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Introduction: Situating Sanskrit after the Sultanates

LUTHER OBROCK

In the latter half of the fifteenth century, Sultan Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (r. 1420-1470) commanded his court poet Śrīvara to compose a Sanskrit praise poem (*praśasti*) commemorating a momentous occasion: the inauguration of the first cannons in valley of Kashmir.[1] In 1465, Zayn's craftsmen had completed their task and the guns were ready for a public demonstration. The diffusion of gunpowder in Eurasia was a momentous technological shift and in embracing and celebrating the cannons, Sultan Zayn was very much a man of his times. His interest in gunpowder and allied sciences appears throughout Śrīvara's account of his life, the Sanskrit *Jainataraṅgiṇī*. In a particularly striking section, Śrīvara speaks of festivals and dramas punctuated by pyrotechnic displays, much to the amazement and delight of the spectators.[2] Śrīvara even reports that Zayn composed a dialogue in poetic Persian that laid out instructions for the making of fireworks.[3] These gunpowder technologies were just a single example of the ways in which the material and cultural base Kashmiri life under Zayn and the sultans had transformed, yet many other examples could also be cited from Sanskrit and Persian sources, including the importation of new technologies such as weaving and bookbinding. Such expertise led to the development of new export industries, in which Kashmir became a key artisanal centre during the sultanate period.[4] From this viewpoint, Zayn's cannons are a synechdoche for shifts during these key centuries as new dynasties fostered new routes and connections, while new technologies flourished.

Using the Āryā metre, Śrīvara describes the cannons in loving detail, deploying the lexical arsenal of Sanskrit to produce dense puns and wordplay. To provide just one example, towards the end of the composition, Śrīvara uses a dense *śleṣa* (sequences of phonemes that can be read in different senses, sometimes translated as pun) to explain the action of the cannons. He writes:

dhātuvibhaktisphārāt padapravṛttyā prayojite śabde |
arthopalabdhihetur bhavatv idam vṛddhiguṇayuktyā ||1.1.80||

[1] Śrīvara's *Jainataraṅgiṇī* 1.1.72-4. Here I follow the edition and the German translation of Walter Slaje in Slaje, 'Schleuder, Katapult, Armbrust und Kanonen: Zur weniger bekannten Militärtechnologie des mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Indien' In *Zeitschrift der Deutchen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 169, 2 (2019), pp. 126–131

[2] See Śrīvara's *Jainataraṅgiṇī*, 1.4.

[3] Śrīvara's *Jainataraṅgiṇī* 1.4.29.

[4] Simon Digby, "Export industries and handicraft production under the Sultans of Kashmir," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 44, 4, (2007), pp. 407–423.

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1. May this (*idam*) [cannon] be a cause for the gaining of wealth (*artha*), [deployed] with the help of a thick cord (*vṛddhiguṇa*), when the sound from the explosion (*vibhakti*) of the gunpowder (*dhātu*, lit. "chemical") had been urged on by the activity of a foot (*padavṛttyā*).
2. May this (*idam*) [*praśasti*] be a cause for the understanding of meaning (*artha*) through the two grades of vowel strengthening (*vṛddhiguṇa*), when a sound is used through the bursting forth of verbal roots (*dhātu*) and declensional endings (*vibhakti*).

The verse can be read in two ways, one giving a meaning that relates to the technical science of Sanskrit grammar and one related to the actual mechanics of firing a cannon.[5] While neither the *praśasti* nor the cannon is named explicitly in the verse, the polyvalence of the words hints toward both meanings. In the case of the verse, the contextual meaning should be that of the cannon, yet the words more clearly toward poetry being its object. Such stylistic excess is common in the Sanskrit eulogistic register, developed over a millennium of ornate poetry (*kāvya*) and inscriptional encomia (*praśasti*).[6] Yet the bidirectionality of this verse also presents a way to think through the complexity of Sanskrit and Sanskrit's use by elite agents in the Sultanate period and beyond.

Grammatical puns are well known in Sanskrit, and the meaning focused on poetic composition would be more readily apparent. In this verse the key is the deictic pronoun *idam*, meaning simply "this". With this simple word Śrīvara is both pointing to the really existing materiality of the cannon and the new vocabulary in the poem he has created around it. At the same time "this" points to a real use of Sanskrit speech in Śrīvara's and Sultan Zayn's world. The sheer grammatical power of Sanskrit still offered something in the Persianate age. Yet as this complex verse shows, Sanskrit grammaticality had to navigate new realities, materialities and ideologies. The vocabulary for the technical aspects of cannons, gunpowder, and the deployment of missiles is unprecedented in Sanskrit literature,[7] thus Śrīvara is creating a language through which to represent new objects and the prestige associated with them.

