JAINISM AND BUDDHISM AS ENDURING HISTORICAL STREAMS

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THE Digambar Jainism of southern and western India and the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka are among the world's oldest extant religious traditions. They grew ultimately out of the same soil and shared many of the same problems, if not the same solutions. One line I will pursue in this article is a comparison of the two as enduring historical streams. It is a comparison which I have found extraordinarily useful in giving an account of the two religions.

The second line arises from the longevity and variation of the two religions. Over their 2500-year history Theravada and Digambar Jainism alone, quite apart from other closely related sects and schisms, have each given rise to a wealth of diverse and often mutually contradictory attitudes, practices and forms of life. The longevity and the variation can best be understood, I suggest, by regarding the religions as enduring historical streams, a patterned flow of contingencies and aspirations, routines and imaginative responses. Such a treatment is designed to achieve fidelity to the rich historical and ethnographic material of each religion—and, as I suggest in the conclusion, to offer an alternative to some present practices in anthropology.

1. *Methodical Wonder*

To speak of *enduring* historical streams is to stress the continuity of the two
religions over a period of 2500 years since their origin. This is quite conventional,
and accords with the wisdom of Buddhists, Jains, Indologists and anthropologists -
with the proviso that Buddhists and Jains would also add a prehistory of uncounted
eons to the chronology.

But to speak of *streams* is to suggest a sense of change and fluidity. That is
reasonable, for both religions have undergone wrenching changes, perhaps
complete transformations. Digambar Jains have lost their original scriptures, while
the Theravada tradition of meditation was broken. Buddhism almost completely
disappeared from the subcontinent, and Digambar Jainism was largely obliterated
from its original stronghold in southern Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Digambar
ascetics have lost the continuity of their initiation, while for long periods in Sri
Lanka the monks' way of life was hardly practised at all. The Buddhism of Sri
Lanka in 1700, or the Jainism of southern Maharashtra in 1900, were so different
from that of the founders as to be nearly unrecognizable.

In the long run none of these misadventures led to total extinction, but they
do suggest that the proper attitude is one of wonder at the monumental longevity
of these processes.

Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere (Carrithers 1989) that such wonder should
be a necessary methical foundation for the study of any matter, such as
Buddhism or Jainism, which we think of as cultural. I argued there that in a very
large perspective, such as that in which we view the rise and persistence of the two
religions, and in an even larger perspective, that in which human sociality itself
evolved, cultural and social change are the norm. Hence any case of persistence
and longevity requires explanation even more than cases of transmutation,
innovation, or disappearance. This argument was directed against the reassuring
assumption that cultures, or religions, just do persist, and that we anthropologists
(or students of religion or Indologists) have only to explain an unchanging form.
On the contrary, to designate something as an enduring culture is really to present
a hypothesis about the survival of a pattern in the long term. The survival of such
patterns—such enduring historical streams—should be made explicit and not just
taken for granted.

What would count as such an explication? First, it should be grounded in
some sense of what is coherent in a process, what makes events or arrangements
or persons count as belonging to Buddhism or Jainism or neither. It would be
against the spirit of fluidity and intricacy in human history to make this sense of
coherence too strict: what we are looking for is a pattern, not an algorithm, a style
rather than a rule. We should even be prepared to see continuity as being merely
serial, as showing merely that some arrangements came before others and in some
sense caused them.

But we would also want to look for some element of the routine, the
predictable. We would ask how Jains or Buddhists have projected (reproduced,

transmitted) such a pattern from generation to generation. Part of the answer to this would show more or less routine procedures, even though the procedures themselves would be seen to change, and the routine would alter over the generations.

On other occasions an emergency or opportunity calls forth an extraordinary, sometimes fitting, sometimes not so fitting response. We should also have some way of understanding such responses.

If the pattern thus explicated may seem too fluid, or the boundary between the routine and the extraordinary too fuzzy, such fluidity and fuzziness is at least faithful to the character of human history.

There is, of course, one straightforward way to meet these requirements, and that is to write in a historical, narrative mode, a style of discourse whose rules set temporal succession and causal explanation in the foreground. Indeed there is probably no other way, at least for us as a species, to grasp fully the complexities of historicity and the vagaries of social life (see Ricoeur 1983; Carrithers 1987b, 1989a, 1990, in press b). Certainly what I have to say below would only gain perspicuity by being set in a narrative frame such as that used by Gombrich (1988). Another possibility might be to devise a new language of representation, such as that of Bohm (1980); but I will not attempt to do so here.

Yet it is possible for anthropologists to compass both the pattern and the mutability thus envisioned, as has been shown recently for Buddhism by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988), and for anthropology in general by writers such as Fox (1985), Peel (1987), Moore (1986), and Wolf (1982). But it is not easy, and one difficulty arises from what seems inseparable from the practice of ethnography. Ethnographers seek to render the obscure clear and the disjointed coherent, and one of the best ways to do so is to ignore change and variation by writing in the ethnographic present. This practice has its pathological side, as several recent writers have shown (Wolf 1982; Carrithers 1987a; Keyes 1987). But it seems inevitable that some measure of complexity, be it contemporaneous variation or change through time, must be sacrificed in the interests of clarity.

It might be useful to distinguish between interpretative and historical discourses, both of which mingle to make a satisfactory account of historical processes. In the interpretative mode such words as 'pattern' itself, as well as 'organization', 'scheme', 'code', 'characteristic form', 'orderly means'—all of which I use below—must be taken as emphasizing coherence and the relative orderliness which people expect at one time or another, while saying very little about the temporal extension or variation of such patterns. The English words 'religion', 'Buddhism', and 'Jainism' are good examples of the interpretative mode, for they have very little historical specificity at all.

The historical mode, on the other hand, stresses particular people, times and especially the particular forces and conditions which affected arrangements. Moreover, it stresses the composition of these in a flow of events such that change, even profound and catastrophic change, even confusion and the bafflement of expectations, can be brought within the ambit of understanding.

2. *Like with Like*

One implication of this distinction is that it is possible to write of the past in the past tense, and yet still remain largely in the interpretative mode by concentrating on coherence and orderliness rather than on change, variation, and causation. Indeed, I begin by taking just such a step. I write first of the two religions in general, in an interpretative mode, as reflected in texts in their earliest accessible forms. It is simplest in this setting to characterize them just as Buddhism and Jainism.

