

BOOK REVIEWS

## The Archaeology of the Nātha Sampradāya in Western India, 12th to 15th Century

By Vijay Sarde. Routledge, 2023. 228 pages. Hardback, £96.00 GBP, ISBN: 978-1-032-21564-8. Ebook, £31.19, ISBN: 978-1-003-37936-2

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*The Archaeology of the Nātha Sampradāya in Western India, 12th to 15th Century* is based on Sarde's doctoral research. Previous scholarly endeavors on the Nātha *sampradāya* (sect or tradition) have predominantly relied on textual and ethnographic analyses to understand its emergence (Alter 2009; Bouillier 2017; Jugnu 2019; Mallinson 2007, 2011). This book re-examines the Nātha *sampradāya* through the analysis of archeological data from over 500 archeological sites in Maharashtra, western India. This now-pan-Indian sect has multiple dimensions: their Haṭhayoga and tantric practices, historiography, stories, legends, beliefs about Matsyendra-Goraksha and Navanāths in society, and mysticism. Sarde historicizes the Nātha tradition, examining the influences exerted by this sect on iconography and yogic practices; and influences on it by other sects and practices within Hinduism and Buddhism. He asks a fundamental question: What factors in the varied cultural milieu of Maharashtra contributed to the blending of various philosophical traditions around the twelfth century, ultimately leading to the emergence of the Nātha *sampradāya*?

The book is divided into six chapters, each covering a different aspect of the Nātha *sampradāya*'s history and evolution. In the introduction, Sarde delves into the etymology of the term “*nātha*,” derived from the Sanskrit root “*nāth*,” signifying “lord, master, protector, shelter” (p. 1). He employs the concept of a cultural landscape as a methodological tool to contextualize religious architecture, perceiving them not in isolation but as located “within larger cultural landscapes that help establish spatial relationships not only with other contemporary religious architecture but also with water bodies and funerary monuments, all of which formed a part of the sacred microcosm” (p. 3). Sarde outlines the prevalence of temples accompanied by monasteries housing ascetics in western India during the eleventh century, alongside the existence of a diverse network of Shaiva sects. By thoroughly elucidating the significance of studying religious architecture within a broader cultural framework for understanding the historical and cultural context of the Nātha tradition, Sarde establishes the groundwork for the subsequent chapters. In the latter half of the introduction, a survey of secondary writings related to Nātha *sampradāya* is presented along with an overview of text-based works in Sanskrit such as *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, *Matsyendrasaṃhitā*, *Amṛtasiddhi*, *Dattātreya yogaśāstra*, and *Khecarīvidyā*.

The sacred meaning read into the geography of the Deccan region is deciphered in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2, “Early Marathi Literature: Beginnings of the Nātha Tradition,” explores the emergence of an institutionalized form of the Nātha *sampradāya* in Maharashtra during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries through the study of *Līlācaritra* and other Marathi literature. This chapter also delves into the relationship between archeological evidence and textual accounts, presenting both as complementary sources of information. According to Sarde, the Nātha Siddha tradition originated in the Deccan during the twelfth century and spread to other parts of the Indian subcontinent within a few hundred years. The full emergence of the Nātha tradition in Maharashtra during the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries can be attributed to the support and patronage of the Yādava dynasty. These rulers, whose presence is evident in the inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakaṭa dynasty from the seventh to the tenth century, later established their own independent kingdom between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The Nātha *sampradāya* flourished in this particular time and place due to the patronage of the rulers of a kingdom. In Chapter 3, “The Archaeological Evidence: Sacred Landscapes in Western India,” the focus shifts to analyzing archeological and architectural remains in western India. The diverse landscape of Maharashtra is covered in the survey of the religious landscape presented in this chapter. The reader is taken to sites such as temples, images, rock-cut caves, monasteries, minor inscriptions, sculptural panels, mural paintings, and *torāṇa* (fort) gates. Sarde explains, “Temples emerged as an important and influential institution in medieval India, patronized by almost all classes of society” (p. 41). The chapter further outlines that one of the principal gurus of the Nātha *sampradāya*, Matsyendra, was related to Kaula practices demonstrating that the archeological evidence of the Nātha tradition is scattered across western India with most evidence located in rock-cut caves and temples.

