



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Review of Andrijanić, I.; Sellmer, S. (2023) Vedic roots, epic trunks, Purāṇic Foliage: Dubrovnik international conference on the Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas

Littunen, O.P.A.

Citation

Littunen, O. P. A. (2025). Review of Andrijanić, I.; Sellmer, S. (2023) Vedic roots, epic trunks, Purāṇic Foliage: Dubrovnik international conference on the Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas. *Religions Of South Asia*, 19(1), 112-114. doi:10.1558/rosa.33543

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4254987>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Review

Vedic Roots, Epic Trunks, Purāṇic Foliage: Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas. DICSEP Publications, vol. 7, edited by Ivan Andrijanić and Sven Sellmer. New Delhi: Dev Publishers & Distributors, in co-operation with the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2023. xxiv + 404 pp., £36,99 (hb). ISBN 9789394852761 (hb).

Reviewed by: Olli-Pekka Antero Littunen, Leiden University, Netherlands.
o.p.a.littunen.2@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Keywords: *Mahābhārata*; methodology; philology; *Purāṇas*; *Rāmāyaṇa*

This edited volume is a result of the seventh DICSEP conference, held in 2014. It is arranged into four sections, corresponding approximately with the sources used: 1. *Mahābhārata* (five papers); 2. *Rāmāyaṇa* (two papers); 3. *Purāṇas* (two papers); and 4. The *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* (one paper). I initially list the titles of the papers and provide some of the main arguments, commenting when necessary. I conclude by presenting some general observations.

The first paper, by Johannes Bronkhorst and titled ‘Who Composed the *Mahābhārata*, Why, and When?’, focuses on how Brahmins played a role in the formation and redaction of the *Mahābhārata*. Bronkhorst extracts information about pre-modern society from the *Mahābhārata* (alongside other sources), arguing that by textually emphasizing their *Atharvaveda*-derived powers, Brahmins made themselves essential for rulers.

‘External Vocatives in the *Nalopākhyāna*’ by Ivan Andrijanić argues that there are various vocatives in the *Nalopākhyāna* which show how it has been added to the *Mahābhārata*, but also that the text has been adapted and reworked after addition. Andrijanić uses the apparatus of the *Mahābhārata* critical edition, as some of the vocatives are only found as variant readings in later manuscripts. His analysis is thus more text-critical than some of the other, more content-focused approaches in this volume.

Greg Bailey’s ‘Arjuna and Bhīma in the Wars: The *Yakṣayuddhaparvan* of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, with Some Reflections on Exploring *Mahābhārata* Stylistics’ details the content of the *Yakṣayuddhaparvan* across its two stylistically distinct sections, which are focused on Bhīma and Arjuna, respectively. The paper is heavy on content analysis and thematic analysis and provides useful lists of passages which can be employed in further research. However, Bailey ends up showing that stylistic analysis is not a very comprehensive method for researching the

Mahābhārata as a whole. This is a worthy conclusion in itself, but it would have been better to note this at the start, to tell the reader what to expect.

‘The Death of Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata*’ by Przemysław Szczurek speculates on the existence of two textual layers in the *Mahābhārata* regarding Bhīṣma’s defeat. Using the methodology of Mislav Ježić—that is, by distinguishing ‘duplication repetitions’ from ‘continuity repetitions’—the analysis discusses how the redactor of the younger layer wanted to elaborate on and surpass the older text. There might be two textual layers which do not overlap, as the author argues. However, the analysis prompts a problem which the author has not discussed. Why were duplication repetitions—the repeating of passages—considered necessary in the first place? If a redactor wanted to adapt and add new connotations to the text, and repetition was not a stylistic choice or a mnemonic device, why add passages instead of changing already existing ones?

