

Ludo Rocher (1926-2016)

With the passing at age 90 of Professor Ludo Rocher on November 2, 2016, the world of Indology lost one of its giants, a man who was as revered for his gentle ways and profound personal integrity as for his vast intellectual accomplishments. Ludo Rocher was beyond question one of the greatest Sanskrit scholars of his generation. He was an acknowledged world authority on Dharmaśāstra and traditional Hindu law, but his published activities and expertise ranged far beyond this specialty, including such fields as Vedic studies, religious literature in classical Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, Pāṇinian grammar, and the history of Indology in the western world. In his many years of teaching, particularly at the University of Pennsylvania from 1966 to 2002, he trained an entire generation of experts not only in Dharmaśāstra but in all major aspects of Indology. In 1987, fifteen of his former students contributed articles to a felicitation volume in honor of his sixtieth birthday, published in the form of a special volume (no. 51) of *Brahmavidyā: The Adyar Library Bulletin*. Not only do many of his students now hold important academic positions, but even a new generation of *praśiṣyas*, his students' students, has already risen to prominence.

Ludo was born into a modest family in Hemiksem, Antwerp, Belgium on April 25, 1926. His mother, Anna Van den Bogaert, was a seamstress and his father, Julianus Rocher, a technical draftsman. He received his MA *summa cum laude* in classics with a minor in Sanskrit at the University of Ghent in 1948 and his PhD, again *summa cum laude*, in 1952 from the same institution, where his principal teacher was Adriaan Scharpé. He also studied in the Netherlands with Jan Gonda and Barend Faddegon, and with Paṇḍit T.S. Śrīnivāsa Śāstrī during his stay at the Deccan College (Pune) between 1953 and 1955. After achieving his Habilitation in 1956, he served as professor at the University of Brussels from 1959 to 1966. Having gained an international reputation by then, in 1966 Ludo was offered and accepted the position of professor of Sanskrit at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught until his retirement in 2002. For his last twenty years at Pennsylvania he was designated the first W. Norman Brown Professor of South Asia Studies, a position named for his predecessor as professor of Sanskrit. At Penn he also served for a total of twenty years as chair of the Departments of Oriental Studies, South Asia Regional Studies, and Near Eastern and Asian Studies. He was president of the American Oriental Society from 1985-86, and Vice President (1981-82) and Chairman of the Board of Trustees (1984-85) of the American Institute of Indian Studies. In 1990, he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

In his personal life, two especially memorable events stand out. First, on April 1, 1961, he married his then-student Rosane Debels, forming a union that was as profound, strong, and harmonious as any two human beings could ever hope to enjoy. Ludo and Rosane were partners in every aspect of their lives, personal and professional, and especially in the later phases of their careers they collaborated closely on several major research projects. The second special event was on June 6, 1972, when Ludo, along with Rosane, became an American

citizen; despite his international renown, he took as much pride in his new identity as the humblest immigrant.

Ludo's life-long focus on Indian law was not entirely a random choice. Rather, it was conditioned in part by his having earned a doctorate in law at the University of Ghent in 1950. He pursued this degree simultaneously with his study of Indology at the urging of his parents, who, like many parents of children with scholarly inclinations, were uncomfortable with the professional prospects of a Sanskrit scholar. It is typical of Ludo's quiet determination that, instead of resenting or resisting what might have seemed an imposition, he made the best of it and combined the study of law and Indology to lay the foundation of his unique career.

The cornerstone of his labors in Dharmaśāstra was always rigorous philological manuscript studies, and several of his most important publications were critical editions of Dharmaśāstra texts. This aspect of his career is bookended, as it were, by his habilitation thesis, published in 1956 as *Vācaspati Miśra: Vyavahāracintāmaṇi. A Digest on Legal Procedure*, and his last major publication in 2016 – at the age of 90 – of the *Vyavahārasaukhya: The Treatise on Legal Procedure in the Ṭoḍarānanda composed at the Instance of Ṭoḍaramalla during the Reign of Akbar*. Ludo's textual studies were "critical" in the truest sense of the term, and this from the very beginning; his habilitation thesis on the *Vyavahāracintāmaṇi* can still serve as an ideal methodological model for the editing of Sanskrit texts. He was also the author of innumerable articles on a vast variety of topics in and around Dharmaśāstra, forty-five of which were collected and republished as *Studies in Hindu Law and Dharmaśāstra*, edited by his *praśiṣya* Donald R. Davis (London, 2012).

Beyond the field of law, one of Ludo's most important publications was *The Purāṇas*, published as a volume of the *History of Indian Literature* series (Wiesbaden, 1986). Thirty years on, this book remains the standard and authoritative reference source for Purāṇic studies. Especially in the later phase of his career, Ludo became deeply interested in the early history of Sanskrit studies in Europe. His earlier work in this area included *Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo. Dissertation on the Sanskrit Language* (Amsterdam, 1976) and *Ezourvedam. A French Veda of the eighteenth century* (Amsterdam, 1984). Two later studies were fruits of his collaboration with Rosane, who was also an established authority in this field: *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company* (London, 2012), and *Founders of Western Indology: August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Henry Thomas Colebrooke in Correspondence 1820-1837* (Wiesbaden, 2013). But even these two *magna opera* of his later years are not the end of the story: their last collaboration, concerning the life and works of Friedrich August Rosen (1805-1837), the first editor of the Ṛgveda, was in progress at the time of his death and will be completed by Rosane.

Such is the power of Ludo Rocher's unwavering dedication to his labors. It would be hard to imagine another scholar who worked with more single-minded concentration from the beginning to the very end of a span of academic publications which lasted well over sixty years, and one in which two of the most important works appeared when he was well into the ninth decade of his life. Ludo always was and will always remain an awesome figure of inspiration to

his colleagues, to his students and their students, and to his many admirers around the world. His unfailing modesty, his kind and gentle nature, his single-minded dedication to scholarship, and his unwavering adherence to the highest principles of precision and perfection – these and other qualities will live on forever in the minds and hearts of all whose lives were enriched by knowing him.

Richard Salomon, University of Washington