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Ian Caldwell

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Review Article

The Myth of the Exemplary Centre: Shelly Errington's *Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm*

IAN CALDWELL
National University of Singapore

Meaning and Power is an attempt to reconstruct the conceptual and administrative structure of a pre-colonial kingdom in South Sulawesi. It is based on insiders' accounts of the ideas and beliefs which formed the basis of personal loyalties in the former *akkarungeng* of Luwu, and which gave shape to local political experience. Traditionally thought of as the oldest of the South Sulawesi kingdoms, Luwu was located at the head of the Gulf of Bone, with its capital at Ware', close to modern-day Palopo. Once the most powerful kingdom in South Sulawesi, its sphere of influence stretched along the coast as far west as Makasar. It was succeeded in the 16th century by the east coast kingdom of Bone, then in the process of expansion under its aggressive and ambitious third ruler, Kerrampelua'. By the late 19th century, Luwu had sunk to a politically insignificant economic backwater, though it was still regarded with respect by its neighbours because of the antiquity of its ruling lineage. In 1906, the Dutch took direct control of the kingdom and deposed its ruler. In the 1930s, a descendant of the last ruler was restored to a faded grandeur at Palopo by the Dutch in an attempt to rule South Sulawesi through more traditional offices.

The book's central theme is "the meaning of the 'center' or 'navel' in the shape of political life and the way that the 'person' is construed and socially constituted in Luwu" (p. 3). It is an attempt to reconcile the study of local epistemologies with the "alleged universals" of modern political studies, "— the nature of 'power', for instance, or the political actor as calculating maximizer" (p. 5).

These ambitious objectives serve to unite a text divided into three sections or parts, an introduction, eight chapters, a "comment", three conclusions, and an epilogue. In the introduction, the author discusses the problems of studying a non-Western political system and sets out her theoretical position. Part One, "A geography of signs", tells how Luwurese conceptions of person, house and polity rest on the notion of navels (Indonesian *pusat*, Bugis *posi'*), or centres, an important concept in local metaphysics. In Part Two, "Centrifugal tendencies", the indigenous notion of *siri'* (Bugis "shame, self-respect") is used to analyze competition between people of similar social standing, "a competition whose centrifugal consequences continually disturbed and disturb the geometry of social order" (p. 139). This introduces a dynamic quality to the rather static "centeredness" of Part One. In Part Three, "Centripetal structures", the author pursues the idea of "white blood" (a notion roughly comparable to the aristocratic English notion of "blue blood") to examine the ways in which status was exhibited and perpetuated in a hierarchically competitive society. From Chapter Three onwards, these themes form the backdrop to a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings and administrative structures of the pre-colonial kingdom of Luwu.

Meaning and Power is of interest not only to anthropologists, but also to historians of pre-colonial South-East Asia. Historians studying non-European societies have

gained many useful insights from the work of social anthropologists. Gullick's *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, Milner's *Kerajaan*, Wheatley's *Nāgara and Commandery*, and Drakard's *A Malay Frontier* are just a few of the historical studies published on South-East Asia which draw profitably on anthropological research. At the same time, well-regarded ethnographic studies, such as Fox's *Harvest of the Palm* and Tambiah's *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*,[1] demonstrate the usefulness of historical records, both written and oral, for the understanding of present-day societies. Anthropology and history are moving closer together, and competence in one discipline increasingly requires a "reading knowledge" of the other.

A recent phenomenon is the appearance of studies by anthropologists which seek to illuminate the past as well as the present. A well-known example is Geertz's *Negara*,[2] which attempts to reconstruct the pre-colonial social and political organization of Bali in the late 19th century. This book appears to have inspired the writing of *Meaning and Power*, to judge by its similar objective of illuminating the political structures of pre-colonial Luwu, coupled with the author's generous admission of her intellectual debt to Clifford Geertz (p. x). The central theme of *Negara* is what Geertz terms the "myth of the exemplary center". This is the notion that political authority in pre-colonial Indonesian states rested less on the ability to wage war than on the ability to stage large and impressive ceremonies. Geertz writes of Bali:

> 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 ... was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power.

