

WORLD PHILOLOGY

Edited by

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Introduction

SHELDON POLLOCK

THIS COLLECTION of new essays by practicing philologists interested in intellectual history and intellectual historians interested in the practice of philology is the first book to examine the discipline across the vast space and time it has actually occupied. There are undoubtedly difficulties in translating the term “philology” into the idioms of Eurasia’s various learned traditions, and these are compounded by the complexities of its conceptual history in the West itself. Yet the problem of how to make sense of texts—the lowest common denominator of philological practice—has been at the heart of those traditions for centuries. Indeed, in a real sense it constitutes the origins of those traditions.

It is the temporal depth and geographical breadth of this problem, with the emergent parallels and differences across cultures—made manifest here by juxtaposition rather than by systematic comparison, which would be premature—that the contributors to this book are concerned in the first instance to delineate. At the same time, a number of us have become increasingly intrigued by the hypothesis that an early modern transformation in philology may be detectable across much of the world; the essays on Song and Qing China, Japan, India, and the Ottoman Empire complement the essay on Renaissance Europe in this regard. This may have begun, according to our still provisional hypothesis, as early as the first quarter of the second millennium; it is in full view almost everywhere by the seventeenth century, when scholars like Benedict de Spinoza in Europe, Melpputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatīri in India, and Yan Ruoju in China sought actively to transform philological thinking.¹ What additionally concerns us is how to

understand the relationship between this early modern philology and its modern academic descendant; how the latter came to be what it now is; how philology has related to adjacent disciplines (or subdisciplines) such as poetics, hermeneutics, and historiography; how all these relations may have changed over time.

In addition to sketching the broader history of philology in various world regions and in particular its development over a long early modern era, whether synthetically or on the basis of a case study of a representative person, text, or problem, this book seeks better answers to, or at least better formulations of, a range of other questions. How coherent in fact is philology as a conceptual category across time and space, or is it impossible to unify without introducing serious distortion in any given tradition? How do we assess philology's relation to other forms of thought, such as scientific or legal thought, and explain the changes in its intellectual status? And—what is perhaps most important, if most elusive—how far may a reconstruction of philological practices in the past relate to a reconstruction of philological practices in the future?

1

The past thirty years have witnessed perhaps the most remarkable attempt in the two centuries since Wilhelm von Humboldt founded the first modern university (in Berlin, 1809–1810) to rethink the order of academic disciplines, which had in fact been largely instituted in Humboldt's day.² The self-flagellation of anthropology; the newly announced "death" of comparative literature; the critique of "autistic" economics; the institutional implosion that led to the wholesale disbanding of departments of linguistics; the frontal assault on some of the ruling ideas (or what were taken to be the ruling ideas) of Oriental studies; the insurgency of the so-called perestroika movement in political science; the boundless proliferation of the "studies" phenomenon, from American to women's, with everything in between (cultural, development, ethnic, film, gender . . . strategic and terrorism studies): all these debates and more, including now the digitization of everything, have left our inheritance of the nineteenth-century university in a shambles.

For no discipline, however, has the reversal of fortune been more dramatic and total than for philology, though its fall from grace has extended over a far longer period than that just described. Philology was the queen of the sciences in the nineteenth-century European university, bestriding that world like a colossus in its conceptual and institutional power. It set the

standard of what scientific knowledge should be and influenced a range of other disciplines, from anthropology to zoology.³ Indeed, the philological seminar of late eighteenth-century Germany offered the model for Humboldt's university as a whole.⁴ Philology's fall to its current position at the bottom of what might be called the Great Chain of Academic Being has been variously charted, but it can be linked in part to a fissiparous tendency characteristic not only of the growth of knowledge but also of institutional ambition and academic rent-seeking. This occurred over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, when philology's subdisciplinary children, including national literary histories, literary criticism (and later, "theory"), comparative literature, and (kin of more proximate origin) linguistics, believed themselves sufficiently mature to rebel and leave home. What resulted was not just institutional but intellectual fragmentation, which often took (or was thought to take) the form on the one hand of theory without practice—literary studies—and on the other of practice without theory—philology. A second factor in philology's collapse is tied to the first: weakened by subdivision, both philology and its components, instead of hanging together, have now all been hanged alone after the contemporary attack, unprecedented for its depth and extent, on the humanities as representing little more than a market inefficiency in the newly corporatized Western university. Philology does not produce patents, say the administrators; indeed, say the students, what is the point of learning to read well when all you need to know is how to count?⁵

This is not an entirely new story, of course, and not entirely a story of external forces. Humanists in general and philologists in particular have been perceiving, or maybe imagining, a crisis ever since there were humanists and philologists. Think of the "proficient philologist" Ismael Boulliau's pointed declaration in 1657: "The age of criticism and philology has passed and one of philosophy and mathematics has taken its place"; or Robert Burton's broader jeremiad of 1621:

Our ordinary students . . . apply themselves in all haste to those three commodious [i.e., profitable] professions of law, physic, and divinity, sharing themselves between them, rejecting these arts in the meantime, history, philosophy, philology, or lightly passing them over, as pleasant toys fitting only table-talk, and to furnish them with discourse.⁶

Then too, philologists themselves are partly to blame for their current abasement. If their professional title is now a term of abuse, "what you call the dull boys and girls of the profession,"⁷ it is because philologists, worn down by a

century of disdain, have in fact become dull. By narrowing their sights to the smallest of questions, the only ones left them thanks to institutional fragmentation, they have nearly turned the discipline's vaunted "rigor" into rigor mortis. But although what we are now observing may have aspects rather of repetition than revolution and may result in part from self-inflicted wounds, recent developments are as worrisome as they are historically unprecedented.

