

write words out syllable-by-syllable with breaks in between). Sometimes, the transcription actually confuses letters (e.g. on p. 164 the transcription should read *Matt'eosi* for *Matt'êosi*).

The album also contains (pp. 11–75) a ‘History of Armenian paleography’ by Dickran Kouymjian, which includes a survey of all previous accounts of the development of Armenian script. This is very welcome, since it gives a summary of many articles and books published in Armenian and often inaccessible to Western scholars. It also includes plates of most of the Armenian undated manuscripts from before the tenth century and previously unpublished photographs of the now destroyed Tekor church inscription, which is reckoned to be over 300 years earlier than the earliest dated Armenian manuscript (black-and-white plates and transcriptions of four other early inscriptions are given on pp. 112–15). In its lucidity and coverage, Kouymjian’s account is unlikely to be bettered, and he is to be applauded for setting the development of the Armenian script in the context of parallel developments in Syriac and Greek and Latin book-hands. He also highlights the importance of the single (undated) papyrus fragment with Armenian script, probably written between the fifth and seventh centuries, which represents our only early example of informal writing (pp. 59–63). It is unfortunate, however, that the early undated manuscripts and inscriptions discussed by Kouymjian do not appear in descriptions of the individual letter forms that follow nor in the comparative tables of letters included at the end of the volume.

This luxurious provision of plates makes the album of considerable interest to art historians. Since many of them reproduce title pages of manuscripts, it offers a very good overview of changing styles of ornamentation, and the use of illustration and text layout over the centuries. Particularly unusual is document 168—a paper text with prayers written in different directions about illustrated roundels. One can also find fine examples of the hand and marginal illustrations of the celebrated miniature painter T’oros Rōslin (plates 75, 76, 78 and 79). For such a well illustrated and finely produced book the price is not as extravagant as it may first appear, and the editors and Aarhus University Press are to be congratulated for a worthy commemoration of 1600 years of the Armenian script.

JAMES CLACKSON

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#### SOUTH ASIA

RAMENDRA NATH NANDI:

*Aryans revisited*.

xiv, 142 pp. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001.

Rs. 350.

Although the title may lead some to jump to the conclusion that *Aryans revisited* is yet another in the long line of recent publications addressing the issue of the ethnic and geographical origins of South Asian culture, the aspirations of its author in fact lie elsewhere. Nandi sets out to define the parameters of the geography and internal chronology of the culture (or cultures) represented in the verse compositions of the *R̥ksaṃhitā* as a part of his proposed examination of the social, political and historical dimensions of the period during which these compositions were produced. Ultimately, Nandi

seeks to clarify the patterns of social organization and means of subsistence, define Ṛgvedic concepts of ethnicity and the relation of ethnicity to language and ritual, trace the process of early state formation, and extract historical data from the myths and legends with which the Vedic poems present us.

It must be said that Nandi consistently identifies legitimate and interesting issues for investigation. Just as consistently, however, he fails to examine them in an organized way. For example, it is true that the social groupings denoted in the Ṛgveda by the terms *viś* and *jāna* have yet to be precisely defined (p. 11). However, Nandi's discussion is unlikely to persuade the reader that the two terms refer to distinct forms of social organization representing different stages of development, with *jāna* referring to an endogamous nomadic group and *viś* referring to settlements of endogamous nuclear families (p. 14). Nor is the reasoning behind Nandi's assertion that the *viś* is an endogamous unit any more convincing (p. 15). No argument at all is provided to justify the claim that in 'the mating behaviour of the Ṛgvedic Aryan ... the earlier stage is marked by incest, polyandry, and levirate. The second stage is marked by the induction of *dāsa* women and growth of polygyny (pp. 19–20)'. Another instance in which Nandi recognizes a potentially lucrative research topic but fails to capitalize on it is his treatment of class distinction in the Ṛgveda. According to Nandi, the horizontal differentiation of segments of early Ṛgvedic society, such as that between the 'sacrificing householders and the bardic singers', is progressively transformed into a vertical hierarchy by the later text RV 10.90, and the beginning of the process is marked by 'the induction of non-kin *dāsa* members into the *viś* or *jāna* (pp. 24–5)'. No convincing substantiation is offered for this claim.

