Chapter 1

The Language of the Gods Enters the World

1.1 PRECOSMOPOLITAN SANSKRIT: MONOPOLIZATION AND RITUALIZATION

The transformation of the social life of Sanskrit around the beginning of the Common Era constitutes one of the most momentous events in the history of culture and power in Asia. It is also one of the least discussed and as a result, unsurprisingly, the least understood.

From around the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., when the earliest form of Sanskrit appeared in South Asia, until around the beginning of the first millennium C.E., Sanskrit functioned as a communicative medium that was restricted both in terms of who was permitted to make use of the language and which purposes the language could subserve. Access to Sanskrit was reserved for particular orders of society, and it was employed predominantly in connection with the liturgy of the Vedic ritual and associated knowledge systems such as grammar, phonetics, and metrics. Its transformation, around the beginning of the first millennium C.E., into a far more broadly available language, with new and unprecedented expressive purposes to execute—above all, *kāvya* and *praśasti,* courtly literature and royal praise-poetry—led to the creation of a culture-power formation that would exhibit an astonishing stability over the following ten or more centuries. The aim of this chapter is to try to grasp this moment of expansion and transformation not only by identifying its salient dimensions but by establishing the very fact that it can be seen as constituting a historical event, indeed, a rupture in time. The existence of this event can emerge only against the background of the long prehistory of Sanskrit in its sacerdotal isolation. In order to capture something of this prehistory and get a sense of the social and discursive boundaries—symmetrical in their structure and related in their logic—that would be crossed around the beginning of the Common Era, it is most

efficient to organize the exposition around two notions: social monopolization, especially as enunciated in *Pūrvamīmāṃsā,* the "prior analytic" of the nature of Vedic textuality, and discursive ritualization, especially as this becomes manifest in the early grammatical tradition.

One key characteristic of Sanskrit in the precosmopolitan period, explicit in the texts themselves whenever the problem of language and culture is raised, is that it was a code of communication not everyone was entitled to use, and fewer still were able to use. It is not just that some people did and some did not employ Sanskrit, but rather that some were permitted to do so and some—the majority, who otherwise might have been able to do so— were prohibited. Given the nature of the primary sphere for the application of Sanskrit, it is not surprising that this constraint was formulated as a restriction on participation in the rituals and liturgical practices of the Sanskrit speech community, whose members called themselves Āryas. And, again not unexpectedly, it is the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* that most explicitly argues out this language monopolization. The foundational text of the system, the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* attributed to Jaimini, dates to the last centuries (most probably third or second) B.C.E. There is good reason to believe that the reflexivity, even anxiety, about Vedic authority evinced in the work, of which the restriction on access to the corpus and its language is only one (if a crucial) component, would have been unthinkable in the absence of the broad religious and social critique that Buddhism had enunciated in the preceding two centuries and the "disenchantment of the world" that critique had signaled (section 2 below).[1] But if the reflexivity of the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* was new, relatively speaking, the restrictions it promulgates were not.

The Mīmāṃsā discussion most pertinent to an analysis of the monopolization of Sanskrit culture occurs in the chapter "On Rights" *(adhikāra).* This addresses a person's entitlement to possess the results of an act of *dharma*— the right, in other words, to participate in the moral universe and engage in the principal modes of conduct aimed at actualizing the worldview of early Sanskritic India. Although explicitly treated in a section seemingly buried in the middle of a vast treatise, this chapter by no means has the minor status its location might imply. It is foundational to the entire system and implicitly underwrites many of its doctrines from the very first aphorism of the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* onward.[2] Especially pertinent to the question of the sociality of Sanskrit is the section "On the Exclusion of the Shudra" *(apaśūdrādhikaraṇa).* The term "Shudra" refers to the fourth and lowest *varṇa,* or rank, in the an-

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1. On the early history of Mīmāṃsā and Buddhist critique, see Pollock 1990 and Bronkhorst 2001; and on the historical formation of the system, Parpola 1981, 1994.

2. See the *adhikārādhikaraṇa* in *PMS* 6.1.27–38. Verpoorten 1987 rightly points to the centrality of the subject for the Mīmāṃsā system as a whole. The discussion that follows is adapted from Pollock 1993a: 109 ff.

cient hierarchical social ordering, an ideal taxonomy often far messier in practice than in theory, but real enough throughout Indian history as a conceptual grid for organizing social status and privilege. It is in the Mīmāṃsā discussion that one of the key differences of the *varṇa* ordering is first articulated: the right of access to the Sanskrit Vedic texts and thereby to the ethical realm of *dharma*. There are certain prerequisites to the right of participation in *vaidika* practices (though these are not necessarily enunciated explicitly in the rules coded in the Veda). An individual must be in possession of the ritual instruments for performing the rite, for example, and must have the financial resources at his disposal, as well as the requisite knowledge. The mere desire to gain the results of ritual action—the various benefits the rites can confer, such as fathering a son, reaching heaven, and so on—does not suffice to qualify one for participation. Mīmāṃsā argues this out with interesting complexity.

The prototypical commandment of ritual action contained in the Veda itself, runs simply, "He who desires heaven should sacrifice." This would appear to sanction a universal applicability, even demand compliance universally. The act of sacrificing, however, presupposes possession of the means of sacrifice, preeminently the ritual fires. And in the scriptural injunction for setting up these fires only the first three social orders are mentioned, not the Shudra. It is true, Jaimini continues, that according to some authorities the fire injunction is intended only to specify the conditions that must be met when actually building the fire, not to ordain who could do it, for surely, as the scholar Bādari declared, "The Shudra desires heaven, too . . . and what is it in a sacrifice that any man [of the three higher orders] can do but the Shudra is incapable of doing?" Yet the insistence that only those actually mentioned have the right is confirmed in the eyes of Mīmāṃsā by way of one more condition: possessing the requisite knowledge, including knowledge of the language used in the rite. For yet another scriptural injunction mentions specific seasons for the initiation into studentship *(upanayana)* of Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya boys, whereas the Shudra and all the others below him are again omitted. The objection that these others might study the texts of the Veda—and the Sanskrit language in which the Veda was composed along with the Sanskrit knowledge systems that understanding the Veda required—on their own, without initiation, is dismissed. Even if the Veda did not explicitly prohibit this, the knowledge thereby acquired would be inefficacious anyway.[4]

3. According to Bādari the injunction is conditional *(nimittārtha)* not constitutive *(prāpika)* (*PMS* 6.1.27; for the *siddhāntin*'s endorsement of the latter see 6.1.37). The quotation in the text is from the *pūrvapakṣa* in Śabara, see 6.1.32 (Bādari's own works are lost).

4. The rule for establishing the sacred fires is given in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.2.6, for the *upanayana* in *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 1.1.1.19. Uttaramīmāṃsā, or Vedānta, seamlessly extends

The argument for establishing inequality of cultural rights in the Vedic world has the circuitousness and tortured complexity characteristic of arguments for inequality everywhere. But its overall thrust and its implications regarding the status of Sanskrit in early South Asia are reasonably clear. To learn Sanskrit, the *saṃskṛta* language, and so to participate in the cult and its benefits presupposed access to the *saṃskāra,* or ritual purification, of initiation (the semantic linkage here will be revisited below). But how is the restriction of initiation to the three higher orders itself validated? This answer, for most *mīmāṃsaka*s, is that the restriction is ultimately self-validating since we cannot otherwise explain it.[5] It cannot, for example, be prompted by social interests, since for Mīmāṃsā the commandments of the Veda are transcendent and not concerned with everyday motivated action—what worldly interests could possibly be served, the argument runs, by the many duties and costs associated with participating in Vedic culture. It may not make common sense to exclude from the world of Sanskrit knowledge certain groups of people who may be as capable of learning as anyone among the three higher orders. But then, neither does it accord with common sense to destroy food in a ritual fire, let alone to slaughter animals at the cultic altar, and yet the Veda authorizes doing just this. Indeed, precisely like sacrificial violence, the rules on the exclusivity of Sanskrit knowledge and the ritual domain to which it relates are warranted precisely because they are incomprehensible: "The purpose of the Veda *(śāstra)* is to inform us of what we cannot possibly otherwise know." Vedic commandment is meaningful to the degree that it enunciates something that transcends the phenomenal and is thus inaccessible to observation, inference, or other forms of empirical reasoning—something, in fact, nonrational, if not irrational.[6]

In brief, then, according to the theory of the most sophisticated circle of Sanskrit intellectuals in late Vedic India, the discursive and social domain of the Sanskrit language was bounded and limited. The limits on discourse were ritual, and the boundaries of society were those established by what might be called a theodicy of privilege.[7] No doubt the actual sociolinguistic situation was far more complex than the Mīmāṃsā theory of exclusion would lead

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the Pūrvamīmāṃsā argument from the prohibition against the Shudra's sacrificing to the prohibition against his acquiring sacred knowledge *(vidyā)* in general (*Brahmasūtra* 1.3.34 ff.). In the late medieval period some scholars sought to temper this judgment (Appayya Dīkṣita [fl. 1550], *Śāstrasiddhāntaleśasaṃgraha* pp. 313–19, though contrast his *Nyāyarakṣāmaṇi* pp. 291–320).

5. Śabara does claim to find an explicit Vedic injunction, however—"The Shudra shall not recite the Veda" (quoted on *PMS* 6.1.37)—but its source is untraceable.

6. "The purpose of the Veda. . . ," *aprāpte śāstram arthavat* (first in *PMS* 6.2.18). As the equally rationalistic Tertullian would have put it, *credibile quia ineptum est:* It is reason that dictates belief in a thing in direct proportion to the thing's improbability (Sider 1980).

7. On the logic of such rules see further in Pollock 1989. "Theodicy of privilege" is an idea borrowed from Weber by Bourdieu (1977b: 188).

us to believe, and the borders around the sacred sphere were probably far more porous. The most basic linguistic data show this unequivocally. Some have argued that the oldest stratum of the Veda shows phonological and lexical convergence between Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit languages, indicating that a significant degree of intercommunity contact, both social and discursive, occurred early on.[8] More generally, the very existence of the Mīmāṃsā discourse on the restriction of rights betrays not just a moment of disenchantment when the rules of everyday life cease to be transparent and require reflexive grounding but a possible concern that the monopolization of Sanskrit itself was not only contentious but contested.[9] For as noted by Śabara, the great commentator on the Mīmāṃsā of perhaps the fourth century, it makes no sense to prohibit something no one does.[10] Ambivalence about the status of Sanskrit over against other languages and, concomitantly, about who was permitted to use it and for what purposes, was deeply rooted and would continue to mark the social, cultural, and intellectual history of Sanskrit for centuries, even after the moment of historical rupture had long come and gone.

Consider only two instances of such ambivalence from a much later period, when the cosmopolitan order of Sanskrit was already far eroded and the changes that had come about were too obvious to deny, and therefore, paradoxically, all the more necessary to deny. Anxiety over participation in Sanskrit culture on the part of those outside the *vaidika* order is captured in a verse, found in a thirteenth-century literary anthology, that praises the Sanskrit poetry of a simple potter named Ghroṇa by proclaiming, "Caste is no constraint for those rendered pure by the Goddess of Speech." Here (by a kind of Freudian *Verneinung*) the author reaffirms old restrictions on access to Sanskrit in the very act of seeking to deny them.[11] The second example, from the very end of our period of study, comes from a sixteenth-century Sanskrit manual on the social and moral practices required of Shudras. No one outside of the three higher orders, the text declares, can have anything to do with the Vedas, Sanskrit grammar, *smṛti* texts, even *purāṇa*s; more than this,

8. On the effects of early bilingualism on Sanskrit, see Emeneau 1974; more recently, Hock 1996. Mīmāṃsā itself problematizes the interpretation of non-Sanskrit words in the Veda (see *PMS* 1.3.10), though without ever asking how they got there in the first place.

9. "A Shudra is a cremation ground; one must never perform Vedic recitation in his presence," according to a *śruti* text cited by Śaṅkara on *Brahmasūtra* 1.3.38; teaching a Shudra Sanskrit grammar and related sciences is famously denounced, along with the selling of learning, in *Manusmṛti* 3.156 (but see also Puṇyarāja on *Vākyapadīya* 2.79).

10. *na hy aprāptasya pratiṣedho 'vakalpate* (on *PMS* 6.1.43).

