

Western Chalukyas and which combine elements of both the Nagara (northern) and the Dravida (southern) styles. The Virupaksha temple is considered the finest among them. The temple was constructed at the behest of queen Lokamahadevi to commemorate the conquest of Kanchipuram by her husband Vikramaditya II. Monuments are generally associated with the rulers who had them built. However, here we also have signatures of the architects who conceived the edifices and the skilled craftspeople who created them. The east porch of the Virupaksha temple has a Kannada inscription eulogizing the architect who designed the temple. It reads: 'Gunda, whose conversation is entirely perfect, who has for his jewelled diadem and crest jewel the houses, vehicles, seats, and couches [that he designed], the *sutradhari* [architect] of the southern country.' Another inscription nearby tells us that this architect was given the title of *Tribhuvanacharya* (maker of the three worlds). Several reliefs on the temple walls bear signatures of the sculptors who carved them.

At the south-eastern corner of the village is the Papanatha temple, similar in its basic plan to the Virupaksha temple, but with a *shikhara* in the northern style. The outer walls are ornamented with many panels depicting scenes and characters from the *Ramayana*, accompanied by label inscriptions. The eastern wall has a short Kannada inscription, giving the name of Revadi Ovajja, the architect who designed the shrine. He belonged to the guild of the Sarvasiddhi *acharya*s, the same guild to which the architect of the Virupaksha temple belonged. Carved close to the inscription are figures of chisels. The names of sculptors such as Baladeva and Devarya are engraved on the temple walls. The Pattadakal temples represent one of the many examples of the spectacular developments in the spheres of architecture and sculpture in the early medieval period.

The term 'early medieval' denotes an intermediate period between the 'ancient' and the 'medieval'. Although the term has acquired a wide acceptance, one of the challenges for this period is to weave together, or at least juxtapose, the evidence from texts in Sanskrit, Persian, and the vernacular languages with that from inscriptions, coins, and archaeology. The different interpretations of the early medieval period are linked to important issues such as perceptions about the nature of Indian culture and civilization, and the basis on which continuity and change in history should be identified. More specifically, these interpretations are connected to historians' assessments of the 'Gupta age' and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

As mentioned in Chapter 9, historians have been long debating the nature of the society, polity, and economy of early medieval India. This period has often been labelled one of crisis, decline, decay, and decadence. The older histories attributed the decline to the advent of 'Muslim rule'. (This phrase has been put in inverted commas because the term 'Muslim' is a very broad one, and it is more useful to describe the Ghaznavids and Ghurids more specifically as Turks). Subsequently, the feudalism school described the period as an age marked by political fragmentation, the transformation of peasants into serfs, and a decline of urban centres and the money economy. The feudalism hypothesis has been applied to both north as well as South India. For South India, there is another interpretative framework—the **segmentary state** model, which presents the kings of this age as ritual figures, devoid of the two important props of royal power—a revenue infrastructure and a standing army. A third major interpretative framework for early medieval India suggests that in many parts of the subcontinent, these centuries were marked by the formation and proliferation of states at the regional level. This hypothesis can be connected with the more specific argument that the early medieval period was one of urban change, but not of urban decay. Much of the older historiography

of this period focused on pan-Indian, or at least trans-regional patterns, but the more recent research highlights the regional and sub-regional specificities and variations.



SIGNATURE OF ARCHITECT AND CARVINGS OF CHISELS, PAPANATHA TEMPLE, PATTADAKAL

The positive impact of several decades of vigorous debate is that it raised important questions about political, social, and economic processes. However, in the long run, the tendency of historians to try to fit their data into one or other model has led to a sort of impasse in which the way forward may in fact lie in breaking free of the constraints of these models. The main focus of historians who have tried to reconstruct the 'big picture' has been on expanding and sharpening the analysis of class and caste hierarchies, and the legitimation of political power. Little attention has been devoted to the history of women and gender relations, both in the public domain and within the household. Writings on gender in the early medieval context have usually come from scholars with an interest in specific issues related to politics or religion. It is essential to include the results and implications of such studies in the larger narratives and to integrate gender relations into the social history of the period. In this chapter, these issues have been woven into the broader discussion of politics, society, and religion.