Śrīvara's work is one of the hundreds of Sanskrit texts, often read and understudied, from the Sultanate period. Their relative neglect can perhaps be seen as a symptom of their historical position: Sanskrit interlopers in a Persian age. However, such neglect tells us more about the disciplinary structures of that undergird the study of premodern South Asia than their position in the lived experience of Sanskrit-speaking and valorising people at that time. The study of Sanskrit in second millennium North India lays bare both the difficulties conceptualisation and also the possibilities for creative re-engagement. This *praśasti* offers a tantalising glimpse into the complex processes underlying the elite representation in Sultanate Kashmir, and by extension invites one to think through the complexities of Sanskrit's continued use in particular circumstances in North India under the sovereignty of Muslim rulers. The reasons for this are undoubtedly multifarious, but still poorly understood. The evidence these texts provide portrays a richness and complexity

[5]For more details on the mechanics of firing a cannon, especially how they seemed to be impelled with a kick, see Slaje, 'Schleuder, Katapult, Armbrust und Kanonen', pp. 130–131.

[6]For a history of *śleṣa* in Sanskrit literature, see Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York, 2010).

[7]For instance, his word for "cannonball", *vajrabāṇa* translates literally as "thunderbolt-arrow" and the word for "cannon" is *yantrabhāṇḍa*, literally "mechanism-vessel".

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of that time, which pushes back against the drive to neatly theorise and periodise literary histories.

In recent years the Sanskrit literature produced after the stabilisation of the first Islamic polities in North India has begun to receive more attention. A number of factors in the field can perhaps begin to explain this increased interest, particularly the turn toward works produced in the second millennium and the increased prominence of multilingual histories of South Asia. Yet still the continued use and prestige of Sanskrit under Muslim hegemony in North India demands a greater attention. This period hosted an intense creativity in and flourishing of literary activity, often reflecting on previous literature while also drawing attention to new of relationships between the text and the world. Yet how can we conceptualise Sanskrit in the second millennium, specifically in relation to new political, religious, and cultural forms? How does the use of Sanskrit in classical or early medieval India compare to its use in Sultanate or Mughal times? What sorts of groups use it and for what ends? In what way is this sort of Sanskrit "new" or "innovative"? Such questions were the original impulses which led to the discussions held at the University of Wisconsin's Annual South Asia Conference during which versions of these essays were first presented.

The essays in this volume seek to understand clearly the position of Sanskrit after the stabilisation of Islamic power, not by offering larger theorisations of Sanskrit, but by looking at specific uses of Sanskrit and their implications for historicising Sanskrit-valorising agents in the broader cultural history of northern India. Sanskrit sources must be seen in relations to these actors who were making specific arguments rooted in their specific time periods. While these Sanskrit works are relatively understudied, we know much more about the world Sanskrit authors and their patrons inhabited than any ancient, classical, or early medieval author. The evidentiary terrain of second millennium, specifically Islamicate South Asia, is far richer and denser than any time prior; the Sanskrit works of this period can be put in conversation with Persian and Arabic histories, vernacular literature, built spaces, and contemporary manuscripts, to name a few. Such data invites interdisciplinary work that allows for a rich picture of the life of Sanskrit in an increasingly Persianate world. Each of the five articles in this volume complicate and enrich the picture of the history of Sanskrit in the centuries of Islamic rule in South Asia. Luther Obrock and Steven Vose concentrate on the pre-Mughal Sultanate period, while Pranav Prakash and Shankar Nair look to uses of Sanskrit under the Mughals. Daud Ali's work looks at the development of a specific genre over several centuries spanning the time of Muslim hegemony in northern and western South Asia.

