

A HISTORY OF HINDU  
ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA



STUDIES IN ASIAN  
ART AND CULTURE

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# Preface

Cathleen A. Cummings

This volume examines the architectures of Hinduism. While the Hindu temple in its many forms and iterations is a significant feature, the book also considers other elements of the built environment of Hinduism, including *ghāṭs*, *samādhis*, *chatrīs*, and sacred groves. The book encompasses broad regional surveys of major architectural traditions and schools, as well as focused thematic essays that provide a deep understanding of how architecture works, functionally and symbolically, within Hindu socio-cultural history.

The book is organized in two parts. Chapters 1–12 provide the groundwork for understanding how Hindus have thought about and developed the built environment for their religious and cultural practices over time. In Chapter 1, Adam Hardy sets out the basic types of Hindu temples that emerge historically and provides the reader with a set of terms for parsing temple types that run throughout the book. This section then presents key themes for understanding architecture and sacred space in the Hindu tradition, such as how time, space, direction, and movement are encoded, metaphorically, in almost all forms of Hindu architecture (Elgood, Chapter 2); the significance of the sacred city of Varanasi to pan-Indian religious building (Gutschow, Chapter 3); the meaning and function of pilgrimage (Branfoot, Chapter 4); Hindu architectural forms associated with water, such as *ghāṭs* and *kunḍas* (Hegewald, Chapter 5); the concept of the “sacred grove,” particularly within Śaivism, as it relates to the idea of sacred space (Chanchani, Chapter 8); stories of village and folk shrines (Huyler, Chapter 9); architectures associated with death and memorialization in the Hindu tradition (Cummings, Chapter 10); relationships between royal patronage, iconographic programs, and the Hindu temple (Huntington, Chapter 11); and ideas and constructs associated with social hierarchy as they relate to the Hindu temple (Tartakov, Chapter 12). Interwoven with these thematic essays are ones that suggest the beginnings and early development of Hindu architecture, including the essay by Meera Dass on the origins of Hindu temples (Chapter 6) and the exploration by Lisa Owens of Hindu rock-cut architecture (Chapter 7).

The second part of the book, Chapters 13–26, are loosely arranged to move the reader chronologically, from the earliest surviving structures that can be associated with Hinduism to buildings and spaces of the Early Modern period.

Within this chronology, most essays focus on one or another regional tradition. This section begins with Himanshu Prabha Ray's study of sacred landscapes and spaces that predate extant temples (Chapter 13), and is followed by Amy-Ruth Holt's review of Early Drāviḍa temple building (Chapter 14), the survey by Cathleen A. Cummings of the pre-Islamic Deccani tradition (Chapter 15), and Thomas Donaldson's study of Orissan temple architecture (Chapter 16). In Chapter 17, Tamara I. Sears presents an in-depth study of sacred centers and temple towns in Central India, and in Chapter 18, Ankur Desai examines Hindu architecture in western India. Chapters 19, 20, and 21 return to South India: Amy-Ruth Holt surveys Cōla architecture in Chapter 19; Fiona Buckee looks at subsidiary architecture in Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu (Chapter 20); and in Chapter 21, Crispin Branfoot presents Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu and the Deccan after the time of Muslim incursions into the south around the year 1300.

From here, the book moves to Bengal, in Chapter 22 by Pika Ghosh; the Himalayas, in Chapter 23 by Yashaswini Chandra; Kerala, in Chapter 24 by Cathleen A. Cummings; and Nepal, in Chapter 25 by Niels Gutschow. The final chapter, Chapter 26, demonstrates the synthesis of 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' architecture that occurs widely by the Early Modern period, in Ashutosh Sohoni's study of Marathā architecture of Maharashtra.

