

# Patrick Olivelle *Vacanamālā. A Sub-Commentary on Viśvarūpa's Commentary Bālakrīḍā on the Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra*

Alessandro Giudice  
Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Italia

**Review of** Olivelle, P. (2022). *Vacanamālā. A Sub-Commentary on Viśvarūpa's Commentary Bālakrīḍā on the Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, xxv + 303 pp.

As is well known, it is thanks to Patrick Olivelle, professor emeritus of Sanskrit and Indian Religions at the University of Texas at Austin, and past president of the American Oriental Society, that, in the last thirty years, the academic knowledge of the Dharmaśāstra has greatly been expanded, both from a philological and a cultural point of view. Suffice it to mention his critical editions and translations of the *Dharmasūtras* (Olivelle 2000), *Manusmṛti* (Olivelle 2005), *Viṣṇusmṛti* (Olivelle 2009), and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (Olivelle 2019; 2020). Now, Patrick Olivelle's latest work, released in late 2022, is the first edition of the *Vacanamālā*, a sub-commentary on Viśvarūpa's *Bālakrīḍā*, that is, in turn, the first commentary (dated to the early nine century CE, cf. Olivelle 2020, 37) on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (most likely dated to the reign of Candragupta II, 375-415 CE, cf. Olivelle 2019, xiv-xv).

In the introduction to his edition (xi-xxv), Olivelle gives a general presentation of the *Vacanamālā*. As said above, the *Vacanamālā* is a sub-commentary that is part of the textual history of the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*. Within the latter, sub-commentaries are not ra-



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re works. Specifically, there are at least three handed-down sub-commentaries to the more popular Viṅṅaveśvara's *Mitākṣarā* (early twelfth century CE), i.e. Viśveśvara's *Subodhinī* (1360-90 CE approx.), Nandapaṇḍita's *Pramitākṣarā* (1580-1630 CE approx.), and Bālabhaṭṭa's *Bālabhaṭṭī* (1730-1820 CE approx.) (cf. Olivelle 2020, 43-4). However, there are also two handed-down sub-commentaries to the less popular Viśvarūpa's *Bālakrīḍā*. As for the first, Gaṇapati Śāstrī talked about a sub-commentary whose portion available to him extended over 5.500 *granthas* and commented on Viśvarūpa's introduction. This was available to the scholar while he was preparing the critical edition of the *Bālakrīḍā* (cf. Gaṇapati Śāstrī 1922-24, I: i). Unfortunately, Olivelle reports he could not obtain a copy of it (cf. xx).

The second sub-commentary is the *Vacanamālā* itself, handed down from a partial manuscript in Malayālam script (ms. no. C-984 of the Oriental Manuscripts Library of the University of Kerala in Trivandrum) and from another that is probably its Devanāgarī transcript (ms. T 555 A & B). Although it is doubtful whether it was intentionally left incomplete or not, the surviving Malayālam manuscript extends only up to the commentary on *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, I: 24 and the related passages of the *Bālakrīḍā*. Nevertheless, its extension is impressive (more than 240 pages of this edition), considering that only a scant portion of the *ācāradhyāya* of the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* is sub-commented on.

Olivelle solves some relevant puzzles regarding the work's author, its sources and predecessors, its date, and its position in the Dharmaśāstra tradition. A picture of the author of the *Vacanamālā* is thus sketched. The latter, probably a native of Kerala, was an intellectual active both in Kāvya and Dharmaśāstra literature. His *Vacanamālā* is inserted within a tradition of Kerala scholars who sub-commented on Viśvarūpa's *Bālakrīḍā*, three of which (*Vibhāvanā*,<sup>1</sup> *Ṭīkā*, and *Amṛtasyandinī*) are mentioned by himself and were probably known in the author's part of Kerala. The *Vacanamālā* is the only source for these three lost works, whose fragments are recollected by Olivelle from the text (cf. xx-xxiv). The author was also a good connoisseur of *vyākaraṇa* and *nirvacana* and cited Pāṇini's *sūtras*, as well as passages from Yaska's *Nirukta* and Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, to explain grammatical rules and to give (para-)etymologies, as often happens in the commentaries on *Smṛtis*. A distinctive trait of the author is instead the frequent references to lexicographical works (such as *Amarakośa*), which is a less common character. As for the medieval Dharmaśāstra scholarship, the author extensively refers to three works, i.e. Viṅṅavesvara's *Mitākṣarā* (twelfth century CE), Devaṇabhaṭṭa's *Smṛticandrikā* (thirteenth century CE), and a certain Varadarāja's *Varadarājīya*, the

<sup>1</sup> Gaṇapati Śāstrī identified the *Vibhāvanā* with the titleless and authorless sub-commentary available to him (cf. Gaṇapati Śāstrī 1922-24, I: ii).

identity of which is dubious. If this Varadarāja were the same author of the *Vyavahāranirnaya*, he would be placed in the late fifteenth century CE, and the *Varadarājīya* quoted would be another work of him regarding *ācāra*. The latter work may be used as the *terminus post quem* to place the *Vacanamālā* chronologically. Besides defining the sub-commentary as “a late medieval text” (xi), Olivelle does not attempt to assign a date to the *Vacanamālā*.

Regarding the text itself, Olivelle states that his “is clearly not a critical edition” (xii) since the text is handed down from a single *testimonium*. Single-witness manuscript traditions are a well-known phenomenon of Classical, German, Medieval Latin, and Romance philological traditions (cf. Brunetti 2017, 51-3; cf. Chiesa 2002, 99-100; cf. Luiselli Fadda 1994, 190) and are not rare in Sanskrit and Buddhist ones (cf. Hahn 2014, 333). Olivelle’s statement aligns with a group of scholars who support that an edition based on a single witness is not critical (cf., e.g., Pierazzo 2015, 47). Nevertheless, if the expression ‘critical edition’ were taken in a broader sense (in line with the Lachmannian perspective; cf. Digilio 2019, 93), Olivelle’s work would be a critical edition based on a codex unicus, as the scholar emended some clerical errors (cf. xii). The *Vacanamālā* text is given as it is in the Malayāḷam manuscript with minimal corrections (1-241), and a few notes on it are provided (242-6).

Furthermore, three other sections are generously encapsulated into the volume, i.e. the section of Viśvarūpa’s work commented on<sup>2</sup> by the *Vacanamālā* (247-88), the citation index (289-96), and the bibliography (297-303). No translation of the *Vacanamālā* has instead been provided, but this is usual for the editions of commentaries on *Smṛtis* and legal digests.

To conclude, not only has Patrick Olivelle outstandingly filled an important *desideratum* among many in Dharmaśāstra studies, but he has also shed light on an almost forgotten work, which is nonetheless pivotal to having a broader comprehension of the textual history of and about the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*.

<sup>2</sup> The text is taken from Gaṇapati Śāstrī’s edition (cf. Gaṇapati Śāstrī 1922-24, I: 1-42).

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