

WAGHORNE, JOANNE PUNZO. *The Raja's Magic Clothes: Re-Visioning Kingship and Divinity in England's India*. Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions. Xees W. Bolle, editor. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994. xxxiv + 285 pages. Glossary, figure, 93 plates (20 in color), bibliography, index. Cloth US\$49.50; ISBN 0-271-01066-5.

Pudukkottai, a South Indian principality of the Tondaiman Rajas, is fast accumulating a posthumous preeminence, albeit of an academic sort, that belies its tiny size and marginality to the British Empire. In 1987 NICHOLAS DIRKS published *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, an excellent study of the relationship between state and society in Pudukkottai. Now we have Joanne Waghorne's elaborate hermeneutical and pictorial essay, *The Raja's Magic Clothes*, which attempts to make the magical dynamism of an archaic India glitter through the Hindu pomp and British circumstance of Pudukkottai's court rituals. Waghorne conceives her work as a "theo-logic" or ethno-theology of "the naked and the dressed" divine-kingship. It focuses on the decorative or ornamental aspects of royal ritual and on the raja as an icon, analyzing the raja's ritual garb and such royal emblems as fans, fly whisks, umbrella, throne, turban, sword, and shoes. Waghorne's term "theo-logic" connotes a theology that is not limited to lofty sacred texts and up-in-the-sky divinities, but one that passionately embraces the religious significance of the here and now in the shape of things and ornamentation. In short, what Waghorne is proposing is a doctrine of "religious materialism." Accordingly, Waghorne's study "depends primarily on an analysis of images, not of concepts," and her arguments are advanced through a "chronological progression of portraits and photographs, a play of images" that are culled from historical and administrative records, court paraphernalia, and other memorabilia.

The first part of Waghorne's multi-decked exposition of Pudukkottai's royal rigmarole begins as a show-and-tell session of the intercultural predicament resulting from encounters between the Raj and its rajas. It deals with the political and scholarly goings-on, in person and in text, between a colorful cast of characters: native rajas and ranis, Brahman bureaucrats, British political agents, and Oxbridge scholars. Waghorne's analysis of the cultural space that the British and the Indians came to share is developed on the following lines: the sacred and the divine had a material locus in *darbar* (royal court) settings and in their ritual splendor of ornamentation; the theologic significance of such ritual and material has been overlooked due to a preoccupation with the otherworldly spirituality of India by Indian scholars and such European scholars as Max Müller and James Frazer; the British were both drawn to such rituals by political pragmatism and also held back by religious scruples regarding idolatrous practices; central to the ritual system of the royal court was not only dress and ornamentation but also the iconic body of the king, in person and as symbol ("the fully ornamented king symbolized human society in the realm"); while both the British and Brahman advisors sought to remake an iconic king according to their respective conceptions of Anglicization and what may be called "Sanskritization," the ironic result was that "the British Anglicized their princes only to redress them in new ornamentation that replicated a most Indian expression of royal rule" (81); as the *darbar* rituals gained ascendancy over the temple rituals nonorthodox and non-Brahmanic elements of a more primordial conception of kingship came to the fore; and what was regarded as royal extravagance was a part and parcel of the *darbar*'s religious materialism and of its notions of divine kingship.

In terms of Indology and religious materialism it is the second part of the book ("Splendor on the Borders of India") that is of greatest interest. Beginning with a detailed description of the royal palace and the division of labor (magical and mundane, personal and public) of its inner and outer circles of retainers, it undertakes an "archeological" expedition to unearth indigenous conceptions of divine kingship that lie beneath the orthodox, Brahman versions.

The Shudra-born Tondaimans' ascent to royal status and the anomalies in caste-related statuses and roles at the royal palace are interpreted by Waghorne in terms of what may be called an "out-of-the forest" model. In this view, a king who comes to power not as an alien, civilizing conqueror but as one who emerges out of the forest symbolizes its fearsome magical power of primal chaos and danger. Drawing selectively from recent works on Indology based on Sangam literature and certain oral traditions, Waghorne sees the divine essence of the raja not as one akin to that of benign deities but as a manifestation of magic.

In her discussion of the myth of King Vena (who makes a fatal call to end sacrifices to the gods on the grounds that all gods are present in the person of the king), Waghorne sidelines the Vedic view that sacrifices are necessary to ensure social order and prosperity and puts forth instead a "retention-release" model: a sort of arm-twisting contest between the magical powers of the king and the Earth. Furthermore, with a seemingly unbounded exegetical imagination that progresses in quantum leaps, Waghorne seeks to portray King Vena and his penchant for self-idolatry as a paradigm of unbridled anti-orthodoxy and hence also as a model for the ritual and personal extravagances of the Pudukkottai rajas! In a chapter entitled "The God on the Silver Throne," which is concerned with the Brahmanic legitimation of Pudukkottai kingship, Waghorne sets up iconic parallels between the god Śiva and the raja in their capacity to take on the roles of king, god, and ascetic (priest). Here a new exegetical twist is added in that sin — in the form of violence, hedonism, and decadence of the sort that is usually associated with high-profile celebrities — is said to be integral to the nature of the royal body and its magical power.

