Book Reviews

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Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020. 336 pages.

Manan Ahmed Asif’s remarkable book, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*, questions the concept of India just as others have interrogated the origins of Hinduism. Asif uncovers how the production of India as a modern nationalist-spatial category effaces the Hindustan that appears in Persian and Arabic sources, which in turn were misappropriated to serve European interests and still are largely ignored by Hindu nationalists in the story of Hindustan. The guide in this recovery project is Firishta’s *Tārīkh-i Hindustān* (composed during the late sixteenth/early seventeenth CE in the court of Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil Shāh II). Asif uses Firishta’s *Tārīkh* as a heuristic through which the reader learns that just as history differs from *Tārīkh*, India differs from Hindustan.

In the introduction, “The End of Hindustan,” Asif outlines the key problem: “Colonization refuses the colonized access to their own past” (4). Through erasing the pre-colonial past and supplanting it with a vision that leveraged false memories in the service of European imperial expansion, the region known today as South Asia was sent down the path it has been on since Partition. In Chapter Two, “The Question of Hindustan,” Asif expands his thesis: “The central issue for the history of the subcontinent is that our prevalent and predominant ‘befores’ and ‘afters’ are an inherited teleology created by the European sciences of history under colonialism” (28). Asif offers “a reading of a set of historiographic frameworks that have overdetermined how we interpret the history of the subcontinent: the paradigm of five thousand years of changeless Hindus and of the Muslim invaders and despots. The two frames are codependent, linked from their very inception in the colonial episteme and throughout the production of its history” (30). Asif juxtaposes William Jones and Abu’l Fazl, Aloys Sprenger and Baihaqī, James Mill and Firishta. In demonstrating the degree to which we rely on colonial depictions of the region at the expense of local Persian and Urdu visions, Asif argues that present day scholars “participate in the erasure of ‘Hindustan’ as a decidedly attendant precolonial geography of the subcontinent” whenever we describe this region in the precolonial era as “India” or “South Asia” without paying due attention to specific linguistic and religious contexts (31).

Chapter Three, “An Archive for Hindustan,” declares that “this book is intended as a simultaneous history of Hindustan as a concept and its erasure, a genealogy of political thought that persisted and that seems to have vanished without a trace” (63). To understand the history of Hindustan, we must work through “the intellectual edifice created by British India and its histories of the subcontinent” (64). This is Asif’s response to the question that may linger in many a scholarly mind: if the colonial history is wrong (or at minimum, represents a projection of European imperial agendas onto the fashioning of an entire region’s collective memory), then we can bypass that projection by directly accessing local vernacular sources. But Asif’s contention is that there is no way to circumnavigate the colonial edifice; instead, one must knock the wall down and then examine it in a discombobulated and deconstructed state.

Firishta’s project differs from both previous *tārīkh*s and contemporaneous British histories, such as those by Alexander Dow. Most Islamicate histories begin
with Adam and Eve before tracing events leading to the Prophet Muhammad and the beginning of the Muslim period. In comparison, Firishta regards the Mahābhārata as an important starting point for his tārīkh, thereby elevating classical Hindu tradition to a pride of place not usually seen in Muslim writings. By contrast, Dow denigrates this exemplar of classical Hindu mythology as nothing more than “fanciful poetry” that cannot possibly have any historical value (89–91). This typifies the type of departure that Asif sees the European histories of India as having taken from the Persian and Urdu depictions of Hindustan. Chapters Four and Five, “The Places in Hindustan” and “The Peoples in Hindustan,” respectively, address how various actors constructed this region in terms of physical and cultural geography. British mapping efforts represented colonial India as “ontologically secure” (102). These efforts flattened relationships between people and places in a reckoning that emphasized Muslim- and Hindu-majority locales, mosques and temples, and political control as the British understood it (102). But how did these communities relate to one another? Asif clarifies: “Not one community, nor people, are introduced or described by Firishta in terms of their ‘otherness,’ nor does he remark that one supersedes another” (144). For Firishta, the Brahmins and the ‘ulamā’ have similar roles to play with respect to administering their respective religious communities. So too with the rājās and the sultaṅs (144). While Firishta depicts Hindustan as a “heavenly” place (in both political and meteorological climate), the earliest Portuguese accounts describe an “inhospitable” place full of rampaging Muslims and oppressed Hindus (145).

Chapter Six, “A History for Hindustan,” emphasizes how Firishta’s Tārīkh has an impressive afterlife, becoming influential within Persian and Urdu histories of Hindustan as well as European histories of India. But the latter group, exemplified by Alexander Dow, would twist Firishta for its own purposes.

In the Afterword, Asif calls us to “turn to the medieval period and recognize the ways in which it continues to organize how our current prejudices are organized” (225). In the presence of such enduring narratives about India and its origins, neither post-colonial scholars nor post-Partition citizens are interested in dealing with the intertwining layers of history and tārīkh. If we do pull apart these layers, then what are we left with? Is it enough to follow Asif’s plea that “it is our collective task to re-imagine the past” (225)? The question remains: are we more comfortable with the artifact of “India” than with the forgotten possibilities of “Hindustan”?

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Nachiket Chanchani, Mountain Temples & Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion, and Nature in the Central Himalayas. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. 288 pages.

In his recent publication, Mountain Temples & Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion and Nature in the Central Himalayas, the art historian Nachiket Chanchani reviews the ancient imagery of the central Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, India,
to answer the question: when and how did this mountainous region become identified as the sacred heavenly mountains of deva bhūmi? His investigation finds that the central Himalayan artistic record generally follows the evolution of Hindu art in India. In Chapter One, he discusses Kalsi’s boulder with Asokan edicts and imported Mathura sculptures of Śiva and Pārvatī found at Rishikesh, which comprise the earliest art from this region. Temple building next appears here in the sixth century, as shown in Chapter Two, with the brick foundation at Koteshwar, a podium shrine and the two dvārapālas of Lakhamandal, and the later remains of four seventh-century temples from Palethi, which all reflect Gupta morphology. Sometime after the seventh century—chronologically concordant with the proliferation of Hindu temples elsewhere in India—the sacred pilgrimage centers or tīrthas of Jageshwar, Pandukeshwar, Champawat, and Dwarahat (described in Chapters Three to Five) emerge with temples and sculptures that similarly reflect the diverse regional influences of their artisans and patrons. Supported by beautifully photographed comparisons to established Indian monuments, Chanchani concludes that the developing sacralitv of the central Himalayas follows the migration of kingdoms, ascetics, and imagery from the lower Gangetic plains.

