

Geschichte der Germanistik

*Historische Zeitschrift
für die Philologien*

Herausgegeben von
Christoph König und
Anna Kinder
in Verbindung mit
Michel Espagne,
Ralf Klausnitzer,
Denis Thouard und
Ulrich Wyss

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Editorial

Marcel Lepper, seit 2005 Mitherausgeber dieser Zeitschrift, wurde zum Leiter des Literaturarchivs der Akademie der Künste in Berlin ernannt. Er vertrat die Deutsche Schillergesellschaft in der Herausgeberschaft der ›Geschichte der Germanistik‹ und muss uns daher verlassen. Von nun einem anderen Ort aus bleibt er uns freudig verbunden, seinen Bericht über die wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Bestände im Akademiearchiv veröffentlichen wir in diesem Doppelheft.

Gern ergreife ich die Gelegenheit innezuhalten und Marcel Leppers Wirken zu würdigen, indem ich den Weg charakterisiere, auf dem die Zeitschrift sich befindet. Mehr als zwei Jahrzehnte (seit 1991) war sie vor allem das Medium germanistischer Wissenschaftsgeschichtsforschung, die als Avantgarde die Wissenschaftsgeschichte benachbarter Philologien nach sich zog. Aus der Beobachtung der anderen wurde allmählich eine Komparatistik. Die Richtung veränderte sich entschieden mit der ›Osnabrücker Erklärung zum Potential Europäischer Philologien‹ (2007) und der Konferenz zur ›World Philology‹ 2008 an der Academia Sinica in Taipeh. In der ›Osnabrücker Erklärung‹ wurde gegen das nationalphilologische Programm in den Philologien der Begriff der Schwierigkeit gehalten – nun galt als eminente Aufgabe der Disziplinen, die Texten Sinn zuschreiben, die Texte jeweils in ihrer Schwierigkeit zu verstehen. Der Begriff der ›Weltphilologie‹ wiederum legte nahe, philologische Praktiken samt ihren Reflexionen weltweit zu vergleichen, gemäß der Idee, es gäbe in dieser Praxis Universalien.

Wir richteten ein neues Editorial Board ein, mit Vertretern – exemplarisch und auf Ergänzung angelegt – der Arabistik, der Germanistik, der Klassischen Philologie, der Sanskritforschung und der Sinologie; und wir gaben der Zeitschrift einen neuen Untertitel: ›Historische Zeitschrift für die Philologien‹. Die Beiträge können nun in drei Sprachen gedruckt werden: Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch, und die jedem Heft beigegebene Fachbibliographie sucht in dem weiten Feld philologiehistorischer Publikationen weltweit die Grenzen der Erkundung hinauszuschieben. Je weiter der Skopus wird, umso persönlicher ist die Zeitschrift. Sie ist nicht das Organ einer universitären Disziplin, sondern gestaltet – imaginär vorerst – eine Disziplin, die es geben sollte. Uns allen: den Herausgebern und ihren Gesprächen untereinander, den Mitgliedern des Editorial Boards, den Wissenschaftshistorikern, die mit uns zusammenarbeiten, und unseren Lesern (bei einer Auflage von 800 Exemplaren) kommt daher, für jedes Heft von neuem, eine große Bedeutung zu. Das Wort Ludwig von Fickers, mit dem wir das erste Heft einleiteten, gilt in jeweils aktualisierter Form: Die Zeitschrift erscheint »nach Maßgabe des inneren Fälligwerdens«.

Wir danken Marcel Lepper dafür, einen schönen Teil des Wegs mitgegangen zu sein, und begrüßen als seine Nachfolgerin Anna Kinder in unserem Kreis.

(Ch. K.)

Aufsätze

Sheldon Pollock

What Should a Classical Library of India Be?

Unlike the three other dual-language series described in this volume,¹ the Murty Classical Library of India (MCLI) has constantly been challenged, both internally and externally, to define and defend the terms of its title and hence the nature of its project. Whereas no one is troubled by the claim to the »classical« in the Loeb Classical Library, or worried about the periodization of »medieval« in the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, or confused by the meaning of »renaissance« in the I Tatti Renaissance Library, in MCLI, »classical«, »India«, and even »library« are all open to contestation. And whereas no one seems to be troubled by the fact that non-Greeks and non-Latins, non-Anglo-Saxons, and non-Italians are editing these other series, the fact that most of MCLI's editors and authors are non-Indians has been, to some, a source of concern. I will address and try to clarify each of these categories in what follows, as well as the issue – new and disturbing and needing attention – of who may edit, translate, publish, or even read South Asian literature. By way of prelude I offer a brief account of the origins of MCLI.

