

RECENSIONI - REVIEWS

REINHOLD GRÜNENDHAL, ANGELIKA MALINAR, THOMAS OBERLIES, PETER SCHREINER, *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien*, Wiesbaden, 1997 (Purāṇa Research Publications - Tübingen)

As the title suggests, this volume consists of a collection of essays by different authors devoted to the analysis of various topics of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, a term used to refer to a particular section of the *Śantiparvan* of *Mahābhārata*, inserted in the instructions which – after the great war – Yudhiṣṭhira receives from Bhīṣma (the fatally wounded general of the opposite party, venerated by Yudhiṣṭhira as a teacher and a master) about ways and means of liberation (*mokṣadharmā*). As Peter Schreiner aptly stresses in his vast and exhaustive introduction, to make the *Nārāyaṇīya* the subject of research implies that the *Nārāyaṇīya* itself can be considered a textual unit, even though it evidently lacks homogeneity and shows clear traces of a complex editorial history (a casual survey is sufficient to make it clear that the text is clearly divided in two extremely dissimilar sections, the second of which is most probably the later). The editorial principles observed in the edition of the *Nārāyaṇīya* are minutely examined by Reinhold Grünendahl in his paper on the “Textual criticism of the *Nārāyaṇīya*”, while the two subsequent essays (both by Thomas Oberlies) examine a more circumscribed portion of the work, the so-called “Part A” of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (i. e. chapters 321-326) first, and secondly *adhyāya* 326. This restriction is due to the fact that, as the author conclusively points out, Part A as a whole is older than Part B (which must be considered as a later addition to the *Mahābhārata*). A sort of link between the first essays (prevalently devoted to textual history and criticism of the text) and the following ones (concerning mostly the various philosophical and religious issues that emerge from the *Nārāyaṇīya*), “Names

of god, concepts of sacrifice and horizons of time in Part A of the *Nārāyaṇīya*", again by Thomas Oberlies, spells out some of the implications for the *Geistesgeschichte* that follow from the analytic evidence of the previous chapter, with special reference to the key-concept of "sacrifice". Using the same methodological approach taken in Thomas Oberlies' paper, Peter Schreiner examines the motif of "vision of god" both in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and in Indian religious history. It is in fact an absolutely essential motif in the context of doctrines on ways of salvation and as a theological topic. And in this sense the contribution furnished by the *Nārāyaṇīya* is huge, roving over the development of the *jīvan-mokṣa* ideal; the allegorical and mythical use of Sāṃkhya terminology; a theology of "forms of god"; the literary use of mythology; and, finally, the importance of practices like the recitation of *stotra*. How the *Nārāyaṇīya* fits into the "general plan" of the *Mahābhārata* is then investigated by Reinhold Grünendahl in his "On the position of the *Nārāyaṇīya* in the *Mahābhārata*". By isolating certain ideas peculiar to the *Nārāyaṇīya* and following them up in the *Mahābhārata* as a whole (for example, an examination of the doctrine of identity, a cardinal point of *Nārāyaṇīya* theology), the paper reveals a dense network of relationships among a number of passages scattered over the entire epic. The author, on the basis of his detailed study, concludes that the passages influenced by the particular school of the "epic" *Nārāyaṇa* theology constitute a "frame" which must have been added to the main corpus at a relatively late stage in their editorial history. Extremely useful to comprehend the similarities (too often emphasized) and the differences between the doctrine of god in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Bhagavadgītā* is the paper by Angelika Malinar, which stresses a crucial issue, i. e. the fact that while the development of the concept of a "highest god" in the *Bhagavadgītā* can be seen as a reaction to the need for a religious foundation for social responsibility and for the legitimation of kingship, the god-concept of the *Nārāyaṇīya* seems to be well rooted in a brahmanical tradition. The author points out that the two texts, far from being merely formally different documents of a single theology (the "vaiṣṇava bhakti"), are totally different, each of them having its own peculiar individuality, and their transmission being independent (at least at the earliest stages). The paper which follows, "The *Nārāyaṇīya* and its parallels", by Reinhold Grünendahl, bears out the hitherto largely unnoticed parallel versions in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* and the *Vaiṣṇavakhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda-Purāṇa*, both of which are most probably derived from the *Nārāyaṇīya*. These papers are followed by an exhaustive "Summary of contents" (which is, in fact, a detailed paraphrase of the text); a "Tabular survey of the *Nārāyaṇīya*" (intended to be a more graphic orientational aid to see one's

