

# Asian Art

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# Brief Contents

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Preface ix • Acknowledgments xi • Introduction xii

## PART ONE

### South and Southeast Asia 1

---

- 1 The Rise of Cities and Birth of the Great Religions: Early Indian Art 2
- 2 Religious Art in the Age of Royal Patronage: The Medieval Period 24
- 3 India Opens to the World: The Early Modern Period 50
- 4 India and the International Scene: The Modern and Contemporary Periods 80
- 5 At the Crossroads: The Arts of Southeast Asia 102

## PART TWO

### China 124

---

- 6 Ritual and Elite Arts: The Neolithic Period to the First Empires 126
- 7 Looking Outward: The Six Dynasties and Sui and Tang Dynasties 146
- 8 Art, Conquest, and Identity: The Five Dynasties Period and Song and Yuan Dynasties 170
- 9 The City and the Market in Chinese Art: The Ming and Qing Dynasties 194
- 10 The Push for Modernization: 1912 to the Present 220

## PART THREE

### Korea and Japan 240

---

- 11 An Unknown Land, A People Divided: Korean Art from Prehistory to Present 242
- 12 The Way of the Gods and the Path of the Buddha: Japanese Art from Prehistory to the Asuka Period 276
- 13 External Influences and Internal Explorations: The Nara and Heian Periods 298
- 14 Strife and Serenity: Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama Periods 324
- 15 From Isolation to Internationalism: Edo Period to the Present 354

Glossary 382

Bibliography 387

Credits 398

Index 400

# Contents

---

Preface IX  
Acknowledgments XI  
Introduction XII

## PART ONE

### South and Southeast Asia 1

---

#### 1 The Rise of Cities and Birth of the Great Religions: Early Indian Art 2

##### THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION 3

Emerging Cityscapes: Mohenjo Daro and Harappa 3  
The Remains of Daily Life 5

##### THE VEDIC PERIOD AND THE ORIGINS OF HINDUISM 9

##### BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST ART 9

The Stupa and its Decoration 9  
The Maurya Empire: Ashoka and his Columns 10  
The Development of Stupa Decoration 11  
The Origins of the Buddha Image: Mathura and Gandhara 14  
Early Buddhist Caves and Monastic Complexes: Ajanta and Bamiyan 18

##### JAINISM AND THE DEPICTION OF THE DIVINE 21

Jain Temples and their Sculpture 21

##### OTHER TRADITIONS OF SCULPTURE 22

##### BOXES

###### ■ CLOSER LOOK

Conveying Narrative in Buddhist Reliefs 12

###### ■ POINT OF VIEW

A Story from the Past Lives of the Buddha 13

###### ■ CONTEXT

Buddhist Symbols and *Mudras* 16

#### 2 Religious Art in the Age of Royal Patronage: The Medieval Period 24

##### THE RITUAL AND ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENTS OF HINDUISM 25

Gods and Goddesses 25  
Literature 28  
The Hindu Temple and its Sculpture 28

##### EARLY HINDU TEMPLES 28

North Indian Temples of the Gupta Era 28  
The Temples of the Deccan 31  
Mamallapuram in South India 32

##### THE CONVERGENCE OF JAIN, BUDDHIST, AND HINDU TRADITIONS 34

Sculpture of the Gupta Era 34  
The Three Religions of Ellora 36

##### BUDDHISM IN SRI LANKA 38

##### LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE 38

Orissa and Eastern Indian Traditions 39  
Jain and Hindu Temples in Gujarat 39  
Eroticism and Khajuraho in Central India 40  
Chola Temples and their Bronzes in Southern India 42

##### MEDIEVAL PAINTINGS AND MANUSCRIPTS 44

Buddhist Palm-leaf Manuscripts of India and Nepal 44  
Jain Manuscripts of Western India 45

##### SOUTH ASIAN TEXTILES AND THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE MARKET 46

Dyed Textiles and their Production 47  
Connections to Egypt and Southeast Asia 47

##### BOXES

###### ■ CONTEXT

The Hindu Temple 29

###### ■ POINT OF VIEW

Part III of the *Vishnudharmottarapurana* 35

###### ■ CLOSER LOOK

Chola-Period Sculptures of Shiva Nataraja 43

#### 3 India Opens to the World: The Early Modern Period 50

##### THE ARRIVAL OF PERSIAN COURT CULTURE AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM 51

Islam 52

##### THE DELHI SULTANATES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES 53

The Qutb Mosque 53  
Regional Sultanates in the North 54  
The Painting and Literary Traditions of Northern India 57  
The Decorative Arts of Northern India 58

##### THE DECCAN SULTANATES, VIJAYANAGARA, AND SOUTHERN INDIA 59

The Sultanates of the Deccan 59  
The Kingdom of Vijayanagara 62  
The Nayakas of Madurai 64

##### THE MUGHAL EMPIRE 64

Architecture of the Mughal Empire 65  
Painting for the Mughal Emperors 68  
Decorative Arts from the Mughal Court 71

##### EUROPEANS AND EUROPEAN ART IN INDIA 74

##### ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE RAJPUT COURTS 75

Drawing and Painting 75  
Architecture 76

<b>PAINTING FROM THE PAHARI COURTS</b>	77
Pandit Seu, Manaku, and Nainsukh	77
<b>VISUAL TRADITIONS OF THE SIKH RELIGION</b>	78
The Golden Temple	78
Book Arts	78

### BOXES

- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II *Hawking* 60
- **POINT OF VIEW**  
Jahangir and the *Jahangirnama* 69
- **TECHNIQUES**  
Mordant and Resist Dyeing 71

## 4 India and the International Scene: The Modern and Contemporary Periods 80

### A MIXTURE OF TRADITIONS: EUROPEAN AND INDIAN ART IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES 81

- The British at Home 82
- European Patronage of Indian Artists 84
- Indian Patronage of European Artists 84
- European and Indian Artists Explore 87

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF EMPIRE 90

- Calcutta 90
- Bombay 90
- Delhi: The Imperial City of India 91

### VISIONS OF THE MODERN IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY 92

- Raja Ravi Varma 92
- Amrita Sher-Gil 92
- Rabindranath Tagore 93

### INDEPENDENT SOUTH ASIA 93

- Architecture 93
- Painting 94
- Film 95

### CONTEMPORARY ART: GLOBALIZATION, DIASPORA, HERITAGE 96

- M. F. Husain and Tyebe Mehta 96
- Bhupen Khakhar 98
- Raghubir Singh 98
- Shazia Sikander 99
- Rashid Rana 100
- Bharti Kher 100

### BOXES

- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Animal Studies 85
- **COMPARE**  
Thomas Daniell and Sita Ram 88

## 5 At the Crossroads: The Arts of Southeast Asia 102

### PREHISTORY 103

- Stone Monuments 103
- Early Ceramics: Ban Chiang 104
- Bronze Craft: Dong Son and Sa Huynh 104

### TRADE 107

### INDIGENOUS ART 108

- Houses 108
- Ancestor Worship and the Spirit World 109

### THE ARRIVAL OF INDIC RELIGIONS 110

- The Dvaravati Culture 110
- The Funan Culture 111
- Srivijaya 112

### THE GREAT FLOWERING 112

- Borobudur 112
- Prambanan 114
- Cham 114
- Angkor 114
- Pagan 118
- Sukhothai 119

### RISE OF ISLAM 120

### AYUTTHAYA 121

### BURMA 121

### MODERN TIMES 122

### BOXES

- **CONTEXT**  
Southeast Asian Cultures and Peoples 106
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Yun Ware Bowl 122

## PART TWO

### China 124

## 6 Ritual and Elite Arts: The Neolithic Period to the First Empires 126

### NEOLITHIC ARTIFACTS 128

- Jade 130

### ANCESTOR WORSHIP 131

- Bronzes 131

### ZHOU DYNASTY RITUAL AND POLITICAL ARTS 134

- Lacquerware 137

### THE TOMB OF THE FIRST EMPEROR OF THE QIN DYNASTY 138

### HAN DYNASTY FUNERARY ARTS, DAOISM, AND CONFUCIANISM 140

- Daoism 140
- Confucianism 143

### BOXES

- **TECHNIQUES**  
Bronze Vessels and Piece-Mold Casting 133
- **COMPARE**  
Two Bronze Vessels 137
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Funerary Banner for the Lady of Dai 141

## 7 Looking Outward: The Six Dynasties and Sui and Tang Dynasties 146

### SIX DYNASTIES PICTORIAL ARTS 148

- Handscrolls 148
- Engravings and Murals 149

### SIX DYNASTIES BUDDHIST CAVE SITES 150

- The Yungang Grottoes 151
- The Longmen Grottoes 152
- The Mogao Grottoes 153
- The Xiangtangshan Caves 155

### SIX DYNASTIES AND TANG CALLIGRAPHY 155

- Wang Xizhi 155
- Huaisu 157

### SUI AND TANG IMPERIAL CITY PLANNING AND TOMBS 157

- Chang'an 158
- Tomb Complexes 158

### SUI AND TANG DYNASTY HANDSCROLL PAINTINGS 160

- Spring Outing* 160
- The Thirteen Emperors* 160
- Night-Shining White* 162
- Wangchuan Villa* 162
- Palace Ladies Tuning the Lute* 163

### TANG BUDDHIST ART AND ARCHITECTURE 1637

- The Great Goose Pagoda 163
- The Fengxian Temple 164
- The Nanchan Temple 166
- The Library Cave 166

### DECORATIVE ARTS FOR THE TANG ELITE 167

- Metalwork 167
- Ceramics 168

### BOXES

#### ■ CONTEXT

- Chinese Cosmology and Daoist Religious Practice 148
- Calligraphy and Painting 157