The extravagant habits of the rajas are linked not only to the legitimation of their power but to further progress in the raja's socialization to a fully ornamented king, reaching its climax in the raja's coronation and his subsequent *darbar* rituals. Waghorne provides a fine description of the coronation ritual and its meaning as the magical robing of the raja. This process is linked by Waghorne to the Prajapati myth, which deals with the creation of life forms. As the author sees it, Prajapati's act of "clothing the earth" is similar to the magic-laden construction of the king's iconic body during the coronation.

*The Raja's Magic Clothes* offers several interesting arguments. One is the idea that the seemingly political arena of *darbar* is no less endowed with religiosity than the temples, and that the image of the ornamented raja seated in state defines a serious form of religiousness. A second view seeks to dispose of the widely held image of India as a heartland of ascetic, other-worldly spirituality — this notion is attributed not only to Indian scholars but also to the scholarly timidity and the Christian context of interpreters like Müller and Frazer. Another important theme of the book is that British political restrictions affected the temple-based Brahmanic theology but did little to dim the magical luster of the royal rituals. These facilitated a theological space in which the older, more fluid, and material forms of indigenous Pudukkottai tradition could resurface. The most significant aspect of Waghorne's study is its advocacy of a form of "religious materialism" allowing for a "re-visioning" of the concept of divinity that is free of rigid dichotomies between the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the secular, sin and salvation, and history and theology.

How convincing are these ideas? The thesis of religious materialism and its sacred dimensions is hardly novel. Nor is the distinction between the theologic and theology necessary to post-Christian thinking. Social anthropologists have long understood the social significance of magic and the correlation between social systems and types of divinities, and they do not draw rigid lines separating magic from religion. The survival of magical elements in more developed theological systems is to be expected. Waghorne's arguments about magical elements in Pudukkottai tend to generate a scene in which the tail wags the dog. It is one thing to re-vision the kingship in light of ideas about the nature of god, but it is another to do the reverse. Even in Pudukkottai "all that glitters is not god"; much of it is show-biz or "theater state," which is hardly unique to Pudukkottai and its myths. One of the issues that Waghorne fails to discuss further is the "outsider" status of the Tondaimans, who migrated south from Telugu-speaking areas and therefore may have enjoyed some flexibility to ignore caste ta-

boos, a tendency perhaps further influenced by the Moghuls. The real problem with the *Raja's Magic Clothes* is that Pudukkottai was not all there was to Hindu kingship. A necessary debate about the conclusions that Waghorne draws from Pudukkottai requires both a historical and a comparative look at divine kingship not only in other areas of India but in other areas of the world as well (FEELEY-HARNIK 1985).

Although Waghorne's theologic of ornamentation seems prone to a glitzy exegesis matching that of Pudukkottai's ornamentation, her effort should be applauded for directing further scholarly attention toward aspects of nonorthodox India. Waghorne deserves credit for showing how different religious traditions accommodate each other. The book's pictorial "ornamentation" (which includes two photographs of the author at work) is, moreover, a joy to behold. Perhaps it is fitting that Waghorne's estimation of the works of Müller and Frazer as "decorative things" is so apt for her own work.

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N. J. C. VASANTKUMAR

Miyazaki International College,

Miyazaki/Susquehanna University,

Selinsgrove, Pa.

## IRAN

MARZOLPH, ULRICH and AZAR AMIRHOSSEINI-NIHAMMER, editors. *Die Erzählungen der Mašdī Galīn Hānom | Qessehā-ye Mashdī Galīn Khānom* [The tales of Mashdī Galīn Khānom]. Collected by L. P. Elwell-Sutton. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1994. Volume 1: texts (Persian, with both Persian and German introductions and bibliographies). 497 (Persian numerals) + 7 (Arabic numerals) pages. Paper DM 98.—; ISBN 3-88226-621-X. Volume 2: Begleitband (supplementary volume). 66 pages. Bibliography, indices, glossary. DM 36.—; ISBN 3-88226-627-9. (In German)

MARZOLPH, ULRICH. *Dāstānhā-ye-širin: Fünfzig persische Volksbüchlein aus der zweiten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* [Sweet stories: Fifty Persian chapbooks from the second half of the twentieth century]. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Band 50,4. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994. 115 pages. Illustrations, bibliography. Paper DM 72.—; ISBN 3-515-06359-5; ISSN 0567-4980. (In German with transcribed Persian original descriptions of each booklet)

Folk narratives of the Islamic Middle East were first studied by Western scholars out of philological or dialectological interest. Then, animated by patriotic sentiments, indigenous scholars joined in collecting and eventually established their own folklore studies. Yet it is only quite recently that this complex field was studied and organized systematically. Both Ellwell-Sutton and Ulrich Marzolph have played a major role in this process.