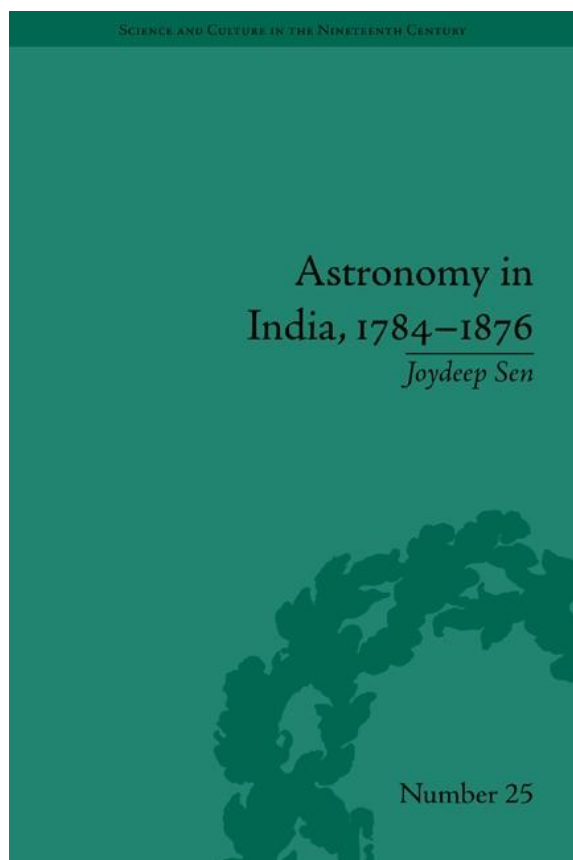


BOOK REVIEWS

***Astronomy in India 1784–1876*, by Joydeep Sen. (Pickering and Chatto, London, 2014; Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century Number 25). Pp. xiii + 268. ISBN 9781781440780, 16 × 24 cm, UK 60 pounds.**

Indian science experienced a major renaissance with the arrival of the British in the late eighteenth century. Till then, astronomy in India was largely restricted to either computational astronomy of Solar System bodies or stars and corrections in the computational tables based on direct observations. The biggest advancement till then had been to build large observatories



called Jantar Mantar to measure the locations of stars. Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur constructed five Jantar Mantars in total, in New Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Mathura and Varanasi; they were completed between 1724 and 1735. However, before they could be fruitfully used, telescopes arrived and these made the Jantar Mantars superfluous.

Although the first known astronomical use of the telescope in India occurred in 1618 (see Kapoor, 2016), telescopic astronomy only flourished with the 1761 and 1769 transits of Venus (Kapoor, 2013). At that time the value of the Astronomical Unit and the relative distances between the Earth, Venus and the Sun were not known with great accuracy. High precision measurements of the exact start and end times

of the transits would provide valuable measurements of these parameters. Hence observing the transits was of great scientific importance. Neither of the transits would have been visible in Europe but they would have been easily visible from southern India. During that period the British and the French had colonies in India and both were in competition. Hence the transit observations were driven both by the needs of science and by political competition.

The 1761 transit was widely observed from India, but in 1769 the monsoon restricted observations to just a few centres. However, these transits proved a boon for Indian astronomy with the arrival of new modern observational instruments and techniques.

Soon after that, the British decided to undertake the Great Triangulation Survey of the Indian subcontinent and for that they needed accurate determination of longitudes of various places. This heralded the establishment of astronomical observatories, starting with one in Chennai. The roles of these observatories were later expanded to include solar observations and the creation of sky charts. The Madras Observatory was eventually shifted to Kodaikanal and is still operational today, but with new and improved instrumentation. These observatories have been credited with several insightful observations. For example, the British astronomer John Evershed first observed the radial motions in sunspots known today as the Evershed Effect from the Kodaikanal Solar Observatory. These activities also resulted in the spread of observational, and in particular telescopic, astronomy to colleges in India and played an important role in the evolution of a scientific approach to nature in the subcontinent.

Joydeep Sen's book on *Astronomy in India, 1784–1876* meticulously records the British contribution to this development as understood from British archives. The book is detailed and provides numerous quotes and references from documents of this period.

However, this book evolved out of Dr Sen's Ph.D. thesis, and this limitation shows up in the book. The treatment of the pre-1784 period in India is sketchy and taken from a handful of European and American scholars. Many of these references are incomplete and do not do justice to the quality of the observational astronomy that was being carried out in India at that time. For example, while the author seems to be aware of the *Indian Journal of History of Science*, no attempt has been made to summarise papers published in that journal from time to time about astronomy of the period. Similarly the research of Indian scholars such as

Rajesh Kochhar who have extensively documented the period in a systematic, objective and scholarly manner (e.g. see Kochhar, 1985a; 1985b; 1989; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; 1993; 2002) finds no mention in the book. Similarly, the seminal research of British astronomers who worked to document Indian astronomical practices of the period (e.g. Kaye, 1998) also does not find an important place in the book.

In summary, the book would have been far more potent if it had discussed in detail issues such as the dramatic impact of the arrival of European astronomers in India, and the cultural conflict that followed the arrival of telescopes (a point that is mentioned more in passing). The language and content of the book are more focused on bringing out the contents of individual communications rather than the exciting impact of these developments on Indian science. The book therefore provides valuable insights into the exact dynamics of the evolution of telescopic astronomy in the subcontinent, but it does not document its impact in India, which was very significant. However, within the limited focus of documenting the debates and discussions in Britain about supporting astronomy in India the book does provide valuable research material.

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Professor Mayank Vahia
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research,
Mumbai, India.
Email: Vahia@tifr.res.in

***Wolf Telescopes: A Collection of Historical Telescopes*, by Edward D. Wolf. (Trumansburg NY, printed for the author, 2016). Pp. 365. ISBN 978-0-9980037-1-9 (hard-back), 222 × 287 mm, US\$125 (plus shipping). Place orders through www.wolftelescopes.com. An earlier soft-cover edition also is available, at US\$85 (plus postage & packing).**

Historic astronomical telescopes can be found in long-established observatories, because that is where they were used, and in public museums. An example is the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, which holds dozens of instruments with Scottish connections and earlier this year held an exhibition “Reflecting Telescopes” highlighting the work of James Gregory and James Short. But private individuals also collect telescopes, often in conjunction with other scientific instruments, or books. Charles Frank and his son Arthur in Glasgow come to mind, as do Robert B. Ariail in the United States and Peter Louwman in The Netherlands.