#### ■ CLOSER LOOK

- Stele Depicting the Visit of Manjushri to Vimalakirti 154

#### ■ COMPARE

- Two Buddhist Images 165

#### ■ TECHNIQUES

- Tang Post-and-Beam Architecture 167

## 8 Art, Conquest, and Identity: The Five Dynasties Period and Song and Yuan Dynasties 170

### SOUTHERN TANG COURT PAINTING 172

### SOUTHERN TANG AND NORTHERN SONG LANDSCAPE PAINTERS 173

- The Dong-Ju Tradition 173
- The Li-Guo Tradition 174

### NORTHERN SONG COURTLY ARTS 176

- Painting 176
- Ceramics 177

### SONG LITERATI PAINTING AND CALLIGRAPHY 178

- Li Gonglin 179
- Huang Tingjian 181
- Mi Youren 181

### SOUTHERN SONG COURT PAINTING, CALLIGRAPHY, AND PATRONAGE 182

- The Ma-Xia School 182

### SOUTHERN SONG AND YUAN RELIGIOUS ART AND ARCHITECTURE 183

- Chan Buddhism 184
- Esoteric Buddhism 185
- Daoism 186

### YUAN COURT PAINTING 186

- Liu Guandao 187
- Wang Zhenpeng 187

### YUAN LITERATI PAINTING 187

- Qian Xuan 188
- Zhao Mengfu 189
- Guan Daosheng 189
- Huang Gongwang 189
- Wu Zhen 191
- Ni Zan 191

### BOXES

#### ■ CLOSER LOOK

- Lady Wenji's Return to China* 180

#### ■ COMPARE

- Two Landscapes 192

## 9 The City and the Market in Chinese Art: The Ming and Qing Dynasties 194

### MING AND QING POLITICS AND ARCHITECTURE 195

- Beijing 196
- The Great Wall 198
- Garden Design 198

### MING AND QING CERAMICS 200

### MING PROFESSIONAL PAINTERS 202

- Dai Jin 203
- Wu Wei 203
- Zhou Chen 203
- Qiu Ying 204
- Chen Hongshou 205

### MING LITERATI PAINTERS 206

- Shen Zhou 206
- Wen Zhengming 206
- Lu Zhi 207
- Chen Chun 208
- Xu Wei 208
- Dong Qichang 210

### MING AND QING FEMALE PAINTERS 210

- Qiu Zhu 211
- Xue Wu 212
- Chen Shu 213

### QING COURT PAINTERS 213



## QING INDIVIDUALIST AND ECCENTRIC PAINTERS 214

Gong Xian 214  
Zhu Da and Shitao 215  
Jin Nong 217  
Ren Xiong 217

### BOXES

#### ■ CLOSER LOOK

*Story of the Western Wing* 201

#### ■ POINT OF VIEW

Dong Qichang and the Northern and Southern Schools 210

#### ■ COMPARE

Two Figure Paintings 218

## 10 The Push for Modernization: 1912 to the Present 220

### REPUBLICAN-ERA PICTORIAL ARTS, 1912–1949 221

Chen Hengke 222  
Guan Zilan 222  
Woodblock Prints 223  
Huang Binhong 223  
Xu Beihong 224  
Qi Baishi 225  
Ding Cong 225

### COMMUNIST-ERA POLITICAL ARTS, 1949–1976 225

Painting 227  
Posters 230

### POST-CULTURAL REVOLUTION PAINTING, 1976 TO THE PRESENT 230

Luo Zhongli 230  
Wu Guanzhong 231  
Fang Lijun 231  
Yu Youhan 232

### PAINTERS WORKING OUTSIDE

#### MAINLAND CHINA 232

Zao Wou-ki 234  
Chang Dai-chien 234

### INSTALLATIONS, PERFORMANCES, AND NEW MEDIA, 1980S TO THE PRESENT 235

Xu Bing 235  
Cai Guo-Qiang 235  
Ai Weiwei 236  
Phoebe Ching-ying Man 236  
Zhang Huan 237  
Lin Tianmiao 237

### BOXES

#### ■ POINT OF VIEW

Mao Zedong on Art and Literature 226

#### ■ COMPARE

Two Sculptural Works 233

#### ■ CLOSER LOOK

*United Nations China Monument: Temple of Heaven* 238

## PART THREE

### Korea and Japan 240

## 11 An Unknown Land, A People Divided: Korean Art from Prehistory to the Present 242

### NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE 244

### THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD 245

Goguryeo 245  
Baekje 246  
Silla 247

### BUDDHISM AND KOREA 248

### QUEEN SEONDEOK 249

### UNIFIED SILLA KINGDOM 249

### GORYEO DYNASTY 251

Goryeo Society and Buddhism 251  
Goryeo Ceramics 252  
Decline of the Goryeo Dynasty 255

### JOSEON DYNASTY 256

Joseon Architecture 257  
Joseon Ceramics 259  
Joseon Painting 261  
Joseon Women Artists 265  
Fall of the Joseon Dynasty 266

### COLONIZATION AND WAR 266

The Korean War 267  
Women and Art 267

### ART IN NORTH KOREA 268

Kim Il-sung's Legacy 268

### ART IN SOUTH KOREA 269

Postwar Period Painting:  
Park Seo-bo and Lee Ufan 269  
Painting in the 1980s 270  
Art and Technology: Paik Nam June 271  
Artistic Developments in the 1990s 273  
Art in the Twenty-First Century 274

### BOXES

#### ■ CONTEXT

Printing and Book Production 253

#### ■ CLOSER LOOK

*Women on Tano Day* 264

## 12 The Way of the Gods and the Path of the Buddha: Japanese Art from Prehistory to the Asuka Period 276

### SHAMANISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHINTO 277

### JOMON PERIOD 278

### YAYOI PERIOD 281

Queen Himiko and Empress Jingu 284

**KOFUN PERIOD** 284

**THE SUN GODDESS AMATERASU  
AND THE SHINTO SHRINE AT ISE** 287

**EARLY BUDDHIST ART** 288

- Empress Suiko and Prince Shotoku 289
- Horyu-ji 290
- Chugu-ji 295
- The Relationship between Buddhism and Shinto 297

**BOXES**

- **POINT OF VIEW**  
Japanese Shamanism 279
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Tamamushi Shrine 294

**13** External Influences and Internal  
Explorations: The Nara and  
Heian Periods 298

**NARA PERIOD** 299

- Chinese Influences 300
- Buddhism under Emperor Shomu and Empress Komyo 301
- Nara Court: Later Years 305

**HEIAN PERIOD** 307

- Esoteric Buddhism, the Arts, and Society 307
- Pure Land Buddhism, the Arts, and Society 312
- Heian Court Life 314
- Calligraphy, Literature, and Painting 317
- Shinto and the Arts 322
- Behind the Scenes 323

**BOXES**

- **TECHNIQUES**  
Joined-Block Wood Sculpture 314
- **POINT OF VIEW**  
Sei Shonagon and *The Pillow Book* 316
- **CONTEXT**  
The Japanese Writing System 318
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Prince Genji 321

**14** Strife and Serenity:  
Kamakura, Muromachi,  
and Momoyama Periods 324

**KAMAKURA PERIOD** 325

- Military Culture 325
- Reconstruction and Renewal 327
- Kamakura Period Sculpture 327
- Kamakura Period Painting 330
- Zen Buddhism 334

**MUROMACHI (ASHIKAGA) PERIOD** 334

- Zen Ink Painting 335
- The Zen Dry Garden 337
- Zen Buddhist Convents 339
- Zen Buddhist Statuary 340
- Noh Theater 340
- The Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku) 342
- Wabi, Sabi, Shibui* 342
- Collapse of the Ashikaga Shogunate 343

**MOMOYAMA PERIOD** 343

- Castles 343
- Shoin* 344
- Painted Screens 345
- Textiles: Noh Robes 348
- Tea Ceremony 349
- Japan's Invasion of Korea 353

**BOXES**

- **COMPARE**  
Two Guardian Figures 329
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
The Tea Garden 350
- **POINT OF VIEW**  
Lifestyles of the Recluse and Ruler 352

**15** From Isolation to Internationalism:  
Edo Period to the Present 354

**CLOSED DOORS: EDO PERIOD** 355

- Architecture 356
- Painting 357
- Ukiyo-e*: Pictures of the Floating World 364
- Textiles 368
- Women Artists 370
- Zen Buddhist Art for the Masses 372
- Edo Period, Final Years 372

**MEIJI PERIOD** 372

- Painting 372
- Separation of Shinto and Buddhism 374
- Japan's Growing Militarism 374

**SHOWA PERIOD** 374

- Kenzo Tange 374
- The Gutai Group 375

**FROM 1989 TO THE PRESENT** 376

- Yanagi Yukinori 376
- Dumb Type 376
- Morimura Yasumasa 377
- Takashi Murakami 380
- Yayoi Kusama 381

**BOXES**

- **TECHNIQUES**  
Woodblock Printing 364
- **CLOSER LOOK**  
Interior of a Kabuki Theater 350
- **COMPARE**  
Two Nudes 379

- Glossary 382
- Bibliography 387
- Credits 398
- Index 400

# Preface

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## A book, tight shut, is but a block of paper.

Chinese proverb

Asia is the largest and most densely populated continent in the world, and Asian art, spanning thousands of years, is breathtaking for its richness, ingenuity, and diversity. Magnificent temples, lavish tombs, ritual bronzes, exquisite gold crowns, beautifully crafted ceramics, sumptuous textiles, fine calligraphy and paintings, colorful woodblock prints, and artfully designed gardens fall under the umbrella of Asian art. In addition to these traditional arts, Asia's dynamic contemporary art scene provides an abundance of innovative, thought-provoking works.

Since the 1960s, and particularly during the last decade, Asian art history has undergone a radical transformation in scholarship, methodology, and pedagogy. Remarkable new archaeological discoveries, dramatic developments in contemporary Asian art, and revised methods of studying/teaching art history have contributed to this overhaul. This book is a response to the need for a new Asian art survey text.

