

munity of the medieval Islamic world responding to—at times absorbing, at times rejecting—classical Islamic law or literature. These two studies, then, are important not only for reading texts in Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Urdu, but also for placing the Jews who wrote them in their broader societies in the medieval and modern periods.

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*Ruby in the Dust: Poetry and History in Padmāvat by the South Asian Sufi Poet Muḥammad Jāyasī.* By THOMAS DE BRUIJN. Leiden: LEIDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2012. Pp. 371. [American ed., 2013. Dist. by University of Chicago Press.]

The separation of Hindi and Urdu into distinct languages with distinct scripts and belonging, supposedly, to distinct religious communities occurred in northern India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over the past century or more, the sorry state of cultural politics in this zone has meant that Muslims are routinely assumed to have produced literature first in Persian and later in Urdu and that Hindus are routinely assumed to have produced literature first in Braj and Avadhi and later in Hindi. Particularly within the modern literary-critical establishment in Hindi, including university departments of Hindi, this has meant that poetry composed by authors with recognizably Muslim names has needed considerable explanation and commentary, even the very fact that it exists. Essentially, modern critics of Hindi literature have felt the need to ask some version of the following question repeatedly: why did a Muslim poet compose in Braj or Avadhi, and not in Persian? And, as a close corollary, the other question that invariably follows is this: to what extent should this poem be read as “Islamic”? And to what extent does it reveal elements that can be identified as “Hindu” or, its relatively less-sectarian corollary, as “Indic”?

Among the poems that have survived in this category, Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat* (composed circa 1540) has attracted particular scholarly attention. Not only did a poet named Muḥammad compose a long narrative poem (approximately six hundred stanzas of nine lines each) in Avadhi, but, even more strikingly, his poem celebrated a Rajput prince named Ratansen and his beloved wife Padmāvati, and their resistance against the Muslim overlord, Sultan ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī of Delhi. It is worth noting here that Jāyasī, as the poet is popularly known, never feels the need to explain this choice of theme and language. And it follows that, most likely, his immediate readers also did not need explanations for these choices of language, genre, and socio-cultural orientation. And yet, every scholarly interpreter of the *Padmāvat* over the course of the twentieth century has felt the need to pose the questions about language, genre, and politics, repeatedly. It is in this context of scholarly reception that Thomas de Bruijn’s *Ruby in the Dust* makes important interventions.

For one, de Bruijn forces readers to confront squarely the role of academic departments of Hindi literature in establishing canonical (and clearly reductive) interpretations of literary works from the past. As he puts it succinctly, any “confusion over where to clarify this work” lies in the observer, and not in the object under observation (p. 173). He traces carefully the emergence of an interpretive consensus around the works of major early modern poets like Jāyasī, Kabīr, and Tulsīdās, reconstrued in the early decades of the twentieth century as among the predecessors for an imagined Hindi-cultural nation in the modern period. Within this canonical interpretation of literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particular texts were understood as “an effort at bridging” the putative gap between Hindu and Islamic precepts and practices (p. 15).

In place of this canonical reading, dependent on projecting imagined cultural boundaries from the present onto a radically alien past, de Bruijn elaborates a deeply historicist interpretation for the *Padmāvat*. He does this by reading the *Padmāvat* within the context of Jāyasī’s entire oeuvre, gleaned information about Jāyasī’s own biography and about his social world from all of Jāyasī’s surviving works. This approach allows de Bruijn to explore how the *Padmāvat* “developed its own aesthetics,

representing the composite outlook of its patrons and a wide audience in the context of local courts and Sufi centres” (pp. 14–15). The same approach also allows de Bruijn to recognize the varied sources for the *Padmāvat*’s narrative structure, its tropes and imagery, and its symbolism. He is thus able to point out the reuse of “Indian folk stories” by the Sufi poets writing in Avadhi. And he offers a more persuasive interpretation of the *Padmāvat*’s polyphony—which has been so disconcerting to modern readers—than the definitive interpretation provided by Vasudev Sharan Agrawal in his elaborate exposition of the poem (Vasudev Sharan Agarwal, ed., *Padmāvat, Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī kṛt mahākāvya (mūl aur sanjīvani vyākhyā)* [Chirgaon: Sahitya Sadan, 1961]).

