

# Inventing Prakrit

## *The Languages of Literature*

*Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language. With each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it, it chooses, in other words, a “language.”*

—M. M. BAKHTIN, *THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION*<sup>1</sup>

### THE TWO HISTORIES OF PRAKRIT LITERATURE

A précis of the early history of Prakrit literature might run as follows: Prakrit was the language of courtly poetry in the Deccan in the first half of the first millennium CE, and its major landmarks include *Seven Centuries*, an anthology of lyrics attributed to a king of the Sātavāhana dynasty named Hāla, as well as *Hari’s Triumph* by Sarvasena and *Rāvaṇa’s Demise* by Pravarasena, both epics by kings of the Vākātaka dynasty in present-day Maharashtra. Prakrit was also the language of the texts produced by Jain monks in around the same period, whether they take the form of commentaries on a canonical text, recastings of the narratives of other traditions (such as *Wanderings of Vasudeva* by Saṅghadāsa, a Jain version of Guṇāḍhya’s *Great Story*, or the *Deeds of Padma* by Vimāla, a Jain version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*), or entirely new stories (such as Pālitta’s *Taraṅgavatī*).

This chapter focuses on the “also.” What I offer here is not just a reading of Prakrit’s earliest known works, but an attempt to read them together, as works that represent and define “Prakrit” in the singular. The way that the history of Prakrit literature has usually been told—to the limited extent that it has been told at all—splits it into two histories. One of these is “courtly” and “Brahmanical,” and the other is “popular” and “Jain.”<sup>2</sup> This bifurcation is not just a convenient way of organizing texts and authors which, like most such conveniences, can easily become facile and reductive. It has become foundational to the way Prakrit is understood today—as a generic term for two groups of languages and their associated literary

practices that do not have much to do with each other. This separation of Prakrit's history into "Jain" and "non-Jain" strands, however valid it may be for understanding the literary production of a later period, is deeply misleading for the earliest period. It may well be the case that these strands are so closely intertwined that we might have to abandon the vocabulary of separation altogether. This is very plausibly the case for the Prakrit-producing literary culture of the western Deccan: the "non-Jain" *Seven Centuries* and the "Jain" *Taraṅgavatī* were in all likelihood produced by some of the same people in the same court.

The two histories of Prakrit converge upon a very obscure but very important period. The standard literary histories represent the first centuries of the common era as a "dark age": few literary productions survive from this period, and of those that do survive, almost nothing specific is known about their dates, authors, and places of composition. The idea of a "dark age" belongs to the same figure as that of a "golden age" under the Guptas in the fourth and fifth centuries proposed by Max Müller in the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> Although Müller's chronology is now completely discredited, the idea of a "golden age" had more staying power. We can briefly consider two discoveries that did more than anything else to discredit Müller's theory. Georg Bühler's work on Indian inscriptions convinced him that the literary practices that Müller associated with the Guptas had existed for centuries prior to them. And the discovery of Aśvaghoṣa's poems, which likewise antedated the Guptas by several centuries, meant that golden-age poets like Kālidāsa were not the first of their kind.<sup>4</sup> These discoveries had the effect of reframing Müller's "golden age," not as a period, but as a set of cultural practices that distinctively characterize that period; these practices might have existed, and according to Bühler did exist, long before that period. Even with this reframed idea, however, there is a danger that any history of Indian literature will have to refer to the practices of the golden age, and that everything will be classified as either an instance of such practices or a precursor to or epigone of them, with the evaluative dimensions that both of these terms imply.

For these reasons, although the history of Prakrit literature is very closely bound up with the history of Sanskrit literature, I do not want to take "Sanskrit literature" for granted as the lens through which we understand and historicize the former. I will therefore try to avoid narratives of the "pre-classical," a practice that both leads to and fails to itself become classical.<sup>5</sup> These narratives hold that Prakrit literature is a precursor to Sanskrit literature, embodying the same style, themes and outlook, but in a less developed and less sophisticated way, or rather represents what Sanskrit literature had to turn away from in order to become refined and courtly.

At the same time, however, I do want to focus my narrative upon a specific set of cultural practices: those of *kāvya*, commonly but not unproblematically rendered as "classical," "courtly," or "belles-lettres" literature. The form of the word

*kāvya* implies that we are dealing in the first instance with Sanskrit. My contention is that the emergence of Sanskrit *kāvya* cannot be separated from the emergence of Prakrit *kavva*, that the two are linked in a strong sense. One is not straightforwardly derivative of the other. Rather, the multidirectional translation of themes, styles, and genres between languages was a crucial part of the practice of literature in this early period. This is not simply to gainsay the historical priority of Sanskrit as a language of *kāvya*. Hermann Jacobi had long ago refuted a version of the argument that classical Sanskrit literature was made up of translations from Prakrit originals.<sup>6</sup> Nor is it simply to interrupt the continuity of Sanskrit textuality from the oral hymns of the *Rgveda* to the courtly lyrics of Kālidāsa and beyond. It does mean, however, that non-Sanskrit texts, and above all Prakrit texts, need to be taken much more seriously when the origins and early development of *kāvya* are discussed. And it refocuses this discussion, too, from a question of historical or ethnohistorical priority (which texts, which authors, which languages were the first, or were believed to be the first, to realize this new discursive form?) to a question of historical possibility (what are the sociocultural contexts within which this new form of discourse could arise?).

One of my motivations for refocusing the discussion is, admittedly, my doubt that a convincing answer to the first question can ever be found. We have heard that Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is the first *kāvya*, but that Aśvaghoṣa's poems are the first *kāvyas* that can be placed in history; that Patañjali knew about *kāvya* already in the second century BCE; that the *caṅkam* poems represent a Tamil tradition of *kāvya* that antedates and influences the Sanskrit and Prakrit tradition; that there may be further precedents in Vedic literature, and so on. On top of this, I have argued in chapter 2 that the inscriptions of the first and second centuries CE represent a transformation in inscriptional discourse from mundane and pedestrian to elevated and literary, and that we must describe some of these inscriptions, both Sanskrit and Middle Indic, as *kāvya*. The multiplicity of possible beginnings, far from sinking the whole enterprise of theorizing the beginnings of a practice, suggests that we should ask about the role that each of these putative beginnings plays in a broader "*kāvya* movement" that spanned the subcontinent and embraced Sanskrit, Prakrit and quite possibly Tamil in its early stages—the first and second centuries CE—and eventually came to include languages as disparate as Tocharian, Sinhala, and Javanese.

What I call the "*kāvya* movement" is one component of what Sheldon Pollock has called the "Sanskrit cosmopolis." This was a cultural-political formation, lasting roughly from the second to the twelfth century and spreading over much of southern Asia, that was imagined through the universalizing discourses of Sanskrit.<sup>7</sup> The history of Prakrit literature, together with the history of inscriptions, suggest that cosmopolitan culture was not originally or essentially indexed to Sanskrit language practices. My argument in this chapter is that the Sātavāhanas and

their successors in the Deccan channeled cultural energies into Prakrit literature, and that this literature represented an ideal of courtliness and sophistication that increasingly came to define cosmopolitan culture in South Asia per se. The forms of literary discourse, like those of inscriptional discourse, “Sanskritized” as they spread throughout South Asia. Significantly, however, the process of Sanskritization did not push Prakrit literature into obsolescence: in contrast to the Middle Indic of inscriptions, Prakrit remained a possible means of literary expression for more than a thousand years. Further, by foregrounding the separation of courtly poetry from religious storytelling, the two histories of Prakrit provide a way of talking about one set of tensions inherent in the “Sanskrit cosmopolis”: literature and its forms of knowledge were imagined to be the common property of groups that had mutually exclusive religious commitments, and were thus a site of intense appropriation, contestation, and exclusion.

A constellation of criteria distinguish the “Jain” and “non-Jain” histories of Prakrit from each other, and it will be useful briefly to review these schematically. The themes of love and heroism are prominent in both kinds of literature, but in Jain Prakrit these are explicitly subordinated to the theme of liberation. The principal genres of courtly Prakrit are the single lyric verse (*muktaka*) and a kind of epic that later authors would call the “great poem” (*mahākāvya*); the former is typically in the *gāthā* meter, and the latter in the *skandhaka*. The principal genre of Jain Prakrit is the story (*kathā*), whether told in verse or prose or a mixture of the two. Courtly Prakrit, especially the epic, is highly stylized and makes use of a range of figures of sound and sense, whereas the literary pretensions of Jain Prakrit are less conspicuous. The language of Jain Prakrit has always seemed distinctive to modern scholars, not only for its archaism and the influence of Ardhamāgadhī, the language of the Jain scriptures, but because it was written in a special orthography that employed the letter *y* as a hiatus filler. These linguistic and orthographic differences are related to different histories of transmission: different groups of people were reading, studying, commenting upon, and referring to these texts. The history of transmission is in turn related to their different social sites: courtly Prakrit, of course, being associated with royal courts and the networks of literary culture they sustained, and Jain Prakrit with temples, religious schools, and pilgrimage sites. Finally, these different locations point toward the different actors involved in each tradition: kings, courtiers, and local elites on the one hand, and monks and their lay communities on the other.

One of the goals of this exercise is to subject all of these criteria to critical examination. The first move is to deny that the distinction between Jain and non-Jain applies to the entire tradition of Prakrit literature, or more precisely, that the meaning and significance of this distinction changes substantially over the course of history. This move simply serves to remind us that the distinction between Jain and non-Jain varieties of Prakrit is actually an artefact of European scholarship,

associated with the work of Hermann Jacobi and Ernst Leumann. Indeed, by “Jain Prakrit,” or “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” as he called it, Jacobi actually meant the language of relatively late narrative literature, where the influence of Sanskrit was relatively more conspicuous than in the language of earlier court poetry. Since Jacobi’s time, however, “Jain Prakrit” has come to be used rather loosely for any text by a Jain author written in any variety of Prakrit.<sup>8</sup> And in particular, it has come to be used of very early texts, such as *Taraṅgavatī* and *Wanderings of Vasudeva*, that Jacobi did not have access to until relatively late in his career. These works were written by Jain authors, but that does not mean that they belong to an exclusively Jain history, or that their authors’ Jainism meaningfully accounts for the features of the text that would interest literary historians. The second move is to replace the retrospective of the present, and the two millennia of appropriation and exclusion that are bound up in it, with a prospective from the very beginnings of Prakrit literature: what would a history of Prakrit literature that is not already bifurcated into Jain and non-Jain traditions look like? This view has been hard to gain, because we seem to know so little about the earliest phases of Prakrit literature, but I believe that scholars have been overly skeptical: we in fact know a good deal, and what we do know undermines rather than supports the division of Prakrit into Jain and non-Jain histories.

#### PRAKRIT’S KINGS

Everyone knows that literature in India began with Vālmīki, the sage who transformed his grief (*śoka*) into metrical verse (*śloka*) and told the story of Rāma. Vālmīki is the first poet (*ādikavi*) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the first poem (*ādikāvya*).<sup>9</sup> What is this thing called “literature” that begins from the *Rāmāyaṇa*? Is it Sanskrit literature? Is Sanskrit already hidden inside the term “literature”? Was Prakrit contained within the tradition that began with Vālmīki, or does it have a beginning of its own?

