# Reviews of Books

*Around Abhinavagupta: Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century.* Edited by Eli Franco and Isabelle Ratié. Leipziger Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte Süd- und Zentralasiens, vol. 6. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2016. Pp. xx + 682. €89.90.

The small valley of Kashmir, in the far north of the Indian subcontinent, has developed something of a fan base among Sanskritists. Though its image in modern news reports is almost exclusively of violent street protests, counter-insurgencies, and tense geo-politics, those who study the earlier history have access to a different Kashmir, one famous across Asia not for its politics but for the amazingly prolific and diverse intellectual culture that it packed into such a small area. Indeed, for almost 500 years, roughly between 750 CE and 1250 CE, Kashmir was home to a remarkable intellectual efflorescence that sparked lasting innovations in a variety of subjects and produced a wide range of scholars, writers, and artists.

Perhaps the most famous of these scholars, and in many ways the most impressive, was Abhinavagupta, a theologian in the Śaiva branch of Hinduism who wrote works on philosophical theology and ritual exegesis, as well as devotional hymns and texts on literary theory and dramaturgy. Abhinavagupta was voraciously erudite, demonstrating detailed knowledge of everything from the classification of rhetorical figures to music theory to the fine points of Buddhist epistemology to the details of various Tantric ritual practices. This makes him the perfect basis for a broad intellectual history of Kashmir in this period. Since Abhinavagupta was interested in so many different branches of knowledge, almost any branch of knowledge current in Kashmir can be somehow connected to him. And since students and scholars of Sanskrit tend to be fascinated and charmed by him—he comes across well in translation—few will question the desirability of better understanding the background of his large and complex body of work. We have, therefore, this informative and valuable edited volume, the published proceedings of a conference devoted to the same subject.

The articles here illuminate many previously hidden threads in Kashmiri intellectual history. Some of them deal directly with Abhinavagupta himself or with the intellectual lineages he inherited or worked in. Others, however, have little direct connection with him. The articles by Orna Almogi ("Tantric Scriptures in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* Believed to Have Been Transmitted to Tibet by Kashmiris") and Chizuko Yoshimizu ("Transmission of the *Mulamadhyamakakārikā* and the *Prasannapadā* to Tibet from Kashmir"), for example, examine the enormous influence that Kashmiri Buddhism had on the textual history of Tibetan Buddhism. Abhinavagupta was, of course, concerned with Buddhism, and Lawrence McCrea shows in his article, "Abhinavagupta as Intellectual Historian of Buddhism," that he was an astute reader of its philosophical history. But these two articles deal with textual sources and histories that are not connected at all to Abhinavagupta's concerns. The reason these articles are included, however, is that the book turns out not really to be a volume about Abhinavagupta. Rather, Abhinavagupta merely serves as the occasion for a collection of studies on Kashmiri intellectual history.

The editors clarify this to some extent in the introduction, when they state, "Our ambition was to highlight the background against which Abhinavagupta's figure has emerged . . . We were hoping to show how the works of the great Śaiva author, far from being an isolated phenomenon, can be seen as an accomplishment of a unique intellectual milieu, that of Kashmir in the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries" (p. vii–viii). Still, this only partly explains the book. If the goal were to see Abhinavagupta as the accomplishment of a milieu, one might still wonder why the milieu in question should be limited to Kashmir in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. Kashmir in these centuries produced many thinkers and traditions that *influenced* Abhinavagupta or were *influenced* by him. And some of the essays do explore this. But, as mentioned, not all do. Moreover, if influence is the criteria, why limit the volume to Kashmir? Abhinavagupta, as well as his interlocutors, studied and cited scores of writers from

outside of Kashmir and from before this period, and they seem to be part of the milieu as well. On the other hand, were all Kashmiri intellectuals from this era really part of Abhinavagupta's milieu in more than just a geographical sense?

It becomes clear, however, that what unifies the choice of subject—Kashmir in these centuries—is not really the drive to understand Abhinavagupta in any particular way. In fact, he could plausibly have been dropped from the title without much change in the book, and he may have been included there more for advertising value than anything else. Rather, what the book is really about, what it really explores, is a particular dynamic described in the introduction, which Abhinavagupta merely participated in and represents as an example: namely, that Kashmiri intellectuals, who arose in great density in this period, tended to interact with and borrow from each other across ordinary sectarian and disciplinary divisions to a much greater degree than prior and non-Kashmiri intellectuals. This is the most interesting and important point that the editors make in their introduction, and the volume's most significant contribution is its various explorations of how this worked. Many of the articles (though not all) deal with some form of interaction between thinkers or schools. More importantly, these interactions have previously been difficult for modern scholars to track properly, precisely because of their interdisciplinary nature. As the editors point out, the "fruitful interactions" of Kashmiri history "transcend the various categories in which Indian literature is usually compartmentalized" (p. xiii), which means that many of them have been overlooked by scholars focused too keenly on one subject or one thinker. Given the density, complexity, and breadth of the intellectual web these thinkers were enmeshed in, an edited volume then makes perfect sense as a medium. Because of the nature of this medium, however, and because of the proclivities of the scholars involved, this volume does not offer any particular story about the Kashmiri miracle or why it may have developed, and does not really theorize it, even in the introduction. The writer who comes closest to doing something like this is Yigal Bronner, in a fascinating article about the literary theorist Udbhaṭa, "Understanding Udbhaṭa." Here Bronner posits that King Jayāpīḍa (r. 776–807) became, for some reason, very interested in funding a wide range of scholarship and encouraging a tolerant atmosphere within his court, and that this may have encouraged a number of very important and precedent-setting interdisciplinary innovations in literary theory. But Bronner's attention is paid only to literary theory, and even there, as he himself notes, "These are questions that require more research" (p. 138). In general, what we have in this volume is a collection of very useful materials that could, potentially, be used to construct a story about the Kashmiri miracle, should scholars in the future wish to do so.

