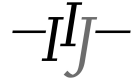




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Review Articles



What is Ailing Purāṇic Studies?

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Abstract

Commencing from a critical reading of two recent publications on the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the *Devīmāhātmya*, this article argues that, contrary to what is maintained by the author of the two books under review, what is ailing Purāṇic studies is not a reliance on traditional modes of textual criticism, but a misunderstanding about its utility for accessing the dynamic history of Purāṇic text corpora.

Keywords

Purāṇas – *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* – *Devīmāhātmya* – *Skandapurāṇa* – text-criticism

Raj Balkaran, *The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth. Ring Composition, Royal Power, and the Dharmic Double Helix*. London / New York: Routledge, 2019. xii, 165 pp. £120.00 (hardback) / £40.49 (eBook). ISBN: 971-1-138-60957-0 (hbk) / 978-0-429-46612-0 (ebk).

Raj Balkaran, *The Goddess and the Sun in Indian Myth. Power, Preservation and Mirrored Māhātmyas in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. London / New York: Routledge, 2020. xi, 184 pp. £120.00 (hardback) / £40.49 (eBook). ISBN: 978-0-367-33805-3 (hbk) / 978-0-429-32202-0 (ebk).

In their announcement ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the *Skandapurāṇa*’, published in this journal in 1994, the authors wrote that “what eventually made its way into generally acclaimed Purāṇic compositions, was a redactor’s choice out of textual materials locally produced. It is through philological research based on manuscripts that this selection and the criteria by which it operated—i.e. the genetic principles of Purāṇa literature as a whole—can be brought alight. No structuralist analysis, taking printed texts for granted, will ever delve so deep.”¹ Since then, five volumes of the critical edition of the early *Skandapurāṇa* have appeared, along with a range of related studies, which have significantly deepened our understanding of the principles of composition, redaction and transmission of the *Skandapurāṇa*, and, by extension, of Purāṇic literature in general.² Constituting the backbone of Brahmanical Hinduism through the ages, many Purāṇas—and the *Skandapurāṇa* is no exception—have been subject to a long and dynamic process of “composition-in-transmission”, attesting to their intensive use by various religious communities.

I start with this quotation because the methodology expressed there is diametrically opposed to that advanced by Raj Balkaran in the two books under review. He writes, programmatically, about “transcending the pitfalls of our predecessors in encountering Indian myth. I take the Sanskrit texts I study herein at face value, attentive to the presence of highly conscious compositional strategies at play by the time of their final redaction. [...] I privilege the thematic trends one discerns in viewing the MkP [*Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*] as a whole over the temporal trends one discerns while slicing and dicing it for historicist or philological aims.” (*The Goddess and the Sun*, pp. 2–3). The difference does not so much lie in the nature of understanding—that Purāṇas were composed and redacted with conscious efforts, and not just randomly, is something that lies at the heart of the research of the *Skandapurāṇa* project and is expressed in the above quotation as well—but in the methodology. In the critical edition of the *Skandapurāṇa*, the rich transmission of the text in its various recensions is presented to the reader in the form of a layered apparatus that allows for a study of the changes of the Purāṇa over time.³ The aim is not

1 R. Adriaensen, H.T. Bakker, H. Isaacson, ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the *Skandapurāṇa*.’ *Indo-Iranian Journal* 37 (1994): 325–331 (327).

2 For an overview of publications, see the website of the *Skandapurāṇa* project: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-skandapurāṇa-project#tab-1>.

3 In the words of the editors of the first volume: “Indeed, the manuscript situation allows a unique opportunity to study the process of transmission, involving on the one hand simple scribal corruptions, and on the other hand major additions and ‘recomposition’ or ‘composition-in-transmission.’ [...] The parallel layers of critical apparatus should facilitate the read-

to slice it and dice it, but to study a living Purāṇa tradition in all its complexity, rather than as a single dead end.⁴ Balkaran, by contrast, advocates taking the texts “at face value”, sidestepping any question of what may have come before or what gave rise to the “final redaction”.

