

G. JAN MEULENBELD:

*A History of Indian Medical Literature.*

(Groningen Oriental Studies Volume XV/I–III.) Groningen: Egbert Forsten (Ia and Ib) 1999; (IIa and IIb) 2000; (III) 2002. Ia: 1 frontispiece, xvii, 699 pp.; Ib: 1 frontispiece, vi, 774 pp.; IIa: 1 frontispiece, viii, 839 pp. (in addition: reprint of 19 pages defective in Ia); IIb: 1 frontispiece, viii, 1018 pp.; III (Indexes): 1 frontispiece, ii, 549 pp. €600.

‘I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so.’ This remark by the critic Sidney Smith is a great comfort when approaching the task of writing a review of G. Jan Meulenbeld’s gargantuan *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, published in five bound volumes totalling 4,020 pages, and including over 36,600 footnotes. This work is a unique survey of traditional Indian medical literature, born of a scholarly lifetime of reading the texts in the original languages, and noting the important features of their contents, their intellectual and medical innovations, the biographical details of their authors, and very much besides. Few other branches of Indian literature are served by a reference work of this completeness, substance and scope. Pingree’s labours on *jyotiḥśāstra* and Kane’s on *dharma* are perhaps of the same order. And as with those works, one may turn to *HIML* for a wealth of literary and historical information ranging far beyond the medical. Meulenbeld’s *HIML* is truly a landmark work, not only for medical history, but also for Indology as a whole.

Volumes Ia (text) and Ib (footnotes) are dedicated to the foundation works of ayurveda, the *Carakasamhitā*, the *Suśrutasamhitā*, the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* and the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*. The content of each of these major works is summarized in detail, with frequent notes giving points of interest and further reading. Full details are given of all the past discussions about the relationship of these works to each other, and of the dates of their layered parts and the identities of their authors. The identities and roles of the key contributors to the text of the *Carakasamhitā*, Ātreya, Agniveśa, Caraka and Dṛḍhabala, are discussed at length. The persons called Suśruta and their identities are examined, as well Dhanvantari, Divodāsa, and the problem of the later revision and expansion of the *Suśrutasamhitā*, including the role, if any, of a Nāgārjuna in this process, are all detailed. The relative chronology of these two works is discussed. As in many other topics, Meulenbeld presents the evidence and past argumentation comprehensively and fairly, and in doing so shows us that the evidence presently available does not warrant a firm conclusion on the matter. The over-confident pronouncements of past scholars, even great ones, are not conclusive. A full survey of the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* is given in a manner which makes it simultaneously a verse-by-verse comparison with the *Hṛdaya*. Following this, Meulenbeld discusses the dates of these two works, the theories concerning their authorship, and the identity of Vāgbhaṭa. This discussion is extremely detailed, covering a mass of data from external sources such as the Chinese Buddhist monk I-ching, and internal ones such as the large number of common verses or ideas in the two works. Meulenbeld is certain that these works are not by the same author. He examines and rejects the opinion of Hilgenberg and Kirfel that the *Samgraha* is an enlarged version of the *Hṛdaya*, in which verse passages have been changed into prose. Meulenbeld carries the discussion of this problem forward decisively, showing that citations from

Niścala's *Ratnaprabhā* and Śivadāsa's commentary on the *Hṛdaya* prove the existence of a *Madhyavāgbhaṭa*, a treatise intermediate between the *Samgraha* and the *Hṛdaya*. Meulenbeld notes that the surviving textual evidence makes it 'legitimate to have doubts about the authenticity of the text of the *Samgraha* as it has been transmitted'. (Ia, 655). To his cogent textual arguments about these works may be added the observation that few manuscripts of the *Samgraha* survive, and most of those are fragmentary. This fact inevitably raises questions about the history and textual security of the printed editions of the *Samgraha* on which today's scholars rely. The *Hṛdaya*, by contrast, is represented by hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts from all over South Asia: for centuries it has been the principal school text in Kerala, and in traditional centres it still is. On this complex topic, Meulenbeld concludes that the many problems about the texts and their authors are 'far from even approaching a solution' (Ia, 656).