Most alarming is the fact that knowledge of historical languages is being lost globally in a way strikingly similar to the global loss of biological diversity. In India, for example, which as recently as the midnight of freedom from colonial rule in 1947 could boast of world-class academic achievement in dozens of classical literary languages, from Assamese to Kannada and Persian to Telugu, it is today next to impossible to identify scholars who have deep competence in any.⁸ The same is increasingly true even in Europe, the first world region to institutionalize the discipline. In 1969, the Romance philologist Erich Auerbach, widely viewed as the consummate practitioner of the discipline in the post-World War II era, warned of the imminent disappearance of philology, describing its loss as "an impoverishment for which there can be no possible compensation."⁹ And the situation today bears out his warning, with academic posts in philology—classical, East Asian, Romance, Semitic, South Asian—disappearing in every country in the European Union with every passing year. A small but exemplary case is Syriac—the language that bridged the Greek and Arabic worlds—which is no longer taught anywhere on the continent.

This volume, while unique in other respects, is not the only attempt to provide a perspective on these developments. A small but significant collection of books, journals, and articles has slowly built up over the past few decades that at once intimates this growing mood of insecurity and seeks to offer reassurance through conceptual (if not historical, let alone transregional) rethinking. In 1990—to take the last quarter century or so as our frame of reference—a cross-section of prominent European literary historians, premodern and modern, was assembled to ask what precisely was to be understood by the term "philology," and the very tentativeness of their answers ("impressionistic and ill-informed explanations," said one observer, a caution "how *not* to think about these issues") demonstrates how little serious attention, of a theoretical, self-reflective sort, scholars had been paying up to that point.¹⁰ Indeed, it had been rare, almost undignified, for philologists to pause and reflect, at least in writing, on what philology actually was,

how it came to be whatever that was, whether it should continue to be what it was. Even the great Auerbach never did.

In the same year as the question “what is philology?” was finally raised, European medievalists published an important, if more modest and practical, collection proclaiming a “new philology,” which has had continuing reverberations in the renewed appreciation of premodern manuscript culture for modern philological practice.¹¹ But there were grander visions too. In each of the last three decades impassioned calls for a “Return to Philology” have been sounded in essays of that name, though “philology” has been understood so discrepantly—as tropology in the one case, text editing in the second, interpretation in the third—as to entirely belie the uniformity of their purpose.¹² Edited collections with European focus began to appear regularly, including—whether as a sign of the advancement of analysis or its paralysis it is difficult to decide—a recent one on “metaphilology.” There have been books that offer new sectional overviews, from a five-volume work of critical studies on the history of classical philology to a series of biographies of Romance philologists (“Auerbach studies” constituting a veritable subfield of its own), as well as appreciations of philology as a whole and in its intersections with other forms of literary theory.¹³ Leading journals have dedicated special issues to exploring the discipline, or rather, attempting to discipline a very disparate set of textual practices.¹⁴ The Centre de recherche philologique (also known as L'École de Lille), founded in the 1960s by the Hellenist Jean Bollack, sought to give institutional shape to the particular theory of philology embodied in Bollack's scholarly oeuvre: the tradition of reception was to be actively reconstructed as the framework of reengaged close reading, where “closeness” refers to continuous reflection on the process of understanding while reading. This theory forms the background for Christoph König's chapter in this book and is splendidly realized in his explication of a Rilke poem.¹⁵

More recently, reflections on such reflections have begun to appear. An edited volume, *Was ist eine philologische Frage?* (What is a philological question?), seeks to shed light on this recent “fascination” with philology by distinguishing three different tendencies.¹⁶ One masks an antitheoretical *resentiment* among some now reengaging with philology, who show a kind of Schadenfreude over the fall of Big Theory in the course of the last decade and seek a return to that past “rigor” whose very historicity and theoretical grounding remain theoretically and historically opaque to them. A second offers a minimalist understanding of philology as the craft of collecting,

editing, and commenting on texts, especially via the use of new technology. A third tendency is maximalist, and aims to rethink the very nature of the discipline, transhistorically and transculturally—the category to which the present collection aspires to be assigned. No explanation is given in the volume, however, for why this last trend has arisen now, since it is not the result of a new theoretical vacuum or of some recent technological innovation. But it cannot be unconnected with the threats to philology noted above, the imperilment of the very capacity to read the languages of the texts philology seeks to understand, and the institutional endangerment—and broader societal disregard and disdain—that constitutes the source of that threat.¹⁷

2

The fate of philology in the modern Western academy—the quite different stories in India, the Arab world, and China will be touched on in turn—is closely linked with its own sense of its nature and purpose, its disciplinary self-understanding. A close correlation can be observed: the more ambitious philology's intellectual aspirations have been, the more prominent has been its institutional presence—and the reverse. One can chart the history of this correlation, and philology's concomitant rise and fall, from the time it was first understood as a distinct academic discipline.

Philology's emergence as an independent form of knowledge is usually marked by the moment Friedrich August Wolf, future editor and critic of Homer and member of Humboldt's new institution in Berlin, declared on enrolling in the University of Göttingen in 1777 that he was a "philologist" (*studiosus philologiae*), thereby becoming the first official student of the subject in Europe. Things are of course more complicated than this legend suggests, given that a philological seminar had been founded in Germany as early as 1737, and Wolf's teacher himself, the remarkable classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne, was already busy at Göttingen transforming the "classical philology" (*Altphilologie*) of recitation, reconstruction, and disputation into a genuinely historicist and hermeneutical discipline.¹⁸ And this is to say nothing of the philological work of Enlightenment thinkers such as Spinoza, or the Italian humanists before them, let alone the scholars of Alexandria in the third century B.C.E., such as Eratosthenes, who described himself as a *philologos*, uniting and transcending the skills of the *grammatikoi* and the Stoic *kritikoi*. Obviously, the development of the discipline in modern Europe has a conceptual history much longer than its institutional one.

