

Editing in India: The First 1500 Years.

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[Rough draft!]

I

It is a great honor to have been asked to deliver the 2015 D. F. McKenzie lecture. I am a philologist, not a bibliographer like Professor McKenzie, but then the two fields do converge in important ways, and indeed, they met in McKenzie himself—not only converge but are merged, in the belief that (to adopt an old Indian image) bibliography without hermeneutic is blind, and hermeneutics without bibliography is lame. Indian classical studies are far too underdeveloped, and the sources at our disposal still too sparse, to write McKenzie’s species of, let’s call it hermeneutics of artifacts and sociology of texts, but if we ever are able to start, his work will be one important signpost to show the way.

People in South Asia have been producing texts for a very long time, and texts of all sorts. (Here are slides of just three such texts that have been sent to me in the past year, which give you some sense of the challenges of script and media diversity that our world presents to the contemporary scholar of SA textuality: an eleventh-century stone inscription from Pakistan-administered Kashmir, in Sarada script; an unpublished copper-plate inscription of the celebrated King Bhoja, also eleventh century, in Devanagari, and bearing his signature; and some Sri Lankan palm leaf scroll manuscripts of indeterminate date, in Sinhala). To be sure, how we define “text” for this world is the first of our problems with the history of editing. Writing was clearly known in northwest India before the invention there of the Kharosthi alphasyllabary (adapted from Aramaic for writing Indic languages) probably in the fourth or third century B.C.E., almost certainly from observation of Achaemenid administrative practices, and, of the far more historically consequential Brahmi, almost certainly in Asoka’s chancellery in the mid-third

century BCE (Kharosthi was restricted to the northwest of the subcontinent) Indeed, Asoka's monumental epigraphy (such as this Girnar Rock inscription [roof]) is likely also to have been inspired by Achaemenid antecedents (such as this inscription of Xerxes). But like other cultural innovations—including, a full millennium later, printing—writing was long rejected as irrelevant to the practices of Indian literary cultures. (Fernand Braudel was right to observe that “‘civilizations’ are defined as much by what they refuse from others as by what they borrow.”)¹ Texts of great scope and complexity were produced and transmitted orally for centuries on end: the Vedas, dating from as early as the mid- to late second millennium B.C.E., offer a celebrated example of scope; Panini's grammar, perhaps of the fourth century B.C.E, offers a celebrated example of complexity (Panini speaks of lipi, writing, but this may well have been Aramaic). Literacy and learning were never as closely aligned in India as they eventually became in the West. And while contemporary scholars sometimes overstate the case or inadequately nuance it, orality in its varied forms, especially the oral performance of literate texts produced by literate authors, the most common way people in India have experienced a text, continues to play a role into present (the traditional performance culture, still alive today, of a work like the—fully literate—sixteenth-century Hindi masterpiece, *Ramcaritmanas*, or Epic of Ram, is a good example).

And of course orality presents special, sometimes intractable, problems for editors—or rather for modern editors (no one understood this better than McKenzie himself, as his work on the Waitangi treaty shows). The premodern Indian editors whom I shall deal of here, however,

¹ Indians almost certainly were familiar with Tibetan block-printing at an early date, and certainly with movable type from the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century, but did not adopt the technology

are largely unconcerned with the orality of oral texts, or more precisely, with the editorial consequences of texts adrift on the sea of orality. (This is not entirely the case with the first redactions of scriptural canons, as the early Buddhists and medieval Jains councils show; and to be sure the Vedic tradition of transmission was engineered precisely to combat textual drift). We do find evidence of “editing” in the large sense in the oral tradition: in the Vedic world, for example, we know of at least five recensions of the *R̥gveda*, though these seem to have concerned above all the *arrangement* of hymns. (Śākalya, editor of the only surviving recension, is also responsible for a phonetically edited text of the *R̥gveda*, the *padapāṭha*, where all euphonic combination is stripped away; here the concern was with the form of the text, not its meaning.)

But today I will set aside all of this evidence of editing in the world of orality (with one exception, that of so-called contamination of mss.) in favor of offering a sketch of the practices of Indian editing of *written* texts—the 1500 year boundaries of my talk being marked on the one hand by the rise of written textuality at the end of the first millennium BCE, and the rise of new editorial techniques in the Indo-Persian world in the early modern period). These practices are based both on what premodern editors **said** about texts as well as on what they actually **did** with them, the sum total of which I hope will give you a sense of their editorial technique and theory of the text. I want to go on then and share some recent work of mine on a specific text and its history, to show you something of the challenges modern editors face that raise issues about the kind of challenges premodern editors faced (I save a thousand words by simply showing you this picture).