This book aims to explore the history of Hindu architecture in South Asia in a way that connects the times, places, styles, and patrons of building with larger, persistent cultural, metaphysical, and symbolic ideas. It endeavors to summarize what is currently known of Hindu religious architecture, present new research, and provide ample context based on a thematic approach that moves beyond standard dynastic and regional surveys. Themes ranging from caste to geometry to sculptural programming; from sacred landscapes to the spatial organization of monuments; from the surfaces of structures to builders, materials, and methods; and to the reception and use of the religious architecture of Hinduism, cut through and across the essays included here. The book incorporates the study of lesser understood and less-studied aspects of Hindu architecture in places like Kerala, the Himalayas, and Bengal alongside analyses of the major and well-known dynastic and regional traditions; and reaches back to a pre-temple 'proto-Hindu' era, and forward to the Early Modern period. The essays compiled in this volume, *in toto*, convey the diversity of Hindu architecture across time and space while also opening a way to comprehend the totality of Hindu architecture and identify the common threads that weave through the diverse corpus. Not every monument or dynasty or place finds voice here, but the book touches on all corners and regions of Hindu religious architecture in South Asia across a broad swath of time. It will be a core resource for students and scholars, yet it is written

in such a way as to be accessible to all readers. The essays are geographically limited to the bounds of South Asia. The western diaspora traditions of Hindu religious architecture, as well as those of Southeast Asia, could represent the subject of a companion volume.

Essays in this volume employ diacritical marks to render south Asian languages into Roman script, except when using words that have been incorporated into the English language (such as *yoga*), or in the case of states, cities, towns, or rivers, the names of which are in current use (whether or not they were employed historically as well). For example, when reference is made to the Ganges River, no diacritics are used; however, when reference is made to the goddess, Gaṅgā, diacritics are employed. In the case of names of states, cities, towns, or rivers that are used exclusively in an historical or mythical context—such as Dāhaladeśa or Gopakṣetra—diacritical marks are employed. Therefore, Kāśī, the mytho-historic name, is spelled with diacritical marks, but Varanasi, the contemporary name, is not. Further, when there are differences between Sanskrit and Hindi in the spelling of a word, we have favored the Sanskrit spelling (for example, *darśana* rather than *darśan*).

Throughout the volume, numbers have been spelled out rather than written as numerals (for example, twenty-six rather than 26). The exception is the number 108 and its derivatives (1008, 10,800). The number 108 is considered sacred and highly auspicious, and has probably been so since the third millennium BCE, if not earlier. Throughout the *Ṛgveda* (dated to approximately 1200 BCE; see Bryant 2001: 243), ‘108’ figures either as a whole number or in variants. According to Subhash Kak, for example, the *Ṛgveda* has 432,000 syllables, equating to 108 x 4000 (Kak 1995: 7), while the Vedic fire altar has 10,800 bricks (Kak 2002: n.p.). The significance of the number 108 may have originated with ancient Indian astronomical observations. The sun, it was observed, is 108 sun-diameters from the earth, and the moon 108 moon-diameters (Kak 1995: 7). Further, the sun’s diameter was thought to be 108 x the diameter of the earth (Kak 1995: 7). These ancient calculations have been shown to be remarkably accurate. As a multiple of the nine planets and the twelve zodiac houses, the number 108 is also the number of possible ways that planets may be placed in Indian astrology (Levacy 2006: xvii). Subsequent to its early astronomical associations, the number 108 and its derivatives have become deeply embedded across multiple domains of Indic culture as an auspicious signifier. For example, the *māla* (string of prayer beads) typically has 108 beads, for each of the 108 *japas* (*mantras* or divine names) recited by a practitioner. The number of dance poses in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* is 108, as are the number of major *Upaniṣads*, the number of names of Śiva, and

the number of Kṛṣṇa's *gopi* followers. Associations with the number 108 in the Hindu tradition go on and on. Thus, because of its unique place in Indic culture we have felt it important to retain its use as a numeral throughout this book.

American English is used throughout the text. We also use the American manner of designating multiple stories in a building, so that the floor that is level with the ground is called the first floor, the floor above it is the second floor, and so on.