Around 1600 CE, in a commentary to a work on vernacular meters called *Prakrit Piṅgala*, Lakṣmīnātha Bhaṭṭa suggested that if one countenances different beginnings for each literary language, there is space at the beginning for more than just Vālmīki. If Vālmīki was the “first poet” in Sanskrit, Piṅgala was the “first poet” of vernacular literature (*bhāṣā*). The first poet in Prakrit, according to Lakṣmīnātha, was Śālivāhana, the legendary king to whom *Seven Centuries*—the most popular, the most influential, and to all appearances the earliest work of Prakrit literature—is ascribed.<sup>10</sup> And although nobody else articulated his priority in precisely this way, as far as I am aware, this king was widely viewed as one of the key figures, if not the key figure, in the Prakrit tradition. Viśveśvara, who lived in the eighteenth century, praised the author of *Seven Centuries* by calling his work the “archetype” (*prakṛti*) of which all subsequent literature is an “ectype” (*vikṛti*)—including, most obviously, Viśveśvara’s own *Seven Centuries*, where this verse appears.<sup>11</sup>

This king was known by several names. The forms Śālivāhana and Śālavāhana appear relatively late in the tradition. Early sources call him Sātavāhana or Hāla.<sup>12</sup> The former is the family name of the dynasty that ruled much of the Deccan between the early first century BCE and the early third century CE (see chapter 2). Later authors seem to use it primarily in reference to a single individual.<sup>13</sup> The name Hāla is included in the list of Sātavāhana kings found in the *purāṇas*.<sup>14</sup> This is no guarantee that there actually was a king named Hāla in the Sātavāhana line, given the occasional unreliability of the *purāṇas* and the complete absence of corroborating evidence from coins and inscriptions.<sup>15</sup> Inscriptional evidence, however, does confirm that Hāla was used as a personal name in this period, and hence the forced derivation of *Hāla* from *Sātavāhana* proposed by several scholars must be abandoned.<sup>16</sup> The names Hāla and Sātavāhana are used interchangeably in literary works, and lexicographers treat them as synonyms.<sup>17</sup>

There are many stories about Sātavāhana in Indian literature. Those I highlight here involve his patronage of Prakrit.<sup>18</sup> According to a well-known story, Sātavāhana was in despair after an embarrassing incident: as he was splashing one of his wives with water in the pool, she said, “Don’t throw water on me!” (*modakaiḥ pūraya*), which the king interpreted as “Throw sweets at me!” When the tray of sweets came out, she berated him for not knowing the first thing about Sanskrit grammar. She told him that he should have analyzed *modakaiḥ* into *mā udakaiḥ*. The sources differ regarding what comes next, but as it’s told in the *Twenty-four Prabandhas*—a collection of popular tales compiled by the Jain monk Rājaśekhara in 1349—Sātavāhana propitiated the goddess of language, Bhārati, with a three-day fast, as a result of which he became a great poet and wrote hundreds of texts. Once he asked the goddess for the entire population of his city to become poets for an afternoon, and on that day a hundred million Prakrit verses were composed, which the king then compiled into the anthology called *Sātavāhanaka*.<sup>19</sup> A similar story is told in an anonymous commentary to *Seven Centuries*. There, Sātavāhana entreats the goddess Bhārati to stay in his palace with him. She consents to do so only for two and a half days, during which time everyone associated with the palace spontaneously composes poetry and prose in the Prakrit language. It was these compositions that Sātavāhana then selected and arranged into seven hundred-verse groups, hence the name of the text.<sup>20</sup>

Both of these stories describe the composition of *Seven Centuries* as a supernatural event of collective effervescence.<sup>21</sup> Sātavāhana was instrumental in both bringing this event about and in transforming it into a textual artefact. We can read these stories along with another one, related by Merutuṅga in 1304, that brings the narrative closer to real-world practices of patronage. When Sātavāhana was told that he owed his good fortune in the present life to an act of selfless generosity in a previous life, he committed himself to giving away his wealth. He gathered all of the poets and scholars and offered forty million gold pieces for just four Prakrit

verses, and then he arranged the verses that were produced on this occasion into a “an anthology seven centuries in extent and bearing the title *Sātavāhana*.”<sup>22</sup> The patron, in all of these stories, creates an extraordinary circumstance by manipulating ordinary proportions in some way—either by paying an enormous amount for a small number of verses, or by having an enormous amount of verse generated in a short span of time—and the site of this manipulation is invariably the royal court.

These point of origin for all of these stories is *Seven Centuries* itself, one of whose first verses reads:

Seven hundred ornate verses amid a crore  
were put together by Hāla, dear to poets.<sup>23</sup>

The most obvious meaning is that Hāla selected seven hundred verses out of a much greater number. But it also suggests a comparison between the verses of this anthology (*kośa*) and the contents of a royal treasury (also *kośa*), and thus the very equivalence between literary wealth and monetary wealth that Merutuṅga’s story turns on.<sup>24</sup> Another verse in the anthology mentions the *Sātavāhana* king, comparing him to Śiva by reading the same word in two different meanings:

There are only two who are capable of  
elevating the family of Pārvatī, or  
uplifting families fallen on hard times:  
Gaurī’s beloved husband, and the *Sātavāhana* king.<sup>25</sup>

According to a unanimous literary tradition, *Seven Centuries* was a product of the royal court of the *Sātavāhanas*. This “courtliness” is the key to our knowledge and understanding of this text, and of the entire tradition that traces itself back to it. Its connection with the *Sātavāhana* court has, however, been subject to doubts. And although these doubts have little bearing on the courtly character of *Seven Centuries* in general—this is evident from a reading of the text itself—they do bear on the dating of the anthology and its role in literary history. Here I will review the principal arguments against an early date and explain why they are unconvincing.

One argument is based on the language of the text. The *Seven Centuries* exhibits lenition of intervocalic consonants to a greater degree than either inscriptions of the *Sātavāhana* period or the language of, for example, Aśvaghoṣa’s dramas (early second century CE).<sup>26</sup> But the assumption that every language undergoes the same development at the same rate is demonstrably false, especially when we are talking about literary languages. Luigia Nitti-Dolci likened this argument to trying to figure out the date of Dante’s works by comparing his Italian to the language of present-day Lithuanian peasants: we would probably say that Dante’s language represents a “later stage of linguistic development,” but that doesn’t mean that Dante came later.<sup>27</sup> A more serious problem is the discrepancy between the languages of



literature and the languages of inscription, which was itself highly literarized, in what I take to be the same political formation. But apart from the evident conservatism of the inscriptional language, it is likely that the language of *Seven Centuries* was meant to be distinctive, conforming more to the poetics of sweetness (see chapter 4) than the poetics of power (see chapter 2).<sup>28</sup>

The second type of argument, formulated first by D. R. Bhandarkar, has the following structure: if *Seven Centuries* were really as old as the ascription to Hāla would make it, then a whole slew of cultural references—the use of the seven-day week, skull-carrying ascetics, the romance of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the Greek loan word *horā* and the Persian loan word *bandī*—would occur for the first time in this text, and that simply can't be the case. Nearly a century later, we know that some of these terms and concepts appear much earlier than Bhandarkar thought, but in any case his argument from silence is not at all probative.<sup>29</sup> We have every reason to expect *Seven Centuries* to be full of firsts, if it is in fact one of the first works of a new kind of literature. One argument of this type merits special consideration because it appeared to provide a definitive *terminus post quem*. Bhandarkar identified Vikramāditya, who is mentioned as a paragon of generosity in W464, with Candragupta II, who ruled in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. But a long and persistent tradition places the “first” Vikramāditya at 57 BCE, at the beginning of the era that bears his name. Bhandarkar's premise that no-one could have referred to Vikramāditya before Candragupta II raises more problems than it solves.<sup>30</sup> A first- or second-century date for *Seven Centuries* remains to be disproven.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that *Seven Centuries* is a collection has provided scholars with an escape clause for the problem of its date: whatever date we assign to “the anthology itself,” and whatever we understand by that phrase, individual verses might come and go. V. V. Mirashi argued on several occasions that while the “core” of *Seven Centuries* dates to the age of the Sātavāhanas, it received additions until at least the eighth century.<sup>32</sup> Mirashi looked at the author names attached to individual verses by some commentaries on the text and sought to identify them with persons that are already known to us. But this project is flawed for several reasons. First, Mirashi identified the “core” of *Seven Centuries* with those verses found in all recensions of the text, which numbered 430 at the time of Weber's 1881 edition. But determining which verses are original is not simply a matter of checking whether a verse is present in all recensions; it requires us to have a convincing theory of its textual transmission, which neither Weber nor Mirashi had, and which we might never have. And given that the text itself proclaims its length, there is no way that we can equate the 430 shared verses with the 700-verse original. Secondly, Mirashi uses the attributions found in the commentaries uncritically, without venturing a theory of where these attributions come from and how they came to be associated with some but not all recensions of *Seven Centuries*. At risk of belaboring the point, Mirashi credits Pītāmbara's attribution of four verses to Vākpatirāja, whom



he identifies with the eighth-century author of *Gauḍa's Demise*, and he assumes that these verses are later additions. But Bhuvanapāla and Ājaḍa attribute three of these verses to different authors. And two of these four verses, despite being eighth-century additions according to Mirashi, are found in the set of 430 verses common to all recensions which, also according to Mirashi, “may have formed the original kernel of the work.”<sup>33</sup>

One of Mirashi's points, however, speaks to the courtliness of *Seven Centuries* in a different way. The lists of authors include a large number of names that end in *-rāja* or *-deva*. These lists thus suggest that many of the people who contributed to *Seven Centuries* were, or at least were later thought to be, members of royal families. Some corroboration can be found in the *Lilāvai*, a novel in Prakrit verse, probably of the eighth century, in which Sātavāhana figures as the hero. Among Sātavāhana's ministers in that text are Kumārila and Poṭṭisa, who are both noted as authors of verses in the commentaries to *Seven Centuries*. It is impossible at this point to say whether the narrative of the *Lilāvai* is based on the attributions of the commentarial tradition, or the other way around.<sup>34</sup> But combining them gives us a more specific, and in my view quite plausible, account of the double authorship of *Seven Centuries*. The authors whose verses comprise this text were participants in a literary culture that was centered on Hāla's court. Their verses are just not “courtly” in the thin sense of merely being composed at a court, but in the thick sense: their authors “discovered their collective consciousness in the experience of life at a court,” and their verses are an expression of this consciousness. A poetic sensibility, style, and technique run throughout *Seven Centuries*.<sup>35</sup>