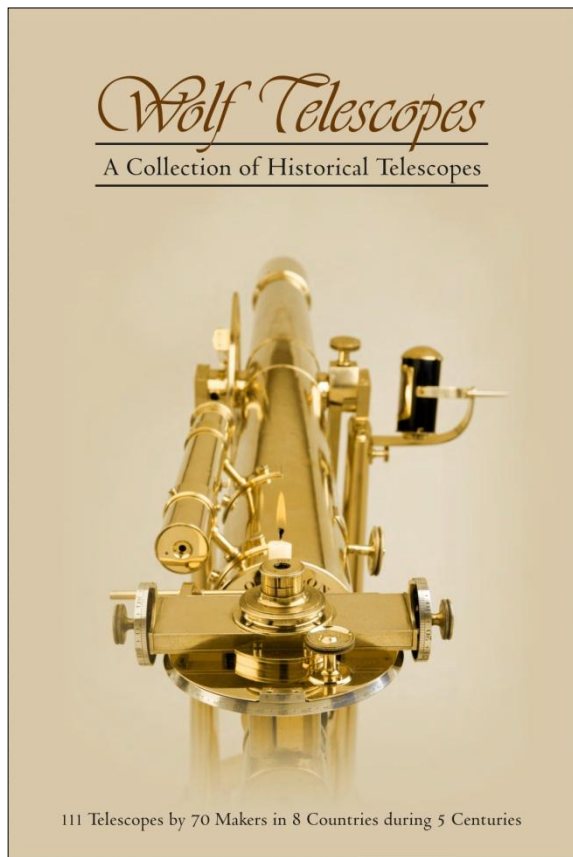
To this list must be added the name of Edward D. Wolf, Emeritus Professor at Cornell, who after a doctorate in physical chemistry followed a career in industry and academia. Since the beginning of the millennium, he has amassed a collection of 111 telescopes, or an average of a new one every six weeks. Most of them are astronomical, though some are terrestrial or marine, and there is a handful of binoculars and surveying instruments.

The principal feature of the collection is its rich variety. It boasts telescopes from many of the famous French, American, English and German makers, such as Adams, Bardou, Alvan Clark, Dollond, Grubb Parsons, Lemaire, Lerebours & Secretan and successors, Mailhat, Merz, Nairne, Negretti & Zambra, Passemant, Plössl, Ramsden, Short, Steinheil, Troughton & Simms, Utzschneider & Fraunhofer, and Zeiss. In total, some seventy makers from eight countries are represented, including instruments from five different centuries if you accept that one beautiful Japanese spyglass might just date from as early as 1690. Most, however, date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In choosing telescopes, Wolf favoured those that retained their associated accessories, such as multiple eyepieces, filters, micrometers, dust caps, storage boxes, tripods, etc. This is valuable, because over time accessories have often been lost, or in the case of boxes, discarded. Many instruments are rare. As an example, I would cite Foucault-Secretan silvered-glass reflecting telescopes. Only a few hundred would appear to have been made, yet the Wolf collection includes three, and they were of great service in my recent study of these instruments (Tobin, 2016). As a practical matter, the coll-

ection is limited to portable instruments—there are no pedestal-mounted telescopes. Nor are there specialist instruments, such as transit telescopes.

The question of what to do with one's collection must haunt every collector. Is the collection permanent, or just a temporary grouping? The dice were rolled for the Frank Collection, which was dispersed at auction in 1986, thereby feeding, amongst others, the National Museum of Scotland, the Science Museum in London and, via intermediaries, the Wolf Collection. Ariail gave his collection to the South Carolina State Museum. Louwman's Collection is exhibited as part of his family's motor-car museum in a



suburb of The Hague. The good news for the Wolf Collection is that it will not be dispersed. It has just been sold to the Beijing Planetarium with the expectation that it will be exhibited at the fifteenth-century Beijing Ancient Observatory, which is now run as an affiliate museum of the Planetarium.

Dispersed or not, every collection is treasure for those interested in telescope history and heritage, and a catalogue is an essential adjunct. For the Frank Collection, the sale catalogue and an earlier exhibition catalogue are the primary resources (Nuttall, 1973; Sotheby's, 1986). The Ariail Collection can be accessed on-line (Ariail, 2016). Louwman has published a magnificently-illustrated compendium of some of

his telescopes (Louwman and Zuidervaart, 2013). And now Wolf follows suit with *Wolf Telescopes*, the even-more-magnificent catalogue of his 111 instruments.

Wolf Telescopes is a joint work between Wolf, his wife, daughter, a granddaughter, and a photographer, Gary L. Hodges. The catalogue does not claim to be a scholarly work. Indeed, no information is given as to how dates were ascribed to individual telescopes (privately, Wolf indicates he used Clifton (1995) extensively for telescopes of British origin). Provenance information is sparse, and there are a few confusions, such as 'Wentworth' with 'Whitworth' and 'Marc Secretan' with 'Auguste Secretan'. But these are minor. The great and unparalleled strength of the catalogue is its 1,500 crystal-clear photographs, which, as Wolf notes, were often technically challenging, requiring a large depth of field for objects composed of parts with very different reflectivities. The multiplicity of images means each instrument is thoroughly documented, and many are seen disassembled. This is invaluable for researchers who want to make detailed comparisons without travelling to China! For example, in *Wolf Telescopes* we can study the great variety of spring designs that different eighteenth-century makers used to support the speculum-metal primary mirrors of their Gregorian telescopes, and the different focus-adjustment mechanisms for the secondaries. The Collection contains two Secretan telescopes numbered 236, one a reflector and the other a refractor, which confirms the suspicion that the two types were numbered separately. And rather subtle differences, well-presented in the photographs, may permit the assignment of unsigned instruments to one maker or another, as I have shown with prism supports in Secretan and Bardou reflectors (Tobin, 2016).