He continues:

> Behind this, to us, strangely reversed relationship between substance and the trappings of rule lies a general conception of the nature and basis of sovereignty that, merely for simplicity, we may call the doctrine of the exemplary center. This is the theory that the court-and-capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order — "an image of ... the universe on a smaller scale" — and the material embodiment of political order. It is not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state, it *is* the state.[3]

The idea of the exemplary centre — the notion that political authority existed to serve religion and ritual, not the reverse — runs throughout *Meaning and Power* (references are too many to cite: see Index, "centers"). According to the author, Luwu belongs to a cultural region lying between Luzon, Bali, the Moluccas and the Malay Peninsula, a region which she terms the "Centerist Archipelago" (pp. 207-216). This region is contrasted with Eastern Indonesia (Seram, Ambon and the Lesser Sunda Islands), where the notion of "duality" is more important than that of "center". It is

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[1]Gullick, J.M., *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (London: Athlone Press, 1958); Milner, A.C., *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982); Wheatley, P., *Nāgara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983); Drakard, J., *A Malay Frontier: Unity and Duality in a Sumatran Kingdom* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1990); Fox, J.J., *Harvest of the Palm: Ecological Change in Eastern Indonesia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press); Tambiah, S.J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[2]Geertz, C., *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[3]*Negara*, p. 13.

the underlying ideas, not just the day-to-day administrative structures, of pre-colonial Luwu which the author wishes to elucidate. This bold and imaginative approach is to be commended. Much can be learnt about Indonesia's pre-colonial past from an anthropological perspective, provided that research is guided by the established methods of testing and assembling evidence developed in historical research.

Meaning and Power, unfortunately, does not follow these methods. As a result, it has three serious weaknesses. These weaknesses call into question both the validity of the author's discussion of indigenous concepts of "person", "place" and "potency", elucidated from conversations with informants, and the usefulness of these concepts as sources of understanding of Luwu's pre-colonial political hierarchy. The weaknesses are: (1) the limited sources on which conclusions are based, (2) the mistaken assumption that Luwu was an Indianized state, and (3) the inapplicability of the "mandala" model of political organization by which the author interprets her data. Let us consider these points in turn.

A Question of Sources

The author's informants are for the most part the descendants and relatives of the former ruling family of Luwu, one of whom was for several years the prime minister (Opu Pa'Bicara) of the Dutch-restored "kingdom" of the 1930s. The late Opu Pa'Bicara is described as "a well-known personage among scholars from Indonesia, Europe, America, and Australia" (p. 22) and his quiet intelligence shines forth from his conversations with the author. Another informant is Andi Anthon, a well-known interpreter of Bugis culture, who has worked with other anthropologists. (Andi is a noble Bugis title.) It is evident that the author's informants are knowledgeable and articulate. But in order to reconstruct a "traditional polity" based on local concepts of hierarchy and authority, one would expect the author to have interviewed people from various levels of society, in order to provide a balanced view of the ideas and loyalties which she is elucidating. Yet she admits on page 22 that: "It will be clear that the view of the culture that I acquired was largely a view from the top, *and the vast majority of those in the middle and on the bottom that I worked with were very respectful of the old order of things*" [my italics]. Furthermore, on the following page we are told that "in the circles in which I moved, villagers looked to a remembered past rather than an imagined future for patterns of how to live".

This easy dismissal of the possibility of alternative interpretations of power and its relation to local epistemologies, is far from convincing. The last 40 years of Luwu's history suggests that non-elite Luwurese, who made up more than 90 per cent of Luwu's population, were capable of radically different visions of self and society. Between 1950 and 1965, South Sulawesi was racked by rebellion, in which thousands died and thousands more fled to the cities or were forcibly relocated in the countryside by the rebels. Much of the fighting took place in Luwu. The rebellion, which increasingly took on an Islamic identity, resulted in a sharp decline in traditional cultural practices and a greater commitment to Islam. The author is aware of the impact that the rebellion had on Luwu's society, for she writes on page 19: "The rural areas of Luwu near the site of my fieldwork were all but abandoned.... Schooling and agriculture virtually stopped, and people sent their children to Ujung Pandang to live with relatives or other protectors."

