

Literary Cultures in History

Reconstructions from South Asia

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Sheldon Pollock

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Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out

Sheldon Pollock

In contrast to most other literary cultures examined in this book, Sanskrit literature has a long and deep tradition of scholarship. A serious attempt at a comprehensive account appeared by the middle of the nineteenth century, and today many single- and multi-volume histories are available.¹ Without the foundation this impressive body of work provides, the historical study of Sanskrit literature would be hard indeed to undertake. At the same time, this scholarship, like all human works, has been shaped by the categories and assumptions of its times, and these seem especially vulnerable to criticism from the theoretical perspective adopted in the present volume.

The difficulty of defining the object of analysis, to which the introduction to this volume has called attention, is in evidence everywhere in Sanskrit literary scholarship. For many writers, “literature” embraces everything preserved in writing, or even in speech. Narrower definitions prove to be arbitrary stipulations or mere tautologies, and hand-me-down qualifiers such as “classical” are typically left unexplained.² Implicitly, Sanskrit literature is usually understood to be Brahmanical and, by preference, the oldest literature, the Veda, the body of orally transmitted texts of myth and ritual; post-Vedic Sanskrit literature remains for many present-day scholars merely “pretty” and “curious,” as the nineteenth-century scholar F. Max Müller put it, and

1. Weber 1852. Among the more influential texts following upon Weber are Müller 1859, Lévi 1890, Krishnamacariar 1906 (and 1937), Winternitz 1908–1922, and Keith 1923 and 1928. The most serious one-volume work to appear recently is Lienhard 1984; six volumes of A. K. Warder’s survey (Warder 1972–) have been published to date. Good regional accounts include De 1960, Banerji 1965, and Raja 1980.

2. For some of these definitions, see the introduction to this volume. Lienhard does define “classical” but darkly: it means “literature that is of a sufficiently high standard to apply the ever-growing canon of poetic rules in a manner that conforms to the traditions of poetry” (1984: 2, 48).

hardly an object of serious intellectual engagement. Sanskrit and India have long been treated as synonyms; works called “Indian theater” and “Indian literature” can unproblematically concern themselves with Sanskrit theater and Sanskrit literature alone. The India that constitutes the conceptual framework of such works, moreover, presents itself as a natural kind, directly given and knowable. At the same time, the prolific genre of regional study (“Bengal’s contribution to Sanskrit literature” and the like) never asks what the regionalization of Sanskrit might signify. History itself is an equally straightforward matter: pure chronological sequence without content, as if time merely passed and nothing passed with it. The dominant literary method is everywhere subjective evaluation, and its standards of taste appear as inerrant as they are unself-conscious. “Too much learning will adversely affect a poem” is a Romantic axiom widely if anachronistically applied by modern scholars, and it is easy to foresee its evaluative consequences for a world where learning could never be too much. In the first comprehensive literary history to appear in post-Independence India, precious little is left that is considered worth reading.³ Even those most sympathetic to the wider Indian world seem to care little for Sanskrit literature. It is with some wonder, therefore, that one registers what has become of the literary culture that for two millennia exercised a unique fascination for people across all of Asia: few today are able to read its great achievements, and fewer even bother.

This curious state of affairs, where our categories of analysis and our judgment seem radically at odds with our object of inquiry and its historical importance, suggests that we need to rethink the research questions with which we approach Sanskrit literature. Is there something we have not fully appreciated that might bring us closer to understanding its cultural life, something we can perhaps capture by exploring how Sanskrit has understood itself? Might it be worth having a better idea of what those who produced Sanskrit culture actually said about the different kinds of texts they made and the different kinds of meanings those texts were thought to bear? We read Sanskrit literature today in printed books, but what were the media of Sanskrit literature before printing, and what were their implications for the experience of literary culture? We might wish to ask directly an even more fundamental question: What did it mean to choose to write in Sanskrit in the first place? This entails asking as well what Sanskrit actually is and in what sense writing in Sanskrit was in fact a choice. Our historical analysis might benefit from understanding how Sanskrit writers themselves conceived of and used their literary past—indeed, it might benefit from appreciating the very fact that they had such conceptions and uses. What, for example, are we to make of their assertion that what they named *kāvya*—for which the En-

3. Dasgupta and De 1962. The judgment on the dangers of learning is that of Lienhard 1984: 4.

glish word “literature” in one of its senses is a good translation—had a beginning in time? If it began, can we concomitantly say that it has ended, and if so, when and under what circumstances? And what might the history of its end tell us about what was necessary to keep it alive? And last, if India is not a natural kind, what in fact is it as far as Sanskrit’s spatial imagination is concerned?

A lot of questions remain in the study of Sanskrit literary culture—complex and largely unasked questions—and many volumes would be needed to respond to them responsibly for a corpus of texts as vast as that available in Sanskrit. The present chapter is the place to try to state the unasked questions clearly, to explain their cultural importance and theoretical kinship, and to suggest some possible ways of going about answering them. This can best be done by examining a relatively small selection of authors and texts that have exemplary status within the traditions of Sanskrit literary culture and by focusing both on moments that mark points of discontinuity—when newness entered or left the Sanskrit world—and on long-term trends that, as will become clear, signify not so much stagnation as achieved perfection of literary culture.

THE IDEA OF LITERATURE IN SANSKRIT THOUGHT

The introduction to this volume assesses some of the answers that twentieth-century Western scholarship has given to the slippery question of what is literature. Aside from anything else we may learn from them, their disagreements about the object of analysis suggest that, a fortiori, Western science alone is inadequate for understanding the different language phenomena and textual practices encountered in the non-West. An indigenist turn, toward local knowledge, would seem to recommend itself easily; for the meanings of texts and language practices that should concern us here in the first instance, in any case, are those historically available to the primary producers and users of the texts. But, in addition, Sanskrit has a long and sophisticated tradition of reflection on “things made of language”—to use the capacious word *vāṇimaya* that often provides the starting point for its textual typologies. And this reflection came to produce those very things even as it was refined by them in turn, and not just within the world of Sanskrit culture narrowly conceived. The theory no less than the practice of Sanskrit *kāvya*, as almost every chapter in this volume demonstrates, was the single most powerful determinant of vernacular conceptions of literature until it was supplemented or displaced by Persian and English counterparts.

There are sound reasons, then, why local knowledge should command our attention. But I name the turn toward it “indigenist” with a slightly pejorative accent to signal the hazards of looking at culture only from the inside out. The very fact that a representation is held to be traditional induces

us to naturalize it, to render it valid across all times, languages, orders of society. But while there may be remarkable unanimity among Sanskrit thinkers about what differentiates the various things made of language, their definitions undoubtedly reduce complexity, as definitions are meant to do. Marginal cases—sometimes precisely the kinds of texts that make history by disrupting dominant definitions—were excluded, while the very fact of ruling some things in necessarily ruled others out. Any adequate analysis of Sanskrit literary discourse would be expected to recover something of this history, reading it now positively as an account of what was said, and now critically as an account of what was unsaid, and even mis-said:⁴ unsaid because no description can exhaust the phenomena it addresses, and mis-said because Sanskrit literary theory, like its object, was enunciated within a field of power and was in the full sense hegemonic in that field. It represented the expression of the culturally dominant—just how dominant can be inferred from the often-resistant work of vernacular literati explored throughout this volume.

Whatever we may conclude about the nature of Sanskrit *kāvya* from examining the works themselves, local theorization about it began at a remarkably late date. The first such texts, Bhāmaha's *Kāvyaṅkārā* (Ornament of *kāvya*) and Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa* (Mirror of *kāvya*), belong to the second half of the seventh century, and though Bhāmaha alludes to some predecessors, there is no reason to think that major works from a much earlier period have been lost. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Treatise on drama) attributed to the sage Bharata may in some early and now-vanished form have been contemporaneous with the earliest extant dramas, which are dated to the second century; Kālidāsa in the fourth century and Amara in his lexicon a short time later were the first to testify to the existence of a work so named.⁵ But Bharata's main concern is the structure of drama, not the theory of the literary, however much it may have helped to shape that theory—especially the understanding of how literature embodies emotion (*rasa*). Generally speaking, Sanskrit literary theory is a tardy development, remarkably tardy considering what the theory itself regards as the historical origins of the literary culture.

What divides this remarkable tradition of reflection, which continued to ponder innovatively the nature of *kāvya* for a thousand years, until Jagan-

4. Here we can invoke a tradition of criticism found in the genre of *vārttika*, whose purpose is precisely to expose all three points (*uktānuktaduruktārthavyakti*).

5. The text was subject to revision and rearrangement especially at the hands of Kashmiri editor-commentators, who seem to have rediscovered its importance in the eighth or ninth century. On the sometimes irreducible incoherence in the present text, especially in the *rasa* chapter, see Srinivasan 1980. For a sympathetic reading of the work, particularly its relation with early drama, see Bansat-Boudon 1992.

nātha Paṇḍitarāja in the mid-seventeenth century, is minor in comparison with what unifies it. Its sense of purpose may have changed between the seventh and the tenth centuries, away from an original ideal prescriptivism toward an analysis of actually existing texts. Yet the habit of sedimentation (rather than the will to supersession) demonstrated in Sanskrit intellectual history across all disciplines ensured the preservation of earlier components of the discourse on *kāvya* even as they were supplemented by new insights and interests. Thus the preoccupation with the analysis of tropes (*arthālanākāra*) that marked the discourse at its commencement, for example, remained central at its end, with Jagannātha still devoting more than two-thirds of his treatise to the topic—precisely the percentage of the earliest texts.

Organized thinking about *kāvya* originated with the aim of providing the rules by which an aspiring writer could produce good *kāvya*. For Daṇḍin, whose *Mirror* is the most influential textbook of its kind in the history of southern Asia, these rules covered a broad range of phenomena that, combined and ordered, provide us with an influential pragmatic definition of what *kāvya* was held to be.⁶ In ascending order of elaboration, Daṇḍin's rules can be grouped according to the following topics:

the choice of language, and its relation to the choice of genre;
 the components of genre, exemplified by the eighteen story elements
 (*kathāvastu*) of description and narration that constitute the genre
 called great *kāvya* (*mahākāvya*), or chapter composition (*sarga-*
bandha);
 the Ways (*mārga*) of *kāvya*, regional styles defined by the presence
 or absence of the expression-forms (*guṇa*), various features
 of phonology, syntax, and semantics;
 factors of beauty (*alanākāra*), the figures of sound and sense.

While quite schematic in some areas, Daṇḍin's treatment isolated tendencies that were to remain key long into the future. In regard to language choice, for example, Daṇḍin shows that in the seventh century *kāvya*, or literature as such, was a phenomenon restricted to the transregional cosmopolitan languages; the vernacular was entirely excluded. The thematic construction of the great *kāvya*, or courtly epic, which is offered as exemplary of all other genres, required a given mix of descriptive and narrative topics. The descriptive concerns the natural order (such as sunrise, sunset, seasons) and the social order (festive gatherings, water sports, lovemaking), whereas the narrative concerns the political order (councils of state, em-

6. On the impact of the *Mirror* in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Karnataka, see respectively Hallisey (chapter 12), Kapstein (chapter 13), and Nagaraj (chapter 5), this volume, as well as Pollock 1998a. It was also adapted in Tamil in the *Taṇṭiyalanākāra* (probably late twelfth century) and in Pali in the *Subodhālanākāra* (thirteenth century).

bassies, military expeditions). These topics find expression in virtually every courtly epic; and every one of these, moreover, is adapted from well-known tales. Clearly, *kāvya* was not something read for the plot—or perhaps for any simple discursive content. Other ends were sought, such as those the next two of Daṇḍin’s categories suggest. The Ways concern the very language stuff that constituted the literary text. And as his exposition of the Ways demonstrates, and even more so that of the tropes (this takes up the great part of his treatise), whatever else *kāvya* may have been about, it was for Daṇḍin also an exploration of the nature and power of language itself.

Although it is not certain that Daṇḍin nowhere cites actually existing poetry, he appears to produce ad hoc his own illustrations of the rules he formulates.⁷ This procedure, which is of a piece with the general prescriptive tone of the work, implies that in its earliest embodiment the discourse on *kāvya* was intended not to explain it but to help produce it. It was knowledge meant in the first instance for writers, not readers, even while it inevitably shaped readerly expectations. The move away from normative prescription to theoretically informed description is first clearly visible in a late-eight-century text whose character is clearly indicated by its title, *Scientific Principles of Literature (Kāvyaśāstrakārikā)*. But even this work basically agrees with Daṇḍin about what constitutes its object; the Ways of *kāvya* and tropes continue to dominate the discussion. A far more profound conceptual innovation occurred in ninth- and tenth-century Kashmir. Ānandavardhana (c. 850) theorized *kāvya* anew by making use of materials that had not previously enjoyed critical scrutiny: the Prakrit lyric (*gāthā*) from perhaps the second or third century; and the *Mahābhārata*, the preeminent “narrative of the way things were” (*itihāsa*) that was textualized during the early centuries of the first millennium. The former enabled Ānanda to develop his new understanding of *kāvya* as meaning-without-saying (*dhvani*, aesthetic suggestion or implication); the latter allowed him to demonstrate how the meaning of the work as a whole resides in an emotional content (*rasa*) that can be communicated only by suggestion. Ānanda’s successors in the next two centuries, especially Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta, transformed the very concept of *rasa*. In line with the new attention to understanding actual literature (and perhaps in association with new theological concerns), they thought of *rasa* as a phenomenon less of the text in itself than of the reader’s response to the text. Analytical emphasis was shifted from the textual processes of meaning

7. At *Kāvyaśāstra* 2.274, 280, 282, 291, and 3.7, 9, Daṇḍin appears to cite from poetry based on *Mahābhārata* themes; none of the verses are from the epic itself and I am unable to trace them. His immediate predecessor, Bhāmaha, cites from authors and works unknown to us and to the later tradition (one Rāmaśarman, author of the *Acyutottara*, at *Kāvyaśāstrakārikā* 2.19; a Śākhāvardhana at 2.47; the *Āsmākhavaṃśa* and the *Rājamitra* at 2.45).

production (how literature makes emotion perceptible) and the construction of social subjectivity (why characters act the way they do) to the modes of our depersonalized experience (why we like sad stories).⁸ These were significant—even radical—reorientations in the discourse on *kāvya*. But they have usually been ascribed an importance quite at variance with their historical effects. For although the new conceptions about literature in medieval Kashmir influenced its interpretation across South Asia (as the reading practices of later commentators suffice to show), they left largely unchanged the way it was composed, even in Kashmir itself.⁹

If we are to grasp the dominant tradition of literary theory, and especially to understand how *kāvya* was held to differ from other language uses and other kinds of texts, we need to look elsewhere. An irreplaceable guide here is the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (Illumination of passion) of King Bhoja, who ruled over a fabled court in what is today western Madhya Pradesh from 1011–1055. In the 1800 printed pages of the *Illumination*, Bhoja sought to summarize the whole of earlier thought at a time before the speculations of the later Kashmiris were widely diffused across the subcontinent and, equally important, before the cosmopolitan literary order started to give way—as it was everywhere about to give way—to the new literary vernacularity.

We get a good sense of Bhoja’s understanding of *kāvya* from two passages: one where he sets out the organization of the *Illumination* as a whole and another where he provides a typology of the genus “things made of language,” of which *kāvya* is only one species. In the first, he tells us that the elements that make up *kāvya* are words, meanings, and the ways in which words and meanings can be “composed” (this is the three-part framework that will structure his entire exposition):

Tradition holds that *kāvya* is a composition [*sāhitya*; also “unity”] of word and meaning: “Word and meaning ‘composed’ [*sahitau*] constitute *kāvya*.” What, however, does the word “word” signify? It is that through which, when articulated, meaning is understood, and it is of twelve sorts, starting with base and affix and ending with sentence, section, and whole work. “Meaning” is what a word gives us to understand, and it is of twelve sorts, starting with action and tense and ending with word-meaning and sentence-meaning. And last, “composition” signifies the connection of word and meaning, and it, too, is of twelve sorts, starting with denotation and implication and ending with avoidance of

8. This history is sketched in Pollock 1998b: 1–24, and briefly compared with the shift in American theory in the 1970s from the earlier text-centrism of the New Critics to reader-response criticism. For the new theological concerns of tenth-century Kashmir, see Gerow 1994.

9. This is clearly demonstrated by the work of Ratnākara, Bilhaṇa, Kṣemendra, Maṅkha, and other writers in this period (900–1100). The best history of the revolution in Kashmiri literary theory is McCrea 1997.

faults, employment of expression-forms [*guṇa*], connection with factors of beauty [*alanikāra*], and presence of *rasa*.¹⁰

The definition cited here of *sāhitya*—a term used to signify *kāvya* as an object of theoretical reflection—is the celebrated if apparently simple formulation offered four centuries earlier by Bhāmaha.¹¹ And it is entirely proper for Bhoja to begin his work with the quotation. The two ideas here—that what makes *kāvya* different from everything else has essentially to do with language itself, and that, accordingly, literary analysis must center on language—are presuppositions that span the entire history of *kāvya* theory and profoundly influenced its production. Assessments based on extralinguistic features are uncommon in the Sanskrit world. *Kāvya* is never conceived of as a unique epistemic form, for instance, teaching us something otherwise unknowable. We find nothing comparable to the Platonic (and pragmatic) opposition between the *mythos* of literature and the *logos* of philosophy. In fact, many masters of systematic thought across the religious and philosophical spectrum wrote *kāvya*, often very unphilosophical *kāvya*. One thinks immediately of Dharmakīrti (c. 650) among the Buddhists, Haribhadra (c. 750) among the Jains, and Śrīharṣa (c. 1150) among the Vedāntins, and such men are the rule rather than the exception. The fact that *kāvya* may be uniquely empowered to make certain truths known to us, accordingly, remains something for Sanskrit readers to work out on their own. Hardly more attention is given to what *kāvya* means as a form of moral reasoning, as a way of understanding how life is to be lived. Although every thinker attributes to literature some didactic role in relation to the ethical, material, emotional, and spiritual realms that make up the four life-goals (*puruṣārtha*), rarely does this become an object of sustained scrutiny.¹² Here another contrast with Greco-Roman antiquity may usefully be drawn. While Sanskrit culture also recognized a trivium of fundamental learning, it was hermeneutics (*mīmāṃsā*), not rhetoric, that rounded out grammar and logic. The focus on the scientific analysis of sentence meaning as opposed to the

10. *Śṅgāraprakāśa* p. 6. All translations here and throughout the chapter are my own unless otherwise noted.

11. *Kāvyaalanikāra* of Bhāmaha 1.16. The term *sāhitya* begins its history here. Its various nuances are discussed at the opening of the *Sāhityamīmāṃsā*, an anonymous work of uncertain date and provenance (probably late-medieval south India; it is *not* by Maṅkha, *pace Sāhityamīmāṃsā* pp. ka, kha); the broader history is considered by Raghavan 1978: 82–103; cf. also Krishnamoorthy 1970. Modern Indian writers such as Tagore have sometimes misunderstood, or creatively reunderstood, the term as *sa-hita* (beneficial) in order to assert a moral function for literature.

12. A rare exception is the *Śṅgāraprakāśa* itself (chapters 18–21). A century earlier Rājasēkhara defended the truth, morality, and civility of supposedly untrue, immoral, and uncivil poetry (*Kāvyaṃmīmāṃsā* pp. 24–25), but the thinness of the discussion indicates how little the matter interested him.

art of forensic persuasion, besides essentially differentiating the two ideals of education, *vyutpatti* and *paideia*, is something that derived from and served to reproduce basic protocols of the reading—and no doubt the making—of literature.

And it is this question, how *kāvya* works as a specific language system—literature not as exhortation but as nontransitive communication, as verbal icon—that interests Sanskrit literary theory to the exclusion of everything else; and this is where its explorations arguably probe deeper than any available from other times or places. The one point of contention among the theorists is how to identify this specificity; the history of discourse on *kāvya* can in fact be described as the history of these different judgments. A later commentator provides just such an account for Kashmiri thinkers of the period 800–1000:

Literature is word-and-meaning employed in a manner different from other language uses. This difference has been analyzed in three distinct ways, depending on what is accorded primacy: (a) some language feature [*dharmā*], such as tropes or expression-forms; (b) some function [*vyāpāra*] such as striking expression or the capacity to produce aesthetic pleasure; or (c) aesthetic suggestion. There are thus five positions, which have been upheld respectively by Udbhata, Vāmana, Kuntaka, Nāyaka, and Ānandavardhana.¹³

One of the last major works of theory, that of Jagannātha in the mid-seventeenth century, shows how long the analytical dominance of the linguistic had persisted when he defines *kāvya* as “signifiers producing beautiful significations.”¹⁴ As for the modalities of “composition” considered by Bhoja himself, which can be reduced essentially to four that occupy him for most of his treatise, all are language-based: (1) *kāvya* must be “without faults”: the congenital threat of solecism, which is copresent with language use, must be eliminated; (2) expression-forms must be used: the phonetic, semantic, and syntactic character of the literary utterance must be carefully constituted with due attention given to the Ways and their emotional register, *rasa*; (3) figures of sound and sense may or may not be joined to the work (unlike 1 and 2, this is optional); (4) nothing must obstruct the manifestation of *rasa*, which for Bhoja is the linguistic production of an emotion in the text.¹⁵

A second passage in the *Illumination* shows that the definition of *kāvya* as a particular composition of word and meaning needs further limitation, in

13. Samudrabandha (Kerala, c. 1300) on Ruyyaka’s mid-twelfth-century *Alaṅkārasarvasva* (text reproduced in Raghavan 1963: 84). Others award primacy elsewhere, for example to propriety (*aucitya*, Kṣemendra, mid-eleventh-century Kashmir) or aestheticized emotion (*rasa*, Viśvanātha, fourteenth-century Orissa).

14. *Rasagaṅgādhara* p. 4: *ramaṇīyārthapratīpādakaḥ śabdah*.

15. See *Śṅgāraprakāśa* pp. 662, 528.

addition to the narrowly linguistic, based on the provenance of the text and, more generally, its communicative nature. Theoretically, the peculiar word-meaning unity that defines *kāvya*—whether this is the presence of expression-forms, or figures, or aesthetic suggestion—can be found anywhere in language. But, in fact, not everything can be *kāvya*:

Words with unitary meaning constitute a unit of discourse [*vākya*]. There are three species of such discourse: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha. As for Sanskrit discourse, it is of three types: relating to revelation, to the seers, and to the world. Discourse relating to revelation has two subtypes: liturgical formulae [*mantra*] and liturgical commandments and explanations [*brāhmaṇa*]. . . . Discourse relating to the seers is of two sorts: revealed texts remembered [*smṛti*] and ancient lore [*purāna*]. . . . Discourse relating to the world has two subtypes: *kāvya* and science, or systematic thought [*śāstra*].¹⁶

I take up later the question of the actual languages used for *kāvya*. Here what requires comment is the three-part categorization of Sanskrit texts according to their origin, whether in transcendent revelation, the mythic realm, or the human world. Like the definition of *kāvya*, this division of textuality long antedates Bhoja and is never questioned in Sanskrit theory before or after. And it shows that *kāvya* comprises a very narrow range of phenomena in the universe of things made of language. Although the logic of the typology might be expected to bring us closer to extralinguistic ideas of the literary of the kind mentioned earlier (such as the Platonic), this line of reasoning—about the truth that only fiction can reveal, for example—is rarely pursued. The concerns of Sanskrit thinkers are different.

What exactly are these criteria of provenance and communicative nature that exclude all other types of texts from the realm of *kāvya*? For many thinkers, a decisive factor is *vivakṣā*, language usage that depends on what a speaker “desires to say,” or what we might call intention. The literary work is in fact sometimes defined as “a sequence of words, succession of units of discourse, or series of episodes delimited with respect to an intended meaning.”¹⁷ Intention is a feature able to differentiate literature from other textual forms since, surprisingly, it is not uniformly distributed in the world of textuality. This odd claim is explained in a passage where the *Illumination* reformulates

16. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 165.

17. Intention is defined at *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 376 (*vaktur vivakṣitapūrvikā śabdaprayatīḥ*); and the literary work on p. 712 (*iṣṭārthavyavacchinā padapañktir vākya-pad-dhatīḥ prakaraṇāvalī vā prabandhaḥ*). Bhoja here borrows from Daṇḍin: “First of all, the body [of a literary text] is defined as a series of words delimited with respect to an intended meaning” (*śarīraṃ* [sc., *kāvya*ya] *tāvad iṣṭārthavyavacchinā padāvalī*, *Kāvya-darśa* 1.10). Or as Anandavardhana put it: “The meaning of the words of a literary text rides on the poet’s intention” (*vivakṣopārūḍha eva hi kāvye śabdānām arthaḥ*, *Dhvanyāloka* p. 496). Authorial intention figures widely in Sanskrit reading and editing practices. See for example the discussion in Bronner 1998.

the three-fold division of texts according to whether they issue from a normal human agent, from a special agent (a mythic seer), or from no agent whatever. Intention itself varies across these three types:

The essence of texts without agents [i.e., the Veda] . . . lies in their specific wording. Given that there is no original speaker of these texts, the category of intended meaning does not apply here at all. The essence of seers' texts, which consist of revealed texts remembered and narratives of the ways things were [*itihāsa*], lies in their meaning; in such texts, intended meaning is pure. Both wording and meaning together form the essence of human texts [i.e., *kāvya*]; the prominence of both aspects derives from particular intentions on the part of agents consciously aware of both these dimensions.¹⁸

These distinctions merit a closer look, for we learn what *kāvya* is in part by learning what it is not.

The Veda is excluded from the domain of *kāvya* for various reasons. It exists forever in beginningless time and was composed by no author, human or divine. Since there is no one to have desired in the first place, the “desire to say” (*vivakṣā*) cannot literally apply.¹⁹ That the Veda's essence is held to lie in its wording reflects an archaic conviction about the magical efficacy of its purely phonic dimension, embodied in the traditional training of syllable-by-syllable reproduction without attention to signification. At the same time, the Veda does have meaning, which lies primarily in its commandments of moral action (*dharmavidhi*). This is in fact its primary signification, one that must not be interpreted away by recourse to secondary language functions associated with *kāvya*, such as implication. While *kāvya*, too, can have real-world entailments—from reading Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* one learns to act like the hero Rāma, and not like the villain Rāvaṇa²⁰—*kāvya* does not, like the Veda, prompt, let alone command, us to do anything.

The intentionality of seers' texts, on the other hand, is “pure,” that is, simple and direct. The authors of such works had infallible knowledge of past events, and their texts transmit this knowledge perfectly by expressing exactly what they mean. In *kāvya*, as in everyday life, when we employ metaphorical language, for example, we desire to express the identity of two things that in reality are different. But no such discrepancy between verbal inten-

18. *Śṅgāraprakāśa* pp. 376–77 (“intended meaning is pure,” *vivakṣāmātram*; “agents consciously aware of both dimensions,” *abhiniṣṭābuddhīnām*). Raghavan mistakenly prints *kāvyaṃ* [*sāstram ca*]. See Joyser's edition, p. 238, and Raghavan's earlier analysis, 1963: 111.

19. Resort to a more metaphorical sense of intention—what a given passage itself “wants to say”—is however common among Mīmāṃsā exegetes, e.g., *Tantravārttika* on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 3.1.13, Poona ed. pp. 65–70; *Sābarabhāṣya* on 1.2.31, which considers the question of whether the words of a *mantra* are “intended” (*vivakṣita*) or not (they are, it turns out).

