

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS¹

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The figure of the great theologian Rāmānuja, who, together with Yāmuna, represents the beginning of the school that bears his name in his tradition's consciousness and who is of central importance in a manner distinct from Yāmuna, conceals perhaps too easily the fact that in spite of its philosophic-scholastic aspect, which is clearly formulated in the school's Sanskrit tradition, in its essential character the Rāmānuja School has become a religious tradition (i.e., a religion). As such, it was not "founded" by Rāmānuja, and its religious aspect becomes fully evident only after Rāmānuja's lifetime, assuming a concrete form in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

The process that led to this phenomenon was very complex. In the first place, this process transpired through the school's Sanskrit tradition, which oriented itself towards the Vedānta of the Brahma-sūtras and which is already tangible in the works of Rāmānuja, Nārāyaṇārya, Meghanādārisūri, Vātsya Varadaguru and his disciple Sudarśanasūri. However, it seems there was also a Vaiṣṇava tradition independent of this Vedānta-oriented tradition. This can be deduced, for instance, from the influence of the *bhakti* theology and its spirituality of the *śaraṅāgati* on the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās. Further, the Jitamṛtestotra and the spiritual hymn in Paramasaṃhitā 30.37-67, among others, may be assigned to this Vaiṣṇava tradition.² In addition to this, following Rāmānuja's lifetime, the Pāñcarātra, together with the spirituality of the Ālvārs, both of which gained in influence to an increasing extent, seems to have been decisive for the development of the ritual piety of the school.

Despite some similarities to Abhinavagupta's position in the Pratyabhijñā school, Rāmānuja's significance for his school is another. Rāmānuja followed a Vedāntic tradition that understood the Absolute, the *brahman*, theistically to be Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. It is this belief that opened the tradition to its religious dimension. Yet the tradition – which in a mystic sense is unquestionably a religious one – seems despite this to have remained rooted in the type of clas-

¹ This text served as the introduction to the symposium's general topic.

² Cf. OBERHAMMER 1998a.

sical Indian system of salvation that serves the attainment of liberation as can still be seen in Rāmānuja's *bhaktiyoga*.³ Rāmānuja puts the ontological relationality of the *brahman* into concrete philosophical terms by the introduction of an "ontological difference" between the eternal *prakārin* and the eternal *prakāra* in the sense of the *brahman*'s relation with the world and with the individual human being. Only thereby is the foundation for the adoption, speaking in historically concrete terms, of the Pāñcarātra with all its dimensions of a religious tradition (revelation, ritual, worship of cult-images, etc.) by the theistic Vedānta.⁴ The theistic Vedānta thereby becomes a religious tradition in the full sense of the word and does not remain merely a system of salvation that is related to mysticism.

Generally speaking, one could perhaps therefore say that new religious traditions develop from two fonts: from a continuum of religious experience that lies within a contamination of the religious tradition and existential thinking; in a religious terminology: mysticism in communication with other religious traditions, through their study, adoption and integration, as well as through rejection and differentiation. They do not seem to arise from mere philosophical intellectual efforts.

As already mentioned, in this sense several traditions were involved in the development of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas' tradition, a fact that is still explicitly referred to today. These traditions were not independent of one another, but rather mutually influenced each other greatly. The manner of this mutual influence and concrete evidence for it, as well as the cooperation between the traditions that led to the formation of that of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas has to date very little been investigated.

³ Cf. OBERHAMMER 2004: 23ff.

⁴ See OBERHAMMER 1999.