I want to emphasize here how new this way of producing literature was, and how new, in turn, the kind of literature it produced was. Previously, any texts that achieved the condition of “permanence,” in Christian Novetzke's apposite term, were either religious in character, such as the Vedas or the canonical texts of the Jains and Buddhists, or belonged to a tradition of epic storytelling, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.<sup>36</sup> Later theorists of all persuasions categorically refused to bestow the status of “literature” (*kāvya*) on religious texts, however poetic the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* or the songs of Buddhist monks and nuns in the *Tripiṭaka* might seem to us.<sup>37</sup> The epics, by contrast, were often regarded as literary productions. But they were still regarded as products of mythical sages in time out of mind. But here, on the banks of the Godāvarī river, people who were interested and invested in literature gathered at the Sātavāhana court, and a set of social identities and cultural practices—those of the patron, the poet, the connoisseur, and the literary gathering (*goṣṭhī*)—thus converged around a new and decidedly this-worldly concept of “literature.”<sup>38</sup>

This culture of *kāvya* coincided with and partook of the emergence of a culture of *kāma* in the prosperous Sātavāhana empire. Art of the period prominently features the pursuit of pleasure. Funerary reliefs from Sannati commonly depict

the deceased in scenes of relaxation and revelry. Even in Buddhist meditation-halls, couples in love form an essential part of the decorative program. And scenes of the refined pleasures of courtly life—represented by barely clothed courtesans, luxury goods, and wine—unify the sculptural program at major Buddhist monuments. Indeed, this courtly aspect unifies the different subjects depicted at the *caitya* at Kanaganahalli, from scenes of the Buddha's life, to the story of Aśoka, to the depictions of the Sātavāhana rulers themselves.<sup>39</sup> And we should not forget that the *Kāma Sūtra*, which integrates literary pursuits into a more broadly aestheticized and eroticized lifestyle, was produced in the immediate aftermath of the Sātavāhana empire, around the middle of the third century CE.<sup>40</sup> With *Seven Centuries*, courtly culture produced for itself a textual artefact of a type that had previously been confined to the spheres—however loosely defined these are—of ritual, religion, and their associated forms of knowledge. But the Sātavāhana court was not unique. Around the same time, that is to say in the early second century CE, there was an explosion of literary activity at the court of the Kuṣāṇas further to the north, if legends connecting the Buddhist poets Aśvaghoṣa and Mātṛceṭa with this court have any basis in fact.<sup>41</sup> And although its chronology has been vigorously contested, the most recent research suggests that the Tamil *caṅkam* literature was contemporary with, and did not simply look back on, the Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇṭiya chiefs of the early centuries CE.<sup>42</sup> One way of looking at this phenomenon, in all of its occurrences, is as the transference of the figures (*alaṅkāras*), characteristics (*lakṣaṇas*), and qualities (*guṇas*) that had served to amplify, strengthen, and beautify language into a new and independent domain of language use. Verse W3, discussed above, says that the verses of *Seven Centuries* have “figures” or “ornaments” (*sālaṅkāraṇa*), possibly suggesting a definition of literature per se. The emergence of literary discourse is closely linked to the literarization of discourse that we traced in inscriptions in the previous chapter. Literature suddenly became a thing that could be pointed at and named.

*Seven Centuries* itself tells us the name of this new discourse in a programmatic introductory verse:

Prakrit poetry [*pāuakavvaṃ*] is nectar.  
Those who don't know how to recite it or listen to it  
make love into a science.  
How are they not ashamed?<sup>43</sup>

This verse is a declaration of independence, certainly of what it calls “Prakrit poetry,” but also, I would argue, of poetry itself. The contrast here is not between Prakrit poetry and other kinds of poetry, or poetry in other languages, but between a literary and an analytic sensibility. Herman Tieken has pushed this contrast as far as possible, taking *Seven Centuries* and the *Kāma Sūtra* of Vātsyāyana as representatives of two diametrically opposed ways of thinking about love and

sex. The *Kāma Sūtra*'s concern with classification and categorization ("fingernails are either long, short, or medium"), according to Tieken, is precisely what *Seven Centuries* ridicules and stakes a position against.<sup>44</sup> In my view the verse is more general. The literary enterprise it initiates is not simply a reaction to a science of erotics in Sanskrit, and Tieken's reading of *Seven Centuries* through the interpretive lens of the *Kāma Sūtra* reduces it to poetry of class-based condescension (as discussed below). Rather, this verse creates a space for learned discourse about love and pleasure by rejecting the models for such discourse currently on offer. The reading and exact significance of the word I have translated as "making love into a science" is unclear, but it seems to refer to the "obsession" (*tatti*) with "facts" (*tatta*) or "systems" (*taṃta*) that characterizes, not only the *Kāma Sūtra*, but almost every type of learned discourse prevalent in India around the turn of the first millennium CE.

The alternative model of learned discourse proposed here is "reciting and listening to" Prakrit poetry. There is no contradiction in foregrounding the performative quality of this literature at the beginning of a written text. Prakrit literature, as it is defined and modelled by *Seven Centuries*, consists of stable textual artefacts, above all, the single-verse *gāthā*, which are nevertheless only fully realized in their performance. And the ideal context of performance was the *goṣṭhī*. We learn first from the *Kāma Sūtra* that *goṣṭhis* were gatherings in which men who were "peers in knowledge, intelligence, character, wealth, or age" sat with courtesans and discussed cultural subjects, including literature. One of the places where such gatherings could occur is the court (*sabhā*). The poet and theorist Rājaśekhara (ninth/tenth centuries) saw the organization of these gatherings as one of the key functions of royal power, and named *Sātavāhana* as an example in this respect.<sup>45</sup> The *goṣṭhī* is implied in the above verse as the site where "Prakrit poetry" is performed, and where "reciting and listening to" (*padhium souṃ ca*) includes all of the practices linked to this performance, such as evaluation, criticism, and discussion.

The history of courtly Prakrit begins with this collection, which is in fact a strange kind of beginning, and in the view of some scholars not really a beginning at all. If Hāla merely selected verses from a tradition that existed before him, then *Seven Centuries* is a *terminus ad quem*, rather than a *terminus a quo*, of the "Prakrit poetry" that it announces. For a generation of scholars that considered spontaneous beginnings improbable or impossible, *Seven Centuries* can only represent the culmination of a long tradition, over the course of which the Prakrit language was "built up" (*ausgebildet*) and made ever more suitable for literary expression. This is a period of what the medievalist Paul Zumthor called "formation," in contrast to the moment of "manifestation" in which a text first becomes visible to us in the historical record. In this kind of narrative, the texts that are actually written down and transmitted in manuscript form are like fossils of a living literary culture that was once much more widespread, and much richer in content, than it appears to

us now.<sup>46</sup> Such a narrative also inflects Prakrit poetry itself as a more broadly based and popular phenomenon than the courtly productions, such as *Seven Centuries*, through which it is memorialized. The courtliness of this literature, according to this story, is an accident of transmission, whereas its popular character is its essence that the very name Prakrit—as in *prākṛtajana*, “the common man”—refers to. The “popular origins” narrative finds apparent confirmation in the content of *Seven Centuries* itself. As is well known, this collection is centrally concerned with village life, and its recurring characters are all “common people”: the plowman, the village headman, the hunter, the bandit, and the women who pick flowers, grind grain, and watch the paddy fields.<sup>47</sup>

The “popular origins” narrative, besides serving as an account of where and how this literature developed, also serves as a way of reading and understanding it, according to which the verses depict the joys and hardships of village life from the inside. Take a verse such as the following (W169), which seems unambiguously sympathetic:

Nothing remains to be done in the fields  
but the farmer doesn't come back home,  
avoiding the pain of a house made empty  
by the death of his dear wife.<sup>48</sup>

Immediately after Weber proposed the “popular origins” narrative, a number of scholars stepped up to propose a counternarrative of “courtly origins.”<sup>49</sup> In recent years this counternarrative has been taken up, and taken to its furthest conclusions, by Herman Tieken. For Tieken, this literature is not “courtly” simply in the sense that it was compiled in proximity to a court. It is “courtly” in the further sense that it represents the perspective of the cultured, elite, urbane man—the *nāgaraka* described in the *Kāma Sūtra*—who looks upon village life with utter condescension. The premise of *Seven Centuries*, according to Tieken's reading, is the sophistication of courtly elites, which they demonstrate to each other by making jokes at the expense of common people. The key insight that Tieken has, which may be obvious to most readers but which runs counter to the “popular origins” narrative, is that this literature was not necessarily composed by the same kinds of people who figure in it as characters. It is “not a poetry of the village but . . . about the village.”<sup>50</sup> Tieken thus reads the above verse (W169) with an implicit distancing of the speaking subject from the subject of the verse: whereas the farmer's wife was all he had, the courtly sophisticate has an endless supply of female companions in his multiple wives and courtesans.<sup>51</sup>

Both of these ways of reading Prakrit poetry turn on a series of diametrical oppositions: urban and rural, courtly and popular, elite and non-elite. They represent, accordingly, an “internal” and “external” hermeneutic, according to which the perspective of the speaker is either collapsed onto the perspective of those

of whom he speaks, or is instead a total inversion of it. My own reading of these poems, and the way they have always been read within the Indian tradition, is based on a rather different premise. This literature is “courtly” in both the thin and thick sense, but the “thick” sense is not simply, as Tieken would have it, the haughty disdain of urban elites for the frustrations of village life. Rather, it is that the village was a topos, a fictionalized and conventionalized place, onto which the drama of courtly life was projected. This place served as a site of exploration: of rhetorical and descriptive possibilities, of social mores, and of emotional depths.<sup>52</sup> In the anonymous characters of Prakrit lyric poetry—and they are always anonymous—courtly elites could see reflections of themselves which were all the more striking precisely because of the enormous social differences that Tieken has highlighted.

What makes *Seven Centuries* a courtly text, what allows us to read it as one, is thus not only the circumstances of its composition, or even what its individual verses say, but rather the way in which they say it. “Clever speech,” *chekokti*, is the current that runs throughout *Seven Centuries*, and which Bhuvanapāla enshrined in the title to his eleventh-century commentary on the text, the earliest available as of today.<sup>53</sup> The set of practices included within “clever speech” includes saying one thing while intending to convey the opposite, speaking two different messages to two different people using the same words, expressing the inexpressible through signs and gestures, and generally all manners of indirection, verbal and otherwise.

