

development of social structures of Ancient Near Eastern societies is also a key element in van De Mieroop's analysis. In fact, the act of writing a language, and, as a consequence, recording memories of past activities, is a fundamental progress related to an increase in the degree of social hierarchy as well as a dramatic transformation of the 'kulturelle Gedächtnis' (J. Assmann, *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, Torino 1997, Italian transl.) of a given society. This type of revolutionary development is particularly visible at the end of the 4th/beginning of the 3rd Millennium, when the cuneiform script was first introduced to a larger geographical area (pp. 28-34 and box 2.2), and at the end of the 2nd Millennium, when the alphabet – both cuneiform and linear systems – slowly became used by the populations settled in the Syro-Palestinian region (mainly in the ancient city of Ugarit and by the Arameans, pp. 189-94 and box 10.1).

To touch on the few negative points of the book, some sections are redundant and repetitive as with the description of the *babiru* ('robber' or 'vagabond' who had to abandon his/her town due to high debt loans) in the Syro-Palestinian region during the late 2nd Millennium (pp. 160 and repeated on pp. 187-88). Another criticism, evident in only a few sections of the book, is the deterministic approach sometimes adopted by the author for the interpretation of historical transformations which took place in the Ancient Near East, such as with the so-called 'Dark Age' of the 16th century (p. 125).

In conclusion, the valuable historical and archaeological subjects used by the author, as well as his demonstrated ease in dealing with Ancient Near Eastern texts, make the book one of the most reliable volumes on Ancient Near Eastern history and a useful companion for students and scholars seeking an up-to-date text for supporting their research.

Nicola Laneri

Christian Luczanits, *Buddhist Sculpture in Clay. Early Western Himalayan Art, Late 10th to Early 13th Centuries*, Serindia Publications, Chicago 2004, XIV-353 pp., 322 figs., pls. and plans mostly in colour. ISBN 1-932476-02-4.

This monograph represents the first detailed and extensive survey of clay sculpture in Spiti, Kinnaur and neighbouring areas, Lahul as well as Ladakh during the renaissance of Buddhism in western Tibet and its periphery, from the turn of the 10th century, when Buddhist art still flourished in India and in the Kashmir Valley.

The book – dedicated to the memory of the late art historian Maurizio Taddei, who initially guided the author's research – is divided into four chapters preceded by a preface (pp. IX-X), acknowledgements (pp. XI-XIII), a note on spellings and pronunciation (p. XIV), and an introduction with two maps (pp. 1-9). Chapter One (pp. 11-19) focuses on the classical Indian technique of clay modelling – of which little evidence is otherwise extant – and iconometry (pp. 12-17), on sculptural techniques in the western Himalayas (pp. 17-18), as well as on early clay statuary in central and southern Tibet (pp. 18-19). The main body of the volume is represented by Chapter Two (pp. 21-195), where the author describes clay sculpture found in major and minor western Himalayan religious foundations – both early, such as Tabo and Poo, and 12th-century, such as Nako and Dungkar – once part of the western Tibetan kingdom, as well as in religious establishments at Alchi, Mangyu and Sumda, in Ladakh.

Chapter Three (pp. 197-279) focuses on the iconography of the various categories of images (Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, goddesses, protectors of the faith), their arrangement in temples and iconographic programmes, style and composition (including the relationship of sculptures and paintings), the ornamentation, thrones and frames of statues, as well as construction techniques and materials. Three appendices (pp. 295-303) describe the iconography of the sculptural mandalas at Tabo and Sumda, and report an inscription at Nako.



These are followed by the notes to the next (pp. 304-22), an extensive bibliography (pp. 323-36), an index (pp. 337-50) and a glossary (pp. 351-53).

The author distinguishes two successive artistic traditions in the late 10th-century and in the 11th-century artistic production at Tabo and related centres: one, corresponding to the beginning of the reformation of Buddhism initiated by the religious king Ye shes 'od and largely carried out under his rule, characterized by the representation of three Buddha families; the other focused on the *yoga tantra* tradition and the five-family configuration centred on Vairocana, which had developed in India after the three-family one. In the 12th-century foundations Christian Luczanits detects two diverging stylistic traditions: an eastern one, with Nako and Dungkar representing the continuation of the Indo-Tibetan aesthetic idiom then characterizing the western Tibetan artistic production; and a western one, more closely associated to Alchi and related monuments (cf. p. 123). The religious art flourishing in Ladakh during the 12th and early 13th century represents a unique tradition, on one hand reflecting coeval developments in Kashmirian art and on the other showing the influence of central Tibetan art (cf. p. 195). The continuation of the tradition of clay sculpture during the 14th and 15th centuries with reference to western Tibet, Kinnaur and Ladakh is briefly surveyed in Chapter Four (pp. 281-93).

Some of the images analysed by the author represent aesthetically significant examples of the artistic history of the areas he takes into consideration; others are the less sophisticated product of provincial artists, recording the cultural and religious history of the sites where they are found. Indeed the aesthetic quality of many of the statues modelled in the western Himalayas is generally inferior to that of coeval images fashioned in the main religious centres of western Tibet; to that effect, one may compare for example the soft modelling of the legs and feet of the standing *bodhisattvas* extant at Tholing (figs. 14-15, p. 32), with the rather stiff one of those belonging to the standing *bodhisattvas* at Tabo (figs. 19-22, pp. 36-37).