Nandi's handling of the question of the stratification of Ṛgvedic compositions results in similar dissatisfaction. He rightly warns against approaching the Ṛgveda as a monolithic text, pointing out that its contents derive from disparate groups distributed over a relatively extensive region, and from at least several generations of composers (p. 7). Nevertheless, his suggestion that 'the sixth book [of the Ṛgveda] marked the passage from egalitarian folkdom to elective chiefdom whereas the seventh book marked the transition from elective chiefdom to hereditary monarchy (p. 22)' rings hollow for lack of evidence.

Given the title of the work, it is odd that Nandi avoids dealing with the much-debated question of an Aryan homeland. After expressing the opinion that the problem is 'unlikely to be resolved in near future', he proceeds with a survey of the geographic distribution of the various portions of the Ṛgveda (p. 84). This survey fails to add anything to what has already been said on the subject by Oldenberg in the first appendix to his *Buddha, sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (1882) and by Witzel ('Ṛgvedic history: poets, chieftains and polities' in *The Indo-Aryans of ancient South Asia* (1995)), yet neither of these works is cited by Nandi.

This neglect of relevant secondary literature is also notable in his treatment of the term *ārya*. It is not only that he overlooks Thieme's classic work, *Der Fremdling im Ṛgveda* (1938). Neither does he mention Kuiper's *The Aryans in the Ṛgveda* (1991) nor Erdosy's contribution to the volume *The Indo-Aryans of ancient South Asia: language, material culture and ethnicity* (1995). This is unfortunate, seeing that both works foretell Nandi's conclusion that the term *ārya* 'did not signify any ethnic entity' but rather an 'ideology' (pp. 60–61). Or, as Erdosy had it in 1995, the term *ārya* 'denoted a multitude of ethnic groups subscribing to a newly emerging ideology'.

To his credit, Nandi has recognized that a proper examination of the

complex issues which he proposes to treat require an integration of the results of textual analysis and archaeology. Yet such omissions do not inspire confidence in his command of either of these fields. Distrust mounts already when, in a brief preliminary section (pp. 8–9) that is meant to introduce the reader to the basic reference materials available to a scholar of the Ṛgveda, no mention is made of Grassmann's Ṛgvedic dictionary, Mayrhofer's etymological dictionaries, Oldenberg's *Prolegomena* and *Noten*, nor of the standard translation of the Ṛgveda by Geldner. Nandi's bibliography better reflects the burgeoning research in early South Asian archaeology, although he is reticent when it comes to attribution by means of footnote. Furthermore, he seems unaware of a number of recent works important for his area of interest, such as the volume edited by Bronkhorst and Deshpande for the Harvard Oriental Series Opera Minora Volume 3, *Aryan and non-Aryan in South Asia: evidence, interpretation and ideology* (1999), and the volume of essays edited by F. R. Allchin entitled *The archaeology of early historic South Asia: the emergence of cities and states* (1995).

It is true that a listing such as this of an author's bibliographic omissions sometimes constitutes mere pedantry, without relevance to an appraisal of the author's arguments. In the case at hand, however, it provides a fair indication either of Nandi's insufficient engagement with the previous research that has been carried out in the fields to which he aspires to make a contribution, or of his wilful neglect of it.

THEODORE PROFERES

RODERICK CAVALIERO:

*Strangers in the land: the rise and decline of the British Indian Empire.*

xvi, 280 pp. London: I. B. Tauris, 2002. £25.

After decades of near-drought, the last few years have seen a veritable flood of new histories of India—some memorable, others not. Like a number of others, Roderick Cavaliero's history focuses on the British in India, from the founding of the East India Company in 1600 through to independence in 1947. The book, which draws its title from a comment made by Lord Bentinck as Governor of Madras in 1807, eschews elaborate arguments and intrusive pronouncements about the rights and wrongs of empire, relying instead upon the vigour and incisiveness of its prose and the strength of its narrative writing. But the underlying presumption, which surfaces most clearly in the preface and concluding chapter, is that although 'Years of apologising for the Raj have encouraged Britons to want to forget the whole experience', the story of how the British came to win (and eventually lose) their Indian empire remains a remarkable, even 'astounding', one. In a work in which European rather than Asian parallels prevail, the tale of the British in India is deemed historically worthy of comparison with the achievements of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and accordingly deserving of sympathetic retelling to an apparently unheeding new age.

Without much of a theme to lend coherence, the opening chapters, crammed with hectic detail, mirror what the author calls 'the roving chaos of Indian life' before the establishment of British orderliness. Only on reaching the more stable ground of the late eighteenth century does he settle into a more even stride and effective turn of phrase. But, given his reliance upon