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Abstracts

State, feminists, and Islamists—the debate over stipulations in marriage contracts in Egypt

RON SHAHAM

In this article I reconstruct the public debate which took place in Egypt during 1995 over a proposal for a new standard marriage contract. The proposed marriage contract, promoted by a group of feminists, was to include stipulations, most of which supported the interests of the wife, such as her right to study, to work, and to function in the public sphere, and her right to a better status within the marriage bond. In studying the obstacles that the proposal faced, I analyse the interests of the groups that were involved in the debate: on the one hand, a secular-rationalistic group, supported by the state along with a large segment of the educated élite and, on the other, a traditional-religious group. Since this proposal is one event in a long-term battle over Egypt's cultural orientation, this essay seeks to shed light on the dynamics of legal reform in Egypt in particular and in Middle Eastern countries in general.

Ritual and classification: a study of the Booran Oromo terminal sacred grade rites of passage

ANEESA KASSAM

This essay provides a detailed description and analysis of the terminal sacred grade (*gadaammojiti*) rites of passage which were performed by one of the Booran Oromo communities in northern Kenya in 1995. It examines the rites within the context of the Oromo ritual system as a whole. It suggests that these rites belong to a cycle within a cycle of time and form the social counterpart of the *gadaa* political process. The study contributes ethnographic evidence for Bourdieu's (1977) assertion that rituals, like other social practices, are the product of underlying generative principles that classify all phenomena in a particular culture.

Pottery in the written sources of the Ayyubid-Mamluk period (c. 567–923/1171–1517)

MARCUS MILWRIGHT

The aim of this article is to reconstruct a picture of the manufacture, trade and consumption of pottery in the Ayyubid-Mamluk period (c. 1171–1517) through analysis of contemporary written sources. Whilst the authors of the period are not principally concerned with the discussion of material culture, the written record does provide some insights into the functions performed by media such as ceramics in the Islamic Levant. It is argued that through the identification of the practical and ceremonial utilities of objects we can come to a fuller understanding of the ways in which the products of different crafts were perceived and valued in Ayyubid-Mamluk society.

Old wives' tales in *Therīgāthā*: a review article

J. C. WRIGHT

The Pali *Therīgāthā* are portrayed by their commentator Dhammapāla as the authentic songs of early Buddhist nuns, or of their entourage: he is at pains to explain away the evident narrative (or otherwise literary) form of at least a large proportion of the text. A new revised edition and first translation of Dhammapāla's commentary, published under Pali Text Society auspices, will facilitate study of the *Therīgāthā* text. Since, however, they studiously ignore the critical work of the Society's own past editors, in favour of the relentlessly 'normalized' Burmese edition, it is still those critical editions that best reveal the appealing poetry that lies hidden in *Therīgāthā*, albeit fragmented in the compilation and textually garbled as a result of the commentator's misguided

search for historicity. Restoration based on textual criticism, rather than on the commentary, shows how these vernacular poems can be related to later Vedic, epic and Pali literature, and their importance for the subsequent development of classical prosody and the rhetorical figures.

The supplement to Ludwig Alsdorf's *Kleine Schriften*: a review article

J. C. WRIGHT

The recent reprinting of, inter alia, Alsdorf's monograph on the manifestations of nascent vegetarianism in *Mahābhārata* and the law books (1962), and of three of his last articles (1974–77) that deal with aspects of the *Chavaka* and *Bhūridatta* Jātakas and the Jain *Maṇipaticarita*, draws attention to many facets of post-Vedic anticlericalism that had important consequences even for orthodox classical Indian culture. It can be shown that one of Maṇipati's tales, as the nucleus of the 'Clay Cart' story, provides an explanation for the basic bilingualism of drama Prakrit; the *Chavaka* parish upbraids one who is a Vidūṣaka in all but name; and *Bhūridatta* shows how greatly 'popular' Indian culture was indebted to orthodoxy, rather than (as Alsdorf thought) to some primitive 'Volksglauben'. His case for the antiquity of the *Vasiṣṭha* Dharmaśāstra; and his lone sponsorship of *aghnya* as the sacrificial animal that is 'unkillable', can be substantiated: a case for understanding *ahī*, Avestan *azī*, as 'heifer' emerges. Alsdorf's derivation of Pali *ū-* from *upa-* calls for more decisive refutation.