

Review

The Jaiminīya Mahābhārata Mairāvaṇacaritam & Sahasramukharāvaṇacaritam: A Critical Edition with English Translation from the Grantha Script, by Pradip Bhattacharya and Shekhar Kumar Sen. New Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts and New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2017. 2 vols., lvii + 747 pp., Rs. 1000 (hb). ISBN 978-9-380-82902-9 and 978-9-380-82948-7.

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An edition and translation of any so far unpublished text is always to be welcomed. But in this case the welcome must be qualified by the fact that this edition is not truly critical, despite the claim made on the title page and elsewhere. The editor has worked exclusively from transcripts into Devanāgarī from Grantha script, done for him by another scholar, for the *Mairāvaṇacarita* of just two manuscripts and for the *Sahasramukhacarita* of a single one, all from the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai. However, as noted in the introduction (pp. xvi–xvii), this library contains five manuscripts of the *Mairāvaṇacarita* and two of the *Sahasramukhacarita*, while other scholars (Petteri Koskikallio and Christophe Vielle, ‘Epic and Puranic Texts Attributed to Jaimini’, *Indologica Taurinensia* 27, 2001: pp. 67–93) have calculated that there are in various accessible collections around 20 manuscripts of the *Mairāvaṇacarita* (also commonly called the *Hanumadvijaya*) and around ten of this *Sahasramukhacarita* (also commonly called the *Sītāvijaya*, as indeed in the colophons of the manuscript used here). There are more manuscripts of another text called *Sītāvijaya* or *Sahasramukhacarita* claiming affiliation to the *Vāsiṣṭhottara Rāmāyaṇa*. The great majority of these manuscripts are in Grantha script.

A positive feature of these two volumes, which are effectively a unit, paged continuously, is the lengthy introduction in the first volume setting the two texts in their context in relation both to the *Jaimini Bhārata* and to other versions of both episodes: in Sanskrit (only in fact the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, ignoring the *Ānanda* and *Tattvasaṃgraha Rāmāyaṇas*, as well as reference in the *Śiva Purāṇa*), in the vernaculars (a surprising absence here is any mention

of Zvelebil's translation of the Tamil folktale, *The Story of Peacock Rāvaṇa*, although other versions are well covered from secondary literature) and in 'Greater India' as they term Southeast Asia. The introduction is followed by reproductions of a couple of Indian miniatures of Hanumān's exploits (regrettably lacking information on the collection housing them) and of twentieth-century murals in the Royal Palace, Phnom Penh. The text and then translation of the 20 *adhyāyas* of the *Mairāvaṇacarita* complete the first volume, while the second volume contains the text and translation of the 50 *adhyāyas* of the *Sahasramukharāvaṇacarita*, followed by a bibliography and a glossary.

The editor raises the question in the introduction of whether these two texts are by the same Jaimini as the *Jaiminīya Āśvamedha* but notes against this the difference in style from that text and the fact that in their internal colophons the *Mairāvaṇacarita* is ascribed just to the *Jaimini Bhārata* but the *Sahasramukharacarita* to the *Āśramavāsikaparvan* of the *Jaiminīya Mahābhārata* (pp. xvii-xxv). The only comment on dating concerns the reference at the end of the *Mairāvaṇacarita* to the six-syllable Rāma mantra found in the *Rāmarahasya Upaniṣad*, belonging possibly to the seventeenth century (p. xviii). But also relevant are the fact that both texts present highly developed versions of their narratives and the appearance of the five-headed form of Hanumān, not attested either verbally or visually before the fifteenth century but introduced almost casually at the climax of the *Sahasramukharāvaṇacarita*.

For the *Mairāvaṇacarita* one of the two manuscripts used is usually followed, with variants from the other given in footnotes (of which the numbering is erratic). The reason for choosing only those two manuscripts appears to be that they are complete (p. 77 n. 1), although the evidence of further manuscripts, even if incomplete, could have been valuable. The text of the *Sahasramukharacarita* has a major lacuna from 13.34d to early in *adhyāya* 17, which might well have been filled if other manuscripts had been consulted. The occasional corrections to the text found in the manuscripts are not always well judged; most obviously, the proposed correction of *sītām* to *mātāṅgīm* at *Mairāvaṇacarita* 5.1c produces a hypermetric *pāda*—a better correction would be *bhāryām*—and adding *śūlam* at *Sahasramukharāvaṇacarita* 35.31a does so even more; the verse is intelligible without it, though awkward.

The translation is made in free verse but is nevertheless literal to the point at times of being almost unintelligible, both in its wording and in its close adherence to Sanskrit word order. An example of the first defect is 'All the devas were powerless before this Rāvaṇa, who made the world scream, Meghanāda of maha-maya, the maha-mighty Kumbhakarṇa' (*Mairāvaṇacarita* 1.24cd-25ab), showing both the over-employment of the untranslated *mahā-* and the failure to translate *māyā* until much later on; another is 'Pranaming the boon-granting deva' (*Sahasramukharāvaṇacarita* 1.21a). An example of the second is 'Outside the city-walls in eight directions eight palaces got built—very large like the palace of Puraṁdara—Sahasramukharāvaṇa as residences for the dānavas' (*Sahasramukharāvaṇacarita* 9.12-13b).

It is indeed unclear what readership the translation is intended for. The translation itself assumes a degree of acquaintance with the culture and its vocabulary that is more consistent with an Indian readership but many of the explanatory footnotes are pitched at an elementary level more suited to a Western readership.

Despite the relatively late date of these two texts within the Rāma story tradition, they show little sign of the *bhakti* emphasis of other texts, as the editor rightly notes (p. xxi), for they are in reality nearer to being folktales than devotional works. As such, a highly literary translation would not have been appropriate and, taken as a whole, this translation is reasonably faithful to their character, including their rather excessive fondness for repetitive battle scenes. So overall this pair of volumes is to be welcomed and it would also be welcome if they were joined before too long by an edition of a similar Rāma-oriented work in the *Jaimini Bhārata* tradition, the *Setumāhātmya* and even of the *Jaimini Rāmāyaṇa*, of which fewer manuscripts are extant in both cases. It is also greatly to be hoped that their publication will provide a stimulus to further work on them by other scholars.