

TRANSLATING, TRANSLATIONS,  
TRANSLATORS  
FROM INDIA TO THE WEST

Edited by

ENRICA GARZILLI

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outside of India cannot be contested. Varahamihira's errors and deficiencies in describing this material is most easily explained on the hypothesis that it was foreign to him also.

In my last example, in chapter XVII, which like the previous one is taken from Varahamihira's summary of the *Vasīṣṭhisiddhānta*, the first two verses are based on the Babylonian period relation for Jupiter and the rest on a breakdown of that synodic period in a manner found in both Babylonian and Greek sources.

vīcaturīṁśad dviguṇāṁ (vīcaturīṁśa dviguṇāṁ)  
 nāḍbhis tāvatbhīr apī ca guroh ||  
 hrtvā navanavadahanair  
 udayaḥ labdhāḥ sthī<tā> divasāḥ ||6||  
 udayanavānīśān (udayanavānīśā) dattvā  
 dhīesu śatvargasāṅgune hy udaye (°sāṅgunair udayah) ||  
 ekanavāgnicchīne  
 padam (vadam) itī sāśādaśam śeṣam ||7||  
 dhīnāsāṅy<ā>ṁśā dvādaśa  
 khaktair vedāḥ kṛtāvībhīr dvau ca ||  
 sapāśākena vakt  
 śad bhāgāḥ (vargāḥ) saśītaḥ śat ca ||12||  
 anuvakro 'śītyārkā<n>(anuvaktī śītyārkā)  
 dīnārḍhaśatena (dīnārḍhamatena) nava<ca> tato 'stamītiḥ ||  
 sthīvāśvam ekamāsam(sthīvā saikam māsam)  
 sputodayo dvyanṭre māśasya (sputodayāśātarām māśam [māsam  
 a]) ||13||

6. "For Jupiter subtract from the *ahargana* 34 (days) and as many *nāḍī*-s and divide (the remainder by 399, the quotient is (the number of) its risings. The (remaining) days are put down."  
 7. "Add to (these) days  $\frac{1}{9}$ th (of a day for every) rising. Multiply (the remainder) is called the *pada*. Add 18 to the remainder.  
 12. "In 60 days (Jupiter) traverses 12°, in 40 (days) 4 (degrees), and in 24 (days) 2 (degrees); (it moves) retrograde 6° in 56 (days) and 6 (degrees) in 60 (days)."  
 13. "In direct motion (it goes) 12 (degrees) in 80 (days); 9 (degrees) in 50 days; then it sets; staying (set it travels) 7 (degrees) in one month; its accurate rising is on the last day of the month (i.e., the 29th)."

## Philology, Literature, Translation

by  
 Sheldon Pollock

1. Like a number of the people in this room, I suspect, I have spent much of my life translating.<sup>1</sup> Of course I'm thinking about the common-sense notion of translating, what Jakobson calls "translation as such", and not Steiner's notion that would equate all forms of linguistic interpretation with "translation". I translated from Latin to English in school, from Dutch and French and German to English (and Latin to Dutch) as a student in a Belgian *athénium*, from Greek and Latin and Sanskrit to English in college; and as a scholar, in the study and in the classroom, from Sanskrit (occasionally from Hindi, and more recently, in a very tentative way, from Old Kannada) to English, but most of all, from Sanskrit to English, day after day. The Sanskrit at issue has been above all *śāstra* -- *alankāraśāstra* and the classical *darśanas*, especially *purvaṁmīmāṃsā* -- and *kāvya*, both later courtly materials and that "first" of Sanskrit poems, the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*; on the last of these I worked for four or five years and translated material that amounts to something like an *Odyssey*. All that said, this is one of the very few times I've spoken in a public gathering about the activity that fills the space of my days, and I've written about it only once.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, though translation was an activity that evidently filled the lives of my teachers as well -- many of them at this institution, Daniel Ingalls, Zeph Stewart, Cedric Whitman, John Finley, Glen Bowersock, G. P. Gould, and others; some of them in India, M. V. Parwardhan, Pattabhirama Shastri, Balasubrahmanya Shastri, who translated into Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil respectively) -- they never talked much about it either, or so far as I know, wrote much about it. And why this should be so it is worth pausing to consider.

Translation as a discrete problem has typically been addressed by philosophers concerned with the higher-order, theoretical issues translation raises; linguists (and increasingly scholars of cognitive science and artificial intelligence) concerned with the psychological or mechanical or technological possibilities of translation; and, finally, poets and would-be poets, whose active conceptualization of translation and its challenges is entirely different from the first two, being concerned as they are with solving precisely the problem, that of the aesthetic

<sup>1</sup> What follows is the text of a talk given at the symposium "Translating, Translations, Translators. From India to the West" (Harvard University, May 1994). Although adding footnotes and amplifications, I have tried to preserve something of the character of the original oral presentation.