1. The Founding of the Murty Classical Library of India

The study of Sanskrit was often viewed – or at least it was viewed in the past, and at least at Harvard University, where I was trained – as linked with the study of Greek and Latin. Sanskrit in fact was once quasi-compulsory for undergraduate classicists, as a »course relating« to the major. The reasoning behind this old linkage may have been vitiated by racialism (a spurious Aryanism conjured out of almost thin air) common to nineteenth-century philology, and founded on fantasies of India as the cradle of Europe, but it reflected the importance of thinking comparatively about the shared features of ancient languages and literatures and about complex societies with long traditions of learning. A student of Classics and Sanskrit in the late 1960s, like me, who would have known about the Loeb Classical Library as a matter of course, would readily have dreamed of someday seeing a Sanskrit version of those green and red volumes.

The same dream presented itself to John Clay in the late 1950s, when he was a student of Sanskrit, Old Iranian, and Classics at Oxford. He left academia to make

1 The Loeb Classical Library, The Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, The I Tatti Renaissance Library. The volume »The Loeb Classical Library and its Progeny« will be edited by Richard F. Thomas and Jeffrey Henderson, and published in: The Loeb Classical Monographs series, Harvard University Press, probably in 2019.

his fortune, but late in life he decided to turn his youthful ambition into a reality, with the creation of the Clay Sanskrit Library. CSL, of which I was associate editor and then general editor, published fifty-six volumes between 2005 and 2009, when it was abruptly closed.

Mr. Clay's philanthropy was unparalleled and his initiative, if short-lived, visionary. CSL was, as the ›Bhagavadgītā‹ might put it, a *sāttvika dāna*, a gift of pure benevolence for which no return, whether financial or egotistical, was expected; nothing beyond the growth of knowledge and the joy of seeing the slow expansion of a row of handsome little volumes that could fit, in James Loeb's much-cited phrase that John Clay often quoted, into a »gentleman's pocket«.

There were three features of CSL, however, that concerned me from the start (I leave aside the fact that the »gentleman's pocket« trim size turned out to be altogether inappropriate for Indic texts). One was the exclusive focus on Sanskrit works, which raises several subordinate problems of its own. For one thing, Sanskrit never existed in a realm of pure isolation – »language of the gods« though it was held to be – hermetically sealed off from other languages and their literatures; on the contrary, it lived always and everywhere in the vast sea of local languages. Indeed, it is entirely clear from the historical record that no one ever played in the streets in Sanskrit, dreamed in Sanskrit, made love in Sanskrit – playing, dreaming, and loving of course being rather significant components of literary creativity. For another, Sanskrit was often in competition with other literary traditions for cultural ascendancy: a competition that started with regional languages from the middle of the first millennium on (beginning with those of the south of India – Tamil, Kannada, Telugu – but eventually in the north too), until by the middle of the second millennium Sanskrit was displaced from primacy, in many places, by Persian, a cosmopolitan language found also in West and Central Asia, or by Classical Hindi, a vernacular that had recently found itself transformed into transregional courtly language.

A second troubling feature of CSL was the decision to print the original Sanskrit text in Roman transliteration, in fact, in an especially odd system of transliteration invented *ad hoc* and baffling at times even to the editors. Last, CSL had no commitment to making its books available in South Asia itself, as if the people of India or the other countries in the region had no interest in their ancient classics. In the last year of the series' existence detailed plans were drawn up to correct at least the last two problems, by designing an edition with the Sanskrit text printed in the Devanagari script, to be published in India at a price students would be able to afford and accompanied by a preface from a South Asian writer or scholar of note that would, it was hoped, testify to the continuing allure of the past for the present.² With the closing of the series those plans were aborted just at the point when they were about to bear fruit.

2 Some prefaces were published in the US edition: Mani Shankar Aiyar (›Three Satires‹), U. R. Ananthamurthy (›Kumārasambhava‹), Partha Chatterjee (›Mṛcchakaṭikā‹), Gurcharan Das (›Mahābhārata‹ Book 5), Anita Desai (›Ratnāvalī‹, etc.), Ranajit Guha (›Bhagavadgītā‹), Girish Karnad (›Uttararāmacarita‹), Sudipta Kaviraj (›Gītāgovinda‹), J. N. Mohanty (›Prabodhacandrodaya‹), Kiran Nagarkar (›Daśa-

The excitement around CSL from its launch in the spring of 2004 until the time it closed in July, 2009 – along of course with the universal admiration for and gratitude to John Clay for his vision and generosity – was palpable to me and everyone else involved in the project. So was the consternation with which its termination was met, both from the public and of course from the translators whose contracted work was in progress but whose books were now never going to see the light of day, even if this meant that ongoing multivolume sets were to be broken (which occurred in the case of the ›Mahābhārata‹ and ›Rāmāyaṇa‹, for example, or smaller works like the ›Kathāsaritsāgara‹ and the ›Kādambarī‹).

With all these considerations in mind – the desirability of a big-tent approach to South Asian classical literature; the advisability of using indigenous script forms; the importance of providing attractively priced editions for readers in the subcontinent, especially young people who not only would thereby have more reliable access to their past but also examples of good scholarship to help them actually learn; and finding a way to ensure that justice would be done on behalf of the CSL translators who had been cut adrift – I sought funding in India for a new library. For it was clear, given the financial straits in which American university presses operate (and only a university press could offer the kind of professional and scholarly direction such an enterprise would require), that a major endowment would be needed, precisely of the sort that had created and ensured the continued success of the Loeb Classical Library itself. My efforts in India, which included approaching a half-dozen major industrialists, came to nothing. There was no Indian James Loeb to be found.

