

Gyula Wojtilla, *Kāśyapīyakṣisūkti. A Sanskrit Work on Agriculture.* Edited with an Introductory Study by G. Wojtilla. Beiträge zur Kenntnis südasiatischer Sprachen und Literaturen 21. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010, 144 pp.; ISBN 978-3-447-06265-7 – reviewed by Jaroslav Vacek, Charles University in Prague

It is particularly due to the great interest on the part of Western scholars that Indian literary tradition is mainly known for its religious, ritualistic and philosophical texts (be it the early Vedic and later Upanishadic texts, or the much later Puranic texts). It is also known for its real literary creations, especially those of the two great epics (though also interpolated with various texts of the above mentioned genres) and the later *kāvya* texts (poetry, drama, epics) with a complex theoretical background and theoretical analysis of the style etc. In a sense this literature represents the ‘ideal’ space not always connected with the ‘real’ world, or reflecting only some of its features.

From among the scientific texts, those most studied seem to be the texts related to phonetics, linguistics and literary theory, and also philosophy (including the commentaries on the various texts). The other scientific fields are often referred to in systematic surveys and histories of literature, but they are mostly of interest to specialists in the various fields of the specific sciences, less to Indologists. In fact, the Old Indian scientific texts in general (including linguistics etc.) represent

an important and unique contribution of the Indian intellectual tradition to the general knowledge and understanding not only of the surrounding world, but of the whole universe, in which they were very much ahead of the rest of the ancient world.

In this context the edition prepared by G. Wojtilla is an important contribution to one very “down-to-earth” type of Indian ‘intellectual’ tradition, namely the description of agriculture. Besides the edition of the text (pp. 31–92), the work includes a systematic analysis of several important topics. The text has been ascribed to Kāśyapamuni and the author, his age and provenance are discussed in the Introduction (pp. 9–19). The text is not easy to date exactly, the proposed dates range within the second half of the 1st Millennium A.D. (p. 11). Further G. Wojtilla analyzes the structure of the work, its language and style and summarizes the information about the sources (manuscripts, etc.; pp. 20ff.). Of particular importance is the Glossary of selected terms unattested or insufficiently recorded in Sanskrit dictionaries.

Some relevant information obtained from the text is analyzed in five Appendices (pp. 103–137), including information about the society of those times as seen in the text (Appendix One) and some aspects of agricultural technology and methods (including crop rotation, meteorology, manure, irrigation, agricultural tools etc.; Appendix Two). Appendix Three touches upon the more ‘metaphysical’ aspects, such as the role of gods, ritual and worship. Appendix Four deals with what is ‘edible or inedible’ and Appendix Five contains a list of the names of plants, as they appear in the text, and their botanical identification.

Though this text is concerned with one ‘practical’ aspect of life, or perhaps exactly because it is so, it is also an important testimony to the language reflecting these various aspects and its special features. In fact, the vocabulary of this branch is in many ways very specific and betrays the influence of the pre-IA languages (cf. e.g. Southworth 2005; or M. Witzel 2006 with further references),¹ and in that

¹ Cf. in particular Franklin C. Southworth, 2005, *Linguistic archaeology of South Asia*. London: Routledge-Curzon (passim, and especially

it reflects one relevant aspect of the ancient reality. From that it would follow that much of the agricultural tradition was to a great extent linked to the indigenous population and that is why many terms were automatically borrowed from their languages.² The list of the names of plants (App. Five, pp. 133–137) deserves attention and this topic should certainly be studied further on the basis of more materials drawn from similar texts. It is not only a lexicographical question. In the case of a specific text it is also a question of what aspects of the external (and also social) reality the text reflects and in which way – which should then provide relevant information with respect to its location in time and space.

To conclude, besides the edition of the text, the book offers a complex analysis of a number of important topics in the Appendices. In doing so it provides an invaluable source of information on, and interpretation of, the questions concerning the agricultural tradition as a complex product of everyday life of ancient Indian society. This is because agriculture was certainly one of the important phenomena characterising the life of ancient people. In this form the present edition appears to be a non-negligible ‘handbook’ to help in understanding this very extensive topic, while it may also offer a useful background for the interpretation of other aspects of ancient everyday life.

pp. 193ff.). Further cf. M. Witzel, 2006, South Asian Agricultural Terms in Old Indo-Aryan. In: *Proceedings of the Pre-Symposium of RHIN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table*. Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RHIN), pp. 96–120. Franklin C. Southworth, 2005, *Linguistic archaeology of South Asia*, London: Routledge-Curzon, pp. 193ff.

² Note what M. Witzel (2006, p. 96) says concerning this question: “(In this paper) only the most important terms can be dealt with, such as those for wheat, rice, millet and plough – all of which have diverse, non-Indo-Aryan origins. This is typical: different from pastoral terms, agricultural ones that have come down to Indo-Aryan from Indo-Iranian and Indo-European (such as ‘barley’) are very rare and indicate the predominantly pastoral interests of the early speakers of Indo-Aryan.”