1 Sanskrit Texts, Translations and Editions

For a start, however, something should be said about what Balkaran means by “the Sanskrit texts” he studies. Although he writes about taking the Sanskrit texts “at face value”, they are in fact not Sanskrit texts, but English translations. Two texts—or rather one, since the *Devīmāhātmya* forms a part of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*—are central to his work: the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (MkP) and the *Devīmāhātmya* (DeM). For the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* Balkaran relies on the outmoded translation of Pargiter, while for the *Devīmāhātmya* he works with the more recent translation of Coburn.⁵ The quotations from Coburn are overall duly attributed, but, for reasons unclear to me, Pargiter’s translations are mostly not acknowledged at all (this is particularly the case in *The Goddess and the King*).⁶ This seems particularly unfair to Pargiter because he comes in for a bashing: “While Eden Pargiter translated the entire Purāṇa into English in 1904, he was heavily under the sway of the he [sic] legacy of Purāṇic scholarship

ers in following the difference between the three parallel recensions whose variants are reported.” R. Adriaensen, H.T. Bakker and H. Isaacson (eds.), *The Skandapurāṇa. Volume 1: Adhyāyas 1–25*. Critically Edited with Prolegomena and Synopsis. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999, pp. 46–47.

- 4 On Purāṇas as “living texts”, see Peter C. Bisschop, ‘Vyāsa’s Palimpsest: Tracking Processes of Transmission and Re-creation in Anonymous Sanskrit Literature.’ In: N. Staring, H. Twiston Davies and L. Weiss (eds.), *Perspectives on Lived Religion: Practices—Transmission—Landscape* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019), pp. 165–172 (166).
- 5 F. Eden Pargiter, *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. Translated with Notes*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1904. Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess. A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- 6 For example, the first citation from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* in *The Goddess and the King* occurs on pp. 35–36 (MkP 78.27–34), which is Pargiter’s translation but cited without attribution. After this follow two quotations that are not traceable in Pargiter (MkP 101.3–5 on p. 39 and MkP 101.16–17) and which may therefore be Balkaran’s own (but it is hard to tell because the earlier one was not), while it is only on p. 41 that an attribution to Pargiter first appears (MkP 102.22). This is, however, again followed on the next page by another unacknowledged quotation of Pargiter’s translation (MkP 103.2–3). On the other hand, the next quotation (MkP 103.5–12, on pp. 41–42, a hymn of the Sun by Brahmā) is again attributed to Pargiter, but confusingly introduced as “MkP 103.1–4.” It is hard to make any sense of this kind of presentation.

inaugurated by H.H. Wilson, one which condemned the Purāṇas as sectarian Brahmanical corruptions of some long-lost pristine non-sectarian texts.” (*The Goddess and the King*, p. 7). The criticism of Wilson has some justification—although he is an easy 19th-century strawman—but if Pargiter was so much under the sway of the archvillain Wilson and this kind of scholarship is to be “transcended”, as vehemently argued by Balkaran,⁷ it would be advisable not to take the translation of such a scholar as the basis of one’s research, but to go back to “the Sanskrit texts” themselves. The analysis of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the *Devīmāhātmya* offered here in the end is not an interpretation of “the Sanskrit texts”, but of Pargiter’s and Coburn’s English translations of the texts. These then are to be taken as the “final redactions”, which obviously they are not, being rather 20th-century scholarly translations, dissociated from the Purāṇic tradition itself and produced for a different purpose and audience.

Moving to the Sanskrit texts underlying these translations, there is serious confusion in *The Goddess and the Sun*, which comes with an appendix containing the Sanskrit text of “The Sun myths of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa” (pp. 143–167) that is beset with a host of problems. For a start, no information is provided about which edition has been used in preparing this appendix. I suspect that it has been lifted directly out of the e-text repository of GRETIL (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages) or Sansknet⁸—again with no acknowledgement—for it contains the very same mistakes as the e-text and, inconveniently, like the e-text does not include word separation. For two telling examples of shared misprints, from the first page alone, compare *saroṣor’kaḥ* (for *saroṣo ’rkaḥ*, 77.3c) and *duḥ khena* (for *duḥkhena*, 77.8b). The text is furthermore plagued by typesetting problems causing all the palatal ś-s to appear as ú-s, so that the reader has to work their way through gibberish like *viúvakarmamaṇah* (77.1b), *prakhyátayaúas* (77.2a), etc. The problem with the palatal ś-s magically disappears in the second part of the appendix (MkP 101–110: “the Sūrya Māhātmya”), which I speculate may be because it is based on a different source, for the GRETIL e-text only goes up to chapter 93. At the same time, the number of typos in this part outnumbers even those of the previous part of the appendix: on p. 148 alone, e.g., *asrjadvijasattama* for *asrjad dvijasattama*

