

Early Tantric Medicine: Snakebite, Mantras, and Healing in the Gāruḍa Tantras. By MICHAEL SLOUBER. New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017. Pp. xii + 375. \$125.

This is the first book-length study of the Hindu tantric medical literature, which scholars of Indian religions and medical traditions alike have overlooked. Even specialists of tantric studies have largely ignored this literature, most of which remains unpublished. Michael Slouber is the first to take up its study in depth, making it the object of his doctoral thesis (Univ. of California, Berkeley, 2012), which forms the basis of *Early Tantric Medicine*. This book makes a compelling case for “tantric medicine”—that is to say, healing traditions of the early-medieval Mantramārga, a.k.a. Tantric Śaivism—being a major branch of Indic medicine whose influences persevere in modern South Asia. As Slouber explains, tantric medicine has three branches: exorcism, the main subject of the *Bhūtanātras*; curing prenatal and childhood illnesses, as taught in the *Bālānātras*; and treatment of snakebite and other poisons, the domain of the *Gāruḍānātras*. The latter branch, known as Gāruḍam, is Slouber’s main focus here. This is a mantra-based curative paradigm in which the doctor is a kind of shaman, a tantric initiate whose assumption of identity with powerful mantra-deities such as Garuḍa-bhairava, Trotalā, etc., renders treatment efficacious.

After the introduction (chap. 1), chapter 2 (“Precursors to Gāruḍam”) explores the roots of tantric medicine in India’s Vedic and classical periods. This begins by tracing the emergence of the divine eagle Garuḍa, enemy of snakes, in Vedic and Epic literature. Belying what readers might expect, the Garuḍa of the *Gāruḍānātras* is not Viṣṇu’s mount, but rather an independent deity treated as a form of Śiva. The remainder of this chapter explores Gāruḍam’s connections with Āyurveda, and explores fascinating references to mantric and medicinal snakebite treatment in Buddhist literature, including Pāli sources and Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Mahāmayūrvīdyārājñī*. Chapter 3 (“Canon and Compendia”) turns to the Śaiva tantric medical literature, outlining what can be known of the largely lost canon of *Gāruḍānātras* and their post-scriptural digests. The chapter reviews evidence for Gāruḍam-based teachings and citations of particular texts in early (ca. sixth–ninth century) tantric literature, including the Śaiva *Svacchandānātra*, *Netratānātra*, *Brahmayāmala*, and *Jayadrathayāmala*, as well as post-scriptural digests such as the *Śaradātilaka*. Especially noteworthy is the Buddhist *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, which openly announces its incorporation of teachings from the *Gāruḍānātras* and proclaims Garuḍa to be a *bodhisattva* (pp. 41–42). In my view this chapter should be read with chapter 7 (“Impact”), which, after exploring the influence of Gāruḍam on later Āyurveda, outlines evidence for the incorporation of medical *nātras* and their teachings into *purāṇas*, most notably the *Gāruḍapurāṇa*, *Agnipurāṇa*, and *Nāradaipurāṇa*. Chapter 7 also explores the impact of Gāruḍam on Vaiṣṇava (Pāñcarātra), Jaina, and Mahāyāna Buddhist literatures. This review of tantric medical literature and its survivals in sometimes surprising places reveals that a wealth of material survives, despite near-total loss of the *Gāruḍānātra* corpus proper.

Chapters 4–6 explicate ritual systems of Gāruḍam, focused on specific mantra-deities: the Vipatī mantra of Garuḍa in chapter 4, Nilakaṇṭha and related deities in chapter 5, and “snakebite goddesses” such as Tvaritā and the Buddhist Kurukullā in chapter 6. Slouber’s account of the five-syllable mantra of Garuḍa known as Vipatī, mentioned in at least thirty premodern texts and still widely used today, from Kerala to Tibet and beyond, is one of the more detailed (as well as accessible) expositions of a mantra-system in the scholarly literature. Chapter 5 elaborates on the three-syllable mantra of Śiva as Nilakaṇṭha and mantras of several other deities, including modern Gāruḍa mantras culled from a variety of sources. The sixth chapter is particularly interesting for its accounts of Gāruḍam mantra-goddesses who show up in multiple religious contexts—Śaiva, Śākta, Jaina, and Buddhist. Chapter 8, the conclusion, reiterates key findings and outlines why this particular study only “scratches the surface of potential research into early tantric medicine” (p. 131).

