

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

controversial issue” (p. 299); otherwise the implicit assumption is that what is presented is not in dispute. Readers should keep in mind that they are seeing only one side of the story.

The book is impossible to summarize; each page is bursting with ideas that could give rise to multiple articles in multiple fields. But in what follows I will attempt to give a sketch of what I take to be the main lines of the central argument and then raise a few questions about the plausibility of this reconstruction of history and prehistory. Let me start with the Indo-Aryan migrations and let me start there by saying that it is very welcome to have an authoritative voice give a detailed account of the Indo-Aryan migrations into India—a voice that controls both the linguistic and the archaeological data and is especially knowledgeable about the Central Asian archaeological complexes, especially BMAC (Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex), that are crucial to understanding the movements and cultural development of the pre-Indo-Iranians and Indo-Aryans. Although this migration cannot really be contested on scholarly grounds, it has been badly battered in recent decades on political grounds by proponents and fellow-travelers of the Indian-nationalist Hindutva movement. It is therefore important to approach this emotionally tinged issue with firm data and scholarly arguments, in both linguistic and archaeological terms. And Parpola more than rises to the task.

His account of the migration(s) does have some personal quirks, however. Although many scholars (see, e.g., p. 76) think that the Indo-Iranians encountered and became influential in BMAC, Parpola splits the Proto-Iranians off very early (starting around 2500 BCE [p. 55 and *passim*]) and then suggests that two separate groups of Indo-Aryans came through BMAC, each from a different previous cultural complex—the first group from the Sintashta culture, taking charge of BMAC around 2000 BCE (pp. 76, 109, 300, and *passim*), the second from the Feđorova Andronovo culture (pp. 109, 300–303, and *passim*), associated with the “post-urban” phase of BMAC (dated to 1700–1500 BCE [p. 71 and *passim*]), arriving around 1700 (pp. 298, 300, and *passim*). These groups made their way into India in two chronologically widely spaced waves, with approximately five hundred years between them (e.g., p. 299), the first wave arriving in the Indus Valley around the twentieth century BCE (e.g., p. 164), the second around the fourteenth century (p. 299). The two groups had very different gods and religious practices and spoke different Indo-Aryan dialects. Counterintuitively, it is the second, later wave that is responsible for the oldest Sanskrit text extant, the Rigveda, and what we think of as the most archaic form of the religion and of the language. The first wave, which Parpola associates with the Atharvaveda, the second oldest Sanskrit text, penetrated further into India, which conveniently allows Parpola to identify practices and beliefs that are attested later with this earlier wave and to assert their archaism with regard to the Rigvedic materials. It was this first wave that had contact with (the remnants of) the Indus civilization on their way south, and they acquired and adapted various Harappan practices and beliefs. This explains how certain features of Harappan religion “skipped” the Rigveda (and Vedic religion more generally) and surfaced in post-Vedic Hinduism. Classical Hinduism, by this account, bears the distinct stamp of Harappan culture, as filtered through and reconfigured by the first wave of Indo-Aryans. After the arrival of the second wave, however, the two waves fused again (at least at the northerly end of the first wave), giving rise to Vedic literature and the consolidated practice of Vedic ritual in the middle Vedic period.

The arguments that support this grand schema are numerous, ingenious, and detailed. Parpola has an inspired knack for noting the telling difference (that would justify the positing of two separate waves) and the telling similarity (that would support continuity from Harappan to post-Vedic times) that escape duller eyes, and it is always a pleasure to watch him assemble these heterogeneous details in service of the larger structure. And yet—at least to my mind, the differences are not different enough and the same not same enough.

To begin with the first issue, although we lack a reliable metric for evaluating the rate of linguistic change, it is essentially impossible for me to believe that two originally unified speech forms—that were associated with different cultural complexes and had been separated for five hundred to a thousand years, during which their speakers had migrated thousands of miles in unforgiving terrain and had encountered other peoples speaking unrelated languages—would not have differentiated so much as to become mutually unintelligible or at least to produce deep dialectal cleavage that could not be easily overcome and that should have left significant traces in the record of the attested language(s). Yet the

two speech forms in question are represented by the Atharvaveda (first wave) and the Rigveda (second wave), which, in the view of most scholars, were composed in the same language, though with some evolution in the Atharvaveda's idiom. Parpola several times denies that the language of the Atharvaveda can be derived from that of the Rigveda (e.g., p. 131), but the differences he notes are trivial and the few incompatibilities can result from a dialect continuum of relatively recent vintage. The linguistic gulf we (or I) would expect is simply not there. The same is true for Iranian and Indo-Aryan. Remember that Parpola sluffs off the Iranians very early (ca. 2500 BCE), before the BMAC encounters, and claims (e.g., p. 297) "considerable differences ... between the 'Iranian' and 'Indo-Aryan' branches" (i.e., the languages). But mere dabbling in the Old Avestan Gāthās and the Rigveda makes it clear that Old Avestan and Vedic are essentially superimposable: their grammars, and even their lexicon and phraseology, are almost identical, and they are distinguished primarily by low-level phonological changes, some of which, moreover, may have arisen during the transmission of the Avestan text, not at the time of composition. If the two languages had been separated for over a thousand years with very different external histories, this near identity cannot be easily explained.