While Chanchani moves clearly through the historic evolution of these Himalayan temples in this work, he stumbles slightly in Chapter Four with a difficult application of the architectural categories of the northern style of nāgara and the southern style of drāvida. These temple divisions are generally defined according to the shape of the temple’s superstructure: the drāvida’s superstructure being pyramidal and sometimes capped by a small dome, while the nāgara superstructure is invariably convex or “beehive” in shape. At the site of Pandukeshwar, he defines the Laks˙mı¯-Na¯ra¯yan˙a temple as nāgara and the nearby Yogabadarı¯ temple as drāvida. While neither of these temples is an exact match for these categories, being heavily reworked over the centuries, the suggestion that both nāgara and drāvida temples exist at the same site leads Chanchani towards a comparison with late Deccan architecture in Karnataka, which is often referred to as a third category of architecture, the heavily debated vesara, or “mixed” style. In practice, it is possible that these regional divisions were never meant to be defined as two hermetically sealed categories outside of the architectural treatises, or Śilpa Śa¯stras. Chanchani’s discovery of both these categories in Uttrarakhand may actually suggest that the ardent following of dichotomies like nāgara and drāvida fails to capture all the variations of form possible in temple building, especially those carried out in remote places far from the well-known hegemonic dynasties of India previously studied.

While this investigation is predominantly material oriented, the “nature” element reflective of the book’s title continually intervenes in ways that address the history of the central Himalayan mountains and outlying region in religious thought. At the beginning and ending of this book, Chanchani tells how a large boulder, worshiped locally as “Bhı¯ma S´ila¯,” nearly hit the popular pilgrimage temple at Badrinath during a mudslide in 2013. Its currently miraculous location adjacent the temple sets up a focal point for Chanchani, in the manner of Michael W. Meister, to view mountains, stone and rock-cut temples, and mountain temples as interchangeable objects of devotion. Chanchani also sees Kalsi’s boulder with Asokan inscription as
an example of a boulder in worship since it was inscribed in a clockwise manner to create a pradaksīna, or circumambulatory path around it. The pilgrimage site of Jageshwar and its natural surroundings, according to Chanchani, grew into its current massive size due to the settlement of Pāṣupata ascetics in its mythic-like groves since the post-Gupta era. He bases this theory on a number of Pāṣupata images found here such as images of Lakulīśa and Natesā (Natarāja), steles of the saptamātrkās (Seven Mothers), and numerous liṅgas and sepulchral monuments. Demonstrating the continuing sacrality of this region, Chanchani’s conclusion brings the reader up to modern times with the development of the famous pilgrimage route of the Cār Dham Yātra (between the four mountain peaks of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath) illustrated in colonial paintings and the frequent naming of Indian temples after these peaks.

Overall, this book is a much-needed study of a well-traveled, yet chronically understudied, sacred region in India. Included at the end of this book is an extensive one-hundred-page appendix of all the existing temple structures and sculptures of the region with locations and dates. Undoubtedly, Chanchani’s native roots to Uttarakhand have significantly enabled him for this study which is shown in his remarkable ability to dismiss popular inscriptions as forgeries, to review various versions of local mythology, and to access overlooked sites and monuments in remote areas. Amid both environmental and health crises, Chanchani’s timely work brings to light the symbolic and physical dynamics between humans and nature exemplified by the ancient worship of mountains and temples. Carefully written and researched, this book is a welcome addition to any South Asian scholar’s library and would be useful reading in an advanced undergraduate or graduate class that incorporates Himalayan architecture or pilgrimage imagery.

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Nawaraj Chaulagain, Hindu Kingship Rituals: Power Relation and Historical Evolution. Harvard Oriental Series - Opera Minora, 11. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2019. 408 pages.

The modern nation-state of Nepal has endured a rapid series of jarring changes: the 2001 palace massacre that left the king’s brother Gyānendra on the throne; the dissolution of the monarchy, the end of a decade-long civil war, and a Maoist Prime Minister by the end of that decade; and the 2015 earthquakes that left many mourning the destruction of urban and rural places and the deaths of some nine thousand people.

This monograph analyzes the coronation rituals and royal festivals—of King Birendra and of the autumnal Navarātrī festival of the goddess Durgā, respectively—in centuries-long performances of continuity that the Sanskrit texts of and derived from Vedic and classical India have sought to maintain. In addition to using simply the more well-known narrative and ritual texts affiliated with royal power, such as the Devī Māhāmya and relevant Purāṇas, especially the Viṣṇudharmottara, Devī
Bhāgavata, and Viṣṇu, the author incorporates a unique set of texts: manuscripts of royal coronation manuals from the private collection of his advisor, Michael Witzel, Nepali newspaper accounts, and conversations with and translations of texts from members of the priestly Aryāl family of Kathmandu, whose connections to Nepali royalty stretch back several centuries. These texts appear right away in Part One, a one-chapter introduction to the author’s methods and theories; juxtaposed to the work of Maurice Bloch, Jan Heesterman, A. M. Hocart, and Ronald Inden, these sources make this book especially worthwhile reading, if sometimes dense.

Part Two, “The Navarātri and Coronation Rituals,” contains six chapters, covers more than two hundred pages, and represents the core material and argument of the book. The first four chapters detail the autumnal goddess festival locally referred to as Daśain. Grounding this study in the Devī Māhātmya and Vedic texts and rituals, the author analyzes in Chapter One the ways that sometimes-violent sacrificial acts in these ritual cycles “bring together both Śrīvidyā and Kālī traditions of śākta tāntrism” in the support of the Hindu Nepali king (64). Chapter Two continues the theme of the goddess, detailing the long-standing Nepalese inclusion of the worship of various forms of goddess, especially of the virgin Kumārī, in numerous royal rituals and city-wide festivals.

Chapters Three and Four comprise a study of “The Royal Navarātri in Gorkhā and “Hanumāṇdhokā Palaces in Nepal,” the palaces of the Śaḥ dynasty before and after 1768, respectively, with each chapter handling one half of the fifteen-day festival. These chapters consist largely of translations and analyses of priestly ritual manuals, including the navarātri pūjāvidhi of the Aryāl priests. Contextualizing them against the background of the Vedic and classical textual tradition, the author attends to the full sequence of the festival’s many well-known rites: the installation (pratiṣṭhā) of the pot of barley shoots in the daśainghar (royal Daśain house) (134); the invocation (āvāhana) of the goddess Durgā to be present in the newly constructed ritual space (145); and the welcoming of the nine plants/leaves (navapatrikā; Nepali phūlpātī) (168). Important to the author’s thesis is the texts’ regular attention to the many rites that support the violence that underlies this royal goddess festival; on the “dark night” (kālarātrī) of the festival’s eighth day (mahāṣṭami), priests will worship the swords (khadgapijā) that lower-caste men will use to sacrifice many animals inside the courtyard of the palace, and on the ninth day (mahānavamī), goats and roosters will be offered to “weapons, implements, and modern cars” (193), while the military installs various insignia (niśāna) that “are transformed into embodiments of Śakti and manifest forms of the unseen power” (195).

