

277 the cultural and political complexity of the centralization of Islamic law in the colonial
 278 state. Drawing upon extensive archival research, she describes how Malay, South
 279 Asian, and Egyptian elites navigated structural and political opportunities within the colo-
 280 nial system. She also points out that the curtailed space of Islamic law is a realm in which
 281 local elites and other colonial subjects resist constraints even while being paradoxically
 282 hampered by the terms they contest. Indeed, Hussin makes a major contribution
 283 through the manner in which she elucidates the dynamic flux of concepts such as
 284 state, law, ethnicity, religion, and politics in the changing and varied colonial and postcol-
 285 onial contexts. For instance, in chapter 5, following an instructive discussion of represen-
 286 tations and the making of Muslim states, she informs us that “[i]n Malaya, Islam became
 287 more and more identified with the Malay elites and the rural Malay peasants that they
 288 claimed to protect” (p. 205).

289 In the two final chapters, Hussin proceeds to explore the entanglements of Islamic
 290 governance and the modern Muslim state as well as the contemporary politics of two
 291 high-profile apostasy dramas, the Lina Joy and Nyonya Tahir cases. She astutely
 292 follows the growing significance of the politics of law in colonial Malaya, India, and
 293 Egypt as subjects paradoxically embrace and attempt to enhance the jurisdiction of
 294 sharia within projects of modernity and secularity. Taking a cue from Talal Asad’s theoret-
 295 ical approach to secularism, Hussin elucidates the interconnected politics of paradox of
 296 the shifting dynamics of religion and secularity across these colonized regions. Moreover,
 297 she illustrates that the two controversial apostasy cases involving Malay women reflect the
 298 simultaneous ascendancy of the arcs of law and ethnicity in the context of contemporary
 299 Malaysia. Here, given the “symbolic centrality” of law and ethnicity, the Malay Muslim
 300 majority appears to have less religious freedom than non-Muslim citizens. Noting that
 301 the politics of Islamic law have changed over time, Hussin suggests the significance of
 302 detailed ethnographic and archival research of the linking of sharia, society, and the
 303 modern nation-state in contemporary societies. This fine text is likely to be of interest
 304 to scholars of Asian studies, state formation, secularism, modernity, and postcoloniality.

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 309 *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present.* By BEN KIERNAN.
 310 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xvi, 621 pp. ISBN: 9780195160765
 311 (cloth, also available as e-book).
 312 doi:10.1017/S0021911818002929

313
 314 Ben Kiernan is best known for his scholarly work on Cambodia and in the field of
 315 genocide studies. However, his deep, long-term engagement with Vietnamese studies,
 316 in its broadest and most interdisciplinary sense—through his students, his colleagues,
 317 and his own travels, wide reading, and research on Vietnam—comes through on every
 318 page of this book. Perhaps because of his thorough grounding in the study of peoples,
 319 such as the Cham and Khmer, who are usually mere extended footnotes in works on
 320 the history of Vietnam, Kiernan’s presentation of Vietnam’s history is unusual.

321 Every other history of the geographic space that is now the Socialist Republic of
 322 Vietnam that I know of, in English, French, or Vietnamese, starts in the north. In

323 contrast, the very first sentence of the introduction to *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest*
 324 *Times to the Present* is a quote from a southern Vietnamese scholar writing in 1820 from
 325 territory that still contained a large Khmer-speaking population. The next paragraph
 326 mentions Champa, Cham, and Khmer languages, and notes the over fifty recognized
 327 minority groups and languages in modern-day Vietnam. This is a positively revolutionary
 328 way to begin a book on the history of Vietnam! Such peoples and their languages, cul-
 329 tures, and former states usually do not appear until well into works on the overall
 330 history of Vietnam, and never before, as far as I can determine, on the first page.

331 This approach is compatible with Kiernan's observation that "Việt Nam is a land
 332 shared and contested by many peoples and cultures for several thousand years" (p. 5).
 333 He certainly does not neglect the ethnic Vietnamese, nor the history of the northern ter-
 334 ritory from which they spread south and eventually conquered both the Cham polities
 335 and the land that was claimed by various Khmer states until well into the nineteenth
 336 century. He gives a clear, well-written overview of the major individuals, families,
 337 social groups, institutions, and states of the north. But even when focusing on the Việt,
 338 Kiernan does not follow the most common division of Vietnamese history into sections
 339 defined primarily by dynasty. The book is divided into six parts: "Chiefdoms," "Prov-
 340 inces," "Kingdoms," "Regions," "Colonies," and "Republics." Each part contains one to
 341 two chapters, but not even the chapter titles follow the convention of being named
 342 after Việt dynasties. Further, information on the "other" peoples of Vietnam—their polit-
 343 ical entities, their relations with the dynasties of the north, and elements of their culture
 344 and religion that became incorporated into mainstream Việt—is presented in every single
 345 chapter.

