ABSTRACTS

Mark Allon (University of Sydney, Sydney)

‘Comments on the Sanskritisation of Buddhist texts’

Early Buddhist communities utilised one or other of the Prakrit or Middle Indo–Āryan languages as the vehicle for their literature. However, with the rise of Sanskrit as the dominant medium for intellectual discourse in India, some communities converted their texts to Sanskrit. In this paper I will discuss the process of the Sanskritisation of Buddhist texts, with particular reference to the new Gāndhārī manuscripts from Bāmiyān, Afghanistan.

Greg Bailey (Latrobe University, Melbourne)

‘On the significance of the Mahābhārata as a cultural artefact in early historical India (400BCE-400CE)’

The study of the Sanskrit epic, the Mahābhārata, has to date been substantially the study of the text as a philological monument, as a mine for sourcing realia about Indian culture, and as a witness for the broadening of early Indian religious culture from its Vedic beginnings to the very strong devotional trends evident in Hinduism. Analysis of its contents as reflexes of historical events is of course fundamental, if extremely difficult, but an evaluation of its appearance as a new genre in a form that can only be described as monumental, is also a desideratum. There is clear evidence in the Mahābhārata that it underwent a revision by learned brahmins at some stage in its development, and that much of the epic is concerned with critically exploring the relationship between the brahmins and the ksatriyas. These two were seemingly jostling for the highest status in providing ideological guidance and normative role models having a referential status in the way an increasingly pluralistic society should be seen to cohere. Much that comes out of this jostling points to an element of self doubt on the part of the brahmins themselves as to their own normative role in society, a tendency caused by the material success of Buddhism from about 200BCE and a
conviction that many brahmins were violating the role models traditionally associated with that class. In this paper I present some of the arguments about the plurality of the brahmin role models, and then ask where this leads us in understanding shifting power relations in some of the polities existing during the early centuries (200BCE-200ACE) of the composition and initial dissemination of this epic. Reference will be made especially to the *Mārkaṇḍeya-samāsjaparvan* (3, 179-221) to illustrate these arguments. Finally, I will speculate on the social and political significance of the *Mahābhārata* as a communicative device within the framework of its probable historical background.

**Adam Bowles (Latrobe University, Melbourne)**

*Blood and soil: the deaths of Duḥṣāsana and Karṇa in the Mahābhārata*

In this paper I will present a discussion based on my introduction to a translation of the second half of the *Mahābhārata*’s *Karṇaparvan* which will appear shortly in the Clay Sanskrit Library. It is in this section of the *Karṇaparvan* that the two champions Duḥṣāsana and Karṇa meet with their deaths, winding up long narrative arcs that stretch back to some of the formative scenes of the *Mahābhārata*. The deaths of Duḥṣāsana and Karṇa—as also of the other Kaurava champions—participate in long agonistic cycles of violence that lead to final acts of retribution, acts which symbolically resonate with original infractions perpetrated by the Kauravas and which always have broad cosmic causes and implications. The Death scenes of Duḥṣāsana and Karṇa will especially be shown to symbolically reconfigure their slights against Draupadī in the *sabha*, and it will thus be suggested that, despite her absence from the *Karṇaparvan*, in a fundamental way this book is about Draupadī.

**Jenni Cover (University of Sydney, Sydney)**

*Is there a valid spiritual function for the ahaṃkāra (ego)?*

Many spiritual adherents regard the *ahaṃkāra* as something that needs to be overcome and crushed, but Narahari liberates the *ahaṃkāra*. For Narahari the *ahaṃkāra*, when properly understood, is the means of ‘playing’ in the world. This paper will present and discuss Narahari’s view of the *ahaṃkāra* (ego), as given in Bodhasāra, an 18th century Sanskrit text. Then the audience will be invited to present their views of the *ahaṃkāra* and participate in an interactive discussion about Narahari’s view. Two of Bodhasāra’s poetic metaphors will be presented. One extended metaphor personifies grammatically masculine and feminine words as men and women. *Buddhi* is personified as a housewife and *ahaṃkāra* as her husband. *Buddhi*, attracted to the undivided *brahman*, separates from her husband, *ahaṃkāra*. But with self-knowledge it is known that even in the presence of the annulled *ahaṃkāra*, there is no shattering of a higher union. The second
metaphor likens the ahaṃkāra to a python. Even though it is a snake it is harmless when understood and handled in the proper way.