7 In portraying Wilson as the archvillain of Purāṇic scholarship, Balkaran follows his teacher Elizabeth M. Rohlman. See her article ‘Textual Authority, Accretion, and Suspicion: The Legacy of Horace Hayman Wilson in Western Studies of the Purāṇas.’ *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 51.1–2 (2005): 55–70.

8 http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/3_purana/mkp1-93u.htm (accessed 15 October 2020). The GRETIL e-text itself is said to have been input by members of the Sansknet project, but its website (www.sansknet.org) has since expired.

(101.9d), *tayām* for *tasyām* (101.11c), *sthitām* for *sthitam* (101.13b) and *yasvarūpaṃ* for *yat svarūpaṃ* (101.13c).

The problem gets worse, however, for the edition cited turns out not to be the one that served as the basis for the translations offered in the volume, that is, Pargiter's translation. The reader, that is, is confronted with a mismatch between the cited translations and the actual Sanskrit text provided in the appendix. The issue is rather fundamental, since the e-text is based on an edition whose text and chapter numbering is different from the Bibliotheca Indica edition of K.M. Banerjea on which Pargiter based his translation.⁹ As a consequence, none of the verse references of the citations from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* in the main body of the book match with the verse numbering adopted in the appendix to the very same book, which thus becomes impossible to use (even leaving aside the many typesetting errors). The titles in the appendix already indicate that something is not quite right, for the first part labeled 'MkP 78–79: Sūrya-Saṃjñā-Chāyā episode' in fact quotes chapters 77–78, while the second part labeled 'MkP 101–110: "the Sūrya Māhātmya"' quotes chapters 98–107. These inconsistencies make the appendix functionally useless for reference or further research.

All of this takes me to the heart of the matter. In my review of DICSEP Proceedings 5, while commenting upon the neglect of the critical editions of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in two articles in that volume, I wrote: "In purāṇic studies it sometimes seems everything goes. It is one thing to disagree with the methodology or approach of a critical edition, or be dissatisfied with its results, but quite another to neglect it."¹⁰ The present two books, significantly preceded by laudatory forewords from two established scholars in the field (Greg Bailey and Hillary Rodrigues), go one step further. They make no mention of the existence of different editions, let alone critical editions, and fail to provide the reader with accurate information about the textual basis of their study. If this really is the way forward in Purāṇic scholarship—Bailey boldly states that Balkaran has established himself as "one of the foremost scholars of the Purāṇas with his work on the *Devīmāhātmya*" (*The Goddess and the Sun*, p. iv)—we face a serious problem. There is apparently no longer

9 K.M. Banerjea, *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. In the Original Sanskrit*. Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1862.

10 Review of Ivan Andrijačić and Sven Selmer (eds.), *On the Growth and Composition of the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas: Relationship to Kāvya. Social and Economic Context* (Proceedings of the Fifth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August 2008), Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2016. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 61 (2018): 185–189.

any need for textual criticism; to the contrary, textual and historical criticism are to be regarded with suspicion, as a last remnant of Orientalist scholarship. For example, Yuko Yokochi is castigated for “[p]artaking in the legacy of colonial scholarship”, when she writes that “sound philological studies based on critical editions have not matured in the research into [Purāṇas], thus hampering plausible assessments of literary sources and synthetization with the archaeological sources” (*The Goddess and the King*, p. 4).¹¹ However, if Purāṇas are indeed “living, organic, multi-formed entities, which continually adapted to history, geography, class, gender, vernacular language, and local custom”, as Balkaran writes (*The Goddess and the King*, p. 17), then what we fundamentally need are more, rather than less critical editions of Purāṇas. We should not limit ourselves to the “final redactions”, whatever these may be. Only a critical edition, which, crucially, reports the readings found in the different manuscript traditions, gives the reader access to the Purāṇas’ layered history, and allows for the study of their profound changes and transformations over time. Furthermore, such critical editions should precisely be studied and prepared in conjunction with all other sources (both material and textual) at our disposal.¹² Only such an integrative approach founded on a text-critical basis means taking the Purāṇas as a “living tradition” seriously, not the faithful acceptance of some random form of a text for which we lack any text-critical basis.