Wolf's importance for disciplinary history lies in his quest to secure the autonomy of philology by separating it from theology. It was no longer to be a mere propaedeutic, but an independent form of knowledge—whereby Wolf confirmed the great emancipatory power of philology, as a critique of authority and a rejection of all metaphysical grounding.¹⁹ Two decades later the Romantic philosopher (and budding Sanskritist) Friedrich Schlegel sketched out, though never published, a remarkable “philosophy of philology” (1797), in which the discipline encompassed far more than Wolf's new triad of grammar, text criticism, and historical analysis. For Schlegel, philology comprises nothing less than “all erudition in language”; it has “an extraordinary and almost immeasurable” extent (indeed, an *ungeheuer*, “monstrous,” extent) demanding conceptual limitation.²⁰ In this Schlegel may have been anticipated by Giambattista Vico, who a half century earlier had claimed (in *New Science*, 1725) that philology comprised not just the “awareness of peoples' languages and deeds” but “the science of everything that depends on human volition: for example, all histories of the languages, customs and deeds of various peoples in both war and peace.” But Schlegel's definition aimed to make an epistemological point rather than simply to offer an alternative organization of knowledge.²¹ “The philologist ought to philosophize as a philologist,” he proclaimed, and the conclusion he drew as a philological philosopher was profound: philology and interpretation as such are identical; interpretation actually precedes and informs all other aspects of philology, including grammar and criticism.²² The pithiest encapsulation of this grand vision of philology, as not any of its subfields but a kind of total knowledge of human thought as expressed in language, we owe to August Boeckh, student of Wolf and author of the much-quoted but now little read *Encyclopedia and Methodology of All the Philological Sciences* (1877, but containing material from possibly as early as 1809). Philology for Boeckh is “knowing what has been known,” or “(re-)cognizing [what the human mind has produced—that is] what has already been cognized.”²³ Disciplinary self-understanding of this magnitude, found in Wolf, Schlegel, Boeckh, and others (most prominently Wilhelm Dilthey)—a topic examined here in Constanze Güthenke's chapter—undoubtedly correlated with philology's ability to achieve the kind of academic dominance mentioned earlier.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century scholars began to descend from these lofty heights toward a more modest, and reasonable, middle ground. For Nietzsche, the most visionary and critical philologist of his age, philology was the practice of “slow reading”: “the leisurely art of the goldsmith applied to language,” and thus “the highest attraction and incitement

in an age of 'work,' where getting things done at once is all that matters: "Philology itself, perhaps, will not 'get things done' so hurriedly: it teaches how to read well." What precisely "reading well" meant was a question that preoccupied Nietzsche throughout his life. He came to see it, as Schlegel did, as a style of hermeneutics above all, but one more critically and reflexively conceived than Schlegel's. As he described it in one of his last published works, philology is *ephexis*, constraint (or restraint), in interpretation, the means by which we learn to guard ourselves both from falsification and from the impulse to abandon caution, patience, and subtlety in the effort to understand. And this pertains not just to reading the Greek or Latin classics, but "whether one be dealing with books, with newspaper reports, with the most fateful events or with weather statistics, not to mention the 'salvation of the soul.'" ²⁴ Peter Szondi, perhaps the last great self-professed theorist in this tradition of hermeneutical philology (he died in 1971), restricted its scope yet further, to the form of knowledge specific to literary texts. ²⁵

The abandonment of this strong middle ground in a march to the bottom began already in the early twentieth century, signaled most prominently by the long entry on "philology" in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* written by the American Sanskritist and protolinguist W. D. Whitney. Notwithstanding his almost Vico-like definition of the discipline as "that branch of knowledge which deals with human speech, and with all that speech discloses as to the nature and history of man," Whitney concerned himself in his exposition (and throughout his life) exclusively with "the instrumentality of [thought's] expression," that is, language, while entirely ignoring "the thought expressed," that is, literature and other forms of textuality. ²⁶ And in this he was fully representative of historic developments under way.

Now that it was split down the middle in the manner scholars like Whitney demanded—however impoverished (if even possible) may be the study of literature without language and the reverse—the grand nineteenth-century mansion of philology was soon to see one of its "two principal divisions" expropriated by the new science of linguistics. ²⁷ The other was quickly carved up and seized, all the most desirable rooms, by those new subdisciplines: national literary histories, comparative literature, and more recently literary theory. What was left was turned into a tenement and rented out to a congeries of regional or national philology departments (East Asian, Middle Eastern, Romance, Slavic, South Asian, and of course English and classics), with worse quarters given to those thought to be lower on the

cultural-evolutionary scale. It is hardly surprising, in consequence of all this fragmentation—to say nothing of the stains philology incurred from its contributions, however forcible and *unphilological* they may have been, to nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism and racialism²⁸—that philology should have been so thoroughly denigrated and brought to its present nadir. To the degree it even remains alive today in the eyes of outsiders—a “proto-humanistic empirical science . . . that no longer exists as such,” according to one observer, no doubt speaking for many—philology leads a pale, ghostly existence. All it has left are the fragments others have left behind: text criticism, bibliography, historical grammar, corpus linguistics. As a disciplinary category it is used in common parlance to refer almost exclusively to the study of the Greek and Latin classics—though even Classics itself has finally repudiated the association.²⁹

The claims of philology outside of the West have largely followed the history just recounted, especially wherever colonialism worked to pre-empt that history by importing and enforcing Western presuppositions. In South Asia, the study of historical languages underwent thorough, if uneven, Europeanization. This started in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with British (as well as German) scholars staffing the colleges and universities founded in midcentury, and inculcating British (and German) philological notions, but of an ever-limited sort. Before long Indians, almost all of them students of Sanskrit, were being trained in England (and Germany; rarely in France and the United States) in the text criticism of Karl Lachmann (and never that of Joseph Bédier). This they often applied, with considerable acuity, to Indian works, though not always in a way sensitive to the lives of Indic texts, which, given the persistence of orality, vast circulation of manuscripts, and unbroken vitality of tradition, often show dramatic differences from those of Greek and Latin.³⁰ They also wrote new forms of literary criticism, profoundly shaped by Romantic standards, and new literary histories, profoundly shaped by European national narratives. This whole style of philological scholarship, of both the more capacious and the narrower sort, had little continuity with precolonial practices, which were largely ignored anyhow except for the printing of premodern commentaries.