The catalogue begins with a Foreword by Robert B. Ariail and other introductory and summary text. This is interspersed with full- or half-page photographs of some of the choicest items in the Wolf Collection, such as a very pretty shagreen-covered 1-inch reflector c.1750, a Dollond 12-foot (long) refractor c.1762 with rope-and-pole mount, the aforementioned 19th-century silvered-glass reflectors, a 92-mm Secretan refractor c.1915–1920, and an Alvan Clark 106-mm refractor dated 1867, which prior to sale to the Beijing Planetarium was believed to be the earliest Clark telescope in a private collection. There then follows a series of 'galleries' presenting the whole collection. Six galleries permute refractors and reflectors with different mountings—hand-held, table or tripod. Final galleries present binocular telescopes, surveying instruments and some historical telescope books. After that, sections present the evolution of makers' signatures, mounts and tripods, oc-

ular focusers, and comparisons with related instruments in other collections. As necessary, Wolf cleaned, repaired and restored his telescopes. This is described and photo-documented in the final hundred pages of the catalogue, along with a page of restoration 'Do's and Don'ts'. ("In general, don't restore!" is Wolf's wise advice.) Since information on any given instrument is often spread throughout the catalogue, it is to be regretted that there is no comprehensive index to hasten finding. It should be noted that for the next year or two, much of the material in *Wolf Telescopes* will remain available via the website www.wolftelescopes.com.

To summarize: The Wolf Collection is important and extensive. Because of its numerous excellent photographs *Wolf Telescopes* sets a new and exacting standard. It is a comprehensive record of the Collection and an unparalleled tool for the study of both the Collection itself and historic telescopes elsewhere. Dealers, all museums with telescope collections, and everyone passionate about telescope heritage should acquire a copy.

A final comment. The investigation of the optics of the Wolf Collection and other Secretan reflectors that Ed Wolf and I undertook in Tobin (2016) was very simple. China has an extensive optics industry and in metropolitan Beijing (population 22 million) numerous students will be studying practical optics. I hope that their professors ally with the Beijing Planetarium to devise student projects that study the Wolf telescopes. Accurate evaluation of the form of the optical surfaces and the performance of the instruments can but yield valuable insights into the development of the optician's art across the centuries.

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Dr William Tobin
Vannes, France.
Email: william@tobin.fr
orcid.org/0000-0002-0533-411X

***Chintamani Ragoonatha Charry and Contemporary Indian Astronomy*, by B.S. Shylaja. (Bangalore, Bangalore Association for Science Education and Navakarnataka Publications Private Limited, 2012). Pp. 96. ISBN 978-81-8467-283-1, 142 x 215 mm, Rs 75.**

The transits of Venus in 2004 and 2012 evoked great public interest all over the world, spurring educators, historians, scientists and numerous others to write papers and books and produce other material for the occasion. The book under review is one such. Published in 2012, it is about transits, the life of Ragoonatha Charry (1828–1880), the First Assistant to Norman Pogson, Astronomer at Madras Observatory, and a 38-page pamphlet that he brought out about the 8 December 1874 transit while preparations were under way for its observation by astronomers spread across India (and elsewhere).

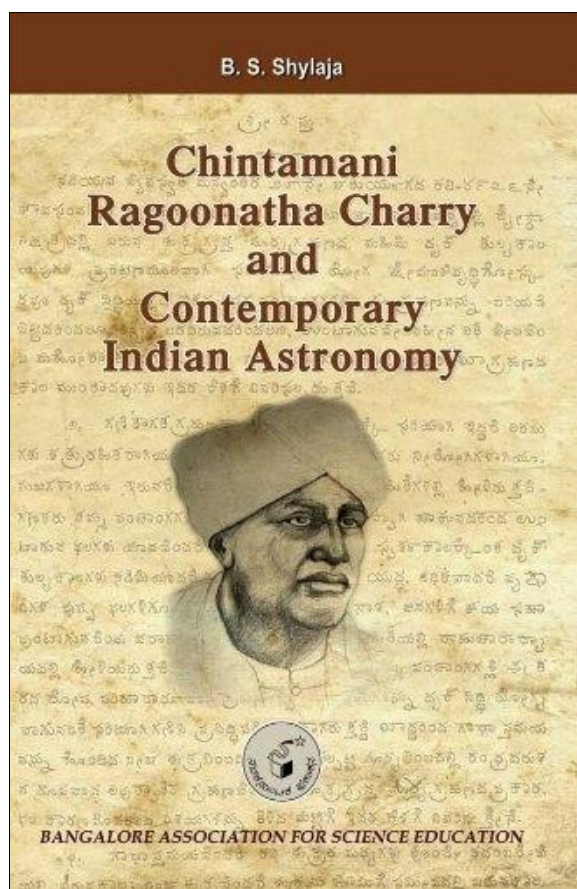
Ragoonatha Charry came from a family of almanac makers and when around eighteen years of age joined Madras Observatory in 1847 during T.G. Taylor's time as Director (Rao et al., 2009). Although steeped in traditional astronomy, once there he learnt about modern European astronomy. He was so devoted to astronomy that he even maintained a private observatory at his home, and he contributed many observations. A science enthusiast, he took a keen interest in communicating information on forthcoming astronomical events to the general public in their own languages. Pogson (1861) has spoken highly of him. About the life and works of Ragoonatha Charry, one should look up his obituary in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* (Obituary, 1881), and refer to the papers by Rao et al. (2009) and Shylaja (2009).

Ragoonatha Charry's pamphlet, titled 'Transit of Venus', was brought out early in 1874 in English and a few Indian languages. Charry states in the Preface:

Having been accustomed for many years to discuss astronomical facts and methods verbally with Hindu professors of the art, my present sketch has naturally, as it were, taken the form of a dialogue; but in the Sanscrit, Canavese, Malayalum, and Maharathi versions I have found it convenient to vary the arrangement. The sketch was first drafted in Tamil, and then translated into English and the other languages ...

Through several figures, the pamphlet, as Charry called it, beautifully explains the transit to the lay public. The English version was presented in the form of dialogue between a Pandit and a Sidhanti, an expert familiar with modern European astronomy wherein the former, a traditionalist requests the latter to explain the forthcoming transit of Venus, a subject not treated in

Hindu astronomy texts. In each version of the pamphlet, the style and the contents differ somewhat. The pamphlet was printed but was not published as such. It also included Charry's passionate address at the Pacheappa's Hall in Madras on 13 April 1874 (one day after Tamil New Year) to a large gathering of 'Native Gentlemen'. Here, he urges them to support a modern *Siddhānta* that he wishes to bring out; the establishment of an observatory for which he offers a few crucial instruments of his own; and the formation of a local society, along the lines of the Royal Astronomical Society. Notably, a favourable review of the pamphlet later appeared in *The Astronomical Register* (see Reviews ..., 1875).