These consummately literary practices are also consummately courtly practices: “Savoir dissimuler,” Cardinal Richelieu is said to have remarked, “est le savoir des rois.”<sup>54</sup> For the poets of *Seven Centuries*, these practices were modelled in the most exemplary way by the inhabitants of the village (*gāma*), and even more so of the poor village (*kuggāma*). The interactions between a girl and her mother-in-law, between a lonely wife and a traveller, between two young lovers, between a young wife and her older co-wives, or between a girl and her friend-turned-messenger were no less complicated, and required no less skill in the manipulation of language, than the interactions that occurred at the royal court. Similarly, the village provided a model for the pursuit of sensual pleasure—arranging sexual encounters with each other is a full-time job for the characters in *Seven Centuries*—not only for the elites of the Sātavāhana court itself but for the merchants, traders, landowners, and officials who enjoyed unprecedented prosperity under Sātavāhana rule and who participated in the culture of *kāma*.<sup>55</sup>

Thinking of *Seven Centuries* as “pastoral” helps us avoid the literary-historical and interpretive faults that follow from thinking of it as “pure popular poetry” or its alleged opposite, “pure courtly poetry.” It is courtly poetry about everyday life; it uses the village and its inhabitants and the natural world to fill out the repertoire

of “clever speech.” And as such it bears comparison with other pastoral genres that are, in some ways, much better known. Nobody believes that the goatherds of Theocritus or Virgil are true to life in any significant way, but neither are they objects of scorn or condescension on the part of these poets, who sought (and often received) the patronage of kings, emperors, and high-ranking officials; in their work “the reader is invited to embrace the beguilement of the song while remaining conscious that its spell is illusory.”<sup>56</sup>

This reading of *Seven Centuries* is not new. It is borne out by the text itself and by the tradition that it began, and it was favored by some twentieth-century scholars.<sup>57</sup> In one pair of verses, someone is looking at the village “from the outside”:

Those people who live in a mountain village are really lucky.  
Nothing stops them from making love.  
The hedges grow thick  
and the reed thickets sway in the wind.<sup>58</sup>

In the mountain villages of these parts  
the hedges blossom with *kadamba* flowers,  
the rock surfaces are clean,  
the peacocks are happy,  
the sounds of waterfalls echo—  
all so charming.<sup>59</sup>

We can distinguish three levels of meaning in these verses. The first is the text’s meaning, which is what the words actually say. The second is the speaker’s meaning, which arises on the understanding, or presupposition, that all of these verses are spoken by one person to another person. This is a meaning which the commentaries standardly supply. The tension between the text’s meaning and the speaker’s meaning, that is, between what is said (*vācya*) and what is suggested (*vyāṅgya*), would later fuel a debate about meaning in literature that would continue for centuries.<sup>60</sup>

The commentator Gaṅgādhara, for example, puts the first into the mouth of a woman who is arranging a tryst with her lover, and the second into the mouth of a messenger who is trying to induce her friend’s lover to come to the village under description. The speaker’s meaning elicits anything that is left unsaid in the text’s meaning. In the first verse, of course, sex is mentioned explicitly, and the only question is how everything else in the verse relates to it. (The thick hedges hide the lovers from sight, and the wind provides cover for the lovers rustling the reeds in the thicket.) But in the second, the context of the verse—both its position after the first in the anthology and the dramatic context that the commentaries help us to supply—guides us to a meaning that remains implicit, which is again the suitability of mountain villages for illicit affairs.<sup>61</sup>

In both cases, there is a third meaning. We can call it the reader's meaning, in contrast to the previous two. These verses are meaningful for the reader, not because he is salaciously interested in the affairs of the fictional characters, but because something about the way these affairs are arranged and communicated has some interest or relevance to him. Because there are potentially an infinite number of such readers, this meaning is the most difficult to pin down. Yet the interest in obliquity, in indirection, in meaning without saying, is relatively constant. A key word in *Seven Centuries* is *vaṃka*, "crooked," which unites the graceful indirection of speech with the suggestiveness of glances and gestures.<sup>62</sup>

A verse worth mentioning in this connection, even though it is found in a much later collection, makes the alignment of these three meanings on the axis of "cleverness" a bit clearer. It is from Jineśvara's *Treasury of Gāthā-Jewels* (1194 CE):

Where can you find speech that's crooked?  
Where do you find glances of half-closed eyes?  
Where sighs?  
In a village that's full of clever people.<sup>63</sup>

"Clever people" are the imagined speakers of the "crooked speech" (*vaṃkabhaṇiāi*) represented by Prakrit poetry. But they are also, necessarily, the poets who thought of these clever sayings in the first place and the readers who take such delight in thinking about them, deconstructing and reconstructing them, and imitating them. The worlds of the court and of the village converge in this category of "clever people" (*chāilla*, *viaḍḍha*) and its defining practice of "crooked speech." And although this "hinge" between the rustic characters of *Seven Centuries* and its courtly readers is very often what the interpretation of its verses turns on, in a number of cases the hinge itself is foregrounded, such as the following:

He looked at her, and she didn't look back.  
The simple girl wouldn't talk to him.  
She didn't even greet him properly.  
Just from this, clever people figured it out.<sup>64</sup>

We, as the readers of this verse, are asked to put ourselves in the position of the "clever people" in the village (*chāilla*) and figure out what is going on between him and her. The commentators all agree that the girl is trying to hide her attraction, but nevertheless makes her efforts legible to certain kinds of readers.<sup>65</sup> Other verses thematize the difficulty of this kind of communication in the village, which contributes to its scarcity value.<sup>66</sup>

Another verse takes on a metaliterary significance by iconically collapsing the speaker's meaning into the reader's meaning:

They are a pleasure to fondle,  
weighty, with hardly a gap in between them,



adorned by nothing but their natural marks—  
 whom do they not delight, these breasts  
     which are like poems,  
     a pleasure to analyze,  
     dense with meaning,  
     no extraneous words,  
     adorned with figures?<sup>67</sup>

This simile involves a number of other figures: “embrace” (*śleṣa*), where two separate meanings converge in a single expression, and “condensed expression” (*samāsokti*), where two separate subjects are discussed at once.<sup>68</sup> Pītāmbara says that the speaker is a woman who is indicating her friend’s sexual availability by paying her breasts a compliment. In this case we see the critical function of distancing that the interpretive conventions perform: they offer “plausible deniability” to the readers of Prakrit poetry by confining its eroticism to an imagined world of speakers. Simultaneously, however, this distancing is undermined. The pleasures of literature and sexual pleasure are “embraced” so tightly that the reader cannot pull them apart—certainly not in this verse, but perhaps not in the rest of *Seven Centuries* either. Among the people who produced and perused *Seven Centuries*, sexual pleasure was not merely symbolic of the pleasures of literature; the two were mutually reinforcing components of a lifestyle that was organized around the pursuit and aestheticization of pleasure.

I will conclude this discussion of *Seven Centuries* by looking at two examples of its “crooked courtliness” and then at the implications that my reading has for literary history. The following is one of the few verses ostensibly addressed to a king. It uses “embrace” to compare a king’s heart to the sky:

Who on earth could cover up something  
 so extensive, so pure, and so lofty  
 as your heart—or for that matter the sky—  
 apart from a cloud-breast?<sup>69</sup>

This is a standard example of royal eulogy (*praśasti*), which is one of the main modalities of later courtly literature in Sanskrit and Prakrit. We might imagine that it was composed by a member of the king’s court and then included in this collection of because it happens to mention the word “breast” (*paoharam*). This is how Bhuvanapāla understands the verse. But this is Prakrit poetry, the defining principle of which is that things are not what they seem. Gaṅgādhara tells us that we should imagine the verse as spoken, not by a poet, but by a procuress (*veśyāmātr*), who uses a clever compliment (*cāṭūkti*) to recommend a courtesan to the king. The fictional situation that Gaṅgādhara imagines has the effect of blocking our inference from the eulogistic content of the verse to the intention, on the part of the poet who actually composed the verse, to eulogize a king.

Similar is the following:

Your heart is made out of pure nectar,  
 your hands dispel longing,  
 O moon-faced one,  
 where can this fiery valor of yours,  
 which consumes your enemies,  
 possibly reside?<sup>70</sup>

The apparent contradiction (*virodha*) in this verse is between valor, which is always figured as fiery, and three cooling substances: nectar, water (implied in “your hands dispel longing,” because royal donations were accompanied by pouring out a jug of water), and moonlight (emanating from the moon-like face). But whereas Ājaḍa thinks that the verse refers to a valorous king, Sādhāraṇadeva and the anonymous commentator of *χ* actually imagine that the verse refers to a woman, who is being flatteringly—and perhaps ironically—compared to a king. These verses certainly presuppose the court as the context against which their meanings emerge, even if they do not unambiguously point to it as the site of their own production. The text constitutes the court as a possible site of meaning in the same way that it does the village.

The tradition that looks back on *Seven Centuries* as one of its foundational texts was fascinated by its ability, first of all, to say two contradictory things at once. This “cleverness” or “indirection” of language (*chekokti*, *vakrokti*) was the essential principle of Prakrit poetry. But *Seven Centuries* was more than a collection of such sayings. It was a literary icon of this principle, a text that uniquely managed to be two contradictory things at once: rustic yet courtly, erotic yet sensitive, superficially simple but complex on further analysis, close to the language of everyday life yet unmistakably literary and refined. Bāṇabhaṭṭa thematizes this quality of *Seven Centuries* in his well-known praise of Sātavāhana at the beginning of the *Deeds of Harṣa* (seventh century):

Sātavāhana has made an inexhaustible and urbane treasury  
 of well-turned verses, all in the same meter,  
 like jewels of proven quality.<sup>71</sup>

Bāṇa’s readers would have known well that *Seven Centuries* is set in the village (*grāma*), so his description of the collection as “urbane” (*agrāmya*), which literally means “not of the village,” must be taken as a reference to Sātavāhana’s ability to transform what looks at first glance like village poetry into something that sophisticated connoisseurs of poetry, including King Harṣa’s own court poet, can appreciate. The Jain monk Uddyotana, in his novel *Kuvalayamālā* (779 CE), refers to the same apparent contradiction in his own praise of Hāla: the king, like alcohol (*hālā*), was able to give the “playful eloquence of speech even to farmers.”<sup>72</sup>

The “Prakrit poetry” that *Seven Centuries* announces is not just poetry in the Prakrit language, but it does mark one beginning—albeit not the only beginning, as we will see—of poetry in the Prakrit language. Like the poetry itself, the language is neither *grāmya* nor *agrāmya*, different both from the vernacular of common people and from the Sanskrit of learned discourse, as it was from the language of contemporary inscriptions. The dominant view regarding the literarization of this language is that it took place gradually and organically over a long period of time.<sup>73</sup> The alternative view is that Prakrit was engineered as a literary language specifically in order to serve as the medium for the new kind of literature represented by *Seven Centuries*. Herman Tiekens ventured that this language is a mocking imitation of the speech of villagers, “as far removed from Sanskrit as possible.”<sup>74</sup> While I differ radically from Tiekens regarding the poetics of *Seven Centuries*, I agree that there is some interaction between its poetics and its language, although it is difficult to be precise about what it is. As I argue in chapter 5, Prakrit was conceived of as both the same as and the opposite of Sanskrit. It was the distinctive language of a new discourse that set itself against existing learned discourses in Sanskrit—and in order to be set against them, it had to have some kind of common ground with them—while remaining more or less intelligible to readers of Sanskrit. The pioneers of this literature perhaps found a suitable model in the language practices of the Jain community.

