

The British Academy

Small Research Grant: Report

To be completed by the grant-holder at the close of the Academy funded phase of research.

Award Number: 37332

This number can be found on your original letter of award. If you do not use this form when you compile your report, please ensure you quote your award number.

1. Name

Full name (surname underlined) and title

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3. Dates of Research

Date of Award

Start Date 01/01/2004

End Date 30/12/2004

For office use only

4. Title of Research Project

Udayagiri: The Archaeology of Time and the Establishment of Hindu Deities as Juristic Personalities.

5. Electronic products or by-products of research

If your research has involved the production of electronic data, have these been offered for deposit to the AHDS or ESDS? Yes

If yes has it been accepted? Not as yet

If you have answered no to either of the above questions, please give reason, and details of your future plans to deposit. Discussion is in train about depositing the site survey (described below). ADS York have indicated that the CAD file will not present archiving problems.

6. Statement of accounts

Those interested in viewing the accounts should apply directly to the Grants office at the British Academy quoting grant number 37332

7. Research report (approx 1000 words)

i. account of research carried out

This project has focussed on the large hill known as Udayagiri, not far from Vidisha in central India. The hill is a crucial place for the history of the Gupta kings (circa 320-500 CE), being the only imperial site to survive from what is generally regarded as the 'golden age' of classical Indian civilisation.

A number of targets were set -- and achieved -- for the current phase of this project. These were as follows:

(1) Survey. The first comprehensive survey was commissioned and completed.

(2) On-site observations. Udayagiri was an astronomical site from at least the second century BCE, a fact proven by astronomical themes in sculpture and several sun-dials engraved on the rocks there. Several visits to the site were made to record the position of the rising and setting sun against the features of the hill. This allowed historical sky maps -- generated electronically -- to be positioned against the features in the landscape.

(3) Supporting documentation. A complete set of photographs was procured from the AIIS archive, Delhi. Older photographs from the Archaeological Survey of India are being procured by the project research assistant Archana Verma.

(4) Museum collections. Sculptures from the site are in the Archaeological Museum, Gwalior. The museum was visited and the key sculptures studied and photographed.

(5) Consultants/research assistants. Three RAs helped carry forward different aspects of the current phase of this project. (a) J. Sutcliffe, hydrologist based in Oxford visited the site. He is currently calculating the capacity of the water-tanks at

Udayagiri in relation to rainfall using the survey map made for the project; (b) Dr G. Meissevan in Berlin was unable carry out the astronomical calculations as originally planned due to other commitments. As a consequence I consulted Dr Clive Ruggles at the University of Leicester who put me in touch with Serena Fredrick, one of his graduate students and RAs, who was able to carry out all the required calculations in an efficient and effective manner. She will contribute a technical appendix to the book currently in preparation, see proposed outputs below; (c) Archana Verma, based in India, supervised the concluding phases of the survey work, checked the results and ensured that a CD with the survey was posted to the UK.

ii. advances in knowledge or understanding resulting from the research

The research carried out with assistance from the British Academy has shown that Udayagiri was an ancient centre astronomical activity, probably from as early as the 2nd century BCE. When the Gupta kings conquered central India in the 4th century CE, they re-worked Udayagiri dramatically, adding a host of sculptures, inscriptions and water-features. This changed the site from a simple place of celestial observation into an astro-political node where the movements of the heavenly bodies were conflated with the political trajectory of the Gupta kings. This helped the Guptas establish a new form of kingship in which they were imperial sovereigns and, simultaneously, the foremost devotees of Vishnu, the deity credited with the regulation of time and the cosmos.

The organisation of time -- and of the Indian calendar and festival cycle -- are determined by solar, lunar and stellar observations. At Udayagiri, the necessary observations were facilitated by the geographical features of the hill, features which were modified and supplemented to enhance and symbolically enrich the observations. In Indian speculative thought, the calendar and year were subject to an elaborate series of homologies. So the year, among many other things, is the royal consecration -- because the consecration takes a year to perform -- and the year is the sacrificial horse -- because a horse is the central offering in the year-long horse sacrifice used to confirm the king's paramount status. The year is also the god Vishnu -- he is the lord of time and, according to ancient lore, absorbed the sacrifice, and thus the year, into his body. The year is also the firm foundation of all created things -- all life is controlled and conditioned by time. Because Udayagiri was a place where time was known and the year made, it became a natural, if not inevitable, place for visualising and memorialising time and the sacrifice, so also Vishnu -- the theistic embodiment of both. This is how Udayagiri can be described as a sacred landscape in every sense -- a place where the knowledgeable pilgrim can directly encounter time and thus the god who embodies it. Udayagiri through these various means is thus a crucial site for the religious and cultural history of India because it documents the transition from ancient modes of sacrifice to theistic and devotional forms of worship.

8. Synopsis of research for public dissemination

Please supply up to 150 words describing your research in terms suitable for a non-specialist. Please note that information supplied here may be used by the Academy in its publications, either in print form or on its web site.

This project has focussed on the large hill known as Udayagiri in central India. The place is crucial for the Gupta dynasty (circa 320-500 CE) because it is the only imperial site to survive from what is regarded as the 'golden age' of classical Indian civilisation.

The research sponsored by the British Academy has shown that Udayagiri was an ancient centre astronomical activity, probably from as early as the 2nd century BCE. When the Gupta kings conquered central India they re-worked Udayagiri dramatically, adding a host of sculptures, inscriptions and water-features. This changed the site from a simple place of celestial observation into an astro-political node where the movements of the heavenly bodies were conflated with the political trajectory of the Gupta kings. This helped the Guptas establish a new form of kingship in which they represented themselves as imperial sovereigns and, simultaneously, the foremost devotees of Vishnu, the deity who was the living embodiment of time and of the cosmos.

The first detailed survey of Udayagiri was carried out under this project. This is available as a download on <http://britac.ac.uk/institutes/SSAS/index.html>

9. Additional information

Please supply any useful web site addresses related to your research that may be of interest to other scholars or general browsers. The Academy may provide links to these sites on its web pages. Please indicate if you would prefer the sites not to be listed publicly.

Project web site Individual home page Other useful addresses

The project is affiliated with the Academy's Society for South Asian Studies. An account of the work will be mounted on the Society's web-site (currently being redesigned). Specifically I plan to put to place relevant articles and the site-survey on the Society's web-site so it can be down-loaded freely.

10. Publications

List any publications which have arisen from the research to date, or are in preparation. Please indicate whether book or article (if other, please describe)

Title Book Article Expected publication date

Book in preparation for publication:

Udayagiri and the Establishment of the Gods: A Religious History of the Gupta Age

Three chapters: (1) The Archaeology and Politics of Time 100% complete
(2) The Establishment of the Gods 90% complete
(3) The Priesthood 40% complete

Proposal accepted in principle for publication by the Royal Asiatic Society, London; anticipated publication in 2006.

Please remember to submit one copy of any book to the Academy in order to fulfil the conditions of the award

11. Dissemination

Indicate if any other dissemination (e.g. conference papers, articles) has taken place or is planned for the future.

Title / description Date

'The Archaeology and Politics of Time', in The Vakataka Heritage, edited by H. T. Bakker (Groningen, currently in press).

12. Signature and date

Signature

Date

Please send the completed form, together with receipts where relevant to: The Assistant Secretary (Research Grants), The British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH. This report form may be downloaded from www.britac.ac.uk/form/reports/ and emailed to grants@britac.ac.uk, with receipts sent under separate cover.

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