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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
*Leonid Kulikov*

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# JOURNAL OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

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Jan E.M. Houben\*

## In memoriam Hendrik (Henk) Wilhelm Bodewitz (1939–2022)

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On the 18th of August 2022, the Dutch Sanskritist and Vedic scholar Henk Bodewitz passed away at the age of 82, after an illness of several years. A book containing his articles on some of his major research themes, *Vedic cosmology and ethics: selected studies*, appeared three years earlier, in August 2019 (Bodewitz 2019), as volume 19 in a series of publications which Bodewitz himself had founded some twenty seven years earlier, the Gonda Indological Studies.

Hendrik (Henk) Wilhelm Bodewitz was born on 13 October 1939 in Gramsbergen, a small town in the Netherlands, in the eastern part of the province Overijssel, the son of Johan

Adriaan Bodewitz and Jennigjen Bodewitz, née Lenters. From 1952 to 1958 Henk attended the Gymnasium – high school preparatory for scientific studies – in the neighbouring city of Coevorden. It is here that one of his teachers used to refer extensively to languages such as Hebrew and Sanskrit, which awoke his interest in the latter, the more exotic of the two. In 1958 he started studying classical languages, Greek and Latin, at the University of Utrecht, and got further acquainted with Sanskrit there. After his “candidate-exam” (a kind of extended BA diploma) he

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*Hendrik Bodewitz*  
(mid- or late 1970s)

switched, in 1963, to the study of Sanskrit as his main subject under Professor Jan Gonda (1905–1991), and got the title of “doctorandus” (a kind of extended MA) in Indo-Iranian studies in 1966. Henk Bodewitz was in one of the most successful batches of Jan Gonda’s students, several of whom would later on become lecturer or professor in the Department of Indology in Utrecht, among them Leen van Daalen (1939–1993), Teun Goudriaan (1939–2016) and Karel van Kooij (born in 1939). Although born one year later, on 6 July 1940, Janneke van Uchelen, Henk Bodewitz’s future wife, was another excellent student of Jan Gonda belonging to the same batch. Both Henk and Janneke Bodewitz remained devoted to their teacher Jan Gonda until the latter passed away in the Wilhelmina park in Utrecht in 1991, neither far from Gonda’s own home, nor far from the Bode-

witz family home, which Gonda had visited regularly for dinners and discussions in the last years of his life.

After obtaining his “doctorandus” degree, Bodewitz became lecturer (“wetenschappelijk medewerker”) at Utrecht University, from 1966 to 1968, and next, from 1969 to 1976, lecturer (“wetenschappelijk medewerker”) at Leiden University, first under Prof. F.B.J. Kuiper (1907–2003, Professor of Sanskrit at Leiden University from 1939 till 1972), next under Prof. J.C. Heesterman (1925–2014, Professor of languages and cultural history of South Asia at Leiden University from 1964 to 1990; Heesterman had obtained his PhD degree in Utrecht under the guidance of Gonda in 1957).

In 1973, while still lecturer at Leiden University, Bodewitz defended his PhD thesis which he had prepared under Gonda at Utrecht University. The subject was one of the more difficult and also most fascinating Vedic texts of the Brāhmaṅgenre, the Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṅga, of which he analyzed and translated the first 65 sections of the first book for his dissertation. Pioneering studies and an edition and translation of selections from the enormous Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṅga had been published several decades earlier by Sanskritist and Vedic scholar Willem Caland (1859–1932), the predecessor of Jan Gonda at Utrecht University. A few years after his thesis, Bodewitz published his concise but monumental study *The daily evening and morning offering (Agnihotra) according to the Brāhmaṅas* (Bodewitz 1976), which supplements and expands his study and translation of Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṅga I.1–65 which also deals with the Vedic Agnihotra ritual. (A new edition of this book appeared in 2003, in New Delhi.) 1976 is also the year that Bodewitz became full

professor of “Sanskrit and Indo-European linguistics” (the title of his chair till 1988) at Utrecht University, succeeding Jan Gonda. Under Gonda the Department of Indology (the *Instituut voor Oosterse Talen*, or “Institute for Oriental Languages”) had already grown from a single chair to a whole team of scholars, with special lecturers for subjects such as Indo-European, Indian art, Indian musicology, Hindi, Dravidian languages, etc. Bodewitz turned out to be not only an excellent scholar in his own specialized domains of Vedic studies and indology, but also an excellent manager of the department. This became gradually more difficult in the course of the 1980s, when university studies in the Netherlands underwent several reorganisations.