way clear in the complex maze of the text); a "Lemma Index", designed as a two-level index: level 1 consists of the lemma, level 2 consists of the occurring word forms (the conventions here adopted are summarized in a complete working report); a list of "Names and epithets of Nārāyaṇa", the importance of which depends on the fact that, as Nārāyaṇa is the main god of the work named after him, the god's names and epithets epitomize the theological doctrines which the authors of the text wanted to communicate; and a vast bibliography.

Aelfric Bianchi

Neuindische Literature. Katalog einer Sammlung aus der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, bearbeitet von KABITA RUMP und GEORGE BAUMANN, Wiesbaden, 1993 (Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen)

This volume offers a complete catalogue of the extensive collection of South-Asian literary works and essays, donated to the University of Tübingen by the University of Hawaii. The collection comprises approximately 7,000 texts, mostly written in the Sixties, and, to a lesser degree, in the Fifties and the Seventies. The index covers numerous subjects: dramas, short stories, novels, theatrical pieces, poetical works, biographies, and autobiographies. Special emphasis is granted to the novel (though a genre relatively recent in the Indian world and undoubtedly influenced by its Western counterpart), lyric poetry (deeply rooted, in contrast, in its ancient national soil), and theatre.

The works whose bibliographical data are listed here are grouped according to a uniquely linguistic criterion: a preliminary macropartition separates the texts compiled in languages related to the Indo-Aryan family from those written in languages belonging to Sino-Tibetan stock. The Indo-Aryan group appears to be by far the most frequently represented in the collection, with its 31 languages, 7 of which are national or official (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Oriya, and Punjabi), and 24 regional, tribal or "minor". The Sino-Tibetan group, on the other hand, is represented in the catalogue solely by one dialect, the Newari, spoken mostly in Nepal and in certain zones of North-Eastern India. Obviously, Hindi (1,227 titles) and

Urdu (1,998) are by far the most frequently represented in the collection; but Assamese (285), Gujarati (872), Oriya (720), and Punjabi (755) also occupy an important place. Among the "minor" languages, Maithili (251), Nepali (229), and Rajasthani (183) deserve special attention. Newari, in contrast, appears in this volume in only 13 entries.

As may be inferred from the above numbers, the catalogue practically ignores certain literatures of great tradition and high value, such as Bengali (7 titles), and totally neglects the area of the Dravidian languages.

It is worth mentioning that the catalogue cites in each entry the various alphabets used in the works listed in it. In fact, it is common knowledge that, due to the complex historical vicissitudes in which the Indian subcontinent has been involved, we not infrequently come across texts whose alphabet pertains to a family other than their language. To quote one of the best-known examples, many works written in Indo-Aryan languages (such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Kashmiri, Urdu, and even Hindi) very often use characters of Arabic-Persian derivation, imported in rather ancient times (since at least the 10th century A. D.). Given these premises, the catalogue provides examples of texts adopting unexpected alphabets in three specific areas: Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi.

The introduction is clear and exhaustive. Besides expounding and explicating the fundamental methodological issues, more specifically connected with the criteria of classification of the various works listed in the volume, it carefully focuses on a series of more wide-ranging topics and problems, concerning for example the genesis in India of particular literary genres such as the novel, the interactions among the manifold regional literatures, or the polarity between unity and multiplicity so typical of the subcontinent even at a literary level.

Aelfric Bianchi

Shankar Goyal, *History and Historiography of the age of Harsha, with a foreword by K.D. Bagpai*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Jodhpur 1992, pp.VII-XX, 1-343.