346 Clearly, *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present* is not primarily a
 347 history of the Việt ethnic majority of the contemporary Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
 348 Its objective is to be a history of the geographic space that is now that nation. Its
 349 primary purpose is "documenting and narrating the experiences of the variety of
 350 peoples who have inhabited the country's different regions since earliest recorded
 351 times as well as their interactions with their natural environments and with neighboring
 352 countries" (p. 5).

353 While the book is not explicitly an environmental history of Vietnam, Kiernan weaves
 354 information on environmental factors, particularly those such as long-term dry or wet
 355 periods that had clear economic impacts, into virtually every major topic covered in
 356 the book. Kiernan's command of the contemporary scholarship on such environmental
 357 factors is impressive, as is his knowledge of the body of scholarship on an astonishing
 358 variety of subjects pertaining to Vietnam.

359 Kiernan utilizes a wide variety of secondary sources ranging, literally, from archaeol-
 360 ogy and anthropology to zoology in English, French, Khmer, and Vietnamese. For
 361 primary sources, Kiernan uses translations of documents in Chinese and archaic Viet-
 362 namese written in Nôm, such as those recently published in *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*.¹
 363 He also uses modern Romanized Vietnamese sources, extensive materials from the
 364 French colonial archives, and a number of declassified American documents. Unfortu-
 365 nately, this wealth of sources is not as user-friendly as it could be. There is no bibliogra-
 366 phy. This makes it time-consuming to find a full citation. Further, the consolidated notes
 367 render it unclear, upon occasion, which source is being cited for which idea or item of
 368 factual information. Even further, the index is woefully inadequate. Numerous topics,

¹George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner and John K. Whitmore, eds., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

369 rhinoceros horn being one, are discussed more than once but do not appear in the index.
 370 One can understand that, with a 656-page book, the publisher would not want to add
 371 quite a number of pages. However, at the very least if an electronic edition is contem-
 372 plated these issues should be addressed.

373 This is a very ambitious book that should attract a wide readership among scholars
 374 who study Southeast Asian history, particularly the mainland, from graduate students
 375 to senior faculty with perhaps some upper-level undergraduates and members of the
 376 general reading public. As recently as six years ago, scholars working on, and teaching,
 377 the history of Vietnam bemoaned the fact that there had been no study of Vietnam pub-
 378 lished in decades that covered all of its long history. Since then three such books have
 379 been published: *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present*, K. W. Taylor's
 380 *A History of the Vietnamese*, and Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam: A New History*.²

381 It is my considered opinion that publication of these three books indicates a matu-
 382 ration of Vietnamese studies as a field. The long history of Vietnam has now been exam-
 383 ined from a number of different points of view, including Kiernan's. It is natural to
 384 Kiernan's training and his scholarly interests to be highly inclusive of information on
 385 peoples such as the Cham and Khmers as integral to the history of the whole long
 386 stretch of land on the eastern coast of mainland Southeast Asia that is contemporary
 387 Vietnam. This is the most unusual and the most original contribution of this book. It is
 388 also the aspect of this book that is the most inspiring and provocative. It opens the
 389 door to the possibility of a history of the geographic space that is Vietnam written primar-
 390 ily from within the history, and thus the viewpoint, of a group of people other than the
 391 Việt. Kiernan has not done that, as that was not one of the objectives of this book, but
 392 he has opened the door. This is a healthy thing for Vietnamese studies. This book
 393 deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone with a serious interest in Vietnam,
 394 Champa, the Khmer, and mainland Southeast Asia.

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400 *Becoming Better Muslims: Religious Authority and Ethical Improvement in*
 401 *Aceh, Indonesia*. By DAVID KLOOS. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,
 402 2017. xvii, 212 pp. ISBN: 9780691176642 (cloth, also available in paper and
 403 as e-book).
 404 doi:10.1017/S0021911818002930

406 In this remarkable book, David Kloos draws from extensive archival research and
 407 ethnographic fieldwork to offer important insights about religious authority and personal
 408 piety in Aceh, Indonesia. In the historical sources and academic literature, Aceh is often
 409 portrayed as a region and people who have drawn on primordial ethnic ties and a conser-
 410 vative brand of Islam to fend off intrusions from both the Dutch colonial state and the
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413 ²K. W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013);
 414 Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).