As the transit of Venus of 2012 drew close, the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) took copies of the pamphlet out of its Archives and reprinted the English version (Ragoonatha Chary, 2012). Around the same time, B.S. Shylaja from the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium in Bangalore wrote the book *Chintamani Ragoonatha Charry and Contemporary Indian Astronomy*, which is the subject of this review.

What is this book about? Shylaja examined the English, Kannada and Urdu versions of the pamphlet and noted certain differences in their contents. This motivated her to present Ragoonatha Charry's contribution in a complete form by providing a translation of the Kannada

version back into English. As she says (page 33), "... the last three sections of the book are exclusive to the Kannada version" Shylaja gives a brief account of Charry's life and the necessary background to the original pamphlets and informs us in what ways the contents differed among themselves. She begins with a description of the transits in general and talks about some of the observations of the transit of 1874 that were made from India. The key parts of the original pamphlets are presented in the form of Appendices 1 and 2. Appendix 1 reproduces the Kannada text of Charry's pamphlet, and the facing pages carry the English translation. The Kannada narration is not in the form of dialogue as it was in the other pamphlets. Appendix 2 deals with the method of estimating the parallax of the Sun as devised by Charry; it uses simple geometry and is elegant. At the end, there is a list of specific technical terms in Kannada that Charry used or coined, along with the English equivalents.

Shylaja's book was brought out with good intent, and just in time for the 2012 transit, but unfortunately it was written in haste. Consequently, at times the narrative is haphazard; there are incorrect statements in places; and key references are missing (Bigg-Wither, 1883; Biswas, 2003; Hennessey, 1874–1875; 1879; Nursing Row, 1875; Pigatto and Zanini, 2001; Pringle, 1875; Strange, 1874; Tennant, 1875a, 1875b, 1877, 1882; The transit of Venus, 1875). Chapter 1 ('Introduction') begins with a grave misprint by referring to the transit of 1881 (instead of 1882), while Chapter 3 refers to the transit of 1768 (it occurred in 1769). Chapter 2 presents a sketch of the life of Ragoonatha Charry. Here, Shylaja quotes from Charry's Urdu pamphlet where reference is made to a 5' long equatorial telescope. For some reason she thinks that this may be a typographical error and the reference should be to a 5" equatorial telescope. Elsewhere in this chapter she states that Charry was the first-ever Indian science communicator, but this is simply not true. Several astronomical works and even encyclopaedias were written in Persian and Urdu in the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century that dealt with modern aspects of astronomy, including telescopes (e.g. see Ansari, 2000; Ghulām Husain Jaunpūrī, 1835; Habib and Raina, 1989), and several works of a similar kind came out in Bangla around the same time. While it is not possible to comment on the accuracy of the translation, there are obvious grammatical mistakes and 'typos' (for example, on page 73 the elongation of Venus is given as 40°, not 35°, as in Ragoonatha Chary, 2012: 27). Furthermore, the referencing leaves much to be desired, with far too great an emphasis on web sites instead of published

books and papers, and there is no Index at the end of the book. However, on the brighter side, we both found Appendix 2 useful.

A book like this that incorporates astronomical and biographical material should be treasured by those interested in the history of Indian astronomy and provide them with enjoyable and, more importantly, reliable, reading. Sadly, this is not such a book, and the fact that the author is no expert on historic transits of Venus and therefore was unfamiliar with much of the relevant literature really stands out. But the publishers also are to blame, and have done a shabby job. At very least, the Kannada text and the corresponding English translation should have been placed on facing pages so as to facilitate a one-to-one match.

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Professor Ramesh Kapoor
31, 4th 'B' Block, Koramangala,
Bengaluru, India.
Email: rckapoor@outlook.com

and

Professor Wayne Orchiston
National Astronomical Research Institute
of Thailand,
Chiang Mai, Thailand.
Email: wayne.orchiston@narit.or.th

***History of the Sky – On Stones*, by B.S. Shylaja and Geetha Kydala Ganesh. (Bangalore, Infosys Foundation, 2016). Pp. 152. No ISBN listed (paperback), 180 x 240 mm, Rs 200.**

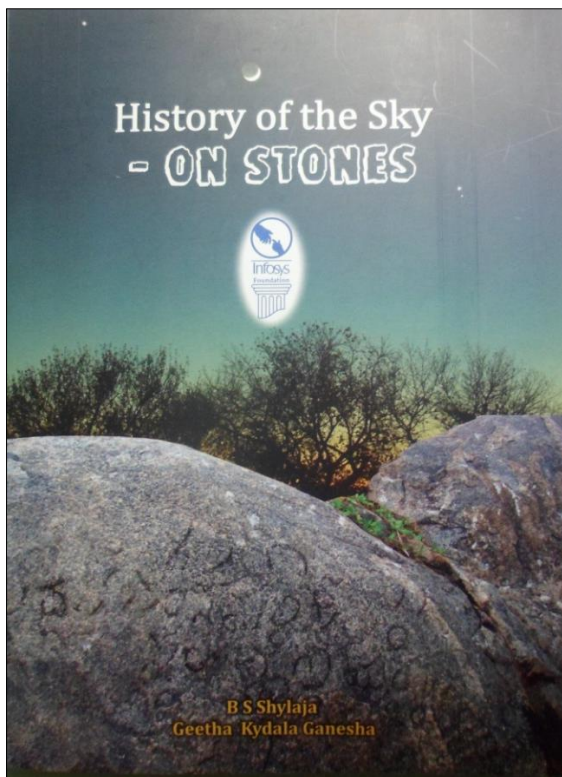
One of the distinct benefits enjoyed by those of us who attended the recent 9th International Conference on Oriental Astronomy in Pune was the concurrent appearance of new books about the history of Indian astronomy.

One of these was an attractive paperback about the invaluable information that inscriptions on stone provide about historic astronomical objects and events. As the authors point out in their Preface:

Every village has a history; and every village has it recorded on one or several stone [sic.]. These stone inscriptions are of great importance to historians, sociologists and traditional scholars, though very little attention was paid on the study as sources of astronomical records.

