

recommended book for any scholar interested in how the mindfulness movement came to be and what are its ethical, cultural, and spiritual roots.

References

- Luckmann, Thomas. 1967. *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. New York: The MacMillan.
- Purser, Ronald E. 2019. *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. London: Repeater Books.
- Wilson, Jeff. 2014. *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marta Kołodziejska

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa, Poland

 marta.kolodziejska@ifispan.edu.pl

© 2020 Marta Kołodziejska

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1857205>



Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India, by Caleb Simmons, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2020, xii + 277 pp., US\$99.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-008889-7

One hears of constant turns in the humanities and social sciences from the cultural turn and linguistic turn to the more recent post-human turn and ontological turn. Such turns, as it goes, help scholars further refine their grasp on reality and proclaim dominion over a world that eludes a fastening grasp. Or, to provide a paranoid reading, these turns could be seen as trends that are themselves responses to institutional and economic pressures – ideology, as some would have it. But perhaps scholars are not the only ones turning to solidify their hold on the world while navigating the changing contours of institutional authority. In his brilliant and evocative book, *Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India*, Caleb Simmons argues that following the encroachment of colonial rule and accumulating political losses, two early colonial kings in Mysore, Tipu Sultan (r. 1782–1799) and Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (r. 1799–1868), also made a turn – a turn toward religion. As he writes, ‘both kings’ reigns were marked by a realization of their place between old and new regimes and that they turned to religion in their search for an idiom through which they could articulate their sovereignty’ (15). Simmons, therefore, importantly centers questions of theology in relation to sovereignty, making *Devotional Sovereignty* essential reading for those interested in the transitions that sovereignty underwent from the early modern to the modern period.

But what is this ‘religious turn’? Why turn to ‘religion’? The turn, Simmons explains, has to do with a changing context in the early colonial period and how Indian kings secured sovereignty in the wake of a burgeoning colonial hegemony that changed the scope of kingship. Rather than understanding this shift as the loss of sovereignty, its diminishing, Simmons foregrounds the creative nature of the change and how Kings redefined the basis of sovereignty from conquest by turning ‘to the metaphysical foundations of kingship to help them define their sovereign domain’ (4). Navigating these turns, Simmons demonstrates how in the negotiation and amalgamation of premodern and modern understandings of sovereignty, religious devotion became crucial to legitimating royal identity and sovereign authority. Religion

guaranteed, as Simmons writes quoting Claude Lefort, ‘that regime or mode of society has a permanence in time, regardless of various events that may affect it’ (17).

This is not to say that religion was not important before. In contrast, the questions Simmons asks concern the dynamic search for sovereignty and the creative reframings that accompanied this search. Even though there emerged a new paradigmatic way to deal with the crisis in sovereignty, recall what Michel Foucault teaches: there is no easy replacement of one form of power by another. Foucault writes in *Security, Territory, Population* (2007), ‘We should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government’ (Foucault 2007, 107). Instead, things escape the old mechanism and there are adjustments to take care of these details.

The chapters explore these adjustments. Simmons begins by examining how Tipu Sultan’s Mysore sultanate articulated sovereignty through South Indian royal genealogical traditions. In his close reading of the *Book of Haider* (*Haider Nama*) and the *History of Haider* (*Nishan-I Haidari*) alongside other genealogical texts, Simmons ably demonstrates how Tipu Sultan and his court curated genealogies and visual demonstrations of conquest and devotion that were not tied to birth, but delegated by the divine – a delegation proven by military conquest and administrative competence (33, 50). Though genealogies were tied to divine favor, favor had to be continually renewed in displays of public devotion. Tipu Sultan’s reign, then, also reveals a devotional continuity and Simmons traces how he drew on his imperial predecessors through his transcommunal patronage of the Sufi *pir* and the *jagadguru* at the Shringeri *matha*.

Yet there were more changes, especially so after the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790–1792). Typically understood, Tipu Sultan turned to Islam. But Simmons argues this focus elides how the turn to Islam and the proclamations of *jihad* did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it was tied to a broader religious rhetoric as the court sought to incorporate non-Muslim international allies. Reworded, the focus on religious identity takes away from the final moment of Tipu Sultan’s religio-political ideology in which the state itself became sacralized. In this sacralization, religious identity cannot be reduced to belief, but must be understood as a matter of political allegiance (89, 94, 97). Examining murals and correspondence, Simmons deftly tackles the questions of religious difference by working through how political alliances were central to sovereignty as acts of piety and religious fidelity. Though Islam was indeed crucial, it was not then, Simmons argues, ‘the defining aspect for his determination of political alliances or of those he considered “faithful”’ (91). Instead, the faithful were determined through their relation to the Mysore government in which allies were pious and enemies were impious. In fact, religious fidelity and infidelity themselves were tied to political relations, which ‘transcended religious tradition’ (98).