As is well known, after the twelfth century Islamic religious ideas, Islamicate political and aesthetic forms, and Persian (and to a lesser extent Arabic and Turkic) literary genres and expectations became increasingly prominent in northern India. These forms partially displaced Sanskrit from its role in the political realm, yet this transformation was uneven, incomplete, and not without a complex set of negotiations that left its mark on both Sanskrit and Persian literary cultures. However, Sanskrit and Persian sources have tended to be held apart, especially given the pernicious and tenacious periodisation of India's premodern past into discreet Hindu and Muslim eras. This model, developed by colonial historians and taken on by nationalist imaginations, equates religious identity with political and aesthetic

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regimes. Further, dealing with Sanskrit works is difficult since under Muslim polities, Persian sources give shape to the history and historiography of the time, while Sanskrit and other Indic language sources are relegated to supplementary roles. While including Sanskrit in multilingual histories can give a richer picture of the time, the actual ideologies of Sanskrit literary patronage, production, and circulation deserve closer attention. Further, a foregrounding of Sanskrit sources demands a careful reading of the texts produced in relation to earlier models. Much work has gone into deconstructing the simple cultural binaries of Hindu and Muslim in South Asian history, yet vocabulary for conceptualising these complex exchanges has only recently began to develop.

In terms of the periodisation of South Asian history first espoused by colonial historians and later enshrined in India by nationalist historians, the story of Sanskrit in South Asia is one of gradual decline. Two causes for the decline Sanskrit after the twelfth century are cited: the strangulation of the creative spirit of the language through increasing scholasticism and pressure from Islamic rule. A fairly standard portrayal of this view is found in the work of S. N. Dasgupta encapsulates this view in his introduction to his *History of Sanskrit Literature*: "With the occupation of Upper India by the Moslems and their inroads into Southern India and with the growth of the stringency of the Smṛti rules and their insulating tendency, the former free spirit gradually dwindled away and we have mostly a mass of stereotyped literature to which South India, which was comparatively immune from the Moslem invasion, contributed largely".[8] In this conception, the brilliance of Gupta era literature leads to decadence in later *kāvya* until finally the political upheavals brought on by the Muslim invasion deal a death blow to Sanskrit literature as a vibrant, living force. Forced back by the political and cultural ascendency of Islam, the focus of literary culture turns from creation to protection; non-productive genres such as commentary and anthologies come to the fore. Such histories use romantic ideals of the "genius" and "vitality" of the language to explain general shifts in the literary and cultural landscape.

The colonial/nationalist vision of Sanskrit's history in the second millennium remained largely uncontested within the field of literary history for much of the twentieth century. Sheldon Pollock reimagined the role of Sanskrit in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* and presented South Asian languages and their literatures in a different light, relying upon a particular vision of "cosmopolitan" Sanskrit.[9] For Pollock, Sanskrit exists at the top of an order of languages as the language in which power is articulated. Sanskrit is essentially not a "language" at all; Sanskrit is literature, which in turn is the aesthetic which unites and orders the political world. In this conception, Sanskrit is not a regional language that has risen to become the pan-Indian language of the elite. Rather, Sanskrit and power are co-articulative. Sanskrit is just as inseparable from politics as it is from aesthetics. In this way, Sanskrit did not emanate from a certain area or polity, on the contrary it was pervasive precisely because it had no links to particular political dispensations or regional identities. For a huge swathe of the world, Sanskrit was the way of being engaged in the world, an ethos, and an aesthetic, which Pollock terms the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

[8] S. N. Dasgupta *A History of Sanskrit Literature: Classical Period. Vol. 1* (Calcutta, 1962), p. cxviii.

[9] Sheldon Pollock, *Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern South Asia* (Berkeley, 2006).

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How did this cosmopolitan linguistic world change in the second millennium? For Pollock, understanding Sanskrit in the second millennium depends upon shifts in "literariness". Sanskrit in its cosmopolitan mode was always defined in relation to the vernaculars, which could be written without necessarily being literary. For instance, in some inscriptions, the poetic portion of the grant would be written in Sanskrit, while the "workly" portion describing the donation and its administration would be written in the vernacular. This began to shift with what Pollock calls "cosmopolitan vernaculars", that is vernaculars with enough poetic and expressive power to write poetry that was expressive of the same ideological visions as cosmopolitan Sanskrit. The development of these cosmopolitan vernaculars was happening at the same time as shifts in political imagination. By the time of the coming of Islamic polities, this shift in the place of vernaculars was well underway.