The 1996 dissertation on which the book under review is based (Thomas de Bruijn, *The Ruby Hidden in the Dust: A Study of the Poetics of Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī’s Padmāvat*, Leiden Univ., 1996) had already circulated widely among scholars. In his discussion of the manuscripts of the *Padmāvat* and of their use in generating the modern critical editions of the text, de Bruijn anticipated the historicist turn in studies of early modern literatures in South Asia by at least a decade. Pointing to the huge variation in the length and quality of manuscripts, the dissertation argued against the notion of an original manuscript transmitted faithfully over the centuries that can then be reconstructed accurately within the philological protocols of a modern critical edition (the critical edition in common scholarly use was Mataprasad Gupta, ed., *Jāyasī Granthāvalī, Padmāvat, Akharavat, Akhiri Kalam aur Mahari Baisi* [Allahabad: Hindustani Akademi, 1952]). The consequences of this for modern interpreters of the *Padmāvat* are reiterated in the book—given the uncertainty about the exact stanzas contained in the original narrative, modern readers should be wary of close readings of the text that claim to lay bare its complex symbolism or esoteric (Sufi) allegory.

Instead of a philologically reconstructed critical edition, de Bruijn suggested in his dissertation a digital edition of the *Padmāvat* that would allow for the juxtaposition of manuscript variations on a single visual plane. Such a strategy for presenting the text could then direct the reader sequentially through the surviving manuscript corpus and provide a more accurate perspective on the idea of the *Padmāvat*, as well as on those portions of its narrative that were transmitted down the centuries. The emergence of commentary as well as other evidence of Jāyasī’s reputation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would then be easier to recognize as key inflection points within the narrative’s historical transmission across both time and space. Such a digital edition of the text(s) transmitted as manuscripts would also encourage scholarly collaboration in new ways: it would address another key problem confronting modern scholars reading the *Padmāvat*—that no single modern reader, given institutional training and cultural boundaries in the present, can have the literacy needed to access the multiple rhetorical and poetic registers, as well as the multiple social worlds, that the narrative inhabits so seamlessly. It is a pity that this discussion did not make it from the dissertation into the published book.

Meanwhile, given the modern critical edition that we do have, *Ruby in the Dust* eschews close tracking of rhetoric and of symbolic tropes as an interpretive strategy. In place of such close reading, de Bruijn invokes Bourdieu’s formulation of a field of literary production—in which both the work of art itself and its subsequent value are produced in particular social and institutional contexts (p. 17)—to contextualize the *Padmāvat* in its own social and cultural environment. He is thus able to point out very simply how the genre of “Sufi *premākhyān* (tale of love),” to which the *Padmāvat* belongs, epitomized “an Indian Islamic literary culture that integrates Persian and Indian forms and content” (p. 14). Bourdieu continues to offer inspiration as de Bruijn suggests that Chishti Sufi centers, such as the ones at provincial towns like Rae Bareilly (which Jāyasī was associated with), should be seen as literary fields. In other words, Sufi congregational centers functioned as sites for veneration, for spiritual teaching, and for the legitimation of local elites. And, de Bruijn argues, it was the convergence of these interests that created the habitus for Jāyasī’s narrative as it mediated between various planes of religious experience and political agency (p. 16).