One of the several merits of Luczanits's work lies indeed in recording a variety of forms

reflecting local artistic idioms, which were obviously felt to be able to convey their religious message adequately, appealing to the devotee's sensibility in the same essential manner afforded by Romanesque art with the eclipse of 'classical' Hellenistic aesthetics. In that respect the book indirectly performs a further role: of making the attentive reader more aware of the gulf dividing the Western perception of Indo-Tibetan art from that of the devotees ordering images and of the artists producing them: to the latter two categories, the aesthetic quality of an image is secondary to its essentially religious function of being a visual support of the faith; whereas to the former – generally biased by post-medieval aesthetic prejudices largely based on notions of 'originality' and 'uniqueness' – an image must be first of all a 'work of art'.

Another important feature of this book is represented by the fact that the author does not deal with images in an abstract way, separating them from their religious environment – as they all too often are in museums and private collections – but always contextualizes them within the complex environment in which they were produced: religious (in their close connection with textual sources), cultural, historical, economic and artistic; he furthermore relates them to coeval painting as well as wood-carving (cf. pp. 228-33).

To the art historian, the greatest merit of this book probably lies in the fact that, on the very grounds of his detailed historical, iconographic and stylistic analyses, Luczanits suggests specific datings for the various temples he takes into consideration (see for example pp. 164, 167 and 170 for Mangyu).

The text seems flawless even in relatively minor details; for instance the author does not follow the recent Western trend to confuse the category of *bodhisattvas* with that of Buddhist goddesses – whom texts regard as inferior to the former even in their iconometric proportions – a fashion that has brought to the coinage of an odd expression, 'female *bodhisattva*', not to be found in Indo-Tibetan religious literature contemporary to the works of art taken into considerations.

The only kind of criticism that may be addressed to this remarkable study seems to be of a minor kind. For instance the expressions

'Central Tibet' and 'Central Tibetan' are used to include areas which – geographically speaking – are found in 'southern' Tibet even by Tibetan standards (lHo kha). The implication that there is no such area as southern Tibet – untenable from a logical point of view – seems to echo the representation of Tibet which the dGe lugs religious order imposed after the 5th Dalai Lama had south-western Tibet conquered by his Mongol allies and betrays a centralist trend that has eventually led most art historians to overlook the special role played by southern and south-western Tibet in the establishment of the most important artistic schools in the Land of Snows from the 15th century onwards.

Tibetan art-historical studies in the last decades have not always followed the methodology indicated by Giuseppe Tucci; since the publication of *Indo-Tibetica* in the 1930s and of *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* in 1949, they have often been left in the hands of people having neither a proper historical training nor a relevant linguistic background. In terms of use, edition, translation and publication of textual and epigraphic sources specifically related to Tibetan art, only David Jackson's work may be compared to Tucci's in terms of amount and quality.

Christian Luczanits's book belongs to the small group of works having marked real progress in the history of Tibetan art in the last fifty years. The result of over a decade of extensive fieldwork and research, it owes much of its value to the author's linguistic competence. It fills a gap in Tibetan art historical studies, particularly in the field of clay sculpture – a topic generally either neglected or snobbed by art historians –, and in fact affords more information than announced in its subtitle. The only specialised study devoted to an important artistic tradition having survived to this day, this groundbreaking and comprehensive monograph is well written and lavishly illustrated; it represents a must for specialized libraries and scholars, as well as a welcome addition to both public and private libraries. Incidentally, the documentation upon which it is based is largely available online on the site <http://www.univie.ac.at/itba/>.

Erberto Lo Bue

Giuseppe Tucci, *Il paese delle donne dai molti mari*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2005, 285 pp.

This book is a republication of twenty-four essays and articles written by Giuseppe Tucci between 1933 and 1956 for several Italian periodicals including, among others, the review published by IsMEO until 1943 – *Asiatica*, the *Bollettino della R. Società Asiatica Italiana*, *La Nuova Antologia*. The republication of these works by Tucci, which were printed beside with his scientific research, testify the intense activity of a distinguished orientalist who did not shrink from high quality popularizing works. The book's editor is a national daily journalist, Stefano Malatesta, who wrote a brief introduction to Giuseppe Tucci's writings which contains several errors, such as when he claims that in India he had 'Mircea Eliade as a colleague'. Tucci was teaching Chinese and Italian in India, and the young student Mircea Eliade had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the Italian orientalist. Shortly after Mr Malatesta mentions how in the mountains between Simla and the Kashmir (Tucci) had met practically all the most famous explorers of the time, from Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein to Paul Pelliot! Sven Hedin and Giuseppe Tucci never met. Between 1949 and 1950, when I was studying in Stockholm with Bernhard Karlgren, I visited the home of the famous Swedish explorer three times. He regretted not having met the Italian Tibetologist. Paul Pelliot was in China in early 1900, when Tucci was aged six. They met in Rome before World War II, although not in the Asian mountains. With regard to Aurel Stein, Tucci spoke to me of his grave in Kabul. In his introduction, Malatesta claims that Tucci was a 'visionary like the early saints and prophets'; let us leave aside this 'visionary' interpretation, which represents the outcome of a single conversation he had with the orientalist and which I do not share. Another criticism that must be made of Malatesta is not to have published the full articles, and to have omitted numerous references and acknowledgments to personalities of the contemporary political and scientific world. Although perhaps not quite censorship, this represented something rather