

Les Lois de Manu. Le Manavadharmashastra. 2022. Introduction by Federico Squarcini, Daniele Cuneo, and Patrick Olivelle. Translation by Georges Strehly (“Série indienne”). Paris: Les Belles Lettres. 432 pages. Hardback, ISBN 9782251453712. EUR 26.90. Ebook, ISBN 9782251918433. EUR 18.99.

The *Mānavadharmasāstra* (‘Manu’s Treatise of Law’), also known as the *Manusmṛti* (‘Smṛti of Manu’), is undoubtedly the most significant normative work in Ancient Indian literature. Since the inception of Indian studies in Europe, it has garnered substantial acclaim and exerted considerable influence. This work was originally composed in the second century CE, as recently suggested by Olivelle (2005: 18-25; 2018: 23-25). It marks a crucial turning point in the history of Indian normative literature, commonly referred to as *Dharmasāstra*. Prior to the composition of the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, a corpus of texts known as *Dharmasūtras* was developed between the third century BCE and the first century CE. These texts, of which those of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha are preserved by manuscripts, were composed in aphoristic prose (*sūtra*) and primarily aimed to summarise scholarly discussions on *dharma*, without establishing definitive positions (Olivelle 2000: 1-10; 2018: 20-23). In contrast, the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, composed in a period of profound social and political upheaval following the invasions of the Indo-Scythians and the Kuṣāṇas between the first century BCE and early second century CE, stands apart from previous works in more than one way, not least in being composed entirely in verse (*śloka*). This text, attributed to a divine agency (particularly Brahmā), asserts its authority in the *dharma* debate by adopting a firm stance on previously open questions, often establishing a consensus that eliminates dissent. The normative texts composed after Manu’s treatise, including notable works such as the ‘Smṛtis of Yājñavalkya, Nārada, Viṣṇu and Parāśara’ (dated approximately from the early fifth to the eighth centuries CE), share both stylistic and content-related features with the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, while also introducing original innovations (Olivelle 2018: 26-28).

The prominence and influence of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* within the Indian tradition have attracted the attention of early Orientalists. It was among the first Sanskrit texts to be translated into Western languages, with the inaugural English translation completed by Sir William Jones in 1794 and published—without the accompanying Sanskrit text—in Calcutta (Jones 1794). The Sanskrit text itself was first published in Calcutta in 1813, followed by a revised edition in 1830. Both Calcutta editions were based on the version provided by the commentator Kullūka, author of the *Manvarthamuktāvalī*. Other nineteenth-century printed editions of the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, such as the translations by Burnell (1884) and Bühler (1886), were also based on this version. A significant exception emerged at the end of the century with the publication of a new edition by Julius Jolly in 1887 in London (Jolly

1887), which represented the first attempt to establish a critical text. However, the first truly critical edition appeared over a century later, produced by Patrick Olivelle and published in New York in 2005 (Olivelle 2005).

Regarding the French-speaking world, there are, to the best knowledge of the author of this review, only two French translations. The first, completed by Auguste-Louis-Armand Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, was published in Paris in 1830 (Loiseleur-Deslongchamps 1830), with a second edition appearing in 1833 (Loiseleur-Deslongchamps 1833). The second French edition before the volume under review was the translation published in Paris by George Strehly in 1893 (Strehly 1893). Unlike Loiseleur-Deslongchamps' work (based on the Calcutta editions), Strehly's translation followed the text constituted by Jolly (1887).

In 2022, the "Série Indienne" of Les Belles Lettres published a new edition of this seminal Sanskrit text, consistent with its mission to make significant Sanskrit literature accessible to an educated non-specialist audience. Since the last French translation was Strehly's, an update was timely. As detailed in the editorial (: 4) and translation notes (: 21-23), this edition of Les Belles Lettres does not present a new translation of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* but rather a lightly revised version of Strehly's translation, updated based on Olivelle's English translation (based on his critical edition mentioned above), published in 2004 and reissued in 2009 (Olivelle 2009), and the Italian edition by Federico Squarcini and Daniele Cuneo, published in Torino in 2010 (Squarcini and Cuneo 2010).

The introductory section (: 7-24), consisting of five chapters, aims to provide a general overview of the text. The first two chapters (: 7-17), respectively devoted to the reception of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* and its original context, were translated from pages of Squarcini and Cuneo (2010: XIII-XXVI).¹ The third chapter (: 18-21), concerning the structure of the text, was translated from Olivelle (2009: XXVII-XXIX). The final two chapters (: 21-24), which include notes about translation and illustrations, were written by the editor. The French translation of the Sanskrit text of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* occupies most of the volume (: 25-404). Explanatory notes accompany it, some drawn from the two reference translations mentioned above, others written by the editor (these are indicated by the abbreviation NdE, *notes de l'éditeur* 'editor's notes'). The work concludes with reproductions of photographs taken in southern India at the end of the nineteenth century, now preserved in the collection *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* ('South-East Asia and Insulindian World'),

¹ It is worth noting that Squarcini and Cuneo support a different dating hypothesis for the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, namely the second century BCE, than Olivelle, who proposes the second century CE. However, Olivelle's proposal is followed by the most scholarship as a reference to date.

labelled as ASEMI, of the Bibliothèque des Lettres at the University of Côte d'Azur, an illustration table (: 405-407), a word index (: 409-422), and a table of contents (: 423-424).

In summary, in the opinion of the author of this review, this edition of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* is an excellent work, well in keeping with the mission of dissemination of the series that houses it. It serves as a valuable resource for a broad French-speaking audience unfamiliar with Sanskrit legal literature, elucidating the socio-political and literary context of the text through clear introductory sections and effective explanatory notes. This volume provides a long-awaited new French edition of the *Mānavadharmasāstra* and establishes a solid foundation for future in-depth studies of the original Sanskrit text, for which most of the current bibliography is in English.

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