This was the time I started my study of indology at the University of Utrecht, in 1981. Occasionally, when in the mid-1980s I arrived for the privatissimum course in Vedic in Prof. Bodewitz’s room, he was still at his typewriter, typing letters to international colleagues to request them to send letters of support for the indology department to university officials or to the Dutch government. The fight for survival of the indology department had to be fought on several levels, including the Dutch government, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Faculty of Letters at Utrecht University itself. Bodewitz’s position as dean of this Faculty, from 1980 to 1982 and 1984–1986, no doubt contributed to the success of his efforts to maintain the indology department in that period. The problems were, however, not limited to Utrecht but were affecting all higher education in the Netherlands, including Leiden University. Towards 1990, the threats of reorganization both on a national level and on the level of the universities were such that it was apparent that neither Utrecht nor Leiden could any longer be maintained as full-fledged indology departments. Under these circumstances, Bodewitz thought it wiser to make the first move by himself, instead of waiting to be confronted with a new series of unpleasant decisions from higher authorities: after years of battling for the survival of the indological department at Utrecht, he now proposed to merge his department and that in Leiden at Leiden University. The open places at Leiden University were already at risk of being abolished: Prof. Witzel had left Leiden for Harvard University a few years earlier (in 1986) and Prof. Heesterman had just become emeritus (in 1990). Others such as Prof. Tilmann Vetter (1937–2012), Professor in Buddhology and Indian Philosophy at Leiden University from 1974 to 2000, were still active. The remaining senior staff of Utrecht University were under threat of early retirement, without continuation of their position. The infrastructure at Utrecht University for specialized studies such as Sanskrit had already deteriorated in several respects, for instance with the closing down, a few years earlier, of the study of Classical letters.

Bodewitz’s proposal to move to Leiden was remarkably well received by his direct colleagues of the Faculty of Letters. The Faculty of Letters even gave an additional subsidy so that the rich indological library of the department could also be moved to Leiden, and the chance of Sanskrit studies ever coming back to Utrecht

University would be minimal. After all, in order to attract more students, the Faculty of Letters in Utrecht had in the meantime decided to go into another direction and to rather develop very broad graduation themes, such as media studies. In the course of time all studies related to Asia disappeared from Utrecht University, except for the study of Islam and Arabic.<sup>1</sup>

With the move of the Department of Indology from Utrecht to Leiden in the autumn of 1992, Bodewitz, till then full professor of “Indic and Iranian languages and cultures, especially Sanskrit” at Utrecht University (title changed since 1988), became full professor of Sanskrit at Leiden University. Here, Sanskrit and indological studies initially found their place in a more conducive context, next to teaching and research facilities covering almost the entire range of ancient and modern languages and cultures of Asia and of other “Non-Western” areas (an important research group in Leiden University at that time in fact carried the name “Centre of Non-Western Studies,” CNWS).

The evolving circumstances of the Dutch academic world also provided new opportunities. On the basis of the legacy of Prof. Gonda of ca. 8 million guilders (ca. 3,6 million euro), Bodewitz established the J. Gonda Foundation and incorporated it into the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences in 1992. Since that time the Foundation has funded numerous research projects, publications, special lectures, etc., in the broad domains of Sanskrit studies and indology. The early 1990s further saw the creation of the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden which facilitated – and still facilitates – the stay of young scholars in Asian Studies, including indologists. The establishment of this institute was one of the recommendations of the “Baby Krishna” report of a committee chaired by Frits Staal, constituted to give advice to the ministry regarding the reorganization of the “smaller” subjects in the humanities and the social sciences on Dutch universities. From the beginning, Bodewitz was a member of the scientific committee of the IIAS.