<sup>2</sup> *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, Vol. II: Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, Princeton, Princeton U. Press, 1986, pp. 74ff.

dimension, which the other two communities ignore, and thus with struggling to keep what is said to get lost in translation from getting lost. Although it underpins all their work, for historians and interpreters of political, social, cultural or literary formations linguistically different from their own, the problem of translation has long had the status of the proverbial family idiot in the attic: everyone knows he's there and impossible to deal with, but no one wants to acknowledge him or they won't be able to carry on with their daily business. And for this reason, too, translation is a problem that many of these scholars -- and here I include myself -- have come to view as intellectually barren: No one addressing translation ever has anything new to say that will improve translation as a practical activity, so unless we are interested in its philosophical, cognitive, or poetic dimensions, we might as well just forget it.

The worst case, of course, is when the philosophical pretends to impinge on practice. Years ago I had the privilege to attend a conference with George Steiner, whose landmark book, *After Babel*, had just been published. The entire panel of philosophers and theoreticians agreed that, yes, translation was really quite impossible. The fine translator from the Dutch, the late James Holmes, was there, and he looked at me, and I at him, in the secure knowledge that we were both going to go home and somehow do the impossible. Certainly for people who actually translate, translation as a metaphysical or even abstract aesthetic problem is banal, and I think that is why all my teachers -- who by in large were not philosophers, scientists, or poets -- ignored it to a man. For they knew then what I since learned: translation is as philosophically problematic, stylistically individual, and practically hard as life, and as we keep on living we keep on translating, with the inevitable singular imperfections that define being human.

2. What is not either theoretically or historically barren or banal is the history of translation regimes, both those in which we have come to operate in the modern academy, where a standard of linguistic truth in translation reigns, and earlier and possibly other regimes, especially those in which the texts were produced that scholars at this symposium are concerned with translating. The principal institutional location of most translation of premodern texts today is the university, and the forms of knowledge and protocols of discourse defined by the university have come to characterize academic translation. To some degree this is responsible for the non-experimental nature of such translation -- one cannot easily both be scholarly as well as aim to transform the English language through translation -- and the narrow reduction of possible translation regimes. Nothing like Pound's *Propertius* (probably happily) nor even Logue's more recent *Homer* (unfortunately) seems on the agenda of contemporary translators of Indian literary texts.

Both for the history of earlier translation regimes -- what it has variously meant in premodernity to transport a text from one language

into another -- and for another, non-banal question that relates to the history of translation viewed within the general history of the economies of cultural exchange, South Asia offers precious materials. Here we confront what is without question the most complex and historically densest network of multilingual literary cultures anywhere in the world -- and yet, it seems to me, virtually all of the crucial questions about the translational aspects of this network have never been unasked. Let me briefly catalogue some of these questions and materials, however provisionally my ongoing work on historical cultural studies of premodern India allows me to do this.

One dimension of South Asian translation regimes I am tracking situates this activity within the general trade in cultural capital, where Sanskrit texts take their place along with other precosities that India exported to the world. An instructive example here is offered by the legends concerning the translation of Sanskrit texts on statecraft into Persian. The following is recounted from *Kalila and Dimnah* (I summarize Keith Falconer's summary):

Nashrivan, king of Persian, having heard that there exists in India a book containing every kind of instruction, directs his vizier to find a man acquainted with "Indian" and Persian. The vizier selects Barzoye, who had earlier traveled to India to extend his knowledge of medicine and chemistry. The latter receives the order to procure the book, which is supposed to be in the library of the king of India. Arriving in India, he meets with great difficulties, but at last obtains not only the book he is seeking but also other works of great value. Barzoye labors day and night translating the book into Persian, fearing lest the king of India may ask for it back. This done, he returns home. A large assembly is convened, and the book is read aloud. It is universally acclaimed.<sup>3</sup>

The romance of the tale shouldn't obscure its factuality: the *Pañcatantra*, which is the text at issue, was translated into Persian around the end of the Sassanian period. Comparable if more intense is the translation of mostly Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese, certainly the most massive translation program in all antiquity. Filliozat calculated that nearly 1700 texts were translated over a period of nine centuries, amounting to something like 40 million Chinese characters. But the market in the West is strong, too, from the time of the Sassanian king if not earlier, where among other things we find translations of scientific and spiritual texts into Arabic and Persian (the *Yogasutra* itself, for example, or the numerous versions of a mystical text called the

<sup>3</sup> Ion G. N. Keith-Falconer, *Kalilah and Dimnah or the Fables of Bidpai*, reprint Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1970), pp. XXI-XXII.

