

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY S.J., *Thinking Ritually. Rediscovering the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini*. (Publications of the De Nobili Research Institute, vol. XVII) Vienna: Institute for Indology, University of Vienna 1990 (293 p.) ISBN 3-900-271-21-6

This interesting, but highly technical study is devoted to the initial phase of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school, an ancient Indian school of thought, centering on sacrificial ritual. Its author tries to “retrieve” its basic text, the Sūtra of Jaimini (4th-2nd century BCE), as a system of thought, from its later explanations. The Sūtra is notoriously difficult to read and for this

NUMEN, Vol. 41 (1994), © E.J. Brill, Leiden

reason it has been interpreted with the help of later commentaries (*bhāṣyas*), especially that of Śābara. Clooney observes that this approach has failed to sufficiently discriminate between the many stages of development in the intellectual history of Mīmāṃsā. It is his aim, therefore, to study the earliest Mīmāṃsā text in terms of the questions it imposes on us when we approach it. The book is divided into two parts: I Deciphering the System of the Sūtras (Chapters 1-3) and II The Meaning and Context of Jaimini's System (Chapters 4-7).

Ch. 1 gives a survey of Mīmāṃsā studies under three points of view: the material as a) a school of exegesis, b) a school of philosophy and c) a theory of sacrifice. In discussion with various scholars Clooney argues that the early Mīmāṃsā can only be properly understood if the explanation of the entire text of Jaimini is taken as a starting-point, and not just its first section dealing with the more general and philosophical topics, as is often done.

Ch. 2 analyses the structure of the Sūtra. Clooney observes that Jaimini uses a consistent method of description and argument in dealing with specific issues. The text has a plan and precision greater than might have been initially expected. It exemplifies a kind of style and thought "in between" those of the sacrificial Śrauta Sūtras and the philosophical Darśana Sūtras. The perception of the Sūtras as a system of rules and relationships oriented to action and event enables Clooney to compare Mīmāṃsā with modern legal reasoning.

Ch. 3 is devoted to the so-called "structural vocabulary" or the "key-terms" of the Sūtras, the words used everywhere in the text to make explicit the structures of sacrificial reasoning. The analysis of these terms enables the author to grasp the distinctive character of the text. Clooney shows that Jaimini has constructed a complex descriptive framework, in which every ritual component can be located and properly handled. The importance of his system becomes clear, if one bears in mind that in ancient India the sacrifice is regarded as a microcosm, wherein the reality of the universe is presented in a pure, intense form. This organisation by Jaimini around the sacrifice also implies the structuring of the universe depending on the sacrifice.

Ch. 4 deals with the question for what reason the structure of Sūtras is developed by Jaimini, and focuses on *dharma* and "sacrifice" (*yajña*) and their interrelationship. Clooney discusses the distinction between ordinary and Vedic experience and language. He stresses the fact that in Jaimini's opinion the sacrifice remains rooted in ordinary experience. As it satisfies human desires, it is something that people can relate to and want to become involved in, but this is not the complete evaluation. Once

a man has undertaken the sacrifice, the action is however no longer governed by his viewpoint and desires. He himself is now part of a larger event not totally dependent on him; for this reason he must adjust his perspective to the obligations and calculations of the ultimate perspective on the sacrifice (*yajñārtha*), which is not reducible to what is meaningful to humans. In this context the transcendence of the Vedic realm is introduced. This transcendence “occurs” when the performer finds himself in a world which accounts for his viewpoint without making him the centre of the world. A world in which the sacrifice is central is no longer the world of ordinary experience. Clooney observes that the concept of *dharma* is essential to a proper understanding of the sacrifice. After a careful analysis of its various meanings he stresses its ritual basis. *Dharma* indicates the functional description of a sacrificial element. This knowledge of *dharma* is based on the Veda.

Clooney elaborates the implications of the preceding in ch. 5. He studies the displacement of the human person from the central focus and shows how Jaimini systematically subordinates the person to the sacrificial event. This is exemplified by three “human” issues, viz. the status of the Vedic *ṛṣīs*, the status of the various Vedic schools, and the question of competence (especially that of women and *sūdras*) in matters of sacrifice (*adhikāra*).

Ch. 6 tries to situate Jaimini’s *Mīmāṃsā* in the context of the *Brāhmaṇas* and Buddhism. Clooney argues that at least regarding to the nature of action and transcendence Buddhism stands closer to the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Mīmāṃsā* than to the *Upaniṣads*. He traces the similarities and differences between *Mīmāṃsā* and Buddhism, and concludes that Jaimini is seeking to offer an intelligent alternative to the other systems of its day, a comprehensive worldview generated exclusively from the texts and rituals of the Vedic world.

Ch. 7 deals with the question as to how to explain the *Mīmāṃsā* of Śabara and his successors. What happened when the system became on the one hand more precise and scientific, and on the other hand more difficult to live by? In this context Clooney deals with the difficult *apūrva* doctrine and its developments. *Apūrva* initially was concerned with the connections between words and actions, but in the course of time this concept was elaborated as the transcendent link between actions and their results, a development concurring with the theory that sacrifice exists primarily for the satisfaction of human desires.

The epilogue is devoted to the possibility of writing a more coherent, more precise and therefore more interesting intellectual history of the *Mīmāṃsā*.

Though Clooney directs himself to specialists in the field of Indian philosophy he also deals with several topics of interest to specialists of Indian religions. A minor point of criticism concerns the translation of *varṇa*, i.e. estate, not caste, but this in no way diminishes the merits of the book.

University of Groningen
Theologische Faculteit
Nieuwe Kijk in 't Jatstraat 104
NL—9712 SL Groningen

L.P. VAN DEN BOSCH