They both arose, or took much of their characteristic colour, at the same time, in the same place—about half a millennium before our era in northeastern India—and with a keen awareness of each other.[1] They both crystallized out of the culture of *śramaṇas*, spiritual strivers, which was so very lively, creative, and variegated at the time. They thereby shared a cosmic moral theory which was impersonal and abstractly formulated. They shared a sombre view of ordinary existence, which they conceived as that of a man at the head of a household. They both assumed that the locus of spiritual effort to escape such an existence lies within the psychophysical individual, rather than in respect of some divine Other. They had in common a technical and a social vocabulary, such as the idea of a *saṅgha* or ascetic order. And both enjoyed a similar relationship with the laity, a relationship governed by the practice of lay liberality and the notion that such liberality purchases spiritual merit.

In a sense Jainism was the ideal type of an ascetic's religion.[2] The notion of *tapas*, the cleansing heat of self-mortification, was central to the Jain *nirgrantha*'s painful practices: plucking out one's hair and beard, eating only once a day, no bathing, and—at least as regards the founder and some later followers—going permanently naked. Moreover, the Jain ascetic was encouraged to push himself as far as possible toward further self-mortification, for example by undertaking strenuous and elaborately patterned fasts. If the objective of the *nirgrantha* was to purify his soul as effectively and quickly as possible, then there was in principle no limit to the fierceness with which that end could be sought. The *nirgrantha* could even fast to death. Jain philosophy pursued the analogy of the soul as a material substance which could be purified to its logical extreme. Only Jains, for example, could have been as concerned as they were about the actual physical extent of the soul: did it fit the body exactly, or was it something smaller inside the body? And correspondingly, Jain practice took the acts of purification to their physical extreme. In that respect, the simplicity and directness of Jainism's cosmology supported the simplicity and directness of Jain ascetic practice. Jainism was certainly not easy to practise, but it was easy to think about.

1. Some of the points made in this section are elaborated in Carrithers 1983a and 1985.

2. The best treatment of Jainism to date has been Jaini 1979.

By contrast, the Buddhist *bhikkhu*[3] was to follow the Middle Way between indulgence and self-mortification, and *tapas* was explicitly proscribed. The *bhikkhu*'s way of life was certainly ascetic in the common English acceptation of the word, but the goal was not conceived to lie in the direction of strenuous self-mortification. The Buddhist conception of the psychophysical individual was a fundamentally psychological one, rather than one patterned on an analogy with the physical world. The Buddhist code was only preliminary to the subtle rearrangement of attitudes and perceptions, a rearrangement achieved through acquiring the skills of meditation and wisdom. There was no single dominant image such as purification of a soul, and no dominant strategy such as self-mortification, which shaped the *bhikkhu*'s code. If there was a dominant notion it was that of *yoniso manasikāra*, 'relevant, fundamental reflection', which has none of the simple and physically referential character of the Jain imagery. Buddhism may have been easier to do, but was far from easy to think about.

The notions of purification and of self-restraint were indeed present in the Buddhist case as in the Jain, but they were present as similes which only suggested but did not circumscribe the more complex reality of psychic and moral life. In Jainism, on the other hand, purification and self-restraint were taken to be direct and literal descriptions of psychic and moral life.

Perhaps the difference between the two religions can best be summed up in the imagery of the liberated individual. The *śramaṇas* generally had a notion of their own independence and separateness, and *a fortiori* of the independence and separateness of one who consummated a particular *śramaṇa* discipline. The Jains took this to a vigorous conclusion: for them the soul itself was fundamentally pure and untouched, so that when purified it became not merely independent but utterly singular, absolutely alone, abiding in solitary bliss at the top of the universe.

The Buddhists on the other hand emphasized self-reliance in a pragmatic sense, and stressed that what was purified or trained was fundamentally a process. The consummation of training was to bring that process to a therapeutic end. Among the images they chose to characterize that end was 'blowing out', *nirvāṇa*, as of a flame. But the Buddha and most of his followers refused to elaborate too greatly on such images, and in fact emphasized the powerlessness of the imagination to compass such a consummation.

So we can speak of each religion as having at the beginning a guiding project: in Jainism, purification through self-mortification for utter singularity; in Buddhism, training through the acquisition of new habits and skills for release. Indeed, the internal consistency of each project was given just by its being a project, that is, by the imaging of an end and the conceiving of a fitting means to achieve that end. I make this point because the religions did not just come into being unintentionally. They were both moulded to a great extent by the unitary intention of one man or at least a small group of men. So to proffer a largely idealist or mentalist explanation of the two religions, at least in their origins, fits

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3. See Carrithers 1983a, 1983b.

the historical circumstances. Moreover, the notion that they were *projects* conveys something of the intention and the energy through which the ancient *nirgranthas* and *bhikkhus* impressed themselves on posterity.

To what extent did these guiding projects inform the collective life of the two religions?

The details of the early monastic code of Jainism[4] are rather less clear than that of the Buddhists, but one characteristic stands out. The initiation, *dīkṣā*, of the *nirgrantha* was at the hands of his teacher alone, and the teacher had absolute authority over the pupil, as for example in the penalties awarded for a transgression. There is nothing here of the possibility, recognized in the Buddhist literature, that a pupil could correct his teacher, nor of the Buddhist practice of collectively sanctioning a penalty. The elementary group of Jain ascetics was formed from the pupils of one such teacher. The Jain form of collective life cannot be regarded as stemming directly from the exigencies of Jainism's guiding project, for some combination of *dīkṣā* and preceptorial authority were, and are, far more widely distributed in India. But, on the other hand, the authoritarian nature of the relationship recognized the athletic strenuousness of the Jain project, and so could be preserved as part of it.

Yet the Jain discipline evidently made room for an alternative to that way of life; namely the *jinakappa*, even more strenuous than that pursued under monastic discipline and designed for the fiercely hardy (see Caillat 1975). This envisaged not only nakedness, but also almost complete independence from other ascetics as well as from the world of the householder. If the ordinary *nirgrantha*'s way of life was designed with the difficulty of *tapas* in mind, the *jinakappa* was designed under the rubric of singularity.

