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Togetherhness Is Sharing an Umbrella: Divine Kingship, the Gnosis, and Religious Syncretism

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עשה לך רב וקנה לך חבר

Secure a teacher for yourself, and acquire a companion for yourself.

To inhabitants of the ancient world, perhaps nothing would have seemed more appropriate than the fact that a man named Chamberlain, prime minister to a king, carried an umbrella—were it not for the fact that Neville (1869-1940) usually carried it closed and pointed downward. Living at what many recent observers have considered the end of an age, or a particular (secular) consciousness, Western society in general and scholars in particular are, more often than not, insensitive, if not oblivious, to reality as it was understood in antiquity. And this lack of understanding is especially troublesome since our social and political theories, institutions, and laws are all ultimately rooted deeply in the past—to say nothing of a collective nature

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of our consciousness (or either a theoretical unconscious or some supposed deep structures of our languages).

Our difficulties in comprehending the past are themselves a product of the past. Unquestioned assumptions deriving from Platonic idealism and Aristotelian either/or logic, for example, have trapped scholarship in its own categories for countless generations – and not just regarding ethics and aesthetics. In studies of divine kingship one can find seemingly endless confusion as to what a king is, what a god is, and how a king could be divine.² Puzzlement is often expressed at how a king could be so naive as to claim world-rulership while being fully aware of another sovereign who ruled (and threatened) just beyond the border. Many students of Southeast Asia despair of understanding how a seeming plethora of religions could coexist and thrive. Some questions seem to be insoluble, for instance, how an avowedly Theravāda ruler such as Kyanziththa of Burma could simultaneously claim to be Avatār of Viṣṇu and also allow Abèyadana to build a Mahāyānist temple at his capital of Pagān, or how the Buddhist Borobudur and the Hindu Prambanan complexes could be built in such relative space/time proximity in ancient Java. This should not really be surprising, though, for even contemporary Asian scholars are handicapped by their Western-style education which conditions them to perceive data within Greek philosophical constructs that are inadequate to deal with the world (and especially religion and kingship) as it was understood by those who did not imbibe that *lethe* which characterized the Greek style of rationalism.

Many conflicting ideas exist as to the nature of the institution of divine kingship. This is not surprising, however, because our blindness to ancient forms also has its roots deep in the past. I see misunderstandings dating at least as far back as the early Greek *polis* – or at least the first performances of *Oedipus*. Post-Renaissance scholar-

ship has seen this drama as the working out of almost every theme except as a political satire (and the radical implications of this position for psychoanalytic theory, mythology, and comparative literature are intended!). Yet if one examines the type of royal/ritual marriage common in the ancient world and the relationship of the *hieros gamos* to succession (and this, whether by sister-marriage of a Pharaoh in Egypt, marriage of a hero to the queen of a deceased king as in the case of Jocasta, the union of a conqueror or hero to a crown princess, or whatever variation of the theme one finds), it is apparent that an early Greek audience would not have seen the play uniquely as a tragedy, Aristotle's rather late evaluation notwithstanding. *Oedipus* was clearly a commentary on the political systems of some of the Greeks' neighboring states, though it may not have been recognized as being relevant to their own past. At that period there was already visible movement toward "modern" consciousness.

An ancient case in point reaches back to the earliest Hellenistic contact with the Eastern world. In few things did Alexander offend his fellow Macedonians as much as in his accepting and encouraging conquered peoples to treat him as divine (or more accurately, as a divine king). In Egypt he was given the title (among others) of Horus — as conqueror he was the *de facto* Pharaoh and was accepted as such — and legitimized with the spread of the story that he was the natural son of Nectanebo, the last legitimate Pharaoh, who had in typical Osiris style visited Olympias as a snake and begotten Alexander. Philip was left out of the picture.³ In Asia there was contention as Alexander's countrymen refused to prostrate themselves before him according to oriental custom. Alexander probably recognized the practical political value of conforming to local custom, but the irritation it caused highlights the growing difference between Eastern and Greek-influenced consciousness.

What Is a Divine King?

In antiquity kings were usually men. Rarely, however, were they merely men. Ken Angrok, the thirteenth-century Javanese hero/trickster/criminal/goldsmith/usurper/king, for instance, is described in the *Pararaton* (Book of Kings)⁴ as a literal son of the god Brahma and a peasant woman, the adopted son of Śiva, and an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Lesser-born figures such as Burma's Kyanzittha were nevertheless likely to be given "the anointing of the head with Indra's anointment,"⁵ and in spite of Theravāda concepts of atheism, to be addressed with the same title – *purhā* – which was used to refer to the Buddha. Few ancient scribes took the care to distinguish between the most exalted *purhā* and a living *purhā*, either.⁶ The "Theravādin" Burmese went so far as to describe their king Kyanzittha as

the exalted mighty universal monarch, who rides upon a white elephant, the omniscient [one], the Bodhisattva, who shall verily become a Buddha that saves [and] redeems all beings, who is great in love [and] compassion for all beings at all times, who upholds the religion of the Lord Buddha, who is exalted above all other kings that [dwell in?] all the four quarters . . . without exception . . . who was foretold by the Lord Buddha . . . who is to become a true Buddha.⁷

Kings were, first of all, exceptional men. They were supposed to be physically perfect, without blemishes or impairments.⁸ The well-being of the cosmos was to be seen reflected in their physical well-being. This requirement of physical completeness was one way of diminishing competition for the throne by near relatives (especially half-brothers). Coedès records from Cambodia, for instance: "On the day that a new king is proclaimed, all his brothers are mutilated. From one a finger is removed, from another the nose is cut off. Then their maintenance is provided for,

each in a separate place, and they are never appointed to office.”⁹ John Cady emphasized how it was customary to purge contenders, especially the sons of ranking queens, when a change of rulers occurred.¹⁰

Beyond bearing all of the physical traits and signs of kingship, the king must be a man of prowess. Notwithstanding Georges Dumézil’s analysis of the Indo-European tradition into threefold categories of warrior, king, and priest, the functions of these three often merge or are indistinguishable. The king usually takes the role of priest on behalf of his people, and the warrior/hero is a candidate for king *extraordinaire*. When Professor Luce discusses the controversial Makuta inscription in his *magnum opus*, *Old Burma—Early Pagan*, he betrays a predictable Western puzzlement at the lack of boundaries between what are, for moderns, discrete categories. He asserts that Makuta “does not sound quite like a hereditary sovereign. Was he not just a war-lord, popularly elected to meet a sudden threat of war?”¹¹ His question sounds strange from a comparative perspective if one goes back—to the “beginning,” as it were—to when Marduk was elected as a “war lord” and king of the gods. Whether one is born to rule and “proved” in the ritual combats of the year rite, or is recognized by having conquered or defended the kingdom and by marrying the just-widowed queen or being rewarded by marriage to the crown-princess and named heir, it is the hero—the man of prowess—who is destined to become king.¹²

Anciently, being elevated to kingship was like ascending to heaven. In early India, ascribing the identity of a king with the Hindu gods was nearly universal. This idea of incarnation carried over into Buddhism, in fact it was implicit in Gautama’s being a Kṣatriya by birth. Professor Luce, in his discussion of the Jambupati or crowned Buddha image, points out that very early the idea of Buddha

as a divine king spread throughout Southeast Asia, but that

Crowned Buddhas, in ancient India as in Burma, are never wholly royal. The correlation and contrast between Monk and King are there, and are intended. Seen in the ultimate perspective, the Wheel of Dharma, turned by the Buddha, merges in the Wheel of Authority, turned by the Cakravartin [world-ruler]. Pryzyluski has shown that before the first century A.D., many traditions identified the Buddha with the Universal Monarch. "For the primitive image of the *sramana* Gautama, humbly clad in coarse *pāmsukūla* (rags from the dust-heap), was substituted that of Buddha-Cakravartin, dressed in royal robes."¹³

The divine king, as representative if not the person of a people's god or gods, has many responsibilities. He insures the welfare of the kingdom – political, economic, social – and this is a manifestation of his broader legitimacy and potency. His worthiness is questioned as problems arise, and his illness or weakness bodes ill (if not requiring the king's death or replacement).¹⁴ Scholars are handicapped in understanding such systems not only by the concepts of immutability and perfection/completeness which Greek philosophy ascribed to God, but by the obviously tenuous political status of divine kings as well. Many are chary of believing that any people would have been so credulous as to accept an individual as divine *and* to consider him answerable with his life for the well-being of the cosmos as reflected both in the heavens and in the stability and fecundity of the kingdom. This contrast becomes stark through comparison to the politically expedient and particularly "Greek" "divine right of kings" espoused by the Stuart kings – the model that most reflects the Western perspective. While in the West it came to be said that a king was only bound to answer to God, a divine

king, while not subject to a plebiscite *per se*, operated in a completely different milieu.¹⁵

The Ideology of Expansion

Western writers read the claims of ancient kings to world-rulership with amusement at people's gullibility or with disgust at pretentious oriental rhetoric and flattery. One is often asked how a Burmese or a Javanese ruler, for example, could pretend to the title of world-ruler, knowing that among other kingdoms, China (to whom they usually paid tributes) lay to the north and India to the west. While the religious and ritual significance of these claims will be discussed below, the spatial perspective must first be outlined.