This work has been a long time in the making! In 2008, I was commissioned to edit a volume on Hindu religious architecture by a major university press as part of a larger project on the architectures of world religions. That project was initially conceived as an encyclopedia, but as work began, it quickly became apparent that the construct of an encyclopedia could limit the substance of the essays and the inclusion of original research, and so we shifted to a 'world history'. At the eleventh hour that press decided to publish only the volumes on Christian architecture, leaving orphan this work as well as volumes on Buddhist, Islamic, and Judaic architecture. I am grateful to Julia A. B. Hegewald and members of the editorial board for the publication series Studies in Asian Art and Culture (SAAC) at the University of Bonn, in particular Susan L. Huntington, for seeing the important contribution of this work and offering to publish it. I would also like to thank Richard Etlin for his extensive guidance during the earlier stages of this project. And I am especially grateful to all the authors included here, who have patiently stayed with me through this long process, for continuing to support this effort. Any faults in the text, however, are mine alone.

Publication of this volume—and especially its many images—would not have been possible without support from the Dean's office of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of Art and Art History, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham; and the following individuals who share a passion for South Asia and a deep commitment to the perpetuation of knowledge: Dr. Allury Arora; Drs. Ambika and Khaleel Ashraf; Dr. Graham Boettcher; Sanjeev Chaudhuri; Drs. Rupa and David Kitchens; Drs. Geeta and Shaily Lakhnupal; Dr. Vivek Lal; Drs. Rajat and Monjri Parikh; Katherine Anne Paul, Ph.D.; Dr. Bisakha Pia Sen; Dr. Monjri Shah; Drs. Farah and Parvez Sultan; Drs. Geeta and Rohit Malik; Mrs. Shammi and Dr. Amrik Walia; and Donald A. Wood, Ph.D. My very special thanks to my great friends and travel companions Drs. Dora and Sanjay Singh and Commander Murali Krishnan, for their generous support of this project and for their consistent kindness, insight, and good humor.

Cathleen A. Cummings, February 2022

## Notes on Contributors

**Crispin Branfoot** is Reader in the History of South Asian Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His research interests include the history of architecture, sculpture, and painting of southern India, especially from the fourteenth century to the present in Tamil Nadu. Among his authored publications are *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple* (2007), *Traditional Arts of South Asia: Continuity in Contemporary Patronage & Practice* (2015), and *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History* (2018); with Roger Taylor, *Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860* (2014); with Archana Venkatesan, *In Andal's Garden: Art, Ornamentation and Devotion in Srivilliputtur* (2015; reprint 2018); and as editor, with Ruth Barnes, *Pilgrimage: The Sacred Journey* (2006).

**Fiona Buckee** is a specialist in Indian temple architecture and an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University in the School of History, Archaeology, and Religion. Her research interests lie in the formal analysis of Indian temples, and she has published work on the original design of Temple 45 at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh, and on the architecture and history of the Mundeshvari Temple in southwest Bihar. Fiona has many years of experience teaching a broad range of Indian art subjects at graduate and postgraduate levels at institutions including SOAS University, the British Museum, and the V&A.

**Nachiket Chanchani** earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in 2012. An associate professor appointed in the Departments of the History of Art and Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, he is concurrently an adjunct professor at the university's law school and a consulting curator at the Detroit Institute of Arts. His first monograph, *Mountain Temples and Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion, and Nature in the Central Himalayas* was published in 2019. Other contributions appear in journals such as *Artibus Asiae*, *Archives of Asian Art*, *Ars Orientalis*, *Arts Asiatiques*, *History of Photography*, and *South Asian Studies*, as well as in various edited books and on the main editorial pages of *The Hindu* newspaper. Professor Chanchani has been associated with curatorial projects at various museums and received fellowships from the Smithsonian Institution, the V&A, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Forum Transregionale Studien, and other organizations.

**Yashaswini Chandra** has a PhD in History of Art from SOAS University of London, where she was also a teaching fellow. She has been guest/visiting faculty at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the department of Visual Arts, Ashoka University, Sonipat. She is an independent scholar, and the western Himalayas is one of her main areas of research.