Buddhism took quite another tack. The Buddha derived much inspiration from his native oligarchic republics, and something of the circumscribed personal autonomy recognized in such a political system was installed in the code of the *bhikkhusaṅgha*. The agreement of all members of a small local *saṅgha*, for example, was stressed as a value and enshrined in procedure. The best method of management was felt to be frequent and frank discussions between equals. Wandering from one *saṅgha* to another was relatively easy, whereas in the Jain case it was treated as a doubtful exception. The Buddhist *saṅgha* did practise a kind of routine gerontocracy, but it was ameliorated by other practices and attitudes.

Among the Buddhists the novice became a fully-fledged *bhikkhu* by *upasampadā*, ordination, a procedure in which a collectivity of his colleagues-to-be formally ratify his new status and membership in the *saṅgha* by common consent. It is true that the Buddhist code prescribed an etiquette of respect for those more senior in the *saṅgha*, yet the spirit in ordination as in other matters was one of a company of equals, all pursuing a common training. Buddhists retained and elaborated in poetry and narrative the picture of the solitary ascetic, but in practice

4. See Caillat 1975 and Deo 1956.

the *bhikkhu*'s life was one created by a collectivity and thereafter circumscribed by his membership in that collectivity. The Buddhist *saṅgha* had to be finely adjusted between individual autonomy and collective authority.

My purpose in stressing the disciplinary code, and especially the methods of creating new ascetics, is to convey some of the orderly means by which each religion in one period or another preserved and projected itself as a historical process. The details of *upasampadā* and of *dīkṣā* have been given little prominence in writing on the two religions, and in the usual treatment they seem obscure technical details. But in fact they are vital matters without which we could certainly not speak of a process, nor would either religion have a history.

3. *Theravadins and Digambars*

As Gombrich has shown so well (1988), Buddhism very soon came to encompass far more than the relatively pure projects which I have delineated, and analogous observations could be made of Jainism. Indeed, for long periods in the history of both religions the original projects might have seemed peripheral or irrelevant. Yet perhaps the surest evidence that the two religions today are actually part of the same current, the same flow of events and aspirations, is their capacity to retrieve something of that original heritage.[5]

So let me turn now to those who most rigorously fashion themselves today as the heirs of those founders, Theravadin forest monks in Sri Lanka and Digambar Jain *munis* in Maharashtra and Karnataka, in India.[6] Because we know a good

5. I am keenly aware of the viewpoint expressed by Jonathan Spencer elsewhere in this special issue. He points out that a still lively obsession with 'original Buddhism' has characterized Western scholarship since the study of Buddhism began in a colonial milieu. And he then goes on to suggest the oddness of this by asking us to 'imagine an ethnography of religion in a Spanish peasant community or an English dormitory suburb which concentrates on the question, 'Are these people really Christians?' (p. 131 above).

This is vividly framed and there is some truth in it. It would indeed be odd if that ethnography did not take a long historical, or a larger social, perspective, if it did not see the local attitudes and practices as variations on a greater theme, and if it limited itself to comparing local practice with some idealized picture of Christianity. In that case it would be pretty peculiar. For the most part, ethnographers of Christianity can take a certain amount of historical and comparative learning about Christianity for granted in their readership and need not labour the comparisons. That is not true for Buddhism, or not yet, so for good or ill ethnographers have had to knit their history themselves. And as David Gellner (1987) has shown so well, the question of authenticity can, if subtly posed, lead straight to the heart of matters.

6. The information on the modern forest monks is taken from Carrithers 1983a. I have treated the Jain ascetics in Carrithers 1987b, 1989b, and in press a. Fieldwork was conducted with a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom.

deal more about these people than about the founders, some more effective historical apperceptions can be cultivated.

I mean the change of designation—from *bhikkhu* to monk and from *nirgrantha* to *muni*—to convey some of the change undergone in the ascetics' role in the two religions. For both religions it is less the actual prescriptions for the ascetics' life which have changed than the landscape in which they are set. Theravada is now only one variety of Buddhism, as Digambar Jainism is only one sect among Jains. Most importantly, both have grown into what a Christian European sensibility might regard as a religion proper, one governing the attitudes and practices of the person in the street as well as the specialists. In such a setting, the original project takes on a different, and in some ways a lesser, importance.

In the midst of these transmutations Theravada forest monks claim to have revived intact the original form of *sangha* life: a fair assumption if we bear in mind that conservatism makes for change no less than innovation. In the Digambar case the prescriptions in force resemble much more those of the *jinakappa*, the hardy individual ascetic's way of life, than of the authoritarian code now found among Svetambars (the other main subdivision of the Jains). But it is difficult to trace a historical thread which explicitly connects the *jinakappa* with today's Digambars, and in general the lineage of Digambar Jainism seems tenuous, not wholly because of our present scholarly ignorance.

Let me begin with the Buddhist case. Between the 1930s and the 1950s a movement to restore some semblance of an original *sangha* way of life gradually gathered momentum. The inspiration to do so was drawn from many sources: from examples in Burma and Thailand of meditating or at least ascetic monks, and from the Theravada canon itself. That movement solidified after the 1950s into the firm and well-established forest *sangha* that we know today. A census of the early 1970s showed that there were more than 600 forest monks.

The Jain case is rather different. One *muni*, Santisagar, began in the early 1920s to tour the countryside, beginning in the extreme northern Karnataka of his birth—in effect southern Maratha country—and gradually travelling farther and farther abroad. His precedent was drawn from a handful of so-called *nirvān svāmīs* who preceded him: figures who did not travel abroad at all, and whose example was therefore available only in a handful of villages south of Kolhapur. For the most part these *nirvān svāmīs* seem to have practised nakedness only when they ate, though one or two were permanently naked. It is fair to say that it was Santisagar who single-handedly revived the order of *munis*. There are now about 100 naked *munis* found throughout India, though most of them come from this area of southern Maharasthra and northern Karnataka.

The two movements had some important features in common. First, they both arose in disestablished religions, so that the logic of royal intervention that had been so compelling through most of their histories, and which had given rise to many new forms in each religion, no longer held. Secondly, nationalist movements helped to encourage the revivals. In the Buddhist case the fervour was enhanced by Buddhist and Sinhalese nationalism, and by the happy and powerful

coincidence of national independence and the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism. In the Jain case it was enhanced by reaction against Hindu chauvinist nationalism and therefore ultimately by the independence movement. And thirdly, both movements were supported by a new phenomenon, an educated middle class who enjoyed a new revivalist, and in many ways Protestant, attitude to their received religious tradition.

