



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature* by Mary Brockington

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Brief Reviews

Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature. Edited by MARY BROCKINGTON. Zagreb: CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS, 2002. Pp. xvii + 408.

The first Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas was held in August 1997. The papers, edited by Mary Brockington and Peter Schreiner, were published by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1999: *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and Relationships*. The volume under review, again under the general editorship of Radoslav Katičić, who contributed the prefaces to both volumes, and again expertly edited by Mary Brockington, contains the proceedings of the Second Dubrovnik Conference, held in August 1999. The number of papers—eighteen—is the same in both volumes; the second volume exceeds the length of the first by about fifty pages.

Greg Bailey continues the tradition of writing the introductory paper. After his “Introductory Remarks on Future Research on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas” (1997), he now reflects on the theme of the second conference, “Stages and Transitions.” The core group of participants in both conferences includes, besides Greg Bailey (with an article in both volumes, in addition to his introductory remarks), Horst Brinkhaus, Mary and John Brockington (each with two articles in the first volume), Klara Gönc Moaçanin, Petteri Koskikallio, Peter Schreiner, Renate Söhnen-Thieme, and Yaroslav Vassilkov. Occasionally, the second volume follows up on an article in the first, as Schreiner’s “Five Topics, Three Functions, One God: On the Interrelatedness of *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*-Material and *Trimūrti* in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*,” which, with “sometimes still conflicting views” (p. 261), continues Brinkhaus’s “Cyclical Determination in the Development of the *Trimūrti*-doctrine” (1999: 35–47). New participants in the second conference are Andreas Bigger, Mislav Ježić, Przemysław Szczurek, James L. Fitzgerald, Freda Matchett, Heinrich von Stietencron, Christophe Vielle, and Annemarie Mertens. Seven papers are, in different ways, connected with the *Mahābhārata*; one paper is devoted to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and nine to the purāṇas.

At a time when much attention is paid to the epics, especially the *Rāmāyaṇa*, “in performance,” I was struck by a pertinent remark made by Bailey (in his contribution on the *Vāmanapurāṇa*), and I dare to extend it to other questions about purāṇas than those that occupy Bailey: many problems about purāṇas “cannot be answered without extensive fieldwork analysing audience reactions to Purāṇic recitations” (p. 202). There are manuscripts and printed editions, sometimes very

different manuscripts and printed editions, of purāṇas. There may have been “original” purāṇas, as the Groningen project is establishing in the case of the *Skandapurāṇa*. Yet, this is only one aspect of the life of puranic texts: in the towns and villages throughout India for many centuries the purāṇas have been in the hands of more or less imaginative story tellers, who impart their own idiosyncratic renderings of puranic stories to their captive audiences. I have referred elsewhere (*The Purāṇas*, 1986, pp. 53–59) to some opinions expressed about the role of the puranic performer, but much more work needs to be done.

This review may be the right place to point to an unexpected but fascinating form of “Stages and Transitions,” not of a purāṇa text but of a purāṇa manuscript. Heinrich von Stietencron’s contribution reads like a detective story, about an illuminated *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* manuscript of which the owner sold sections and single pages to museums and individuals all over the world. Von Stietencron is now engaged in an effort to reunite all folios in a photographic documentation. He concludes with an appeal to anyone who might be able to help him in his endeavor (p. 310).

All papers in this volume are written in English, each with its own bibliography; Croatian summaries are added at the end of the volume (pp. 397–407). There are two useful indexes, one index of passages (pp. 381–88) and one general index (pp. 389–96).

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The Rāmāyaṇa Revisited. Edited by MANDAKRANTA BOSE. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2004. Pp. xii + 378, illus.

Mandakranta Bose may be best known for her work on Indian dance and, more recently, on women’s studies. However, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which “was for me a part of life I took for granted with no expenditure of conscious effort,” has more recently become an object of a critical engagement as “a foundational text of South and South-east Asian Societies” (p. vii). Her edition of the papers of a 1999 conference at the University of British Columbia, *A Varied Optic: Contemporary Studies in the Rāmāyaṇa* (2000), appeared in a revised second edition, *The Rāmāyaṇa Culture: Text, Performance and Iconography* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2003).