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Archaeological Excavations in Central India (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh).
By R. K. Sharma and O. P. Mishra. pp. 238. Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003.

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history of early Buddhism in South Asia to the end of the first millennium CE with special emphasis on patronage and routes of transmission. A shorter Chapter 3 is called 'Trade Networks in Ancient South Asia' (pp. 183–228). Here the author looks at the texts, inscriptions and archaeological evidence that document the networks through which Buddhism passed in South Asia. Chapter 4 continues and expands the theme under the heading 'Old Roads in the Northwestern Borderlands' (pp. 229–256). The focus here is Gandhāra, a pivotal border region in the transmission of Buddhism from India proper to Central Asia and China. Chapter 5 moves from general considerations to a close focus on 'Capillary Routes and Buddhist Manifestations in the Upper Indus' (pp. 257–287). With Chapter 6 'Long-Distance Transmission to Central Asian Silk Routes and China' (pp. 289–309), Neelis turns to the initial pattern of long distance transmission through numerous routes and centres, charting the rather complex processes of transplantation, transmission and transformation of Buddhism beyond Gandhāra. With Chapter 7, 'Conclusion: Alternative Paths and Paradigms of Buddhist Transmission' (pp. 311–319), the author closes with an overall assessment of Buddhism as a flexible religious system that was able to adapt to different environments and thus successfully attract élite and sub-élite patronage. The strength here, as elsewhere in the book, is the author's impressive command of the historiography and his ability to place his own interpretation in the context of existing theories and models.

This is a book of considerable ambition, covering a host of subjects and a huge geographical area. I have little doubt that some readers will take issue with the author's treatment of particular subjects, but rather than quibbling about details, I think we should bear in mind that this is the first modern and theoretically-informed history of Buddhist transmission, as opposed to a simple history of Buddhism or a précis of Buddhist doctrines and their development. In that sense, this is a pioneering study and essential reading for any serious student of the history of Buddhism and Indian religion. The book is well-produced with very few typographical errors (the only one I spotted was at the top of p. 9). The several maps are clear and help clarify the arguments. I suppose we could have hoped for more maps and plans, given this is a work on the transmission of Buddhism, but inevitably a 'middle way' has to be found between the wishes of scholars, the patience of the publishers and the bank-balance of most readers. At just over £100 in the UK, this is an expensive book but one that is worth every penny and one that will be consulted and read for many years to come.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN CENTRAL INDIA (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh). By R. K. SHARMA and O. P. MISHRA. pp. 238. Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003.

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This book, not previously brought to notice in a scholarly journal as far as the present reviewer is aware, provides an annotated listing of the excavations carried out in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (now divided into two states, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh). The area covered is huge – more than 400,000 sq km – and the excavated sites are very many in number. The book has four lengthy chapters titled: 1. Archaeological Background, 2. Prehistoric Sites, 3. Proto-historic Sites, and 4. Historic Sites. This is followed by a bibliography, index, some illustrations and two appendices on radio-carbon dating in central India and ostrich egg-shell sites in central India. The quality of illustrations in Indian publications is rapidly improving but those in this book are somewhat

disappointing, hinting, like the whole book itself, at the wealth of information that needs more detailed study.

Although the book easily gives an impression that all excavations conducted in Madhya Pradesh have been included, those interested in the subject should also consult S. G. Bhatt, (ed.), *Narmada Valley Culture and Civilisation*, Special Number, *The Journal of Academy of Indian Numismatics & Sigillography* XXI-XXII, 2006–07, published from Indore by the Academy of Indian Numismatics and Sigillography, and R. K. Sharma, (ed.), *History, Archaeology and Culture of the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 2007). Attention may also be directed to Pankaj Rag, Faiz Ahmad Kidwai and O. P. Mishra, *Cultural Heritage Of Narmada Valley (Spl. Reference to Hoshangabad)* (Commissioner of Archaeology, Archives and Museums: Bhopal, 2007). All appeared after the book under review but include a number of excavations conducted before 2003 that have not been listed by Sharma and Mishra.

This is, of course, primarily a reference book to which scholars will refer when they want to know which sites have been explored and what has been said in the published notices. The location of each site is given, so any targeted archaeological research in central India will necessarily begin with this book (coupled with the other publications just mentioned). The volume under review will be essential for any archaeological library and the authors are to be commended for the labour they have undertaken to assemble the relevant information.