In this regard, it is also worth noting that there is not a single mention, let alone use, of the two volumes of the critical edition of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*—including significantly, for the subject of the two books under review, the *Devīmāhātmya*—that were published in 2011 by the Oriental Institute in Baroda.¹³ While in the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa* the Baroda edition of that text has provided the basis for almost all subsequent scholarship, including the recently completed Princeton translation,¹⁴ the Baroda critical editions of the

11 The quotation is from Yokochi’s PhD thesis: Yuko Yokochi, *The Rise of the Warrior Goddess in Ancient India: A Study of the Myth Cycle of Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsini in the Skandapurāṇa*. University of Groningen, 2004, p. 7.

12 For the possibilities that such an approach allows, see the many publications of the *Skandapurāṇa* project referred to in n. 2 above.

13 M.L. Wadekar (ed.), *The Critical Edition of the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇam. Vol. 1 (Adhyāyas 1–75)*. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 2011. M.L. Wadekar (ed.), *The Critical Edition of the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇam (Devīmāhātmyam) (Adhyāyas 76–88)*. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 2011.

14 The last volume of the translation, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, was published in 2017: Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (tr.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume VII: Uttarakāṇḍa*. Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017. As the Goldmans state in their preface: “the importance of having, at last, a scientifically reconstructed archetype of the text as was then being produced by the learned scholars of the

Purāṇas have not had a comparable impact on Purāṇic scholarship. I am not aware of even a single review of them. It is true that these editions leave much to be desired,¹⁵ but to entirely neglect them appears to be the other end of the extreme.

2 The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth

After this lengthy introduction to the problematic nature of the source material, let us turn to the subject matter of the two books under review. The first, *The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth*, involves, as its subtitle indicates, a study of three phenomena deemed central to the inclusion of the *Devīmāhātmya* in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*: ring composition, royal power, and what Balkaran calls “the *dharmic* double helix.” Inspired by the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, Balkaran argues that the narrative of the *Devīmāhātmya* points to a ring composition, a framing device that functions to guide the interpretation of the text.¹⁶ He also invokes in this connection the notion of a

Rāmāyaṇa Department of the Oriental Institute of the M.S. Sayajirao University of Baroda under the directorship of the late Dr. U.P. Shah was obvious” (p. xv). It was in fact the appearance of the critical edition that gave the impetus to the Princeton translation.

- 15 For example, the Baroda editions of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* uncritically follow the neat divide of a Northern recension and a Southern recension of the text on the basis of script, which is a model that has come under criticism in Epic scholarship. More important, the introduction to the two volumes of the critical edition of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* that have appeared so far give very little insight into the editor’s understanding of the nature of the text and its transmission and do not engage with any recent scholarship. Furthermore, the edition of the *Devīmāhātmya*, while incorporating the readings from some of the manuscripts from Nepal, neglects the evidence from some of the oldest *Devīmāhātmya* manuscripts from the region: e.g. NGMPP A 1157/11 (dated Nepal Saṃvat 229 = AD 1109) and NGMPP A 1157/12 (dated Nepal Saṃvat 518 = 1398AD). I thank Yuko Yokochi (Kyoto University) for providing me with information of these manuscripts. Nonetheless, an impressive number of 50 manuscripts have been used in the preparation of the Baroda edition of the *Devīmāhātmya*, which goes far beyond any edition before it and its achievements cannot therefore be put aside.
- 16 Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2007. Balkaran remarks on the scant work done on ring composition in studying Sanskrit texts (p. 23), referring primarily to a PhD thesis of Matthew Bryan Orsborn, *Chiasmus in the Early Prajñāpāramitā: Literary Parallelism in Connecting Criticism & Hermeneutics in an Early Mahāyāna Sūtra* (University of Hong Kong, 2012). Orsborn’s work has been published, in 2017: Shì Hùifēng, *The Structure and Interpretation of Early Prajñāpāramitā: An Analysis via Chiasmic Theory*. Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong Press, 2017. To the few studies listed by Balkaran should be added at least: Stephanie Jamison, *The Rig Veda Between Two Worlds: quatre conférences au Collège*

