edge of Vedic, Epic, Purānic, and Tantric texts, as well as her knowledge of both the general themes and ritual minutiae of religion on the ground in South India (an appendix with maps of sites visited lists nearly a hundred villages). The evidence she accumulates is not just textual and ethnographic but also iconographic. She includes 108 plates, a large number of them stone images of phallic posts with the images of Pōtu Raja and other associated deities carved into them, thus illustrating the theme of the identification of the posts with the local deities. Biardeau discovers that Pōtu Raja and his multi-forms are subordinate to the goddess, that the goddess is almost always a warrior goddess, and that the brahmanical dichotomy between purity and impurity, which manifests in humans as vegetarian and nonvegetarian, is reassigned to goddesses spatially situated within villages, which themselves become multi-forms of the yiṣpa, an axial symbol. Eventually, the central post assumes the yiṣpa’s “triple Vedic function as essential sacrificial instrument, world axis, and substitute for puruṣa” (316), the cosmic man in whose image the world is generated.

These are only some of the riches of this complex and valuable volume. Not many people have the energy, intelligence, and skill to bring such a vision to fruition. We are grateful not just to Biardeau for producing this volume but also to the team of translators and editors who have brought it to the anglophone world.

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HARLAN, LINDSAY. The Goddesses’ Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. xiv+256 pp. $74.00 (cloth); $29.95 (paper).

As ethnographers often find, people encountered during fieldwork can have their own ideas about what topics make for appropriate research. A researcher who allows herself to be instructed can stumble upon unexpectedly fertile projects. This was the case for Lindsay Harlan when she was researching her earlier book, Religion and Rajput Women (1992). The men who received Harlan in the outer spaces of households often cross-examined her about why she wasn’t writing about something they considered important, such as Rajput history and heroism. Harlan amicably allowed her hosts to hold forth on heroes, even as she persevered with the project at hand. The seeds of her next research project were already sprouting, and in The Goddesses’ Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship we are treated to the first of two harvests. While this volume follows the theme of gender in the narratives and songs flowering around ancestral and domestic worship of Rajput heroes, Harlan also promises us a second volume that will examine hero cults rooted in shrines tended by specialists from a cross-section of castes.

Heroes invariably embody key cultural ideals. In the martial context of Rajasthan, it is no surprise that heroes tend to have sacrificed their lives undertaking valorous feats in battle, or to have died otherwise engaged in struggle. Laying down their lives, they transform themselves into offerings to their lineage goddesses and so are granted a place in goddess shrines. Further, they are honored as deified ancestors by succeeding generations of their family. Harlan delineates three main categories of heroes: the jhunjharji and bhoomiyaji, who have lost their lives in combat and often mark village boundaries or land,
and the sagasji heroes who were killed not in battle but by other means. She also traces the connections between heroes and the Bheruji, who is frequently the guardian deity or henchman in Goddess shrines.

A memorable motif in jhunjharji narratives is a hero so passionately engrossed in fighting that even having his head chopped off cannot distract him; only when two women exclaim over a headless torso in combat does he realize what happened, falling dead to the ground. Though headless heroes sometimes fall for other reasons too, the limits of male heroism, it appears, are laid down partly by women. The wives of heroes often undertake their own form of female heroism, sending their husbands off to battle for family honor or fearlessly jumping into flames to become satimatas. Future generations of household women proceed to beckon deified heroes back home, offering worship with the hopes of receiving abundance and fertility.

Harlan examines Rajput heroes through multiple frames and a thorough, always gracious engagement with the work of other scholars of South Asian religious traditions and folklore. As she points out, most work on heroes in South Asia has focused on epics. Her research extends scholarly understanding of heroes beyond epics and toward ancestral hero worship, narratives providing the rationale for this worship, and songs honoring heroes. While sensitive to the charged political context surrounding the worship of Hindu heroes who die in battle with Muslims, Harlan focuses on hero worship primarily as a religious phenomenon indexing gender. Harlan shows how heroes’ features can shift with differently situated gendered perspectives, variously exhibiting ambiguity, contradiction, coexistence, and fusion.

Men’s narratives of heroes, Harlan finds, tend to elaborate on the historical aspects of heroic deeds; men tell tales of their ancestral heroes partly as a privileged claim to status. Women’s narratives tend to be shorter, less rooted in historical detail, and more attentive to the ritual context of hero worship, since women are largely responsible for performing rituals that honor deceased heroic family members. Women also honor heroes through songs sung for weddings and other celebrations in nightlong ratijagas. In these songs, the heroes are depicted as attractive men—indeed, potential lovers—who are welcomed home for good food and other domestic comforts that ideally will result in the lineage’s continuity.

Harlan writes with clarity, respect, and a masterful control of relevant scholarly literature. Her seasoned knowledge of Rajput traditions and the wider scholarship allows for a detailed explication of underlying themes in narratives and songs. In sticking close to representations of heroes and the contexts of interviews, this volume is less concerned with evocative descriptions of worship, performative occasions, or how devotion to heroes manifests itself in the life experience of particular Rajput men and women. We can look forward to the projected second volume that will locate heroes amid traditions of cultic worship.

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CHIDESTER, DAVID. Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture. Berkeley: University of California Press. xii+294 pp. $50 (cloth); $19.95 (paper).

Among the student notes compiled from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s lectures on religious belief, readers find the philosopher addressing the status of religious