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978-0-521-51874-1 - The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual: Temples and the Establishment of the Gods

Michael Willis

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HINDU RITUAL

In this groundbreaking study, Michael Willis examines how the gods of early Hinduism came to be established in temples, how their cults were organised, and how the ruling elite supported their worship. Examining the emergence of these key historical developments in the fourth and fifth centuries, Willis combines Sanskrit textual evidence with archaeological data from inscriptions, sculptures, temples, and sacred sites. The centrepiece of this study is Udayagiri in central India, the only surviving imperial site of the Gupta dynasty. Through a judicious use of landscape archaeology and archaeo-astronomy, Willis reconstructs how Udayagiri was connected to the Festival of the Rainy Season and the Royal Consecration. Under Gupta patronage, these rituals were integrated into the cult of Viṣṇu, a deity regarded as the source of creation and of cosmic time. As special devotees to Viṣṇu, the Gupta kings used Udayagiri to advertise their unique devotional relationship with him. Willis shows, through his meticulous study of the site, its sculptures, and its inscriptions, how the Guptas presented themselves as universal sovereigns and how they advanced new systems of religious patronage that shaped the world of medieval India.

Michael Willis is curator of the early South Asian and Himalayan collections at the British Museum. A Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University, he is the author of *The Temples of Gopakṣetra* and *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*.

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*Temples and the Establishment
of the Gods*

Michael Willis

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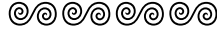
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For Lucy



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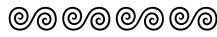
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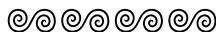
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This book had its naissance in a catalogue of Indian temple sculpture at the British Museum. The collection, now available online, needed an introductory essay, and for this I had planned to explore how and when the people of India began to make religious images and install them in temples for worship. I soon discovered that these questions involved a bewildering range of historical and religious problems, many of them little studied. In addition, key sources, especially inscriptions, needed reexamination if our understanding of image worship in early Hinduism was going to be advanced in a substantive way. My ambition to do so was supported by the British Museum from the start, and I am indebted to the Trustees of the museum for providing an organisational framework in which innovative research of this kind is a priority.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABORI	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</i>
ARE	<i>Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy</i>
AŚ	<i>Arthaśāstra</i>
ASIR	<i>Archaeological Survey of India Reports</i>
BDCRI	<i>Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute</i>
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-orient</i>
BhG	<i>Bhagavad Gītā</i>
BMC	British Museum Catalogue (refers to coin catalogue numbers)
BS	<i>Bṛhatsamhitā</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CII	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
EI	<i>Epigraphica Indica</i>
EITA	<i>Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture</i>
E&W	<i>East and West</i>
IA	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
IHQ	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
IJ	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
IJHS	<i>Indian Journal of History of Science</i>
JAIH	<i>Journal of Ancient Indian History</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JASB	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</i>
JBORS	<i>Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society</i>
JBRB	<i>Journal of the Bihar Research Society</i>
JESI	<i>Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India</i>
JIABS	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>
JIP	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
JNSI	<i>Journal of the Numismatic Society of India</i>
JOR	<i>Journal of Oriental Research</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JUPHS	<i>Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society</i>
Kāś	<i>Kāśyapasaṃhitā</i>
MAI	<i>Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India</i>
MBh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>

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MDh	<i>Mānavadharmasāstra</i>
Pkt	Prakrit
SAS	<i>South Asian Studies</i>
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Skt	Sanskrit
VaiSS	<i>Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra</i>
VDhP	<i>Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa</i>
VS	Vikrama Saṃvat
VSm	<i>Viṣṇusmṛti</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>