20. The common formula of didacticism is perhaps found first in Bhoja, *Śṅgāraprakāśa* p. 471; see also *Kāvyaṃprakāśa* 1.2.2 *vṛtti*.

tion and reality occurs in seers' texts; in fact, reality itself adjusted to whatever they may have said: "The language of honest men in everyday life corresponds to reality," says the eighth-century dramatist Bhavabhūti (whom Bhoja cites here) in his *Uttarāmacarita* (1.10), "but reality itself came to correspond to the language of the ancient seers." Elements of *kāvya* may appear to be present in Vedic texts remembered (*smṛti*), in narratives of the way things were (*itihāsa*), or in ancient lore (*purāṇa*), as they may in the Veda itself, but they are unintentional and therefore entirely irrelevant—indeed, invisible as *kāvya*—to traditional audiences.

Let us see how this textual typology works in critical practice. All kinds of texts—science, narratives of things as they were, and, as just noted, *kāvya* itself—have the capacity to teach us something by prescribing or prohibiting action, something Bhoja calls the educative function.²¹ But they execute this function in very different ways, as the following examples show (note that their formal organization is entirely irrelevant to the discussion; all illustrations are verse). The educative in *kāvya* is shown in the following verse:

If I call to mind that beautiful girl, what hope have I to stay alive?
If I forget her and live, what point would there be in living?²²

This is *kāvya*, we are told, because "the expression itself (*ukti*) has primacy." However we might want to characterize the "educative" aspect of the text (perhaps it shows how neither prescription nor prohibition applies to the dilemma of unfulfilled love), it does not expressly enjoin or define appropriate action, nor adduce an actual account of such action from the past as authority. Its specificity resides precisely in the self-sufficiency of the utterance itself. In *śāstra*, by contrast, where prescriptive, injunctive, and related forms of discourse are found, the particular wording or terminology has primacy, as in the descriptions in the following text from the chapter on physiognomy in the *Bṛhatsamhitā*, Varāhamihira's early-sixth-century treatise on cosmology (here human *śāstra* is conflated with its transcendent prototype, as often elsewhere):

He who seeks lordship over the world should marry a virgin
whose feet have nails that are glossy, convex, tapered, and tawny,
whose ankles are not bony but fleshy, lovely, inconspicuous,
whose toes are thick, whose soles have the hue of lotuses.²³

21. *adhyeyam*, *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 596; cf. *Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharaṇālaṅkāra* pp. 228–29, from which I take the definition (*yaś vidhau ca niṣedhe ca vyutpatter eva kāraṇam*).

22. *Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharaṇālaṅkāra* p. 228.

23. *Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharaṇālaṅkāra* p. 229 (citing *Bṛhatsamhitā* 70.1).

In narratives of the way things were (*itihāsa*) or ancient lore (*purāṇa*), it is the meaning or reference—indeed, the event—that has primacy, as in this verse from the *Vāyupurāṇa*:

In whatever direction the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu glanced with a smile
the gods in confusion and terror thither did obeisance.

Textual types can be mixed, to be sure: The materials of *śāstra* can appear in *itihāsa*, as they frequently do in the *Mahābhārata*, or in *kāvya*, as when the gasp and cry of a woman whose lover bites her lip during foreplay are described in a poem, with technical allusion, as “the benedictory prelude (*nāndī*) of the drama of love-making that will ensure its perfect consummation.” The materials of *itihāsa* can appear in *kāvya*, as when the eighth-century poet Māgha transforms the puranic verse on Hiraṇyakaśipu just cited into the following:

As that abode of royal power wandered through the universe,
the gods—their trembling hands raised to jeweled crowns in homage—
performed sunrise, noonday, and sunset obeisance
to any direction where he chanced to roam.²⁴

What marks off *kāvya* from other kinds of text is that the *raison d’être* of its type of expression is the expression itself. Bhoja states this in another way by distinguishing *kāvya* from ordinary language in terms of directness: “Ordinary language is the direct language of science and everyday life; *kāvya*, by contrast, is the indirect language found in descriptions,” that is, in statements that do not prescribe action.²⁵ It is indirection—*how* what is said is being said—that for Bhoja most simply identifies *kāvya* as a specific kind of text. At the same time, such an identification suggests a specific way of reading. For to know such differentia (that intention does not pertain to the unauthored Veda but commandment does; that historical truth is a matter only of seers’ texts; that indirection does not mark *śāstra*) is at once to procure a set of interpretive protocols: Do not read *kāvya* the way you read science, ancient lore, or the Veda; do not be concerned (except insofar as it is a source of pleasure) about a breach between what is said and what is really meant, about correspondence with an actual world, about information or injunction. And do not expect *kāvya* to be like ordinary language; its purposes are different.

Everything Bhoja has told us, let me repeat, will be familiar to students of

24. *Śisūpālavadha* 1.46. Normally they would turn to the east, to the zenith, and to the west as the day advanced. The preceding citation is *Vāyupurāṇa* 67.2.65.

25. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 351: *yad avakram vacas śāstre loke ca vaca eva tat / vakram yad arthavādāu tasya kāvyam iti smṛtiḥ* (note that *arthavāda* is not used here in the narrower sense Bhoja gives it at *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 483).

Sanskrit textuality. The distinction between the unauthored Veda and the texts of seers comes from a much earlier period and originates outside of literary-critical discourse. The differentiation of Veda, *itihāsa-purāna*, and *kāvya* each according to its predominant textual feature (sound, sense, expression) is not original to Bhoja either.²⁶ Much older, too, is the associated formulation that the Veda acts like a master in commanding, the seers' texts like a friend in counseling, and *kāvya* like a mistress in seducing. And this is precisely the point. Bhoja is summarizing an organizing logic, an episteme that informed the discourse on *kāvya* from the beginning and lasted without major modification until the end of Sanskrit literary culture. Not only was it perfectly possible to define *kāvya*, but its definition was specifically framed by a contrast with a vast range of other language uses that were not literature, could not be read as literature, and never were read as such.²⁷ This does not mean that literary theory offered no further refinements within these dominant definitions. When Ānandavardhana argued that what defines literature is the particular modality of the production of meaning known as aesthetic suggestion, texts lacking this feature could no longer be regarded, in his view, as literature in the full sense. Thereby the tradition of "brilliant literature" (*citrakāvya*), which had been so important to writers for centuries (it includes among other things the remarkable genre of double narratives [*śleṣa*]), was devalued in a stroke.²⁸ But the basis of Ānanda's devaluation itself remains strictly within the dominant paradigm of what constitutes the literary.

The Pragmatics of Literature

If we examine actual practices of Sanskrit literary culture, such as performance (the social spaces for the consumption of literature, for example), com-

26. A similar formulation was offered in the *Hṛdayadarpaṇa* of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (as cited by Abhinavagupta on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 16.1, Māṇikyacandra and others on *Kāvyaaprakāśa* 1.2 *vṛtti*). But Bhoja appears not to know Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's work (cf. Pollock 1998b: 26 n. 37), and both may be drawing on a common source.

27. Contrast this with another cosmopolitan tradition, that of early Latin. Here everyone who wrote was simply an *auctor*, differing only with regard to their genres, whether *philosophia*, *historia*, or *poesia* (which were differentiated more on the basis of subject matter than mode of expression). In their clear delineation of literariness Sanskrit thinkers seem uncommon in the premodern world.

28. Distinguish *citrakāvya* in this broader signification from its narrower connotation, "pattern poetry." See *Dhvanyāloka* 3.41 ff. (p. 494 ff.). Observe that *citra* features such as *yamaka*, or identical syllabic strings repeated with different meanings, are found in the oldest courtly epics (e.g., *Saundarananda* of Aśvaghōṣa, cf. 9.49), as are certain *schemata grammatica* (the illustration of aorist forms in *Saundarananda* 2). Ānandavardhana's strictures, it may be noted, again had little impact on practice. If anything, the popularity of *citrakāvya* only increased in the following centuries. On the history of *śleṣa*—which was in vogue in the three centuries before Ānanda and may have conditioned his views—see now Bronner 1999.

mentary and pedagogy (who explains texts, and for whom; what is entered onto syllabi and where; the divisions of knowledge in schools and surveys), and the reproduction of texts (the purposes of copying manuscripts and the audiences for which they are copied), we find that the semantics of the literary as summarized by Bhoja is, some remarkable exceptions aside, generally corroborated by its pragmatics. Nowhere does the theoretical differentiation of *kāvya* from other language uses achieve a greater degree of reality as a cultural practice than in the case of the Veda.

The two genres do, it is true, have some features in common. The liturgical formulas (*mantra*) were referred to, from within the Vedic corpus itself, as *sūkta*, well-uttered—a term comparable to that later used for *kāvya*, *sūkti* (or *subhāṣita*), well-spoken. The hymnists were called *kavi* (poet), and some of the old associations of this title were passed along into later periods, though the subsequent use of the term is significantly broader, as Abhinavagupta’s teacher, Bhaṭṭa Tauta (c. 950), argued:

It is said, “None a poet (*kavi*) but also a seer (*ṛṣi*.)” A seer is so called because of his vision (*darśana*), which is knowledge of the true nature of entities and their varied states of being. And it is because of his vision of the truth that the seer is declared in *śāstra* to be a poet. The conventional meaning of the word “poet,” for its part, is derived from his capacity for vision as well as his powers of description (*varṇanā*). Thus, although his vision was permanently clear, the sage who was the first poet [Vālmiki] did not in fact become a poet until he attained the power of description.²⁹

In addition, important intellectual ties link the tradition of Vedic interpretation and the analysis of *kāvya*. Little is known about the early history of this interaction, but by the end of the first millennium the analysis of literature had become thoroughly permeated by the concepts, principles, and procedures of Mīmāṃsā, the “discipline of discourse” (*vākyaśāstra*), or scriptural hermeneutics. Mīmāṃsā scholars were the first to theorize, on the basis of Vedic texts, a number of themes that were to become central to literary analysis. Śābara (fourth century?) drew the distinction between direct and figurative expression (*śruti* and *lakṣaṇā*) before any literary scholar did, and Ku-

29. For *sūkta*, cf., e.g., *ṚV* 7.58.6 and 10.65.14. The Tauta citation comes from Hemacandra (c. 1170) in *Kāvyaṅuśāsana* p. 432 (“true nature of entities and their varied states of being,” *vicitrabhāvadharmāṃśatattvaṅprakhya*). He introduces it with the remark: “A *kavi* is so called both because of his vision, as declared in the phrase ‘None a poet but also a seer,’ and because of his powers of description, coded in the verbal root *kavṛ* [or *kṛvṛ*] [from which the noun *kavi* is derived], which has the meaning ‘description.’ The work or activity [*karma*] of a *kavi* is called *kāvya*.” (The *taddhita* suffix in question is *ṣyañ*, *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 5.1.123–24; *kāvya* in this sense is post-Vedic.) For the “vision” of the Vedic *kavis* see Gonda 1963: 318–48; Granoff 1995 discusses tales suggesting that the word’s archaic associations (of seer, wizard, etc.) may have been alive in some circles into the late-medieval period.

māṛila (seventh century) theorized metaphor and metonymy (*gaunatā* and *lakṣaṇā*) with a sophistication not seen in literary theory for another several centuries. We even find figurative interpretation of Vedic texts. In the case of *mantra*, for example, metaphorical analysis is sometimes used to support the hermeneutists' claim that the purpose of such texts is indeed to communicate meaning (in the view of Mīmāṃsakas, the texts' liturgical efficacy does not derive from the mere fact of utterance) and thus is particularly useful where such a text appears to be nonsensical.³⁰

Aside from these historical linkages, the Veda will strike contemporary readers as objectively literary in respect of form, content, and expression. Major portions of the Veda are versified; they can be emphatically figurative; their use of language is so foregrounded as to constitute an unmistakable part of their meaning. So it is entirely natural that modern scholars, such as the art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy, should judge the Veda to be "in a less restricted and technical sense of the word" *kāvya*. But it is precisely the technical sense of *kāvya*—the sense Sanskrit poets and theorists and readers made of it—that matters to us in the first instance. What we may believe in our heart tells us nothing of Sanskrit literary culture in history, and nothing in this history makes the Veda *kāvya*. The grounds for its original exclusion from *kāvya* is an important historical problem worth exploring, but for my purpose here, it is enough to note the historical consequences. Not only was the Veda regarded as a form of textuality totally different from any other, but it was never practiced as anything remotely approaching *kāvya*. *Mantra* and the other genres of the Veda were never performed as literature (as the nature and location of their ritual use shows), never read as literature (as the commentaries from at least the ninth century onward clearly demonstrate), and never selected for inclusion in literary anthologies. When Śābara wants to draw an absolute contrast between the nonintentional, transcendent Veda and intentional, human discourse, he cites *kāvya*. The late-tenth-century philosopher and literary theorist Abhinavagupta put it most directly: "It is not

30. *RV* 4.58.3, which begins "It has four horns, three feet, two heads," is taken to be a series of metaphors: by the four horns are intended (*abhiprāya*) the four priests, by the three feet the three pressings of *soma*, by the two heads the patron of the sacrifice and his wife. It is, Śābara adds, "like praising a river by saying that a pair of water birds are its two breasts, a line of snow geese its brilliant white teeth, the silvery rushes its garment, and the dark seaweed its flowing hair." See *Śābarabhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.2.46. The distinction between *śruti* and *lakṣaṇā* is drawn by Śābara in his comment on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 6.2.20; Kumāṛila's analysis of metaphor and metonymy is found in *Tantravārttika* on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.4.22 (p. 313; cited with approval by Mammaṭa in *Kāvyaṣaṭṭha* 2.12 *vṛtti*). A striking example of Mīmāṃsā-based reading practices of literary texts is contained in the section on "features of discourse units" (*vākyaadharmā*) in chapter 9 of *Śyngāraṣaṭṭha*. McCrea 1997, especially chapter 2, explores the impact of Mīmāṃsā on literary theory in Kashmir. The meaningfulness of *mantras* is argued in *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.2.31 ff.

the mere capacity for producing meaning as such that enables a text to be called *kāvya*. And that is why we never apply that term to everyday discourse or the Veda.” Abhinava and every other reader of *kāvya* in South Asia before colonialism would have been mystified to see the West turn the *Ṛgveda* into literature.³¹

If an untranscendable line was thus drawn between *kāvya* and Veda, with regard to some other genres and several major texts the boundaries of the literary in practice were more permeable than Bhoja’s description would suggest. What a vital culture does to stay alive—even one like Sanskrit, whose vitality drew on such peculiar sources—is to push constantly on the limits of definitions. Thus, we encounter works that, in light of the taxonomy I have set out, would have to be considered as ambiguous or hybrid, or as having passed into or out of the realm of the literary over time.

Consider first the phenomenon of the *śāstrakāvya*, science-literature. The *Bṛhatsamhitā*, which Bhoja cites as a model of *śāstra*, aspires to the condition of poetry both formally (it uses some sixty different meters, many found only in *kāvya*, as well as *gāḍya*, or literary prose) and by its use of the self-sufficient utterance (*ukti*) constitutive of *kāvya*. A section in praise of women (which introduces a technical discussion of propitious moments and methods of sexual intercourse) at times resembles a literary anthology:

To enjoy a beautiful woman
is to be king of the world
even if in fact a pauper.
Woman (and food enough!) is the essence
of kingship; all else just fuels desire.³²

That the work was excerpted in anthologies demonstrates that it was read as *kāvya*.³³ Its textual status is made ambiguous, however, by the fact that Varāhamihira himself consistently calls the work a scientific treatise on cosmology, but

31. The contemporary judgment on the Veda is that of Ananda Coomaraswamy 1977: 80 n. (he adds how absurd it would be to think otherwise). Contrast the judicious statement of Lienhard 1984: 57. For Abhinava’s comment see *Dhvanyāloka* p. 44; Śabara cites *kāvya* at *Mīmāṃsāśūtra* 1.1.24 (“As they glide among the blue lotuses sweetly calling, the geese seem to be almost dancing, dressed in violet silks”). Later writers such as Jagannātha occasionally identify figures of speech in the Veda or the *smṛti* (see for example *Rasagaṅgādhara* p. 420), but this does not imply that they understood these works to be *kāvya*. As for the influence of the Veda on *kāvya*, Renou exaggerates when arguing that *kāvya* as such is the “direct heir of Vedic *mantras*” and seeks “a Vedic effect” by means of a vocabulary and a density that can often be traced back to Veda (1956: 169 n., 1959: 16).

32. *Bṛhatsamhitā* 73.17.

33. As for example the *Sūktimuktāvalī*, which was edited by Jalhana at the Devagiri court of the Yādavas in 1258.

also by the undeniable predominance of directness and information—or what Abhinava calls bare meaning—over indirection and imagination.³⁴ A verse like the following,

A Brahman is rendered homage at the feet, a cow at the rear, a goat at the
mouth,
but there is no part of a woman's body where homage may not be done,³⁵

could easily be categorized as a “well-turned” lyric, but it is immediately followed by a verse that evacuates any literary impact it might have in isolation:

For a woman is totally pure and cannot become polluted,
since every month menstruation removes her impurities.³⁶

Premodern readers surely felt this difference, though no major thinker ever bothered to spell it out in the detail lavished on other questions about the literary. And the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* is not an isolated case of *śāstrakāvya*. The version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by an author known as Bhaṭṭi, a seventh-century work of enormous popularity in South and Southeast Asia, is a systematic illustration of the rules of grammar and poetics—the first of a large subgenre. It is included by Bhoja in the category of literature; by the seventeenth or eighteenth century, and probably sooner, it was being read exclusively as a grammatical textbook.³⁷

More complicated issues are raised by a text like Kalhaṇa's celebrated *Rājatarāṅginī* (The river of kings, c. 1150). Present-day readers would immediately label this work a history, especially given the author's own insistence on the importance of historiographical methods, such as weighing evidence and judging the truth of matters “free from passion and hatred.” And this was the judgment of the translators at Akbar's court in the late sixteenth century, who rendered it into Persian along with other texts the Mughals regarded as histories, such as the *Mahābhārata*, while translating

34. The self-descriptor “astral science” (*Ijyotiḥ-śāstra*) is common in the work, and only once—and by implication—does Varāhamihira seem to refer to it as *kāvya* (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 105.4).

35. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 73.8.

36. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 73.9.

37. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 729. The work is listed as a grammar in Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī's library catalogue of the early eighteenth (?) century. Grammar poems after Bhaṭṭi more frequently narrate the political history of a patron than they narrate a legend: Halāyudha's early-tenth-century *Kavirahasya* (The poet's secret) illustrates Sanskrit verbal forms through an encomium of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III; Hemacandra's *Kumārāpālarīta* exemplifies his own Sanskrit and Prakrit grammars via *śleṣa* while telling the history of the Chālukyan dynasty of King Kumārāpāla. The balance tips from *kāvya* to *śāstra* in a work like the *Pratāparudrayaśobhūṣana* of the late-thirteenth-century writer Vidyānātha, who defines tropes by way of verses in praise of the Kākatīya king. This genre has an afterlife in *bhāṣā* literature, too, as a work like Kavibhūṣaṇ's Brajbbhasha *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* (1674) testifies.

few literary texts. But Kalhaṇa himself explicitly identifies his work as *kāvya*, and he affiliates it with literature by frequently echoing earlier poems that had achieved the particular synthesis of the literary with the historical-political that Kalhaṇa sought.³⁸ Moreover, the work was regarded as literature by his contemporaries; one verse is cited in a literary-theoretical text, the *Alaṅkārasarvasva* (Compendium of tropes) of Ruyyaka (who undoubtedly knew Kalhaṇa personally), and a dozen or so verses are anthologized in the *Subhāṣitāvalī*. Western students of Kalhaṇa have also pointed out the literary conventions that structure the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, while at the same time (mixing endogenous and exogenous criteria) arguing that his work is not “critical in our sense” and therefore should not be interpreted primarily as history.³⁹

Yet these arguments, from both outside and inside the tradition, have their limits. For one thing, a degree of literariness (in a less culture-specific sense) unavoidably marks all narrative history, as recent scholarship has sufficiently demonstrated. For another, no other *kāvya* ever written in Sanskrit commences with the kind of self-justification Kalhaṇa offers; none shows quite the interest in facticity (chronological, geographical, historical), in the reality effects of concrete detail, or in understanding motive or determining what really happened. It is precisely this highly referential quality that renders the status of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* ambiguous in the minds of readers today, as it was also in Mughal Delhi and, no doubt, in twelfth-century Kashmir.

Referentiality of this sort, where direct correspondence with a historical truth (or perhaps the creation of historical truth by such supposed correspondence) constitutes an explicit writerly aim, has long been regarded by modern scholars as a serious deficiency in Sanskrit literature. Quite the opposite is true. The historicization of the literary narrative, if not exactly on the order of Kalhaṇa’s positivism, began with Bāṇa in the seventh century and underwent an ever-intensifying development over the following millennium—so much so that it eventually suffocated the poetry of personal expression that had been one of the luminous achievements of Sanskrit literature. It remains the case, however, that historical fact constituted something of a problem for Sanskrit literary theory.

To be sure, fact no less than fiction was acknowledged as a source of liter-

38. See *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* 1.7 (on historical method); 1.2–5, 44–47 (on *kāvya*). The most notable literary echoes are with Bilhaṇa’s *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* (c. 1080) and Bāṇa’s *Harṣacarita* (c. 640). Kalhaṇa’s contemporary Maṅkha in fact compares Kalhaṇa’s historical-literary style to Bilhaṇa’s: “He so burnished the mirror of his poetry that it could reflect the image of Bilhaṇa’s ripeness [*prauḍhi*]” (*Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* 25.79). Note however that Kalhaṇa never mentions his literary models, eschewing the convention of “praise of poets past” that I examine later in the chapter.

39. See *Alaṅkārasarvasva* p. 93, where *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* 4.441 is cited. For the judgment on history, see Kölver 1971: 8–9.

ary narrative. A distinction between historical and fictional genres (*ākhyāyikā* and *kathā*) was drawn as early as Bhāmaha (seventh century), who contrasts with “imaginary tales” narratives “that celebrate the real events of gods and others.”⁴⁰ Yet fact was also held to be malleable, and necessarily so. Ānandavardhana counseled poets to alter any received historical account that conflicted with the emotional impact they sought to achieve. One must not arbitrarily modify received stories in any way that runs counter to their already established emotional register (a dramatist cannot, for example, simply turn the dignified hero [*uddāta*] of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into a romantic one [*lalīta*]), but one can and should change fact to suit the *rasa*:

Another means by which a work as a whole may become suggestive of *rasa* is the abandoning of a state of affairs imposed by historical reality [*itivyttavaśāyātā sthitiḥ*] if it fails in any way to harmonize with the *rasa*; and the introduction, by invention if need be, of narrative appropriate to that *rasa*. . . . No purpose is served by a poet’s providing merely the historical facts [*itivyttamātra*]. That is a task accomplished by historiography itself [*itihāsād eva*].⁴¹

Two centuries later Bhoja added a moral criterion for altering received stories, whether derived from history or imagination. He speaks of “texts whose plots required emendation” (*pratisaṃskāryetivyṭta*):

If one were to compose a literary work on the basis of a story just as it is found to exist in narratives of the way things were [*itihāsa*], it could come about that one character, though acting with all due propriety, might not only fail to attain the desired result but might attain precisely the result he does not desire; whereas another character, though acting improperly, might attain the result he does desire. In these cases, emendation must be made in such a way that the character acting properly is not denied the result he seeks, whereas the other not only should fail to attain his desire but should also attain what he does not want.⁴²

Elsewhere he lists a number of works—most now lost, but undoubtedly all once extant—that altered historical narratives in the interests of moral propriety (*aucitya*) and *rasa*.⁴³

40. “Fact,” *vṛtta*, *itivyṭta*, the latter term also more generally connoting “plot” (for the narrower meaning “historical narrative,” cf. *Arthaśāstra* 1.5.14, which makes it a subset of *itihāsa*); “fiction,” *utpādya[vastu]*, *utprekṣita*. Bhāmaha’s distinction between *vṛttadevādicaritaśāṃsi* and *utpādya[vastu]* (*Kāvyaśāstrā* 1.17) is found also in the *Amarakośa* (1.6.5, 7): *ākhyāyikā* is a work the matter of which we know to have occurred (*upalabdihārthā*), and *kathā* is “imaginary in its [narrative] construction” (*prabandhakalpanā*).

41. Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990: 434 ff. (translation somewhat modified). Ānanda mentions as models of such emendation the works of Kālidāsa, the *Harivijaya* of Sarvasena, and his own *Arjunacarita*.

42. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 746.

43. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 711. Works with doctored plots include the *Nirḍoṣadaśaratha* (blameless Daśaratha), in which the exile of the hero Rāma is effected by two magical creatures im-

In such a universe, where the moral imagination of a literary work and its emotional coherence took precedence over any other dimension, a historical poet like Kalhaṇa was presented with unusual challenges. For his stated aim was to proceed “like a judge in relating what had actually happened,” while yet attempting to ensure that the work produce a particular *rasa*, that of tranquility (*śānta*).⁴⁴ Unusual challenges also confronted the authors of public poetry: the royal and other inscriptions, especially praise-poems (*praśasti*), which record the genealogy of kings and celebrate their notable deeds in always stately and sometimes powerful *kāvya* style. It may be a consequence of these challenges that with few exceptions (approaching a statistical zero), authors of inscriptional poetry never wrote textualized poetry, and they seem to have occupied a place in the world of cultural production altogether different from that of writers of *kāvya*.⁴⁵

The permeability and instability of Sanskrit textual categories find their limit case in Vyāsa’s *Mahābhārata*. About its genre there is no uncertainty, for in virtually all Sanskrit text-lists it defines the category of *ītiḥāsa*, the narrative of the way things were. Our standard taxonomies of textual forms represent this genre as radically different from *kāvya*, and many other thinkers are in agreement. Tauta’s verse cited earlier goes on to say that “Although ‘vision’ may be found to exist in other textual types such as *ītiḥāsa*, these cannot be *kāvya* because they lack the descriptive element [*varṇanā*].” The *Mahābhārata* should therefore be performed and taught and reproduced and, what is most important, read and understood and appreciated differently from *kāvya*. But from at least the seventh century, the work came to be treated as something close to *kāvya*. Ānandavardhana considered it “moral-spiritual science with the beauty of literature,” and drew from it some of his most powerful examples of aesthetic suggestion, at the same time conceiving of this massive work as a unified literary whole, with a single predominant emotional force.⁴⁶ Yet—an exception to this exception, in terms of textuality, performance, and reading—no Sanskrit *kāvya* in India was ever as textually open, as expandable, as the *Mahābhārata*. A courtly epic like Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of the divine prince Kumāra), which ends before the birth of the hero named in the title, could in a later age be perceived as unfinished

personating his stepmother, Kaikeyī, and father, Daśaratha, (the former selfishly manipulative, the latter pathetically uxorious in the “historical” *Rāmāyana*), and, most famously, Kālidāsa’s *Śakuntala* (fourth century), in which the lover’s forgetfulness is not willful and perverse (as in the “historical” *Mahābhārata*) but caused by a curse that results from his beloved’s unintentional show of disrespect to an ascetic.

44. *Rājataranṅinī* 1.7, 23.