As with any survey text, the authors' challenge is to avoid overwhelming the student with an encyclopedic deluge of information or reducing the content to a dry list of art works. We have drawn upon our experiences teaching Asian art history courses and our own scholarly research to distill the subject's richness into an accessible narrative that provides a starting point for the study of Asian art. For purposes of clarity, the material is organized according to region and chronology. The arts of South and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan—positioned within their societal contexts—provide the focus of the book. Relationships between the various regions are discussed, for example, the diffusion of Buddhism from India to other parts of Asia, and its widespread impact on the arts. Artworks in a broad range of media are carefully selected and examined to illuminate culturally important images and diverse viewpoints. The text balances formal considerations with contextual issues.

Examples of Asian art and architecture are examined against a backdrop of religious, political, historical, economic, and social issues. *Asian Art* provides clear explanations of religious beliefs and philosophies that inform the art, for example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Daoism, Confucianism, and Shinto. The latest developments in Asian scholarship are discussed, including contemporary art and current trends and the contributions of women artists and patrons. The representation of women in Asian art highlights roles assigned to Asian women

throughout history and the underlying conditions for women within Asian societies. Consideration is given to neglected areas of scholarship relating to indigenous Asian peoples, such as the Ainu and their culture in Japan.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

The text includes high-quality color images, maps, diagrams, site plans, a glossary, and a bibliography. Online audio pronunciations of personal and geographical names and terms are included for instructors and students unfamiliar with Asian languages. A series of Cross-cultural Explorations questions at the end of each chapter encourages students to explore the interconnections between the artistic and cultural traditions across Asia. Also incorporated into the text are box categories that allow the student to pause in order to go more in-depth, or encourage critical thinking about key concepts they have just learned:

■ **CLOSER LOOK** focuses on one artwork in each chapter, examining it in detail with explanatory labels that point out the work's specific features. In Chapter 5, an early twentieth-century Burmese lacquerware bowl is the highlighted artwork, and attention is given to the materials comprising the object and the imagery of palace life decorating its surface. In Chapter 11, the painting of a festival, Tano Day, by the Korean artist Sin Yunbok (1758–?) is examined and an explanation provided as to why it was a controversial painting for the period.

■ **COMPARE** introduces and discusses two artworks, placed side by side. A list of questions invites the reader to make their own comparisons between the two works based on what they have learned in the chapter. In Chapter 8, two Chinese landscape paintings created hundreds of years apart, one by Fan Kuan (ca. 960–1030) and the other by Wang Meng (1308–1385), are presented for comparison. In Chapter 15, two nudes, one a multi-media work by the contemporary Japanese artist Morimura Yasumasa (b. 1951), and the other, a nineteenth century oil painting by French artist Édouard Manet (1832–1883) are placed side by side to underscore connections between modernity and the past, and Asia and Europe.

■ **TECHNIQUES** explains and illustrates key techniques used by the artists to create their masterpieces. In Chapter 6, the process of piece-mold casting used to make ancient Chinese bronzes is explained, and in Chapter 15, the techniques developed to create an eighteenth-century Japanese woodblock print are revealed.

■ **CONTEXT** provides important background information that enriches the understanding of the artworks in the main discussion. In Chapter 1, which includes an introduction to Buddhism and Buddhist art in India, various symbolic elements and hand gestures (*mudras*) that convey the Buddha's exalted state are highlighted, and in Chapter 7, a discussion of Chinese cosmology and Daoist religious practice illuminates the interpretation of many Chinese artworks.

■ **POINT OF VIEW** features an extract from original source materials to highlight the content discussed in each chapter. For the discussion of seventeenth-century Mughal art in India in Chapter 3, a section from the Mughal emperor Jahangir's writings on art is provided. This supplementary material may also address the chapter's content from a contemporary perspective to emphasize connections between the past and present. Chapter 12 discusses the influence of shamanism in early Japanese art, and Point of View provides a reading on current shamanic practices in Okinawa.

The Pearson eText available within MySearchLab lets students access their textbook any time, anywhere, and any way they want. Online audio pronunciations of personal and geographical names and terms are included in the eText for instructors and students unfamiliar with Asian languages. Instructor PowerPoints for most images in the book are available to adopting instructors. Note that every effort has been made to obtain digital permissions for all images used in the printed book, but there are some images sources that have denied all electronic rights. To learn more, please visit [www.pearsonhighered.com/art](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/art).

## THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

A book of this size and breadth is the result of teamwork. Marika Sardar wrote the chapters on Indian art, while Miranda Bruce-Mitford composed the one on Southeast Asia. Lara C. W. Blanchard wrote the Introduction and the section on Chinese art, and Dorinda Neave contributed the section on the arts of Korea and Japan.

One of the great privileges of writing a book on the history of Asian art is to experience doors opening both on personal and professional levels, and to meet extraordinary people

thousands of miles away who contribute their time and expertise to the project. All four authors of this text experienced multiple examples of this type of collaboration, an essential component of scholarly research. One such encounter involved a quest to decipher a complicated Chinese script accompanying the sixteenth-century painting of the Zen Buddhist nun Shun'oku-Soei, by Tosa Mitsumochi (see Chapter 14, FIG. 14-21). This hanging scroll is housed in Daiji-in temple, Kyoto. At first I asked Kyoto-based researcher Mineko Matano for assistance. The enigmatic classical Chinese characters proved too complicated for her and Toda Jitsuzan, the head priest at Daiji-in temple, to decode, so she enlisted the help of Kyoto University professor Ken Mikata. He also found the inscriptions difficult to decipher, not only because of the old-fashioned writing but also because of the esoteric Zen Buddhist terms contained within the text. Mikata forwarded the text to Sotetsu Abe, a retired president of Hanazono, a Zen Buddhist University in Kyoto, for his scholarly input. Abe was able to decipher the text, and independent scholar Ms. Toki Okada researched the difficult Zen Buddhist terms. Finally, Mikata, Okada, and Matano gathered to discuss the results of their collaborative efforts and Matano translated the text into English. She gave the head priest of Daiji-in temple the decoded text in Japanese and English, much to his delight, because the portrait had always been a fascinating mystery for him.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Asian Art History is a discipline that has undergone many changes since its emergence in the early 1900s, partly in response to geopolitical shifts. Asia today, in all its facets, offers a wealth of visual material for the art historian to reassess as new discoveries come to light and fresh ways of studying the arts emerge. In the twenty-first century, popular questions debated by scholars include:

- What is Asian art?
- How is Asian art exhibited in museums and galleries?
- How should it be taught in schools, colleges, and universities to address the realities of our changing world?

We hope that this text will provide a starting point for further discussion of these issues and above all ignite students' interest in the art and cultures of Asia.

*Dorinda Neave*

# Acknowledgments

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**FROM DORINDA NEAVE:** In addition, I would like to extend thanks to Mineko Matano, Toda Jitsuzan, Ken Mikata, Toki Okada, and Sotetsu Abe (who have already been mentioned in the Preface), and a very special thanks go to Patricia Fister for her encouragement of the project and careful scrutiny of the chapters on Japanese art. Capilano University generously funded research trips to Japan. Thank you to the helpful librarians and staff at Nichibunken (International Research Centre for Japanese Studies) in Kyoto. Thanks also to Professor Ro Myoungcho of Seoul National University for his generous sharing of visual images.

Family members Venetia Halstead, Barry, Samuel, and Davina Shell offered steady encouragement throughout this project, which was years in the making from conception to publication.

**FROM LARA C. W. BLANCHARD:** I am happy to acknowledge the Provost's Office at Hobart and William Smith Colleges for a sabbatical leave that provided time to write. I thank my colleagues in the Art and Architecture Department, and my students; interactions with them over a dozen years have helped shape my own introductory course on Asian art history, and much of what is written here would doubtless be familiar to them. I am especially indebted to Roslyn Hammers of the University of Hong Kong, who generously agreed to read drafts of the chapters on Chinese art, providing invaluable suggestions for improvement. Finally, I am grateful for the unflagging support and encouragement of many friends and family members, particularly Steve, Daria, and Shirley Blanchard; Audrey and Pat Thompson; and Douglas Williams.

**FROM MARIKA SARDAR:** I would like to thank colleagues (and friends) Navina Haidar, Deborah Hutton, Laura Weinstein, Dipti Khera, and Tamara Sears.

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# Introduction

**I have a wife as  
familiar to me  
as the hem of this well-worn robe  
and thus these distant travels  
darken my heart with sorrow.**

**Ariwara no Narihira**

There is no single Asian aesthetic, just as there is no such thing as an essentially Western aesthetic. Any assessment of the style, purpose, or meaning of art must consider an object's historical context: The arts of Asia differ according to their regional cultures in a particular period and the social groups of their makers. Still, certain elements are seen repeatedly in examples of the arts of South, East, and Southeast Asia. Asian artists tend to foreground the meaning of imagery, particularly as developed in literary, religious, or philosophical texts. In creating visual representations, an artist may employ **naturalism** (making the subject look as it does in nature—a rhetorical stance that affirms meaning by showing things as they actually are), exaggeration (calling viewer's attention to particular qualities of an object), or both simultaneously, and these choices help convey an artist's intent to the viewer. In addition, Asian artists often rely on a demonstrably subjective viewpoint, an approach that represents a counterpoint to the objectivity sought in some art traditions, such as the scientific interest in anatomy seen in the drawings of the Italian Renaissance, or the French Impressionists' interest in the qualities of light. For these reasons, Asian art is often understood as expressive: It insists

upon its link to creative practice and upon the importance of the maker's imagination and/or perception.

The Japanese painter Ogata Korin's (1658–1716) *Irises at Yatsushashi* (*Eight-Plank Bridge*) exemplifies the importance of both meaning and expression in Asian art (FIG. I-1). At first glance, these irises are undeniably beautiful: The artist renders the blossoms in indigo and blue, and the leaves in emerald green, against a background of glimmering gold leaf. More importantly, though, this subject, which Korin painted many times, is profoundly meaningful. Korin's irises grow in clumps near a low wooden bridge, alluding to a particular moment in the *Tales of Ise*, written by the poet and courtier Ariwara no Narihira (825–880). Narihira recorded how, after he was banished from the capital, Kyoto, he and his companions paused beside a marsh and composed poetry about irises growing beside an eight-planked bridge. His own poem is cited above: a lament about parting from his beloved wife that ostensibly does not concern irises, yet contains a hidden reference to them. In Japanese, the poem reads:

Karagoromo  
kitsutsu nare ni shi  
tsuma shi areba  
harubaru kinoru  
tabi o shi zo omou.