The roles of the king have their cosmic analogues. As many peoples viewed their god as having organized matter out of chaos and as having created the world, so too their king by his personal presence and power must organize the world both religiously and politically and insure its order. The canopies of the umbrellas carried over the heads of the kings, whether in Africa, Southeast Asia, or elsewhere, signified—as did, to a lesser degree, the umbrellas of ministers with delegated authority and those of vassal-kings—the expanse of the heavens. This symbol can be found in earliest times in the umbrella-like roof of the tent of a nomad chief and later in the tentlike canopy over a king's throne.¹⁶ The staff of the umbrella was the link or connection between earth and heaven and an indication that the world was ordered. If the king were not seen as personifying that link, he was principally responsible for maintaining it—the guardian and priest of the cosmic tree.¹⁷ However his responsibility was formally pictured, the king maintained contact between earth and heaven and thereby ordered the earth. From the very person of the king extended the lands to the cardinal points, and accordingly many kings were known as lord “of the four

points of the compass."¹⁸ No matter that other kingdoms existed, the *mandāla* of creation and the center of the cosmos were recognized in the king. Those areas outside the king's control, though ruled and inhabited by others, were chaotic by definition. They became ordered when his reign was extended to them. The kingdom, capital, palace, temple, and ultimately the king's tomb all reflected the organization of space and life around the divine center and point of connection with the heavens. In his role as organizer and definer of the world, the king was also able to perform such tasks as recognizing holy sites and founding cities.¹⁹ It should not be surprising that the religious responsibility to sacralize territory was held by the same person—the king—who was under an imperative to maintain and expand the realm through military action. The divine king's political roles were a mere reflection of macrocosmic reality.

The forces of evil and disorder never rest, and the king must therefore periodically renew the order of the cosmos. This ritual renewal (acted out in year rites in which the king victoriously combats chaos/death, participates in a sacred marriage with its promise of fertility, etc.) preserves and extends order in the world. Often in the earliest records, and as late as the nineteenth century in the kingdoms of Central Africa which claimed an Egyptian origin for themselves, the king would be sacrificed when signs were discerned that his strength or potency was diminishing. It is not surprising, however, that substitute sacrifices were developed, or that kings encouraged such changes. Games, races, and ritual combats all symbolized the struggle by the forces of order for victory over chaos.²⁰ When the king's death was simulated (a substitute being killed in his stead), he would emerge victorious from the tomb, and stability would be insured. But the king's victory was not immediate and did not go unchallenged.

A usurper, often having "murdered" the king, asserted control momentarily. This lord of misrule would subse-

quently be killed or driven away, and the king would reassume the throne. But before the king's triumphant revival, the usurper baldly asserted that he was the god of this world and took control. Ceremonially, the world was often represented in the form of the throne itself (frequently a lion throne), which often served as altar and royal bed as well. Recently, N. Falk recognized the king's conquest of the wilderness as a royal ordeal.²¹ The conquest is a struggle for possession of the throne. It is acted out frequently, in the king's pleasure park/garden/paradise/hunting preserve or symbolic wilderness.

Ms. Falk points out that Buddhist sculpture which depicts the conflict between the Buddha and Māra under the Bodhi tree shows the Buddha picked as the perfect spot to attain enlightenment a *yaksha-caitya*, or tree with the usual stone throne beneath it – in this case the throne from which Māra claims to rule. The Buddha's choice was an explicit challenge to Māra's claim. Ms. Falk explains:

Māra, lord of death and desire – that is, of the realm of *samsāra* – becomes aware of what is going on. He therefore attacks the *bodhisattva* in an attempt to remove him from the seat. . . . Māra challenges the *bodhisattva* saying in effect: "The seat is mine, for I have given the most gifts." The *bodhisattva* claims the seat, on the same basis, and calls the earth to witness his generosity. He retains the seat and that same night attains to enlightenment.²²

Ms. Falk concludes that this clearly depicts a struggle for kingship – generosity being the basis for claiming a royal throne in India, as elsewhere.²³ For some time I have been interested in a Burmese variant of this same text in which Māra (rather than the Buddha) strikes the earth with his hand and makes a terrible noise and, having failed to drive away the Buddha and the hosts that attended him, withdraws his armies in a great temper of anger.²⁴ When the

Buddha refuses to worship Māra, the latter's claim to be the god of this world stands refuted.

While in many texts the animal kingdom accedes to the sovereignty of a divine king, men are not always so submissive, and political dominion is most often achieved through warfare or the threat (implied or explicit) of force. The Buddha differs from Māra in that he wins converts by precept and example rather than by force. Every divine king makes the pretense of being a Cosmocrator and center of the universe—it is *de rigueur*, part of his role by definition. Usually such a world-ruler demonstrates the legitimacy of his kingship not just by ritual combats, however, but by military protection and expansion of his territories, rolling forth, as it were, to fill the entire earth. The purpose of such expansion is not to acquire *Lebensraum*, but to drive back the forces of chaos. The divine king must always demonstrate his merit, and is thereby driven to a constant bellicose attitude, if not an actual state of war. Overlordship (even while in a vassal or tribute relation with another more powerful suzerain), either by military conquest or through accepting voluntary submission and granting protection to a weaker lord, is a sign of heaven's favor.

Finding Unity in a Man

An unavoidable consequence of the expansionism incumbent on divine kings was the difficulty of maintaining unity. Once the frontiers of the king's own ethnic/religious group's territory were crossed and other peoples were conquered or voluntarily rendered fealty, the problem of winning hearts and minds—gaining their loyalty—became important. Oaths of loyalty, like chastity belts, are a *contradictio in adjecto*, and do not solve the problem.²⁵ "Nationalism" as a means for uniting diverse peoples, if it succeeds at all, is always based on perceived self-interest—and few foundations could better be termed a will-of-the-wisp. Conquered or vassal states that submitted to an over-

lord were, as often as not, of different language and culture backgrounds. They might have had little or nothing in common with a king's people except the taxes they paid and the person of the king. Ultimately, the only common denominator which divine kings had to offer to unite their various subjects was their royal and divine person. It was in the king that fusion could occur, and through him that syncretism took place.

The divine king, serving as an interface between cultures, was inevitably a multivalent symbol. One could recall the multiple political titles of the Queen of England (a political though not a divine kingdom). Each title reflects a people conquered or assimilated (though hardly unified, as events in Ulster and calls for Scots separatism that flowed from the economic promise of North Channel oil eloquently testify). The titles themselves reflect that the ruler of anything larger than the smallest kin-based group must stand for very different things to different people. On the other hand, the titles of divine kings represent the symbolic ritual functions which the divine king performs as the vicar if not the incarnation of each subject people's deity. The multiple crowns and ritual functions of Egypt's pharaohs are an obvious case in point.

Every people required connection with the divine, and that connection was embodied in the king.²⁶ The king's year was the sacred ritual year, from New Year to New Year, and he was the primary religious and political actor. The royal progress, which will be discussed below, reflected not only political necessity but ritual responsibility as well. While virtually every religious group had its priesthood and presiding figures, the high priest was most often merely a facilitator. The king was the nexus of the cosmic and the mundane, and the priests performed the highest initiation and conferred the highest keys on the person of the king. It was in his presence or on his person that the most sacred rituals and the highest mysteries had to be

performed, and the divine king became the gnostic *par excellence*, holding the knowledge, power, and authority upon which the welfare and salvation of his subjects depended. With each royal progress through his domains, and at the beginning of each new age (year) in his capital, the king was reordained as the head of each cult and therefore of each people under his suzerainty.