11. See *Sūktimuktāvalī* p. 45 no. 69. The verse is ascribed to Rājaśekhara, as is the following: "Ah, what power of the Goddess of Speech, that the untouchable *(caṇḍāla)* Divākara should have been a member of the literary circle of King Śrīharṣa, and the equal of Bāṇa and Mayūra" (no. 70).

"a Shudra is never to utter a Sanskrit word."[12] Here we have a late restatement of a very ancient postulate under visibly new social conditions (when, for example, so-called *sat-śūdra* communities in Maharashtra were claiming the right to use Sanskrit liturgy in their life-cycle ceremonies), the very novelty of which may have prompted this stubborn reassertion of archaic monopolization.[13] But the key point to stress here is that the many responses to the restrictions that had long hedged in Sanskrit show both how actual these restrictions were and how significant was the act of challenging them.

The discursive boundaries of Sanskrit in the archaic period are symmetrical with, or indeed even narrower than, the social boundaries just mapped. It is no cause for wonder that the domain of what could be said in Sanskrit should be shaped by who was permitted to speak and for what purposes. Discourse typically owes its most important characteristics to the relations of language production within which it is generated.[14] The redrawing of the discursive boundaries of Sanskrit at the beginning of the Common Era occurred concurrently with a marked shift in its social boundaries. The older limits of the sayable are most powerfully indicated by the name itself that comes to be given to the language, *saṃskṛta*, and the epithets applied to it, such as "language of the gods." The latter may not be attested until relatively late, perhaps not before Daṇḍin's seventh-century work on literary theory, *Kāvyādarśa* (Mirror of Literature): "The language called Sanskrit is the language of the gods, taught [to men] by the great sages of old." (How humans were first able to learn this language is rarely discussed; one of the few direct observations is that of Daṇḍin's tenth-century Buddhist commentator on this passage: "The great sages themselves spoke the languages of Place *[deśabhāṣā],* but they were able to teach Sanskrit thanks to their extraordinary attainments. As a result, while the Prakrits are multiform, Sanskrit is uniform.")[15] But Sanskrit's apotheosis, along with the unique status thereby conferred on it, can be found far earlier than Daṇḍin. It is significant that the richly associative term *saṃskṛta* as an adjective qualifying speech or language *(saṃskṛtā vāg)* occurs for the first time in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* a work of the last centuries before the Common Era. The demon king Rāvaṇa had

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12. *Śūdracintāmaṇi* of Śeṣa Kṛṣṇa (c. 1580), pp. 41–47, especially 44: *śūdrasyāpi viśeṣeṇa saṃskṛtaśabdoccāraṇapratiṣedhāt.*

13. Hints of this claim are found earlier, as when the eleventh-century *ŚP* (p. 500) denies the right of access to *vaidika* culture only to *kṣudraśūdra*s (low Shudras, as opposed to *sat* Shudras).

14. See Bourdieu 1977a: 647.

15. See *KĀ* 1.33 and Ratnaśrījñāna there. The claim to be the "language of the gods" or "speech of the noble" *(ārya)*—and with it, the assertion to historical primevality—has a long afterlife. Hemacandra, the Jain scholar of late-twelfth-century Gujarat, represents Ardhamagadhi, the language of the Jain canon, as the source from which all other languages developed (an argument he makes, however, in Sanskrit, *Kāvyānuśāsana* 1–2). Pali is projected as the "root-language of all beings" in postcanonical literature (Collins 1998: 49).

disguised himself as a Brahman and abducted the princess Sītā, and when at last Hanumān, the monkey scout of Prince Rāma, discovers her he pauses before speaking, wondering what language he should use:

> If like a Twice-born [Brahman] I address Sītā using *saṃskṛta* speech
> she may think I am Rāvaṇa, and will be frightened.
> Far better to speak a human language, one that will make sense to her.[16]

The artifice of the narrative may aim to direct attention away from the fact, but Hanumān proceeds to subvert his own announced intention. Whatever language he presumably was using with Sītā, what we find the learned monkey speaking—we and everyone else, Brahman or not, who has ever read or heard the work—is of course Sanskrit.

It is no coincidence that in this first recorded use of *saṃskṛta* as the name of the language, allusion should be made to both the language's monopolization by a particular social group and the peculiar restrictions on its use that distinguished it from "human language." The *Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* which both literary tradition and the text itself regard as the first Sanskrit *kāvya,* represented an entirely new genre in Indian literary history (chapter 2.1), and its reflexive understanding of the social and discursive peculiarities of the language it employed became possible only at a moment that marked the beginning of a new cultural order. Moreover, both of Hanumān's allusions—to the social limits and the discursive limits on the use of Sanskrit—make perfect sense when we keep in mind its liturgical functions in the early period. It is entirely in keeping with the monopolization of the language along these two axes that the oldest connotations of *saṃskṛta*—in the word's earliest appearances in the Vedic corpus around the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. and resonant for centuries thereafter—are invariably ritual. An analysis of the semantic field demonstrates that "*saṃskṛta* speech" not only bears the literal sense that would eventually come to predominate in scholarly circles of ancient India—that of speech items "put together" from nominal and verbal morphemes, a process subjected to penetrating analysis in the grammatical tradition culminating in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (The Eight Chapters) sometime in the third or fourth century B.C.E—but also, and even more strongly in the early period, *saṃskṛta* conveys a derived meaning: it is speech "made fit" for sacrificial functions. The language was named *saṃskṛtā [vāg* or *bhāṣā],* or, at some later date, *saṃskṛtam,* because like other instruments or objects of liturgical practice it was rendered and kept ritually pure.[17]

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16. *Rām.* 5.28.18–19. There is some textual confusion here (which the Baroda edition does little to alleviate), but the traditional reading of the verse (see *Tilaka* and *Bhūṣaṇa*) is unambiguous.

17. See Thieme 1982, 14. According to Cardona, grammatical description is viewed as a *saṃskāra* in two ways: "as a derivational explanation of correct speech forms" and "as a purification of speech, since correct speech forms are thereby segregated from corrupt ones"

There is no tension, however, between the ritual and grammatical meanings of *saṃskṛta*. The sacerdotal associations of the name of the language are in complete harmony with grammar's understanding of its own purposes, which were initially to describe and conserve sacred usage. In the conceptual universe in which *vyākaraṇa* (grammar, or perhaps more strictly, language "analysis") arose and functioned as a foundational intellectual discipline, a strong distinction was drawn between two kinds of action: instrumental and this-worldly, and noninstrumental and otherworldly *(dṛṣṭārtha* or *laukika,* and *adṛṣṭārtha* or *alaukika).* During the epoch of its formation as a knowledge system, grammar, and with it its first and originally sole analytical object, Sanskrit, were affiliated exclusively with the latter. Like everything else in this world, the character of language analysis would gradually change, but from an early period it functioned as an auxiliary science in the service of the revealed texts, as one of the six "limbs of the Veda."[18] In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī,* this sacerdotal function characterizes both registers of the language: on the one hand, the idiom actually used for the Vedic texts themselves, what Pāṇini calls *chandaḥ,* verse, or better, "the Verse" (albeit not all texts classified as Veda are versified); on the other, the rigorous, normative idiolect restricted to (Vedic) pedagogical environments, which he calls *bhāṣā,* speech.[19] That both had largely sacral associations as late as the beginning of the Common Era is shown in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya,* the *Great Commentary* on Pāṇini's grammar.

Patañjali (his date is considered in chapter 2.1) appears to have lived at a moment of transition in intellectual history when the tradition of systematic study of grammar had somehow been disrupted. In the old days, he explains in his famous preface, Brahmans learned Sanskrit grammar directly after their initiation into studentship and before learning the Veda; today they study the Veda first and consider grammar useless. It is because of this state of affairs, in addition to the fact that declaring one's purpose is an essential prelude to every *śāstra,* that Patañjali finds it necessary to review the reasons for studying the grammar of Sanskrit. The most important are the following five: pre-

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(Cardona 1988: 653–55). If this were strictly and narrowly true, we might expect to find the term applied also to the explanations and purifications of Prakrit grammars or those of other languages, for these after all have "correct speech forms," insofar as that is precisely what grammar is intended to present (only *apabhraṣṭa* language, but not the Apabhramsha literary language, does not). But this is never the case.

18. The term is as old as the *Nirukta* (400 B.C.E.?), see 1.20 (where it is used without further specification). The commandment *ṣaḍaṅgo vedo 'dhyeyaḥ*—"The Veda along with its six limbs is to be studied"—is not found in the Veda itself; *Mahābhāṣya* vol. 1: 1 attributes it to *āgama;* see also *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 2.8.10.

19. The precise limits of this term are of course problematic and very much tied up with the question of an everyday Sanskrit. Renou 1942 (part 2): 53–54, for example, largely skirts the question.

serving *(rakṣā)* the Veda; mastering morphological analogy *(ūhā)* for the performance of ritual; obeying scriptural injunction *(āgama),* which requires familiarity with grammar and the other five liturgical knowledges (phonetics, etymology, metrics, ritual performance, and astral or calendrical science); attaining facility of understanding *(laghu)* of more complex forms from simpler forms; and resolution of doubts *(asaṃdeha)* about the interpretation of sacrificial prescriptions. Patañjali goes on to cite a number of Vedic passages that identify additional functions of grammatical knowledge. These include the ability to distinguish between those who employ correct language forms and the "antigods" *(asura)* with their deviant usage; avoiding the potentially fatal consequences of the improper use of a word; acquisition of true learning, which consists in understanding and not just reproducing; gaining "infinite victory in the other world"; observing propriety in social interaction especially between preceptor and student; attainment of parity with the "Great God of language that has entered mortals"; and last, fulfilling the obligation of performing the naming ceremony of one's son.[20]

Not all of these reasons may be entirely clear to us, but there can be little doubt that for Patañjali, principal heir and final arbiter of the *vaidika* grammatical tradition, the purposes of Sanskrit language analysis were more or less exclusively tied to sacred performance and to the pedagogical practices, both social and discursive, pertaining to knowledge of the sacred. The same conception is shared by Kātyāyana, the major exegete of grammar who lived between the time of Pāṇini and Patañjali, and whose additions to and criticisms of Pāṇini are minutely scrutinized in the *Mahābhāṣya.* For Kātyāyana, the Sanskrit language is not something invented by humans but rather is *lokasiddha,* always already preexistent in the world. Accordingly, the only possible purpose of knowing this language as systematized in grammar is to impose constraints on its usage in the service of sacred action *(dharmaniyama).*[21] Kātyāyana's view, for its part, is in complete accord with Mīmāṃsā doctrine on the authority of grammar, which is explicitly and powerfully argued out in a section of the system devoted entirely to this topic.[22] And it correlates with yet another core Mīmāṃsā conception, that of the *autpattika,* "originary" or natural, connection between words and meanings. It is because the Sanskrit language is uncreated and without origin that the Veda itself could be considered beginningless and uncreated, and so immune to the kinds of error, and unconstrained by the kinds of limits, to which all other human communication is subject.

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20. Patañjali describes the need for restating the purposes of grammar in *Mahābhāṣya* 1: 5 lines 5 ff.; the five principal reasons are discussed on 1: 1 lines 14 ff., and the supplemental ones on 1: 2 lines 10 ff.

