conquerors repeatedly targeted both cities, many of their earliest buildings were either damaged or razed. On the other hand, to compensate for such destruction, the new rulers often added more ethnic diversity to the two cities. Each successive conquest contributed to a multi-ethnic population in both centers. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century apparently wreaked havoc in these regions, particularly in Bukhara, but the city recovered and eventually became the capital of an Uzbek Khanate in the seventeenth century. Bukharan merchants played an influential role in Eurasian trade from that time until the Russians annexed Bukhara in 1868.

Russian occupation of Bukhara laid the foundation for the book under review. Lev Semenovich Barshevsky, a Russian military official assigned to the region in the late nineteenth century, took many of the photographs reproduced in the work. Sadly, “after...the establishment of Soviet power many pages of the khanate’s history passed into oblivion for political reasons” (p. 7), and these photographs were squirreled away in the archives of the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, the Russian Geographical Society, and the Archives of the Cinema and Photo Documents of Uzbekistan where access to these visual documents of a bygone era was severely limited. Liberalization in Russia over the past few years has, in part, removed the political censorship which had proscribed wider circulation of these photographs. Andrei G. Nedvetsky has combed the archives and has gathered together the photographs in this book, which also contains a sketchy introduction to the history of Bukhara and to social and economic conditions there as of the 1890s.

Nedvetsky divides the photographs into eight sections which may be classified into two—people and architectural monuments. Many of the portraits of individuals are posed and somewhat staged. Although the emirs, officials, and military men accommodate to the camera and thus spontaneity is lost, the photographs are, nevertheless, an invaluable record of Bukharan costume, jewelry, palace and home furnishings (including chairs, clocks, and rugs), and food. The pictures of the military men afford glimpses of their weapons and their barracks. Moreover, Barshevsky’s camera reveals the remarkable ethnic diversity of the population. It leaves an indelible, if, to repeat, staged, record of the city’s Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, Russian, Kirghiz, Indian, Afghan, and Jewish residents.

Even more remarkable are Barshevsky’s less posed photographs of sites and monuments. A huge bazaar for the exclusive sale of pots, a store with metal pans, a barber shop, an outdoor stand offering to grind knives and scissors, all emerge in these photographs and are reminiscent of modern Middle Eastern and Central Asian bazaars. Barshevsky’s camera also captures the joyousness of a dancing festival, the dynamism of an equestrian competition, and the horrors of an execution. Barshevsky provides, in addition, a visual record of the most renowned mosques, minarets, madrassahs, and palaces, as well as the prisons, cemeteries, mausolea, caravanserais, tea-houses, and private residences.

Nedvetsky ought to be commended for his labors in compiling this book. The major deficit is the lack of more detailed identifications of the sites and persons depicted in the photographs. The book will nevertheless prove valuable to students of this vanished period in Central Asian history.

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This is an intriguing, but frustrating book. The appeal derives from the authors’ highly original investigation—one is tempted to say, discovery—of the only extant material evidence of precolonial Burmese market exchange, namely a series of weights used to measure monetary units and commercial goods. During at least two extended trips to

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Burma, the authors located and examined over a thousand animal-shaped weights of varying descriptions and provenances. So far as I know, they have provided the first systematic description of these materials, the first chronological classification, as well as the first effort at iconographic interpretation. But a variety of problems, deriving both from the intractable nature of the weights themselves and from the authors’ historiographic approach, bedevil their efforts.

As an exercise in technical description, the book is meticulous and impressive. Supplemented by four appendices, four maps, and 62 black-and-white plates, the text provides a comprehensive description of the weights’ mass units and mass scales, component materials and manufacture, dimensions, shapes, design, and decoration. Made of cupriferous alloy, these objects range from 2 to 4000 grams and have three principal designs, those of a feline-like beast, a duck or duck-like bird, and an elephant (the latter used only in northern Thailand). The Gears argue, logically enough, that they were used for weighing only high-value goods, principally the privately-controlled lump-silver money which constituted the chief currency in precolonial Burma. The first six chapters are concerned mainly with these technical descriptions and a discussion of the weights’ economic function. Particularly valuable is Chapter 3, which discusses all too briefly the system of lump currencies and which provides rare photographs of silver and lead varietes. Chapters 7-16 then attempt to interpret the material by devising a chronological typology (Chapter 15) and by discussing in great detail the mythic and political symbolism of the animal motifs, the origins of these symbols, and their putative diffusion to Burma from other parts of Asia.

