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Chapter 1

Translation and State

*If you seek your heart's satisfaction, submit to dissatisfaction,
So that this very pain becomes a remedy for you.
Abū al-Faẓl, Preface to the Razmnāmah.¹*

The multiplicity of texts produced in South Asia over the *longue durée* embody the cultural life of more than one quarter of the world's population and remain key to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge in all its forms. Unparalleled for complexity and linguistic variety, many elements of India's textual corpus have been translated, the best-known case being the migration of the Buddhist canon – and much ancillary literature – into Chinese and Tibetan.² Much less studied is the translation of Indic texts into Persian. Thanks mainly to state patronage, a vast number of texts were translated into different forms of Persian between the sixth and the nineteenth centuries. Stepping beyond ethnicity, religion and region, Persian became the prevailing *lingua franca* in Eurasia by the fifteenth century, with the Persophone population of South Asia being substantially larger than that in Iran itself.³ Perhaps the most poignant example of this widening use of Persian is the stele from Galle, now in the National Museum in Colombo, with its trilingual inscription in Chinese, Tamil and Persian (Figure 2). It was set up in 1409 to register gifts from the Chinese emperor to Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim shrines in Sri Lanka.⁴ In India, kindred interactions across linguistic, cultural and religious divides transformed the relationship of the Persian-speaking elites with the peoples they ruled. From the seventeenth century until the twentieth, increasing numbers of manuscripts were written, copied and read in Persian by Hindus,

¹ Chapter 2, 29 (printed text). Page numbers in the 'printed text' refer to the edition published in Tehran, for which see below.

² For recent insights, Dorji Wangchuk, *Cross-cultural Transmission of Buddhist Texts: Theories and Practices of Translation* (Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2016).

³ Juan R. Cole, "Iranian Culture and South Asia, 1500–1900," in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. N. R. Keddie and R. Matthee (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 15–35.

⁴ Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 121; for the inscription, M. Willis and Saarthak Singh, Galle Trilingual Stele – Persian Inscription, SIDDHAM (2020), retrieved March 2022.

and from the eighteenth century by Europeans living in India.⁵ The importance of this corpus as a monument of social, cultural and political exchange has been largely excised from historical memory due to aggressive colonial interventions and the ascendancy of English in the twentieth century.

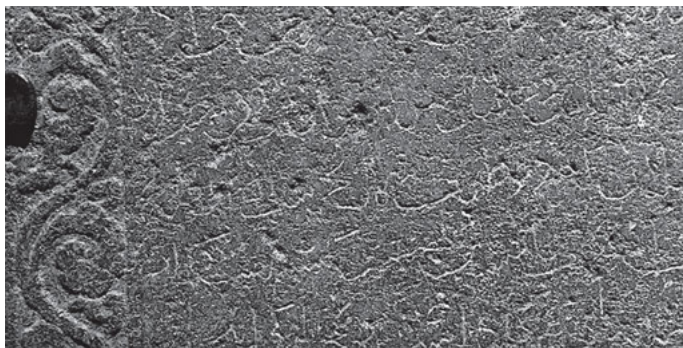


Figure 2: Galle, Sri Lanka. Trilingual Stele of Zheng He (鄭和) dated 1409 CE. Detail of the Persian portion. National Museum of Sri Lanka. Courtesy SIDDHAM (OB03125).

The earliest known Indic text rendered into Persian was the *Pañcatantra*, a book of wisdom in fable form that was translated into Pahlavi (Middle Persian) at the behest of the Sassanian ruler Anūshīrvān (reg. 531–79). This was undertaken in a period of significant cultural and technical exchange under the Maukhari rulers of north India.⁶ The Pahlavi version is lost (unlike the game of chess which came from India at the same time), but it has survived in Syriac and Arabic translations from the Pahlavi. The *Kalilah wa Dimnah* – as the Arabic version is known – was widely circulated.⁷ Slightly later, in 773, the astronomical text *Brāhmasphuṭasiddhānta* was brought to Baghdad by an embassy sent from Sindh to the Abbasid court. This was translated by al-Fazārī into Arabic (rather than Persian) and it was through this vehicle that Indian numerals were transmitted to the middle

⁵ Examples are many and will be cited in this book in the appropriate place; as an indicative example we note Richard Johnson's personal copy of Mīr Qamar al-Dīn Minnat's *Divān*, circa 1782. British Library Or. 6633.

