BOOK REVIEW

Cantera, Alberto, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta*  
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Only rarely does a doctoral thesis acquire the status of a handbook that can be used as an introduction to an entire field of research. In even less instances can the introduction to a doctoral thesis lay claim to the same fame. Yet this is in principle what *SPÜ* is: the reviewed introduction to the author’s PhD-thesis, which entails a commented edition of the four first chapters of the Avestan and Pahlavi Vidēvdād. By expanding the preliminary studies which he needed to undertake to study the Pahlavi translation (henceforth: PTr.) of the Avesta, Cantera has provided scholars of the language and culture of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Iran with a new research tool of wide scope and much detail. An equally positive judgement was passed by Mayrhofer (2005) in his review of *SPÜ*.

The book is divided into five chapters: an introductory chapter on the terminology used for the Avesta and its translation (p. 1–34), Chap. 2 on the history of Avestan studies, Chap. 3 on the oral and written transmission of the Avesta and some controversies surrounding this issue, Chap. 4 on dating the PTr. of the Avesta, and Chap. 5 on the translation technique which the Pahlavi translators used. A short epilogue summarizes the main results and puts them in a larger, Indo-Iranian framework. Indices on text passages and words discussed complementize the book.

In the preface, Cantera makes two important points. Firstly, he notes that serious studies of the “Technik, Wert, Alter und Rolle der Pahlavi-Übersetzung in der Avesta-Überlieferung” can hardly be carried out without having an integral text edition and a complete glossary of the whole PTr. at our disposal. Several scholars are now working on parts of such a project, but the final goal has not yet been reached. *SPÜ* is firmly based on an exhaustive study of the first half of the Vidēvdād (see

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on Chap. 5 below), and on other selections from the PTr. which the author does not precisely define (see on Chap. 4). Secondly, Cantera gives three reasons why the PTr. deserves scholarly attention as a subject in its own right: 1. The PTr. is our main witness for the transmission of the Avesta in Sasanian and post-Sasanian times; 2. Other important Pahlavi texts seem to have been heavily influenced by the PTr., making the PTr. one of the cornerstones of Pahlavi studies; 3. Depending on whether we view the PTr. as trustworthy (that is, directly continuing an old tradition) or not, we can decide whether to take it into account in the interpretation of the Avestan text itself.

The layered history of the Avesta and its PTr., the theological contents of the texts and the checkered history of Avestan studies since the 18th century usually do not make for easy reading; under the given circumstances, Cantera has done an excellent job of writing a fluent story. The presentation is clear, the German accessible and varied, and the line of argumentation usually easy to follow. SPÜ cautiously builds on previous studies by other scholars of Avestan and Pahlavi, and draws on his own research to arrive at new and insightful views. On the whole, it does not seem exaggerated to say that SPÜ has taken the study of the PTr. to a higher level. In addition to that, we will need to rethink some parts of the textual history of the Avesta itself. The main conclusions at which SPÜ arrives (p. 345–347) are:

– The PTr. of the different Avestan texts are chronologically stratified. This was always suspected, but SPÜ places this view on a much firmer footing. From older and better texts to younger and less reliable ones, Cantera distinguishes five categories: 1. Vidēvdād; 2. Nērangestān, Hērdadestān; 3. Yasna; 4. older Xwardag Abastāg (Ohrmazd Yašt, Afrīnagān, Sīrōzāg, Niyāyišn); 5. younger Xwardag Abastāg (Gāh partly, Wištasp Yašt, most other Yašts).
– The oldest PTr. show a surprisingly good understanding of the Avestan language. This suggests an uninterrupted tradition from at least the beginning of the CE, if not before.
– Linguistically, the oldest translations resemble the language of Manichean and Inscriptional Middle Persian (2nd–3rd c. AD) more than the later Book Pahlavi (600–900 AD).
– There is evidence for different oral and maybe written versions of PTr. of the same Avestan texts, probably from different exegetic schools. These versions can be dated to the 4th to 6th centuries.
– The final redaction of the PTr. of the oldest texts (Vidēvdād, Nērangestān, Hērdadestān) probably took place in the 6th century.

In the last part of Chap. 5, SPÜ dwells on the question whether the PTr. ultimately goes back to an Indo-Iranian tradition of orally transmitting sacred texts and providing them with a philological and grammatical analysis. Spiegel first raised this question in 1860 and tended to reject this explanation. Cantera is now in a position to be more optimistic about the possibility of a common source. The Avestan texts themselves show similarities to the padapātha version of the Rigveda, especially in the use of the separation point which separates first from second members of compounds, preverbs from verbs, suffixes from their base, and certain endings from nouns. As SPŪ rightly holds, many details of the analysis in Avestan are reminiscent of those in Rigvedic, to an extent that excludes coincidence. Since direct influence