The Sankhar Goyal's volume reconstructs the obscure age of the indian history, when, during the 6th and 7th century A.D., as a result of the dismemberment of the Gupta empire, the Puṣyabhūti's dynasty thrive and the Harṣa's kingdom flourished.

The book consists of four parts. A methodological introduction, which is inspired by the view that the political history must be *primarily a study of the political aspect of the society*, opens *Part I* (p.1); a detailed examination of the ancient (pp. 1-14) and medieval (pp. 15-29) sources and, then, a survey of the most important Harṣa's historians follows it. Among the latest historians, a special attention is given to S.R. Goyal (especially, pp. 39-76) who, in numerous studies (see pages 40 and 41, notes 1, in addition to the *Bibliography* of the book taken into consideration) culminating in the recent volume *Harsha and Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerut 1986, which has left an important trace in the Harṣa's historiography, is supporter of a *new political history* which sticks to a new methodological principle: it is essentially, as Shankar Goyal with great precision reminds us (p. 40), *the study of political activity in the total situational context*, for which «why» and «how» are *no less important* than «what» and «when». Four *Appendices*, respectively, on the date of the *Harṣacarita* and on the plays ascribed to Harṣa, on the *Life of Yuan Chwang* and on the *Coins of Harṣa Śīlāditya* (pages 68-95), conclude *Part I*.

The reconstruction of the real history of Harṣa is placed in *Part II* (chaps. 5-11; pp. 95-239). The author prefaces it with a description of the political situation of India in the time of the decline of the empire of the Guptas, and he pursues analysing the rise of the dynasty - whose origin was *vaiśya*, not indeed *Kṣatriya* (pp.127-128) - through the action of Puṣyabhūti, and the kingdoms of his successors, Naradavardhana, Rājyavardhana I, Ādityavardhana, Prabhākaravardhana and Rājyavardhana II, to whom the whole Chapter 7 is dedicated (pp. 151-166). The reconstruction of the life of Harṣa, from the birth to his accession to the throne, of his wars and conquests and of his relations with China and India, are placed in the remaining Chapters (8-11) of *Part II*.

An analysis of the social and economic aspects which marked the so-called "medieval period" and, then, of the rise of feudalism and of its impact on the social, economic and political life, opens *Part III* (chap. 12; pp. 240-272) and it forms the unavoidable presupposition to analyze the political and administrative structure of Harṣa's reign (chap. 13). An *Appendix* (pp. 291-300) on «*Voices of protest and dissent in the works of Bāṇa*» concludes this part. In *Part IV* (pp. 303-329), then, the author gives his own opinion on Harṣa and on his personality and, finally (pp. 329-332), an *Appendix* on the chronology of the Yuan Chwang's travels follows it. An ample *Bibliography*, however, mostly restricted to the indian scholars, and an *Index* conclude the volume.

The general widespread notion that Harṣa or Harṣavardhana was the last great king of ancient India and that, among the numerous merits, he also

had to endeavour to compose the great conflicts which troubled his age in a syncretist and tolerant view which respected the requirements of all people, is decidedly revised in Sankhar Goyal's volume: the figure, which emerges from it, is, indeed, that of a ruler endowed with not remarkable or even mediocre abilities, ambitious, who did not have the interests of his people at heart (p. 315) and who was great only in his personal interests; a king full of contradictions (p. 312) of an obscure period of transition and of conflicts, who was great *only in comparison with the lesser monarchs of our country* (p. 328) and who, above all, was - so we are precisely told on page 310 -, *a typical representative of his age, [...] not its maker*. The authors too, who wrote about Harṣa, first of all Bāṇa, do not avoid negative criticism (particularly on p. 328); they would voluntarily misrepresent the facts in order to save Harṣa from the guilt of having taken part in the obscure death of his brother, Rājyavardhana II (pp. 44 and 160-165). His literary abilities are also doubted (pp. 69-75 and 315) and his own attitudes of religious tolerance would have been suggested only by political aim. Moreover, as to the belief that he was a Buddhist, the Shankar Goyal's opinion is that Harṣa never was a Buddhist, neither before meeting Yuan-Chwang nor after.