Rowe Freney (Independent Scholar, Brisbane)

‘The ubiquitous eva or a journey through the Bhagavad Gita with an indeclinable, meaningless rhythmic filler’

Sometimes in translation from Sanskrit into English we find a word which does not readily conform with the English idiom. Such a word is ‘eva’ which may have no part to play in the meaning or may profoundly affect the purport of the sentence. Winthrop Sergeant in his translation of the Bhagavad Gita usually calls ‘eva’ a meaningless, rhythmic filler whereas Maurer in his introductory Sanskrit text places great emphasis on ‘eva’ and its effect on the meaning of the sentence. This talk will explore various aspects of the word ‘eva’.

Peter Friedlander (Latrobe University, Melbourne)

‘Dhammapada traditions and translations’

The collection of Buddhist sayings called the Dhammapada is considered by many to be a spiritual classic. Since it was first translated into English in the 19th century it has been seen by many in the world as the archetypal representation of a Buddhist text. It is quite possibly one of the most translated Buddhist texts today, with translations into most world languages and probably more than a hundred different translations into English. This paper seeks to explore two things. First, what the Dhammapada actually is, by looking at the different Buddhist Dhammapada textual traditions of India, South East Asia, Tibet and China. Second, how the different translations of the Dhammapada since 1840 have changed over time in response to contextualising it within different traditions and circumstances. By studying the differences between the first translations and more modern translations I argue it is possible to explore the ways in which the notion of a sacred text itself has developed over the last two centuries and how pre-modern understandings of the text have been displaced by new paradigms on how to relate to sacred texts like the Dhammapada.

Rex Howard (Independent Scholar, Brisbane)

‘Sankara, Sanskrit, Advaita Vedanta philosophy’

Sankara is considered to be one of the principle proponents of the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. In his various writings he demonstrates a detached and yet highly detailed use of Sanskrita grammar to interpret scriptural texts from the point of view of
Advaita philosophy. This paper provides a brief examination of Sankara’s place in philosophical literature, and his use of Sanskrita grammar in textual interpretation.

Gai Kroczek (Independent Scholar, Perth)

'Max Muller, Sanskritist and Indologist: undertaking the publication of the Rig Veda 1844 to 1874'

Freiderich Max Muller was born in December 1823 in the small town of Dessau in Germany. His father was the famous poet Whilem Muller. He underwent a classical education including Latin and Greek. While at the Nicoli School in Liepzig, Muller was introduced to the subject of Sanskrit and so began a lifelong love of all things Sanskrit. After completing a Doctorate of Philology in 1843, Muller published a translation of the Hitopedsa stories from Sanskrit to German, before going to Berlin to further his Sanskrit studies. His dedication to Sanskrit led him from there to Paris where he was introduced to the Rig Veda by Eugene Bornouf. It was Bornouf who encouraged the young Muller to “… either study Indian philosophy and begin with the Upanisads and Sankara’s commentary or study Indian religion and keep to the Rig-veda, and copy the hymns and Sayana’s commentary, and then you will be our great benefactor.” Having made the choice for the Rig-veda, Bornouf also warned Max “Don’t publish extracts from the commentary only, if you do, you will publish what is easy to read, and leave out what is difficult.” The task was daunting and Max feared that he might never find a publisher, but Bornouf maintained that “The commentary must be published, depend upon it, and it will be.” So began a journey which was to take Max Muller not only from Europe to England and Oxford but the next 30 years of his life. When he had finally finished the mammoth task he wrote these words which appear in the preface of the 6th Volume of the Rig-veda: “When I had written the last line of the Rig-veda and Sayana’s Commentary, and put down my pen, I felt as if I had parted with an old, old friend. For thirty years scarcely a day has passed on which my thoughts have not dwelt on this work, and for many a day, and many a night too, the old poets of the Veda, and still more their orthodox and painstaking expositor, have been my never-failing companions. I am happy, no doubt, that the work is done, and after having seen so many called away, in the midst of their labours, I feel deeply grateful that I have been spared to finish the work of my life. But habits established for so long a time, are not broken without a wrench, and even now I begin to miss my daily tasks; I begin to long for some difficult and corrupt passages to grapple with, for some abrupt quotation – or for some obscure allusion to Panini to trace back to its original source.”
Dianne Kruger (Independent Scholar, Perth)

