

GRAŻYNA SPYCHALSKA-WILCZUROWA

Warszawa

STANISŁAW FRANCISZEK MICHALSKI

(1881-1961)

Stanisław Franciszek Michalski, the son of Seweryn Michalski, a physician, was born on January 29th 1881 at Tarnogród. He took his school-leaving certificate at Biała Siedlecka in 1904. He completed his initial studies in Warsaw, but after the strike which took place in the schools in 1905, he left college. Then for a time he worked as a private teacher. In 1908 he took up Indian Studies and at the same time a course in Indo-European linguistics at the University of Vienna, under the direction of professors L. Schröder and P. Kretschmer. In 1910, still during the period of his studies at the Viennese University, he published in Warsaw the first translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, a philosophical poem from the sixth book of *Mahābhārata*.

In March 1912, he obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Oriental Studies from the University of Vienna, for his work *Krishna im Mahābhārata*. After his Doctors degree he left for Göttingen, where he studied for a time under prof. Oldenberg and prof. S. Wackernagel.

At the end of 1912, he returned to Warsaw. From 1912-1914, he lectured in Indian philosophy and literature, as well as in Sanskrit, at the Wolna Wszechnica Polska (The Free Polish Higher Institute of Learning) in Warsaw.

In 1912, he published a translation of Rhys Davids' *Buddhism*, together with a translation of the *Rigveda* hymns under the title *Forty Songs of the Rigveda*. In 1913 his translation of the *Upanishad* came out.

He spent the war years 1914-1918 in Switzerland. During that time he worked on translating into Polish A. Meillet's book, *An Outline of Comparative Grammar of the Indo-European Languages*. This translation was published after his return to Poland in 1919.

Furthermore, during the period 1919-1921 he published a work on Indian philosophy and philology at the Wolna Wszechnica Polska. From 1921 he taught in a secondary school. During these years he did a great deal of work on translations from Indian Literature. In 1921, a second edition of his Polish translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* appeared containing an introductory preface: in 1922, he published

the Sanskrit text of the *Bhagavadgītā* with an introduction in French. In 1923, a French translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* came out in Paris and at the same time there appeared in Warsaw a Polish translation of the Vedantic Treatise of Śamkara under the title of *Ātmabodha*. Later in 1924 and 1929 he published a Polish translation of selections from the *Upanishad*, in 1925 a translation of the Pāli text of the *Dhammapadam* — the Polish title was *The Path of Truth*, the most well known poetic collection of Buddhist sayings, belonging to the Pāli Canon.

In the space of the following years, St. F. Michalski was concerned mainly in publishing and in literary activities. As early as 1912, there had existed a publishing firm, Ultima Thule, directed by him, in which appeared outstanding works on world literature and, moreover, nearly all done by himself. St. F. Michalski published extensively, translated and wrote introductions to various works. He also wrote novels. At that time he used the literary pseudonym Alfred Iwieński. He was also the editor and the author of the Ultima Thule Universal Encyclopaedia (*Encyklopedia Powszechna Ult. Th.*).

He spent the war years 1939-1945 in Warsaw. During that period, he gave private lessons as well as doing research, mainly on the Indian epic entitled the *Mahābhārata* and *Rigveda*. He also wrote a *History of Indian Literature*. The manuscript of this vast work, together with many others, and his priceless research library perished during the Warsaw Rising of 1944.

After the War, in 1945, he moved to Łódź, where he became a lecturer in Indian Studies at the university. In 1954, he received the title of Senior Lecturer (Docent) at Łódź University, in recognition of the entirety of his research work.

He lectured for 15 years at Łódź University, covering a very vast field of Indian Studies. His lectures on the language included: Sanskrit, Vedic, Pāli, the history of Indian Literature, Sanskrit poetry, as well as drama, and fairy tales, philosophy *Rigveda*, Vedic religion and philosophy, *Vedānta*, the grammatical *Sutra* of Pāṇini, an interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* philosophical texts, Buddhism, Pāli text on the Buddhist Canon, an outline of Indian History, as well as Indian Geography.

During that period he did extensive research mainly on the *Rigveda*, and on the Pāli language and Pāli texts.

In 1948, there appeared a second edition of his translation of the *Dhammapadam* with a preface, then he published fragmentary translations of the Buddhist Canon of *Suttanipāta* in the „Oriental Review” („Przegląd Orientalistyczny”). Likewise, he prepared for print a *Grammar of the Pāli Language*.

He also arranged for publication a new translation of the eighty hymns, under the title *Eighty Songs of the Rigveda*. While working on this translation, he published a series of priceless scholarly works from his research on the *Rigveda*, such as *Hymnes philosophiques du „Rigveda”* I, II, *Atharvaveda* X, 2, *Etude sur le mot „kshoni” dans le „Rigveda”*, *Zodiacal Light in the “Rigveda”*, *Brahman dans le „Rigveda”*, *Aśvins et Dioscures*, *Vedique dhasi*, *Vedique ari*, *arya*, *ārya*, lies in an unfinished state among his manuscripts.

Among other works he prepared *An Outline of Indian Philosophy*, with the inclusion of a special part on the period of Vedic philosophy.

From 1957, St. F. Michalski worked in collaboration with *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, in which he published a series of articles in a section entitled Materials for a Dictionary of Literary Genres such as: *Upanishad*, *Ākhyāna*, *Ākhyāyika*, an article on *The Problem of Literary Genres in Indian Poetry and Literature* and an obituary notice on Hélène Willman-Grabowska.

He brought out a work, in 1961, entitled *Kālidāsa* in the Research Note Books of Łódź University, and at the same time, in Paris, a French translation of the hymns of the *Rigveda*.

