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Shifting Stones, Shaping the Past: Sculpture from the Buddhist Stupas of Andhra Pradesh

Catherine Becker

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In this wide-ranging exploration of the creation and use of Buddhist art in Andhra Pradesh, India, Catherine Becker examines how material remains and visual experiences shape and reveal essential human concerns.

Shifting Stones, Shaping the Past addresses the fundamental Buddhist question of how humanity progresses centuries after the passing of its teacher, the Buddha Sakyamuni. How might the Buddha's distant teachings be made immediate and accessible? Beginning with an analysis of the spectacular relief sculptures that once adorned the stupas. Over a period of almost two millennia, many of these stupas have fallen into disrepair. While it is tempting to view these monuments as ruins, they are by no means "dead." Turning to the 20th and 21st centuries, Becker analyzes examples of new Buddhist imagery, recent state-sponsored tourism campaigns, and new devotional activities at the sites in order to demonstrate that the stupas of Andhra Pradesh and their sculptural adornments continue to engage the human imagination and are even ascribed innate power and agency. *Shifting Stones, Shaping the Past* reveals intriguing parallels between ancient uses of imagery and the new social, political, and religious functions of these objects and spaces.

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