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Ritual Sovereignty and Ritual Policy

Some Historiographic Reflections

The year 1980 witnessed the publication of the two seminal books by Burton Stein on the Segmentary State in medieval South India and by Clifford Geertz on the Theatre State in nineteenth-century Bali.¹ Whereas in previous decades the debates on rituals and the state in India and “Indianized” Southeast Asia had been dominated by the endeavour to define royal cults and “ancient Indian kingship from the religious point of view”, as known from the title of J. Gonda’s famous monograph,² the concepts of the segmentary and theatre states contain (at least partly) radically new definitions of the nature and function of royal rituals. Stein invented and defined “ritual sovereignty”, a kind of state ideology of the Great Kings (*maharaja*) of South India, as fundamentally different from “actual political control” exercised by numerous Little Kings, and Geertz reduced the pre-colonial kingdoms of Bali to an arena for the performance of royally sponsored mass rituals. In view of the sometimes heated debates on these concepts, the present panel “Rituals and the State in India” and its contributions attempt a re-evaluation of the nature of kingly rituals on the “imperial” as well as local level and their relationship with state formation and the state in India. My introductory historiographic reflections about ritual sovereignty and ritual policy are primarily a critical evaluation of the definition of state rituals in Geertz’s theatre state and in particular of Stein’s concept of ritual sovereignty and its important modifications. The issue at stake is the question whether royal rituals are mere cultural-ideological performances or also a means of an intended ritual policy to legitimise and enhance political control and power.

The Theatre State and its Critics

After Robert Heine-Geldern’s cosmological concepts in his erstwhile “hegemonic” article on state and kingship in Southeast Asia,³ Clifford Geertz’s concept of the

1 Stein 1980.

2 Gonda 1966. See also Heine-Geldern 1942; Varma 1954; Heesterman 1957 and Dumont 1970.

3 Heine-Geldern 1942.

theatre state in Bali has become, next only to Stanley Tambiah's "galactic polity" of Theravada Buddhist Thailand,⁴ the most famous attempt to define the function and the significance of rituals in Southeast Asia's processes of state formation.⁵ The nature of rituals and ceremonies in the theatre state is best introduced by Geertz himself:

"The expressive nature of the Balinese state was apparent through the whole of its known history, for it was always pointed not toward tyranny, whose systematic concentration of power it was incompetent to effect, and not even very methodological toward government, which it pursued indifferently and hesitantly, but rather toward spectacle, toward ceremony, toward public dramatization of the ruling obsessions of Balinese culture: social inequality and status pride. It was a theatre state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the cast, stage crew, and audience. The stupendous cremations, tooth filings, temple dedications, pilgrimages, and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds or even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means of political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for. Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power."⁶

In continuation of this often quoted passage one may add: "The assiduous ritualism of court culture was not merely the drapery of political order, but its substance"⁷ and "it was the king's cult that created him, *raised him from lord to icon*"⁸.

Geertz's *Theatre State* (or often referred to as *Negara*) "evoked an enormous flood of reaction and further investigation".⁹ In view of the fact that Geertz is widely acknowledged as the internationally most influential anthropologist of his time and that he himself regards his *Theatre State* as one of his most important monographs, it is astonishing that scholars of Southeast Asian and in particular Balinese

4 Tambiah 1976.

5 Other, equally famous models of state formation and the state in pre-colonial Southeast Asia refer to rituals and ritual sovereignty only in limited degree. E.g. K. Wittfogel's controversial *Oriental Despotism* (Wittfogel 1957) or O.W. Wolters's presently most influential concept of *mandala states* (Wolters 1982); Wheatley 1983; and, more recently, particularly Manguin 2002.

6 Geertz 1980: 13.

7 *Ibid.*: 32.

8 *Ibid.*: 131, my emphasis.

9 Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 154.

studies reacted mostly critically to it.¹⁰ Henk Schulte Nordholt, the author of several important contributions to related Balinese studies,¹¹ pointed out in one of its earliest reviews, “that it is Geertz’s over-fertile imagination which has created the ‘classical’ Balinese state to which he applies his theatre metaphor, and not the Balinese”.¹² His conclusion has, as will be shown, also some bearing on Stein’s concept of ritual sovereignty: “The distinction between ‘power’ and ‘pomp’ is largely a false one. In the Balinese state pomp was an essential part of royal power, but not the opposite of it”.¹³ The major tone of the many other reviews which followed is that Geertz’s concept depoliticises what is essentially a political institution. It is “essentially ahistorical or at least non-processural” and makes the Balinese state “more exotic, more extraordinary and more other than the evidence warrants”.¹⁴ Burkhard Schnepel therefore concludes that it “offers little scope for the analysis of political conflicts”,¹⁵ which, however, are well documented between Bali’s once flourishing nine “theatre states”. In her comprehensive review article on theories of state formation in early maritime Southeast Asia Jan Wisseman Christie points out that Geertz’s model “moves even a step beyond that of the ‘segmentary state’ in suggesting that the ruler’s hegemony was of ritual nature even in the core of the state.” And although she admits that Geertz’s concept of the theatre state “may be accurate to a degree in describing some Balinese polities at the end of their beleaguered careers, there is no reason to believe that it provides more than a distorted and blurred image of a functioning *negara* of earlier periods”.¹⁶ Her statement gains in significance as Geertz regards his theatre state model as “a sort of socio-logical blueprint” not only the nineteenth-century Bali, but also for the “classical Southeast Asian Indic states of the fifth to fifteenth centuries”.¹⁷

10 “Geertz is arguably the most influential anthropologist of his generation and inarguably the most influential in other disciplines and among specialists other than Indonesia. [...] Ironically *Negara*, the apotheosis of his thinking on politics and history, and in his own view one of his most important works (Mark Mosko, personal communication), has remained something of an enigma, rarely referred to even by historians or political scientists. Among anthropologists, however, and especially among specialists in South East Asia, it did not go unnoticed, but reactions were mixed, combining admiration for its scope and ambition with scepticism about its claims” (MacRae 2005: 394).