The significant differences between the two movements can best be understood by asking two questions. First, what was the background against which the revival or reform movements came into being? And secondly, what were the chief concerns of the reformers in shaping the revival? It was, of course, in acting out those concerns that the reformers showed what they made of each religion's guiding project in action.

One concern of Buddhist reformers was to repudiate what had long since become the common understanding of the monk's role, as a specialist in ceremony and learning. For through much of Buddhist history monks were defined not so much by their ordination—indeed in some periods in Sri Lanka ordination was absent—and still less by their devotion to self-liberation. What counted instead were ceremonial duties, such as officiating at funerals and at apotropaic rites, which are the bread and butter of the village monk. For reformers, such practices seem the very antithesis of the original project.

The processes which led again and again from one to the other must always have been complex, but there is still a certain logic about the move from renouncer to specialist. It would have been self-defeating merely to cultivate the Buddhist teaching oneself without passing it on to other monks, and we owe the preservation of the scriptures themselves to specialists who devoted themselves to memorizing and passing on parts of them. Another, simultaneous move was just the giving of some advice to layman, already a *śramaṇa* practice. Learning itself could, moreover, be turned to more than one purpose, and the apotropaic verses themselves have the formal character of sermons or homiletic poetry. So in hindsight there seems a certain inevitability to what happened (see Gombrich 1988 and Carrithers 1984).

Moreover, just as the meaning of the monks' learning expanded, so too did the sense of the *saṅgha*. It is probably more difficult than we recognize to summarize the *saṅgha* as it arose, developed, and changed over two millennia in Sri Lanka, but three generalizations will suffice. First, the notion of *saṅgha* has the character of both a legal fiction and an unattainable ideal, and the various arrangements that have been regarded at various times as the *saṅgha* have had very disparate relations to the fiction and the ideal. Secondly, even when the *saṅgha* disappeared as all but an ideal, it was so basic to Buddhist texts that even the most cursory reading of them would suggest reviving it. And thirdly, political thought and practices were enduringly affected by thought about the *saṅgha*, which came to be regarded by many in ancient and medieval Buddhist kingdoms as necessary to the body politic. This connection between Buddhism and political hegemony has profoundly affected the sensibility of Buddhists in Theravada countries. So for

much of Buddhist history talk about the *sangha* had as much—or as little—sense and importance as talk about the Church in a Christian society.

Among Digambars, what happened was a revival rather than a reform, for there was nothing directly analogous to the established Buddhist *sangha* against which Santisagar could react. Santisagar does seem to have had some sharp things to say about certain religious practices, figures, and attitudes. He did undertake to reform certain practices among the laity, such as participating in village ceremonies involving animal sacrifice, and drinking. But he could not react against an established *sangha* of *munis*, because there existed nothing of the sort. The tiny handful of widely dispersed *nirvān svāmī*s had no collective or mutually agreed identity. And in fact the most widespread form of religious practice consisted rather in the building of temples and their elaborate and varied use as centres of worship and of temporary ascetic vows.

The counterpart role to the local Buddhist monk in Digambar Jainism has been played for some centuries by an hereditary caste of temple priests, *upādhyes*. So far as I have been able to determine, *upādhyes* have never had a formal method of initiation. Sons learn the rituals from their fathers. Moreover, just as the *upādhye*'s skills are thus treated as something of a technological vocation, so *upādhyes* themselves are treated by the local Jain community rather more as employees than as preceptors.

The *upādhyes* officiate at life-crisis rituals, but they also play a part in a rich culture of lay asceticism which has no counterpart in Buddhism. For while traditionally a Buddhist layman must be ordained to attain to any level of Buddhist accomplishment, the Digambar world has for a millennium or more cultivated ascetic practices appropriate to a wide range of people. These range from the formal scheme of the *pratimā*s or ascending stages of asceticism, packaged in the *śravakācāra* literature for men, to the scheme of *vratas* or ascetic vows packaged in the *purāna* literature and now used mostly by women.[7] At the end of the last century, and in the present one, the women have been by far the most active in such practices. It is difficult to gauge how long this has been so, or even whether these vows should be regarded as purely Jain in their import, since many of them resemble the vows taken by neighbouring Hindu women. But despite these qualifications I think it likely that the Digambar laity in general, and especially the women, have often taken a more vigorous part in enacting their religion than have the Buddhist laity.

Digambar Jainism has been politically far less successful over the centuries than Theravada Buddhism, but none the less there exists the figure of the *bhattārak*, a rough counterpart of the monastic magnates and powerful political monks of Theravada. The *bhattārak* role has now so diminished that its *raison d' être* seems rather enigmatic, but only a hundred years ago the two established

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7. The scheme of the *pratimā*s, and indeed the whole hierarchy of Jain practices and cosmology, are laid out with enviable clarity and authority in Jaini 1979. The *śrāvakācāra* literature is treated in Williams 1963.

bhaṭṭāraks around Kolhapur, for example, had some responsibility for temple priests as a body, and had at least some judicial responsibility delegated to them from the state. They were equivalent to, and perhaps for earlier kings indistinguishable from, the Hindu caste gurus of the region. They represented Jains to the state, received landed wealth from the state, and indeed the title *bhaṭṭārak* applies to an office as much as to the holder of that office. Above all, *bhaṭṭāraks* were responsible for preserving not just the ceremonial and narrative literature of the *upadhyes* but also the philosophical and dogmatic literature which is the proper province of the *muni*.

Each *bhaṭṭārak*'s seat is passed on to a successor in a slightly different way, and, so far as I can determine, the method of succession was derived not from any Jain prescriptions but from the usages of the local polity. Most are appointed by their predecessors. To my knowledge all are meant to be celibate, but they need not evince a very deep commitment to asceticism. Their initiation to some level of asceticism does not constitute the formal taking of office, which for the most part occurs only with the death of the predecessor, rather as a son succeeds to his father's property on the latter's death. Indeed, in this case the successor succeeds to his predecessor's identity, for he takes the same name.