⁶ Hans T. Bakker, *The World of the Skandapurāṇa* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 64–66.

⁷ François de Blois, *Burzoy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah wa Dimnah* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990). At the time of writing, the text is the focus of a project led by Beatrice Gruendler.

east and the west.⁸ The next significant moment of exchange came with Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī (circa 943–1048). A gifted polymath, he served as a court astrologer to Maḥmūd of Ghazna and travelled to India with Ghaznavid patronage. There Bīrūnī studied religion, science and society, producing *Researches on India* in about 1040. Edward Sachau's translation has instigated much secondary literature.⁹ Another historian and official who flourished under Maḥmūd was Gardīzī who provides some glimpses of India in his *Kitāb Zayn al-Akhbār*.¹⁰ Yet others have been noted by Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi in his monumental *'Arab va Hind ke ta'alluqāt*, a work that, we may note in passing, has not received the attention it deserves.¹¹

The subsequent establishment of the Sultanate in Delhi initiated a sustained period of engagement with Indian knowledge. Under the Tughluq kings, manuscripts were collected and translations undertaken in fields as diverse as astronomy, music and medicine.¹² The interests of Fīroz Shāh (reg. 1351–88) extended even to antiquities as evidenced by the Mauryan pillars he brought to Delhi, events recorded in the much-studied *Tārīkh-i Fīroz Shāhī*.¹³ Texts were translated in fifteenth-century courts as well and embraced works on music, poetics, medi-

8 Sharif H. Qāsmī, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Translations of Indian Works* (New Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts, 2014); David Pingree, "The Fragments of the Works of al-Fazārī," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970): 103–23.

9 Edward Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910). Some further studies among many are Yohanan Friedmann, "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions," *JAOS* 95, no. 2 (1975): 214–21; David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 630–59.

10 C. Edmund Bosworth, "Gardīzī, Abū Sa'īd 'Abd-al-Ḥayy ibn Ḥaḥḥāk b. Maḥmūd," *Encyclopædia Iranica* X, no. 3 (2012): 314–15, retrieved January 2022; also Bosworth, "Gardīzī," *Encyclopædia of Islam*, THREE, ed. Kate Fleet et al (2013), s.v., retrieved January 2022.

11 Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī, *عرب و هند کے تعلقات* (Allāhābād: Hindūstānī Academy, 1930), translated as Nadvi and M. Salahuddin, *Indo-Arab Relations: An English Rendering of Arab O' Hind Ke Ta'llugat* (Hyderabad: Institute of Indo-Middle East Cultural Studies, 1962), summarised in Nadvi, "The Early Relations between Arabia and India," *Islamic Culture* 11 (1937), 172–79.

12 For example, Fabrizio Speziale, "Majmū'a-yi Šamsī," *Perso-Indica* (2013), retrieved January 2022; Eva Orthmann, "Tarjuma-yi kitāb-i Bārāhī (occult sciences)," *Perso-Indica* (2017), retrieved January 2022. More generally, Saiyid A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), 204.

13 For example, Vasileios Syros, "State Failure and Successful Leadership in Medieval India," *Studies in History* 37, no. 1 (2021): 7–25. The Indian pundits assigned to read the ancient edict inscribed on the pillar failed in the task however, see Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199. The issue revisited in Finbarr Barry Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the past in Sultanate Delhi," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 95–116.

cine and farriery.¹⁴ These important translations, still only studied in a formative way, were harbingers of many produced from the sixteenth century under Mughal patronage, beginning with emperor Akbar (reg. 1556–1605).