**Cathleen A. Cummings**, Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, received her doctorate in art history from the Ohio State University, and MAs from Ohio State and the University of London. She specializes in South Asian art, particularly in the areas of Hindu temple architecture and Indian miniature painting. Her book, *Decoding a Hindu Temple: Royalty and Religion in the Iconographic Program of the Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal*, was published in 2014 by the South Asian Studies Association. She has also published on Rajput painting and Vajrayana Buddhist art. She has curated exhibitions for the Peabody-Essex Museum in Massachusetts, the Birmingham Museum of Art, and the Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts at UAB. She is currently researching localized traditions of religious architecture, especially at Nagpur, and female architectural patronage in the context of India's Maratha polity in the eighteenth century.

**Meera Dass** is an art historian, conservation architect, and architect with expertise on fifth-century Hindu cave temple architecture at Udayagiri, Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh. Based in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, Dass has served as a member of India's National Monuments Authority, a sister organization with the Archaeological Survey of India, in the implementation of the Ancient Monuments, Sites and Remains Act. She has curated exhibitions and collections, including the Air India collection. As Convenor for the Indian National Trust for Art and Culture Heritage, she has worked extensively in re-engineering the heritage core of Ujjain and Chanderi, two heritage towns of Madhya Pradesh.

**Ankur Desai** received his doctorate in art history from the Ohio State University in 2018. He specializes in the art of South Asia, with a particular focus on Hindu architecture and iconography in pre-modern and modern contexts. His doctoral dissertation examines the temple-building tradition of the internationally established Swaminarayan Hindu community. His essays, "Visnu as the Emanation Sri Krsna" & "Visnu," were published in *Realms of Wonder: Jain, Hindu, and Islamic Art of India* (Adelaide, Australia: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2013). His dissertation on the art and architecture of Swaminarayan Sampraday is currently being revised for publication. He is currently a Visiting Professor of Art History at the Kansas City Art Institute.

**Thomas Eugene Donaldson** taught art history at Cleveland State University for more than thirty-five years. In addition to forty-five articles on Orissan art in leading international journals and *Festschriften*, his publishing credits include: a monumental three-volume work, *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa* (1985–1987); *Kamadeva's Pleasure Garden, Orissa* (1987); the text for *Ornaments of Orissa*, co-authored with Ramesh Prasad Mohapatra (1996); *Sculpture Masterpieces from Orissa: Style and Iconography*, co-authored with Karuna Sagar Behera (1998); *The Iconography of Vaiṣṇava Images in Orissa* (2001); *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* (2001); *Tantra and Śākta Art of Orissa*, 3 vols. (2002); and *Śiva-Pārvatī and Allied Images: Their Iconography and Body Language* (2007), along with numerous articles and essays.

**Heather Elgood** is Course Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art. Her teaching covers the religious and ritual arts of Hindu and Buddhist India as well as Indian Buddhist wall painting, Pala Buddhist illustrated manuscripts, and fifteenth–eighteenth century Indo-Islamic, Jaina, and Hindu manuscript illustration. Her research has focused on the ritual and religious arts of Hinduism. She was awarded an MBE for ‘Services to Higher Education and the Arts’ in the 2015 New Year’s Honours List, published on 30 December 2014. Her publications include: *Hinduism and the Religious Arts* (2000); “The Roots of Village Hinduism,” in *World Archaeology*, 2004; and a contribution to the textbook *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods*, edited by Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, published by Routledge in 2008.

**Pika Ghosh** teaches South Asian art and religion at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. Her research focuses on material culture in performative contexts in eastern India from the seventeenth century to the present. Her first book, *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal* (2005), identified the emergence of a new architectural formation in the religious and political environment of the seventeenth century. She is interested in ethnographic approaches and how current practices, such as ritual and oral lore, can inform us about the pre-modern period. She has recently completed a monograph on nineteenth-century Kantha imagery, analyzing the visual archives of such textiles to listen for Bengali women’s voices: *Making Kantha, Making Home: Women at Work in Colonial Bengal* (2020).

