

These quibbles should not detract from what is an excellent overview of the vast panorama of the archaeology of Afghanistan. The current unsettled state of the country makes it a difficult one in which to pursue archaeological research, and looting continues to rob artefacts of their vital archaeological context. One recent interesting addition to the bibliography is Agnès Meyer, *Concurrence, coopération et collaboration en archéologie : l'exemple du Séistan, 1908–1984*, PhD thesis, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne – Paris I, 2017. Let us hope that in another forty years there will also be such an abundance of new material as to engender a further edition.

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SOUTH ASIA

EMILIE AUSSANT and GERARD COLAS (eds):

Les scolastiques indiennes. Genèses, développements, interactions. (Études thématiques 32.) 326 pp. Paris: École française d’Extrême Orient, 2020. €40. ISBN 978 2 85539 270 7.
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Under the aegis of the École française d’Extrême Orient, Émilie Aussant and Gérard Colas edited in 2020 a remarkable volume of collected essays by several leading scholars of South Asian studies (N. Balbir, P. Granoff and P. Olivelle, to name just a few), focusing mostly on the pre-colonial Sanskritic cultures of the subcontinent. Its title admirably reflects the multi-faceted purpose of this enterprise: “Les scolastiques indiennes. Genèses, développements, interactions”.

After the theoretically rich introduction by the editors, the book contains 13 articles, organized in four elegantly christened sections: 1) “De la pratique scholastique à l’émergence de scholastiques” (4 essays); 2) “Apories, crises, échanges” (4 essays); 3) “Écarts” (2 essays); 4) “Des discours et des pratiques” (3 essays). The volume is rounded off by an accurate bibliography, a carefully penned index, a section of abstracts in both French and English as well as a section of short author biographies, also in both languages. The proudly bilingual nature of the volume is also attested by the presence of six essays in French, including, of course, the introduction. In this respect, I hope not to over-interpret the intention of the editors by highlighting their laudable choice to preserve and foster the multilingual nature of contemporary scholarship against the potentially impoverishing hegemony of the English language. The editorial care, the accurate layout, the choice of font and paper have all contributed to the production of an all-round high-quality publication, which is a synesthetic pleasure to page through.

The introductory essay traces several epistemological attitudes in Indian studies towards textualized South Asian scholarly disciplines and learned practices. For instance, what one might call an “emic approach” takes seriously the Sanskrit concept of *śāstra* (knowledge system or, simply, branch of knowledge) and organizes research along the lines drawn by the traditional framework. This method is beset with issues such as lack of historicity and an essentializing tendency, but it does minimize the dangers of superimposing Western concepts onto the South Asian archive. By contrast, close to the other end of the spectrum, what we might call

the “cherry-picking approach” carries out readerly raids through highly praised South Asian texts in search of what is established as universal, human constants such as “reason” or “religion”. This well-meaning form of “epistemology” is, nevertheless, plagued with a lack of historical awareness about its own conceptual toolkit, and it risks misinterpreting much of the primary source material owing to insufficient contextualization. Trying to move beyond these and other similarly problematic epistemic perspectives, the editors propose an “experimental and critical attitude, away from the arbitrary and dogmatic application of Western taxonomies” by employing the term “scholasticisms” (*scholastiques*) as a flexible and dynamic concept that needs no strict definition, as it does not aim at delimiting and normalizing research, but at disclosing and orienting it. To quote a famous line by Wilhelm Halbfass, arguably one of the luminaries of the hermeneutical project carried out by this book, “the dialogic situation is still open”.

No single essay is below the standards of international scholarship or undeserving of a thorough analysis, but lack of space forces me to focus on the two papers that are closest to my research interests.

Y. Bronner’s contribution, “In search of scholasticism: Sanskrit poetics and its long path to Śāstrahood”, is a vibrant read that highlights how the history of Sanskrit poetics is nothing but a millennium-long search for the creation of a full-fledged scholarly discipline, “a long journey full of twists and turns, false starts, and dead ends” (p. 99). This historical characterization renders the discipline of *Alaṃkāraśāstra* – with its constant *Streben* towards an ideal of “Scholasticism” represented by other disciplines such as Grammar or Vedic Exegesis – the ideal, theoretical foil to gauge the contours of what a *scholastique* is supposed to be in pre-modern South Asia. Moreover, I might add, the history of Sanskrit poetics mirrors, so to speak, the history of Euro-American philosophy after the decline of the scholastic tradition, i.e. a succession of incessantly opposing views and new attempts at the creation of the ultimate theoretical edifice of Knowledge that constantly lies out of sight and falls short of the acceptance of every new generation of thinkers.