While earlier Muslim rulers had engaged with their non-Muslims subjects in substantial ways, Akbar is remembered as the first king to cross the social and religious borders of his kingdom in a sustained manner. He aimed to resolve some of the most complex and troubling issues surrounding the interactions of the peoples in the Mughal domain. Under Akbar's influence, the court developed a lively literary culture that explored the indigenous traditions of the Indian people, albeit through a Persianate lens. The stage was set when Persian was declared the official language of court: members of the imperial bureaucracy were required to learn Persian, including a large number of Hindus who sought employment in the administration.¹⁵

The royal library of the Mughals, now dispersed apart from the residue preserved as the 'Delhi collection' in London, had books in many languages including Turkish, Arabic and Persian.¹⁶ Sanskrit manuscripts were also present.¹⁷ This implies that all these languages were read, at least by some. And there can be little doubt that most people had speaking abilities in the local vernaculars. Of course Persian speakers and authors had been in India from an early time, perhaps the most famous among them being Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (d. 1325).¹⁸ Over the centuries, a vibrant form of the Persian language developed and Indo-Persian culture – with a number of Turkic elements – flourished during the period of the Delhi Sultans (1206–1526).¹⁹ At the same time there was contact with the Persian

14 Puyan Mahmudian and Stefan Reichmuth, "Ḥikmat-i Sulaymān-Šāhī," *Perso-Indica* (2020), retrieved January 2022; Eva Orthmann and Fabrizio Speziale, "Qurrat al-mulk," *Perso-Indica* (2021), retrieved January 2022.

15 Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 317–49; Arthur Dudley, *Delhi: Pages from a Forgotten History* (Delhi: Hay House Publishing, 2015).

16 A starting point is John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 3/4 (1997): 243–349. A useful account of the 'Delhi collection' is found in Bink Hallum, "New Light on Early Arabic *Awfāq* Literature," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. Liana Saif et al (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 115–16.

17 Abū al-Faḍl mentions that Akbar's library held Sanskrit texts, see AA 1: 103.

18 Amīr Khusraw was practised in the styles of Persian poetry developed in medieval Persia and he became an iconic figure, Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sufis and Sultāns* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). Amīr Khusraw also famously composed in local vernaculars. For an early survey: N. S. Gorekar, "Persian Poets of India," *Indo-Iranica* 16, no. 2 (1963): 66–85.

19 Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119; earlier A. Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India, 1206–1556 AD* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969); Stefano Pellò, "Local Lexis? Provincializing Persian in

of Iran, especially Safavid Iran during Humāyūn's period of exile there.²⁰ Turkish had come to India with the medieval Turkic dynasties (the Tughluqs being the most prominent) and the first Mughal emperor Bābur (1483–1530) wrote his memoirs, the *Bāburnāmah*, in Çāğatayca.²¹ Despite this, and the ongoing contacts with central Asia, dialects of Turkish did not thrive in India. A working knowledge was maintained nonetheless, as shown by a Turkish grammar and vocabulary, explained in Persian, with a panegyric in prose and verse to Muḥammad Shāh (1702–48), to whom the work is dedicated.²²

While Persian did not come to dominate the linguistic scene until the fourteenth century, the turn away from Sanskrit toward local vernaculars had begun to develop from the twelfth century. The most telling evidence of this trend in north India is the *Rāūla vela*, a poetic work composed by the poet Roḍa. Preserved in an inscription from Dhār, Madhya Pradesh, it is now kept in the museum in Mumbai (Figure 3).²³ Paleographically speaking, the record shows similarity to the famous Dhār inscription of Arjunavarman (*circa* 1210–15) which takes the form of play called the *Vijayaśrīnāṭikā*.²⁴ The *Rāūla vela* belongs to a poetic type known as *Nakhaśikha*, well known from Sanskrit, Prakrit and the later literary tradition. The aim of works in this genre was to present a poetic description of the glory, charms and beauty of the Nāyaka or Nāyikā – from head to toe – along with an account of their costume, coiffure and ornaments. The long history of *Nakhaśikha*

Fifteenth-Century North India,” in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166–85.

20 For Humāyūn's reign the sources are given in W. M. Thackston, *Three Memoirs of Humayun* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2009).