Pollock's influential article, "The Death of Sanskrit" offers a nuanced account of the transformation of elite culture from the point of view of the transformation of elite literary production. His article looks both inward to the "political institutions and civic ethos required to sustain Sanskrit literary culture" and outward to the "competition with vernacular cultures".[10] For Pollock, Sanskrit operated in a prestige economy where being cordoned off from outside influences kept the language viable to a small group of interested intellectuals. The more it operated within these refined spheres, the more it was able to reproduce itself. Yet the more it flourished within its increasingly limited scope, the less it interacted with and mattered to the larger political and social world. As he puts it, "The social spheres of Sanskrit literary production grew ever more constricted, and the personal and this-worldly, and eventually even the presentist-political evaporated, until only the dry sediment of hymnology remained".[11] While in some ways Pollock's conception seems to echo that of Dasgupta quoted above, for Pollock the main impetus for this "death" of Sanskrit was an upending of this language order that had defined the cosmopolitan period. The ethos of the cosmopolis was already coming undone before the coming of Islam, which seems to have merely accelerated the political and cultural forces behind the reimagining of elite culture and the South Asian language order.

While Pollock's article has been criticised,[12] its underlying questions and historicisation have remained compellingly relevant. How can we talk about Sanskrit production in the second millennium in which it clearly lost ground to vernacular languages and other transregional languages of power like Persian? While Pollock does nod to the increasingly local concerns of Sanskrit production, Yigal Bronner and David Shulman see this as the success of a localised, "vernacular" Sanskrit. In their article "A Cloud Turned Goose", they argue that what Sanskrit loses in cosmopolitan sweep, it makes up for in localised depth: "Sanskrit participated along with the vernaculars in the project of inventing and elaborating distinctive regional differences".[13] Sanskrit, particularly Sanskrit poetry, neither presupposed a cosmopolitan scope nor participated in transregional circulation. Sanskrit

[10] S. Pollock, 'The Death of Sanskrit' In *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 43, 2 (2001), p. 395.
[11] Pollock, 'Death of Sanskrit,' p. 417.
[12] See for instance, J. Hanneder. 'On "The Death of Sanskrit,"' *Indo Iranian Journal* 45. (2002), pp. 293–310.
[13] Bronner and Shulman, 'A Cloud Turned Goose: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 43, 1 (2006), p. 6.

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poetry more and more begins to speak to specifically regional concerns. "Sanskrit enables a unique connectedness of the various domains. It opens up a certain space and offers the poet a kind of freedom".[14] In this imagination, Sanskrit is just one regional choice among many that is able to be uniquely locally expressive simply because of its resonances with past cosmopolitan literature.

In his monograph *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry: The Sena Salon of Bengal and Beyond*, Jesse Knutson uses Pollock's cosmopolitan theories of the registers of language to understand processes of regionalism and vernacularisation in eastern India.[15] His analysis, structured around the closing years of the last Hindu rulers of Bengal, argues that the collapse of sovereignties led to an anxiety that manifested itself in the Sanskrit literature of the period. The poetry of this time hints toward the contradictions at the heart of Sanskrit cosmopolitan kingship and society. In this, Knutson's work seeks a particular type of "realism" that reflects and reacts to the lived political and material situation. To locate this, *Into the Twilight* explores the relationships between economic life and social relations in premodern eastern India. That Sanskrit literature must be situated within these structures indicates a way towards a nuanced understanding of the processes underlying Sanskrit's continued use as it itself transforms influenced by (and also influencing) vernacular literature. His work's greatest strength lies in its insistence on particularity of historical moments and the lived world which Sanskrit inhabits. The Sena court thus both inherits certain cosmopolitan structures while also incorporating vernacular elements that later give birth to a particular sort of vernacular literature. History and historical changes thus impinge upon Sanskrit literary culture and foster "vernacularised" or regional sorts of presentation. While sharing ideas with both Pollock and Bronner and Shulman, Knutson's presents a nuanced case study of the complex set of literary negotiations that accompany real cultural and political shifts.

The preceding works largely concentrate upon Sanskrit's literary history in relation to the rise of Indic vernacular languages, the essays in this volume look particularly to its relation to Islamicate political formations and Persianate literary expectations. How does Persian and Persian literariness impinge upon Sanskrit literary culture? In what way do competing language orders interact? In what way does the imagination of older orders with Sanskrit on top spur on the continued use of Sanskrit? While Eaton has theorised a Persian Cosmopolis that functioned similarly to Pollock's Sanskrit Cosmopolis,[16] the interactions between these two cosmopolitan spheres is difficult to theorise broadly. The Persian of South Asia also was constantly interacting with linguistic, aesthetic and political expectations and served different functions within different contexts. For instance, Muzaffar Alam has traced the complex history of Persian in the Mughal court.[17] Even in a new political dispensation with a new language order, the relations between languages were constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. The writers and patrons of Sanskrit literature, too, were part of this creative foment. In the Mughal context, Audrey Truschke argues that

[14]Bronner and Shulman, (2006), p. 5.