Rājaśekhara relates that Sātavāhana enjoined the use of Prakrit in his palace, just as Sāhasāṅka enjoined the use of Sanskrit. What kings do, Rājaśekhara intends us to understand from these examples, is fix the price of products in the marketplace of culture. Whatever Prakrit may have been and whatever it may have been called before Sātavāhana and his associates compiled their influential collection of lyrics in this language, it became something altogether different afterwards. It became a literary language whose special power—its seemingly innate eroticism and suggestiveness—was recognized and appreciated by people who cared about literature. And the class itself of “people who cared about literature” was virtually called into existence by *Seven Centuries*, which became the common property of, and a model for, a courtly literary culture.

The courtliness of *Seven Centuries* bears on the relationship between Prakrit and Tamil poetry. Since much of the scholarly discussion of *Seven Centuries* has been focused through this problem, it warrants a mention here, but since the issues are complex and beyond the scope of this study, it will be a very brief mention. George Hart argued that most of the distinctive features of Prakrit poetry, from its nature symbolism to its metrical forms, are adapted from Dravidian culture, and thus Prakrit poetry has a close genetic relationship with *caṅkam* poetry in Tamil that Hart dates to roughly the same period.<sup>75</sup> The parallels between Prakrit and Tamil poetry are indeed suggestive, but scholars remain divided over what exactly they are suggestive of, in large part because there has been no consensus regarding

how to situate either Prakrit poetry or Tamil poetry in a coherent and convincing historical narrative.<sup>76</sup> The Tamil tradition, however, seems to have known *Seven Centuries*, if that is the text that Nakkīraṇār and Mayilainātar call *Cātavākāṇam* as an example of a poem named after its patron.<sup>77</sup>

One of the ways in which the Vākāṭaka kings of the Deccan followed in the footsteps of their immediate predecessors, the Sātavāhanas, was their encouragement of and participation in literary production. And as for the Sātavāhanas, literature for the Vākāṭakas meant Prakrit literature. Two of the classics of Prakrit literature are ascribed to Vākāṭaka kings. The earlier of these is *Hari's Victory* by Sarvasena, who ruled from Vatsagulma (modern Vāsim) around 330–350 CE.<sup>78</sup> Bhoja provides a few dozen quotations from this work, which is otherwise lost. Its subject is Kṛṣṇa's theft of the Pārijāta tree from Indra's heaven in order to give it to his wife Satyabhāmā. The later is *Rāvaṇa's Demise*, or as it is more widely known, *Building the Bridge*, by Pravarasena II. This king ruled first from Nandivardhana (modern Nagardhan), the traditional seat of the Vākāṭakas, and later from the eponymous Pravarapura (modern Mānsar) in the first half of the fifth century. Pravarasena II's regent in the early days of his reign was his mother Prabhāvatiguptā, herself the daughter of Candragupta II Vikramāditya. Their marital alliance with the Guptas seems to mark a turning-point not just in the political fortunes of the Vākāṭakas, but in their language practices as well. As noted in the previous chapter, Prabhāvatiguptā's numerous inscriptions, all composed in confident and relatively elaborate Sanskrit, represent a decisive shift away from Middle Indic. It is also significant that *Hari's Victory* and *Rāvaṇa's Demise* narrate the deeds of Viṣṇu, in his forms as Kṛṣṇa and Rāmacandra respectively. These works seemingly partake of the same devotion to Viṣṇu that animates the *purāṇas* compiled in roughly the same period, particularly the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. They also came to represent a literary style that later authors called Vaidarbhi (after Vaidarbha, the heartland of the Vākāṭakas) or Vatsagulmī (after Sarvasena's capital).<sup>79</sup> In his influential discussion of the "ways" (*mārga*) of poetry in the first chapter of his *Mirror of Literature* (ca. 700 CE), Daṇḍin argued that it was the Vaidarbhi style, and not the contrasting Gauḍī style, that represented the height of literary beauty. And although Daṇḍin and his commentators usually give Sanskrit examples of this style—as they do for every topic in the *Mirror*—its identity and basic character were established by a group of Prakrit texts.

Pravarasena neatly summarizes the powers of literature toward the beginning of *Rāvaṇa's Demise*:

Knowledge increases.  
Fame spreads.  
Virtues take hold.  
The deeds of great men are heard.

Is there anything about *kāvya*  
that doesn't draw us in?<sup>80</sup>

This sentiment is so deeply ingrained in the tradition that it sounds cliché. Bhāmaha and Mammaṭa, just to take two prominent examples, start with it as one of the self-evident axioms of poetics. Yet a number of points bear emphasis here. First, Pravarasena is among the first to articulate these ideas. Secondly, in contrast to the limited scope that *Seven Centuries* announced for itself—*pāuakavva* was, as a counterpart to learned discourses on love, still in the end concerned with love—Pravarasena's *kavvālāvā* speaks directly and effectively to all domains of human life. Or those domains, at any rate, that most mattered to the publics to whom courtly literature was addressed: the cultivation of knowledge, the pursuit of public recognition, the fashioning of the self as an ethical subject, and the propagation of a set of ethical and cultural ideals. It seems fitting that this ambitious vision of the powers of literature frames a narrative of conquest. *Rāvaṇa's Demise* tells of the capture of Laṅkā and the defeat of Rāvaṇa by Rāma and his allies. It is not just a courtly poem, but an imperial one, composed during one of the high-water marks of empire in ancient India. Finally, Pravarasena enunciates this universalist vision of literature in Prakrit. Prakrit was by no means the universal language of literature in Pravarasena's day—he was, after all, the grandson of Candragupta II Vikramāditya, one of Sanskrit's legendary patrons—but it was, by this time, one of the two languages in which it was possible to imagine writing literature, ensconced in its long-term position as the only alternative to Sanskrit.

### THREE MYTHS OF CONTINUITY

In the foregoing I have stressed the discontinuities of courtly Prakrit: it was a way of using language that had little historical precedent, and it helped to distinguish an emergent sphere of literature per se from the discourses that surrounded it. By contrast, the other history of Prakrit literature, that of Jain Prakrit, is usually told in a way that foregrounds its continuity along three dimensions, which tend to puncture whatever social, historical, and even linguistic boundaries we might draw around it. My purpose here is to explicitly lay out what these continuities are. But if it can be shown that they are myths—not in the sense that they are completely untrue, but in the sense that they represent a very particular and interested vision of the past—then like its courtly counterpart, Jain Prakrit might turn out to have had a historical beginning.

The works of Jain Prakrit are, first of all, represented as continuous with Jain teachings. The terms “canonical” and “post-canonical” reflect this continuity: they do not simply refer to texts composed at different historical times—in fact the historical position of many texts is very indeterminate—but texts that occupy a

position within the particular temporality of the Jain tradition. This is a linear temporality marked out by the succession of teachers.

The *Wanderings of Vasudeva* (*Vasudevahiṇḍi*) provides an example of the work that this first concept of continuity does. This Prakrit text, composed by the monk Saṅghadāsa in the early centuries of the common era, is now well-known as an early and evidently faithful adaptation of Guṇāḍhya's *Great Story*, which was itself composed around the first century CE, and according to some traditions at the Sātavāhana court.<sup>81</sup> But in Saṅghadāsa's text, the adaptation of the *Great Story*—in which Vasudeva takes the place of Guṇāḍhya's hero Naravāhanadatta—is preceded by a section called “the origin of the story” (*kahuppatti*). There, Saṅghadāsa tells us that the story he is about to tell “has come down through the lineage of teachers.” After narrating the stories of Jambūsvāmin and Prabhava, the leaders of Jainism in the generations after Mahāvīra, he comes to Mahāvīra himself, and it is through Mahāvīra that the story of Vasudeva is ultimately narrated.<sup>82</sup> Saṅghadāsa's historical vision leapfrogs over his principal source, Guṇāḍhya's *Great Story*, by several centuries.

The second kind of continuity is between Jain language practices and demotic, “everyday” language practices. Where the first refers to continuity over time, this is a synchronic continuity between different discursive spheres. Whereas other traditions create and maintain boundaries that separate the language of the tradition from the language of the surrounding world—the stereotype here is of the Brahmins jealously guarding the Sanskrit language like a secret—the Jains, according to this conceit, tended to dissolve those boundaries and to speak to the common people in a language they could comprehend.<sup>83</sup> It is true that a number of authors do emphasize the demotic character of Prakrit, but they do so at a time when this character was surely no more than notional, and in contexts that make it clear just how notional it was.

To critically examine this second kind of continuity, we can begin from a story that was told about Siddhasena Divākara, a Jain teacher widely believed to have been a contemporary of Candragupta II Vikramāditya (ca. 380–415 CE). His principal works marked the entry of Jain thought into a wider philosophical conversation between Buddhists and Brahmins.<sup>84</sup> But according to later hagiographic texts, Siddhasena was a Brahmin who never quite shook his preference for Sanskrit. He was converted to Jainism when his formidable Sanskrit learning was defeated by the folk wisdom and popular appeal of the Jain monk Vṛddhavādin. Even after his conversion, however, he was embarrassed on behalf of the Jain community that their scriptures were written in Prakrit rather than in Sanskrit. So he offered to translate them into Sanskrit. The elders found this suggestion so reprehensible that Siddhasena was forced into exile from the community for twelve years. Siddhasena's suggestion amounted to a betrayal of the very ethos of populism and accessibility that had brought him over to Jainism in the first place. In this story, as

Phyllis Granoff has pointed out, Sanskrit stands for exclusivity and the privileges of birth, while Prakrit stands for inclusivity and the value of wisdom over mere learning.<sup>85</sup>

This is, in other words, a story about how Jains understood their own language practices. Within the story, the use of Prakrit is motivated by a fundamental commitment to making Jain doctrines accessible to the widest possible spectrum of people. But outside of the story, we have some reason to believe that it was actually the other way around: that later authors thought that Jainism was inclusive and “demotic” *because* its scriptures happened to be written in Prakrit. As far as I know, one of the earliest explicit statements about Prakrit’s demotic character comes from Haribhadra Sūri, perhaps around the seventh or eighth century, in a widely quoted verse from his *Daśavaikālika Ṭīkā*:

Those who know the truth  
have produced scriptures in Prakrit  
for the benefit of children, women,  
the slow-witted, and the uneducated,  
and for men who strive after good conduct.<sup>86</sup>

Haribhadra is here reflecting on and trying to motivate the language that he has inherited through the Jain tradition—more than a millennium, of course, after the scriptural dispensation of which he speaks. But he was one of the first Jain teachers to use both Sanskrit and Prakrit extensively, and we might suspect that he was also one of the first to think of the choice between Sanskrit and Prakrit as a choice between two audiences, a learned elite and the unlettered masses. This dichotomy is a product of the representation of Sanskrit and Prakrit as complementary language practices, identical but opposed, which I will discuss in chapter 5. At the same time, Haribhadra’s own use of Prakrit subverts this dichotomy. His Prakrit poetry, represented by *The Story of Samarāditya* for example, is no less learned, and I would venture to say no more accessible to the unlettered masses, than any of its Sanskrit counterparts. And consider the context of the verse. Assuming that we accept Haribhadra’s claim that the *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*, and the other texts of the Jain canon, are actually in Prakrit—a claim that we will soon have reason to doubt—it should not be lost on us that Haribhadra’s commentary on it is, in fact, largely in Sanskrit. On some level, he knew that Sanskrit would be more intelligible than Prakrit. There is, in other words, something slightly disingenuous about the claim that Prakrit is demotic in the context of Haribhadra’s own literary production, even if it may be true—I emphasize *may*—that Prakrit was demotic to begin with.