On examining the hundreds of sites that have been explored over the last five decades, some of them very important, the most striking feature is that publications are limited to a few short paragraphs in journals like *Indian Archaeology – A Review*. In some cases more information is given, but the general and correct impression is that while archaeologists love to dig, they have no appetite for writing their reports. There are a number of exceptional cases, for example Dungawada (pp. 99–100 in the volume under review), but these are exceptions that prove the rule. One hears that pressure is mounting to print the reports, but not much has been produced to date aside from several books that have appeared thanks to Dr Mishra's efforts in the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Archives in Bhopal. The reason for this is structural. In the Archaeological Survey of India budgets are assigned each year for excavation, so excavations are done. If budgets are not used, they are lost, so archaeologists are "still digging", to borrow from the title of a little book by Mortimer Wheeler published in 1955. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that archaeologists in India are allowed to take their write-up into retirement and receive a pension supplement to finish the work. This is bound to subvert the intended effect: instead of encouraging completion, it will guarantee delay. The report will not be done in service and no rational human being will take a pension cut. Indeed, there is no incentive to finish whatsoever and so far nobody has figured out how to make a dead archaeologist write a report. History shows that most prefer to die rather than write.

Although a case might be made to rescue the reports and publish them, there is a deeper question about the worth of the work. Wheeler, who has just been mentioned, reformed the Archaeological Survey as its Director General from 1944 to 1948. The techniques established in his time are practically unchanged within the Archaeological Survey (university-based archaeologists and those in some state departments are more progressive). The approach of most archaeologists listed in the book under review can be gauged from the summaries which show that excavated finds are classified using established chronological and typological frameworks, i.e. those first developed in the time of Wheeler and elaborated very slightly after his time. In other words, there is an existing set of periods, Chalcolithic, Pre-NBP, NBP, Sunga/Satavahana and so forth, and these are imposed, cookie-cutter style, on whatever material is found. There really is no reason to excavate (apart from spending the budgets) because the chronological framework will always be the same. The significance of the book reviewed here is thus easily missed. In listing almost all of the excavations that have been done, and quietly noting that many

reports need to be written, this publication is bound to become the factual foundation on which any reform of archaeological practice in India is going to be based.

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BETWEEN THE EMPIRES: SOCIETY IN INDIA 300 BCE TO 400 CE. Edited by PATRICK OLIVELLE. pp. 524. New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.
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This important volume is the published outcome of a conference held at the University of Texas at Austin in 2003. As one would expect from the capable editorship of Patrick Olivelle, the book is a landmark contribution to the study of early Indian history and culture. The work has a commendable focus – unlike the published proceedings of many conferences – and addresses the period ‘between the empires’, that is the centuries between the Mauryan period and the rise of the imperial Guptas. The list of contributors includes Dilip Chakrabarti, J. Mark Kenoyer, Frederick Asher, Himanshu Ray, Shailendra Bhandare, Harry Falk, Patrick Olivelle, Stephanie Jamison, Madhav Deshpande, Alf Hiltebeitel, James L. Fitzgerald, Johannes Bronkhorst, Gregory Schopen, Richard Salomon, Paul Dundas, Aloka Parasher-Sen and Michael Witzel. As will be evident to anyone who has worked on ancient India, this is a list of ‘major players’ in the archaeological and cultural history of South Asia. With the sole exception of Bhandare, all the contributors are senior scholars, doyens at the peak who, based on long research experience, have formed and consolidated their particular vision of Indian civilisation. Regardless of what one might think of the individual results, *Between the Empires* presents much that is new and will be essential reading for anyone working on the years between 300 BCE and 300 CE.

This six hundred year period – if we can call such a long span of time ‘a period’ – was marked by crucial developments in religious ideas, iconography, numismatics and textual formation. I suppose we should expect nothing less in six centuries. It is of course a provocative misnomer to describe this whole time as ‘between empires’. Aside from the kind of polity implied by the word ‘empire’ – a problem in itself – the Kuṣāṇa kingdom, which stretched from the edges of Bihar to central Asia was a trans-national and trans-regional political formation of immense scale. The Kuṣāṇas are mentioned in several places in the volume and contributed much to the early Gupta state, but there is no separate article on them. Of course one cannot have everything in one book and the editor notes some of the gaps in the preface (p. vi). I suppose the most notable gap is the also most difficult: there is no study of Manu or the *Arthaśāstra*, works composed, it is generally agreed, in or slightly after the second century CE. Both are of utmost importance for the later history of India. Until the date of these deliberately anachronistic texts is settled there cannot be much progress. The authors who composed these texts did not sit down and write free-standing works in a vacuum, unrelated to the political and social circumstances of their time. I think they must have been written for a patron, that is a king who had clear and ambitious ideas about the kind of state – or indeed empire – he hoped to achieve.

Whatever we finally decide about Manu and the *Arthaśāstra*, in this volume the problem of textual formation ‘between the empires’ is dealt with in Olivelle’s essay “Explorations in the Early History of Dharmśāstra”. This is a detailed and informative study of the term *dharma* and the texts which flowed from the exploration of that concept. Olivelle notes (following Pollock, see p. 188) that ancient writers, under the influence of Mīmāṃsā, deliberately excluded reference to the lived reality of their times. The *sūtra*-literature defies chronological definition because the texts, in the words of Jan Gonda, “deal solely with country or village life. Of the social and political conditions they contain almost