

misjudgment. Consider also 6.25, where Sanskrit *buddhyā dhṛtigṛhitayā* ("with insight that is held firmly") is translated as "with his mind grasped by resolution." Another example of his difficulty with finding apt English equivalents for the verb *grah*, a more serious one, occurs at *BhG* 6.35 where he translates *gṛhyate* "one can get a grip on (the mind that wanders)." Here he is clearly unaware of the non-standard American English idiom "to get a grip" attested on college campuses since the 1970s.

The introduction begins: "You are about to have the profound pleasure of reading one of the truly great books in the history of the world," and it closes with the same statement. The tone of this introduction is for the most part just as casual as the tone of the translation. Some examples: "Knowing a couple of things will make your reading easier. The first is that the Gita is a conversation within a conversation. Dhritarashtra begins it by asking a question, and that is the last that we hear out of him" (p. xv). "Sanjaya pops up now and again throughout the book . . ." (p. xvi). On p. xviii Fosse asks a rhetorical question: "Who would've written such a complicated book (as the *BhG*)?" The introduction is too brief, in my view, for a general non-specialist audience (this fault, however, may be attributed to the publisher, rather than to the translator). Fosse recommends that the reader visit the publisher's website for further material. There is no bibliography at all anywhere in the book, and footnotes are excluded as a distraction from the high drama of the conversation between Krishna (*sic*) and Arjuna. Returning again to this book's intended audience, I am puzzled by two of the book's design features. On the one hand, it includes the Sanskrit text, not in transliteration but "in the beautiful Devanagari script" (p. xx). One would reasonably conclude from this that this edition is aimed at yoga students with a serious interest in reading, or learning to read, Sanskrit in Devanagari. On the other hand, throughout the introduction and in the translation itself no attempt is made to transcribe Sanskrit terms and names correctly. Instead, dismissive reference is made to "ugly transliteration" (p. xxi). The book fetishizes Devanagari on its covers, with a running loop of multicolored Devanagari. It seems to me a strange pedagogical practice to highlight the Devanagari so extravagantly while completely ignoring the correct transliteration of it.

Fosse is a good Sanskritist, but this edition of the *BhG* is not quite a success. It fails to serve its intended audiences, in spite of the fact that Fosse has made many good decisions in presenting it. His scholarship is for the most part reliable and his decision to translate the *BhG* into straightforward prose was wise. There are no glaring errors of interpretation (but let it be noted that 3.15 is only half translated; apparently lines *cd* have been lost in transmission, without a trace, somewhere between the translator and the editors). The *BhG* is a proselytizing missionary text that very much wants to be understood, like the also eagerly accessible Greek of the New Testament Gospels. But the Sanskrit of the *BhG* is not a koine like the often clumsy Greek of the Gospels. It is a good colloquial Sanskrit of its time. Good scholarly translations should reflect this fact, and Fosse's version does this.

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Vedic Ideals of Sovereignty and the Poetics of Power. By THEODORE N. PROFERES. American Oriental Series, vol. 90. New Haven: AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY, 2007. Pp. 167.

This brief monograph consists of four chapters: "Introduction: Politics and Liturgical Poetry" (pp. 1–22); "Ritual Fires and the Construction of Sovereignty" (pp. 23–76); "Fire in the Waters and the Alchemical Ring" (pp. 77–113); and "The Universal Sovereign as a Paradigm for Spiritual Freedom" (pp. 114–52). It also contains a brief bibliography, an index of Sanskrit words and phrases, and an index of cited passages. Its thesis is clearly stated in its opening paragraph:

This monograph examines a number of motifs central to the expression of the ideal of sovereignty as it is articulated in Vedic liturgical poetry. It argues that, because the qualities and privileges of a sovereign leader were coveted even by those for whom there was no possibility of

attaining royal station, the language proper to the domain of kingship was gradually generalized and used to express aspirations toward a freedom and self-determination that became progressively more mystical in nature. Thus, the study is not primarily concerned with the political history of the Vedic period or the constitutional organization of a Vedic polity. Rather, it focuses on the poetic form of Vedic political discourse within its liturgical context, and upon the ways it was adapted to express new ideas.