“model reader” developed by Umberto Eco: “It anticipates a reader intimately familiar with the interplay of two divergent religious ideologies: one fundamentally world-embracing, the other fundamentally world-denying.” (p. 27). These two religious ideologies are subsumed under the concept of “the *dharmic* double helix”, which essentially concerns the irresolvable conundrum of the well-known pair of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. The introductory narrative of the *Devīmāhātmya* commences with king Suratha who has lost his kingdom and encounters the merchant Samādhi who has lost his family, in the hermitage of the forest-dwelling ascetic Medhas: “The king, longing to govern and protect the social sphere, is the paragon of world-affirmation, while his merchant counterpart, who requests release from worldly existence, personifies world-abnegation. The *brāhmaṇa* who instructs them both must remain ambivalent in order to ambiguously encapsulate the ideologically double helix.” (p. 27). The *Devīmāhātmya*’s “chiasmic structure”, which shows parallels to that of the *Bhagavadgītā* (represented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3), was set up to negotiate this “double helix” and to ultimately promote the value of *pravṛtti* over *nivṛtti* in relation to the king’s duty: “The central exposition of the DM, like that of the BhG, concerns the restoration of kingship.” (p. 114). As Balkaran explains at some length in the conclusion, his own book has been composed in the form of a ring composition as well: “this work has chosen to follow suit, organizing its conclusion through a centrifugal motion inversely addressing the frames centripetally established at its outset.” (p. 147).

I am sympathetic to a narrativist approach that pays attention to the structural composition of a Purāṇa as a whole, but such research should go hand in hand with a philological and historical study, in order to be able to address and contextualize the strategies of the anonymous composers and tradents involved. The aim of such a study is not, as Balkaran would have it, to dissect the text and qualify the insertion of the *Devīmāhātmya* as “spurious”, but instead to draw attention to the Purāṇas as living texts, which were subject to a process of “composition-in-transmission” by actual people in real time and place. It gives the lie to the old Orientalist myth of a civilization with no history.¹⁷

de France en mai 2004 (Paris: De Boccard, 2007); Simon Brodbeck, ‘Ekalavya and *Mahābhārata* 1.121–128,’ *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10 (2006): 1–34; Somdev Vasudeva (ed./tr.), *The Recognition of Shakuntala by Kālidāsa* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): Introduction; Sheldon Pollock (ed./tr.), *Rāma’s Last Act by Bhavabhūti* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): Introduction. Note also (already long before Douglas 2007): Gary A. Tubb, ‘Heroine as Hero: Pārvatī in the Kumārasambhava and the Pārvatī-pariṇaya,’ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.2 (1984): 219–236.

17 For an enlightening perspective on the Purāṇas as a species of history-writing, see James L. Fitzgerald, ‘History and Primordium in Ancient Indian Historical Writing: *Itihāsa* and

By studying the *Devīmāhātmya* with such a perspective in mind, we may gain a better understanding of how and why the *Devīmāhātmya* was inserted into the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna* in its current position and acquired its canonical status. After all, we can only speculate about possible motifs of the author(s) if we also have an understanding of what came before and how the redaction created a new balanced whole, in the present case how the *Devīmāhātmya* was incorporated into the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna* according to the principles of ring composition argued for by Balkaran. In studying Purāṇas, context is everything.

