

## BOOK REVIEWS



*Early Buddhist Architecture in Context: The Great Stupa at Amaravati (ca. 300 BCE–300 CE)*. Akira Shimada. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 265 pp. ISBN 978-9-004-23283-9.

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Akira Shimada's book is a welcome and timely addition to the nearly two centuries of research on the Amaravati Mahastupa (great stupa), and a more recent but expanding literature on the archaeology of early historic South Indian Buddhism. The study of this remarkable Buddhist monument presents a rather unique case for archaeologists, epigraphers, and social, religious, and art historians. Once a massive and beautifully adorned stupa, built and maintained by generations of early South Indian Buddhists, it was abandoned sometime during the fourteenth century A.D. By at least the late eighteenth century, it was willfully pillaged, first for building materials and then, over the course of a series of disastrous salvage projects, pillaged again for "objets d'art" bound for museum collections. Indeed, so complete was the destruction of the site that Upinder Singh closes her 2004 essay, "The Dismembering of the Amaravati Stupa," by saying that: "the result of a century-and-three-quarters' exploration and excavation at Amaravati is that, today, the site of what James Fergusson described as the most elaborate and magnificent piece of architecture found in any part of the world, is marked by a nondescript mound ringed by a few forlorn stones." Today the surviving architectural assemblage of the Amaravati stupa is scattered across a number of museum collections. The details of their provenience are documented by an even more scattered body of incomplete or inadequate field notes and reports, presenting a formida-

ble challenge to those wishing to study the site and its wider social contexts. Shimada's research, presented in this volume, has risen to that challenge, considerably advancing our knowledge of the social and material history of Amaravati itself and the wider social history of Buddhist practice in early historic period Andradesa (ancient Andhra Pradesh).

Shimada takes on the material and social history of Amaravati, first, by squarely tackling the elusive issue of chronology, carefully reconstructing the Mahastupa's building history before moving on to explore a range of issues involving the developing role of the Buddhist *sangha* (order of monks and nuns) within a socially diverse South Indian society. The former, no small feat, has been attempted several times over the past century, with less than satisfying results. Shimada's approach to the problem differs in that it provides a remarkably synthetic and systematic overview of the evidence, exploring the stupa's epigraphic, sculptural, and archaeological records together as a cohesive body of complementary evidence, building on important correspondences in the data and interrogating the discrepancies. This stands in opposition to many past studies that focused on one or two of these elements, often in atomistic ways bereft of both an understanding of architectural coherence and a wider sense of construction as a social process. His work is thorough, comprehensive, and transparent, digging deep into a diverse set of East India Company, British Colonial Office, and pri-

vate records, as well as providing a fresh look at the architectural evidence housed in several museums. Shimada then moves on to consider a number of broader social themes including patronage, ritual practice, urbanism, trade, and exchange, activities that articulated the Buddhist *sangha* at Amaravati and elsewhere with a wide range of communities.

The book begins with an account of the problems that have befuddled chronological reconstruction and interpretation of the stupa and the wider archaeological site. These include the state of the site upon discovery by British colonial officials, the nature of their subsequent salvage operations, and the efforts of Indian, colonial, and other foreign scholars to approach chronological reconstruction through studies of palaeography and sculptural style that were reliant on unrefined regional dynastic histories. Critical to this end, Shimada reviews how tropes of decay, popular with colonial Indologists, led at times to very specific theories of causation for the construction of the stupa (e.g., dynastic patronage, Greek and Roman influences on sculptural style), theories with very little real empirical support. In beginning to address the issue of deficient regional chronology, Chapter 1 neatly reviews recent developments in epigraphical and numismatic research on a complex network of early historic dynastic histories that place the small number of royals from the Sada and Satavahana dynasties named in Amaravati donative inscriptions within a more absolute regional chronology.