Sarde embarks on deciphering the images of Nātha yogis found in their western India iconography – the various seated and non-seated *āsanas* (postures) which developed over time – in Chapter 4, “The Iconography of Devotion: Images of Nātha Yogis in Context.” Sarde explains, “There are many Nātha yogis whose images are yet to be identified” (p. 90), largely due to unknown iconography and the absence of written text. The appearance of Nātha yogis is also described as wearing features such as the *yogapaṭṭa* (band), *śṛṅgī* (horn made of antler), *kuṇḍala*<sup>1</sup> ear adornment, *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread), *sonṭā* (wooden staff), headdress, *mekhalā* (waistband), *adhārī* (a wooden club with flat horizontal top), *kamaṇḍalu* (vase), *Jholā* (bag), and *ḍamarū* (small hourglass-shaped drum), *sumaraṇī*, *kanṭhahāra* (necklaces), *valaya* (wristlets), and *keyūra* (armlets). Based on this, Sarde details various Nātha yogis such as Matsyendra, Adinātha, Girija, Minanātha, Chaurangi, Goraksha, Virupaksha, Kanha, Jalandhara, Siddha Nagārjuna, Vinapa, Vajraghantapa, Khadgapa, Kankalipa, and description of unknown Siddhas and Nātha yogis. Along with discovering new stone images of the Nātha yogis, this chapter lays the groundwork related to the appearance of the Nātha yogis through iconographic evidence, which also helps the reader understand the following chapter.

Chapter 5, “Haṭhayoga: The Visual Record,” traces the origins of *Haṭhayoga*, which became an epitome of the Nātha *sampradāya*. *Haṭhayoga*, known as “the yoga of force” (p. 130), has distinctive features of *āsanas* (body postures) for meditation and ascetic practices to control and manipulate the *prāṇa* (ether) and the *bindu* (semen) not only through the mind, but through the *bodymind*. Sarde discusses how the term *Haṭha* was related to the Buddhist *tantras* and was absent in Shaiva *tantras* until much later. Rather than elaborating in detail, Sarde only briefly mentions that in Buddhist practice, *Haṭha* was related to non-celibate practices. In contrast, in the Shaiva and Vaishnava yoga texts, *Haṭha* is related to celibate practices, which are associated with the word *Haṭha* as we use it in today’s zeitgeist. There is a particular emphasis on analyzing temple iconography and sculptural depictions, highlighting the importance of the visual in the archeological. These visual representations offer valuable insights into adopting and implementing *Haṭhayoga* practices. Chapter 6, the conclusion, discusses the influence of the Nātha tradition beyond western India. These regions include Nepal, Central India (Ujjain, Khajuraho, Gwalior, and Maheshvar), Bengal and Assam, Orrisa, Goa, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Sarde explores the influence of the Nātha tradition in these diverse areas by examining archeological findings and textual evidence, highlighting the provenance of the earliest instances of the Nātha tradition having emerged in western India. Sarde highlights the need to research texts and documents in regional languages to understand unidentified postures and practices. Tantra and alchemy in Nātha *sampradāya* are other exciting avenues of research along with the ethnography of Nātha tradition in Maharashtra.

<sup>1</sup>Where the middle part of the ear is torn to wear the circular shaped *kuṇḍala* made of clay, worn at initiation ceremonies, which is why they are also referred to as *Kānphaṭā* yogis. It is also worn by gods, goddesses, and ascetics since ancient times.

The book's main contribution is to study the Nātha *sampradāya* through archeological evidence for the first time. Regarding the question about the origin and development of the Nātha tradition, Sarde suggests that it originated mainly in northern and central Maharashtra. Sarde reached this finding based on his examination of archeological data and early Marathi devotional literature. The book analyzes the archeological evidence of Nātha *sampradāya* from various sites in western India, such as temples and rock-cut caves, and interprets the iconography and sculptural representations of Nātha yogis found in those locations. Sarde's approach involved a comprehensive survey of these archeological remains and their contextualization within the broader cultural landscape of Maharashtra during the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Sarde's conclusions are based on a combination of archeological evidence, analysis of iconography, examination of early Marathi literature, and paves the way for critical reassessments of previous scholarly work on the subject. Overall, the book aims to shed new light on the Nātha *sampradāya* by providing a comprehensive study of its archeological evidence, regional specificities, and its place within the larger context of asceticism in early India.

In the present day, Nātha sects primarily thrive in Nepal, although they can also be found in other regions near and in the Himalayas, such as certain areas in northern India and Bengal (Alter 2009). Alter (2009) has also noted this sect's influence on the drumming traditions of the Garhwal Himalaya. His work on the influence of Nātha *sampradāya* on two rhythmic instruments from Uttarakhand, namely *ḍhol-damauñ*, suggests a link between them by discussing the text of drumming, named *Ḍholsāgar* (Ocean of Drumming) and how it is framed as a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī like most tantric texts. Alter (2009) mentions that "Śiva's close association to the drum links all Nāths to the drum even though they are not necessarily drummers by caste" (p. 190).