45. For some brief observations see Pollock 1995b.

46. For the *Mahābhārata* as *śāstrarūpa kāvyacchāyanvayī* and possessing *śāntarasa* see *Dhvanyāloka* 4.5 (p. 530). Cf. also Tubb 1985.

and requiring completion (nine chapters were in fact later added), but the body of the work had an integrity that strongly resisted interpolation.⁴⁷ Nor did any Sanskrit *kāvya* (aside from the perhaps unique case of the twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava lyric of Jayadeva, the *Gītagovinda* [Govinda in song]) ever become the object of endowments for perpetual recitation in temples, as occurred in the case of the *Mahābhārata* from as early as the seventh century. And a whole history of reading the epic, which is sedimented in centuries of commentary on it, never treats the work as anything but a text of the seers (*ārya*), with an ontology, authority, and referentiality radically different from *kāvya*.⁴⁸

In short, whether a text's purpose is thought to be the direct and truthful narration of the past or, instead, the celebration of its own linguistic realization would seem to make a great deal of difference to the way it is understood. Yet none of this pragmatic slippage in the taxonomy of the literary is ever thematized in Sanskrit, despite the difficulty of accommodating even canonical works in the theory. The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, whose status as first *kāvya* we will consider momentarily, was for many premodern readers a work that simultaneously narrates what truly happened exactly as it happened and makes absolute claims for regulating the moral order; that is, it is both an *itihāsa* and a *dharmasāstra*.⁴⁹ By contrast, the *Bhāgavatam*, a tenth-century masterpiece of incalculable literary influence and popularity, calls itself ancient lore (*purāṇa*) and tries to fulfill a *purāṇa*'s genre requirements, but it more often looks and sounds and speaks like a *kāvya*, and was sometimes read as one.⁵⁰ A comparable development manifests itself in, for example, the Jain tradition of literary *purāṇas*, most remarkably with the *Ādīpurāṇa* (First *purāṇa*) of Jinasena II (837), which actually calls itself a *kāvya*.

The behavior of textual types was thus more unruly than the orderly classifications of Sanskrit literary theory might lead us to expect. Yet this un-

47. Cf. also Shulman 1991.

48. This is true from the earliest extant commentator on the work, Devabodha, a Kashmiri ascetic of perhaps 1000, to Nilakaṇṭha at the end of the seventeenth century, who insisted that the text be "treated like scripture" (*āgamayitavyam*) (p. 2, col. 1, line 16). On the latter, see also Minkowski (in press).

49. *Kāvyaśāstra* (early tenth century), p. 7: *rāmāyaṇam itihāsam*; for the *Pythvīrājaviṅaya* (c. 1190), the *Rāmāyaṇa* is "as true as the Veda" (1.3; cf. the commentary of Jonarāja on *Pythvīrājaviṅaya* 1.5). The seventeenth-century scholar Madhusūdhana Sarasvatī, in his review of the eighteen disciplines, lists the *Rāmāyaṇa* under *dharmasāstra* (*Prasthānabheda*, pp. 1, 9). A tenth-century writer is praised in an inscription as the "Vālmiki of the Kali Age" for "expounding revealed literature in books of moral history" (*dharmetihāsaparvasu*, EI 2: 164). The thirteenth-century philosopher Madhva ranked both the "originary *Rāmāyaṇa*" and the *Mahābhārata* with the Vedas (cf. *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* p. 157, citing *Skandapurāṇa*).

50. This holds even for the Kṛṣṇacarita chapter of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. See *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 4.10, where *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5.13.21–22 are cited to illustrate *alanikāradhvani* and the author is referred to as *kavi*.

ruliness was within limits. The *Bhāgavatam* is the only (non-Jain) *purāṇa* among scores to aspire so noticeably to the condition of *kāvya*; the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* constitute genres unto themselves. And these texts aside, along with a few others noted earlier, there never was any large-scale migration between the literary and the nonliterary in the eyes of those inside the tradition. Literature in Sanskrit thought never remotely approached the open category it has become in the critical and pedagogical (if not popular) practices of the contemporary West.⁵¹ In general, the state of literary taxonomy was a steady one for nearly two thousand years. And in this we can perceive both a victory and a defeat of Sanskrit literary culture: Such an astonishingly broad and long-lasting consensus among readers and writers about how *kāvya* should be written and interpreted produced literature of ever greater refinement, and reading of ever greater sophistication. But this was a consensus that arose in and made sense for a particular world, a particular sociality and polity; and when these changed, Sanskrit literary culture was unable to change with it.

WHAT WERE SANSKRIT POETS CHOOSING
WHEN THEY CHOSE TO WRITE IN SANSKRIT?

Not only do Sanskrit discourses on literature take *kāvya* to be a peculiar use of language, but they also confine this use to a narrow range of languages. Bhoja, as we saw, gave a paradigmatic formulation: “Words with unitary meaning constitute a unit of discourse [*vākya*]. There are three species of such discourse: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha. [Sanskrit] discourse . . . relating to the world has two subtypes: *kāvya* and science, or systematic thought [*śāstra*].” Although this would appear to restrict *kāvya* to Sanskrit, we will see that Prakrit and Apabhramsha, too, function as languages of the literary (indeed, only as such, for in Bhoja’s eyes Sanskrit retains a monopoly on scientific discourse, narratives of the way things were, and the rest). That it is possible to make *kāvya* only in this triad of languages is the unanimous judgment of Sanskrit literary theory from its beginnings in Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin.⁵² And this raises at least three critical questions, which I consider

51. The rise of the grand philosophical prose style (with Śaṅkara’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, eighth century, or Jayantabhaṭṭa’s *Nyāyamañjarī*, c. 900), which may seem unthinkable without the earlier developments in literary prose, was never read in relationship to it. When Jayanta wanted to be truly literary he wrote literature (the drama *Āgamaḍambara*). Bhoja does vaguely associate literary style with nonliterary discourse when he observes that treatises on polity (*arthaśāstra*) are characterized by “the eastern path” (*gauḍīyā rīti*), and those on spiritual liberation (*mokṣaśāstra*) by “the western” (*lāṭīyā*) (*Śṛīgāraprakāśa* pp. 1107, 1179).

52. Bhāmaha, *Kāvyaṅkāra* 1.16, cf. 34–36; Daṇḍin, *Kāvyaadarśa* 1.32. Daṇḍin and other theorists include Paishachi, the language of a single work of literature, the placeless and dateless—and lost—*Bṛhatkathā*.

in turn: What exactly were these languages? Why in the opinion of theorists (and, with few exceptions, in actual fact) did they constitute the sole vehicles for the creation of *kāvya*? And what factors conditioned a writer's decision to use one language rather than another?

The first question—what actually is Sanskrit (and Prakrit and Apabhramsha)—is one not asked of most of the other languages treated in this volume, since they come before us like facts of nature. Of course, from a more capacious historical vantage point, there is nothing at all given or natural about any language; all are only jargons until they are unified by certain cultural practices, foremost among which is the production of literature. But in the case of Sanskrit and its two companions we feel compelled to raise the question, which already, and correctly, intimates something of their unusual position in the repertory of literary codes represented in this book.

The need to ask is occasioned in part by the very words we use to refer to these languages. In contrast with, say, “Kannada” or “Bangla” or “Sindhi,” which in their semantic core signify at once a group of speakers and their geographical location, the terms “Sanskrit,” “Prakrit,” and “Apabhramsha” all refer to social and linguistic characteristics and not to particular people or places. The word *samśṛta* points in the first instance to the language's paradigmatic analyzability: it is something “put together” by means of phonological and morphological transformations of the sort so powerfully described in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition (synthesized around the third or fourth century B.C.E.). At the same time, the term long preserved associations from the sacred domain of Vedic liturgical practices: Sanskrit is also that which is “rendered fit” for these practices because, like other instruments or objects used in ritual acts, it has been made ritually pure. In its oldest form, Sanskrit was an idiom of liturgical acts and their associated scholastic disciplines, spoken and fully alive for that domain in the way long-cultivated learned idioms can be. Only gradually and hesitantly did it enter into the realm of worldly (*laukika*) communicative practices—coinage, deeds, inscriptions, and the like, including *kāvya*—around the beginning of the common era. What is important to bear in mind, however, is that it never fully became—and almost certainly never had been—a code of everyday usage. It was never the language of the nursery, the bedroom, or the field, although since Sanskrit poets experienced childhood, love, and (no doubt some of them) labor, they learned to speak of these things, too, after their fashion, in Sanskrit.⁵³

What they almost certainly did not speak either, whether in the nursery, bedroom, or field, was Prakrit, at least in the form in which we know it in

53. See Pollock 1996 on the *laukika* transformation of Sanskrit, Thieme 1982 on the descriptor *samśṛta*, and Deshpande 1993 and Houben 1996 on the sociolinguistic status of Sanskrit.

Prakrit literary texts. The word itself, according to the standard interpretation, refers to the “common” or “natural” dialect(s) of which Sanskrit represents the grammatically disciplined variety. But in fact it typically connotes a literary language and only very rarely is used to mean spoken vernaculars (the usual term for these was *bhāṣā*, speech). Unlike Sanskrit, for which literary theory acknowledges a single, unified register, Prakrit was recognized from a relatively early date to have three or four regional types: Maharashtri (belonging to Mahārāṣṭra), Shauraseni or Sauraseni (belonging to Śūrasena, or Mathurā and environs), Gaudī/Magadhi (“Gauḍa” referring to Bengal; “Magadha,” to Bihar), and Lātī (belong to Lāṭa, southern Gujarat).⁵⁴ Often, however, the term “Prakrit” is used in a more restricted sense to refer specifically to Maharashtri, which eventually became the single primary language of Prakrit literary creation.⁵⁵ Employed in the early centuries of literacy (c. 250 B.C.E.—250 C.E.) for public inscription until displaced dramatically and permanently for this purpose by Sanskrit, the Prakrits that we know from actual existing literature are grammaticized dialects. They were in fact not associated with or limited by any regionality and fully shared the commitments and values of Sanskrit literary culture.

A transregional and more or less standardized literary language confronts us in Apabhramsha, too. The name literally refers, once again, to a linguistic trait, that of “degeneration,” or the simplification of phonology and morphology, and can pertain both to solecism in general and to the literary language specifically. Daṇḍin distinguishes these two senses, calling the literary language the “dialect of, among others, the Ābhīras,” whereas “in scholarly discourse anything that deviates from correct Sanskrit is so named.”⁵⁶ Although perhaps based ultimately on a Middle Indo-Aryan dialect of the midlands, the Apabhramsha found in literary texts is linguistically unlocalizable, largely without regional variation, and like Prakrit was used ecumenically: in the lyrics in act 4 of the drama *Vikramorvaśīya* (early poems even if not original to the play) by the Śaiva Kālidāsa in fourth-century Ujjayinī; in the *Harivaṃśa* by the Jain Puṣpadanta in mid-tenth-century Karnataka; in the

54. The varieties are named as early as *Nāṭyaśāstra* chapter 17 and *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.34–35.

55. On the notion of primary literary languages see later in this chapter. For the use of “Prakrit” in the narrow sense of Maharashtri see *Saptaçatakam* v. 2; *Gauḍavaho* v. 65, 92; and Upadhye in *Līlāvāī* 1966: 73.

56. *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.36. “Ābhīra” is usually taken to refer to a pastoral people in western India. The negative connotations of Apabhramsha were eventually lost but were still alive in the seventh century, when the Vedic textual scholar Bhaṭṭa Kumārila remarked: “The scriptures of the Buddhists are linguistically corrupt and so could not possibly be holy word. . . . When texts are composed of words that are grammatically false—with words of the Magadhan or Dakṣiṇatya languages and even worse, the Apabhramshas of these languages. . . how could their doctrines possibly be true?” (*Tantravārtika* on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.3.12, p. 164). Kumārila cites an illustration, but its source is unknown; it is not Pali.

messenger poem (*dūtakāvya*) *Samdeśarāsaka* by the Muslim Abdul Rahman in fourteenth-century Multan.

When the Sanskrit theoreticians inform us that *kāvya* is composed in three languages, they mean what they say: three languages alone are fit for literary expression, and others are not. The definition becomes meaningless if “Prakrit” or “Apabhramsha” is taken to refer to local language *tout court*; this would be tantamount to saying that literature is composed in language—an un-Sanskritic tautology. Whatever may have been their original regional specificity, by the time of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin both the literary Prakrits and Apabhramsha had already been subjected to philological analysis and standardization, and along with Sanskrit were represented as tied to no particular place—and, as we have seen, they were not.

For a history of Sanskrit literary culture this formulation has important implications. Multilingualism is a dimension of the writer’s craft for the Sanskrit critical tradition, but this is a multilingualism with two important restrictions. *Kāvya* is composed only in languages of the subcontinent—nothing indicates that literature was thought to exist in other cultural worlds (translations were made from Greek, for example, but only for scientific texts)—and, more important, only in languages that occupy subcontinental space. It is languages that travel, languages available to anyone anywhere in the world where *kāvya* is produced, languages that, as their names imply, transcend ethnic group and in a sense transcend space and time, that are qualified for embodying *kāvya*. Excluded from the world of *kāvya* as conceptualized in the Sanskrit tradition were the numerous vernaculars, from Kannada to Kashmiri, until such time that these languages themselves claimed the right to embody *kāvya* by bursting through to textuality and literariness. This historical transformation, which I call “vernacularization” and which was in full development everywhere in South Asia by the middle of the second millennium, contributed substantially to drawing an outer limit to the existence of a vital Sanskrit literary culture by making the choice of language in the making of literature far more problematic than it had ever been earlier.⁵⁷

From a postcolonial location one tends to think of choice of language as one pertaining to the regional-language writer when confronted with languages of global cultural power such as English or French. But Sanskrit writers were also making a choice when they made literature in Sanskrit, though the precise nature of the choice and the conditions of choosing differed from those of their postcolonial descendants and varied even in precolonialism from epoch to epoch. In the later medieval period this was largely a decision *not* to write in one of the emergent vernaculars. For the greater part of

57. A detailed account of the three-language theory, and the historical practice of vernacularization, is provided in Pollock forthcoming.

the first millennium, however, from the time when we can first refer with historical confidence to the existence of *kāvya*, the choice was more limited, as were the social and cultural preferences it reflected.

For the seventh-century literary scholars Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, the division of literary-language labor among the three transethnic and transregional codes was strictly a function of genre. Thus the dynastic prose poem (*ākhyāyikā*), such as Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* (Life of King Harṣa), was composed in Sanskrit alone, as was the courtly epic (*mahākāvya*), such as Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of the divine prince Kumāra); the genre called the *skandhaka*, exemplified by Pravarasena's *Setubandha* (Building the bridge; also known as the *Slaying of Rāvaṇa*), was written in Prakrit alone; the *osara* (no extant example) was composed in Apabhramsha alone; the long narrative tale, such as Bāṇa's *Kādambarī* or Dhanapāla's *Bhavisattakaha* (Tale of what is to be), could be written in Sanskrit or Apabhramsha.⁵⁸ The link between language choice and genre both in theory and practice is old and enduring, and is probably constitutive of Prakrit and Apabhramsha literariness. Prakrit in these discussions refers, let us note again, only to Maharashtri, for Shauraseni and the rest with rare exceptions ceased to have independent literary existence after the second or third century and appear only in drama or related genres.

Indeed, it is language use in drama that helps us understand how, although three languages are prescribed for literature throughout most of Sanskrit literary theory, other languages are not only mentioned in that theory but can in fact make their appearance in literature. Early on it was recognized that drama was written “in a mixture of languages,” as Daṇḍin puts it.⁵⁹ This precept invites us to distinguish—and to read traditional accounts of literary language as distinguishing—between what we may call primary and secondary languages for literature. The former consist of those used in the creation of an entire literary work, that is, the three cosmopolitan idioms. These alone can constitute what a twelfth-century writer called the “body of a literary text.” While these “primary” languages were chosen for a given work on the basis of its genre, “secondary” languages were those used for mimetic

58. *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.37; *Kāvyalankāra* of Bhāmaha 1.28. See Ratnaśrījñāna on *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.37, where his reference to *Setubandha* is intended to illustrate the *skandhaka*. Other writers add further detail. For Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the independent lyric verse (*muktaka*) could be written in any of the three literary languages, Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Apabhramsha—and we have examples in all three languages, though these become increasingly rare for the latter two—but language restrictions applied to other genres. Thus, certain minor types of story literature called “short story” (*khaṇḍakathā*) and “full story” (*sakalakathā*) were written in Prakrit (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.7, p. 323, with Abhinavagupta there).

59. *nāṭakādi tu mīśrakam*, *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.37; cf. Abhinavagupta on *Dhvanyāloka* 3.7. Ratnaśrījñāna on *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.32, however, explains “mixture” to be that of the three literary languages.

purposes. They appear in drama in direct discourse (royal women always speak Shauraseni, ruffians Magadhi, and so on), and in a few other literary works, such as the tale (*kathā*), where reported speech is prominent.⁶⁰ Thus, aside from imitative uses of language to provide local color in drama and similar dialogue genres, language choice for making literature, in the wider literary culture of which Sanskrit was part, was shaped by factors utterly different from that which governs writing today: the use of one's so-called natural language. In fact, it may not be going too far to claim that it is the exclusion of natural language from the realm of literature that to a significant degree defines Sanskrit literary culture.

The single factor we have so far identified as regulating literary language choice, namely, genre, cannot wholly have determined that choice. For one thing, a genre like *kathā* could be written in any of the three languages. For another, other genres said to be restricted to particular languages, such as the various species of courtly epic, the Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, the Prakrit *skandhaka* or *āsvāsaka*, are themselves virtually indistinguishable from each other—except for their language (and the metrical form associated with it). It is not easy to believe that a writer would select a genre first and then the language appropriate to it; some commitment to a literary code had to come first, and the choice of genre from among those available to the language in question would follow. What would a commitment to a literary code consist in? Why would a writer choose to write in Sanskrit rather than in Prakrit or Apabhramsha? This is a fundamental question, or so one would think, but it has not been posed in literary scholarship as clearly as one would expect. A recent work called *A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit—Pali—Prakrit*, for example, hardly addresses the issue at all, the title notwithstanding.⁶¹ No doubt one answer for all cases is improbable, since the nature of commitment to language demonstrably changed over time. Assumptions widely shared in modern scholarship are worth considering if only to avoid their errors: One is that such a choice was never actually made, since before colonialism and modernity began their deplorable work of linguistic reduction, Indian poets were always multilingual; another is that religious community

60. “These four languages [Paishachi is included] are the ones that may constitute the body of a poem,” *Vāgbhaṭālankāra* 2.1. Daṇḍin implies this mimetic use when he says, “A *kathā* is composed in all languages” (*Kāvya-darśa* 1.38). The *Kuvalayamālā*, a “mixed tale” (*saṃkīrṇakathā*) completed in Jalor in 799, announces that it is “composed in the Prakrit language, written down in the letters of the Marahatta region. As a curiosity the story is also told in Sanskrit when needed for [i.e., when reporting] another's speech, and here and there made with Apabhramsha, as well as demonstrating the Paishachi speech” (p. 4, vv. 11–12); it also provides numerous examples of reported speech in various Indian languages and dialects. Further materials on primary and secondary in Sanskrit literary theory may be found in Pollock forthcoming.

61. Lienhard 1984. On p. 49 brief reference is made to the “preferences” purportedly created by the language traditions of the different religions.

regulated cultural commitments and membership in such a community accordingly determined language choice in advance.

The first explanation would seem to find support in the *Kāvyaṁimāṁsā* (Inquiry into literature) of Rājāśekhara, a court poet in early-tenth-century Kānyakubja and Tripur. In this partially preserved encyclopedia of literary art the author comments on the question of languages in literature:

A poet must first of all fashion himself. He should ask himself: What is my inborn talent; what are my strengths with respect to languages? What does society favor? What does my patron favor; what kinds of poetic assemblies does he occupy himself with; what is he emotionally attached to? The poet should then adopt a particular language—so say the authorities. But Rājāśekhara holds that while it is true a specialized poet works under such constraints, for a poet who knows no intellectual limitations all languages are as much within his command as a single one. Moreover, a given language is adopted by virtue of [its prevalence in] a given region, as it is said, “The people of Gauḍa [Bengal] are devoted to Sanskrit, the people of Lāṭa [south Gujarat] are fond of Prakrit, the people of all Mālava, the Takkas [Panjabis], and the Bhādānakas employ their own Apabhramsha, the people of Avanti, of Pariyatra, and of Daśapura [Chattisgarh] use Bhutabhasha [Paishachi]. The poet who dwells in mid-Madhyadeśa is expert in all [these] languages.”⁶²

Again, we should note the premise here that literature can be made in only three primary languages (or four, including Paishachi), albeit a range of secondary languages may be used for mimetic purposes.⁶³ But while this restriction to cosmopolitan codes for literature is in evidence everywhere, Rājāśekhara’s ideal image of a poet’s unlimited creativity in all four languages seems to be just that, an ideal. If we examine the actual literary-historical record available to us—admittedly, counterexamples may have vanished—it is remarkable how very few writers produced literature in different primary languages.

Three who come first to mind were all scholars as well as poets: Rājāśekhara himself composed one play wholly in Prakrit (it is the only such play, and doubtless an experiment), all the rest of his oeuvre being in Sanskrit; Viśvanātha (first half of the fourteenth century), a literary theorist, tells us he wrote one Prakrit poem besides his Sanskrit works; and Ānandavardhana, in addition to a courtly epic in Sanskrit, wrote a text in Prakrit “for the education of poets,” most likely a textbook on aesthetic suggestion that naturally would use the language in which this style had first manifested itself in

62. *Kāvyaṁimāṁsā* pp. 50–51.

63. That the former are uppermost in the author’s mind is shown by the fact that these transregional languages are microcosmically configured in the literary assembly of the ideal king (pp. 54–55). In his play *Bālavāṁyaṇa* 1.11 it is obvious that when Rājāśekhara describes himself as “expert in all languages” he means the three plus Paishachi.

South Asian literature.⁶⁴ Aside from such scholar-poets, writers composing works in more than one primary literary language were rarities. Muñja, king of the Paramāras and Bhoja's uncle (d. c. 996), appears to be the only Sanskrit poet who produced a serious corpus of verse in Apabhramsha as well as Sanskrit (both only fragmentarily preserved); the stray Apabhramsha verse attributed to this or that Sanskrit poet tells us little. Writers we know only as Prakrit poets have Sanskrit verses ascribed to them in anthologies, but such ascriptions are unverifiable; and not a single such poet is elsewhere associated with a Sanskrit work. The tendency we find in the cosmopolitan languages holds true for poets composing in regional languages as well. The tenth-century Kannada writers Ponna and Ranna, for example, may have called themselves "emperor poet in both languages," but they clearly derived this title from the occasional Sanskrit verse included in their Kannada works. Those few cases of primary text production in both Sanskrit and a vernacular for which we have the evidence of extant texts are wholly exceptional.⁶⁵

It is difficult not to conclude from all this that aside from dramatic mimesis and the occasional pedagogical demonstration or tour de force, multilinguality has a purely imaginary status in Sanskrit literary culture. In actual fact, a writer was a Sanskrit writer or a Prakrit writer or an Apabhramsha writer or—at a later date, and with very different cultural-political resonances—a vernacular writer. The mid-eleventh-century Kashmirian Kṣemendra is instructive here. He advises the aspiring poet of talent to "listen to the songs and lyrics and *rasa*-laden poems in local languages . . . to go to popular gatherings and learn local languages," but he seems not to have taken his own

64. In the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, Viśvanātha mentions his (lost) Prakrit *kāvya Kuvalayāśvacarita* (Life of Kuvalayāśva) in the *vṛtti* on 6.326; his Sanskrit *Rāghavavilāsa* in the *vṛtti* on 6.324. On Ānandavardhana's Prakrit *Viśamabāṇalīlā*, in addition to his Sanskrit *Arjunacarita*, see Pischel 1965: 12, and Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990: 10–11.

65. The exceptions to the rule of Sanskrit monolinguality include Vedāntadeśika (fourteenth century) in Tamil (and very occasionally, for the demonstration effect, in Prakrit); Śrīnātha (fifteenth century) in Telugu; and Vidyapati (fifteenth century) in Maithili. In *Vikramāṅkadēvacarita* 18.65, King Harṣa of Kashmir (fl. 1075) is credited with *sarvabhāṣākavitvam*, "literary skill in all languages," but if this means the ability to *produce* literature in all languages no evidence is available to support it. On Muñja see Bhayani 1993: 262–66. Ānandavardhana, in describing how the use of different languages multiplies the possibilities of meaning, cites a verse of his own written (possibly ad hoc) in what his commentator calls "Sindhi" (*Dhvan-yāloka* p. 544). The Sanskrit verse 723 in *Subhāṣitaratnakośa* is attributed to Pravarasena, elsewhere to Bilhana or to one Kaṅka; eleven poems have come down under the name of Vāk-patirāja. Viśvanātha says he wrote a *praśastiratnāvalī* (praise poem of a notable featuring a string of titles) in sixteen languages (cf. *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 6.337), and many writers boast of their mastery of the six or even the canonical eighteen languages. When such claims are not simply expressions of scholarly (and not creative) mastery or mere bragging, they represent limited experiments.

advice. A large portion of his literary corpus has been preserved, and there is not a scrap of anything but Sanskrit.⁶⁶

If the explanation of multilinguality does not hold and premodern Indian writers did in fact actively make a choice—from among transregional and not natural languages, and with the genre constraints on language only as a consequence of choosing—we are back to searching for the grounds of the choice. Here most scholars would resort to the second assumption mentioned: that affiliation to religious community underwrote the choices that were made. Yet this is entirely unhistorical with respect to early literary culture. The force of the religious explanation derives, on the one hand, from what are interpreted as ancient and ever-valid injunctions by the founders of non-Vedic religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism, to propagate their tenets in non-Sanskrit or even local language, and on the other, from the widespread modern assumption of an exclusive and exclusionary concomitance between Brahmanism and Sanskrit. Both views are false.

As often, what was done in practice is more instructive than what is claimed in texts, and in practice none of this logic obtains. If early Buddhism was hostile to Sanskrit, by the first or second century of the common era a complete canon of Buddhist scripture in Sanskrit was in existence, and the creativity in Sanskrit of Buddhist poets is massively in evidence. We possess or know of major works from at least a half-dozen masters by 600 C.E.⁶⁷ This literary production has little, in some cases nothing, to do with the religious identity or beliefs of the writers. This is fully demonstrated by the poetry of Dharmakīrti (c. 650), the literary scholarship of Ratnaśrījñāna (900) or Dharmadāsa (1000?), the metrical studies of Jñānanaśrīmitra (1000), or the anthological work of Vidyākara (1100). Aside from the occasional Buddhist theme or Buddhist deity hymned in the prelude of a work, there is hardly anything we can point to as constituting a Buddhist literary aesthetic. Not only did Buddhism not stop Buddhists from writing Sanskrit literature, but when they did write, their behavior was not recognizably Buddhist. The Jains, for their part, may have composed their early scriptures in a form of Prakrit, but they eventually adopted Sanskrit as well, among other languages. In Karnataka, for example, in the ninth century they turned decisively to Sanskrit for the production of their great poetic histories with the *Adipurāna* of Jinasena II. Other Jain poets produced less specifically sectarian poetry in Sanskrit, such as the monumental mixed prose-verse narrative of Somadevasūri, the *Yaśastilakacampū* (The *campū* of Prince Yaśastilaka, 959). At the same time they wrote dramatically new work in Kannada (Pampa's courtly epics of the mid-ninth century)

66. *Kavikaṇṭhābharāṇa* 1.17, 2.11, pp. 65, 69 (“poems in local languages,” *deśabhāṣākāvya*; “lyrics,” *gāthā*).