That such Europeanization was uneven can be observed in vernacular language scholarship. In their text criticism scholars often continued older practices of selecting the best manuscript and noting occasional variants, with very little explicit theorization. Exemplary is the career of the Tamil scholar U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Caminataiyar, 1855–1942). Without exposure to Western philological methods when he made his spectacular discovery

of the corpus of ancient Tamil literature, he edited according to principles largely derived from tradition (inventing others as he proceeded), while being stimulated, though in a way less easy to trace, by the "science of nationality" model of contemporary European philology.³¹ One is reminded of the procedures of the Italian humanists, who (as Anthony Grafton remarks in his essay here) "did not devise their practices *de novo*, as a whole, but worked them out on the fly," while deriving "substantial elements of their methodology from the ancient texts they read and taught." In Tamil, however, as in all other vernacular philologies of South Asia, the general tendencies noted earlier have ultimately prevailed. With the loss of its social and institutional context, engagement with historical languages has faded to the vanishing point or, where still in existence, has ceded almost entirely to a descriptive linguistic model,³² or been reduced to ethnochauvinism and nationalism.

Trends somewhat dissimilar to those in South Asia are visible in the twentieth-century Islamic world, where the liveliness of philological reflection is to some extent to be explained by the dominance of religious textuality (especially hadith) in everyday life. A large number of philology manuals were produced in Egypt, for example, sparked by lectures of the German scholar Gotthelf Bergstraesser in 1931–1932; these compare Western and traditional methods, favoring sometimes the putative scientificity of the former, sometimes the cultural normativity of the latter. Thus, in some cases older practices were continued; in others, Europeanized styles of philology came to dominate. Mehdi Mohaghegh in Iran and the Ottoman (later Syrian-Egyptian) scholar Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari produced superb editions by continuing some of the practices outlined in works like al-Dīn al-Ghazzī's sixteenth-century treatise on the "proper manner of perusing books" (described in Khaled El-Rouayheb's chapter), typically choosing one manuscript as the basic text and supplementing it as needed with others. Juxtaposed to these were scholars such as Ihsan 'Abbas (Lebanon), Sa'id Nafisi (Iran), and Ahmed Atesh (Turkey), who for the most part were trained by French or German scholars. Even more significant than questions of the presence (or absence) of the past in modern philology is the scope of that philology: the excitement in the first half of the twentieth century at rediscovering the literary and historical works that had fallen out of the late-medieval syllabus has given way in the present to stark traditionalization and sectarianization, with Shiites publishing only Shiite works, Saudis Salafi works, and so on.³³

An exception to this general tendency is found in East Asia, unsurprisingly to the degree we attribute causal force to colonialism in the transformation of preexisting philological tradition. In China (despite Marxism and Maoism) and Taiwan (though colonized by Japan), modern scholarship has shown considerable continuity with the doctrine of evidential studies in the Qing, which was developed to gainsay the hermeneutics promoted in the Song (discussed in the essays of Benjamin A. Elman and Michael Lackner, respectively), whereby scholars avoid theoretical speculation and continue to accept traditional authority. At the same time, intellectual historians have been expanding the domain of what counts as philological inquiry by assessing Chinese exegesis as hermeneutics, emphasizing the role of commentaries, or reconnecting earlier philology to its social and political contexts.³⁴

Japan presents a rather similar picture of continuity (as Susan Burns shows in her chapter). When first encountering European philology, early twentieth-century Japanese scholars counterposed to its new theories and methods those appropriated from their own past, especially the so-called nativist philology (*kokugaku*, literally, "our country's learning") of the eighteenth-century scholar Motoori Norinaga, who argued that the earliest literature had to be read, both grammatically and conceptually, as pure expressions of the Japanese world, entirely devoid of Chinese influence. (There are substantial ironies in this doctrine, given that Japanese nativists were getting their philological ideals from the Japanese Confucians, who were accessing the philological works of Qing China.) In Japan, Taiwan, and now the People's Republic of China, philological studies continue to command remarkable prestige and academic preferment in traditional scholarship. The post-Maoist appeal to the Qing philologists' slogan "To search truth from facts" now graces the title of the lead Communist Party journal, once called "Red Flag." At all events, it is clear that the history of Westernization in philology, in both its intellectual substance and its institutional fate, was uneven across the non-West, and contingent to a large extent on the force of colonialism and other paths of modernization.

3

The current threat to the institutional survival of philology in most places and its vastly diminished disciplinary self-understanding; the need to understand the history of these factors in the modern world and their variability across regions; and, last, the urgency to frame some kind of response,

are among the factors that have inspired this book project. But we have also been driven by a far more basic, even innocent question: What has philology been over time and space, in the rest of the world no less than in Europe, and before the modern era just surveyed? Given the densely tangled history sketched above of the notion of “philology” in the West, compounded by the built-in problems of translation in the widest, most conceptually challenging sense of that term, globalizing the intellectual history of philology and the history of its practices is no simple matter.

One of the purposes of this book is precisely to explore the diversity and complexity of philological phenomena across time and space. The editors began their inquiry expecting neither that global intellectual history would turn out to be completely homogeneous nor that it would inherently resist all synthesis. We started instead from the assumption that our presentation of philology must comprise as wide as possible a sample of the reading practices discernible in history, and that these practices, to the degree they exhibit family resemblances, should be grouped into the same category; that “philology,” accordingly, might constitute a single coherent object of analysis. But we were prepared to abandon hopes for such coherence and pluralize our object—and, as a concession, to entitle the book “World Philologies”—if it were to disintegrate under historical scrutiny.

From surveying the various definitions of philology in the West over the past two centuries, we have gained a sense of the shifting shape of the discipline, and some remarkable parallels with that history from elsewhere in the world are offered in this book. One apparently intractable problem, however, is that, whereas every textual tradition has developed practices no one would hesitate to include in the category “philology” however variously we define it, a comparable covering term is not always available in traditions outside the Greek and Roman. Some do come close: *ṣināʿat al-adab*, “the art of literary culture,” in early Abbasid lands; *kaozheng*, or “evidential scholarship,” in late imperial China; and *kokugaku*, “national studies,” in early modern Japan combine many of those concerns into a single category that also includes a second-order reflection on how philology is to be done. But if elsewhere we have difficulty locating this sort of integral conceptual object, we nonetheless always find parts of what we can readily understand as, precisely, parts of philology: concern with problems of grammar and usage, with the history of manuscript (or printed) sources and their discrepant readings, and with problems of interpretation.

