Peter Schreiner


Following more than one and a half century after Horace Hayman Wilson’s groundbreaking and hugely influential English translation of the Viṣṇupurāṇa, this volume presents a fresh and first translation of the Viṣṇupurāṇa into German, published in the popular Verlag der Weltreligionen series. The volume is even billed on the accompanying cover as the first translation of a Sanskrit Purāṇa into the German language: ‘Mit dem Viṣṇupurāṇa erscheint zum ersten Male ein Purāṇa in deutscher Übersetzung aus dem Sanskrit.’¹ Like Wilson’s original English translation, this is more than a mere translation. Schreiner has been engaged in the study of the Viṣṇupurāṇa almost from the start of his Indological studies, culminating initially in his unpublished habilitation thesis Die Hymnen des Viṣṇupurāṇa: Materialen zur Textanalyse des Viṣṇupurāṇa (Tübingen 1980). The volume is concluded with an overall study of the Viṣṇupurāṇa, which i.a. summarizes the findings of this thesis and ‘betritt insofern Neuland in der Purāṇa-Forschung’ (p. 622, n. 29). The work is testimony to a lifetime deep engagement with the text.

Wilson in his days provided extensive annotations to his translation, employing the help of a team of Pandits, ‘so as to render the present publication a sort of concordance to the whole, as it is not very probable that many of them [Purāṇas] will be published or translated.’² Luckily these prophetic words have not been proven true, but critical research of the Purāṇas has for a long time been considerably limited compared to certain other fields of Sanskrit literature, not in the least because of the long lack of critical editions. As for translations, a significant number of the Purāṇas have been translated and published in recent decades in the Ancient Tradition and Mythology series, which now comprises more than 70 volumes. These can, however, hardly be qualified as scholarly translations and should only be used with the greatest

¹ The qualification ‘Sanskrit’ is needed. The first translation of a Purāṇa into German was made, long ago, from Tamil: H.W. Schomerus, Śivaitische Heiligenlegenden (Periyapurāṇa und Tiruvātavūrar-Purāṇa). Religiöse Stimmen der Völker. Texte zur Gottesmystik des Hinduismus 2. Jena: Diederichs 1925.
² H.H. Wilson, The Vishṇupurāṇa: A System of Hindy Mythology and Tradition. Translated from the original Sanskrit and illustrated by notes derived chiefly from other Purāṇas. London: Trüber & Co., 1840, p. lxxii. As Schreiner observes (p. 651), the publication of Wilson’s translation was done long before the Sanskrit text itself was published for the first time in 1868.
care. Against this background, a new translation of one of the early Purāṇas with a significant cultural and historical legacy is most welcome, in particular because it concerns a Purāṇa that has been critically edited.

The critical edition of the Viṣṇupurāṇa was published by the Oriental Institute, Baroda, in 1997 and 1999, after the completion of their edition of the Rāmāyaṇa, published between 1951 and 1975. Schreiner himself was involved in this publication as well; he prepared the pāda index of the Baroda edition. As he was one of the first generation of Indological scholars engaged in the preparation of electronic text files, he was able to produce a computer-generated pāda index for the edition. A little of this history is documented in the book: ‘Im Zuge meiner Arbeit über die Hymnen des Viṣṇupurāṇa (1980) wurde eine elektronische Version des Sanskrittextes der Veṅkaṭeśvara-Ausgabe und jener von Bombay 1889 erstellt. Der konstituierte Text der Critical Edition wurde nachträglich manuell mit der Veṅkaṭeśvara-Ausgabe kollationiert. Mit Genehmigung der Autoritäten des Oriental Institute, Baroda, wird dieser elektronischen Text im Internet zur Verfügung gestellt.’ (p. 652). Schreiner refrains from engaging with the edition’s principles of selection of individual readings (‘Es konnte nicht die Aufgabe der Übersetzung sein, die Arbeit des Herausgebers grundsätzlich zu hinterfragen oder neu aufzurollen’, p. 652). And he does not include translations of those passages that have been relegated by the editors to the critical apparatus or appendix for want of sufficient textual support (‘Es ist der konstituierte Text der Critical Edition, der hier übersetzt wurde, und zwar ohne die in Fußnoten oder Appendices ausgelagerten und von der Überlieferung nicht hinreichend gut bezeugten Interpolationen’, p. 652). While he is to be credited for making this translation principle explicit—in contrast to many other translations in the field that simply follow the text of an edition without any further consideration—it is regrettable that Schreiner has refrained from translating these passages, for it would have forced the reader to engage with the question of the ‘Textüberlieferung’ and ‘Wirkungsgeschichte’

3 Ancient Tradition and Mythology, by a ‘board of scholars,’ published by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. A translation of the Viṣṇupurāṇa is not (yet) included in this series.
5 While no link is provided in the book, the e-text has been made available on the server of the Universität Zürich: http://www.aoi.uzh.ch/indologie/textarchive.html (accessed 23 April 2016).