From 1966 onwards, Luwu has been South Sulawesi's frontier region. The opening of the world's largest nickel mine in the early 1970s transformed its economy and administration. Between 1970 and 1980, the population of Luwu doubled as thousands of migrants poured into the area. Yet apart from a few prefatory remarks, the impact that these changes must have had on her noble informants, and on the way in which they viewed the world, is barely considered. These changes must have been painful and profound. In the words of the Opu Pa'Bicara: "The era of akkarungeng and datu is over.... Kesaktian [potency] has disappeared from the world" (p. 304).

One of the weaknesses of indigenous South-East Asian historical sources is that they almost always present an elite view of events. What anthropologists can offer as a useful and often necessary corrective is a "peasant's-eye" view of the South-East Asian world. Did the ordinary Bugis or Makasar explain his lack of political power in the same terms as his leaders, or was there a certain scepticism towards notions of "potency" and "white blood"? (Gullick remarks that in the 19th century west-coast Malay states there was no evidence that this latter attribute was seriously believed in: "It was part of the conventional make-believe used to express the sense of royal dignity."[4]) Just how important was the threat of physical or economic retribution? Who controlled agriculture and trade, and what was the material relationship between leader and follower? What we are offered in *Meaning and Power* is an elite ideology, divorced from its economic and political base.

Regarding the sources, a second criticism is that there are gaps in the basic literature on South Sulawesi in the book's bibliography. Many of these omissions are works by Dutch scholars: among the 166 items mentioned, there is just a single Dutch language entry – a catalogue of manuscripts. (H. Th. Chabot's *Verwantschap, stand en sexe in Zuid-Celebes* [Groningen, 1950], the standard ethnography of lowland Makasar society, is listed in English translation.) Considering the extensive Dutch literature on Sulawesi, which includes a valuable 57-page article on 19th-century Luwu,[5] the author's reference to "the long Dutch tradition of careful work on the area, which contemporary scholars can build upon" (p. x) seems little more than lip service.

Another omission is Susan Millar's outstanding 1981 Cornell Ph.D. thesis[6] (published as *Bugis Weddings; Rituals of Social Location in Modern Indonesia* in 1989 by the University of California). Millar's study offers valuable insights into the relationship between status and political power which help explicate (and in turn are confirmed by) the indigenous historical records of South Sulawesi. To what extent does the present study support Millar's interpretation of this relationship? We are never told. The author's failure to address such a closely-related study (one must presume that she has read it) is very strange.

Historical sources, in which South Sulawesi is remarkably rich, are also ignored, owing to the author's self-confessed inability to read Bugis (p. 24). But several important Bugis histories are available in Dutch and Indonesian translation. The image of South Sulawesi that they portray is of aggressive, warring kingdoms intent upon the conquest and dominion of territory; a different picture indeed from *Meaning and*

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[4]*Indigenous Political Systems*, p. 45.

[5]Braam Morris, D.F. van, "Het landschap Loewoe" (*Tijdschrift van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* XXXII (1889): 497–530).

[6]Millar, Susan Bolyard, "Bugis Society: Given by the Wedding Guest" (Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1981).

Power's mystical, navel-gazing polity, with its benign indifference to "real" power, namely the physical control of people and places. Even a cursory glance at Leonard Andaya's study of the 17th-century Bugis warlord Arung Palakka,[7] with its chronicling of the interminable warfare, rapine and murder which characterized political life, would suggest that power was based less on concepts of potency and "centeredness" than the ever-present threat of violence.

The author's inability to read historical sources does not stop her, however, from commenting erroneously on them. She has examined one modern genealogy and mistakenly interprets its temporal linearity as an imported Western rationalization (p. 225). We are told on page 125 that Bugis historical writings "ignore political processes", when in fact they record them in some detail. Indigenous Bugis genealogies and chronicles, which date back to the early 15th century, and which have the advantage of having been written by the ruling elite for their own edification, exhibit a remarkably modern historical consciousness and give reasons for their own creation. Nevertheless, they are dismissed unread, with the statement that "the larger motivation for these records was not primarily a historicizing impulse", despite the fact that "the events recounted [in these sources] 'really happened' or are plausible in a Western epistemology" (pp. 229–30). This statement is as patronizing as it is false. The Chronicle of Goa, for instance, states that it was written so that the great rulers of the past would not be forgotten by their descendants. It voices the fear that should the past be forgotten, future generations might have too great an opinion of themselves, while strangers may think the Makasar people of little consequence.[8]

Was Luwu Indianized?