Like his predecessors Willem Caland and Jan Gonda, Henk Bodewitz was a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences. In addition, he was a member and later president of the scientific committee of WOTRO, the foundation for scientific research of the Tropics, which was part of the Dutch Research Council, NWO (formerly ZWO). In 1990 Bodewitz, moreover, succeeded F.B.J. Kuiper as one of the editors-in-chief of the *Indo-Iranian Journal*, where Bodewitz had already published several articles and reviews since 1974. Bodewitz remained editor-in-chief till 2002, first

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<sup>1</sup> Another remnant of the Insitute for Oriental Languages founded by Gonda in 1956 and directed by Bodewitz since 1976 was the teaching of comparative Indo-European languages, since 1964 taught by Dr M. van Strien–Gerritsen, who got her PhD degree in 1973 with a dissertation under Jan Gonda. Her teaching of comparative Indo-European languages which I followed from 1981 to 1983, became part of the department of Celtic Languages & Culture that still exists at Utrecht University.

together with J.W. de Jong, co-founder of the Journal, till 1996, later on together with the latter's successor O. von Hinüber. The reviews of Bodewitz never stuck to the level of mere book notices, but always contained a general evaluation of the entire work, together with an engagement, often somewhat provocative, with some of the author's themes or points: they are always informative and interesting to read.

After the bibliography of the scientific publications of Bodewitz that appeared in Griffiths and Houben (2004), I give here an updated version in Appendix B to this obituary (together with Appendix A: a list of the dissertations prepared under the guidance of Professor Bodewitz). An online bibliography is at present also available on the page devoted to Henk Bodewitz on the website *Dutch Studies on South Asia, Tibet and classical Southeast Asia* (<https://www.dutchstudies-satsea.nl>), co-funded by the J. Gonda Foundation. Although in number more limited and thematically more focused, Bodewitz's publications continued the approach of his teacher Gonda and Gonda's predecessor Caland. Just as Bodewitz distinguished four periods in the scientific productivity of Gonda, we easily see four distinct periods in the work of Bodewitz. These periods coincide with the surrounding administrative conditions of Sanskrit studies and indology in the Netherlands.

**(I)** 1969–1981: the first period lasted 12 years and saw the emergence of Bodewitz as a Sanskritist and Vedic scholar of international repute: he participated in international conferences and published his first scientific articles from 1969 onwards; he obtained his PhD degree and published his thesis in 1973; and was appointed as Professor and head of the Department of Indology at the University Utrecht in 1976. After receiving a copy of his thesis on the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa, Armand Minard (1906–1998), Professor of Sanskrit in Paris and specialist on another great Vedic prose text, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, wrote to him as follows:

It's a nice and good surprise that you have just made me. I especially admire – considering your young age – that you have had the courage to tackle one of the most important and rich texts of Vedic prose.

A translation is always welcome, and it can be said that an untranslated text always remains somewhat on the margins of the main currents of research. But when – as is the case with your work – it is accompanied by marvelously rich notes, when – almost in every sentence – one sees all the parallel passages provided, which shed light and open up horizons, then the reader feels fulfilled.

I am glad that your teacher, Prof. Gonda, has found a disciple of this quality. For a country that has produced – to speak only of the great dead – giants like Kern and Caland, it is comforting to think that this brilliant tradition is being safeguarded.

(A. Minard, carbon copy of letter dated 15 January 1973 sent to Bodewitz, my translation from French, see full text in Appendix)

This was the period in which “pure science” could still flourish at Dutch universities, a period in which the Dutch research council carried the name ZWO, the organization for “pure scientific research” (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Zuiver-Wetenschappelijk*



*Onderzoek*, founded in 1950). The name of this organization would be broadened in adaptation to new conditions in 1988 as NWO (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*, organization for scientific research).

