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Review

Reviewed Work(s): On the Growth and Composition of the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas. Relationship to Kāvya. Social and Economic Context. Proceedings of the Fifth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August 2008 by Ivan Andriyanić and Sven Sellmer

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the future is perhaps rather to be sought, for instance, in the development of semi-automated, interactive visual alignment of its multiple Sanskrit versions, a technology that has been applied to medieval French literature.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, it might be time for the field of Indology and Buddhist Studies, just like other fields of the humanities, to bid farewell to word indices or, by way of a classic Buddhist metaphor, to leave the raft after having reached the other shore.

Ruixuan Chen

<sup>26</sup> Stefan Jänicke – David Joseph Wrisley, Interactive Visual Alignment of Medieval Text Versions. In: Brian Fisher, Shixia Liu and Tobias Schreck (ed.), *2017 IEEE Conference on Visual Analytics Science and Technology. Phoenix, Arizona, USA, 1–6 October 2017. Proceedings*. IEEE Computer Society 2017, pp. 127–138.

Ivan Andrijić – Sven Sellmer (ed.)

*On the Growth and Composition of the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas. Relationship to Kāvya. Social and Economic Context. Proceedings of the Fifth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August 2008*. Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2016. XXXVI + 536p. US\$ 60,- (ISBN 978-953-7997-28-1).

Under the aegis of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ivan Andrijić and Sven Sellmer edited in 2016 this impressive volume of the proceedings of the Fifth Dubrovnik Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (DICSEP 5), held in August 2008.

After an accurate and informative Preface by the General Editor, Mislav Ježić, and the partially overlapping but insightfully critical introductory essay by Greg Bailey, the book boasts nineteen articles, all written in English by a spectacular plethora of leading scholars in the field as well as a few younger researchers, resulting in a total sum of more than 500 pages of clearly penned, state-of-the-art scholarship. The editors cleverly organized the inevitably multifarious contributions within five well thought-out sections: (1) Growth of the Sanskrit Epic and Purāṇic Texts (4 essays); (2) Social and Economic Context (6 essays); (3) Composition and Narrative Strategies in the Purāṇas (3 essays); (4) The Sanskrit Epics and Kāvya (4 essays); and (5) Word Studies (2 essays). Among the variety of theories and approaches (be they historical and compositional or literary and structural), what is maybe the crucial recurring theme of the majority of essays is aptly pinpointed by Bailey: “[T]he hypothesis that the *Mahābhārata* is somewhat of a clearing house for the presentation of a more expansive view of the world than what is found in the Vedic literature, whilst simultaneously

preserving the Vedic brahmin as an essential cultural marker in society” (p. 3). The volume is smoothly rounded off by the list of Contributors, two carefully redacted indices (Index of Passages Cited and General Index) and a section with summaries of the papers and a table of contents in Croatian, in order to at least implicitly contextualize, if not defy, the hegemonic nature of the English language in contemporary South Asian Studies. The very professional editorial care and the aesthetically pleasing and reader-friendly results also deserve a special mention in the current worldwide decline of these undervalued qualities of what actually makes a book.

No single essay is below the high standards required by such a prestigious publication. The first section of the volume opens with “The Archetypal Design of the Two Sanskrit Epics”, a masterful paper signed by Alf Hiltebeitel. As in some of his previous research, the celebrated American scholar, one of the major world experts of the Sanskrit epics, focuses on the heroines of the two story-worlds, Draupadī and Sītā, by tracing parallels and similarities amongst crucial moments of their life stories (birth, marriage and encounters with monsters). Most importantly, his contention is that the common, underlying archetypal design is first taken up by the Mahābhārata and then redeployed and updated in the Rāmāyaṇa.

The volume continues with a paper by Oliver Hellwig, “A Computational Approach to the Text History of the *Rāmāyaṇa*”, which offers a very sophisticated machine-based analysis of semantic and lexical units of Vālmīki’s epic with the aim of reconstructing compositional layers in the text. The computational method is thoroughly described in the paper and its results confirm Brockington’s famous assessment of the Rāmāyaṇa’s layering, with the first and the seventh books representing a later stage of composition. Book 2 is also singled out by Hellwig’s analysis as standing out with respect to the core of the epic, also in accordance with Brockington’s conceptions and possibly corroborating the more daring hypothesis of the following essay in the volume.

Mislav Ježić’s “*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Dasarathajātaka*” first reiterates the conclusions of previous scholarship by the same author: the core books of the Rāmāyaṇa, from books 3 through 6, present the underlying structure of a fairy tale, as they match closely the scheme created by Vladimir Propp. Second, it argues that “book 2, completed with a finale similar to that found at the end of book 6, existed as an independent and complete story which directly inspired the version of the Rāma story in the *Dasarathajātaka*” (p. IX) and, basically *contra* Brockington, that this second book was the earliest kernel of the epic, to which the so-called core books were added only after the redaction of the Jātakas.

