Hickford's exhaustive research, intellectual suppleness, and sly preaching merit respect. But who will read this book? Its virtues might have reached a wider readership after skillful editing. Because of syntactic arabesques curling to the horizon, this book captures the truth in the adage that less can be more. A strong editorial hand could have halved it without damage. A clever author with worthwhile ideas can be forgiven for taking readership for granted, but not a venerable publisher.

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Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. Pps. 198. $45.00 (ISBN 978-0-6740-6639-7).
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In colonial India, civil court cases often played a vital role in defining the boundaries of religious identity. In an effort to manage India's diverse population, the British chose to apply different family laws to different religious "communities." In the process, they invented the very categories they applied to litigants, who often experienced far more porous social relationships in their daily lives.

This volume concerns the identity of the Khojas of Mumbai, a community of merchants and traders who had come under the religious authority of the "Aga Khan." During the 1820s, that title belonged to Hasan Ali Shah, a Persian governor who had risen to prominence by assisting the British in their designs against Persia's Qajar dynasty. Teena Purohit contends that prior to a landmark 1866 court case in which the Khojas contested the authority of Aga Khan, they had no fixed religious identity. It was in resolving the dispute between the two parties that the colonial judge, Joseph Arnould, defined the Khojas as Ismaili Shia Muslims and the Aga Khan as their legitimate leader. Prior to this, Khoja religiosity had been shaped by the Satpanth tradition, which incorporated both Hindu and Qur'anic concepts into its theology.

In the decades leading to the 1866 dispute, elite members of the Khoja community had come to resent the large payments their community had to make to the Aga Khan as tribute. They published articles that portrayed the Aga Khan as a corrupt leader who falsely claimed divine status for material gain (29–30). In their lawsuit, they argued that Khoja property belonged to members of their caste and that the Aga Khan did not belong

to it. In order to advance their case, the plaintiffs had to establish sharp differences between their beliefs and those held by the Aga Khan. They essentially portrayed themselves as belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam, and the Aga Khan as a Persian Shia. The lawyers for the plaintiffs drew evidence from a range of religious texts and Orientalist writings, which they either misunderstood or misapplied to the Khojas.

A text known as the *Dasavatar* played an important role for both sides of the case. That text concerns the ten incarnations of Vishnu, with the first nine belonging to Hindu Vaishnava tradition, and the tenth more recognizably Shia Islamic. The plaintiffs undermined their own case by erroneously grouping the *Dasavatar* with other Persian texts. The defense, however, used the text to construct a narrative about the Khojas, which eventually won the day. The transition from the ninth to the tenth *avatar* (or incarnation) signified the conversion of the Khojas from Hinduism to the Shia Ismaili sect of Islam, a faith held by the Aga Khan himself (as the plaintiffs themselves had contended). In his landmark decision, Arnould expounded on the history of the sectarian divisions within Islam and the practice of Ismailis of concealing their identity (*taqiyya*) by accommodating to their surroundings (hence the first nine *avatars*) until the arrival of their final imam.

Purohit uses the decision of the Aga Khan case to make two larger claims. The first of these concerns an Orientalist bias pervading the judgment that privileges an Arab-centered interpretation of Islam. Khoja beliefs and practices, she contends, were not deviations from an Arabic-centered orthodoxy, but illustrated Islam's heterogeneity and dialogue with Sanskritic ideas and practices. Her discussion of *ginan* literature forms the basis of her argument that Hindu devotional (namely, Vaishnava) motifs pervaded the *Dasavatar*. Hence, there was no radical rupture between the ninth and tenth avatars to warrant the conversion narrative that colonial officials were all too eager to embrace.

The second claim is that the judgment instituted, in the case of the Khojas, an "identitarian" notion of religion, derived from Christian distinctions between church and sect. This notion had not previously belonged to Khoja self-understanding. Here again, a text-based argument that draws from messianic imagery in the Satpanthi "Enthronement Hymn" illustrates the essentially non-identitarian space that the Khojas had occupied before colonial courts defined them as a sect of Shia Islam.

To address these larger concerns, the book draws more from religious texts than from a rich supply of case law or ethnography about the Khojas. The book is framed as a critique of Orientalism; but by anchoring its argument so heavily in religious texts, does not the author reinforce the Orientalist view that Indian communities were largely defined by sacred texts (albeit in "non-identitarian" ways)? Arnould's decision may indeed have defined Khoja identity in an unduly sectarian manner. A deeper time perspective on

the evolution of Khoja identity and detailed discussion of the decision itself would have brought its impact into sharper relief.

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Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. 526. $35.00 (ISBN 978-0-674-04555-2).
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Once upon a time (half a century ago), the leading professional association of American historians was called the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA). Its journal, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* was subtitled, modestly, "a journal of American history." In 1965, the MVHA changed its name to the Organization of American Historians (OAH), but the OAH's journal (which became *The Journal of American History*) continues to wear the old association's badge: a steamboat. Old habits die hard.

But old histories do not. In the race for interpretive novelty that constitutes so much of the contemporary field of American history, few spare a thought for what that bygone association of "an" American history with the Mississippi Valley might tell us. And therefore, as the OAH tries to "internationalize" American history, it fails to notice how the name of its former professional self might stand not for a quaint folksy regionalism superseded by a national historical consciousness, but for a profoundly global conception of the continental heartland's economy and its place in the world. That economy, its obsessions and lusts, its demonic cruelties, and above all its manifold materializations—in "sun, water, and soil; animal energy, human labor, and mother wit; grain, flesh, and cotton; pain, hunger, and fatigue; blood, milk, semen, and shit" (9)—is Walter Johnson's subject. It is an economy sedimented so deep in the muck of the river that defines it that Johnson's remarkable labor of retrieval at first seems hopeless, akin to the Sisyphean task of a dredge: each bucket of filth brings to the surface the microscopic remnants of a thousand lives; each is but a fraction of what must be disgorged, coughed up, and written down. Simultaneously, it is sedimented in the ledgers of thousands of planters and merchants, factors and bankers, spread across two continents; column upon column of abstracted inky scratches. It is Johnson's genius to marry the muck to the scratch, and from that infectious combination to conjure the economic culture of the cotton kingdom, in all its viscous viciousness, *and* the precise trigonometry of its location in nineteenth century capitalism's world-wide