Chapters Five and Six represent a two-chapter study of “The Rājyabhīṣeka of King Birendra” of 1975 from a similar variety of Vedic, Purānic, scholarly, royal, and local texts. The reader is often meant to infer the close performative connections with the Navarātri festival treated in the previous section, but the similar construction and subsequent treatment of powerful sacred personages in both quickly become evident. Setting Birendra’s coronation within the overlapping contexts of Vedic and Nepali royalty highlights the unique treatment of the latter, for example, the growing Śaiva influence seen most clearly in the presence of the famous deity of Paśupatināth.
The book ends with a two-chapter conclusion that discusses the rhetoric of asal Hindustan (the true Hindu state) established by Prthvī Nārāyaṇa Śāh in the 1760s. This rhetoric unevenly guided the ensuing two-and-a-half centuries of Śāh rule, as it occasionally and recently veered into Hindu nationalism; following Gyānendra’s restoration of Parliament and the Constitution in 2006, and despite the final dissolution of the monarchy in 2008, this religious rhetoric continues to be debated. Two short appendices follow, the first accounting for three other royal festivals in the Kathmandu Valley and the second illustrating Bīrendra’s 1975 coronation program with full-color photographs.

As a lightly edited dissertation, this Indological monograph is strong on the details of the classical Sanskritic tradition, though it lacks the lively narratives of lived and local traditions that have guided more recent relevant studies (for example, Anne T. Mocko’s 2016 *Demoting Vishnu* on royal festivals; Mark Liechty’s 2017 *Far Out* on, among other things, the spectacle behind Mahendra’s 1956 coronation; Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz’s 2018 *Reciting the Goddess* on Newār textual and performative traditions; and the 2018 volume, *Nine Nights of the Goddess*, edited by Caleb Simmons, Moumita Sen, and Hillary Rodrigues). Regardless, this author’s attention to unpublished and local texts, manuscripts, and newspapers provides a unique dimension to his study, and this text will serve as a wonderful resource for the further study of ritual and power in South Asia.

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John Fahy, *Becoming Vaishnava in an Ideal Vedic City*. Wyse Series in Social Anthropology, 9. New York: Berghahn, 2020. 204 pages.

I really like it when a book I am already looking forward to reading is even better than what I anticipated. *Becoming Vaishnava in an Ideal Vedic City* is one of these books. It provides a fascinating collection of ethnographic insights and historical reasons for the generation of the “Hare Krishna” movement, otherwise known as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna CONsciousness). Ultimately, this volume is a discourse on the anthropology of ethics in relation to the moral system of ISKCON, the religious pedagogy that has evolved to cultivate perceived legitimate members, and the ways that relevant essentialized “Vedic” characteristics are performed or rationalized within the twenty-first century context.

Anyone interested in either a discussion of the anthropology of ethics or an encompassing study of ISKCON will certainly find this a fascinating read. A key strength is the distillation of complex social theory regarding morality and ethics, which non-specialists and general readers alike would find accessible, relatable, and interesting.

Most biographies of ISKCON normally start with the (second) counter-cultural movement of the 1960s, yet John Fahy shows how the “century of Christian-Hindu syncretism” in West Bengal between 1850–1950 catalyzed the Bhadrālok movement to become the ideological base of ISKCON (11). The book explores how
unavoidable moral failure is; Fahy’s central question relates to whether people who
fail to live up to the demands of a moral system still inhabit that system (16, 19). It
builds on the idea that moral failure is a constitutive element of ethical experience,
which ISKCON’s members are able to translate their individual shortcomings into a
“privileged mode of self-cultivation” (22). Each chapter enters into dialogue with
emergent debates on the anthropology of ethics. The respective themes are place,
the self, knowledge, emotion, and culture (24).

ISKCON attempts to remain true to a “Vedic lifestyle,” even though it has survived
several scandals and the post-charismatic phase following the founder’s death.
However, migration to the “Vedic city” of Mayapur, West Bengal, comes with
attendant problems of town planning, global governance, no legal authority, high
divorce rates, and the struggle for global migrants to economically sustain themselves
in a distant land and adopted home (34). The commercialization of “sacred land”
exposes the challenge of balancing piety, politics, and profit. Particularly with the
unresolved issues of ISKCON’s acquisition of 350 acres of land acquired in 1971 and
the multiple rumors “shrouded in murky tales of burnt crops and poisoned wells” and
“violent conflicts” during attempts to secure the land (35). The “precarious economic
model” serves to undermine the pursuit of a cohesive community,” which looks
beyond Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism’s soteriological strategy to focus on bhakti, instead of the
classical Hindu goals of the puruṣārthas (38, 58).

The concept of “Vedic” necessitates leaving it as vague as possible across a
“range of understandings of what constituted Vedic culture” (130). It is not found in
an idealized, yet “anachronistic social structure,” but rather in the “micro-practices
that animate one’s daily life” (131). This enables both strict adherence to the main
precepts and a flexibility for the more liberal-minded devotees to subjectively
rationalize what “Vedic” means. The essentialized monolithic concept of “Vedic” is
an example of “(Constructive) Ambiguity” that is just out of reach of articulation;
the Vedic metonym informs and legitimates a variety of competing ambitions while
enduring contradictions and inconsistencies. This “semantic weakness” is “but a
necessary condition of its enduring importance” (131). It provides a flexible moral
scaffolding for people to repeatedly fail well, while aiming for something
perceptibly higher through adherence to the orthodox concept of varṇāśrama-
dharma, which is emblematic of a traditional idealization of Hinduism (138). While
this provides tangible rungs during the process of learning to embody Krṣṇa
consciousness, for many international devotees varṇāśrama-dharma is a “peripheral
element of the moral imagination” that is an “expensive business” and point of
tension between conservative and liberal-minded devotees (140, 145).

The “ideal Vedic city” and “ideal Vedic lifestyle” “cohere around sometimes
competing conceptions of Vedic culture” (164). Locating and identifying ethics,
Fahy steers into the moral ambiguity of subjective ethical striving. He avoids
judging the inconsistencies of ISKCON’s moral system while demonstrating why
Émile Durkheim’s argument about morality equating society ought to be considered
obsolete (166–67). Failure is considered inevitable, while narratives of weakness
become an integral feature of an ethical life juxtaposed against not living up to lofty
ideals. The people are relatable for their virtue and for their continual striving
amidst regular failing to attain the “simple thinking, high living” philosophy of
ISKCON, in which “people live with and negotiate these indeterminate spaces in their everyday ethical striving” and demonstrate allegiance through imperfection (166).

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Dominic Goodall, Shaman Hatley, Harunaga Isaacson, and Srilata Raman, eds., Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions: Essays in Honour of Alexis G.J.S. Sanderson. Gonda Indological Studies, 22. Leiden: Brill, 2020. 632 pages.

This volume is the result of a 2015 Toronto symposium convened in celebration of Alexis Sanderson’s lifelong contribution to the study of Śaivism and the Tantric traditions on the occasion of his retirement from Oxford University. Divided into five thematic sections, the volume includes twenty-three essays of cutting-edge research by leading scholars in their field—many of them former students of Sanderson—who build on and extend aspects of Sanderson’s formidable work. While some of the essays present preliminary or tentative findings, the uniformly high caliber of the scholarship speaks to Sanderson’s influence and dedication as a teacher, supervisor, colleague, and groundbreaking Indologist.