Chapter 2 is a partial reworking of an article Shimada published in *Aribus Asiae* (2006), which presents a concise and penetrating analysis of the Mahastupa's building history. The result is a convincing account of a construction and incremental renovation program at the stupa, spanning the course of several hundred years between the second century B.C. and A.D. 250. Following a brief discussion of the stupa's early period, Shimada turns to his analysis of the three construction phases of the late-period stupa railing, first parsing through the notes of no less than four largely unpublished nineteenth-century excavations, then documenting the location and character of individual architec-

tural elements in meticulous detail. The empirical detail of this argument is striking, and demonstrates how the myriad of different-sized rail elements in various sculptural styles recovered during nineteenth- and early twentieth-century excavations were indeed spatially clustered by type, demonstrating a building sequence that began at the south gate of the stupa and proceeded clockwise, the direction of Buddhist ritual circumambulation. Employing the combined evidence of palaeographical and sculptural styles and the handful of inscriptions mentioning royals with datable reigns, Shimada infers a building process for the railing that spanned the course of some 300 years, following a punctuated temporal rhythm consistent with the incremental acquisition of donations from a range of patrons who are carefully recorded on individual building elements. The remainder of the chapter offers a somewhat less conclusive yet convincing account of the refurbishment of the rest of the stupa, based on the fragmentary record of drum and dome slabs, friezes, and other elements. This remarkable "excavation" of the archive and resultant chronological analysis is perhaps the most important inferential development to emerge from the Amaravati data since the hundreds of donative inscriptions were translated in the early twentieth century.

Having established a tentative chronology for the construction of the stupa, Shimada turns his attention first to a broader assessment of sociopolitical and socioeconomic structure and practice in the Krishna Valley (in Chapter 3), then to the more specific issues of Buddhist patronage (Chapter 4) and social-spatial interaction between the Buddhist *sangha* and lay and non-lay urban communities in mediating trade and exchange and funerary practices (Chapter 5). Shimada's assessment of the wider sociohistorical context of the lower Krishna Valley during the early historic period is somewhat obstructed by the quality and quantity of published archaeological data and a largely absent local textual voice (Buddhist donative inscriptions aside). There is, therefore, a certain inevitable reliance on nonlocal textual sources and metahistoric narratives of Iron Age and early historic period South India constructed by

others using a socioevolutionary theoretic to read the rather thin archaeological data. Nevertheless, Shimada makes excellent use of the available numismatic and inscriptional data to pull the discussion firmly back to the local. He builds more localized cases for the existence of small regional polities that preceded the major historical dynasties of the later early historic period, and more critically infers a significant social and economic transition evidenced by a quantitative shift in donors from larger social groups during the early period of construction at Amaravati to smaller property holding families during the later period. This is precisely the kind of analysis needed to build a stronger case for developments in social structure and practice throughout the region, and would have been very difficult to accomplish without the careful temporal reconstruction of the stupa's construction history.

Chapter 4 examines Buddhist patronage more closely. Here attention is given to a much wider body of pan-Indian evidence for the developing meaning of patronage, donor practices and identities, and the roles and responsibilities of the *sangha* as both recipients and donors alike. The chapter ends with an expository discussion of the social contours of patronage and its spatial organization, an issue that was long misunderstood at Amaravati. Stupas, rather than being reliant on elite patronage, were in fact the domain of cooperative, socially heterogeneous, and often temporally protracted donative activities, while the construction of *viharas* (monastic residences) and the donations of large endowments of property were the more exclusive domain of elite single donors, typically those of royal birth. This socially inclusive construct of patronage is what Shimada argues was one of the principle components of the Buddhist *sangha's* early historic period success, particularly among developing urban societies, during this period of remarkable social and ritual transition.

The book's final chapter explores the relationship between early historic urban centers and adjacent monasteries, inquiring into the reciprocal character of this relationship beyond the practice of patronage. After building a well-reasoned argument based on archaeo-