The first syllable of each line—*ka-ki-tsu-ha-ta*—echoes the Japanese word for the rabbit-ear iris, *kakitsubata*. Since the ninth century, the subject of irises beside a planked bridge has



**I-1 • Ogata Korin  
IRISES AT  
YATSUSHASHI  
(EIGHT-PLANK  
BRIDGE)**

Japanese, Edo period, ca. 1709–1716. One of a pair of six-panel screens, ink, color, and gold leaf on paper, 5' 4<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" x 11' 6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" (163.7 x 352.4 cm) each. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Louisa Eldridge McBurney Gift, 1953, 53.7.1 & 53.7.2.

reminded those familiar with Japanese literature of Ariwara no Narihira's sorrow. Ogata Korin's painting embodies this emotion through its references to the witty court culture of the Heian period (794–1185).

## CULTURES AND LANGUAGES

The multiple regional cultures within Asia (**MAP I-1**) have undeniable connections, particularly in the realms of religions, philosophies, and languages, yet the distinctive qualities of each culture reveal the fallacy of perceiving Asia as a monolithic entity. Trade, travel, and invasion served as major mechanisms for the transmission of cultural elements. Commonalities between cultures increase with geographical proximity: Thus, East Asian cultures, for example, share certain practices that do not appear in South or Southeast Asia. The ensuing chapters detail many of the defining elements of the separate cultures of these regions; here, we consider those elements that are shared.

Numerous religions originated in Asia, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in India (all responses to the earlier Vedic tradition); ancestor worship and Daoism (both a religion and a philosophy) in China; **shamanistic** practices in both Korea and Japan; and Shinto in Japan. Some of these religions spread throughout Asia. Asian societies also accommodated the practice of foreign religions. To cite only a few examples, the capital of Tang dynasty China (618–907) was home to practicing Nestorian Christians, Jews, and Muslims, while Islam was the

faith of the rulers of India's Mughal dynasty (1526–1858). Shinto shrines were constructed in Korea during the Japanese occupation, and Christianity remains a significant religious practice in Korea today.

Of all these religions, Buddhism comes closest to a unifying element in Asian cultures, although the practice includes two major traditions—Theravada and Mahayana—and distinct schools such as Pure Land, Esoteric, and Chan or Zen Buddhism. From its origins in northern India and Nepal, Buddhist practice spread southward as far as Sri Lanka and thence to Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia. It also traveled north to Central Asia and from there, via the Silk Road, to China; transmission of Buddhist practice also occurred between Tibet and China. Ultimately, exchanges between China and Korea, Korea and Japan, and China and Japan ensured that Buddhism thrived throughout East Asia, even as it disappeared from India. Still, the introduction of Buddhism to such disparate cultures meant that in each case, the local practice of Buddhism developed distinctive characteristics through interaction with indigenous religions and philosophies. Chinese society saw significant tensions between followers of Buddhism, practitioners of Daoism, and adherents of Confucian philosophy. In Japan, on the other hand, a more eclectic approach to religion meant that an individual could practice both Shinto and Buddhism. Compared to Buddhism, Hinduism proved to be a more enduring practice in India and also developed a following in Southeast Asia, but did not spread beyond these regions.



MAP I-1 • ASIA

Multiple languages are spoken in India, but perhaps the most important was Sanskrit, an Indo-European language. Most Buddhist and Hindu names and terms are rendered in this language, and Sanskrit captions are sometimes found in works of art. Sanskrit also became the basis for written languages in Southeast Asian cultures, despite the dissimilarity of the region's spoken languages. (An exception is northern Vietnam, which because of its proximity to China developed a written language based on Chinese characters.) In India, Arabic and Persian scripts emerged as decorative elements in art and architecture, reflecting connections with both the Islamic world and Persian culture.

East Asian cultures had multiple links beyond the adoption of Buddhist practice. Perhaps most important were the linguistic connections, despite the fact that the many dialects of Chinese (actually more like separate languages) belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and Korean and Japanese, which appear to be related to each other, are sometimes classified among the **Altaic** languages. The Chinese dialects have shared a standard written language of characters (*hanzi*) since the early imperial period, with pictograms and ideograms used to write literary and, later, vernacular forms of the language. Chinese characters also served as the basis for the written forms of both Korean and Japanese. Koreans used Chinese characters (known there as *hanja*) exclusively until the development of an alphabetic system—now known as *hangul*—in the fifteenth century. *Hangul* became increasingly popular, particularly among certain social groups, and became the official writing system in the late nineteenth century; now the use of Chinese characters in Korean writing is rare. The Japanese also adopted Chinese characters (known in Japanese as *kanji*) and modified them to create

two syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana*, which are phonetic systems for writing Japanese syllables and collectively referred to as *kana*. Today, the Japanese mix *kanji* and *kana* in everyday writing, with characters and *hiragana* representing native Japanese words and *katakana* used for the approximation of loan words from other languages. In the early periods, however, the educated Japanese elite wrote in Chinese characters, women used *hiragana* to write vernacular Japanese, and Buddhist monks developed *katakana* as a phonetic shorthand (see Pronunciation of Asian Languages, below).

The use of Chinese characters in both Korea and Japan meant that education included classical Chinese texts. Consequently, elements of Daoist cosmology became familiar throughout East Asia (although neither the Korean nor the Japanese peoples adopted the practice of religious Daoism). Aspects of Confucian philosophy, which originated in China and became the basis for its political bureaucracy, informed Korean and Japanese governing systems and social practices. Members of the Korean and Japanese elite also studied Chinese literature, especially poetry. Perhaps most significantly, in all these cultures the attention to brushwork found in both calligraphy and painting meant that writing directly on a work of art enhanced it, and many Chinese, Korean, and Japanese works of art include writing as an essential part of the composition.

Naming conventions are distinctive in the different cultures. In India, there are multiple naming conventions corresponding to different regions. In some areas people use only a single name, but where multiple names are the custom, the general order is given name first, followed by the middle name or patronymic, and then the family name. In China, Korea, and Japan,

## Pronunciation of Asian Languages

Linguists have developed multiple systems to render Sanskrit, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese words in the Roman alphabet. This book uses a modified version of the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (without the diacritical marks that indicate vowel length or aspirated consonants), as well as the Hanyu Pinyin

system for Chinese words in the Mandarin dialect (known in mainland China as *putonghua*), the Revised Romanization system for Korean, and Modified Hepburn Romanization for Japanese (but without the macrons that indicate doubled vowels).

### SANSKRIT – modified International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration

Vowels	English equivalents	Consonants	English equivalents	Consonants	English equivalents
a	mother or father	k	kite	p	butter
i	fit or feet	kh	kite + hat	ph	pay
u	wood or food	g	go	b	boy
r	butter or bird	gh	go + hat	bh	book
l	turtle	n	no or sing	y	young
e	cake	c	jay	r	red
ai	like	ch	chalk	l	law
o	bone	j	jug	v	vine
au	cloud	jh	jug + hat	s	song
		t	done	sh	shall or should
		th	tan	h	hat
		d	dog		
		dh	dog + hat		



## CHINESE – Hanyu Pinyin romanization

Initials	English equivalents	Finals	English equivalents	Finals	English equivalents
b	boy	a	father	o	ought
p	pie	ai	pie	ou	rose
m	may	ao	cloud	ong	rose + song
f	fan	an	want	u (after b, p, m, f, d, t, n, l, g, k, h, zh, ch, sh)	too
d	dog	ang	father + song	u (after j, q, x)	chew
t	toy	e	bird	ü	chew
n	no	ei	eight	ua	want
l	lie	en	fun	uai	wine
g	go	eng	lung	uan	went
k	king	i (after b, p, m, d, t, n, l, j, q, x)	feet	uang	want + song
h	hay	i (after z, c, s)	hidden	ue	wet
j	jingle	i (after zh, ch, sh)	burr	ui	way
q	cheap	ia	yacht	uo	sword
x	sheet	ian	yen	un	wood + run
zh	joy	iang	yacht + song		
ch	chalk	iao	yowl		
sh	should	ie	yet		
r	run	iu	yo-yo		
z	buzz	in	seen		
c	pets	ing	sing		
s	snake	iong	yo-yo + song		
w	wood				
y	yacht				

Apostrophes can be used to separate syllables in romanized words where the division would otherwise be unclear.

## KOREAN – Revised Romanization system

Initial consonants	English equivalents	Vowels	English equivalents	Final consonants	English equivalents
g	go	a	father	k	took
kk	great	ae	may	n	on
n	no	ya	yacht	t	pet
d	do	yae	yea		
tt	date	eo	young	l	pal
r	rose	e	end	m	stem
m	may	yeo	young	p	map
b	ball	ye	yet		
pp	boy	o	oh	ng	song
s	song	wa	water		
ss	say	wae	way		
		oe	bird		
j	jay	yo	yo-yo		
jj	just	u	food		
ch	cheap	wo	wonder		
k	king	we	wet		
t	tall	wi	we		
p	pet	yu	you		
h	hat	eu	good		
		ui	with		
		i	sheet		

## JAPANESE – Modified Hepburn Romanization

Consonants	English equivalents	Consonants	English equivalents	Vowels*	English equivalents
k	king	j	jay	a	father
g	go	n	no	i	feet
s	song	h	hay	u	too
z	zoo	p	pay	e	end
sh	sheet	b	bay	o	oh
t	tall	m	may	ya	yacht
ch	cheap	y	young	yu	you
ts	pets	r	rose	yo	yo-yo
d	day	w	wood		

\*Vowels can appear in combination (as in the word aoi, “blue”) but are always pronounced individually rather than as diphthongs.

names include both a family name and a given name, and the proper order is family name first, followed by the given name. In premodern China, artists could adopt style names—a courtesy name, literary name, or both; in contemporary society, it is usual to refer to someone by his or her full name. Japanese names operate somewhat differently; artists could take nicknames, but artists sometimes also changed their surnames to indicate affiliation with teachers. It is common to refer to a Japanese figure of the premodern era by the given name only (thus, Korin for Ogata Korin).