The early compendia called 'the great triad (*brhatrayī*)'—those ascribed to Caraka, Suśruta and Vāgbhaṭa—are works that at least most Indologists have heard of, if not studied. But volumes IIa and IIb of *HIML* will reveal to many for the first time the staggering volume and diversity of scientific literary production in the post-classical period. They survey the thousands of Indian medical works written from about AD 600 up to the present. As far as is possible, each work is described under the following headings: contents, authors and works quoted in the work, its special features, the author and his date, and later authors and works that quote the work. The 'special features' sections deserve particular mention, since they give invaluable information about plants, diseases, or concepts that are mentioned uniquely in a work, or indeed that one would expect to find but are missing. It is especially this detailed analysis of positive and negative evidence, combined with the citations and testimonia, that enables Meulenbeld to place works in a chronological relationship to each other, and to solve innumerable arguments about priority and dating.

Volume II opens up a vast new arena for research. And while all periods produced unique and important works, it is particularly fascinating to see that the rate of literary production in no way diminished in the later periods. Authors in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced a rich and important crop of diverse medical treatises, often describing new diseases, new theories, new treatments, and new medicines. These facts decisively contradict the two common opinions that post-classical Indian medicine was static and unchanging, and that medical creativity entered a dark age after Vāgbhaṭa.

This volume also includes several chapters that will be of interest to a wide range of scholars beyond medical historians. These include the chapters about the pre-modern literature on cookery, on the specialist treatises about pulse diagnosis, on veterinary medicine, on several alchemical treatises, and on the study of gems. Amongst the appendices is a valuable collection of references to medicine found in non-medical literature. This is effectively a research bibliography arranged by title, covering 132 works and genres. Thus, headings such as 'Inscriptions', 'Jain literature', or 'Mahābhārata' give the researcher an immediate head start in studying the medical materials of these fields, and will be especially useful for teachers thinking of pointing their postgraduate students towards projects in medical history.

Volume IIa is completed by a bibliography, the most substantial ever published for ayurveda. This bibliography has also now appeared as a database available for consultation on the Internet. *An Annotated Bibliography of the*

*History of Indian Medicine* is (in 2003–04) at the address <http://www.ub.rug.nl/indianmedicine/>. It contains some 10,000 entries, and is due to be updated as new publications appear: submissions are invited. The online bibliography is searchable in various ways, including keyword, adding greatly to its value as a research tool.

The fifth and last part of *HIML*, vol. III, provides a comprehensive set of indexes, entirely necessary to provide access to the materials of the first four volumes, where information on related topics can sometimes be widely separated. It is important to read the ‘Directions for Use’ at the beginning of this volume, which explain some special features of the indexes.

*HIML* focuses primarily on Sanskrit literature, which is justifiable in view of the fact that the vast bulk of surviving literary material on Indian medicine is in that language. But medical literature in Tibetan, Arabic, Prakrit, Pali, Hindi and many of the other Indian vernaculars are also considered, though normally in the context of their relationship to the Sanskrit materials.

Meulenbeld’s rich appendices to his 1974 *Mādhavanidāna* had already to a large extent replaced Kashikar’s 1956 update and translation of Jolly’s 1901 *Medicin* as the basic survey and bibliography on medical literature. Other important surveys included P. V. Sharma’s *Āyurved kā Vaijñānik Itihās*, and Atrideva Vidyālaṅkāra’s *Āyurved kā Br̥hat Itihās*. *HIML* has now unquestionably become the foundational work on the subject. But its scope is so much greater than earlier works that it cannot sensibly be compared with them. The publication of *HIML* is a quantum leap in the study of Indian medical literature, and provides so much collateral information on other fields that it is already becoming a necessary reference for general work on Indian culture. A colleague working on tantric sources recently sent me an email that is typical of responses to *HIML*: ‘To say that it’s a goldmine, awesome, etc. is an understatement. I can hardly conceive of one person doing all that work in one lifetime’.

In his introduction (Ia, 4), Meulenbeld makes the point that *HIML* is not and does not seek to be a ‘continuous history of Indian medical literature’ in the sense of providing what one might call a ‘story’, having progressive and regressive lines of development, and offering the reader a global sense of the meaning and shape of Indian medical history and its literature. There is a great deal of information on these topics to be found scattered in *HIML*, and it provides the comprehensive and necessary foundation for such a narrative history. But Meulenbeld notes that with the publication of *HIML*, it is now possible for someone else to ‘take upon himself the duty of composing a readable, yet accurate and detached, history of Indian medicine and its literature’.