While divine kings initially may have been partial toward their own concept of divinity, being a "defender of the faith" as it were, these same rulers almost inevitably brought about the dilution of their belief as their power spread and they extended their rule and "religion" over greater areas. By becoming head of the cults of conquered peoples, the king began the process of assimilation and confusion whether he wanted to or not. A very necessary *Realpolitik* was in direct conflict with any "missionary" zeal the king might have had, and divine kingship patterns, I am suggesting, were a primary cause of religious syncretism in antiquity. Professor Luce recognizes one aspect of the problem when he discusses how Kyanzittha tried, with his priest Shin Arahan, "to lead Burma fast into the Theravāda fold": "[he] found by experience (like the Indo-Greeks of Gandhāra) that the most effective way to teach them Buddhism was to give them a large number of images to worship."²⁷

Their Theravādin commitment, however, rapidly seems to have given way to larger national priorities:

Under the aegis of Buddhism – chiefly, but not only the Theravāda – [of] Buddhism of a wide syncretistic kind, embracing not only Mahāyānism and the earlier Tāntric schools of East Bengal, but also the old Vedic and Brahmanic cults (excluding sacrifice), especially Vaiṣṇavism, whose influence was deep in lower Burma, both among the Mon and Pyu, heedful also of the old Nāga-worship of the north, of native Burmese animism . . . of the clan-spirits (*kindok*) and spirit-mediums

(*don*) of the ancient Mons, perhaps even of aboriginal totemism—he seems to have striven, with the help of his mahathera Arahan, to lay a broad and strong foundation for a united Burma.²⁸

This unification through syncretism cannot be accounted for in terms of the character of any one of these religions, however. Professor Coedès exhibits a basic misunderstanding of popular Southeast Asian religion, what I have called the Theravādin trap,²⁹ when he writes: “Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, in the special form of royal and personal cults, were religions that were hardly suited to the masses; this explains the ease and speed with which the masses adopted Singhalese Buddhism.”³⁰ In fact, only by being mixed with indigenous cults through royal patronage did Theravāda Buddhism become widespread in Southeast Asia. Theravāda Buddhism itself, as it was exported from Sri Lanka, was above all a royal cult, and a continuation of a very old *yaksha* cult.³¹

Just because divine kingship practices filled very pragmatic political needs, or at least attempted to, it does not necessarily follow that those who were involved were cynical or opportunistic in their religious practices. Even in deposing a ruler, many probably felt they were following heaven’s mandate, rather than self-interest. Regardless of the sincerity of a pretender or usurper, however, the system entailed several imperatives. In attempting coups, as well as in disputes of succession, beyond the strategic considerations and necessities (e.g., military alliances, some loyal following) and tactical opportunities, certain more specifically religious actions were necessary. The first involved filling the “power vacuum” that resulted with the removal of a king, which entailed being ordained or initiated into as many cults as possible, both to secure the loyalty of those peoples and to insure the uninterrupted ritual stability of the cosmos. If there were several claimants (as in the case of several sons each claiming the right of

succession at the death of his father) with different power-bases and regional alliances within the kingdom, this could result in very quick tours around the country to various religious establishments in order to be ordained and have conferred the keys of as many cults as possible, thus enhancing the image of the claimant's legitimacy, as well as resulting in battles with other pretenders and their allies. Royal progresses by a new king from cult center to cult center insured a kind of restoration of the keys to preside over the kingdom as a whole. The second imperative was intimately related to the first and could be summarized by saying that "marrying Jocasta was the rule." Acquiring wives from various local leaders would tend to build alliances, of course, but the ritual role of the sacred-marriage cannot be ignored. On this point Professor Coedès also seems confused. Writing of Pushkara (or Pushkaraksha), who became king at Sambhupura on the Mekong in the eighth century, he remarks: "It has been suggested that he obtained this royal status 'by marriage' but this is a gratuitous hypothesis; we can just as easily hypothesize that he seized power because the throne was vacant."³² Rather than one action precluding the other, of course, both are compatible means to the same end. With scarcely more evidence than in the former case, Coedès recognizes the obvious regarding Suryavarman's eleventh-century claim to legitimacy in ruling Cambodia both by descent from Indravarman, and through his wife back to the son of Yasovarman: "We may have here an example of the legitimization of power by means of marriage to the wife or daughter of a predecessor."³³

The legitimization of rule, the potential for practical alliance-making, and the normal structure of year rites and royal ritual combine to make not only marriage but some sort of polygyny almost inevitable. Elaborate protocols were usually maintained, however, to distinguish between "hostage" queens and "tribute" queens of inferior status

on the one hand, and "alliance" marriages between equals and so forth on the other. Concubines generally occupied another status altogether. Such multiple marriages seemed to promote political stability in the short run, but as often as not led to disputes over succession between potential heirs. It should surprise no one that the great kingdoms of antiquity so frequently broke up at the end of the reign of particularly successful kings. The crucial factor at this point, however, is that a queen, given in marriage by a vassal to his overlord, would be the partner *par excellence* with whom to participate in the cult of that particular people.

A divine king, after he was initiated into the highest gnosis of each of his subjects' cults, became the patron of those cults as well. When he periodically renewed, through ritual, the fertility and well-being of that land, he would often set aside lands for the support of that priesthood, and so forth. Thus, the cults became beholden to him. More importantly, in most cases the rituals of such cults were daily or at least periodic in their rehearsal of the vital aspects of the year rite. For that purpose the king would bring priests of each group to his capital and maintain cult centers there. As priests traveled back and forth, they were exposed to other systems. Religions coexisted and mixed (coincidentally or not), precisely because it was necessary for the king to participate in and patronize the cults of the gods of every people under his dominion. The price of unity, as has been pointed out, was syncretism. Nevertheless, the royal propensity to keep records and the cost of such activities (which was usually borne by the king) often means that more can be known about a particular cult through royal sources than from anywhere else. While many of these sources have been relatively neglected in the study of Gnosticism, their pro-royal bias is easier to deal with than when a writer's bent is unknown, and such documents would seem to provide not only evidence on

the process of religious syncretism, but also possibly the clearest picture of the nature of gnosis as it was understood in a particular cult—and how it was communicated to the highest initiate of that cult, the divine king.³⁴

The Royal Progress

I do not pretend to offer any radically new insights into the structure of the royal progress in general. Dr. Nibley and others have far surpassed what I can hope to contribute there. Particular Indian and Burmese cases will be mentioned as a prelude to treatment in the next section of one Javanese text in particular, and a general corollary to a working diffusionist hypothesis will be suggested: “often, the more things change, the more they stay the same!”³⁵ Nothing paradoxical is intended in that statement. It simply implies that adaptation of a given cultural pattern to its larger ecosystem is a prerequisite to its survival. Thus, if in one culture the center of a cult-complex is a war-horse surrogate for a king, in another place and time an elephant may be substituted for the horse because it is the preferred animal for warfare, or somehow fits the new ecosystem or culture-setting better. It should be easy to see how use of an elephant might dictate other changes in ritual, as well, and yet the essential form could be maintained.