67. These include Aśvaghōṣa, Mātṛceṭa, Kumāralāta, Haribhaṭṭa, Candragomin (or whoever wrote the play *Lokānanda*), Dignāga, and Āryaśūra. See also Hahn 1993.

and Apabhramsha (Puṣpadanta's *Mahāpurāṇa* [Great *purāṇa*] of 970). None of the important meanings of such literary-language experimentation can be captured through an explanation based on religious identity. On the contrary, literature, as Bhoja put it memorably, is nonsectarian.⁶⁸

Attention to the historical record helps us unthink the supposed concomitance of Brahmanism and Sanskrit as effectively as it does that between non-Brahmanism and non-Sanskrit.⁶⁹ In the archaic period Brahmanism eschewed the use of Sanskrit in the nonliturgical realm, and it was within the political context of new ruler lineages from West and Central Asia that Sanskrit first came to be used for public written forms of royal eulogy, and possibly for literature itself. Staunchly Brahmanical lineages to the south such as the Sātavāhanas (c. 100 B.C.E.–250 C.E.) held to the old ways and supported no literary production whatever in Sanskrit. It is perhaps within such a context, where there obtained a pronounced cultural sensitivity about the very different discursive domains of Prakrit and Sanskrit, that we may come to understand something about the creation of the earliest extant Prakrit poetry. The great Maharashtra Prakrit anthology, *Gāhakośo* (Treasury of lyrics; also known as *Gāhāsattasāi*, The seven hundred lyrics), is a compendium of the sophisticated culture—a non-Sanskritic but largely *vaidika* culture—of the kings and poets of the Sātavāhana court. It is composed in an idiom imitative of rural life (bordering in fact on a secondary, mimetic function of the language) for an audience at once urban and urbane, as the seventh-century poet Bāṇa clearly understood when he spoke of the collection as cultured (*agrāmya*) despite its rustic (*grāmya*) content.⁷⁰ Sarvasena's *Harivijaya* (Viṣṇu's conquest) and Pravarasena's *Rāmāyana* narrative *Setubandha* register the continuing commitment to the realm of Prakrit on the part of the Sātavāhana successor rulers—Vaiṣṇava rulers—of the northern Deccan.⁷¹

That Prakrit poetry continued to be composed by writers in the *vaidika* tradition (or at least writers who were neither Buddhist nor Jain) long after this date seems to represent more than anything else an aesthetic choice

68. *sāhityasya sarvaṣāradatvāt, Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 398 (cf. Ratneśvara on *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇālāṅkāra* 3.3).

69. To those outside the Sanskrit cultural order, however, these distinctions might be blurred and all learned discourse in Sanskrit might be thought of as Brahmanical; thus, it seems, was the case for Amīr Khusrau (d. 1325), for whom Sanskrit was squarely identified with the Brahmins (see Alam, chapter 2, this volume).

70. *Harṣacarita* v. 13. The point is argued in Tieken 1995.

71. The Vākāṭaka dynasty, to which these kings belonged, ruled c. 250–500. On Sarvasena (fourth or early fifth century) see Kulkarni 1991. A long tradition of misidentifying Pravarasena (actually Pravarasena II of the Vākāṭaka line, r. c. 400–410) with a Kashmiri king of that name began with Kalhaṇa (*Rājatarāṅgiṇī* 3.354) and has oddly been continued by Kosambi in *Subhāṣitaratnakośa*, p. lxxxv, and Lienhard 1984: 234–35. It is corrected first, I believe, in the editor's note in *Kāvyaṁimānsā* p. 217; cf. also Mirashi 1963: lvi.

shaped by the character of the language itself, its earliest literary uses, and its particular modes of expression—a choice perhaps tinged with nostalgia for a vanished age of imagined simplicity and naturalness. This last factor may be sensed at the beginning of Kōuhala's beautiful and influential Maharashtra romance, *Lilāvai* (c. 800), a work that breathes in every verse mastery of the most sophisticated Sanskrit literary culture. When the author's mistress asks him for a tale, he responds, "Ah, my love, you will make me look ridiculous for my lack of learning in the arts of language. Far from telling a great tale, I should in fact keep silent." To this the mistress replies, "Any words that clearly communicate meaning are good; what care we for rules? So tell me a tale in Prakrit, which simple women love to hear—but not with too many localisms, so that it's easy to understand." Throughout this exchange, the artifice of artlessness is hard to miss, as is the massive learning required to appear simple.⁷² Other aesthetic values inform Vākpatirāja's historical biography of Yaśovarman of Kānyakubja (c. 725), the *Gauḍavaho*. "From time immemorial," the poet explains, "it has been in Prakrit, and in that language alone, that one could combine new content and mellow form. . . . All words enter into Prakrit and emerge out of it, as all waters enter and emerge from the sea." At the same time, he seems to have been aware that the language was, for his milieu, culturally residual: many men, he says with a certain defiance mixed with melancholy, "no longer understand [Prakrit's] different virtues; great poets [in Prakrit] should just scorn or mock or pity them, but feel no pain themselves."⁷³

Whatever the causes of the desuetude of Prakrit, it is a fact that *vaidika* as well as Jain and, indeed, nonreligious cultures could and did express themselves effectively in the language. This is equally true, if less well known, of Apabhramsha. Most of the texts in this language for the first half-millennium of its literary existence (up to 1000 or so) have been lost, but we know from citations in later works that to write in Apabhramsha implied no tie whatever to any particular religious community. It was used by all kinds of poets: Brahmanical (for instance, Caturmukha and Govinda, pre-ninth century), tantric

72. *Lilāvai* vv. 38, 40–41 ("arts of language," *saddasatha*; "what care we for rules," *kim lakṣhanen amha*; "localism," *desi*). The choice of language here no doubt is also partly related to the fact that the *Lilāvai* concerns the romantic history of King Hala Sātavāhana and Lilāvati, princess of Siṃhaladvīpa.

73. *Gauḍavaho* vv. 92–93, 95; see Suru's note on v. 95 (contrast Bodewitz and van Daalen 1998: 44). The faulty transmission of the language in late-medieval manuscripts of dramas show how alien it had become to the average reader; cf. Coulson 1989: xli ff., though as observed in note 78 below, scholars continued to study the language for centuries. The two beautifully inscribed if perhaps pedestrian Prakrit poems from Bhoja's court, both *Avanikūrmāsataka*, may have had more to do with the pedagogical environment of the school where they were installed than with any other literary purpose (EI 8: 241–60; for other grand and large inscribed Prakrit texts see *Archaeological Survey of India, 1934–35*, Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1937, p. 60).

Buddhist (such as Kānha and Saraha, tenth century, eastern India), and Muslim (Abdul Rahman, fourteenth century, western India).⁷⁴ And it implied no tie to religious expression, either. Many of the early citations are in fact erotic stanzas of a sort familiar from the Prakrit tradition. And they strive to create a similar rural ambience while displaying full mastery of Sanskrit poetics. We find countless verses like the following:

What kind of poison vine is this that grows in the herders' camp,
which can make a strong man die if it isn't wrapped around his neck?

The god of love invented the strangest arrow in the world,
one that can kill you if it strikes—and kill you if it doesn't.

He didn't break the hedge or make a sound,
I didn't see him at the door.
I've no idea, mother, how my lover
could enter so quickly into my heart.⁷⁵

The elegant simplicity of such poetry is immediately recognizable to readers at home in the Prakrit tradition. But Apabhramsha could also be used in a very different voice:

Śrāvaṇa was in one eye, Bhādrapāda in the other,
Māgha in her pallet bed spread upon the ground;
in her cheek Autumn, in her limbs Summer,
Mārgaśīrṣṇ in the sesame field of her joy;
and on the simple girl's lotus-pond face
deep Winter took up position.⁷⁶

74. For recent surveys see Vyas 1984 and Bhayani 1989b; Sarma 1965 provides a useful review of scholarship on Apabhramsha in Hindi and Gujarati. On Caturmukha, author of a courtly epic on the churning of the ocean of immortality, see Bhayani 1958; Govinda's poem on the life of Kṛṣṇa is cited in the *Svayambhūchandā* (Bhayani 1993: 224). A *Karṇāparākrama* in Apabhramsha is mentioned in the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*.

75. All three verses are from the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (which cites nearly seventy, though this number pales in comparison to its more than 1650 Prakrit verses), p. 421 (Bhayani 1989a: 8; the paradox explicit in the verse is resolved by the realization that the poet is talking about a girl, further suggested by the feminine of the Apabhramsha word for "necklace"); p. 478 (Bhayani 1989a: 12); p. 422 (Bhayani 1989a: 9). Similar materials are preserved in the third section of Hemacandra's grammar, including three of the four verses treated here, and in his *Chandonuśāsana* (cf. Alsdorf 1937: 73–110; Vyas 1982). A lovely extended poem called a *carcarī* and composed in Apabhramsha (though called simply "Prakrit") is given in the mid-twelfth-century royal encyclopedia *Mānasollāsa*: It is a verse about Holi, meant "to be sung at the spring festival in the Hindolaka *rāga*" (see *Mānasollāsa* vol. 3, p. 33, vv. 303–303). Master 1949–1951: 412 discusses an Apabhramsha *dohā* from *Kuvalayamālā* that he considers the "earliest recorded" example.

76. *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* p. 376 (Bhayani 1989a: 7). Bhoja understands Māgha as Mādhava, spring, which leads him to interpret its metonymy as the fresh plants associated with spring that are meant to cool down the woman's body. Compare the English madrigal: "April is in my mistress'

Judging from the commentary on this poem, this is a text taken to embody the most courtly of poetic techniques. Besides illustrating the genre known as “miscellany” by showing the simultaneous presence of all the seasons in the lovelorn woman, the verse displays all six types of verbal powers (from direct denotation to metonymy-mediated-by-metonymy) that, as the commentator says, “one can find in the works of the greatest poets.”⁷⁷

All this said, there is also no question that there was a growing trend—not easy to date but beginning in the early second millennium—toward a reduction in language options. It seems to have become virtually impossible for non-Jain authors to write in Apabhramsha after about 1100; Brahmanical works after Bhoja’s time and non-Jain works after the *Samdeśarāsaka* may not exist at all. The same largely holds true of Prakrit, which was more or less completely abandoned, again to the Jains—though occasional literary experiments, and philological interest, continued outside the Jain world at least up to the mid-eighteenth century.⁷⁸ For reasons that remain unclear but seem present in the development of the regional literary cultures, too, there were forces at work in the later medieval period that gradually narrowed the spectrum of choices available for literary expression for everyone and at the same

face, and July in her eye hath place, and in her bosom lies September. But in her heart there lies a cold December.” (I thank Carolyn Bond for this reference.)

77. *Sarasvatikanthābharaṇālikāra* p. 135 ff., which presupposes the kind of discussion introducing the citation in *Śyngāraprakāśa* chapter 7 (“miscellany”: *prakīrṇaghatanā*). To give the flavor of this elaborate analysis: The six substantival locatives and “simple girl” are all (1) direct denotations, the last two (“sesame field of her joy,” “lotus-pond face”) are used (2) *metaphorically* (via the shared qualities of attractiveness [as a place where girls go to meet their lovers] and beauty, respectively). The four month-names (Śrāvaṇa, Bhādrapāda, Māgha, Mārgaśīrāḥ) are used (3) *metonymically* (referring to the drizzle, downpours, cold, and frost, respectively, associated with them [Mārgaśīrāḥ is also the season when sesame fields, her place for secret rendezvous, are mown]), and although directly denoted, the seasons, since they cannot be simultaneously present, are communicated not by the denotation that expresses reals (*tathābhūtārtha*) but by (4) *denotation that expresses unreals* (*tadbhāvāpatti*, cf. *Śyngāraprakāśa* p. 354 ff.). The verb “has taken up residence” is used in (5) a *transferred sense*, which leads us toward a (6) *metonymy mediated by metonymy* (*lakṣaṇalakṣita*). “To take up position” in its primary sense is used of kings and their armies; used in a transferred sense with reference to a season, the verb implies the presence of all the season’s accoutrements, its effectivity, power, etc., and thereby the powerful consequences of its action mentioned in the verse. Furthermore, each season or month, by metonymically expressing the woman’s powerful pain of separation from her lover, at the same time metonymically expresses her powerful love for him. The metonymical use of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādrapāda—their drizzle and showers—point metonymically toward the girl’s constant crying and, through yet a further metonymy, to her yearning for reunion with her lover. (A Sanskrit version of this poem is cited by the *Balāpriya* commentary in *Dhvanyāloka* p. 149.)

78. See Upadhye in *Lilāvai* 1966: 36 on Rāma Pānīvāda of Kerala. Serious Brahmanical scholarship on Prakrit is demonstrated by the important grammars produced in seventeenth-century Bengal (Mārkaṇḍeya and Rāmaśarma), and by the learned commentary on the *Rāvaṇavaho* composed, again from Bengal, at the end of the seventeenth century (*Rāvaṇavaho* 1959: xi ff.).

time made those choices seem all the more inevitable. Indeed, it was at this time that Sanskrit began to develop a concomitance with Brahmanism far more invariable than it had had for the previous thousand years.

Prior to this period, however—and thus for most of the history of Sanskrit literary culture—writers chose to be Sanskrit writers from a range of language options, and since multilinguality was not one of these, they had to choose. Choice was determined in part by genre, in part by aesthetic considerations, especially social register (the degree of rusticity or sophistication implied by the theme). Yet another condition, as yet unmentioned and more elusive, concerns the sphere of circulation. One writes to say something in particular and to a particular audience, and chooses a language appropriate for both message and reader. To choose to write in Sanskrit, even from the earliest period, was to choose a cosmopolitan readership of truly vast proportions. I say more about the circulatory space of Sanskrit literature later, but in the context of the question of language choice it is worth observing that it extended far beyond the subcontinent, into Central Asia and as far as the islands of Southeast Asia. Neither Prakrit nor Apabhramsha, to say nothing of regional-language literature, commanded anything remotely comparable to this kind of audience.⁷⁹ Only a Sanskrit poet could make the boast Bilhana makes about his work: “There is no village or country, no capital city or forest region, no pleasure garden or school where learned and ignorant, young and old, male and female do not read my poems and shiver with pleasure.”⁸⁰

Nor was this an empty boast. Consider just one case from the early period of Buddhist Sanskrit poetry. We no doubt find a range of languages used for the inscription of the Buddha’s word (or what could be taken for the Buddha’s word) and for monastic rules of discipline. None of this local-language material—Gandhari, for example—circulated very far beyond the limits of its vernacular world. The works of the first great Buddhist Sanskrit poets, however, such as Aśvaghōṣa (second century) and Mātṛceṭa (not later than 300), were read not only in northern India but in much of Central Asia. In Qizil and Sorčuq (in today’s Xinjiang region of China), manuscript fragments have been found bearing portions of Aśvaghōṣa’s dramas and his two courtly epics, *Saundarananda* (The story of handsome Nanda) and *Buddhacarita*

79. Neither appears to be found later in Central Asian manuscripts or is preserved in any Southeast Asian literary tradition. Pravarasena is mentioned once in an inscription of Yaśovarman of Khmer country (c. 900) (Majumdar 1974: 16), though I doubt this is anything more than second-hand name-dropping. Brajbhasha enjoyed a transregional status in north India during the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries (see McGregor, chapter 16, this volume), at the end of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan epoch, and attracted writers such as Keśavdās who in an earlier epoch would have composed in Sanskrit.

80. *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 18.89 (“country,” *janapada*).

(Deeds of the Buddha). Mātṛceṭa's poetic hymns circulated even more widely, to the northern branches of the Silk Road, where the surviving fragments of his texts outnumber all others. A late-seventh-century account of his work by a Chinese pilgrim in India suggests the possibilities for near-universal dissemination that a great Sanskrit poem could have:

In India numerous hymns of praise to be sung at worship have been most carefully handed down, for every talented man of letters has praised in verse whatever person he deemed most worthy of worship. Such a man was the venerable Mātṛceṭa, who, by his great literary talent and virtues, excelled all learned men of his age. . . . [His] charming compositions are equal in beauty to the heavenly flowers, and the high principles which they contain rival in dignity the lofty peaks of a mountain. . . . Through-out India everyone who becomes a monk is taught Mātṛceṭa's two hymns.⁸¹

This range of circulation was made possible not so much by the religious universalism of Buddhism as by the literary universalism of Sanskrit and the aesthetic power—beauty “equal . . . to the heavenly flowers”—that it could evince. This at least is the inference suggested by the spread of nondenominational and nonreligious Sanskrit poetry in Southeast Asia, where by the ninth or tenth century at the latest, literati in Khmer country were studying masterpieces such as the *Raghuvamśa* (Dynasty of Raghu) of Kālidāsa, the *Harṣacarita* of the early-seventh-century prose master Bāṇa, and the *Sūryaśataka* (Hundred verses to the sun) of the latter's contemporary, Mayūra.⁸²

Accordingly, when poets chose to write in the Sanskrit language, they were choosing, along with a certain aesthetic, a certain readership—in this case a cosmopolitan, virtually global readership. And they did this, we may accordingly infer, because they had something cosmopolitan, something global, to say.

THE TIMES OF SANSKRIT LITERARY CULTURE

Problems similar to those encountered in thinking about the literary and what are taken to be its defining features beset the question of historicity. We find a tension between, on the one hand, the need to understand how readers and writers of Sanskrit fashioned and thought of their literary culture and, on the other hand, contemporary theoretical positions arguing that any text can be literature depending on what one wants to do with it (reasonable po-

81. I-tsing, who also translated Mātṛceṭa's *Śatapañcāśatikastotra* into Chinese; see Shackleton Bailey 1951: 4.

82. Clear allusions to *Raghuvamśa* are found in the Pre-Rup Inscription of the mid-tenth century (*Inscriptions du Camboge*, vol. 1, p. 73 ff., vv. 164, 194, etc.). Bhāravi and Mayūra, among other poets, are elsewhere named (cf. Majumdar 1974: 16).

sitions, given the unruliness of texts in the face of literary rules). A similar tension between the views from inside and outside appears as we try to grasp what Sanskrit writers did and did not understand about their existence in literary time. On the one hand, the visions of the past that Sanskrit poets themselves had, and that constitute what history meant to those who made it, have a first-order significance for us. On the other hand, this tradition offers no clear conception of literary change, and no way of describing what became of Sanskrit literary culture over time. That a literary community perceived nothing of its own development may tell us some important truth, but it cannot very well be the entire truth. Inevitably, therefore, we sometimes need to step outside a tradition to see what cannot be seen from within.

The history we are concerned with here is not the raw chronological sequence of authors and texts. The many histories of Sanskrit literature available make this as unnecessary as it is conceptually uninteresting. It is more purposeful to press on the historical pressure points of literary culture in history: when Sanskrit literature begins and when it ends—or whether it does neither, and what is assumed even in asking such questions. Understanding what it meant for *kāvya* to begin (if it began) will give us some sense of what it is. The process by which it died (if it died) will give us some sense of what had been necessary to keep it alive.

Sanskrit Literature Begins

A view from within of the history of Sanskrit literary culture is made possible by the unexpected presence of what we might term the ethnohistorical habit of Sanskrit writers. I call it unexpected in part because scholarship has ignored it, but in part because of the concern Sanskrit literature so often evinces in trying to escape time no less than space.

Around the seventh century the convention was invented (and quickly adopted everywhere) of prefacing a literary work with a eulogy of poets past (*kaviṣṭrasaṃsā*). Bāṇa, author of the *Harṣacarita* (c. 640), the first Sanskrit literary biography that takes a contemporary as its subject, seems to have been the first to use it. This is not to say that earlier writers never refer or allude to predecessors. In a well-known passage in the prologue to Kālidāsa's drama *Mālavikā and Agnimitra*, an actor complains to the director, "How can you ignore the work of the great poets—men like Dhāvaka, Saumilla, Kaviratna—and present the work of a contemporary poet like Kālidāsa?" to which the director famously replies, "Not every work of literature is good just because it is old, or bad just because it is new."⁸³ This exchange contains several fea-

83. *Mālavikāgnimitra* 1.2. Variants give Bhāsa for Dhāvaka and Kaviputra for Kaviratna. Somila (*sic*) is the author of the *Śūdrakathā*, which is cited in Bhoja's *Śṅgāraprakāśa*. Cf. also

tures of the eulogy mode to come. For one thing, it implies a canon of literature in which the author seeks a place, affiliating himself to the lineage of his predecessors by the very act of naming them. For another, it suggests that a precondition for entering the canon is innovation—making literature that makes some kind of history. In the more formal eulogies what constitutes this history, for different writers at different times, takes on a more organized structure.

The temporality of the eulogies is only one of their intriguing features. In addition, a number of the more general propositions about Sanskrit literary culture argued earlier in the chapter find corroboration, and some new insights emerge about communities of readers and standards of taste.⁸⁴ A literary sphere at once multilingual and restricted is projected: Only the three cosmopolitan languages are ever mentioned (all three, incidentally, share the praise-poem convention), never Tamil, Marathi, or any other regional language, and no writer is ever shown to be master of more than one language.⁸⁵ The linguistic diversity that poets saw as making up their unified sphere is expressed in terms of genre diversity. Bāṇa's praise-poems in fact offer a survey of the main varieties of literature by mentioning their foremost representatives or innovators: the tale (*kathā*) in Sanskrit prose (or Prakrit or Apabhramsha verse) in the Sanskrit *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu (c. 600); the prose biography (*ākhyāyikā*) in the lost Prakrit work of Āḍhyarāja; the Sanskrit courtly epic (*mahākāvya*) in Kālidāsa, and Prakrit courtly epic (*skandhaka*) in Pravarasena; the Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Apabhramsha lyric or anthology of lyrics (*muktaka* and *kośa*) in the Prakrit collection of Sātavāhana; the drama (*nāṭaka*) in Bhāsa (300?).⁸⁶ The boundaries of *kāvya* are everywhere affirmed; other forms, such as ancient lore (*purāṇa*), are excluded.⁸⁷ Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* is included, however—further evidence that its place in textual taxonomies was long in tension with the history of its reception, at least among working poets.

Sūktimuktāvālī of Jalhana, p. 43, v. 49, where in a verse attributed to Rājasekhara, "Rāmila and Somila" are mentioned as joint authors of the *Śūdrīkakathā* (*sic*) (noted in Raghavan 1978: 806).

84. The account that follows is based on five *kaviṃśaṃsā*: Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* (Kanauj, c. 640); Daṇḍin's *Avantisundarikathā* (Kāñcīpuram, c. 675); Uddyotanasūri's *Kuvalayamālā* (Jalor, 779); Dhanapāla's *Tilakamañjarī* (Dhārā, c. 1020); Someśvara's *Kīrtikaumudī* (Anhilapātana, c. 1250). For further detail see Pollock 1995c.

85. Apabhramsha eulogies of poets are found from the beginning of the extant tradition, that is, from Svayambhū (c. 900), cf. Bhayani 1993: 205. Vernacular language eulogies unsurprisingly name cosmopolitan models: The *Sāhasbhīmavijaya* of Ranna (982), for example, celebrates both Kannada and Sanskrit poets (1.8–9).

86. The lost work of Hariścandra, named a *gadyabandha*, or prose text, by Bāṇa, may have been the mixed prose-verse composition called the *campū*, the one major genre missing from Bāṇa's list.

87. An exception is the Jain author Jināsena II, who in his *Ādīpurāṇa* (837) eulogizes a number of writers of genres other than *kāvya*, such as Siddhasena, who is praised as a logician (vv. 42–55).

A distinct, if unanticipated, division of literary communities manifests when we look at these eulogies across their whole history. Buddhist poets seem to never be mentioned, despite their decisive contribution to the development of Sanskrit courtly epic (Aśvaghoṣa), drama (Kumāralāta), verse-prose composition (Āryaśūra), and religious lyric (Mātṛceta).⁸⁸ Only Jain poets, by and large, include praise of Jain poets. This kind of community compartmentalization needs more analysis, but some things are already clear. For example, whereas Jains alone read certain kinds of Jain literature (their version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* found no resonance whatever outside their own traditions), many of them—as Hemacandra or Jinasena demonstrate dramatically—were eager to read anything.⁸⁹

The poems also offer some insight into the standards of literary judgment, sometimes exasperatingly vague standards to be sure, that were used by writers themselves. Command and charm of language, power of description, formal mastery, and sometimes emotional impact, are emphasized, but rarely moral discernment and never mastery of the elements that make up the practical criticism of today, such as plot, characterization, or voice (this distribution of concerns was shared, generally speaking, by Sanskrit commentators, too). Obviously, the praise of past writers also creates a literary canon by representing the representative and providing accounts of what counts in literary history. The criteria of selection at work are, again, unclear, and contradiction between the praise-poems and pragmatic canonization—that effected through quotation in literary treatises, for example, or anthologization—is not unknown. Astonishingly absent from the praise-poems are two names associated with the most powerful lyric poetry in India: Amaru and Bhartṛhari.⁹⁰ At the same time a self-canonization is at work, for through his eulogies a poet is affiliating himself to a cultural lineage and asserting his place within it. As such, these verses reveal not so much inert traditions handed down from the past as orders of significance shaped in the interest of each particular present.

88. Citations of Buddhist literary texts in works on literary theory (aside from the commentary on Daṇḍin by the Buddhist Ratnaśrījñāna) are very rare. Ānandavardhana quotes two poems of Dharmakīrti, whom he names (*Dhvanyāloka* pp. 487–90), and Rājaśekhara anonymously cites Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* 8.25 (*Kāvyaṁimāṁsā* p. 18). I find no more.

89. Jinasena's *Pārśvanāthābhyudaya* famously appropriates Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*. Hemacandra wrote a *Kāvyaṅuśāsana* that sought to summarize the whole prior history of poetics (a text profoundly indebted to Bhoja). Yet in the *kaviprasaṅgā* of Jinasena's *Ādīpurāṇa* only Jain poets and scholars are mentioned. One exception to community compartmentalization is the praise-poem of the Brahman Someśvara, though this was composed in thirteenth-century Gujarat in a literary world dominated by Jains.

90. Neither is mentioned even in the eulogies assembled in anthologies. The sole exception I find is a verse on Amaru by Arjunavarmadeva, his thirteenth-century commentator (*Sūktimuktāvalī* p. 48, v. 101).

The temporality of the eulogies is perhaps their most elusive quality, except in point of chronology. Readers familiar with the rudiments of Sanskrit literary history will note with wonderment that Someśvara in the thirteenth century can provide a reasonably accurate chronological survey of well over a thousand years of literary creation. And this was a chronological interest hardly peculiar to the Jain milieu in which that poet worked; it is shared with Daṇḍin, who lived six centuries earlier.⁹¹ Even where the chronology of the praise-poems may be awry, the interest in establishing a historically ordered ancestry remains undeniable. Chronological exactitude is not, of course, of equal concern to all Sanskrit ethnohistories. Some scholars have found more evidence for India's supposed deficiency in historical intelligence in a work like Ballālasena's late-sixteenth-century *Bhojaprabandha* (The story of Bhoja), where Kālidāsa (fourth century), Mayūra (650), Māgha (650), and Bhavabhūti (700) are placed together along with Jyotirīśvara Kaviśekhara (1475) at King Bhoja's court (1011–1055).⁹² But much testimony besides the praise-poems, not least the temporally punctilious inscriptional discourse, suggests that Ballālasena was not living in a timeless (let alone mindless) universe, but that he was imaginatively telescoping a whole literary tradition into an ideal place and time in order to examine the cultural economy of Sanskrit in what was considered its most perfected courtly embodiment.

In any case, the praise-poems make it clear that to see oneself connected to a cultural practice with a great past, and to know something of the temporal structure of that past, were important values for Sanskrit writers. In this, participants in the literary sphere may be thought to have differed little from their colleagues in other sectors of Sanskrit culture, where the authorizing function of lineage affiliation (*paramparā*) is everywhere in evidence. What this past might have meant to them as a process of change through time, however, is another matter altogether. The chronologies are merely catenated, with poets linked to poets in such a way that nothing historical separates Kālidāsa in the fourth century from Yaśovīra in the thirteenth; there is no narrative to tell of decline or progress, or to suggest the strangeness or difference of the past. All generations of Sanskrit poets were coeval; the past was never seen as different and never passed away.