21. Kātyāyana's *siddhānta* is given in *Mahābhāṣya* 1: 8 lines 3 ff.

22. See PMS 1.3.24–29, and the remarkable exegesis in Kumārila's *Tantravārttika.*

Again, entirely in keeping with this ritual view is the account that Patañjali proceeds to give of the domain of language usage *(śabdasya prayogaviṣaya),* that is, the domain of the language that is the object of grammatical analysis. It comprises only the following: the four Vedas and their auxiliary sciences and mystical knowledges, texts all geared toward ritual action; the dialogue *(vākovākya)* portions of the Veda, which exemplify (rather than command) such action; narratives of "the way it once was" and accounts of the past *(itihāsa, purāṇa);* and life science *(āyurveda).* In the same spirit, Patañjali adds a further restriction on what constitute "constraints on (linguistic) practice" *(ācāre niyama),* namely, sacrificial action *(yājñe karmaṇi).* Outside of this sphere—and this is the clear implication here and of all that has gone before—there is no ritual sanction on language usage. Thus the employment of dialectal or vernacular forms in everyday life—and it was these forms that, we infer, were used in everyday life—does not produce spiritual demerit *(adharma).* In short, for Patañjali, the communicative world within which Sanskrit and its grammar function is not simply coextensive with the lifeworld in general, as experience with other languages and their practices would lead us naturally to assume. The sphere of Sanskrit is markedly narrower: it is in essence the sphere of sacred textual knowledge, with only the most tentative moves toward textual practices beyond the sacred.[23]

Patañjali's identification of the functions of Sanskrit grammar and their pertinent realm of language practice is broadly consistent with what we know to have been the discursive domain of Sanskrit in concrete historical terms. The basic question here, usually formulated as whether or to what degree Sanskrit was ever an everyday spoken language, has long been debated, and current sociolinguistic opinion seems rather muddled. The fact that our data force us to even ask this question may be taken as already implying some actual limitation on the sphere of usage. It is significant that, with the exception of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* no remains of a nonsacral, this-worldly Sanskrit are extant from the early epoch of literacy (from the third century B.C.E to, say, the first century C.E.), when, as some believe, Sanskrit was still supposed to have been an everyday idiom, whereas vast amounts of such Sanskrit are available from the later period when Sanskrit "had ceased to be truly a current language."[24] It is not easy to believe that virtually every scrap of early evidence of such a usage has been lost. The mate-

23. The domain of language usage is detailed in *Mahābhāṣya* 1: 9 lines 20 ff., and 11: 11. See also Cardona 1988: 639: the language that constitutes the object of the grammar was held to be "used for purposes such as ritual performance," as opposed to a "more vernacular speech"; similarly Deshpande 1985: 137.

24. Cardona 1988: 646. The testimony typically adduced to show the contrary, such as the grammarian's argument with the *sūta* (*Mahābhāṣya* on 2.4.56, 1: 488 lines 18 ff.), may not be so straightforward as it seems if the *sūta* were less a rikshawallah than a ritual figure (a *rājakartṛ* in *Atharvaveda* 3.5.7; or perhaps comparable to the *rathakāra* of *PMS* 6.1.44 ff.), or a personage

rials from the early age of literacy are decidedly non- or un-Sanskrit, whereas everything in Sanskrit from this period indicates a radically delimited arena of use.

Moreover, all that we can infer about the sociality of the language from the moment we can glimpse it provides further counterevidence to the belief that Sanskrit ever functioned as an everyday medium of communication. Never in its history was Sanskrit the vehicle for memories of childhood and adolescence, or for a whole range of comparable life experiences associated with this-worldly language use. Sanskrit was never bound to the land, to the village, or to any specific regional community. Indeed, when Sanskrit was finally constituted as the vehicle for political expression in inscriptions, the business of land or village—the specifics of a grant or endowment or bequest—came increasingly to be done in non-Sanskrit languages, especially in south India and Southeast Asia. Given such traits, Sanskrit in precolonial India has sometimes been analogized to postcolonial English, as being in some fundamental sense "inauthentic" (a judgment with respect to consciousness) or "illegitimate" (a judgment with respect to class location). But we will see throughout the course of this study that such judgments constitute a conceptual anachronism, as does the application of most of the language dichotomies borrowed from the contemporary West, such as living *versus* dead, learnéd *versus* natural.[25] These are all too crude to enable us make sense of the language world of premodern South Asia, where linguistic options were far more multiple than in modernity, notions such as mother-tongue were absent (chapters 8.3, 12.1), and the very capacity to escape the limitations of the local place and the temporal moment of the individual life memory— the inauthenticity and illegitimacy of Romantic language theory—was considered a defining virtue of Sanskrit.

Accordingly, the most plausible assessment of Sanskrit's social and discursive world for perhaps the first thousand years of its existence on the subcontinent seems to be the following: At least two species of the language family usually called Indo-Aryan were in use as far back as we can see. One of these, Sanskrit, was a formal speech, viewed as correct by the custodians of the language and employed in particular contexts broadly related to *vaidika* ritual activity; the other was a demotic speech with what are usually called Middle-Indic characteristics.[26] Sanskrit thus had a mutually self-limiting re-

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like Lomaharṣaṇa of the *MBh*. The situation depicted by Patañjali thus may well have ceremonial aspects. The one exception to the absence of early *laukika* Sanskrit is the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (see chapter 2.1).

25. See chapter 8.3. The metaphor of language death was first used in Italian humanism (Agamben 1999: 50). It has no currency in premodern India. See also Pollock 2001a: 393.

26. See again Cardona 1988: 638 (though contrast pp. 639 and 646). The case has yet to be made for an "everyday Sanskrit" at this period (with the epics preserving an "underlying col-

lationship with textualized discourse on liturgy and liturgical knowledges: this discourse was composed exclusively in Sanskrit, and Sanskrit culture consisted entirely of this discourse. The point is worth repeating that for most of the first millennium or more of Sanskrit's existence in South Asia, we have virtually no indubitable evidence for its employment in any domain we would call, along with the *mīmāṃsaka*s, this-worldly, the realm outside the practices of the sacred and the forms of knowledge necessary for the sacred. Like its very name, the character of its discursive functions situates Sanskrit far beyond the arena of everyday social existence.

We might be inclined, accordingly, to think of Sanskrit during this period as the higher pole of a classic diglossic situation, where the lower pole is constituted by protoregional speech forms (probably not the Prakrits as we know them, which, given their relatively early grammaticization and restricted literary uses, were equally high diglossically).[27] But the split in standards between Sanskrit and local language was such that "diglossia" seems an entirely inadequate category to describe it. For what we encounter is not an internal split (di-) in registers and norms, typically between literary and colloquial usage, in what local actors conceived of as a single language, but a relationship of extreme superposition (hyper-) between two languages that local actors knew to be entirely different. This modality, which I will call "hyperglossia," was ubiquitous in southern Asia before the vernacular revolution and derived ultimately from the discursive restrictions and social monopolization, the extreme compartmentalization of usage as well as the difference in cultural opportunity that characterized Sanskrit from the earliest epoch. If the former attribute was one that Sanskrit would never entirely renounce—indeed, its function specialization as the preeminent language of literature and systematic thought would continue to constitute a large portion of its enduring prestige and appeal—its social monopolization was soon to be challenged and eventually destroyed.

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loquial dialect," an "epic-vernacular substratum which at this period may have still been a living force"), let alone for a "Sanskrit for the common man" (Salomon 1989a: 277–78, 283, 284). Deshpande's assessment of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* ("a description by a Brāhmaṇa grammarian of the male Brāhmaṇa's second language, for the benefit of male Brāhmaṇa learners") is a probable account of Sanskrit in the first millennium B.C.E. But his further argument, that the narrowing of the "sociolinguistic parameters " of Sanskrit—the momentous restriction of Sanskrit to liturgical contexts—was a later development occurring in the few centuries between the time of Pāṇini and Patañjali and for no discernible historical reason, is dubious, to say the least (1992, especially 119–21).

27. For a recent argument about Sanskrit diglossia see Houben 1996; and for diglossia in India more generally, Shapiro and Schiffman 1983: 164 ff. On the distinction between the grammaticized Prakrits and the protoregional languages compare Nitti-Dolci 1938: 8, and for a more recent statement, Masica 1991: 53 ff. On literary restrictions see chapter 2.

1.2 FROM RESISTANCE TO APPROPRIATION

It is only within the context of the social monopolization and discursive ritualization of Sanskrit—the restrictions on who may use the language and the purposes for which it may be used—that we can make sense of the first explicit and systematized assaults on the *vaidika* cultural order. At the same time, these critiques serve to establish the reality of the foregoing description of that order. The most important of them for our purposes here are embodied in the language theory and practices of early Buddhism, though these were in fact only part of a larger process, a transvaluation of values, that occurred in the last centuries before the Common Era.

An adequately detailed and historically sensitive account of just what the critique enunciated by early Buddhism meant within the larger intellectual and cultural history of the subcontinent remains an important desideratum for Indological scholarship.[28] A simple inventory of the strategies, from basic terminology to core notions of culture and society, by which early Buddhism sought to appropriate, redefine, and transform the very elements of the late *vaidika* conceptual order shows both how profound this critique was and how much it can tell us about the nature of its target. The dynamic at work here is familiar from other oppositional movements in the domain of religion and culture more generally and is well captured by the phrase "normative inversion," whereby one group turns another's obligations into abominations, and often vice versa.[29]

A preeminent instance of a substantive sort is the Buddhist proscription of one of the great sacred mysteries in the Vedic world, animal sacrifice. At the more intimate level of doctrinal terminology other illustrations abound. Consider the name chosen for the Buddha's teaching, *dharma* (Pali *dhamma*), or even more combatively, *saddharma,* the real or true *dharma* (already in the oldest parts of the Pali canon). An ancient, even primary, meaning of *dharma,* the key word of Vedic ritualism, is sacrifice—it is to sacrifice that the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* is referring when it opens with the words "Now, then, the inquiry into *dharma.*"[30] Early Buddhism thus sought to annex and redefine the term that expressed what Buddhism most fundamentally rejected. (Even *dharma*'s somewhat later sense of "duty" as an expression of one's essential

28. Much of the best current work in early Buddhism (Schopen 1997 or Collins 1998) has been concerned with making sense of Buddhist social and intellectual history itself, an obvious prerequisite to any larger analysis.

29. See Assmann 1997.

30. For *dharma* as "sacrifice" see, e.g., *Ṛgveda* 10.90.16. Mīmāṃsā sought for centuries to limit the enlargement of the term's semantic realm; exemplary is the *Pūrvottaramīmāṃsāvādanakṣatramālā* pp. 254–57, a treatise of the sixteenth-century thinker Appayya Dīkṣita. See Pollock 2004c.

nature is turned upside down in the antiessentialist Buddhist appropriation.) Similarly transgressive redefinitions pertain to *ārya,* recoded from its old meaning, "noble," a member of the "twice-born" social order, to "adherent" of the Buddhist spiritual order. More striking is *sutta* for referring to the discourses of the Buddha: this is probably a dialectal variant not of Sanskrit *sūtra* (that is, a précis of any form of systematic knowledge) but rather of Sanskrit *sūkta,* a Vedic hymn. The Buddhist idea of three knowledges *(vijjā)*—of one's former lives, of the lives of others, and of the Four Noble Truths—may very well have been intended "to parallel and trump" the Brahmans' *vidyātraya,* or the knowledge constituted by the three Vedas. More subtly, the notion of (ritual) action at the heart of the term *karma* in the *vaidika* world was replaced by (spiritual) intention in Pali *kamma.*[31] These positive transvaluations in early Buddhism of core *vaidika* values were complemented by a range of pure negations, beginning with *an-atta (an-ātma),* the denial of a personal essence, whereby the core conception of Upanishadic thought was cancelled. All this evidence suggests that at the semantic level, to start with, Buddhism sought to turn the old *vaidika* world upside down by the very levers that world provided.