II. Core Practices of Sanskrit Philology

In India (no different from elsewhere), editing, like philology more generally, consists of both what people say they are doing and what they do without saying. Our knowledge of the

first, or **explicit** philology, is, unfortunately, as underdeveloped and unsystematized as that of **tacit** philology. And this is odd given that India was among the most densely textualized and systematized cultures of the premodern world; philology's ancillary knowledge forms—grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, interpretation theory, and the like—all attained vast discursive systematization and astonishing refinement; Sanskrit was unquestionably the most **philologized** language in human history (the philological habit is fostered by the target language's time-space distance, and Sanskrit, as the language of the gods, was maximally distant from the human world); then, too, Indian thinkers produced systematic discourse on everything else in their world, from hermeneutics to husbandry. Yet no matter what definition of philology we adopt—whether a maximally wide one like my own, “the discipline of making sense of texts,” or something narrower like “textual criticism” per se—no corresponding term for it is found in Sanskrit (or any other South Asian language) and no organized knowledge about it was ever set down in a work. (Various explanations for this deficit are possible, but these don't concern me now.) We are therefore left to exhume the principles of explicit Sanskrit philology for ourselves, and given the labors involved, few have bothered to do so.

The main source of these principles is literary commentary, which emerges only at the end of the first millennium, when we find for the first time not only detailed exegeses of literary texts but the invention of a largely new text-critical vocabulary (including such key terms as “variant,” *pāṭha*, and “interpolation,” *prakṣipta*, “received” in contrast to “conjectured” text, but also the many other subcategories I'll discuss in a moment). This is surprisingly late in the history of Sanskrit textuality, which as already noted goes back to the late second millennium before the common era, but, more important, a full thousand years after the beginnings of Sanskrit poetry itself (that is, what Indians themselves called poetry, *kāvya*, whose origins were in my view intimately if obscurely related to the coming of writing). And we have really no good

explanations for why it originates when or where it does, in early tenth-century Kashmir. There are no significant historical or institutional or material conditions of possibility we can identify (contrast the rise of Alexandrian philology, for example, which as I see it was a direct consequence of the sheer presence of multiple versions of Homeric texts collected in the Alexandrian library). Although literary or text-centered commentary is late we do of course have centuries of, let us call it exegetical commentary, of the sort devoted to philosophy or science, which is found as early as the beginning of the common era. Here however the concern is almost without exception with the work's argument, not with its textual embodiment, which accordingly never became an object of sustained philological reflection (such works were said to be *arthapradhāna*, focused on meaning, in contrast to poetry, which was *śabdārthapradhana*, focus on both the specific words as well as meanings). [Consider Kumāriḷa, the author of the greatest of Sanskrit philosophical commentaries: he only rarely discusses readings of any texts he is considering, and on the one occasion known to me that he uses the word *pāṭha* it is in the sense of recension, not variant].) I should also note that Vedic scriptural commentary, which also emerges at around the beginning of the second millennium, has quite different preoccupations, especially with the ritual and myth aspect of the texts. (This text-critical unconcern might be attributed in the Vedic tradition to the fidelity of the text-transmission. But the general indifference to the *textual constitution* of Indic scripture itself, as distinct from its truth, is found also in Southern Buddhist and Jain commentaries: both do notice variants in the received text but do not critically adjudicate among them. Even for Mahayana scriptures, it is the truth of text, not its linguistic realization, that qualifies them as *buddhavacana* (as Prajnakaramitra points on the BCA); in the same way the authenticity—that is, revealed quality—of the new Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava scriptures of earlier medieval India is proven not by their language but by their content.)

Unsurprisingly, literary commentary is directed toward the epics and court poetry and drama. The elements of *explicit* philology as practiced here relate to both textual criticism and interpretation. The text-critical issues, on which I will concentrate, pertain in the Sanskrit world to questions of recension, emendation, and interpolation that are familiar to us, but the responses offered are not always so. (I concentrate on the Sanskrit world since commentary in India is generally speaking a Sanskrit practice. Vernacular text commentaries are late and Sanskritic in inspiration—those on Tamil poetry from about the twelfth century on, those Braj Bhasha from the eighteenth century; many other traditions—Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, for example—have few or no premodern commentaries. Commentaries on Prakrit and Apabhramsha texts were usually composed in Sanskrit, with the exception of early Jain scriptural exegesis (which was in Prakrit, though Jains eventually turned to Sanskrit too.)

[Let me take a moment to show you, in the spirit of McKenzie, the physical form of a Sanskrit commentary. It is typically one of three sorts: *pañcapāṭha*, where we have the text in the center and the commentary in four surrounding areas (top, right, left, bottom—the order in which the commentary is read—with rosette in the middle), as here in the oldest extant example of a Sanskrit literary commentary, Prakāśavaṛṣa's early tenth-century exegesis of the sixth-century court epic *Kirātārjunīya* (the ms., from Munich, itself is of course far more recent, and incidentally is lacking the introductory verses). The second form is the *trīpāṭha*, where we have text in the center and commentary above and below, as here in a late commentary by Gaṅgārāma Jāḍi on a work I edited some years ago, the *Rasataranṅiṇī* of Bhānudatta. The third form presents the commentary alone, without the base text (as here another ms. of Prakāśavaṛṣa's commentary, from BORI)—and where accordingly the constitution of the text to which it refers has to be derived from the lemmas in the commentary itself.]