‘The naughty na: an example of the application of Panini’s grammar for good spelling’

This is a talk about why and when the dental na changes to cerebral na, including the relevant sutras. It also includes a liberal dose of lighthearted storytelling and practical examples. Panini’s Ashtadhyayi was composed some 2,500 years ago and consists of some 4,000 sutras. 39 of these sutras in the final chapter of Book Eight relate to the question of when dental na changes to a cerebral na. Three sutras will be covered in particular and many others in passing.

Phillip Kruger (Independent Scholar, Perth)

‘Vedic mathematics: magic or mathematics’

This is an introduction to Vedic Mathematics and it is a workshop requiring participation from the audience. No expertise in mathematics is required. Vedic Mathematics is a unique system of mathematics based on a few simple rules which enable mathematical problems to be solved easily and efficiently. These rules are called “sutras”. They are simple and fast and can be easily understood, even by small children. Sutras act like threads which will guide the calculations. They work in a way that allows the mind to work freely, spontaneously and naturally. This new method and technique is based on the work done by Shri Bharati Krshna Tirthaji who was born in India in 1884. There is a radical difference between the western approach to mathematics and the vedic approach. The vedic approach allows for intuition to play a much greater part; it is indeed creative. The sutra we will be introduced to is the nikhilam sutra which means, “All from nine and the last from ten.”

Anita Ray (Latrobe University, Melbourne)

‘Turning the kaleidoscope’

Just when we imagined that 19th century evolutionary theories had been laid to rest, a burgeoning group of evolutionary biologists, philosophers, psychologists and social scientists have resurrected Darwinian ideas and applied them to religion. Fundamental to the arguments of Pascal Boyer (2001), Richard Dawkins (2006), Colin Renfrew (2004) and David Sloan Wilson (2002) are the two key Darwinian notions: the idea of ‘natural selection’ and ‘the tree of life’ concept. Whereas Natural Selection contends that species adapt for purposes of continued existence, the Tree of Life hypothesis asserts that members of a given species have a single common ancestor and numerous altered descendants. This paper examines the premise of David Sloan Wilson (2002) that religious groups are rapidly evolving entities whose members adopt common beliefs
and adapt to their environments for the sake of survival. In short, religion is group-level adaptation. My paper proposes that it is difficult to sustain Wilson’s ideas with respect to Hinduism, the world’s third largest religion. Taking the Hindu Sindhi community as a case study, I will demonstrate that transformations within that community have little to do with group-level adaptation and everything to do with the options available at given historical moments. Re-formations within the Hindu Sindhi tradition are not mechanisms of survival but the encountering of other religious practices and the reception of certain practices that fit well with their own. The innumerable coloured fragments comprising the Hindu kaleidoscope are reconfigured into vibrant new patterns of religiosity not because of social utility but due to the twists and turns of history.