In the Hellenistic tradition, the concepts of edition (*ekdosis*) and of variant (*graphe*; the now-common Latin term *varia lectio* dates only to the Re-

naissance) were explicitly enunciated (as Franco Montanari shows in his chapter) and formed the core of what, in various times and places in Europe, would come to be called *philologia*. The term is famously foregrounded in Martianus Capella's fable of the marriage of Mercury and Philologia (recounted here by James Zetzel), but already we face complications, for Martianus Capella's philology, whose handmaids were the seven liberal arts (grammar, dialectic, and the rest), was not that of the Hellenists, who were restricted to the purely text-critical side of the discipline. If such nominalization is elusive in other traditions outside those already noted, the kinds of practices themselves that both Greek and Latin philology comprised are richly attested. Consider Persian or Sanskrit learning in the seventeenth century. It was precisely for the purpose of *ekdosis* though an analysis of *variae lectiones* that 'Abd al-Laṭīf of Gujarat collected manuscripts of Rūmī's *Mathnawī* (discussed by Muzaffar Alam in his chapter) or, a few decades later and a few thousand miles eastward, Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara gathered manuscripts for his edition of the *Mahābhārata*, India's great epic (described by Sheldon Pollock in his chapter). If no term for "philology" is specifically employed, this is certainly what 'Abd al-Laṭīf would have understood by the cluster of notions he names *muqābala* (comparison, collation), *taṣṣīḥ* (correction), and *tanqīḥ* (purging, inquiry), and Nīlakaṇṭha by the process he describes as "gathering many manuscripts from different regions" and "critically establishing the best readings." That neither of these scholars had a word, let alone a theory, for the philological enterprise as a whole—and that neither tells us any more about their methods than the Latin commentators described by Zetzel—may be surprising, but it is considerably less significant for intellectual history than the fact of their enterprise itself.

We have seen how the scope of philology expanded in Europe in the late eighteenth century, moving beyond *Altphilologie* to become, for Schlegel, the very science of criticism itself, of understanding the world mediated by language. The struggle over the scope of philology, between what at one extreme is essentially the historical study of individual vocables and at the other "all erudition in language," would take on specific contours in nineteenth-century Germany with the controversy between *Wortphilologie*, or the philology of words (promoted by the classicist Gottfried Hermann), and *Sachphilologie*, or the philology of things (promoted by the classicist August Boeckh).³⁵ But we can observe something like this tension in many other times and places, despite the fact that different terms of debate (and sometimes no explicit terms at all) were used. A case in point is offered by the early Arabic intellectual tradition (examined by Beatrice Gruendler in her

chapter), where the battle lines were clearly drawn between grammar and literary criticism. The former was represented by the scholars of the Qur'ān (and of the pre-Islamic poetry they collected in order to illuminate its sometimes obscure language—an early and quite astonishing instance of linguistic ethnography) and hence of the high Arabic language (*'arabiyya*). The latter was embodied in the patrons, readers as well as poets, of the “new poetry” of the early Abbasid period. But it is also entirely plausible to reframe this struggle as a contest over the scope of philology, how to evaluate and hierarchize the modalities of textual understanding—and of course, how to evaluate and hierarchize those whose job it is to produce such understanding. Especially striking is how these antithetical views were finally “aufgehoben” and synthesized in a new, more capacious discipline that actually integrated linguistic and literary knowledge: the “art of philology” (*ṣinā'at al-adab*) or “the literary arts” (*al-'ulūm al-adabiyya*), the latter of which even included creative writing. Here we are directed toward an even richer conception of the discipline that includes what might be called the study of “authorial philology.”

With that phrase we point to the integration of philological knowledge or principles into the very production of a text—how, in other words, the pre-suppositions employed by scholars for editing and interpreting texts come to be used by authors for creating them. The Hebrew tradition provides a striking example of this that speaks at the same time to the more general nature of its philological project. Early Hebrew intellectual history shows remarkably little concern with questions of the grammar of the Bible or even its textual transmission, whether written or oral. Scholars were focused exclusively on the problem of interpretation, above all the resolution of inconsistencies and contradictions in a text that was viewed as perfect and “omnisignificant” (as Yaakov Elman characterizes it here), and that, equally important, was held to be a source of knowledge of law. Understanding the Bible was a matter of understanding what it asks the reader *to do* and not just *to know*. (Here Hebrew exegesis bears a striking resemblance to other hermeneutical philologies, especially Roman law and what in India is known as *Mīmāṃsā*, the discipline of interpreting the sentences of the Vedas that eventually became the exegetical science of Indian jurisprudence.) This sort of early Hebrew philology became “authorial” when its assumptions informed the very composition of texts like the book of Chronicles, which is constructed precisely in a way that aims to reconcile the contradictions and explain the inconsistencies that mark sections of the Pentateuch.

In East Asia, by contrast, the primary impetus for and focus of the philology of ancient texts were presented by the peculiar puzzles thrown up by

Chinese and Japanese script, especially in the early modern period when these puzzles were intensified by historical caesuras and the new historicism, so to call it, that they provoked. Scholars in the late Ming (1368–1644) and early Qing (1644–1911) concluded (as detailed by Benjamin A. Elman here) that they had lost the empire to barbarians (the Manchus) because they failed to read the classics properly. In order to solve old problems of unintelligibility they set about devising new philological principles (the groundwork for this cleansing philology was, however, laid in the Song-Yuan era, 1000–1350, which Michael Lackner discusses in his chapter). In the early Tokugawa period Japanese scholars, following interactions with Confucian China and Korea via books and manuscripts, took up Japan's earliest texts with the aim of reconciling them with the metaphysics of Song thinkers—and eventually, of establishing their cultural autonomy. But they too were confronted with a veritable “linguistic labyrinth” (as Burns calls it), and to negotiate it philology proved crucial.