Throughout the book, Luwu is referred to as an Indic state. We are told that "The ideas that informed the conduct of politics in these [Bugis and Makasar] societies – the search to accumulate potency drawn from formless cosmic energy, the reverence for ancestral legacies in the form of state regalia, the sacredness of the ruler, the mandala pattern in state organization – clearly link them to the historical so-called 'Indic States' of Bali, Java, and the Malay peninsula" (p. 14). The Indianization of Luwu is the self-evident truth on which *Meaning and Power*'s reconstructed polity rests: all of the above ideas, with the possible exception of the second, are Indian in origin.[9] Yet historians ascribe only a slight degree of Indian influence in the kingdoms of South Sulawesi.[10] The author offers no evidence for the Indianization of Luwu, neither does she exhibit any awareness that historians have argued against it. Let us look briefly at the evidence.

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[7]Andaya, L.Y., *The Heritage of Arung Palakka: A History of South Sulawesi (Celebes) in the Seventeenth Century* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1981).

[8]Wolhoff, G.J. and Abdurrahim (eds.), *Sedjarah Goa* (Ujung Pandang: Yayasan Sulawesi Selatan dan Tenggara, n.d.), p. 9.

[9]Stutley, M. & J., *A Dictionary of Hinduism: Its Mythology, Folklore and Development 1500 B.C.–A.D. 1500* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 260; Wolters, O.W., *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), Chapter II.

[10]See, for example, Macknight, C.C., "The Emergence of Civilization in South Celebes and Elsewhere", in Reid, A. and L. Castles (eds.), *Pre-Colonial State Systems of Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1975) and Zainal Abidin, *Persepsi Orang Bugis, Makasar Tentang Hukum, Negara dan Dunia Lain* (Bandung: Penerbit Alumni, 1983), p. 209.

Coedès defined Indianization as the expansion of an organized culture founded upon an Indian conception of royalty characterized by Hindu or Buddhist cults, the mythology of the Purānas, the observance of Indian law texts and the use of the Sanskrit language. The transmission of the first three features was by means of the last: "It is for this reason that we sometimes speak of 'Sanskritization' instead of 'Indianization'."[11]

None of these features can be shown to have been present in South Sulawesi. Central to Indian conceptions of royalty was the idea of the *cakravartin*, the "universal ruler". "The *cakravartin*'s dominions are often referred to as 'the whole earth', i.e., stretching from sea to sea, like those of the emperor Asoka."[12] In the words of the present author: "In contests between two peers in these centrist societies, everything is at stake; one emerges victorious, the other utterly vanquished" (p. 74). Yet the historical records of South Sulawesi show nothing of the sort. Kingdoms were defeated in war, yet their territorial integrity, barring perhaps some minor adjustment, was respected, and it was customary to retain the vanquished ruler or another member of the local royal family as vassal lord.[13] In short, we do not find the slightest hint of a political philosophy based on an "idea of social and cosmic unity, and of law and order, of a 'fundamental unity [that] transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners and sect'".[14]

There is no evidence of a knowledge at any time in the past of the Sanskrit language. The number of Sanskrit loans in Bugis is small by comparison with Malay and Javanese and acquired mostly through contact with the former language.[15] The Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata and other great works of Indic literature were unknown in pre-colonial South Sulawesi. There are no vernacular-language versions of Indian literary and philosophical works: Bugis literature is either indigenous, or of Islamic inspiration. No evidence of an Indic mythology can be found in Bugis genealogies and histories. Ruling families instead trace their origins to *tomanurung* (heavenly descended beings) in accordance with the widespread Austronesian myth of origin.[16] Nor is the Indian literary style, with its emphasis on myths, legends and symbols, reflected in the chronicles and historical writings of South Sulawesi.[17] Lastly, there is no evidence of Indic laws in South Sulawesi, nor any evidence of any knowledge of such laws. Perhaps the most convincing argument for the slightness of Indianization is that writing, a prerequisite for the spread and dissemination of Indic ideas, does not appear to have developed in South Sulawesi until around 1400, at least one hundred years after the emergence of the first large segmentary states.[18]

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[11]Coedès, G., *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), pp. 15–16.

[12]Stutley, *Dictionary*, p. 58.

