

a “sweeter” attainment for those who attempted it (p. 140). Nevertheless, Scheible has contributed an interesting and innovative study of early *vamsas* that helps to advance efforts by scholars to read Buddhist literature as *literature*, with all the dimensions and effects that this label entails.

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*The Unfinished: Stone Carvers at Work on the Indian Subcontinent.* BY VIDYA DEHEJIA AND PETER ROCKWELL. New Delhi: ROLI BOOKS, 2016. Pp. 280, illus.

This book is the result of a fruitful collaboration between the renowned art historian, Vidya Dehejia, and a specialist on stone carving, Peter Rockwell. It examines many of India’s most famous rock-cut and structural temples at the sites of Ajanta, Ellora, Mamallapuram, Khajuraho, Bhubaneshvar, Halebidu, and Thanjavur. However, unlike most scholars who have examined the iconographical programs and architectural design of temples at these sites, the authors of this book focus on *unfinished* stonework. It is surprising—even to those of us who feel that we know these monuments intimately—that a significant percentage of their architectural and sculptural elements remain today in an incomplete state. In many cases, these elements appear to have been abandoned in mid-creation. Why is this the case and what can we learn from studying these unfinished expressions? Throughout the book, the authors chisel away at these questions and provide new and valuable information regarding the processes and techniques of stone carving employed at these sites. At the same time, they challenge our understanding of what it means to identify monuments as either “complete” or “unfinished,” especially when we consider their ritual usability.

The book is organized in two parts. Part one contains five chapters that provide the interpretative lens for examining the “why” of unfinished monuments. Important contributions include an innovative classification system for identifying India’s unfinished stonework (chap. 2) and its application to monuments at Mamallapuram and the western caves (chapters 2 and 3). In chapter 4 the authors examine dedicatory inscriptions associated with these sites in order to develop more nuanced perspectives regarding the impact of donative activity in the excavation process. Chapter 5 continues with an analysis of epigraphical material, though here it shifts to the many sculptors’ names found on the structural temples at Khajuraho. Rather than serving as a visual statement of pride for the artists, the authors surmise that the inclusion of names may have functioned as a way to keep track of work performed and payments due.

Although chapter 5 concludes part one of the book, its emphasis on the agency of artists serves as a nice transition to part two, which highlights the tools, teams, and processes of stone carving. Three chapters (7, 8, and 9) address carving in the rock-cut tradition while the remaining chapters (10, 11, 12, and 13) examine built temples and their imagery. In their discussions of structural temples, the authors carefully reconstruct what they call the “rhythm of construction” in order to understand the many strategies at play in simultaneously building and sculpting elements. The book concludes with an epilogue that identifies the hands of artists working at Mamallapuram and an appendix by Randall Law, an archaeogeologist, who analyzes the geological characteristics of stone found across the subcontinent.

Overall, the book is exceptional in scope and fills a significant void in the scholarship on Indian stone temple architecture. The close observations made by the authors, their collection of art historical and epigraphical data, and the beautiful photographs that accompany the descriptive text, all contribute to the importance of this book in advancing our knowledge of temples and their construction. Of primary importance are the authors’ analyses of the types of stone found in India, a stone’s workability, the tools used for stone carving, the methods of quarrying or extracting stone, and the labor force required for building and carving stone temples. This last point of discussion is fascinating, as the authors remind us that in addition to the stone carvers themselves, teams of workers who could build scaffolding and blacksmiths who could sharpen iron chisels were an equally important presence at the

construction site. While the authors briefly look at the specializations of craftsmen also recorded in premodern textual material, it is their examinations of the monuments themselves that make this book a compelling read and one that every art historian of South Asian art should engage with.

Another novel contribution of the book is the authors' classification system for identifying and understanding unfinished stonework. Though introduced in chapter 2, this system serves as a framework for viewing the monuments throughout the book. The authors subdivide the category of the "unfinished" into four groups: barely begun, unusable unfinished, usable unfinished, and almost finished. These distinctions are not only important for understanding the variant forms of unfinished work, but for identifying monuments that can be considered "complete" in terms of their consecration and ritual use. As indicated throughout the book, many monuments exhibit elements (such as shrines and/or shrine imagery) that were rushed to completion so that the space would be ritually usable. This was the case even if a majority of the architectural and decorative elements remained unfinished in one way or another. Thus, monuments that fall into the "usable unfinished" category are, in the end, just as ritually "complete" as those that are finished. This suggests that artists, patrons, religious elites, and worshippers had a fluid conception of what constitutes a "completed" temple. Such a flexible approach to the making and understanding of these monuments complicates previous explanations for the unfinished temple, including a cessation of funds, socio-political circumstances, and/or flaws in the stone itself.