There is historical evidence that the institution of kingship persisted in India for at least three millennia. Over such a time span it should not be surprising that the kingship rituals of India as we know them are many and varied. Yet these rituals—the Cakravartin year cycle or wheel ritual, the Dasapeya which bestowed the power of the New Year on the king, the Nirajana with its yearly expiation, the Rajasuya in which the king’s power is renewed, the Abishekaniya with its rebirth, the Vajapeya where the king takes the ritual place of Prajapati (who was sacrificed to create the cosmos), which entails among other things chariot races the king is supposed to win, the Mangala, and

for our purposes most important, the *Aśvamedha* or horse sacrifice – contain little to surprise the comparativist. Each can and should be studied in isolation as a *Ding in sich*, as well as in the Indian context, but to neglect the insights a comparative perspective and diffusionist approach can provide may lose for us a vital dimension in our understanding of them. W. F. Albright and P. E. Dumont's fertile collaboration on "A Parallel between Indic and Babylonian Sacrificial Ritual" should make this evident to every student, though little work of this caliber has been produced by more recent generations of scholars.³⁶

Let us begin with the *Aśvamedha*, an Indian version of a royal progress. In it, a stallion, perfect of body, was "allowed" to run "free" for a year through all the king's realms. The horse's activities during the year were nowhere so random as that might imply, however. The horse was accompanied by a sizeable contingent of warriors, if not the king and his entire Court. The horse was allowed to mate, it was to traverse all the lands ruled by the king, and it was to end the year precisely where it began. Its course had to have been carefully guided. Any lord who rejected the authority of the suzerain and wished to assert his independence or superiority had only to resist the passage of the stallion and its escorts across his lands. In fact, as each lord allowed the court's passage, tribute was paid and gifts were requited by the overlord. As was the case with other progresses, the *Aśvamedha* dramatized and ritually reenacted

the original seizure and subduing of the land; it is always the triumphant procession of a victor, pacifying the land, receiving formal submission, suppressing rebellion, rewarding loyalty, imposing justice and order on the world. . . . "The journeys and entertainment of the ruler . . . appear as the result of the superimposing of the authority of nomadic warriors over sedentary agrarians."³⁷

While from one perspective the *Aśvamedha* seems to entail tremendous expense, it is precisely in making the circuit that revenues are collected, and it is not a once-and-for-all enterprise. Just as elsewhere, it is to be repeated. As Jan Gonda points out:

On every anniversary of the first "coronation" the king should repeat the rites; this leads to welfare, to increase of the country, to the destruction of enemies and so on. Then the "inauguration" has become cyclic, annually carrying the ruler and his realm beyond a difficult stage, and re-creating the beneficial power inherent in kingship.³⁸

Royal progresses are documented from millennia before and after Christ. Whether or not one can demonstrate a continuity from one in particular to another, sufficient similarities can be noted to demonstrate their relatedness. For example, Professor Luce, in his study "Old Kyaukse and the Coming of the Burmans," argues that the name of one town among those originally conquered by the Burmans: "Mrankhuntuin, 'Horse-leaping Post' . . . recalls the great *Aśvamedha* rite of horse-sacrifice . . . so the practice of horse-[sacrifice], and doubtless other sacrifice was still widespread among the early Burmans."³⁹ At least one contemporary Burmese scholar (a fervent nationalist) contests this interpretation and goes so far as to state that the "*Arvamdha* [sic] was a ritual known to vedic India but not to Southeast Asia."⁴⁰ This position is absurd if by "known" the writer means to imply awareness. The Mahabharata epic was known throughout the Indianized states of Southeast Asia, and its description of the *Aśvamedha* is more than sufficient to diffuse essential details of the ritual. More substantial questions would involve whether the ritual was actually practiced, whether the Burmese horse-sacrifice was similar in anything more than that it entailed killing

a horse, or whether some distinct variant of the ritual evolved. To suggest a continuity from Albright's Babylonia through India in its epic period to Burma in the second millennium A.D. might seem overly courageous. The question reduces, however, to whether the apparent survival of certain elements and the seeming adaptation of others justifies asserting that a continuity exists, rather than the perpetuation of an anachronism or a revival of misunderstood and out-of-context fragments culled from ancient lore.

A record that suggests the persistence and adaptation of such practices comes from the reign of Kyanzittha, the ruler, who first unified what constitutes most of modern Burma in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries A.D. Among other things, besides building many national shrines and temples and endowing priestly colleges and cult centers, he imported much of Singhalese Buddhist practice. In the intercourse that followed, a replica of the Buddha tooth-relic from the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy was miraculously produced and sent to Burma. According to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, Kyanzittha, at the behest of his high priest Arahan, placed the tooth-relic on the back of a sacred white elephant (one of the vital signs of South-east Asian kingship) and determined and covenanted to build a *zedi* to house it wherever the animal might kneel (in the first instance at the national shrine, the Shwezigon). We should not find it surprising that at that point the tooth miraculously reduplicated itself and one relic was left at the shrine, while the elephant proceeded to Mt. Tangyi where the process repeated itself as it did again and again throughout Burma.⁴¹ What is being suggested, of course, is that the peregrinations of the white elephant are substituted for those of the horse, while the basic religious-political significance of the act persists. Escorting the royal elephant over the countryside and building shrines where it knelt was an outright assertion of sovereignty. There were other ways to do this, of course. But this one was

chosen. More than the symbolic presence of the king/cult was involved. In the end there was the physical presence of the person of the king traveling the land.

The Nagara-Kertagama

From Java comes a text with remarkable comparative potential. The *Nagara-Kertagama* (The Kingdom Which Is Ordered according to Holy Tradition, as it is called in a colophon) is the product of a court poet and priest, the *rakawi* Prapanca, for the benefit of Rajasanagara (or Hayam Wuruk, as he is also known), king of the fourteenth-century Majapahit empire of Java. The other title given in the only manuscript known—*Deca Warnana* (Description of Country)—while preferred by most scholars, does not, from my perspective, adequately reflect the ritual content and nature of the text. While the *Nagara-Kertagama* is unique in its length and richness as a resource for fourteenth-century and earlier Majapahit historical and cultural studies, from another perspective it is predictable and stereotyped—almost a cliché. I do not mean to diminish its value in any way by that statement. The text is invaluable because it contains a detailed record of one of many royal progresses made by Rajasanagara, a description of an annual court festival (year rite), and other details of life and politics in general. It illustrates the survival of ancient rituals of kingship into the fourteenth century A.D.—not as bits and pieces but as meaningful wholes—and exposes how they were perhaps adapted to changing environments, while maintaining an essential integrity. Moreover, if one were to prepare a composite or ideal-type model of ancient kingship patterns, this very recent case would seem to be more complete than many, though not all,⁴² that are older. That is meant as a commentary on the condition of many ancient records, however, rather than a denial of the persistence of ritual and the ancient *Weltanschauung*.

The *Nagara-Kertagama* text has gone through several

editions, the latest and most complete being that of Professor Pigeaud, to whose work I shall refer here.⁴³ While the text is in Javanese, Professor Pigeaud points out that it is “a product of high poetical schooling conforming as far as possible to Sanskrit prosody and *kawya* rules.”⁴⁴ The earliest records from Java are engraved copper plates and stone slabs that date to the ninth century. The *Nagara-Kertagama* text was preserved on a palm-leaf manuscript of the type familiar throughout South and Southeast Asia. The text employs chronograms and other mnemonic devices (many of which may remain undeciphered today because as students of Southeast Asia have recognized, many ritual texts were mere prompters that accompanied a much more secret oral tradition, as exemplified in the Naxi script used in the southwestern Yunnan), which suggest that it may have been intended for recitation. While *Saka* dates are given, the Javanese calendar cannot be correlated exactly to India’s. One might expect that either the royal progresses or the annual court rite at the capital would take place in the first month of the year (*Kasa*), for example. But the progress for which we have the best record (that of *Saka* A.D. 1281 or 1359) took place in the month *Bhadra* (August-September), which, as Pigeaud points out, is at the end of the “cold” season and “in the middle of the East Java monsoon, the dry season. This season of course was the only time suited for travelling. During the West monsoon the roads were made impassable by the rains, and the rivers were difficult to cross.”⁴⁵ Such adaptations, as will be seen below, are to be expected. While the *Saka* calendar is a solar/lunar calendar of 365 days, other complications arise because another calendar year of 210 days (30 weeks of 7 days each) was concurrently followed to observe the sacred *wuku* year.⁴⁶ The two new years were rarely, if ever, exactly in phase with each other. Thus, this text presents many unsolved (and perhaps in-

soluble) problems for scholars. The value of the information it provides far outweighs the difficulties, though.

Majapahit was at the point of its greatest development during the reign of Rajasanagara.⁴⁷ Many diverse cultures and peoples were united under his rule. While scholars may debate the degree of overstatement and objectivity on the part of the court poet in his description and adulation, the common discussion of whether the king actively ruled over an equivalent of modern Indonesia and part of Malaysia, or was at the center of a "sphere of influence" and received tribute or some form of "token submission" from the more distant domains, and whether those domains were in large part "internally self-governing," betrays a significant lack of understanding of the institution of ancient kingship generally and is irrelevant to our discussion. The main thing, for our purposes, is that what those kingdoms are reported to have done fits a pattern and reflects certain understandings as to the "ideal" nature of relations between kingdoms and kings that is revealing in itself. One thing is certain. An attempt was made to describe the order of the kingdom according to holy tradition.