logical and textual data for a settlement social dynamic of "inside" (i.e., urban) and "outside" (e.g., monasteries, cemeteries, marketplaces) spaces, Shimada turns his attention to two fields of practice that he argues the Buddhist *sangha* may have mediated for wider components of urban societies: funerary practices and commerce. The argument for the *sangha's* involvement in funerary practices is strong, and is substantiated by archaeological data and some textual prescription. The case for commercial activities is logical and well reasoned, but not yet well supported by archaeological data. This is not to say that Shimada and others before him are incorrect in suggesting a strong role for the Buddhist *sangha* in early historic commercial activities. Indeed, the archaeological evidence for the location of monasteries just outside of urban spaces is strong, as are the Vedic textual prescriptions for the location of commercial activities beyond the walled enclosures of urban settlements, although it is possible that the influence of these texts may have had less bearing on southern Indian urban centers than they had on their northern counterparts during early historic times. Rather it is hoped that future archaeological work in and around early historic South Indian cities will clearly demonstrate the existence and character of that relationship. Nevertheless, Shimada's overarching argument here, that monastic places should not be viewed as exclusively sacred and instead as integral parts of a wider sociospatial matrix of places and activities carried out on the margins of urban communities, is of critical importance to advancing our understanding of both urbanism and monasticism in early historic period South India.

*Early Buddhist Architecture in Context* is a thorough and comprehensive investigation of the social and material context of the Amaravati stupa. It deftly navigates the morass of incomplete and unsystematic accounts of the site's protracted destruction, analyzing and assessing the record to produce a penetrating and transparent account of the stupa's building history and wider social-historical context. It is a "must read" for anyone with an interest in South Asian archaeology, social history, art, architecture, and Buddhist studies.

The assessment of the Mahastupa's building history is a major development in the study of this fascinating site, and Shimada's discussion of the wider social contexts of early historic Buddhist practice will certainly help to guide future research and stimulate much further discussion.

## REFERENCES CITED

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2004 Dismembering the Amaravati stupa, in *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology*: 249–289, ed. U. Singh. New Delhi: Permanent Black Press.

*Rock Carvings in Hong Kong*. By William Hong Kong: Meacham Publications, 2009. 168 pp. ISBN 978-9-881-73242-2.

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Very little is known internationally about the rock art traditions of Southeast Asia, and even less about the rock art specific to the coastal shores of Hong Kong. The majority of the rock art sites discussed by Meacham are located on the islands of Hong Kong in the South China Sea. However, he also includes other known sites in the surrounding region, including those that have been recorded in Taiwan. The catalogue of regional sites makes this book useful to any researcher of rock art worldwide who would like to compare the archaeological contexts and thematic elements in this region to work that has been done elsewhere on cultural practices of rock art and their expression of ideas about local environments and the supernatural. Dual language texts in English and Chinese are accompanied by beautiful photographs, illustrating nearly every other page.

All of the rock art images are petroglyphs, although some of the walls where they appear also seem to be stained with red, orange, yellow, purple, or brownish hues. Some stains are polychromatic in adjacent vertical or diagonal bands or spots, and at times the stains appear to be strongly weathered. However, no discussion of the stains (e.g., whether they were artificially applied to the surface of the rock, or if they occur naturally as lichen growth on the surface, or if they are natural hues in the rock matrix) is provided. The petroglyphs are typically referred to as carvings, indicating the author's belief that abrading the surface with a harder engraver

material produced them, although "pitting" designs are discussed as having been formed either naturally or through pecking (p. 84). A few motif terms are used, such as "cup-like hollows" to refer to cupules, and "gameboards" to refer to multichambered geometric patterns to which the author applies a functional analogy from a modern cultural practice of drawing a checkerboard on a surface to play a game. Meacham also attempts to assign the petroglyphs to particular chronological styles based on the presence of any combination of three broad motif categories: geometric, zoomorphic, or emblematic motifs. The challenge of categorizing is due in part to several petroglyphs that begin with one design and continue into another (e.g., blending a zoomorphic design into a geometric pattern along a single engraved line). Other general descriptive terms used by Meacham include: curvilinear, rectilinear, pits, grooves, and swirls. The last term does not appear to differentiate between the continuous spirals or the S-shaped spirals that can be visibly distinguished in the photographs. All rock art images are displayed in either black-and-white or color photographs, and one image is a digital artistic rendition.

At the beginning of the book, Meacham informs the reader that the majority of these photos were taken during the 1970s. He does not provide the reader with specific reasons for the delay in publication and impetus for self-publication here, although they may be implied in his remarks in the appendix