11 Schulte Nordholt 1991, 1996.

12 Schulte Nordholt 1981: 473.

13 *Ibid.*: 476.

14 MacRae 2005: 394f.

15 Schnepel 2002: 76.

16 Wisseman Christie 1995: 240. In his study of *Negara Ubud*, today a centre of tourism and Balinese art, Graeme MacRae remarks “he [Geertz] was largely wrong about pre-colonial Bali, but, ironically and presciently, his model makes increasing sense in early twenty-first century Bali.” (MacRae 2005: 393)

17 Geertz 1980: 10.

The Relevance of Balinese Studies for Rituals and the State in India

This is not the place to refer in greater detail to “the enormous flood of reaction and further investigation” evoked by Geertz, particularly as that pertains to a large extent to important issues in the context of Balinese studies, e.g. the debate on local or kingly management and control of agricultural irrigation which, however, are only of little relevance for rituals and the state in India.¹⁸ Suffice it therefore to refer briefly to the results of two of the investigations which were conducted in the wake of Geertz’s theatre state and which may have some bearing on the following deliberations about Stein’s segmentary state in India.

Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin introduces her paper “The Precolonial Balinese State Reconsidered” with the statement that by critically examining the basis for the construction of hegemonic theories of the pre-colonial Balinese state, “I will outline another state whose formation is based on the construction of ‘localities’”.¹⁹ Her examination of Geertz’s model and her own research in Bali led her to the view “that temple and ritual networks creating a series of purposeful, fixed in time, cyclically repeating migrations to different sites within a large area were a fundamental principle of organization of the pre-colonial Balinese state and thus of royal supremacy. [...] It was the regular repetition of the creation of localities that brought people from formerly otherwise unrelated neighbourhoods together on arranged pilgrimage routes that produced the particular form of the Balinese state. The convergence of thousands of people at temples aroused a feeling of social closeness and sense of community that was vital for the constitution of an overarching community”.²⁰ Moreover, we are told that “temples were political places *par excellence* in which the prestige and claims to power were negotiated again and again”.²¹

In her quest to establish locality and its identity, based on pilgrimage and temples, as a basis of the Balinese state, she refers several times to Appadurai and his “locality concept”²² and to the segmentary model of Southall,²³ both of whom we shall soon meet again as chief witnesses of Stein’s segmentary model. But it is astonishing that she does not refer at all to Stein and his South Indian model of the segmentary state. Especially after its modification in the context of late medieval Vijayanagara, it might be nearer to her locality-based outline of the Balinese state than

18 “The king played a central role in rituals at certain places, especially those most closely connected with irrigation agriculture.” (Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 154)

19 Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 154.

20 Ibid.: 156f.

21 Ibid.: 169.

22 Appadurai 1996.

23 Southall 1956.

Southall's African prototype. This can be surmised from her writing on the networks of temples and royal seats that constitute the structure of the Balinese state. "In the case of the Sea Temple of Sakenan and the Crater Lake Temple [which figure prominently in her research] the king's palace formed the head of a hierarchical-segmentary and functionally structured system of temples that were sometimes far from each other, all integrated into a huge ritual cycle that ended at the royal temple or seat. The regional temples were linked with powerful clans and members of the elite that participated in the main ritual in the royal temple as long as they accepted the sovereignty of the king. The overarching order of the state and the integration into it of hierarchical segments of differing social status were staged by means of ritual performances".²⁴

Finally, it may be mentioned that in his critical appraisal of Geertz's theatre state, MacRae suggests "a more dynamic model based on Bourdieu's metaphor of material and symbolic capital".²⁵ Even if one does not, as MacRae points out, accept the reduction of Bourdieu's metaphor to material and its implicit materialism, what matters to him is Bourdieu's conceptualisation of different kinds of social power which can be converted and re-converted into each other, or, in Bourdieu's words, "the indifferencedness of economic and symbolic capital [and] their perfect interconvertibility." What matters for us is that MacRae is certainly right when he regards Bourdieu's metaphor as a "reminder of the dynamic relationship between the material and symbolic dimensions of such institutions as *negaras*"²⁶ and, by implication, the ritual policy of medieval Indian rulers. But to my knowledge Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital has not yet become an agenda in the discourse on the Indian state, especially of the pre-colonial period.

The Segmentary State and Ritual Sovereignty

Burton Stein's concept of ritual sovereignty is of much greater significance for our debate than Geertz's theatre state as it refers directly to the state in India and raises several relevant issues of this panel. It is derived from Aidan Southall's anthropological study of the Alur society in eastern Africa²⁷ which Stein summarised as follows: "In a segmentary state sovereignty is dual. It consists of actual political sovereignty, or control, and what Southall terms 'ritual hegemony' or 'ritual sovereignty'".²⁸ Stein's conceptualisation of his Indian segmentary state model and its

