

Review

Krishna et ses métamorphoses dans les traditions indiennes: Récits d'enfance autour du Harivaṃśa, by André Couture and Christine Chojnacki. Religions dans l'Histoire. Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014. 454 pp., €24 (pb). ISBN 978-2-84050-953-0.

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The most well-known stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood are those of Book 10 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As explored by Noel Sheth (*The Divinity of Krishna*, 1984), Freda Matchett (*Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra?*, 2001), and others, those stories stand within a tradition that reaches back through the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to the *Harivaṃśa*, the earliest text that tells of Kṛṣṇa's childhood in detail. But as this book demonstrates, the tradition of adjusting and elaborating upon those *Harivaṃśa* stories was by no means confined to Hindu contexts. This book places the *Harivaṃśa* stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood alongside sometimes very different stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood from the Buddhist and Jain traditions; and in so doing it supplies valuable materials for the study of inter-religious dynamics in early South Asia.

The book is framed in prospect by a short introduction, a historical chart of the salient texts in the three religious traditions, and a detailed summary of *Harivaṃśa* chapters 30–78 (which were translated into French by Couture and published in 1991 as *l'Enfance de Krishna*). The meat of the book is split into three parts, focusing on Kṛṣṇa's childhood in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, respectively. Each part has an introduction of its own, and then presents a series of individually introduced textual passages of varying lengths, in translation from Sanskrit, Pāli, Ardhamāgadhī, or Apabhraṃśa, as the case may be. The book ends with a short conclusion, a bibliography of sources in various languages, and three detailed glossarial indexes, one for each part of the book.

The Hindu part (pp. 41–126) contains extracts from the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*, from an important Southern Recension interpolation into the *Mahābhārata* (appendix passage 21 of the *Sabhāparvan*, the subject of a recent study by Thennilapuram Mahadevan), and from

Kṣemendra's eleventh-century *Bhāratamañjarī*. The Buddhist part (pp. 127–61) contains the *Ghatajātaka* with its *Jātakaṭṭhavaṇṇanā* commentary. The Jain part (pp. 163–376) is the longest by far; after an introduction (reworked from a previously published article) that distinguishes three different categories of narrative modification within the Jain materials, this part of the book is then further subdivided into Śvetāmbara and Digambara sections, the former containing extracts from the *Antagaḍadasāo* and Hemacandra's *Triṣaṭṣīśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, and the latter containing extracts from Jinasena's *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, Svayambhu's *Riṭṭhaṇemicariu*, Guṇabhadra's *Uttarapurāṇa*, and Puṣpadanta's *Mahāpurāṇu*.

Within the Jain part of the book the translations are interspersed with brief summaries, sometimes of passages that have not been translated (because they are judged to be less important), and sometimes of passages that have. Although the method of presentation thus varies from extract to extract (and sometimes even within the same extract), the variations make sense; they succeed in making these very different and sometimes difficult texts accessible, and thus in facilitating the book's comparative agenda.

I will not offer a detailed analysis of the book's translations; that were better done by a native French speaker. Suffice it to say that they are clear and thoughtful translations, the majority of them in prose, interspersed with short parentheses supplying important words from the source language, elucidating pronouns and epithets whose reference might otherwise be obscure to the reader, and giving details of the metres used in the source text.

It should be pointed out that there are several ways in which *Krishna et ses métamorphoses dans les traditions indiennes* stops short of being quite what its main title might suggest. Firstly, the book largely restricts itself to Kṛṣṇa's childhood, ending with the death of Kaṃsa and the liberation of Mathurā, and thus there are many famous episodes in Kṛṣṇa's life with which it does not properly deal. This restriction is not explicitly justified within the book. It is quite rightly pointed out that to cut out Kṛṣṇa's childhood and treat it in isolation 'is, from an Indian point of view, artificial and thus unsatisfactory' (p. 14, my translation, here and below)—but it is also in practice very difficult to do, particularly with the Buddhist and Hindu materials, and so the texts translated sometimes include (e.g. towards the end of the *Ghatajātaka*) reworkings of episodes not mentioned in the introductory part. Secondly, as the authors admit, the Hindu part of the book is rather restricted in terms of the range of sources that are included; although 'the chosen extracts allow the reader to see that the lists of [Kṛṣṇa's] great deeds were able to vary depending on the speaker' (p. 16), nonetheless the Hindu Purāṇas showcase a variety of developments that are not exemplified here. As mentioned earlier, that variety has been explored already within the scholarly literature, and the intent of this volume is to open up an inter-religious comparative perspective by demonstrating 'the way, or rather ways, in which young Kṛṣṇa was talked about before the BhP supplanted the HV tradition' (p. 15); but nonetheless, in doing

that it runs the risk of downplaying the variety within the Hindu tradition. Thirdly, and again as the authors admit, the variety within the Jain tradition is also more extensive than the texts selected for inclusion might suggest.

Notwithstanding such potential drawbacks—which, after all, are an inevitable result of keeping it down to manageable proportions—this book constitutes a significant breakthrough for the study of Kṛṣṇa in South Asian literature. Its collaborative authorship and its strategy of alternating panoptical overviews with translations of key passages allow it to present a wide range of detailed materials in a way that will be useful and entertaining for many different types of readers, from students and the interested general public to professional researchers. Its accessibility is also enhanced by its very reasonable price. I only wish it were in English, so that I could use it with my students.