

Plates of over eighty black-and-white photographs from every region add much value to the book, which closes with a fairly exhaustive bibliography and a very useful index-glossary. It is likely to remain an unrivaled reference in the history of wheeled transport in the subcontinent for some time and adds an important chapter to the history of Indian technologies.

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Demoting Vishnu: Ritual, Politics, and the Unraveling of Nepal's Hindu Monarchy. By ANNE T. MOCKO. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. ix + 246.

When in June 2001 almost the complete royal Nepalese family was wiped out in a shooting spree, or when in 2005 the last Shah king assumed direct rule that triggered the People's Movement of 2006, it was apparent that these events would shake the foundations of Nepal's political system. It is one thing to realize that history was being made, but another to pin down the key changes, as Anne T. Mocko has done in her PhD thesis and the present monograph based on it.

Starting from the observation that in June 2008 King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah quietly abdicated and turned into a normal citizen, she sets out to trace the unmaking of this last Nepalese king in the preceding interim period (2006–2008). She asks how the monarchy could have ended so abruptly but still largely peacefully, and how and why elites who up till then found “it more convenient to rule *through* a Shah king than replace him” (p. 29) suddenly turned against it. Rather than through a conventional political analysis, these questions are answered from the perspective of ritual studies.

In her introduction (ch. 1) the author argues, building on pertinent theories about kingship and ritual practice, that a cornerstone in constructing the social office “king of Nepal” and its attendant ideologies was the performance of exclusive roles in rituals. In her investigation of how the monarch was dismantled by “systematically acting against the office of kingship, rather than the person of the king”—by blocking his access to “objects, locations, events, duties, privileges, and relationships through which the monarchy had been constructed and supported” (p. 2)—two sets of rituals are focused on. Initially, the “succession rituals” that transferred the office to its last holder in 2001 are dealt with, contending that these failed in many respects and “left Gyanendra's kingship incompletely established” (p. 61). In the calendric “reinforcement rituals,” which reconfirmed the king's royal identity on a regular basis, roles previously reserved for the king were shifted to the head of the democratic state from 2007 on. Construing Nepalese royal ritual as elitist practice, “performed not for ‘the people’ but for the king” (p. 11), the author limits herself to asking how ritual performance is productive of political ideologies, leaving the question of their reception aside. She follows the main actors involved in recasting the rituals. On the basis of personal interviews, observations, and journalistic and academic source material, she delivers an “ethnography of event” (p. 24) that takes a detailed look at “institutionally invested political elites carrying out a revolutionary project” (p. 11). Given this research framework and the volume's approach to tracing ritual dynamics in the making, the book offers invaluable testimony regarding how Nepalese kingship ended but was survived by its rituals.

Chapter 2 contains a sketch of the Shah dynasty's rule (1768–2008)—a commendable introduction to that period of Nepalese history. It tackles the “institutional endurance” (p. 27) of Shah kingship despite mostly weak monarchs and continual power struggles. From the beginnings under the charismatic king of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1722–1775), whose conquests laid the foundations of what is now Nepal, it moves on to the “Period of Puppet Kings and their Puppet Masters (1777–1950),” during which the actual kings were largely excluded from exercising political power and confined to ceremonial rule. By not adopting the conventional break between the early Shah (1768–1846) and Rana (1846–1951) periods, this periodization is refreshing and corresponds to the book's focus on royal powers. For the phases that witnessed the restoration of full kingship (1951–1990) and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (after 1990) the double rhetoric of presenting the monarch as the

spearhead of both democracy and development on the one hand and of a Hindu state on the other is highlighted. The chapter ends with a closer look at the last king's rule. In contrast to his assassinated predecessor and brother Birendra, who had succeeded, as constitutional monarch, in getting himself recognized as the mild-mannered father of the nation, Gyanendra is characterized as having been a failed king.

The very transmission of kingship onto this king, performed amidst the collective shock over the royal massacre of 2001, was, as discussed in chapter 3, defective. As is aptly shown, such transfer of office was not achieved by any single ritual, but by a whole set of "succession rituals"—from the cremation of the previous office-holder to the enthronement of the new one. Together with peripheral rituals, such as the grooming of the crown prince or the royal unction (*rājyābhiṣeka*), these events were also meant to work as mutual safeguards in case one of the rituals failed. It is then the concept of "ritual failure" as theorized by R. Grimes (p. 62) that rhetorically underpins the tracking of an incredible series of flops, failures, and fumbles in the succession between Birendra and Gyanendra. From the irregularities of performing multiple royal cremations, to the succession—conforming to rule but under circumstances outwardly irregular—by the crown prince and alleged assassin Dipendra (declared king for the last few days of his life while in a coma), to accidents and quarrels that overshadowed the secondary funerary rituals, to the non-performance of the *rājyābhiṣeka*, seemingly none of the succession rituals was successfully performed. Paradoxically, the ceremonial masters made no mistakes but followed precedent and protocol. Still, the image of the monarchy was severely damaged through their indifference to the unusual circumstances and public sentiments. Thus in spite of the fact that—or, as Mocko suggests, *because*—the rituals were performed as faithfully as possible, they did not achieve what they were intended to. One may debate whether it is really "one of the main purposes of public rituals . . . to stamp collective narratives about relationships and statuses as *officially true*," but one cannot but agree with the conclusion that in 2001 the "relationship between ritual and public narrative broke down," so that "all Gyanendra inherited was ambiguity" (p. 82).