Such coevality may in part be seen as a function of the specific nature of Sanskrit literary ideology. This generated and enforced a model of language,

91. Daṇḍin unquestionably meant to present his predecessors in chronological order. His list: Vyāsa, Vālmiki, Subandhu, *Bṛhatkathā*, Śūdraka, Bhāsa, Sarvasena, Kālidāsa, Nārāyaṇa, Mayūra, Bāṇa, Dāmodara (*Avantisundarī* vv. 2–22; cf. Mirashi CII 5: 29, 49). Someśvara's: Vālmiki, Vyāsa, Kālidāsa, Māgha, Bhāravi, Bāṇa, Dhanapāla, Bilhaṇa, Hemasūri, Nīlakaṇṭha, Prahlādana-deva, Bhoja, Muñja, Naracandra, Vijayasena, Subhata, Harihara, Yaśovīra (*Kīrtikaumudī* 1.7 ff.).

92. "Absurd," "utter lack of chronological sense," according to the translator (Gray 1950: 8); on the Jain *prabandha* literature cf. Sewell 1920 (who throws out the baby of historicity with the bath water of imprecision).

form, and, often, content that was meant to be largely abstracted, isolated, and insulated from the world of historical change—this despite the ever-deeper historicity that historical change was to bring about (as was the case in Vijayanagara-era texts). In this we should perceive not failure but a core dimension of Sanskrit’s cultural victory: In part it was thanks to Sanskrit’s brilliant apparatus of grammar, prosody, and poetics, providing stability no less than dignity, that it effectively did escape time. But in part, the coevality of the praise-poems was owing to the very history of Sanskrit cultivation. The generations of Sanskrit poets could be thought of as simultaneous because in one important sense they were. They continued to be read and copied, discussed and debated, and to provide important models of artistic fashioning for uninterrupted centuries. However scholars might wish to periodize Sanskrit literary culture, it is crucial to bear in mind such local procedures, by which, as part of its fundamental self-understanding, the culture sought to resist all periodization.

That said, the praise-poems all concur in declaring that Sanskrit literary culture began. No one regards the tradition of literature to be without origin, like the Veda, or attempts to locate an origin in God, the way many Sanskrit knowledge-systems envision their textual history as a series of abridgements of a Perfect Text originating with Śiva, Brahmā, the Sun, or other deity. The praise-poems are unanimous in their conviction that literature had a beginning and that it began with Vālmīki. In this they agree with the widespread tradition, far older than the oldest eulogy, that holds the *Rāmāyaṇa* to be the first poem (*ādikāvya*). “Vālmīki created the first verse-poem,” proclaimed the Buddhist poet Aśvaghōṣa in the second century, when he himself was in the process of creating what may have been the first courtly epic, one heavily influenced by Vālmīki.⁹³ In fact, the *Rāmāyaṇa* thematizes its own innovation at its start, in the remarkable metapoem that represents the sage as inventing something unprecedented. Yet what we are to make of this universal conviction is not immediately apparent. What did Vālmīki actually do that was new?

When Aśvaghōṣa attributes to Vālmīki the creation of the first verse-poem (*padya*), he cannot simply mean versified language. Whatever the Veda’s place in textual typologies, the fact that it consists of metrical texts (long antedating Vālmīki) was denied by no one. Indeed, its commonest name is *chandas*, “the Verse” (as another well-known collection in the West came to be called “the Book”). The particular verse-form that constitutes Vālmīki’s primal poetic utterance, the eight-syllable quatrain (*anuṣṭubh*, *śloka*), is used in a large num-

93. *Buddhacarita* 1.43. Aśvaghōṣa himself used Vālmīki’s narrative to structure his account of the life of the Buddha—and perhaps meant to link his own innovation to the first poet’s in the same way as he linked his hero Siddhārtha to the Rāghava dynasty in his second epic (*Saundarananda* 1.21). See Pollock 1986: 28.

ber of versified Vedic texts. What Āsvaghōṣa meant by *padya* is undoubtedly versified *kāvya*, as *gadya* signifies unversified *kāvya* and not simply prose (which in fact is also attested from the early Vedic period). But this still does not tell us what Vālmiki invented in inventing versified *kāvya*, or in other words, what is “first” about the first poem.

There are at least three ways of examining this question, or any other question in the history of a literary culture. We can listen (1) to the text itself, or (2) to the tradition of listening to the text, or (3) to whatever we can hear in the world outside the text and the tradition. When we do the second and try to reconstruct the tradition of the interpretation of Vālmiki’s primevality, it is puzzling to discover how thin it actually is. Everyone in South Asia knows that Vālmiki was the first poet, but no one tells us why. After Āsvaghōṣa’s attribution we find only passing allusions. Kālidāsa refers to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as Vālmiki’s “personal discovery” (*upajñā*) in the same way that grammar is Pāṇini’s; Bhavabhūti in the early eighth century mentions Vālmiki’s formal innovation, as does Rājaśekhara in the early tenth.⁹⁴ But there is nothing more, not even among the phalanx of commentators (perhaps a dozen over the five-hundred-year period beginning around 1000) who cherished and pondered the significance of every syllable of the text. That Vālmiki effected a break in literary-cultural history seems somehow an assumption that derives its power not from any corroborating tradition of analysis and argument but from the poem’s own assertion of primacy, and the manner in which it is made.⁹⁵

The structure and character of this assertion, contained in the metanarrative account in the first four chapters of Vālmiki’s work, add their own complications, and listening to the text in pursuit of some logic of events in the creation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* requires more than just hearing. “Vālmiki closely questioned Nārada,” the work begins, “and asked him, ‘Who in this present-day world is a man of qualities?’” The abrupt inquiry receives no justification and perhaps needs none, for the problem of moral will that is found at the origin of Sanskrit literature and that continues to shape much of its history is ever with us. Nārada, a kind of *deus ex machina* whose function, however, is to inaugurate action rather than conclude it, here responds to Vālmiki’s question with a synopsis of the principal action of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. It is as if the poet were receiving the legend of Rāma as it may have existed in

94. See *Raghuvamśa* 15.63 (and *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2.4.21), and *Uttararāmacarita* (beginning from 2.5). According to Rājaśekhara, Sarasvatī, “out of good will toward Vālmiki . . . secretly made over to him beautifully versified language” (*sacchandāmsi vacāmsi*) (*Kāvyaṁīmāmsā* p. 7).

95. According to a late commentator, although the authority of a text obviously cannot be established by the text’s own claims to authority, that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is based on the fact that it was composed by an absolutely reliable witness, the supreme sage Vālmiki (Mādhavayogin’s *Kataka*, vol. 1, p. 30). Presumably no further corroboration was required.

some unadorned, popular oral form (in much the same way, in fact, that Aśvaghōṣa was to take a documentary Middle-Indic version of the life of the Buddha and turn it into a courtly Sanskrit poem).

The critical moment in the narrative comes when, taking leave and musing over the tale Nārada has told, Vālmiki sees an act of violence at the river-side: a hunter shoots one of a mating pair of birds, and the poet in his pity (*soka*) bursts out with a curse that has the form of verse (*śloka*), the linguistic affinity here corroborating an ontological affinity in accordance with ancient belief. Astonished at his own spontaneous invention, the poet returns to his dwelling to find waiting for him Brahmā, the supreme deity of Sanskrit knowledge, with his four faces constantly reciting the four Vedas. Brahmā explains that Vālmiki has just created verse and has done so through the god's will. He commands him to compose in verse the full story of Rāma, both the public and private doings, and assures him that all he tells in his poem will be absolutely true. As Vālmiki begins to meditate, the whole of the story enters his consciousness; he becomes truly the omniscient narrator, and using his new formal skills he transforms the legend into *kāvya*. He teaches the entire poem, word for word, to two young ascetics, Kuśa and Lava, who are shown to memorize the whole of the text and chant it "just as they were taught it," and who perform the work in the presence of Rāma himself. What we are listening to or reading when we read or hear the *Rāmāyaṇa* is what Rāma himself once heard—and those who sang it to him were in fact his two lost sons. The truth of Rāma's moral vision, and the veracity of the text in which it is embodied, are certified by the protagonist himself and the sons who are his second self. The poem is not only "sweet," self-conscious in its rhetoric and aesthetic, but a "mimetically exact account," a perfect representation of what really happened.⁹⁶

The text itself, then, as well as the many later ethnohistorical accounts, affirms that Sanskrit literature had its beginning in Vālmiki's work. And this accords with the categories of later theory, which as we have seen radically differentiates *kāvya* from all earlier textuality (*Veda*, *purāṇa*, and the like). But to repeat: exactly what began with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, what was new and made it *kāvya* and nothing else, are questions that stubbornly persist, and it is no easy matter to provide historically sensible answers. At this point we may try our third approach and attempt to supplement the arguments of the text and the tradition with whatever else we can discover of literary reality.

While the claim to formal innovation at the most literal level of octosyllabic verse is clearly anachronistic, there is more formal complexity to the *Rāmāyaṇa* than this, and it may be in the range of its complex meters and other techniques of prosody and trope, less common in earlier forms of tex-

96. *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.4, especially vv. 12 and 16 (and, for the role of god's will in the creation of verse, see 2.30: *macchandād evā te brahman pravṛtṭeyaṃ sarasvatī*); cf. Pollock 1984: 82–83.

tuality, that a measure of its newness lies. Perhaps, however, it is somehow the fact that the vehicle for such formal features is Sanskrit itself, rather than some other form of Old or Middle Indo-Aryan. The text may be elusive here, but surely it intimates something significant by the authorizing presence of Brahmā, the very voice of Sanskrit. More subtly, the text hints that its newness resides not so much in form and linguistic medium but in its recording in metrical Sanskrit of something previously not thought worthy of registering in such a way. Unlike the Veda with its accounts of transcendent and mythic experience, it is the personal response to human experience that fundamentally marks the *Rāmāyaṇa* and all Sanskrit *kāvya*, even when the theme itself is transcendent and mythic. “I was overcome with pity”—the poet speaks in rare first person—“this issued forth from me; it must be poetry and nothing else.” It was to become a staple of later Sanskrit criticism that the literary work expresses the emotional subjectivity of the writer: only the poet who is himself a man of passion can create a poetic world of passion.⁹⁷ On this view, it is because the poet himself felt pity that there can exist the poetry of pity (*karuṇarasa*) traditionally held to lie at the core of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Perhaps it is this conception of experience and textuality that was viewed as unprecedented. Then again, what made the poem new could be the more mundane but decisive factor that it was a text committed to writing when this was still a relatively new skill in the subcontinent. Or, finally, perhaps *kāvya* began in the sense that, for the first time, the culture found one of its examples useful or important enough to preserve—or rather, the culture preserved it precisely because it was the sole example of its kind, a first poem without a second.

These issues are so hard to disentangle because they are in fact historically entangled. Innovations in form, genre, subject matter, language, medium, and mentality all combined to condition the emergence of Sanskrit *kāvya*. Two of these in particular, the use of the Sanskrit language as such for the production of *kāvya* and the widespread adoption of writing and its impact, merit closer if necessarily brief attention; for if we do not understand that Sanskrit itself, in a sense, no less than writing *began*, we cannot understand how Sanskrit literature itself could.⁹⁸

When discussing the word *saṃskṛta* and its primary meanings I alluded to the language’s ancient associations with Vedic liturgy and related practices of knowledge and ritual. That at some epoch Sanskrit emerged from the liturgical realm to which it had largely been restricted and became available for

97. So Ānandavardhana: *Śiṅgārī cet kaviḥ kāvye jātaṃ rasamayaṃ jagat* (*Dhvanyaloka* p. 498). For brief remarks on the expression theory of art and its fate in Sanskrit criticism, see Pollock 1998b.

98. A fuller consideration of the two questions, from which the following is compressed, is available in Pollock 1996 and forthcoming.

new cultural functions such as *kāvya* and the inscribed political praise-poem (*praśasti*) associated with *kāvya* is not in doubt. What remains disputed is when this happened, and under what conditions. Inscriptions and testimony from nonliterary texts, among other evidence, combine to suggest that the invention of *kāvya* was relatively late, not long before the beginning of the common era—that is to say, as many as eight centuries or more after the Sanskrit language in its archaic form was first attested on the subcontinent.

For the first four centuries of literacy in South Asia (beginning about 250 B.C.E.), Sanskrit was never used for inscriptions, whether for issuing a royal proclamation, glorifying martial deeds, commemorating a Vedic sacrifice, or granting land to Brahman communities. The language for public texts of this sort was Prakrit. Abruptly in the second century, and increasingly thereafter, Sanskrit came to be used for such public texts, including the quite remarkable *kāvya*-like poems in praise of kingly lineages. Nothing suggests that prior to this time there were any comparable inscriptional texts that have since been lost. What epigraphy establishes for us is not the latest date for the existence of literature in Sanskrit (as is usually assumed) but rather the earliest. It provides evidence not of a renaissance of Sanskrit culture after centuries of supposed Jain and Buddhist countercultural hegemony (another old and still common view) but of the invention of a new kind of Sanskrit culture altogether.

This conclusion is exactly what is suggested by the testimony of other realms of cultural activity. From among the vast library of early Sanskrit texts, no evidence compels belief in the existence of *kāvya* before the last centuries B.C.E., if that early. Our first actual citations from Sanskrit *kāvya* are found in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (Great commentary) on the grammar of Pāṇini. The materials he cites, if astonishingly thin for a work on the Sanskrit language some 1500 printed pages in length, suggest a state of *kāvya* reasonably developed in form and convention.⁹⁹ The problem is not the data of literary culture in the *Mahābhāṣya*, however meager, but the date of the author, Patañjali. The evidence usually adduced for an early date is ambiguous and meager; the most compelling arguments place him no earlier than the middle of the second century of the common era.¹⁰⁰

The ideology of antiquity and the cultural distinction conferred by sheer age have seduced many scholars into attempting to push the date for the in-

99. Patañjali, however, refers to a poet by name only once, mentioning “the poem composed by Vararuci” (*vārarucaṃ kāvyam*, on 4.3.101) (this is also the single use of the word *kāvya* in the sense of “literature” in the entire *Mahābhāṣya*). He mentions three literary works, the *ākhyāyikās*, or prose narratives, *Vāsavadattā*, *Sumanottā* (on 4.2.60), and *Bhīmarathā* (on 4.3.87), though we do not know for a fact that any of these were in Sanskrit. Note that Prakrit works were often referred to by Sanskrit names (*Setubandha*, *Pañcabāṇalīlā*, etc.).

100. Frauwallner 1960: 111.

vention of *kāvya* deeper into the first millennium B.C.E. Everywhere, however, we run into problems. The arguments most recently offered for an early date of the *Rāmāyana* in the final (or so-called monumental) form we have it today—before the rise of Buddhism in the fifth century B.C.E.—are unpersuasive. The conceptual world of the *Rāmāyana*, which knows and reproduces core features of late Maurya political thought, is post-Aśoka (after 250 B.C.E.). Attributions in anthologies of *kāvya* verses to the grammarian Pāṇini (whose own date is largely conjectural but is conventionally placed in the mid-fourth century B.C.E.) are late and devoid of historical value. The corpus of plays discovered in Trivandrum in the early 1900s and ascribed to Bhāsa, which have been fantastically dated as early as the fourth century B.C.E., have been shown in a recent careful assessment to derive most probably from the Pallava court of the mid-seventh century. The very late date of the commencement of literary theory (not before the sixth century) suggests strongly that the object of its analysis was late as well. Consider that in Kashmir, the site of the most intense creativity in theory, the earliest *kāvya* we can locate in time with any confidence (the poet or dramatist Candra[ka] being undatable) is the (lost) work of Bhartṛmeṅṭha from the mid-sixth century.¹⁰¹ Thus, inscriptions, testimonia, citations in literature, and the history of literary theory, to say nothing of philology—every piece of evidence hard and soft—prompt us to place the development of *kāvya* in the last century or two before the beginning of the common era. Moving it back appreciably before this date requires conjecture every step of the way and a fragile gossamer of relative dating.

If with the soberest accounts we locate the invention of Sanskrit *kāvya* near the beginning of the common era, we cannot easily dissociate it from the dramatically changed political landscape of southern Asia at the time, when ruler lineages from Iran and Central Asia had newly entered the subcontinent. Little of the precise nature of their social and political order is understood—the collected inscriptions issued by the principal groups, the Śaka and Kuṣāṇa, would not fill a couple of dozen printed pages. Some scholars may be right to see in their activities merely the consecration of a new trend rather than its creation. Yet the willingness that others show to link the new

101. See Goldman 1984: 18–23 on a pre-fifth-century date for the *Rāmāyana* (contrast Pollock 1986: 23 ff.); Warder 1972–: vol. 2 (1974), pp. 103 ff. on “Pāṇini”; equally dubious is his early-third-century B.C.E. date for a Sanskrit drama by “Subandhu,” pp. 110–11. On the Pallava connection of some of the Bhāsa plays see Tieken 1993 (if the character of the Prakrit some of the plays exhibit seems to require a somewhat earlier dating, nothing requires placing them before the second or third century). Candraka is mentioned in *Rājataranṅinī* 2.16, after what Kalhaṇa calculates as more than a thousand years of Kashmiri history (colophon of chapter 1), and is the very first poet mentioned in a work preoccupied with literary history. Note, too, that the earliest complex metrical inscription in Sanskrit is the Mora step-well record of 50 B.C.E., part of which is in the *bhujāṅgaviṅṃbhita* meter.

expansion in the ancient prestige economy of Sanskrit with their presence is, I believe, fundamentally correct.¹⁰² For one thing, these new courts underwrote, or promoted, the development of new forms of cultural production, such as the political praise-poem, which appeared in Sanskrit for the first time in 150 C.E.—and what an extraordinary innovation it must have seemed, to behold the language of the Veda and sacred learning used in public in praise of a ruling Śaka overlord. For another, it is around this era that textual communities previously antagonistic to Sanskrit, such as Buddhists (many of them patronized by these ruling groups), began to adopt Sanskrit for both scriptural and literary purposes. The literary-cultural values that first came into prominence in this period were to remain core values of Sanskrit literature. The royal court, for instance, would become the primary arena for the creation and consumption of *kāvya*. The universalist aspirations that marked the political formations of the time would mark Sanskrit literature as well, and would limit any tendency toward localism or historical particularity. In every other area of literary communication—from lexicon, metric, tropes, and poetic conventions to character typology, narrative, plot, and the organization of elements that create the emotional impact of a work—a universal adherence to a normative aesthetic is discernible. To write *kāvya*, whether in Tamil country or Kashmir, in Kerala or Assam, was to engage in an activity whose rules, like those of chess or politics, were everywhere the same—though, again like the rules of chess or politics, they only regulated the moves and did not determine the outcome. Moreover, correctness in literary-language use and the informed appreciation of literature not only would come to define cultural virtuosity but would become signs of kingly virtue: every king must be a learned king, and learned above all in *kāvya*, both in creating and appreciating it.

Echoes of all these developments can be found in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, both as a poem and as a cultural practice. For example, at its core it is poetry about polity, offering an extended meditation on the nature of the king: at once a divine being, capable of transcendent acts of power (stimulating the aesthetic emotion of *vīra*, the feeling of the heroic), and a human being, for whom suffering is ineluctable (stimulating the aesthetic emotion of *karuṇa*, the feeling of sadness). Its social milieu is courtly, too: the text shows itself to be performed before king Rāma, as it was performed in fact before countless overlords. Everywhere that the text circulated it carried a vision of kingly behavior—and a vision of the practice of *kāvya* as well—that everywhere inspired emulation. And, to return to the question of beginnings, the fact that

102. Sylvain Lévi's article of 1904, though extreme in some of its formulations and flawed in some of its particular arguments, is nonetheless an important, and unjustly ignored, contribution to the debate. The arguments were restated by Sircar in 1939, and have yet to be adequately answered.

the *Rāmāyaṇa* was the first text to use the word *saṃskṛta* in reference to the language it uses may reflect that it was the first to use that language for the kind of text it is.¹⁰³

Another reason for the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s status as first poem may have to do with its relationship to writing and the possibility that it was one of the earliest major texts to be preserved, if not composed, in written form. We have become accustomed to hearing of the importance of printing for the creation of literature in modernity. What marks the true watershed in South Asia is writing, along with its complex relations with a changing but enduring oral culture. From the middle of the third century B.C.E., when scholars in the Maurya chancellery brilliantly adapted the imported technology of writing to Indic language use, literacy spread across the subcontinent and beyond, never to be lost, with such dramatic consequences for literary creation and preservation that, in comparison, the later transition to print seems almost a historical footnote.¹⁰⁴

The mid-third century is, I have suggested, the outermost historical limit of Vālmiki's *kāvya*. Some formative relationship to writing, then, cannot be ruled out a priori. Yet the manuscript tradition is sui generis. It is impossible to reconstruct an archetype; instead, the work must have been written down at different times and places, as transcriptions of oral performances of a more or less memorized text (attempts to show the presence of standard oral improvisational techniques have been unconvincing). At all events, it may have been the very impulse to preserve the work through the new technology of writing that contributed to its status as the primeval poem. The representation of pure orality that opens the monumental version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* may confirm rather than belie the literacy of its transmission and even origins. The entire metanarrative—Vālmiki's receiving the story orally, spontaneously creating a new versified speech form, using it to compose his *kāvya* through pure contemplation, and teaching it to Rāma's sons, who memorize and perform it orally—displays precisely the kind of reflexivity about the oral and nostalgia for its powers that would be irrelevant if not incomprehensible in a world ignorant of writing. Far from being the documentary account of oral creation and transmission it purports to be, the prelude to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is better seen as an attempt to reimagine orality and recapture its authenticity in a post-oral world. As a staged oral communicative situation, it closely parallels narratives of beginnings in other newly literate, and self-consciously literate, cultures.¹⁰⁵

103. *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* 5.28.18, *vāk saṃskṛtā*, "Sanskrit speech."

104. A general review of recent scholarship on writing in India is offered by Salomon 1995.

105. On the Old French *chansons de geste* see Gumbrecht 1983: 168; the literacy underlying the very exemplum of oral metanarratives, the dream of Caedmon, is argued by Irvine 1994: 431 ff. The manuscript history of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is discussed in Pollock 1984.

Such speculation aside, there can be no doubt that Sanskrit literary culture was thoroughly imbued with and conditioned by writing from its earliest period. More precisely stated, it is writing itself that made *kāvya* historically possible as a cultural practice. So little studied is this question that we fail to realize just how literate Sanskrit literary (and general) culture was, as well as the degree to which writing was constitutive of literature in both the cosmopolitan and vernacular periods. At the same time, we need to recognize that the role of writing was conditioned by the enduring ideology of orality, along with the actuality of oral performance.

That the participants in Sanskrit literary culture were thoroughly familiar with writing from an early date is repeatedly confirmed by the casual references to the practice in Sanskrit *kāvya* itself. In the works of Kālidāsa, for example, literacy is represented as a common and unremarkable skill.¹⁰⁶ Later, of course, for a poet like Rājaśekhara (fl. 930), writing material constitutes “basic equipment of the science of literature” (though the real basic equipment, he notes, is *pratibhā*, genius), and the daily routine of the poet is unthinkable without it.¹⁰⁷ This is so even for poets who, unlike Rājaśekhara, worked outside the court, such as the author of the tenth-century *Śivamahimnaḥ stotra* (Hymn to Śiva’s greatness): He was only hyperbolizing his own real practice when he wrote this lovely verse:

If the inkwell were the ocean and the ink as black as the Black Mountain,
if the pen were a twig of the Wishing Tree and the manuscript leaf the earth,
if the writing went on forever, and the Goddess of Learning herself were to
write,
even then the limit of Your powers could never be reached.¹⁰⁸

A drier India might have preserved for us the hard evidence to show that the age of Sanskrit oral composition and transmission ended when the age of *kāvya* began. But the oldest manuscript remains of *kāvya* that we do possess, second- or third-century fragments of the work of Aśvaghoṣa discovered in Central Asia, testify by their very existence that Sanskrit literature circulated not in oral but in written form, and that it was consumed, so to speak, through the eye: read and studied and annotated on birch bark or palm leaf.¹⁰⁹

106. The scene in *Śakuntala* in which the rustic heroine writes a letter to her urbane lover on a lotus leaf and reads it aloud (after 3.68) is deservedly celebrated; but we also find the celestial nymph Urvaśī writing a letter on birch bark to Purūravas (*Vikramorvaśīya* act 2.11 f.), and learn that the Vidyādhara women have magical materials available for writing their own love letters (*Kumārasambhava* 1.7). See Malamoud 1997: 87–89, 99.

107. *Kāvyaṁimānsā* p. 50 (“basic equipment of the science of literature,” *kāvyaavidyāyāḥ parikara*).

108. *Śivamahimnaḥ stotra* v. 32.

109. Some of the fragments are provided with interlinear glosses from the hand of an attentive Tocharian reader. See Hartmann 1988.

This is not to imply that reading was the sole mode of consuming *kāvya*, let alone that oral knowledge was obsolescent. If literacy had become commonplace and writing central to the creation and reproduction of Sanskrit literary culture, other evidence suggests how different this was from the culture of modern literacy. Kālidāsa may tell us how the young prince Raghu, “by learning how to write, gained access to all things made of language (*vānīmāya*) as if gaining access to the sea by way of a river,” but he also shows us another prince who, though he learned to write as a child, only “acquired all the fruits of political wisdom when he frequented those mature in oral knowledge.”¹¹⁰ If the culture of *kāvya* is unthinkable without writing—and we have to pass over in silence here the many features of style, structure, and intertextuality that are constitutive of Sanskrit literature and unavailable in a purely oral world—literacy in premodern India should never be equated directly with learning (as we might assume from the notion of the *litteratus* in Latin Europe). Nor should it be taken as the sole or even the principal mode of experiencing *kāvya*. That mode remained listening—but listening to a manuscript being read aloud. This was so even for supposedly popular oral forms such as ancient lore (*purāṇa*). A seventh-century work dramatically describes for us a professional reader. And a striking figure he is: dressed in the finest cloth of Pauṇḍra, eyes jet-black with *kohl*, lips brilliant red from chewing betel nut, he places his book before him on a reading stand. Untying the book he opens it to the place marked by a bookmark for the morning reading, takes up a sheaf of manuscript pages and then,

As the brilliant white glints from his teeth seem to wash away the dirty ink from the letters with sparkling water, or to bestrew the book with a shower of white petals, he reads out the ancient lore spoken by the God of Wind. And as he does, he charms the listeners’ minds by the sweet modulation of his recitative [*gīti*], sounding like the anklets of Sarasvatī herself, Goddess of Speech, who must be dwelling inside his mouth.¹¹¹

For public readings of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* we have massive evidence, but even *kāvya* occasionally thematized its own literate-oral performance. In his twelfth-century courtly epic Maṅkha describes how he read out his work from a written text (the act that in fact constituted its publication) before a large audience at his brother’s literary salon. Maṅkha’s depiction of the magic by which inscribed letters are transformed into sound (written with the description of the *purāṇa* reciter in his memory) serves well to suggest the fascination that literacy continued to exercise in a culture

110. *Raghuvamśa* 3.28, 18.46 (“oral knowledge,” *śrūta*).

