

The open archive approach results in an engaging book, in which the reader meanders between fragments of history that sometimes turn out to be connected in unexpected ways.

The ethnography in the book offers exceptional insights into the discursive and aesthetic practices of documentary filmmakers in India, and into the institutions, social networks and negotiations that have shaped these practices. The lively descriptions of film festivals, small private auditoriums and discussion groups reveal the multiplicity of filmmaking as well as film screening practices in India, and provide challenges to existing discourses about India's documentary film history.

To highlight two of these challenges. First, the author contests the prevalent idea that the much-celebrated filmmaker Anand Patwardhan was a sole pioneer. She instead tells the story of Indian documentary film from the perspectives of a wider range of filmmakers, while also including the perspectives of activists, bureaucrats, students and feminist groups with whom filmmakers have aligned. Second, she contests the idea that the practices of 'independent' filmmakers since the 1970s and 1980s constituted a decisive break with a past of 'state propaganda' in which documentary filmmaking was controlled by Indian state institutions. This second argument is developed by a conceptual unpeeling of the concepts of 'state' and 'independent', and a descriptive explanation of the continuities between the two categories. For example, in the decades after 1947, the postcolonial state's mission of producing films to educate populations about projects of nation-building and development was broadly shared by 'independent' filmmakers, who actively contributed to that mission.

The impact of changing technologies and channels of distribution is shown in a special chapter on the arrival of video

technology since the 1980s. Video technology allowed the circulation of films beyond state control, which prompted filmmakers to develop new links with activists and grassroots social movements, while NGOs started using documentary film as a mode of participatory development in which local communities became part of the filmmaking process. The arrival of the internet does not receive the same amount of analytical attention in the book, which leaves some open-ended questions as to how digital technologies have again restructured film distribution and introduced renewed mechanisms of state control. Another unanswered question, which arises from the descriptions of shifting alliances of filmmakers, activists and state actors, is how documentary filmmaking practices have been shaped by, and have attempted to reshape, religious politics – although the book does mention some examples of films that confront this topic.

For future students of such questions the book has much to offer – in the first place, a way of thinking about documentary filmmaking as a practice that is multiple rather than singular, shaped by complex layers of negotiation and ever-changing yet continuous with the past.

SANDERIE VERSTAPPEN 

University of Vienna (Austria)

Bielo, James. 2018. *Ark Encounter: the making of a creationist theme park*. New York: New York University Press. 223 pp. £18.11. ISBN-13: 978-1479842797.

This is a clear and insightful ethnography of the grand design and creation of Ark Encounter, a creationist theme park in Kentucky that, quite literally, brings 'the story' of Noah and his ark to life with a

'life-size' replica 510 ft long by 85 ft wide and 91 ft high. How and why do fundamentalists materialise the Bible, extend Christian public culture and choreograph creationist arguments in a threatening secular scientific environment? James Bielo addresses these questions from the position of anthropologist witness to the work of the controversial team of evangelist designers piloting the park into existence and constructing their gigantic ark – a new \$150 million covenant for a modern generation of believers.

Bielo had unprecedented access to Ark Encounter's production and divides his long-term ethnography into an account of the process, and then its reception, all with an anthropology of religion context and analysis. This ark is an example of entertainment but also devotion. It has religious and fun imperatives: it is an immersive biblical environment of religious role play, experiential creationism led by the Answers in Genesis (AIG) movement. With a performative and embodied frame, Bielo argues that a visit to the ark becomes 'a walking poetics of faith' (p. 30) where the experience instantiates a creationist past into a creationist present, the 'literal historicity of creationism' for the religious consumer. This is not the first time that the Bible has been materialised, and in Chapter 2 Bielo contextualises Kentucky's ark alongside biblical gardens, travelling panoramas, creation museums, other creationist or biblical theme parks and re-creations. He neatly uses Peirce's semiotics to show that some are indexical (directly connected) and others iconic (resembling) and that all are affective in establishing an intimate and emotional connection with the visitor.

This architectural animation of Christianity took six years to develop by the Ark creative team (2011 to launch in 2016). Bielo accompanied the team through their collaborative and creative

labour and in Chapter 3 shows how the concepts took shape on design boards, on 3D printers and in carpenters' plans. The aim was for the engagement of the imagination and the immersion of the body. Dragons as dinosaurs is one creationist manoeuvre in an ark display, the heterodoxy of believable legends, of tails and tales deliberately confused to counter evolutionary facts. 'Just imagine' is the slogan that invites the tourist congregation to gaze and engage with this fantasy-filled experience of God.