The first part includes three essays on the theme of early Śaivism by Peter C. Bisschop, Judit Törzsök, and Dominic Goodall. Bisschop’s essay observes that the term “Atimārga”—used in Mantramaṇḍa sources to refer to non-Tantric, ascetic traditions (for example, Pāṣupatas and Lākulas)—was not typically used by these traditions themselves, while analyzing a rare instance of this in an unpublished twelfth-century māhāmya. Törzsök explores a range of possibilities for what the term “Soma” might have meant in the designations of Śaiva Kāpālikas. Goodall’s essay sheds light on the concept of vrata in early Tantric Śaivism, particularly in the Guhyasūtra of the Niśvāsatattvasamhitā.

Part Two focuses on exegetical and philosophical traditions and contains five essays. The first, by Alex Watson, considers where to situate the self-theory (ātmavāda) of the Saiddhāntika theologian Bhatṭa Rāmakaṇṭha relative to Nyāya and Buddhism, continuing a line of investigation begun in Watson’s earlier work. Isabelle Ratier’s essay offers a preliminary edition and translation of fragments of Utpaladeva’s commentary (vivṛti) on his Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā (ĪPK). Christopher D. Wallis focuses on an alchemical metaphor for spiritual transformation in Abhinavagupta’s commentaries on the ĪPK, shedding new light on the terms samāveṣa, turya, and turyāṭīta. Péter-Dániel Szántó draws attention to the role and influence of an eleventh-century East Indian Buddhist scholar, Vāgīśvarakirti, in a Kashmirian debate concerning initiation and, further afield, in an inscription from the Khmer Empire. Srilata Raman looks at how representations of Rāmānuja in Śrīvaishṇava stotra literature in Sanskrit and Tamil reflect doctrinal changes in Śrīvaishnavism, particularly between Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai traditions.

Part Three includes six essays that center on the theme of religion, the state, and social history. Csaba Dezső analyzes the role of Vasiṣṭha as royal chaplain in the Raghuvamśa and shows how this accords with norms set out in the Arthaśāstra.
Gergely Hidas traces the theme of Buddhist rituals for the protection of the state through early first millennium Mahāyāna literature down to the present day. Nina Mirnig examines how the emergence and development of a form of Śaiva initiation intended for lay worshipers reflected socio-historical developments in Śaivism. John Nemec addresses questions of religious change, authority, and innovation through an analysis of selected writings of Kashmirian authors (tenth–fourteenth centuries), while challenging aspects of Sheldon Pollock’s model of theory (śāstra) versus practice (prayoga). Bihani Sarkar’s essay charts the history of the nine-night festival of the Goddess (Navarātra), highlighting distinct stages in its development as well as complexities in its regional variations.

Part Four contains six essays on mantra, ritual, and yoga. Jürgen Hanneder’s essay examines sources for the cult of the Kashmirian lineage deity Śārikā with a focus on Śahib Kaul’s Śārikāstotra. Diwakar Acharya offers an edition and translation of the hitherto unpublished Kāmesvarīstuti (ninth century?) that focuses on the worship of Nityā Sundarī. Shaman Hatley’s essay addresses the relationship of meditational discipline to ritual performance in the Brahmāyāmala, a major source for the early history of Śaiva yoga. James Mallinson examines the Amṛtasiddhi, the earliest work to teach many of the key principles and practices of hathayoga; he concludes that the work was composed in a Buddhist Vajrayāna milieu. Csaba Kiss presents an edition and translation of chapter forty of the Matsyendrasamhitā, focusing on details and ambiguities in its treatment of sexual ritual. Jason Birch’s essay studies hathayoga textual sources of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and illuminates developments that foreshadowed twentieth-century transnational yogas.

The fifth part includes four essays on art and architecture by Libbie Mills, Ryugen Tanemura, Anthony Tribe, and Parul Dave-Mukherji. Mills’ essay examines textual sources for the architecture and design of early Śaiva mathas to elucidate what went on inside them and concludes that they appear to have been “practical domestic establishment[s]” (503). Tanemura’s essay analyzes parallels between Buddhist and Śaiva consecration (pratiṣṭhā) ceremonies through a comparative focus on the Buddhist Kriyāsamgrahapanjikā and Śaiva pratiṣṭhā sources. Tribe argues that an eight-armed form of Mañjuśrī found in early Western Himalayan art (eleventh–thirteenth centuries) should be identified with Mañjuśrī as Ādibuddha and not with Mañjuśrī as a bodhisattva. Dave-Mukherji examines the Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa in the context of modern interpretative frameworks for traditional Indian art.

The volume is highly recommended for graduate students, researchers, and readers looking to better understand the far-reaching influence and place of Śaivism and the Tantric traditions in the landscape of medieval Indian religions. That the book is available in Open Access format is to be welcomed for making its valuable contributions easily accessible.

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Gopal K. Gupta, *Mâyā in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Human Suffering and Divine Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 288 pages.

In his book, *Mâyā in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Human Suffering and Divine Play* (henceforth *Mâyā*), Gopal K. Gupta analyzes the employment of the polyvalent Sanskrit term *mâyā* (whose meanings range from illusion to this phenomenal world itself) within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ca. ninth to tenth century CE), one of the most prominent Hindu sacred texts. Given the central importance of the doctrine of *mâyā* within Indian thought, Gupta’s book thus marries two areas of central importance for scholars of Hinduism. Those who are interested in Indian philosophy will find Gupta’s book to be a crucial resource to understand the development of the doctrine of *mâyā* within Vaishnava thought. Those who are interested in Hindu sacred texts will also appreciate how *Mâyā* illuminates various aspects of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that have not been critically researched before.

A brief overview of *Mâyā* is as follows. In Chapter One, Gupta introduces the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and explains its significance within India’s intellectual history. In Chapter Two, the development of the doctrine of *mâyā* is traced out, from its earliest usage in the Vedic *sāṁhitās* to its usage within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Chapter Three discusses the theistic Sāṃkhya system of metaphysics found within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that enumerates the fundamental constituents of reality and that, unlike non-theistic Sāṃkhya, includes God within its ontological framework. In Chapter Four, Gupta analyzes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s Puraṇjana story, an allegory that illustrates the nature of this world and how the self becomes entangled in the cycle of birth and death. In this same chapter, Gupta also develops the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s analogy of our worldly existence being like a dream-like state, a motif that suggests that liberation from the world is a type of awakening through which we realize our original condition of existence. Chapter Five illuminates the theological dimensions of *mâyā* by drawing upon various narratives within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that illustrate how God (identified with Kṛṣṇa) allows knowledge of both God and his devotee to be obscured due to *mâyā* so that God and the devotee can enjoy more intense exchanges of love with each other. The most iconic of these narratives is Kṛṣṇa’s famous rāsa dance with the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana, although Kṛṣṇa’s revelation of his universal form to his mother is described also. In Chapter Six, Gupta pushes back against the idea, based off certain interpretations of *mâyā*, that women are to be viewed as temptresses who distract men from their soteriological pursuits. In Chapter Seven, Gupta briefly describes how theological motifs within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and within Vaishnava exegeses of the text can be drawn upon to formulate a response to the perennial problem of evil, as this problem is formulated within Anglophone philosophical contexts. Chapter Eight contains a discussion of the bondage of the self within this world and gives a brief overview of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s view of grace. Finally, Chapter Nine explains the reception of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the nineteenth century and argues that its philosophical and theological insights went unnoticed by its critics during this time period.

