

C. H. B. REYNOLDS (ed.): *An Anthology of Sinhalese literature up to 1815, selected by the UNESCO National Commission of Ceylon.* (UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Sinhalese Series.) 377 pp., front., 7 plates. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970. £4.50.

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How badly this book was needed appears from its bibliography. From the whole of Sinhalese literature up to 1815 (which I shall call 'classical') only four books of translation into English had previously been published; and even of these not one is both physically and intellectually accessible to the non-specialist. The present volume contains 340 pp. of translations from 22 classical Sinhalese works, selected by a committee of Sinhalese savants. Each translation is the work of two hands, a native Sinhalese speaker and a native English speaker (though in fact some contributors are virtually bilingual). Mr. Reynolds, the editor, is joint translator with T. Rajapatirana of extracts from 2 works, covering 120 pp.; in contrast H. Peiris and L. C. Van Geysel have translated extracts from 13 works, covering 117 pp., and H. Jayasinghe with Van Geysel 2 more works (20 pp.); most of the balance is by V. and C. B. Cooke; the other translators involved are D. E. Hettiaratchi, S. Paranavitana, and W. G. Archer. Thus although 10 individual translators were involved, most of the work is by three couples, so that spelling and terminology could perhaps have been standardized. Only two of the translations have previously appeared elsewhere (I rely on the information in the book). The editor has also contributed a general introduction (9 pp.), brief introductions (usually less than a page) to each Sinhalese work translated, an appendix on Sinhalese metre, and a glossary. There are very few footnotes. Of the plates only two are original.

Choice for an anthology is a matter of taste, but one can ask whether this selection is fairly representative. It is. A great deal of classical Sinhalese prose literature is translation or close paraphrase of surviving Pali texts, mostly commentaries on the Theravādin canon, and poets too have generally used themes from those sources. This is not at all to say that the dominant flavour is always religious: some prose authors are primarily writers of good stories; most poets used the Buddhist themes as pegs on which to hang descriptions, in the tradition of Sanskrit *kāvya*, of the beauties of nature, women, etc. However, given that both subject-matter and stylistic convention are largely inherited from India, in an anthology of *Sinhalese* literature I would have tried to choose more pieces which were distinctively Ceylonese in form and content. From this point of view, the selections from the *Saddhamālamkāraya*, which deal with the national hero Duṭṭugāmuṇu, are felicitous; but a long extract from an eighteenth-century Sinhalese translation of 'The questions of King Milinda', twice well translated into English from the Pali, seems a bad choice, however elegant the language of the Sinhalese version. If the last two centuries of the period were under-represented, how about a secular poem like the *Imḡirisi-hatana* 'The war against the English'? The absence of war poetry from the anthology is surprising, and this account of a gory British defeat would have added balance and interest. But perhaps I should not criticize a selection which conspicuously refuses to be influenced by those strident voices which try to minimize the Indian element in Sinhalese culture.

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The translations have the cardinal virtue of accuracy: my sampling discovered no mistakes. No less important, they are readable. The style is fairly homogeneous throughout the book; nothing very ambitious has been attempted. The verse is translated into prose or free verse, and there is only one brief appearance of that *démodé* embellishment, rhyme (though most Sinhalese poems are rhymed). Only Reynolds and Rajapatirana in their *Amāvatura* passages, where they adopt a mildly archaic style to match the original, are clearly aiming to convey a distinctive linguistic flavour. Their translation, like some

of the others, tends to be a bit long-winded, probably because of an admirable desire to be explicit. For example, *Sesu daruvo, piṭat vūhu*, literally '(The) remaining boys became out', is translated, 'Then the other young men that were there were cast out from the master's favour' (p. 58). It might have been worth including some passages literally translated, or as close to literally as would be intelligible in English, to provide literary information and aesthetic contrast. Unfortunately the only poem of more than one stanza to be published in full, the *Sālahihini-sandēsaya*, reads the least well—though the translation has been twice published previously.

Although this book appears in the UNESCO series of representative works, unfortunately it does not seem to be aimed at the general reader. Certainly it is unlikely to reach him—the price precludes that. Had the book been planned for him, it would presumably have included a general introduction to Theravāda Buddhism, the subject of nearly every extract. The general reader would require a note on Sinhalese pronunciation (a mere lack of diacritics is insufficient) and other linguistic help: the simple and (where they exist) anglicized spellings adopted by some contributors would have been used throughout; proper names would have appeared in one form only rather than varying (as the editor warns us) between Kapilavastu and Kimbulvat, etc.; and compound names would have been consistently dissolved, e.g. Vihara Maha Devi for Viharamahadevi. Finally, the book would have been much shorter, both to appear less formidable and to keep down the price.

The Orientalist, on the other hand, using the book in a library, will welcome its bulk, though he might have swapped some pages of translation for a few more scholarly contributions on the level of the excellent metrical appendix, complete with melodic patterns of recitation. There is no attempt to provide any learned apparatus, for instance by identifying the Pali passages of which many of the prose extracts are translations. It would have been interesting to compare, even in translation, a Sinhalese extract with its Pali original. The professional reader may be irked by the lack of standardized transliteration (long *a* is variously printed as *a*, *ā*, and *aa*), by such compromise forms as 'Taxalaa' (between normal academic 'Taksalā' and anglicized 'Taxila'), and by such quirks as 'by the Taadi' (p. 66), translating Pali *tādinā* 'by such a one' (referring to the Buddha). If long vowels are to be marked, neither professional nor layman is likely to agree with the editor in preferring 'Siitaa' to 'Sitā'; would a reader educated enough to be looking at the book be unable to cope with the macron?

But these last criticisms are pedantic. I enjoyed the book, and welcome its publication. But then I already have a specialized interest. It is a pity that the book has been unimaginatively planned, so that its price alone makes it unlikely to reach beyond the congregation of those already converted to Zeilanicophily.