In early 2009 I presented the idea of what I was then calling the ›Classical Library of India‹ to Dr. Sharmila Sen of Harvard University Press, senior editor in the humanities and also responsible for the three other HUP dual-language series. She expressed interest, and together we began working out a detailed prospectus. One new strategy was to seek the help of foundations, both in the U. S. and in India. Our proposal was under serious consideration that summer, when the writer Gurcharan Das (who had also been helping establish contact with Indian donors) put me in touch with Rohan Murty, a young Indian scholar completing his doctoral degree in computer science at Harvard while also taking courses in classical Indian studies with professor Parimal Patil. Dr. Murty was intrigued by the idea of a dual-language library that I laid out and impressed by the financial plan and description of the role of HUP presented by Dr. Sen. In consultation with his family, he approved a proposal for an endowment in November, 2009. After a massive effort of translators, editors, book-designers, typographers, and HUP's editorial and production staff, the first five books were published in December, 2014. As of today, the Library comprises twenty-three volumes in thirteen languages and ten scripts. Thirty-eight more are in the pipeline, which bring the number of languages to fifteen and of scripts to twelve. New proposals are reviewed on a regular basis.

kumāracarita›), Gieve Patel (›Ātmārpanastuti‹, etc.) and Amartya Sen (›Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa‹). Others, like that of Romila Thapar (›Mudrārākṣasa‹), unfortunately had to be cancelled.

2. Elementary Aspects of a Classical Library of India

Prior to the Clay Sanskrit Library and despite the long history of dual-language editions of the classics in Europe (and even older polyglot versions of the bible), there had been no bilingual books in South Asian literature and thought in any languages, let alone a uniform series (bi-*scriptal* books, in Devanagari and Nastaliq, are found in early-modern north India). Other types of collections were long available: of text editions alone, starting with the Bibliotheca Indica (Calcutta, 1848, edited initially by Edward Röer; BI included Indo-Persian, Arabic, and vernacular works as well as Sanskrit);³ of texts and translations (in separate volumes), an early example being the Harvard Oriental Series (Cambridge, Mass., 1891, edited initially by Charles Lanman; HOS comprised mostly Sanskrit, but also a few Pali and Prakrit works); of translations alone, one of the oldest and certainly the best known being the ›Sacred Books of the East‹ (Oxford, 1879, edited by F. Max Müller; SBE included West Asian and East Asian as well as South Asian works).

Given the peculiar profile of the Clay series, a host of the conventions that were to govern MCLI had basically to be developed from scratch. Consider the question of scripts and typefaces. We had first to decide which script to use for which language, for unlike Greek or Latin or Arabic or Chinese, where scripts were in principle un-substitutable, any Indian language could be written in several different ones. In the case of Sanskrit, historical circumstances had made Devanagari the default choice by the middle of the second millennium, so there the script question was solved. But for Pali, the language of southern Buddhism, things were not so easy. Pali has been written (and printed) in Sinhala, Thai, and Burmese scripts (surprisingly, no Pali manuscripts from mainland India are extant), but none of these had ever emerged as the transregional dominant. For the past 150 years Western scholarship has used Roman to print Pali, and MCLI chose, *faute de mieux*, to continue that tradition. Panjabi presented a more painful choice. A poet like the great eighteenth-century Sufi Bulleh Shah (the edition and translation of which by Christopher Shackle constitutes volume 1 of MCLI) had long been read in two scripts, a Brahmi-derived script often called Gurmukhi, and a version of Perso-Arabic script. The partition of India in 1947 left the Punjab divided into two religious groupings of unequal population: the larger comprised of Muslims in Pakistan, who these days can rarely read the former script (and who in any case confront a state policy prioritizing Urdu); the smaller comprised of Hindus in India, who rarely can read the latter (and whose literary heritage has been largely appropriated by the Sikhs). In this complex context, the translator chose to have the text printed in Gurmukhi but with the assurance that MCLI would one day develop an electronic book version allowing readers to toggle between scripts. This would not only provide access to all readers and enhance the pedagogical value of the series, but by the use of a simple radio-button solve a long-

3 This remarkable initiative deserves far more historical study than what is available (a few pages in Moni Bagchee, *The Asiatic Society. A Brief History*, New Delhi 1984, pp. 29-33).

term »communal« struggle over script-based cultural authority. The development of such an e-book remains a key MCLI objective.