The next article, “Cosmogony in the Transition from Epic to Purāṇic Literature” by Horst Brinkhaus, is an accurate philological analysis of two cosmogonic myths (one more in the spirit of Sāṃkhya, the other closer to the ancient Vedic model) and their combination across multiple sources, namely, the Mahābhārata, the Harivaṃśa, the Mānavadharmasāstra and four Purāṇas (Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Mārkaṇḍeya). The final, historical aim that the essay successfully achieves is to show how the Harivaṃśa plays a transitional role between the material found in the Mahābhārata and how the later texts draw on this source.

The social and economic context of the epics is the focus of the second section of the volume. Its first essay is tersely titled “Āśramas, Agrahāras, and Monasteries”. In this textually rich account of several religious institutions across numerous sources, both textual and epigraphical, Johannes Bronkhorst offers the well-documented hypothesis that the two institutions of *āśramas* and *agrahāras* must have mostly overlapped in practice as places of Vedic study and performance of rites. Furthermore, according to the author the idyllic depiction of *āśramas* in the epics and later Brahminical texts is one of many clear signs of the historical need for Brahmin communities to advertise in front of potential royal donors their then-burgeoning institutional bodies as a valid alternative to the successful monasteries of Buddhists, Jains and Ājīvikas.

In the following article, “A Probe for Economic Data in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-samāsyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (3,179–221)”, Greg Bailey offers a very original, economic and partially historical interpretation of a passage on the progressively declining epochs of mankind (*yuga*), which is normally understood in mythological and religious terms. The dire portrayal of social and economic disarray is implicitly ascribed, according to the terminological analysis carried out by the author, to the malicious agency of ascetic groups, Buddhists in particular. Obviously, this can once again be interpreted as part of the marketing strategy of Brahmins in search of royal patronage. More interestingly from a historical perspective, the same passage could be seen as expressing “the brahmins’ corporate anxiety about the transformation from small to large-scale societies where different modes of wealth acquisition are practised and kings are becoming more involved in raising taxes and wealth redistribution” (p. 8).

The crucial figure of the Vrātyas takes center stage in the two following articles. Yaroslav Vassilkov’s “The *Mahābhārata* and the Non-Vedic Aryan Traditions” combines textual studies, archeology and anthropology in order to identify a pre-Vedic type of “pastoral heroic” society and to isolate some of its characteristics (for instance, the cow as a paradigmatic form of wealth). This culture, akin to brotherhoods of unmarried warriors attested in other Indo-European sources,

would represent the ancient background against which Vedic culture was an underrepresented newcomer and a dangerously rival societal form.

Tiziana Pontillo's paper "Droṇa and Bhīṣma as Borderline Cases in Brāhmanical Systematization: a Vrātya Pattern in the *Mahābhārata*" is a detailed survey of an impressive number of *vrātya* elements in the epic. Its daring and powerfully argued conclusion is that the orthodox class division between warrior/sacrificer and priest/officiant is a new pattern that substituted the *vrātya* model in which the same social agents would play both roles in different circumstances, the two heroic characters of the title being the paradigmatic figures of the ancient system that was bound to die for the new to take hold.

The self-immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres (*sahagama-na*) is the focus of "How Did Mādrī Die and Why Was She Burnt Twice?" by Przemysław Szczurek. On the basis of a perusal of juridical, poetical and epic sources composed over almost two millennia, the author shows how the practice of *sahagama-na*, originated among the military aristocracy, became progressively more and more accepted in brahmanical circles, which explains its marginality in the oldest epic strata as well as the narrative discrepancies in the account of Mādrī's demise.

"The Strange Story of Princess Mādhavī" by Danielle Feller is a multi-faceted analysis of the extremely complex life of king Yayāti's daughter and the boon granted to her to regain virginity after the birth of each of her sons from her four husbands. Two main lines of interpretation are offered: Mādhavī as paradigmatic of the position of women as sexual objects and mere instruments of reproduction; and, more interestingly, Mādhavī as a capsized symbol of the sacrificial horse in the *aśvamedha* and therefore an emblem of the interconnected natures of kingly power and human fertility.

The articles of the third section move to the Purāṇas and their composition. Renate Söhnen-Thieme's "Mapping the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*: Framework, Dialogue Structures, Time Concepts, and Other Narrative Strategies" fully delivers what it promises: a carefully researched analysis of the complex structural and compositional layers of the arguably most important specimen of purāṇic literature. Indebtedness, appropriation and replacement in authority are the key aspects of the relation of the Bhāgavata with its three most important textual sources: the Mahābhārata, the Viṣṇupurāṇa and the Jain tradition.