In the Karnataka of the seventh to twelfth centuries,[8] when Digambar Jainism flourished, the title *bhaṭṭārak* perhaps designated a much wider variety of figures, though they must have been persons of weight in the polity and have often commanded great wealth. And in fact something like the process of domestication in Buddhism had occurred with respect to the *bhaṭṭāraks* in Digambar Jainism. In medieval south India *bhaṭṭāraks* derived their Jain identity, and probably their sanction within the state, from their initiation within what was understood as a *muni*'s line of succession. The *bhaṭṭāraks*' actual initiation was most likely of a lesser degree than that of a full *muni*. That is one of the possibilities allowed by the development of the elaborate stages of ascetic accomplishments in Digambar Jainism; it is the practice today, and there is some evidence that it was also the practice in the past. But the fact of having some initiation, and some connection with the notional *muni saṅgha*, allowed them to play roles in high policy and in the preservation of learning similiar to those which important Buddhist monks, with their ascetic ordination, had played in Sri Lanka.

So the tasks of preserving, promulgating, and transmitting Digambar Jainism have been dispersed among a number of roles—the laity, the *upadhyes*, the *bhaṭṭāraks*, whereas in Buddhism they were concentrated in the hands of the monks. Indeed, it is difficult to discern in the southern Digambar epigraphical literature any more than the bare mention of *munis*, and certainly there is little evidence that *munis* existed as a *saṅgha*, that is, as a corporation within society. It is even possible that for a good deal of Digambar history initiation as a *muni* occurred mostly as an option exercised late in life, as is the case today, or on the

8. For this I have used Lewis Rice's *Epigraphia Carnatica* (1889-1934).

point of death. Digambar Jainism presents us with the spectacle of an ascetic religion that has got along very well without the ascetics.

4. *Making Ascetics*

Let me concentrate a little more closely on the making of ascetics.

In the Buddhist case, the form of ordination, *upasampadā*, shorn of non-essentials, is this. An individual is adjudged by sponsors to be worthy of ordination. This presupposes a period of training as a novice, and it also presupposes a list of, what are in effect, bureaucratic qualifications: good health, permission from family, being male, freedom from debt and slavery, etc. These are part of what now seems a ceremony, but they are still alive as actual qualifications.

The act of ordination itself inheres in a curiously low-key procedure: the proposal of the candidate to the assembled monks, and their acceptance of him merely by silence. In the circumstances of ordination these details may seem minor compared to the more colourful local ceremonies, but they are the key. One becomes a monk: (i) by being qualified according to a commonly agreed set of criteria; (ii) by being proposed to a collectivity by sponsors; (iii) by being accepted by that collectivity; and (iv) the collectivity itself must be properly constituted according to a set of clear rules. The whole process has little that is colourful about it, but it is peculiar all the same. It depends constitutively, from the ground up, on the notion and practice of a collectivity. It is probably rather like what it must have been in an earlier age to supplicate for a degree at Oxford.

This is very much in keeping with Buddhism as a corporation in society, and it may seem very far from the experience of asceticism. Yet if we turn to the forest monks of the 1950s, we find that all of them were seriously, indeed passionately and intimately, concerned with the issue of ordination.[9] It was not a matter of outward form or of mere legality, for it lay at the core of their identity as monks. And that is so because the restoration of the original project, namely training for liberation, depended upon the restorers' credentials as sons of the Buddha, descendants through a line of pupillary succession from the Buddha himself.

All of the key figures in the movement—Jinavamsa, Nyanananda, Ratanapala, Anandasiri—regarded the propriety and purity of their line of ordination as keys to their ability to pursue the ascetic life. Even the warrant to undertake meditation itself was strongly felt to depend upon the meditator's qualification as a properly trained and inducted member of the *saṅgha*. For these monks at least, the pursuit

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9. For a fuller account of what follows see Carrithers 1983a.

of the path to individual liberation cannot be separated in either an emotional or a cognitive sense from membership of a collectivity.

On the other hand, a movement of self-ordaining Buddhist ascetics rose briefly to prominence, but then faded out (Carrithers 1979b). Their eclipse owed a good deal to political and social factors. But they were not accepted by other monks, for they did not enjoy membership, legally constituted but psychically constitutive, in the body of the *sangha*. Yet their sheer existence shows how varied and mutually inconsistent the movements attached to Buddhism could become.

The Jain initiation, *dīkṣā*, is rather more difficult to describe, partly because it proved difficult during fieldwork to gather information about it, but partly also because of some confusion among my informants. But this confusion itself I take to be evidence that *dīkṣā* does not now possess the meticulously legal nature of the Buddhist *upasampadā*.

As now practised, Jain initiation happens at the hands of one *muni*. The one to be initiated should have gone through *kṣullak* and *ailak*, two lesser stages of asceticism which correspond roughly to that of the Buddhist novice. To my knowledge there is no list of straightforward characteristics now applied as of bureaucratic necessity to the one to be initiated, but he must be male, whole, healthy, and unencumbered. Moreover, just because the criteria are not relevant in any *legal* sense, they form no part of the ceremony itself, as they do in the *upasampadā*.

In the Jain *dīkṣā* there is no equivalent of the two sponsors facing a collectivity. The central act, the taking of the five *mahāvrata*s or great vows (celibacy, non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-attachment), is empowered simply by the new *muni* repeating them after his teacher. This act is now surrounded with a very great deal of ceremony, much of it taking the same form as the initiation ceremony which occurs in the consecration of a Jina image, the Jain equivalent of a Buddha: for example, just as potent seed-syllables are painted on the body of the image, so they are painted on the body of the initiate. But the core is just the taking upon oneself of the vows. There is nothing in the vows themselves which implies anything other than a personal undertaking by the initiate to adhere to them. As I understand it, there is not even an explicit vow to live in obedience to a guru.

So in the first place, the form of the ceremony, among Digambars today at least, gives no place to the notion of the *muni sangha*. Unlike the Buddhists, the Digambar Jains do not enshrine the collectivity of ascetics in their initiation. Unlike the Svetambars (see Cort n.d.), there is no formal recognition of a line of pupillary succession. Moreover, there does not appear to be any necessary bond created by the initiation. It is true that some Digambars today are keen to emphasize that their scripturally preserved rules envision an authoritarian relationship between teacher and pupil. And in principle such relationships, when replicated from one generation to the next, should give rise to a form of social organization patterned on patriliny, as is now the case among Svetambar *munis*

(ibid.). Yet however true this may have been of Digambar *munis* some time in the past, they now have a very hazy notion of their own predecessors.