Since we were designing our typefaces from scratch, we had to carefully balance the idea and character of a classical type (some features of which, for Panjabi, say, or Sindhi or Telugu, have been taken from manuscripts) against the fonts used in contemporary South Asia publishing, lest we found ourselves achieving historical authenticity at the expense of contemporary legibility. We also needed to ensure that the Indic language on the left page agreed in weight and »temperature« with the Roman typeface (Antwerp) on the right side. To maintain a certain uniformity across the books, the typeface for each of them had all to be designed afresh (and at considerable expense).⁴

In South Asia, colors, across the spectrum, seem to be more deeply laden with meaning than in other parts of the world. Green and red (or rather, saffron), for example, carry ineradicable associations of the Muslim and Hindu communities, respectively. Objects are similarly densely-laden signifiers (crescent moons, cows, lotuses and other flowers, or, for external reasons, the swastika ...). Contrast the green of the Greek Loeb and the red of the Latin, neither which bears any historical-cultural meaning;⁵ whereas the Greek key design on the former can be transferred without scruple to the latter. No modern Roman would see this as an act of Greek »hegemony«, however historically hegemonic Greek culture once had been for the Roman). The design adopted for the MCLI logo, which came to us as a result of an international design competition, is a stylized elephant – something entirely neutral in terms of religion –, which spells out the initials of the series, while the color chosen after much discussion is *rāṇī kā raṅg*, »the queen's color«, a dark pink (very close, entirely coincidentally, to Pantone's »color of the year« for 2014, »radiant orchid«), which has no associations with any particular community anywhere in India.

A range of conventions for printing and punctuation had to be established. In accordance with the manuscript practices and in contrast to modern Indian-language publishing, MCLI chose to eschew all non-Indian punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation points, quotation marks, and the like), except for the hyphen, which is attested (if differently designed) in manuscripts, and the comma that has become conventional in marking the *caesura* in Hindi verse (additional punctuation is sometimes permitted in complex Persian prose). Even the practices of Sanskrit orthography, though reasonably well established today, show a host of variants that had to be sorted out. A simple case is the decision to permit use of the single

4 To date, Murty Bangla; Murty Gurmukhi; Murty Hindi; Murty Kannada; Murty Sanskrit; Murty Sindhi; Murty Tamil, and Murty Telugu, all the work of John Hudson and Fiona Ross. For more information see <http://murtylibrary.com/design-and-typography.php>.

5 »James Loeb simply chose red for »Roman and green for »Greek« (Jeffrey Henderson, personal communication).

avagraha sign and prohibit use of the double, which is often found in modern publications in India to signal the coalescence of a long vowel.⁶

More puzzling to a general audience is the need to explain the terms embedded in the series name. While »classical« (in the »Loeb Classical Library«) may be taken to imply that one tradition alone possesses texts worthy of such commendation, or has experienced a »medieval« period (in »Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library«) or »renaissance« (in »I Tatti Renaissance Library«), few people would bother to contest the usages.⁷ Editors of dual-language book series for at least some non-western traditions, however, do not have the luxury any longer of simply choosing the names they consider appropriate, any more than they can unreflectingly choose their logos or colors; they cannot expect consensus about the reasons for the choice or feel secure in their wide acceptance. »Classical«, »library«, even »India«: none of these terms in the name »Murty Classical Library of India« goes without saying; all have had to be argued out. I will consider each separately.

3. What is »India«?

How was it possible for someone like the celebrated anthropologist Clifford Geertz, citing a quip of the novelist E. M. Forster, in 1963 to describe India as »waddling in at this late hour to take her seat among the nations«?⁸ Was there no India before 1963? That Geertz's view was not some personal opinion – though it was one he, as director of the University of Chicago's »Committee for the Comparative Studies of New Nations« project, could have argued out better than most – is not hard to show. In October, 2014, a few months before the launch of MCLI, I was contacted by a Harvard University Press publicist preparing a launch event in London. She had, I was told by an HUP representative, »one last question that strikes me as a good one: Could you speak to what »India« means in the context of the MCLI? She adds, »Most

6 A proposal in 1866 by Georg Bühler and Franz Kielhorn for a new series of Sanskrit textbooks, while offering no intellectual argument in its support – presumably it was self-evident in those halcyon days – does include detailed suggestions for orthographic conventions. The *avagraha* sign, for example, was proscribed, though the usage is widely attested in manuscripts and was adopted by the best Indian presses (e.g., Nirnaya Sagar Press of Bombay, founded 1867); MCLI generally follows them. Other issues, such as the assimilation of nasals, remain unstandardized to this day (yielding e.g. both *sambhava* and *saṃbhava*, *sāṅkhyā* and *sāṅkhyā*, are in use). Incidentally, the Bühler-Kielhorn proposal led to the creation of the »Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series« (vol. 1, ed. by Bühler, 1868), which indeed followed their proposed guidelines (though the *avagraha* sign was in fact added in later editions). For the proposal itself see The Pandit 1, 1866, no. 2, pp. 25-26 (I thank Dominik Wujastyk for the reference).

7 Scholars of Greek and Latin are becoming increasingly aware of their tradition's tacit immodesty. See for example the qualifications placed on the term »classical« in Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis in *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, Mass. 2010, p. x (the rediscovery of the term in the renaissance did however proceed from its Latin roots, pp. 205-206).

