

## PREFACE

The diffusion of Indian classical literature and the scholarship devoted to it are not as widespread as one would think. Neither do they correspond to the vastness and sophistication of the texts, which the authors of this highly prestigious tradition composed over a period of two thousand years. While this may appear strange, it is not entirely without explanation: in addition to several international and eminent scholars belonging to very active research centres, the traditional Indian point of view on classical literature or *kāvya* might, in my opinion, have influenced the diffusion of texts belonging to such a literary tradition. In particular, in traditional India, as well as nowadays, wise men and scholars have always considered *kāvya* to be a source of personal aesthetic experience, while serious and scientific efforts should be devoted to the understanding of religious and philosophical texts, which would grant a way to salvation. To draw a comparison with European literature and culture, it would mean that one could read the works of Petrarca, Boccaccio, Shakespeare or Goethe for the sake of his own pleasure, while one should only devote serious study to the texts of Medieval Scholastic theologians or Empirical philosophers.

Stemming from a sheer love of all poetry, two meetings were organized a number of years ago to gather together some of the best specialists in the field of *kāvya*, to share our points of view on this literature and to collect different experiences, acquisitions and perspectives on such a multifaceted field of study. The two seminars, which took place in 1994 and in 1995 respectively, did not have many participants, but they both were set in a very charming and prestigious place, namely the University of Venice “Ca’ Foscari”, where I was teaching Indology. The theme was

the investigation of the mysterious origin of *kāvya*, and the seminars could already count on the presence of some of the most important scholars in the field of Indian classic literature.

As a consequence of having a chance to meet others, intimately linked by a sincere passion towards our studies, and in such an agreeable and stimulating context, interest grew and many other colleagues joined the original group. Since that, we created and maintained a net of connections, which was facilitated through mutual visits and participation in international conferences; personally, I have always tried to extend invitations to foreign colleagues, firstly in Venice and then in Milan, where I started teaching in 1997.

Soon afterwards, the unforgettable Indologist Bernhard Kölver had the idea of an international seminar on classical poetry, and this was organized in 1998 at the Carolina University in Prague, where the colleagues contributed also with their precious and broad knowledge of Tamil literature. After this seminar, we decided to arrange an annual meeting. It was a pioneering and bold project, which was supported by the Chancellors of both universities involved, Milan and Prague. Later, other institutions participated in the annual meeting, and a fuller record of the subsequent development of the project can be found in the review below. Here let me mention only that in 2000, on the occasion of the second International Conference on Indian Studies, the Jagiellonian University of Cracow joined the initiative and became one of the official organizers and promoters of subsequent meetings. Eventually, the University of Warsaw officially collaborated in the organization of the seminars and the 2008 conference on *kāvya* took place in the capital of Poland.

This is a story of fruitful scientific cooperation, then, one whose successful results are based on three main elements: expertise, passion for the matter we study and, last but not least, the link of friendship and esteem which has bound together all the participants. Taking place every year since 1998, these seminars on classical Indian literature mean that we do not need to establish other academic organizations or more formal forms of association. The last seminar took place in Prague at the beginning of June 2009, while the “itinerant” seminar will take place in Milan in 2010 and in Cracow in 2011.

Clearly, I cannot judge the effectiveness of these upcoming events, the themes of which are generally discussed and decided upon during previous seminars. Nevertheless, there are several factors that suggest

that these meetings will continue to be successful: complete cohesion regarding the norms of scientific inquiry; coherence with the given general theme; very open debates between delegates; and insightful remarks from participants. Combined, these elements make the seminars not only fruitful, but also enjoyable and lively.

It is my honour to present this volume of papers to the community of scholars who will value them. I warmly thank all the researchers who contributed to the international seminars on *kāvya*, but gratitude and a special mention here must go to Isabella Gualandri, the Director of Quaderni di ACME, who made the publication of these Proceedings a reality.

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