

tribe?" *LRB* 34/17, 2012, 20–22. The treatment of language (p. 57) puts this problem in clearer relief. The regional vernacular is certainly Mālvī, but this is an extension of Rājasthānī dialects, suggesting a cultural migration following the Mālavas, a route subsequently followed (and presumably supported linguistically) by the Paramāras who came into central India from Rājasthān. If one is going to make points about this language, then it needs to be linked with inscriptions, for example the unusual vernacular from Gyāraspur, so far unread, in R. Salomon, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 39, 1996, 133–61 or, more prosaically, the Sānchī inscriptions. On the latter, Basant does not know Herman Tiekens, "Aśoka and the Buddhist *Samgha*", *BSOAS* 63/1, 2000, 1–30.

Chapters 4 and 5 give a hugely useful summary of the archaeological evidence from Chalcolithic times to the Iron Age. The author has made the best of an imprecise chronology and the fact that excavations are mostly unpublished (see the review by Neuss cited above). Still, one is struck by the fact that the concepts of urbanism do not sit comfortably with the archaeology, or at least the way the archaeology has been recorded and discussed in the literature. There are huge city sites in Malwa, Dangawada being one example (Dhangewade in map, p. 123; K. K. Chakrabarty *et al.*, *Dangawada Excavations* (Bhopal, 1989) not cited). One cannot have a city like this without the apparatus of an urban centre and some kind of city-state. In the space of this review I cannot comment on the many points which this interesting book raises, but looking at the discussion of fortifications (pp. 135–8) we find no reference to Besnagar, very near Sānchī, which is discussed at length. This is probably because there is no notable publication on the subject. The square fortified city of Nandour is not mentioned, although there is a sketch plan in S. K. Pandey, *Excavation at Nandour* (Bhopal, 2004). This was an important early historic city, mentioned in the Sānchī inscriptions and a centre for minting early coins (not discussed).

I will pass over the issues raised by Basant's discussion of Sānchī in chapters 6 and 7 (innocent of Julia Shaw, *Buddhist Landscapes in Central India*, London, 2007), and turn to the final chapters dealing with literary references. Here, aside from the problematic dating and use of the *Arthaśāstra* (see my *Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, Cambridge, 2009), one is struck by the anachronistic application of the *Skandapurāṇa*, etc., despite the author actually noting the problem. Surely the book would have been better if this was just side-stepped? There is also a lack of compelling links between Malwa and some texts, for example the *Milindapañha*. Exactly what Pali works tell us about early urbanism at – let's say Nandour – is unclear. In sum, this book has all the features of the Delhi school with its inward-looking historiography and desk-bound research unconcerned with site visits and country walking. Still, as long as we know what we are getting, this is a courageous work and an essential basis for future research.

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ALI USMAN QASMI:

*Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Qur'an Movements in the Punjab.*

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This book is a study of a Muslim religious orientation, the Ahl al-Qur'an, that emerged in colonial Punjab during the early twentieth century and continues to have its adherents in Pakistan. Prominent representatives of this orientation, viz., 'Abdullah Chakralawi (d. 1916), Ahmad-ud-din Amritsari (d. 1936), Aslam Jayrajpuri (d. 1955), and Ghulam Ahmad Parwez (d. 1985), had significant differences with one another, which is why Qasmi prefers to see it as a cluster of related movements rather than as a single group. What the Ahl al-Qur'an have had in common is a rejection of the long-established Muslim view that traditions (that is, hadith-reports) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad are a source of religious norms second only to the Quran in authority. While some Muslim orientations emerging in colonial India sought to make the study of hadith the basis of their reformist ideas, with the Ahl-i Hadith going so far as to deny the authority of the medieval schools of law in favour of basing their norms exclusively on the Quran and the hadith, the Ahl al-Qur'an argued that the Quran alone ought to be taken as the source of Islamic teachings. As Qasmi shows, this view had much in common with the misgivings of nineteenth-century Muslim modernists towards hadith. That, in turn, had a good deal to do with the modernist effort to defend Islam against missionary polemicists, who tended to base their criticism of Islam, and especially of particular aspects of the life of Muhammad, on stories preserved in the form of hadith. Rejecting the authenticity of embarrassing hadith reports and, in case of the Ahl al-Qur'an, of the authority of hadith altogether, was one way of taking the sting out of many a polemic. Yet it exposed the Ahl al-Qur'an to sharp intra-Muslim polemics from those deeply committed to affirming the centrality of the Prophet to all facets of Islam.