Gupta succeeds in showing that the employment of *mâyā* within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* demonstrates a theological and philosophical profundity that has yet to be
fully explored. For instance, the notion that God voluntarily “forgets” his majesty to relate to his devotees in a more intimate manner (found in Chapter Five) is a fascinating theological motif that warrants the attention of theologians, both within and outside Hindu contexts. There are several praiseworthy features of Māyā. Gupta’s knowledge of Indian philosophy and history is showcased throughout the book, as he engages with a wide variety of disciplines and sub-disciplines within and outside Indian thought. Gupta is remarkably thorough in his analysis of his primary texts, and he shows a mastery of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa that is rarely seen. Third, Gupta tackles various philosophical challenges through the lens of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and he does so with commendably acuity. For instance, I found his discussion of the guṇas to be particularly insightful (54–59).

However, despite the merits of Māyā, there is a small section of the book that could have been more clearly explained. In Chapter Eight, Gupta attempts to describe the distinctive view of grace found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (158–62). However, I did not find this account of grace, which states that grace is given in response to one’s performance of devotional activities, to be markedly different than the “monkey” school of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, which too states that grace is given to individuals in response to their acts of devotion.

Overall, Gupta’s multifaceted and in-depth book is a well-written and insightful work that deserves serious attention, and its relevance is not limited only to specialized scholars in the field of Hindu studies. It is accessible to a wide audience and does not presuppose extensive knowledge of Hinduism. It is also clear in its explication of terms and concepts that may be unfamiliar to a reader who has not extensively studied Hinduism.

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Ehud Halperin, The Many Faces of a Himalayan Goddess: Hadimbā, Her Devotees, and Religion in Rapid Change. AAR Religion, Culture, and History series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 296 pages.

Situated at a distance from the family of religious cultures to which it bears clear resemblances, Hinduism in the Himalayas maintains a number of unique features obvious to all who encounter it. More than simply the maintenance of such features, it is their retention in the face of potential reform and of those social, political, and economic features often seen as part and parcel of modernity that define such local ritual and religious forms. The book under review treats the rites and narratives associated with the Himalayan goddess Haḍimbā in an examination of the ways that her devotees have negotiated her traditional cultural forms against those introduced in the various processes associated with modernity.

Situating his research within the wealth of contemporary studies of Hindu goddesses (see Frank Korom’s review essay on goddess literature in IJHS 24.3), Ehud Halperin establishes in his introduction the logic behind the publication of such a monograph: the comprehensive case study of a previously understudied
village goddess provides the opportunity to examine how the flows of Brāhmanization and Sanskritization from North India have affected the active West Himalayan cult of Haḍimbā (3–4). Though not a village ethnography in the classic anthropological sense, this book is deeply rooted in its surroundings; its first chapter situates the people and lived performances surrounding Haḍimbā’s rath chariot festival in the Kullu Valley—part of the Himalayan Dev Bhūmi (Valley of the Gods)—where she resides and as part of the devī-devtā system whose divine members individually and collectively “influence the religious, sociopolitical, economic, agricultural, and even environmental dimensions of life in the area” (20).

Each of the following five chapters responds to one aspect of the question the author asks in his introduction: “Who is Haḍimbā Devī?” (7). In Chapter Two, Halperin describes how her rath festival furthers her identity as a fluid compound entity who exerts a complex agency along with her devotees. One of the distinctive examples of agency to which the author regularly returns is the local gur oracle through whom local deities “observably and effectively incarnate, perform, converse, and deliver messages” (43). Haḍimbā’s rath, its structure and ornaments collectively produced, guarded, and assembled by the villagers, unites the entire village while still reproducing caste, gender, and age distinctions; moreover, and like the gur, the rath similarly and diversely communicates the goddess’ desires; interacting with and distinguishing herself from the other devī-devtā (and their rath) of the Valley, Haḍimbā speaks through the sometimes violent movements of her rath to reflect and attempt to resolve tension among performing (sub-)communities, as “she promotes social participation and solidarity” (77).

Chapters Three and Four attend to the narrative webs of association that contribute to Haḍimbā’s complex identity. The first of these two chapters handles the local and focuses on her relationship with Manu Rṣī in Old Manali village, identified by some as the author of the Manusmr̥ti who has Haḍimbā as his personal protectress and by others as her brother. Reading local colonial documents about the relationships between their two rath, Halperin asserts that the mythological relationship between these two deities is rooted in “financial, administrative, and practical considerations” (91). The second of these two chapters builds upon the local narrative complexity that connects Haḍimbā’s origins to multiple external locales. Here, and increasingly in contemporary Kullu, Haḍimbā is Hidimbā the rākṣasī from the Mahābhārata—the mother of Ghaṭotkaca and the wife of Bhīma. But this apparent narrative unity reflects the composite nature of her narrativizing, as even these more explicitly Sanskritic narratives reveal a diversity of agents and sources within an ever-changing tradition. Encouraged by colonial scholars who gave a place of primacy to Sanskrit literature, domestic tourists familiar with the television epic, and local agents who work to construct a sense of regional otherness, Haḍimbā’s epic identity has come to reflect one mode of “creative Sanskritization” that keeps her rooted in Kullu but accessible to all (148).

Chapters Five and Six handle the relationship of the goddess with issues of modernity. Similar to sections in William S. Sax’s 1991 Mountain Goddess, the first of these chapters highlights social difficulties in the contemporary performance of the buffalo sacrifice to Haḍimbā. Despite the prominence of vegetarianism, increasingly supported by conservative political parties and espoused by many domestic tourists,
the recent increase in the frequency of buffalo sacrifices reflects, in part, the increase in
wealth brought to Kullu from those same tourists and promotes “communal
integration and cooperation” among the local communities performing those
sacrifices (181). And, preceding a short conclusion, the final chapter takes up the
relationship between global warming and the goddess who reigns in one of the most
ecologically sensitive places on the planet. This book’s theme of a goddess gradually
composed of multiple and disparate stories is furthered here, as locals offer a multitude
of explanations for the waning power of the goddess over climate change: the moral
decline of the region’s residents (for example, abandoning cows), external influences
brought into the valley (for example, sexual promiscuity from the West), and
increasingly dominant global systems (for example, scientific thinking) over against a
more local and holistic worldview.