When we ventured to explore this new avenue to fetch unknown records of astronomical observations we did not know the volume of the task that lay ahead. (page 3).

I suspect that had the authors realised the magnitude of the task at hand they would quickly have diverted their attention to other projects, for soon they were 'drowning' in inscribed stones, where ~ 38,000 inscriptions had been recorded over the past century or more. These inscriptions date back to the third century BC, and they contain a "... wealth of information



on various aspects of evolution of culture, trade, history and region ..." (page 12). Most of these have no relevance to astronomy, but those that do and are discussed by Shylaja and Ganesha in their book exceed 1,500. The stunning thing is that their study was restricted to the central part of southern India, and even there new inscriptions continue to be discovered. Imagine the plethora of data available if and when the whole Indian Subcontinent is surveyed in this way!

So what sorts of information have Shylaja and Ganesha uncovered in the course of their research? Since inscriptions normally were only engraved on special occasions, there are abundant records of solar and lunar eclipses, planetary conjunctions, and lunar occultations, and

occasional references to comets. Fortunately, the dates of all of these are accurately recorded in the inscriptions, but since various dating systems were used in different parts of India during the past two millenia the inscription dates must be converted to our current 'Western' calendrical system. This challenge is outlined in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Solar eclipses and lunar eclipses are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. Solar eclipses (total, annular and partial) date from AD 21 May 616 to 24 March 1849 and they are listed individually on pages 107–115. Several of these eclipses are mentioned in more than one inscription. Not all of these eclipses were in fact observed, as some of the paths of totality bypassed India. However, the authors conclude that

In general we find that the large number of eclipse records provide a homogeneous data for verifying long term variation of parameters involved in the prediction of eclipses. (page 38).

The earliest lunar eclipse recorded on an inscription dates to AD 30 April 660, and the latest to 8 May 1876. Individual eclipses are listed on pages 116–126. A particularly interesting record dates to 14 February 1710 when the eclipsed Moon occulted Regulus (*Magha*) just before moonset at dawn.

Many planetary conjunctions are recorded on stone inscriptions, and these, and lunar occultations of stars and planets, are discussed in Chapter 8 and listed individually on pages 127–148. Some of these must have been visually-aluring events. For example: on 2 October 1117 and 22 August 1467 Saturn was in conjunction with Aldebaran (*Rohini*) and the Hyades; on 2 March 1169 the Moon, Jupiter and Mercury were in conjunction; on 10 February 1671 the Moon, Mercury and Saturn were in conjunction; and occultations of Mars by the Moon occurred on 12 December 1112 and 14 December 1132. In addition to these and other conjunctions and occultations, there also are many records of solstices and equinoxes, the earliest of which dates to AD 687.

Chapter 9 is titled "Revelations of Celestial Phenomena", and the authors claim that "Our studies of stone inscriptions have revealed quite a few new results which have escaped the attention of epigraphists", but some of their conclusions are open to debate. Thus, drawing on references to *Ketu*, they suggest that two new stars reportedly observed by Chinese astronomers on 9 and 18 December 1297 between Pisces and Andromeda can be associated with the planetary NGC 7662, on the basis that its two distinct ellipsoidal shells document eruptions 700 and 1050 years ago. Yet neither

of these dates aligns precisely with the Chinese observations, and planetary nebulae are not known for nova-like eruptions.

In Chapter 9, Shylaja and Ganesha also point out that inscriptions hold promise of identifying transits of Mercury and Venus, but although they suggest one possible transit of Mercury (21 April 1056), they were not able to assemble any convincing evidence of transits of Venus (cf. Kapoor, 2013). However, they live in hope:

These examples offer an optimistic view: the current survey on stone inscriptions has covered only 10% of the available 30,000 (and more being added now) records centered in and around Karnataka. Hence a systematic search of such inscriptions from all over India is likely to yield more results. (page 84).

Arguably one of the most important parts of the whole book is Section 9.3, which is titled “The period of rotation of the earth”. Here Shylaja and Ganesha discuss the role that accurately-dated solar eclipses have played in documenting variations in the rotation rate of the Earth, a field of study pioneered by the noted British astronomer, Professor Richard Stephenson of Durham University. Stephenson has plotted these variations (referred to as ΔT) against time (e.g. see Stephenson, 2006; 2007; 2011; Stephenson and Morrison, 1995), and in Figure 9.3 on page 87 Shylaja and Ganesha include one of his plots (erroneously referred to as a ‘Soma Diagram’, and published by Morrison), where eight new data points, based on dated Indian eclipses, are included. It is heartening to see India finally making a valued contribution to this important area of history of astronomy research, which is known as Applied Historical Astronomy.

While most of this book is devoted to astronomical stone inscriptions, the authors devote nearly four pages to the lifespan of Sri Rāmanujācārya, “... the great saint of the Srivaishnavite sect, [who] has left a remarkable imprint in the whole of South India.” (page 97). His birth and death dates are generally given as AD 1017 and AD 1137, and this long lifespan has generated much debate. Using data contained in inscriptions, Shylaja and Ganesha come up with a revised birth date of AD 1077, and a more realistic lifespan of 68 years.

The final chapter in this book is titled “Expectations and realities”, where the authors stress that astronomical inscriptions were not recorded because of the importance of the celestial events *per se*, but rather because their occurrence led to offerings being made. Thus

... emphasis lay on the act of donation ... and recording the donor and donee. The actual celestial event was perhaps only an excuse to

perform this action ... [and get] its name immortalized on the stone inscription. (page 102).

Most of the inscriptions used in this study were already recorded earlier by others, and the challenge Shylaja and Ganesha faced was to work their way through these extensive published lists and sift out the astronomical inscriptions. In the process they encountered many unfamiliar words that had to be deciphered; some of these words were unique to the inscriptions and were not found in the general historical literature. Sometimes the inscriptions offered conflicting interpretations, but by using off-the-shelf astronomical software (e.g. Occult, or NASA eclipse web sites) they were able to resolve many of these issues. Nonetheless, many areas of India were not covered in their study, and Shylaja and Ganesha now “... are eagerly awaiting the new and revised compiled volumes [of inscriptions] to be published.” (page 106).

This is an attractive-looking reasonably-priced paperback book, liberally decorated with figures, maps and tables (many in colour). I noticed very few ‘typos’, although in my copy of the book the last four lines of text on page 80 were duplicated at the top of page 81, and earlier on page 80 in two places Greek symbols were replaced by pairs of boxes. Apart from these anomalies, the Infosys Foundation did a good job as the publisher.