There is an intriguing possibility to explore the potential connections between the Nātha tradition, as documented by Sarde in western India, and the Nātha tradition in the Himalayas, particularly in relation to Himalayan drumming using *ḍhol-damauñ* instruments. This raises the question of whether there exists a historical and cultural link between these two regions through the Nātha tradition and its influence on drumming practices. Further investigation could shed light on the interplay between these traditions and contribute to a deeper understanding of their shared roots and influences. However, Sarde points out that the early yogis from this tradition, such as Matsyendranāth and Gorakshanāth in early documents, have been addressed without the "nātha" suffix. Moreover, there are many humans, deities, and places where the word *nātha* is used without connection to Nātha *sampradāya*. The word Nātha may be older than the Nātha tradition. For instance, one of the most revered abodes of Śiva in Garhwal Himalaya known as Kedarnāth, said to have been built by Adi Shankaracharya in the eighth century, also uses the *nātha* suffix. Sarde accordingly points out that "it is not fair to say that every place, god, yogi, saint, or person is associated with the Nātha *sampradāya*" (p. 2).

Throughout the book, Sarde's use of archeological evidence alongside textual accounts provides a comprehensive picture of this religious tradition and its complex genealogy. *The Archaeology of the Nātha Sampradāya in Western India, 12th to 15th Century* offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the emergence and development of the Nātha *sampradāya* in western India during the twelfth to fifteenth century. The book provides a comprehensive analysis of the archeological evidence related to the Nātha *sampradāya*, including their temples, sculptures, inscriptions, and other artifacts. Sarde has drawn from various sources, including primary texts, epigraphs, and field surveys, to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of the Nātha *sampradāya* and its influence on the society and culture of western India and beyond. The book will interest students, scholars, and readers in archeology, South Asian ethnography, Hindu studies, yoga studies, religious studies, psychology of religion, and ancient meditative traditions of India.

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## Rupture, Evolution, and Continuity: The Shandong Peninsula in East Asian Maritime History During the Yuan-Ming Transition

By Ma Guang. Harrassowitz, 2021. 230 pages. Hardback, €68.00 USD, ISBN: 978-3-447-11700-5. Ebook, €68.00, ISBN: 978-3-447-39202-0.

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In this new book Ma Guang wants to shed new light on the historical significance of the Shandong peninsula during the critical Yuan-Ming transition (ca. 1350–1450). The author attempts to situate the region within the broader geopolitical context, challenging dominant narratives of “terra-centrism” and “Southeast China centrism,” while also redirecting our focus upon the so-called *wokou* factor in East Asian international relations in the period under consideration. In the process the book also attempts to engage with broader issues, theories, and debates in the field, addressing the Sino-centric tributary framework of international relations, the impact of climate change, and discussions of continuity or discontinuity between the Yuan and Ming dynasties. This makes for a fairly ambitious project and the end result is not nearly as revolutionary as the author tries to suggest owing to the ignorance (or deliberate exclusion) of the most important recent secondary works on the subject, many of which could have reinforced the author’s conclusions and all of which predate them, some by decades.

The book starts off on a weak note with Ma claiming there are no works on the significance of Shandong and the northeast Asian maritime realm available in English. This is surprising given that his own graduate adviser edited one work featuring such scholarship.<sup>1</sup> It also ignores scholarship in the region on the late Ming period by the likes of Christopher Agnew and myself.<sup>2</sup> As might be expected, Ma invokes Braudel in a comparative sense and then tries to make the case that the early Ming *wokou* (Japanese pirate) troubles have generally been overshadowed in favor of focusing on the more spectacular pirate raids of the sixteenth century. This assertion is not entirely incorrect, but is problematic on several levels. For one, as is the case throughout this book, the relevant recent English language scholarship is almost entirely ignored. This includes the excellent work on Japanese piracy by Peter Shapinsky, which is essential to getting the full international picture as the author

<sup>1</sup>See Angela Schottenhammer and Roderich Ptak (eds), *The Perception of Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>See Christopher Agnew, “Dengzhou and the Bohai Gulf in Seventeenth-century Northeast Asia,” in Kenneth R. Hall, ed., *The Growth of Non-Western Cities: Primary and Secondary Urban Networking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 171–94; and Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China’s Ming Dynasty, 1618–44* (London: Routledge, 2014), in addition to other works by these authors.