

ŚĀSTRĀRAMBHA: INQUIRIES INTO THE PREAMBLE IN SANSKRIT. Edited by WALTER SLAJE *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes Band LXII. Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft. pp. 225. Weisbaden, Harrassowitz, 2008.*
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This volume contains revised versions of papers delivered at a special thematic session of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference held in Edinburgh in 2006. As announced in its title, the individual essays are largely concerned with the question of the introduction or the opening section to works of Sanskrit systematic thought. This is a worthy topic: the Sanskrit intellectual tradition was for well over two millennia preoccupied with the interpretative and structural challenges posed by the beginning of a treatise, in a way that makes the broadly similar concerns of post-Hegelian western philosophy (the “question of the preface”) seem jejune by comparison. The opening argumentative moves of a work provided the opportunity to venerate whatever deity might ensure its successful completion, to establish its fundamental parameters of topic, content, purpose, and proposed audience (the well-known *anubandha-catuṣṭayam*), and to allow for rhetorical, stylistic, and polemical fireworks. Taking this common focus as a point of departure, the volume’s contributions provide ample testimony to the significance of the question of *śāstrārambha* across a wide variety of genres.

Following a brief (and appropriately self-reflexive) preface by Edwin Gerow, the volume consists of ten individual essays: Christopher Minkowski provides an overview of the history of the *maṅgalācaraṇa* or invocatory verse; Piotr Balcerowicz contributes a study of Jaina epistemological writings as seen through their introductions; J.E.M. Houben looks at the opening ‘key’ to Mallavādin’s highly idiosyncratic *Dvādaśāranayacakera*, and its application to the philosophy of grammar; Philipp André Maas surveys the text-critical situation of the beginning of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*; Johannes Bronkhorst discusses whether, for Śāṅkara, the ritual hermeneutics of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā may be said to constitute the preface to the *Vedāntasūtras*; Marcus Schmücker looks at the theory of undertaking (*ārambha*) in post-Śāṅkara Advaita and its criticism in Venkaṭanātha(/Vedāntadeśika)’s *Śatadūṣaṇī*; Silvia D’Intino examines the opening of Skandasvāmin’s commentary on the *Rgveda*, especially the five-fold typology of *mantras* found there; Gary Tubb takes the opening discussions in works of poetics as indicative of the field’s problematic status within the world of *śāstra* more generally, and points to the resolution of this difficulty in the opening of Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja’s *Rasagaṅgādharā*; Giuliano Boccali surveys the introductory verses to major works of Prakrit and Sanskrit *mahākāvya*; and finally Walter Slaje, the volume’s editor, provides a close reading and analysis of the beginning of Kalhaṇa’s historical poem, the *Rājataranṅiṇī*.

All of these have been carefully presented: the volume is remarkably free of misprints, both in the Sanskrit quotations and in the English and other European languages used and quoted by the authors (the few problems that remain are without exception self-correcting). All of the papers are of a very high scholarly standard, especially in the care given to the translations of the primary sources, a few minor mistakes here and there notwithstanding. Given that the volume began life as a conference panel, it comes as no surprise that while certain essays appear to have been composed with the topic in mind, others represent versions of ongoing (and sometimes only tangentially related) work. Bronkhorst’s essay on Śāṅkara’s *śāstrārambha*, for instance, is described by its author as “essentially an extract” from a longer article published in 2007 in the proceedings of the previous World Sanskrit Conference (in fact, it can also be found in his monograph *Greater Magadha*, published the same year). Some of the essays appear to be introductions to larger research projects: Minkowski’s programmatic overview of the cultural history of the opening verse invocation raises many more questions than it attempts to answer (not that this is entirely a bad thing), while Tubb’s all-too-brief essay on the intellectual status of *alamkāraśāstra* is hopefully to be considered as an advertisement for future, more detailed studies.

Balcerowicz's superb essay on Jaina *śāstra* calls for particular comment. Here we see the general theme of the volume taken up and used in a way to provide an excellent sketch of Jaina intellectual history, from which I learned a great deal. He argues that the opening sections of the tradition's epistemological treatises in Sanskrit and Prakrit can be organised according to a formal model, one which evolves over time and thus provides a criterion for relative chronology within the tradition. He demonstrates, compellingly, that the major transformation in this model was catalysed by the influence of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, especially its insistence (encoded in its own opening verses) on the priority of reason over scriptural authority. In his philological as well as philosophical rigour, and in the ways that he connects Jaina philosophy with the much better-studied world of Buddhist thought, Balcerowicz provides a model for how an Indic history of ideas can and should be done.

Slaje's closing piece on the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* also merits special mention. Along with Boccali's contribution, this is one of two essays concerned with *kāvya*, literary writing, rather than *śāstra*, although both scholars do make considerable reference to śāstric materials, especially *alaṅkāra*. Closely reading and commenting upon the opening forty-seven verses of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, Slaje demonstrates that it was meant to be evaluated as a serious piece of *kāvya*, while providing a valid narration of the past events that formed its subject matter (*bhūtārthakathane*, to use the poet's own words). Treating it as *both* poetry and a form of historical writing, Slaje effectively demonstrates the untenability of the dilemma that has long plagued the interpretation of Kalhaṇa's great work. At the same time, he connects the text both with the vibrantly interconnected world of twelfth-century Kashmirian Sanskrit writing, and with the later *Rājatarāṅgiṇīs* of Jonarāja, Śrivarā and Śuka. His argument that the language of these latter texts can be used as a sort of commentary to Kalhaṇa's own (often opaque) poetic idiom is a real contribution to our understanding of this Kashmirian habit of historical writing. Slaje's essay as a whole is a model of careful Indology, registering other interpretations of individual verses and clearly explaining where his rendering differs and why.

It is thus a little jarring to find that the essay as a whole is directed towards the task of disproving the argument of a German PhD thesis published a little more than a decade ago, which took Kalhaṇa's text as an instance of "counter-history" (*Gegengeschichte*). To deploy all of this philological acumen in the service of demolishing the argument of the work of a doctoral student (one who, as Slaje notes, worked entirely through translations) calls to mind the parable of the mosquito and the bazooka. What's more, this one argument is throughout taken as a single instance of the wider threat posed by the 'post-modern'. While this label did certainly once mean something in the academy, across a wide spectrum of fields, it has come in some Indological circles to signify a sort of spectral anti-empiricist, anti-rationalist intellectual adversary, a generic argumentative bugbear reminiscent of the place of the Cārvāka in some forms of Sanskrit doxographic writing. Honestly, when was the last time anyone was met face to face by a self-professed 'post-modernist'? Speaking only for myself, it was in the final year of my BA, in the person of another undergraduate.

All told, this is a splendid collection of essays, to be highly recommended. The focus on such a widespread structural feature of śāstric writing is a very salutary one, and something that is otherwise almost unexampled. In his Preface, Gerow suggests a companion volume on the topic of *siddhānta* (or "authoritative conclusion"). I would add my own voice to this suggestion, and go on to add that there are other special topics equally crying out for such collective enquiries, for instance the use of interpretative analogies (*nyāyas*) or the śāstric habit of hierarchically ranked typology (*tāratamya*, *ānupūrvya*). Future editors and contributors would have this path-breaking volume to look to as a model.

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