

The Anka Ceremony of the King of Puri (India)

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ABSTRACT The paper deals with the status of craftsmen in India. It has often been remarked that traditional craftsmen occupy a peculiar position in the caste system. On the one hand they are regarded as always pure and as representatives of the divine architect Viswakarma, on the other hand they usually rank among the lower groups in any given local caste system. The author refers to different attempts to explain this situation. He shows that the reality is more complex than many of these explanations presume and that various categories of craftsmen and their occupations have to be dealt with. Starting with this general critique the author continues to give a detailed description and analysis of one particular festival at the royal palace of Puri (Orissa). The aim is to describe the ideas and values involved in the work of a particular group of artisans who are responsible for preparing new golden coins at the beginning of the king's year. The material is used in the final conclusion to interpret the high status held by goldsmiths in many parts of India.