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Vinas through the Ages | Translated from the German and with an introduction by Dileep Karanth

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About the Book

The term v???, attested in India since the second millennium BCE, has consistently denoted a musical instrument. Yet what that instrument was changed over time. In different periods, v??? could refer to a harp, a zither, or a lute – each representing the dominant string instrument of its age. Visual sources often depict these forms side by side, making clear that they were understood as distinct instruments rather than variations of a single type.

This study approaches the evidence by closely aligning textual descriptions with roughly contemporary works of art, examining terminology, function, and form in their historical context. Such a perspective helps to avoid the common pitfall of reading later classifications back into earlier material. While the surviving sources are necessarily selective, and some instruments may have eluded both textual and visual record, the method allows for a more precise reconstruction of historical usage.

By tracing how the referent of v??? shifted across centuries, the book sheds light on the dynamics of musical terminology in premodern India and offers a more differentiated understanding of its instrumental traditions.

About the Author

Monika Zin, is an art historian specializing in the art of South and Central Asia. Since 2016, she has led the research project Buddhist Murals of Kucha at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig. She also co-edits the series Leipzig Kucha Studies together with Eli Franco.

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