## ARTISTS AND PATRONS

One key to understanding the historical implications of a work of art is to consider the artist's intentions, whether he or she is following a personal inclination or working on behalf of a patron—in which case the patron's wishes also require consideration. In East Asia, it became common for scholars who created art to write an account of the circumstances that led them to make it. In later periods of Asian history, artists' names were often recorded, as signatures on works of art and sometimes in historical texts. This practice suggests a concern with the artist's identity, a circumstance that often dovetails with a culture that values the artist's perspective. (On occasion, a signature is meant to ensure accountability, as with the **terra-cotta** figures produced for the tomb complex of the First Emperor of the Chinese Qin dynasty, r. 221–210 BCE;

see FIG. 6-1.) Even in cases where an artist is wholly unknown, one may draw conclusions about the artist's intentions through an analysis of the work itself, and this represents a means of determining a work's historical significance.

If an artist is unrecorded but the patron's identity is known, this suggests that the patron's desires were paramount. Sometimes patrons were so involved in the conception of a project that they were represented visually in a work of art or at a site. A representation of the Angkor ruler Suryavarman II (also known as Paramavishnuloka, r. 1113–1150), for example, appears at Angkor Wat (FIG. 1-2; see also Chapter 5, FIG. 5-18)—significant because the ruler was the temple's patron, the temple was dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, and the ruler identified himself with Vishnu. These connections help reveal the political implications of the site. Of course, in some cases both artist and patron were known—a situation that suggests a relatively autonomous artist and a patron attracted by the artist's reputation. For example, a painting thought to be a copy after Xie Huan (ca. 1370–ca. 1452), *Literary Gathering in the Apricot Garden*, demonstrates the erudition of a group of Ming dynasty (1368–1644) court officials. Xie Huan was a court artist specializing in figure painting. The likely patron of his original work (which still survives in China) is the Grand Secretary Yang Rong (1371–1440), who hosted the depicted gathering on April 6, 1437. An unidentified court artist may have produced the version illustrated here for a second Grand Secretary, Yang Shiqi (1365–1444). Both



**1-2 • KING SURYAVARMAN II HOLDS COURT**

Cambodian, ca. 1113–1150.  
Sandstone relief. Inner walls of southern side of third gallery, Angkor Wat, Angkor.



**I-3 • After Xie Huan *LITERARY GATHERING IN THE APRICOT GARDEN (DETAIL)***

Chinese, Ming dynasty, ca. 1437. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 14 $\frac{9}{16}$ " x 7' 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (37 x 243.2 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1989, 1989.141.3.

Yang Rong and Yang Shiqi are included among the participants, with the former in red and the latter next to him in blue (FIG. I-3). Interestingly, Xie Huan's painting includes a self-portrait, a patron-approved addition that reveals the role of the court artist in the promulgation of the officials' status; the copyist did not include the figure of Xie Huan in the second version.

Generally, Asian artists can be divided into two broad groups: professionals and amateurs. Professional artists typically work for compensation, often in response to a patron's commission or the taste of the art market, whereas the amateur artist usually did not, nor did he or she receive the same sort of training. Because professional artists were generally highly skilled, they often attained high status. An exception occurs in middle-to-late imperial China, where the art of the scholar-amateurs—also known as the *literati*—came to be privileged among their own social group and at court. These artists regarded painting and calligraphy as an intellectual pursuit. A detail of Qian Xuan's (ca. 1235–before 1307) painting *Wang Xizhi Watching Geese* (FIG. I-4, see also Chapter 8, FIG. 8-25) shows the esteemed calligrapher contemplating the movements of geese swimming in a pond, a scene that emphasizes the importance of the artist's inspiration in a context where there is no patron.

Asian artists worked in a wide range of media, formats, and genres. Often an artist's training would predispose him or her to working in a particular medium—as a mural painter, for example, or a maker of objects for the tea ceremony—although some were sufficiently versatile that they could work in multiple media. (Ogata Korin, for example, was both a textile designer and a painter.) In addition, an artist usually gained a reputation as a specialist in a particular genre.

Religious art and architecture was a predominant specialty, particularly in the early period of Asian art history, although

the names of many architects of tombs, temples, and shrines were not recorded. Sculptors or painters of icons or narrative cycles that relate religious content often worked in conjunction with other artists at a religious site, or out of a workshop or studio that specialized in such subjects. The architects, sculptors, and painters who created religious art needed a firm grasp of the visual elements that conveyed aspects of belief, including **iconography**.

Many artists worked directly for Asian rulers or with prominent members of society to create art with political content, such as court painters in both India and China. For example, *Literary Gathering in the Apricot Garden* attests to the education (including connoisseurship of art) that allowed the patron, an official, to attain a prominent place at court. In India's Mughal era, the approximately 50 artists who created the illustrated *History of Akbar* (*Akbarnama*) also show how artists could glorify a ruler, in this case the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605). His *History* records his life and much of his long reign, written in courtly Persian by the historian Abu'l-Fazl. One page of the illustrated manuscript

**I-4 • Qian Xuan *WANG XIZHI WATCHING GESE (DETAIL)***

Chinese, Yuan dynasty, ca. 1295. Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 9 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (23.2 x 92.7 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ex coll.: C. C. Wang Family, Gift of The Dillon Fund, 1973, 1973.120.6.





**I-5 • AKBAR BUILDING FATEHPUR SIKRI, HISTORY OF AKBAR (AKBARNAMA)**  
 Indian, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1590–1600. Manuscript page, ink and color on paper, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (32.7 x 19.5 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

(FIG. I-5) shows Akbar supervising a number of workers as they construct the city of Fatehpur Sikri, which served as the capital from 1569 to 1585. The teams of craftsmen and builders working together to create the structures of the imperial city attest to Akbar's power, just as the intricately rendered scene that depicts them demonstrates the wealth of the court.

Connoisseurs often treated female artists as a separate social group, primarily because of the biased view that their work was inherently different from that of men. In fact, female artists can easily fit into the categories established to describe male artists. A case in point is the Japanese artist Tokuyama Gyokuran (also known as Ike Gyokuran, 1727/8–1784). Gyokuran had an artistic upbringing: Her mother and grandmother, proprietors of a teahouse in Kyoto, were accomplished *waka* poets. In her youth, Gyokuran studied with the literati painter Yanagisawa Kien (1706–1758), and perhaps through him met her husband, the artist Ike Taiga (1723–1776). Gyokuran's paintings belonged to the literati mode and demonstrated her knowledge of Chinese literature. Her painting *Peach Blossom Idyll* (FIG. I-6) is a visual

reinterpretation of a well-loved Chinese poem, "The Peach Blossom Spring," written by the recluse Tao Qian (literary name Yuanming, 365–427; see also Chapter 9, FIG. 9-18). She executes the painting in a sketchy, abstracted style that showcases different types of brushstroke—a hallmark of Chinese and Japanese literati paintings—and, unusually, colors it with hues of green, gold, blue, brown, and peach. The painting does not betray the painter's sex, nor is the subject gendered feminine.

## MEDIA AND FORMAL ANALYSIS

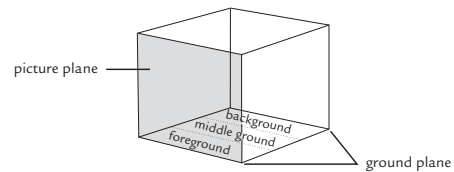
The art forms considered in this book include examples of two-dimensional art, such as painting, woodblock prints, and calligraphy; three-dimensional art, such as sculpture, ceramics, examples of the decorative arts, installations, and performances; and architecture. As in other art traditions, meaning and function are encoded in formal qualities of these arts, and thus formal analysis provides a key to understanding Asian art and architecture. In order to understand what an artist intended to convey, or



**I-6 • Tokuyama Gyokuran (also known as Ike Gyokuran) PEACH BLOSSOM IDYLL**  
 Japanese, Edo period, ca. 1750–1784. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 44 x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (111.7 x 49.5 cm). Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. Museum purchase B76D3.

the values of those for whom a work of art was made, it is useful to think of the choices that the artist made—or, alternatively, the options that the artist rejected.

The traditional media for two-dimensional Asian art include the use of ink or color (either mineral pigments or vegetable dyes), sometimes with the addition of gold or silver, on silk, paper, hemp, or plaster. Analyzing two-dimensional art requires careful consideration of multiple elements. It is logical to begin with composition, or the overall layout of forms, including whether the artist has left areas of negative space and the ways that a viewer's eye is encouraged to move. To create forms, artists could use both line and color, or focus on one to the exclusion of the other. Lines might be even in width or modulated, changing from thin to thick; the media used to make lines might be wet or dry, creating different effects. Artists applied hues of color in tints or in shades, lightly or in saturation; the approach to color might be painterly (not dependent on the use of outline). The artist could make forms that appear flat, or alternatively create a sense of mass or volume through



**I-7 • TECHNIQUES USED TO CREATE A SENSE OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE IN A TWO-DIMENSIONAL WORK OF ART.**

the use of shading or modeling. Related to the latter idea is the problem of creating a sense of three-dimensional space or depth (FIG. I-7). Rendering recession into depth depends on some combination of techniques, including the delineation of foreground, middle ground, and background; the creation of an angle of recession; the use of atmospheric perspective (with objects in the distance appearing fainter); the use of overlap; and the use of diminishing scale (with objects in the distance appearing smaller). The viewer's vantage point might be stable, but often in Asian art the vantage point shifts, simulating the experience of looking at something from multiple angles. Proportion and scale within an artwork might be naturalistic, but Asian artists commonly use **hieratic scale**, a system in which the most important figure is rendered largest.