Finally, I should mention that unlike the book by Shylaja about Charry and the 1874 transit of Venus that is reviewed above by Ramesh Kapoor and me, *History of the Sky – On Stones* reveals Shylaja’s true talents when she focusses on a topic she is familiar with. It is to be hoped that she and Ganesha will continue this study, and expand their analysis of astronomical inscriptions beyond central southern India. Obviously, this is a long-term project, but an important one, as it can throw valuable new light on Indian astronomy and at the same time contribute to Applied Historical Astronomy.

I feel that this interesting book marks a new era in the study of Indian astronomy, and that it deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in the history of Indian astronomy.

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Professor Wayne Orchiston
National Astronomical Research Institute
of Thailand,
Chiang Mai, Thailand.
Email: wayne.orchiston@narit.or.th

***History of Indian Astronomy. A Handbook*, edited by K. Ramasubramanian, Aniket Sule and Mayank Vahia. (Science and Heritage Initiative Indian Institute of Technology, and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, 2016). Pp. x + 662. ISBN 978-81-923111-9-7 (hard cover), 170 x 247 mm (for the price, email mnvahia@gmail.com).**

The other book received by those who attended ICOA-9 in Pune, India, in November 2016 was a handsome 672-page volume, edited by three luminaries of Indian astronomical history, Professor K. Ramasubramanian (Indian Institute of Technology), Dr Aniket Sule and Professor Mayank Vahia (both from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research).

As the 'blurb' on the back cover indicates,

This volume is a compilation of twenty-one thematic articles that provide a glimpse of the origin and development of astronomy in India from the Vedic period till the beginning of 20th century. These articles have been contributed by a galaxy of renowned scholars.

After an introductory chapter titled "Roots of Indian astronomy" by Mayank Vahia, Nisha Yadav and Srikumar Menon where they review astronomical basics before discussing "Astronomy and civilisation" in an Indian context, the archaeologist, Riza Abbas, writes about "Rock art and astronomy in India". Those familiar with international developments in rock art studies will be aware of the challenges involved in assigning astronomical meaning to different motifs, so I was very surprised to read that Joglekar et al. (2006) have found evidence of a prehistoric supernova explosion depicted on an engraved stone slab at Burzahom, and that "In this study they have scientifically proved that this would be first record of a sky map drawn to record a particular event." (page 48). Even though I allowed the publication of a paper about this same engraving in this journal (see Iqbal et al., 2009) in order to encourage lateral thinking and discussion, in fact this engraving is controver-

sial, and other equally-compelling interpretations can be proposed for it that have nothing whatsoever to do with a supernova.

In Chapter 3 Srikumar Menon discusses "Megalithic astronomy in India", where he stresses their relative abundance in southern India (see the distribution map on page 65). Menon concludes:

Despite nearly two centuries of academic attention being focussed on them, the Indian megaliths still have a lot of unanswered questions centred on them ...

Stone alignments in different parts of southern India and Vidarbha seem to hold some promise of astronomical sightlines incorporated as part of their design and layout. (page 81).

We then move from archaeoastronomy to ethnoastronomy (Chapter 4), where Mayank Vahia and Ganesh Halkare talk about "Astronomy of tribals of central India". Although regretting the use of the term 'tribals' in lieu of 'tribes', I found this chapter interesting, although most of it was familiar to me thanks to a series of research papers that the authors had already published (and several of them in this journal). As Vahia and Halkare point out, "... several Indian tribes that have been isolated from the mainstream have their own understanding of the sky and constellations." (page 85). Over the next 11 pages or so they discuss indigenous constellations in different areas of the sky and their terrestrial associations (ecological activities, the monsoon, etc.), along with the Milky Way, Solar System objects, eclipses and creation myths. The authors hope that this chapter "... will encourage researchers in other parts of the country to undertake similar studies of the astronomy of the tribes of India before modernity completely overwhelms them." (page 104).

Then follow two chapters about Vedic astronomy, and I found the first of these, by R.N. Iyengar (Jain University, Bangalore), captivating, where he discovers references to eclipses, comets, meteorite impacts, and the shifting of the 'pole star' in Vedic texts. However, these references are not always obvious since

... Vedic culture personified celestial objects and their actions. Hence the texts carry a background that has to be deciphered for extracting the archaic models of the visible sky." (page 108).

As with those who wrote earlier chapters in this book, Iyengar draws on his own earlier publications, but then brings his long 63-page chapter up-to-date by including considerable new material.

Kak's much shorter chapter follows, and this presents a useful overview of the relationship

between Vedic astronomy, ritual and temple design.

Those with an interest in calendars will value Chapter 7, where two retired Indian astronomers, S.K. Chatterjee and A.K. Chakravarty discuss the “Indian calendar from post-Vedic period to 1900 CE”. Their long and detailed account (49 pages) is a partly-revised version of a paper that they first published in 2000.

An old Japanese friend of mine, Dr Yukio Ohashi, is the author of the next chapter, which is titled “The mathematical and observational astronomy in traditional India”. This long chapter is a reprinted version of a paper that was originally published in 2009 so was in little need of up-dating. Those with an interest in Vedic astronomy and Indian calendars also will find much of interest in this 77-page chapter, which in fact ranges beyond India to also discuss—albeit briefly—Greek, Islamic, Tibetan, Chinese and even Thailand and Burmese astronomy. Immediately prior to presenting an invaluable 9.5-page list of references, Yukio winds up his informative chapter in a charming way: “I hope some readers of my paper will become future researchers, and they will make my paper outdated by their own research works!”

In Chapter 9, M.S. Sriram, M.D. Srinivas and K. Ramasubramanian review “The traditional Indian planetary model and its revision by Nīlakaṇṭha Somayājī”, while M.S. Sriram discusses “Bhāskarācārya’s astronomy” in Chapter 10.