The theme of interaction is especially pointed with respect to the overlap of theology and aesthetics, which the editors characterize as a "complex relationship" whose "exact nature . . . has yet to be determined" (p. xiv), though this volume makes great steps in that direction. A few of the articles deal with aesthetics alone, apart from religious philosophy or other non-aesthetic fields. But many of the articles show aesthetics in complex interaction with other subjects, particularly subjects that might be labeled "religious." Alessandro Graheli shows, in "The Force of *Tātparya*," that Abhinavagupta's aesthetic texts utilized a semantic concept borrowed from the Kashmiri Naiyāyika Jayanta Bhaṭṭa. Lyne Bansat-Boudon, in "The World on Show, or Sensibility in Disguise," looks at a poetic stanza that shows up both in Abhinavagupta's aesthetic works and his religious works. Elisa Ganser, in "Elements of Ritual Speculation in the *Abhinavabhāratī*," continues an important scholarly discussion about the extent to which Mīmāṃsā ritual hermeneutics influenced Kashmiri aesthetics. And Judit Törzsök, in "Theatre, Acting and the Image of the Actor in Abhinavagupta's Tantric Sources," examines how theater, actors, and dancers are discussed and presented in the tantric texts that Abhinavagupta would have known.

However, though religion clearly plays some kind of role in all these interactions, there is a dearth of theoretical discussion in some of the articles that sometimes leaves it unclear how and to what extent religion itself matters. Sometimes this is orthogonal to the concerns of the article, but occasionally the lack of theory creates deeper problems. One example of this is Vincenzo Vergiani's otherwise very good article on Helārāja, "Helārāja on Omniscience, *Āgama*, and the Origin of Language." Vergiani insists over and over again without explanation that Bhartṛhari is an "atheist" and that Helārāja "theologizes" him. One could, perhaps, make that argument about Bhartṛhari. But it is an argument one would need to make, and it is not one that would hinge on facts. It would hinge on one's theory of theism and

atheism, which Vergiani does not discuss. If, as Vergiani admits, Bhartṛhari believes in an "absolute" that is "light, consciousness, eternal, all-encompassing, etc." (p. 585), well, some people have a word for that. True, that may seem different from the personal god of other religious traditions, which may be Vergiani's criterion for theism. But is it really different? In what way? And what does that change? This is more than a semantic problem, because categorizing Bhartṛhari as atheistic without theorizing that word prevents Vergiani, or his readers, from connecting Helārāja's treatment of Bhartṛhari to other similar appropriations of more clearly religious thinkers or works, such as, for example, Abhinavagupta's Śaiva re-write of the Vedānta text *Paramārthasāra*.

Of the articles that discuss aesthetic/religious interactions, the most interesting, and theoretically the most far-reaching, is Somadeva Vasudeva's article "*Lakṣaṇam Aparyālocitābhidhānam*—Śobhākara's Resistance to Ruyyaka," on the literary theorist Śobhākara. Rather than simply tracking the movement of terms and ideas between different fields, Vasudeva goes one step further and inquires into *why* these terms were transferred in such a way. Why do Śobhākara and his nemesis Ruyyaka bother to argue so extensively over how to categorize rhetorical figures? The suggestion is that there may be more at stake in these debates than first appears, which the theorists themselves do not explicitly describe. Vasudeva calls this the "underlying motivations and ideologies that steered the debate" (p. 497) and attempts to begin excavating them. One of Vasudeva's methods—tracking the imagery of the *maṅgala* verses of different texts—reveals a potential hidden lineage of Saurya literary theorists who carried out a consistent, centuries-long argument against non-dual Śaiva literary theorists. His broader conclusion is that Ruyyaka and Śobhākara, in arguing about rhetorical figures, were partially arguing about the cogency of Nyāya philosophy of mind, and therefore perhaps, by extension, about the best way to uphold the validity of the Vedas. These conclusions are, by Vasudeva's own account, provisional. Still, they seem on the right track, and illuminating. If we see that drawing minute distinctions between rhetorical figures formed part of a larger debate about religious and moral issues, we might start to gain a deeper appreciation of why these intellectuals would spend so much time on them.

There is doubtless further that can be done on this subject, and even on Abhinavagupta's own corpus. No article in this volume addresses developments in Kashmiri poetry, although Kashmiri poets were clearly also involved in very sophisticated projects of inter-sectarian borrowing and experimentation. Similarly, the long and arguably influential presence of Vedānta in the valley is barely mentioned. These are not criticisms—the volume is already copious and informative. It is only to say that there is still much more to learn about this fascinating time and place, which may, if Bronner is correct, offer valuable lessons about the productive value of tolerance and exchange. And if future scholars are able to raise new questions and penetrate more deeply into the intellectual history of medieval Kashmir, it will only be because of thorough and informative volumes such as this one, which have already made great progress.

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