*Amṛtakūṇḍa*).<sup>4</sup>

A second regime relates translation to strategies of (usually surreptitious) incorporation. It is striking that, with the exception of astronomical literature translated from the Greek, those Sanskrit texts that are translations from another language never seem to acknowledge themselves to be so: the translation itself is an appropriation whose name cannot be spoken. A celebrated instance here is the *Bhāgavatapurāna*, which as Friedhelm Hardy has shown, is partially translated from the verses of the Tamil devotional poets.<sup>5</sup> It is thus unsurprising that, unlike the world of Latin, for example, where a *translatio studii* took place not unlike what we find in the regional traditions of the subcontinent, there exists no Sanskrit or other Indian discourse on translation; in fact, there exist no common word for translation in any premodern Indic language. The IA term *anuvādayati* in this sense is modern; *parivatteti* appears occasionally in Pali texts (*Mahāvamsa* 37.175; 244),<sup>6</sup> and (so far as I have discovered) once in a Sanskrit text, Rājāśekhara's account of the type of plagiarizer (one among the *śabdārthaharaneṣu kaviprabhedāḥ*) by whom "a poem is converted from one language into another", *anyatamabhāṣānibaddham bhāṣāntareṇa parivartyate*. The example Rājāśekhara gives is a very close, if slightly expanded, Sanskrit version of a *gāthā* from the *Sattasaī*:

*necchai pāsāsanṅki kāo dinnam pi . . .*  
*...-oggaiyavalayamañjīṭṭhiam piṇḍam||*  
*dattam piṇḍam . . .*  
*pāsāsanṅki gāitavalayam nainam āśnāti kākah||*

[Her fallen bracelet encircles the riceball, and the crow hesitates to eat, thinking there's a trap.]<sup>7</sup>

But this phonological transformation hardly constitutes "translation"; somewhat further along the continuum, now in the case of scientific literature, is a work like the *Kavirājanamārga*. This rhetorical treatise was produced at the court of Nīpatuṅga Amoghavarṣa, king of the

4 See Helmut Ritter (ed.), "Al-Bīrūnī's Übersetzung des Yoga-sūtra des Patanjali", *Oriens* 9 (1956), pp. 165-200; Bruce B. Lawrence, "The Use of Hindu Religious Texts in al-Bīrūnī's India with Special Reference to Patanjali's Yoga-Sūtra", in *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abū'l-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, New York, New York University Press, 1975, pp. 29-48. The *Amṛtakūṇḍa* is currently being translated by Carl Ernst, to whom I owe these references.

5 Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-bhakti*, Delhi, Oxford U. Press, 1983.

6 References courtesy my colleague Steven Collins.

7 *Kāvyaṁmānāsā*, ed. Dalal, Baroda 1934, pp. 66-67.

Rāṣṭrakūṭas at the end of the ninth century, by his court poet, Śrīvijaya. Its conceptual foundations, overall structure, rhetorical categories, definitions, and sometimes even exemplifications, are derived from the *Kāvyaśāstra/Kāvyaśāstra* of Daṇḍin (late seventh century; the work played a similar role in the later Sinhala, Tamil and Tibetan poetic traditions). Here is one example out of many, the illustrative verse for the figure *ratnāpāhnavarūpaka* or *ratnāpāhnavuti*:

*naitan mukham idaṁ padmanam na netre bhramanāv imau |*  
*eṭāni kesarāṇy eva naitā dantarciśas tava ||* (*Kāvyaśāstra* 2.94)

[This is not a face, it is a lotus, these are bees, not eyes,  
 these are filaments, not the gleaming of your teeth]

*vadanam idāhamburūham madalolavilocananiḅgal allam ivaliḅgal |*  
*mudam allidu vikananam embidaninbene baḅege*  
*ratnāpāhnavutiyam ||* (*Kavirājanamārgam* 3.24).<sup>8</sup>

[This is not a face, it is a lotus, these are bees, not eyes wild with lust,  
 and this not pleasure but a blossoming" -- an utterance of this sort is called "metaphorical denial"]

It is of course especially interesting and important to determine those areas where the vernacularizing cultural politics of a court like that of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas found it important to deviate from, while incorporating, the cosmopolitan discourse of Sanskrit. But that is another story.

Another regime, closely related to the former, understands translation as ennoblement or communicative enhancement (it's not always clear which obtains). Important examples here would be Sanskrit versions of Prakrit texts where the antecedent is fully acknowledged. In some instances, of course, these are just full-scale applications of the translational impulse found in the *chāyā*, the Sanskrit "shadow" that came to be attached to many Prakrit verses in medieval India. I am currently studying the history of this latter practice, and its communicative context is complex. In the early eleventh century, for example, Bhoja never provides *chāyā*-s for any of the numerous Prakrit quotations in the *Śrīḅārataprakāśa*, whereas Kṣemendra, his Kashmiri contemporary, seems always to do so, as in *Aucityavivācararā*. And certainly it is "communicative enhancement" that governs the production of something like the Sanskrit version of Pravarasena's *Ravanavaha* that was prepared by one Śivanarāyanadāsa "at the command of Rāmasiṅha, during the time of Jahangir." But something different seems to be going on in the case of Jaina texts: the *Hartvaṁṣapurāṇa*, exists both in a Sanskrit version of one Jināsena (A.D. 783) and in Apabhraṁṣa versions by Svayambhu and Puṣpadanta (tenth

8 *Kāvyaśāstra*, ed. Thakur, Darbhanga 1957; *Kavirājanamārgam*, ed. Krishnamoorthy, Bangalore 1983.