[13]Andaya, *Heritage*, p. 43.

[14]Stutley, *Dictionary*, p. 58.

[15]Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (Nagpur: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1952), pp. 38–45.

[16]Ras, J.J., *Hikayat Bandjar: A Study in Malay Historiography* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1968), Chapter IV.

[17]Noorduyn, J., "Origins of South Sulawesi Historical Writing", in Soedjatmoko *et al.* (eds.), *An Introduction to Indonesian Historical Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 137–38.

[18]Caldwell, I.A., "Power, State and Society in Pre-Islamic South Sulawesi", in Acciaioli, G. and C. van Dijk (eds.), *Authority and Leadership in South Sulawesi* (Leiden: Foris, forthcoming).

The conclusion must be that South Sulawesi was never Indianized, in any real sense of the word. Sulawesi lay at the fringe of Indian influence, and exhibits little more than the "merest trace of that enriching Indian tradition so familiar elsewhere in Southeast Asia".[19] The organization and administration of pre-colonial Luwu must, therefore, have rested not on Indic, but on indigenous, "Austronesian" categories of social and political thought. It is thus not to ancient India, but to the cultural complex represented by the West-Austronesian-speaking societies, from which South Sulawesi language groups are believed to have descended,[20] to which we must look for indigenous categories of thought. After 1600, this cultural complex was modified by Islam (the state religion of Luwu for almost 400 years!), an influence which is hardly mentioned in the present book.

The Inapplicability of the "Mandala" Model of Political Power

Having mistakenly assumed Luwu to be an Indic (and not an Austronesian-Islamic) state, the author proceeds to describe its political structure and dynamics using the familiar, Indian-derived "maṇḍala model", popularized by Anderson in his article, "The idea of power in Javanese culture".[21] In this article, Anderson likened the traditional Javanese polity to "a cone of light cast downwards by a reflector lamp ... the gradual, even diminution of the radiance of the lamp with increasing distance from the bulb is an exact metaphor for the Javanese conception not only of the structure of the state but also of center-periphery relationships and of territorial sovereignty".[22] This imaginative and stimulating article was intended as a "preliminary step towards a fuller investigation of the interrelationships between culture and social action in Indonesia"[23] but instead has tended to become the new orthodoxy. Among its more questionable claims is that Indicized kingdoms had no borders. For the present author, this "illuminating and now classic explication of traditional Javanese political thought" (p. 35) can be accepted as paradigmatic: "It is by now fairly well accepted in the study of Southeast Asian history that political centres were more concerned with control of people than of territory. Territorial boundaries, especially, were a matter of some indifference" (p. 108).

This familiar claim – that Indonesian states were defined by their centres, not their boundaries – has considerable validity in the coastal, Malay-speaking Islamic sultanates of the western Indonesian archipelago, where a balance between the demands of trade and defence was facilitated by several thousand miles of coastline, with hundreds of river estuaries on which to locate a capital. But agriculture, not trade, was the economic basis of most of the inland kingdoms of Indonesia. Investment in land, in the form of irrigated, terraced ricefields, could clearly not be written off as lightly as could a coastal capital, with its bamboo and wood houses and boat-dwelling population. It is not difficult to see in the historical record of South Sulawesi well-defined notions of territory which are difficult to balance with the idea of the mandala state.

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[19]Macknight, "Emergence", p. 129.

[20]Bellwood, P., *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1985), p. 109.

[21]Anderson, B.R.O'G., "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture", in Holt, C. (ed.), *Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

[22]Anderson, "Power", p. 22.

[23]Anderson, "Power", p. 2.

One such notion of territory is the existence (*pace* Anderson) of political borders. The present book's claim that the borders of Luwu were "a matter of some indifference" rests largely on an anecdote attributed to the Dutch scholar Korn, cited in Geertz's *Negara*.[24] Following their takeover of South Sulawesi early this century, the Dutch wished, for administrative reasons, to determine the boundary between two "petty princedoms". They called in the princes concerned and asked them where the borders of their kingdoms lay.

Both agreed that the border of princedom A lay at the furthest point from which a man could still see the swamps, *and [the] border of princedom B* lay at the furthest point from which a man could see the sea. Had they, then, never fought over the land between, from which one could see neither swamp nor sea? "Mijnheer," one of the old princes replied, "we had much better reasons to fight with one another than these shabby hills" [my italics] (pp. 108–109).