There is some fascinating detail in Bielo's ethnography, such as the design team's use of creative resources from Hollywood to *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the *Book of Kells* and *Beowulf* to Wikipedia's list of extinct animals. Kevin, for example, designs a helmet for soldiers of the period 'to give good character': the position of the hands has to be accurate in operating a *ballista* (catapult) but what the cord is made from is not considered to be important; let me add here, too, that Noah, the reputed inventor of wine, is not foregrounded at Ark Encounter. These and other examples show how history is fashioned, and with the dragon times and longevity of Noah (over 900 years), illustrates the different temporal landscape that fundamentalists claim to inhabit. Creationism, Bielo points out, is a heterodox position. At Ark Encounter we have survival of the most entertaining – myths, memes and edutainment for the believer rather than evolution for the scientist.

The last chapter in the book reiterates the walking poetics of faith approach to this immersive biblical theme park, a location of leisure but one far less escapist than most with its creationist narrative. The encounter with the place, along wooden decks with animal scratches on for authenticity, affords 'an embodied fundamentalist gaze' (p. 142) that adds texture and example to John Urry's classic concept of the tourist gaze. These sensory

engagements with place through sight and touch are tactile opportunities to enact religious commitment (p. 160), a visceral extension of the Bible that anthropologists, religious studies scholars and social scientists will find most useful. For me, working in Belfast where former paramilitaries take tourists on Republican walking tours of The Troubles – and where the Titanic Museum is a great monolith in the docks where the infamous ship was once built, another attraction without artefacts – there are really useful comparisons and contrasts to be made and new concepts to apply.

JONATHAN SKINNER 
University of Roehampton (UK)

Chew, Sing C. 2018. *The Southeast Asia connection: trade and politics in the Eurasian world economy, 500 BC–AD 500*. New York: Berghahn Books. 188 pp. Hb.: US\$135.00. ISBN: 978-1-78533-788-8.

This book is an important recalibration of Southeast Asia's contribution to the ancient world economy. Professor Sing Chew's use of 'connection' in the book's title signifies a perspective that is much valued by anthropologists. He emphasises various structural relationships that have shaped production, exchange (through the trading network), politics and culture of Southeast Asia during the late prehistoric and early historic periods. Historians of Southeast Asia who work on long-term global transformations, such as Victor Lieberman and Anthony Reid, indicate that Southeast Asia has its original and dynamic politics and social-ecological systems. However, it has long been widely considered merely as a buffer area between the two great powers of India and China, its uniqueness overlooked. Summarising a huge volume of literature while referring to recent

archaeological evidence, Chew has produced detailed accounts, with Southeast Asia being a major provider of commodities and shaping connectivity of the 'maritime silk roads' – trade routes featuring commercial networks spanning from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea.

Chew is a highly respected scholar of long-term global ecological transformation. In the section 'Early Southeast Asia', Chew has demonstrated his scholarship by presenting a comprehensive description of this region's geographical features. He also points out that climate and sea level changes have shaped humans' adaptation to its specific landscape. In prehistoric Southeast Asia, 'ecological parameters conditioned the socioeconomic development of human communities' (p. 14). Continuing with ecosystem–human society interaction narratives, Chew draws on archaeological evidence to examine farming products and metal fabrications up to early historic periods.

Mountains and forests in Southeast Asia's landscape made overland commercial routes extremely difficult and dangerous. Sea routes, benefiting from relatively calm, warm and predictable (due to monsoon winds) watercourses, were much more favourable. Priceless spices and minerals were shipped from Southeast Asia all the way to the Roman Empire. The Roman and Greek archives cited by Chew, as well as the recent excavations in the port of Roman Empire Berenike, reveal the diversity of spices and other farm and forest products. China and India rarely demonstrated their power on the sea in the entire ancient time. In the meantime, Southeast Asia was constantly absorbing elements of Chinese, Indian, Persian, Arabic and other Eurasian civilisations due to commercial contacts. These factors can add up to explain why Southeast Asia stayed as a highly independent and diversified political and cultural module. These standpoints are