111. *Haryacarita* pp. 85–86 (“professional reader,” *pustakavācaka*; “marked by a bookmark for the morning reading” [or: “marking the portion read by the morning reader”], *prābhātika-prapāṭhaka*; “modulation,” *gamaka*).

where orality remained, in some measure, alive. When his guru, Ruyyaka, the celebrated literary theorist, invited him to recite his poem, Mañkha

spread out his manuscript-book: The leaves appeared to be hidden under hundreds upon hundreds of letters—so many dark drops of ichor flowing from the temples of the cow elephant that was Sarasvatī, Goddess of Learning.

The letters—black pearls of the jewelry of the Goddess of Speech—irresistibly attracted his eyes. And having spread the book out he calmly recited his poem in a voice that rang like the anklets of the Goddess of Knowledge dancing inside his mind.

And as his poem took to its unearthly path and entered their ears, the listeners showed their pleasure by constantly shaking their heads, while the dark stubble on their cheeks stood erect and seemed to make manifest the letters of poems their ears in times past had drunk in, and were now expelling.

Like specks of dust from the feet [or: words] of the Goddess of Speech, the rows of letters thus made manifest, at every step [or: word] and in consonance with the poem, brought forth a miracle: On gaining entrance into their ears [dustlike though these black letters were,] they produced teardrops in the eyes of those good men, in equal measure to their joy.¹¹²

The reading at an end, Mañkha made an offering of the “book of the poem,” the form in which it ultimately existed, to the Great God Śiva. Both writing and recitation, it is clear, were constitutive of literary culture, as well as of each other.

Such oral performance, along with the well-documented (if unfamiliar) power of memorization that operates in a tradition where texts are objects for listening, constitutes one importantly different feature of the medium of Sanskrit (and generally South Asian) literature in comparison with other forms. But there are additional and larger consequences for Sanskrit literary culture as a whole that derive from this persistent orality. For one thing, if literature is communicated largely through oral performance, then in addition to whatever significations and functions we may imagine, it represents a social, indeed almost a collective or even congregational, phenomenon. As such it typically speaks, thematically, to the concerns of a social collectivity and will change as the relevant collectivity changes, as happens under

112. *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* 25.142–45. (“spread out his manuscript-book,” *vyastārayat pustakam*; “recited,” *paṭhan*; “feet/words,” *pada*; “in consonance with the poem,” *kāvyaśaṣṭhvada*, presumably meaning that the letters when recited conveyed exactly the information that the poem—conceived as something separate from its graphic realization—intended to convey; “book of the poem,” *kāvyaṣṭakam*). See also 25.10 for public recitation as a kind of publication, and 25.150 for the author’s ritual offering of his book to Śiva.

conditions of vernacularity. For another thing, Sanskrit poetry in recitation came alive in the minds of listeners in a way that purely bookish literature—works of mute, dead letters such as those of Western modernity—can hardly do. This is a fact that takes on visible shape in the manuscript histories of many poems. The literary work of Bhartṛhari (sixth century), for example, shows what it can mean for fully literate literature—produced by a literate poet and via inscription—to enter the vortex of oral reproduction. The manuscripts of his *Śatakatrāyam* (The three hundreds) show countless variants—not scribal errors or learned corrections but clearly oral variants in what by any standard still counts as fundamentally a literate culture. A living tradition, then, carries costs for contemporary text-critical and other literary scholarship. Or perhaps better put: The text as unitary entity—however much this is required by the participants’ own insistence on authorial intentionality—is constantly and in some cases irremediably destabilized by the messy business of bringing literature to life in a world of oral performance.

Whichever factor, or more probably, combination of factors, we decide to take as decisive and however we then choose to answer the question of why Sanskrit literature is said to begin, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is said to begin at all. Somewhere in the Vālmīki story lies embedded the important truth that at some time, and for the first time, a new kind of text came to be composed in Sanskrit: one that was formally innovative, crucially dependent on the new technique of inscription, this-worldly in its social location, centrally concerned with the realm of human emotion, and for which a new name, *kāvya*, would be used. This all occurred in a new world, too, where new social-political energies and practices were coming into being that would shape Sanskrit literature for the next millennium—until those energies dissipated and practices changed so much that a living literary culture could no longer be sustained.

Sanskrit Literature Ends

Even if the beginnings of Sanskrit *kāvya* elude precise location in time, the very fact of its commencement is unanimously asserted by the Sanskrit tradition and not open to doubt from historical scholarship. But can we say the same thing about its end? Considering the fact that India’s Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters) awards prizes for literature in Sanskrit as one of the twenty-two officially acknowledged living literary languages, one might be inclined to argue that Sanskrit literary culture has not in fact ended. What is undeniable is that its vital signs have changed over time. If we look at three episodes of change—Kashmir after the twelfth century, sixteenth-century Vijayanagara, and Delhi-Vārāṇasi in the seventeenth century—it may be possible to learn something about the mortality of this culture, and what in the

intellectual, social, or political spheres had been required to keep it fully alive.¹¹³

Sanskrit literary culture in Kashmir, as noted earlier, does not enter history before the sixth century (with the poet Bhartṛmeṇṭha), but by the middle of the twelfth century more innovative literature was being written there than perhaps anywhere else in South Asia. The audience before which Maṅkha read out his *Śrīkaṅthacarita* indicates the vibrancy of literary culture in the 1140s. In addition to Ruyyaka, the greatest literary theorist of the century, and Kalhaṇa, author of the remarkable historical poem *Rājatarāṅginī*, a host of men were present who embodied the literary-cultural values of the age: Trailokya, “who was as accomplished in the dry complexities of science as he was bold in the craft of literature, and thus seemed the very reincarnation of Śrī Tutātita” (i.e., Kumārila); Jinduka, who “bathed in the two streams of [Mīmāṃsā] thought, of Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara, and thereby washed off the pollution of the Kali age,” and who at the same time wrote “goodly verse”; Jalhaṇa, “a poet to rival Murāri and Rājaśekhara”; Maṅkha’s brother Alaṅkāra, who wrote literary works that “circulated widely in manuscript form” and made him the peer of Bāṇa.¹¹⁴ In short, this was a time and place where the combination of intellectual power and aesthetic sophistication was manifested that marked Sanskrit literary culture at its most brilliant epochs. What makes this particular generation of Sanskrit poets so noteworthy, however, is that it turned out to be Kashmir’s last.

Within perhaps fifty years, creative Sanskrit culture in Kashmir all but vanished. The production of literature in all of the major genres ceased. The last *mahākāvya* was written around 1200. No more drama was produced, whether historical or fictional (*nāṭaka*; *prakaraṇa*), no more prose or verse romance (*kathā*) or historical narrative (*ākhyāyikā*); no more collections of lyric poetry (*śataka*, *kośa*). The wide repertory of forms was reduced to the *stotra* (hymn or prayer), hitherto near the margins of literary culture. No new literary theory was ever again produced; the last such work dates from the late twelfth century. And as a whole the generation immediately following Maṅkha’s is a near-total blank.¹¹⁵ When in the fifteenth century Sanskrit literary culture again manifested itself in Kashmir, at the court of Sultan Zain-

113. This section is abridged from Pollock 2001.

114. *Śrīkaṅthacarita* 25, 26 ff. (“circulated widely in manuscript form,” *patralabdhadūragati*, v. 46). Except for stray anthology citations, the works of all the writers mentioned have been lost.

115. One exception is Jayānaka, who left Kashmir in search of patronage and found it in Ajmer, where around 1190 he wrote the *Prthvirājaviṅaya*, a remarkable literary biography of Prthvirāja III Chauhan (cf. Pollock 1993). Aside from Jayānaka’s poem, the only text we know of from the entire century and a half following Maṅkha is the *Stutikusumāñjali* of one Jagad-dhara, c. 1350–1400, a grammarian. The last *mahākāvya* is the unambitious *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* of Jayaratha, and the last major literary-theoretical text is the *Alaṅkāratnākara* of Śobhākaramitra (both twelfth to thirteenth century).

ul-⁵ābidīn (r. 1420–1470), it was a radically diminished formation in respect to both what people wrote and how, historically, they regarded their work. Nothing shows this more poignantly than the major texts from the court: two appendices to Kalhaṇa's history, *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (by Jonarāja and his student Śrīvara). Both lament the disappearance of poets, and both readily admit to a creative inferiority that is anyway unmistakable.¹¹⁶ No Kashmiri Sanskrit literature ever again circulated outside the valley, as it used to do. Many important literary works survived through recopying in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but virtually all originate from the twelfth century or earlier. Despite the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*'s habit of noting the great writers and scholars that populated earlier courts, neither of its continuations mentions any Sanskrit works either for the three-hundred year interval separating them from Kalhaṇa or for their own periods.¹¹⁷ In brief, we did not lose the great post-1200 Sanskrit literature of Kashmir; it was never written. The kind of Sanskrit literary culture that remained alive in Kashmir was a culture reduced to reproduction and restatement.

How are we to account for the fact—which we can now see was a fact—that one of the most intensely creative sites for the production of Sanskrit culture in twelfth-century South Asia collapsed by the thirteenth century and was never to be revived? One factor seems to have been transformations in the social and political spheres, “troubles in the land,” as Jonarāja put it around 1450, “or, perhaps, the evil fate of the kings themselves.”¹¹⁸ With accelerating intensity during the first centuries of the millennium what we might identify as the courtly-civic ethos of Kashmir came undone. One cannot read in the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* itself the account of the start of this collapse without being numbed by the stories of violence, treachery, madness, suicide, impiety, and insurrection. Already in the mid-twelfth century the court had ceased to be a source of inspiration to the creative artist; no one shows this better than Maṅkha himself. The picture we get from Jonarāja's account of the three centuries separating him from Maṅkha and Kalhaṇa is likewise one of near total dissolution of orderly life in urban Kashmir, to be set right only by Zain-ul-⁵ābidīn a century after the establishment of Turkic rule in Kashmir, around 1420. It is not easy to grasp the deep reasons for the two hundred years of social implosion before this time—during which “Hindu” rule, to use Jonarāja's idiom, continued, and the presence of Turks in the

116. *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Jonarāja vv. 6, 13, 26; *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Śrīvara 1.1.9–12, 3.6. Cf. 1.1.12 in particular: “Not a single great poet is left to teach the men of today, who have so little talent for poetry themselves.”

117. Jonarāja offers nothing on this order. When Śrīvara does mention literary production among his contemporaries, it is *deśa*, or regional, literature, by which he meant *Persian*, not Kashmiri (as 1.4.39 shows).

118. *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Jonarāja, v. 6.

valley was insignificant—but what is clear is that when it occurred, Sanskrit literary culture imploded with it.

Different circumstances seem to account for the slow depletion of energy in Sanskrit literary culture in Vijayanagara. Named after its capital city in Karnataka, this remarkable transregional political formation ruled much of India below the Vindhya mountains from the Arabian Sea to the borders of Orissa between 1340–1565. In stark contrast to Kashmir at the time, Sanskrit literary production here was continuous and intense, and the domain of cultural politics of which it formed part was far more complex. For this was a multilingual empire, where literary production occurred also in Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu. In Telugu especially, a large amount of strikingly new literature was produced through Vijayanagara courtly patronage, including the poetry of Śrīnātha and Tikanna; the emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509–1529) himself used Telugu for his most important work, and one of the great texts of political imagination in the sixteenth century, the *Āmuktamālyā* (The girl who gave her garland to God).¹¹⁹

Vijayanagara's Sanskrit literature, by contrast, presents a picture of an exhausted literary culture. It is difficult, in fact, to identify a single Sanskrit literary work that continued to be read after it was written, that circulated to any extent beyond the domain where it was composed, that attracted a commentator, was excerpted in an anthology, or entered a school syllabus. Much may have been destroyed when the city was sacked in 1565, but the works of the major court poets and personalities survive. One of the more compelling questions these works raise is how they survived at all.¹²⁰ The vital literary energies of the time had been rechanneled into regional languages; nothing shows this better than the different reception histories of two texts of the period. Kumāravyaśa's Kannada *Bhārata* (c. 1450) not only circulated widely in manuscript form but came to be recited all over the Kannada-speaking world, as the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* itself had been recited all over India a thousand years earlier. By contrast, the Sanskrit *Bhāratāmṛta* (Nectar of the Bhārata) of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court poet, Divākara (c. 1520), lay inert in the palace library as soon as the ink was dry and remains unpublished to this day.

Sanskrit literary culture did retain social importance, and it continued to be taken seriously as a state enterprise. The celebrated minister and general Śāyaṇa, in the early decades of the empire, may have been more attracted to religious and philosophical textual work (his editing and commentarial

119. See Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume. On the paucity of courtly Kannada literature from Vijayanagara see also Nagaraj, chapter 5, this volume.

120. These include Aruṇagirinātha Diṇḍima's *Rāmābhyudaya* (court of Devarāya II, r. 1424–1446); Divākara's *Bhāratāmṛta* (court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya); Rājanātha Diṇḍima's *Acyutarāyābhyudaya* (court of Acyutadevarāya, r. 1530–1542), and poems attributed to several princesses and queens, starting with Gaṅgādevī's *Madhurāvijaya* (court of Bukka).

labors on the Vedas reached industrialized magnitude during the reigns of Harihara I [1336–1357] and Bukka [1344–1377]), but he also produced a new treatise on literary criticism and an anthology of poems.¹²¹ Many of the later governors responsible for the actual functioning of the empire had a cultural literacy that exceeded the mere scribal and accountancy skills some have ascribed to them; they were men of considerable learning, if again only reproductive, and not original, learning.¹²² But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this scholarly reproduction was its qualitative superiority to the literary creativity of the period.

Something of the dilemma of Sanskrit in Vijayanagara—a literary culture at once politically fundamental and aesthetically enervated—can be suggested by a glance at a Sanskrit drama written by the emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya himself, the *Jāmbavatīpariṇaya* (Marriage of Jāmbavatī). In its mythopolitical character—it celebrates the king’s historic conquest of Kaliṅga—the work is typical of almost all the rest of Sanskrit literary production in the Vijayanagara world, whose very hallmark is the prominence of the project of empire to which it is so thoroughly harnessed. Virtually all the drama left to us is state drama; the long poems are *caritas*, *vijayas*, or *abhyudayas* (poetic chronicles, accounts of royal “victory,” or comparable accounts of “success”), detailing this campaign and that military victory. All these genres have a long history, no doubt, but in comparison with the previous thousand years of Sanskrit poetry the Vijayanagara aesthetic is emphatically historicist-political. Perhaps this is one reason why none of these works, over the entire history of the existence of the empire, was able to outline its immediate context. Such at least is the inference one may draw from the manuscript history of the works, the absence of commentators, the neglect from anthologists, the indifference of literary analysts and teachers. In Vijayanagara Sanskrit was not dying as a mode of learned expression; Sanskrit learning in fact continued unabated during the long existence of the empire, and after. Something else—something terribly important—about Sanskrit literature here seems moribund. The realm of experience for which Sanskrit could speak literarily had palpably shrunk, as if somehow human life beyond the imperial stage had outgrown Sanskrit and required a vernacular voice. This shrinkage accelerated throughout the medieval period, leaving the concerns of empire, and finally the concerns of heaven, as the sole thematics.

Only once more would the larger realm of human experience find ex-

121. The treatise *Alaṅkārasudhānidhi* is unpublished; cf. Sarasvati 1968. The anthology *Subhāṣitasudhānidhi* was edited by K. Krishnamoorthy in 1968.

122. On the culture of the *daṇḍanāyakas* contrast Stein 1989: 124. Consider Śaḷuva Goppa Tippa Bhūpāla (a *daṇḍanāyaka* of Devarāya II), who wrote an important (and the only printed) commentary on Vāmana’s late-eighth-century Kashmiri treatise on literary theory in addition to producing original works in Sanskrit on music and dance.

pression and make literary history in Sanskrit: in the poetry of Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja (d. c. 1670). And this was in a much reinvented form and under circumstances more radically novel than the time and the place—Delhi, 1650—might suggest. In his literary oeuvre and in the course his life took, Jagannātha marks a point of historic break in the history of Sanskrit literary culture. His movements as a professional writer traveling in quest of patronage from region to region and court to court—from Andhra to Jaipur and Delhi, and from Udaipur to Assam—show that the transregional space that Sanskrit literature had occupied during the two preceding millennia (which I map later in the chapter) persisted well into the seventeenth century despite what are often represented as discontinuities in the political environment with the coming of the Mughals in the preceding century. In the same way, Jagannātha's life as a court poet, and much of the work that he produced in that capacity (like his panegyrics to the kings of Udaipur, Delhi, and Assam), was no different from the lives and works of poets centuries earlier. His masterpiece of literary analysis, the *Rasagaṅgādhara* (The Gaṅgā-Bearer [Śiva] of aesthetic emotion), participates as a full and equal interlocutor in a millennium-long debate on the literary and shares the same assumptions, procedures, and goals.

Yet Jagannātha marks a historical end point in a number of important ways. If it can be said that his ontogeny recapitulated the phylogeny of Sanskrit literary culture, this was probably the last such case; we know of no later poet who circumambulated the quarters of Sanskrit's cosmopolitan space. While we should not exaggerate his artistic power, still, no later poet produced literary works that achieved the wide diffusion of his *Rasagaṅgādhara* and of his collection of poems, the *Bhāminīvilāsa* (Play of the beautiful woman). His literary criticism is rightly regarded as the last original contribution to the ancient conversation; thereafter all is reproduction. And if his panegyrics are conventional—after all, they were meant to be—one senses in his lyrics some new sensibility. In the stories that have gathered around his life, too, he became the representative of the historical change that marked the new social realities of India and made the late-medieval period late. For he is described as a Brahman, belonging to a family hailing from the bastion of orthodoxy and tradition in the Veṅgināḍu region of Andhra Pradesh, who fell in love with a Muslim woman and met his death—whether in despair or repentance or defiance the legends are unclear—by drowning in the Gaṅgā at Vārāṇasī.

Something very old died when Jagannātha died, but also something very new. What was new in his literary oeuvre had much to do with his social milieu, the Mughal court of Shāhjahān (r. 1626–1656), where he was a client of both Prince Dārā Shukoh and the courtier Āsaf Khān. The sometimes startling intellectual and social and aesthetic experiment that marked this world marked Jagannātha, too. What it meant for Sanskrit, Persian, and vernacu-

lar poets to gather in a common cultural space in Shāhjahānābād is an unstudied question. But Jagannātha's oeuvre suggests two important areas of innovation, one in the relationship between Sanskrit and both vernacular and Persian literature, the other in the kind of subjectivity that could find expression in literature.

A late-seventeenth-century history recounts Jagannātha's association with the great musician Tansen, and a collection of popular religious songs in the vernacular is attributed to him as well. None of this material has been published, let alone studied.¹²³ But it all would be consistent with hints in his writing of an important and perhaps new interaction with regional poetry. A verse in the *Rasagaṅgādhara*,

Her eyes are not just white and black but made of nectar and poison.
Why else, when they fall on a man, would he feel at once so strong and weak?

is almost certainly adapted from an earlier poem in Brajhasha, and a verse of the great poet of the preceding generation, Bihārī Lāl, corresponds to one found in the *Bhāminīvilāsa*.¹²⁴ These examples are likely to be the tip of an iceberg. If we could see all of it, we would know what we do not at present know: how familiar Sanskrit and vernacular poets were with each other's work, what it meant to adapt poetry from one language into another, and what it was in the first place that influenced a poet's choice to reject his vernacular (and no longer just Prakrit and Apabhramsha) and continue to write in Sanskrit.

A similar new relationship with Persian literature is suggested by some poems included in Jagannātha's oeuvre concerning a Yavanī (Muslim) woman named Lavaṅgī. The historical reality of the poet's liaison with her is less important than the fact that the verses about her got attached to his literary corpus, and to no one else's—and that they are verses of a sort written by no one either before him or after:

I don't want royal elephants or a string of fancy horses,
I wouldn't give a second thought to money, if Lavaṅgī,
with those eyes that flash, those breasts that rise
as she raises the water jug, were to say to me Yes.

123. The history is the *Sampradāyakaḥpadruma*, v.s. 1729 (= 1673) of one Viṭṭhalanātha, also called Manarañjana Kavi, who claimed to be a grandnephew of Jagannātha. Cf. Athavale 1968: 418, who also mentions the collection of Vaiṣṇava *bhajans*, *Kīrtanaḥpraṇālīpadasaṅgraha*. It is not clear whether the author is the same Jagannātha.

124. "Her eyes are not just white": compare *Rasagaṅgādhara*, p. 365 (= *Paṇḍitarājākāvyaśaṅgraha* p. 58, v. 76), and *Bihārīratnākara* app. 2, v. 123; compare also *Bhāminīvilāsa* in *Paṇḍitarājākāvyaśaṅgraha* p. 62, v. 127 (= *Rasagaṅgādhara* p. 258) and *Satsaī* v. 490. Mathuranath Shastri was the first to suggest (though he did not identify) the vernacular parallels in the Sanskrit introduction to his edition of *Rasagaṅgādhara* (1939: 28).

Dressed in a dress as red as a rose,
Lavaṅgī—with breasts heaving
as she places the water jug on her head—
goes off and takes along in the jug
all the feeling in all the men's hearts.

That Yavana girl has a body soft as butter,
and if I could get her to lie by my side
the hard floor would be good enough for me
and all the comforts of paradise redundant.¹²⁵

Part of what seems new here is probably due to a cultural conversation with Indo-Persian poetry made possible by Jagannātha's social location (he is credited with knowledge of Persian). For Lavaṅgī is assuredly a Sanskrit version of the *maḥbūb*, the ever-unattainable beloved of the Persianate lyric whose unattainability is epitomized by otherness: being a Christian (or Greek or Armenian) in earlier Persian *ghazals*, or a Hindu in later Indo-Persian poetry, as in the following verse from the celebrated Khusrau (1253–1325):

My face becomes yellow because of a Hindu beloved,
O pain! He is unaware of my condition.
I said, "Remove the weariness of my desire with your lips."
He smiled and said, "*nāhī, nāhī*."¹²⁶

Beside this new willingness to draw sustenance from Persian and vernacular traditions in order to reanimate Sanskrit poetry, Jagannātha's work evinces a significant new personalization of the poetic. While this seems to recover something from the distant past—the extraordinary energies of, say, Bhartṛhari—it adds something unprecedented, too. No one in Sanskrit literature had spoken in quite so self-referential a way before:

He mastered *śāstra* and honored every rule of Brahman conduct;
as a young man he lived under the care of the emperor of Delhi;
now he has renounced his home and serves Hari in Madhupur.¹²⁷
Everything Paṇḍitarāja did he did like no one else in the world.

No one before had dared to make Sanskrit poetry out of personal tragedy, the death of one's child, for example:

125. *Paṇḍitarājākāvyaśaṅgraha* p. 190, vv. 582, 584, 585. Sharma rightly remarks that nothing indicates that the verses about her are not Jagannātha's—in fact, quite the contrary (*Paṇḍitarājākāvyaśaṅgraha* 1958: viii). The alternative view fatuously holds the poems to be "the production of his enemies" (Sastri 1942: 21). The *Sampradāyakaḥpadruma* (see n. 123) affirms that Jagannātha "married the daughter of a Sāha," a Muslim (*sāhasutā gahī*).

126. I am grateful to Sunil Sharma for allowing me to use his translation.

127. That is, Mathurā. There is a well-attested variant, "in the city of Śiva," that is, Vārāṇasi. It is there that, according to tradition, Paṇḍitarāja died.

You didn't care how much your parents would worry,
 you betrayed the affection of your family. My little son,
 you were always so good; why did you run away
 to the other world?

let alone the death of one's wife:

All pleasures have forgotten me;
 even the learning I acquired
 with so much grief
 has turned its back.
 The only thing that won't leave my mind,
 like an immanent god,
 is that large-eyed woman.

Your beauty was like the food of gods to me
 and in my mind transformed into poetry.
 Without it now, most perfect of women,
 what kind of poet can I ever be?¹²⁸

To be sure, there are complications to a simple interpretation of these verses, especially the last two, as autobiographical effusions of the poet.¹²⁹ But to participants in the culture who copied and recopied and circulated his texts, it seemed as reasonable that the greatest Sanskrit literary critic and poet of the age should compose a sequence of verses on the death of his wife as that this wife should have been a Muslim. Whether he married her or not, somehow the age demanded that he should have; whether he wrote the verses or not, someone did, and for the first time in Sanskrit. From all this, a certain kind of newness was born—but stillborn. There was to be no second Jagannātha.

Sanskrit learning as such certainly continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Sanskrit literature continued to be written. A colonial survey, for example, provides information on hundreds of new works composed in early-nineteenth-century Bengal. With rare exception, however, none of these entered onto school syllabi, none attracted commentarial attention, and most never circulated beyond the village in which they were composed. The depletion that such a pragmatics of literary culture suggests was no mere function of local transformations in Bengal, such as changes in patterns of patronage with the dissolution of the great landed estates; it is found throughout the Sanskrit cultural world, in courtly environments as well as rural. The Maratha court of Tanjāvūr in the early eighteenth century, for example, was a place of intense transformation, increasingly linked to a new

128. *Paṇḍitarājakāvyaśaṅgraha* p. 78, v. 32; p. 90, v. 4; pp. 69–70, vv. 3, 10.

129. The interpretation of these and a number of poems in the *Karuṇāvilāsa* is complicated by Jagannātha's own analysis of them in his *Rasagāṅgādhara* (examined in Pollock 2001).

world economy and intercontinental cultural flows (visitors and missionaries from Europe were common). Vernacular-language literary production showed considerable flair, and indeed, Sanskrit scholarship was of a high order.¹³⁰ But only one writer at the court stands out from the mass, Rāmabhadra Dikṣita, and while two of his works, the *Patañjalīcaritam* (The life of Patañjali) and the *Śṛṅgāratīlakabhāṇa* (The satiric monologue of erotic ornament) retain interest for the quality of the imagination at work and the liveliness of the language, these texts, to say nothing of the rest of his oeuvre, hardly represent literary production commensurate with the dynamism of the time and place.¹³¹ And what has been said of the state of Sanskrit literary vitality found at Tañjāvūr could be said of Jai Singh II's Jaipur in the early eighteenth century, or Krishnaraja Wodeyar's Mysore at the beginning of the nineteenth. Sanskrit literary production, while prominent, appears to have remained wholly internal to the palace. Not a single Sanskrit literary work of the period transcended its moment in time in the way, for example, that the work of Bihārī Lal, chief poet at the court of Jai Singh's father, proved capable of doing.

In the south as in the north, at dates that vary in different regions and cultural formations, Sanskrit writers had ceased to make literature that made history. The reason for this, in the case of the nineteenth-century Burdwan literati interviewed by early colonial officers, is assuredly not their aspiration to fashion a literary-cultural order in which the fourth-century master Kālidāsa would have found himself perfectly at home; even less is it their failure to create literature to our own contemporary liking. Sanskrit literature ended when it became a practice of repetition and not renewal, when the writers themselves no longer evinced commitment to a central value of the tradition and a feature that defined literature itself: the ability to make literary newness, "the capacity," as a great Kashmiri writer put it, "to continually reimagine the world."¹³²

It is no straightforward matter to configure these three endings of Sanskrit literary culture—and there are certainly others, with other characteristics—into a unified historical narrative. Some generalizations are nonetheless possible. Unlike old Greek literature, which ended with a single political act, the closing of the Academy by Justinian in 529, Sanskrit literature knows no

130. One new or newly invigorated form was the multilingual operetta, see Peterson 1998. Sanskrit scholars included Dhundhi Vyāsa, who composed his remarkable treatise on the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Dharmākūṭam*, and a valuable commentary on the *Mudrārākṣasa*.