8 Clifford Geertz, *The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States*, in: *Old Societies and New States*, ed. by Clifford Geertz, New York 1963, p. 139.

of the works were written at a time when India as such didn't exist. And in the UK, just as in India, few people from the subcontinent self-identify as ›Indian‹. They're Bengali or Tamil or ... And then there are Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Bangladesh speaks Bengali, that's OK).‹ If you have the chance, would you be able to respond to this?«

The notion that »India« as such« did not exist before the British fashioned it through a long-drawn-out process of colonial consolidation, which then vanished with partition in 1947 while new entities such as »Pakistan« (»The Land of the Pure«), and eventually »Bangladesh« (»The Place of the Bengalis«) were created – and »India« presumably recreated – is a very widespread view. But unless carefully hedged about with qualifications, which it rarely is, this way of thinking is a gross misconception. It betrays the blinding force of nationalism on our thinking, and radically misrepresents the character of the places, polities, and cultural processes that existed before the nation-idea began to burn its way through the brains of modern Europeans.

From a historical or even philosophical perspective, it should by now require no elaboration that nothing in our social or cultural world exists »as such«, as some pure essence, self-same from its origins and immunized against further change. What we call »nations« – what Geertz and the publicist were thinking of – are all modern confections. From that perspective, to be sure, there was no »India« »as such« before 1947, just as there was no »Germany« or »Italy« »as such« before 1871.

Things become a little more complicated if we pause to ask what »Germania« meant to Tacitus, say (»Germania omnis a Gallis Raetisque et Pannoniis Rheno et Danuvio fluminibus [...] separatur«, ›Germania« 1), or »Italia« to Dante (»Di quella umile Italia fia salute / per cui morì la vergine Cammilla«, ›Inferno« 1. 106-107). True enough, pre-national regions, from »England« to »China«, were all fuzzy around the edges. Their borders were not policed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel; they had no national flags or flowers or songs. But Germania and Italia and India were not, for all that, conceptually empty terms. What the United Nations or the U. S. State Department today name »India« did not emerge from a historical vacuum, let alone directly from Lord Mountbatten's endgame of colonialism. It has a deep if complex past.

A range of terms and conceptions from the precolonial past, both insider and outsider terms and conceptions, were available for describing the area of which what we now call India formed part: *Bharatavarsha* (»The Clime of the Bharatas«), the name bestowed by the Sanskrit epic literature and source of today's official Hindi name of India, *Bhārat*; *al-Hind*, the name bestowed by early Arab travelers marking the land dominated by the Indus River; and indeed »India« in various forms, from *Indikē* (*chorē*) in Herodotus to *Indu* in the seventh-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang. To what do these various terms actually refer, however?

They referred not to a space defined by political unification – what spaces in the pre-national era were »politically unified« rather than momentarily conjoined in fragile and fugitive power formations? – but by other process, one of which was cultural unification. This consisted, in part, of a broad but specifiable set of liter-

ary languages and practices (stories, motifs, conventions, aesthetic preferences, and so on). Both in the circulation of material literary objects – manuscripts – as well as in the narratives contained in those objects this cultural space was mapped out. The space narrated in the Sanskrit ›Mahābhārata‹, for example, is largely congruent with the space within which ›Mahābhārata‹ manuscripts circulated and were reproduced.

True enough, from some perspectives this literary-cultural area can be perceived to have extended to Central or Southeast Asia. For many Persian writers, the space of reference was a larger region called ›*Ajam*‹, the whole domain of Persian literary culture, which linked much of South Asia with lands as far to the north as Samarkand and as far to the west as Istanbul.⁹ As for Southeast Asia, Sanskrit poetry was studied and imitated, or adapted via vernacular literary production from Angkor in royal inscriptions to Java (where the literature called *kakawin* – the term is derived from Sanskrit *kāvya* – looks very like the regional poetry written in the subcontinent).¹⁰ But for all that, the core domain was comprised in the area stretching from what is today called Afghanistan in the west to Bangladesh in the east, from Nepal in the north to Sri Lanka in the south. That is MCLI's ›India‹.¹¹ (I often refer to that space as ›South Asia‹ here, though that term is a modern bureaucratic one and has obviously no salience for the precolonial period.)

You will have inferred from what I have said so far, if you did not already know, that there is no language called ›Indian‹ that could have provided the kind of unity, or rather semblance of unity, that Greek, say, or Chinese (or rather, Chinese characters) provided for their parts of the world. (When Arabs and Persians spoke of a language called Hindavi, ›Indian‹, they were referring to what we now call Hindi, a regional language of north India, that had an important transregional presence in early-modern India, and that in a modified form became the national language of India.) India has always been a multi-lingual literary space; certain languages might have become dominant in it – Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi, English – but none completely defined let alone filled it. Such diversity, which became something of a cliché during the first decades of Indian independence – the state motto being ›Unity in Diversity‹ –, but which in the past few years has come under pressure from an intolerant Hindu nationalism, is constitutive of this space, and without representing it fully no library can be a library of India.

