
The product of many years of study of medieval Jain writing, this book provides a unique window into Jain monastic culture, intellectual life and politics. It is a detailed study of texts primarily written in Sanskrit, but also in Prakrit, by a single monastic lineage in Śvetāmbara Jainism, the Tapāgaccha. Dundas is a scholar of profound erudition. The wealth of information that he provides on a topic about which little has been written in any European language may prove daunting to the non-specialist reader, but this is a book that deserves to be read by a wide audience. It deals with issues that were not unique to the Jain monastic group that is its subject: the creation of a group identity; the promotion of a cult surrounding a charismatic leader; the definition of scripture and debates about the role of interpretation; the nature of a canon and its potential expansion; heresy and the exclusion of outsiders, and the need for a measure of religious tolerance. These are central concerns of scholars in religious studies, and this book makes us aware that the study of Jainism, though often relegated to small specialist circles, has much to contribute to these larger discussions.

The Tapāgaccha was one of the dominant monastic groups in medieval India. Śvetāmbara Jains were divided into a number of competing groups or gacchas. Most of these groups had only local importance; some were even named for the village in which they operated. Differences between them were for the most part minor, revolving around the minutiae of how and when a ritual should be performed. Competition for patronage from the lay community was keen, and texts and inscriptions indicate that given gacchas sought an exclusive relationship with the specific Jain castes for whom they performed ritual services and whom they instructed in matters of the faith. The situation is different when we come to the two most important gacchas of northwestern India, the Kharataragaccha and the Tapāgaccha, which were active in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Both groups had larger aspirations and described themselves as the true inheritors of the Jain teachings, the only ones who preserved the correct Jain monastic practice. Their aim was to establish once and for all a normative and universally applicable Jain practice. In their writings, the issues that divided them were major, indeed so major that they did not hesitate to criticize each other in the harshest of language and demonize their opponents as false monks.
The Kharatagaccha began as a reform group, probably in the mid 11th century. Little is known of its founder, Vardhamâna, but his successors, Jinaśvara, Jinavallabha, and Jinadatta, all wrote strongly polemical works in which they lashed out at the lax practices of the monks around them. Much of their criticism was directed against the so-called Caityavâsin or “Temple-dwelling Monks”. In the eyes of the Kharataras, these monks had fallen from the true Jain practice, which demanded that monks have no fixed abode and lead itinerant lives. Kharatara monks objected to other practices, often those of the laity; they had strict rules regulating the role of women in Jain temple worship and they were against the celebration of certain festivals that no doubt had come in from Hinduism. Kharatara monks went so far as to forbid their followers from worshipping in temples with images that had been consecrated by monks of other gacchas.¹

The Tapâgaccha, which is the subject of the present monograph, today ascribes its own beginnings to the community of monks that surrounded the Jina, Mahâvîra, and particularly to his disciple Sudhanâmar. As Dundas explains (p. 2), this is a very different description of its origins from one that he had proposed in his book The Jains, relying on medieval Tapâgaccha sources. There he had stated that the Tapâgaccha originated with the 13th century monk Jagaccandasûri as a reformist movement. He was taken to task for this description by the great scholar-monk Jambûvijaya, whose recent death has been such a loss to us all. Their differing perspectives serve as the starting point of Dundas’s present book.

In his first chapter, Dundas examines the differing versions that Tapâgaccha monks offered to describe the origins of their gaccha. Any group that proposes to speak as the authentic monastic community needs to establish its legitimacy, and that means creating an account of an unbroken lineage that guarantees the authenticity and demonstrates the continuity of both practice and doctrinal interpretation. The earliest lineage account that we have dates from the 13th century (Dharmaghoșasûri, who died around 1300). It is a poem in Prakrit, and Dundas suggests that it was not meant as a comprehensive history of the group or an attempt to define its identity, but probably had a ritual use, being employed in the installation of monks to a high rank (p. 27). He further suggests that the group did not yet have