

Book Reviews

K D Somadasa, *Catalogue of the Sinhalese manuscripts in the library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1996, pp. 420, £30.00 (1-86983-581-6).

Mr K D Somadasa and the Wellcome Institute have produced a sumptuous volume in cataloguing the 469 Sinhalese manuscripts in their possession, which cover a wide spectrum of subjects. Only about five of the fifteen pages of the subject index cover medicine, ritual or astrology; most of the rest is Buddhist literature. It would have been of interest to know how and why these manuscripts were acquired by the Institute, though it may well be that such details have not been preserved (just as it seemed impossible in 1981 to discover the source of the 45 Sinhalese manuscripts at that time being catalogued in the India Office Library).

The manuscripts do not seem to be catalogued in any particular order; perhaps they are numbered in order of acquisition. The sequence in which the entries are now printed does not seem to be that in which they were compiled, but the excellent indexes, in both Roman and Sinhala script, when consulted will make the entries clearer in the numerous cases of multiple copies where information is split between various entries.

Mr Somadasa points out in a short introduction some of the interesting highlights of the collection, headed by the magnificent copper grant which figures as entry no. 1. Here the comment "See plate 1 for full text" is distinctly optimistic. It is, however, just possible to see that the photograph of the verso side is printed upside down. Besides those instanced in the Introduction, other items which might repay further study are numbers 69, a polemical letter from one monk to another, not precisely dated: 86.VIII, on a religious debate conducted in 1871: 90, on local history: 258, on a census taken in 1840: 328, which refers to a Buddhist-Christian controversy which the editor implies must have been printed at the time: 388, on the making of fireworks: 406, on a legal dispute of 1871.

Some of the titles under which the manuscripts are listed seem to be the compiler's own, and sometimes presuppose some knowledge of Sinhala. The catalogue text is followed by a fine series of plates, excellently coloured in many cases, and by three indexes.

The descriptive portion of each entry follows very much the same lines as the Nevill catalogue entries from the British Library, admirably published by Mr Somadasa over the last ten years, and includes descriptive notes on the manuscripts themselves, sometimes brief assessments ("useful copy"), and reference to printed versions of the texts in question where they exist. Occasionally a mysterious word probably indicates some sort of lacuna ("indiscretion" on p. 215).

The detailed application necessary to produce a work of this size and calibre deserves high praise: after producing eight volumes of this kind it would seem that Mr Somadasa has still not quite finished. How fortunate for scholars whose interests lie in the direction of Sri Lanka that Mr Somadasa has been able and willing to remain in this country well past retirement age, in order to complete these catalogues. The Wellcome Institute has indeed been fortunate.

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Paul Brodwin, *Medicine and morality in Haiti: the contest for healing power*, Cambridge Studies in Medical Anthropology 3, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. xvi, 240, £50.00 (hardback 0-521-57029-8); £17.95 (paperback 0-521-57543-5).

This welcome addition to the literature on medical anthropology will be of interest to historians as well as social scientists and public health specialists. Paul Brodwin argues that in the rural Haitian community of Jeanty sick people set out to depict themselves as upright social actors, because illness can raise disturbing questions about personal guilt.