*Ruby in the Dust* thus emphasizes such mediations—between the political and mystical realms, for instance—as the distinctive attribute of the *Padmāvat*. At the same time, it is the poem’s embeddedness in both political and mystical realms that accounts for the “semantic polyphony” of the idiom (p. 18). Thus we see “the projection of themes from Sufi mysticism and popular Islam on the image of a Rajput warrior” in the *Padmāvat*, as “notions of sacrifice and service tie together the representation

of love, loyalty and legitimate kingship presented in the poem” (pp. 107–8). The warrior’s loyalty and steadfastness are recoded as the ethical pursuit of, service (*seva*) to, “mystical love [that] safeguards the moral integrity of the Rajput king, even when faced with the dishonourable conduct of his overlord sultan ‘Ala’ al-din” (p. 267).

The first half of *Ruby in the Dust* delineates the imprint of social and literary environments on the *Padmāvat*, while the second half of the book goes on to explore how particular themes are expressed within the text. De Bruijn’s central argument is that “the thematic complexity of *Padmāvat* and the mediating position of its poet [both] resist reduction to either a purely religious, mystical or a purely political reading of the work.” The *Padmāvat* is then best interpreted as communicating “a more general moralist message, that has relevance in both a religious and a worldly context” (p. 272). The presence of elements from numerous literary traditions is, de Bruijn argues, “crucial to the rhetorical functionality” of the poem; it is this “dialogic openness,” coupled with the absence of any metalanguage or explanation, that allows the *Padmāvat* to represent “a universal, divine order in a local, Rajput microcosm” (p. 102).

This is where de Bruijn diverges from Aditya Behl’s reading of the Avadhi *premākhyāns*, four narrative poems of comparable length composed within a period of roughly one hundred and fifty years of each other, in the same region of north-central India. (Behl’s monograph was edited and published posthumously, as *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, ed. Wendy Doniger [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012].) Behl argued that the Avadhi *premākhyāns* elaborated complex allegorical (and, at times, numerological) codes intended in particular for an erudite Sufi audience. In contrast, de Bruijn argues that the Avadhi romances communicated a less sharply defined Islamic piety and a more general moralism, endorsing values resonant to several distinct social groups precisely because those values were invoked in such broad terms. De Bruijn’s reading of the text within its historical context also means that he differs from Behl in his interpretation of the aesthetics of the *Padmāvat*. Where Behl worked with a model of literary tropes of diverse origins being skillfully amalgamated into a coherent vision of a spiritual quest, de Bruijn interprets the numerous citations of oral and literary traditions in the *Padmāvat* as indicating the poem’s “vast cultural hinterland of Indian and Persian materials” and therefore as an intertextual field of meanings available to both the poet and his audience (p. 23). Instead of assuming the origins of tropes to be determinative of their meaning, as the binary of Indic / Islamicate invariably suggests, de Bruijn is able to outline an intertextual field of literary production in which Jāyāsī’s *Padmāvat* and Tulsidās’s *Rāmcharitmānas*, separated only by some three decades, both drew on a shared repertoire of linguistic and cultural referents from the Avadhi zone in the mid-sixteenth century. His discussion of the echoes of the Rāma stories in the *Padmāvat* (pp. 132ff.) is tantalizing, and one hopes very much that he will elaborate on that intertextuality of early modern Avadhi literature in future work. Such attention to a discursive field located within, and articulating the ethos of, a “hybrid” social world in sixteenth-century Avadh will go a long way toward dismantling the ethnocentric interpretations of early modern Avadhi and Braj literature that were deployed anachronistically in the twentieth century.

Such exploration of the discursive field of sixteenth-century Avadhi will also hopefully help scholars in the twenty-first century to free themselves from the limiting critical vocabulary inherited from twentieth-century giants of the field. Since that scholarship is not yet in place, we are still constrained by a critical frame that invokes binaries of community and cultural practice. Thus, on the one hand, *Ruby in the Dust* productively uses the notion of Bakhtinian polyphony to indicate not just multiple rhetorical registers and diverse genealogies for tropes, but also multivalence in the context of distinct audiences—moving us in the direction of literary interpretation sensitive to sociological contexts. On the other hand, though, de Bruijn himself refers to the genre of the *Padmāvat* as *premākhyān*—a compound derived from the Sanskrit, which gained currency in the modern Hindi-language critical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Within the *Padmāvat* Jāyāsī classified his own narrative as *kathā* (tale). *Ruby in the Dust* is