Perusing the table of contents, one might be forgiven for taking *Early Tantric Medicine* to be a conventional monograph of eight short chapters with unusually long back matter. It is, however, effectively a work in two parts: the three appendices are lengthier than the monograph proper and in some ways constitute the heart of the book. These present the editio princeps of ten chapters of the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* (appendix C), a post-scriptural digest of the *Bhūta-* and *Gāruḍānātras* composed

prior to the eleventh century, with an introduction (appendix A) and English translation (appendix B). As Slouber argues, the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* is “the most significant postcanonical” tantric medical source surviving (p. 46), incorporating long tracts from otherwise lost earlier medical *tantras*. The edition includes most of the chapters on Gāruḍam, which provide much of the core data for chapters 4–7 of the monograph.

Methodologically, this book is a work of “discovery” focused on identifying *Gāruḍatantra* manuscripts in archives (especially Nepalese), careful philological analysis of select sources, and a wider review of data from published sources for evidence of Gāruḍam. The book does remarkable work in bringing little-known material to light. While the volume’s core research is philological, in exploring Gāruḍam’s reception up into contemporary times, Slouber draws on diverse source materials, including art and architecture, folklore, film, websites, and ethnographic research, including his own fieldwork in Nepal. Though much remains to explore, *Early Tantric Medicine* brilliantly situates Gāruḍam in its wider contexts of Indian religion and medicine. One of the book’s concerns is to dismiss the view of tantric medicine as a marginal form of Śaivism limited solely to pragmatic concerns; he demonstrates that the *Gāruḍatantras* in fact teach a complete tantric system with a soteriological dimension. This is a major contribution to our understanding of Tantric Śaivism’s diversity. Slouber also grapples with historiographic and conceptual problems. Decrying the tendency to position early Āyurveda as a rational, empirical enterprise opposed to traditions of “magical medicine,” Slouber highlights the intertwined, complementary natures of religious and medicinal approaches to healing in premodern India. Overemphasis on the dichotomy between magico-religious and rational-scientific approaches leads not only to mischaracterizing Āyurveda, but also to marginalizing other medical traditions. In framing the book, Slouber seems to oscillate between making sound historiographic arguments of this kind, advocating for medical pluralism, and voicing a kind of cultural relativism (e.g., highlighting ways in which modern biomedicine is culturally situated, and perspectives from which Gāruḍam is rational). These perspectives are not necessarily incompatible, but the matter merits nuanced explication.

The critical edition of the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* in appendix C has been carefully constituted. Using the stemmatic method, Slouber makes a strong case for excluding three of the six surviving manuscripts, demonstrating that these descend from other surviving witnesses and contribute no additional data. As with most other early Śaiva *tantras*, the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*’s manuscripts incorporate numerous corrupt readings, and Slouber does not hesitate to emend the text, when warranted. The critical apparatus has four levels. The top level identifies the sources available and their sigla, while the second reports significant variant readings (presumably with some degree of orthographic falsification; the introduction is light on such technical information). A third level adduces parallels from other texts, especially the late-medieval digests of Kerala; in many cases these support emendations or particular interpretations of the text. The fourth level consists of short philological notes, on occasion supplemented by brief but useful endnotes to the translation. A focus of this apparatus level is to note instances of nonstandard Sanskrit, which are frequent. Slouber’s translation (appendix B) is lucid and has useful, though brief endnotes. This brevity is a notable limitation: relatively little space is devoted to discussion of doubtful readings, alternative possible conjectures, and so forth.

One might argue for retaining even more nonstandard (but often well-attested) Sanskrit forms in the edition, or at least clarifying the criteria for their rejection. For example, in 1.11f Slouber follows the palm-leaf manuscript in reading *yac ca-m-uttamam* (with a hiatus-breaking *-m-*), but rejects its hiatus-breaking *-m-* in 2.4b without explanation. Another minor example is the emendation of *taṃ jñātvā* (2.1b) to the more correct *taj jñātvā*; here the grounds for going against the manuscripts are weak, for conflation of these masculine and neuter pronouns is commonplace in early tantric literature. Cf. 3a, where Slouber emends to *tad eva* rather than accept *tam eva* (where *tam/tad* must be nominative in sense). Of more linguistic interest, in 3.4c Slouber conjectures the indicative verb *vimuñcati* [*viṣaṃ ghoram*] where the manuscripts point toward an anomalous reduplicative form, probably *mumuceti* or *mumuñceta*; while these may seem implausible, cf. *mumocati*, transmitted in *Devīpurāṇa* 119.38b. Caution may be warranted in relegating such oddities to the critical apparatus until the dialect is better documented. This is a minor criticism, however: Slouber’s edition substantively contributes to our knowledge of the Middle-Indic-influenced idiom of the Śaiva *tantra* corpus.