Several of these techniques appear in Abu'l Hasan's (fl. 1600–1630) *Jahangir Embracing Shah 'Abbas* (FIG. I-8), depicting a fictional encounter between the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) and his rival Shah 'Abbas (r. 1587–1629) of Iran. The richly colored composition is arranged so that Jahangir's head is at the center and placed against a large expanse of gold, an abstract representation of the sun whose blazing glory emanates from the emperor. A hieratic scale makes Jahangir, who stands astride a lion, appear larger than the weak-looking 'Abbas, paired with a meek lamb. The use of these two symbolic animals and the placement of the rulers on top of a globe to represent the extent of their respective realms are borrowed from English royal portraits; here, the artist



**I-8 • Abu'l Hasan JAHANGIR EMBRACING SHAH 'ABBAS**

Indian, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1618. Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper, 9 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (23.8 x 15.4 cm). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Purchase, (F1945.9a).

employs allegorical devices to show that Jahangir's kingdom is larger, and, significantly, the lion pushes the lamb away from border territories disputed between the two. The fact that the picture depicts a symbolic rather than an actual event means that the artist has chosen not to create a convincing three-dimensional space, and according with conventions of Indian painting, the bodies of the figures appear flat, their interaction a bit awkward. Adhering to the strict rules of Mughal portraiture, however, the faces are rendered with great detail and with delicate shading that gives them a more three-dimensional appearance. Furthermore, Jahangir is shown in strict profile, while his rival's face is turned in a three-quarter view, which indicates Jahangir's exalted status.

A different approach to painting appears in the Chinese artist Wang Zhenpeng's (1280–1329) *Vimalakirti and the Doctrine of Nonduality* (FIG. I-9). This painting is rendered in ink on silk with no use of color, and the artist depicts the scene using various brush techniques. Thin, even lines serve to define forms, while thicker, modulated lines describe swirling drapery. A couch is represented using fine lines that create a subtle pattern as well as broad washes of dilute ink. Wang Zhenpeng manipulates the tonal qualities of the ink to create a sense of mass and space, and, additionally, uses orthogonal lines and overlapping forms to indicate recession into depth. Hieratic scale reveals the prominence of the figure elevated on the couch—the layman Vimalakirti, whose understanding of Buddhist doctrine approached that of an enlightened being.

Three-dimensional examples of Asian art are typically made with media that require the subtractive process of carving, such as wood, stone, or jade, or media that can be formed using an additive process, such as metal, clay, or lacquer. The representation of mass or void in a three-dimensional object is one of the most important considerations. For a sculpture, the viewer's

vantage point is significant: Objects sculpted “in the round” can be viewed from front, back, and sides, while a **relief**—an image carved into the surface of a slab of stone or wood—is viewed only from the front. Texture becomes an important quality of surface treatment, along with color and line.

An Indian sculpture from Sarnath in the Gupta period (320–647) known as *Buddha Preaching the First Sermon* (FIG. I-10) suggests the Buddha as a tranquil figure. The unknown sculptor used sandstone, a relatively soft, easily carved stone. The Buddha sits cross-legged on a throne, with his head and knees forming the three points of a triangle—a shape that inherently implies stability. Behind the head, the perfectly round halo suggests the cycles that are an important element of Buddhist philosophy. The smooth texture of the body contrasts with the intricately carved halo, reminding the viewer that the figure represents the beliefs of a school of Buddhism in which the Buddha is regarded as something like a supreme deity, while ideal proportions and beautiful facial features indicate the Buddha's perfection. The figure's gesture and the images on the base of the throne are part of the iconography of the Buddha's first sermon. The figure and throne are not carved in the round; the back of the sculpture is a flat slab, suggesting that the preferred vantage point was from the front, and that the sculpture may have been placed against a wall.

A tea bowl (FIG. I-11), made by the Japanese artist Raku Ichinyu (1640–1696), exemplifies the subtlety of the wares made by the Raku lineage of potters, which originated in Kyoto with the son of a Korean immigrant. This bowl is remarkably

**I-9 • Wang Zhenpeng VIMALAKIRTI AND THE DOCTRINE OF NONDUALITY (DETAIL)**

Chinese, Yuan dynasty, 1308. Handscroll, ink on silk, 15<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 85<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (39.2 x 218.3 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1980, 1980.276





**I-10 • BUDDHA PREACHING THE FIRST SERMON**

Indian, Gupta period, ca. 475. Chunar sandstone, height 63" (160 cm). Sarnath Museum, Sarnath.

first) and then shocking the piece in some way—immersing it in cold water, perhaps, or thrusting it into a pile of organic matter such as straw, or transferring it into a smoky reduction kiln. The rapid change in temperature leads to spontaneous, uncontrolled effects that reflect the aesthetic of Zen Buddhism; it is perhaps significant that Ichinyu became a lay Buddhist late in life and resided at a temple. Cracks in the bowl were repaired using a technique that involved wet lacquer sprinkled with gold powder, simultaneously drawing attention to the bowl's imperfections and revealing how highly valued this seemingly unassuming object was.

In analyzing architecture, it is necessary to consider materials (in premodern Asia these often included some combination of earth, wood, stone, masonry, plaster, paper, ceramic tile, and thatch), the disposition of masses and voids, and elements of surface treatment, as one would in three-dimensional art. One must also, however, consider distinct aspects of architectural sites, such as the plan of a building, the layout of the entire site, how the site is integrated into the local geography, whether it is oriented to the cardinal directions or to some other feature, the way that a viewer is supposed to approach the site, as well as the relationship of inner and outer both in terms of a structure and in the site as a whole.

The site of Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto reveals much about the values of the branch of the imperial family who built it, the Hachijonomiya family. The site is on the Katsura River, the location of a fictional mansion owned by the titular character

different from the refined ceramics produced in a comparable era in China (see, for example, Chapter 9, FIGS. 9-8, 9-9, and 9-10)—a deliberate choice on the part of the artist. In accordance with the aesthetic of the tea ceremony, the bowl is rustic—made of **earthenware** dipped in a matte glaze, with a pocked surface that hints at the rough texture of the raw clay—and hand-built, perhaps through coiling, rather than created on a potter's wheel. Ichinyu may have invented the black glaze mottled with red seen here, and the bowl's small foot is a hallmark of his style. The Raku potters fired ceramic wares in single-chamber kilns at relatively low temperatures, typically removing an object from the kiln while it was still hot (rather than letting it cool



**I-11 • Raku Ichinyu TEA BOWL**

Japanese, Edo period, late 17th century. Raku ware, earthenware with black glaze and gold lacquer repairs, diameter 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (12.5 cm). British Museum, London.



**I-12 • KATSURA DETACHED PALACE (ALSO KNOWN AS KATSURA IMPERIAL VILLA)**  
Japanese, Edo period, ca. 1620–1663. Aerial view. Kyoto.

in a classic novel, Murasaki Shikibu's (ca. 970–ca. 1015) *The Tale of Genji*. An aerial view of the site (FIG. I-12; see also FIGS. 15-3 and 15-4) reveals modest wooden buildings and extensive gardens focusing on a pond. Rather than using the geometric, symmetrical layout common to Buddhist temples, the more organic Katsura site blends into the surroundings, a reminder of the importance of nature in the Shinto religion associated with the imperial family. All of the buildings have sliding doors that open out to the gardens. The site is fenced; once inside, visitors pass through a series of modest gates and can explore the site via a winding path that leads around the pond and through the gardens. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the site is carefully manipulated to give an impression of idealized nature.

## ART HISTORY IN ASIA

China, Japan, India, and Korea all had written discourses about art. Of these, the Chinese discourse may be the most extensive. The Chinese art tradition has included works of connoisseurship, criticism, and theory on calligraphy and painting—the forms of visual art most highly valued—as well as catalogues of bronze vessels, ceramics, and other antiquities. Since ancient times, different voices—including artists, collectors, and connoisseurs of the imperial court and the elite classes—have written about examples of art and visual culture. Anecdotes and comments about painting,

including some that considered the significance of visual representation, were recorded beginning in the third century BCE. By the Six Dynasties era (220–589), painters were writing essays about the criteria for assessing both figure painting and landscape, and other texts recorded painters' biographies and presented a classification system for artists. The ninth century witnessed Zhang Yanyuan's compilation of a comprehensive painting history, *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*. In subsequent eras, artists and collectors continued to write critically and theoretically about art, in histories of painters and calligraphers, catalogues of important collections of art and visual culture, or individual musings on art jotted down spontaneously. *Letter about a Coral Tree* (FIG. I-13), by the scholar-artist Mi Fu (1051–1107), is an example of a note on a beautiful object he had acquired; indeed, Mi Fu created inventories of his art collection and authored critical commentary on important artists and paintings. A coral tree is a found object and thus stretches the definition of what can be considered art, and Mi Fu's sketch and calligraphy would be regarded as art in and of themselves. The advent of printing by the Tang dynasty ensured that the collected knowledge of Chinese art history could be disseminated and studied, and connoisseurship became an important element in elite culture, as seen in Wen Zhenheng's (1585–1645) *A Treatise on Superfluous Things*.

Although Japanese writers allude to art-making from a relatively early period—eleventh-century examples include *The Tale of Genji* and Sei Shonagon's (ca. 965–ca. 1025) *The Pillow*



*Book*—the fact that comprehensive histories of Japanese art did not appear until the late nineteenth century (through the efforts of Okakura Kakuzo, 1862–1913, and Ernest Fenollosa, 1853–1908) suggests that what historians now refer to as art might actually be better understood as examples of visual or material culture. Buddhist sculptures, for example, were valued as religious artifacts, and the monk Kukai (774–835) included images in his *Catalogue of Imported Items*. Still, many Japanese artists received training in styles of earlier eras: The Kei School sculptors of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), for example, created Buddhist images in the style of the sculptures made in the eighth-century capital, and artists of the Muromachi (1392–1573) and later periods who illustrated *The Tale of Genji* often deliberately adopted the style of the classic illustrations of the earlier Heian era when the novel was written. Moreover, elite patrons amassed collections of art. A member of the artistic San'ami family, who took responsibility for the art collection of the Ashikaga shoguns in the fifteenth century, produced the first Japanese text devoted to art criticism: a 1476 catalogue of Chinese paintings titled “A Treatise on the Scrolls in the Lord’s Watchtower.”