Stray reference to **recension** practices (there exists no extended account) is made by commentators on the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, since they typically served as editors as well (although the word *śodhana*, purifying, is occasionally found for the act of editing, no term for “editor” or “edition” exists in Sanskrit or in any Indian language apart from Persian before the modern period—a sign of the discursive deficit mentioned earlier.) Commentators on court poetry were often editors too, of course, and while normally silent about procedures, they evidently shared the methods of the epic colleagues. Neither the oral origins of the Sanskrit epic (shadowed by the vernacular oral epics that existed then and still do) nor the transition to literate transmission or the performative nature of its presentation is ever mentioned, let alone taken into account by editors as a diagnostic for differences in textual variation from court poetry, which was literate in its creation and far more stable in its transmission. Conceptions of textual coherence, authorial intention, and the rest were accordingly shared by commentators in both genres. (By some division of labor now obscure to us, no one commented on both genres; sometimes commentators, as in the case of Arjunamiśra in seventeenth-century Bengal, were members of families specializing in epic exegesis over generations. Commentators on court poetry were often, though not always, specialists too—Prakāśavarṣa’s successor, for example, Vallabhadeva, as far as we know wrote only commentaries).

Editions of the two epics were repeatedly produced, and, by a process as yet entirely unclear to us, “published” in the period 1000-1700. An important aspect of recension that emerges clearly in this process is regionalization, itself a feature of tacit philology I’ll return to shortly. Our oldest *Rāmāyaṇa* commentator, a thirteenth-century south Indian (Uḍāli Varadarāja), refers to the need to establish the correct reading (*samyakpāṭha*) corrupted by scribes unskilled in the various scripts, by “examining multiple manuscripts from multiple

regions” a phrase echoing one used a century earlier by another south Indian editor, this time with respect to a court poem (Dakṣiṇāvartanātha: “I prepared my commentary [on the *Raghuvamśa*] after examining variants in manuscripts from various regions, adopting the right readings and rejecting the others,” and would be used again four centuries later in an edition of the *Mahābhārata* (Nīlakaṇṭha gathered “many manuscripts from different regions”). Despite appearances, this was no formulaic gesture. When an eighteenth-century scholar (Vidyāsāgara) in today’s Bangladesh tells us he based his edition of the *Mahābhārata* on “the traditional text of Bengal,” the “manuscripts of the Bangalore-region traditional text,” and a recension found in “manuscripts from the West,” he is referring to stable recensions (this is what *saṃpradāya* seems to mean), and not just this or that particular manuscript; and like other commentators he refers to these recensions when discussing readings. This sort of knowledge of regionalization is remarkable, but no commentator ever offers a judgment on how regional recensions are related.

All such recensions were held to be versions of the same work, however, and could accordingly be used to emend each other. (The obvious and radical differences between parts of the epic that had far longer periods of oral transmission, such as Book 4, *Virāṭa parvan*, and those transmitted entirely in writing, were never noted.) If no commentator ever describes his method for the **emendation** of variants (*pāṭha*), all have clear if complex criteria. The first *Rāmāyaṇa* commentator seeks to establish “the *right* reading (*samyakpāṭha*) that has been corrupted by scribes unskilled in the various scripts,” while a twelfth-century predecessor on the court epic refers to “adopting the *correct* readings (*sādhūn [pāṭhān]*) and rejecting the others.” A seventeenth-century *Mahābhārata* scholar tells us he “critically established the best readings” (*vinīścītya ca pāṭham agryam*), having evaluated them by frequency (common, occasional, rare) and manuscripts by their age (old, recent, damaged, “good”).

The categories “right, “correct,” “best”—largely referring to grammatical, metrical, or other sort of standard—are complimented by others found the work of commentators on court poetry. Our second oldest editor, Vallabhadeva in tenth-century Kashmir, may well be a key innovator here (his predecessor Prakāśavarṣa shows no interest whatever in textual criticism). He judges readings (or passages) by a wide range of criteria: not just as grammatically or contextually “correct/reasonable/proper/right” (sādhu/yukta/samīcīna/samyak), but also as “authoritative” (prāmāṇika), “false” (ayukta, apapāṭha), “mistaken” (prāmāḍika), “corrupt” (duṣṭa); “narratively contradictory” (asaṃbaddha), “illogical” (anyāyya, [V. on KS 6.19], “obscene” (asabhya), “ancient” (ārṣa/prācīna/jarat; and, lastly, “lovely,” “beautiful,” and “more beautiful” (sundara/ramya/ramyatarā). He employs the familiar principle of difficulty and the antiquity such difficulty implies (“This must be the ancient reading precisely because it is unfamiliar” *aprasiddhatvād ārṣaḥ pāṭhaḥ*, but also sometimes combines principles of antiquity and aestheticism (“The old reading in this verse is more beautiful,” *jaratpāṭho ’tra ramyatarāḥ*). But antiquity can be too ancient, as it were, if it produces a grammatical or other irregularity such as a Vedic archaism.