131. See Raghavan 1952: 41 ff.

132. *prajñā navanvomesāśālinī pratibhā matā / tadanuṣṛāṇanājīvadvarnanānīṣuṇaḥ kavīḥ / tasya karma smṛtaṃ kāvyam* (Genius is the intellectual capacity to continually reimagine the world. It breathes life into description, and when a poet has achieved mastery in this, he produces work that can be called "poetry"). The verse is attributed to Bhaṭṭa Tauta (fl. 950) and cited by Ruyyaka in his commentary on *Kāvyaṭṭakāśa* 1.1.

abrupt and singular moment of termination.¹³³ Instead, like the later history of Latin, Sanskrit's literary decline was entropic. At the same time, and because of this very entropy, Sanskrit, like Latin though not so self-consciously, was the object of periodic renewals: forced rebirths stimulated by the politics of this or that region, as in the fifteenth-century Kashmiri sultanate of Zain-ul-ābidīn, or at the court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar in eighteenth-century Mysore.

These periodic renewals never succeeded, however. Other deeper forces of change were at work. These may not be easy to specify, but one may quickly dismiss the commonest explanation, which traces the decline of Sanskrit culture to the coming of Muslim power. Even the highly condensed evidence presented here proves how false this reading is. What sapped the strength of Sanskrit literature was not "alien rule unsympathetic to *kāvya*" and a "desperate struggle with barbarous invaders."¹³⁴ It was more often than not the case that the barbarous invader sought to revivify *kāvya*. What destroyed the literary culture of Sanskrit were much longer-term cultural, social, and political changes. Although there were additional social sites for Sanskrit literary production and consumption, in late-medieval Kashmir the enfeeblement of urban political institutions that had previously underwritten Sanskrit seems to have been an especially significant force in the erosion of Sanskrit literary creativity (a process that had begun a full two centuries before the establishment of Turkic rule). In Vijayanagara, it was in part a heightened competition among new languages seeking literary-cultural dignity. But these factors did not operate everywhere in the same degree. There were no powerful exemplars of literary vernacularization in Kashmir to stimulate the kind of competition Sanskrit encountered elsewhere; if anything it may have been the new supraregional idiom of Persian that challenged Sanskrit's pre-eminence. In Vijayanagara the institutional structure of Sanskrit literary culture remained fully intact, but literary expression was increasingly constrained by an imperial historicist project. Those who had anything literarily new to say, beyond the celebration of imperial power, said it in Telugu or Kannada; those who did not continued to write in Sanskrit.

The communicative competence of readers and writers of Sanskrit during the late-medieval and early-modern periods remained largely undiminished throughout India. Even in the north, where political change had been most pronounced, great scholarly families continued to reproduce themselves without interruption, and ceased to do so only when a conscious decision was made to abandon Sanskrit in favor of the increasingly more com-

133. Fuhrmann 1983.

134. Warder 1972-: vol. 1, pp. 8, 217, where he continues the fantasy: "In the darkest days [*kāvya*] kept the Indian tradition alive. It handed on the best ideals and inspired the struggle to expel tyrannical invaders."

elling vernacular. A good example here is Keśavdās, the great Brajhasha poet at the court of Orccha in the early seventeenth century, who, though born into a distinguished Sanskrit family, self-consciously chose to become a vernacular poet.¹³⁵ And it is Keśavdās and others like him—Bihāri Lāl and the rest—whom we recall from this place and time, and not a single Sanskrit creative writer (in other domains, such as philosophy and law, Sanskrit remained unchallenged, as the work of someone like Mitramiśra, a legal scholar at Orccha, shows full well). For reasons that in each case demand careful historical analysis, at different times and in different places but increasingly everywhere, it became more important—politically, socially, and aesthetically more urgent—to speak locally rather than globally. Sanskrit, the idiom of a cosmopolitan literature, died over the course of the long vernacular millennium in part, it seems, because cosmopolitan talk made less and less sense in an increasingly regionalized world.¹³⁶

THE PLACES OF SANSKRIT LITERARY CULTURE

Literary culture is a phenomenon that exists not just in time but also in space. There are at least three ways we might think of the location of literary culture: as discursively projected by the texts themselves, as concretely embodied in their dissemination, and as conditioned by the sites of production and consumption. The discursive projection of space happens narratively (where stories take place) as well as critically (in spatial frameworks of literary analysis); such representations are internal to the tradition, and, again, are of first-order significance. The concrete embodiment of literary culture is produced by the circulation of manuscripts, and by their potential transformation in transit through processes of localization. The circulatory space of manuscripts and the conceptual space of discourse do not necessarily overlap, and asymmetries are as instructive as convergences. Finally, the sites of production and consumption concern the social locations (court, temple, school, and so on) that help shape the primary meanings and significations of literature.

The sociotextual community for which a literature is produced derives a portion of its self-understanding as a community from the very act of hearing, reading, performing, reproducing, and circulating literary texts. The conceptualization of space in literature and the embodiment of this concept in people are often importantly related to political formations, which exercise power over persons in space. Given the often close relationship between polity and cultural space, and the possibility that South Asian polity was something very different from what we know from European experience, the

135. See McGregor, chapter 16, this volume.

136. For further discussion see Pollock 1998a and 1998c.

places of literary culture present as complex a problem as its times. This is especially so in the case of Sanskrit, in view of the role it has increasingly been called upon to play in the construction of post-Independence culture: as the classical past that has prefigured, and thereby given legitimacy to, the modern nation.

Mapping Sanskrit Culture

It is astonishing to find, once we begin to look, how often literary narratives project Sanskrit culture as a spatialized phenomenon. This is not to claim for Sanskrit something unique or to imply that all the spaces Sanskrit literature creates are of the same conceptual order. But the very fact that producing a framework of reference is so dominant a concern has something of general importance to tell us about the character of Sanskrit literary culture, and the kind of frameworks it does produce has something very particular to tell us.

The maps that Sanskrit *kāvya* texts generate are often complex, producing a range of relevant spaces above and beyond the geographical, though physical place remains always central. Were we to possess an adequate history of the messenger poem (*dūtakāvya*), one of the most prolific genres in the South Asian literary world and one that by definition charts movement through space, we could demonstrate the shifting boundaries, and the varieties, of literary domains.¹³⁷ The earliest example in Sanskrit, the *Meghadūta* (Cloud messenger) of Kālidāsa, in fact offers a set of overlapping transparencies, so to speak, as the cloud journeys from periphery to center through a range of cultural landscapes. Most prominent is the topographical, as the cloud proceeds from the plains of the northern Deccan, Mālava, and the midlands, north to the mountains of the high Himalayas and its destination, Alakā, the magical kingdom of Kubera, overlord of demigods.¹³⁸ At the same time, a sociosexual landscape is recapitulated in the movement from the naive country girls and pastoralists' wives of the rural world to the urbane and beautiful ladies of the city of Ujjayinī and finally to the perfect woman, the hero's lover, in Alakā. Again, a more strictly literary-cultural landscape emerges as the cloud travels from the rustic, Prakritic world of the south to a sophisticated

137. On the *Pavanadūta* see later in the chapter, and Freeman's account, chapter 7, this volume, of the Malayalam (or Manipravalam) examples.

138. From Rāmāgiri (Rāmtēk, near present-day Nagpur) the cloud proceeds via the Āmrakūṭa and Revā rivers to Vidiśā in the Daśārṇa country, via the Vetravati and Nirvindyā streams to Avanti and its town Viśālā, and then by the Śīprā river to the city of Ujjayinī. From Ujjayinī the cloud passes over other small rivers to Daśapura, Kurukṣetra, and on to the foothills of the Himalayas, Mount Kanakhala near Hardwar, the Krauñcarandhra Pass, Mount Kailāsa, Lake Mānasa, and Alakā.

courtly, decidedly Sanskritic world, with its consummation in the divine realm that Sanskrit poetry imagines as its ultimate referent.¹³⁹

In the *Buddhacarita* (Deeds of the Buddha; second century), Aśvaghōṣa plots out the important locales in the life of the Buddha in northern and eastern Magadha (modern Bihar) as the prince pursues both a spiritual and physical quest, from one vision of the world to another (as represented by the teachers Bhṛṅgu, Arāḍa, and Udraka) and from his birthplace in Kapilavastu to the site of his triumphs in Rājagṛha. A thousand years later, Bilhaṇa maps the literary courts important to a traveling poet in 1080, as he describes himself leaving home in Kashmir for the great centers of Sanskrit culture in the midlands, Gujarat, and the western coast, until finally he finds patronage at the court of the Western Cālukyas in the central Deccan.¹⁴⁰ Five centuries later still, the two demigods whose wanderings form the narrative frame of Veṅkaṭādhvarin's *Viśvagunādarśacampū* (The mirror of universal traits, c. 1650) take an aerial tour of India. They move quickly from Badarikāśrama in the Himalayas, Ayodhyā, Kāśī (Vārāṇasī), and Gurjaradeśa before beginning their more leisurely tour of the shrines and sites of southern India: the Nāyaka capital at Senji, the great temples and monasteries dedicated to Viṣṇu in southeast Andhra and Tamilnadu (while noticing the new English town of Madras on the coast) and those at Melkote in southern Karnataka and Udipi on the west coast.¹⁴¹ In all three cases, important circuits are being projected, whether of pilgrimage, patronage, or spiritual power—as in Kālidāsa's case circuits of topography, modalities of feeling, and culture—each specific to its historical moment.

To this diverse selection of mappings—imaginative, biographical, and religiocultural (and others could easily be added)—across one and a half millennia of Sanskrit literary culture we can juxtapose a far more significant and dominant macrospace plotted first and most insistently in the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁴² This vast spatialization, largely bounded by the subcontinental

139. I have profited from discussion with my former student Yigal Bronner on the maps of the *Meghadūta*.

140. *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 18.87–101. Bilhaṇa traveled to Mathurā, Kānyakubja, Prayāga, Vārāṇasī, Mount Kālañjara and Dāhala country, or Tripur, in central Madhya Pradesh, thence to Saurāṣṭra (where he wrote the drama *Kaṇhasundarī* for the Chālukyan king Kaṇva) and Koṅkana before proceeding to Kalyāṇa. The journey has something of an exile about it, and the writer longs to return home to “the good people of Kashmir” (v. 103). See further on the history of late twelfth-century Kashmir earlier in the chapter.

141. Most recently discussed in Narayana Rao et al. 1992: 1–12.

142. Other varieties requiring other kinds of analyses include the network of kingdoms described by the wanderings of the princes in the seventh-century *Daśakumāracarita*; the cultural geography of the *Samayamātkā* of Kṣemendra, whose heroine's picaresque adventures map the very self-consciously bounded world of eleventh-century Kashmir (*Laghukāvyaśaṅgraha* pp. 355–66); and works like the Jain *Kuvalayamālā*, where pilgrimage, trade, and politics all seem to combine as the prince wanders from Jalor in the west to Bijāpur, Mathurā, and eastward to Vārāṇasī.

sphere, accompanies, even constitutes, most of the key narrative junctures in the epic tale itself: when the hero Arjuna departs on his exile at the beginning of the tale; when his brother Yudhiṣṭhira dispatches his four brothers to conquer the four directions in preparation for his imperial consecration; when war is declared and troops gather; when, after the war, the victors perform the horse sacrifice to confirm their universal dominion; and lastly, when the brothers renounce their overlordship and begin their “great departure,” performing a last circumambulation of the world—of the sort repeatedly described and charted—to gain power over which their family had been destroyed and which they fittingly take leave of as they prepare to die.¹⁴³

As in the case of the ethnohistorical praise-poems, it is the very existence, and the insistence, of this geography that merit attention, rather than its precision. In this the *Mahābhārata* may be doing nothing unusual; spatialization is a defining concern of much epic literature. But that is exactly the point. Each epic creates a relevant world, for which its vision of culture and power makes sense; and if this world can rightly be said to have created the epic in the first place, the epic recreates it in turn by its very narrative of location. A preeminent example here is the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a text also preoccupied with the geography of heroic action, epitomized by the spectacular aerial tour of the subcontinent during Rāma’s homeward journey.¹⁴⁴ Its spatial vision was to some degree actualized in the Vijayanagara empire, which was founded

143. More detail is available in Pollock forthcoming. Arjuna charts a path from Indraprastha (near modern Delhi) north to Gaṅgādvāra and into the eastern Himalayas, southeast to Naimiṣa (Avadh region), east to Kauṣikī (Mithilā), southeast to Gayā, and further to Vaṅga (eastern Bengal), south down the Kaliṅga (Orissan) coast, over to Gokarṇa on the west coast of present-day Karnataka, north to Prabhāsa and Dvārakā in Kathiawar (Gujarat), northeast to Puṣkara in Rajasthan, and thence back to Indraprastha (*Mahābhārata* 1.200–210). For the *dīgviḥaya*, Arjuna proceeds to the north (Ānarta [north Gujarat], Kashmir, and Balkh [northern Afghanistan]); Bhīma to the east (Videha [Mithilā], Magadha, Aṅga [east Bihar], Vaṅga, Tāmrālīpi [south Bengal coast]); Sahadeva to the south (Tripur, Potana [north of Hyderabad], the lands of the Pāṇḍyas, Drāviḍyas, Coḍrakeralas, Andhras [peninsular India]); and Nakula to the west (Marubhūmi [Thar desert], Mālava, Pañcanada [Panjab], as far as the Pahlavas [Persia]) (*Mahābhārata* 2.23–29). The sacrificial horse wanders from Trigarta [Himachal Pradesh] to Prāgyotiṣa [western Assam], Mañipūra, Magadha, Vaṅga, Cedi, Kāśī, Kosala, Draviḍa, Āndhra, Gokarṇa, Prabhāsa, Dvārakā, Pañcanada, and Gāndhāra (*Mahābhārata* 15.73–85). On their *mahāprasthāna* the Pāṇḍavas travel first to the Lauhityā (Brahmaputra) river in the east, “by way of the northern [i.e., northeastern] coast of the ocean to the southwest quarter,” then to Dvārakā and from there to Himavān, Vālukarṇava (the great Ocean of Sand) and Mount Meru (*Mahābhārata* 17).

144. The journey from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā passes over the sea and the causeway at the southern shore, to Mount Hiraṇyanābha, Kiṣkindhā, Mount Ṛṣyamūka, Pampā, Janasthāna, the Godāvarī river, Mount Citrakūṭa, the Yamunā and Gaṅgā, Śṛṅgaverapura, and home (*Rāmāyaṇa* 6.111; a beloved scene reworked in a number of *Rāmāyaṇa* retellings, from *Raghuvamśa* [chapter 13] onward; especially rich is Rājasekhara’s *Balarāmāyaṇa* 10.26–96). The *Rāmāyaṇa* geography is more exoticized than that of the *Mahābhārata* and has provoked fantastic readings over the past century (see the brief comments of Goldman 1984: 27–28, and Lefebvre 1996: 29–35).

where it was in northern Karnataka in part because of the site's historical *Rāmāyaṇa* associations. *Mahābhārata* space is recreated in later inscriptional accounts of royal conquest, which in turn find their way back into *kāvya*. The pillar inscription of Samudragupta (r. 335–376), for example, plots an epic space of Gupta power and was itself transformed into courtly epic by Kālidāsa in his account of the dynasty of the sun kings in the *Raghuvamśa* (chapter 4).¹⁴⁵ If the literary geography of power in Sanskrit culture sometimes sought and achieved a kind of symmetry with the aspirations of historical agents, these aspirations themselves often seem to have been shaped by literature.

The epic macrospace has, to be sure, a later history of its own. A range of vernacular domains of culture and power were to be defined in relationship to it when the transregional formation of Sanskrit, and accompanying visions of empire, gave way during the course of the second millennium to new, more regionalized forms of polity and culture. Such is the case with the earliest complete vernacularization of the *Mahābhārata*, Pampa's Kannada-language *Vikramārjunavijaya* (c. 950). Here the epic world has been shrunk to the narrower sphere where the Kannada language and the emerging forms of postimperial polity had application.¹⁴⁶ But the compression of space even finds expression in Sanskrit itself in the late medieval period. We have already observed how the *Viśvagunādarśacampū* projects a new circuit of religion and polity in seventeenth-century south India. In the same way, the *Pavanadūta* (Wind messenger) of Dhoyī, a poet at the court of Lakṣmaṇasena of Bengal in the late twelfth century, creates a new region of power by combining two illustrious models of Sanskrit spatialization already mentioned: Raghu's conquest of the quarters in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* and the journey of the cloud in his *Meghadūta*. In Dhoyī's poem the spring wind, carrying to Lakṣmaṇasena a message from a lovelorn nymph in the imaginary city of Kananagarī in Kerala, follows a path from Mount Malaya on the southwest coast to Bengal that retraces the king's putative conquest of the southern quarters. But the narrative of this journey is perfunctory and clearly only preparatory to the detailed account of Gauḍa (western Bengal) itself.¹⁴⁷ It is the region that has now begun to count, even for the writer of cosmopolitan Sanskrit.

Congruent with the subcontinental sphere projected narratively in the *Mahābhārata*, and in the many *kāvya* works influenced by it, is the geocultural framework found in the second-order accounts of literature in the Sanskrit tradition—a framework shared by most forms of Sanskrit thought during the age of *kāvya* and employed for the analysis of every sociocultural

145. See Ingalls 1976: 16 n. for references to earlier scholarship.

146. See Pollock 1998c: 50–51.

147. The descriptions of Suhma, Trivenī (the Delta), and Vijayapura (the Sena capital) occupy the greater part of the work (vv. 27 ff.).

phenomenon, from the distribution of female sexual types to forms of customary law. A brief account of the notion of the Ways-of-writing (*mārga* or *rīti*) can illustrate this well.

The different styles of composing Sanskrit literature, based on features of phonology, semantics, and syntax, formed a component of literary analysis from at least the late seventh century, when Daṇḍin described them in detail in the first chapter of his *Mirror*. To these Ways regional appellations were given—at first just two: Gauḍa, the writing way of Gauḍa (Bengal) in the (north)east, and Vaidarbha, the writing way of Vidarbha (Berar) in the south. It is probable that the distinctions foundational to the theory of the Ways were originally apprehended by southern poets writing Sanskrit with sensibilities shaped by the Dravidian languages of south India; the range of diagnostics employed for differentiating the two styles is consistent with marked tendencies in the two language families, and in fact southern writing is defined by the presence of features “inverted” or absent in the north.¹⁴⁸ But whatever the true origins of the distinction, from the early period of Sanskrit literature the Ways were available for use by writers all over the Sanskrit world—something especially evident after the eighth or ninth century when the Ways were linked with emotional register (southern style was reserved for erotic poetry, northern style for heroic).

The notion of regionalized styles took on a life of its own after the late eighth century, when a Kashmiri critic, Vāmana, made it the core idea of his literary theory. The primary interest of later thinkers was to multiply literary Ways to fill out the subcontinental terrain. Besides the two of the oldest tradition, later scholars distinguished Ways of the midlands, of Gujarat, and of the zone between them (Avantī), of Bihar in the northeast, of Surat in the west, and, in the south, of Āndhra, and of Tamil country.¹⁴⁹ Some kind of cultural politics underlay this multiplication; it is as if it were increasingly exigent for every region to be represented on the map of literary style. And it would seem reasonable to attribute this once more to the actual and ever more prominent demarcation of vernacular literary spheres in the early second millennium.

Yet for the writers of Sanskrit literary criticism, such regional differences are not perceived as actually regional at all. As stylistic options, the Ways of literature evinced as little local difference as the Sanskrit literary idiom itself. Writers everywhere wrote “southern” poetry in exactly the same way. And

148. In southern writing there is a de-emphasis of certain consonants prominent in Indo-Aryan languages; analytical as opposed to nominalized usages; primary as opposed to etymologically derived words; and descriptive as opposed to troped discourse. See further in Pollock 1998a.

149. Vāmana added *pāñcālī* (*rīti*): Rudraṭa (c. 875), *lāṭiyā*; Bhoja, *āvantikā* and *māgadhī*; Śara-dātanaya (c. 1100–1130), *saurāṣṭrī* and *drāviḍī*; Śiṅgabhūpāla (c. 1330), *āndhrī*.

this is precisely what we would expect: To participate in a cosmopolitan cultural order such as that of Sanskrit meant precisely to occlude local difference, or rather, to make the local universally standard. Accordingly, what the Ways served to suggest in the first instance was not the regionality of Sanskrit but precisely its transregionality: Sanskrit is everywhere. However insistent on mapping stylistic places Sanskrit writers may have been, what they showed thereby was how Sanskrit pervaded all places. And the writers demonstrated this by producing a literature that sought to escape place no less than time. The fact that it is as impossible to identify where a Sanskrit work was composed as it is to identify when, unless we are explicitly informed, shows how often they succeeded.

It is, furthermore, precisely because it represented a cultural totalization of this sort that *mārga*, or the culture of the Way (now in the singular), would come to constitute the counterpart to the culture of Place (*deśī*). The new binary opposite of the Way and the Place, which emerged around the tenth century in regional-language discourse, became the principal conceptual framework by which southern vernacular intellectuals sought to make sense of their complexly dialogical relationship to Sanskrit literary culture.¹⁵⁰

Regionality and Recension

Both the narratives of Sanskrit literary space and the analytic framework of literary thought, such as the discourse on the Ways of writing, project a much smaller world than Sanskrit literature historically occupied. As epigraphical evidence shows, almost simultaneously with the beginnings of the public literary inscription of Sanskrit in South Asia, an identical cultural practice, with identical kinds of texts and documents and discourses, made its appearance throughout the regions now known as Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Indonesia. As far as we can judge from the evidence of epigraphy, these lands of Southeast Asia participated as fully in the culture of the Sanskrit cosmopolis as did South Asia itself. Indeed, to think of South and Southeast Asia in this epoch as separate areas makes little sense; the processes of cosmopolitanization and vernacularization occurring in the one region were identical to what we find in the other at the same period; Java and Kannada country in the tenth century offer a remarkable illustration of this.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Sanskrit remained a central feature of the cultural-political life of much of Southeast Asia for a thousand years from the fourth century onward—and the fact that the literati of those worlds mastered the entire range of Sanskrit literary practice, displayed this mastery in

150. This matter is considered in detail in Pollock forthcoming. For briefer remarks, see Pollock 1998a, Nagaraj, chapter 5, and Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume.

grand public inscriptions, and produced on its model vernacular literature of great power—the lands of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia were never included in the narratives of epic journeys, in other maps of *kāvya*, in the doctrine of the Ways, or in any other cognitive geography from the subcontinent. We can account for this in some part by the actual history of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia. Aside from the political poems of the inscriptions (which are themselves fully realized texts of their kind and sometimes spectacular in their grandeur), we cannot confidently point to the creation of a single new work of Sanskrit *kāvya* during the entire seven or eight centuries of cosmopolitan culture in Cambodia, Java, or elsewhere in the area. But the absence itself is enigmatic, and it yields to no easy explanation.

These eastern reaches of the Sanskrit cosmopolis excepted, the internal maps of literary texts and the discursive frameworks of literary theory do have some significant objective correlates. Foremost among these is the range of distribution of Sanskrit literary manuscripts, of which the *Mahābhārata* again provides a model case. Leaving aside manuscripts disseminated through migration, for the preservation of which no habit of reproduction ever developed,¹⁵¹ the spread of *Mahābhārata* manuscripts largely followed the boundaries represented so frequently in the text itself. These are visible in what modern (and in some cases premodern) scholars have identified as the principal “recensions” deriving from the different script traditions: Nepali, Bangla, Grantha (Tamilnadu), Malayalam (Kerala), Nagari (comprising north-central India down to Maharashtra and Gujarat), and Sharada (Kashmir and much of west Panjab). There exists no Afghan recension of the *Mahābhārata*, nor Tajik, Burmese, Cambodian, Cham, or Javanese.

Many of the names applied to these *Mahābhārata* recensions—some of which, again, are indubitably precolonial, such as *gaudīyasampradāya*, the Bengal vulgate—might be taken to imply that in the course of its diffusion the text itself became regionalized, that there is something significantly Bangla about the Bengal vulgate. Indeed, the same might be assumed for Sanskrit literary culture as a whole, since we can identify regional recensions for countless texts. And accordingly, the supraregionality that so many other factors of Sanskrit literary culture promote would seem to have been counteracted at the level of the text itself. In fact, such an assumption would be false. Nonetheless, examining some dominant traits of Sanskrit manuscript culture and the regional writing systems on which it is based is helpful in understanding the literary objects under consideration. We need to remember that everything we read when we read a Sanskrit text has been copied

151. These include such things as a manuscript of the *Ādiparvan* donated to a temple in Cambodia in the seventh century (the Prasat Prah That inscription), or the eleventh-century Old Javanese version of the epic that is one part Sanskrit *pratika* and nine parts vernacular adaptation.

and recopied for centuries—a textual devotion, under environmental conditions of unusual severity, that is hard to parallel in world culture and that has preserved for us the works of the greater number of the canonical poets earlier discussed.¹⁵² Obviously, the less we understand of this process, the less we understand of the product.

In contrast to all other quasi-global cultures of the premodern past, the Sanskrit order enforced no fixity of the written sign. If elsewhere language and script were as a rule mutually exclusive of all other language-script combinations (Latin was written only in the Roman script, for example), the adoption of Sanskrit literary culture proceeded independently of logographic uniformity. Sanskrit writers wrote the exact same language, with equal success, in scores of different graphic forms, including those that we now call Brahmi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Bangla, Newari, Sinhala, and Javanese.¹⁵³ The specific modality of writing would thus appear to be wholly irrelevant to a history of Sanskrit literary culture.

Conventional wisdom holds, however, that the very diversity of graphic realizations, and their growing distance from each other over time, had an enormous impact on Sanskrit literary history, especially in respect of regions and recensions. Most scholars assume that writing styles and manuscript traditions formed closed systems: Given the regional exclusivity of scripts—or what is taken to be their exclusivity—Sanskrit literary texts are said to have developed versions peculiar to writing traditions, and hence recensions tended to become regionalized. In addition, the more localized the script, the less it communicated with others and thus the purer the textual tradition it is thought to contain; Malayalam (in Kerala) and Sharada (in Kashmir) are usually offered as the model instances.¹⁵⁴

There is some truth to this conventional view, but it needs important qualification. Scripts in precolonial South Asia seem to have represented as

152. Major early works that have disappeared are in fact relatively few: *Aśvagoṣa's* (or Kumāralāta's) *Sūtrāṅkīrā*, the texts of Saumilla and Kaviratna, Hariścandra's *Śūdrakakathā*, the real plays of Bhāsa, the *Hayagrīvavadha* of Bhartṛmeṅṭha, the collected poems of Dharmakīrti. Other sectors of cosmopolitan literary culture fared far worse. Almost all Apabhramsha literature before the tenth century has vanished, and much non-Jain Prakrit literature.

153. Although all South Asian and many Southeast Asian scripts derive ultimately from Brahmi, by the second half of the first millennium they were thoroughly regionalized and differentiated. Thus, for example, the Kathiawadi style of the Maitrakas of Valabhī (sixth-seventh centuries), the proto-Kannada style of the Bādāmi Cālukyas (sixth-seventh centuries), and the proto-Bangla style of the Pālas (ninth-tenth centuries), have lost all appearance of kindredness (Dani 1986: 108 ff.).

