
This volume edited by Walter Slaje contains ten papers that were presented at the 13th World Sanskrit Conference, held in Edinburgh in 2006. The book is introduced by E. Gerow’s En archêi èn ho logos. With vivacity of style and sharpness of observation the author provides the reader an overview of the variety of topics and ancient Indian texts that are treated in the book. These are all related to the notion of beginning, ārambha, especially as applied to philosophical or scientific treatises, śāstra. The volume is appended with a useful index by A. Pohlus.

It is notable that three papers concern themselves with the beginning of a work in the sense of paratext (though none of the authors use this term), defined according to G. Genette (1991: 261f.) as a threshold that is the “privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public in the service [...] of a better reception of the text”. A common characteristic in the Indian tradition of composing and transmitting written works is the fact that, in the hand of commentators as well as ancient editors, this opening portion of a work has often shifted from the status of paratext to that of text (see, for instance, the case mentioned by P. Balcerowicz, p. 35, n. 25).

In the first paper of the volume, Why Should We Read the Maṅgala Verses?, Ch. Minkowski offers a fine outline of the nature, role and history of maṅgala verses, and also presents some of the theoretical reflections that developed about them. Minkowski distinguishes between the different types of auspicious opening phrases found in manuscripts or printed editions based on the respective responsible person, i.e., the author of the
work, the commentator, or the copyist. The history of maṅgala verses in the various śāstras he traces, admittedly provisionally, confirms Genette’s (1991: 270) general statement that, in the case of a paratext, one is dealing “with a discourse much more ‘constrained’ than many others”. Another discussion of paratextual opening verses is found in the important contribution of P. Balcerowicz, Some Remarks on the Opening Sections in Jaina Epistemological Treatises, which compares a number of philosophical Jaina texts in order to investigate leitmotifs in their initial verses. He observes a diachronic development in their content. Originally, they display a ritualistic dimension in the texts’ composition (p. 32). This then evolves in a vein that is polemic and self-asserting, an ideal reply to the authors of the Buddhist epistemological school. Balcerowicz suggests that the features of an author’s maṅgala verses reflect both the character of a given work (p. 59) and a changing audience, which after the mid-sixth century was no longer exclusively Jaina (p. 57). The author’s tentative assumption that Samantabhadra’s and Akalaṅka’s later works are of polemical character and mainly addressed to a non-Jaina audience (p. 57 and 69) seems, however, to be in need of further evidence.

The third paper dealing with paratextual elements, Ph. A. Maas’ Descent with Modification: The Opening of the Pātañjalayogaśāstra, shows that the maṅgala verses of the vulgate Pātañjalayogaśāstra may have been added in Bengal after the 12th cent. AD (p. 113). He arrives at this conclusion mainly on the basis of philological considerations. This demonstrates the importance of working with critical editions that contain a reliable critical apparatus referring the reader to the various readings that history has produced in the process of a text’s transmission. Most of Maas’ article is devoted to methodological considerations concerning textual criticism and their application to the extant textual witnesses of the Pātañjalayogaśāstra. A tentative stemma representing the relations between witnesses (p. 100) is supplemented by a statistical table (p. 101) containing percentage data that can be used to establish affiliations between witnesses. However, Maas observes that the table is not a particularly “powerful tool to enhance our knowledge of the stemmatical relations” (p. 103). His statement can be supported by pointing out the contradiction between the relation of the manuscripts Tvγ and Pcξ as indicated in the stemma and the relation deriving from the calculation based on the data of the table. In fact, according to the stemma, the two witnesses Tvγ and Pcξ go back to a common exemplar gy, whereas according to the calculation for the group-affiliation they should not because the percentage of common readings shared by Tvγ and Pcξ, namely 56, is lower than 61%. A further remark of Maas — “the reason for this weakness lies in the incoherence of the textual tradition itself” (p. 103) — most proba-
bly alludes to contamination (i.e., the use of different sources on the part of a copyist in the production of a new copy of a specific text), which unfortunately regularly forces the textual critic to make observations case-by-case and spoils the reliability of the clear-cut results one obtains by adopting numerically-based methods when analysing stemmatic relations between textual witnesses.

