

rulers. The archaeological data seem to support this notion of *Rohana* as a highly independent province relying on its economic strength derived from its participation in international trade with highly valued goods.

The production of steel in Sri Lanka and its subsequent trade to the Middle East also shows that even in pre-modern times, a global trading network existed, the dimensions of which we are only beginning to comprehend. As places of production and channels of procurement were well protected, we may never get a full picture of commerce in the ancient or medieval world, but studies such as this one give food for further thoughts about its possible connections.

If Sri Lanka has in recent times gained some fame for repeatedly adding exciting and valuable contributions to our knowledge of early South Asian history and culture, the results of this study add to this reputation. Moreover, the integrated approach combining ethnoarchaeology, excavations, archaeometallurgy, and experimental archaeology illustrates what archaeology can contribute to social science research, past or present.

*Tilman Frasch*

RICHARD H. GROVE, VINITA DAMODARAN, SATPAL SANGWAN (eds.), *Nature and the Orient. The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. XX, 1036 pages, 73 tables and figures, Rps. 1450,-. ISBN 0-19-563896-4

If environmentalists still had to regard Schumacher's famous slogan "small is beautiful" as their gospel truth, the editors of the volume under consideration would have failed right from the beginning: The book is extensive in every respect. It accounts for an impressive 1036 pages, and besides its broad regional and disciplinary approach its contents cover a long time span from the stone age to the early 1990s. Its 31 papers, presented at a conference in Delhi in 1992, are all dedicated to the environmental history of South and Southeast Asia. Environmental history is a younger, but nevertheless fruitful branch of the history tree, which moreover has the advantage of serving as a bridgehead to interdisciplinary research in cooperation with other disciplines such as geography, economics or ethnology.

Volumes of such massive size can not be adequately reviewed and are, perhaps, best described in broad outline: Of the 31 papers, 19 are concerned with forests and related questions such as forest use, forest policy, and deforestation. Two concentrate on irrigation, one each on mining and marine environments and the rest on more general themes of nature and the environment. Regarding the period and the area, an overwhelming majority of 25 papers treat the colonial period and/or South Asia (including Burma as a part of the Indian Empire). For this focus, two main results can be made out. First, most of the authors are unanimous that the impact of colonial forest and land legislation was destructive to the ecosystem, resulting in far-reaching erosion, desiccation, and deforestation, even if an ongoing process of deforestation since prehistoric times has to be taken into account. There is also agreement that the various types of shifting and swidden cultivation as practised by forest-dwelling communities all over South and Southeast Asia have to be regarded as much less harmful to the forest than British forest officers were wont to

maintain. In turn, colonialism had a deep impact upon these forest dwellers, forcing them into the global economic system. Two particularly interesting case studies show how on the one hand the Soras of Orissa were drawn into a vicious circle of indebtedness and defraud, while on the other hand the Orang Asli in Malaya harboured resistance to the government even after the Malay states had gained independence.

The book shows many interesting facets of the relationship between man and – mostly – forest in colonial South Asia, but it is obvious that it cannot represent “The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia”, as the subtitle boldly states. Further research will have to fill the gaps that exist not only concerning Southeast Asia, but also the relationship between man and water or the exploitation of mineral resources, to give but a few examples. On the whole, the papers collected in this book give a fairly comprehensive picture of current research on various periods, areas, subjects, and modes of perception of man and his environment in South and Southeast Asia. In this respect the book is an important landmark in the field of interdisciplinary environmental research.

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AMITAV ACHARYA, ANANDA RAJAH (eds.), *Reconceptualizing Southeast Asia. Special Focus in: Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Singapore, 27,1,1999

This volume draws together some of the papers presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Seminar on Southeast Asian Development in Pekanbaru, June 1997. As the editors point out in their introductory essay the concept of Southeast Asia as a region needs to be reconsidered in the light of the current economic crisis and the resurgence of an ASEAN identity. The earlier positivist approaches that described Southeast Asia in terms of “Unity in Diversity” by essentializing more or less arbitrary cultural traits are, according to the authors, mistaken. “The notion of Southeast Asia as a cultural or geographic entity is manifestly overstated. What is less contestable is that the notion of Southeast Asia has a far greater plausibility as an imagined construct.” This theme is further elaborated on in Ananda Rajah’s article “Southeast Asia: Comparatist Errors and the Construction of a Region” and by Amitav Acharya in “Imagined Proximities: The Making and Unmaking of Southeast Asia as a Region”. Another equally interesting approach is provided by Anthony Reid who argues that the lack of centrality in Southeast Asia has led to “a saucer model of Southeast Asian identity”. This idea is further elaborated in a paper by Steven Douglas on “‘Centrality’ and ‘Balance’ in Southeast Asia: Official Ideologies and Regional Crisis” and Michael Vatikiotis, “ASEAN 10: The Political and Cultural Dimensions of Southeast Asian Unity”.

As the field of Southeast Asian studies is still dominated by empirical studies on individual communities, villages, towns or nation states it is refreshing to read the papers in this volume that take on the region as a whole. An earlier debate started by Heine-Geldern, Coedes and others is now continued in this very useful and stimulating study.

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