As it is not possible to give a complete or comprehensive account of all the historical aspects of the period *c.* 600–1200 CE, this chapter focuses on a few issues such as the larger historiographical debates and on developments in the Deccan and the far south.

Sources, Literary and Archaeological

Sheldon Pollock ([2006], 2007: 1) argues that there were two great moments of transformation in culture and power in pre-modern India. The first happened around the beginning of the Common Era, when Sanskrit, which had a long history as a sacred language restricted to religious practice, was 're-invented' as a language for literary and political expression, eventually spilling out far beyond the frontiers of the subcontinent. The second moment of transformation was located in the beginning

of the second millennium CE, when vernacular speech forms became literary languages and began to challenge the position of Sanskrit, eventually replacing it.

*The Sanskrit literature of the early medieval period has usually been described as characterized by pedantry, ornateness, and artificiality. The literature includes philosophical commentaries and religious texts, *bhanas* (monologue plays), *stotras* (hymn compositions), story literature, and anthologies of poetry. Historical and epic-Puranic themes were popular in *kavya*. The technical literature includes works on metre, grammar, lexicography, poetics, music, architecture, medicine, and mathematics.

The growth of regional polities was accompanied by the composition of royal biographies by court poets. Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* is one of the well-known works of this genre. Sandhyakaranandin's *Ramacharita* is written in *shlesha* (with double meaning) and simultaneously tells the story of the epic hero Rama and the Pala king Ramapala. The few works of poetry woven around quasi-historical themes or characters included Padmagupta's *Navasahasankacharita*, which tells the tale of king Sindhuraja Navasahasanka of Malwa, and his winning of the hand of a princess named Shashiprabha. Bilhana wrote the *Vikramankadevacharita*, a eulogistic work about Vikramaditya VI, the Chalukya king of Kalyani. Hemachandra's *Kumarapalacharita* (in Sanskrit and Prakrit) tells the story of Kumarapala, king of Anahilawada, while illustrating the rules of grammar. There is uncertainty about the authorship of the incomplete *Prithvirajavijaya*, which gives an account of the victory of Prithviraja Chauhan over Muhammad of Ghor. Chand Bardai's *Prithvirajaraso* is an epic woven around the exploits of the same Chauhan king. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is a historical chronicle of the rulers of Kashmir from the earliest times up to the 12th century CE.

The early medieval Puranas reflect the increasing popularity of theistic elements within the Hindu cults. They include the *Bhagavata Purana* (c. 10th century), the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (composed some time between the 10th and 16th centuries), and the *Kalika Purana* (10th/11th century). Sections on *tirthas* (pilgrimage), *vratas* (vows), penances, gifts, and the *dharma* of women were added to the older Puranas during this period. The Upapuranas, many of which were composed in eastern India, are even more valuable for the information they provide on popular beliefs, customs, and festivals. They can be used to trace the dialogue between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical ideas, values, and practices, which resulted in the emergence of distinct regional cultural configurations.

A. D. Mathur (2007) has recently argued that in the early medieval period, Hindu law (*vyavahara*) emerged from the shadow of *dharma* and established its independent identity. This was accompanied by an increasing formalization of law and legal procedures, and there was a tendency to empower the state to regulate and arbitrate in the social life of subjects, including with regard to marriage issues. A large number of important and influential Dharmashastra compilations, digests, and commentaries were written during this period. The compilations include the *Chaturvimshatimata*, which put together the teachings of 24 law-givers. Jimutavahana wrote a work on procedural law called the *Vyavaharamatrika* and a digest of laws on inheritance called the *Dayabhaga*, which became extremely influential in Bengal. Major commentaries include those of Medatithi (9th century), Govindaraja (11th/12th century), and Kulluka (12th century) on the *Manu Smriti*. Vijnaneshvara (11th–12th centuries) and Apararka (12th century) wrote commentaries on the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*. Vijnaneshvara's commentary, titled the *Mitakshara*, became an authority on

various aspects of Hindu law. Other important Dharmashastra works include Lakshmidhara's *Kritya Kalpataru* (12th century) and Devanabhata's *Smritichandrika* (11th/12th century).