The same impulse toward inverting the normative manifests itself at a more fundamental level of thinking. It is fully in harmony with Buddhism's central analysis of the human predicament—the discovery of the origins of suffering in desire and the concept of dependent origination *(pratītyasamut-pāda)* to explain the functioning of desire—that Buddhism developed a wider-ranging understanding of contingency or conventionalism in human life. This stood in radical opposition to the naturalism of the *vaidika* thought world, one of pure Bourdieuean *doxa,* where both the order of society and one's place in it went without saying. The new conventionalism came to have application not only to individual psychology but to the social world at large and, more important in the present context, to language. Against the Mīmāṃsā tenet that the relationship between word and meaning is *autpattika,* originary or natural—a position sometimes absurdly reduced by its opponents to a mechanical, even magical theory of reference—Buddhists typically argued for a relationship based on pure convention *(saṅketa,* sometimes *avadhi).* What was at stake for Mīmāṃsā in asserting the uncreated, eternal nature of language was the possibility that *vāṅmaya,* or a thing-made-of-

31. On *ārya (ariya),* see Deshpande 1979: 40–41; for *sūkta (sutta),* Gombrich 1990: 23; *vijjā* and *karma/kamma,* Gombrich 1996: 29 and 51–52, respectively. Additional examples include *dakṣiṇā,* a "payment to a priest for sacrificial services" in the Vedic world, becoming "merit accrued from giving gifts" in the Buddhist; *ārṣa,* "relating to the sages *(ṛṣi)*" of the Veda, appropriated as an epithet of the Buddha (Lüders 1940: 712–714); *nhātaka/snātaka,* "one who engages in ritual bathing," becoming "one who washes off evil by means of the Eight-fold Path" (Norman 1993: 276). The textual articulations of early Buddhism recapitulate many of these trends (see Gombrich 1990: 23–24).

language—that is, a text, like the Veda—could be eternal too, something the Buddhists sought fundamentally to reject. About the notion that nothing in language generally or in Sanskrit particularly is transcendent, Buddhist doctrine is unambiguous. Here once more is heard the subversive inversion of *vaidika* terminology in a way that must have resonated scandalously in the minds of twice-born candidates for membership in the new order: As the oft-repeated Buddhist formula has it, "All mental formations" *(sarve saṃskārāḥ, sabbe saṃkhārā)*—in fact, all things formed, no doubt including all Vedic rites *(saṃskāra)* and perhaps even Sanskrit itself *(saṃskṛta)*—"are noneternal"; they arise and, having arisen, disappear. Indeed, like social formations in general, language itself came to be regarded by Buddhists as a human invention. As a later Pali grammar puts it, "The signifier is related to the signified as a matter of pure convention," a position that contrasts as profoundly as possible with Mīmāṃsā postulates of a primal, necessary, and nonarbitrary relationship between the two.[32]

Two observations on the Buddhist critique noted earlier merit restating here. First, a dialectical process seems to have been at work. It was almost certainly in response to the disenchantment of the *vaidika* world effected by Buddhism, perhaps in particular by the altogether new kind of reflexivity and sense of human agency it offered, that *vaidika* thought itself developed some of the distinctive characteristics that were to mark it long into the future. The explicit formulation of what are now rightly viewed as axioms that naturalized the social world and the world of discourse—restrictions on the right to sacrifice and on the originary relationship of word and meaning (the *adhikāra* and *autpattika* doctrines discussed earlier) as well as the notion of an authorless and eternal Veda existing entirely outside of history—were likely developed in response to the Buddhist critique: neither makes sense without the arguments to the contrary. Second, even though the basic oppositions at issue in categories such as *autpattika/kṛtaka* (natural/factitious) may remind us of similar disputes elsewhere in the ancient world—such as the fifth-century-Greek argument (in Plato's *Cratylus*) over whether signifiers and signifieds were connected by nature *(physis)* or convention *(nomos)*—the stakes of the debate in early South Asia were far higher. The Greek contro-

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32. The Pali grammar is *Saddanīti* 636.26, 786.5: *saṅketaniruḷho saddo attheṣu ti.* The Mīmāṃsā doctrine is found in theoretical discourse first in *PMS* 1.1.5. No adequate historical scholarship on the Buddhist view is available (it is not homogenous; one later commentator strikingly calls Pali *opapātika* [Collins, forthcoming]). The notion of *saṅketa* as well as related terms was nowhere elaborated; the relatively late and thin references include *Abhidharmakośa* 2.47 (pp. 272, 275), and *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.92; early Pali texts do not comment on the matter. The Buddhist *saṅketa* approximates the *samaya* of early Nyāya (*Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.55; only later *naiyāyika*s, such as Vācaspati Miśra, ascribed the convention to God). For the relativization of societal relationships in early Buddhism see *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* or, even more pointedly, the *Aggañña Sutta* (Collins 1998: 480 ff.), almost a social *pratītyasamutpāda* analysis.

versy may also have extended beyond the bounds of language analysis to include crucial questions of justice, but the philosophical positions in India were expressions of radically different visions of life, of separate and apparently irreconcilable understandings of human existence and destiny.

In light of these broad tendencies, there was every reason for Buddhism to reject Sanskrit in the course of its confrontation with the social-religious practices for which Sanskrit was the principal vehicle. The logic of this rejection and the alternative codes that were recommended instead are brought out in the following text on Buddhist monastic discipline (fourth to third century B.C.E.?), the most famous, and probably most vexed, passage of any work in early India pertaining to the "question of the language":

> Two monks, Brahmans by birth, were troubled that other monks of various clans, tribes, and families, were corrupting the Buddha's words by repeating them each in his own dialect *(sakāya niruttiyā)*. They asked the Buddha, "Let us put the Buddha's words into [Vedic-Sanskrit] verse *(chandaso āropema)*." But the Blessed One, the Buddha, rebuked them, saying "Deluded men! This will not lead to the conversion of the unconverted . . ." And he commanded (all) the monks: "You are not to put the Buddha's words into [Vedic-Sanskrit] verse. To do this would be to commit an infraction. I authorize you, monks, to learn the Buddha's words each in his own dialect."[33]

Scholarly disagreement persists about what exactly the Buddha is telling his disciples to do here, in large part because of uncertainty about the meaning of the phrase *sakāya niruttiyā*.[34] But there is not much doubt about what he is telling them not to do. However we wish to characterize the critique that early Buddhism enunciated, it clearly was not, and perhaps could not have been, enunciated in the Sanskrit language. The resistance to Sanskrit, which has a very rich later history (discussed throughout part 2 of this study),

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33. *Vinayapiṭaka* 2.139; I follow but slightly modify Edgerton's version, agreeing instead with the commentator he cites, "like the Veda, in the Sanskrit language" (contrast Edgerton 1953: 1 n. 4). Collins, forthcoming, may be right to translate "in a (fixed) recitational form, as the Vedas are in Sanskrit," leaving the referent indeterminate, but Sanskrit was the only fixed recitational game in town. Brough 1980 correctly notes that Vedic and Sanskrit would not have been considered two separate languages at this period (contrast Renou 1956, 84 n. 1); indeed, for Pāṇini *chandaḥ* and *bhāṣā* constituted the two poles of a single language (so Rau 1985: 104). The Chinese translation of the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* by Buddhajīva of Kashmir (423 B.C.E.) represents the Brahmans as reciters of the "Chandoveda," and has the Buddha tell them: "Let [the disciples] recite according to the speech of the country" [the Chinese represents Skt. *deśa-bhāṣā*] . . . It is forbidden to regard the words of the Buddha as the language of the outsiders *[bāhyaka]*," which the context strongly suggests means "to present in a Sanskrit form" (cited Mair and Mei 1991: 390–91; see also Mair 1994: 722–23, and more generally Lamotte 1976: 610 ff.).

34. Norman 1980: 62 translates as "explanatory gloss."

is perceived for the first time in the Buddha's rejection here. Scholarship has often exaggerated the importance, and minimized the contingency, of language choice in effecting or signaling religious change and, more generally, in defining religious communities (chapter 10.4). But there is no question that sometimes new ways of thinking did require new ways of speaking, whether for reasons of ideology or efficacy, and early Buddhism is the first and most celebrated case in point.

What the Buddha refused to allow his disciples to do, most scholars agree, was to transmit his doctrine by redacting it in Sanskrit, the form that had hitherto defined authoritative discourse on the transcendent for an influential community in South Asia. In fact, for the following four centuries or more the Buddha's words would be redacted in a range of languages other than Sanskrit. Some of these were very local (such as Gandhari in the far north of the subcontinent, or Sogdian and Tocharian in western and central Asia), a fact that gives us one answer to the question of how *sakāya niruttiyā* was pragmatically understood. At the same time, other Buddhists further south invented a new and parallel sacred language: Pali. This language combined elements of such geographical disparity that it would never have constituted the "native" language of anyone, certainly not the Buddha.[35] It is worth noting in passing that a similar rejection of Sanskrit occurred among the Jains, who employed an actual form of the northeast-Indian spoken language (so-called Ardhamagadhi) for their scriptural texts, without, however, attributing to Mahāvīra, the founder, any clear injunction to do so.

The very character of these languages of early Buddhist scripture provoked trenchant criticism among *vaidika* authors, who argued that such dialectal features undermined its doctrinal authority. In order to make just this point, the most brilliant and fearsomely polemical theoretician among these authors in early medieval India, Bhaṭṭa Kumārila, the "Lion's Roar" of Brahmanical learning, cites a passage from what appears to be a Buddhist canonical text, which includes, not coincidentally, the scandalous phrase *ime saṃkhatā dhammā saṃbhavanti sakāraṇā akāraṇā vinassamti* ("These *saṃskṛta* entities come into being when their cause is present, and perish when it is absent"):

> The scriptures of the Buddhists and Jains are composed in overwhelmingly incorrect *(asādhu)* language, words of the Magadha or Dakshinatya languages or their even more dialectal forms *(tadapabhraṃśa).* And because they are therefore false compositions *(asannibandhana),* they cannot possibly be true knowledge [or, holy word, *śāstra*]. When texts are composed of words that are [gram-

matically] false *(asatyaśabda),* how can they possibly communicate meaning that is true *(arthasatyatā)?* And how could they possibly be eternal [as true scripture must be] if we find in them forms that are corrupted *(apabhraṣṭa)?* . . . By contrast, the very form itself of the Veda proves its authority to be independent and absolute.[36]

The conviction enunciated here, which links intelligibility and truth of content to intelligibility and "truth" of form—and links truth of form to Sanskrit—would prove immensely influential in Indian history. For it articulates the grounds of resistance to the development of vernacular literary cultures, and, after the vernacular revolution, the grounds for restricting that revolution to the sphere of expressive literature such that Sanskrit remained the primary language of science up to the very eve of colonial rule. But equally remarkable is Kumārila's apparent historical ignorance. For by the time he was writing in the mid-seventh century, a vast Buddhist canon in Sanskrit, a "quite definite translation into Sanskrit," as one scholar has called it, had been in existence for centuries.[37]

The Buddhist turn to Sanskrit for the transmission of the word of the Buddha is attested already from the second century C.E.; portions of a canon (for which the Sarvāstivāda school appears to have been principally responsible) might have existed from as early as the third century. Canonical texts from several centuries prior to the period are found redacted in various forms of Middle Indic mixed with Sanskrit (sometimes called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit), an idiom that seems less a failure to achieve Sanskrit than a continuing reluctance to use it fully.[38] From about the second century, however, Buddhist discourse in north India, and perhaps in much of South Asia excluding the peninsula, where Pali preserved a modest mainland presence, seems to have largely meant discourse in Sanskrit. What exactly

36. *Tantravārttika* on *PMS* 1.3.12, p. 164 lines 8–15, rearranging slightly the verse and the prose gloss (the passage Kumārila goes on to cite is not Pali); p. 166 lines 1–2 (see also *Nyāya-sudhā* p. 236 lines 19 ff. and the broader linking of correct language and truth in *Śāstradīpikā* pp. 46–47). For Kumārila, the transcendent character of the Veda is revealed in part by its lexical and semantic uniqueness (e.g., words like *īḷe* [*ṚV* 1.1.1], which no human being could ever have invented, cf. p. 164 lines 18 ff., 165 line 6). Already by Kumārila's time Dakshinatya Prakrit (assuming this refers to Maharashtri) and perhaps even Magadhi had been grammaticized, as in the version of the *Prākṛtaprakāśa* commented on by Bhāmaha (cf. von Hinüber 1986: 54, Scharfe 1977: 192). Accordingly, there would be no paradox in Kumārila's speaking of their "corrupt forms."