In India, the situation was similar. There were treatises on art-making, such as the *shilpashastras* concerning elements of Hindu iconography, as well as texts that detailed the process whereby deities could be visualized (clearly a related phenomenon). The seventh-century *Chitrasutra* described artistic criteria

known as the six limbs of Indian painting. These were said to have been formulated in ancient times, and included such elements as naturalism, similitude, and authenticity; in addition, artists used particular techniques and sought to infuse art with emotion and grace. The *Chitrasutra* also set out key terms that clarify the commonalities between the visual and performing arts and their connections to aesthetics and poetics. In the ancient and medieval periods, moreover, critical texts provide insight into the artist–patron relationship. A comprehensive history of Indian art appeared in the nineteenth century with the arrival of European colonists.

The writing of art history today often takes into consideration the ways that art and architecture link to their cultural and historical context. To do this effectively, art historians must delve into art’s relationship to social history and be aware of concurrent developments in other modes of human expression, such as literature, religion, philosophy, and politics—all of which are reflected in the writing of even the earliest connoisseurs of Asian art. This book focuses on certain highlights of artistic practice throughout Asia, seeking to illuminate the diversity of the region’s artistic traditions. In so doing, we consider various aspects of the role of art in Asian cultures, including why the creation of art was a meaningful form of expression for both artists and patrons, how art encompasses the values of individual Asian cultures, and how art provides another means of understanding developments in Asian history.

**I-13 • Mi Fu LETTER ABOUT A CORAL TREE**

Chinese, Northern Song dynasty, ca. 1100. Handscroll, ink on paper, 10½ x 18½” (26.6 x 47.1 cm). Palace Museum, Beijing.





## PART ONE

# South and Southeast Asia

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**VIEW OF THE TAJ MAHAL FROM THE GREAT GATE**  
Agra, 1631–1643.

The geographic regions of South and Southeast Asia cover a vast territory as linguistically diverse as Europe and containing many independent countries. South Asia (often referred to as the subcontinent) is made up of India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the island of Sri Lanka, while mainland Southeast Asia includes Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia, while the multiplicity of islands and archipelagoes are divided up between Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, and East Timor.

These regions are often studied together because certain strong cultural traits linked one end of the continent to the other. Trade connected South Asia to Southeast Asia from at least the early centuries CE, and played an important part in spreading the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism throughout the subcontinent and then into mainland Southeast Asia and the islands. Later, Islam would take root across the region as well, often following the same trade routes. The visual methods for conveying religious concepts spread with these religious doctrines, and certain aesthetic preferences lend a similarity, at a basic level, to artistic production across the region. Literary



epics such as the *Ramayana* became popular wherever Hinduism spread, providing another layer of cultural commonality. And many cultures in Southeast Asia would use Indian scripts as the foundation from which they would develop their own written languages.

Nevertheless it is also incredibly important to acknowledge the diverse individual histories, languages, literatures, and values of each area within the vast extent of South and Southeast Asia if we are to understand the artistic legacy left to us today. The range of climates and topographies in this area is immense. To the north of the Indian subcontinent, harsh and cold conditions prevail in the Himalaya and Karakoram mountains (boasting the highest peaks in the world). Northwestern India features hot and dry deserts, while the east and south of India is lush and wet with tropical jungle, as are Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The multiplicity of languages is astonishing. Starting with Persian-inflected languages in the west, they evolve into the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian idioms of India, and the entirely distinct linguistic families of Southeast Asia, some with distant origins in China to the north, others in the islands of the Pacific. These differing

conditions contributed to the development of many unique artistic traditions that were further shaped by the materials available locally.

No one work of art could encapsulate the entire artistic legacy of this region, but the Taj Mahal represents the level of refinement that could result from its characteristic multicultural blend. It is a tomb built by the emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627–1656) for his wife in the northern Indian city of Agra. It combines the domes and decorative calligraphy prevalent in the architecture of Iran and Central Asia with Indian white marble and red sandstone, and decorative details made possible only when the imagination of its architects, designers, and craftsmen were encouraged by an expansive patron. It is one of modern India's most beloved monuments.



# The Rise of Cities and Birth of the Great Religions: Early Indian Art

**The entire universe, all movables and immovables, emanated from an image ...the universe is an image, and an image is the universe.**

*Aparajitapriccha of Bhuvanadeva* (ca. eleventh century)

South Asia's earliest artistic traditions developed over a 3,000-year span between around 2600 BCE and 500 CE. In the first part of this period, the transition from a nomadic to a settled lifestyle occurred, with the establishment of some of the world's earliest known cities. In the later part, the great religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism flowered. At their core is the belief that the soul is caught in a cycle of death and rebirth until it realizes that this world is an illusion. Once that realization is achieved, the soul is released; but exactly what the soul is released into is one of the key differences between the three. So compelling was the power of these beliefs that they would shape the region's cultural formation, and their influence would spread far beyond the subcontinent into Central, East, and Southeast Asia.

While most of the surviving **artifacts** (man-made objects) from India's first cities are not obviously religious in nature, the art that survives from the later period is focused almost entirely on the ritual needs of its religions. The overriding concern for the artist at this time was how to depict the divine—that

more enlightened entity who has broken the cycle of death and rebirth, and can help guide the believer toward that goal. Although each religion had distinct interpretations of such a being, all three would base it on the human form (**FIG. 1-1**).

## THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

South Asia's first known civilization emerged around 2600 BCE, and was characterized by a distinct urban and social structure that had formed over several centuries. Many cities of this civilization were located in the Indus Valley—a part of the Punjab region of Pakistan, where five rivers originating in the Himalayan Mountains converge and create the mighty Indus River (**MAP 1-1**). The Indus Valley city of Harappa was the first to be discovered, and gave the entire civilization its present-day name, but related settlements once covered a vast part of the Indian subcontinent. Archaeologists have begun to uncover new sites and cities along a second major river called the Saraswati, which ran to the east of the Indus, and additional sites are known in Makran and Baluchistan, farther west into Pakistan, in neighboring Afghanistan, and in Rajasthan, Sindh, and Gujarat in India. It seems likely that similar cities also existed in southern India, and that they lie awaiting excavation under still-inhabited settlements and cities.

### EMERGING CITYSCAPES: MOHENJO DARO AND HARAPPA

The process of urban development started around 6500 BCE, with the growth of villages comprising simple mud-brick houses surrounded by nomadic camps. The peoples of this period used tools, had domesticated animals, and possessed the basic principles of

#### 1-1 • SEATED BUDDHA WITH TWO ATTENDANTS

Kushan period, 82 CE. Red sandstone, 36 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 33 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 6 $\frac{5}{16}$ " (93 × 85.4 × 16 cm). Mathura; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.



MAP 1-1. SOUTH ASIA

agriculture. Between 5000 and 2600 BCE, these villages coalesced into towns with defensive walls and large-scale buildings that may have served as palaces and temples. Their inhabitants developed crafts, including **pottery** painted with geometric designs and images of animals. They had beads made from precious stones that must have been imported from Central Asia.

Between 2600 and 1900 BCE the process of urban development picked up pace. Approximately 1,500 sites are associated with this era. These ranged from villages to small cities, all located at a distance of one day's walk from one another and surrounded by farms and seminomadic communities raising livestock. Although spread across a large area, these sites were all part of a hierarchical, tax-paying society sharing many cultural

features, including a written language and a standard system of weights and measures. Images on **seals** and other objects suggest a common belief in a male horned deity and a mother goddess to whom **terra-cotta** figurines were offered.

The two best-known sites are in Pakistan, near the border with India: Mohenjo Daro on the banks of the Indus, and Harappa farther north near the ancient Ravi River (the course of which has since changed). These cities were built on large mud-brick foundations that would have protected them against flooding, and accommodated populations of approximately 35,000 to 40,000 people. Each featured a raised **citadel** to the west and a lower city to the east, both surrounded by massive brick walls. Both settlements also had a number of large public buildings, market areas, workshops, and residences. These structures were built along wide roads that ran roughly north–south and east–west, as well as along smaller interconnecting lanes and alleys (FIG. 1-2).

1-2 • AERIAL VIEW OF MOHENJO DARO  
ca. 2600–1900 BCE.





**1-3 • SUMP POTS IN LATRINES AT HARAPPA**  
ca. 2600–1900 BCE.

Houses were typically two-storied and constructed from uniformly-sized bricks that must have been made in organized workshops. Many had private wells and bathing platforms with watertight floors; some of the baths were located on upper floors and were serviced by pipes built into the walls of the houses.

Most residences also had separate toilets consisting of large jars buried in the floor, which were connected to city-wide drainage systems that removed dirty or polluted water from each house and kept it away from the clean water supply (FIG. 1-3).

The monumental architecture of these cities is varied. At Mohenjo Daro, a large structure with stairs leading to a high platform was probably a temple. In the citadel is a tank known as the Great Bath. Once surrounded by a **colonnade** (series of columns) and measuring approximately 39 by 23 feet (12 by 7 meters), it has a brick floor and its sides were specially sealed to prevent the leakage of water (FIG. 1-4). It is unlikely that the Great Bath was merely an oversized bathtub; it was probably used for ceremonies, such as those for ritual purification. The act of purification before prayer would remain an important feature of later South Asian religions, and water reservoirs for cleansing are still found at most sacred sites. Around the Great Bath were large buildings that have been identified either as granaries or as great halls that may have served the administrators or priestly class who oversaw the city.