3 The Goddess and the Sun in Indian Myth

The second book, *The Goddess and the Sun in Indian Myth*, published only one year after *The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth*, continues the presentation of the structural composition and ideological system of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*. Here, Balkaran focuses attention on the glorification of the Sun in the Purāna: “This book explores the manner in which the structure and content of the *Sūrya Māhātmya* mirrors that of the *Devī Māhātmya* (the subject of the Goddess and the King), and, ultimately argues for an ideological ecosystem at work in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* privileging *pravṛtti* (over *nivṛtti*) dharma and the cosmic function of preservation, of which Indian kings, the Goddess (Devī), the Sun (Sūrya), Manu and Mārkaṇḍeya himself are paragons.” (p. 1). The identification of MkP 101–110 as a “*Sūryamāhātmya*” that mirrors the *Devīmāhātmya*, is presented as the book’s major discovery. The study of the interrelations between these two Māhātmyas is a significant contribution, but it deserves mentioning that Pargiter had already identified these chapters as constituting “The Majesty of the Sun” (Pargiter 1904: xxx). *The Goddess and the Sun* repeats at times verbatim extensive parts from *The Goddess and the King*, showing little care in editing, and both books are in fact so closely related in subject matter, methodology and style that one wonders why two slim books with so much overlap needed to be produced, rather than a single comprehensive one.¹⁸ Not only is there considerable overlap between the two books, but *The Goddess and the Sun* is also plagued by an uneven presentation, giving the appearance

Purāna in the *Mahābhārata* and Beyond.’ In: Kurt A. Raaflaub (ed.), *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World* (Malden, MA / Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 41–60.

18 I raise this issue here also because both books come at the regular Routledge price of £120.00 each. For two slim books that have received no serious copy editing and are printed in a cheap format, charging such a price seems outrageous.

of having been assembled from different studies that do not fit together. A particularly telling case occurs on p. 29: “Prior to commencing our methodological demonstration through analysis of the *Gītā* proper, I must first remark on what I call “guiding principles.”” This remark suggests that an analysis of the *Bhagavadgītā*, whatever its relevance for the *Sūryamāhātmya* under study, will follow, but no such analysis is in fact given here. It looks like the section has simply been lifted out of a separate study on the *Bhagavadgītā*, without having been properly edited to make it fit the present publication.

Returning to the *Sūryamāhātmya*, the Saura portions of the Purāṇas are definitely a valuable object of study that have not received the attention they deserve. The first chapter includes an overview of solar sources (Vedic, Epic, and Purāṇic), largely building on secondary literature. Again Balkaran goes astray in referencing the texts involved, however, because he has not consulted the sources cited from the secondary literature. For example, on p. 14 he cites MBh 7.82.14–16, apparently following Farquhar’s *An Outline of Religious of India* (1920: 151–152), but without saying so explicitly. Farquhar of course refers to an older edition of the *Mahābhārata*, so that the verse numbering does not correspond to the critical edition which Balkaran later on refers to, relying on van Buitenen’s translation (p. 18). Readers wishing to check these references for themselves are thus led astray.¹⁹ For the *R̥gveda* Balkaran notably cites the 1896 translation of Ralph Griffith instead of the recent (2014) translation by Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton, while for the *Chāndogya* and *Kauśītaki Upaniṣad* he cites an even older and equally outdated translation of Max Müller (printed Muller).²⁰ Some of the claims in this part of the book are really quite baffling, e.g. “It [the Saura sect] is in fact one of the five most prominent sects within India’s great epic, including which are Gaṇeśas, Śāktas, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas and Sauras.” (p. 17). Passages like this suggest that the *Routledge Hindu Studies Series*, in which both books have been published, does not involve proper peer review and editing: it is hard to understand how a statement like this—and there are many others that could have been cited as well²¹—could have been published otherwise.

An intertextual study of the Saura portions of the Purāṇas would be a rewarding enterprise. Although Balkaran refers to the important *Sāmbapurāṇa* in this connection (pp. 22–25), he fails to mention the work by Heinrich von Sti-

19 The passage in question corresponds to MBh 7.58.14–16 in the critical edition.

20 Both quotations are cited from “sacred-texts.com”.

21 E.g. the identification of Varāhamihira as working at the court of Candragupta II in the sixth century(!): “Varāhamihira (who was at the court of Chandragupta II) in the sixth century” (p. 89).