In many ways the Sanskrit tradition of India presents counterpoints to all these tendencies. No term was ever coined that comprised all the disparate textual practices so highly developed in that culture, including grammar, phonetics, prosody, lexicography, poetics and tropology, and hermeneutics (as well as the text criticism already illustrated by Nīlakaṇṭha's editorial work). No irreconcilable conceptions or principles ever divided grammarians and literary critics; all textual specialists were schooled in all the philological arts. Texts (at least culturally important texts) were recopied over the generations in ever-modernizing scripts, or passed down orally, so that no gulf between writing and reading ever developed. Texts that could not be recopied, or were thought unworthy of recopying, or were not transmitted orally did become illegible. Inscriptions in the Brahmi script, for example, including the Asokan edicts of the third century B.C.E. that mark the start of Indian literacy, remained illegible to Indians for a millennium (until the British civil servant James Prinsep deciphered them in 1836). But no one seems to have been much concerned with this loss, not even the Buddhists, who had appropriated Asoka in their legends. Other ancient languages that had no cultural or religious base gradually became more or less illegible too, such as Prakrit outside of the Jain community (for which Prakrit, in one of its registers at least, was the medium of scripture).

Thus, absence of nomenclature is neither as surprising nor as consequential for a global history of philology as it may appear at first glance. Sometimes, as it seems necessary to argue in the case of the Sanskrit tradition—where the arts of language played the foundational role in intellectual life that mathematics played in Greece—philology may have so permeated the

thought world that it did not need to be, or perhaps could not be, identified through a separate conceptual category. Sometimes, moreover, the creation of a technical term or second-order discourse would appear to be a function of specific social conditions of possibility. Consider in this regard the theorization of, and indeed the very term, "translation." Despite the fact that in India, to stay with that case, there is evidence of frequent and varied translation into and out of Sanskrit and other languages, we find no reflection on the practice in any South Asian intellectual tradition before colonialism (even in the Indo-Persian world, despite the massive translation project undertaken by the early Mughal court), not even the terms by which to describe it. In Europe, by contrast, translation did become an object of analysis in its own right, but only in the Renaissance and only owing to the pressure of new institutional forces. It was restrictions imposed by the Church on producing new versions of the Bible, Latin or vernacular, that prompted Erasmus in the early sixteenth century to explain not just his purpose in re-translating the New Testament but his methods and very concept of translation (he wanted, *inter alia*, to make the text *latinius*, "more Latin," than the Vulgate).

Analogously, people might simply engage in an array of philological practices until for one or another institutional or political reason they are forced to explicitly conceptualize as a totality what they are doing. This occurred in the German university world, where Wolf, as earlier noted, was led to invent the discipline of "philology" in 1777 because he needed to declare an academic major; or, more grandly, in China in the mid-seventeenth century, when Ming intellectuals, confronted with the fall of the empire, developed "evidentiary scholarship" to ensure proper reading of the classics lest the texts ever fail them again. But philology pre-exists such conceptualization, since—at least the evidence of this book suggests this conclusion—wherever there are texts there is philology in some sense, both readerly and authorial. Had we more time and space we could have shown the evidence of such preconceptualized, or underconceptualized, philology in everything from Babylonian and Assyrian text commentaries at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. to the hip-hop corpus analyses of today.

4

This volume begins with the Hellenistic age since, obvious historical and cultural differences between ancient philology and the modern conception notwithstanding, the foundations of philology in the West, at least as a sci-

entific discipline of text criticism, were laid during that period, from the third to the first century B.C.E. As Franco Montanari argues, it was first the practices of book production, especially correction of manuscripts, that eventually transformed into the practices of philology: the corrector of a copy of Homer became, in time, the corrector, or editor, of Homer. How exactly the Alexandrian critics went about their business, whether by comparison of sources or pure conjecture, is a question that has divided Hellenists for generations.

Essential for intellectual history, however, is the invention of the two key concepts mentioned earlier: *ekdosis* and *varia lectio*. The idea of *ekdosis* was fundamentally defining the correct text of a work as such, overcoming and correcting the differences found to exist between the copies in circulation. The basis for this approach was to compare different exemplars of a given text and to choose the reading held to be the correct one. This was indeed put into practice, albeit within the limits imaginable for a process that was still in its infancy. But it would be a mistake to view the whole issue as a matter of quantity, either of the copies subjected to comparison or of the readings examined comparatively, or of the quality of the results obtained. What is essential to recognize is the historical importance of the underlying principle: the realization that a text needed to be cleansed of the defects inflicted on it by the very manuscript tradition through which it had been preserved, and that in order to achieve this it was necessary to assemble suitable tools and techniques (which gradually became consolidated and enriched over time). This intellectual innovation laid the basis for text philology as it has developed in the West over the following two millennia.

The evidence for how Romans thought about understanding texts falls into two broad classes: remarks found in ancient commentaries and the like, and the actual manuscripts. These two sets of evidence hardly ever overlap; only rarely can we perceive any influence of discussions of textual problems on the transmitted texts. In his chapter James Zetzel concentrates on the evidence found in the commentaries on and *paradosis* of the two most widely read and discussed school authors, Virgil and Cicero. He asks, first, how ancient scholars went about assessing the correctness of the manuscripts in which they read literary texts, and, second, what they actually did to such texts. (Did they alter texts in accordance with their critical beliefs, for example?) While grammarians took a very radical and interventionist stance in their theory, they were extraordinarily conservative in their actions. If we contrast ancient philological techniques with those of Christian philology in the fourth and fifth centuries, we can see the relationship

between the worth ascribed to texts and the willingness of scholars to alter them: the more important "truth" was, the less cautious scholars were in correcting it.

In the Hebrew tradition, which Yaakov Elman analyzes here, the dominant form of philology, the chief concern of rabbinic scholarship, was interpretation, not grammar or transmission. While the earliest rabbinic work, formally speaking, is the Mishnah (early third century C.E.), it and other works of the third through fifth centuries contain teachings that date to the second century B.C.E., as has been confirmed by anti-Pharisaic polemics recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the book of Jubilees; thus the most continuous Jewish philological tradition for which we have records is the rabbinic one. However, its roots can be found in the Bible itself, with later books commenting on earlier ones—the "authorial philology," as described above, of the sort found in Chronicles.