This book’s effortless balance of personal anecdotes; translations from Sanskrit,
colonial, and local texts; and thick descriptions of rituals devoted to the goddess
places it among the best of contemporary ethnographic work. And its consideration
of multiple interrelated themes—ritual performance, the Hindu goddess, and
climate change—makes it accessible and required reading for South Asian students
and scholars at all levels.

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Patrick Olivelle, ed., Gṛhastha: The Householder in Ancient Indian Religious
Culture. Oxford University Press, 2019. 303 pages.

The book under review is an edited volume on the married householder, gṛhastha, in
ancient Hinduism, a character whose role was until recently considered unproblematic
because the Vedas and their ritual and social institutions are centered on him. What
needed explaining was not the householder but the celibate ascetic, who has no
presence in the early Vedic religion. As reported by the editor, Patrick Olivelle, this
paradigm was challenged in a paper presented by Stephanie W. Jamison at the 2015
annual meeting of the American Oriental Society and expanded since to anchor the
present volume. Jamison discovered that the gṛhastha, in fact, was absent from the
early Vedic literature, and so was “the householder” in general. In the Vedas, the
householder is referred to by other terms, dāmpati and grhāpati, but always in the dual
number paired with his wife. Thus he is a householder by accidence, as he tends to the
real householder—the house fire as the god Agni—and is married to the house lady.
However, when the gṛhastha emerges for the first time, in the Dharmaśāstra literature,
it is not relative to the household or the house fire that his function is defined: its
counterpart is the ascetic, the “gone-forth,” pravrajita. From this, Jamison argues that
the gṛhastha upon his appearance was a “stay-at-home,” not a layman but a religious
specialist who practiced his craft not in the forest or on the road like the ascetic but at
home. In other words, gṛhastha became more a soteriological than a social category:
an aspirant after the highest good—heaven or liberation—just like his ascetic counterpart, rather than a head of a household.

Jamison’s argument, then, is that lexical discontinuity involved in conceptual change, and her question is, what corner does this change come from. In pursuing the answer, she finds that the pravrajita-grhastha pair appears as a “term of art” at roughly the same time as the early Dharmaśāstras in Asoka’s inscriptions, not in Sanskrit but in forms of Middle Indic. Her conclusion has immense consequences of our understanding of religion in ancient South Asia:

The implications of this word history are quite striking, at least to me. It indicates that the grhastha, so thoroughly embedded verbally in the orthodox Brahmanical dharma texts and so explicitly the foundation of the social system depicted therein, is actually a coinage of and a borrowing from śramaṇic discourse, which discourse, at this period, was conducted in various forms of Middle Indo-Aryan. The grha-stha, literally the “stay-at-home,” is thus defined against a contrastive role, that of an ascetic of no fixed abode and no domestic entanglements, a role well recognized in heterodox circles, but not available in Brahmanical orthodoxy save as a later, post-retirement life stage (18–19).

The remaining eleven essays plumb the depths of Jamison’s discovery in Buddhist, Jaina, and Brāhmanical literature of the pre-Gupta era. Here I will focus just on one issue that emerges as particularly important. Jamison’s thesis about the grhastha’s origin in Śramaṇic discourse is put to test in the contributions of Oliver Freiberger and Claire Maes, who search for householders and “stay-at-homes” in the Theravāda Pali and Jaina Ardhamāgadhī scriptures, respectively. Although both corpora in their available form post-date Asoka and cannot be taken as evidence for pre-Asokan Śramaṇic discourse without a grain—or a lump—of salt, it surely is significant that the grhastha is indeed used, commonly relative to pravrajita, but neither very often nor exclusively so. What is the significance of this for Jamison’s thesis? Both authors suggest that grhastha would have been the least ideologically charged term for the domestic counterpart of the ascetic, and for this reason the most appealing for Brāhmans; in other words, that our term hits the sweet spot. I wonder if that is the case. Even if we imagine that grhastha rather than another term was preferable to Brāhmans, it is unclear why it would have been preferable to Asoka. Is the grhastha/pravrajita pair in Asoka’s inscriptions reflective of some traction among Brāhmans; that is, have Brāhmans appropriated grhastha from Śramaṇic discourse, rather than grhin or upāsaka, and influenced Asoka? Or, is this a case of Asoka’s idiosyncrasy that made its way to Brāhmanic discourse? I think a third story is also prima facie plausible, that the term did appear first in some Dharmaśāstra context, perhaps no longer known to us, as an identity marker of a community of “stay-at-homes” in response to the practice of going forth. In other words, that it did not necessarily come from Śramaṇic discourse, but would have been impossible without it.

Whatever the details may be, however, it is impossible to overstate the importance not only of Jamison’s thesis—which Olivelle rightly describes as “seminal”—but of the entire volume as well. We will never think of the grhastha as
we used to, and the consequences of this for understanding the religious history of the Indian subcontinent are enormous. In front of us is a paradigm shift.

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Caleb Simmons, Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India. AAR Religion, Culture, and History series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 296 pages

Drawing upon sources such as texts, letters, paintings, sculptures, and patronage records, Caleb Simmons explores the reigns of two rulers of Mysore, Tipu Sultan (r. 1782–99) and Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (r. 1799–1868), seeking to demonstrate how each ruler articulated and performed sovereignty in the late early modern and early colonial period of Indian history as British hegemony expanded its reach. Simmons first provides a brief history of Mysore along with a discussion of sovereignty as a dynamic process, arguing that religion provides a conceptual framework and idiom for sovereignty, and that Tipu Sultan and Krishnaraja III have often been understood through an anachronistic Hindu versus Muslim framework that obscures the complexity of their performances of sovereignty in a religiously plural environment. The juxtaposition of Muslim and Hindu kings of the same region provides fertile ground for Simmons to chart and compare the various means through which each ruler performed his sovereignty, hinting at the ways in which categories such as “Muslim” and “Hindu” or “religion” and “politics” may obscure the adroit ways in which these kings and their courts negotiated the internal, regional, and colonial contexts within which they operated. Simmons argues that British colonial rule led to a reconstitution of sovereignty that helped lay the foundation for “modern Indian political structures and practice and the ideological foundations of the Hindu nationalist movement” (211).

The first three chapters focus on Tipu Sultan, drawing on literary genealogies produced in his court, his relationships with the Chishti Sufi saint Gisu Daraz and the Sringeri Matha, the murals in his summer palace, and his international correspondence with his envoys and with Afghan, French, and British officials. Chapters Four to Seven turn to Krishnaraja III, analyzing his literary genealogies, his sponsorship of devotional portraiture and installation of images of himself in temples, the murals in one of his palaces, and murals from a temple that Simmons reads in conjunction with a pilgrimage that Krishnaraja III had his court priest perform. (Given that Simmons’ analysis at many points rests upon a close reading of visual sources such as murals and paintings, it is unfortunate that the images in the book are reproduced at low resolution.) The book concludes with a brief epilogue highlighting the ways the images of each king are appropriated, reshaped, and contested in the contexts of contemporary India and Pakistan, suggesting that it is possible to draw explicit connections between various forms of devotional sovereignty in colonial India and the later rise of Hindu nationalism.
Simmons argues that both Tipu Sultan and Krishnaraja III demonstrated their sovereignty in part through acts of devotion and patronage, and similarly that members of their courts produced works that drew upon earlier conventions for legitimating the kings’ sovereignty. For Tipu Sultan, this included drawing upon both traditionally Islamic forms of devotionalism, such as assertions of the divine authorization of his rule, but also demonstrating his knowledge of traditionally Hindu symbols of sovereignty and sponsoring Hindu rituals, for instance through sponsoring temple offerings to the goddess Canḍi for the welfare of the Sringeri Māṭha. Simmons suggests that Tipu Sultan and his court constructed a sort of political religion in which religious fidelity was defined through allegiance to the state of Mysore.