Meenakshi Shrinivasan (University of Sydney)

Sanskrit recitation

Starting from the Vedic period up to 20th century, we come across a standard method of narration in Sanskrit poetry. These are known as Mantras, Stotras, Slokas and Subhaashhitas. The method of chanting these varieties is known as “Chandaha”. In Vedic Sanskrit literature, poetry is known as “Mantra” and others are called Stotras, Slokas and Subhaashhitas. All these have a minimum of eight letters known as Anustup to a maximum of 24 letters known as Drutavilambitavrutta in each pada (line). The literature covers a variety of subjects. Descriptions of sunrise, sunset, moonrise, etc are explained in different meters. It also explains human nature like stress, anger, sorrow, joy, happiness and such by drawing a parallel with nature, natural elements and behavioural patterns like storms, mountains, rivers, breeze and so on. Sixteen different varieties of descriptions are specified in the epics.

Naomi Smith, with the help of Mathew & Rosey Dunstan, Catherine Lennox, Ros Mackay, Elizabeth Rocheta (Independent Scholars, Sydney)

‘A short walk with Panini’

For many years, students of the School of Philosophy NSW/ ACT have been studying the traditional grammatical system of India composed by Panini, a grammarian who lived during the 5th century BC. Panini’s great work the Ashtadyayi – the Eight Lectures – contains almost 4000 sutras which regulate every aspect of Sanskrit grammar, from sandhi combinations, to the formation of words from their seed forms, to the addition of case endings. This brief introduction to the system will examine some aspects of the metalanguage used by Panini in his sutras. It will also include a practical demonstration of three sequences of sutras: vowel sandhi; the formation of the masculine noun ending in ‘a’ in the singular nominative case; and the formation of the third person singular verb in the present tense from its verbal root. The demonstration
will use a PowerPoint presentation of the sequences of sutras, and students will chant the appropriate sutras in the traditional manner.

McComas Taylor (ANU, Canberra)

‘What makes a purāṇa powerful? The case of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa

The purāṇas are the ‘source books’ of Hindu cosmology, theology and mythology. The Bhāgavatapurāṇa is perhaps the mostly widely known and influential, and is often mentioned in the same breath as the Ramayana and the Mahābhārata. It consists of 18000 verses in 12 sections, the most famous of which is the tenth, which deals with the activities of Krishna. This paper is premised on two ideas: first that the purāṇa was the product of human hands, not divine ones; and second, that textual truth cannot function in a vacuum, but is enabled by a set of textual practices. What makes this purāṇa so influential? What textual strategies did its creators adopt to enable it to function as ‘true discourse’ for its intended audience? This paper looks at the question of the ‘meta-authors’ of the text, performative aspects and certain power claims that text makes for itself. I will also look at what I can the purāṇic paradox: puranas necessarily draw on Vedic authority for their own legitimacy, but need to reject Vedic theology as bhakti or devotional texts.

Victoria Yareham (University of QLD, Brisbane)

‘Towards a systematic approach to stylistic translation: Rgveda 1.161 as an example’

Despite the fact that translation has shaped the field of Indology for more than two centuries, there exists a dearth of critical analysis concerning the translating of Sanskrit texts. In response, this paper will present a reflective analysis of my own process of translating the archaic, religious poetry of the Rgveda (RV) into modern English. I will examine a single hymn, RV 1.161, that in fourteen verses recounts the mythological tale of the Rbhus, three mortal brothers who become deified through a number of magical feats. As a scholarly translator of poetry, I endeavour to maximise the translation’s ability to convey numerous stylistic features while upholding linguistic and philological principles. Hence, a translation produced on this basis differs from previous ones that tend to give precedence to the linguistic level of analysis. Although RV 1.161 is not an especially poetic hymn, an extensive stylistic analysis yields forty distinct stylistic features that may be classified into five categories: alliteration, anaphora, rhyme, internal parallel structures, and external parallel structures. The paper will provide some representative examples for each category to demonstrate the high capability for stylistic features to be transferred into English, but also to draw attention to some of the inherent challenges when attempting a poetic translation. Although the scope of the discussion and its results are limited to RV 1.161, I aim to demonstrate the benefits of
undertaking an exhaustive stylistic analysis to enable the poetry’s original expression
greater representation in the final translation.