[15]J. Knutson, *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry: The Sena Salon of Bengal and Beyond* (Berkeley, 2014).

[16]R. Eaton, "The Persian Cosmopolis (900-1900) and the Sanskrit Cosmopolis (400-1400), in *The Persianate World: Rethinking Shared Space*, (eds.) A. Amanat and A. Ashraf (Leiden, 2018), pp. 63–83.

[17]M. Alam, 'The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,' *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 2 (1998), pp. 317–349.

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from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, Sanskrit literary works were constitutive of both Mughal self-understanding and self-presentation.[18] Her work is an invitation to read Sanskrit works produced at the Mughal court more carefully and to think through the ways in which the ethos of Mughal court life informed and was informed by the Sanskrit works which were translated and patronised by the Mughal elite. These interactions were not limited to the Mughals. Rather, throughout South Asia Sanskrit works were produced by, patronised by, or circulated within Persianate spheres. It is in this rich context that this volume seeks to situate evocative case studies, not to fit any previous model of Sanskrit in the world, but rather to show the multifarious trajectories for Sanskrit imagined by authors, patrons, and audiences in an increasingly Persianate world. Taken together they hope to hint at diversity of habitations of Sanskrit in the Persianate age.

The twelfth century through to the seventeenth centuries showed the development and popularisation of new genres which offered new imaginations of Sanskrit, politics, poetry, and the past. In this volume, Daud Ali's article takes up one of these literary forms, the *prabandha* and shows how these *prabandha* texts create a vision of the figure of author that is unprecedented in earlier classical Sanskrit. He charts the concept of authorship through the twinned genres of poetic anthologies and lives of poets in the *prabandha* corpus (which often embed verses known from the anthologies). Prior to the second millennium, the lives of poets are rarely noted beyond brief genealogies and references in later works. However, the *prabandha* literature delights in showing well-known authors from the classical period engaged in composing works, often at the court of the semi-mythical King Bhoja of Dhārā. These "scenes of authorship" became a way to reflect upon the Sanskrit literary tradition in a way that indexes and explains the literary sensibilities collected and celebrated in the poetic anthologies. Ali's work is particularly evocative when these new imaginations of text and authorship are placed in their broader historical context, with its new and evolving forms of politics and elite representation in Persianate and Islamicate spheres.

The use of Sanskrit to commemorate the lives of important figures is also explored in the work of Steven Vose. His article concentrates upon the Jain monk and scholar, Jinaprabhasūri and his relationship with Delhi Sultanate and his presence at the court of Mohammad Tughluq. Rather than concentrating on the particular historicity of the Jinaprabhasūri and his accounts, Vose rather proposes reading the Jain sources alongside Persian sources. Particularly fascinating in his discussion is his contextualisation of Jinaprabhasūri's text, the *Vividhātīrthakalpa*. In a way resonant with Ali's reading of the *prabandha* literatures, Vose holds that the geographical imagination underlying the *Vividhatīrthakalpa* is conditioned by the political geography of Sultanate rule. Sanskrit texts are used to make claims about political and religious relationships to Jain audiences. The positioning Jinaprabhasūri's works and the narratives surrounding his life show the negotiation and renegotiation of various hierarchies, communities, and power structures.

While the stabilisation of the Delhi Sultanate profoundly reshaped the political and military structure of North India, it also presented opportunities for new connections within the sultanate territory. Luther Obrock investigates Sanskrit donative inscriptions from the Delhi hinterland produced during the reign of the Delhi Sultans and places them within networks

[18]A. Truschke, *A Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, 2016).

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of mercantile mobility. His essay argues that political and social changes in the Sultanate period left traces in the rhetoric and structure of Sanskrit epigraphic poetry. Concentrating on a particular thirteenth-century inscription that commemorates the construction of a well, Obrock shows that the self-presentation of the rich merchant Uḍḍhara depends on a layering of landscapes and histories that unites different areas and centres them at the site of the merchant's pious donation. The epigraphic poem is able to bring together different geographical, historical, and religious visions into a new sort of composition, which continued to be used in mercantile donative inscriptions in the coming centuries.

