Review: Nadeem Omar Tarar (2022) *The Colonial and National Formations of the National College of Arts, Lahore, circa 1870s to 1960s: De-scripting the Archive*. Anthem Press, New York-London.

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From my point of view, a great book is the result of a simple recipe: a great story, happy writing, a brilliant mind that can see what we readers would not have been able to see. The human capacity behind this book – a great book, which every scholar of Pakistani studies should have on his/her bookshelf – was a Professor of Communication and Cultural Studies at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, currently affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, USA. One of his specialisations is the history and development of the print culture of South Asia.

The recipe I mentioned, despite what many of my colleagues believe, also applies to scientific works, to the type of books that should be reviewed in a journal such as this.

So, what do we have here? A great book that combines research and reading, accessible on multiple levels, usable as a university seminar topic, but also a book for the informed reader, exciting and attractive. A book that, utilising archival sources, examines the formation and evolution of the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore. "The National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, established as the Mayo School of Art in 1875, is the Pakistani equivalent of London's South Kensington School of Design (presently Royal College of Art, London, United Kingdom). The comparative renown of the Mayo School of Art, where Rudyard Kipling's father, John Lockwood Kipling, was the founding principal, is matched by its relative obscurity in South Asian art history. Unlike other colonial art schools in South Asia, the NCA, with its status of a public university of arts in Pakistan today, has been scantily represented in contemporary scholarship" (from the *Introduction,* p. 1). The study analyses, traces and reconstructs the institution's history from its "metropolitan European roots" during the British colonial period "through the American restructuring of art education administration and pedagogy in the early years of independence".

As the book is written with care, discipline, skill, intelligence and style, the result could only be an excellent work, besides being the first comprehensive study of any of the major and influential schools of art and design in South Asia from their colonial-era roots to the present day.

The book begins with the birth of the NCA archive in 1999-2000, and stems from this, but above all from the recognition of the archaeology of visual culture in South Asia. This is a Copernican change of the first order. This is narrated above all in the opening pages of the book, when it analyses the transition from artisan

castes, from the hereditary nature of artistic gesture, which we archaeologists are now beginning to read in the traditions of ancient guilds: in Sanchi (where they are celebrated by countless inscriptions), in Saidu Sharif and in Butkara in Swat, where their existence is revealed by the expert eye of art historians such as Domenico Faccenna. Then there is another issue that is close to my heart and which the author wisely unravels: the propaganda value of visual art narrative when discussing the "British discovery of Indian art". This is perhaps one of the most powerful chapters in the book. The relationship with the Lahore Museum, a relationship of contemporaneity, geographical proximity, architectural principles of the shells of the two houses of art that was (the Museum) and art that is and will be (Mayo School of Art). The whole book is extraordinarily beautiful and important, but if I had to choose a chapter, I would definitely say that that would be one of the two final chapters, either the one on *The Phantom of Bauhaus at the NCA* or the one entitled *Eclipsed by Tradition: The Last Hereditary.* Both truly achieve levels of concise precision. The human stories of Shakir Ali and Mark Sponeburgh (this from Oregon to London and to Lahore)[1] in one and that of Haji Muhammad Sharif in the other are of decisive importance for their historical significance and for the intrinsic ethical and human values they teach us.

I cannot help but draw a line between the Bauhaus dream of Mark Sponeburgh and Lahore's NCA and the unintentional Bauhaus dreamscape of the Ruler of Swat. The story I mention here is interesting:

"*In the summer of 1950, one of the very first fieldwork visits in northern Pakistan led to an ethnographic exhibition of Folk Arts of Swat held at the NCA gallery a year later in February. The students made measured drawings, photographic surveys, rubbings and paintings as well as collected samples of woodcrafts, jewelry, textiles, basketry and paintings. The exhibition also travelled to Karachi where it was hosted by the Pakistan American Cultural Center. Later the entire collection of artifacts became part of the ethnological gallery of the Lahore Museum. Sponsored by the Asia Foundation, the fieldwork was deemed as the "first step to compile an index of Pakistani Design similar to the American Index of Design."* (p. 169). Although the Bauhaus dream in Lahore began a little later, when Sponeburgh arrived there, I cannot help but imagine the potential intertwining between the aesthetic short circuit of NCA students searching for the vernacular tradition of Swat and finding themselves faced with a completely

[1] Mark Sponeburgh, sculptor and art historian was Professor of Sculpture at the University of Oregon from 1946 to 1956 and a visiting professor at the Royal College of Arts in London from 1956 to 1957. Beginning in 1958, he taught art in Egypt and Pakistan first as a Fulbright Research Fellow, then as a professor at the NCA. In 1961 he accepted an invitation to teach art history at Oregon State University, until his retirement in 1983 as Professor Emeritus. Maybe few know that Captain Mark R. Sponeburgh was one of these "Monuments men" celebrated by the 2014 movie by G. Clooney (see p. 210, fn. 43).

different landscape where modernism overlaps with the vernacular profile in the Swat Valley of Yusufzai State, ruled by the dreamer Wali Miangul Jahanzeb.

The contrast between the two architectural landscapes, the vernacular and the state-built, must have been extraordinary in the eyes of visitors and residents alike. Brand new to the eyes and for the time, consistent in its functional expression, this architectural style – entirely hybrid if not eclectic – consists of quotations assembled almost at will, sometimes incongruous. One gets the impression that the aim was to create something that would be perceived as "modern" at all costs. Yet, from this "whirlwind" of formal stimuli, a style all its own eventually emerged. However, the new architecture was entirely "copied" and arose from mental models brought by the Indo-Pakistani merchant diaspora (very powerful in Lahore), but also from the spread of photography, the princes' travels in Europe, and Anglo-American journals. These visual echoes can be recognised in certain details: porthole windows, curved corners, horizontal string courses in parallel series, Venetian terrazzo floors, plastered surfaces painted in shades of white and ochre. The volumes and proportions of the spaces, sometimes ergonomic and minimalist, sometimes expanded to unnatural gigantism (the Wadudia Hall, 1958), are the original and almost accidental product of this local style. As for the style, in its eclecticism, we know that it was not the result of professional architects' designs, but rather the experience of the construction site managers who translated their clients' ideas into forms. In fact, beyond the practicality of the forms, this eclectic architectural landscape gives the impression that they are merely the fruit of the dreams and imagination of their clients. The fall of the state and its absorption into Pakistan led to the rapid abandonment of the "Miangul" style and the introduction of the brutalism of the welfare state in government buildings in the 1970s. However, the taste for rounded walls and horizontal lines survived as details, reduced to references, in the emporiums of the bazaars at least until the 1980s: the Phantom of Bauhaus in Swat!

Apologising to the reader and to the author of the book, Nadeem Omar Tarar, for this long digression of mine, I would like to conclude with the words of another scholar, Arindam Dutta, who, like me and maybe Nadeem Omar Tarar, perhaps feels indebted (amongst many) also to the genius of Walter Benjamin. Arindam Dutta, professor of architecture at MIT, the author of *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility* (New York, Routledge 2007) wrote that "this book undertakes a much-needed shift in focus towards the manner in which institutional dynamics and state practices have structured aesthetic thought and art practice alike. The reader will particularly appreciate how artistic concerns are linked to broader governmental concerns of socialization and economic behavior." I do totally agree with him.

Swat, 1953, Jahanzeb College: Saidu Hostel. (Photo by L.M. Olivieri)