I also find it difficult to believe that once the second wave of Indo-Aryans arrived in India, the two waves fell upon each other like long-lost brothers (*I very distant cousins*) and proceeded companionably to swap gods and cultic practices and harmoniously to build a new synthetic religion. Although Parpola sees "a fundamental religious difference between the two waves of Proto-Indo-Aryan speakers" already in BMAC times (p. 109)—differences that surely should have deepened over the next millennium—it is hard to point to any differences so "fundamental" in Vedic religion as we have it. The supposedly Atharvavedic gods (e.g., Mitra and Varuṇa and the Aśvins) are entirely integrated in the Rigveda, worshipped in the same words and in the same way as the old Rigvedic gods like Indra. They have different qualities, but then that is in some ways the point about having a religious system that incorporates a range of gods: to mirror the structures and concerns of the whole (or whole elite) society. The differences in tone and register between the Rigveda and the Atharvaveda are easily explained by differentiation in religious function. Again, they are not different *enough* to require or support Parpola's hypothesis of deep separation.

We should now consider the "sames"—namely the continuity he sees between the Indus civilization and post-Vedic Hinduism. First is the question by what mechanism Harappan concepts and practices could have been transferred to the Indo-Aryans, since the Indus civilization essentially ended in the very early second millennium BCE. It is a major conceptual leap from the undeniable statement that classical Hinduism differs in major ways from Vedic religion to the claim that much of what is non-Vedic in classical Hinduism should be attributed to the Indus civilization, whose flowering essentially ended at least 1500 years (approx. 1900 BCE [p. 22 and passim]) before "classical Hinduism" began (dated by Parpola to 400–200 BCE [p. 4 and passim]) and which inhabited a different geographical area from the core areas of post-Vedic Hinduism. This is, of course, the beauty of Parpola's (more or less invisible) first wave of Indo-Aryans, who arrived early enough to run across the last of Harappan culture, scoop up what they wanted, and carry it further into the subcontinent. It almost seems that the posited first wave exists in this schema primarily to be the conduit of Harappan materials into the later world of Hinduism.

But the even more problematic question is figuring out what the Harappans believed and practiced in the first place. It all pretty much depends on the seals, both the visual iconography and, far more troublesome, the language encoded in the writing system (if indeed it is a writing system). Deciphering this script has been a trap and a graveyard for many scholars and would-be scholars, though fortunately Parpola has for the most part avoided sinking into the quagmire. He has been working on this problem for nearly fifty years, cautiously and methodically. His long-held belief that the language thus encoded is Dravidian is plausible—though not, as he claims (e.g., p. 165), the only plausible suggestion. He works very ingeniously with the rebus principle and intra-language puns and homophones, identifying these puns in attested Dravidian languages, especially Old Tamil, and backprojecting the same puns visually onto the seals. With this method he feels that he has identified astronomical and divine names on the seals, though he certainly does not claim a complete decipherment; these astronomical associations he then finds in different guise in the cosmology of later Hinduism. It is easy to be swept along as

he details his methods and results; there is an internal consistency and a certain plausibility from one step to the next. But we must still keep in mind two fundamental problems: 1) we have no access to or control over Harappan phonology, so we have no way to check whether the readings Parpola posits bear any resemblance to the later Dravidian words; 2) the first Dravidian language attested, Old Tamil, is documented only in the last centuries BCE and in substantial texts only from the common era. It further belongs to the South Dravidian branch of the family. Thus, approximately two millennia and the better part of a continent separate the Indus Valley seals from attested Dravidian, and considerable language change can have happened in that period of time and across that space. Even reconstructed Proto-Dravidian does not get us close enough. Parpola's decipherment depends crucially on the assumption that the same puns and homophonic relationships he finds in Old Tamil (etc.) obtained in the same form in the language of the Indus civilization; probing this assumption is made almost impossible by the fact that homophones depend entirely on phonology, and we have no access to the phonological realization of any of the signs of the Indus script, as was pointed out above. Thus, the decoded names of gods and astronomical bodies on the seals, which then are transferred and transformed into features of later Hinduism, all rest on a series of shaky hypotheses and assumptions. They may be right, but they fall far short of proof.

In assessing observable similarities and observable differences, Parpola seems to work with an essentially static model. On the one hand, his two sets of Indo-Aryan speakers, separated for over five hundred years and culturally very distinct, insofar as culture is reflected in religion, have maintained their language so faithfully that, once reunited, they can immediately take up the conversation where it left off nearly a millennium before. The other side of the coin is that minor linguistic differences between the two earliest Sanskrit texts must indicate that they belong to two fundamentally distinct linguistic systems; the differences cannot be the result of language change or dialect differentiation. Similarly, his decipherment of the Indus script relies on Dravidian having barely changed over two millennia. For me, at least, a dynamic model is more realistic and better captures processes seen in the histories both of Indo-Aryan and of other languages and language families—not to mention cultural evolution more generally.

In giving this brief and crude sketch of the central arguments (as I see them) of this fantastically detailed book, I am afraid that I risk caricaturing it—which is decidedly not my intention—and I wish to make especially clear that Parpola makes no claim for which he does not provide detailed evidence and argument, generally drawn from across the array of disciplines at his command, and that these claims interlock in mutually reinforcing ways. That the evidence can be taken in different ways, and different arguments made based on it, does not negate the deep consideration that the author has given to all aspects of the many problems and the extraordinary achievement the work represents. It is impossible to do justice to the imaginative richness of this book, the thousands of connections made, the curious or ignored details put into a whole new light by a striking leap across cultures and millennia. If, in my earthbound way, I cannot follow all these leaps and accept all the joins, the book has nonetheless provided me with far more intellectual stimulation and sheer scholarly pleasure than much of the scholarly work I find it easier to agree with. If only we all had the same intellectual daring as our beloved colleague Asko Parpola!

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Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries. Edited by LAWRENCE WANG-CHI WONG and BERNHARD FUEHRER. Hong Kong: RESEARCH CENTRE FOR TRANSLATION, CHINESE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xx + 440. \$52.

Anne Michaels writes in *Fugitive Pieces* that “You choose your philosophy of translation just as you choose how to live: the free adaptation that sacrifices detail to meaning, the strict crib that sacrifices