Where manuscripts offered no guidance in correcting a solecism, our Kashmirian commentator is ready to suggest a revision in order to save his author from censure. But he does not actually alter the text; instead, he preserves the offending reading. And in this he was entirely typical: the text as received in the manuscript tradition, thus, always trumped a text as conjectured (*āgata / kalpita*, apparently late in this text-critical sense).

The same faithfulness toward the received text is found in the treatment of **interpolation**—and we must note here that the very idea of “interpolation,” *prakṣipta*, later *kṣepaka*, is also a second-millennium innovation. Commentators identify interpolation by a wide range of criteria: manuscript comparison (the fourteenth-century commentator Mallinātha can

athetize six verses in Kālidāsa's early fifth-century poem *Meghadūta* only by having compared mss.—he himself is silent about his procedures); narrative coherence (*Rāmāyaṇa* commentators use this criterion regularly); stylistic and aesthetic refinement, a sort of *usus scribendi* (Arjunavarmadeva on the *Amaruśataka*). But however determined and however convincingly determined to be an insertion, the offending passage would still be preserved and transmitted. In this editors behaved like copyists, who routinely declare that they “copied exactly” what they saw,” whether it was right or wrong. And again, this was not just convention. As an editor of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* put it, he found no evidence that any scribe “ever *deliberately or intentionally* omitted a single line of the text” (the same conservatism can be noticed among Alexandrian scholars).

Let me mention, though it is an important feature meriting more than the passing mention I can make of it here, that we can perceive in this commentarial work how Sanskrit philology was conceived of as a **disciplinary** tradition. The eighteenth-century epic commentator from Bangladesh made use of at least a dozen earlier commentaries, including one from the eleventh century, the oldest available, and in this he was typical. Every philologist, both on epics and court poems, saw himself participating in a tradition in which predecessors were to be systematically studied. Thus, the epic exegete Nīlakaṇṭha tells us explicitly that he followed “the explanations of early teachers”; while Mallinātha in the fifteenth-century Deccan closely studied the works of earlier philologists as far away in time and space as the early tenth-century. Some chronology, or at least the succession, of editors was preserved in memory and understood to represent a meaningful order.

In “**tacit** philology,” by contrast, processes are at work—in the creation, reproduction, and circulation of the text-artifacts themselves—whose origins and effects were rarely addressed by editors, however much it shaped their philological practice. I'll just touch on four of these

processes: regionalization; script diversification; the “contamination” of text traditions, especially through oral transmission; constraints on manuscript reproduction.

When Sanskrit editors refer, as we have seen, to the regionalization of recensions, they do so as a simple fact, not as a text-theoretical let alone conceptual puzzle. Most works of Sanskrit literature, when sufficiently widely disseminated, evince textual diversity that varies by region. Both epics, for example, divide (or seem to divide—this may be the bipartite stemma illusion that Bédier first and famously identified) into a northern and a southern recension (with the oddity that the *Mahabharata*’s northern recension is the more conservative, and the *Ramayana*’s southern). And the same phenomenon is found in other genres, such as drama (Kalidasa’s *Śākuntala*, exists in an eastern, southern, and northwestern recension), lyrical poetry (*Amaruśataka* has a western, southern, and eastern recension), and court poetry (five such recension have been described for the *Raghuvamśa*: eastern, western, Kashmiri, southern, and north-central). As modern scholarship on all these texts has demonstrated time and again, these recensions are generally not reducible to an archetype, a fact unknown to premodern editors

Although regionalization is a basic condition of Sanskrit editorial practice, it is not easily explained. **Scripts diversified** over the course of the second millennium and came to correlate ever more sharply with region (though less regularly with religious community, until the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century). Manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, for example, are available in at least ten different scripts, which must have contributed to the localization of a text-tradition. But I doubt script by itself was a sufficient cause. In most of the cases mentioned we are dealing, not with *versions* but with *recensions* created by commentators. The three different recensions of Amaru, for example, are represented by three commentator/editors (Arjunavarmadeva in the west, Vemabhupala in the south, and Ravicandra in the east), and their circulation and reproduction followed regionally circumscribed circuits (scholars elsewhere of

course could procure such recensions, as we have seen). [In any case, multiscriptism was more common than is now recognized; manuscripts, and the literati themselves, circulated far and wide, and we have plenty of evidence that the scripts of even the most distantly separated regions—Kerala and Kashmir, for example--were read by scholars in the other region, as will become clear in a moment.]