Nor is anything passed on which might form a bond, such as the *mantra* which is part of many Hindu ascetics' *dīkṣā*. At the initiations I attended, a *bhaṭṭārak* and an *upādhye* were present to coach both the initiator and the initiate on their parts. *Munis* today are usually old and in effect retired before taking initiation, so they are unlikely to be formed by their teacher, and indeed the teacher-pupil relationship may have relatively little didactic content. In fact, the *muni saṅgha* at present does not seem responsible for its own ritual and social reproduction.

It is possible that this may have been the case for a very long time. The great edifice of spiritual families or lineages[10] which appears so frequently in sources from the southern Digambar medieval world, have the semblance of an autonomous *muni saṅgha*, but perhaps not the reality. In inscriptions they are most often mentioned in relation to *bhaṭṭāraks* receiving grants, while whatever *munis* may have existed are hardly attested, either as individuals or as groups. Might the lineages therefore have retained significance as providing the pedigree for the legitimacy of the *bhaṭṭāraks'* and for access to rights and property, rather than as the *muni saṅgha's* spiritual heritage? Perhaps. But even if the *muni* lineages were more substantial than this scanty evidence suggests, they have now vanished completely.

In fact, Digambar *munis* in the current period of revival seem to have been remarkably casual about the issue of initiation altogether. Santisagar himself received initiation at the hands of Devendrakirti, who was not himself a *muni* but rather a *bhaṭṭārak*. The significance of this can be seen best in the example of another *muni*, Siddhasagar: the one *nirvāṇ svāmī*, preceding Santisagar himself, who seems to have exerted a good deal of influence on the revival, at least by his example. Siddhasagar achieved his final, *muni* initiation by taking the vows and removing his cloth before the image of a *tīrthaṅkar* (a Jina) at the pilgrimage place Sammedshikhar! There was, in other words, no living representative of the *muni saṅgha* present. This is now recounted with great enthusiasm and approval as showing Siddhasagar's determined devotion to the ascetic's way of life. The implication is: how fitting that a man intent on utter singularity and autonomy should be made a *muni* by himself.

It is difficult to reconcile such self-ordination with the notion of a *muni saṅgha*, or with the ancient idea and practice of discipline under a teacher. What really legitimates the Digambar *muni* today is his asceticism, his *tapas*. Such an attitude is consistent with the original project of Jainism, which stressed *tapas* and proposed a straightforward and strenuous route to the cultivation of *tapas*—but it is not entailed by that project and seems to contradict at least the attitude of spiritual succession promulgated in the medieval sources.

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10. *Gana, gaccha,* and *saṅgha.*

So Santisagar's reform, aimed at retrieving an original form of life, nevertheless showed what wide variations can occur and still be called 'Jain'. This is to see things in the historical mode with a vengeance.

5. *A Problem*

At present we can look upon both religions as still possessing the potency to generate a way of life more or less patterned on their original projects. That is the sense in which Theravada Buddhism and Digambar Jainism have successfully survived, so they can fairly be regarded as *enduring* historical streams—if only because each have a beginning and an end which are similar.

To recognize the survival of the religions only in a potential may seem too weak or too broad a characterization of the processes which bore them across history. We might think that something more certain or more inevitable is required. But in the first place, religions do not necessarily survive, and India has seen many, such as Ajivikism, or the Pudgalavadin school of Buddhism, or the Yapaniya sect of Jainism, which have disappeared utterly.

Secondly, those processes were not continuously orderly, neither were they inevitable or predictable. Looking back on their respective histories, a Buddhist or Jain today might sigh with relief, because their religions' fates were chancy, and responsibility for survival was dispersed over a tangled complex of sometimes rather unlikely persons and institutions. For the most part it is difficult to visualize one single thread which reaches unbroken from the beginning of either religion to the present. Even the Theravada *sangha* has had a difficult passage: its tradition of ordination was batted back and forth between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and its actual continuity cannot be unequivocally demonstrated. Moreover, in the process its tradition of meditation, a vital part of the original project, was lost and had to be reconstituted from books, as did much of the practice of canon law. In the perspective of millennia even the firmness of the Buddhist *sangha* wavers and melts.

And thirdly, we might be less anxious about the fate of the projects had they begun as what they became, broad-based religions. For our view of religion is influenced by our own experience, and among us the notion of religion and of an expansive church are often synonymous. But these projects were designed around, and were intended for, an élite only. So to that extent there was a disparity between their origins and their subsequent fate, between the versions of *śramaṇa* life they began as and the widely embracing and very different ways of life they later became.

This disparity makes it particularly difficult to conceive the historical integrity of Jainism and Buddhism in a straightforward way. It is one thing to describe the original project and its routine reproduction, but quite another to connect that with

some of its historical repercussions. How can we account, for example, for Sinhalese Buddhism in the centuries before 1753, when there was no tradition of ordination in the island, and only *ganninanses*, not very learned ceremonial specialists and landed proprietors with families, preserved a tenuous connection with the original Buddhist project (Carrithers 1979a)? How can these phenomena be connected with Buddhism as it arose at the Buddha's time? And how can we account for large stretches of the Digambar world for perhaps centuries before Santisagar, when *munis* were unknown outside isolated pockets, and the preservation of Jain texts and teaching lay in the hands of *bhaṭṭāraks*, *upādhyes*, and the laity, none of whom observed the original project or reproduced themselves by *muni dīkṣā*?

It is, of course, possible to set out a narrative as I have suggested for the recent past. One could start at the beginning and unravel events and their causes until we knew how the Buddhist *saṅgha* was metamorphosed into a landed priesthood, or how *bhaṭṭāraks* and *upādhyes* became the custodians of Jain practices and attitudes. But is it possible to point to some more general principles which would be true of both decline and revival, which would point to some continuity and therefore make more compelling the image of a stream?

6. *Some Connections*

Let me begin by looking again at the Buddhist and Jain projects. The projects were both framed by a notion of individuals alone. As the Buddha said, 'it is within this fathom-long carcass, with its mind and its notions, that I declare there is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world'.[11] Yet the projects each entailed something more than just individuals, for they were also moral teachings.

