

knowledge about the Arab world. The exercises are subdivided into different kinds and help the student not to forget basic structures. Using this book, the student of Arabic will be able to learn the morphology and syntax of modern written Arabic. It is well-known that even educated Arabs sometimes encounter considerable difficulties in using their own language according to rules which remain valid and nearly unchanged since the revelation of the Koran fifteen centuries ago. However, after using this book with the help of an experienced teacher every student who is diligent and has a little bit of talent and above all is also well-motivated can eventually attain quite a good command of Arabic. The authors have presented a valuable contribution to the teaching of modern literary Arabic which will be appreciated both by teachers and students.

Karol Sorby

SCHULER, Barbara: *Of Death and Birth. Icakkiyamman, a Tamil Goddess, in Ritual and Story*. With a Film on DVD by the Author. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag 2009. 501 pp. ISBN 978-3-447-05844-5

The book under review is the 8th volume of the series Ethno-Indology, Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals. It is a revised version of a PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Hamburg in 2004. The author devotes her attention to the study of the relationship between an oral text and ritual in southern India. The text is represented by the southern line of the ancient story of the goddess Nili whose name is Icakki there. The problem is studied in great detail and from many aspects.

The book is divided into three main parts: Texts (pp. 5 – 217), Interpreting the Text (pp. 219 – 230), and The Living Ritual Context (pp. 231 – 343). These parts are followed by Final Conclusions and three Appendices, Appendix A: A Tabular Summary of the Ritual Sequence which also comprises 7 photos, Appendix B: A Tabular Comparison of Text versions by Topic, and quite a long Appendix C: The Encyclopaedic Apparatus: The ‘Complete’ Icaki *katai* (pp. 361 – 475).

As has been already said, the basis of this work is *Nili Katai/IK* (The Story of Nili/Icakki). B. Schuler had access to ten hand-written paper manuscripts of this story copied from the originals. She marked them as N1 – N10 and introduced short characteristics of all of them on pages 11– 21. The author has chosen the version N1 from the village of Tollaviḷai as a base text for editing and translating. However, before doing so she tried to trace the story of Nili throughout the history of Tamil literature. She also pointed to resemblances of the Nili story in a Kannada and a Malayalam work as well as to references to Nili in the popular tradition. The author also devoted due attention to the genre of the story, the story type, the title of the text, she discussed the opening of the story, the narrative and performance style of the *katai*, and the structure of the story.

The core of Part One presents, as has already been mentioned, a critical edition of the Icakkiyamman *Katai* (N1) (pp. 63 – 144) and the translation of the story with

annotations (pp. 145 – 217). Since the base text was highly defective it was inevitable to use various versions of the text in order to understand it better and to bring a ‘complete’ story. Moreover, the author has twice completely revised the edited text and translation, first after the rediscovery of the lost variants N1 – N9, and again after the discovery of version N10.

Appendix C is a very useful complement to this part of the book. It provides the complete versions of N10 and N1 as well as the reading of texts N2 and N8.

Very detailed, line by line analysis of individual versions of the text has brought several results. For instance, Appendix C makes transparent relations between texts of N1, N10 and some other versions. As the author claims, the method used enabled her to prove that this text is ‘to a large extent a relatively fixed one, enclosed within a ‘complete’ text which admits of improvised variations based on formulaic oral material’ (p. 10).

Part Two is relatively short. It brings a discussion about major themes in the *Icakkiamman* Katai. The author has found them in the tensions between men and women and in the bond of Icakki and her twin brother.

In Part Three the author investigates the relation of the Icakki cult to the bow-song tradition and the relationship between text and ritual in *Kanniyākumari* district in southern India. She describes the communities who are most closely associated with Icakki worship there – the *Vēlāḷas*, the *Nāṭārs*, and the *Kaṇiyārs* – and studies the goddess’s name Icakki, *Iyakki*, *Ēkki* which is related to the Sanskrit word *yakṣī*. She argues that there are similarities between the features ascribed to Icakki in the context of worship and vedic conceptions of *yakṣas*. She also points to the fact that in the story told within the *villuppāṭṭu* bow-song tradition the goddess is called not only Icakki but also *Nīli* and concludes that ‘at a textual level two originally autonomous figures have converged: *Nīli* and *Icakkiamman*’ (p. 253).