Turning to Sanskrit's use in the Mughal world, Shankar Nair's contribution looks to a particularly neglected genre in Sanskrit history, hagiography. Like Steven Vose's texts concentrating on Jinaprabhasūri, these hagiographies interface between the intellectual output of a religious figure and his interactions with the world. While these texts have been investigated to fill out pictures of sectarian lineages and self-conceptions, Nair's article looks at the way in which the hagiographical form itself was in conversation with other sorts of religious and hagiographic writing, particularly Muslim writing in the Mughal period. While hagiographies are seen to be inward-looking, Nair shows that hagiographies were very much directed toward specific audiences to made specific claims that can only make sense in the larger religious landscape.

Returning to elite poetic literature, Pranav Prakash concentrates on manuscripts and the processes of literary production that underlie Sanskrit in the Mughal period. Focussing upon the Mughal panegyrics of the court poet Rudra, Prakash traces the complicated manuscript history of his works while highlighting the scholarly presuppositions—philological and historical—that have shaped the reception of Rudra's text in modern scholarship. The crux of the issue is that the manuscript versions of the text do not agree and take different forms in the different issues. Prakash argues that these manuscripts cannot be taken as deficient copies made by ignorant scribes, but rather that the reflect both specific compositional moments in terms of the poet Rudra as well as the scribes. This work invites reflection on the actual placement and performance of Sanskrit literature in elite contexts in Mughal South Asia. Further, foregrounding materiality of the manuscript tradition combined with careful codicological studies can begin to show the place of Sanskrit texts in the lived world. Issues of circulation and valorisation can be enriched by thinking of the material place of Sanskrit manuscripts and how they are produced and circulate. Prakash's invites a return to material production in the understanding of Sanskrit literature in the Mughal world.

Each of these essays provide a small case study that can help enrich our picture of Sanskrit's various uses in an increasingly vernacularised or Persianised world. While Sanskrit literary history tends to write of broad transformative trends as the *geist* of Sanskrit shifts and settles and gradually fades, Sanskrit's communities of patrons, audiences, and authors speak to its multifarious, uneven, contingent, and divergent histories in practice. Development, innovation, and exchange are uneven, and do not happen everywhere at the same time (or perhaps never happen at all). The centuries covered in these articles hint to the dynamism of the language and the multiplicity of stories yet to be told. While the Sanskrit produced in the Persianate age has been relatively neglected, the sheer number of texts and manuscripts available from this time as well as the mass of sources in numerous languages present an opportunity not only to enrich the story of Sanskrit but also the social, cultural, political, and intellectual history of this time period.

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The essays here highlight the complex life of Sanskrit for authors, groups, and political actors in the centuries between the first stabilisation of Islamic dynasties in North India and the hegemonic rise of the Mughal Empire (ca. 12th–16th c. CE). In these contexts, Sanskrit texts intertwine with the world and navigate it, are produced by authors and are esteemed by audiences, are copied by scribes and inscribed by engravers. The histories produced in the *prabandha*s described by Ali creatively reimagine the culture of the past and the hagiographical stories described by Vose and Nair imagine relationships between actors, communities, and the world. The presence of these texts ripple outward into larger communities and networks, themselves embedded in built landscapes and lived practices. The world of writers and audiences leads to that of scribes, manuscripts, paper and ink, stone and chisel. The manuscripts described by Prakash circulated inseparably from their content; Sanskrit poetry was as much a physical object as an abstract literary text. The Cannon Eulogy of Śrīvara is a textualised example of something that belongs very much in the world, and directs the listener toward the real presence of the cannon in the world. In much the same way, the Pālam Bāolī inscription described by Obrock focuses turns, at the end, to focus on the well itself, an integral part of the landscape in which it was embedded.

The larger question of how to frame such texts and how to use them to write richer histories of North India. While much work has gone into deconstructing the simple cultural binaries of Hindu and Muslim in South Asian history theoretical and historiographical models often smooth over the complexities of the time. Perhaps a return to Śrīvara and his cannon *śleṣa* is a fruitful model, which simultaneously looks back to the self-conscious power inherent in the Sanskrit literary language for elite representation while also looking forward toward new political, cultural, and material realities. Śrīvara's layering, situated by the deixis of the verse itself, locates it as performed at a specific place and time and embedded within certain social contexts and relations. Śrīvara's verses stand as a provocation to understand the way in which Sanskrit was used and valorised by specific agents in specific historical contexts in medieval and early modern South Asia. The contributions in this volume, each in their specific way work to identify such sites of production and performance, where the power of Sanskrit literature intersects with the world.

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