9 Sunil Sharma, Redrawing Boundaries of ›Ajam‹ in Early Modern Persian Histories, in: Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective, ed. by Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani, London 2012, pp. 49-62.

10 The best short introduction to the latter is in Thomas M. Hunter, A Distant Mirror: Innovation and Change in the East Javanese Kakawin, in: Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature, ed. by Yigal Bronner et al., Delhi 2014, pp. 739-786.

11 A seven-hundred page elaboration on all this is available in my Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India, Berkeley 2006. Southeast Asian, Central Asian, and even Tibetan works are therefore not barred from MCLI, but they can be admitted only once the core area of Indian literary production is adequately established in publications.

4. What is a »Library«?

Short of attempting to create a Borgesian library of all books ever produced in this space, choices must be made about what gets admitted into MCLI, and therefore criteria for choosing have to be established.

The easiest decision to make concerns genre. You cannot have a Library of India that excludes either expression (poetry, drama, and the like) or thought (philosophy, law, and the like). Both were part of the world of »classical« India that I describe below, indeed even more so than in classical Greece. In the latter, an invidious distinction was drawn, from Plato on, between *logos* and *mythos* of a sort that never found root in the former. Philosophers like the Buddhist logician Dharmakīrti (seventh century) composed poetry as readily as poets like Śrīharṣa (twelfth century) wrote philosophy, a complementarity absent from Greece after the age of the pre-Socratics. LCL of course had no hesitation in including the works of Plato beside those of Homer, or those of Cicero beside those of Vergil. It's just that in India the tradition itself demands their co-presence.

What do we do, however, with the works of religious expression and thought found at the threshold of Indian history, that is, those of the Vedic era? Whatever modern scholars may take to be the expressive and aesthetic aspirations discernible in those works, no one inside the tradition, not once in two thousand years, held them to be *kāvya*, »literature«, in the sense of the term used by those who produced *kāvya* over those two millennia; on the contrary, they have been seen to be radically different from any other form of discourse – existing far beyond literature or thought (and beyond even the human, according to orthodox doctrine).

Nonetheless, in the case of Vedic texts, too, MCLI sees no reason to be constrained by their traditional status. Despite bizarre allegations to the contrary, the Library is fully committed to including religious texts.¹² In our very first season we published a great work of Krishna devotionism, ›Sur's Ocean‹ (›Sūrsāgar‹); we are currently publishing volume 5 of a seven-volume translation of what has sometimes been called the Hindi bible, namely, the ›Epic of Ram‹ (›Rāmcaritmānas‹); we have plans to publish a wide range of other religious classics, including the scripture of the Sikhs (›Gurugranthsaḥib‹) and Mhaimbhat's ›Līlācaritra‹, a foundational work of the Maḥanubhava religious order of Maharashtra. As for Vedic literature, much of it already exists in enduring translations – the ›Rigveda‹ and Upanishads most recently, and many of the ›Brahmanas‹ from an earlier period. Were new and better versions to be produced it would perfectly possible to include them.

When we turn from questions of genre, the criteria of choice become considerably more complicated. The launch of MCLI was sometimes greeted, among some Indians

12 Roberto Calasso, Indian Classics: The Big New Vision, in: New York Review of Books Sep 24, 2015. The writer appears not to have opened any of the books under consideration, somehow convinced instead that he had been commissioned to review Moritz Winternitz's general index of the ›Sacred Books of the East‹, to which he devotes a large section of his essay. (Winternitz's book was published in 1910 – and it is an index.)

at least, with the worry that its Western editors had usurped the power to decide the canon of Indian literature. This sort of thinking is a product of an unfortunate if understandable postcolonial passion. It is of a piece – though in the same way that climate denial is of a piece with the critique developed by science and technology studies – with earlier claims, deriving from the excesses of Edward Said's work, that it was the orientalist who created India's literary and religious canons. Two decades ago, in the heyday of Orientalist critique, we were repeatedly told that it was the orientalist who »canonized certain scriptures, such as the ›Bhagavad Gita‹.¹³ They did nothing of the sort – in the case of the ›Gītā‹ the work was canonized by the eighth century at the latest – nor did they create a canon of Indian literature. Sir William Jones may have christened Kalidasa »the Shakespeare of India« in 1789, but the inscriptional poet Ravikirti had already made him the touchstone of literary creativity more than a thousand years earlier, in 634 ce.

Indian thinkers, thus, had their own processes of canonization, some of which we can recover today: lists like the »five great court epics« of Sanskrit or Tamil; the identification (however fanciful at times) of certain authors as »primal« poets of their tradition (Valmiki for Sanskrit, for example, Pampa for Kannada, Keshavdas for Braj Bhasha); inscriptional celebrations of authors from as early as the mid-seventh century; »praises of poets past« at the start of works that begin to appear around the same date; *cāṭu* verses, or informal appreciations of writers that circulated orally for centuries. We know precisely what works traditional Indians prized, and those materials – where they are still extant – are the first choice for inclusion in MCLI.