This is a good, thorough work of scholarship that carefully frames its thesis within a very helpful outline that meticulously maps its argument. From the great aranya of Vedic literature Proferes has extracted a clear picture of the evolution of Vedic notions of kingship or sovereignty. He starts in chapter 1 with an analysis of kingship and divinity that has been outlined most recently by Oberlies, which identifies four divinities as most frequently characterized as kings. Indra is the god-king of battle-mobilization, a warrior-king, while Varuṇa is the god-king of the Vedic clans at peace and settled, and thus his focus is inward, on civil society. (Mitra is of course closely linked with Varuṇa, sharing the role of the "peace-king" [Oberlies's "Friedenskönig"] with Varuṇa.) The third god-king according to this interpretation is Soma, the god who is also a plant and a juice, as well as a king around whom the soma-pressing Vedic clans unite. Agni, as the god of the domestic fire, represents domestic kingship. But in contrast with all other god-kings, whose kingship is restricted both thematically and temporally by their functions, Agni also represents the fire of the clan and the universal fire of the Vedic peoples or tribes. Proferes notes that because Agni represents these three primary social units of Vedic culture, he represents a perennial and universal form of kingship, concretely expressed in the perennial and pervasive cult of fire. His thesis is that, since Agni is symbolically central to the social organization of Vedic culture, he was a perfect homologue or *bandhu* of the Vedic king. Much of the rest of the book is therefore focused on the network of associations between Agni and the king.

From this starting-point Proferes proceeds to an extensive discussion of the symbolism of fire in the politics of Vedic kingship, and he shows how this symbolism evolved throughout the Vedic period. The political dimensions of fire symbolism in Vedic are laid out in great detail. The political organization of Vedic households, clans, and tribes around the central dominant figure of the king is reflected in the ritual organization of the domestic and communal fires around the central fire of the king. Thus, as Proferes says, "the division of fire, its distribution over many hearths, contrasts with the integration of a single fire in the ideal center of the wider polity, symbolizing the tensions of the fission and fusion process" (p. 75). Just as the king is the central figure around which his kingdom is organized, so the king's fire is the central fire around which the fires of the "five peoples" (*pañca + jana, kṣiti, carṣaṇi*, etc.) organize themselves. He also traces possible antecedents in the *Rigveda* of the later Vedic Tānūnaptra rite, by means of which a sacrificer (*yajamāna*) establishes an alliance with the officiating priests at his soma rite (pp. 51–61). Thereafter Proferes proceeds in Chapter IV to a discussion of the Abhiṣeka, the Vedic "royal unction" ceremony. He shows how the symbolism of the fire in the waters which is found in the śrauta rituals is reflected already in the *Rigveda*, where (at *RV* 8.6.4) we encounter the trope: the clans submit to Indra's fighting spirit as the rivers submit to the sea (p. 92). Proferes shows that this is not just an incidental figure in Vedic but in fact is widespread. In the course of reviewing this trope, he produces a novel and provocative translation and analysis of the well-known Rigvedic hymn 10.124 (pp. 106–11). There is also a full translation and analysis of *RV* 10.121, the much-discussed hymn to the Golden Embryo (pp. 137–41).

The book also contains an extended discussion of the antecedents of the Agnicayana ritual in the Rigvedic imagery of the solar bird and the communal fires (pp. 118ff.). This final chapter concludes with a study of the theme of sovereignty in the Upaniṣads (pp. 143ff.), where the traditional tropes discussed in the earlier chapters are transferred from the figure of the king to the Upaniṣadic figure of the sage who knows deep truths (*ya evaṃ veda*). This study illuminates the famous Upaniṣadic identification of the *ātman* (self) and *brahman* (cosmos? absolute?) by persuasively showing the formulaic links between the relationship of the king to his kingdom and the analogous relationship between the *ātman* and *brahman*. Just as the king "becomes the rule or dominion" (*rāṣṭram + bhū-*), i.e., "gains kingship," so the *ātman* like a king becomes "all this" (*sarvam idam, idam sarvam*, etc.). Likewise the *ātman* in the Upaniṣads is a king (*īśvara, īśāna, adhipati*, etc. [p. 149]) (cf. also the *vaiśvānara* fire, etc.). Proferes concludes his monograph with this paragraph:

