakṣetra (London, 1997) |

Anila Verghese, *Archaeology, Art and Religion: New Perspectives on Vijayanagara*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press (2000), xvii + 342 pp., 10 maps, 17 figures, 80 plates.

This book of essays deals with a far wider range of topics than its title suggests. Anila Verghese provides innovative analyses of Vijayanagara and its numerous monuments by looking at data gathered by the Vijayanagara Research Project alongside inscriptions and travellers' accounts. Besides looking at temples, she considers the importance of memorial stones, as well as monuments connected with food consumption, the performing arts and martial display. Beginning with general essays about the site, the book then telescopes into detailed studies of specific themes and their cultural implications.

The first four chapters provide an overall picture of the site, its history, the role of royal patronage and temple morphology. The introductory chapter establishes Vijayanagara's historical context and gives a cursory description of its different monuments. The chapter that follows considers Vijayanagara's archaeological history beginning with the antiquarian investigations of Colin Mackenzie in the early nineteenth century, and ending with a detailed survey of work done between 1975 and 1995 connected with the Vijayanagara Research Project. The third chapter traces the evolution and growth of the city by looking at monumental and inscriptional evidence. Temple growth was connected with patronage, and this patronage extended into other areas such as the gifting of villages to temples and the construction of new suburbs.

Chapter four looks at the development of temple architecture from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries by setting up a chronology of inscriptionally dated temples. The oldest temples at Vijayanagara are Deccani style freestanding shrines, while those constructed later are temple complexes built in the Tamil idiom. Verghese concludes that a straight-forward progression from simple to complex architecture did not occur. Although the elements of Tamil style temple architecture and planning became increasingly dominant towards the sixteenth century, smaller Deccani style temples continued to be constructed, showing that one style of temple architecture was not supplanted in favour of another.

The fifteen chapters that follow move beyond the general picture of Vijayanagara and its history. Instead they focus on distinct features of specific monuments. For example, chapter six looks at the iconography of *sati* stones alongside the many sensational travellers' accounts of the practice of sati at Vijayanagara. Although *sati* was clearly an important social practice at Vijayanagara, its scale and frequency was definitely not as widespread as the travellers' accounts suggest. Such accounts provide useful information, but are for the most part exaggerations. When considered in conjunction with the iconography and frequency of sati stones, the information in travellers' accounts can be more faithfully interpreted.

Chapters seven and eighteen also consider the importance of memorial stones. Chapter seven looks at carved images of the Shaivite folk deity, Mailara, three of which are on freestanding stone slabs. These images show that the cult of Mailara was not widespread. The absence of Mailara images inside larger temples shows that his worship at Vijayanagara never synthesized with the cults of more popular deities. Chapter eighteen looks at two hero stones and five other carvings of an unidentified warrior doing battle with an enraged elephant. There are no identifiable written accounts of this hero, but the iconography and placement of these
carved memorials suggests that the warrior in question was a Shaiva bhakta who may have lived during Vijayanagara times, and whose fame placed him on a level comparable to the folk cult of Mallara.

Food production is another theme that Vergheze dedicates an essay to. In chapter sixteen, monuments, inscriptions and travellers accounts connected with the preparation and distribution of food are all considered. Granaries, places where food preparation took place and the monolithic feasting table in the royal enclosure are all looked at alongside travellers' accounts of kingly feasts and inscriptions describing the feeding of Brahmins. Although this chapter offers sparse information on the cooking and feeding habits of the common people, it tells a great deal about where food was purchased, where it was stored, the importance of sponsoring feasts and the types of food eaten by Brahmins and royalty.

Other chapters examine themes represented on the sides of Vijayanagara's famous Mahanavami platform alongside similar carved images found at other locations in the City of Victory. For example, chapter seventeen looks at representations of music and dance performances on the Mahanavami platform and the Vitthala Temple alongside travellers' accounts of such performances to show the importance of dance and music in the religious and social life of Vijayanagara. In chapter thirteen and fourteen respectively, Vergheze picks up on representations of Vasantotsava, the festival of spring, and on carvings depicting martial display on the Mahanavami platform, the Vitthala temple complex and elsewhere. The carvings described in those two chapters show that the spring festival and military parades were important ritual aspects of Vijayanagara life that developed further during the subsequent Nayaka period.

By picking apart known information about Vijayanagara and reforming it in previously unconsidered ways, this collection of essays offers the reader some fascinating new views on the material culture of the City of Victory. My only qualm with this book is Vergheze's insistence on working within a set framework of 'religious' versus 'non-religious' buildings, zones and practices. Her research shows that in such a pre-colonial society, it is extremely problematic to adhere to an absolute distinction between the sacred and the secular, yet she does not take the initiative to address this difficulty. However, in all other respects, this book provides a fascinating plethora of innovative approaches to the study of Vijayanagara and its monuments.

Jennifer Howes

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Rima Hooja (with Pandit Bhagwan Das Jain and Mahopadhyaya Vinaysagar), Mandan Sutradasr's Devata Murti Prakaranam, Jaipur: Prakrit Bharati Academy (1999). 278 pp., 14 colour photographs and 4 pages of line drawings.