Death overtook him at the height of his creative power, in the middle of a further work taken from his research on the *Rigveda* text. He died on August 8th 1961, and his burial took place on August 11th at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw.

Dr Stanisław Franciszek Michalski was from 1923 a member of the Warsaw Oriental Society, later a member of the Polish Oriental Society, a member of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Poona, an associate member of the Łódź Research Society, a member of the Polish Writers Union.

As a person and a scholar — he was distinguished for his profound learning, his erudition and his conscientiousness in his research work, being, at the same time, a man of unparalleled modesty. He was a prominent expert on Indian Culture, its rich literature and philosophy, an outstanding scholar of the *Rigveda*, distinguished throughout the whole world, the author of beautiful translations of the masterpieces from Indian Literature.

St. F. Michalski, as the translator of masterpieces of old Indian Literature, won for himself a position in French as well as Polish Literature. Literary critics and scholars call attention to the high standard of his translations. A very positive appraisal of the French translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, published in 1923, was made by the American scholar of Indian Studies, prof. Franklin Edgerton.

In Poland especially, his translation of the *Forty Songs of the Rigveda* and the *Upanishad* — published three times, 1913, 1924 and 1929 — was very highly valued.

The Polish specialist in Indian Studies — prof. Stefan Stasiak — expressed great admiration for the last new translation of the *Eighty Rigveda Songs*. He calls attention to the difficulties of interpreting the *Rigveda*, and at the same time to the value of the translation: St. F. Michalski, he points out, is not only faithful to the text, rendering its literary form, but also to the rhythm of the original which he imitates in the rhythm of his translation. Besides the characteristics of St. F. Michalski's translations mentioned by prof. Stasiak, we can see yet another which is worth underlining: namely that the translator renders the phonetic value of the original text. This feature appears in all of his translations: as, for example, in the translation of the *Dhammapadam* Michalski rendered the very calmness and quietness of the sounds of the Pāli language, in the words of the author of the translation to *The Path of Truth* "... the childlike babbling of the Pāli tongue, in which all roughness

is smoothed out, every harsh sound avoided, the words floating out from the mouth, before travelling to the ear bover in the air like some piece of fluff or a thread of silk so as not to strike the ear too sharply”.

It is also worth while to draw attention to the fact that all St. F. Michalski's translations are at the same time scientific translations in which the translator accepts the responsibility for the precise choice of word to render all aspects of that of the original text.

Of the research work conducted by St. F. Michalski during the period from 1945, his *Outline of Indian Philosophy* deserves distinction and especially the section on the *Veda* period of philosophy, as does his *Grammar of the Pāli Language*, destined, principally, as a University text-book. A great deal of material on the history of Indian literature and poetry can be found in his manuscripts. His work on *Indian Poetry and Literature* for *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* also merits attention. This is probably the first attempt ever made to distinguish literary genres from the body of Indian literature.

The central question, that bewitching work, which still constantly attracted him, to the research of which he devoted nearly all his life — 50 years of study, 1911-1961 — was the *Rigveda*. He said himself that “the intensity of feeling, the precision of expression, the unusualness of the adjectives and metaphors, the severe ruthlessness of primeval natures, expressed in an unparalleled style and language, make the *Rigveda* a unique phenomenon in literature, a vast report on man's experiences thousands of years ago”.

His work on the *Rigveda* is one of the most difficult tasks ever accomplished on Indian Literature, for the translator, who demands as much of himself as Michalski does, encounters enormous difficulties.

The *Rigveda* hymns, of great literary value, are an ancient monument of the Indo-European race, which long ago, before 1500 B.C., came to the valley of the Indus and Punjab rivers. They are the only artistic creation of a lyrico-apostrophic nature from that era, and they do not give a complete picture of the vocabulary of the Vedic language. His research into the translation of this work necessarily required a vast work-shop of knowledge, and had to be based upon laborious comparisons of the vocabulary with that of other Vedic texts and of every day life in later periods, and a search for commentaries: very often he had to resort to other languages related to Vedic. The interpretation of each hymn required separate research, not to mention the fact that sometimes it can take whole years to determine the meaning of a single word.

In other words, it is not just a simple question of translation, but of exegesis.

St. F. Michalski published a series of valuable works on the exegesis of the *Rigveda*. These works place him at the forefront of scholars throughout the world who are conducting research on the *Rigveda*.

In the treatises: *Atharvaveda* 10,2, *Etude sur le mot „kshoni” dans le „Rigveda”* and *Vedique “dhasi”*, he gives a new interpretation to the expression “apo vasanah”,

of the words “kshoni” and “dhasi”. An interesting article *Zodiacal Light in the “Rigveda”* substantiates, by means of the *Rigveda* texts, his opinion that it was unjustifiable to consider Savitara as a Sun God. It is contradicted by the fact that he appears in the sky usually at night or before sunrise. On the other hand, at that time, in the regions in which the poet of the *Rigveda* composed the hymns (Kashmir and Punjab) a Zodiac light makes an appearance in the sky, whose nature corresponds to the phenomenon described in a poetic manner in the *Rigveda*.

In this work *Brahman dans le „Rigveda”* he interprets the idea of Brahman in the *Upanishad*. In a great discussion entitled *Ásvins et Dioskures* he gives a new interpretation to the Indian, Ásvins deities, based on laboriously arranged texts in Vedic and Greek. This work is again noteworthy in so far as it determines methodical principles for research work on the *Rigveda*. In manuscript form can be found yet a final unfinished work entitled *Vedique ari, ariya, ārya*.

In the person of Stanisław Franciszek Michalski a conscientious scholar was lost to science, a worker worthy of high esteem, and with him an international cultural exchange of poetic treasures — he was a translator of Indian poetry who placed uncommonly sensitive stress upon its greatness and its beauty.

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