These adjustments became more pronounced with the coronation of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III. After the East India Company (EIC) defeated Tipu Sultan’s sultanate in 1799, the EIC restored the prior rulers, the Wodeyars, to the throne and Krishnaraja III became King at the age of four. Trouble remained in the region, however, and, in 1831, the Maharaja was stripped of all political power as administration and revenue collection transferred to the colonial state. No longer responsible for day-to-day life of administration, Krishnaraja III, Simmons writes, ‘replaced his administrative life with a life of religion devotion and the arts’ (14). And this inflected claims to sovereignty; there were more adjustments.

For example, even though the King was a subordinate of the British, genealogical literature (*vamshavali*) remained central to authority, power, and succession. But now it was ‘rearticulated in terms of devotion, supernatural power, and divine injunction’ (127). The King was no longer tied to a conquest, territory, or biological succession, but located in a mythic context

and supernatural world – which expanded the very idea of devotionism beyond political alliances and sectarian identities to a ‘new vision of Hinduism’ (126). The public display of devotion was, once again, central in disseminating the religious identity of the King and sacralizing his lineage even as the nature of royal patronage changed. In a capacious undertaking, Simmons examines paintings, sculptures, murals, and iconography and their capture of Kingship, which was defined through acts of devotion in a broader ancient Hindu family.

Despite British dominance and control, these visual creations provided ‘an open but subtle means to critique colonial authority and to present a different perspective on power that was rooted in Indian understandings of sovereignty’ (170). Yet not all these displays were for the public. The murals of the Rangamahala in the Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore, for example, though reminding viewers that divine power extended into the temporal realm, were not aimed at changing the mind of the populace. Rather the concern was to display the potential power of the Mysore King in an inner realm which complemented the turn to religious devotion and ritual in public. This negotiated and refashioned Kingship reconstituted how space and territory were ordered since the Kings of Mysore were able to carve a space for themselves even while under British suzerainty – a point Simmons elaborates by examining a pilgrimage undertaken by a Mysore priest.

This turn to religion had significant consequences. Importantly, in these varied adjustments, we see how sovereignty is distributed across India’s landscape as the landscape becomes both sacred and sovereign. In other words, the diffusion of sovereignty occurred through the demarcation of a new space, which allowed the sovereign surplus that connected the earthly to the Divine, to be transferred onto ‘Indian “geo-flesh”’ (212). This transfer then laid the groundwork for the modern nation. To quote Simmons: ‘The surplus of sovereignty, the “flesh” of the perpetual and metaphysical body of kingship, was therefore transferred into Indian landscapes that could bridge immanence and transcendence, reflecting the ontology of the deities housed in these sites’ (233). In other words, with all these various adjustments over the years, there was now a separation between the transcendent sovereign and administrative and military dominance of the British, bridged by the ‘flesh’ of the Indian landscape (23). One could say, in these adjustments, we have the birth of governmentality as the sovereign becomes latent and administrative praxis in relation to a population takes hold.

Locating a turn to ‘religion,’ however, brings troubles as well. What does it mean to write that Tipu Sultan and Krishnaraja III turned to religion, a notoriously difficult idiom, or, more accurately, name? Religion is, recall, as Gil Anidjar writes in *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature*, a name that Christianity endows the world (Anidjar 2008, 46). This particular endowment occurs with a central turn in the History of Christianity, a political theological turn, the secularization of theological concepts or, better yet, ‘the liquidation of theological concepts’ as Anidjar writes in *Blood* (Anidjar 2014, viii). This liquidation is not a clean affair, but a bloody mess. And, consequently, in any turn to religion, we have a return of Christianity.

Simmons acknowledges the centrality of such theological concepts to his own inquiry, but not just as transformations wrought by Christianity in its imperial conquests, in its liquidation. One example: Simmons makes this association explicitly regarding the relation between divine and earthly sovereignty. As we saw, Simmons argues that

the productions from the courts of both Tipu Sultan and Krishnaraja III provide insight into the identity formation of kings and their claims to royal power and dynastic continuity by reimagining their political history within a realm of divine-human interaction that gives Mysore kingship stability in a volatile period. (19).

