

Pratik Chakrabarti. *Inscriptions of Nature. Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 2020. 263 p. ISBN 9781421438740. 57 \$

Although the term itself is more recent, as a comparative category, the “global south”, corresponding roughly to the divide between the colonized and the colonizing, emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. It was grounded, literally, in the ground itself, that is, on observations that the South—including the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Australia, and South America—shared a common geology, which produced similar climatic conditions and life forms, and, in turn, served to naturalize claims about comparable cultural and political structures, and, more pointedly, to justify Northern powers’ colonial interventions in the South. The “deep time” of geological formations, stretching back into a past before human history, is both historical and eminently political. This is one of the bolder claims made by Pratik Chakrabarti in his most recent book, *Inscriptions of Nature. Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity*, which delves into the making of natural knowledge in nineteenth-century India and into its links to antiquarianism and philology, to identify the “narratives central to constructing the imagination of the geological evolution of the Indian landscape and its human and nonhuman inhabitants” (p. 10). Historicizing the category of the natural, Chakrabarti shows how the construction of “deep time” in India causes “myths to appear as facts and provide them with historical and political legacies, both in the colonial and nationalist contexts” (p. 13).

Following a somewhat meandering introduction—which covers ambitious conceptual ground, even as “Orientalism,” which appears profusely throughout, is not explained until eighty pages later—the book is organized around five chapters, each centered on a different coupling of the natural and the historical. The material follows the Himalayan expeditions across Tibet and Kashmir and the earliest discovery of fossils by British explorers; the eighteenth-century Mosaic historical tradition in India through which geologists linked Indian fossils with Puranic traditions; and the geological and ethnological explorations of landscapes and tribes in central India. Chakrabarti builds on vast and erudite archival research to propose a rich intellectual history, with a variegated set of characters, from English naturalists, antiquarians, and philologists, to missionaries, mineral and agricultural prospectors, engineers, and East India Company administrators, who travelled between England and India, between museums and laboratories and the field. (One wishes Indian scholars had more of a voice

in the book, side-by-side British scholars, or at least for some explanation for their reduced participation in these pursuits, if that was indeed the case). Reflecting on the hybrid nature of their disciplines like archaeology, anthropology, geology, and paleontology in the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for the same scholar to produce work on alluvial beds, intervene in philological discussions about Indian antiquity, or offer evidence on India's prehistoric races. Nor was it uncommon for the same person to engage in prospecting for soil propitious to cotton or for gold or coal mines. Collecting fossils and inventorying racial characteristics depended, after all, on infrastructures built for exploiting India's natural resources, and knowledge of its land and people in turn enabled and justified efficient exploitation.

Inscriptions of Nature follows a roughly chronological arc. The first chapter explores the digging of the Doab canal, in Punjab, in the 1820s, which unearthed ancient canal networks, lost riverbeds, traces of mythological rivers, and prehistoric fossils. Most relevantly for Chakrabarti's argument, the engineering project reflects the deep entanglements between the natural and the historical, between landscape and monument, where ancient canals and works were read as nature, and where, conversely, myths were used to make sense of geology. These kinds of intersections lay the ground for the rest of the book. The following chapter follows the same set of characters north into the Himalayas and the Gangetic plains. Here, the search for precious metals and trade routes through Central Asia resulted in the discovery of ancient fossils and the construction of a geological narrative postulating the original presence of the ancient ocean Thetys, spread across Eurasia, followed by Himalayan upheaval, which raised the ocean bed and laid the fossils bare. It is in these alluvial plains, and based on the assumption of stable climatic conditions, that geologists proposed the origins of an ancient human race, at the same time that scholars in London were searching for the origins of Druidism in the east. Though, Chakrabarti admits, such theories placing the question of human origin in the context of a broader search for the evolution of landscapes and rivers were farfetched, they firmly embedded Indian antiquity into the geological narrative of an ancient alluvium. These kinds of associations between race and landscape resonated throughout the nineteenth century, especially in the construction of the theory of Gondwanaland (the topic of the book's last two chapters) —the supercontinent consisting of South America, Africa, India, and Australia—, built on shared colonial experience of putatively common geological and racial characteristics.