“Lunar and solar eclipse procedures in Indian astronomy” by P. Venugopal, K. Rupa and S. Balachangra Rao comprises Chapter 11 while the same authors but in revised order (Balachangra Rao, Venugopal and Rupa) discuss “Transits and occultations in Indian astronomy in the following chapter. From ca. 505 CE Indian astronomers knew the causes of solar and lunar eclipses and in Chapter 11 the circumstances of the eclipses were computed “... according to Bhāskara II’s *Karaṇakutūhala*, *Grahalāghava* and Improved *Siddhāntic* procedures ISP.” (page 408). Meanwhile, similar procedures were used to compute transits and occultations, but although planetary conjunctions are discussed in most traditional textbooks on Indian astronomy transits of Mercury and Venus are not explicitly mentioned. The authors therefore proceed to outline a procedure developed by Professor T.S. Kuppanna within the framework of Siddhāntic astronomy, using the 2004 and 2012 transits as examples.

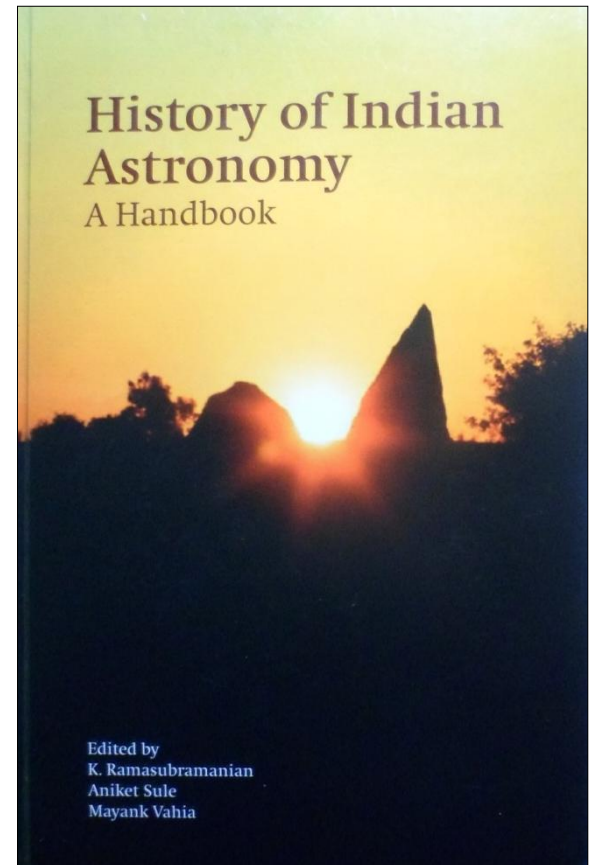
The next chapter is titled “An overview of the *vākya* method of computing the longitudes of the sun and moon” and was written by Venketeswara Pai, K. Ramasubramanian, S. Sriram and M.D. Srinivas, and aims “... to highlight the ingenuity and beauty of the *vākya*

method of planetary computations.” (page 430).

Continuing the computational astronomy theme, Chapter 14 by Clemency Montelle (from New Zealand) and K. Ramasubramanian discuss “The numerical tables related to eclipse computation in the *Parvadvayasādhana* of Mallāri”. They point out that the *Parvadvayasādhana*

... is somewhat unusual in the sense that it presents more complex tables having multiple rows and columns in the form of beautiful verses in *śardūlavikrīḍita* metre (19 syllables per quarter). (page 475).

The theme of the book changes notably with Chapter 15, which is about “Indian astronomical



instruments: A descriptive catalogue of extant specimens”, penned by S.R. Sarma. In researching this theme, Sarma says that he

... decided to make a survey of museums and identify pre-modern astronomical and time-keeping instruments. Such a survey, I hoped, would be useful because the actual specimens might help in understanding the brief descriptions of the texts. Conversely, textual knowledge would help in identifying an instrument and in dating its original design. Finally, this combined approach of studying the texts together with instruments would throw better light on trans-cultural exchanges, especially between the Sanskrit and Islamic traditions of instrumentation in the medieval period. (page 478).

In the following 21 pages Sarma presents an assortment of astrolabes, celestial globes, armillary spheres, various types of quadrants, sundials, gnomons, water clocks and other rarer types of instruments of Indian design and construction. On a plaintive note Sarma describes how he made an inventory of the portable astronomical instruments at the Sawai Jai Singh Astronomical Observatory in Jaipur in 1991 and later sent his catalogue to the Observatory's Superintendent, but by the time a new building for the display of these instruments was opened the original Superintendent had retired and the instruments were displayed without proper identification. "It is like a museum displaying a painting by Picasso without any label! It is a great pity." (page 498). I totally agree with him.

The next two chapters in the book were written by B.S. Shylaja, whose name should now be well known to all, thanks to the two preceding book reviews that appear in this issue of this Journal. Chapter 16 is about "Navigation and astronomy". I presume that Shylaja's primary focus is meant to be Indian maritime navigation, but unfortunately she ranges far and wide geographically, discussing the Kerkennah fishermen of Tunisia; Gilbert and Caroline Islanders in the Pacific; Portuguese navigators; Lieutenant James Cook's use of eclipses, Jovian satellite phenomena and the 3 November 1769 transit of Mercury to determine longitude; the Bugis voyagers of Indonesia; and even the Vikings. I have to say that I found this hotchpotch of examples confusing, as much better case studies could have been employed if Shylaja's aim was simply to document the range of techniques used internationally in order to determine latitude and longitude. Then, when we finally put aside these various examples and look just at Indian navigation the pickings are lean and we end up with a rather simplistic account of how certain coastal people from the Subcontinent used astronomy to successfully sail from one place to another. However, variations in the navigational techniques and instruments used at any one time in different coastal regions of the Subcontinent are not discussed, and there is no attempt to trace changes in the techniques and technology that occurred with the passage of time. Various indigenous names for different stars listed on page 508 and 511 are not referenced, while some key references that Shylaja does mention in the text are not listed in the References section (e.g. Grimble, 1931; Leybourn, 1861 and the various papers by Vardarajan). A map of the Subcontinent and adjacent regions of the Indian Ocean would have been helpful for those readers wishing to pin down localities that Shylaja does mention. However, Shylaja seems aware of the limitations of her study when she mentions that the navigational

techniques of some coastal groups have still to be studied. Furthermore, "The study hints at a vast treasure house of astronomical knowledge which is slowly being lost." (page 512), and "... satellite communication systems have now revolutionized the lifestyle in these tiny islands and are slowly wiping out the traditional techniques." Despite these caveats, and although I am vitally interested in this topic and have written on it myself (e.g. see Orchiston, 1998; 2016: Chapters 4–6), I found this to be one of the least rewarding chapters of the book.