37. Brough 1954: 362, 367–68.

38. Evidence for a canon in Sanskritized Middle Indic in the first century C.E. is discussed in Salomon and Schopen 1984: 116–117. In the northwest, Gandhari continued to be in use for centuries. A medieval Buddhist commentary refers to the intentional "use of occasional solecisms in verses in order to loosen the fixation on standard language on the part of those who believe in the absolute language standards [of Sanskrit]" (*teṣāṃ ca suśabdavādināṃ suśabd[ā]grahavināśāyārthaśaraṇatām āśritya kvacid vṛtte 'paśabdaḥ,* from the *Vimalaprabhā,* a commentary on the *Śrī Kālacakra,* cited in Newman 1988: 125).

prompted the Buddhists to abandon their hostility to the language after half a millennium—the first instance of giving up resistance to Sanskrit and giving into its power, a process that would be reenacted time and again in Indian history—and finally adopt it for scripture, philosophy, and a wide range of other textual forms, some of which they would help to invent, is a question for which no convincing arguments have yet been offered.[39]

Various interpretations are common and recurrent, but none is entirely persuasive. One simply identifies Sanskrit as "the language of learning" to which all others had to conform. Another points toward "a desire to emulate the practices of the Brahman communities"—a "'keeping up with the Joneses' syndrome of competition with Brahmanical communities for popular esteem"—coupled with anxiety at the "gossip about the perceived inferior linguistic habits of the Buddhist monks." Neither explanation takes us very far, only replacing one question with another: why, after nearly five centuries, was it suddenly necessary or desirable for Buddhists to participate in such learning, or to achieve such emulation and avoid opprobrium, when it had long been perfectly acceptable to adopt a separate cultural style and to transmit a rather considerable amount of learning in regional speech forms? A third explanation, a variant on the first, assumes that Sanskrit has a natural communicative superiority that made it irresistible: the "technical precision of Sanskrit," according to Etienne Lamotte, "knowledge of which continually grew among diverse strata of society, made it an ideal instrument for presenting doctrines and ideas," but Lamotte unwittingly refutes himself by what he proceeds to demonstrate: that such materials could be, and in fact were, equally well presented in Pali, Gandhari, and other languages. And in any case, the assumption behind this explanation is dubious: neither Sanskrit nor any other prestige dialect has an inherent capacity qualifying it for tasks of complex expression, let alone an "inherent beauty and force" that somehow naturally "fulfilled the intellectual requirements of the Indian Man."[40] The value of a language resides, in part at least, in the social value of those who speak it. When natural superiority is attributed to Sanskrit, it is usually for the same reason (or unreason) why Heidegger believed that when a Frenchman begins to think philosophically he inevitably does so in German.

Other accounts of the Sanskrit turn among the Buddhists are more firmly grounded in some kind of sociology or history yet still remain problematic.

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39. See in general Mishra 1993, Gombrich 1990, and for earlier literature, Lin Li-kouang 1949, 176 ff.

40. So S. K. Chatterji (cited in Shapiro and Schiffman 1983: 143). The ideology of "natural superiority" among languages is discussed in Joseph 1987: 30 ff., 41. On Sanskrit as the language of learning, see Brough 1954: 362, 367 (and cf. 368), Lamotte 1976: 646 ff.; for Brahman emulation, Salomon 2001: 250.

Thus one scholar takes as his point of departure the fact that many of Sanskrit Buddhism's major teachers were converted Brahmans. But the same may be said of many Pali Buddhist teachers, including the greatest among them, Buddhaghosa. The assumption that Buddhists realized they could not win over the Brahmans, the "bearers of culture," to the teachings of the Master unless they presented their holy texts in the language of the *śiṣṭa,* the learned, begs the question why this realization dawned only centuries after the Buddha, and leaves us to wonder how the many Brahmans mentioned in Pali texts had themselves been won over. More recently it has been argued that the relevant condition in the adoption of Sanskrit as a canonical language was Buddhism's penetration westward to Mathurā and the heart of Āryāvarta, the core region of *vaidika* culture. But Buddhists had been located in other areas where, we are told, the "dominant culture was Hindu, Brahmanical, and Sanskrit" without adopting Sanskrit; then, too, at least according to the social imaginary of the Vinaya text recounted earlier, the use of "Vedic-Sanskrit verse" for the word of the Buddha was a conceptual possibility far to the east. Indeed, some early Buddhist records composed in Sanskrit give no indication that they were written in Mathurā but show vocabulary with eastern characteristics and suggest a "seemingly independent Sanskritization." Moreover, the presence of Buddhists in Mathurā seems to be in evidence long before the period when they began to adopt Sanskrit.[41]

The history of the Jain relationship to Sanskrit, for its part, also throws into doubt many of the assumptions underlying explanations of the Buddhist turn. For one thing, the Jains never considered their eastern Prakrit inadequate for communicating their ideas, since their canonical texts were never redacted in Sanskrit. On the contrary, throughout history a tacit prohibition against any such undertaking remained in force. The story of the monk Siddhasena, from a twelfth-century collection of tales, shows this clearly. When, like the Brahmans of the Vinaya tale, Siddhasena suggests rendering the holy texts into Sanskrit, he is excommunicated from his religious order until he repents. This attitude maintained itself despite the notable presence of Brahman converts in the Jain community throughout its history, and even despite the existence of a community of Jain Brahmans in medieval Karnataka (chapter 10.4). While it is true that the Jains adopted Sanskrit relatively early for philosophical disputation (at least from the time of Umāsvāti, author of the *Tattvārthādhigamasūtra,* in perhaps the third or fourth century), for centuries to come they remained reluctant to commit fully to Sanskrit for other

41. For Mahāyāna teachers, see Deshpande 1979: 42; for winning over the Brahmans, Lüders 1940: 713. The role of Mathurā is considered in Fussman 1980b: 425; easternisms in Buddhist Sanskrit are noted in Norman 1979: 294. Fussman has commented further on Sanskrit as a link language among Indian Buddhists whose Middle-Indic dialects had ceased to be mutually intelligible (1982a: 38–39).

kinds of moral or aesthetic texts. No Sanskrit biography of Mahāvīra was pro-
duced before the *Vardhamānacarita* of Asaga in 853 (whereas Aśvaghoṣa's
Sanskrit "Life of the Buddha" dates probably to the mid-second century C.E.),
and the first universal history in Sanskrit is Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa* of 678
(a rendering of Vimalasūri's Prakrit work of four centuries earlier).[42]

The fact that many Buddhist communities in the north of the subconti-
nent abandoned their long-standing language pluralism in favor of Sanskrit,
the language they had rejected for centuries, therefore awaits better expla-
nations. What we can be certain of, in view of all the evidence we have seen
so far, is that their choice represented an astonishing expansion of the realm
of Sanskrit, far beyond the *vaidika* sanctum to which it had been restricted
for a millennium and in the most unanticipated directions, including the
textualization of ideas fundamentally opposed to the *vaidika* world. Yet this
is fully in keeping with other, equally momentous developments that took
place at the same time, in the one or two centuries just before and after the
beginning of the Common Era.

1.3 EXPANDING THE PRESTIGE ECONOMY OF SANSKRIT

Our ability to trace the lineaments of the expansion of Sanskrit's social and
discursive domain, and to understand something of the new cultural-
political order this generated, takes on an altogether different degree of his-
torical precision once we enter the age of writing. This commenced around
the middle of the third century B.C.E. with the records issued by Aśoka, the
third overlord of the Maurya dynasty (320–150 B.C.E.). This has long been
known. An emerging scholarly consensus, however, now regards the Brāhmī
syllabary, the first South Asian writing system (and the parent script for al-
most every other writing system in southern Asia), as the deliberate creation
of Aśoka's chancery for the promulgation of his edicts on moral governance
(in both the epigraphical idea itself and some of its formulaic language Aśoka
was imitating Achaemenid practices).[43] The convention thereby inaugurated
among southern Asian courts—the public display of inscribed texts on rock
faces, free-standing pillars, temple walls, or, after about the mid-fourth cen-
tury, copperplates—was to continue from this point on uninterruptedly to
the middle of the second millennium. As we will see, these texts are valuable
indices of not only a new kind of political imagination but, equally impor-

42. The Siddhasena episode is recounted in *Prabhāvakacarita* p. 58; cf. also Granoff 1992.
On Asaga, see Upadhye 1983: 284–94. A general account of Jain views of Sanskrit is provided
in Dundas 1996; the Jain turn to Sanskrit for writing *kāvya* is an important understudied question.
43. On the invention see, above all, Falk 1993, especially p. 339; Salomon 1995; on the
Achaemenids (550–330 B.C.E.) model, Benveniste 1964: 144–45, and Pollock 2004a: 417.

tant, a new kind of literariness, as well as the language in which literary expression could be coded. We find repeatedly throughout South Asian history that inscriptions functioned as synecdoches of the larger literary and political cultures of which they were products, and that they came to be transformed in tandem with these larger cultures.

If students typically know that written texts in India appeared first with Aśoka, they are not always aware that these texts were composed not in Sanskrit but in various Middle-Indic dialects, sometime referred to as Prakrits. While closely related to Sanskrit, these dialects were considered entirely distinct from it by premodern Indian thinkers, who developed a set of clear categories to frame the distinction (chapter 2). As noted in section 1, for the first three to four centuries of literacy, next to nothing was inscribed except in the Prakrits. Moreover, the records in question, in stark contrast with what was to come, are entirely documentary and not literary in character, a distinction again fully intelligible according to local conceptual schemes. Not a single literary inscription of the sort to be found later in such abundance was produced in Sanskrit during this period, while the very few inscriptions that do aim toward expressivity were composed instead in Prakrit. In fact, a mere handful of inscriptions in Sanskrit are available, in contrast to the many Middle-Indic texts, and these Sanskrit epigraphs are by and large exiguous: one- or two-line records commemorating a *vaidika* or quasi-*vaidika* rite. These early Sanskrit documents are worth a glance in order to establish a baseline for the dramatic changes that occurred soon after.

What appear to be the earliest documents, from probably the first century B.C.E., announce the founding of a temple enclosure *(pūjāśilāprākāra)* in one case, and the dedication of a water tank in the other; the next two oldest, from the early first century C.E., record the establishment of sacrificial post memorials *(yūpa)*.[44] These are typical of the rest of the small corpus in being private rather than public gestures. Although, strictly speaking, all inscriptions are public in the sense of being open proclamations available to all with eyes to see or ears to hear (save Buddhist reliquary inscriptions meant to be deposited inside *stūpa*s), only a couple of these early Sanskrit records were issued from royal courts. One of the latter is the sole Sanskrit document of the Śuṅgas, the dynasty that succeeded the Mauryas to the north (their one other extant record, and the only one to mention the dynasty's name, is in Prakrit). It is a very brief stone inscription from Ayodhyā in the northeast of what is today Uttarpradesh (dated no earlier than the first century C.E.), mentioning King Dhana[deva], "who twice offered the royal horse sacrifice" *(dviraśvamedha-yājin)*, and memorializing the construction of a tomb.[45] One does not want to minimize the importance of such documents as these and the first inti-

44. See *EI* 16: 27; *JA* 1993: 113; *ASI A/R* 1910–11: 40 ff.; and *EI* 22: 198–205 respectively.
45. *EI* 20: 57. The Prakrit Śuṅga inscription is published in *BI* p. 11.

mation they offer, however reticent and tentative, of some new desire—for publicity, permanence, or whatever—in the old *śrauta* world that the technology of inscription in Sanskrit satisfied, or perhaps created, as technology can do. But the main point to register is that these inscriptions were very isolated occurrences. They did not mark any kind of historical break in Sanskrit cultural consciousness or inaugurate a new public or civic discourse; they remained fully internal to the *vaidika* world. The moment of discontinuity was still on the horizon, and when it did come, it would be vast and total.

Prior to that moment, however, the state of affairs just recounted is very curious, and very suggestive of larger cultural tendencies. To put a fine point on it: For the first time, beginning in the mid-third century B.C.E., the possibility was widely available not only of actually writing Sanskrit—the older *vaidika* world having been one of pure and carefully regulated orality—but of writing it publicly. Yet how to explain the fact that, for the following four centuries or more, nothing of a public Sanskrit has been found and almost certainly was never produced, whereas epigraphy in Middle Indic abound? For Louis Renou, the leading French Indologist of the previous generation, the question why Middle Indic should have appeared in epigraphy centuries earlier than Sanskrit constitutes "the great linguistic paradox of India." And he insisted on explaining it, as so many other scholars have explained so many other problems in Indian history, in religious terms: as a convert to Buddhism, Aśoka supposedly adopted the Buddhist hostility toward Sanskrit described earlier, and the "epigraphical habit, thus primed would continue for many centuries."[46]

Yet this explanation seems to be refuted by a simple fact, one that is no mere artifact of our data: in the early period of literacy in South Asia, no dynasty, regardless of how *vaidika* it was—and therefore, according to the logic of the religious argument, both willing and able to use Sanskrit—employed that language for its public records. Exemplary here are the cultural practices of the Sātavāhana. This lineage exercised some form of rule over a wide area of southern India from about 225 B.C.E. to 250 C.E. From the large body of Sātavāhana inscriptional and numismatic evidence available to us now, a very striking kind of cultural politics emerges. This was a lineage of rulers who unequivocally saw themselves inhabiting a Vedic world, as evidenced by both their continual performance of the solemn ceremonies of the *śrauta* tradition and their explicit self-identification as Brahmanical.[47] Yet

46. Renou 1956: 84.

47. Their Brahmanism is indubitable, notwithstanding uncertainties about the nuances of *ekabahmaṇa* ("exclusively Brahmanic," "alone worthy of the name of Brahmanic," "the one support of the Brahmans," etc., Mirashi 1981: 13, 35; the suggested translations include those of Georg Bühler and R. G. Bhandarkar). Additional references to the Brahmanism of the Sātavāhanas were first collected in Lévi 1904: 172.

every scrap of text they produced—documentary, *praśasti,* literary—is in Prakrit. There is no evidence for their use of Sanskrit in any nonliturgical domain.