In this way, concepts of sovereignty inspired a whole new set of religious values and ideas, many of which contributed to the speculative explorations of spiritual liberation recorded in the early Upaniṣads. The idea of the identity of microcosm and macrocosm was enhanced by the identification of the king with his dominion, idealized as the universe in its entirety. The paradigm of sovereignty was thus formative for a language and symbolism of spiritual aspiration that went on to dominate religious discourse in India for centuries. The ideal attributes of a great king became the model for the spiritual aspirations even of those with no claim to political power. Gradually, the political aspect of the ideal faded, and was preserved only in certain key metaphors employed in what was now a new discourse of spiritual freedom. Thus it might even be said that late Vedic and early Hindu spirituality reflects the popularization of the ideals of an ambitious king. (p. 152)

In closing this valuable work, Proferes promises a future exploration of the theme of kingship, of *rājavidyā*, with regard to Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*. He refers to Angelika Malinar's 1996 monograph *Rājavidyā* (revised English translation, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrine and Contexts*, 2007 [see preceding review]).

Since Proferes has been careful to point out that his monograph is not so much concerned with Vedic polity, but is focused rather "on the poetic form of Vedic political discourse within its liturgical context," a comment on the poetic form of his translations in this monograph will be of use to would-be readers. While the translations are accurate and rooted in good philology, they are also often very awkward and clumsy. The sentence on p. 71 that translates and comments on *RV* 4.38.9ab reads: "As horse, 'the peoples cheer the speed and dominance of the racer filling the bounded lands.'" I fear that only a Vedicist who can construe the accompanying Vedic text will be able to decipher this sentence. Besides awkward syntax like this, there are occasional lapses of diction, for example when he translates the Vedic term *vīryā* as 'puissance' (p. 52). This translation conjures up images of Francophile Vedic poets, which I would think we would want to avoid. On p. 149 in the passage *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.17 the phrase *pañca pañcajanā* is translated quite accurately as "the five Five peoples," without any comment or explanation whatsoever. In discussing the hierarchy of fires in Vedic, a very important topic, Proferes refers to this Agni hierarchy as an "igneous hierarchy" (p. 24). This rather obvious allusion to the etymological link between 'agni' and 'igneous' made me cringe a little.

Finally, one philological matter is worth noting. In discussing *RV* 5.27.6, Proferes interprets the word *āsvamedhe* as a reference to the Vedic horse sacrifice, rather than as a proper name, as most Vedicists have taken it (see most recently M. Mayrhofer, *Die Personennamen in der Ṛgveda-Saṃhitā: Sicheres und Zweifelhafte* [Munich, 2003]). This is an interesting and intriguing suggestion, but it is offered without comment or any reference to previous work, as if the suggestion were perfectly obvious and settled. Perhaps Proferes knows something that I don't know. It would have been useful to me, for one, to have been enlightened by him about this interpretation.

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Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights. By FRITS STAAL. New Delhi: PENGUIN BOOKS, 2008. Pp. xxxvi + 419.

This charming book consists of five parts, divided into sixteen chapters, plus two brief mathematical appendices. Part I, two chapters, focuses on the Indo-European and Central Asian origins and background of the Vedas. Part II, eight chapters, is the heart of the book: a fairly detailed outline of the Vedic compositions and the culture that is reflected in them, in 136 pages. Part III, "Analysing the Vedas," offers in three chapters useful overviews of Staal's most significant contributions to the study of Vedic mantras and Vedic ritual, as well as interesting new evidence for the migrations of Vedic culture into and within the Indian subcontinent. Part IV, "What We Can Learn from the Vedas," introduces the notion of "Vedic sciences"—not those pseudo-sciences celebrated in the popular press, but rather