(II) 1982–1992: a 10-year period characterized by the struggle under reorganizations such as the “task division and concentration operation” (Dutch acronym: TVC) imposed by the Dutch Ministry of Higher Education, until the move to Leiden University. In spite of the administrative responsibilities and challenges as described above, Bodewitz continued his specialized, philological research, mainly in the domain of Vedic Studies. The publication in 1990 of *The Jyotiṣtoma ritual: Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇā I*, 66–364, together with his *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I*, 1–65 which he published 17 years earlier, completes Bodewitz’s annotated translation of the entire first book of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Informally he announced to colleagues and students that he had no plan to continue to work on the other two books of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Some important new work has been done on the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, but to this day, 33 years later, the other two books of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa have remained untranslated, except for several fragments, especially in works by Willem Caland in the beginning of the 20th century (1915 and 1919) and later on by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (1985, see below). Four important articles on the theme of the “Yonder World”, collected in the volume *Vedic cosmology and ethics: selected studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) as chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, were published in this period. Another important article relevant to “Vedic cosmology and ethics” appeared in this period, “The ‘marriage’ of heaven and earth (JB. 1, 145–146; PB. 7, 10, 1–9; AB 4, 27, 5–10),” which, however, does not fit well the two main divisions of the 2019 volume, “Yonder World” and “Vices and Virtues”, and is hence not part of the volume of collected articles.

(III) 1992–2002: another period of 10 years: Professor at Leiden University: specialized philological research in Vedic Studies, gradually supplemented by publications dealing with broader themes and additional themes, such as three articles on the Bhagavad Gītā and a contribution on *ahimsā* to a volume entitled *Violence denied: violence, non-violence and the rationalization of violence in South Asian cultural history*, ed. by Jan Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Bodewitz 1999). In the late spring of 2002 Bodewitz was one of the main conveners of the Third International Vedic Workshop, which brought together specialists in Vedic Studies from all over the world. The year 2002 further saw the publication of his *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad. Translation and commentary with an appendix, Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka IX–XI* as vol. 16 in the series Groningen Oriental Studies. On the 1st of November of the same year he concluded his university teaching with a Valedictory Address with the title “De late ‘ontdekking’ van het Sanskrit en de Oudindische cultuur in Europa” [The late “discovery” of Sanskrit and ancient Indian culture in Europe] which deals with the remarkably late acquaintance with Sanskrit of the European public, while much information about Indian religions and even grammars of Sanskrit remained unpublished in religious institutions such as the Vatican. This lecture, in Dutch, is a

good example of the lively, humoristic and occasionally polemic style of presentation of an original and well-researched topic which always characterized Bodewitz's lectures and teachings.

(IV) 2003–2022: Professor emeritus, a period in which Bodewitz remained active and productive roughly during the first 10–12 years, till 2015, working mainly from his home in Utrecht. This period saw the publication of several articles on concepts of virtues and vices as expressed in Vedic texts. In anthropological terms they are philological studies of an “emic” or inside perspective on virtues and vices. Together with two articles that appeared earlier (in period III, 1992–2002), they form the second part of the 2019 volume *Vedic cosmology and ethics*. Since my appointment in Paris and my teaching there starting in 2002, we continued to meet and discuss on several occasions, although much less frequently than before.

In 2015 his reduced mobility started to be clearly noticeable, and in 2016 I hesitatingly accepted his request to write a long and detailed review of a volume of Essays by his colleague and friend Klaus Mylius, a review he still had wanted to write himself. I was able to show him my review in the summer of 2019, which though accepted for publication was at that moment still forthcoming in the *Bulletin d'Etudes Indiennes* (see now Houben 2022).

The work of Bodewitz often presupposes familiarity with the encyclopedic works that Jan Gonda wrote on Indian religion and literature in general and on Vedic studies in particular, for instance Gonda's *History of Indian Literature*, vol. I: *Vedic Literature* (Gonda 1975) and *Die Religionen Indiens I: Veda und älterer Hinduismus* (Gonda 1978). His description of Gonda's approach also applies to a large extent to himself.