Happily, Shylaja has made a better fist of Chapter 17, "Astronomical aspects associated with temples". Temples in India date back more than 2,000 years, and apart from their religious and educational functions some of them also were associated with time-keeping and calendar-making. After reviewing Indian calendars and festivals Shylaja transports us to South Africa, where ceremonies of reputed south Indian origin are still performed by the local inhabitants at specially-constructed places of worship. These reported south Indian-South African cultural links are fascinating and warrant critical examination. The book then returns us to India and the mathematical and astronomical knowledge exhibited by temple-builders across the subcontinent and across the sands of time. Two structures with clear astronomical associations that she reviews in considerable detail are the Vidyāsankara Temple at Śrīrgerī and the Gavi Gaṅgāhareśvara Temple at Bengaluru, although she seems unfamiliar with the paper by Kameswara Rao and Thakur (2011) about the former temple. Shylaja then discusses a number of other temples that exhibit solstice alignments, and then explores the concept of a basic scale that was used in temple construction in southern India. Leading from this is the fascinating idea that the sun temples in some cities—such as ancient Varanasi (see Rana, 2009)—were based on astronomical alignments. Shylaja stresses that her study is still in its infancy, and

A mammoth task lies ahead — we have to decode how the blueprint of the temples were [*sic*] prepared and what were the astronomical aspects that were incorporated. (page 545).

In Chapter 18 we return to astronomical instrumentation—albeit on a gigantic scale—when N. Rathnasree (from the Nehru Planetarium) discusses "The Jantar Mantar observatories of India teaching laboratories of positional astronomy". I found it interesting that one of Jai Singh's objectives when he set up these giant masonry observatories 300 years ago was that "... common citizens could ... make observations on their own ..." (page 552) and this is precisely what Rathnasree has done as part of the outreach program of the Nehru Planetarium.

So, for the first time in 300 years, the Jantar Mantar were used successfully as a teaching laboratory, as illustrated by various photographs and graphs that accompany this chapter. After reading this interesting chapter, I now see the Jai Singh observatories in a totally new light.

The third-last and penultimate chapters in this long but invaluable book were written by Professor Raza Ansari, a long-time colleague through our mutual IAU and ICOA associations. Chapter 19 is titled “Tradition of astronomical sciences in medieval India” and was developed from a paper that Ansari published in 2014 so is totally up-to-date. After some introductory comments, Ansari discusses in sequence the major astronomical features associated with the Sultanate Period (AD 1191–1526) and the Mughal Period (1526–1748), including the contributions made by Babur, Naṣīruddīn Muḥammad Humāyūn, Abul Faṭḥ Jalāluddīn Akbar, Nūruddīn Jahāngīr, Abul Muẓaffar Shahābuddīn Muḥammad Shāhjahān and Roshan Aktar Muḥammad Shāh. As Ansari points out,

During the Mughal period, the constant stream of scholars, crafts men, and artists particularly from Central Asia continued vigorously, and those migrants brought with them knowledge of all natural sciences into India. (page 583).

In an astronomical context, this is well portrayed in this excellent, well-researched and well-referenced chapter, but one key reference that has been published since Ansari wrote this chapter is Kapoor (2015).

Nor does this high standard change in Ansari’s next chapter, “Reception of modern western astronomy in the 18th–19th centuries”, where

... we confine ourselves mainly to Persian-speaking Indian scholars, who came into direct contact with the British scientists, engineers, and doctors. These ideas resulted in an academic interaction and exchange of scientific ideas. Consequently, we present here a brief survey of selected Indo-Persian writings dealing with Modern European Astronomy ... (page 607).

Those selected for this analysis are: Sawā’i Jai Singh, Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusain, Mirzā Abū Ṭālib Khān Iṣfahānī, Ghulām Ḥusain Jaunpūrī, Raja Ratan Singh, Ḥadā’iq al-Nujūm and Tafadḍul Ḥusain Khān bin Ikramullāh Khān. But much of this impetus was stifled when the British Colonial Government introduced English as the official language during the nineteenth century.

And so we arrive at the final chapter in this impressive tome, Professor Rajesh Kochhar’s contribution on “The growth of modern astronomy in India, 1651-1960”. I have known Rajesh for several decades, and have been impressed with his writings on the history of Indian astronomy, so I was rather disappointed to discover

that all he chose to do was reprint a paper that originally was published in *Vistas in Astronomy* back in 1991 (and is listed in the references assembled on page 349 in these book reviews). The problem is that while the basic narrative of Indian astronomical history has not changed during this 300-yr period, much additional research has been published. So we certainly can accept Rajesh’s accounts of “Use of the telescope in the 17th century”, “Advent of modern astronomy in the 18th century”, “Madras observatory (1786–1899)”, “The great trigonometrical survey of India ...”, “Lucknow observatory (1831–49)”, “Trivandrum observatory (1837–52)”, “Poona non-observatory”, “19th century positional astronomy – a critique”, “Advent of physical astronomy (1874)”, “Takhtasinghji’s observatory in Poona (1888–1912)”, “Kodaikanal observatory (1899)”, “Nizamiah observatory (1901)” and “Uttar Pradesh state observatory, Nainital (1954)”, but to bring readers up-to-date the books by Launay (2012), Nath (2013) and Sen (2014) need to be consulted, while all of the following research papers contain material that supplements that presented in Kochhar’s chapter: Biswas (1994; 2003); Kameswara Rao et al. (2009; 2011); Kapoor (2011; 2013; 2014); Kochhar (2002); Orchiston et al. (2006); Orchiston and Pearson (2011); Pigatto and Zanini (2001); Rathansree et al., (2012); and Reddy et al. (2007).

After Kochhar’s chapter, the book ends with a 10-page glossary of astronomical terms, but there is no Index.

Notwithstanding my comments about the final chapter, and the absence of an Index, overall this is a wonderful book, with lots of interesting reading. Most of the chapters are well illustrated, and many chapters have long lists of references for those wishing to follow up specific areas of interest. I have no hesitation in recommending this book, and believe that it will long remain a primary reference work for those interested in the history of Indian astronomy.

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Professor Wayne Orchiston
National Astronomical Research Institute
of Thailand,
Chiang Mai, Thailand.
Email: wayne.orchiston@narit.or.th