etencron on this Purāṇa²² and inaccurately claims that “all of the Saura material we see in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*” is “borrowed from the *Sāmba Purāṇa*” (p. 23). The *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*’s Saura material in fact goes far beyond the mere parallels with the *Sāmbapurāṇa*²³ and requires more detailed research than has yet been done. I also found that several parts of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*’s *Sūryamāhātmya* have extensive parallels in the *Brahmapurāṇa* and the *Sāmbapurāṇa*.²⁴ Uncovering such parallels can help in gaining a more detailed understanding of Purāṇic intertextuality, as well as retrieving some of the extensive Saura material scattered through the Purāṇa corpus. It may also help answer the question to what extent the *Sūryamāhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, which includes a remarkable repetition of the Saṃjñā myth, may have been added under the influence of the preceding *Devīmāhātmya*. To mention one piece of evidence perhaps pointing in this direction, the *Sūryamāhātmya* includes an episode describing the creation of the weapons of the gods from Sūrya’s *tejas*, which is an inversion of the *Devīmāhātmya*’s episode of the creation of Durgā’s weapons from the gods’ *tejas* (p. 62). This episode from the *Sūryamāhātmya* is precisely missing in the parallels with the *Brahmapurāṇa* and the *Sāmbapurāṇa*, which may suggest that it was added to the preexisting material by the compiler of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*’s *Sūryamāhātmya*. Such questions are, however, not taken up in *The Goddess and the Sun*.

22 Von Stietenron’s *Indische Sonnenpriester: Sāmba und die Śākadvipīya-Brāhmaṇa* (1966) does appear in the bibliography, however, which lists numerous publications on Saura matters not referred to in the book itself (e.g. six art-historical articles by Gerd Mevissen that find no mention anywhere and that are hardly relevant to the book’s subject matter).

23 The hyperbole is repeated (and extended) on p. 135: “The only other place outside of the myths of the MkP and *Sāmba Purāṇa* where we see the Sun exalted as the supreme figure is in the Ādityahṛdaya of the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa.” For examples of the extensive Saura material in the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, see Bisschop, ‘Vyāsa’s Palimpsest’, and Peter C. Bisschop, ‘Vyoman: The Sky is the Limit. On the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*’s Reworking of the *Līṅgodbhava* Myth,’ in Lucas den Boer and Elizabeth A. Cecil (eds.), *Framing Intellectual and Lived Spaces in Early South Asia: Sources and Boundaries* (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 75–104.

24 The parallel between the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the *Brahmapurāṇa* starts at MkP 104 (referring to the numbering in the appendix of Balkaran) and BrP 32, covering several chapters. A partial parallel between BrP 32.49–79 and *Sāmbapurāṇa* 11 has been identified in the concordance (appendix 4) in Peter Schreiner and Renate Söhnen (eds.), *Sanskrit Indices and Text of the Brahmapurāṇa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), but the more extensive parallel with the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* has been missed in that publication.

4 Moving Forward?

A number of scholars of the Purāṇas, past and present, are subject to harsh criticism in these two books, from Horace Hayman Wilson to Frederick Eden Pargiter and from Wendy Doniger to Yuko Yokochi.²⁵ An artificial divide is set up between text-critical scholars “slicing and dicing [...] for historicist or philological aims” on the one hand, and those who read individual Purāṇas as an integrated whole, for whom Balkaran’s primary example is Greg Bailey, on the other. In certain respects, this unproductive binary recalls the arguments of divisive publications by Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee on the *Mahābhārata*,²⁶ which likewise set up a divide between “good” and “bad” scholars, as though the Deva-Asura war needs to be transplanted to the battleground of academia. Nothing is to be gained by such a division. What we rather need is a community of scholars who take the Purāṇas serious in all their complexity, who are equipped with the tools from the various scholarly disciplines involved, be they philology, religious studies, history or narratology, and who are willing to tackle the complex issues together. First of all, however, as argued above, it means getting the sources right, and in this respect philology remains key.

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- 25 Doniger receives a separate and extensive treatment in chapter 3 of *The Goddess and the King* in a section titled “Debunking Doniger” (pp. 68–87). I really do not know what purpose is served by negative titles like this.
- 26 Most notably Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Criticism*. London / New York: Anthem Press, 2018.