Krishnaraja III, too, drew upon longstanding conventions of Indic sovereignty. For Tipu Sultan, political interests tended to overshadow religious identity in performance of sovereignty. In contrast, for Krishnaraja III, who had no administrative or military power under British rule, devotional acts incorporating Śakti, Vīraśaiva, and Vaiṣṇava imagery served to create what Simmons terms a “new vision of Hinduism” that decentered sectarian allegiances (126). When Krishnaraja III sent his court priest on a pilgrimage throughout India, it constituted a sort of royal digvijaya, the king demonstrating his sovereignty through these acts of devotion rather than the military conquest that is a traditional part of Indic kingship.

Analyzing a private mural complex in one of Krishnaraja III’s palaces, Simmons makes the intriguing point that the visual culture of the king’s court shows that all Indian kings, Hindu and Muslim, share a vision of kingship resting “in a divine authority to which the British do not have access” and that there is a shared “visual rhetoric of courts throughout the subcontinent” (185, 193). Simmons could have further deepened his exploration of sovereignty in India with greater attention to the implication of these various idioms of courtly rhetoric shared by kings throughout the Indian subcontinent. While it is easy to focus on Tipu Sultan as a Muslim ruler and Krishnaraja III as a Hindu ruler, Simmons’ work shows that each performed his sovereignty through strategies and symbols that transcend those religious boundaries. Simmons’ epilogue hints at the ways in which these kings’ performances of sovereignty foreshadow more recent developments in both India and Pakistan. Equally important is the fact that the rhetoric of sovereignty throughout much of Indian history has not been based on conceptualizations of “religion” and “politics” so much as on dharma, articulated in differing ways by Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh kings, and some engagement with categories such as “dharma” (which for kings, of course, incorporates politics) could have sharpened this study of sovereignty and the role that devotion plays within it. Nonetheless, this is a well-crafted, richly detailed analysis of two kings that should be of great value to anyone with an interest in the idioms of sovereignty in early modern, colonial, and contemporary India.

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Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*. AAR Religion in Translation series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 350 pages.

A gigantic tree is always visible to us, but its deeply hidden and unseen roots are not. They are to be excavated and made visible to a critical eye. This book is a story of a scholastic struggle interpreting poetry, poetics, and prayer in relation to each other and of mapping the territory of *stotras* within this discourse. It is a meta-tale of the *stotra* literature that problematizes the concept of praise-poems. Like folklore and unlike the canonical literature, most *stotras* may have fugitive and nomadic lives that are to be threaded together to situate their unruly maps. This is also because they are the primary and potent vehicles of the dynamic transmission of devotion. A serious study like Hamsa Stainton’s has brought in an optimistic to map the intellectual territory that these *stotras* have occupied for the past twelve hundred years in Kashmir. This is hard to achieve, and Stainton has done a commendable job.

Stainton’s book also compels us to think about why we have as modern scholars usually subjected the Sanskrit *stotra* literature to a marginal treatment. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the Sanskrit hymns from Kashmir alone or other parts of South Asia, but this is true of hymnal literature in general that is a part of any South Asian linguistic culture. In that sense, Stainton has opened up a gateway for us—how we should seriously begin studying hymnal literatures across linguistic cultures in South Asia. As abundantly illustrated by Stainton in the initial chapters of his book, *stotras* indeed have complex histories, and a serious study of *stotra* literature has tremendous potential of bringing in fresh and deep insights into religious, political, social, literary, and philosophical spheres. For exploring the history of ideas, like altruism, empathy, and devotion (*bhakti*), in South Asia, hymnal literature undoubtedly supplies rich source material.

Do *stotras* talk philosophy, speak literature, satiate the spiritual quest of compassionate devotees, or are they only praise and portrayal of exalted characteristics of gods and goddesses, sometimes simply compiling their thousand names? Or, do they even have their own voice to which we are deaf? Thus, Stainton asks and answers the fundamental question: “Yet what exactly is a *stotra*?” (28). The first three chapters of the book bear a detailed and comprehensive answer to this question while critically introducing the *stotra* literature in Kashmir.

Mapping the lives of *stotras* can help us map the religious histories, sacred geographies, and literary phenomenology of early medieval India. For instance, I have always wondered how a *stotra* like the *Mukundamālā* (38) composed by King Kulaśekhara of Kerala (fl. ninth century CE) traveled all the way to Kashmir and became so popular there that it was mistaken to be Kashmiri in origin. In the same way, the popularity of *stotras* like the *Gaurīstuti* and *Jayastuti* attributed to Śaṅkaracārya among contemporary Kashmiris “remains a fascinating and understudied feature of *stotra* literature” because of “the ascription of such a diverse range of hymns to this one author, along with their great popularity” (55). And, of course, the “regional traditions have their own histories that get lost when *stotras* from all over South Asia are put into a single, linear history” (40), and our pan-South Asian presentation of these *stotras* forces them to shed their local aesthetics.
Indeed, Sanskrit practiced in Kashmir had its own distinct aroma, and Bengal and Kerala had their own. Stainton has managed to catch hold of this distinctiveness while also situating the discourse in its abstract methodological robustness.

Thereafter, the major focus of Chapter Four, “Poetry as Theology,” is the popular lengthy stotras like the Sāmbhapaṅcāṣikā of Sāmbha, the Stavacintāmaṇi of Bhaṭṭ Nārāyana, Śivastotrāvalī of Utpaladeva, the Śivastotra and Candistotra of Ratnākara, the Bhairavastava and Kramastotra of Abhinavagupta, the Bhairavānukaranāstotra of Kṣemarāja, the Paramārcanatrimśikā and Cittasamatoṣtrimśikā of Nāga, and the Devināmavilāsa of Sāhib Kaul. Chapters Five and Six, “Poetry as Prayer” and “Stotra as Katha,” respectively, remain almost exclusively focused on the otherwise understudied Stutikusumānjali of Jagaddhara Bhāṭṭa. Chapter Seven, “Devotion as Rasa,” once again evaluates the texts like the Stavacintāmaṇi, the Śivastotrāvalī, and the Stutikusumānjali in the light of the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition. In Chapter Eight, “Stotra as Tradition,” Stainton has captured the trajectory of stotras in twentieth-century Kashmir—how and why they become a part of a living tradition.