First, both projects were *moral*, that is, they had from the very beginning an integrally, constitutively moral dimension, and this morality was inherent in the description of individuals. This facet of the teachings is easy to miss if we concentrate purely on the cosmology or ontology of the renouncers, since many of their terms seem purely technical and narrowly psychological. But running through both Buddhism and Jainism is a notion of human perfection, and this notion was framed in evaluative terms which applied general and abstracted moral judgments to human actions *toward each other*. For example, actions are either bad and demeritorious (*pāpa*), or else good and meritorious (*puṇya*). In the larger movement of Indian social thought of which the *śramaṇa* religions were a part, this moralizing dimension was salient. Such a recognition of the essentially moral

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11. For source and context see Carrithers 1983b: 3.

nature of the human constitution amounts to an admission, even in such individualistic religions, of our basic human sociality.

This at least minimally social feature of both religions mingled for the most part harmoniously and unremarked with their individualism. But the other entailment of sociality which they had to recognize, that of teaching, did not fit so easily. The potential conflict was expressed in many ways. Jains, for example, hold that all living beings turn as listeners to a Jina at the moment of his final release; but the Jina does not preach, for he is beyond human intercourse: instead he emits, as a natural consequence of liberation, a divine sound which is interpreted by those who have ears to hear. Buddhists recognize the same difficulty in the story of how the Buddha, after he achieved awakening, decided at first to keep his method to himself. It was only later that he was persuaded out of a sense of compassion to teach. These philosophical narratives reveal some recognition of the contradiction between radical individualism and the fact of human sociality.

Yet in the final analysis it was the sociality and not the individualism which won out. Humans in general have a propensity, indeed a positive volition, to pedagogy, the teaching by elders or parents of the young, and that pedagogy concerns an aesthetic standard for acting toward other humans (Premack 1984; Carrithers 1989a, 1990). There are misanthropic strains in both religions which might in some moods deny that will, but both responded to it from the very beginning. It is as if the Jain project of liberated singularity, and *a fortiori* the Buddhist project as well, were only legitimated by their being taught. In the sheer act of conceiving their projects the early Buddhists and Jains already incurred an unexpected overhead, the expense of passing that project with its moral teaching on to others.

7. *Automatisms, An Aesthetic Standard, and Disputations*

Let me look more closely at those moral teachings. For ascetics there are legal prescriptions (whether honoured or not), while for the laity there is a morality, a short series of abstract injunctions, for example against harming others or lying. Underlying both the rules and the morality is an *aesthetic standard* (Premack 1984). In both religions, that standard includes the notion of *samvara*, self-restraint, a quality to be applied to all acts of body, speech and mind.[12] Self-restraint does not exhaust what might be regarded as the aesthetic standard in either case, but for simplicity's sake let me concentrate on it alone.

12. Another term that might be used here is 'habitus', following Bourdieu 1977.

The aesthetic standard so understood is different from a morality or rules in that it is partly embodied, that is, it exists partly as a quality of bodily movement, or as a physical posture, or as a propensity in speech and action. In that respect, the aesthetic standard is essentially fuzzy and indeterminate, since it does not fully prescribe actions, but only a quality of actions. It is expressed by Buddhist and Jain texts quite specifically as a posture and style of motion—restricted gestures, downcast eyes, gentle speech. Such movement is, strictly speaking, applicable to ascetics only, but something of the same style appears today in Sinhalese Buddhist lay ideas of *lajjāva* or shame (Carrithers 1982) as a personal quality, and in Digambar Jains' notion of *saṃskār* or proper upbringing (Carrithers 1989b).

Considered as a style of movement, the aesthetic standard of self-restraint cannot fully determine a purely Jain or a purely Buddhist style. Much the same attitude of self-restraint is shared between them and with other religious streams, such as Brahmanism, or Vaishnavism, or Lingayatism. This fundamental lack of specificity is a source of both strength and weakness: strength in that it allows for different specific images to be laid on top of the bodily style and be called Jainism or Buddhism, weakness in that the stream can easily be diverted by the same means. In other words, the aesthetic standard *underdetermines* the full content of action.

In any case, the aesthetic standard is suited to transmission not so much in purely sentential rules and injunctions, but rather in poems and images, in figural and patterned language, in ritual and in plastic art. Both religions in fact possess a vast literature rich in tropes and stories, characters and places, prosodies and song, liturgy and gesture, and they have inspired a wealth of sculpture and painting. Learned Jains or Buddhists may sometimes assert that their artistic heritage is purely vulgar and that the religion subsists in philosophy alone, but history attests the opposite. In this perspective, even the religions' elaborated cosmologies, with their heavens and hells, can be regarded more as vehicles for effective corporeal imagery than as metaphysics (Carrithers 1982).

Moreover, from the complex, nearly musical prosody of Buddhist homiletic verse, through the compelling images of a Jina or Bahubali standing rooted in self-control and *tapas,* to the unforgettable plot of the Buddha's search for awakening, these artistic heritages are full of patterns, and those patterns have a powerful common character: they are so organized as to make learning and transmitting them easier, indeed sometimes practically effortless. Just those configured features which make us regard these as artistic rather than soberly factual artefacts also confer longevity on them. Such patterns have, very nearly, a life of their own—or at least they do when coupled with the people who produce and experience them (see Neisser 1982, Finnegan 1977). Bearing in mind that provision, I think it fair to speak of these patterns—in language, in sculpture, music or painting—as *automatisms*. Or, to maintain the figure of the stream, they form long-lived eddies, a recurring pattern passed on while the substance bearing the pattern changes.

But it is also important to stress that these automatisms also underdetermine events. As I have shown for the Buddhist revival (1983a), the rich heritage of

Buddhism weighed heavily with the modern forest monks. But the variety of their responses to that heritage, and to an enthusiastic and supportive setting, shows that even so detailed a template falls far short of determining the course of human action.

It is inherent in these images and patterns, as in the aesthetic standard underlying them, that they concern relations between persons. That is the sense of their moral dimension and their meaning as teaching. The relationship which they embody is, above all, that between preceptor and pupil, between preacher and audience. This relationship is built into the religions' ways of designating the laity. Jains refer to a layman as a 'listener', a *śrāvaka*. Buddhists call a pious supporter an *upāsaka*, one who 'sits by' or 'sits at the feet of' a monk teacher. Moreover, the etiquette of the sermon reinforces this ideal relation by a specific use of the aesthetic standard of self-restraint: the listeners are to behave in a modest, restrained manner before their spiritual superior. Not just the content but also the social setting of a sermon transmits a shared sensibility of superiority and inferiority, guide and follower—and, for that matter, materially supported and supporter.