By the second century C.E., two trends in biblical philology had emerged: a striving to make every jot and tittle of the biblical text meaningful ("omnificance"), which often involved ignoring what was called "the plain meaning" of the text, and the striving to understand the biblical or even rabbinic texts in a somewhat more restrained way, which animates the Aramaic translations of the Bible. Another constraint surfaces in rabbinic interpretation of legal texts: the need to make them conform with current circumstances, practices, conceptions, or values. Generally speaking, plain-sense interpretation remained the province of those charged with the determination of legal and ritual requirements, that is, the writers of *responsa* and codes. In regard to biblical interpretation and exposition, however, homiletic approaches of various sorts remained the preferred methods.

In the Arabic tradition, which would come to exercise such profound influence on both Hebrew and Persian scholarship, philology in the sense of the linguistic sciences (*naḥw*, "grammar," and *lugha*, "lexicography") constituted the first scientific approach to Arabic poetry, which it used as data in the project of codifying the high Arabic language (*ʿarabiyya*) during the early Abbasid dynasty (late eighth and ninth centuries C.E.). This earned Arabic philologists status in both scholarship and society. But during the same period, as Beatrice Gruendler shows, poetry itself evolved aesthetically, revisiting old models in unconventional ways and adopting a rhetorical style and daring imagery. As a result, philologists no longer accepted it as sufficiently pure for their purposes; they did not understand its intricacies, and they voiced (at times disingenuous) criticism of contemporary poets. The "new style" (*badīʿ*) found instead admirers among the elite (scribes,

courtiers, and the aristocracy), where the first poetics of this style arose, before poetics emancipated itself as an independent discipline. But the tension between the old philology and poetics was only temporary. By the twelfth century, poetics and the composition of poetry were integrated into what came to be defined as the “philological arts” (*al-‘ulūm al-adabiyya*), though a century later poetics would again be incorporated, within the branch of rhetoric (*balāgha*), into a standard theory of language.

We enter a rather unfamiliar world when we consider Song-Yuan China and the two different philological techniques it evinces. One, typified in Zhang Zai (1020–1078), is a hermeneutic approach to the Chinese classics; the other is found in diagrammatic interpretations of canonical writings. According to Michael Lackner, whereas the former was characterized by rewriting the classics through the innovative form of a mosaic, the latter invented visual tools to elucidate the syntactic and semantic structure of crucial passages and texts.

Philology in traditional India found its most sophisticated theoretical expression in two independent disciplines, grammar and hermeneutics, both fully matured by the end of the first millennium B.C.E. Indian philological practice, however, is manifest most distinctively in commentarial writing. Sheldon Pollock charts the historical contours of commentary on literary and scriptural texts, a remarkably late invention, relatively speaking, of the early second millennium, and an obscure one in terms of its historical conditions of possibility. Sanskrit commentary embodies every dimension of philology discussed so far, though never is any such discipline named, let alone constituted as a distinctive form of knowledge. What exactly it meant to edit and to read a text in premodern India are interesting questions for intellectual history; but do the answers have any bearing on the development of a truly critical renewal of the discipline? The consequences of the philology of India in the past for Indian philology in the future is a subject we are only beginning to explore.

Between 1400 and 1650 the multiple textual traditions of Western Europe underwent radical changes. The rise of secular schools and libraries and the introduction of printing transformed the conditions of textual study. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation revolutionized biblical studies. Texts and traditions about which Western scholars had known relatively little, and that indirectly—Greek and Jewish ones in particular, but Islamic and others as well—became directly accessible. Anthony Grafton recounts this history, describing the principal tools that scholars developed as they tried to understand, master, and explicate these textual traditions. In particular—in an

early instance of the importance of the history of philology for the practice of philology—he differentiates between the tools that scholars derived from the textual traditions themselves and the new ones that they devised as they confronted a transformed world of canons and texts.

Few episodes in world philology provide a more exact parallel to the model of classical textual criticism and exegesis than what we find among some scholars of Persian literature in Mughal India, specifically the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period of extraordinary yet previously unstudied innovation. These practices, which, as noted earlier, included the editing (*taṣḥīḥ*) of literary texts and the composition of commentaries (*tah-shiya wa tashriḥ*), are examined by Muzaffar Alam with special reference to a remarkable edition of the *Mathnavī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) prepared in the mid-seventeenth century by ‘Abd-al-Latif ‘Abbasi of Gujarat. We possess not only the scholar’s edition but also an autobiographical account of his tireless travels through the Islamic world in search of manuscripts of the text. This is a world of philology with deep linkages among family, learning, literature, and Mughal service, which parallels very closely the situation elsewhere in the period, especially in imperial China.

Philology in the largest sense, as we saw, is about the practices of reading as such. And in Ottoman scholarly culture of the early modern period these practices were subject for the first time to careful analysis, as can be observed in a manual examined by Khaled El-Rouayheb on “the proprieties of studying” written by an Ottoman polymath of the seventeenth century. El-Rouayheb situates this manual synchronically as well as diachronically by relating it both to seventeenth-century Ottoman scholastic culture and to what Franz Rosenthal in a classic work called “the technique and approach of Muslim scholarship” in earlier centuries.

The historical and philological consequences of evidential research studies (*kaozheng xue*) in late imperial China (1600–1800), which Benjamin A. Elman explores, contributed to the emergence, in the decades of the late Qing and early republic (1890–1930), of a virulent form of cultural iconoclasm and revolution that saw its roots, hence its legitimacy, in earlier studies. But such perspectives misrepresent the actual motives that Qing scholars clearly laid out in their own writings. In the end, the scholarly intentions and cultural consequences of evidential research are analytically distinct. As literati scholars, they remained committed to classical ideals. Representing the last great native movement in Confucian letters, they sought to restore the classical visions of state and society. The early modern consequences of their cutting-edge philology, however, yielded to a corrosive modern

decanonization and delegitimation that went beyond the intellectual limits they had imposed on their own writings.