In his "Textual Strategies, Empowerment and 'True' Discourse in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*", McComas Taylor focuses on the complex relation between text and audience. He analyses the formidable claims to power and authority that the Bhāgavata makes through its textual strategies of empowerment, such as the use of authoritative fictional meta-authors (Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Nārada, etc.), the sacred

landscapes chosen as places for its recitation, the references to its superiority to the Vedic tradition coupled with the paradoxical self-representation as the culmination of the Veda, etc. The exceptional reception history of this most influential purāṇic text, epitomized by the week-long recitations of the text that still take place today in Vṛndāvana and Mathurā, testifies to the success of its legitimizing techniques.

Strategies of interfaith persuasion and dissuasion are the focus of Kenneth Valpey's "Precept, Practice and Persuasion: Truth and Heresy in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*". The studied portions of the text stage a heated polemic against the heretic naked ascetics belonging to the renunciatory traditions by recounting how their heterodox views had been proclaimed by Viṣṇu himself, in the form of Māyāmohinī, the "Magic Deluder", in order to deceive the Asuras and thus win by ruse the battle against evil. Whether this narrative stratagem betrays a feeling of upcoming danger or a sense of brahmanical confidence remains an interesting open question.

The following section, dealing with the relationship between the epics and *kāvya* tradition, opens with a masterful article by Patrick Olivelle, "Aśvaghōṣa and the Brahmanical Theology of the Epics and the Dharmaśāstras". Reiterating and expanding decades-long research into the historical dynamics among early Indian traditions, the author shows how Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* can be interpreted as a concerted response and reaction to the whole brahmanical culture of his time, from the epics to the Dharma literature. This deeply intertextual nature of the *Buddhacarita* is shown in its reinterpretations and disruptions of brahmanical doctrines such as the concept of *trivarga*, shunned in favor of the up-front pursuit of liberation, or the old-fashioned notion of *dharma*, updated as the *saddharma*, the "true *dharma*" of Buddhism.

The second article of this section, Klara Gönc Moaçanin's "The *Nalopākhyāna* Seen through the Lens of *Kāvya*", highlights the *kāvya* elements of both style and content within the famous tale and argues that the love story of Nala and Damayantī was most probably an independent literary composition later on interpolated in the original epic and originally based on a fairy tale.

"The Repudiation of Sītā in Canto XX of the *Bhāṭṭikāvya* with Special Reference to the Use of Imperatives" by Lidia Sudyka compares the episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* with its treatment by the seventh-century poet-grammarian who set out to treat Pāṇini's grammar in his work by illustrating it through the *Rāma* story. The results of the analysis of canto XX and its use of imperatives highlight how the figure of Sītā in the *Bhāṭṭikāvya* is imbued with honor and strength, which bestow upon her a more elevated moral status than in Vālmīki's epic.

The paper by Anna Bonisoli Alquati, “Rāma’s Story in Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśa*”, is a literary study of the famous *kāvya* and its intertextual relation with its obvious source for the Rāma story, the Rāmāyaṇa. A particular focus of the article is the authorial agency of the poet, expressed in the numerous changes to the epic material and its rearrangements that Kālidāsa successfully weaves into the plot in order to fulfill his two purposes: the evocation of poetic emotions and keeping the focus on the dynastic history.

The last two papers of the volume zoom in all the way to the level of individual words and the worlds of meanings that they encompass. Of extreme interest for psychologically oriented researchers like the present reviewer is the article by Sven Sellmer, “Aspects of *manas* in the *Mahābhārata*”, in which an extensive survey of the grammatical uses and semantic nuances of the term within the narrative portions of the epic (i.e., leaving out the theory-laden didactic portions) offers a very important step towards the formulation of an implicit “epic psychology” and the clarification of the exact semantic field covered by the term *manas*.

“Sanskrit Reciprocal Pronouns: Their Semantics and Use in the Epics and *Arthaśāstra*” by Leonid Kulikov is the last article of the volume. This essay is a linguistic study of three terms usually considered as synonyms in Sanskrit: *anyonyam*, *parasparam* and *itaretaram*. Although it proved impossible to find a uniform rationale of their use across all consulted sources (possibly also because in the case of the epic the choice of words heavily depends on metrical exigency), Kulikov argues that at least in the *Arthaśāstra* “*Paraspara-* is used in contexts of inimical activities, or, at any rate, referring to the activities that have some negative consequences [...]. By contrast, *anyonya-* is employed in other cases – that is, in the contexts of friendly or neutral activities” (p. 474).

To conclude, the volume *On the Growth and Composition of the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas* is a very important contribution to contemporary scholarship in the field, and it was a pleasure to read and shortly review its contents as a “teaser” for prospective readers in search of extraordinarily deep insights into the interconnected realms of narration, religion and society in Sanskrit culture.

Daniele Cuneo