Siddharṣi, a poet of the early tenth century, exemplifies how notional the demotic character of Prakrit was. At the beginning of his *Endless Stream of Likenesses and Births*, he notes that “Sanskrit and Prakrit are the two languages worthy of



preeminence, and among them Sanskrit resides in the hearts of self-styled scholars, while Prakrit, beautiful to the ear, awakens true wisdom even in children.” Why, then, has Siddharṣi written his large collection of stories in Sanskrit? “Nevertheless, the Prakrit language doesn’t appeal to them. If you have the chance, you should please everyone: hence, by that principle, this work is composed in Sanskrit.”<sup>87</sup>

A third of continuity is the underlying identity of Jain language practices, and their common identification as Prakrit. This is both a synchronic and a diachronic concept: the former because it organizes language taxonomically under the rubric of Prakrit, and the latter because this taxonomy encompasses the whole history of Jain language practices, at least for the first millennium of Jainism. The language of Mahāvīra’s original teachings, collected in the canonical texts called *aṅgas* according to the Śvetāmbaras, but lost forever according to the Digambaras, was called Māgadhi or Ardhamāgadhi by the Jains themselves. Precisely at what point Jains came to regard this language, or indeed any other language, as Prakrit, or a variety of Prakrit, is very difficult to say. The late-canonical *Sthānāṅga Sūtra* and *Anuyogadvāra Sūtra* do mention a division of language into Sanskrit and Prakrit, but the context makes it clear that it applies to literary (or more precisely musical) practices rather than scripture.<sup>88</sup> In the twelfth century, the Śvetāmbara monk Hemacandra viewed the language of the canon as a Prakrit “of the sages” (*ārṣa*), and dedicated a surprisingly small portion of the rules of his Prakrit grammar to this variety.<sup>89</sup> Modern scholars have followed Haribhadra and Hemacandra in gathering all of the Middle Indic languages that Jains ever used under the category of Prakrit. According to the influential classification of Richard Pischel, the Jains employed three principal varieties of Prakrit: Ardhamāgadhi in the canonical texts of the Śvetāmbaras; Jain Śauraseni in the doctrinal literature of the Digambaras; and Jain Māhārāṣṭri in the commentarial and narrative literature of both sects.<sup>90</sup>

All three of these continuities are invoked in the proposition that the language of the Jain tradition is, and always was, Prakrit, and that the use of Prakrit is part of what characterizes Jainism as an inclusive and egalitarian religion in contrast to the Brahmanical traditions, which insisted on using the obscure and exclusive Sanskrit language.<sup>91</sup> No less a scholar than Ludwig Alsdorf described Jain literature as “an uninterrupted tradition on the soil of the motherland,” organically developing from “anti-brahmanic, popular linguistic origins” and an “inclination to a popular tongue.”<sup>92</sup> There are aspects of this representation that are plausible, if sentimental and indigenist. But it should be clear that such representations trade on a three-fold continuity—between Jain literature and Jain religious teachings, between the various languages of Jainism, and between these languages and the languages of the everyday—which is hardly as obvious as Alsdorf takes it to be. There is little doubt that by the time that Jain communities were assembling, comparing, and commenting on their canonical scriptures in the fifth and sixth centuries, Sanskrit

would have been equally if not more intelligible than the languages of Jain scripture and commentary, for the monastic and lay communities alike. The rationale for using Prakrit must therefore be sought in the history of Jain language practices.

#### PRAKRIT'S MONKS

I will focus in this section on some of the literature composed in “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī,” given that the connections and divisions imposed on Prakrit literature by this name, first coined by Hermann Jacobi, constitute the forestructure through which we read and understand it.<sup>93</sup>

The name refers to a set of linguistic characteristics that, on the one hand, separate this language from Ardhamāgadhi.<sup>94</sup> These linguistic differences roughly correspond to differences of genre and, by the same token, chronological differences—but only roughly. Scholars have traced the influence of Ardhamāgadhi on the language of later Jain literature, as well as the influence of “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” on the transmission of the Ardhamāgadhi scriptures.<sup>95</sup> The use of “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” is thus associated with the cluster of texts that Ludwig Alsdorf called “late canonical and postcanonical verse literature,” in contrast to “early canonical literature.” One distinctive characteristic of this literature, according to Alsdorf, was its metrical form, the *gāthā*, which is all but absent from earlier literature. I argue in chapter 4 that the *gāthā* is indeed one of the diagnostic features of Prakrit literature, and the extensive use of this verse form in “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” thus links it closely with non-Jain literature such as *Seven Centuries*, while distinguishing it from chronologically earlier layers of Jain texts.

On the other hand, the name “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” establishes the language as parallel to, and therefore also distinct from, Māhārāṣṭrī pure and simple (“reine Māhārāṣṭrī,” as Oskar von Hinüber revealingly calls it), the language of non-Jain Prakrit literature.<sup>96</sup> There is a double exclusion at work here: first and most obviously of non-Jains from “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī,” which is by definition a language that can only be used by Jains to do things such as write commentaries on Jain canonical texts; secondly, however, it excludes Jains from the category of “Māhārāṣṭrī.” This exclusion, which at first seems to concern a small and arcane field of textual production, turns out to have ramifications for Indian literary history as a whole. The texts that fall under the category of “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī” are typically considered in connection with the Jain scriptures and the non-canonical texts that either supplement them or stand in their place. They are not made to play any significant role in the history of “classical literature,” or what the tradition itself called *kāvya*, and certainly not in its formative stages.<sup>97</sup>

One of the reasons for this separation is the Jains’ “marked” status throughout Indian history. For the people who constructed the curriculums of literature in premodern India—most of whom, with a few late exceptions, were not themselves

Jains—Jain literature was usually Jain first and literature second. I think this markedness has more to do with the Jains being a religious minority than with any principled evaluation of the religious or ethical content of the texts under consideration. One would be hard-pressed to claim that Bhāravi's devotion to Śiva, for example, is more neutral or subdued than the Jainism of Uddyotana. Generally speaking, although Jain authors acknowledged the influence of non-Jain authors, non-Jain authors rarely returned the favor.<sup>98</sup> One example is the typology of stories that Ānandavardhana, a devotee of the Goddess, gives at the end of his *Light on Suggestion*: it is only from the adaptation of this passage at the hands of the Jain monk Hemacandra that we know that certain genres in Ānanda's typology are represented principally, if not exclusively, by Jain narratives, and indeed Ānanda's typology itself probably derives from the Jain poet Haribhadra.<sup>99</sup>

Corresponding to the "marked" status of Jain contributions to literary history is the "unmarked" status of authors of a broadly Hindu or Brahmanical persuasion whose works constitute something like a literary canon: Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha, Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Daṇḍin, Rājaśekhara, and so on. Indian literary culture was characterized by a tension between openness in principle and closedness in practice. Part of what made it such an attractive ideal was that it was, in principle, open to anyone who had the requisite knowledge, skills, and creativity, regardless of their religious persuasion. This ideal, however, bestowed legitimacy on actual practices that were often far less inclusive than the ideal would suggest: literary practices, for example, that enshrined the values of particular communities and their interests. This tension, in turn, was productive: not of a successive and inexorable broadening of literary culture in practice, as in Habermasian public spheres, but of a seemingly endless variety of cultural formations that hybridized the literary-cultural ideal with more or less substantive, and more or less rigid, religious and ethical commitments. When Jains wrote literature in Prakrit, they were not participating in a "shadow" literary culture entirely cut off from the mainstream, but neither were they recognized as full-fledged participants in the mainstream by the latter's own voices. They might be seen as creating a "counterpublic" to the mainstream literary public that Brahmanical authors presupposed.<sup>100</sup>

Early Jain literature often thematizes its marginalization from a mainstream literary tradition. I have already mentioned the founding myth, according to which the sage Vālmiki produced the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first poem, by transforming his grief into verse. This was supposed to be the foundation, not merely of Brahmanical literature, but of literature as such. The Jain monk Vimāla produced an alternative story, called *Deeds of Padma*, which directly challenged both the chronological priority and the truthfulness of Vālmiki's version.<sup>101</sup> The story of Rāma was in fact the story of Padma, which—like the story of Vasudeva for Saṅghadāsa—was transmitted by a line of Jain teachers that stretched all the way back to Mahāvīra himself.<sup>102</sup> Vimāla's story is related through the mouth of

Mahāvīra's disciple Gautama, and it is occasioned by King Śreṇika's doubts about the version of the Rāma story with which he was familiar. How could the powerful Rāvaṇa be defeated by monkeys? Why would the compassionate Rāma shoot a golden deer, or for that matter kill Vālin? People who promote false teachings (*kusatthavādīhi*), the king infers, must have manipulated these stories for their own purposes.<sup>103</sup> Gautama confirms: it's all a lie that wicked poets (*kukaiṇo*) have told in their delusion.

Vimala lays claim to an authentic and unadulterated version of the Rāma story. Scholars, of course, were never convinced, and they have tended to argue the opposite: that Jains pilfered the narratives of other traditions—that is, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Great Story*—to serve their own didactic ends.<sup>104</sup> I suggest viewing the Jain versions of these works not just as “Jain versions,” but as attempts to lay the foundation stones for a new literary tradition. The language of this new tradition was Prakrit, in contrast to Vālmiki's Sanskrit. The authors had to have been conscious of this difference.<sup>105</sup> And this tradition, unlike Vālmiki's, would be not just open to Jain voices, but dominated by them. Sheldon Pollock has shown that the adaptation of the great epics was one of the key strategies by which new literary traditions both announced themselves and found their cultural-political orientation. In Pollock's account, this process is a component of vernacularization, and it begins—so far as we can tell—with Peruntēvaṇar's production of a Tamil *Mahābhārata* in the ninth century.<sup>106</sup> Against this theoretical background, Vimala's production of a Prakrit *Rāmāyaṇa* and a Prakrit *Lineage of Hari*, the latter now lost, as well as Saṅghadāsa's production of a Prakrit *Great Story* raise several important questions. Why transcreate at all? Why transcreate these texts? And what is the tradition in which these transcreations place themselves?

One important starting point for the tradition of “Jain Māhārāṣṭri” is the tradition of commentary on the canonical texts of Jainism. These commentaries are among the earliest, and probably the most copious, productions in the Prakrit language. I say “the Prakrit language” advisedly, because their language is generally identical to the language of the literary works produced by Jains and non-Jains alike in the early centuries of the common era.<sup>107</sup> Any history of Prakrit literature must account for the striking connections between the discourses of commentary and literature. But none have, so far, for several reasons. First, the myths of continuity would have us believe that the commentarial discourses themselves do not have a beginning, that they represent processes of exegesis and diegesis that have been going on continuously since the days of Mahāvīra. Second, the dating of the commentarial discourse is extremely difficult, in part because there is no evidence whatsoever for its date apart from its association with particular Jain teachers, and their dates in turn are difficult to establish with any confidence, ranging from the third century BCE to the sixth century CE. And third, the dating of the literary discourse is just as uncertain. I think, however, that we can begin to connect some

of these moving parts by relating them within a field of Prakrit textuality that appeared not much earlier and not much later than the first century CE.