With the king's "social identity . . . utterly insufficient" (p. 86), the "reinforcement rituals" could not "entirely compensate for his chaotic and inadequate succession of 2001" (p. 91). Three of these annual rituals are investigated in the following chapters, regarding both their history and their reform in the two years after the reinstatement of the House of Representatives in April 2006. In 2006 when Gyanendra technically was still king, he was still allowed to follow his ritual protocol. Political elites undermined this through non-support, however, so that the monarch stood alone in places where his public appearance had formerly been framed by democratic leaders and diplomats. After the prime minister was declared interim head of state in early 2007, the monarch was displaced from royal ritual altogether, his role therein being shifted to the new head of state.

In these chapters, as in the preceding part of the book, the meticulous tracing of events leads to astonishing insights. The first ritual discussed (ch. 4), the Bhoto Jatra, is part of a procession in Patan and features the public showing of a vest (*bhoto*) with the king acting as its main observer. That this ritual formed the first public occasion on which the prime minister took the king's place was lucky coincidence for the reformers. It not only seemed acceptable to replace the king in this only slightly ritualized role; the government also had almost complete control over organizing the event, and so could smoothly introduce changes it had discussed with all actors beforehand. Thus had it not been preceded by the Bhoto Jatra, the recasting of Indrajatra (ch. 5), during which the king annually received blessings from the royal goddess Kumari and which featured ritual specialists who were staunch royalists, could have been much more difficult. Still, this ritual prompted resistance, which led to the odd situation that in 2007 the girl-goddess blessed two rulers. The third festival treated, the autumnal Dasain (ch. 6), posed the challenge of having to disentangle the office of kingship from the person of the king. In this major state ritual, the king's roles as head of the Shah lineage, head of the government, and father of the nation had long become conflated.

The treatment of the three "reinforcement rituals" stresses their distinct characters, while at the same time elucidating their relation to one another in the "loose system of practices sustaining the social reality of kingship" (p. 93). Accordingly, the recasting of each ritual harbored peculiar difficulties. Competing interests at play needed to be negotiated. But by the time the first president was sworn into office

in 2008 the erstwhile royal rituals had been fully transferred onto the ceremonial protocol of the new head of state by what were largely administrative measures. Thus the elites' project of "re-ritualizing the state" (p. 60) was accomplished.

A few inaccuracies in the book need pointing out: One may call it an improper entanglement of facts to say that the first Rana prime minister, Jung Bahadur, tied his newly conferred kingship to his prime-ministership (p. 33), when historians argue that he in fact intended to pass on the title of Maharaja of Kaski and Lamjung to his sons and that of prime minister to his brothers, which led to quarrelling among his heirs and ultimately the massacre of 1885. The assertion that there had been no violent death of a Shah king before 2001 (p. 80) is perhaps a bit of an overstatement. While this is certainly true of the post-1950-period, it is not of the early Shah period. In 1806 King Rana Bahadur, who had abdicated, was assassinated by his half-brother Sher Bahadur. Other misleading statements include that the girl chosen to embody Kumari remained in office "until she reached approximately age twelve" (p. 122), while it is bleeding, usually with the onset of menstruation or when teething, that ends a girl's tenure, and that the Khadgasiddhijatra did not take place during the Dasain of 2011 (p. 225 n. 10), which it indeed did. These are, however, only minor lapses, which neither affect the validity of the overall argument nor diminish the major conclusions stated in chapter 7.

Just to single out some points the present reader finds remarkable: The book looks at political change through the lens of ritual studies and, more particularly, draws attention to often neglected aspects of rituals, including their planning, organization, and administration. Actors involved in such processes, the "makers of ritual behind the scenes," usually remain unknown (*Ritualmacher hinter den Kulissen*, ed. by J. Gengnagel and G. Schwedler [Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013], 13). Anne Mocko has documented their agency and voices. From such a perspective, the actual staging of rituals represents only the final outcome of complex negotiations. Following Nepalese royal rituals sequentially, both through the annual cycles and over multiple years, also elucidates how change once introduced sets precedent for and thus eases subsequent performances. The book also brings to light the often ad hoc character of decisions and many intriguing moments in which coincidence comes to either hinder or help actors, leading one to wonder more generally how much of what is couched in historians' narratives in terms of cause and effect actually was the outcome of happenstance or coincidence.

In short, the book under review can be warmly recommended. For those who are interested in Hindu kingship or, from an even broader perspective, modern monarchy and democracy, it provides an accessible introduction to the Nepalese case. For those particularly interested in Nepalese history and religion, it will be a mine of carefully collected and referenced data, a stimulating look into the performance of rulership and a contribution to ongoing discussions on religion and secularism (cf. *Religion, Secularism, and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal*, ed. D. Gellner, S. Hausner, C. Letizia [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016]). Thus it is not only fortunate that somebody has dealt with these recent dynamics of Nepalese royal ritual, but that it was Anne Mocko who did so. Her book will certainly captivate both general readers as well as specialists.

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Reading "The Tale of Genji": Sources from the First Millennium. Edited by THOMAS HARPER and HARUO SHIRANE. New York: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xx + 610. \$65.

This impressive anthology presents translations of texts—some well known, others less so—that trace the reception history of the canonical work of Japanese literature, *The Tale of Genji*. The collection's appearance marks the growth of non-Japanese interest in the *Genji* and its now assured place in world literature. Whereas Shirane's previous edited volume on *Genji* reception (*Envisioning "The Tale of Genji": Media, Gender, and Cultural Production*, Columbia Univ. Press, 2008) examines the tale's impact in visual and popular culture through scholarly papers, this volume gathers sources focused on the readerly engagements from the tenth through twentieth centuries. Many of the materials have