24 Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 168

25 MacRae 2005: 393.

26 Ibid.: 409.

27 Southall 1956.

28 Stein 1980: 274.

inherent ritual sovereignty evolved gradually over three decades. It was first presented in 1973 as a paper at a conference at Duke University which was published in 1977, followed by his magnum opus *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* in 1980. Whereas these early studies focus primarily on the Chola state,²⁹ the realm of the segmentary state was chronologically further extended to Vijayanagara in his volume of the *New Cambridge History of India*.³⁰ The segmentary state became, next only to Indian Feudalism, the most important but also most controversial theory of the early medieval Indian state.³¹ Stein “reconsidered” it several times and, as will be seen, modified it considerably.³²

Of particular relevance in the context of our panel is his already mentioned differentiation between two kinds of sovereignty. As pointed out by Ronald Inden, Stein distinguishes between *ritual sovereignty* as a loose and custodial hegemony exercised by the king at the top of the pyramidal segmentary structure on the one hand, and *political sovereignty*, consisting of the direct rule or control exercised by local authorities and little kings in their immediate localities on the other.³³ Stein regards the several hundreds of autonomous and highly developed nuclear areas (*nādu*) in the river basins as seats of actual political power and as the central element of the South Indian Chola state, which therefore “may be best described as a multi-centred system”.³⁴ In their central dynastic core area, the Cholas exercised an uncontested monopoly of authority and power, based on a fairly well developed administration which, however, faded off gradually into mere ritual sovereignty in its intermediate zones and periphery. The ritual sovereignty of the Cholas was based on the royal Siva cult as “the overarching ideological element which makes these units segments of a whole”.³⁵ The thousands of copper-plate and stone inscriptions of the Cholas, which conventional historians conceive as manifestations of actual political control, had primarily the function of distributing the standardised message of their great kingship to all places of the realm. They have to be taken as evidence of ritual sovereignty rather than actual political control, a difference that, according to Stein, is fundamental. The persons who were distributing the royal message “were involved in the ritual sovereignty which converted a congeries of local political systems into a segmentary state” (Stein 1977: 16). In 1985 Stein even went a step further when he argued that “the Chola state existed as a

29 Stein 1969, 1977, 1980.

30 Stein 1989.

31 Kulke 1995b.

32 Stein 1985a, 1989, 1995 [1989].

33 Inden 1978: 28; Stein 1980: 274

34 Stein 1969: 180.

35 Stein 1977: 18.

state only as the hundreds of the *nādus* of its realm recognized the overlordship, the ritual sovereignty, of Chola kings".³⁶

On the one hand, Stein's theory was praised as an appropriate "alternative model to the unitary state model"³⁷ and as "an immensely powerful deconstructive tool" against conventional models³⁸ which is "far more accurate than the older 'imperial' one developed by Nilakanta Sastri".³⁹ On the other hand, Stein has been strongly criticised by historians of South India for diminishing drastically the administrative control and power of the Chola state even during its "imperial phase" in the eleventh century.⁴⁰ Thus, for instance, Y. Subbarayalu observes that in the century from the middle of Rajaraja I's reign about A.D. 1000 through to the reign of Kulottunga I there is a disappearance of chiefly troops and that "inscriptions are bewilderingly silent about the chiefs who were, it seems, replaced by [Chola] officials".⁴¹ K.R. Hall, too, detects during this period "a move toward centralization"⁴² and J. Heitzman points out that "more 'segmentary' or 'feudal' political organizations succumbed to royal dominance".⁴³ In 1983 B.D. Chattopadhyaya took up the issue in the broader context of early medieval India. He criticised the idea that the concept of ritual sovereignty defines the state as a "ritual space" or "state *sans* politics", relegating different foci of power to the periphery instead of analysing their transformation into vital components of the political structure of an "integrative polity".⁴⁴ And R.S. Sharma, in defence of his concept of Indian Feudalism, ascertains that "the myth of the ritual sovereignty of the Coḷas as distinct from actual political authority exercised by its different local centres (segments) of power was exploded by several scholars. [...] The attempt to project the 'segmentary' as a model for the early Indian state and society has proved to be abortive".⁴⁵ More recently R. Thapar pointed out that "the changes that led to the consolidation of power of the Chola state were reflected in ways not conforming to the segmentary state, such as in official titles especially at the higher levels of administration, the tendency to reorganize administrative units territorially, standardization of taxation, and the gradual replacement of chiefs by high-status officers"⁴⁶. In his more

36 Stein 1985a: 394.

37 Spencer 1983: 7.

38 Dirks 1987: 403.

39 Shulman 1985: 19.

40 Kulke 1982, 1995b.

41 Subbarayalu 1982: 270.

42 Hall 1980: 196.

43 Heitzman 1995 [1987].

44 Chattopadhyaya 1983.

45 Sharma 1995 [1985]: 83f..

46 Thapar 2002: 370f.

recent comprehensive review B. Schnepel focuses very critically on Stein's transfer of Southall's African concept of segmentary lineage societies to South India. He observes that "the distinction, so basic to the model, between ritual and politics [...] remains questionable"⁴⁷ and that in comparison with other concepts of the Indian state, "the model of the segmentary state is that in which the control and exercise of power by the central power is seen to be at its lowest level".⁴⁸

These critiques and my own predicament with Stein's rigid distinction between rituals and politics were in my mind when I began to draft this paper. But reading Stein again thoroughly after many years soon became an exciting exercise of "revisiting Burton Stein". I was surprised to "discover" that he was in fact a much stronger advocate of the existence of an intrinsic relationship between rituals and political domination than hitherto acknowledged by his critics. This finding made me realise the need for a more differentiated appraisal of his concepts as well as of possible changes and inconsistencies. In regard to our concern about the relationship between rituals and the state, it is relevant that his earlier and later writings seem to exhibit a certain discrepancy between his estimation of the function and effect of royal rituals at the local level on the one hand and the "imperial" or state level on the other. Looking at the critiques of his much maligned ritual sovereignty and its rigid distinction of two kinds of authority, it turns out that they are based primarily on his earlier writing of the late seventies and early eighties (primarily 1977 and partly 1980) which indeed over-emphasise (or even restrict) the political significance of royal rituals at the local level. Changes in his perception of the political nature of the great state rituals of the Cholas and in particular of Vijayanagara⁴⁹ as well as the stepwise modification of his concepts in the following years⁵⁰ have hardly received notice until now.