Besides the complete absence of Sanskrit inscriptions, not a single Sanskrit work in any of the new textual forms of *kāvya* that were coming into being around this time is associated with the court, or indeed, found anywhere within the space-time world of the Sātavāhanas, which comprised most of the Deccan (the area between the Narmadā and Kṛṣṇā rivers) and much of peninsular India over a period of some four centuries. Two Sanskrit texts that are associated with the court (or at least were written within its penumbra), and point toward the same conclusion, are examined more closely below. One, the *Yugapurāṇa* (Lore of the Cosmic Ages), actually announces the momentous historical changes in literary culture that were about to take place on the subcontinent, and to do so it had to employ a sacred-prophetic register for which Sanskrit was the only appropriate vehicle. The second is the grammar named the *Kātantra* (Brief System). Although the career of its author, Śarvavarman, was later to become the stuff of legend, the work can be located with reasonable certainty in the Sātavāhana world of perhaps the second century C.E. What makes this grammar remarkable is that it is clearly a work of popularization in both its mode of presentation and its substance. It almost totally eliminates the complex metalinguistic terminology of its Paninian model (which it clearly sought to displace, and successfully displaced for many reading communities for centuries) and excludes all rules pertaining to the Vedic register of the language—a striking modification in a knowledge form that for a millennium had regarded itself as a limb of the Veda and, as Patañjali showed, was above all intended to ensure the preservation of Veda. With these innovations the *Kātantra* seems to have been contributing to a wider movement of desacralization of the use of Sanskrit that was manifesting itself in other regions of South Asia at that moment. As for the Sātavāhanas themselves, everything we know about their dynasty and their world indicates that they maintained a very conservative attitude toward Sanskrit and rigorously confined it to the domain of *vaidika* ritual and related scholastic contexts; their commitment to Prakrit outside these contexts was therefore anything but an "ex post facto fabrication" of modern scholarship.[48]

Elsewhere, too, it is not only common but absolutely regular to find Prakrit used in the early period for inscriptional materials of the public domain on

48. On Śarvavarman and the *Kātantra*'s relationship to Kumāralāta's grammar, see chapters 2.2, 4.1. It was Renou who argued "Que les Śātavāhanas aient été prākritisants . . . a pu être fabriqué après coup d'après des déductions fondées sur l'existence du Kātantra et de l'anthologie de Hāla" (1956: 99 and n.). He was, moreover, in error in viewing Sātavāhana records as purely "bureaucratic"; some of their inscriptions show unmistakable *praśasti* style (see chapter 2 n. 11). Nāgārjuna's *Suhṛllekha,* an epistle of spiritual counsel addressed to a Sātavāhana king, was purportedly written in Sanskrit (only Tibetan and Chinese translations survive).

the part of ruling families clearly committed to a *vaidika* and Brahmanical culture. Instructive here are the earliest inscriptions of the Pallavas (300–900), the first epigraphically attested rulers over the northern regions of Tamilnadu. Their oldest records, from the late-third and early-fourth centuries, are in Prakrit, but an unusual form of Prakrit ("in no way absolutely pure," as one scholar described it; it shows phonological preservations of Sanskrit forms and certain other "gross irregularities"). In fact, it seems an unfamiliar, almost reluctant Prakrit, certainly used because Sanskrit was thought inappropriate for public records. The first document records a ritual payment *(dakṣiṇā)* to one [Jīvasi]vasami (Jīvaśivasvāmin) for his performance of various apotropaic rituals (the *santisathiyāyaṇa, śāntisvastyāyana*). The second record was issued a decade later by *yuvamahārājo bhāradāyasagotto palavānaṃ sivakhaṃdavammo* ("crown prince Śivaskandavarman of the Bharadvāja [i.e., a Vedic] lineage") in assigning a gift of land to a Brahman community (a *brahmadeya*). Notably, the legend on the seal of the Prakrit record is in a somewhat different alphabet from that of the grant itself and renders the name of the king in the Sanskrit form *śivaska[ndavarmmaṇaḥ],* in contrast to the orthography on the plate itself. In 338 the third extant Pallava record, a copperplate land grant again in Prakrit, was issued by the same Sivakhaṃdavamo, whose Vedic ritual accomplishments the record celebrates with a title in Prakrit: he is an *aggiṭṭhomavājapeyasamedhayājī,* that is, a performer of the *agniṣṭoma, vājapeya,* and *aśvamedha* sacrifices, among the greatest of the Vedic rites. Again, the seal bears the king's name in Sanskrit: *śivaskandavarmaṇaḥ;* also in Sanskrit is the benediction at the end: *svasti gobr[ā]hmaṇalekhakavācakaśrotṛbhya iti* (Welfare to cows, Brahmans, the engraver, the reciter, and the audience [of the grant]). A last example comes from the latter half of the fourth century. This copperplate is entirely in Prakrit except for two verses cited at the close and attributed to "Vyāsa"—verses that would be repeated in land-grant documents for the next thousand years—which are composed in entirely normative Sanskrit:

bahubhir vasudhā dattā bahubhiś cānupālitā |
yasya yasya yadā bhūmis tasya tasya tadā phalam ||

svadattāṃ paradattāṃ vā ye haranti vasūndharāṃ |
gavāṃ śatasahasrasya hantuḥ pibati duṣkṛtam ||

Many have gifted land and many have protected it. Whoever possesses the land, and so long as he possesses it, possesses the fruit thereof. Whoever steals land, whether he gave it or another did, drinks the sin of a man who has slain a thousand cows.[49]

49. The four records are reedited in *IP:* 29–41. For the remarks on the Prakrit of the Pallavas, see Pischel 1965: 8; see also Lévi 1904: 170, who first noted the significance of Śivaskandavarman's seal. The Pallavas' list of *vaidika* rituals (which was used formulaically elsewhere and later) harkens back to third-century Ikṣvāku records (Cāṃtamūla I is *agihot-āgiṭhoma-vāja[peya-*

The concomitance between content such as this, which emerges from of a purely *vaidika* milieu, and the use of Prakrit for its public dissemination is not encountered in Sātavāhana and Pallava records alone; it is standard in the inscriptions of ruling groups across South Asia over the first four or five centuries of literacy. One conclusion is unavoidable: The choice of Prakrit for public inscription cannot have been conditioned by the religiously grounded conviction, as conveyed by the Buddhist theologians in the Vinaya account and embodied by the language choices of the writers of early scriptural texts, that Sanskrit was tied to Brahmanism and for that reason was to be avoided for all purposes of non-*vaidika* (let alone anti-*vaidika*) communication. Brahmanism itself avoided Sanskrit, too, for all purposes of nonliturgical cultural discourse. A second conclusion is that the choice of Prakrit cannot have been the result (as it is often supposed to be) of the sheer inability to write proper Sanskrit, since it is obvious that proper Sanskrit could be written when proper Sanskrit was desired.

Now, of course, when we use terms like the "choice of Prakrit" and "proper Sanskrit," we are presupposing that Sanskrit and Prakrit are distinct, and that the distinction between them was registered on the cognitive map of the people who chose Prakrit and employed proper Sanskrit. But it is not unreasonable to ask whether such a distinction can confidently be ascribed to the period in question. If it cannot, then Renou's "paradox" turns out to be an artifact of modern notions of razor-thin boundaries between languages that are simply inappropriate for a premodern world, with its supposedly broad language zones and their hazy borders. In fact, some scholars, questioning the "unitary" character of post-Vedic Sanskrit and positing the existence of so-called vernacular Sanskrits, have sought to weaken or even erase the distinction between Sanskrit and Prakrit and instead represent them as mere "poles of a dialectic spectrum."[50] Such an understanding would mean that no language choice was being made in the epigraphical record.

Here lie complexities about modern and premodern kinds and categories that will be encountered throughout the course of this study, not just in matters of language identity but in everything from the conceptual status of literary genres (like "epic") and political formations (like "empire") to encompassing notions of time and space. Again, we need to distinguish methodologically between the absolute truth of linguistics and the certitudes of lan-

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āsamedha-yājisa] hiraṇakoṭi-go-satasahasa-hala-[satasahasa-padāyisa], etc.) (*EI* 20: 17 ff.; cf. Sircar 1939c: 384). With the Sanskrit of the Pallava seals compare the contemporaneous charter of Jayavarman, Kistna district, Tamilnadu (*EI* 6: 315–19; possibly the oldest copperplate record in South Asia). The charter is in Prakrit, whereas the seal reads: *bṛhatphalāyanasagotrasya mahārājaśrījayavarmmaṇaḥ;* contrast this with lines 4–5 of the plate itself: *bṛhatphalāyanasagoto rājā sirijayavammo.* The Sanskrit is also written in different characters from the Prakrit.

50. See Salomon 1989a: 277; Deshpande 1993b: 33–52.

guage users that provide the grounds for their beliefs and actions. No one would deny that a modest spectrum of variation in Sanskrit (though hardly a "dialectology") can be identified from the variety of Sanskrit registers available in Indian literary history; such a spectrum is easily explained by the influence of living speech on a literary language in a diglossic or hyperglossic (or just polyglossic) environment. But this has little bearing on the conceptual or cognitive status of the Sanskrit language in premodernity, both for those who participated in Sanskrit literary culture itself and for those who regarded it from the outside. From both perspectives, the speciation of Sanskrit from its linguistic others was as clear as any could be before the rise of unified languages under the modern regime of print-generated standardization.[51]

At its borders, every language may appear to merge into something else; the fact that it can be defined, cognitively and discursively, as a *language* in the first place, rather than continuing to exist as unmarked jargon, is largely due to the presence of a body of grammatical, literary, and other texts that provide it with norms and hence stability (a fact repeatedly corroborated by the evidence in part 2 of this book). And it was precisely by means of the vast production of philological, scriptural, and eventually literary texts that the tradition itself insistently thematized Sanskrit as such and distinguished it from non-Sanskrit. Moreover, even if various kinds of Sanskrit are found in use—nonnormative or informal Sanskrit; Sanskrit influenced by Apabhramsha or later Persian; Sanskrit transitional between the cosmopolitan and vernacular, which late inscriptions show in abundance—they were employed not indiscriminately in the production of texts by writers floating unselfconsciously on a wide dialectal sea but quite intentionally and restrictedly; wholly normalized Sanskrit would be produced for the specific arenas for which it was appropriate. Furthermore, Sanskrit was everywhere conceptualized as an identifiable and unified entity. Buddhist and Jain language preferences for scriptural text production would be unintelligible in the absence of the acknowledged distinctiveness of Sanskrit. In short, when the absolute perspective of science *(pāramārthika sat)* is at odds with the representations produced from within the traditions of language thought *(vyāvahārika sat),* it is to the latter that we must defer if we are to understand the history made by knowledgeable agents.[52] And according to the *vyāvahārika sat* of premodern South Asia, Sanskrit was an indubitable unity. This is something attested

51. There is much uncertainty about the history of "standardization." Joseph 1987 constructs his entire paradigm around the modernity of the notion (cf. p. 7), and yet koiné Greek is taken as a "prototype" and Latin as the first standardized language (p. 50). See also chapter 14.2 and n. 48.