The intellectual movement in eighteenth-century Japan known as *kokugaku* took up the philological examination of the earliest texts written in Japan, most significantly the mytho-history known as the *Kojiki* and the poetic anthology the *Man'yōshū*. Both works date from the early eighth century, before the emergence of *kana*, or the Japanese syllabaries, and thus are written entirely in Chinese characters, using styles of inscription that were later abandoned. As Susan Burns explains, the *kokugaku* scholars (or “nativists,” as they have come to be named) argued that correct reading of the early texts was the key to understanding what they conceived of as an original Japan that had existed before the influence of Chinese culture in the form of language, texts, ideas, and institutions. The nativist movement of the eighteenth century is explained by focusing on the work of the scholar Motoori Norinaga. In his groundbreaking study of the *Kojiki*, Motoori argued that the ancient text was fully readable as Japanese, and that it recorded intact ancient transmissions from the age of the deities and thus revealed Japan’s original culture. Although Motoori’s work was challenged by later nativist thinkers, in the modern period scholars of the new discipline of national literature made him a model for students of “classical studies” and “textual studies.” Only in the postwar era have the ideological underpinnings of Motoori’s work come under scrutiny.

As noted earlier, in nineteenth-century Germany, philology, especially classical philology, achieved unprecedented institutional dominance. To a degree this success can be attributed to the quality of philological scholarship itself, of course, but, as Constanze Güthenke shows, equally if not more important were the major programmatic works—those of Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm Dilthey, in particular—that argued for philology as the foundation of the science of interpretation. The models of disciplinarity and the institutional practices championed by German classical philology were eventually exported across disciplines and national cultural systems. But so were the contradictions, or at least tensions, inherent in these models, between, for example, empirical depth and conceptual breadth, the particular and the universal, and scientificity and creativity. The problems and possibilities of philology in the age of Romanticism thus remain, in many ways, the problems and possibilities of philology as such.

That philology can be a source of some of the most creative thinking about literary interpretation is demonstrated in Christoph König’s chapter,

in which he examines what a theory of philological practice might look like today, with an analysis of a sonnet by the modern German poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The philological practice of attributing meaning to literary texts should be examined historically, he argues, in viewing conflicts of interpretations within the discipline's European tradition of scholarship, and systematically, within a hermeneutic tradition. The main question he raises is how to reinterpret the term "philology" if the aim is to master the *métier* and to "understand" the individual text at the same time.

The book concludes with Ku-ming Kevin Chang's study of the different trajectories of philological developments in Germany and Anglo-French countries. Linguistics, or *linguistique*, as the science of living languages was an Anglo-French reaction to the dominance of German philology, which excelled in the study of written languages. He investigates the context in which these two intellectual forces were introduced simultaneously to the most successful institution of Chinese history and languages in the first half of the twentieth century, the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica, by scholars who had solid training in both Western and Chinese scholarship.

On the evidence offered by the essays in this book, then, its title seems entirely justified: terminological dilemmas notwithstanding, we can legitimately speak of philology in the singular as a unitary global field of knowledge. If we were to redefine philology in a way that most closely corresponds to that historical phenomenology and captures its true capaciousness, we would think of it most simply as the discipline of making sense of texts, whatever sense we may wish to attribute to "sense," and however much the corpus of "texts" to be included in this discipline may change over time. Philology is neither the theory of language (that is now the domain of linguistics) nor the theory of truth (that is philosophy), but the theory of textuality as well as the history of textualized meaning. If philosophy is thought critically reflecting on itself, then philology may be seen as the critical self-reflection on language.³⁶ Under this description, and with the materials offered in this book, we recognize that philology has been at once as historically deep as any other form of systematic knowledge and as global as language itself. Both in theory and in practice across time and space, accordingly, it would seem to merit the same centrality among the disciplines as philosophy or mathematics.

If this is not the place philology occupies in today's university, the university of tomorrow may look different. The decades-long critique of disci-

plines may finally be gaining traction, to the degree that recent attempts at reconstruction, reform, or renewal of the university made all over the world—most prominently in China, India, and the European Union, but also in the United States—while often prompted by market imperatives, actually aim to produce a new, truly global institution. What are the minimal requirements that successful applicants for admission to the twenty-first-century temple of disciplinarity will have to meet in order to qualify as core knowledge forms? One is historical self-awareness. Twenty-first-century disciplines cannot remain arrogantly indifferent, as the teleological social sciences often appear to be, to their own historicity, constructedness, and changeability—this is an epistemic necessity, not a moral one—and accordingly, the humbling force of genealogy must be part and parcel of every disciplinary practice. Another is nonprovinciality. Disciplines can no longer be merely local forms of knowledge that pass as universal under the mask of science; instead, they must emerge from a new global, and by preference globally comparative, episteme and seek global, and by preference globally comparative, knowledge. A third requirement is methodological and conceptual pluralism. Understanding by what means and according to what criteria scholars in past eras have grounded their truth claims must be part of our own understanding of what truth is, and a key dimension of what we might call our epistemic politics.

No aspirant for inclusion in the twenty-first-century disciplinary order could satisfy these historical, global, and methodological-conceptual requirements better than a renewed philology. Philology, as these essays demonstrate, is constitutively concerned with the history of its own practices; transregional in its existence, and, in its modern Western avatar, comparative in its objects of study, perhaps the first systematically comparative discipline;³⁷ and based squarely on the confrontation with multiple forms of understanding. If, like mathematics, philology is a method, it is also, like mathematics, a discipline, aiming—or having the as yet untapped potential to aim—toward “analytic perspectives that disaggregate complex phenomena into potential general variables, relationships, and causal mechanisms,” and able to grow in intellectual, hence institutional, strength the greater the historical scope of operation it is encouraged to embrace.³⁸

One of the more disabling constraints on the creation of a new philological disciplinary formation is that, while philology may historically have been as global as language itself, that very fact, far from stimulating the research and writing it would seem to merit, has gone largely unregistered. For most parts of the world almost nothing substantial has been produced

that would enable students to develop a global appreciation of this history, to know how philology has made our world, not just in Europe but everywhere. Once we begin to appreciate its vast historical life—and this book could easily have had a companion volume of studies of philology in Mesopotamia (where it may in fact have begun),³⁹ Egypt, Africa, medieval Latin Europe, vernacular India, Korea, Southeast Asia—we will see that philology has been everywhere that texts have been, indeed, in a way we have yet to fully grasp, everywhere that language has been. It is the project of charting the life of this sort of philology in all its various manifestations that this book aims to initiate.