Simmons connects this to the work of Ernst Kantorowicz who, Simmons explains, demonstrates how ‘the king, his lineage, and his sovereignty were apotheosized and were, thus

inseparable from theology, as the structures of royalty in medieval Europe were mapped onto the Christology of the time' (27–28, fn. 77). These two processes were similar. He writes,

similar to the processes through which sovereignty and its relationship to the divine are projected onto the king and his lineage described by Kantorowicz, the courts of early modern Mysore negotiated sovereignty through discussions of divine election, the transfer of sovereignty from divine to the earthly sovereign, dynastic continuity, and lineage succession. (27–28, fn. 77)

But a division between divine and earthly sovereignty was not just mapped onto Christology; the division itself is unimaginable in *that* form (the king's two bodies) without Christ. In *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), Kantorowicz details how ritualized mysterious action of the sacrament of Eucharist, *corpus Christi* – not just any ritual, but one tied to blood and purity – became the *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) in which the Church became 'the organized body of Christian society united in the Sacrament of the Altar' (196). The Church became one mystical body of which Christ was the head – a racial regime. This entire edifice depends on certain theological particulars with distinct outcomes: Christ bridging the gap between God and man, for example, between divine and earthly sovereignty, between immanence and transcendence in his presence. The thematic of the king's two bodies, in other words, is saturated by Christology – a particular tradition that has granted its name and problems to all.

For Simmons, however, this is not a particular problem since, as he writes, 'the problem of the two bodies of the king is also prevalent in Indian political theory of succession and was central in courtly thought in Tipu Sultan's Mysore sultanate' (32). But is this problem so easily transposed to understand Mysore under Tipu Sultan? What happens to sovereignty when there is no Christ – does it retain the same form of the king's two bodies? In other words, does a division between earthly and divine sovereign – a division that then must be reconciled for legitimacy – translate across the world? We know this is not the case everywhere; we can turn here to the relational cosmopolitics in the Andes that Marisol de la Cadena has asked us to consider in *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (2015). Or we can consider how the division between Divine and human might not need reconciliation, but, instead, how it can open a space for continuous critique in *sharia* as Brinkley Messick has forcefully shown in *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (1996). By beginning with the separation of Divine and earthly sovereignty that needs to be bridged, there is already a question of Christ – one that bleeds into 'Indian political theory' even though there are other possible arrangements, understandings, interactions of the divine and earthly and even, possibly, no separation at all.

To develop further, if we return to Simmons' correct critique that the focus on religious identity premised on belief is a modern form projected onto early modern South Asia, we also have to attend to how it is a Christian form as Talal Asad has so eloquently shown in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993). But if religious identity centered on belief is a troublesome translation to the South Asian context, then why do the same troubles not arise with *The King's Two Bodies*, which is, after all, a specific debate around Christology (50 fn. 4)? Put differently, if a turn to religion connotes a turn to Christianity, then, what does it mean to invoke a turn to 'religion' to challenge Christian assumptions such as the notion that religion is premised on belief? It is the sound of one civilization clashing as Anidjar writes elsewhere (Anidjar 2007).

Yet these are also precisely the bigger questions Simmons himself is trying to raise in tracing the emergence of the Indian 'geo-body' and the troubled theological life of sovereignty in the subcontinent. How does a metaphysics of presence become articulable as a problem of a

universal theology? When do Western metaphysics and Christian theology come to epitomize problems in all theologies? Locating a turn to religion then can, of course, bring troubles, but it can also elucidate how and when problems arise. As Gary Wilder reminds, turns can have a foreclosure effect since new optics, such as political theology, can become routine research topics that reaffirm assumptions (Wilder 2012). One worries that Wilder's caution can be extended to locating turns in the past as well—that demarcating religious turns, too, can function to routinize and reaffirm Christian assumptions while foreclosing the possibility of discrepant aporetic categories that undo our sacred ties. But the power of Simmon's work lies precisely in raising questions about our categories and our given premises. It is exceptionally researched and impressive in argumentation, demanding we consider the importance of working through theology in relation to sovereignty – an essential albeit difficult task.

References

- Anidjar, Gil. 2007. "A Review in Three Parts." *The Immanent Frame*. <https://tif.ssrc.org/2007/12/26/a-review-in-three-parts/>.
- Anidjar, Gil. 2008. *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Anidjar, Gil. 2014. *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- De la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst. 2016 [1957]. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Messick, Brinkley. 1996. *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilder, Gary. 2012. "From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns." *The American Historical Review* 117 (3): 723–745.

Rajbir Singh Judge
California State University, Long Beach, USA
✉ rajbir.judge@csulb.edu

© 2020 Rajbir Singh Judge
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1858654>



The Varieties of Nonreligious Experience: Atheism in American Culture, by Jerome P. Baggett, New York: New York University Press, 2019, xvi + 272 pp., US \$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-147-988452-0

This book, written by a sociologist of religion at Santa Clara University, is meant to be a counterpart to William James' classic of classics, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Where James analyzes believers, Baggett analyzes atheists. James' sources are written accounts, by or about believers, not a few of them famous. Baggett's sources are interviews with over 500 atheists, none of them known. Indeed, their professional ordinariness is conspicuous. James' sources cover religions around the world, past and present. Baggett's sources are almost all Christian, or formerly so. James focuses on religious experience. Baggett focuses on religious—or atheistic—belief.