It is in the non-technical historical discussions that problems arise. The authors claim at the outset that Burmese-language materials “proved of uncertain value” (p. xvi); and among over a thousand footnotes, I have found only one reference to a Burmese source. Yet in fact a significant number of Burmese royal edicts, commercial records (that-kayits), and court records are directly relevant to the book’s main theses. Nor, despite its length, does the bibliography include standard secondary sources on economy, society, and religious organization in the period with which the Gears are concerned, such as those by William Koenig or E. Michael Mendelson. Most of the problems the authors set themselves are difficult enough, but without Burmese source materials, or at least a nuanced understanding of rural society and politics, the undertaking becomes quite insuperable.

Consider the basic questions of who manufactured the weights, who disseminated them, and who used them. The Gears posit a model of a powerful, centralized, standardizing monarchy, well able to impose its norms on local merchants and traders. Thus they assume that all weights were manufactured in a single center “under the supervision of the Chief Minister” [in fact there was no such official] and disseminated thence throughout the empire (pp. 9, 12-13). Because it “was in the financial interest of the Burmese monarch to ensure that his masses were identical... it seems unlikely that the kyat mass would have varied from one locality to another (p. 3).” Yet all we know about the organization of the monkhood—an institution far more central to the monarchy’s raison d’etre than its system of commercial weights—and the organization of political and economic life suggests a decentralized, confused, particularist system in which central control was desultory, often nominal, and largely restricted to the capital and chief provincial towns. To be sure, the royal writ grew stronger in the late Toungoo and early Konbaung eras. The authors are correct that some kings were interested in standardizing local weights and measures. (Here they would have done well to cite further materials from Thu-ru-u-zana’s 1750s text Law-ka-byu-ha kyān.) But there is no evidence that all weights were manufactured in the capital, that local varietes were formally prohibited much less effectively eliminated, that some local traders did not operate outside central control. The fact that all lump coins were produced by independent brokers, rather than at a central mint, points to a localization of commercial standards which must have affected weights no less than currency.

The problem of chronology follows directly. Virtually none of the weights are dated or inscribed. How then to determine when they were manufactured, and by implication, how
commercial life evolved? The Gears make a truly heroic effort using the following criteria: evidence of metal erosion; changes in artistic style; alleged correlations between changes in mass, as revealed by European records, and changes in style; events in Burmese history that would have affected the imperial styles. But the notion of uniform style again rests on the assumption of centrally-controlled manufacture. If, as seems likely, some weights were produced locally and contemporary regional styles were therefore distinct, the effort to base a unified chronology on stylistic criteria falls apart. Nor is the argument that the introduction of new styles reflected disjunctures in imperial history particularly convincing, since new and insecure dynasties, most notably the Konbaung, sought to emphasize their links to the previous line of kings. My own view is that the weights will remain undatable unless some breakthrough in metallurgical testing occurs.

But it is in the area of stylistic symbolism that the Gears’ analysis is most open to question. We are told that the beast-weights symbolized “an earthly god-king (devaraja) characteristic of Burma (pp. xv, 248).” Burmese kings were embryo-Buddhas, dhammarajas, cakkavattis—but never god-kings. It is said that changes in the bird-weights of Lower Burma reflected changes in the status of Lower Burma’s female ruler or in the relation of that region to the north—but we are given no supporting evidence from architecture, statuary, or chronicles. Most suspect is the tendency to attribute Burmese art forms to distant, usually ancient, and extraordinarily diverse Asian and Mideastern prototypes. The Burmese mass scales allegedly derived from the Babylonian-Assyrian sexagesimal scale (p. 25). The animal-style art of the Mons of Lower Burma may have originated in the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia (p. 108). Shan horse sacrifices probably date back to ancient Indo-Aryan horse sacrifices (p. 148). Other Mon motifs reminiscent of Mesopotamia and Persia may have been transmitted to the Burmese by a Persian Buddhist (sic) from Yunnan (p. 248). These and other analogies are usually little more than speculation, based on crude isomorphism and theories of undiluted cultural diffusion, without reference to social context or mediation. The stylistic development of animal weights can best be understood in the setting of Burmese (or in the widest useful context, Indo-Burmese) art and architecture, a topic on which this book is remarkably silent. In short, the authors have performed a valuable service by drawing our attention to these long-neglected artifacts, but before we can understand their implications we need local studies of art and economic organization.

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The dynastic transition from Koryǒ to Chosŏn (Yi) in Korea in the last decade of the fourteenth century has recently drawn significant attention among scholars of Korean history with regard to the nature of the social transformation that accompanied the dynastic change. The view widely held in Korea and Japan is that there was a clear break in the leadership of the state and government that accompanied the overthrow of Koryǒ (918-1392) and the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). This view has recently been challenged by an American scholar, John Duncan of UCLA, who sees the continuation, rather than disruption, of dominance by the old ruling elites, even after the dynastic change in 1392. The Confucian Transformation of Korea by Martina Deuchler adds a significant new dimension to this debate by focussing on the ideological and social transformation that took place in Korea.

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