Local Politics and Royal Ritual Sovereignty

Let me begin with the local level by quoting at some length from a letter which Burton Stein wrote after having read the draft of my paper "Fragmentation and Segmentation Versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Indian Feudalism

47 Schnepel 2002: 47.

48 Ibid.: 36. Very recently Noboru Karashima summarised again his strong critique: "I also criticized it by pointing out that Stein's theory was nothing but a new version of the old theory of the stagnation of the Oriental Society, based on unchanging village communities, with the village of the old theory having been replaced by the segment (nadu). There are many points to be criticized in his theory, but the crucial point is his categorical denial of centralization or even the efforts made towards it by the Chola kings of the middle period [11th and early 12th centuries]." (Karashima 2009: 3)

49 Stein 1980, 1984, 1989.

50 Stein 1985a, 1989, 1995 [1989].

and the Segmentary State in Indian History” in which I expressed my reservations against his concept of ritual sovereignty in his early writings.⁵¹

“I accept your point about regionalization of bhakti traditions, but insist that the cultic concomitant of this was to strengthen segmental shrines. ... [Regarding] the matter of political implication I reiterate that I see the local level not as passive before royal pressures to control, but seeking such links (not of political but ritual subordination) for purposes of local rule. I reject the idea of ritual ‘as a weak substitute’ and do see it as a genuine political means, as you put it. Do we really differ here? A similar kind of disagreement, which may be a false one, is on the matter of integration versus segmentation (or fragmentation, as the title [of the paper] puts it). I contend that the seg. [*sic*] state formulation is precisely about integration, *given* segmentation. ... Finally, ‘integration’ is always a key factor ... because the segmentary state only exists as its constituent parts recognize a ritual centre, a king, and by which recognition advance and strengthen the segmental parts. Thus I consider your title mistakes the case: it is not segmentation *versus* integration, but segmentation *and* integration.”⁵²

Stein’s expositions are revealing as they locate the political relevance of rituals exclusively at the local or (in Stein’s terminology) “segmental” level. Thus, he insists that the cultic concomitant of regionalisation of Bhakti cults is “to strengthen segmental shrines” and that the local leaders seek ritual subordination under the centre “for the purposes of local rule” and that the recognition of the royal ritual centre “advance and strengthen the segmental parts.” His acceptance of rituals “as a genuine political means” was therefore indeed by no means lip service. But what matters is that he restricted the political function of rituals primarily if not exclusively to the local level rather than considering their impact as well on the authority of the Cholas and thus on the structure of the state as a whole. Of course, none of these statements is wrong. Regionalisation of Bhakti indeed strengthened local shrines and leaders, and the ritual recognition of “the ritual centre, the king” strengthened local leaders. These findings meanwhile belong to the canon of defining “Little Kings” whose local domination is strengthened by, or even based on, mutual ritual recognition by the great and the little kings.⁵³ What is significant is the exclusiveness of the local or segmental level where Stein readily consents that rituals strengthen religious and political leaders and thus enhance and validate “actual power.” Under the *chatra* (umbrella) of royal *ritual* sovereignty, the seg-

51 Kulke 1982.

52 Letter of 20 June 1982 (Stein’s italics); for a more extensive quotation of the letter see Kulke 1982: 263.

53 Dirks 1987; Berkemer 1993, Berkemer & Frenz 2003; Schnepel 2003.

mental leaders of the intermediate zone and periphery were allowed to enjoy their “actual *political* control”, given their ritual subordination under the ritual centre. This “ritual subordination”, however, as we are told by Stein, strengthened and validated primarily local or segmental rule. Royal cults seem to figure in Stein’s concept primarily as a means of validating actual *political* control of local leaders and thus preventing the state from “being transformed into a more unitary kingdom”.⁵⁴ It was particularly this line of argumentation which provoked the above quoted strong and at times one-sided reactions of historians of South Indian history in the early eighties after the publication of Stein’s “Peasant State”.⁵⁵

“Revisiting Burton Stein” and his Modifications of Ritual Sovereignty

But “revisiting Stein” resulted in the important “discovery” that in addition (and partly contradiction) to his – admittedly at times also one-sided – emphasis of the far-reaching implications of royal rituals for the local level, he conceded them also a considerably stronger effect on the state level than hitherto acknowledged by his critics. This becomes evident already from his estimation of the royal Siva cult of the Cholas⁵⁶ and then in particular from his account of Vijayanagara’s great annual Mahanavami or Durga festival in an article and his second monograph.⁵⁷ The truly “imperial” Brhadisvara temple at Tanjore, India’s then largest temple, was built by Rajaraja I (986–1014), the founder of the “Imperial Cholas”.⁵⁸ Its monumental central lingam, the Rajarajesvara, unites his name with *isvara* or Siva which Stein calls “a fitting symbol of a powerful, sacred kingship”. He regards the royal Siva cult at Tanjore and its rituals as “the overarching ideological element” and the “keystone of the system of ritual hegemony”⁵⁹ which “was recognized by locality chiefs, even very remote ones”.⁶⁰ Stein emphasised that the Tanjore-centred royal Siva cult was not meant simply for the purpose of securing the central core area under Chola control. “The royal cult, the prominence of Brahmanical forms, and the network of Brahmanical institutions in the intermediate and peripheral zones of the Chola state is best viewed as a means by Chola rulers to affect ritual hegemony over the numerous locality chieftains of the macro region. [...] What Rajaraja and his successors perfected was a conception of dharmic incorporation which did two things: *it strengthened Chola authority and it provided locality chiefs with stronger ritual or*