A third process of tacit philology pertains to the “**contamination**” of written texts by continuously living oral practices across all genres. The vigor of Sanskrit manuscript culture remained undiminished until the late colonial period, and as manuscripts moved across the world where Sanskrit was used, editors compared manuscripts to chose best readings—and entirely familiar scenario, but one complicated in India by the fact that manuscripts were often carried in people’s heads (knowledge that was *kaṇṭhastha*, not *granthastha*, was prized). Because the tradition was still in part oral, textual transmission often shows the consequences of memorization (and performance): variants that are neither scribal errors nor learned corrections but oral variants in what by any standard was nonetheless fundamentally a literate culture. The text, if we can even speak of this in the singular, was constantly and in some cases irremediably destabilized by the messy business of bringing works to life in a still-oral world, whether in the classroom (where the set text was, and still is, typically recited from memory, or launched into the world of memory from recitation from a single written exemplar) or in literary performance. “Contamination” seems hardly the right word for what is, thus, the normal state of affairs. (This whole situation demonstrates that the claim of many westerner editors, such as Alphonse Dain, that “the rules developed by classical philologists” are “just as valid” in “the realm of the East,” (“Les règles élaborées par les philologues classiques valent pour l’étude” “au domaine de l’Orient,” is, unfortunately, false [*Les manuscrits* 3 ed. p. 8]). The extraordinarily stable transmission of other works, even in such vast compositions as the *Kampan Ramayana* or

Tulsidas' *Ramcaritmanas*, where textual variation is exceedingly rare despite the fact that those responsible for the transmission performed the works orally, is something of a conundrum, and may have to do with the influence of the rigorous memory culture of the Vedic tradition, whether those performers directly participated in it or not.

The exuberance of oral-literate philology, however, had its limits, if sometimes inexplicable ones. It is astonishing to reflect on how many major works of Sanskrit culture exist today in a single manuscript (or descend from single late-medieval exemplar). I have already alluded to the **general constraint on manuscript reproduction** (the last aspect of my tacit philology) that was imposed by **conceptual supersession** intensified by very hostile environmental conditions. Manuscripts not recopied regularly were likely to be lost (though palm leaf mss. can last a long time if properly cared for), and works held to be superseded by later productions were not often considered worthy of recopying. In the case of commentaries on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, or Treatise on Drama, the great work of Sanskrit dramaturgy from perhaps the third or fourth century, all commentaries prior to Abhinavagupta's (some two centuries worth of exegesis, among them three great treatises of Bhatta Lollata, Sri Sankuka, and Bhatta Nayaka), disappeared, likely as being thought to have been made superfluous by the great master's work. Supersession, however, cannot explain the numerous examples of single-manuscript survival of many major works, including the central treatise on Indian political theory (the *Arthaśāstra*), or the masterpiece of the eighth-century Buddhist poet-philosopher (Santideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*), or the most important history ever written in Sanskrit (the *Rājatarāṅginī*, for which a mid-seventeenth cen. "codex archetypus" constituted the source of all later copies). We can only marvel at "the slenderness of the thread by which the fate of so many" Sanskrit classics hung, as Reynolds and Wilson put it in *Scribes and Scholars* (103, in reference to the unique mss. that at end of the tenth cen. kept Catullus, Propertius, Petronius, and many others alive)—though here, I

don't think, "generations of carelessness and stupidity" are to blame so much as an unforgiving climate. For the contemporary editor, such works also present a text-critical problem of a different nature than anything described so far.

III

I want now to try to synthesize from these disparate data some elementary forms of Sanskrit editorial theory and method, before going on to supplement this synthesis with an account of some of the challenges this history presents to the contemporary editor. Most of what we have seen is altogether familiar, including such principles of emendation as *lectio difficilior melior/potior est*, narrative non-contradiction and the like, all of which serves more to demonstrate the uniformity, rather astonishing uniformity after all, of global philology. Let me concentrate here on the less familiar.

Most Sanskrit editors could recognize both the **transregional** dissemination of works, when it existed, and the **regionalization** of their text traditions. They explicitly acknowledge that all such witnesses have something essential to contribute to the establishment of the text and must be compared to attain textual truth, because all are instantiations of *one and the same work*. If *recensio* [for which we have no Sanskrit term] shows an appreciation of multiplicity, multiplicity never threatened the idea of the unity of the work—however difficult it may have been to maintain unity in many cases (e.g., MBh 4)—and editorial behavior was based on that presupposition.

