

GERHARD OBERHAMMER: *Offenbarungsgeschichte als Text. Religionshermeneutische Bemerkungen zum Phänomen in hinduistischer Tradition.* (Publications of the de Nobili Research Library, Occasional Papers 5.) 109 pp. (Commission Agents: Gerold & Co., Vienna.) Wien 1994.

Occasional paper is a modest designation for this substantial piece of research. Already the author's 'Introductory remarks' suggest the depth and thoroughness of his analyses of chosen texts which claim the status of revelation, and of the history of their formation. In the context of his hermeneutical investigations he regards 'revelation' as meaning, ultimately, an entry of Transcendence into experience which is turned into an aprioristic, mythical outline; the Transcendence may be experienced on that occasion in any of the hitherto known forms: as an impersonal, although not unspiritual Absolute, as a personal God or even as the Unconditioned which is outside any 'beingness' (*Seiendheit*). The experiencing person has a sense of unquestionable fulfilment and lasting salvific situation, but in his experience there is also a tendency to articulation. Thus the revelation becomes 'text'. The means for it are given *a priori* by his mental horizon and capacity to remember and it is brought out in the course of a reflective process which has an interpretative element stemming from

his beliefs. He can further express his present experience of the Transcendence and transmit its message by using the means of expression ready at hand such as those of a traditional ritual.

The succession of revelational events can be followed as a history of revelation within a tradition in its changing textual versions and still the claim for or belief in its eternal nature or *Urheberlosigkeit* (*apauruṣeyatva*) can persist within it. It does not even matter in what form the revelation is articulated in the text; it may be in terms of 'historical' events, poetical metaphors or myths, again depending on the mental outlook and beliefs of its recipient. It is the task of textual hermeneutics to clarify this process.

The author applies his method first on the lines of transmission in the Vedic tradition. Thus the *Brhadāranyaka Up.* Contains lists of Vedic teachers which is, however, headed by Brahma Svayambhu. Yet when Satyakāma of the *Chāndogya Up.* was accepted as his pupil by Haridumata Gautama, he was not instructed by him for a whole year, but while looking after the cows of his teacher, he experienced *brahman* revelation in four instalments, transmitted to him by the bull of his herd, his evening fire, a wild goose and a cormorant (an *apauruṣeya* way, to be sure). Only then did his teacher instruct him in the traditional inherited lore. Two kinds of transmission, one of salvific *vidyā* and another of traditional Vedic knowledge, transpire from Satyakāma's own method when he in turn becomes a teacher. Thus the revelation renews itself both as experience and text.

The author follows its history in further examples as far as Śaṅkara and then turns his attention to the analysis of later Hindu texts whose translations are given in the Appendix (*Mṛgendrāgama*, *Paramasaṁhitā*, *Jayākhyasaṁhitā*, *Pādmasaṁhitā* and Kaunḍi-ya's *Pañcārthabhāṣya*). This review can provide only a very simplified glimpse of his hermeneutical method, but its fruitfulness may be obvious even so. To follow his theoretical considerations requires some effort, though. His style of writing makes frequent use of the capacity of his native tongue to form long sentences with many inserted sub-clauses. It is well worth the effort, but it is quite a contrast to his Paris seminar papers on *jīvanmukti*. Maybe he should be asked to present this occasional paper in French also.

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