54 Stein 1977: 14.

55 Stein 1980.

56 Ibid.

57 Stein 1984, 1989.

58 For the political nature of Chola temple architecture, particularly of Tanjore’s Brhadisvara Temple, see Spencer 1969; Heitzman 1991; Champakalakshmi 1996 and Ogura 1999.

59 Stein 1980: 341.

60 Ibid.: 352.

symbolic bases for their own local rule."⁶¹ This quotation is necessary to refute the prevalent opinion that Stein failed to consider also political implications of royal rituals for the validation of political sovereignty and the actual power of the central ruler. In his study of state rituals of the Cholas the allegedly fundamental distinction between ritual and political authority which he proclaims as essential in his theoretical deliberations on the segmentary state in 1977 was thus already considerably modified as a means of strengthening the political authority of the Cholas as well as that of their local little kings.

This realisation becomes even more evident from Stein's depiction of the Mahanavami festival of Vijayanagara. "The Peasant State" contains already a fairly detailed depiction⁶² that was followed by a special article⁶³ which Stein then integrated in his Vijayanagara monograph.⁶⁴ His historical contextualisation of Vijayanagara's state ritual is particularly noteworthy for our panel as it is valid for other Indian regions too, e.g. for Orissa⁶⁵ and Mewar.⁶⁶ "In the fifteenth century, a new form of kingly public ritual came into existence that provided a vastly more encompassing form of public ritual, one that transcended locality and involved all in the realm".⁶⁷ With its "overwhelmingly royal character and its symbolically incorporative character"⁶⁸ Stein calls it "the ritual focus of the Vijayanagara kings"⁶⁹ and refers to B. Saletore who characterised Vijayanagara's Mahanavami as "religious in atmosphere, it is essentially political in significance".⁷⁰ Its ritual arena, the royal centre of Vijayanagara, was even more strongly dominated by the king than the royal Siva cult of the Cholas at Tanjore.⁷¹ It is remarkable that in the case of

61 Ibid.: 339, my emphasis. Already in 1969 G.W. Spencer pointed out in his seminal article on religious networks and royal influence in eleventh-century South India: "In order to understand the importance of Rajaraja's patronage to the Tanjore temple, we must recognize that such patronage, far from representing the self-glorification of a despotic ruler, was in fact a method adopted by an ambitious ruler to enhance his very uncertain power" (Spencer 1969: 45); see also Kulke 1978b.

62 Stein 1980: 384–390.

63 Stein 1984.

64 Stein 1989.

65 "Jagannatha cult was a synthesis of various elements which brought together deities with a strong territoriality, i.e. Viraja-Durga of Jajpur, Siva-Lingaraja of Bhubaneswar and Purushottama-Jagannatha of Puri. The coming together of important sub-regional deities [...] paved the way for political consolidation." (Sahu 2003: 21). See also e.g. Eschmann 1978; Kulke 1978b, 1979, 1993; Panda 1990; Tanabe 2003.

66 Teuscher 2002.

67 Stein 1984: 311

68 Stein 1980: 389.

69 Ibid.: 384.

70 Saletore 1934: 372; Stein 1980: 388.

71 Fritz & Michell 1991.

Vijayanagara, Stein clearly admits the existence of “*kingly ritual power* [which] is expressed in numerous ways: in the manifestation of wealth displayed and elaborately redistributed at many points of the nine-day festivals; in the various consecratory actions involving the king’s weapons as the means of his royal fame and protection; and also in the king’s frequent and often solitary worship (and ultimately his identity with) the deity who presides with him over the festival and in whose name and for whose propitiation the festival occurs”.⁷² One could easily add to Stein’s list further expressions and means of “*kingly ritual power*”. One would think particularly of the grand durbar-like Dasara with its ritualised military procession on Dasami, the final and tenth day, about which Domingos Paes, the Portuguese traveller and chronicler, reported in detail c.1520 A.D.⁷³ Attended by all the grandees of the kingdom and ambassadors of allied states, its political function was not unlike the great ritualised Imperial Assemblages at Delhi at the height of the British Raj⁷⁴ or the May Day Parade in Red Square, Moscow, attended by the Soviet and now Russian leadership on the tribune at the Kremlin Wall or, more recently, the military parades in Pyongyang.