In respect to **emendation** we find a tension between normativity and fidelity. On the one hand, any literary work in Sanskrit was a part of Sanskrit culture, and was accordingly expected to adhere to the rules—of grammar, prosody, rhetoric, aesthetics—that defined that culture. On the other hand, when these rules were violated, most editors still rejected emendation, and while suggesting what the “correct reading” should be (writers like the 11th cen. Mahima Bhaṭṭa will

often suggest the “correct reading,” *yuktaḥ pāṭhaḥ*, that should replace a putative solecism in a verse of one or another great poet), preserved and transmitted what they found in their manuscripts (actual scribal practices are more various and, in general, less philological, and should not be conflated with those of commentators). Editors sought to establish as coherent a text as possible on the basis of received tradition rather than conjecture (“We must explain the text as we find it,” runs a later proverb, *sthiter gatiś cintyā*). When they had to choose they saw no contradiction in simultaneously applying criteria of antiquity, normativity, and aesthetic propriety. Judgment, not hard rules, guided choice.

The commitment to fidelity toward the received text is corroborated in the treatment of **interpolation**. Commentators regularly preserved materials considered to be interpolated (as they continue to transmit corrupt readings). In fact, they and scribes in general sometimes went out of their way to ensure that material they *knew* to be interpolated was included in their transmission. Preservation was a virtue, omission a sin, and as a rule bigger texts—where bigger texts were available—were better than smaller texts. This tendency toward agglomeration—the quest for the **maximally inclusive edition** (including clearly pseudonymous additions)—can be found in almost every genre, epic (*Mahābhārata*), lyric poetry (Bhartṛhari), court poem (*Śiśupālavadhā*), even the scientific treatise (*Yogaśāstra* of Patañjali).

Sanskrit editors without exception held texts to be unitary creations embodying authorial intention, even in the case of texts that we today consider paradigms of composite authorship, such as the *Mahābhārata* or *Amaruśataka*. And the criteria of textual criticism they developed were in harmony with that fundamental principle, for they aimed to recover that authorial unity even while preserving the flux of its transmission. If variants could be adjudicated on the basis of antiquity, it was only because of the implicit conviction that the older the reading the closer it brought us to the original (normativity functioned similarly: it is unthinkable that great Sanskrit

writers could have violated norms). When editors took cognizance of the problem of regional variation, it was out of the same implicit conviction that a single text underlies variation, and variation therefore constitutes deviation. It is only because texts were viewed as coherent wholes that the notion of interpolation could ever have developed into the widespread criterion it became.

In keeping with editorial method is the general consensus that the **history of editing** itself mattered. The best scholars took care to familiarize themselves with as much of the tradition of learning as they could gain access to and in as chronologically precise a way as they could reconstruct. Tradition itself never mattered mechanically, however. Scholars were ready to reject received views, however old, if better arguments or evidence were available. The wider literary tradition as such was similarly central to interpretation and the very idea of what it meant to read a Sanskrit text, which I have had no time to discuss here. Without the web of intertexts to which the work referred it would not make sense. Tradition was the ground for understanding.

IV.

Many of the questions addressed by premodern Indian editors of course confront the contemporary editor of Indic texts, and how precisely premodern theories and methods do or should relate to contemporary editorial practice is an important—in my view, critical—methodological question, though it's not possible to address it now. (This question cannot be separated from the general place of tradition and the plurality of textual meaning—what I distinguish as historicist, traditionist, and presentist meaning in other publications.) What I would like to do in the time remaining is share some reflections on a project I have just begun where I find myself confronted with issues that undoubtedly put me in the same position as those earlier scholars, to give you a sense of the challenge they, and we, face.

Sometime in the second half of the 10th cen. in Kashmir, a remarkable thinker named Abhinavagupta completed his massive commentary on the Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, or "Treatise on Drama," which he named, punningly, *Abhinavabhāratī*, "The New 'Dramatic Art'"/Abhinava's 'Dramatic Art'" (its full title is or *Nāṭyavedavivṛtti Abhinavabhāratī*, "Exposition of the Veda of Drama, the New 'Dramatic Art'"), and which as I've already noted superseded—and thereby doomed to oblivion—all earlier commentaries on the "Treatise." What we know about these earlier works in fact we know almost exclusively from the *Abhinavabhāratī* itself; all mss. of their texts have vanished without trace. And oblivion, as I also noted, could come about not only through supersession, but also through the fragility of manuscript culture itself. Consider the work of Abhinava's greatest predecessor in the field of aesthetics, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, whose early tenth-century *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*, or "Mirror of the Heart," revolutionized thinking in the field and profoundly influenced Abhinava. Less than three generations later the work was unavailable in Kashmir even to the most fervid bibliophiles (around 1000 Mahima Bhaṭṭa, whom we have already encountered, lamented that he "never had the chance to see the 'Mirror,'" *adr̥ṣṭadarpaṇa*-). The same fragility claimed several other of Abhinava's literary-critical treatises (like the *Kāvya-kautukavivṛti*, Exegesis of "Literary Investigations," on a treatise of his teacher Bhatta Tota)—and almost claimed the *Abhinavabhāratī* itself

