Review Essays

A New Text and Translation of Java's Rāmāyaṇa

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Willem van der Molen, *H. Kern Rāmāyaṇa. The Story of Rāma and Sītā in Old Javanese, Romanized edition*. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2015, xxxvi + 656 pp. [Javanese Studies, Contributions to the Study of Javanese Literature, Culture and History 1]. ISBN 9784863271965 (hardcover).

Stuart Robson, *The Old Javanese Rāmāyana. A new English Translation with an Introduction and Notes*. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2015, viii + 812 pp. [Javanese Studies, Contributions to the Study of Javanese Literature, Culture and History 2]. ISBN 9784863271972 (hardcover). Both books can be ordered (free of charge) with the publisher, at <http://www.aa.tufs.ac.jp/en/publications/inquiry>.

As the inaugural volumes in a series devoted to the study of Javanese literature, culture, and history, the ILCAA (the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) has published a text and translation of the Old Javanese Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin (ꦏꦏꦮꦶ). This remarkable series will likely come to represent a benchmark in the field of Old Javanese (Kawi) studies, and will make these important works accessible to a wider readership.

In the first of the two volumes of the ILCAA Willem Van der Molen has romanised the critical edition of H. Kern (1900), which was originally published

in Javanese script. This strikes me as a wise choice of strategies for presenting the text to a modern readership. Attempting a new critical edition incorporating readings from manuscripts available after Kern's time would be an enormous undertaking, and might not yield results in new readings sufficient to justify the effort. Perhaps more important, the republication of Kern's text gives us a timely reminder of the high standards in philology that were achieved by Kern's generation, and their continuing relevance for textual studies in the languages of Indonesia. Van der Molen intervenes very little in Kern's readings, and his emendations are clear and succinct. His work is enhanced by his clear information on the transcription of Javanese script and four appendices on the vast array of meters found in the work.

Van der Molen provides us with an important key to the trisyllabic meters used in the RK and does a serviceable job of rendering the scansion of the morae-based meter Āryā. However, in this case his analysis misses the interaction of the 4-morae feet of Āryā with several trisyllabic feet of the *gaṇa-vṛtta* type. An analysis based on this understanding might have led him to note that four verses described as 'deficient by 3 morae' (RK 1.1–60 & 7.72–75) are not errors, but instances where the poet has chosen to vary his use of Āryā with the common variant Upagīti. This meter differs from Āryā proper in having only 12 morae in the second line and an unusual number of morae (5) and arrangement of heavy (*guru*) and light (*laghu*) syllables in the penultimate foot of the line. This minor lapse in analysis should be understood in the light of the paucity of materials available on this type of Indian meter and the difficulty of mastering the specialised vocabulary of Indian texts on meter like the *Vṛttaratnākara*. The field, in fact, is in need of a separate monograph on this minor but important subject that causes difficulties as much for Balinese readers of the RK as for philologists trained in the West.

Beyond minor quibbles of this type I find no shortcomings in Van der Molen's work and find his volume a joy to work with. It is a pleasure to have Kern's expert reconstruction of the text at hand in a form that bears the stamp of a competent and dedicated philologist.

The reader has another happy experience in store when opening the translation of the RK prepared by the veteran critic and translator S.O. Robson. At a time when the state of inattention to the role of philology in the humanities and Social Sciences has been decried by many scholars aware of its importance in providing the raw material of their historical and critical studies, it is refreshing to encounter the mature products of a philologist who enjoys what he does. After a long career in translating major works of the kakawin genre, Robson has completed a process of studying and translating the RK that has given us a translation that is a pleasure to read. Robson's style is unforced and down-to-earth,

and maintains a flow of narrative that is difficult to achieve in translating the verse epics of the kakawin tradition.