Three papers present reflections deriving from the analysis of the introductory sections of Indian philosophical texts. J. E. M. Houben, in Doxographic Introductions to the Philosophical Systems: Mallavādin and the Grammarians, examines a passage of Mallavādin’s Dvadaśāranayacakra (I take the liberty of giving the reference here: p. 9, lines 6–7). He demonstrates that Mallavādin’s use of two crucial terms in the passage, *vidhi* and *niyama*, has an “intended affinity with grammar” (p. 86), and that the passage itself is a key-statement, which is repeated throughout the work as an interpretative tool. J. Bronkhorst’s contribution, What was Śaṅkara’s Śāstrārambha? (an abridged version of the essay published in Bronkhorst 2007), takes up the issue of the existence of a unified Mīmāṃsā tradition, especially by analysing Śaṅkara’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. The author’s new interpretation of certain fundamental passages in this work indicates that there is no compelling evidence that, at least until Śaṅkara, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta were “one system of thought” (p. 128). It is then Śaṅkara with his followers and their critics who are among the philosophers examined by M. Schmücker in his interesting article Advaitic Reasoning of Undertaking (ārambha) the Brahmavicārasastra and the Counter-argument in Veṅkaṭanātha’s Śatadūṣaṇī. These philosophers critically reflect on the problems that arise when undertaking the composition of a śāstra, i.e., the act of beginning such a work, in connection with the notion of ignorance, which per se challenges the legitimacy and reliability of a treatise by posing the question of how somebody, or something, that is spatially and temporally conditioned can describe and teach the unconditioned.

The introductory section of a text of Vedic exegesis is carefully investigated by S. D’Intino in Meaningful Mantras. The Introductory Portion of the Ṛgvedabhāṣya by Skandasvāmin. Skandasvāmin’s introduction focuses on the categorization of *mantras* together with an enquiry into their nature: *mantras* are “the very fabric of the memory of the ritual action” (p. 158); they bear a meaning whose obscurity is due to the man’s ignorance (p. 161) and whose understanding does not depend on metrical considerations.

Works of poetics and poetry are the subject of the last three papers in the volume. G. A. Tubb’s Philosophical Beginnings in Sanskrit Treatises on Poetics examines Jagannātha Pāṇḍitarāja’s treatment of the four tra-
ditional anubandhas in the opening of a treatise, in which two traditionally adversary aspects, the poetical and the philosophical, are reconciled. Jagannātha’s innovative contention is in fact that the alaṅkāraśāstra has the status of a philosophical discipline. G. Boccali, in The Incipits of Classical Sargabandhas, offers a survey of the formal preambles of a number of classical poems, identifying their typical features and the reasons for them. The author suggests that the variety of forms displayed in the beginnings of poems composed before Daṇḍin’s time can be related to the fact that “the kavis were keen on voicing their opinion, often giving their reflections a prominent position in their poems” (p. 199). W. Slaje opens his ‘In the Guise of Poetry: Kalhaṇa Reconsidered by hurling several pages of abuse against historians (especially one) who have imposed purely Western, post-modern constructions on pre-modern India. He then analyses Kalhaṇa’s preamble, in particular, in order to demonstrate that the author was a writer of historical poetry who wanted his works to be characterized by a dominant rasa ‘sentiment’, in accordance with Dhvani theorists (p. 228).

Although different in spirit and in object, all ten papers collected in this volume present original observations and the book itself has the merit of pointing out how attention to a structural element such as the “beginning” brings new knowledge and new perspectives in our understanding of the philosophical and literary writings of ancient India. Reaching the end of the book, however, some readers may notice the absence of contributions concerning the openings of Buddhist philosophical texts, some of which present a particularly interesting treatment of the aim of a treatise. The topic has been, for instance, analysed by Toru Funayama (1995), a fine supplement to this volume.

REFERENCES