‘Insertion of the *Anugītā* into the *Mahābhārata*: Where, When and Why?’ by Mislav Ježić discusses how the first of the three parts of the *Anugītā* is older than the other two (the first is a reinterpretation of the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*) and speculates that it possibly dates from between 100 BCE and 200 CE. The ‘where’ part refers not to a geographical location but to the position of the text within the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*. Ježić disproves Karmarkar’s earlier hypothesis that the *Anugītā* has nothing to do with the main subject of the surrounding text, and he provides a detailed analysis of the text sequences in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*.

‘Sītā: Icon of Moral Affirmation’ by Mandakranta Bose shows how Sītā—not Rāma—is the character who puts forth the most important moral teachings in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, influencing Rāma’s actions; the examples that are given of Rāma’s behaviour show how morality is not always his main goal. This paper provides an intriguing hypothesis concerning the source of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s morality, although it relies heavily on content interpretation. In my opinion, an additional philological analysis considering the possible existence of different textual layers containing the actions of Sītā and Rāma could provide more insight.

Hideki Teshima’s ‘The Evolution of the Kuśa-Lava Episode: Its Vedic Origin, and Variations in the Epic and Post-Epic Texts’ charts a plausible development of the characters Kuśa and Lava (Rāma and Sītā’s twin sons) by careful intertextual analysis, using a multitude of textual sources. The logical continuation of this research is to investigate even more sources, which the author has already started to do (see his ‘Notes on the “Lava-Kuśa Episode” in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*’, in *Medhótá śrāvaḥ I: Felicitation Volume in Honour of Mislav Ježić on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, 2023).

‘Purāṇic *stotras* in Comparison, with “A list of *stotras* in the *Mahāpurāṇas*”, ed. Ram Shankar Bhattacharya’ by Peter Schreiner provides a detailed text-critical analysis and various hypotheses, among which the most important are that the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is surprisingly unified, probably close in age to the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata*, and that its *stotras* are the oldest (i.e. predating the Śaivite ones). Schreiner’s case study supports the scholarly speculation that when it

comes to *Purāṇas* related to specific religious affiliations, Vaiṣṇavism predates Śaivism.

Noor van Brussel provides a paper titled ‘From Regional *Purāṇa* to Ritual Performance: The Multivocal *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya* and Its Ties to the Narrative Tradition of the *Dārikavadham* in Kerala’. This work contextualizes the *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya*, shows how it derives a part of its authority from pan-Indian *Purāṇic* traditions and relates it to extant ritual performance. The connection with contemporary performance was refreshing to see in a volume which otherwise focuses so heavily on written sources. The *Purāṇic* tradition is still very much alive—extending beyond the texts themselves—and research that shows aspects of its fluidity and wide-reaching influence is crucial.

The last paper, by Renate Söhnen-Thieme and titled ‘Prebirth and Rebirth as a Narrative Device in the *Mahābhārata* and Some *Purāṇas*’, is textually broad, although the need to explain so many distinct stories and sources makes the paper slightly too descriptive. Söhnen-Thieme concludes that the textual traditions indicate a difference between ‘prebirth’ (i.e. previous births) and ‘rebirth’ (i.e. births to come), and that prebirth/rebirth ideas might have been included in specific parts of the *Mahābhārata* in order to incorporate material from other traditions.

In sum, this edited volume provides the specialized reader with various intriguing conclusions and speculations. It would benefit from adding more philological, text-critical analysis to content interpretation, and thus from an even more enhanced understanding of the texts (especially the Epics) as less fossilized. Future collaborations combining the approaches seen here (such as detailed character analysis, study of contemporary performance traditions, philological separation of textual layers, etc.) would push the limits of what can be achieved by studying the Epics and *Purāṇas*. In fact, many of the authors featured in this volume have indeed employed, at least partially, the approaches displayed here and have published further works between the conference and the volume’s publication. Several authors have mentioned, often in footnotes, other secondary sources published after 2014. In any case, the reader is left eagerly looking forward to the next publications arising from the fruitful DICSEP conferences and their timely contributions to the field.