I found the Forward and Introduction to Robson's volume particularly enjoyable. Robson is unashamed of his enthusiasm for philology and presents us with a modest but inviting feast at the table of the RK. The main course consists of accounts of larger themes like the defining role played in the kakawin by the recognition of Rāma as an incarnation of the supreme deity, text-internal evidence for the time and place of the work's composition, and connections with the Indian models for the RK and sources of inspiration in the field of political leadership. His remarks on lexicography are more playful, giving us insight into the joy of discovering the origins and underlying meaning of words like *guci*, a pan-Malay-Indonesian word for 'jar' whose origins lie not in China but in Giao Chi, a production centre for trade ceramics of northern Vietnam. Lest this seem a trivial point, we need only remember that the trade in 'water jars' played an important role in the ancient trading networks in the eastern Indian Ocean world that were the conduits of both material culture and techniques as well as the spread of religious and cultural ideologies. In studying the direction and movement of these currents, uncovering the meaning of key terms in a textual discourse is like finding cultural footprints, a skill that has been honed to a fine edge by Robson.

Given the well-known relationship of the RK to the *Bhaṭṭkāvyam* (BK) and other parallels in the Indian textual corpus, a point Robson acknowledges with admirable clarity in the introduction to his volume, it seems fair to ask whether the present work might benefit from a greater attention to the way that the figures and tropes of the Indian tradition were taken up by the poets of ancient Java. This is especially true in the case of the RK, a work that played a crucial role in building a literary language and idiom that endured thereafter for over a millennium and is replete with figures of speech that meet the standard Indian requirements of ingenuity and beauty, but are recast in a local idiom.

The subtlety and fluency of Robson's translations ensures that in the great majority of cases his handling of figures of speech that can be traced to the Indian tradition is without fault. However, in a number of other cases there are points where a greater familiarity with the traditions of *kāvya*, the epics and works of the Indian tradition of poetics, might yield a more felicitous translation, or deeper insights into the horizon of expectations that framed literary discourses of ancient Java.

One example can perhaps open a fruitful discussion of the role of Sanskrit in Old Javanese studies. This relates to the treatment of RK 16.26 in Van der Molen's text (p. 330) and Robson's translation (p. 388). Since neither mention Aichele (1926) in their bibliographies I suppose we must assume that they have

missed his useful emendations to this verse based on the analysis of six verses between RK 16.24–16.29. Aichele has shown that the reading of this verse can be improved by noting that it is part of an extended figure of speech called *kañcī yamaka*, a ‘sonorous figure’ wherein the last several syllables of each line should be mirrored in the initial syllables of the following line. Based on his analysis of the use of this figure in RK 16.26 Aichele was able to amend the (c) line from faulty *amogha teka milu maweh panas ika*, ‘suddenly it joined in giving heat’ to a form that is consonant with the requirements of the figure: *aho ya teka milu maweh panas rika*. A comparison between Robson’s reading and one based on Aichele’s emendations does indeed produce a more felicitous reading in the (c) line:

The gushing water emerged in streams from the rocks / And came out cool, as well as pure and clear / But suddenly it joined in causing fever / At the time of separation from a beloved it is not cool.

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The gush of water spouting from the rocks / Emerges coolly, and is moreover pure and clear / Ah, behold! That too joins in giving one a feeling of heat / At the time of suffering the pangs of separation (cool water) is not cool.

Reviewer’s emendation

A reading that takes into account the sequence of phonemes required by the *kañcī yamaka* no longer refers to the ‘suddenness’ of the water’s feeling hot, but rather calls attention to the surprising transformation of something cool and pleasant to its opposite. This is, of course, a relatively minor point of philological propriety, but it can be used to open up a discussion of the more general issues that arise when we think of the RK as the product of an ‘interpretive community’ whose enjoyment of literature was framed by a particular set of skills, knowledge, and expectations. RK 16.26 is among many other verses that are notable for an overlay of figures based on the sonorous possibilities of language (*śabdāṣṭkāra*) and figures of speech that depend on factors of meaning and perception (*arthāṣṭkāra*). It is not surprising to find the poets of ancient Java developing a repertoire of figures of speech whose original impetus must have come through exposure to the *kāvya*, and quite likely a handbook on poetics like Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyadarśa*, but the degree to which they developed verses combining the two types of figures is remarkable even by Indian standards, and was clearly intended for an audience that took pleasure in the merging of the categories of sound and sense.