Describing an image of a Jain Tirthankara, Stella Kramrisch wrote in 1946:

"On the rigidly symmetrical pedestal of this seated image rest its legs, crossed in 'padmasana', or 'Lotus posture'. Their horizontal volumes are supported by those of the lions forming the socle. They are neatly placed beneath the horizontal plane of the seat which has a lotus carved on it, and at a right angle, an ornate cushion and the circular cloth laid over the edge of the throne. Their crisp and meticulous ornamentation sets off the smooth volumes of limbs and lion emblems of the relief..." Describing another Jain image, she wrote, "Calm and widely spaced, the image is competently carved but lacks any further qualification as a work of art."

In such a way, any piece of Indian sculpture may be described in terms of compositional principles of vertical and horizontal planes, smooth volumes and meticulous ornamentation – to offer or deny it a qualification as a work of art. Alternatively, using overlays, the same piece can be reduced to a network of lines possessing esoteric significance that unlocks its secret of mystical power. There is also a vast resource of mythology that can sustain the appeal of Indian sculpture. By and large, these methods of aesthetic appreciation are akin to personal responses in so far as they have little in common with the perception and methods of the makers of Indian sculpture.

Understanding the design involves getting inside the head of its designer, and getting an insight into his training. Ideally it ought to entail understanding the theory that shapes his method, and seeing him work, apart from looking at the object he produces. This may be achieved if all the three dimensions of theory, practice and practitioner are accessible. But what does one do if the object is old and decontextualised, and its designer and patron buried in history? Firstly, one can learn about the method from craftsmen who continue the work of a living tradition and are a link to the past. Secondly, one may read the theoretical literature written nearer the time and place where the object was produced. It is a bonus if the subject of the available literature was the making of the object, and a further reward if the writer was also a practitioner.

It is this opportunity that Rima Hooja's book offers. The subject of this study is a text written in the fifteenth century by Mandan Sutradasr, who was not only a prolific writer of texts on architecture and sculpture, but also a successful builder and designer of
forts at Kumbhalgarh and Achalgarh, and of the Visnu temple at Eklingji. His patron, Maharan Kumbha (r. 1433-1468), who was a scholar himself, held court to many scholars and architects, but Mandan stands out because of the many texts he wrote. Out of his nine known texts, Devata Murit Prakaranam is the first to be translated into English. Dr. Hooja also provides us with Pandit Bhagwanas Jain’s Hindi translation, including the original text in Sanskrit, and some corresponding passages from other related texts in Sanskrit with Hindi translation - which all together makes it a model text book, and leaves us with no further excuse to ignore Mandan’s work.

Mandan’s text is composed of eight chapters and follows a familiar normative structure in the discussion of various types and stages of sacred sculpture. Here is a foretaste of some of the important insights the texts provides. Chapter One is on materials, the size of images, defects and portents. For example, the orientation of a stone on the ground decides which end of the slab will be the statue’s head, and the sizes of the standing, seated and reclining images are proportionally related to the width of the temple, the size of the garbhagriha, and the height of its door. Chapter Two begins with the units of measurement, the talaman of various images of gods, goddesses, demons, birds and animals, and the subdivision of 7, 7½, 8, 8½, and 9 tala images.

An important consideration in the positioning of sculptures - one that museums today may like to bear in mind while displaying old sculptures - is that each image has a specific line of vision. This means that the height at which the sculpture is placed is determined by its type. The height of the doorway of a temple is divided into 64 parts, and an odd-numbered part is used for positioning the eyes of the deity. For example, a mukhalinga should be on the 25th portion, Jalashayin (Visnu) on the 27th, Buddha on the 39th, Visnu, Brahma and Jinas (Tirthankaras) on the 55th part, and so on. This is discussed in Chapter Three along with the positioning of the statue within the garbhagriha, the orientation of statues, and the crossing lines of vision. Chapter Four describes the various rupa or forms of Brahma, 12 forms of Surya, their associated deities and dvapalas, the Navagrahas, and the eight Dikpalas. Chapter Five starts by allocating deities to various varna groups, and describes the types of Visnu idols, their attributes and forms, and the various types of Shaligram stones. The Sixth Chapter is on Shiva, his various forms, attributes, and the proportions and construction of various Lingas. The Seventh Chapter is on the 24 Tirthankaras and 24 pairs of Yaksha and Yakshinis. The last chapter includes 12 forms of Gauri Devi and her 8 Dvarapalikas; on eight forms of Ganesh and his eight dvapalas, Kartikeya, eight Leela Devis, the nine Durgas, the eight Mother-Goddesses, 12 forms of Sarasvati Devi, Chandi Devi, Lakshmi, and Katyayani.