**Niels Gutschow** graduated in architecture from Darmstadt University and wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the Japanese Castle Town in 1973. From 1978 until 1980, he was head of Münster’s Monument Protection Authority, and between 1980 and 2000, he served as a member of the German National Committee for Conservation. He did an apprenticeship as a carpenter in Japan (1962/63) and was member of a team for the first bilateral conservation project in Bhaktapur, Nepal (1971). Since 1980, his research has been dedicated to the wartime and post-World War II history of urban planning in Germany and Europe, and to urban space and rituals in India and Nepal. He was a consultant for UNESCO at World Heritage sites in Nepal (1992) and Pakistan (1995) and a member of a German-Japanese commission of conservation experts between 1996 and 1999. Since 2004, he has been an honorary professor at Heidelberg University (Department of Indology). He is currently associated with the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, aiming at the rebuilding of ten buildings at Patan’s Darbar Square, four of which had totally collapsed in the 2015 earthquake. His publications include more than one hundred fifty articles, published mainly in scientific journals, as well as fifty-three books, many co-written with other authors. Among his recent solo publications are: *Benares: The Sacred Landscape of Varanasi* (2006); *Bhaktapur–Nepal*, vols. 1–2 (2017); and *The Sky Face: Kirtimukha and Related Hybrid Creatures in the Architecture of Nepal, South- and Southeast Asia* (2019).



**Adam Hardy**, architect, architectural historian, and Professor of Asian Architecture at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, is Director of PRASADA, a center that brings together research and practice in South Asian art and architecture. His research is largely in the history of architecture in South Asia, particularly Hindu temple architecture, as well as that of Indian Buddhist and Jaina temples. Contrary to a prevailing tendency to focus narrowly, his work has embraced most of the subcontinent over a lengthy time span, while at the same time involving detailed formal analysis. He brings to light a meaningful way of looking at what at first sight might seem bewilderingly complex structures. The work has revealed striking structural homologies between architecture and other branches of culture, and shown how, within a number of regional traditions, forms evolve in a characteristic way, notwithstanding conspicuous artistic inventiveness. Drawings have played an important role in his research, not only for explanation but also as a means of analysis. Among his publications are *The Temple Architecture of India* (2007) and *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India: Bhoja's Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur Line Drawings* (2015).

**Julia A. B. Hegewald** is Professor of Oriental Art History and Head of the Department of Asian and Islamic Art History at the Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn. She graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where she also received her Ph.D. Her books include: *Water Architecture in South Asia: A Study of Types, Developments and Meanings* (2002); *Jaina Temple Architecture in India: The Development of a Distinct Language in Space and Ritual* (2009; 2nd ed. 2019); *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience* (2011); *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age* (2014); *Jaina Painting and Manuscript Culture: In Memory of Paolo Pianarosa* (2015); *In the Footsteps of the Masters: Footprints, Feet and Shoes as Objects of Veneration in Asian, Islamic and Mediterranean Art* (2020); and as editor with Subrata Kumar Mitra, *Re-use: The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety* (2012).

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**Lisa N. Owen** received her Ph.D. in art history from the University of Texas at Austin and is currently an associate professor at University of North Texas. While her teaching embraces all aspects of South Asian art, Dr. Owen’s research focuses on ancient and medieval rock-cut monuments in India. She is particularly interested in the ways that sacred space is articulated in this medium and how carved imagery and space shape devotional practices. Her interests also include the production of imagery in ancient India, patterns of patronage, and constructions of identity. Her current book project, *Rocks, Caves, and Divinity: Creating Places of Worship in Medieval Southern India*, questions the saliency of employing traditional art historical categories such as ‘architecture’ and ‘sculpture’ to India’s rock-cut monuments that clearly express a power of place through more complex visual systems. Dr. Owen’s fieldwork in India has been supported by an American Institute of Indian Studies Senior Short-Term Fellowship, a Fulbright-Nehru Research Scholar Award, and a Howard Foundation Fellowship. Her publications include *Carving Devotion in the Jain Caves at Ellora* (2012) and essays in *Marg, Artibus Asiae*, the *International Journal of Jaina Studies*, and the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*.

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