The Sanskrit text is attractively typeset in Devanāgarī script. My only complaint is that the print should be larger for both the text and apparatus—a constraint perhaps imposed by the press to save paper, but which makes it difficult to study the rich, multi-level critical apparatus, and unnecessarily taxing to read the text itself.

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The Brahmayāmalatantra or Picumata, vol. 1: *Chapters 1–2, 39–40, & 83: Revelation, Ritual, and Material Culture in an Early Śaiva Tantra*. By SHAMAN HATLEY. Collection Indologie, vol. 133; Early Tantra Series, vol. 5. Pondicherry: INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE PONDICHÉRY/ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT/ASIEN-AFRIKA-INSTITUT, UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG, 2018. Pp. xiv + 695. Rs 1600.

In 2007 Shaman Hatley completed a doctoral thesis entitled “The *Brahmayāmalatantra* and Early Śaiva Cult of Yoginīs,” a work that I consider to be the finest study of the Yoginīs written to date. Hatley never published that dissertation (although it is accessible online), and it is only now that he has brought out his first monograph on the subject of the same *Brahmayāmalatantra* (BraYā). This volume is neither simply one of “three separate projects . . . carried over” (p. v) from his dissertation nor, in spite of its title, a simple edition and translation of five chapters from that massive Tantra. Nor is it simply the first volume (albeit published three years after volume two: Csaba Kiss, *The Brahmayāmalatantra or Picumata*, vol. 2: *The Religious Observances and Sexual Rituals of the Tantric Practitioner: Chapters 3, 21, and 45. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation* [Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2015]) of a projected set of three critical editions and translations of portions of the BraYā (p. 22). Nor is it a return to the Yoginīs that were at the heart of the 2007 dissertation. They and their cults are not treated in any of the five chapters edited and translated here; however, as Hatley promises, these will figure prominently in the chapters of the BraYā slated to appear in a forthcoming volume three (p. 23). What one does find here are “heavily revised or re-written” passages excerpted from other parts of the original thesis, appearing as portions of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2 of the present volume’s part I, together with the edition and translation of the BraYā’s first two chapters, and an appendix (A) comprising a list of chapter titles and colophons in the work’s principal manuscript source (NAK 3-370). New here are editions and translations of the BraYā’s chapters 39, 40, and 83, together with Hatley’s extensive general introduction, a set of “topical studies” (chaps. 2 through 6) based on the BraYā chapters edited and translated in the book’s part II, and several additional appendices (B–F). Three of the chapters treated here (1, 39, and 83) “form a coherent group insofar as all three set forth narratives of origin” in contradistinction to the rest of the text, “which is otherwise almost entirely prescriptive in nature.” The subjects of these chapters are the mythology of the “descent” of the BraYā (chap. 1), the origin myth of the “streams” (*srotas*) of the broader Śaiva revelation (chap. 39), and the origin myth of the regalia and practice of the “Great Vow” (*mahāvratā*) (chap. 83). The BraYā’s chapters 2 and 40, prescriptive rather than narrative, treat of the work’s pantheon of mantra deities and the “Razor’s Edge Observance” of ascetic (non-orgasmic) coitus, respectively. I will not pass judgment on the quality of the edition and translation of this highly challenging text, since Hatley’s expertise in these matters surpasses my own. The critical apparatus is a model of erudition, with non-critical readings, grammatical and critical notes, and cross-references to dozens of other (mainly) tantric scriptures provided in remarkable detail. The edited text of the five translated chapters is provided in both Devanāgarī (part II) and romanized (appendix F) scripts.

After several introductory sections containing requisite information on the BraYā’s manuscript witnesses, editorial conventions, and so forth, the latter part of part I, chapter 1 provides the reader with what is to date the most comprehensive account of the BraYā’s redactional strata, relationship to other tantric scriptures (both Buddhist and Hindu, extant and non-extant), and, most importantly, the thorny