Introduction:

Medieval India and the Paramāra Dynasty

MICHAEL WILLIS AND ADAM HARDY

This collection of essays focuses on the history, literary culture and legacy of the Paramāra dynasty. Ruling from central India, with collateral branches of the family at Candrāvatī, Vāgaḍa, Bhinmāl and Jālor, the Paramāras constituted an important force in the Indian medieval world. They flourished between the tenth and twelfth centuries and throughout their history entertained high political ambitions. In particular Vākpati Muñja (*circa* 973–95) and Bhoja (*circa* 1000–55) undertook military campaigns that sought to establish the Paramāras as a paramount power in India. Although frustrated in these aims, they are remembered nonetheless as a great dynasty, representative if not paradigmatic of the vibrant civilisation of the late medieval age.

The legacy of the Paramāras is substantial in terms of surviving texts, inscriptions, monuments and popular legends. The essays presented in this volume highlight some of this legacy. The papers show that however much seems to be known about the Paramāras, there is still a great deal that needs to be studied and published. The process of historical interpretation has barely started and a wide range of source-material is still untouched – from unedited texts extant only in manuscript to monuments and sites that have not even been noted by the relevant departments in the Government of India.

The essays presented here emerged from the activities of the Vidisha Research Group. This international consortium of scholars (organised by the first author of this introduction in 2000) has sought to encourage new ways of working and thinking about pre-modern India. This aim has been advanced by various activities, mainly seminars and field research, that have helped group members develop innovative projects of an interdisciplinary nature. The geographical focus has been the Mālwa region of central India, including the Narmadā River valley. Inevitably, however, many of the group's research themes have wider South Asian connections and implications.

A key project to emerge from the Vidisha Research Group was *The Indian Temple: Production, Place and Patronage*, led by Adam Hardy, Daud Ali and Michael Willis. This project was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council from 2006 to 2009. It is a pleasant duty to thank the Council for their generous support of this research scheme. The main aim of that project was to explore questions about the construction, patronage and social place of temples in Indian society. Each of the essays in this volume expands our understanding of these issues in a substantial way. The findings were unanticipated when the research proposal was first conceived, highlighting the extraordinary richness of the Paramāra period and its cultural treasures. In India's headlong rush for modern wealth, we hope the

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articles collected here demonstrate that there is still much to be gained from drawing on the treasures of the past.

As first author and a visiting research fellow at the Käte Hamburger Collegium for the study of 'Dynamics in the History of Religions' at Ruhr-Universität, Bochum, I would like to thank Professor Dr Volkhard Krech, the programme's director, for his enthusiastic interest in the research presented in this volume, and for agreeing to write a short foreword that puts the findings published here into a wider context. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Leverhulme Trust for supporting my research project *Politics, Ritual and Religion*. Coupled with the time afforded by the fellowship at the consortium in Bochum, the support of the Leverhulme Trust allowed the present volume to be organised, edited and brought to publication. I am particularly delighted that the Royal Asiatic Society agreed to consider this suite of papers for inclusion in a special issue of the journal. Dr Sarah Ansari kindly contributed the editor's foreword and Charlotte de Blois who gave special attention to all the technical and specialist details. To both many thanks are due. I am, of course, especially grateful to the scholars who took time to write papers for this collection and patiently waited for me to organise and edit them.

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