But canons, as we know from the canon-wars of the recent past, are also always expressions of culture-power relations. It is inevitable, then, that we ask what in fact the role of MCLI should be in navigating the swirling waters of past and present forms of cultural domination. Consider the third volume in the series, ›Therīgāthā‹, or ›Poems of the First Buddhist Women‹, a text in Pali likely dating to the third or fourth century bce. Although the ›Therīgāthā‹ received a commentary by a sixth-century scholar who wrote on much of the Buddhist canon, the work seems to have largely fallen out of circulation even in the world of southern Buddhism (to say nothing of Hindu India, where it was completely unknown) until it was reedited and translated at the end of the nineteenth century. Only then were its historical importance and aesthetic power fully recognized. Traditions, clearly, are not always to be trusted to represent themselves in their fullness.

Indeed, they can be actively unwilling to do so. This is especially the case of the literature of oppressed castes in India, and of the peoples »without history«, who appear largely in the margins of the dominant cultures or who lived in a world of more or less pure orality. Unlike the Greek and Latin literary cultures, however, where nothing is left of the literatures (in Oscan, Umbrian, Etruscan in Italy; Punic, Phoeni-

13 E. g., Peter van der Veer, *The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism*, in: *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, ed. by Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, Philadelphia, Pa. 1993, p. 40.

cian, Libyan in North Africa, and other languages elsewhere) of those who were crushed politically or culturally by Athens or Rome, substantial amounts of oppositional writings are available from precolonial India. What kind of library would it be that simply displayed the evidence of civilization and suppressed the evidence of barbarism, that ignored those who were victims of a structural inequality almost without parallel in world history but who nonetheless somehow found a way to bear witness to that oppression through their texts? MCLI is actively seeking to commission new editions and translations of the works of low-caste and so-called untouchable poets such as Sarala Das (fifteenth century Odisha) or Ravidas (sixteenth century, north India). As for oral poetry, which continues to maintain a large presence even in contemporary South Asia, it is much more difficult to include, given uncertainty about dating and the challenges of textualization. But properly edited materials that can be convincingly dated to the precolonial era will find a place in the Library.

I say »dated to the precolonial era« because dating, though not the sole criterion of the »classical«, is certainly part of it.

5. *What is »Classical«?*

I suppose that if one were to stop the mythical woman in the street and ask her to name one »classical« Indian poet, it would be Rabindranath Tagore, the only Indian to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913). Tagore won the prize not because of his Bangla poetry (of which the Nobel committee appears to have known nothing whatever) but because, in the words of the official citation, he »made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West« (this refers exclusively to Tagore's own translation of his poetry collection ›Gītāñjali‹). That in itself, however, would be no disqualification: many Indian poets produce strong work in English, and in any case Tagore's style, according to the Nobel citation itself, is »classic«. Yet Tagore will not be admitted to MCLI, because he is a modern writer, and for MCLI, the South Asian modern cannot be the South Asian classical.

That will of course seem an arbitrary judgment, but the limits on inclusion that all series must set can seem arbitrary. James Loeb originally intended his library to include »all that is of value and of interest in Greek and Latin literature, from the time of Homer to the fall of Constantinople.«¹⁴ Today LCL actually extends, not to 1453, but only to about the fifth century (though Bede's eighth-century ›Ecclesiastical History‹ was published in 1930, and remains in print, and some Byzantine poems appear in volume 1 of the ›Greek Anthology‹), albeit that chronological revision is nowhere explained.¹⁵ The Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library establishes its limits by the simple fact of its being bounded by a »classical« LCL and a »renaissance«

14 James Loeb, his introductory preface printed in the first editions of 1912, entitled *The Loeb Classical Library: A Word About Its Purpose and Its Scope*.

15 For an argument that the culture of classical Greek literature was terminated by a single political act, the closing of the Academy by Justinian in 529, see Manfred Fuhrmann, *Die Epochen der griechischen*

ITRL: »DOML fills the chronological gap between two other existing series [...] The Loeb Classical Library [...] will not venture much beyond the fourth or fifth centuries [...] The ambit of the I Tatti Renaissance Library runs from the late thirteenth through the early seventeenth centuries; while Boccaccio [d.1375] figures in ITRL, Dante [d. 1321] will not.«¹⁶

Chronology is relevant to MCLI as well, but for quite different reasons. Whatever one may think of recent arguments about the reality of an »early-modern« era in South Asian history (their persuasiveness is sometimes diminished by exaggerating genuine but small-scale and usually local innovations), the consolidation of British power around 1800 had profound consequences. It marked a true historical *caesura* bringing an altogether unprecedented kind of modernity. Once again, the consequences I have in mind are not those typically showcased in recent social history, where hypotheses of colonization – of religious identity, sexuality, whatever – can be disputed, but rather those more measurable, and undisputable, consequences that occurred at the level of language and literature. Just consider how thoroughly Persian was replaced by English as the language of imperial prestige (as Christopher Shackle puts it). But with the coming of colonialism a far wider and deeper retransformation began of making South Asian authors Western and modern, who thereupon dutifully produced the Romantic poetry, the national novels, the social realism, and all the other requisites of a modern literature. Equally important, it entailed an unprecedented alienation of South Asians from their old idioms and modes of expression, so much so that the linkages to the past, and to the media of accessing the past, were broken; they might be relearned but could never be recreated.