Ironically, it is clear from this anecdote that neither prince was uncertain about the borders of his or his neighbour's kingdom. The author's (and Geertz's) confusion stems from the fact that there was evidently a tacitly agreed no-man's land of uncultivatable swamp between the two kingdoms (similar to the desert strips of no-man's land between the modern borders of Iran and Pakistan, or Iraq and Jordan). Similar boundaries can be found for other kingdoms in South Sulawesi. Perhaps the best example is that of Ajattappareng, a coalition of five principalities lying on the fertile lowlands north of the central lakes. Each of these principalities – Sidenreng, Rappang, Sawitto, Suppa' and Alitta – was located on a large plain, separated from the others by low hills or by stretches of water. As in Korn's "petty principalities", territorial boundaries extended at least to the limits of fertile, agricultural land.

Clear evidence for this is found in the so-called vassal lists of the kingdoms of South Sulawesi. Bugis and Makasar kingdoms were segmentary states composed of chiefdoms (often numbering more than a dozen), each ruled by an *arung* (chief). These chiefdoms were in turn made up of villages, each under the authority of a headman. Detailed lists of these chiefdoms and their component villages have come down to us in Bugis historical writings.[25] That of Sidenreng, the most important of the five Ajattappareng principalities, is listed on page 37 in Matthes' catalogue of Bugis and Makasar manuscripts.[26] This list is, in effect, a map of the Sidenreng's pre-colonial political administration. Like other lists, it is divided into a list of chiefdoms, followed by their component villages. It reflects a territorial notion of political authority based on these chiefdoms, their villages and associated lands.

Bugis histories show clearly that territory in the agricultural kingdoms was not "irrelevant", but the reason for many a bloody campaign for control, not of swamps, but of the rich, rice-bearing alluvial plains which generated much of the kingdoms' wealth. Macknight has shown how in the 15th century, the kingdom of Bone expanded from a small cluster of allied settlements to encompass the whole of the alluvial plain now associated with the name. The early rulers of Bone did not set out to attract

[24]Geertz, *Negara*, p. 24.

[25]Caldwell, "Power".

[26]Matthes, B.F., *Kort verslag aangaande alle mij in Europa bekende Makassaarsche en Boeginesche handschriften vooral die van het Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, 1875).

followers through elaborate ritual (the "exemplary center" model), but by military conquest of territory.[27]

The author's failure to grasp the importance of territoriality and the existence of borders stems in part from her lack of knowledge of Luwu's political geography. "The main regions in Luwu", we are told, "were Bua', Ponrang and Baebunta. Below these were lesser areas or regions, including areas in what are now Tana Toraja, Central Sulawesi, and even on the other side of the Gulf of Bone" (p. 125). This is patently wrong. Bua' and Ponrang were small, strategically unimportant chiefdoms located on the coast south of Palopo. Baebunta was a chiefdom near Masamba which controlled the pass leading from Sa'bang into the Rongkong valley. Much of Baebunta's wealth derived from trade passing along this route between the coast and the fertile Seko valley, deep in the mountainous interior of central Sulawesi. Local people claim that Baebunta once rivalled Luwu, of which it later became part.[28] What *Meaning and Power* describes as the "main regions" of Luwu are in fact simply the first three names from the 15th-century tributary list of Luwu.[29] The remaining seventeen, which the author's informants apparently cannot recall, presumably constitute the "lesser regions"! Braam Morris names sixteen chiefdoms (*landschap*) which, together with Palopo, constituted the kingdom of Luwu in the late 19th century.[30]