1. The term was used extensively by Shyam Manohar Pandey in his foundational *Madhyayugīn Premākhyān* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1965), the work of literary history that inspired the entire English-language scholarship on the Avadhi tales in the last four decades.

thus a valiant attempt to outline a socio-historical context for the *Padmāvat*, and a hypothesis of what it might have meant to distinct constituencies of audience in its own era. It remains constrained, though, by the relative paucity in the broader scholarship of historical insights and critical vocabulary that can do enough justice to the complexity of sixteenth-century society and culture.

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*The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization.* By ASKO PARPOLA. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xviii + 363. \$105 (cloth); \$38.95 (paper).

This is an impossible book to review, or, rather, it would require a small army—maybe not so small—to review it properly. The book covers such a range of time and space and of disciplines that only the author himself, a true polymath, can command the knowledge and expertise required to evaluate the many parts of the work. The geographic range starts from the Eurasian steppes and spans Central Asia, South Asia, and the ancient Near East. Chronologically it begins in the fifth millennium BCE and continues to present-day village Hinduism. The author is equally at home in the technical archaeology of multiple cultural complexes and in linguistic and textual studies, the latter encompassing both the Indo-Iranian and Dravidian language families from ancient to modern (with some Sumerian and Akkadian thrown in), along with religious and ritual studies, art history and iconography, archaeoastronomy, anthropology and ethnography, and probably a host of other disciplines that I’ve forgotten to mention. It is a tour de force and an exhilarating, constantly engrossing read. Unfortunately I, of course, do not possess a range of skill and knowledge to match that of the author, and so my review can only be partial and my judgments incomplete.

The book serves in many ways as the grand summation of Asko Parpola’s long and distinguished career, though hardly a final one. The first of his publications listed in the bibliography dates from 1967; four densely packed pages later it ends with six items in press: happily we have much more to look forward to from his fertile mind. In this book he constructs what we might call a Master Narrative of South Asian history, culture, and religion, seeking in particular to explain the features of “classical” Hinduism, which took shape in the centuries before the beginning of the common era and continues in many forms today, as an amalgam of the Vedic religion(s) of the Indo-Aryans, who migrated into South Asia from Central Asia sometime (or times) in the second millennium BCE, and that of the quite distinct and historically unrelated Indus Valley (/ Harappan) civilization of the late third / early second millennium—teasing out the contributions of each and the ways in which their elements fused or remained distinct. Hence the title, *The Roots of Hinduism*. But he casts his eyes much further back and further afield: on the one hand, to the steppe and Central Asian cultures that gave rise to the Indo-Iranians and eventually the Indo-Aryans in the millennia before their advent in South Asia and, on the other, to the interrelations, especially through trade, between the Indus Valley civilization and other cultures of the same era, particularly those in the ancient Near East (West Asia, in Parpola’s term), and the influence these ancient Near Eastern cultures exerted on Harappa.

The book is a synthesis, but the antithesis of the usual plodding summary of the consensus of prevailing views, relatively uncontroversial and inherently conservative, that such syntheses tend to be. It is instead the bold and imaginative reconstruction of a single iconoclastic scholar, whose views are always stimulating but also often seriously contested in the rest of the scholarly world. It is an intricately detailed, multipart structure of dazzling beauty, but it is also quite fragile—for each piece has been differently explained by other scholars and each join could have been joined to a different piece. Because it is a synthesis, based *inter alia* on the dozens of the author’s published works listed in the bibliography, he has had to severely limit his treatment of the counterarguments made to his assertions and his counters to those counterarguments. Only occasionally do we meet a statement like “this is a