One of the above topics that are discussed in the text is that of tala, a unit of measurement equal to 12 angulas (about 9 inches), which also means rhythm. Talaman is the concept of the proportionate subdivision of a statue setting its constituent parts to a particular rhythm. Describing the vertical talaman structure of statues in 7½ tala, Mandan (II.18-20 pp. 57-58) writes:

“I now talk about statues in the 7½ tala scale. This is the size in which images of Mangal (Mars), Shukra (Venus), Budh (Mercury), Shani (Saturn) and other planets are made. The keshanta [tip of forehead or hairline] should be 3 angulas, face 12, neck 3, chest 10, stomach 10, and distance from the navel to medran (linga) or end of torso 10 angulas.

From the medran through the thigh to the knee, the distance should be 18 angulas. The knee should be 3 angulas, the distance from the knee to the ankle-bone 18 angulas, and from the ankle to the sole of the foot 3 angulas. (In this way, the completed statue in the 7½ tala scale will have a standing height of 90 angulas).”

Obviously, not all statues of the above planets in all times follow the 7½ tala structure, but it is equally obvious from the text that the concept of talaman is central to Indic iconography, and that its inclusion as a tool of analysis of sculpture should be given due attention. In any case, it is more enriching to discuss design using the theoretical parameters of its generation rather than describing it in arbitrary terms of vertical and horizontal spread. However, in applying theory to analysis, it must be borne in mind that like the Vastu Shastras, this text is not a manual or a rule-book, but the theoretical framework of practice. Even in the rare case of Mandan, where our accessibility both to the writer and to his built works tempt us to draw one-to-one correspondences between them, the relationship between theory and practice still remains complementary, one informing the other. As continuity and change are two important ingredients of a tradition, his buildings and sculptures, however distinctive, would have taken their lead from other buildings and sculptures around him, as his texts did. By referring to other texts such as Natyashastra, the Puranas, and Vishvakarma Shastra, Mandan establishes himself as an aware participant in the long-running textual tradition. At one point he also urges the reader to consult Deeparandav for other types of composite idols, a cross-reference intended to control the size of his work. This is interesting not only because Mandan wishes consciously to avoid unnecessary repetition, but also because it shows he assumes the easy accessibility of other texts to his readers. We of course are living in different times where some students of Indic art are inclined to dismiss the importance of understanding the theory that informs
their subject on the grounds of language, accessibility, and a certain hesitation in acknowledging a different world-view. This book removes the first two hurdles, and so makes the third a matter of choice.

Vibhuti Sachdev

Vidhya Dehejia (ed.) Devi: The Great Goddess - Female Divinity in South Asian Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Ahmedabad and Prestel Verlag, Munich, London and New York (1999). 408 pp., foreword, acknowledgments, map, appendix, bibliography, and index.

The Indian ambassador to the United States opened a banquet at my university with an unusual dedication - to the consorts of Brahma, Visnu and Shiva, the three major deities in the Hindu pantheon. He then observed that the ideal woman blended the qualities (gunas) of these three deities: the wisdom and knowledge of Sarasvati, the bounty and fortune of Lakshmi, and finally the playful and sensual beauty of Parvati. He concluded by lamenting that every gentleman seeks such a woman but that this ideal remains forever elusive. Indeed, he said that this fact explains much of life’s dilemmas. The men shook their heads in knowing delight while we shuddered to think how our female colleagues reacted to this wry but sagacious humour. Nevertheless, his words forcefully underscored for all of us the irresistible role that goddesses continue to play in the lives and imaginations of South Asians, from a villager to an ambassador. The rich history of the Goddess, or Devi, is celebrated by this important exhibition assembled by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C., during 1999.

The catalogue features 120 objects that are enhanced by eight provocative essays and a lively introduction by the chief organizer of the exhibition, Vidya Dehejia, Associate Director of the Freer-Sackler Galleries. The objects range widely, comprising metal and stone images and a variety of painted works, and are drawn from ten museums and a total of twenty-six private collections. The earliest are three terracottas dating to before the Common Era while the latest is a fibreglass sculpture by Anish Kapoor (b.1954) contributed by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. Such an unconventional juxtaposition of objects may rattle traditionalists at first but this selection reinforces the notion that Devi is omnipresent, invisible yet essential, like the very air surrounding us.

Some of the stone pieces are ‘old favourites’ (such as the Durga from the Heeramaneck Collection now in the LA County Museum or the Ambika from Orissa in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London) but numerous important paintings and sculptures appear for the first time here. Indeed, this judicious selection from a wide number of private collections affords a glimpse at significant material that otherwise would remain unpublished. Dehejia divides this large group of diverse objects into six divisions, reflecting various attributes or ‘functions’ of the Goddess. The categories begin with the most forceful and elemental modes of the deity (Cosmic Force) which are often wrathful manifestations, such as Durga and Kali. The other five sections are devoted to the Goddess as Giver, Heroine and Beloved, Local Protector, Semidivine and Auspicious and finally Saints.

