

ASKO PARPOLA

Pierre Rolland (1940-1974)

"... svalpaś ca kālah"

Some months ago I received a brief and shocking message from Madame Gilbert Rolland: "Hélène et Pierre-Yves ont la douleur de vous faire part du décès de leur papa Pierre Rolland survenu brutalement le 28 mai 1974." At the present moment, I have no further details of Pierre Rolland's tragic and very untimely death.

In a short autobiographical sketch published in Indo-Iranian Journal 15:1 (1973), p. 80, Pierre Rolland has given the following data of his career: Born the 2nd of May, 1940, at Santec, Finistère, France. M.A. in classical literature, Paris 1966. Ph.D. in Sanskrit, Aix-en-Provence 1970. Studies in Indology and Indo-European linguistics at Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Göttingen, Tübingen and Erlangen. Study tours to India. Alexander von Humboldt scholarship 1971-1972. Since 1969 research associate of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Aix-en-Provence.

I had the pleasure of knowing Pierre Rolland personally. It was characteristic of Pierre Rolland that he took a very active interest in establishing close personal contacts with other scholars in his field, and in attending international conferences, whether they concerned Indology in general (Berlin 1971). Tamil studies (Paris 1970) or Sanskrit (Delhi 1972). I saw him last at the 29th International Congress of Orientalists (Paris 1973).

While (1.11.1971-1.11.1972) a research fellow (Humboldt scholarship) at the Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Göttingen, Pierre Rolland toured around Germany visiting various centres of Indological study, and in that connection he and his wife Gilberte were able to pay a visit to Copenhagen, where I was working at that time. The accompanying photograph was taken in front of the National Museum of Denmark in the middle of April, 1972.

Our feelings regarding his amiable character have apparently been shared by many who came to know him. Thus, S. A. Dange in the preface of his book Vedic concept of "field" and the divine fructification (Bombay 1971), acknowledges the inspiration drawn from "the lively interest" shown by Pierre Rolland.

Pierre Rolland's primary research interests concentrated in the Vedic ritual, and he was able to make several important contributions to the study of this field during those few years of active research that were given to him. The theme of his thesis, an annotated French translation of the rules of the ancient Indian domestic rites according to the Vārāha branch of the Maitrāyaṇī school of the Yajurveda,¹⁾ had originally been suggested by Louis Renou. Unfortunately for Indology in general but particularly for Vedic studies, this great scholar passed away in 1966. Pierre Rolland naturally regretted this loss, but he was fortunate in finding a number of good guides, particularly professors Armand Minard and Colette Caillat at Paris, and Jean Varenne at Aix-en-Provence. Pierre Rolland's doctoral dissertation is, surprisingly, the first French translation of a Grhyasūtra, thus making one of these important texts of easy access to the French-reading public. It is also the first translation of the Vārāha Grhyasūtra and in many respects carries further the critical and exegetic study begun by Raghu Vira in his edition of this text (Lahore 1932), accepted as a doctoral thesis (Utrecht 1929) by that great master of the Vedic ritual

texts, Willem Caland.

Raghu Vira also brought out, in collaboration with Willem Caland, a critical edition of the Śrautasūtra of the Vārāha school (Lahore 1933), and he published three of its later accessory texts, pariśiṣṭas (the caturhotrka, the gonāmika, and a part of the chando'nukramanī, 1932-1935). Caland died in 1932, and Raghu Vira's research interests turned elsewhere, with the result that until recently, the 22 further important pariśiṣṭas of the Vārāhas remained unknown. In the course of his work on the Grhya, Pierre Rolland took up these severed threads, and carried on the research of these pariśiṣṭas with zeal and ability. In two short but significant studies, he dealt with the Vārāha pariśiṣṭas called Vrsotsarga, Rahasya, and Bhūtotpatti. The last of these brought him to the field of ancient Indian medicine, while the extensive and (to my knowledge) still unpublished study of the Vārāha pariśiṣṭa Grhyapurusa is likely to turn out to be an important contribution not only in the field of Vedic studies but also that of ancient Indian architecture.

Even the topic of one further Vārāha pariśiṣṭa, the caturhotrka, already edited and translated by Raghu Vira, was examined by Pierre Rolland, who, however, took as his starting point the corresponding passage (I,9) of the oldest text of the Maitrāyaṇī school, the Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā. The paper comprises an introduction which analyses the "litany of the four hotars"²⁾, the text of the MS passage, and a French translation with notes. In the beginning of 1973, Pierre Rolland wrote me that he was working on the cāturmāsya sacrifices on the basis of MS I,10. It can thus be seen that he was moving on to the exegesis of the Maitrāyaṇī and the closely related Kātha and Kapisthala-Kātha Samhitās, which undoubtedly constitutes one of the most important tasks of the Vedic philology at the moment.³⁾

Once initiated into the study of the Vedic ritual, Pierre Rolland has, indeed, keenly sensed the crucial areas in this vast field. This is shown by the selection of the topic of his researches in Göttingen: the mahāvratā, which provides one of the most important clues to the prehistory of the Vedic ritual. Though comparatively short, the paper embodying the results of his studies constitutes a most valuable contribution to the understanding of this much discussed rite which will, I am sure, not lose its great interest to the history of Indian religion.⁴⁾

It may be taken as a recognition of Pierre Rolland's achievements that he was in 1973 entrusted the writing of the fascicle on the ritualistic Sūtras of the new encyclopedic History of Indian Literature which is in the course of publication under the editorship of Jan Gonda. In this connection, reference must also be made to Pierre Rolland's willing help and participation in the project of filming and recording the last living tradition of the Vedic agnicayana sacrifice in Kerala under the auspices of an international body of interested scholars under the chairmanship of J. F. Staal. It is a great pity that he cannot (as he had planned to) participate in the field work scheduled to take place in spring, 1975.