Equally surprising as Stein’s perception of *royal ritual power* is his unexpectedly high esteem of the political role of religious institutions in his Vijayanagara monograph.⁷⁵ This becomes quite evident if one compares it with the volume “South Indian Temples” which he edited in 1978. His own contribution to it, a detailed survey of temples in Tamil Nadu from 1300–1750, contains no significant reference to their political role during this period.⁷⁶ However, in his Vijayanagara volume we find plenty of them. Thus he ascertains that “the Vijayanagara age saw temples emerge as major political arenas”⁷⁷ and “temples and *matha* were prime instruments for Vijayanagara political purposes”.⁷⁸ As for Vijayanagara’s astonishingly peaceful relationship with the conquered Tamil country we are told: “The ease with which the remote sovereignty of the rayas [of Vijayanagara] came to be exercised over the Tamils and others depended upon the favour they showed to Tamil deities”.⁷⁹ In particular the intrusive Telugu Nayakas pursued a similar policy outside their own home country. For them temples “became the arenas where the new stratum of local lords – often outsiders – sought to integrate their armed

72 Stein 1980: 390; my emphasis.

73 Sewell 1924.

74 Cohn 1987.

75 Stein 1989.

76 Stein 1978.

77 Stein 1989: 65.

78 Ibid.: 103.

79 Ibid.: 104.

rule by raising local deities to new, august statuses".⁸⁰ Stein also points out that the mathapati and leader of a sectarian centre "was among the most powerful men of the Vijayanagara age".⁸¹ Together the king and his great commanders and the temples formed "the three great institutions of the Vijayanagara age".⁸² And regarding the rise of local deities, usually tutelary deities of clans and local leaders, and their integration into the Brahmanical pantheon he observes "an extension at the level of religion of what had been happening in secular politics to bring local magnates and superior lordships into closer relationship. Political integration of the age was thus matched [...] by a linking of local magnates, their penates and ancient canonical gods".⁸³

One may rightly ask, how to explain this seeming discrepancy between Stein's earlier and later estimation of the political nature of royal rituals in South India. Most likely we have to look for historical as well as historiographic reasons. Historically, significant changes had taken place between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, the foci of his two major studies. The above mentioned "vastly more encompassing form of [royal] public rituals" and the mass congregation at royal centres and temples created a hitherto unknown visibility of sacred kingship under Vijayanagara rule. As already pointed out, it is this context where the debate about Geertz's Theatre State has some relevance for late medieval India too. Another new aspect of "kingly ritual power" was the royally sponsored and at least partly controlled network of powerful sectarian centres.⁸⁴ And finally the enormous temple donations and building activities of Vijayanagara rulers at South India's temple cities and places of pilgrimage have to be mentioned. They enhanced and validated their role as "major political arena" through royal presence.⁸⁵ In this context, Bhairabi Sahu's observation of a convergence of ritual and political centres is notable.⁸⁶ Krishnadeva Raya, Vijayanagara's most powerful king, is praised for his valuable temple donations on the occasion of his coronation in 1509 to the great temples at Srisaïlam, Tirupati, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai and Chidambaram⁸⁷ and almost all the big temples of southern India owe some temple towers (*gopuram*) to his long reign. All these historical developments strengthened the political

80 Stein 1989: 14. But B.D. Chattopadhyaya rightly emphasises that "cult assimilation does not necessarily imply a harmonious syncretism, but it does imply the formation of a structure which combines heterogeneous beliefs and rituals into a whole even while making (or transforming) specific elements dominant." (Chattopadhyaya 1994: 30)

81 Ibid.: 102.

82 Stein 1989: 65.

83 Ibid.: 105.

84 Appadurai 1978.

85 Sewell 1924; Fritz & Michell 1991.

86 See Sahu's contribution in this volume.

87 Kulke 1977.

nature of royal rituals in the age of Vijayanagara not only in the central core area but increasingly also in the intermediate and peripheral zones. These changes, aptly noticed by Stein, induced him to modify his concept of ritual sovereignty, initially based primarily on evidence of the Chola period.

However, apart from these historical reasons, Stein's increased awareness of the existence of kingly ritual power (and not just ritual sovereignty) is also the outcome of the sometimes heated historiographic debates particularly with supporters of Indian Feudalism, the then dominating school of pre-colonial Indian history. These debates are well documented in the belligerent essays of Burton Stein and R.S. Sharma in defence of their models.⁸⁸ But, as has been shown, initially Stein's concept of ritual sovereignty and its distinction from "actual political control" played only a minor role in these debates⁸⁹ which focused on the reproach that, as Stein put it, "I have denied any central features or forces at work in the kingdoms of the Cholas and Vijayanagara".⁹⁰ This changed considerably with the publication of an article by Aidan Southall.⁹¹ In it he "revisited" his African model of the segmentary state in South India and came forward with several rather strange suggestions for the advancement or even reformulation of Stein's concept. Without going into the details of this debate,⁹² suffice it to mention two points raised by Southall. To the great surprise of concerned scholars, he defined the segmentary state of the Cholas as an "expression of the Asiatic Mode of Production"⁹³ and reiterated that "the spheres of ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide".⁹⁴ Southall's equation of the Chola state and Stein's segmentary state concept with the AMP, "the unfortunate thesis that Marx had once propounded"⁹⁵ provoked strong reactions not only among adherents of the "School of Indian Feudalism" against the segmentary model as a whole and its application to Indian history in particular,⁹⁶ but also by Stein. In his contribution to a seminar on "State Formation in Pre-Colonial South India" at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1989,⁹⁷ he admits that Southall's reformulation poses difficulties for him as it "confuses conceptual levels".⁹⁸