*Most of the Prakrit works of this period are Jaina texts in the Maharashtri dialect. Their language is marked by artificiality and ornamentation. The few available Pali texts show a strong Sanskrit influence. Apabhramsha represents the last stage of the Prakrit languages, out of which the various modern north Indian languages emerged. Apabhramsha works of this time include several texts on Jaina doctrines and saints, epic poems, short stories, and *dohas* (couplets).

The devotional songs of the Alvars and Nayanmars and the hagiographies of the saints were among the important Tamil texts. Royal biographies include the anonymous *Nandikkalambakam*, a poem in some 80 stanzas, giving a eulogistic account of the reign of the Pallava king Nandivarman III. Several works in Kannada, many of them associated with Jainism, were written as well, some under the royal patronage of the Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, and Chalukyas.

Literary sources offer both direct as well as indirect information about their time. An example of a text that gives direct, useful historical information is the anonymous *Lekhapaddhati*, a work in Sanskrit and Prakrit composed in Gujarat in about the 13th century, which contains models of various types of legal documents. Another example is the *Krishi-Parashara*, an early medieval text of Bengal, dealing with agriculture. Historical information can also be prised out of texts that appear on the surface to be of little historical value. For instance, Jain folk tales (*dharma-kathas*) of western India often have merchants as protagonists, and are a useful source of information on trade and traders. Mathematical texts such as the 9th century *Ganitasarasangraha* of Mahaviracharya and the 12th century *Lilavati* of Bhaskaracharya offer incidental information about prices, weights and measures, wages, and coins.

Apart from indigenous texts, Chinese and Arab accounts are useful sources of information for early medieval India. Foremost among the former are the accounts of the monks Xuanzang (c. 600–64 CE) and Yijing (635–713 CE), both of whom visited India. One of Yijing's works gives an account of Buddhist doctrines and practices in India, while the other provides brief biographical sketches of 56 Chinese monks who visited India in the 7th century. The important Arab works include the 9th–10th century writings of travellers and geographers such as Sulaiman, Al-Masudi, Abu Zaid, Al-Biduri, and Ibn Haukal. Later Arab writers include Al-Biruni, Al-Idrisi, Muhammad Ufi, and Ibn Batuta. Such accounts are especially useful for information on trade.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

New evidence regarding Wang Xuance's missions to India

The Chinese travellers who made the arduous journey from China to India and back included monks and diplomats. Wang Xuance was one of several official envoys sent by the Tang emperors to India in the 7th century. According to Bangwei Wang, various sources suggest that he travelled to India three times. A Buddhist encyclopaedia edited by a contemporary monk named Daoshi, who also happened to know Wang Xuance personally, states: 'The Tang ambassador Wang Xuance has been there [India] three times. When I met Xuance, he told me this.' In fact, Daoshi makes a similar statement in two other places in his work. Wang Xuance himself made

the following assertion in one of his reports to the emperor: 'Since Buddhism arose in India, I, the servant [of Your Majesty], have been sent there three times, and I saw and heard a lot.'

Wang was first sent to India by emperor Taizong as assistant to the imperial ambassador Li Yibiao. Members of the delegation left China in 643 and travelled to India via Tibet and Nepal. In Magadha, they met king Harsha and visited a number of Buddhist pilgrimage places. This is how Wang Xuance described the experience: 'I had the unexpected good fortune to see the venerable footprints [of the Buddha]. Sometimes sad, sometimes happy, I could not control my feelings.' The delegation returned to China in 645. A year or two later (in 646 or 647), Wang once again started off for India, this time as the head of the delegation. The route was the same as that adopted for the first mission. Chinese sources state that this embassy was attacked by soldiers led by a person named Arunasha, and all except Wang Xuance and his second-in-command Jiang Shiren were either killed or captured. Scholars have different opinions on the date of Wang Xuance's third mission, which must have taken place some time between 657 and 661 CE.