RK 16.26 is a good example of this tendency, for it not only makes creative use of a ‘figure of sound’ based on doubling of phonic sequences (*yamaka*), but also has been composed as an *apahnuti*, a figure of speech based on the denial of one thing and its replacement with another. This figure depends on a denial or deferment of a pre-existing figure with conventional meaning and associations. In RK 16.26 the coolness of water is taken as the conventional meaning, which is then subverted by a denial of this coolness. This particular type of *apahnuti* was classified by Daṇḍin as a *svarūpāpahnuti*, ‘a denial of essential nature’. Here the essential quality of coolness is denied the cool water gushing from a waterspout in order to highlight the ‘heat’ in the lover caused by separation from the beloved. This sophisticated figural motif is then interwoven with the sonorous figure of a ‘chained-yamaka’ (*kañci-yamaka*) that frames the play of identity and difference set up by the *apahnuti*.

What is at stake here is not the relative merits or demerits of the approach that Van der Molen and Robson have taken to their project, for I dare say that even those who may want to problematise some aspect of these two masters of their craft will very likely do so by standing on their shoulders. And we may want to remember that the style of philology and translation that we find represented in Van der Molen and Robson reflects positive advancements in the field of Old Javanese studies following WW II, when philologists like A. Teeuw and P.J. Zoetmulder introduced a keen sensitivity to the nuances of Javanese language and culture, thus charting a course in philology that mirrored the turn towards a Southeast Asian perspective prominent in the work of historian O.W. Wolters. The generation of Teeuw and Zoetmulder imparted this sensitivity to their students in Leiden, Indonesia, and Australia, including Peter Worsley, S. Supomo, and Kuntara Wiryamartana, as well as Robson and Van der Molen themselves.

At present there are increasing signs of a renewed interest in Old Javanese by a younger generation of Sanskritists, and there are a number of younger scholars of Old Javanese whose research involves work in Sanskrit. As this generation comes of age there may be moments when it can seem that the advances made by the older generation in bringing Southeast Asian sensitivities to their work might be undone by a headlong rush to find Indian parallels and sources for works of the Old Javanese tradition.

This came out in a recent exchange of views between Van der Meij (2012:337–40) and Griffiths & Acri (2014), where Van der Meij expressed concern that their adoption of the standard Indological spelling for words in Old Javanese (contra the tradition of publications of the KITLV) may ‘herald a return to the deplorable situation where Indonesian phenomena are not considered in their own rights but rather in those of a so-called “Sanskrit Cosmopolis”’ (Van der

Meij 2012: 340). Perhaps Van der Meij's discomfort with the term 'cosmopolis' responds more to popular notions of this term as a replacement for 'Greater India' or 'Indianisation' than to Pollock's call for attention to the role of the linguistic ideology of Sanskrit in the formation of the early states of South and Southeast Asia. Be that as it may, Van der Meij's fears are quite understandable in a broader sense and remind us that whatever shortcomings there may be in the 'Leiden school' in Old Javanese studies, its representatives have set a high standard in readability and attention to philological detail that should remain a standard for future efforts in the field.

It may be of interest to note that a younger generation of Indologists have found Pollock's term 'cosmopolitan vernacular' more immediately useful than his formulation of the term 'Sanskrit cosmopolis'. This term refers to the many cases where a regional, vernacular language has developed a literature based on the model of Sanskrit, but transformed into a local idiom of literary expression. If we think of the composition of the RK as reflecting the seminal stage in the development of what proved to be a spectacular success story among the 'cosmopolitan vernacular' languages, then we will perforce be interested in giving attention to both the Sanskrit and Indonesian sides of a process of literary development that depended at its inception on the conditions of a transcultural world.

I am sure that there will be students who find that new ground can be broken in Old Javanese studies through more work that understands Old Javanese as a cosmopolitan vernacular language, with a particular relationship to Sanskrit that should be taken into account in studies of the Old Javanese corpus. In this enterprise there can be few better traveling companions than the text and translation of the RK that we now have thanks to the unflagging efforts of scholars like Van der Molen and Robson, and the generous support of the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

References

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