88 Stein 1985a, 1995 [1989]; Sharma 1993, 1995.

89 See however Kulke 1982.

90 Stein 1995 [1989]: 139.

91 Southall 1987.

92 See Stein 1995 [1989].

93 Southall 1987: 65.

94 Ibid.: 52.

95 I. Habib, see Kulke 1995a: 6.

96 Sharma 1995.

97 Stein 1995 [1989].

98 Ibid.: 151.

But most important in regard to our deliberations is Stein's reaction to Southall's reiteration of his concept of ritual sovereignty. Since, after all, it had formed a major prop too of Stein's South Indian segmentary model since 1977, it is astonishing that in 1987 he refuted it outright: "It is necessary to reject Southall's proposition that the 'spheres of ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide'. I am now convinced that in India the proposition is incorrect, that [instead] *lordship for Hindus always and necessarily combined ritual and political authority*."⁹⁹ There can be no doubt that Southall's interference into the South Indian segmentary state debate induced Stein to clarify his position primarily in order to save his concept from being unnecessarily roped into the sterile AMP debate. However, his unexpectedly clear rejection of Southall's reiteration of the strict distinction between ritual and political sovereignty has as well a case history and may have to be regarded as Stein's most significant modification of his concept. One may call it a cumulative effect of his fruitful discussions with colleagues during recent years and Stein's readiness to integrate the studies of his colleagues into his own concept. Thus, for instance, his comprehensive survey of temples in Tamil Nadu from 1300–1750 has, as already pointed out, no special references to their political significance.¹⁰⁰ However, Arjun Appadurai's seminal article on the kings, sects and temples of South India in the same period focuses exactly on this subject.¹⁰¹ Years later, in his Interim Reflections, Stein acknowledged Appadurai's strong influence with reference to this article. "We principally owe our understanding of the interposition of royal authority over temples as a form of conquest to Arjun Appadurai", and to Carol Breckenridge Appadurai that kings and chiefs of the Vijayanagara period "converted sectarian worship groups into political constituencies by collaborating with leaders of popular sectarian orders in the control of temple affairs".¹⁰²

Having "revisited Stein" and looked at the development and modifications of his concept of ritual sovereignty, I agree with Kenneth R. Hall's suggestion in his early review of Stein's Peasant State: "Perhaps 'ritual sovereignty' was a means to implement political power".¹⁰³ Hall's assumption, still cautioned by his wording "perhaps", has meanwhile become true by Stein's own conclusion that "lordship for Hindus always and necessarily combined ritual and political authority." It was this realisation which prompted me to exchange the initially planned title of my paper "ritual sovereignty *or* ritual policy?" for "ritual sovereignty *and* ritual policy". We may therefore look at and use Stein's writings as textbooks and a store-

99 Ibid.: 160, my emphasis.

100 Stein 1978.

101 Appadurai 1978.

102 Stein 1995 [1989]: 158.

103 Hall 1982: 409.

house of ideas for our panel on the relationship between rituals and the state in India, rather than as controversial statements against which we have to establish the existence of these relations. Royal rituals are certainly no substitute for “actual political control” and centralised administrative and military coercion, but they may very well legitimise and validate, and thus strengthen, political authority. I regard the methods to achieve this aim as ritual policy, independent of the question of whether it is exercised at the central royal level through ritual sovereignty, based on the performance of royal rituals, or at the local level through the integration of a powerful tribal goddess into the “pantheon” of an emergent little king.¹⁰⁴ What matters in both cases is the trans-local integrative function, bottom-up and *vice versa*.

However, one last question remains, even though it may not be necessary to answer it now. What about the validity of Stein’s concept of the segmentary state in South India after his abandonment of the allegedly “fundamental” distinction between ritual and political sovereignty, a definition only recently defended vehemently again by Southall? As a result of the intensive and often controversial debates that followed on his early publications on the segmentary state in South Indian history,¹⁰⁵ he seems to have become more sparing in defining the Chola state and Vijayanagara as segmentary. At the great Vijayanagara conference at Heidelberg in 1983 he even considered the possibility of defining Vijayanagara in terms of patrimonialism.¹⁰⁶ But in his Vijayanagara volume he reaffirmed its segmentary nature although no longer as affirmatively as previously: “The idea of a ‘segmentary state’ was proposed as appropriate for the Cholas as well as for Vijayanagara. In broad terms, that argument of several years ago is still considered valid.”¹⁰⁷ However, it is astonishing to read in his Interim Reflections (presented at a conference in the same year) that “at the time that I adopted the segmentary formulation I was insufficiently alert to a major discordant theoretical element which still remains a part of Southall’s formulation. This is the relationship between what I was calling political segmentation or a ‘segmentary state’ and something called ‘segmentary society’”.¹⁰⁸ If one considers Stein’s modification of essential parts of his own concept and his uncertainties about its African prototype in the context of a critical anthropological appraisal of its Indian reconstruction, one wonders about its significance in the context of Indian history. According to Burkhard Schnepel, in the light of the theory of segmentary lineage societies, the transfer of the African model of the segmentary state model to South India is “ultimately not convincing:

104 Kulke 1978a, 1992; Mallebrein (in press).

105 Stein 1977, 1980.

106 Stein 1985b.

107 Stein 1989: 10.

108 Stein 1995 [1989]: 135.

none of the basic units, processes and principles attributed to segmentary lineage societies in modern anthropological theory find correspondence in South India."¹⁰⁹

Since it was not granted to Burton Stein to let his Interim Reflections be followed by another thorough evaluation of his concept, we can only speculate whether he would have further liberated himself from the strict adherence to the African segmentary model and created an "independent South Indian model" which, I think, would have been "possible as well as promising." Burton Stein seems to imply this cautiously in his Interim Reflections: "Before turning to an examination of changes in what I am calling a segmentary political order that must be made to meet the more serious criticisms against the formulation, I should say that I believe that a reconciliation of the views of Kulke and Chattopadhyaya with my own are possible as well as promising, and I do not mean by the usual compromise method of observing that we three are studying different places at somewhat different times, hence variations are to be expected. Of course, they are, but it is at the level of theory that I believe that a convergence of views is both promising and likely, since I believe that each of us is actually dealing with evolving structures within a single broad form and in our own ways we are privileging certain elements and neglecting others."¹¹⁰

Concluding Remarks: Ritual Sovereignty and/or Ritual Policy?