It is important to develop the methods using which one can study or understand the embedded structures, whether evidently visible or not, in the stotras. And Stainton has only set the ball rolling in the cases of embedded hymns in kāvya or Tantra (47), political eulogy or panegyrics (44), and Tantric worship (51). Taking inspiration from Stainton, new work on embedded hymns can be prepared. In fact, I think Stainton’s book will be incomplete if it does not propel us to think about similar categories in other languages of Kashmir. For instance, there is almost no scholarly engagement available of the praise-poetry, devotional literature, or hymnal literature composed in pre-modern or modern Kashmir in languages other than Sanskrit (that is, Kashmiri and Persian). The Vāk, Śruk, and particularly Līlā literature or Nāṭ literature is a fertile ground for such a study. This would also be important to ascertain how Sanskrit devotional hymns influenced the Līlā narratives in Kashmiri literature depicting Kṛṣṇa and Rāma bhakti.

Some statements found throughout the book such as, “Manuscripts of it are found throughout India” (54), read more like impressionistic notes while the author could have chosen to provide more specific data. Despite this, the book is well argued, and the author has richly annotated his text with generous illustrations on almost every page of the book in the form of translations along with the original Sanskrit text in the footnotes.

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Ithamar Theodor and Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, eds., Dharma and Halacha: Comparative Studies in Hindu-Jewish Philosophy and Religion. Studies in Comparative Philosophy and Religion series. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018. 272 pages.

Before delving into the contents of this impressive volume of essays, it is worth briefly considering the nature of this work as a comparative study. First and
foremost, the use of the term “comparative” in the study of religion raises the spectre of Comparative Religions, a methodological approach long associated with the academic study of religion, but one seen as severely compromised by the views of its nineteenth-century founders (male, Protestant, European). This is not lost on the volume’s editors, who declare in the introduction that the Comparative Study of Hinduism and Judaism (which is also a working group of the American Academy of Religion) was, in fact, “founded as an alternative to the Protestant Christian paradigm of comparative religions” (3). That model, briefly stated, invariably viewed “other” religions through the lens of Christianity, emphasizing deeply the element of belief and the “sacred” while discounting broader elements of culture and practice. How then does the Comparative Study of Hinduism and Judaism differ from the antecedent field of Comparative Religions? This question is vigorously addressed in the volume’s epilogue, by Barbara Holdrege, which reprises the history of the field (to which Holdrege has made groundbreaking contributions) and recounts a number of the major elements that have been found in common, yet not without widely divergent applications in these two traditions, such as the elements of ethnic identity, the relationship of practice to belief, and the deeply embedded notions of purity and impurity. As Holdrege points out, beyond its challenge to dominant paradigms in the study of religion, this approach may also be taken as a call to scholars “to critically interrogate the theories, models, and categories that perpetuate the legacy of hegemonic paradigms in the academy” (233–34).

The volume consists of eleven essays, divided into three parts: Ritual and Sacrifice; Ethics; and Theology. The final essay, Barbara Holdrege’s comprehensive discussion of the history of the field, also provides a methodological framework for the volume as a whole. Despite their individual authorship, and the diverse topics they cover, the essays are not unrelated. For example, Jewish and Hindu mysticism forms a leitmotif in several essays and stands as the central topic in another. Other topics that extend through a number of essays are the Hindu/Jewish understanding of the relationship of the divine and the human; the bearing of scriptural authority to the lived-in world of everyday practice; and the profound effects of interpretation on the history of these traditions.

The three essays in Part One (“Ritual and Sacrifice”) include Rachel Fell McDermott and Daniel F. Polish’s discussion of God/gods in Jewish and Hindu thought that point to, but also overcome, the obvious and overly simplistic characterization of Judaism as an aniconic monotheistic faith and Hinduism as a polytheistic image-worshiping faith; Tracy Pintchman’s thorough description of an American Hindu Goddess temple which overtly correlates its Śakti Garbha with the biblical Ark of the Covenant; and Philippe Bornet’s comparison of the Hindu-Jewish purity rules which, despite significant differences in formulation, “sanctify” domestic life. Part Two (“Ethics”) begins with Ithamar Theodor’s wide-ranging consideration of the roughly equivalent terms Dharma and Halacha that not only considers the moral precepts themselves, as one would expect, but also follows a nuanced thread into the Hindu and Jewish mystical paths that are at once otherworldly yet also deeply ethical. Two essays in this section (by Aaron Gross and by Purushottama Bilimoria) take on the subject of animal ethics, discussions in which the subject of using animals for food looms large. Although the two traditions
would again seem to be at odds here, the one decidedly meat-eating, the other with at least a theoretical preference for vegetarianism, what emerges from these chapters (particularly, in their juxtaposition) is that both traditions have at their center a concern for the *treatment* of animals and that both abjure violence against animals in some fashion. But here the ideal invariably gives way to the exigencies of life; as Bilimoria notes, “Both diets are ways of encoding in food a striving for a lesser violence where non-violence is impossible” (106). The last essay in this section, Shoshana Razel Gordon Guedalia’s study of the widow marriage taboo in Judaism and in Hinduism, uncovers the history of a long-standing misogynistic prohibition, while bringing to the fore attempts at its reform by two deeply influential thinkers, Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar in nineteenth-century India and Maimonides in twelfth-century Spain.

The final section of the collection (“Theology”) includes Thomas A. Forsthoefer’s study of the figures of the *guru* and the *zaddik*, emphasizing the often-difficult coalescence of the divine and the human, a theme which is also prominently featured in Yudit Kornberg Greenberg’s discussion of erotic love as a means to the divine in the Sanskrit *Gitagovinda* (“Song of Govinda [Krṣṇa]”) and the Hebrew *Shir Ha-Shirim* (“Song of Songs”). The final two essays in this section engage the direct, albeit mystical, apprehension of the divine in Judaism and Hinduism, discussed by Paul C. Martin in a comparison of the Tantric/Kabbalist traditions and Daniel Sperber in a focused study that juxtaposes the *tetragrammaton*, the four syllables expressing God’s nature and name in the Jewish tradition, and the divine syllable *aum*, said in the Hindu tradition to represent “this all.”

Although Hinduism and Judaism would seem to be unlikely bedfellows for the comparative enterprise, the essays in this volume demonstrate that their juxtaposition does indeed reveal that, as Forsthoefer observes in his essay, “The fruit of comparison across cultures, done well, is a richer understanding of what it means to be human and a richer stock of insights on human experience…” (159). What is “richer” here is a nuanced world of convergence and divergence, whereby elements from one of these traditions throws into high relief its “twin” in the other tradition. In brief, this engaging volume is highly recommended for those seeking a fresh perspective on either Hinduism or Judaism (or both) or for those who wish to expand their methodological horizons and incorporate comparison (disregarding its checkered history) as a meaningful interpretive tool.

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