While Dehejia cautions that these distinctions are not hard and fast this classification allows the reader to distinguish the ‘forest from the trees.’ This division ensures that the bewildering diversity is governed by an overarching thematic unity. The eight prefatory essays reflect the viewpoints of scholars whose disciplines vary widely, ranging from art historians, to students of Indian religion and anthropology. Thomas Coburn’s pioneering work on the Sanskrit Devi Mahatmya has been familiar to scholars for some years but the ancient text ‘comes to life’ when it is illustrated by ten spectacular pages from a Guler manuscript dated to 1781 preserved in the Lahore Museum. Since this text expresses many of the most fundamental concepts associated with the Goddess, it functions like an invocation at the beginning of our journey through the text. Next, George Michell differentiates between northern and southern architectural traditions from the perspective of the Goddess and also highlights the role that female divinities played in dynastic history and courtly building conventions. The rituals of the Minakshi temple at Madurai and a Durga Puja in Orissa are perceptively contrasted by Dennis Hudson. The third essay is jointly written by Dehejia and Sagarcee Sengupta and examines the fam/n works of Subrahmanya Bharati at the turn of the nineteenth century and those of a number of popular Bengali poets from the 18th century on.

The next essay by Terence McInerney centres on a single manuscript, an unidentified Sanskrit text attributed to Basohli from the Punjab Hills, c. 1660-1770. Devoted to different manifestations of the Goddess, sixteen of the thirty-two known folios are illustrated in the catalogue and the Sanskrit captions on the reverses are translated in full. That so many paintings in this dispersed series are brought together is another tribute to the exhibition’s organizers. The next essay is anthropological in nature and explores the ways in which four localized popular deities have been absorbed into the mainstream. No book on the Devi at the end of the twentieth century would be complete without an essay on ‘calendar art’, or the garish religious posters appearing inside homes and bus stations throughout.
India. Ranging back to Raja Ravi Varma’s oil paintings, Tapati Guha-Thakurta’s treatment also discusses the controversy over M.F. Husain’s contentious nude Sarasvati. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s contribution, ‘Moving Devi’, examines the interaction between the ever-changing relationship between the Devi of the Puranas and the Devi of the Everyday in modern Bengal, introducing to the discourse on Devi the concept of ‘invagination’ (sheathing). In this concluding essay, Devi is fully and fashionably clothed in the latest academic terminology, comfortably installed now in current intellectual discourse. Among the contributions, Spivak’s challenging commentary is the least traditional in its approach.

The essays are therefore extremely wide ranging but each augments in its unique way the objects that are the focus of the exhibition. Inasmuch as the contributions touch on so many bases, there is something here for everyone, for old timers and new comers alike. Dehejia, McInerney, Debra Diamond, Amita Sarin and Mary Slusser prepared the catalogue entries, each with the rigor and completeness that the objects merit. The volume can also serve as a quick reference source, with its handy six-page index and dense nine-page bibliography.

The book’s handsome layout and its generous number of exciting photographs greatly contribute to the volume’s success. The 120 objects are illustrated, but the volume is sprinkled with diverse photographs that are generally published for the first time, with contributions by Stephen Huyler and Raghurad Singh, among others. Perhaps the most stunning are full-page illustrations facing each of the essays. Many are striking details of the works of art included in the exhibition, such as the bust of a Kushan-period bracket figure that is so crisp we feel with our eyes the texture of the special red sandstone of Mathura. Perhaps the most evocative of the images, however, is a detail from a late seventeenth-century painting on paper of five ethereal female ascetics, or yoginis, dressed in fine white muslin silhouetted against a light brown and green landscape. Such exquisite photographs lead the reader along effortlessly, blending insights from the essays with splendid visual reinforcements.

After putting down the volume, my mind drifted back to the learned Indian ambassador’s remarks concerning man’s tireless but fruitless search for the ideal woman combining the qualities of bounty, knowledge and beauty, the attributes of Lakshmi, Sarasvati, and Parvati. Although a single woman imbued with all of these traits may indeed be beyond our reach, this important exhibition catalogue surely comes close to encompassing that ineffable ideal.

Donald M. Stadtner

Corinna Wessels-Mevissen. The Gods of the Directions in Ancient India: Origin and Early Development in Art and Literature (until c. 1000 AD). Monographien zur Indischen Archäologie Kunst und Philologie, Band 14. Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, (2001). 233 pp.

This study, a modified version of the author’s PhD submitted to the Freie Universität, Berlin, deals with the gods of the directions, an interesting and very characteristic feature of Indian temple sculpture. The subject is handled in a traditional way, starting first with the literary evidence (section 1). The amount of information the author has collected is impressive and an indication that the textual evidence has not been regarded simply as a tedious prelude to the archaeological and visual evidence. Although it is now unfashionable to assume that all discussions should start with Vedic texts, in this case we have little choice, the dikpālas beginning their long religious careers as Vedic deities. The author highlights (p. 11) some fascinating material in the sūtra-texts which show that certain deities were connected with the directions at an early date, i.e. before the appearance of a significant amount of temple architecture in the fifth century CE. After acknowledging that later literary material overlaps with the representations themselves, the author moves through the images at early sites (sections 2.1-2) and in different regions from the seventh century (section 2.3). The material is complex and this part of the book is accompanied by many diagrams to help the reader place the various images on the temples. The coverage is impressively encyclopaedic and it seems much of what is presented will become indispensable for anyone working on temple iconography and related problems. The closing parts of the book deal with concepts of dikpāla representation (section 2.4) and iconography (section 2.5). The use of the word ‘concepts’ here is a little misleading; what is really covered are the various configurations of the directional deities and their placement on vertical panels, friezes, doors, etc. The book is heavily illustrated (327 figures) with many images taken from the archive of the American Institute in Delhi. All are of good quality and the standard of the book’s production is very high. In summary, Wessels-Mevissen’s book is bound to become a foundational reference as nothing else of any consequence has been published on this fascinating subject.