Let me now try to draw some tentative conclusion from the historiographic reflections on Geertz's and Stein's concepts of rituals and the state in pre-colonial Bali and India. The evaluation of their concepts and in particular those of their critics, as well as Stein's modifications, helped greatly in clearing up a (or most likely the) most relevant question for our panel, the distinction between rituals and actual political control. Stein initially regarded this distinction as fundamental, but withdrew it, being "now convinced that lordship for Hindus always and necessarily combined ritual and political authority." Geertz did not postulate this distinction explicitly, but by depriving royal rituals of possible political implications even at the centre, he went implicitly even a step further.¹¹¹ For our considerations it is important that Schulte Nordholt points out, "perhaps it is because of the way Geertz

109 Schnepel 2002: 43.

110 Stein 1995 [1989]: 145f.

111 In the Comments of several scholars, added to Hauser-Schäublin's article, Geertz writes: "The argument of *Negara* was and is not that politics and religion were separated realms but that they were deeply interfused. The declaration of authority edicts, rituals, titles, inscriptions, processions, paraphernalia, dance dramas, and the rest cannot be taken as descriptive of institutional relationships." (Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 171) I don't see any reason not to agree with this statement. But Geertz fails to integrate these "declarations of authority" into his concept of the Balinese theatre state.

draws distinctions between 'power' and 'pomp', between 'politics' and 'religion' [...] that the idea of the theatre state was able to emerge" a distinction which he regards "as largely a false one."¹¹² If Geertz's concept of a theatre state has some validity at all, it is the situation when the political authority of "indigenous" rulers was reduced to a (socially and culturally still influential) ritual authority under the colonial regime, whether in Bali under the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or in India under the British East India Company.¹¹³

These findings are helpful for the clarification of the other major problem, the above mentioned "issue at stake". Whatever one may derive from these historiographic considerations, one can safely infer that royal rituals were not only cultural-ideological performances but also a genuine means of an intended ritual policy to legitimise and enhance political control and power. We are strengthened in and entitled to this conclusion not only *because* of Stein's modification of his concept, but even *despite* Geertz's distinction between the "pomp and politics" of his imagined depoliticised theatre state.

These results of our debate reveal a new side of Stein's hitherto strongly criticised concept of ritual sovereignty. For his concept of the segmentary state, based on Southall's segmentary model, ritual sovereignty is essential as it "converted a congeries of local political systems into a segmentary state"¹¹⁴ and "the Chola state existed as a state *only* as the hundreds of the *nādus* of its realm recognized the overlordship, the ritual sovereignty, of Chola kings".¹¹⁵ Ritual sovereignty was thus not only indispensable for Stein's model, its importance was also acknowledged as an essential means for the cohesion of the vast Chola state which is certainly not completely wrong. The reason why his concept was rightly exposed to criticism was its inherent negative connotation, that for the Cholas ritual sovereignty was allegedly the *only* means of retaining their sovereignty in the intermediate and peripheral zones which were supposedly controlled politically only by local leaders, a depiction of the Chola state which caused Chattopadhyaya's comment that "it is a fine study of the state *sans* politics."¹¹⁶ Stein's early perception of ritual sovereignty is not surprising as it was conceived when he was still under the strong influence of Southall's African model which he applied as a whole to medieval South India. But since Stein rejected Southall's proposition that the spheres of ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide as he was "now convinced that in India the proposition is incorrect", we are entitled to define our own concept

112 Schulte Nordholt 1981: 476.

113 Cohn 1987.

114 Stein 1977: 16.

115 Stein 1985a: 394. my emphasis.

116 Stein 1984: 214.

of ritual sovereignty not any longer against Stein, but also by referring to the rich material offered in Stein's writing on the Cholas and Vijayanagara.

Ritual sovereignty doubtless existed in various forms and polities and has accordingly to be defined in detail for different regions and, in particular, different stages of state formation from the rise of tribal chiefdoms to early kingdoms and, finally, to imperial kingdoms.¹¹⁷ In this regard a look at Bourdieu's metaphor of economic and symbolic capital and their "interconvertibility" may be worth considering while studying the changing role of rituals at these three different stages of state formation. In pre-colonial India at least one observation seems to be appropriate in all these cases. Ritual sovereignty was not a mere substitute for political sovereignty. It was the result and expression of an intended ritual policy which was an additional but essential means to legitimise and thus to enhance not only "actual political control", but in most cases also actual economic exploitation. In the princely states of colonial India, when its rulers were deprived of their political power, their ritual policy degenerated and in most cases aimed primarily at validation and enhancement of their contested social status among their princely colleagues on the regional and imperial level. Locally, however, ritual policy became increasingly a means to "legitimise" economic exploitation,¹¹⁸ e.g. for the construction of their new vast royal palace complexes.

117 "The shift from early kingdom to imperial kingdom/regional state was accompanied by a change in the ideological domain. The construction of the Jagannatha temple and the emergence of Jagannatha as tutelary deity of the Eastern Gangas demonstrate this. The political advantages accruing from these developments are obvious" (Sahu 2003: 21). See also Berkemer & Frenz 2003; Gutschow 2003; Inden 1987; Kulke 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1992, 1995c, 2006; Mallebrein (in press); Panda 1990; Schnepel 2003; Tanabe 2003; Teuscher 2002; Tripathi (in press); Veluthat 1982.

118 Pati (in press).

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