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Niels Gutschow

The Nepalese Caitya – 1500 Years of Buddhist Votive Architecture in the Kathmandu Valley

With drawings by Bijay Basukala und an essay on Newar Buddhism by David Gellner. 320 pp. with 600 ill., 259 x 325 mm, English ISBN 3-930698-75-7

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»I have been acquainted with the activities of Niels Gutschow for almost twenty years now, and greatly admire the energetic field work which forms the basis for all his publications. This volume is no exception. It contains hundreds of beautifully executed measured drawings and finely printed photographs of never, or hardly ever studied monuments in the Kathmandu valley. The attention to smaller features, usually overlooked in larger architectural complexes, is particularly striking. Though the Kathmandu valley is well known to scholars and interested visitors, few have taken such pains to document the architectural heritage.

The volume is, however, much more than a mere compilation of architectural evidence. The text reveals a profound understanding of the cultural context of the caityas, their forms and sculptural decoration. The comprehensive, yet approachable treatment of the Mahayana Buddhist background of the monuments details the religious meaning of the caityas, without in any way shrouding them in fashionable esoteric mystery. The chapter on ritual is of particular interest, since it gives an ethnographic dimension to the study, with its detailed observations of daily life and urban festivals. Further chapters present a typological classification of the caityas illustrated with carefully chosen drawings and photographs. The historical progression of forms is well argued.

There can be little doubt that this publication will be the definitive study on the subject for many years to come. The generous assortment of drawings and photographs will surely be invaluable for architects, archaeologists, art historians and historians of religions. Since so many of the smaller and more obscure caityas are now being threatened by modern development, the appearance of this work is timely.« (George Michell)

Niels Gutschow started his long journey into Asia as a Buddhist monk in Burma in 1962. He studied architecture in Darmstadt, Germany, and wrote his dissertation about Japanese castle towns. Since 1971 he worked in Nepal and India as a conservation architect and as a researcher, inquiring into the relationship of urban space and ritual. In Germany he works as an expert in war-time and postwar architecture and planning.

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