Michael Willis
Vidya Dehejia (ed.) India through the Lens: Photography 1840-1911 Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C. in association with Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Ahmedabad and Prestel Verlag, Munich (2000). 315 pp., 18 figures, 134 catalogue plates, 1 map

This exhibition catalogue comes at a time when both the historical content and the current use of the 19th century photograph are subject to ever increasing scrutiny. The debate, outlined here, focuses on the seemingly opposite approaches to the photograph as an art form, and the photograph as historical document. In recent decades certain photographs have been accepted as 'fine art' by curators and collectors. A concerted effort was made by all concerned to raise the photograph's status to that of an engraving or a drawing, and a canon of master photographers was quickly developed. Of paramount importance to this approach are the aesthetic qualities of the print, and its physical condition. In the past few years, however, a contrasting approach has developed as the vast photographic archives sitting in nineteenth century European museums have gradually been 'rediscovered'. Scholars from various disciplines have shown an interest in using photographic archives for their research. Many approach the photograph as little more than a historical document, but at the same time show a marked reluctance to question the reliability of this material. The connoisseurship associated with the 'fine art' approach is often unknown to them and valuable information concerning the photographer, the date of the photograph, and the context in which it was made, is regarded as almost irrelevant.

It is in this context that the Sackler Gallery launches this publication. Following the lead of Clark Worwick's 1976 publication The Last Empire, Milo Beach clearly states in the foreword that the purpose of this book and exhibition is to examine the photographs as works of art, while at the same time recognizing the colonial context from which they emerged. Vidya Dehejia enlarges upon this ambitious aim in an introductory essay, where some of the most interesting ideas in the book are to be found. Touching on the current debate on the status of the photograph as outlined above, Dehejia goes on to provide an overview of the beginnings of photography in India before outlining some of the different theoretical approaches to this material. Particularly interesting is her discussion on the relationship between photography, painting and the debated existence of a peculiarly Indian visual aesthetic. She dismisses the earlier claim put forward in J.M. Gutman's Through Indian Eyes (1982) that, in the 19th century, there was a recognizably Indian way of taking photographs. She points out that Indian photographers were just as willing to produce picturesque landscape views as their British contemporaries. This argument could have gone further, however perhaps including a discussion of painted photographs as a particularly Indian appropriation of the medium, or an examination of the influence photography had on the work of late 19th century Indian artists such as Raja Ravi Varma. Almost in passing, the notion of successful and unsuccessful photographs is raised. This would have made for a fascinating discussion of aesthetics, given that many of the photographs which we prize today are rarely those which were admired in the 19th century.

Eight essays follow, their subject matter often overlapping. Four essays examine the work of individual photographers: Samuel Bourne, Felice Beato, Donald MacFarlane and Lala Deen Dayal. The other topics covered include archaeological and ethnographic photography, the photographic panorama, the relationship of the Maharajas with the camera, and the Imperial Durbars of 1877, 1903 and 1911. These divisions, apparently quite arbitrary at first glance, in fact follow parameters set up by earlier writers in the field.

Within each essay there is little that is new, either in the approach or in the factual information provided, reflecting an overall lack of boldness throughout the publication. The essay on MacFarlane by Jane Ricketts, while thorough, reprises her own article of 1982. John Falconer and David Harris again cover much ground already tackled in their previous publications, yet the depth of their research stands out in this context. Falconer draws extensively on the archives of the Oriental and India Office Collections in his discussion of the photographic documentation of Indian antiquities, while Harris balances factual accuracy with a thoughtful interpretation of Beato's photographs of 1858-59, made following the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. In contrast, Charles Allen would have benefited from a reading of Bernard Cohn's article 'Representing Authority in Victorian India' of 1983, one of the few scholarly analyses of the British durbar. There could also have been some consideration of how the British manipulated photography and film (which was also shown at this exhibition) in their portrayal of these spectacular events.

Despite this book's aim to have us consider the aesthetic qualities of the photographs, however little attention is given to the artistic and aesthetic context in which the photographs were produced. The English vision of the picturesque, perhaps the single most important factor in the composition of Indian landscape and architectural photographs, is dealt with primarily by Gary Sampson who writes on Samuel Bourne, but it is also touched upon by Jane Ricketts. Both writers try to explain its use as a colonial encounter; 'a subconscious desire to regiment, control, and impose a sense of order', yet it is surely the subsequent use of the photograph and its public consumption that has greater significance as a
Michael Willis modestly identifies the present work, a catalogue of Buddhist materials from Central India, as part of the ongoing publication of the wealth of collections held in the British Museum (p. 8). He also notes that his catalogue reunites two associated collections which had been divided between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Moreover, it represents the first photographic publication of the collection as the original publication utilised stylistic drawings (Cunningham 1854). However, this publication represents far more than the above points, as it can also be identified as part of the developing focus on material culture of Buddhism rather than utilising a purely textual or art historical approach (Coningham 2001; Schopen 1997; Trainor 1997).