## THE REMAINS OF DAILY LIFE

In addition to architecture, the excavations of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro revealed pottery, cooking vessels, and implements made of metal, bone, and shell. Also found were gaming pieces,

**1-4 • THE GREAT BATH AT MOHENJO DARO**  
3rd–2nd century BCE.



**1-5 • JEWELRY  
FROM MOHENJO  
DARO AND  
HARAPPA**

ca. 2600–1900 BCE.  
Gold, bronze, agate,  
carnelian, and  
turquoise, various  
dimensions. Mohenjo  
Daro Museum.



**inlay** for furniture, and necklaces and belts made from beads of **carnelian**, lapis lazuli, and turquoise (FIG. 1-5). It is clear that some of these objects were imported from other Indus Valley centers, and fossilized cart tracks and toy-size models of carts provide evidence for travel and trade by land. Representations of ships on seals and **amulets** (charms worn for protection against harm) show that trade must have also occurred by sea—markets may have existed as far away as Mesopotamia to the west, where contemporary written sources mention a land called Meluhha, which can be plausibly identified with the Indus Valley.

More than 2,000 seals were also found during excavations. They typically consist of a line of writing and a drawing, most often of an animal. They are made of a soft stone called **steatite**, which was carved, covered with an alkali, and hardened in a kiln. These seals were probably applied to documents or to closed bags of goods to certify their contents, but they are interesting from an art historical perspective because of the images they bear. A horned animal, whose identification scholars dispute, occurs in the hundreds (FIG. 1-6). While some equate it with the mythical unicorn that would later figure in European **iconography** (symbolic imagery), others say it is simply a bull

**1-6 • STAMP SEAL AND IMPRESSION WITH A  
“UNICORN” AND A RITUAL OFFERING STAND**

ca. 2600–1900 BCE. Burned steatite,  $1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{3}{8}$ " (3.8 × 3.8 × 1 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
Dodge Fund, 1949 (49.40.1).

whose horns, shown in profile, have been merged into one long projection emanating from the animal's head.

The representation of an unidentified deity on a seal from Mohenjo Daro is also intriguing (FIG. 1-7). A three-headed figure with curling horns sits on a throne in a **yogic** posture, legs folded under and arms outstretched to touch the knees. He is surrounded by animals, including small deer. Elements of this imagery coincide with later depictions of the Buddha preaching in a deer park, as well as of the Hindu god Shiva as Lord of Beasts—although again, whether these connections can be made







**1-7 • STAMP SEAL WITH A SEATED MALE FIGURE**  
ca. 3000–1500 BCE. Steatite,  $1\frac{1}{16} \times 1\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{3}{8}$ " (2.6 × 2.7 × 1 cm).  
National Museum, Karachi.

**1-8 • FIGURINE OF A MOTHER GODDESS**  
ca. 2600–1900 BCE. Terra-cotta, height 7" (18 cm). National  
Museum, Karachi.



is highly controversial. The script found on the seals remains undeciphered; to date, scholars have been able to determine only that it was written from right to left.

The numerous crudely made terra-cotta female figures found at these sites, wearing headdresses and elaborate jewelry, are thought to represent a mother goddess and were probably a kind of **votive offering** (token of worship) to her. One particular clay figurine found at Mohenjo Daro (**FIG. 1-8**) wears a fan-shaped headdress, and once had long braided hair. She wears heavy necklaces over bare breasts, a wide belt on curvaceous hips, and would have had bracelets at her wrists. These ornaments would probably have looked like those illustrated opposite (see **FIG. 1-5**). It is assumed that the figurine's female attributes are accentuated because this goddess was associated with fertility; her devotees probably placed similar figurines at **altars** or temples in order to receive her divine assistance in that regard. Of slightly different proportions, but with breasts, hips, and jewelry also emphasized, is a metal figurine from the same site (**FIG. 1-9**). This unique find has been called a "dancing girl," and is

**1-9 • FIGURINE OF A DANCING GIRL**  
ca. 2500. Bronze, height 4" (10 cm). National Museum, New Delhi.



not considered an offering in the same sense as the terra-cottas—her posture, and the fact that she was made from bronze, hint at a different purpose.

A male figure from Mohenjo Daro belongs to a separate class of sculpture (FIG. 1-10). Made of steatite like the seals, this object would also have been hardened by heating at a very high temperature before being painted, adorned with gold jewelry, and set with shells for the eyes. Although he is still commonly referred to as a “priest-king,” scholars today think he may represent a clan leader or revered ancestor. Quite different in character, but foreshadowing future developments in sculpture,

**1-10 • TORSO OF A “PRIEST-KING”**

ca. 2600–1900 BCE. White, low-fired steatite,  $6\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{8}$ " (17.5 × 11 cm). National Museum, Karachi.

is a torso of a male statue from Harappa (FIG. 1-11). Beautifully modeled, and the most **naturalistic** of all the Indus Valley sculptures, this figure represents a departure from the other excavated material and its dating has been called into question. Most do still place it within the Harappan civilization, though, because in common with other statues of the period its arms and head were attached to the torso using dowels (rods). As with many other artifacts of its era, however, the identification and purpose of this miniature statue remain a mystery.

How the great Harappan civilization came to an end, and why its cities were abandoned between 1800 and 1700 BCE, are still unsolved puzzles. Current scholarship suggests environmental reasons—most likely the shifting or silting of the region’s rivers, which in turn would have upset local agricultural and economic systems. It is possible that the populations of these cities simply migrated to more stable climates in the subcontinent.

**1-11 • MALE FIGURE**

ca. 2600–1900 BCE. Red sandstone, height  $3\frac{2}{8}$ " (9.3 cm). National Museum, New Delhi.



## THE VEDIC PERIOD AND THE ORIGINS OF HINDUISM

Around 1500 BCE, groups of **Aryan** tribes from the Caucasus region to India's northwest started moving into the Indus Valley region and, from there, into the heart of the subcontinent. The language, traditions, and religious rituals of these newcomers would become an integral part of South Asian culture and belief. Previously characterized as bringing a violent end to the Harappan cultures, the process of Aryan settlement in the Punjab and Rajasthan is now understood as a more peaceful integration that took place after the Indus Valley cities had already been abandoned.

As more archaeological evidence of Aryan culture awaits discovery, literature remains our main source of information about the society of this period. The major works attributed to the Aryans are the four *Veda Samhitas* (*Collections of Knowledge*), written in the ancient and still-living language of Sanskrit. The **Vedas** are believed to be the revelations from **Brahman**, the supreme universal spirit, to a group of sages, and they constitute the core of what would later become the Hindu scriptures. The written form in which the Vedas are known today is probably not the result of a single transmission; the content and the style of the texts suggest the verses were compiled over a 700-year period between 1500 and 800 BCE.

The Vedas refer to numerous gods, of whom there are echoes in the later Hindu pantheon, as well as in Buddhist and Jain texts. They also provide evidence of a codified body of prayers, offerings, and sacrifices required by the gods. It was believed that only priests (*brahmins*) had direct contact with the gods, and so could perform the necessary ceremonies on behalf of individuals. As a result, their role in society became increasingly important.

Also embedded in the Vedas is a great deal of information about the Aryans' history and the makeup of their society. The texts seem to describe, for instance, varied types of interaction between the Aryans and the peoples they encountered in India, ranging from armed conflicts to the adoption of vocabulary from Indic languages. The Vedas also reveal the stratification of society into different social groups, or **castes**. The priestly class was at the top of this hierarchy, followed by the warriors (*kshatriya*), the farmers and merchants (*vaisyha*), and the peasants (*shudra*). The definition of these four groups, their rights, and the rules encoding their behavior are fundamental to the way society on the subcontinent has been conceived up to the present day.

## BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST ART

Possibly in reaction to the autocracy of the *brahmin* priests of the Vedic period and the hierarchical caste system they enshrined, two

new religions arose in northeastern India during the sixth century BCE: Buddhism and Jainism. From the mid-first millennium BCE to the end of the first millennium CE, both of these religions played a major role, along with Hinduism, in the ethical, social, and cultural life of the whole subcontinent.

At the heart of Buddhism is the story of Siddhartha Gautama, who is believed to have lived from ca. 563 to 483 BCE. He was born into a royal family in the area of India bordering Nepal, but the conception and birth of this historical figure have since become shrouded in legend. A six-tusked elephant is said to have impregnated his mother, who gave birth to the baby from her side. Raised in a palace, Siddhartha renounced his comfortable life at the age of 29 in order to search for the solution to human suffering. After six years and much meditation, he finally attained enlightenment and became known as the Buddha, which translates as "The Enlightened One." He started preaching what he had learned—that enlightenment could be reached not with the intervention of priests, but through the realization of the Four Noble Truths: that life is suffering; that the reason for this suffering is desire; that freedom from suffering is the end of desire; and that there is a path to this freedom, called the Middle Way, which negotiates between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

## THE STUPA AND ITS DECORATION

In the centuries following the Buddha's death, his philosophy was further developed and spread throughout the region. This early Buddhism stressed both the teaching and the moral codes of the Buddha himself. Popular worship developed around the **stupa**, a structure in the shape of a hemispherical mound that functioned as a funerary monument to the Buddha. It was developed from the Buddha's request that his followers cremate him and build a memorial at a place where people could gather. His wishes were partly respected—his ashes were enshrined, but only after being split into eight portions and placed within eight separate stupas at sites across northern India associated with key moments in his life. Later, during the reign of Emperor Ashoka (r. 272–231 BCE) of the Maurya dynasty (ca. 323–185 BCE), the **relics** were further divided and distributed to additional sites—84,000, according to the traditional reckoning.

The first stupas were simple structures, shaped as rounded mounds representing the curving form of the universe. Initially, their main function was to allow **pilgrims** access to the Buddha's remains, but over time they evolved into larger monuments decorated with religious imagery, and were often surrounded by monasteries and other buildings. In addition, symbolic features were added to the structure. A square railing at the top represented the Buddhist heavens, while a mast with umbrellalike tiers emerging from the center of the stupa referred to the axis of the universe. As the Buddhist faithful circled the building on foot (**circumambulation**), passing the gateways (*toranas*) marking the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and