The literary world before 1800 is, therefore, certainly different from the present, and radically so. But is it »classical«, the way that all of Greek and Latin literature without exception (and not just »all that is of value and of interest«) has become »classical«? What in fact does »classical« mean? What is a classic?

A classic question, that, one that at a more general level has been considered and reconsidered in the modern era from the famous opening salvo of Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve in 1850 to (at least) J.M. Coetzee in 2001.¹⁷ What is striking about most of these European accounts is their uniformity – and their unreflexive provinciality. For Sainte-Beuve, for example, the classic is a work that uncovers »a certain moral truth that is not equivocal« and recaptures »a certain eternal passion in the

und der römischen Literatur, in: Der Diskurs der Literatur und Sprachgeschichte, ed. by Bernard Cerquiglini and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Frankfurt am Main 1983.

16 <https://www.doaks.org/research/publications/dumbarton-oaks-medieval-library>.

17 C.A. Sainte-Beuve, Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?, in: Selected Essays, Boston, Mass. 1896 [1850], pp. 44-45, 52; T.S. Eliot, What is a Classic?, in: Selected Prose, New York, N.Y., 1975 [1945], pp. 116, 128; Frank Kermode, The Classic, Cambridge, Mass., 1975, pp. 45; 15-16; Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, New York, N.Y., 1996 [1960], p. 288; Italo Calvino, Why Read the Classics?, The New York Review of Books, October 9, 1986; J.M. Coetzee, What is a Classic?, in: Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986-1999, New York, N.Y., 2001, pp. 1-16. The arguments here are further developed in my Crisis in the Classics, in: Social Research: An International Quarterly, 78, 2011, no. 1, pp. 21-48.

heart where all seemed known and discovered«; it is »effortlessly contemporaneous with all ages«, possessed as it is of a »universal morality«. T.S. Eliot demands of the classic maturity, amplitude, catholicity, nonprovinciality, comprehensiveness, and, yet again, »universality« (for Eliot these requirements were met in full only by Vergil). For Kermode, the classic possesses »intrinsic qualities that endure«, it is »more or less immediately relevant«, with a »perpetual contemporaneity«. Gadamer, too, thinks of the classic as »a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present«.¹⁸ Calvino's definition is different but problematic in precisely the same way: classics are books read in our youth that are reread in our adulthood.

If for Calvino classics are books we already know, in a sense, how can non-Western works fit into this definition when they are as a rule absent – or at least have been absent – from the youth of Westerners – and, given the caesura described earlier, absent (with the exception of a few tales of legend and devotion) from the youth of everyone in South Asia, too? That may seem an obvious objection to Calvino's definition, but it actually applies to all the others as well. Those descriptions pertain to works that are only repeating to us what we already know: they are »immediately relevant« to our situation because our situation is the same as theirs; their moral vision makes sense – to Sainte-Beuve, Eliot, Kermode et al. – because it is already belongs to them, a »universality« that is actually the generalization of their own particulars.

I want to suggest, to the contrary, that what makes the works included in the Murty Classical Library of India »classics« is their very resistance to contemporaneity and universality, that is, their capacity to give us a new appreciation of the vast variety of human life in the past. There will of course be many occasions for learning something about our shared humanity from these works, but they also provide access to radically different forms of human consciousness, and thereby extend the range of possibilities of what it has meant or could mean to be human. For MCLI, the classic is the non-contemporaneous, the different, the diverse, the unfamiliar, the lost, the suppressed, the alternative.

6. *A Precolonial Library in a Postcolonial Age*

There are two further obstacles to developing a classical Indian library, and these are perhaps more challenging than any discussed so far. One consists in internal constraints on making Indian material available in translation; some of these are shared with all other translation enterprises, some seem to be more or less specific to the world of Indian literary culture. The other consists of external constraints, which are social and political in nature, and which have no parallel in any of the series we have mentioned in this essay or others published elsewhere.¹⁹ Both can effectively

18 Sainte-Beuve (fn. 16), pp. 44-45, 52; Eliot (fn. 16), pp. 116, 128; Kermode (fn. 16), pp. 45, 15-16; Gadamer (fn. 16), p. 288. See further on this argument in my *Crisis* (fn. 16), pp. 15-16.

19 Including *The Library of Arabic Literature*, New York, N.Y., 2012 ff.; *The Library of Chinese Humanities*, Berlin u. a. 2015 ff.; *The Library of Judeo-Arabic Literature*, Chicago, Ill. 2017 ff.