An illuminating example of the ease with which the author handles evidence contrary to her exemplary centre model can be seen in her discussion of the *arajang* or regalia of Luwu. "Although I was aware before I went to Luwu of the importance of regalia ... what had not been clear to me was that some 'royal' arajang were located in the regions outside the centre" (p. 124). This awkward fact – that regalia are not confined to the centre, but scattered at various points across the landscape – flatly contradicts *Meaning and Power*'s "deeply centerist" model. One cannot help, therefore, but admire the author's ingenuity in interpreting the regional arajang as "'placeholders' for the titles and responsibilities the ruler could bestow", a move which enables her at the same time to offer a model of smaller regional centres, created (and presumably controlled) by the centre. These "placeholders", it is claimed, were issued by the central ruler to political appointees. Some were issued to "inner officiants" belonging to the central court, such as the author's patron, the Opu Pa'Bicara, while others were issued to the *arung lili'*, the local or regional nobility. These regional pieces "were considered lesser aspects or pieces of Arajang Luwu, the central regalia". We read that the local nobility, "who shared the local navel-residence with the arajang" came and went, but that "the local arajang endured.... Their presence located centers and sub-centers in geographic space, and held the places of which the akkarungeng consisted, providing continuity over time" (pp. 124–29).

The only evidence that the author offers for her "placeholder" theory is the claim by Heine-Geldern that in South Sulawesi it is really the regalia that reign.[31] Heine-Geldern does not offer any evidence for what he terms this "curious conception"

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[27]Macknight, C.C., "The Rise of Agriculture in South Sulawesi Before 1600", *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 17 (1983): 92–116.

[28]I am grateful to Mr. Ian Vail for this information.

[29]MS. NBG 100, Leiden University Library, p. 63.

[30]Braam Morris, "Landschap", p. 499.

[31]Heine-Geldern, R., *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 18, 1956), p. 10.

(it is worth noting that this notion was clearly favourable to the Dutch, who until the 1930s held the regalia of several South Sulawesi kingdoms). But the lists of their constituent chiefdoms (and the lists of the chiefdoms' constituent villages) that have come down to us suggest that each chiefdom was a political unit in its own right, rather than a centrally created administrative office, which is what *Meaning and Power* seems to imply. It seems more likely that the regalia found in these chiefdoms formed part of their own ancient traditions of rulership, rather than that they were seals of office issued by the Datu Luwu, a practice for which we are offered no evidence.

Luwu's own regalia are in fact mentioned in a collection of oral traditions which concern the first four generations of Luwu's ruling family.[32] The opening lines read:

> This sets out the writing concerning the one who descended, Simpurusia. It tells of the things which came down with him from Botillangi' [the upperworld] and of the things which came up with him from Peretiwi [the underworld], and the deeds of all the rulers.

The introduction then lists three items of the regalia which descended with Simpurusia, the legendary founder of Luwu's ruling dynasty (*not* Batara Guru as in some 20th-century genealogies, which conflate two earlier traditions). The second and third pericopes, which can be found in Dutch translation,[33] serve to account for the possession by Luwu's royal family of other magical objects, including a number of percussion instruments used by transvestite ritual specialists (figures 1, 15 and 16 in Matthes's ethnographic atlas).[34] In none of these stories is there any emphasis on the regalia or other magical objects as "foci" of power. Instead, they function as "signs of status"[35] presented to the ruling lineage of Luwu by overlords of the three realms of the pre-Islamic Bugis cosmos: Botillangi' (upperworld), Kawa (earth) and Uriliung (underworld).

Conclusion

The author has set herself a commendable task, and it is unfortunate that the book's conclusions do not live up to its promise. The number of historians working on South Sulawesi can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and a study of this size and scope is potentially of great interest. It brings no pleasure to say that *Meaning and Power* is a disappointing book. Its central weakness is one of method: instead of following a systematic historical procedure (which might be summarized as bibliographic search, collection of data, checking of data against related sources, testing of interpretive models, analysis of data and historical conclusion) the author has allowed her model of an Indicized, mandala state to select as well as to interpret data. Her use of this data is further weakened by her poor knowledge of Luwu's political geography. The result is that *Meaning and Power* sheds little useful light on Luwu's past.

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[32]MS NBG 127, Leiden University Library, pp. 41–45.

[33]Kern, "Boegineesche scheppingsverhalen", in *Feestbundel uitgegeven door het Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen bij gelegenheid van zijn 150 jarig bestaan, 1778–1928* (Weltevreden: Legatum Warneranium, 1929).

[34]Matthes, B.F., *Boegineesch-Hollandsch woordenboek, met Hollandsch-Boegineesche woordenlijst, en verklaring van een tot opheldering bijgevoegden ethnographischen atlas* (Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, 1874).

[35]Cf. Anderson, "Power", pp. 13–19.