Majapahit court religion, as commonly described, was a syncretism of Siva-Bhairava worship and Tantric Buddhism of the Kalachakra school. This picture is manifestly oversimplified, and the Majapahit royal compound itself was described as containing various Buddhist, Sivite, Visnuite, and chthonic shrines. Residences were provided for numerous groups of priests nearby. The text also makes reference to numerous Hindu and Buddhist centers of Tantric and non-Tantric orientation throughout the country: cult centers, monasteries, shrines, estates, and vestiges of earlier systems as well. The king is described as participating in some form of worship at virtually every cult-establishment mentioned in the record. In fact, the whole text could be viewed as a *history of the ritual of the realm*.

The text begins with a dedication to the Siva-Buddha

(1.1.1), but by the end of the first stanza it says “there is an apparition of Him in the world” (1.1.4).⁴⁸ The entire first canto stresses the divine identities of Rajasanagara and how he was a Prabhu at birth (1.4.1), born to the purple. Throughout the text the king’s superiority is emphasized, as might be expected. It is said “verily he is a divine incarnation in the material (world)” (73.1.1-4). Besides his divinity he is described as a “world-conquering Prabhu” (7.1.1) and “supreme Ruler of the world” (12.4.4). Cantos 13 through 16 list tributaries. Whatever the real extent of his rule, Rajasanagara maintained trade relations with all of Asia (83.4). The world was ordered because of his presence and virtue, the protocols of caste were observed and sinners repented (1.5.3, 4).

Cantos 8 through 12 discuss the capital and the royal compound. The palace, a long hall where court was held, the residences of other royal officers, and the large field where the annual festivals were held seem to have been located in four quadrangles of uncertain scale, intersected near the palace by “the cross-roads, sacred, imposing” (8.2.4). Here, at the center of the town and kingdom, “every month *Caitra* [March-April] it is the meeting-place of the Royal servants’ assembly” (8.2.4). This annual coronation/renewal is elsewhere said to occur “every month *Phalguna* [February-March]” when “the Illustrious Prince is offered *paripuja* (procession worship), celebrated in his own Royal residence” (83.5.1). The festival actually extended through parts of both months (85.1).⁴⁹ Traders and royal emissaries from other seagoing powers were in the port of Majapahit at this time, waiting for the change of the monsoon winds to return to their ports or their next stop. It would have been impossible for monsoon-blown traders, travelers, and tributaries to attend New Year rites at Majapahit (or Singasari) at another time of year. For many reasons such as this one, year rites were repeated and rehearsed in several parts of a given kingdom a number

of times in a particular year. First-fruits offerings from a given crop will be harvested when they will, for example, and a calendar might be modified in accord with such circumstances. Often, though, the original New Year and other rites persist, and other observances are added, keeping the king constantly on the move and coincidentally in continual review of his many stewards and dominions.⁵⁰

Thus, the entire year comes to be occupied with rituals which perpetuate and renew the cosmos and the kingship – to say nothing of practical political ends. The king's year and the ritual year were one. If one restricts the definition of a new year rite to the period of time commencing with the parties on the evening of December 31 until the bowl games are over on January 1, or, for that matter, to the eleven days of the *akitu* festival, the multiple purposes of the year rites and the adaptability of diffused culture-patterns to local environmental constraints will be missed. This is not to say that *everything* the king did was necessarily part of a year rite (though in Egypt, for instance, certain acts were repeated daily). There would be little explanatory value in the concept were that the case. But records of particular events should not be ignored in regard to their relationship to the ancient pattern simply because they do not jibe with a strict calendar definition of the New Year. When a kingdom is known to have followed several calendars this becomes more obvious, of course.

The royal progress of *Saka* 1281 is described beginning with Canto 17. I take definite exception to Pigeaud's and Zoetmulder's view that Cantos 38.3 through 54.3 are "intermezzos" inserted because of antiquarian or literary considerations by the poet.⁵¹ To the contrary I see the narrative extending continuously from Canto 17 through Canto 60. The royal progress was clearly an annual affair: "Every time at the end of the cold season He makes a tour, diverting himself" (17.4.1). The obvious goal of the progress of *Saka* 1281 is Singasari, the old capital as well as the cult

center of Rajasanagara's ancestors, and it is from Singasari that the king is said to be "making ready to go home, longing for the charms of his own town" (55.2.1). While I shall discuss other features of the progress momentarily, the so-called "intermezzos" must first be explained.

While with other commentators we can wish Prapanca had said more about the details of ancestor worship and other cultic observances in Singasari, there is no question that when the king arrived "in Singasari he entered His sojourning-place finally" (38.3.2) and that while there he stayed in the royal *dharma* or religious domain (35.1.4). The supposed literary devices begin with the king's arrival. The first poetic "insertion" (38.3 through 49) is dismissed by other scholars as nothing more than the poet's inclusion of a recitation by an old Buddhist official of the genealogy of the dynasty of Singasari, their royal fortunes, their religious domains, and the cultic work for the dead that was established for each ancestor's benefit. The living king, of course, worshipped these ancestors, and to neglect the possibility of a relationship between the rituals of ancestor worship and the inclusion of a long genealogical/historical passage is astounding. The purpose of the visit to Singasari was ritual. Generally in Java, once a capital was conquered and then retaken, it was abandoned as the capital and another erected. The oldest seat of the dynasty was the ideal place for rehearsing the drama of creation itself. The second supposed poetic insertion directly follows the first. It is assumed to be a "fancied" description of a royal hunt in the countryside around Singasari. In fact it is clearly a ritual hunt, and quite appropriately part of a royal progress. It begins with a *battue* (50.2). Once encircled, the animals hold a conference, presided over by the lion, the "game-animals' Monarch" (50.6.3), at whose side "the jackal, entering into the Presence, [was] not frightened" (50.6.4). The question of the day was the policy to follow — what conduct was proper. It was crucial to uphold the law

(*dharma*). Some advocated flight, others resistance. The lion, having heard the two plans proposed, answered that if the threat came from “bad people, *wahya* (worldly) should be the conduct: run or struggle” (41.4.3).

Concerning the case, though, that you should be found in the activity of the Prince, hunting, simply await death, offer your life, do not be reluctant [51.5.3, 4]. For a Prince is proper to be an instrument to take away life of creation. Lord Giripati (Shiwa) is incarnated in Him, being the paramount *Prabhu*. It is clear that shall disappear the evil (the sins) of anybody who will die by His killing [51.6.1-3].

As is typical of royal (ritual) hunts, what we have here is a classic assertion of the divine king’s “right” to rule, being the god of this world and holding, Nimrod-like, that great secret, the power over life and death in his hands.⁵² There follows an almost comic scene in which servants, mandarins, and priests alike are scattered or wounded by the animals. Into the chaos rides the king. “He made for the centre of that innermost wilderness, following the game, whichever caused fear” (54.1.3). “Exterminated were the animals, thrust, lanced, cut, crissed, dying without a gasp” (54.2.4). Rather than poetic intermezzos, these two passages represent the most explicit kinds of ritual assertions of Rajasanagara’s status as lord of creation and Cosmocrator, taking place at the cult center where the kingdom and the world-order originated. Instead of being accidental insertions, these sections are essential to the purpose of the narrative as a whole, and to the maintenance of the order of creation in the kingdom.

The progress itself consisted of a large caravan of carts—its number increasing at each stop. Queens, mandarins, headmen, priests of many cults, the poet-scribe—in other words the entire court—all make the journey. The king rode in a palanquin—the focus of the entourage. At each religious center on the route rituals were performed.

At each stop local leaders and commoners alike pressed forward to give gifts. The rulers of Bali and Madura came as well. "All of them submissively offered *hatur* (homage) presents, all of them trying to outvie each other: pigs, sheep, buffaloes, cattle, fowls, dogs . . . were accepted in succession (28.2.1-3)." At each place the king requited the gifts with cloth, money, lands, titles, or whatever was needed locally, perhaps. There were sporting contests, and at several points the king took new wives (27.1.4, 31-34). All the subjects were pleased, and "the common people then praised (His bounty)" (28.3.4). The text contains much more regarding this and the progresses of other years, along with more specifically political records, the final funeral rites for the dead Queen Mother—work necessary for the welfare of her soul—and a description of the year rite in the capital of Majapahit.