We would not expect there to be extant any manuscripts of his commentary from the period of its composition—birch-bark is the most fragile of Indic writing materials and eleventh-century exemplars from the region are rare. But there are no manuscripts of the work in Kashmir from *any* later date, either. The book completely vanished from the land of its birth—and it vanished almost immediately. Although a definitive answer to the question requires more complete sifting of the evidence than I have been able to do [*Someśvara?], my reasonably careful survey to date shows that the ABh is never cited or alluded to by a single one of

Abhinava's successors in the discipline of aesthetics and rhetoric, though that field of study remained vibrant in Kashmir at least to the end of the twelfth century. Abhinava's most committed adherent and the author of the most widely-read handbook of literary theory in premodern India, Mammaṭa (c. 1050, a little more than a generation after Abhinava's death), shows no sign of familiarity with the work. (I should point out that the ABh.'s aesthetic theory differs in rather substantial ways from his *Dhvanyāloka*, "Light on Suggestion," that only work of his that Mammaṭa does know). So far as we can see, the text had simply vanished in Kashmir.

There is no sign of the ABh until the end of the twelfth century, and then not in Kashmir but in Gujarat to the south. Here the work was clearly known, and independently known, to four scholars: Hemacandra, the great Jain polymath (he died in 1172), his two students Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra (who in their dramaturgical work *Nāṭyadarpaṇa*, Mirror of Drama, cite from parts of the treatise other than those cited by Hemacandra), and the anonymous author of about the same time who wrote a the *Kalpalatāviveka*, Analysis of the "Wishing Vine [of Poetry]" (the base text itself has disappeared). And that is it: In the whole later history of Indian literary thought across the subcontinent not a single writer explicitly cites the ABh. (and two implicit citations have yet to be verified). It further evidence of the "slender thread" of preservation but also a matter of wonder that Abhinava's treatise, the greatest work in Indian dramaturgy and aesthetics, summarizing the entire earlier history of those disciplines, and at the same time offering his final views that diverge in key ways from his earlier thought on central questions, should have disappeared without trace from the land of its birth and everywhere else. From that point on, in Gujarat as in Kashmir, and across all of India, the silence about the ABh was total. It would remain unbroken for the next seven hundred and fifty years.

This of course is the condition of vulnerability known to all manuscript cultures, one especially heightened in India due to environmental conditions. Already in the early fourteenth

century the philosopher Madhva (d. 1317) noted how “many thousands of manuscripts have disappeared. [and those that are extant have become disordered. So confused can a text have become that even the gods themselves could not figure it out].” But additional, and important, conditions of and constraints on traditional manuscript culture appear in the later history of Abhinava’s work.

In 1915, the curator of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, S. Kuppuswami Sastri, sent out a “search party” to look for Sanskrit manuscripts in Kerala. What led the “Government of Madras” to believe that (as the scholar K. S. Ramaswami Sastri wrote 50 years later) “unique and valuable Sanskrit manuscripts were stored up in the private and public libraries of Malabar,” that is, today’s north Kerala (or who in the “Government of Madras” even cared), we’ll never know. What these scholars actually found is also maddeningly unclear because the leader of the search team never wrote up anything remotely resembling a coherent account. What is not in doubt, however, is that among other things the search team discovered were manuscripts of the *Abhinavabhāratī*.

Kerala, as you can see on this map, is as far away from Kashmir as you can get and still remain in mainland India. But the fact that manuscripts traveled, and traveled far and often, and, relatively speaking, fast, is one of those basic conditions of and constraints on premodern Sanskrit editing. I am no expert on the Kashmir-Kerala route, but I do know that it was well-traveled, and by no means restricted to works relating to Saivism or tantrism: manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, for example, show by very clear evidence how old and intense this traffic was (in the early period, and perhaps into the early second millennium, no doubt carried by actual migrations of Brahman communities to the south). And they traversed radically different script and manuscript regimes, from Śāradā in Kashmir to Malayalam in Kerala, with all the possibilities for transcription errors that this traversal implies. [Here is a

random example of the former I grab from my hard drive: a page from a commentary on the *Amaruśataka* in the Islamicate *kitāb*, or codex, format, and in Śāradā script, held here in Oxford (śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ om namasmara[.]tya[/tr]nai line 2, devīrati vijayaṁte mrganābhi citrapatrāvalī); and a page of a 12th cen. ms. from the National Museum, Delhi; and of a fragmentary *Ṛgveda* ms., in Malayalam script from the Government Oriental Ms. Library, Chennai.]