So an essential relatedness and dependence in tutelage characterizes the religions in a deep and pervasive way. This pedagogy is a development, an interpretation, of the original human endowment, a relationship between elder and younger. But a similar interpretation is widespread in India, and cannot be attributed to the *śramaṇa* religions alone. So if we can discern a source of continuity in the religions' pedagogy, we must also admit that the actual form of the religions must be underdetermined by that pedagogy.

8. *Conclusion*

So the minimal continuity of historical streams is discernible in three traits: an aesthetic standard, a bundle of specific automatisms, and a form of relationship. Even when the original project was no longer embodied in actual practice, it lived on at one remove. For example, at the end of the last century religious practice among Digambars consisted largely of building temples, the consecration and worship of images, and an occasional recounting of some legendary tale by an *upādhye* or *bhaṭṭārak* to an audience. Some, mostly women, took a vow and fasted on ceremonial occasions. Many of these practices were in themselves very different from the original project and were formed by an agrarian Hindu political and economic setting. But among them were preserved some reference to, or depiction or reflection of, the three traits. On the one hand, these underdetermining traits clearly had not the force in themselves to preserve or re-create the original project. Indeed, they were so close to surrounding practices that it was difficult to distinguish them from domestic and communal Hinduism. Had things

continued in that vein, Jains might indeed have found themselves to be Hindus in all but name, and that was the view taken by Jain reformers, both lay and ascetic (Sangave 1976). But, on the other hand, there was preserved at the same time and in the same practices the possibility that the original projects could be taken up again, in one form or another, in the flesh. That potential could, and did, give rise to a vigorous movement of *munis* once again—at the hands of particular named Jains in particular historical circumstances.

I emphasize the particularity of the circumstances giving rise to Santisagar and his revival for three reasons. First, Santisagar himself, the named individual, seems to have been necessary to the revival: given the sheer difficulty of what he did, Jains could not have done without him. He, and those who supported him, were not automatisms themselves, but had to will the revival. The view of free will here is just that of Dennett (1984), which I think is captured in the phrase, 'it seemed the best thing to do at the time'.

Secondly, even if we stress Santisagar's necessity, both movements were dependent as well on other currents. Some of those currents, such as the larger movements of nationalism and the rise of an educated class, had little to do with the streams of Jainism and Buddhism as such, yet interacted powerfully with them in the given circumstances. Here the figure of an intersection or conjuncture of currents seems very much to the point, for it captures both the uniqueness of the times and some continuity with what had gone before.

And thirdly, the enduring patterns—images, habits, even whole bodies of scripture—do not have the capacity to determine action. As I have shown in the case of the Buddhist revival (1983a), different individuals made quite different things out of the materials they found to hand. Even the *upasampadā*, the Buddhist ordination itself, was not conceived as necessary by all reformers. And so it is with Santisagar: we can say that he received a specifically Jain heritage, but the heritage had no force in itself to create a future. Some features of his reform, such as the absence of a sense of pupillary succession, were probably not so much a re-creation as a new creation or an unforeseen consequence. We can recognize the pattern, but we can also recognize the difference.

The problem I have tackled is that of setting such disparate matter as the original Jain project, the late nineteenth-century practice of Digambars, and Santisagar's subsequent re-creation of the original project into the same frame. Perhaps the villains are just our words 'religion', 'Jainism' and 'Buddhism'. We commonly include under such headings all the facts which might in some way pertain to each other, and in so doing we include phenomena that would strain even the loosest 'family resemblance' definitions of the words. Certainly, some Jains or Buddhists themselves might dispute the inclusion of this or that matter under the heading of *jaina-* or *buddha-dharma*. To follow that line too far, however, would be to reject a reasonable if loose consensus, held by many of the adherents themselves as well as scholars, about which matters hang together.

I have rejected another view as well, which might be characterized as the method of stasis. For writers such as Tambiah (1984), and to an extent Dumont

(1979) and Sahlins (1985), enduring social and cultural patterns have a determining character with little place for will, accident, change or the commingling of circumstances. Somehow everything comes out looking the same each time. They have understood the anthropologist's aspirations to interpretation and to sociological holism to imply the existence of monolithic 'structures', and indeed the word itself and its accompanying imagery reveal the absence of a sense of change or flow. As Peel wrote, such a view 'is inconsistent with a realistic concept of what society is and human experience within it', because it 'eliminates change, incompleteness and potentiality, memories and intentions—in a word, historicity' (1987: 108-9).

In contrast, I have tried to see what could remain of a distinctly anthropological perspective if we took a more comprehensive view of human life. I suggested that long-standing patterns can be discerned, even if they underdetermine actual events or trends, and even if they fail to explain the actual continuity and survival of the religions. The discernment of such patterns is characteristically, but not at all exclusively, the province of anthropologists. I also suggested that these patterns in Buddhist and Jain life can be related to a wider view of the human phylogenetic endowment. This too is, in principle if not often in practice, the province of anthropologists.

Finally, I have implicitly put forward a view of holism in ethnography. I have assumed that an account of some matter such as present-day Sinhalese forest monks or Digambar *munis*, or contemporary changes in Sri Lankan religion, must consider not just the relevant social, political and economic facts, but also their fundamental historicity. Historicity implies that the language of ethnography must contain not only generic terms, such as *muni* or monk in the abstract, but also irreducibly particular terms referring to specific conditions, forces, persons, places and times in a historical setting. The evidence from Buddhism and Jainism suggests that such a setting cannot easily be extended to millennia but must be confined to a measure of years, decades, or at most centuries. Only within that narrower scene can a fully ethnographic, historical, causal account be offered. Only in that setting is it possible fully to relate all the other social, political and economic forces which bore upon the religions. Only in that setting can the static vocabulary of structural functionalism be deployed, and only then with caution. At any given time there were people making Jainism and Buddhism, and those people acted in irreducibly particular circumstances. We can give a general account of pattern in the longevity of Buddhism or Jainism, and indeed I have tried to do so here; but the causes of that longevity lie within each episode and cannot be inferred from the patterns and aesthetic standards alone.

Does that make anthropology a picturesque annex of social history? No, it makes social history an integral part of anthropology.

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