Cantos 83.4 through 91.9 give a general description of the year rite at the sacred crossroads in the center of the kingdom. The mandarins of the entire land came (83.5.2). There were first-fruits offerings (83.5.3). An order of worship involving portable pavilions (83.6.1), sacrifices (83.6.3), and such was followed. The king was carried about in the "jewel-*singhasana* (lion throne palanquin)" (84.3.1). All the people, commoners and those of rank, gathered at the great field (84.6). The poet omits a direct description of the consecration (84.7.2), though we do not know whether this was because of the sacred or secret character of the rite, or its commonplaceness. A great assembly is held with the purpose of preventing the people from falling into error, and they are told "they have to follow the 'Teachings of the Raja Kapa-kapa (Kings of yore),' [which are] always every *Caitra* [March-April] read (to them)" (85.2.1, 2). On the empty plain or great field at Bubad a temporary camp is erected on the same plan as the royal compound itself (86.3.3). There are games and gambling (87.2-3), feasting (89.5, 90.1-2), and drinking of

spirits (90.3). There is always enough of everything, even for the drunkard. "If there are people addicted (to drinking) just as well they are visited, their liquor is all-surpassing. Nor does it occur that (the Princes) censure them for their faults, completely they are covered up (90.5.2-3)."⁵³ All praise the king's bounty and finally return home. As was said at the outset, this text is, if anything, a cliché. But while it is quite predictable, its detail, placed in the context of comparative data, is quite illuminating.

Inconclusive Unscientific Postscript

In summary, as one reviews the cultures of antiquity, it is apparent that systems of divine kingship were the rule, and that the Greek *polis* was an exception. The divine king came to power through religious ritual, especially the ritual of marriage. The divine king was the highest initiate into the secret, saving knowledge (gnosis) of his religion and the religions of the peoples he conquered. Usually he was regarded as an incarnation of the god of that people as well. One of the primary roles of the gods was to create – that is to organize or order the cosmos. That duty to organize matter and defeat chaos translated itself in the "real" world into an imperative for political stability and territorial expansionism, usually by military means – driving back the forces of disorder. Success in maintaining and extending his reign, however, created another problem for the divine king – achieving unity. Having achieved a military/political sovereignty, the divine king was in a position to be a unifying force, since as ruler he automatically fell heir to the ritual role of god-on-earth to each conquered people, as well as his own. As the divine king filled the religious responsibilities incumbent on him, however, he also brought about the confusing of the various religions in his person, as well as the intermingling of the priest-hoods and cults of each people within the context of the royal establishment – in the court at his capital, and in the

circuit of the court about his realm in the royal progress (whatever form it took). As the various priesthoods and religions not only coexisted but had to adapt their rites so as not to conflict with those of other groups, all of whom had their part in court ritual, in time beliefs were changed as well. Also, the king's involvement with the various groups went beyond ritual participation and fiscal patronage—often as far as settling disputes over belief and appointing or legitimizing the leaders of the priesthoods of these religions. While the process of religious syncretism resulting from a divine king's effort to achieve national unity can be seen most clearly in cases such as that of Kyanzittha of Burma, a close examination of the structure of divine kingship shows this to be a predictable rather than an exceptional result. In simple words, then, political unity is achieved through compromising the integrity of the religions.

For us as students of broader social and personal religious questions (a task we cannot avoid, but usually do badly), other lessons follow. As A. M. Hocart perceptively observed about Adolf Hitler in the early 1930s while writing his important work *Kings and Councillors*,⁵⁴ seeking a savior/king to solve our problems and unify us in this secular age is fraught with danger—a painfully accurate if secular “prophetic” warning which is still timely.

Finally, while a call to return to “old” or “conservative” political values—with a promise of unity which will lead to stability, security, law, and order—sounds attractive, we must not forget that the basis of such a condition among men has been compromise and the dilution of religious principles in order to promote political unity. Any *man* who would present a program or movement to unite us against the forces of chaos that seek to overcome us, any society that unites many people of very different religions, must accommodate.⁵⁵ Today there are no divine kings that

can order the earth; there is only politics. And as to politics, the First Presidency's letter of 20 July 1849 still rings true:

Never, no never, no never drag Priesthood into a political Gentile warfare. Let no religious test be required, or the holy influence and power of the Priesthood be brought to bear in any political question. If the intrinsic merits of all such matters will not furnish argument sufficient—for all necessary purposes, then let them go, for it is better that the whole political fabric, corrupt as we know it to be, should totter and go to destruction, than for one Saint to be offended.⁵⁶

Notes

1. I must acknowledge that Hugh Nibley opened my academic eyes and ears—the mouth, however, I cannot blame on anyone except myself. Everything from his dissertation to his latest article has influenced my thought and work. More importantly, while I was his student and through him began to grasp the concept of total consecration, I gained a desire to waste and wear myself out in this work.

2. For a general background on divine kingship, besides the works of Hugh Nibley, see the writings of S. H. Hooke, A. M. Hocart, and others. The work of such scholars is sadly neglected compared with others who avoided comparativist analyses. In his foreword to a reprinting of A. M. Hocart's *Kings and Councillors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), ix, the late E. E. Evans-Pritchard made quite pointed and cogent remarks about the deficiencies of the work of such men as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown when contrasted to someone such as Hocart who, along with a brilliant analytical mind, brought Greek, Sanskrit, and other language skills, together with a depth of understanding of many cultures, to the task of describing and interpreting other cultures. See also E. Washburn Hopkins's article, "The Divinity of Kings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (December 1931): 309-16; A. Basu's "Hindu Doctrine of Divine Kingship," in *The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 167-71; and Jan Gonda's article, "The Sacred Character of Ancient Indian Kingship," in the same volume, 172-80.

3. For a brief survey see R. D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London: Robert Hale, 1968), 101.

4. *Pararaton*, ed. and tr. K. J. Padmapuspita (Jogjakarta: Penerbit Teman Siswa, 1966), contains the Kawi text and an Indonesian trans-

lation. *Pararaton*, tr. R. Pitono Hardjowardojo (Jakarta: Bhratara, 1965), contains only an Indonesian version. While Dutch translations have been published, the *Pararaton* is not available in English.

5. *Epigraphia Birmanica*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. Chas. Duroiselle (Rangoon: Supt., Govt. Printing and Stationery, Union of Burma, 1960), 1:141.

6. Than Tun in "Religion in Burma, A.D. 1000-1300," *Journal of Burma Research Society* 42/2 (1959): 50-51.

7. *Epigraphia Birmanica*, 1:146.

8. Perhaps the best discussion of the qualifications of a king is in the Mandaean text of the 1,012 Questions. While it specifies the requirements for a priest, among the Mandaeans every priest is a *malka br malkia* (a king, son of kings), and the means to union with the infinite. See especially E. S. Drower, *The Coronation of the Great Sislam* (Leiden: Brill, 1962).

9. George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968), 75.

10. John Cady, *Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 50, cf. also 61, 73.

11. Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma—Early Pagan*, 3 vols. (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1969), 1:25.

12. *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, tr. Pe Maung Tin and Gordon H. Luce (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 30-33, contains a story of a hero, Sawhti/Minhti, who is supposed to have slain a number of monsters which had oppressed the kingdom and against which the king was powerless. Here we have an almost universal "mythic" theme—a youth of noble birthright entering the oppressed country, freeing the about-to-be sacrificed maidens from the monster, being recognized by the king as of a royal "bone and race," married to the king's daughter (Thirisan-dadevi), and proclaimed heir. I argue that historical information can be derived from *The Glass Palace Chronicle* and other such records because they are histories of the rituals of the realm.

13. Luce, *Old Burma—Early Pagan*, 1:186. While Luce speaks of the "spread" of Buddhist iconography, we can as easily say "diffusion." By "diffusion" this writer has no intention to imply that a succession of cultures can be traced around the globe from a single source, appearing to be cut with the same cookie cutter from the same dough, or copied by some xerox-type process. If that thesis is advanced, it raises more problems than it can possibly answer, and it has no more real explanatory power than either the quasi-mystical or biogenetically based depth-psychological models ad-

vanced by C. G. Jung and others for explaining similarities between cultures vastly separated in space and time.