Gonda started from the available texts and sometimes stated that the material studied alone could make clear what those who composed the texts had thought. The texts would speak for themselves. ... Of course, Gonda was not entirely unbiased regarding the material in the texts, no more than other philologists. Unfortunately, he rarely formulated his principles explicitly. Karel Werner, in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* of 1982 [Werner (1982) (JH)], tried to indicate what Gonda thought the ancient Indians thought, and in that context mentioned some sources of inspiration for his thinking. (Bodewitz 1992: 14, my transl. from Dutch)

Unlike Gonda, however, Bodewitz is not so much interested in the gods and powers that are supposed to have surrounded “Vedic man,” but rather in the latter's human condition – his experience in life, his beliefs regarding virtues and vices, his commitment to or relativization of the ritual system, etc. It so happens that the Vedic text to which Bodewitz devoted most of his scholarly career, the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa, pays little attention to myths in which gods and demons are central, as in other Brāhmaṇas: its focus is, quite remarkably, “a modest plane of existence, human rather than cosmic” as Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty wrote in 1985, in her book with the

somewhat provocative title *Tales of Sex and Violence* (Doniger O’Flaherty 1985), one of the very rare other publications, apart from those by Caland and Bodewitz, that deals with narratives in the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa.

With the passing away of Henk Bodewitz the world has lost a Sanskritist, indologist, and specialist of Vedic Studies of great international fame who contributed significantly to the field and who also, as if against his will and in passing, reshaped the administrative context of indological studies and studies of ancient and classical India in the Netherlands. Just a few weeks earlier, on 28 July 2022, his wife Janneke Bodewitz had passed away. They are survived by their two children, Jord and Wanda, and their respective families.

## Bibliography

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#### At Utrecht University

Leendert A. Van Daalen, 1980: *Vālmiki’s Sanskrit*.

Jan A. Schoterman, 1982: *The Ṣaṣṣāhasra Saṃhitā, chapters 1–5, ed., transl. and annotated*.

Herman Tieken, 1983: *Hāla’s Sattasaī: stemma and edition (Gāthās 1–50), with translation and notes*.

Joep Bor, 1987: *The voice of the sarangi: an illustrated history of bowing in India = De stem van de sarangi: een geïllustreerde geschiedenis van de Indiase strijkinstrumenten*.

Margriet L.B. Blom, 1989, co-promotor: A.J. Gail: *Depicted deities: painters’ model books in Nepal*.

Dory M. Heilijgers, 1992, co-promotor T. Goudriaan: *The system of five cakras in Kubjikāmatatantra, 14–16*.

Jan E.M. Houben, 1992, co-promotor J. Bronkhorst: *The Saṃbandha-samuddeśa (Chapter on Relation) and Bharṭṛhari’s Philosophy of Language: A study of Bharṭṛhari’s Saṃbandha-samuddeśa in the context of the Vākyapadīya, with a translation of Helārāja’s commentary Prakīrṇa-Prakāśa on the Saṃbandha-samuddeśa*.

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Dr Dory M. Heilijgers-Seelen for refreshing and confirming my memory. Several dissertations have been published but here I refer to the dissertations as such.

### At Leiden University

Alexandra A.E. van der Geer, 1998: *The Bhāsa Problem: a statistical research into its solution*.

Arlo Griffiths, 2004: *Paippalādasamhitā of the Atharvaveda, Kāṇḍas 6–7: A new edition with translation and commentary*.

### Prof. Bodewitz was co-promotor of

Paul J.C.L. van der Velde, 1993 (promotor: M.A.G.T. Kloppenborg, Utrecht): *Rasikarāja and Dīnanātha, Brajghosa poetry and the encounter with Krishna's world*.

Roelf Barkhuis, 1995 (promotor: H.T. Bakker, Groningen): *Agastyasamhitā 1–23, introduction, critical edition and annotated translation*.