Bangwei Wang draws attention to the recent discovery of an inscription in Skyid-grong in Tibet, which throws light on this third mission. The inscription on a rock face is seriously damaged, especially in its lower part. The surviving text covers an area 81.5 cm in width and 53 cm in length. It consists of 222 legible characters arranged in 24 lines, many parts too damaged to be read. The main purport of the inscription can, however, be understood. It states that the emperor sent Wang and his companions to India in the sixth month of the third year of Xianqing, i.e., in 658 CE. In the fifth month of the summer of some year (probably in 659 CE), the delegation arrived at a certain place, probably the very spot where the inscription was inscribed. There is also mention of some hitherto unknown members of Wang's delegation. The inscription also indicates that the route taken by the delegation passed through Skyid-grong and Nepal.

Another inscription mentioning Wang Xuance was recently discovered at the Longmen Grotto in Luoyang. This records his gift of a Maitreya image for the southern cell of the Bingyan Grotto in the second year of Lingde (i.e., 665 CE). The diplomat was evidently a pious lay Buddhist.

Wang Xuance wrote a diary of his visits to India called *Zhong Tianzhuguo xing ji* (Records of the Travels to Middle India), which apparently included maps of India and sketches of Buddhist artefacts. Unfortunately, the diary is lost.

SOURCE Wang, 2002; Sen, 2003: 23, 40, 205, 261

As for the previous centuries, inscriptions continue to form a major source of historical information for c. 600–1200 CE. The interpretation of the epigraphic data is in fact central to the major debates concerning this period. Royal land grant inscriptions, mostly recording grants to Brahmanas, are especially important. Equally important are epigraphs recording non-royal and royal gifts made to religious establishments.

The assessment of the early medieval numismatic evidence is an issue of debate. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the hypothesis that there was a subcontinental decline in the money economy from c. 400 CE onwards can be questioned. Archaeological data on the early medieval period is extremely meagre, and this is a major drawback when it comes to framing and testing hypotheses related to settlement history.

Political Narrative and Political Structure

The contours of the kingdoms of early medieval India were fluid and are difficult to define. Kingdoms are more easily identified by their nuclear areas and political centres than by their boundaries. The political narrative of these centuries reveals some large, relatively long-lived kingdoms such as those of the Cholas, Rashtrakutas, Palas, and Pratiharas. There were also the more numerous short-lived kingdoms which had a much more modest range of territorial control. The interaction between lineages took the form of war and conflict as well as of military and matrimonial alliances. The details of how different lineages established their political and agrarian resource base in various parts of the subcontinent are obscure. B. D. Chattopadhyaya ([1983], 1997: 205–08) has pointed out that there was no dichotomy between lineages and states in early medieval India, and that lineage ties were in fact central to political formations.

The spread of state society was accompanied by a high level of spatial mobility of political elites and unprecedented levels of military build-up. The incessant warfare during the period indicates the importance of coercive power and military might in the politics of the time. Apart from a centrally hired core, the armies of kings included mercenaries, hired when the need arose. For instance, many Pala inscriptions from Bengal and Bihar address (among others) military contingents recruited from among the Gaudas, Malavas, Khashas, Kulikas, Hunas, Karnatas, and Latas. Similarly, the *Rajatarangini* mentions that kings of Kashmir recruited mercenaries from other areas. The core and mercenary troops were supplemented, when the need arose, by the military might of allied and subordinate rulers.