154. See for example Katre 1954: 29–30. For the prominence of such views in the text-criticism of the epics, cf. e.g., Sukthankar 1927: 82: the Sharada version of the *Mahābhārata*, he asserts, was protected by its “largely unintelligible script and by the difficulties of access to the province.”

little a barrier to supralocal communication as regional languages.¹⁵⁵ And although most scholars who accept the sharp image of impermeable script traditions are prepared to blur it by acknowledging the circulation of literati and manuscripts—which, besides being vast and relatively rapid, is what makes Sanskrit textual criticism uniquely problematic—we know from the textual history of early works like the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* and later works like the *Nāgānanda* of Harṣa (r. 590–647) that even Malayalam manuscripts were accessible and legible to scholars in lands as distant as Kashmir or Nepal.

Little systematic knowledge is available about the lives of literary texts in Sanskrit, especially post-epic texts, since the critical editing of works in which the logic of variation itself has been taken as an object of study has scarcely begun.¹⁵⁶ The textual traditions of important Sanskrit works regularly fall into recensions that editors would have us think of as regional. A recent edition of the *Raghuvamśa*, for example, identifies five such traditions: eastern (*gauḍa*), western (*nāgara*), Kashmiri (*kāsmīra*), southern (*dākṣiṇāṭya*), and north-central (*madhyadeśīya*); the *Nāgānanda* likewise shows five (Nepal, Tibet, north India, the Deccan, and south India). But what we do not understand very well for either the *Raghuvamśa* or the *Nāgānanda*—and they seem to be representative of many Sanskrit works—is how such regional recensions developed and what, beyond script identity, their regionality actually consists in.¹⁵⁷

Beside the limited influence of script, the provenance of commentators is likely to be a key factor in textual regionalization. Commentators were editors as much as exegetes, and the editions they established often became dominant in a given region (these, too, however, circulated widely outside their script area, so much so that the commentaries of the tenth-century

155. It seemed unreasonable to Katre to assume that professional copyists could be acquainted with more than one “or at most two scripts,” but substantial evidence suggests that mastery of different writing systems was widely valued (cf. *Vikramāṅkadevācarita* 3.17; EI 12: p. 280, v. 78; EI 19: 51). Negative evidence includes mistranscriptions from unfamiliar scripts (cf. Dvivedi 1986: xvi–xvii; Vādirāja cited by Raghavan 1941–1942: 6; Stein 1900: v). Further doubts about the “writing-system premise” that underlies epic text-criticism and the reality of regional versions have recently been raised by Grünendahl 1993.

156. The critical editing of Sanskrit literary texts is in its infancy. Outside of the two epics, Hillebrandt’s *Mudrārākṣasa* (1912), Kosambi’s *Śatakatrayam* (1948), Miller’s *Gītāgovinda* (1977), Coulson’s *Mālatīmādhava* (1983), Dvivedi’s *Kālidāsa* (1986) and a few *Kālidāsa* volumes published by the Sahitya Akademi almost exhaust the twentieth-century list. We have no detailed accounts of the textual history of many great works, from *Kirātārjunīya*, *Śiśupālavadha*, *Daśakumārācarita*, *Harṣacarita*, and *Kādambarī* onward. This is a consequence of the sheer number of manuscripts available for any important text, their paleographic complexities, and practical difficulties of simply gaining access to them.

157. See Dvivedi in *Kālidāsaśāstrāvalī* 1986: xlv. Hahn 1991 (who argues that none of the five *Nāgānanda* versions can be derived from any other).

Kashmiri scholar Vallabhadeva were studied assiduously in fifteenth-century Āndhra). Just how such editions were established also largely escapes us, as do the text-critical principles they were based on. We do know that commentators typically collected and compared manuscripts in order to constitute their text. In some instances efforts were made to secure copies from all over the subcontinent. This is famously the case with the *Mahābhārata* editor of late-seventeenth-century Vārāṇasī, Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara, who tells us he gathered “many manuscripts from different regions and critically established the best readings.”¹⁵⁸ This may well have been the case with skilled *kāvya* editors, too.

As for what constitutes the correct or the best reading and the criteria for establishing it, scholars then as now differed—and they differed, then as now, on the basis of principles and not whim. One of the earliest extant commentators on *kāvya*, Vallabhadeva (fl. 950, Kashmir), often chose a reading on the principle of difficulty and the antiquity such difficulty suggests: “This must be the ancient reading precisely because it is unfamiliar.” Or he might combine principles of antiquity and aestheticism: “The old reading in this verse is more beautiful.” Yet authenticity has its limits for Vallabha; like other commentators he will rewrite a verse in order to save his author from a supposed solecism.¹⁵⁹ The willingness of some editors to emend, whether on the basis of grammatical deviation or supposed aesthetic or logical fault, was a source of worry to poets, such as this twelfth-century Kashmiri poet working at the court of Ajmer:

Noble learning, however pure in itself,
should not be applied to emending the works of good poets.
Holy ash is not scattered, in hopes of purification,
on water one is about to drink.¹⁶⁰

Yet in fact, emendation was restrained or resisted by many commentators, who took care, as did one fifteenth-century scholar of Āndhra, to assure read-

158. *Mahābhārata* with the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha, vol. 1, introduction, v. 6: *bahūn samāhṛtya vibhinnadeśān kośān viniścītya ca pāṭham agryam*.

159. Thus Vallabha replaces the Vedic word *triyambaka* (Three-Eyed, a name of Śiva) with an everyday synonym (*maheśvaram*, Great God), for “Since the [*svarabhakti*] *y* in *triyambaka* is permitted [by grammarians] only in the Veda and not in this-worldly writing (*bhāṣā*), we must here instead read ‘Great God’” (commentary on *Kumārasaṃbhava* 3.44, cf. 3.28). For his first principle see 1.46, *aprasiddhatvād āṛṣaḥ pāṭhaḥ*, regarding the reading (*līlā*)-*cikurām* (-*caturām*), as per Aruṇagiri and Mallinātha, the Sanskrit version of the familiar maxim *lectio difficilior melior est*; for the second, 2.26, cf. 2.37, *jaratpāṭho ’ra ramyatarah*.

160. *Ṛṭhvirājavijaya* (Victory of Ṛṭhvirāja, c. 1190) 1.14: *viśodhane satkavibhāratimām śud-dho ’pi pāṇḍityaguṇo na योग्याḥ / na kṣīpyate bhasma viśuddhikāmair apām hi pātavyatayoddhṛtānām*. Kṣemendra similarly attacks grammarians and logicians as hostile to poetry, *Kavikaṇṭhābharāṇa* 1. 15, 19, 22.

ers that they were transmitting exactly what they found in their manuscripts.¹⁶¹ Generally editor-commentators sought to establish as coherent and authoritative a text as they could on the basis of the materials available to them (*āgata*) rather than conjectured (*kalpita*).

Such practical criteria have something important to tell us about the model of textuality at work: Some readings are not only objectively more beautiful (*ramya*) than others, or contextually more sensible (*yukta*) or more clearly what is intended by the author (*vivakṣita*), but are also older or more original (*jarat*; *āṛṣa*); some may clearly be corruptions (*apapāṭha*) and in need of emendation (*śodhana*), and some are just as clearly interpolations (*prakṣipta*) and must be rejected.¹⁶² Text-critical practices of this sort are common among commentaries on not only epics but also *kāvya*. It is thus by no means unusual for Arjunavarmadeva (fl. 1215), editor-commentator of the *Amaruśataka*, to reject a number of verses as the interpolations of a second-rate poet satisfied even with the anonymous fame of having his work included in Amaru's collection.¹⁶³ And when taken as a whole these practices suggest a model of textuality at once historicist-intentionalist and purist-aestheticist—standards that, if obviously contradictory, are perhaps not fatally so. That is to say, texts were held to be intentional productions of authors, whose intentions could be recovered by the judicious assessment of manuscript variants. At the same time, literary texts were *lakṣyagrantha*—instantiations of the rule-boundedness (*lakṣaṇa*) of Sanskrit literary production in terms of grammar, lexicon, prosody, and the poetics of sound and sense—and when conflict arose, they had to yield to the superior claims of the rules.

What we do not find, however, among the text-critical practices, editor-

161. Mallinātha in the introduction to his *Raghuvamśasamjivini* (*nāmūlyam likhyate kiñcit*). For a good example of emendation based on logic see Maṅkīyācandra on *Kāvyaṭīkā* (ed. Mysore), vol. 2, p. 372.

162. An important discussion of general principles is found in the work of early-fourteenth-century scholar and religious reformer Madhva (and his commentator Vādirāja). The explanation of the meaning of *śāstras* such as the *Mahābhārata*, he tells us,

has to be provided by way of the sentences of the text themselves [and not through discourses invented by our own imagination, com.]. But people interpolate passages in the text [*prakṣīpanti*], suppress passages that are there [*antaritān kuryuḥ*] or transfer them [*vṛyatyaśam kuryuḥ*] to elsewhere in the text whether by mistake or intentionally. Many thousands of manuscripts have disappeared and those that are extant are disordered. So confused can a text have become that even the gods themselves could not figure it out. *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* 2.2–5.

The Sanskrit text of Vādirāja's commentary here is cited in Gode 1940.

163. *Amaruśataka* pp. 46–47. Arjunavarmadeva's grounds for rejection of supposedly inauthentic verses are purely aesthetic: "These jangling lines will simply give learned men a headache"; "She 'takes his breath away,' like a witch, no doubt"; "her beauty [saltiness] doubles my thirst' must have been written by a ditchdigger in the Sambar salt lake." Text-critical procedures among *Rāmāyaṇa* commentators are discussed passim in the notes to Pollock 1986 and 1991.

ial principles, or reading protocols of commentators is anything marked by or conducive to regional difference, the occasional vernacular gloss aside. Premodern philology is standardized throughout the Sanskrit world. Likewise, nothing in any sense regional accompanied the regionalization of scripts and the production of regional recensions. The language of the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata* or of the Bangla recension of the *Śākuntala*, for example, is as little marked as southern or Bangla as is its material culture or mentality. All recensions of the epic transmit the epic's transregional talk and thought and realia, as all recensions of the *Śākuntala*, whether Bangla or Malayali, transmit the talk and thought and realia of courtly culture.¹⁶⁴ Norms of literary form and aesthetics that were universal in their self-understanding universally found application. The diversity and localism of scripts, editors, and recensions did nothing of significance to localize or diversify the cosmopolitan world of Sanskrit literary culture.

The Social Sites of Sanskrit

In addition to the conceptual maps of writers and critics, and the actual routes taken or boundaries created by the inscription, editing, and circulation of texts, the relevant "places" of Sanskrit literary culture include the sites of its production and consumption in the social world. That Sanskrit *kāvya* was above all a courtly practice may not be news, though we still lack a serious study of exactly what kind of practice this was. Yet the court was not its exclusive social space.

The oldest extant anthology of Sanskrit poetry is a twelfth-century compilation called the *Subhāṣitaratnakōśa* (Anthology of well-turned verse). This was the work of the abbot of a Buddhist monastery at Jagaddala in what is now Bangladesh. While the anthology provides many insights into the elements of practical literary consciousness—about standards of selection and canonicity, the principles of organizing the literary universe, the status of and knowledge about authorship—its social location is very puzzling: What do we make of the fact that a collection of this-worldly poetry, three-quarters of it dealing with the physical love of men and women, was prepared at an institution for Buddhist renunciates?

Anthology-making has a long history in Sanskrit and Prakrit literary culture. If we leave aside the ancient testimonies of spiritual awakening in Pali (*Thera-* and *Therīgāthā*), this begins with a text mentioned earlier, the Maharashtra Prakrit *Gāhākoso* (Treasury of lyrics, or *Gāhāsattasāi*, the seven hundred lyrics), attributed to King Hāla of the Sātavahana dynasty (c. third cen-

164. In the case of the *Śākuntala* itself, a recent article finds "regional" variation explainable on entirely nonregional grounds: the inflated (Bangla) recension is argued to be the stage version; the shorter (Nagari) text, the "author's" version (Bansat-Boudon 1994).

ture). It is remarkable that virtually every one of the important anthologies of whose provenance we have any knowledge turns out to have been, like the *Gāhākoso* itself, the work of intellectuals associated with royal courts. A rash of such anthologies is found at the beginning of the second millennium (another manifestation of a widespread, if poorly understood, proliferation of encyclopedism throughout Sanskrit culture of the period).¹⁶⁵ The *Subhāṣītaratnakōśa* may fit this pattern. The Jagaddala monastery had close ties to the Pāla dynasty—it was there Pāla kings received royal consecration—and it makes sense, too, that those who were likely recruited as tutors to the court would be expected to be familiar with the literature the court cultivated.¹⁶⁶ Other hypotheses can no doubt be framed to explain why Buddhist monks had the kind of library such an anthology presupposes. Perhaps this sort of literature was a prompt to meditation on the defilements—or a pleasurable source of them. But whatever the truth of the matter, the presence of erotic poetry in this monastic community (unlike the presence of manuscripts of Juvenal in the monastery of Montecassino) was scarcely accidental: If we can infer anything, it is that Sanskrit literature was seriously cultivated far beyond the assembly of the king—an impression strengthened by a second feature of the anthology, its choice of materials.

In addition to the eulogies of gods and kings and poets, the verses that chart a woman's erotic history from childhood to old age, and the other long-cultivated topics of Sanskrit poetry, the *Subhāṣītaratnakōśa* includes a generous selection of the poetry of rural life, rural joy, and rural misery. This kind of material, much of it written by tenth-century poets of Pāla Bengal, Yogeśvara chief among them, is not readily found elsewhere, either in other anthologies or in independent works (one of the earliest *kāvya* texts, the *Harivamśa*, excepted). And it reveals a world of concerns of Sanskrit literature—and may imply other sites of its production and consumption—of which we would otherwise have little idea. One might be prone to suppose that, again, like a Theocritan pastoral or indeed, like the *Gāhākoso* itself, this poetry of village and field, as it has been called, is a courtly vision of the rural, designed for urban and urbane listeners. But it is hard to sustain this facile interpre-

165. The *Saduktikarnāmyta* by Śrīdharaḍāsa was produced at the court of Lakṣmaṇasena of Bengal in 1205; the *Sūktimuktāvali* by Jalhaṇa at the Devagiri court of the Yādavas in 1258; the *Subhāṣītaisudhānidhi* by Sāyaṇa at the court of Harihara I (r. 1336–1357) or Bukka (r. 1344–1377) of Vijayanagara; the *Śārīngadharaḥpadhati* by Śārīngadhara at the court of the Śākambharī Chauhans in 1363; the *Subhāṣītavali*, substantially reedited by Śrīvara, at the court of Zain-ul-ʿabidīn of Kashmir, c. 1450 (it is likely to have been originally composed c. 1150). On the far earlier *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā*, see Collins, chapter 11, this volume. The new drive toward cultural totalization is signaled by, inter alia, a new genre called the *dharmānibandha* (compendium of moral action, on which see Pollock 1993), and by such royal encyclopedias as the *Mānasolāsa*, considered later in this chapter.

166. Kosambi in *Subhāṣītaratnakōśa* pp. xxxi–xxxix.

tation in the face of verses like the following (I give them in the lovely translation of Daniel Ingalls):

Somehow, my wife, you must keep us and the children
alive until the summer months are over.
The rains will come then, making gourds and pumpkins grow aplenty,
and we shall fare like kings.

The children starving, looking like so many corpses,
the relative who spurns me, the water pot
patched up with lac—these do not hurt so much
as seeing the woman from next door, annoyed
and smiling scornfully when every day my wife
must beg a needle to mend her tattered dress.

I wear no golden bracelet
bright as the rays of autumn moon,
nor have I tasted a young bride's lip
tender and hesitant with shame.
I have won no fame in heaven's hall
by either pen or sword,
but waste my time in ruined colleges,
teaching insolent, malicious boys.¹⁶⁷

Both the provenance of the *Subhāṣitaratnakośa* and the materials it contains point toward social worlds—far from the court—where Sanskrit literature was very much alive, and this is an impression corroborated by, among other things, inscriptions reporting local endowments for training in *kāvya* and related arts.¹⁶⁸ And on the evidence of contemporaneous narratives from the Kashmir valley, at the other end of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan world, we may expand this social universe beyond the monastery and the village (or the village school) to include two other important sites: the temple and the private urban dwelling. In the early ninth century, a councillor named Dāmodaragupta at the celebrated court of King Jayāpīḍa (r. 779–813, the patron also of the literary scholars Udbhaṭa and Vāmana) wrote a unique narrative poem, the *Kuṭṭanīmata* (The madam's handbook). The centerpiece of the work is the tragic love story of prince Samarabhaṭa and the actress Mañjarī, whom he meets at a temple of Śiva where he has gone to offer wor-

167. Ingalls 1968a: 257, 276. Ingalls was the first to call attention to the “Sanskrit poetry of village and field” (1954), though in his fine essay on the *Harivaṃśa* (1968b) he curiously neglected to trace its long history.

168. See for example EI 13: 326 ff. (929 C.E., western Karnataka: *sāhityavidyā* is taught, along with grammar, *arthaśāstra*, *ītiḥāsa*); EI 5: 221–22 (1112 C.E., western Karnataka: *kāvya* and *nāṭaka* are taught in addition to the Vedas, grammar, and philosophy); EC 7 (Beḷagmi inscription, Sk. 102: in the Kōḍimaṭha, “all poems, dramas, comedies” are taught along with philosophy, grammar, *purāṇa*, and *dharmaśāstra*).

ship. Seated amid a crowd of male dancers, musicians, singers, merchants, and guild masters, the prince asks to see some entertainment and is addressed by a drama instructor who has recently immigrated from Kānyakubja:

Do not expect skill in a dramatic performance where the members of the audience are merchants and the performers prostitutes. My student-actresses and myself, by contrast, have recently arrived here, taking refuge in this holy temple, now that great King Harṣa has passed away. But my students are desolate and only rarely, out of anxiety of not having any income at all, do they move their hands and feet in presenting the *Ratnāvalī*.¹⁶⁹

The director invites the prince to watch one act of Harṣa's famous play performed by the all-female troupe, Mañjarī taking the lead role of Sāgarikā. At the end of the performance, the prince expresses his appreciation with a learned critique and presents the director with a house and a plot of land.¹⁷⁰

The theater in old South Asia, even the Sanskrit theater, could thus be as much a popular entertainment as it typically was elsewhere in the world. That it took place in the temple importantly stretches our sense of that institution in premodern India (though the kind of court-temple division in literary production, found for example in later Āndhra, is not known here).¹⁷¹ It is accessible not just to princes but to guild masters and merchants; and it is sustained by strictly material transactions—hardly what we think of as courtly culture.¹⁷²

Distant from the court, too—if not quite so distant—was the literary salon, of which a memorable description is provided by Mañkha at the time of the recitation of his courtly epic, which I discussed earlier. This took place at the home of his brother in Pravarapura (present-day Srinagar) around the year 1140. Due no doubt to the unprecedented royal abuses in twelfth-century Kashmir that helped to bring Sanskrit literary culture to an end, the court had more or less ceased to command the sympathies of the subjects, and kingly power was irrelevant to Mañkha's life as a poet and to the theme of his poem:

How fortunate am I that Sarasvatī, Goddess of Speech, willful though she may be, has prompted me to praise no one but Śiva.

Away with those whose speech, though immersed in Sarasvatī, Goddess of Speech [bathed in the river Sarasvatī], dirties itself like a drunken woman with the filth of praise given to kings.

169. *Kuṭṭanīmata* vv. 794–96.

170. *Kuṭṭanīmata* vv. 739–947.

171. See Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume; and contrast Freeman, chapter 7, this volume. On the temple theater of medieval Gujarat, see Yashaschandra, chapter 9, this volume.

172. Dāmodaragupta's description is corroborated by a wide range of other evidence, including, for example, the prologues to Bhavabhūti's plays, which inform us that they were performed at the popular festivals of Ujjain.

The vision belonging to Sarasvatī is befouled by a poet when rendered subservient to kings.¹⁷³

Mañkha's work is uncontaminated by the evil of praising kings; "All poets, yourself excepted," he is told by the ambassador from the Koṅkana, "have served only to teach men how to beg."¹⁷⁴ Royal power has become irrelevant not only to literature but to literary culture. The venue of the recitation of Mañkha's poem amounts to a kind of inchoate literary public sphere, consisting of scholars, literati, and men of affairs from home and abroad—but no king. Yet it seems to have been a sphere that could not be sustained for long.

We are thus obliged to acknowledge a wide range of social locations for the production and consumption of Sanskrit literature, though its primary site, the main source of patronage and of the glory (*yaśas*) conferred by the approbation of the learned, undoubtedly always remained the royal court. And it is *kāvya* as courtly practice that we need to understand if we are to understand the heart of Sanskrit literary culture.¹⁷⁵ One important and unexploited document to help us is the *Mānasollāsa* (The mind's delight, also called *Abhilāṣitārthacintāmaṇi* [Wishing gem for all things desired]), a royal encyclopedia composed around 1130 at Kalyāṇa (in the northeast of present-day Karnataka) during the reign of King Someśvara III, the last of the great overlords of the Western Cāḷukya dynasty.

Part of the new encyclopedism of late medieval India, the *Mānasollāsa* represents a summa of kingly action, touching on everything from the acquisition and consolidation of political power to its physical and intellectual enjoyment. In the last category are included the entertainments of learned discourse (*śāstravinoda*) and of storytelling (*kathāvinoda*).¹⁷⁶ The section actually commences with the entertainment of arms (*śastravinoda*), where the king himself comes forth to display his mastery of various weapons. This is followed by learned discourse; displays by elephant drivers and horsemen; diversions such as dueling, wrestling, and cockfighting; and finally, singing, instrumental music, dancing, and storytelling. Whether acting as spectator or participant, the king is centrally involved in all these activities as connoisseur and critic.

The *sabhā*, or cultural assembly, of the king includes not just courtiers, ministers, and the like but also, prominently, masters of all the verbal arts: scholars, makers of poems, experts in vernacular languages (who are employed

173. *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* 25.5, 8, 9.

174. *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* 25.112.

175. See further in Lienhard 1984: 16 ff.; Smith 1985: 87 ff.; Tiekens 1992: 371 ff.

176. See *Mānasollāsa* vol. 2, pp. 171 ff., vv. 197 ff.; and vol. 3, pp. 162–65, vv. 1406–32, respectively.

principally for singing, not for literature), reciters of *kāvya*, epic rhapsodists, and genealogists. For the entertainment of learned discourse these are supplemented by disputants and exegetes, men learned in the *śāstra* and skilled in the arts of language, “practiced in the three precious [knowledges]”—grammar, hermeneutics, and logic—“creators and interpreters, men who are adept at versification and who know the principles of sweet poetry, and who are knowledgeable in all languages.”¹⁷⁷

The entertainment of learned discourse begins when the king commands the poets to recite a lovely poem, and during the recitation he is shown to reflect on the poem’s good qualities and faults. The protocols of critical reflection are supplied by the text as well:

Words make up the body of a literary text, meaning is its life-breath, tropes its external form, emotional states and feelings its movements, meter its gait, and the knowledge of language its vital spot. It is in these that the beauty of the deity of literature consists.¹⁷⁸

This précis is then expanded into a detailed account of the elements of literary knowledge that a royal connoisseur in central India at the end of the twelfth century was expected to possess and apply: the expression-forms (*guṇa*) and the different Ways (or Paths, *ṛiti*) of writing; the basic concepts and common varieties of meters; the major figures of speech; the features of the principal genres; and the components and operation of the primary aesthetic moods. The king listens to this talk about literature and reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the poems he has heard recited.¹⁷⁹

The penultimate entertainment—before the entertainment of magical ointments and powders that render a person clear-sighted or invisible or enable him to walk on water—is storytelling. After the king has finished his daily duties, dined, and rested, he summons men to tell him stories about the deeds of heroes in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, ancient lore (*purāṇa*), or the *Bṛhatkathā*, from plays or courtly epics. The storytellers should be eloquent and cultured men who believe in the truth of the duties demanded by the moral law (*dharma*), men young in years but mature in intellect, who are “axes to fell the tree of sadness, fires to burn the tinder of despondency, moons to swell the ocean of passion, suns to open the lotuses of desire.”¹⁸⁰

177. *Mānasollāsa* vol. 2, p. 155, vv. 3–5 (“creators and interpreters,” *utpādaka, bhāvajña*; “the principles of sweet poetry,” read *madhurakāvya*).

178. *Mānasollāsa* 4.197–206 (vol. 2, pp. 171–72; the passage cited is vv. 205–6). “The knowledge of language its vital spot” (*śabdavidyāsyā marma*): the most vulnerable point in a literary text is its correct use of language.

179. *Mānasollāsa* vol. 2, pp. 172–189, vv. 4.205–(404, misnumbered).

180. *Mānasollāsa* vol. 3, p. 62, v. 1410.

There is a third section of the work, the entertainment of singing (*gītavinoda*), where something of the literary may pertain as well. But here all that earlier in the text has been said to constitute *kāvya*—above all, the special unity of sound and sense, and the preeminence of cosmopolitan language—no longer applies with any force.¹⁸¹ A verse that still circulates among pandits tells us:

Children understand song, beasts do too, and even snakes. But the sweetness of literature—does even the Great God himself truly understand?¹⁸²

This brings us close to what the literary could mean as a twelfth-century courtly attainment. The practice of Sanskrit literary culture was, in the first instance, an intellectual endeavor. It consisted of theoretically informed reflection on normativity and thus presupposed active knowledge of all the categories of literary understanding. Without these there could be no analysis and so no “intellectual delight.” And it was at once a coherent discursive science (*śāstra*) and one entertainment (*vinoda*) among others. It was no more instrumental to power in any direct or overt way—no more concerned with the attainment or constitution or legitimation of power—than the king’s display of weaponry or his understanding of cockfighting. *Kāvya* was above all a component, and perhaps the supreme component, of royal competence and distinction, of royal pleasure and civility.

In the primeval moment of Sanskrit literary culture, the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* is recited before the hero of the tale, and in this moment much that characterizes the entire history of the culture is encapsulated. The location of the performance is the royal court, whose fortunes were by and large to be the fortunes of *kāvya*. Where the court collapsed, as in thirteenth-century Kashmir, an entire creative literary tradition, however great, could collapse with it; when its presence crowded *kāvya* too closely, as in Vijayanagara, the very life breath could be taken from the poetry. The language of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was no quotidian idiom of any historical court, but rather a language of the restricted domain of cosmopolitan culture. It was chosen for this text from among other languages because of its peculiar aesthetic and cultural—and not religious—associations, not least its cosmopolitanism, precisely commensurate at the level of the political with the imaginative projection of power in Rāma’s heroic progress across the macrospace of the subcontinent and in the new order he creates. When this order of cosmopolitan power

181. For further analysis of this section, particularly its relevance for a history of vernacularization, see Pollock forthcoming.

182. A version is cited by the glossator *ad* Kalhaṇa’s *Rājatarāṅginī* 5.1, p. 72.

gave way in the early centuries of the second millennium to a range of new, vernacular polities, Sanskrit literary culture began to give way too. As for the tale itself, everything being told is of course already known to the listener—Rāma lived it, after all. He is not listening for the plot, and what he derives from listening is not a particular form of knowledge. Systematic thought, the way things really were in the past, moral action—these are the concern of other knowledges and textual forms. Yet Rāma listened and was transfixed. Was it the Way of writing that captured him? Or was it what he could catch echoing in the text, a something that was meant without being said? Or was it the feelings represented there that could make him feel beyond himself, even when those feelings were his own?

Knowing something of the history of Sanskrit literary culture and the unparalleled power it exercised in premodern Asia may not answer such fundamental questions, which long preoccupied the best minds in the Indian world. But it at least may suggest why they bothered with them at all.

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- CII *Corpus inscriptionum indicarum*
 EC *Epigraphia carnatika*
 EI *Epigraphia indica*

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