While I found the authors' classification system to be both innovative and useful, I did encounter some inconsistencies in its application, particularly in regard to temples labeled "usable unfinished." This can be seen, for example, in the authors' discussion of a Jain cave at Ellora called the Quarry cave (pp. 79–81). Given its roughly hewn interior, the cave at first glance appears to be unusable. However, the authors note a carved *sarvatobhadra* image in the center of the hall that may have been used in worship activities. The authors state,

Thus, in the midst of towering pieces of rock yet to be cut away, with an uneven floor and an even more uneven ceiling, is an image that may have been sanctified and put into worship. This Quarry cave, which displays so many characteristics of an unusable monument, may have served, through subtle manipulation, as a usable holy spot. (p. 80)

In the photograph provided by the authors, however, it is clear that the *sarvatobhadra* image is also unfinished. The base does not exhibit a level of carving to collect (and subsequently divert) liquid offerings poured over the image during *abhiṣeka*. Thus, identifying the state of completeness for what might function as a consecrated image is equally nuanced and complicated. A desideratum in the book is a detailed examination of many of the images used as criteria for "usable unfinished" temples.

More in-depth explanations of what constitutes ritual practice at these sites would also strengthen their assessments. Although this is a book on artistic processes, not devotional activities, I think it is important to identify for the reader what types of activities might be expected to occur in these spaces and whether or not unfinished aspects of the monument might deter or reshape them. A case in point is the number of monuments that have floors with large sections of uncut rock making circumambulation impractical, if not impossible.

Their analyses of carved imagery would also benefit from a consideration of theological perspectives. Unfinished figural forms, particularly deities, are often explained as being the result of rushing to meet an auspicious date for the consecration of the temple or to simply keep the construction process unimpeded. Other explanations rely on the level of "readability" of the unfinished forms. For example, in their assessment of the Draupadi *ratha* at Mamallapuram, the authors state,

The patron responsible for the shrine may well have decided that the Durga images on the shrine's outer walls were sufficiently readable by devotees so that carving them to a uniform level of refinement became an issue of marginal importance. (pp. 161–62)

While all of these explanations are plausible, the appearance of these forms materializing from temple walls might additionally suggest the concept of *svayambhu* (self-manifestation) that is found in many devotional and artistic contexts. The notion that these images are self-existing or that they were

created on their own accord might contribute to their “acceptance” in an unfinished state. Such conceptions might even inform stone cutting processes. For example, in the western caves the authors note the primacy given to completing the Buddha’s head and face over the rest of his body (pp. 175–81). While this approach may assist in keeping the figure proportional, it might also indicate that this was the most effective way to articulate the Buddha’s presence, even if left unfinished.

My interest in seeing a greater dialogue between religious practice and the creative process stems from the meticulous work presented by these two authors. In no way does it detract from the book as an extremely valuable study of India’s premodern monuments. Importantly, the book challenges assumptions about the unfinished through its focus on human building activities, motivations, and strategies. It also provides new insights into the skills of India’s stone carvers and what they could accomplish with the hammer and chisel. For scholars dedicated to the study of India’s artistic expressions, it is essential reading.

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*Nomadism in Iran: From Antiquity to the Modern Era.* By DANIEL T. POTTS. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014. Pp. xxv + 558, 3 maps, 21 illus., 5 tables. \$90 (cloth); \$45 (paper).

Dan Potts has undertaken a sweeping, revisionist, narrative of nomadic existences within Iran over twelve millennia. His central arguments are: distinction must be made between full-time nomads and communities that kept/keep herds of sheep and goats yet were/are essentially sedentary or from which only a small number of persons were/are involved in seasonal migrations; the plateau’s demography began to change with the arrival of Iranian tribes in the second and first millennia BCE but nomadism remained the exception rather than the norm; nomadism began occurring in Iran on a large scale only from the eleventh century CE onward with the advent of Turkic-speaking tribes; and scholars have projected the lifestyles of nomads of late medieval and modern Iran backward without supporting evidence.

Potts sets the stage in the preface by drawing upon an observation by the Muslim geographer Ibn Ḥawqal from around the year 977 CE that numbers of tribes present in Iran seemed exaggerated by at least one hundred percent (p. xi). Potts transitions immediately to Western anthropologists’ observations from the 1950s through 1990s on tribes in Iran as “impermanent agglomerations of people . . . political, not ethnic constructs.” Having made those points, Potts acknowledges however that “awareness of nomadism in the Iranian world is not a recent phenomenon” since it showed up in accounts at least as early as Herodotus’ fifth century BCE *History* (p. xii). He suggests that viewing nomadism as a dominant political, ethnic, and/or economic pattern within Iran is a “modernist perspective [which] distorts the historical reality of a land in which the rural population, while keeping herds, was overwhelmingly sedentary and in which most of the documented nomadic groups came originally from outside the region, mainly during the last millennium” (p. xv). Then, through ten chapters and one appendix, supported by an eighty-seven page bibliography (pp. 445–531), Potts marshals considerable evidence to make the case for the validity of his reinterpretations.

In contrast, and noteworthy because the book spans the entirety of Iran’s pre-history and history, the three maps (pp. xxiii–xxv) provide little information for most chapters. The first map is a general one of Iran’s topography and main places (largely marked only in the western provinces) the second and third cover early archeological sites in western Iran and southwestern Iran—visually paying little attention to eastern Iran, especially the northeast and its province of Khurasan, which at the very least was a major transit and stopping point for peoples moving onto the plateau from Central Asia, tribes that included not only those who gave Iran its name but much later the Turko-Mongol nomads whose descendants ruled until modern times.

Those maps are a useful locatory guide for readers not familiar with sites mentioned in chapter 1 which, though initially discussing the concept of nomadism (pp. 1–5), focuses largely on demol-