We have good reason to suspect, on the other hand, the existence of multiple points in space/time (dispensations) that might have functioned as centers of diffusion, but even so, we must articulate our hypotheses and test them carefully, rather than simply asserting them. The best metaphor I can offer for explaining a modern general diffusionist hypothesis is by comparison with the plant world. Seeds, having a basic genetic pattern, are (in fact designed to be) dispersed – whether by the wind, by birds, on the fur or sometimes through the intestines of animals, on floodwaters or with a man's seed grain, etc. Similarly, certain ideas, culture patterns, technologies, and so forth (or human genetic traits, for that matter) can also be carried into or imported by a given group. But to suggest that a knowledge of origin and the means of importation answers or moots scholarly questions is not to follow the analogy far enough. The ecology of a seed's landing place is as important as the seed (cf. Matthew 13:3-8). What influences plant growth? Soil characteristics, rainfall, hours of sunshine per day, annual temperature variation – these are but a few of the factors that can not only determine germination and growth in a new locale, but can induce variation, selection, and ultimately, survival. How a seed of known genetic characteristics grows in a new environment tells us as much about the nature of the parent plant as it does about the offspring. The analogy goes further. Will our plant, once flowered, cross-pollinate with indigenous plants? Can it resist pests and diseases? Will it preserve essential characteristics or become an effectively new organism? And what if a crossbred or selection-adapted seed is somehow carried back to its point of origin or into still another environment? Will the parent plant predominate, or the new plant? This botanical analogy is offered as a model for a diffusionary hypothesis because it reflects the dynamics of the particular case, while not allowing us to neglect the broader historical context. Where diffusion has been used to end discussion it has been as surely misused as has the dogma of independent invention.

Diffusionism is not a panacea. Indeed, it will, if employed carefully, greatly complicate our picture of the past and invalidate many popularly held notions. The evidences available today of Chinese, Southeast Asian, and South Asian influence in Mesoamerica are a prime case in point. While some Americanists are now grudgingly examining evidences of transoceanic contacts, it has rightly been pointed out that the real question is not "Was there contact?" but

rather "What was the significance of the contact which occurred?" "Were contacts repeated?" and "Did items diffuse in both directions?" and so forth.

Finally, those who would focus exclusively on Mesoamerica in their search for materials that might lend insight to an understanding of the Book of Mormon run the risk of neglecting any insights that might be gained from the growing body of literature which shows the interrelatedness of Andean and Mesoamerican civilizations. Those peoples had commerce, shared aspects of their calendar system, and in many other ways evidence almost continuous contact and mutual influence. The cultures of Mesoamerica and the Andes without question had at least as much contact with and influence on each other as either did with any Old World peoples and civilizations.

14. For a brief description of one kingdom in Central Africa which persisted almost into the twentieth century, see John Beattie, *Bunyoro: An African Kingdom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 27-28. A number of the ex-ruling families of Central Africa claimed that their kingship had Egyptian roots. With the excellent evidence that exists of these peoples having migrated southward over the centuries and of conquering local peoples, Egyptologists would do well, in spite of the time gaps involved, to examine these peoples' claims *and* their institutions. On Southeast Asia see Robert Heine-Geldern, "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia," Data Paper: No. 18 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University/Southeast Asia Program, 1956).

15. The rigidity of Western categories is manifest in more than scholarship. In administering the colonized kingdoms of the third world, Western powers, if they did not wholly dispossess or exterminate a ruling class, recognized and used the old regime for administrative purposes. The "rulers," whose power and legitimacy were undermined by military defeat and colonization, in turn exploited the Western view of their class. Thus, disputes of succession and attempted coups became cases of "sedition" and drew heavy reprisals from a colonial power. When the colonial powers were finally removed, many third-world peoples rose up (as in Central Africa) and massacred ruling groups whom they had not been able to remove in more traditional and often less violent ways because of their colonial status. The Meiji restoration in Japan replaced the Tokugawa *shogunate* because it had allowed Commodore Perry to pollute the sacred land and had demonstrated its loss of mandate in the process. The imposition of the treaty in 1854 and the resulting

loss of face both justified the Meiji takeover and brought to power a group committed to avenge the dishonor. That group led Japan into World War II. Such transfers of power were at least as common under divine kingship as in nation-states today, though not usually as violent.

16. Hugh Nibley, "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," *Western Political Quarterly* 29 (1966): 599-630.

17. E. O. James, *The Tree of Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), esp. ch. 4.

18. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, 2:14.

19. *Ibid.*, 1:233. Coedès, *Indianized States*, 114-15, 175. See also C. J. Bleeker, "La Fonction Pontificale du Roi-Dieu," *The Sacred Bridge* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 220-24.

20. See my informal discussion, "Righteousness as a Counter-culture," *New Era* 2 (April 1972): 46-49.

21. Nancy Falk, "Wilderness and Kingship in South Asia," *History of Religions* 13 (August 1973): 1-15.

22. *Ibid.*, 11. Māra's threat and challenge is not an empty one. In his bestowal of "gifts" he buys up religionists and militarists and rules with blood and horror in this world of *samsāra*.

23. *Ibid.*, 12. See also Hugh Nibley, "Sparsiones," *Classical Journal* 40 (1945): 515-43.

24. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, 1:130-31. In the more traditional version of this incident, rather than Māra having "wrent" upon the earth in frustration at the Buddha's refusing to worship him, it is the Buddha who seeks the earth's recognition and testimony as to his divinity – this by means of touching the earth with a particular ritual hand-position (*mudra*).

25. No society has a monopoly on this problem, of course. See Hugh Nibley, "The Unsolved Loyalty Problem: Our Western Heritage," *Western Political Quarterly* 6 (1953): 631-57.

26. See Hugh Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," *Western Political Quarterly* 4 (1951): 226-53.

27. Luce, *Old Burma – Early Pagan*, 1:72, 361.

28. *Ibid.*, 72-73. After almost a millennium, of course, Burma still is not a united nation. It threatens to split along ethnic/religious lines in spite of Kyanziththa's best efforts.

29. Basically, the "Theravādin trap" involves accepting a philosophical definition of Buddhism that was articulated and perpetuated by a handful of highly literate monk/theologians, and using that definition to describe religion and societies of ancient and contemporary Sri Lanka and Buddhist Southeast Asia, even though the supposedly pure atheism of Theravāda has virtually no relationship

to popular religion as practiced either anciently or today. Popular, nominally Theravāda Buddhism is as syncretistic and polytheistic as the phenomenon described by Luce; cf. n. 27. Philosophers and theologians, when asked what people believe, all too often describe what they think the people should believe (and what is intellectually acceptable to themselves) rather than what actually exists.

30. Coedès, *Indianized States*, 369, n. 1.

31. See A. M. Hocart, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, vol. 4, *The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy* (London: Government of Ceylon, 1931). In the twentieth century, when Hocart visited the rites at Kandy, the Wednesday day service still included the participation of two old women whose "presence is said to be in imitation of the king's practice of retiring with dancing girls" in connection with the cult, p. 31. From 1828 until 1846, while the British government held control of the temple and its administration, as well as appointments to its priesthoods, this was taken by the people of Ceylon as a sign of the legitimacy of British rule, and the British governor in many ways took the ritual place of the king, p. 4. Of particular interest as well is Hocart's translation of "Temple Regulations, about A.D. 1300," to which he devotes an entire chapter. Thailand, which maneuvered through the period from the sixteenth century until the present without being formally colonized, still maintains the outward forms of divine kingship. King Birendra of Nepal's mud- and dung-smearing coronation a few years ago argues for the preservation of at least the forms there, in spite of a Harvard degree.

32. Coedès, *Indianized States*, 85.

33. *Ibid.*, 135.