If this last affirmation - namely, that Harṣa never abandoned his śaiva faith nor made Buddhism his own religion -, adds nothing new to what is already known about the personality of Harṣa (the opinion that Harṣa had been a Buddhist is indeed for some time old-fashioned and an unequivocal confirmation of his attitude towards the various religions may be found in the *Nāgānanda*) -, no doubt Harṣa's figure is seen, in Shankar Goyal's volume, in quite a new light, even though it is not absolutely original. In the volume - which certainly has the merit of offering an ample and precise summary of the storiography and bibliography of Harṣa and his historical period - it is indeed undeniable (nor does the author try to dissimulate it) a constant dependence on S.R. Goyal and this scholar has, in the last analysis, the priority of many opinions which are stated in the book, besides the paternity of the - above-mentioned - methodological rule which is adopted by author and which, in truth, provokes some perplexity. It is certainly unquestionable that a reconstruction must proceed with a revision and with a close examination of the sources, but the objectivity of the method may be criticized if it is based on the resolute rejection of what is explicitly said, turning what is not said to advantage, on the basis of the principle - that, certainly, cannot be of greater value, for instance, than a acceptance with all due reserves of the sources - that one thing is said to hide another one that is the truth.

So we are at a loss when the author draws from some details mentioned by Bāṇa (such as Harṣa was born to rule; Rājyavardhana II had a dislike for

the throne and Prabhākaravardhana wanted Harṣa as his successor [pp.47 and 154-157]), that they prove Bāṇa had written his *Harṣacarita* to defend Harṣa who had a connection (which however, on p. 165, is considered *impossible to identify*) with the conspiracy culminating with the murder of Rājyavardhana II. It is also perplexing when the author, with regard to Harṣa's works, concludes (pp.74 and 315) - once again following S.R. Goyal's footsteps (whose opinion is quoted on pages 51-75) -, that those would have been written by Bāṇa or by Dhāvaka since there was the rumour and they, who ascribe the works to Harṣa, don't explain «why» and «how» it existed; furthermore, even the author is inclined to attributing them to Bāṇa and therefore explains the difference of style by accepting the opinion which had been expressed by S.R.Goyal: Bāṇa, that is, *could and did deliberately adopt simpler language and style for these plays* (p. 74). Nor are we less puzzled, about the impartiality adopted in the reconstruction, when the author, after having manifestly distrusted Bāṇa's assertion that Prabhākaravardhana would have appointed Harṣa as his successor (pp. 154 ff.), again, uses the information to say (p. 312) that father's behaviour probably made Harṣa become an *ambitious* and, finally, when, on p. 315, he utilizes, in my opinion, in a superficial way the hint, included in the *Harṣacarita*, to his (namely, of Harṣa) *vinā playing*: for the author it would only prove the interest of Harṣa in the art, but it is a very meaningful hint if it is put in relation with the *Nāgānanda*. In this work, indeed, there is a whole section dedicated to the sound of the *vinā* (I, 13-15) - not to mention the constant pursuit of musicality in the language -, which attests Harṣa's musical talent and his profound competence in the musical science and accepting that Harṣa was competent would have made it possible - consequently, on the basis of what is expressly said - not to exclude that its author, a profound expert in music, could have been Harṣa.

Therefore, this reconstruction causes many perplexities. To tell the truth, Shankar Goyal's volume is certainly documented as far as sources are concerned; it is decidedly useful for bibliographic updating on Harṣa and his historical age and, together S.R. Goyal's works, it is proof of a new trend of political history, but it rewrites a whole period of indian history raising many questions: no doubt, if the view proposed is valid, it would open - as K.D.Bagpai points out in the *Foreword* - *a new vista for further researches*.

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