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Translation from 17th century Dutch: Johan Joshua Ketelaar, *Instruction in Persian and Hindostani with their declensions and conjugations, as well as a comparison of Hindostani and Dutch measures and weights, together with the explanation of some Moorish names, etc.* [partial translation from the Dutch original, a manuscript of Utrecht University Library from 1698], unpublished typescript. (see now also: <https://www.uu.nl/en/specialcollections/collections/manuscripts/modernmanuscripts/instructieofonderwijsinghederhindoustanseenpersiaanse-taalenbyketelaar>, accessed 6 August 2023.)

### 1969

Der Vers *vicakṣaṇād ṛtavo...* (JB 1, 18; 1, 50; KauṣU 1, 2). *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Supplementa* 1(3). 843–848. (English translation in: Bodewitz 2019, 405–409.)

### 1973

*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I, 1–65: translation and commentary, with a study: Agnihotra and Prāṇāgnihotra*. Utrecht: Utrecht University PhD thesis.

Also published as:

*Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa I, 1–65: translation and commentary, with a study: Agnihotra and Prāṇāgnihotra* (Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina 17). Leiden: Brill.

#### 1974

Vedic *anuṣṭhú* and *anuṣṭh(u)yā*. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 16. 1–17.

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Gab es damals auch Dyumnas? Die Weltentstehung nach dem Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Supplementa* 2. 292–298. (English translation in: Bodewitz 2019, 410–416.)

#### 1976

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#### 1978

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## Appendix: Letter from Minard to Bodewitz

UNIVERSITÉ DE LA SORBONNE NOUVELLE  
(PARIS III)

Le 15/1/73 ..... 19.....

U. E. R. des langues et civilisations  
de l'Orient  
et de l'Afrique du Nord

285, rue de Vaugirard  
75015-PARIS

13, RUE SANTEUIL, PARIS-V\*

Mon cher Collègue,

C'est une belle et bonne surprise que vous venez de me faire. J'admire -surtout considérant votre jeune âge - que vous ayez eu le courage de vous attaquer à l'un des textes les plus importants et les plus riches de la prose védique.

Une traduction est toujours la bienvenue, et l'on peut dire qu'un texte non traduit reste toujours un peu en marge des grands courants de recherche. Mais quand - comme c'est le cas pour votre travail - elle est accompagnée de notes merveilleusement riches, quand - presque pour chaque phrase, - on voit apparaître tous les passages parallèles qui apportent leur lumière et ouvrent des horizons, alors le lecteur se sent comblé.

Je me réjouis que votre maître, le Prof. Gonda, ait trouvé un disciple de cette qualité. Dans un pays qui a produit ~~si peu de choses~~ pour ne parler que des grands morts - des géants comme Kern et Caland, il est réconfortant de penser que cette brillante tradition est sauvegardée.

A mes compliments et à mes remerciements, j'ai plaisir à joindre (puisque c'est encore le temps des vœux) mes vœux de fécond travail.

Armand MINARD

Puis-je vous demander indulgence pour cette mauvaise frappe ?

**English translation**

15 January 1973

285, rue de Vaugirard  
75015 PARIS

My dear Colleague,

It's a nice and good surprise that you have just made me. I especially admire – considering your young age – that you have had the courage to tackle one of the most important and rich texts of Vedic prose.

A translation is always welcome, and it can be said that an untranslated text always remains somewhat on the margins of the main currents of research. But when – as is the case with your work – it is accompanied by marvelously rich notes, when – almost in every sentence – one sees all the parallel passages provided, which shed light and open up horizons, then the reader feels fulfilled.

I am glad that your teacher, Prof. Gonda, has found a disciple of this quality. For a country that has produced – to speak only of the great dead – giants like Kern and Caland, it is comforting to think that this brilliant tradition is being safeguarded. To my compliments and my thanks, I am pleased to add (since it is still a time for wishes) my best wishes for fruitful work.

Armand MINARD

Please accept my apologies for this poor typing quality.

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