In many instances, the expansion of state society involved the displacement or integration of tribal communities. The interactions between tribal and Brahmanical cultures (however difficult it may be to define both these terms) are reflected indirectly in inscriptions. For instance, the Sanskrit inscriptions of Assam contain a sprinkling of Khasi, Bodo, and other non-Sanskritic words (Lahiri, 1991: 101). In south-east Rajasthan, the expansion of the power of the Guhila dynasty involved the transformation of the Bhils from hunter-gatherers to farmers. The foundation legend of king Guhadatta killing the Bhil chief Mandalika and seizing power suggests a fierce contest between the Guhilas and Bhils (Sinha Kapur, 2002: 38–39). The tribal element surfaces in other ways in Orissa (Singh, 1994: 287–88). Inscriptions of the imperial Ganga king Anantavarman Chodaganga refer to an ancestor named Kamarnava who defeated Shabaraditya, no doubt a chief of the Shabara tribe. On the other hand, the names of some of the dynasties, details of their origin myths, and references to their worshipping autochthonous deities such as Stambheshvari suggest that some of these kings were in fact successful tribal chiefs who had enhanced their political power and had also got 'Hinduized'. The importance of the tribal element in the history of Orissa is best reflected in the Jagannatha cult, which clearly had tribal origins.

The *prashastis* of royal inscriptions reveal prevailing political hierarchies. Inscriptions of subordinate kings frequently refer to their overlord, while those of more powerful rulers sometimes mention their subordinates. Although there are various problems with the feudalism hypothesis as a whole, the term 'feudatory' or 'vassal' can be applied to subordinate rulers who were obliged to offer allegiance and military service to their suzerains. The emergence and development of such chains of command generally had nothing to do with land grants. There are some instances of early medieval kings granting land in return for military service, but this was by no means the general trend.

Claims to political paramountcy were reflected in the use of three titles that usually occur together in inscriptions—*maharajadhiraja*, *parameshvara*, and *parama-bhattaraka*. Paramount kings were sometimes described as commanding the obeisance of the *samantas* or of the circle of kings. Titles of subordinate rulers included *maharaja*, *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, *ranaka*, and *mahasamantadhipati*. Such a ruler was often also described as 'one who has obtained the five great sounds' (*samadhigata-pancha-mahashabda*), apparently referring to the privilege of hearing the sound of five musical instruments. Subordinate status was also indicated through the use of the overlord's dynastic era and by the lesser king being described as meditating at the feet of his overlord.

The royal *prashasti* contains poetic embellishment, conventional rhetoric, and downright flattery. But along with the seals and invocations, it allows us to identify certain elements that comprised both the ideal and practice of kingship. The sectarian epithets of kings reflect more than mere religious affiliations or eclecticism, and can be viewed from the perspective of royal policy. The titles and designations in land grant inscriptions suggest the different tiers, ranks, and functionaries in the administrative infrastructure of kingdoms, although it is not always possible to identify their precise meaning. During the early medieval period, the horizontal and vertical linkages of political power are more visible than ever before and the emergent political elites can be connected with alliances with landed groups, some of them created and buttressed by royal grants.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The image of the ideal king in inscriptions of Orissa

The analysis of kingship in ancient India has traditionally been based on literary sources. However, inscriptions constitute another important source of information on this subject. The *prashastis* of royal inscriptions are especially informative on the ideology of kingship. They offer a good sketch of the image of the ideal king in different times and regions.

The recurrent themes in *prashastis* of kings of early medieval Orissa include their bravery, military exploits, and physical beauty. Comparisons with the heroes of the *Mahabharata*—especially Yudhishtira—are frequent, as are comparisons with legendary kings such as Puru, Dilipa, Nala, Nahusha, Mandhata, Bharata, and Bhagiratha. Kings are also often compared with various deities, sometimes with the very deity whom they worshipped, usually either Shiva or Vishnu. Cultic affiliation is indicated through sectarian epithets such as *parama-maheshvara*, *parama-bhagavata*, and *parama-vaishnava*.