The commentarial literature is notoriously complex, but its chronologically earliest layer is agreed to be a set of “explanations” (*niryuktis*) composed in Prakrit *gāthās* and attributed to the teacher Bhadrabāhu. These are, more precisely, versified lists of topics for oral explanation.<sup>108</sup> One Bhadrabāhu, who is said to have led a group of Jain clerics to Śravaṇabelagoḷa in today’s Karnataka when a famine threatened the Jain community in North India, is believed to have been a contemporary of Candragupta Maurya. But many scholars have resisted identifying this Bhadrabāhu, who would have lived in the early third century BCE, with the author of the *niryuktis*. The leading authorities on Jainism place Bhadrabāhu, the author of the *niryuktis*, in the first century CE.<sup>109</sup> Bhadrabāhu’s explanations set into motion a process of commentary in Prakrit that continued for several centuries, and these centuries were decisive for Jainism as a religion: between the first and fifth century CE, the foundational texts were revised and expanded, Jainism split into two major sects, and the community attempted to constitute a stable canon of scripture through a series of councils. The common typology of commentary in Jainism distinguishes between the original “explanations” (*niryuktis*), the expanded “discussions” (*bhāṣyas*), also in Prakrit verse, and more “granular” commentaries (*cūrṇis*) in Prakrit prose.

The readiest explanation for the use of Prakrit in this extensive commentarial discourse is simply that it was the spoken vernacular at the critical time and place in which this literature took shape. In composing, memorizing, reciting, and commenting upon texts in Prakrit, Jain monks were unknowingly laying the foundations for Prakrit textuality outside of the relatively narrow confines of their religious texts. Indeed, one of the reasons why there has been so little scholarly reflection on Vimala’s or Saṅghadāsa’s use of Prakrit as a literary language is that it seems a *fait accompli*: Prakrit was, in fact, the only language that Jain monks of this earlier period ever used.

But even if the use of Prakrit as a religious language was one of the preconditions for the subsequent use of Prakrit as a literary language, it was never a *fait accompli* that Prakrit would be used for literature. Sanskrit provides a useful parallel. It was used as a religious language for a thousand years before its sudden reinvention as a language of political power and imaginative literature; this reinvention did not simply entail Sanskrit’s extension into new discursive spheres, but fundamental changes in the way the language was cultivated and deployed. This appears to be the case with Prakrit as well: rather than seeing the development of “Jain Māhārāṣṭri” literature as slow and inevitable accumulation of religious material, we can discern a group of texts that employ the same language and verse forms as commentarial discourse, but for completely different purposes and with completely different results.

This group of texts includes *Wanderings of Vasudeva*, Vimala's *Deeds of Padma*, and Pālitta's *Taraṅgavatī*. These are texts that have just barely survived into the age of print, or in the case of the *Taraṅgavatī*, survived only in later abridgements. Many similar texts have been lost, including Vimala's *Lineage of Hari*. Nobody really knows when any of these texts were composed, but references in other texts place most of them before the middle of the first millennium CE.<sup>110</sup> Vimala's date is particularly controversial because he tells us that he completed the *Deeds of Padma* 530 years after Mahāvīra's death. Most reckonings would thus place him in the first century CE, which is as obvious to some scholars as it is impossible for others.<sup>111</sup> I see no reason to doubt that these texts are broadly contemporaneous with the efforts of Bhadrabāhu and later teachers to comment on the Jain scriptures, and also with the efforts of Hāla to stake out a role for Prakrit within literary discourse. They can thus be seen as a link between two textual cultures: one that saw itself as literary, and engaged in a dispute over the boundaries and definition of the literary, and one that employed textuality as a way of preserving and elaborating upon the doctrines of Jainism. For most of these texts, however, the specific connections to both of these cultures—to say nothing about the historical circumstances of their composition—remain obscure.

#### PĀLITTA'S TARAṅGAVATĪ

Pālitta's *Taraṅgavatī* is the missing piece that links the two histories of Prakrit literature to each other.<sup>112</sup> As noted above, this text only survives in later abridgements. Bhadreśvara included a synopsis of the story in 425 verses in his *Book of Stories* (twelfth century). Another, longer version (about 1640 verses) is called *Taraṅgalolā*. According to the final verse in the manuscript, a certain Yaśas copied it out for the monk Nemicaṇḍra, but whether it was he who abridged the original *Taraṅgavatī*, or whether he merely copied an existing manuscript of the abridged *Taraṅgalolā*, is unclear.<sup>113</sup> Whoever he was, the redactor notes his motivations at the beginning of the *Taraṅgalolā*:

Pālitta composed a long story called *Taraṅgavatī*,  
 full of regional words, intricate and extensive.  
 In some places it has captivating groups of verses,  
 in others closely bound couplets, and in still others  
 longer runs that are difficult for others to understand.  
 Nobody recites it, nobody asks for it to be recited, nobody tells it.  
 It has become the special preserve of scholars.  
 Nobody else can do anything with it.  
 That's why I have collected the verses that Pālitta wrote  
 and removed the regional words to create this abridged story,  
 in the hope that it will not entirely disappear

from the hearts of other people.  
I beg forgiveness from that monk.<sup>114</sup>

The “regional” words that, according to the author, got in the way of non-scholarly readers understanding the text are words that cannot easily be analyzed as deriving from Sanskrit. The use of such words was a distinctive feature of Prakrit in both its Jain and non-Jain varieties, and defining these words was the primary task of its associated forms of knowledge (see chapter 6).

Unlucky as the loss of Pālitta’s original is, Harivallabh Bhayani has shown using parallel texts that *Taraṅgalolā* is a relatively faithful abridgement of *Taraṅgavatī*.<sup>115</sup> Pālitta was remembered as an important Jain teacher, and hence many stories about his life and career can be found in Jain narrative literature.<sup>116</sup> In fact, he was important enough for there to have been at least two of him, just as there were—at least according to some scholars—at least two Nāgārjunas, two Siddhasenas, and two Haribhadras. M. A. Dhaky argued convincingly that there were three: the existence of our Pālitta, the author of the *Taraṅgavatī*, is attested in late-canonical and post-canonical texts of the early first millennium CE; another adept, who was known by the Sanskrit name Pādalipta, was associated with the pilgrimage site of Śātruṅjaya and probably lived in the early eighth century; yet another Pādalipta, the author of a Jain ritual manual, lived sometime after the eleventh century.<sup>117</sup> The stories about Pālitta aggregate details from a range of Jain sources about the various monks who had taken this name. As an example, Pālitta’s teacher is usually said to be Āryanāgahastin of the Vidyādhara lineage. But the more recent narrative literature gives Maṇḍana and Saṅgrama as the monks who were charged by Āryanāgahastin with teaching him, and they are known to be the teacher and teacher’s teacher respectively of the most recent (eleventh- or twelfth-century) Pālitta.<sup>118</sup> Some of the details related in the stories of Pālitta, however, point to an authentic tradition about events of the first century, such as the conflict between Sātavāhana and Nahapāna.<sup>119</sup>

The *Taraṅgavatī* is a novel in Prakrit verse, and specifically in the *gāthā* meter closely associated with Prakrit literature. It uses the strategy of emboxed narration that is common in the story literature of India, but in this case—as in later stories for which it served as a model, such as Uddyotana’s *Kuvalayamālā* and perhaps also Daṇḍin’s *Avantisundarī*—the stories span several human lifetimes. The recollection of past lives is the event that propels the narrative forward and, at the same time, backward. The central motif, which later authors usually mention in connection with *Taraṅgavatī*, is the pair of ruddy shelducks (*cakkāyas*) who are reborn as the lovers Taraṅgavatī and Padmadeva.<sup>120</sup>

The story takes place in Kauśāmbī, and later authors tell us that Pālitta himself was a native of Kośāla, both in present-day Uttar Pradesh. But it was at the court of Sātavāhana in Pratiṣṭhāna, according to a unanimous tradition, that Pālitta



achieved lasting literary fame. The Jain narrative literature relates that Pālitta already had worked in the courts of Muraṇḍa in Pāṭaliputra, of Bhīma in Oṃkāra, and finally of Kṛṣṇa in Mānakheṭa before he was summoned to the Sātavāhana court at Pratiṣṭhāna.<sup>121</sup> There Pālitta composed a “completely new work,” the *Taraṅgavatī*, and explained it at court.<sup>122</sup> The work reportedly pleased the king but provoked criticism, jealousy, and accusations of plagiarism from other court poets and intellectuals. In response, Pālitta faked his own death, whereupon his rivals finally admitted that they had fabricated the charge of plagiarism.

It is significant that Uddyotana, in composing the eulogy of previous poets at the beginning of his novel *Kuvalayamālā*, begins with two verses that mention Pālitta and Sātavāhana together, and then one that focuses on Pālitta:

The words of Pālitta, Sātavāhana, and the Chappaṇṇayas,<sup>123</sup>  
are like a lion’s roar, and I’m like a young deer.  
How can I even *take a step / write one word*?

Pālitta, whose mind was pure, whose virtues were deep,  
and who had the power to put the highest truths into writing,  
adorned Hāla in literary gatherings [*goṣṭhīs*] like a necklace,  
which had pure jewels, a strong cord,  
and was rich in gems of the highest quality.

He is like the Himalaya, and his *Taraṅgavatī*  
is like the Ganges River that flows from it:  
pairs of ruddy shelducks make it beautiful,  
and it causes delight with the charm of its royal geese.<sup>124</sup>

Immediately afterwards, he praises Sātavāhana in a verse noted above. Abhinanda evoked the relationship between poet and patron in his *Deeds of Rāma* (ninth century):

The excellent poet Śrīpālita was cherished  
by Hāla with the highest honor,  
the works of Kālidāsa achieved unparalleled fame  
through the enemy of the Śakas,  
Śrīharṣa brought to fruition the speech  
of the prose poet Bāṇa,  
and Śrīhāravarṣa has taken Abhinanda into his kind treatment  
constantly.<sup>125</sup>

In Pālitta the courtly and the Jain histories of Prakrit are crossed, or rather, they have not yet been separated from each other. Pālitta was a leading participant in the literary culture that was associated with Hāla’s court. As Bhayani demonstrated, several verses of Pālitta’s are included in *Seven Centuries*, and were likely excerpted

or adapted from the *Taraṅgavatī*. Even if there is only a small number of verses shared between these texts, which are in any case incompletely preserved, they nevertheless point to a nexus of commonalities in form and content that are disguised by the distinct categories of “courtly poetry” and “Jain narrative literature.” The language is similar: what sets the *Taraṅgavatī* slightly apart, both from *Seven Centuries* and from later literature in “Jain Māhārāṣṭrī,” are its archaic features, which may also be regionalisms or colloquialisms. I note in chapter 6 that some of these features, which are typically associated with “archaic Jain Māhārāṣṭrī,” are in fact described by the Prakrit grammarians, who are usually seen as describing a non-Jain literary language.<sup>126</sup> The *Taraṅgalolā* has several orthographic features that are typically associated with Jain texts, but I doubt both whether these features were present in the original *Taraṅgavatī* and whether they are diagnostic of a specifically Jain version of the language in any case.<sup>127</sup> The style is also very similar. It is self-consciously literary, and it abounds especially in figures of sense. The goal, even in Pālitta’s narrative poem, is always to present a thought in a striking and elaborated way within the scope of a single verse. The metrical practice, too, seems to be more or less identical.

