

sample is indicative of wider trends, Asian communities have invested their future in a country that has much to gain from them but is not sufficiently proactive in creating conducive circumstances for this to happen (p. 236). The voices we hear through Bhatti's ethnography are telling us that there is still a long way to go if schools are to play this role, and her research amply demonstrates a number of areas where action demands to be taken. The data are 10–12 years old, but the brief update Bhatti provides does not lend much optimism with regard to the pace and scope of change.

Throughout the book, Bhatti quotes various findings from other studies, but seems reluctant to contextualize her own findings sufficiently. Overall I am left with a sense that while the ethnographic detail is both useful and interesting, as a book, it is not quite well enough woven together to have the impact it might have made. Studies like this really do need to be read by teachers, people in education, and policy-makers: tighter editing would, I think, have made this book more accessible.

CAROLINE DYER
University of Manchester

The Sanskrit Epics. By JOHN BROCKINGTON. Handbuch der Orientalistic (Handbook of Oriental Studies). Zweite Abtelling, Indien, Band 12. Series Editor J. Bronkhorst. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998. x, 596 pp. \$183.50.

This most welcome volume presents not only a staggering compendium of research on the Sanskrit epics done over the past two hundred years, but also the judicious, modestly argued evaluations of that research by a scholar whose intimacy with the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* appears to be nearly matchless. If these two texts are the touchstones for the culture and ethos of premodern India, then this handbook is an indispensable guide to their worlds, replete with information on areas as diverse as geography, philosophy, religious practice, and social values, as well as highly focussed discussion on the metrics, textuality, transmission, and influence of the works themselves. The bibliography alone is a treasure that will assist students and senior scholars alike in their explorations of the epic Sanskrit corpus.

Brockington begins with an introduction which attempts to describe the epics in broad fashion as narratives, textual productions, and cultural documents. A section of this first chapter is entitled "The Relationship of the Epics to Vedic Literature," which to some may signal an underlying conventional history of Indian literature—a history in which epic literature must be placed in a Vedic context and in which the Sanskrit epics form the basis of non-Sanskrit versions. Yet many of the writers that Brockington appreciates do challenge this brahminic-colonial history. After an extremely useful second chapter on "The History of Epic Studies," the remainder of the book consists of parallel sections on the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, with a chapter on the *Harivaṃśa* between them. The first chapter for each epic deals with matters of language, poetics and textual growth, the second with archaeological, political, geographical, and cultural aspects, and the third with religion and philosophy. The apparatus consists of bibliography, index of passages cited, and a general index containing both English and Sanskrit items.

This is a handbook, a central genre in an earlier era of scholarship. Yet the past century has seen the production of critical editions of the epics, comprehensive translation projects, and the application of a host of new methodologies to epic study.

Even the most careful student of the epics may not know many of the articles and books discussed here. Brockington seems not only to have located just about everything written on the epics up to 1996—this handbook was completed in 1997—but to have digested them all. Indologists will be especially grateful for his substantive presentations of research from languages other than English, French, and German. As a handbook it aims not primarily to put forth original views of the epics, but “to present an overview of both epics, within which the history of previous scholarship and the current state of research are given particular prominence, and thereby to build up a coherent view of the nature and significance of the epics, both in themselves and in relation to the rest of Indian culture” (p. ix). Thus readers will find stimulating material from the Indology of the nineteenth century as well as the Indology of the 1990s. Holtzmanns’ and Dahlmann’s theories about the nature of the *Mahābhārata* are here, as are Sheldon Pollock’s studies of the political meaning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in ancient times and the contemporary scene. Still, Brockington is present in every chapter, in the incorporation of his own work on the epic texts, in footnotes which amplify the ideas of others, and in evaluations, usually gentle even when disapproving, of the more than two centuries of work he surveys.

Brockington’s writing is accessible and free from jargon. Were it not for the fact that in many instances he does not translate Sanskrit phrases that are the subject of extensive discussion, a great deal of this book would be useful even to mature undergraduates. As a “handbook,” it can be used for its individual sections, although each discussion will happily lead the reader to another. Surprisingly, the book gives the impression of brevity; for at 525 pages (without apparatus) it seems that studies have been excluded which might illumine the epic material but not written directly on the epic texts. I was wondering, for example, what Brockington would have to say about Wilhelm Halbfass’s two pieces on Dharma (which do cite the *Mahābhārata*) in *India and Europe*, but didn’t find it; likewise some recent work on science and technology in ancient India is missing. One wishes the index, although quite good, could have been more complete. After looking at Halbfass I wanted to see Brockington’s material on the Nārāyaṇīya section of the *Śānti Parvan*. The index contains many references for Nārāyaṇa, some of which refer to the *Nārāyaṇīya*, but no specific entry for Nārāyaṇīya. The index of passages cited usefully divides the major books into their parvans, and there one can find the *Nārāyaṇīya* listed under *Śānti Parvan*, but suppose a student had heard of this important section but did not know its location, it would be difficult to find. Further, some of the less central passages discussed in the text do not appear in the index of passages cited. From one point of view these may be quibbles, yet it would seem that in a “handbook” intended to serve as a *reference work*, an *exhaustive* apparatus would be crucial.

Brockington takes us all the way from the archaeology of North India to the television *Rāmāyaṇa* and new work on the epics that will be facilitated through electronic “recensions.” To contemporary readers accustomed to “strong” interpretation in studies of Indological texts, this wondrous survey will function rather as a multifaceted resource—something like a vast, intelligently constructed web site. Accordingly, one can only hope this book will find a future life in some brave new virtual form (or with another publisher), for at a retail value of \$183.50 it will more likely be found on the noncirculating reference shelves of university libraries rather than on the desks of every eager student of South Asian civilization.

DAVID L. GITOMER
DePaul University