34. An important discussion of Gnosticism from a comparative viewpoint is Geo Widengren, *The Gnostic Attitude*, tr. Birger A. Pearson (Santa Barbara: University of California Institute of Religious Studies, 1973), cf. also *Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

35. To write about diffusion from India through Burma to Java (in whatever manner) is a modest task. The "spread" of Malayo-Polynesian languages from Madagascar to Hawaii is undisputable, for instance. And by some of the same means that the languages spread, the Indonesian *gamelan* (a percussion instrument) arrived in Madagascar, moved to and spread across Africa where it became known by, among other names, the *mdimba*, and was finally transplanted by escaped black slaves into the highlands of Guatemala, finally resulting in the *marimba*. Paddy rice (*O. sativa*) spread by the

same means to Africa. This process is well documented. See A. J. Carpenter, "The History of Rice in Africa," in I. Buddenhagen and G. Persley, eds., *Rice in Africa: Proceedings of a Conference: Held at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria, 7-11 March 1977* (London: Academic Press, 1978), 3-10. Ideas themselves can move as freely as languages or material culture. A significant example of culture transfer (and feedback!) is found in the nonviolent philosophies that grow out of texts that deal with Christ and Krishna. In the eighteenth century, British colonial officers published English versions of the Gita. Western interest in Indian religions and texts grew quickly. Thoreau became involved with the subject, is known to have read the Gita, published other texts in the *Dial*, and translated at least eight chapters of the Harivamsa from French into English for publication. Thoreau's writings influenced Tolstoy, as did the Bible and the Gita. Gandhi was attracted to Tolstoy's ideas on pacifism, and his contacts with Tolstoy helped him to develop his philosophy of nonviolence. Martin Luther King brought Gandhi's ideas back to America and these were later adopted by Cesar Chavez. Such cases abound. Unfortunately, popular literature by Van Daniken and others has again compromised the "intellectual respectability" of the study of possible relationships between the high cultures of antiquity, but a great deal is being done. Some of the more important scholarly works include Robert Heine-Geldern's important essay in the *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 4, *Archaeological Frontiers and External Connections*, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Gordon R. Willey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966); the landmark *Man across the Sea: Problems in Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. C. L. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); and the exhaustive forthcoming study (approximately 5,000 entries and 1,200 pages) by John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Transoceanic Culture Contacts between the Old and New World in Pre-Columbian Times: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography*. A problem which may merit further exploration is the relative place given to trees of the genus *Ficus* in the Javanese *Nagara-Kertagama* (8.1.3) in comparison to other cultures, such as in F. J. Neumann's discussion of the place of *Ficus* trees in Aztec religion, "Paper: A Sacred Material in Aztec Religion," *History of Religions* 13 (November 1973): 151-59. Whatever the implications of this topic, enough evidence exists as to the relationship between Southeast Asia and the Americas to jeopardize both antidiffusionist views and the beliefs of those who hold that the pre-Columbian Americas were populated by *no more than three migrations* from the ancient Near East.

36. W. F. Albright and P. E. Dumont, "A Parallel between Indic and Babylonian Sacrificial Ritual," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54 (June 1934): 107-28.

37. Hugh Nibley, "Tenting, Toll and Taxing," 610.

38. Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 114. Contrast to this Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), and, of course, A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (New York: Grove Press, 1959). P. E. Dumont, *L'Asvamedha* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1927), though difficult to obtain, is still unsurpassed on this topic. While the Asvamedha is best known through its inclusion in the *Mahabharata*, other sources are available and should be consulted. It should be noted that ostensibly the most scholarly translation to date, *Mahabharata* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973 and following), has been done by J. A. B. van Buitenen, an admitted historicist who sees "religion" being restricted to rituals and claims to be amazed at how little religion there is in the *Mahabharata*. Given the expense and enormity of the task, it is doubtful that many other scholars or presses will attempt a translation which is more sympathetic to the text. That is felt to be unfortunate, especially since the historicist systematically neglects certain perspectives. One topic in particular which I have found of special interest is an examination of the eighteen major books of the *Mahabharata* as a whole—comparing their structure to that of ancient year rites. What emerges from this attempt is best explained by defining the text as a super year rite which was effected to insure the transition from one cycle of years (*yuga*) to another. In other words, it might be called a *yuga* rite. The transition to the current (*Kali*) *yuga* was, of course, supposed to have occurred in the year of the *Mahabharata* war. Seen as a *yuga* rite in comparison with year rites, the *Mahabharata* exhibits a coherency completely contrary to the picture usually painted of it—a pastiche, the elements of which van Buitenen calls "disappointing," "inept," "silly," "inane," "needlessly presented," and "foolish," and, one suspects, he translates accordingly. See van Buitenen, *Mahabharata*, Book 1, xx-xxi. I must admit that few books can boast introductions which so clearly highlight the author's biases—or the insights which a comparative stance might have provided.

39. Gordon H. Luce, "Old Kyauksè and the Coming of the Burmans," *Journal of Burma Research Society* 42/1 (1959): 83; cf. also 101, and Luce, *Old Burma—Early Pagán*, 1:13.

40. Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese History Before 1287: A Defense of*

the Chronicles (Oxford: The Asoka Society, 1970), 14-15. In conversation, a prominent anthropologist conceded that the case for Old World-New World diffusion was indisputable, but that it was a taboo subject for anyone to write about who wanted to be invited to do research in a given country more than once. His feeling is that many nationalistic scholars in emerging nations feel a great burden to prove the value of the national culture and justify pride in indigenous institutions, and thus are either absolutely irrational or politically hamstrung on the topic of diffusion.

41. Pe Maung Tin, *Glass Palace Chronicle*, 91-92. Viewed in isolation, this narrative would probably be, indeed has been, dismissed as purely mythical. From a comparative perspective it becomes quite clear what is going on, and the probability of a historical basis for the story is highlighted.

42. The most complete example is probably still illustrated in Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 295-310. If anyone still wonders at the preoccupation with year rites in ancient texts, it might be well to recall that on or around the day elsewhere described as the birthday of the King, at a place perhaps coincidentally called the "Crossroads of the West," we fill vacancies in the line of succession, are instructed in the law, raise our hands in token of our acceptance of leadership for another year, and so forth.

43. Th. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century: A Study in Cultural History*, 5 vols. (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960). This is a model of editing and scholarship. The five volumes, consisting of a transcription, notes on the text, translation, commentary, glossary and index, are a joy to work with. Also useful is Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, 3 vols. (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). The text has not, however, been immune to an obstinately ahistorical reading by Clifford Geertz.

44. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 3:xii.

45. *Ibid.*, 4:42.

46. After the spread of Islam, Java adopted the Moslem lunar calendar while retaining the *Saka* and *wuku* systems for some purposes. With the colonization of Java by the Dutch, the Christian calendar also came into use and is used in Indonesia today. On some topics, however, one is likely to encounter A.D., a.h., *Saka*, and *wuku* dates, though this is not as great a problem as is faced by the Chinese minority on Java. Also, the older systems contain a great deal of uncertainty and potential for error. Compared with Bali, on the other hand, Java's calendars are a model of simplicity.

47. For a basic description see Coedès, *Indianized States*, 239, and D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 84. It will be seen from these sources that many positions taken in this paper go against the majority consensus regarding a number of issues.

48. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 3:3. All translations given are from Pigeaud. All citations given in the text will follow his system for numbering: canto, stanza number, line.

49. *Ibid.*, 4:267.

50. On the persistence and spread of a calendar system, see the important article by Paul Kirchoff, "The Diffusion of a Great Religious [Calendar] System from India to Mexico," *XXXV Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 1 (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Libros de Mexico, 1964).

51. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 4:117, and P. J. Zoetmulder in his valuable *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 352, both use the word "intermezzo" in their discussions. To my knowledge there is not a single scholar of Javanese literature who follows my point of view. All look at the text strictly from an isolated viewpoint, excluding the insights of comparative data.

52. Hugh Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," *Western Political Quarterly* 2 (1949): 328-44; and "Man's Dominion," *New Era* (October 1972): 24.

53. For all the emphasis that has been placed on the existence of "Tantric" practices in Java, scholars have been careful to avoid the problem of what might happen to either "right-" or "left-handed" Tantra when it diffused into areas such as Java where meat and drink were not prohibited in the first place. Scholars would do well to overcome their distaste for Tantric studies, not only because of its probable origin as a popularization of divine kingship and sacred marriage rituals, but because it is doubtful that any Asian religions escaped its influence, and our view is severely distorted by pretending Tantra isn't there.

54. A. M. Hocart, *Kings and Councillors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

55. The danger of a minority religion seeking allies in such a compromising context is highlighted in F. W. Grupp and W. M. Newman, "Political Ideology and Religious Preference," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12 (December 1973): 404, table 1.

56. *Brigham Young Manuscript History*, 20 July 1849, 105. This letter was from Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, with copies going to Orson Hyde and others in Iowa.