The volume is divided into two sections: the first consists of four introductory chapters and the second, a catalogue of 28 objects from the sites of Sanchi, Sathbara, Sonar, Bhopur and Andher. The core of the text, authored by Michael Willis himself, is supported by two additional papers by Joe Cribb and Julia Shaw. Chapter 1 introduces the geographical, religious, ritual and social context of the collections and is followed by Shaw’s study of visibility and access within the ritual landscape. Chapter 3 comprises Cribb’s summary of Early Indian history, including a section on the importance of the Rabatak inscription, providing a broad geo-political context and Chapter 4 discusses the chronology of Buddhist sculpture within the context of central India. The catalogue is divided into five sub-sections, each referring to one of the five monastic sites represented. Each site is provided with a short summary of the main occupation, monuments and history of archaeological exploration before detailing the relevant monuments and objects. Where relevant, texts and translations are offered as well as a technical description of objects and their manufacture - mainly lathe-turned reliquaries. References to relevant publications by Cunningham, Marshall and others have also been provided as well as illustrations of the objects.

Whilst the catalogue’s 28 objects are well represented within the black and white photographic illustrations, a number of minor points should be noted. Firstly, whilst the catalogue contains 28 objects, it is unclear how four of them (two sculptures, part of a stone railing and 2 flakes) contribute to the discussion of reliquaries and ritual practice. Secondly, none of the reliquaries have been redrawn for this volume, forcing reliance on originals dating to the 1850s; indeed, the absence of colour photography is disappointing. Thirdly, there is no discussion of the point at which the inscriptions were added to the objects. Were they specifically manufactured as reliquaries or were they utilitarian objects that were later selected as containers and then inscribed? Although, Dr Willis discusses the colonial or imperial tool. The vision of the photographer must be more dependent on aesthetic encounters.

Duotone reproductions, rather than full colour plates, are used to illustrate every photograph from this exhibition, including the lengthy panoramas. This form of printing is becoming the accepted way to publish photographs - a decision usually based on cost. In this case, while it is perhaps preferable to have every image reproduced, we lose the variation in tone and the vast range of colours and textures achieved by 19th century photographers. It needs to be made apparent that the photographs do not actually look like this. The uniformity of the reproductions makes the lucid technical explanations of the different processes almost redundant.

There are some editorial inconsistencies and a few small errors in this book (including the dating of the photograph on the front cover), but this does not affect the overall quality of the publication. Most of the topics are, as far as they go, fluently presented. The problems associated with using this material should be more clearly stated, however. This is a good, if limited, introduction to a subject on which much still remains to be said.

Sophie Gordon

Michael Willis with contributions by Joe Cribb and Julia Shaw Buddhist reliquaries from ancient India. London: British Museum Press (2000). 138 pp. incl. 124 figures & 9 maps; 34 pp. catalogue.

Whilst their contemporaries in the British Isles were engaged in a frenzy of barrow opening, in central India in 1851 two young army officers dug into a series of ruined stupas mounds. The two officers, Major Cunningham and Lieutenant Maisey, were rewarded with the discovery of undamaged relic chambers containing Buddhist reliquaries, many of which were inscribed. The relics and their containers were divided between the two and remained personal possessions until the British Museum acquired Cunningham’s collection in 1887 and the Victoria and Albert Museum Maisey’s in 1921. The significance of these ritual deposits was acknowledged immediately by Cunningham, who matched personal names inscribed on the reliquaries with important Buddhist personages recorded in the Sri Lankan Pali chronicle known as the Mahavamsa (1854, p.101). Whilst some of Cunningham’s matching of relics to historical personages have been questioned by Dr Willis (p. 74), the collections still provides a unique opportunity to study the dynamic relationship between Buddhist personages and their relics, and monuments in the second and first century BC.
terminology of reliquaries (p. 17), there is little debate as to why some were decorated and others not or why some were stone and others ceramic. Finally, the actual discussion of the archaeological context of each object is limited and only set within the catalogue. A more complete synthesis of the work of Cunningham, Maisey and Marshall might have allowed a fuller discussion and understanding of the sequence deposition within a firmer context of space and time. As a result, the present work concentrates more on the objects themselves rather than their specific material contexts.

These points notwithstanding, this volume plays an important part in the increasing focus on the material results of ritual actions in order to provide a balance to the art historical or textual approaches (Coningham 2001). Indeed, Dr Willis has tried to assess the influence of the regional Buddhist notable, Gotiputa – ‘the Light of Sanchi’, through the location of his relics and those of his disciples within the five sites. That they only occur within peripheral stupas, suggests to Willis that the oldest stupas at the centres of two of the sites contain the relics of the Buddha and his key disciples. The volume is also notable as it contains the first attempt to introduce the phenomenological approach to South Asian archaeology. However, the impact of this innovative chapter is substantially reduced as the majority of it has already been published (Shaw 1999). It is also worth noting that whilst such approaches are interesting, they suffer from a series of unknown variables such as vegetation or tree cover, micro-phasing and dating as well as the impact of temporary structures which may be archaeologically invisible.

