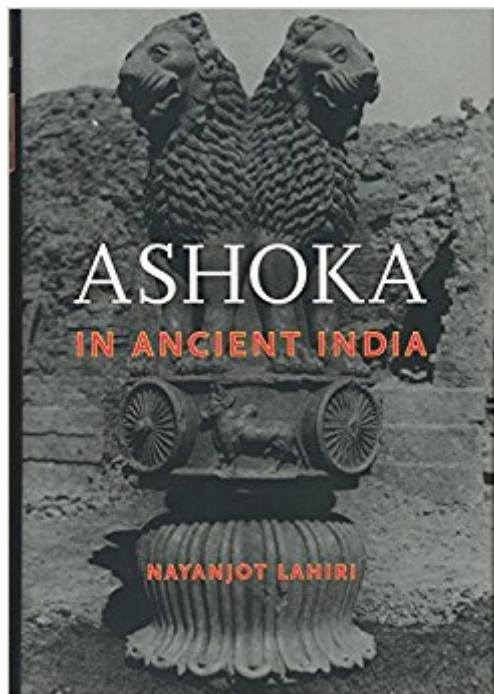


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Ashoka In Ancient India



Synopsis

In the third century BCE, Ashoka ruled an empire encompassing much of modern-day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. During his reign, Buddhism proliferated across the South Asian subcontinent, and future generations of Asians came to see him as the ideal Buddhist king. Disentangling the threads of Ashoka's life from the knot of legend that surrounds it, Nayanjot Lahiri presents a vivid biography of this extraordinary Indian emperor and deepens our understanding of a legacy that extends beyond the bounds of Ashoka's lifetime and dominion. At the center of Lahiri's account is the complex personality of the Maurya dynasty's third emperor—a strikingly contemplative monarch, at once ambitious and humane, who introduced a unique style of benevolent governance. Ashoka's edicts, carved into rock faces and stone pillars, reveal an eloquent ruler who, unusually for the time, wished to communicate directly with his people. The voice he projected was personal, speaking candidly about the watershed events in his life and expressing his regrets as well as his wishes to his subjects. Ashoka's humanity is conveyed most powerfully in his tale of the Battle of Kalinga. Against all conventions of statecraft, he depicts his victory as a tragedy rather than a triumph—a shattering experience that led him to embrace the Buddha's teachings. Ashoka in Ancient India breathes new life into a towering figure of the ancient world, one who, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "was greater than any king or emperor."

Book Information

Hardcover: 408 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; First Edition edition (August 5, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674057775

ISBN-13: 978-0674057777

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 1.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #767,815 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #151 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > India & South Asia #852 in Books > History > Asia > India #4662 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations

Customer Reviews

Fascinating. (Chandras Choudhury Wall Street Journal 2015-08-20) Where Lahiri really scores is

in the field of Ashokan archaeology, where she brings together all the work that has been undertaken in the years since 1997. These advances have all been woven seamlessly into Lahiri's narrative, so as to give the clearest chronology yet assembled of the life of Ashoka and what Lahiri calls "his trajectory as a communicator" and his "intellectual evolution," most notably the quite extraordinary change of heart that followed Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga and how this transformed his concept of kingship. (Charles Allen Literary Review 2015-09-01)[Lahiri's] idiosyncratic book combines legends, archaeology, and even personal information shrewdly teased out of the edicts to craft an arresting profile. (Brian Bethune Maclean 2015-09-14)Richly thoughtful. The result of all this careful, well-presented thought and research is what is certainly the best biography of Ashoka the Great ever written in English. (Steve Donoghue Open Letters Monthly 2015-08-01)Many biographies have been published on Ashoka, the greatest king of India, but this biography is different, and perhaps the best written on the extraordinary king. (R. N. Sharma Choice 2016-01-01)Lahiri has firmly grounded the Ashoka of legend and inscriptions with a novel kind of detail and deliberation, spelling out the connections and implications, combining solid historical analysis with fresh interpretation. (Upinder Singh, University of Delhi)Many biographies of Emperor Aśoka (third c. B.C.E.) have been written over the past century or so, but Lahiri's is perhaps the most gripping. Lahiri's is, indeed, a very engaging biography, probably the best I have read. (Patrick Olivelle Journal of the American Oriental Society 2017-01-01)Lahiri [presents] an accessible and engaging biography of the emperor in his time that navigates the complex terrain of available evidence. Lahiri has produced what is probably the best biography of Aśoka to date. Lahiri has produced a uniquely accessible volume that draws readers into the landscapes of Mauryan India and guides them through a rich encounter with the Aśoka of edict and legend. (Mark McClish Indian Economic and Social History Review 2017-04-01)

Nayanjot Lahiri is Professor of History at the University of Delhi.

A biased writer.

Too many assumptions which makes it boring to read. Too look at a historical context while keeping a present day perspective does not work well.

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