52. Though in fact the disagreement is trivial. Emeneau's view from outside, if somewhat overstated, remains largely correct: "We find in [Sanskrit] no dialects, no chronological development, except loss and at times invasion from the vernaculars of the users, and no geographical divergences" (1966: 123).

to by everything from the repeated injunctions in scriptural texts themselves "to use correct language [i.e., Sanskrit] and not incorrect language [i.e., dialectal forms]" to the view of the ninth-century commentator cited earlier, that "whereas the Prakrits are multiform, Sanskrit is uniform."[53] Indeed, by the period under discussion in this book—and precisely in this period and through the processes with which it confronts us—even the earlier categories for constituting different kinds of Sanskrit, such as Pāṇini's distinctions between *chandaḥ* and *bhāṣā* (the language of the Veda and that of learned discourse) or *udīcya* and *prācya* (morphological differences marked as northern and eastern) had been almost completely abandoned.[54]

There seems, accordingly, to be little to recommend any of the available explanations for "the great linguistic paradox of India." There is no reason to believe that the various sorts of Prakrit hybrids that we find in epigraphy are evidence of an "intermediate stage in the popularity of Sanskrit and the decline of Prakrit," as if a half-realized Sanskrit were somehow a half-popular Sanskrit; or that the Prakrit that some call epigraphical hybrid Sanskrit, which makes its appearance around the middle of the first century C.E. in Mathurā (where Buddhist migration is supposed to have been a condition for a Buddhist appropriation of Sanskrit), marks the failure of an attempt to achieve Sanskrit; or that the Sātavāhana court used Prakrit in sheer ignorance of Sanskrit.[55] As we have seen, epigraphs from other parts of India might be composed wholly in Prakrit while ending with a benediction or citation from a *dharma* text in normative Sanskrit. When standard Sanskrit was desired, standard Sanskrit was written, and for the public, political document, Sanskrit was evidently not desired. The Prakrit inscriptions, and perhaps even early Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts, might be taken as evincing a reluctance or refusal to write Sanskrit far more readily than an inability to do so.

If to speak of "proper Sanskrit" and "the choice of Prakrit," therefore, does not invoke categories that were anachronistic or unintelligible to premodern Indian conceptions, and does not presuppose language practices that no one practiced, and if religious affiliation was not the decisive factor in choosing Prakrit over Sanskrit, then clearly some other set of cultural factors must have conditioned the choice of language for public inscription in the first four or five centuries of South Asian literacy. It seems most reason-

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53. Injunctions such as *nāsādhu vadet* ("One should not speak ungrammatically") and *sādhu-bhir bhāṣeta* ("One should use grammatical speech") are discussed repeatedly in Mīmāṃsā, especially on *PMS* 1.3.5 ff. *(śiṣṭākopādhikaraṇa)* and 1.3.10 ff. *(pikanemādhikaraṇa)*.

54. For the second, see for example Agrawal 1963: 39. The question of regional variation in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* has attracted surprisingly little notice; see also chapter 5.3 and n. 35.

55. On the "intermediate stage" theory see Sircar, 1965–83, vol. 1: 430 n. 2; for "epigraphical hybrid Sanskrit" (though there is nothing especially inscriptional about the dialect) see Damsteegt 1978. For the Sātavāhanas see Mirashi 1981: 177 ("Their knowledge of Sanskrit must have been very meager," etc.).

able to assume that these factors pertained above all to the social value of Sanskrit and the reluctance—taboo may not be too strong a word—to employ it for the new public documentary mode. Very likely, this reluctance would have been most powerfully stimulated, and thence generalized as a value of high culture, precisely in contexts where both the agent and the act were fully embedded in the *vaidika* world (like Sivakhaṃdavamo, an *aggiṭṭhoma-yājī,* awarding a *dakṣiṇā* or granting a *brahmadeya*). The reality and salience of such reluctance seem to be corroborated by everything we know or can infer about the nature of Sanskrit culture for the entire first millennium B.C.E.: the prevalence of its liturgical dimension, the forms of knowledge necessary for liturgy, and the restriction of its use to those alone who participated in this form of life.

Such was the steady state of literary-cultural convention that was exploded in the early centuries of the first millennium. It was then that ruling elites made the first experiments in the inscription of text in standard Sanskrit that would become dominant convention in the public expression of royal power across a large part of southern Asia for centuries to come. The beginnings of the formation of this new Sanskrit order are to be located in the cultural-political events of this epoch in the same way that its eventual breakup is to be located in the cultural-political events that occurred during the first half of the second millennium. The radical reinvention of Sanskrit culture seems to have occurred—at least, it is here that we can actually watch it occurring—precisely where one might expect it, in a social world where the presuppositions and conventions of *vaidika* culture were weakest: among newly immigrant peoples from the far northwest of the subcontinent (and ultimately from Iran and Central Asia), most importantly the Śakas (the so-called Indo-Scythians), especially a branch of the Śakas known as the Western Kṣatrapas, and the Kuṣaṇas.[56]

Large-scale generalizations about these peoples are exceedingly difficult. The same ethnonym, "Śaka," was borne by various groups who may have differed considerably in their lifeways. The major transformation with which we are concerned here was inaugurated by the Śakas of what is now Gujarat; to what degree others shared their cultural aspirations remains unclear. It was signaled by a celebrated inscription composed by a Western Kṣatrapa overlord named Rudradāman around 150 C.E. (year 72 of the Śaka era). Prior to this point, Śaka inscriptions (as well as coins) had by and large conformed to the cultural model in place everywhere else. Rudradāman made a departure from this model, and a radical one. The size and place of his document befit its historical importance: It is engraved in massive dimensions (the whole measures eleven by five feet) on a huge rounded granite boulder at

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56. For a brief summary of recent scholarship on these peoples see Wink 1997: 52–59.

Junāgaṛh on the Kāṭhiāwāḍ peninsula, a site long marked by cultural distinction (eventually it would become part of a major pilgrimage circuit of the Śvetāmbara Jains). Juxtaposed to Rudradāman's inscription are fourteen earlier Ashokan Prakrit edicts; Rudradāman actually mentions the events of four centuries earlier that occasioned these records: the building activities of "the Maurya king, Candragupta," and of "Aśoka Maurya" and his subordinate, "the Yavana king Tuṣāsphena" (line 8). A Sanskrit inscription by the Gupta king Skandagupta would be added three hundred years later (457 C.E.). The Junāgaṛh rock thus carries, inscribed on its surface, seven centuries of Indian cultural-political history, thereby both demonstrating the capacity of certain objects, natural or man-made, to embody and preserve political charisma, and instantiating one form of the historical imitation and emulation that would prove central to the imperial mode across time and space (see chapters 6, 7). But it is first and foremost the content of Rudradāman's inscription that arrests attention: It is a Sanskrit *praśasti,* approximating *gadyakāvya,* or art-prose, whereby the king, on the occasion of repairing a great public waterworks, the reservoir called Sudarśana (Lake Beautiful) that had been damaged in a storm, celebrates his own political and cultural achievements. And it is like nothing the Sanskrit world had seen before:

> The water, churned by a storm wind with an awesome force like the wind at the end of time, leveled the hills, uprooted trees, and tore down embankments, turrets, towers, shelters—scattered and broke to pieces < . . . > and the stones and trees and shrubs and vines lay strewn about everywhere . . . He who from the womb possessed the splendor of consummate royalty, whom all castes resorted to and chose as their lord, who has made a vow—a vow he kept—to take no life except in battle < . . . > but never hesitates to strike an equal foe who faces him in combat; who rules as lord of eastern and western Ākarāvantī, Anūpa country, Ānarta, Surāṣṭra, Śvabhara, Maru, Kaccha, Sindhusauvīra, Kukura, Aparānta, Niṣāda, and other areas gained by his valor, and everywhere—town, market, countryside—is untouched by trouble from robbers, snakes, wild beasts, or disease. . . ; who [composes] prose and verse, clear and pleasant, sweet and charming, adorned with figures of speech and stamped by proper use of language; whose body is beautiful and marked with most excellent marks and signs . . . He, Mahākṣatrapa Rudradāman . . . by a vast sum of money from his own treasury and in a timely manner, strengthened the dam and lengthened it, three times greater than before < . . . > and far more beautiful now has Lake Beautiful become.[57]

The text of this inscription has been known for more than a century and a half; James Prinsep, the British colonial administrator and decipherer of the Ashokan inscriptions, first published it in 1838. What is not always appre-

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57. Sircar 1965–83, vol. 1: 176 ff. lines 6–16. Angle brackets indicate lacunae in the inscription.

ciated adequately, however, is its historical distinctiveness. The hundred and fifty years since Prinsep's work have witnessed an intensive hunt for inscriptions throughout South Asia, resulting in forty-four volumes of *Epigraphia Indica,* ten books of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* and countless reports of as yet unpublished inscriptional finds from archaeological investigations around the subcontinent—by some estimates amounting to as many as one hundred thousand records. Yet nothing whatever has been discovered to unsettle the certainty that Rudradāman's text marks a true break in cultural history. For the first time, self-consciously expressive Sanskrit, with all the enormous authority, power, and cultural value garnered by the very fact of its centuries-long monopolization and ritualization, was used in a public space, in bold letters for all to see, for the self-presentation of a living overlord.

To what degree Rudradāman's inscription was part of a larger cultural-political initiative of the Śakas is impossible to determine with any precision. Only the merest scraps of their writing have been preserved; all told, we have no more than several dozen records or portions of records, none anywhere close to Junāgaṛh in size, and only a handful that point to the Sanskrit turn so magnificently on display here. But if we have only remnants of that culture, they are nonetheless suggestive remnants. Consider the fact that the next oldest inscription (279 C.E.) after Rudradāman, composed according to the formal conventions of what, precisely during this period, was coming to be called *kāvya,* is found at the close of a record of one Śrīdharavarman, who describes himself as a Śaka appointed as principal governor *(mahādaṇḍanāyaka).* But the predilection of the Śakas for the use of Sanskrit seems to be evident from even earlier documents, which show "learned or pretentious borrowings" from Sanskrit, and a Middle Indic markedly "infiltrated" by the language. And the new ruling lineages to the east, the Kuṣāṇas, seem to some extent to have shared the Śaka view of cultural politics.[58]

There is no little significance in the fact that while the Śakas helped transform the world of Sanskrit culture, they stood at a considerable remove from the old *vaidika* order. Whereas Rudradāman celebrates his own proficiency in various forms of Sanskrit knowledge *(vidyā),* including grammar, the Western Kṣatrapas themselves were scarcely "Brahmanized," as one scholar puts it. They did not adopt a *vaidika* lineage title (a *gotra* affiliation) until a century after Rudradāman. There is no indication of their offering special pa-

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58. The earliest securely datable evidence for the complex metrical structures that mark *kāvya* as a literary form apart from all others is a step-well inscription from the time of Śoḍāsa, son of Rājūvula, the Śaka lord ruling in Mathurā c. 50 B.C.E., part of which is in the *bhujaṅgaviṛmbhita* meter (*EI* 24: 195 ff.; this is the dedication of a *vaidika* structure and not composed by a Śaka, but it is within their cultural ambit and so conforms to their norms). Not all Kṣatrapa inscriptions following Rudradāman are in Sanskrit, as Lévi believed (1904: 169), see *EI* 37: 142 ff. For the Śakas' "learned borrowings" see Fussman 1980a: 9; for Śrīdharavarman's inscription, which ends with a *śārdūlavikrīḍita* verse, *EI* 16: 230 ff.

tronage to Brahmans; instead, their administration largely relied on non-Brahmans: Pahlavas (Parthians), Ābhīras, and others outside the *vaidika* world.[59] The Junāgaṛh inscription itself demonstrates this at its close in a passage that also hints at a developing cosmopolitan culture in which the old right *(adhikāra)* to participate in moral and political action *(dharma* and *artha)* was scandalously being expanded beyond its archaic restrictedness to the twice-born: the minister of the Mahākṣatrapa, "the Pahlava Suviśākha, son of Kulaipa," is praised as having "duly enhanced loyalty *(anurāga)* by his political and moral action and views *(arthadharmavyavahāradarśanaiḥ),* and increased the moral quality, fame, and glory of his master."