Finally, it should be stated that whilst demonstrable benefits have been derived from Dr Willis’ study of reliquaries in the collections of the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum, the time must have come for the fully scientific excavation of a Buddhist complex so that the dynamic nature of such sites and ritual practice can be more fully mapped.

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Dilip K. Chakrabarti, India an Archaeological History. Palaeolithic beginnings to Early Historic foundations. New Delhi: Oxford University Press (1999). 374 & xvi pp., 56 figures, 8 maps.

This book is an admirable, ambitious, and in many ways successful, attempt to write a current and accessible summary of the archaeological evidence for the development of South Asia from the beginning of the Palaeolithic until about 300 AD. The book is divided into the following eight chapters: i) a wide-ranging introduction; ii) the Palaeolithic; iii) the Mesolithic; iv) the development of settled life in the north-west; v) the Indus civilisation; vi) the Neolithic to Iron age development of India beyond the Harappan zone; vii) the Early Historic period; and viii) a summary of some general issues.

It is not entirely clear who this book is aimed at; the dust-jacket claims that it is ‘a must-buy for students and specialists’, which is almost certainly true, but it also claims that it is ‘the only ‘current’ introductory text on Indian archaeology’, which is not true as Raymond and Bridget Allchin published a book with a very similar geographical and chronological range. The Origins of a Civilization, as recently as 1997. Both books replace the now increasingly dated The Rise of Civilization (Allchin and Allchin 1982), which has for a long time been the standard introductory text to South Asian archaeology. Between them Chakrabarti 1999 and Allchin and Allchin 1997 represent two quite different interpretations of the South Asian archaeological record. A crude characterisation of these, not entirely explicit, positions would have Allchin and Allchin presenting what could be called a more traditional Western view, and Chakrabarti presenting a view which favours indigenous developments and has a greater focus on the post-colonial politics of archaeology.

This book demonstrates an impressively wide-ranging, almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the archaeological evidence. The clear organization of the text allows the book to usefully double up as a reference work, a function it would have served better had the indexing and referencing been stronger than they are. But Chakrabarti intended this to be ‘much more than a compendium of ancient Indian archaeological data’ (p. xv), the question is how successful has he been? As with all such books, there is a compromise to be made between too much and too little detail. It has to be said that in this book the reader will possibly feel that there is often too much compilation of fact and too little synthesis or context. In fairness, this is the nature of the archaological data-base in South Asia at present, which is, for many periods, still too fragmentary and dispersed to allow robust and convincing interpretations to be constructed.

R.A.E. Coningham
In some areas the book presents important new perspectives incorporating some of Chakrabarti’s current research. The best example is chapter VI on the Neolithic to Iron age cultures beyond the Harappan zone. This chapter demonstrates the amount of progress that has been made in recent years, and begins to crystallise the more rounded view of South Asian prehistory that has been developing over the last decades.

In many places it would have been useful to have had a more balanced summary of conflicting views and the current debates on particular topics; for example the appearance of domesticated rice in South Asia (pp. 205-209, 327-329), or the date of the Buddha (p. 264). In recent years many such questions have tended to assume political or nationalist overtones and it is worrying that in this book Chakrabarti fails to acknowledge that debate exists and fails to mention works which go against his own views (e.g. Bechert 1992; Glover & Higham 1996). A good example is the issue of the movement of Indo-European languages into South Asia and the Rigveda (which may or may not be related). The debate over these particular issues has generated a mass of literature, it is also politicised, with some scholars rejecting the very notion of ‘Indo-European’ languages as a Western construct, and others, including Chakrabarti himself, dismissing the idea of the movement of Indo-European speakers into South Asia as a paternalist or racist hangover from the colonial period (e.g. Rajaram 1994; Chakrabarti 1997, p. 208). Whatever Chakrabarti’s personal views, it would, in the opinion of the present reviewer, have strengthened this book if the ongoing debates over many of these issues had been acknowledged and discussed. Such an approach would also, in many cases, have served to make clearer the significance of some of the enormous amount of data that Chakrabarti presents.

One would have expected better illustrations in a book such as this. For some reason each of the eight maps of South Asia carries the text ‘This map is neither accurate nor to scale’ which does little to inspire confidence. Map 3 has been misprinted as map 4, and vice versa, and there is no map to illustrate the geographical introduction (pp. 20-24) or to show the location of frequently-mentioned geographical features such as states, regions, passes, hill ranges etc. (e.g. the Aravallis) thereby forcing the student or non specialist to turn to an atlas.

These things said, on the whole this book is a very useful contribution, though with some weaknesses, most notably its failure to present a fully balanced view of current academic debate. It presents a lot of information in a well-organised, compact, format and will be a useful introductory textbook for undergraduates or newcomers to the field who will, however, be well advised to use it in conjunction with other works in order to gain a fully balanced picture. It will also be a useful reference source for specialists in South Asia and specialists elsewhere who need to refer to South Asia. The book’s ambitious approach demonstrates what is possible with archaeological information, and will hopefully help to encourage and to focus the academic agenda of archaeology in South Asia.