As already shown by the scope of his reviews, Pierre Rolland was, however, an indologist who was not exclusively devoted to the Vedic ritual. Reference has already been made to the fact that he dealt with medicine and architecture in the course of his Vedic studies. His attention to the old Buddhist literature is shown by the short paper pointing out the use of the same remarkable simile ("like the wheel follows the foot of the draught-ox ...") in three Gr̥hyasūtras and the first stanza of the Dhammapada.⁵⁾ It is also but natural that Pierre Rolland should have been interested in the ceremony of caste excommunication, a topic near enough to the gr̥hya ritual. In spite of its late date (quotations from the Mitākṣarā, etc.),

he realized the value of the short text called Ghātasphoṭavidhi, ascribed to Aparārka, which provides the only known more extensive description of this rare but interesting rite. He published it according to a manuscript of the Vaidika Saṃsodhana Maṇḍala (no. 3093), with an introduction, and an annotated translation. But Pierre Rolland had interest in a side-field, too, largely independent of the Vedic studies in the narrow sense of the word: this was the Hindu pilgrimages, and particularly those in Kashmir. To my knowledge, it did not yet come into expression in his publications, but it was undoubtedly partly his interest in Kashmir that made him to render into French the stanzas of the Kashmiri poet Bilhana.

In short, we have lost a very gifted and amiable young scholar, who had just started his career in a most promising way. The sorrow of his family, friends and colleges is great.



Pierre and Gilberte Rolland in Copenhagen in April, 1972

Provisional bibliography of Pierre Rolland⁶⁾

1970

- a. "Deux pariśiṣṭa de l'école Vārāha", Journal asiatique 257 (1969), p. 265-272.

1971

- a. Un rituel domestique védique: Le Vārāhagr̥hyasūtra. Traduit et annoté. Aix-en-Provence: Publications universitaires de lettres et sciences humaines d'Aix-en-Provence. [Diss. phil. Aix-en-Provence 1970] 8^o, 214 p.
- b. "La litanie des quatre oblateurs (Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā I,9)". Journal asiatique 258 (1970), p. 261-278.
- c. "Le cérémonial d'exclusion de la caste dans l'Inde ancienne". Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri 80th Birthday Felicitations Volume, Madras, p. 487-497.
- d. review of: J.A.B. van Buitenen, The Pravargya (Poona 1968), in: Journal asiatique 258 (1970), p. 376-378.

1972

- a. "Un fragment médical 'védique': Le première khaṇḍa du Vārāhapariśiṣṭa Bhūtotpatti", Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft 30, p. 129-138.
- b. review of: S.A.Dange, Legends in the Mahabharata (Delhi 1969), in: Journal asiatique 259 (1971), p. 385-386.
- c. "Les cinquante stances du voleur de Bilhana" [offprint, p. 1-12]

1973

- a. Le Mahāvratā. Contribution à l'étude d'un rituel solennel védique. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 8^o, 29p. (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, I. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1973, Nr. 3, p. 51-79.)
- b. "A study of a solemn Vedic ritual, the mahāvratā", Journal of the Bihar Research Society 59, p.

- c. "Le boeuf et la roue (A propos de Dhammapada 1 et Vārāhagrhyasūtra XV,22)", Indo-Iranian Journal 15, p. 40-42.
- d. "Dhammapadavārāhagrhyasūtrayoh anadvan cakras ca", Viśva-Sanskrtam 9, p. 179-181.

In preparation

- a. [An English version of 1971a] Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- b. Le Vārāhaparīśiṣṭa Grhyapurusa. (157 typewritten pages.)
Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute.
- c. review of: Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal IX:2 (Sept. 1971)
- d. review of: J. Bertolaso Stella, *Historia do indianismo* (Sao Paulo 1972)
- e. review of: J. Bertolaso Stella, *A Bhagavad-Gita* (Sao Paulo 1970)

Footnotes

- 1) For a basic orientation, cf. L. Renou, Les écoles védiques et la formation du Veda, Paris 1947 (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique, 9), where the Vārāha school is dealt with on pp. 182 f. and 190.
- 2) For the caturhotar formulae, cf. also J. C. Heesterman in WZKSO 12/13 (1968/69), p. 176 f. It is also interesting to note that the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (3,12,1-5) describes a caturhotra-cayana, a special form of piling the fire altar, which is said to belong to the K a ṭ h a school, like the sāvitra, nāciketa, and vaiśvasrja cayanas (also in TB 3,12), of which the nāciketa form is referred to, as is well known, in the K a ṭ h a Upanisad.
- 3) Cf. my review of the reprints of von Schroeder's editions of the MS and the KS in *Acta Orientalia* 36 (1974), p. 491 ff.
- 4) Cf. A. Parpola, Arguments for an Aryan origin of the South

Indian megaliths, Madras 1973, p. 34 ff., and the review cited in n. 3.

5) Perhaps this parallelism between the later Vedic and early Buddhist texts underlined, once again, by these occurrences, is not due to their contemporaneousness, but to their common retention of the traditions of the Pre-Rgvedic Aryans of India, which in the Vedic literature comes to the surface relatively late. Cf. the references cited in n. 4.

6) I have mentioned below only those works in the last section that Pierre Rolland himself told to be in the press. He may have finished the study of MS I,10 referred to above, and perhaps even other titles. Also, I cannot give details of 1972c, since the offprint I have at hand gives no place of publication.