A particularly difficult problem the Ahl al-Qur'an faced was to show that the Quran did, indeed, suffice as the source of Islamic norms and practices. Their opponents challenged them to demonstrate, for instance, that the manner of performing the ritual prayers could be learnt from the Quran itself. While some, like Chakralawi, took pains to delineate the contours of a "Quranic prayer", such efforts carried little conviction and were abandoned by other Ahl al-Qur'an stalwarts. Aslam Jayrajpuri argued, for instance, that a distinction was necessary between hadith and widely followed facets of the Prophet's practice (*sunnat-i mutawatir*) which had come to be embodied in the Muslim community's way of doing things and of which ritual prayer was a prime example. This approach went some distance towards trying to remedy particular vulnerabilities in Ahl al-Qur'an positions without going so far as to acknowledge the authority of hadith itself. It did little, however, to appease the critics, and there has long been considerable bad blood between the Ahl al-Qur'an and the 'ulama of various other Sunni orientations in South Asia. Ahl al-Qur'an intellectuals such as Ghulam Ahmad Parwez sought refuge from the 'ulama's opposition in alliances with the modernist governing elite, notably the Ayub Khan regime in the 1960s, which was itself often at loggerheads with the traditionalist 'ulama. Such alliances tended, however, to exacerbate the traditionalist hostility towards the Ahl al-Qur'an.

Though the Ahl al-Qur'an have never enjoyed widespread support in colonial India or Pakistan, Qasmi argues that the importance of this orientation lies in helping provoke a debate, in conditions of modernity, on how to think of the Prophet and, more generally, of the religious history of Islam. This is a useful way of assessing the Ahl al-Qur'an's contribution to debates on religious authority in modern South Asia, and Qasmi has made an important contribution in this regard. There is, however, some uncertainty in this book about precisely how to understand the influence the Ahl al-Qur'an intellectuals may have exerted outside their ranks. Qasmi repeatedly notes some affinity between the Ahl al-Qur'an and particular intellectuals,

reformers and government officials, and he frequently takes it to signify Ahl al-Qur'an influence on those other figures. Yet the fact that people sometimes expressed doubts about the authenticity of inconvenient hadith reports or even sought to take the Qur'an as the ultimate source of their reformist ideals does not necessarily mean that they were influenced by the work specifically of the Ahl al-Qur'an. Likewise, it is easy to exaggerate the influence of Ghulam Ahmad Parwez on the policies of President Ayub Khan. Ayub Khan was, indeed, in contact with Parwez, as Qasmi shows in drawing on some hitherto neglected archives; and the two men agreed in their vision of a Muslim state that was unencumbered in its modernizing reform by the 'ulama and their scholastic tradition. Yet such views are standard fare in Islamic modernism everywhere. While Ayub Khan sought religious support for his policies wherever he could find it, and Parwez clearly saw an opportunity to expand the Ahl al-Qur'an influence through official patronage, it does not follow that Parwez's influence loomed larger than anyone else's in guiding Ayub Khan's unsuccessful effort to take on the Pakistani 'ulama.

If the nature and scope of the influence the Ahl al-Qur'an were able to project on others remains rather unclear, so does the question of whom to count among the Ahl al-Qur'an. Ahmad-ud-din Amritsari's view that people of different faiths could agree on certain universals, best expressed by the Qur'an, without having to renounce their particular faiths, has notable affinities with those of Ubayd Allah Sindhi (d. 1944) as well as Abu'l-Kalam Azad (d.1958), yet neither Sindhi nor Azad is usually thought to have belonged to the Ahl al-Qur'an. Conversely, there is insufficient reason to think that the rather more discriminating attitude Ja'far Phulwarwi (d. 1982) took towards hadith as compared to many others among the 'ulama puts him, as Qasmi suggests, somewhere in the Ahl al-Qur'an camp. But if he was not quite a part of that group, then the suggestion that such 'ulama helped broaden the Ahl al-Qur'an's reformist reach becomes correspondingly weaker. On another note, it is not quite clear how to think of the Ahl al-Qur'an in relation to the Ahl-i Hadith. Qasmi argues against those who have seen the Ahl al-Qur'an as emerging from within Ahl-i Hadith circles. His point that there is a wider milieu in which the rise of the Ahl al-Qur'an ought to be placed is well taken, yet his own evidence continues to point to the importance of the Ahl-i Hadith in the immediate surroundings of several Ahl al-Qur'an intellectuals. Despite such uncertainties, however, this is an important contribution not only towards a better understanding of the Ahl al-Qur'an but also to the study of Islam in modern South Asia.

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NAVINA NAJAT HAIDAR and MARIKA SARDAR (eds):

*Sultans of the South: Arts of India's Deccan Courts, 1323–1687.*

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*Sultans of the South* is an exceptionally rich collection of essays on the arts of the Muslim courts of the Deccan (central India) during the medieval and early modern periods. With its publication, the study of Islamic art in the Deccan comes to full maturity after two other recent contributions: *Silent Splendour: Palaces of the*