Though the data are scant in the extreme, making any grand generalization hazardous, such a milieu does seem a likely place where the desacralization of Sanskrit would first be attempted.[60] Although the Śakas' contemporaries to the east, the Kuṣāṇas, may not have incorporated the Sanskrit idiom in their political discourse, various large and small bits of circumstantial evidence indicate their predilection for the same cultural-political practices as the Śakas. For example, credible tradition places the Sanskrit poet Aśvaghoṣa, the earliest known author and perhaps even inventor of both the courtly epic *(mahākāvya)* and dramatic genres, at the court of the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka. And in Kuṣāṇa inscriptions, even Middle-Indic inscriptions, a Sanskritized form of the king's name and title (e.g., *mahārājasya kāṇiṣkasya)* is typically used.[61]

Viewed through the lens of the traditionalism reigning in the cultural-political sphere of the Sātavāhanas, the Śakas' principal competitors to the south, the appropriation of Sanskrit language and culture must have seemed like a sign of the world turned upside down. Such at least is strongly suggested by the Sātavāhana text mentioned earlier, the *Yugapurāṇa.* The only South Asian work to refer in any detail to the coming of the Śakas (and also one of the earliest accounts of the *yuga* theory), the *Yugapurāṇa* is likely to have been composed in Ujjayinī—that is, within the cultural sphere of the Sātavāhanas—and possibly not long after the arrival of the Śakas in the middle of the first century B.C.E.[62] The part of the text especially relevant here is couched as a historical prediction (a convention of the genre *purāṇa,* or "ancient lore," whereby knowledge of the present and immediate past can only be presented as foreknowledge and not as remembrance). This pre-

59. Pingree 1978: 4.

60. Yet note that for Patañjali, Śakas and Yavanas were non-outsiders *(aniravasita),* even though they lived outside Āryāvārta (*Mahābhāṣya* on 2.4.10; a reference that may suggest a later date for Patañjali than typically assumed, see chapter 2.1).

61. Fussman 1988: 19 contrasts the Middle-Indic form of the name of a noncourtly monk, *bhikhasa sihaksa.*

62. Mitchiner 1986: 81–82.

diction, spoken by God, describes the Kali Age commencing after the *Mahābhārata* war (v. 37), and the coming of the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks) and the Śakas (vv. 42 ff.). The conflicts predicted upon their arrival, coupled with or perhaps triggering a vast catastrophe, would bring about *yugānta,* the end of the cosmic epoch, and an apocalypse eventually ushering in a golden age. The text foretells, however, that before then the entire structure of the *vaidika* social order will be disrupted:

> All four social orders will adopt the same dress and the same ways . . . Outcastes, quick to invert the proper disposition of things, will perform sacrifice to the triple fire with *mantra*s embellished by the sacred Sanskrit syllable *oṃ* when the end of the age is near. Shudras will observe the vows of the fire sacrifice and recitation of *mantra*s, when the end of the Kali Age is near. Shudras will call Brahmans "fellow," and Brahmans will call Shudras "Ārya" . . . The *mleccha* king Āmrāṭa, red-eyed and dressed in red . . . will destroy the four social orders, recognizing all those that had previously gone unrecognized . . . The Śaka will destroy the good conduct of his subjects and their devotion to their proper tasks.[63]

These political evils would be followed by cosmic destruction, but "those who still remain, and who hold the moral law dear and cleave to *dharma,* however diminished they are by thirst and hunger" will survive the apocalypse if they betake themselves to one of the twelve political regions *(maṇḍala)* that will have been created out of solicitude for them.[64] These regions comprise an area that corresponds reasonably closely to what we know as the Sātavāhana political order at its largest extent.[65] It is here that people will preserve *dharma: vaidika* liturgy and the rules of comportment, especially the right of participation *(adhikāra)* reserved for certain social orders and the access to and command of Sanskrit that this right entailed. Here Sanskrit will not be "turned upside down" *(-vikriya)* but will be used the way the *Yugapurāṇa* itself uses Sanskrit: in the service of Vedic-puranic *(ārṣa)* status and authority, the one function for which it was used by the Sātavāhanas, within whose cultural sphere the *Yugapurāṇa* was composed.

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63. Vv. 50, 53–55, 69 (the correct reading here may be *kṛtvāpūrvavyavasthitān,* "disrupting in an unprecedented way all the old established orders"), 88. "Quick to invert . . . " *laghuvikriyāḥ* (uncertain). The term *mleccha* (generally translated as "uncultured" in this book) refers to those outside *vaidika* society. Some of the *Yugapurāṇa* here corresponds with what is probably the oldest of the "prophecies of the past" in the *purāṇa* tradition, *Harivaṃśa* book 3 (e.g., 116.13 ff., "All will recite the Veda *(brahma),* all will be Vājasaneyins, Shudras will use the word *bhoh*). But there the threat is not the Śaka but the Śākya, the Buddha (v. 15: "Shudras will perform *dharma* in dependence on the Śākya Buddha"), and the geographical orientation is, predictably, northern and eastern (vv. 28–29, Kauśikī River in Bihar, Aṅga, etc., Kashmir).

64. Vv. 98–99.

65. The domain between the Vindhya Mountains and the Kṛṣṇā River (today's Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh), the Eastern Ghats of Orissa, and the Kāverī River system. See Mitchiner 1986: 75–79.

The remarkable incongruity in general language practices—the Brahmanical Sātavāhanas generally using Prakrit, except where a Vedic aura was sought, as in the *Yugapurāṇa,* and the outsider Śakas, their competitors for power, using Sanskrit—seems from this perspective rather less enigmatic than scholars have typically taken it to be.[66] The former attempted to preserve Sanskrit in its ancient and pristine sacral isolation and to use Prakrit for political and other *laukika* communication (a habit continued by all their successors to as late as the fourth century, see chapter 3.1), and they produced an end-of-time narrative spelling out the consequences of doing otherwise. The latter sought to turn Sanskrit into an instrument of cultural-political power of a new sort that did in fact mark the end of an era. If not the only answer to the great language paradox of early India, these data certainly offer a cogent one.

The Śakas' appropriation of Sanskrit for public political purposes at the beginning of the Common Era is an event symptomatic or causative of a radical transformation in the historical sociology of Sanskrit. It is comparable in character and very possibly related to the Buddhist appropriation of Sanskrit after half a millennium of rejection. Exactly what role in this whole process is to be assigned to the newly settled immigrants from outside the subcontinent has long been a subject of debate. Earlier scholars may have been right to argue that the new overlords only consecrated the vogue of literary Sanskrit and did not create it, though the evidence to prove this conclusively does not exist. A caution has been raised against adopting any mechanistic model and in favor of viewing the factor of political change as mere concomitance (and, we are rightly warned, "concomitance is not causality"), yet the synchrony of the two events is striking, and it may ultimately prove correct to locate in the Śaka practices a truly "innovating force."[67] What is historically important is not so much that new power-seekers in the subcontinent began to participate in the prestige economy of Sanskrit—other groups had sought and found inclusion even in *vaidika* communities—but rather that Śakas, Kuṣāṇas, and the poets and intellectuals they patronized, often Buddhist poets and intellectuals, began to expand that economy by

66. Mirashi expressed astonishment at the "contrast in the attitudes of the indigenous Hindus and the foreign Śakas," given that "followers of the Vedic religion" produced their records in Prakrit and the Śakas theirs in Sanskrit (and "fairly correct Sanskrit" at that) (1981: 66).

67. See, respectively, Renou and Filliozat 1947 vol. 1: 244 (also Renou 1956: 98–99), Fussman 1980b: 425, and Damsteegt 1989: 306. Damsteegt's argument is not carried further. Here, as in his 1978 work, some confusion remains. In Mathurā, as elsewhere, "the inscriptions of the pre-Kṣatrapa age," which includes "Hindu," that is, "Brahmanic," inscriptions, are all rightly said to be composed in Middle Indic, and the use of Sanskrit appears only after the arrival of the Kṣatrapas. But then the Sanskrit turn is illogically ascribed "not to the fact that [some Sanskrit] records are connected with the court, but to the fact that they are under the influence of Brahmanic culture" (p. 302).

turning Sanskrit into an instrument of polity and the mastery of Sanskrit into a source of personal charisma. If this kind of Sanskrit has a prehistory, no one has found it.

There seems to be something new here, therefore, and we must try to understand what it is. When we are asked to consider the extraordinary prestige that "the Indian civilization of the Madhyadeśa could have held for the tribal chiefs of Swāt," we might be inclined to assume that these tribal chiefs just picked up Indian civilization as if it were set out in a display case, already fully formed.[68] But the epigraphic record suggests something quite different: that these chiefs helped to create a central component of this civilization by employing Sanskrit in hitherto unprecedented ways. It is true that there are associations of great antiquity between kingly power and Sanskrit. But the greater part of the texts, from among the Vedic *saṃhita*s and *brāhmaṇa*s, that establish these associations had for centuries been embedded in an entirely ritual context and accordingly could not be dissociated from it, whereas the "epic" materials, to the degree that they were not in fact one element of this historical transformation (chapter 2.1), were imaginative accounts. What Rudradāman appears to have inaugurated is something entirely different: Here is political poetry in a language that had never been used for such a purpose before—for the publicly inscribed celebration of a living ruler. Moreover, from that point onward for a thousand years and more, political poetry would be made only in that language. Perhaps it was as much for the Śakas' cultural innovations as for their political dominion that a new era came to be named after them, the Śaka era, beginning in 78 C.E. (the date of the putative capture of Ujjayinī); this era was later to be adopted widely across southern Asia (chapter 3.1).

It may ultimately be impossible to decide whether long-standing discursive restrictions rather than religious preferences explain the absence of Sanskrit from early Indian epigraphy, or whether recently arrived ruler lineages were the first to break with *vaidika* convention and desacralize Sanskrit in the interests of a new cultural politics. But without question a true historical caesura confronts us here. The arresting fact bears repeating, however familiar it may be to scholars: It is only in the second century, and with real prominence only in the third and fourth centuries—some three to four hundred years after public writing is found in the subcontinent—that texts expressing royal power in literary Sanskrit made their appearance, along with a new politics of culture and culture of politics connected with this language choice and discursive move. Prior to this period, not a single example is to be found anywhere in South Asia from Peshawar to Tamilnadu, though we have so much Sanskrit otherwise and, relatively speaking, so many inscriptions. The moment

68. Fussman 1980a: 9.

of rupture, in other words, is no mere illusion, no simple artifact of the hazards of preservation. And it marks not the *terminus ante quem* for the existence of a worldly Sanskrit stretching back into the mists of time yet unaccountably vanished without trace, but the *terminus post quem,* a real inauguration.

The standard account of Sanskrit cultural-political history purports to explain these developments by postulating a "resurgence of Brahmanism" leading to a "reassertion" or "revival" of Sanskrit as the language of literature and administration after the Maurya period.[69] The more plausible interpretation is that a new cultural-political formation, a Sanskrit cosmopolitan formation, was on the point of being invented. The textbook narrative posits the resurgence of a community we have no reason to believe was in need of resurgence; it assumes a reassertion at the expense of Buddhism, which in fact hardly suffered a subsequent decline (quite the contrary, it expanded markedly); it asks us to believe in the revival of cultural forms that cannot be shown to have preexisted in the first place. Sanskrit of the kind under discussion had not died; rather, it had not yet been born, at least not for the uses to which it was about to be put—*laukika,* or this-worldly, uses, such as political discourse, beyond the domain of the liturgy and its sacral auxiliaries.[70]

Many uncertainties continue to obscure our insight into the origins of the Sanskrit cultural-political formation, the agents involved, and their social goals. But at least the fact that this formation *did* begin should now be beyond dispute. The development of the second of its components, the public expression of political will, which has claimed our attention so far, is the focus of chapter 3. There we will see how the Sanskrit idiom of power came to be consolidated, with Prakrit forever banished from the domain of the political, everywhere and almost simultaneously, in the rush toward worldly Sanskrit. What had now begun was not only *praśasti* but also the genus of which that discourse is a species. In other words, what began when Sanskrit escaped the domain of the sacred was literature.

69. See respectively Norman 1988: 17–18 (the claim that "the Prakrits remained in use only as the languages of the early texts of non-brahmanical religions" is likewise in need of correction), Kulke and Rothermund 1986: 85, and Falk 1988: 117. A Sanskrit renaissance was first described by F. Max Müller: The political-historical break effected by the Śaka "interregnum" was accompanied by a "blank" in Brahmanical literary culture already weakened by Maurya hostility. The reborn literature was "artificial" in contrast to the "natural" literature of the Vedic age (Müller 1882: xviii ff.. 84 ff.).

70. Or coinage. Whereas coins of the second and first centuries B.C.E. found across the north are all in Prakrit, there is a clear move to Sanskrit for the first time in the Śaka period. The Śakas themselves eschewed the use of Sanskrit on their coinage—legends in pure Sanskrit are few, and the kings who issued such coins also issued coins in Prakrit (on the dialect see Bloch 1911: 16). But this changed quickly: within two centuries, the commercialization of Sanskrit among the Guptas was complete. See Diskalkar 1957: 186; Jha and Rajgor 1992: 48.