There are many more questions that attracted the author’s attention, for instance the question of Icakki in people’s belief, Icakki in different local stories and the split of *Icakkiamman* iconography.

Then B. Schuler offers a description of her field trips in southern India and of Icakki temples that she visited during field trips. She looked at the cult of *Icakkiamman* as practised in *Paḷavūr* and examined the places linked with Icakki in the village as well as the members of the ritual gathering, the goddess’s relationship with other deities, and the iconic and aniconic representations of Icakki in *Paḷavūr*.

Next a description of the sequence of events of the *koṭai* festival performed in three cycles follows. The ritual is studied in great detail. Particular attention is devoted to the inner logic of the ritual system in *Paḷavūr*, to its most significant components and junctures. B. Schuler divided the ritual practice into various components including the goddess’s self-recognition, self-procreation, reorientation, and reintegration.

Finally the relationship between the two texts, namely the translocal *IK* and the local Icakki story, and the ritual is examined. The author comes to the conclusion that the ritual and the translocal *IK* interact indirectly while the ritual and the local story interact quite directly.

The book is completed by an exquisite DVD by the author.

All parts of this very interesting book prove the author's high erudition. Her comprehensive study significantly enriches our knowledge of ritual tradition in India.

Anna Rácová

HÜSKEN, Ute: *Viṣṇu's Children. Prenatal life-cycle rituals in South India*. Translated from German by Will Sweetman, with a DVD by Ute Hüskén and Manfred Krüger. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2009. 322 pp. ISBN 978-3-447-05834-6

The present book is the 9th volume in an excellent series Ethno-Indology, Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals. It is a reworked English version of a thesis originally submitted in the German language. In her book the author concentrates on the ritual tradition of the Vaikhānasas, a Brahmanic community in South India. Members of this community perform rituals in South Indian Viṣṇu temples and consider themselves to be Viṣṇu's children who are preordained for this service already before birth due to the prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali. This crucial ritual is at the heart of the author's research and as such it is examined from various perspectives. In five parts of the book the author investigates the interpretation of this ritual in relevant Sanskrit texts, its performance as well as its adaptation and interpretation under changing circumstances.

The text of this well-designed book is supplemented with a list of Sanskrit texts, a list of secondary literature, an appendix *Tabular view of six Guruparamparās*, and two appendices regarding an exquisite DVD, *Text of the DVD booklet*, and *Text of the 'Introduction' to the DVD*. The book also includes abbreviations and an inevitable index.

Part One of the book is devoted to the analysis of the Sanskrit text *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* by the Vaikhānasa scholar Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita which explicitly expresses the Vaikhānasas' superiority over other vaiṣṇava traditions. The position of the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* within the Vaikhānasa literature is discussed and due attention is also given to its author Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita and the editor Parthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya.

Part Two (pp. 53 – 141) investigates rituals in the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa*. In this text, Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita claims that it is the Vaikhānasas' familial origin expressed and confirmed through saṃskāras that entitles them to perform temple rituals. He also seeks to rid the Vaikhānasas of accusation of being devalakas, that is temple priests who perform rituals for money or material goods. He excludes them from this definition and argues that it was Viṣṇu himself who allowed the Vaikhānasas to live 'from his goods' (p. 63).

Next comes a description of Vaikhānasa life-cycle rituals (saṃskāras). Particular attention is given to the prenatal saṃskāras niṣeka, ṛtusaṃgamana, garbhādhāna, pūṃsavana, sīmantonnayana, and mainly to viṣṇubali. Ute Hüskén analyses relevant texts and shows how the viṣṇubali ritual changed in performance and in interpretation and how it came to express the Vaikhānasas' specific identity in this process – their