Derek Kennett

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Kenneth R. Kennedy, God-Apes and Fossil Men: Paleanthropology in South Asia. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (2000), 480 pp., 50 illus.

Any discussion of the evolution of humans and human culture in South Asia has almost inevitably included reference to racial classification and human migration and diffusion of both ideas and populations. Within the latter, Indo-Europeans or Indo-Aryans are still frequently proposed as a major source of change within South Asia during the second millennium BC. Such entrenched and pervasive views have influenced many areas of research in this region, from palaeoanthropology itself, through allied subjects such as archaeology, linguistics, genetics and history. Indeed, the continued acceptance of the Indo-Aryan model of cultural change is shown in the force of arguments proposed by leading South Asian archaeologists such as Dani (1967, 1992) and the Allchins (1982, 1995), who draw on evidence from all these disciplines to support their views.

God-Apes and Fossil Men is a much-needed volume that examines the questions of racial typology and human evolution in South Asia from a palaeo-
anthropological perspective, based primarily on the examination and assessment of skeletal and dental data. The primary theme of the book, this examination of human evolution and biological diversity of both living and ancient populations in South Asia, is achieved through the testing of a number of hypotheses specifically related to the effect of the movement of peoples and ideas in the pre- and proto-history of the region. These hypotheses range from the suggestion that the stone tool using prehistoric cultures in South Asia belong to different races as a result of migrations and settlements documented by the archaeological and skeletal record, through to the invasion of Indo-European speaking Aryans into the north-west, resulting in the abrupt end of the Harappan Civilisation c. 1500 BC.

Kennedy establishes very clearly that the history of antiquarian studies in the sub-continent has greatly affected both the development of palaeoanthropology, archaeology, linguistics and related areas, and their interpretation. The unique background to prehistoric studies here has shaped not only the methodologies used, but also permitted the development of explanations of culture based on race that can be seen to have perpetuated both Western and Oriental social views. This thoughtful and detailed history encompasses many of the parallel developments in Europe, and shows how they influenced research in South Asia. For example, Kennedy points out that had 'prehistoric archaeology developed first in south Asia, we would not be employing terms such as palaeolithic, mesolithic, and neolithic in the way we do today' (p. 382). While South Asian scholars are without a doubt aware of the influence and legacy of those such as William Jones, Robert Bruce Foote and Mortimer Wheeler, Kennedy presents the interaction between these Western antiquarians and the scholars and philosophies of the Subcontinent. This provides a fascinating history of these disciplines within their social and cultural context.

Central to this book is the role of racial classification, how it has arisen within South Asia, and how it has come to have such a fundamental affect on prehistoric studies and interpretations. In addition to the history of antiquarian study itself, Kennedy also presents the evidence for human evolution and activity in South Asia from the earliest discoveries of hominoid fossils in the Siwalik Hills, through Pleistocene hominids and the Palaeolithic populations. The main Mesolithic groups, early farmers and pastoralists, the Harappan Civilization and the Megalith builders follow in chronological order across the whole of South Asia. For all of these sections, both palaeoanthropological and archaeological material is considered in some detail, along with other relevant data such as linguistic or historical tracts where appropriate. This makes the book a valuable source of information about a range of sites and materials, as well as addressing the theories and models associated with the evolution of humans and culture in this region. Through the explicit testing of the hypotheses Kennedy outlined, it also allows the re-interpretation of the palaeoanthropological data in light of the archaeological and other evidence. To this end, Kennedy refutes much of the received wisdom relating to races and the connection between racial development and cultural development in the sub-continent. For example, it is suggested that skeletal changes in prehistoric populations are far more likely to be the result of changes in subsistence and socio-economic strategies rather than due to racial categories, when all available evidence relating to a particular period and/or site is considered together.

Inevitably, a considerable proportion of the book is given over to consideration of the Indo-European debate. Again, Kennedy draws on a range of evidence to convincingly demonstrate that the 'so-called Indo-European problem has remained unsolved for the reason that linguistic, archaeological, geographical, historical, chronological and biological data do not converge to any point of universal agreement among scholars' (p 366). It is hoped that with such a thorough account, it may now be possible for South Asian researchers to move beyond finding the cause of cultural change in the form of an incoming Indo-Aryan group, and rather recognise, as Kennedy concludes, that in biological terms, it is impossible to distinguish 'Aryans' from 'non-Aryans'. Surely enough material has now been collected and published from sites throughout South Asia to allow alternative models of indigenous development to be recognised.

This is an enjoyable, well-written book, which handles a potentially loaded subject sensitively yet directly. It encompasses a huge amount of data both in terms of the chronological and geographical areas covered and also in the themes addressed. As such provides both a useful source book for South Asian palaeoanthropology and related archaeology up to the Early Historic Period, and a positive new model for understanding biological and cultural development there.

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