One area in which discoveries based on the leads given in *HIML* are especially likely to be fruitful are manuscript studies. *HIML* is primarily based on the evidence in published editions of texts, but it also takes careful account of a large amount of manuscript evidence. Inevitably there is much more to be done in this field, especially as new Indian manuscript collections are being catalogued all the time. Thus, a copy of Śaṅkarasena’s *Nāḍiprakāśa* was recently found in Wellcome MS Indic ̡ 80, a Kashmiri Śāradā manuscript datable to c. 1750–1850. This pushes the probable date of Śaṅkarasena’s activity back almost a century earlier than *HIML*’s tentative dating. Such additions to the evidence provided by *HIML* will doubtless gradually accumulate over the decades ahead, during which *HIML* will continue to provide the fundamental reference point for research.

Reciprocally, *HIML* will be a critically important aid to future cataloguers of Indian medical manuscripts.

Almost every page of *HIML* contains nuggets of cultural and historical gold. For example, when Meulenbeld is discussing the *Kalyānakāraka* by the Deccani Jaina author Ugrāditya he notes that ‘The developed state of alchemy in a [South Indian] treatise from the ninth century can only be explained by assuming that this science originated in Southern India and spread from here to the northern parts of the country much later’ (IIa, 155). Such incidental remarks, arising out of the close scrutiny of particular texts, can be expected gradually but profoundly to affect the alignment of many other aspects of Indian literary and cultural history.

The printing of the work is exemplary, and misprints are astonishingly few, which is just as well, given the many thousands of cross-references and citations throughout the text. The volumes are expensive, and this precludes their distribution in India beyond a very few well-funded libraries. This is regrettable, since the scholarship in these volumes will be slow to reach those whose medical tradition is so superbly explored.

DOMINIK WUJASTYK

RACHEL FELL MCDERMOTT and JEFFREY J. KRIPAL (eds):

*Encountering Kālī—in the Margins, at the Center, in the West.*

xviii, 321 pp. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003. £15.95.

Could the hold that the Hindu goddess Kālī has taken over the Western imagination in recent times owe something to a false etymology? Any student of Hinduisim learns early on that we are currently living in the *Kaliyuga*, the last and the worst of the four Yugas or ages of the world—an age of vice and degeneracy. ‘Kali’ was primarily the name of the die or the side of the die marked with one dot—the losing die. We are in a losing age: hence the adoption of the term, which is probably Dravidian in origin. Durgā, wife of Śiva, in her manifestation as the terrifying goddess Kālī, takes her name from Sanskrit *kāla*, meaning ‘black’. It is terribly tempting to make a connection between Kālī and the Kaliyuga, especially if one dispenses with the diacritics that are such a bore to get right even with the best word-processing programs. Thus Keith E. McNeal, in his fascinating contribution to this excellent collection of essays on Kālī in the East and West, says of her devotees in Trinidad: ‘They are aware of the cruel hardships their ancestors endured in coming to the New World, and of the courage that survival through those times necessitated. And their own experiences vividly suggest that the worldly degeneration of the Kaliyug is here to stay. Thus it is clear to them that they should seek the protection and blessings of Mother Kali, for it is her mysterious *shakti*, or power, that liberates us from suffering in this turbulent age.’ The implied connection here is not explicit enough to secure a conviction in a court of law, but it does arouse suspicion... .

Yet the drift of the book as a whole, which has essays ranging from Patricia Dodd’s close study of ‘Kālī the terrific and her tests: Śakta devotionalism in the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*’ to Rachel Fell McDermott’s ‘Kālī’s new frontiers: a Hindu goddess on the Internet’, and from Hugh B. Urban’s ‘“India’s darkest heart”: Kālī in the colonial imagination’ to Patricia Lawrence’s harrowing piece on ‘Kālī in a context of terror: the tasks of a goddess in Sri Lanka’s civil war’, is that such a connection, whether