H. David’s article on the birth and early development of Advaita Vedānta as an exegetical tradition is a staggeringly learned and state-of-the-art contribution that spans the formative centuries of the most known and sometimes least understood philosophical system of South Asia. The clear formulation of a separate exegetical category for Upaniṣadic statements is traced to an innovative move in Maṇḍana Mīśra’s *Vidhiviveka*, the culmination of centuries of fuzziest recourse to, and problematic categorization of, Upaniṣadic materials in earlier authors such as Gauḍapāda and Bhartṛhari. The philological care is exemplary, especially while handling arduous and textually fraught works such as the *Vākyapadīyasvavṛtti* and the *Vidhiviveka* itself.

Knowing well that no book can aim at exhaustiveness and that scholarly lacunae are never to be blamed, but to be filled with further research, I would have loved to have seen an article on Sanskrit dramaturgy, which would have permitted a deeper investigation into the relationship between “scholastic” discourse and concrete practices, which is only tackled in the last section of the volume. In this regard, one should refer, most prominently, to the article by C. Zotter, who focuses on “the dynamics of actual ritual practice in a specific local and social context” (p. 240) in Nepal, with an approach that merges the historically informed textual study of numerous ritual texts from a plurality of genres with hands-on anthropological fieldwork in the Kathmandu Valley.

To conclude, *Les scolastiques indiennes* is an extremely valuable contribution to contemporary scholarship in South Asian studies, whose strongest suits are the presence of several outstanding papers and the open-ended, overarching vision of

the enterprise that gives rhythm to this collective volume without stifling it in any predetermined conceptual scaffold.

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EAST ASIA

GUILLAUME JACQUES:

A Grammar of Japhug.

(Comprehensive Grammar Library 1.) xxvi, 1562 pp. Berlin: Language Science Press, 2021. ISBN 978 3 98554 001 3 (hardcover), 978 3 96110 305 8 (digital edition).

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Guillaume Jacques's grammar offers a comprehensive description of Japhug, one of the Core Gyalrong languages of the Tibeto-Burman (Trans-Himalayan, Sino-Tibetan) language family spoken in Sichuan Province, China. The grammar is based on oral texts and conversations rather than on elicited material, the data being recorded over nine fieldtrips (2002–2018) and supplemented by constant phone contact with the consultants. Taken together, the amount of data, extensive and long-lasting contact with the language community, and reliance on non-elicited materials archived in Pangloss, mean that the grammatical description rests on particularly solid ground and makes credible claims that can be independently verified. Readers benefit from the hyperlinks in the digital edition of the grammar that connect the examples to the Pangloss archive that hosts the recordings of the original narrations. While archiving at least a part of the original data to a publicly available database has become common practice in grammar writing of less-researched languages, Jacques's interactive approach offers a great illustration of how information technology can and should be used to enhance grammatical descriptions in the digital era.

Descriptive grammars show a decades-long trend towards longer and more in-depth descriptions of their target languages. While the trend is partly due to advances in linguistic research, such as the "epistemicity boom" of recent decades that has benefitted descriptions of evidential systems in languages of the world, the trend also reflects changes in the genre of descriptive grammars, "comprehensive grammars" gaining ground as a prominent subgenre. Jacques's detailed grammar fits neatly into this trend in grammatography and in many ways epitomizes it. With a meticulous and systematic treatment of Japhug grammar, the description not only synthesizes the author's previous work on the language that has appeared in various articles and monographs, but also offers many new contributions, which makes *A Grammar of Japhug* not only the most comprehensive documentation of a Tibeto-Burman minority language, but also one of the most comprehensive monographic grammatical descriptions of any language in existence. This is all the more remarkable an achievement, since prior to the author's first steps in Japhug research approximately two decades ago, very little was known about the language, and more broadly, many breakthroughs of Gyalrongic scholarship were still to take place.

From the viewpoint of users, comprehensive grammatical descriptions present their own challenges distinct from those of shorter grammars. For instance, while typologists looking for source materials concerning specific grammatical phenomena often lament