The 1915 search team’s discovery was only vaguely described—a “set” of three mss., in the introduction to the edition of the first volume of the ABh. that the editor M. Ramakrishna Kavi published in Baroda in 1926. It was left to left to Kavi’s successor, Ramaswami Shastri, to try to make sense of things, though again he gives very little hard evidence to substantiate the explanations he provides, hardly more than any premodern editor ever would. Shastri tells us that the set discovered, called A, was in private possession in northern Kerala, one part held in Calicut, two parts in a village in Malabar District; they comprised chapters 1-19, 20-28, 29-31, out of the work’s 37 chapters; hence a continuous if incomplete group. A Devanagari transcript was made of this set and is now in Chennai; of the mss. themselves we now have no clue whatsoever, they too have vanished. Another “set” of of *two* mss., called B, was not “discovered” in 1915, but was housed in the Travancore Palace library (now transferred to the Oriental Research and Manuscripts Library in Karyavottom, Trivandrum). They are not a continuous set, like the private mss., but rather two incomplete mss. of the whole (the second breaks off at the 14th chapter). (Ramaswami Shastri merely asserts that the two “sets” share many lacuna and must be derived from a common source; this remains to be demonstrated.) Here are photos, the first ever taken, of the first and last folios of the oldest extant manuscript from the royal collection (at least 600 years old), and the first and last of the second manuscript, probably about 250 years old; I also include a slide of the portion I am planning to re-edit first, Abhinava’s

work on *rasa*, or aesthetic emotion (here he begins his “reconstruction”). Devanagari transcripts were also made of these two manuscripts; yet further copies of these and the Chennai transcripts were made, and sent to Baroda, Pune, Lucknow, Benares (with all the new errors inevitable in such a process). So far as I can tell, all the editions of the ABh., from M. R. Kavi’s first edition of vol. 1 to the current fourth edition, including all the remaining three vols. and editions of the work, have been produced on the basis of this transcribed material. I have found no evidence that anyone since the pandits who prepared the transcripts in the late teens and early 1920s examined the original extant mss. No doubt the difficulty of access, and more consequential, the complexity of script in these early manuscripts, hard even for trained paleographers to read, are responsible, as they are likely to have been throughout the history of Indian philology.

But what is astonishing is that *additional* manuscript materials preserved in Kerala appear never to have been taken into account by anyone. Aside from the two palace mss. the old “Curator’s Office” possessed one of the oldest ms. of the work, perhaps also sixteenth century, acquired from Malappuram Dist. (now held by the ms. library). It is likely to have contributed to the edition, one that has remained completely unknown until the past few months, that had been planned by that curator, T. Ganapati Sastri. Only eight pages were published in 1923; why the edition was suspended, and more curiously, how this work related to the 1926 edition of Kavi, remains unknown. You can see that the Ganapati Sastri ed. carries sigla for three other mss. collated for the work, which, once again, have nowhere been described (Sastri died in 1926 and left no papers), but are likely to have been the Curator’s Office ms., the younger of the two palace manuscripts and a third of which we are presently ignorant. The basis of the ms. was probably the very old ms. 20410: As you can see, the printed pages are bound with a carefully made transcript evidently prepared for the press, T 566, which it seems to have been a transcript of 20410. (There are two more extensive transcripts in the library, but as if to exasperate us yet

further, none of these three anywhere identifies its source.) Last, the Kerala U. library acquired a manuscript of the Abh. in the early 1960s from from Kāṭṭumādam Mana, a remarkable Brahman “household” (*mana*) also in Malappuram Dist. (It is still in existence, and describes itself as the “most reputed historical Tantric Mana of North Kerala”). This ms., whose cover and first folio I show you here, may well be the oldest of them all, perhaps, if my paleographer colleague in Trivandrum is correct, as early as the sixteenth century. Let me repeat that neither this ms. nor that of Curator’s Office has ever been collated for an edition of the ABh.

In my engagement with the manuscript history of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, and with the mss. themselves, I have been awakened more than ever to the real conditions of life of our premodern editors. The fragility and rarity and inaccessibility of manuscripts; the vast distances that mark their dispersion; the complexity of scripts; the intense focus on the text itself, with relative indifference to anything that sets the text in its bibliographical context—all this is visible in the long history of Indian editing. And much of it, like much of the Indian editorial technique we have explored, is of course just like early Europe, but *more so*. Indeed, the fact that anything at all has survived from the past, and not only has survived but been curated with such evident care (if also evident disregard for bibliographical niceties, which would have driven McKenzie and his heirs like me to distraction), is testimony to the extraordinary devotion to learning that people in India have evinced over the past two millennia.