What’s more, the *Taraṅgalolā* does not steer clear of eroticism—although it is hardly as frank as *Seven Centuries*—but rather channels it towards its own didactic ends. The opening scene of the novel, for example, has the nun Suvratā going out for alms with her students and captivating a neighboring housewife with her beauty, who says:

Never in a dream, in a statue, in a painting, or in stories have I ever seen or heard of a woman as beautiful as this nun. What is she? A bouquet of loveliness put together by attractiveness? Or has the moonlight in all its beauty come down to earth? Could it be that creator has put the whole essence of youth into carefully making this slender girl, with all of her beauty and good qualities? If she looks so good with her head shaved, I can only imagine how stunning she was before! Her body is covered in dirt, and she wears no jewelry, but I can hardly take my eyes away from her. My gaze constantly wanders over every part of her body, eager to take it all in, stopping only to think how beautiful it is. Even the divine nymphs would feel an attraction to such a beauty, joined as it is with the nun’s grace, and capable of lighting up one’s heart, unlike anything else in the world. The goddess Lakṣmī herself has left her lotus pool, put on a nun’s clothing, and come to my house, manifested by our generosity.<sup>128</sup>

There are faint echoes, or anticipations, of *Seven Centuries* in these verses.<sup>129</sup> Pālitta’s specialty, to judge by quotations in later authors, was his striking descriptions of nature: the thunderous nights of the monsoon, the flight of a flock of parrots (a verse that appears in *Seven Centuries*), the rush of water buffalo into a lake, or the clear night sky.<sup>130</sup> Yet the above passage shows that the Jain monk was not aloof from the culture of *kāma* that surrounded him. Legend has it that he owes his name to this very inclination. The young monk, then named Nāgendra,

was coming back from begging alms, and made up an alliterative verse as he was walking: “A mango from the red-eyed girl, a fig from the girl with flowerlike teeth, and fresh rice congee from the newly married girl: that’s what I have in my pot.”<sup>131</sup> On hearing this, his teacher Āryanāgahastin called him Ālitta, because his young student, who sought alms from the pretty girls, was “inflamed” (*ādīpta-*) by lust. Nāgendra said that he would prefer to be called Pālitta—which is to say, he wished that his teacher would consider him “illuminated” (*prādīpta-*) by virtue rather than “inflamed” by lust. The later versions of this story did not pick up on the subtle addition of a prefix, namely *pra-* in the sense of *prakarṣa* or “excellence,” and instead connect the young monk’s name with his reputed power of flight: he is said to have been “anointed on the feet” (*pādalipta*) with a magical preparation that allowed him to fly. I believe, however, that the power of flight and the name “Pādalipta” are both associated with a later teacher, and not with the first-century author of the *Taraṅgavatī*.

A. K. Warder acutely observed that the *Taraṅgavatī* was “a contrasting counterpart, as it were, to the lyrics collected by Sātavāhana, in the same new language.”<sup>132</sup> Pālitta and Hāla were indeed the co-creators of Prakrit literature, each concerned with pushing the new discourse in a certain direction, but borrowing from and overlapping heavily with each other in the process. They were an odd couple. Hāla, if his opening verse is any indication, was a devotee of Śiva, but *Seven Centuries* wears its religion so lightly that some scholars have tried to read out of it, or into it, the philosophy of hedonistic materialism (Cārvāka or Lokāyata).<sup>133</sup> Pālitta was, of course, a Jain monk, and his novel concludes with Taraṅgavatī and Padmadeva accepting the Jain faith and becoming ascetics.

The storied relationship between Hāla and Pālitta, I think, was not one of mere contemporaneity or financial patronage: each partner brought unique resources to the literary enterprise they were jointly involved in. Pālitta, for his part, was well versed in Jain lore, which was at that very moment being collected and reformulated in the massive commentarial project of Bhadrabāhu: Pālitta and Bhadrabāhu share a language, Prakrit, and a metrical form, the *gāthā*, which they each employed in their own way to redefine the discursive parameters of Jainism. It is possible that Buddhist communities, who must have constituted a large portion of the population under Sātavāhana rule, also used Prakrit in similar ways, although we have very little evidence in this regard. The edifying stories of Jain preachers, however, did not in themselves count as literature, at least according to the new standards of literature that were emerging around the first century CE. It was only when Pālitta was pulled into Hāla’s court, and made to “adorn his literary gatherings” (*goṣṭhīs*), that the old art of Jain storytelling was transformed into a new kind of literature. Just as subsequent poets looked back upon *Seven Centuries* as the prototype of the single-verse lyric (*muktaka*), subsequent poets looked upon *Taraṅgavatī* as the prototype of the romance (*kathā*). Even before the Pālitta and

his *Taraṅgavatī* were known to scholarship, Rudolf Hoernle had suspected that Prakrit literature owes its origins to a process similar to what I have just described: “The Brahmanical opponents of the Jains . . . who employed the Sanskrit language for their religious and all higher literature, condescended to employ the literary Prakrit, created by the Jains, only for purposes of secular literature of a lower class (erotic and dramatic poetry, etc.) and, in doing so, subjected the language to a high degree of pedantic artificialization.”<sup>134</sup> Leaving aside Hoernle’s Victorian disdain for the pedantic and artificial, it does seem that courtly Prakrit owes much to the active involvement of Jain poets, and conversely, that Jain uses of Prakrit depended on the standard set by courtly literature for their wide dissemination and intelligibility.

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has focused on the emergence of Prakrit literature, by which I mean *pāuakavvaṃ*, the conjuncture of both Prakrit and literature in their strict senses. I have traced this emergence from two different perspectives: the eroticized world of courtly lyric, and the didactic world of Jain narrative. My conclusion is that both camps cooperated in the production of this new discursive phenomenon. If we look at an author like Uddyotana, we see that he could look upon both Hāla and Pālitta equally as forebears. Yet the memory of literary culture came to be increasingly circumscribed by religious affiliation. Hāla was converted to Jainism centuries after his death, although it was primarily because of the high literary quality of *Seven Centuries* and not the alleged Jainism of its author that staid and celibate monks continued to read, copy, and imitate this extremely erotic text. Pālitta, for his part, was more or less erased from the memory of Hāla’s court in Brahmanical sources. He is absent, for example, from the *Lilāvaī*, which makes Hāla and several of his co-authors characters in a fantastic romance. In this text, Hāla’s closest advisor is Nāgārjuna. Although certainty is difficult on this point, I suspect that the *Lilāvaī* evokes the second-century Buddhist teacher, who was known to be an associated of a Sātavāhana king, rather than a later Nāgārjuna (“*siddha* Nāgārjuna”) whom Jains identified as a student of Pālitta. Still, Pālitta’s absence is striking.<sup>135</sup> He is also absent from the list of famous Prakrit poets that Rājaśekhara gives in his *Karpūramañjarī*.<sup>136</sup> Most of all, his *Taraṅgavatī* is now a permanent absence in Indian literary history.

I have zeroed in on a moment when Prakrit literature was given the form that it would take for more than a millennium afterwards. The still-dominant view is that Prakrit means “language of the common people.” But when authors of the eighth, tenth, or twelfth centuries wrote Prakrit, they wrote in the specific literary language pioneered by Hāla and Pālitta around the first and second century CE. This was a crucial moment, not just for Prakrit, but for Indian literature as a whole.

It was the period in which the foundations of classical literature were established, from its figural vocabulary to its repertoire of genres to its linguistic parameters. Subsequent authors remembered Hāla and, to a lesser extent, Pālitta as important starting points of their traditions. And although they became legendary in their own right, they are among the earliest historical figures—as opposed to mythical sages—to appear in the genealogy of *kāvya* that poets provide.<sup>137</sup> *Seven Centuries* in particular was one of the most widely read and appreciated works of literature in India. Although much will of course remain obscure about the invention of Prakrit, there is also much that we can piece together from the available evidence. First, this invention took place in the Deccan around the first and second centuries CE. Second, it represents the convergence of the courtly culture of the Sātavāhanas with the discursive practices of the Jain community. No better example of this convergence exists than Pālitta himself, a Jain monk who attended Hāla's court and contributed verses to *Seven Centuries*. Third, the cultivation of Prakrit poetry at the Sātavāhana court is one of the earliest instances we can point to where literature was pursued for its own sake, where social identities attached to this new pursuit, and where political power took an active role in promoting this domain of culture.

Finally, I want to clarify what I mean by the “emergence,” “invention” or “creation” of Prakrit literature, and of Prakrit as a literary language, since these terms are all likely to be misunderstood as implying a conscious effort to create something that did not exist before, like Esperanto. Literarization is the double movement by which a language is employed for expressive purposes and becomes invested with a literary expressivity. Part of literarization is the emergence of new discursive spheres, new genres and practices to occupy them, and new disciplines to regulate them. The languages of literature are constituted as such by this process. I would claim that a person can speak, recite, or sing in Prakrit only after a language called “Prakrit” has been identified and at least minimally characterized. It is possible that people used forms identical to Prakrit in their speech before the invention of Prakrit under the Sātavāhanas, just as it is possible that someone might have uttered the words “the time is out of joint” before *Hamlet* was composed. But just as knowingly quoting Shakespeare is different from serendipitously anticipating him, writing in Prakrit is different from writing forms that are similar or identical to Prakrit forms. Writing in Prakrit is a practice that has certain rules, procedures, norms, or models, whether they are defined implicitly or explicitly. Literarization as a process involves the building up of those models and the production of texts in accordance with them. This is why the discourse that literarization produces, *kāvya* or *kavva*, could be and often was described in terms of its norms (*lakṣaṇa*) and the texts that model them (*lakṣya*). Thus literarization is always accompanied by a rarification of discourse. What is elevated to the level of literature in this specific sense, through magnificent acts of generosity and miraculous acts of insight,

is only a fraction of discourse, and what has survived in manuscript form is an even smaller fraction. This rarification applied to languages as well: the world was full of languages around the first century CE, but the practices of literature were keyed to a very small number of them. It was never inevitable that Prakrit would become one of them. But its successful use in the early centuries of the common era, under the patronage of Sātavāhana rulers and with the cooperation of Jain monks, ensured its position alongside Sanskrit as one of the primary languages of literature for roughly a thousand years.