While chapter 2 explores the ways in which Indian antiquity was read through fossil evidence, Chapter 3 looks at the other side of the coin, turning to

Hindu mythological traditions, the Puranas and Vedas, to interpret fossils unearthed in the Gangetic plains. Shaligrams —fossil ammonites venerated by Hindus as Vishnu's avatars— and tortoises —thought to carry the world on their back in both Indian and Amerindian mythologies— were entryways to interpreting the fossil record through sacred geographies and texts, at a time when European deep history discarded biblical interpretations. This had the effect that Hindu myths and sacred geographical ideas emerged as more naturalistic and enduring entities in Hindu imagination of India.

Chapters 4 and 5 center on Gondwana, in central India, to explore how assumptions about geological primitivism and racial primitivism went together in nineteenth-century theories. Viewing the histories, lifestyles, and cultures of aboriginal populations through paleontological and geological frames sustained the identification of these peoples as remnants of prehistoric races. It also helped underwrite the two-race theory, according to which, aboriginal peoples were conquered by a civilizing Aryan race, arrived from elsewhere. History repeats itself with the British conquest; in the context of nineteenth-century colonial appropriation of resources, racial categories served to pacify tribes, encroach on their land and their past, and promote colonial mining and agricultural expansion. The search for a primeval purity of life —for a vast and changeless Gondwana— is inseparable from the colonial interventions that brought about vertiginous change and the disenfranchisement of aboriginal populations.

I come to *Inscriptions of Nature* as a historian of nineteenth-century Latin American —particularly Mexican— science, and the case studies that make up this book can at moments seem distant. While Chakrabati is conversant with literatures of African and Australian histories of science and anthropology, the few dictums on South America seem, by comparison, flat. Yet, as I read through his discussion of the two-race theory in India, I cannot help but compare it with similar explanatory frameworks which, in the case of Mexican preconquest history, postulated the presence of an aboriginal, primitive population —whose descendants still roamed the country in the nineteenth century—, which received the gift of civilization, in the form of agriculture, building techniques, and writing and calendar systems, from a more advanced race, arrived from elsewhere. The Hindu, the Egyptians, and the Chinese were alternately touted as civilizers at different moments. The two-race theory was employed in the nineteenth century, both by colonial powers and by the Mexican state, to justify interventions on Indigenous land and history. At the same time, as in the Indian case, the naturalization of Aztec myth continues to provide the Mexican state with lithic foundations for national ideologies.

If the concept of the Global South is a comparative category, as Chakrabarti suggests, the questions he asks in this book could not be more exciting and relevant and serve as inspiration to explore synergies between geology and antiquity, race and landscape, as they emerged in the contexts of asymmetrical geopolitical arrangements elsewhere. Seeking to make explicit the politics of nature, Chakrabarti pushes against a powerful naturalist narrative that, in the Latin American case, has its origin in the Humboldtian sciences, especially in Humboldt's interpretations of Amerindian cultural monuments as materializations of the continent's putatively savage nature and agitated geology. Today, it can take the form of alternative naturalisms that postulate deep and intimate relations between peoples and landscapes. Chakrabarti asks his readers to recognize that the natural has been incorporated into the colonial archive, is the bedrock of Western history, and can serve as framework for reproducing colonial effects. Ultimately, Chakrabarti insists, it is a question of who gets to speak in the name of nature. ■

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■ **Agnieszka Kościańska.** *To see a moose. The history of Polish sex education.* New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books; 2021. 354 p. ISBN 978-1-80073-060-1. 145 \$

Con esta obra, Agnieszka Kościańska nos lleva a hacer un viaje por la educación sexual en Polonia durante el siglo xx. Desde textos escolares, pasando por los de las figuras católicas más mediáticas y llegando a las canciones populares, un recorrido fascinante de los discursos predominantes en la educación sexual y las figuras más relevantes.

El libro se divide en tres grandes bloques, dedicando cada uno a un tipo de discurso sobre la educación sexual. El primero, y más extenso, con el título *Behind and beyond the school gates*, se centra en cómo la educación sexual en los colegios ha adoptado diferentes modelos, siendo el más extendido el modelo medicalizado. El segundo bloque, *The view from the pulpit*, se centra en el discurso sobre sexualidad que la Iglesia católica ha intentado proyectar. Por último,