21 Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

22 Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 512, BL Add. 16759. The dictionary dedicated to Muḥammad Shāh is not alone; for other dictionaries and a philological study of fifteenth-century material: Dilorom Karomat, “Turki and Hindavi in the World of Persian: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Dictionaries,” in *After Timur Left*, ed. Orsini and Sheikh, 130–65.

23 Collected by John Malcolm and held in the Asiatic Society until transferred to the museum where it bears number SI 9, see Michael Willis, “Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī: From Indology to Political Ideology and Back,” *JRAS* 22, no. 1 (2012): 136; Harivallabh Chunalil Bhayani, *Rāula-vela of Roḍa: a rare poem of c. twelfth century in early Indo-Aryan* (Ahmedabad: Parshva Prakashan, 1994); study of the language in Mātāprasāda Gupta, *Rāula Vela aura usakī bhāṣā* (Ilāhābāda: Mitra Prakāśana, 1965) and Kailāśa Candra Bhāṭiyā, *Rāulavela: prārambhika Hindī kā pahalā śilāṅkita kāvyā* (Nai Dillī: Takshaśilā Prakāśana, 1983); online resources: M. Willis, Dhār stone slab of with the Rāūla vela of Roḍa, SIDDHAM (2022), retrieved April 2022.

24 Bhayani, *Rāula-vela of Roḍa*, v; S. K. Dikshit, ed., *Pārijātamañjarī alias Vijayaśrī by Rāja-Guru Madana alias Bāla-Sarasvatī* (Bhopal, 1968).

begins with the description of Umā in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* and is elaborated in later languages, especially in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. The *Rāūla vela* is unique as the earliest *Nakhaśikha* in early new Indo-Aryan literature.²⁵ The language of the poem imitates the characteristics of various contemporary dialects, but the underlying dialect represents a transitional stage between Apabhraṃśa and the earliest forms of Hindi.²⁶ The point here is that a work of this sophistication and conscious artistry does not emerge as a single product without precedent. Rather, it is indicative of a linguistic ground swell of which we know little apart from the increasing use of Apabhraṃśa as a transregional language.²⁷

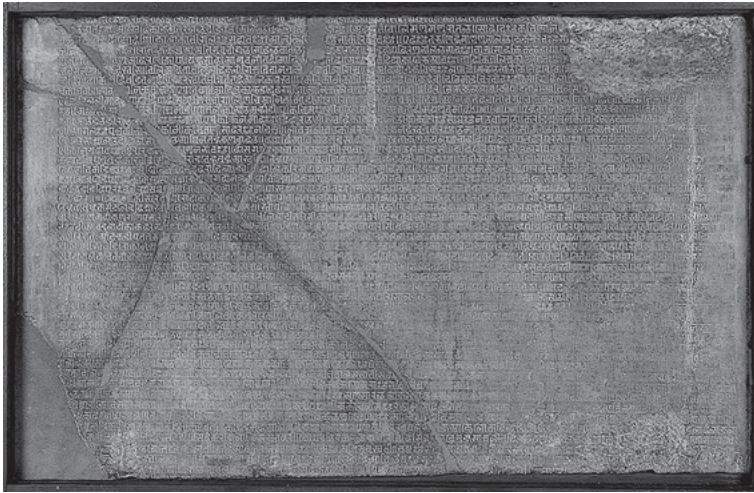


Figure 3: Dhār, Madhya Pradesh. Inscription containing the *Rāūla vela* of Roḍa, late twelfth or early thirteenth century. CSMVS, Mumbai. Courtesy SIDDHAM (OB06001).

²⁵ Bhayani, *Rāūla-vela of Roḍa*, xxxiv.

²⁶ Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 103.

²⁷ Eva De Clercq, “Apabhramsha as a Literary Medium in Fifteenth-Century North India,” in *After Timur Left*, 339–64; Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language of Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017). Non-literary registers of language are still uncharted: Salomon, “British Museum Stone Inscription of the Tripuri Kalacuri Prince Valleka,” *IJ* (1996): 133–61, appendix in an undeciphered middle Indo-Aryan language; Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate, 1191–1526* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 170, the purport of the text is unclear due to the dialect being undeciphered, but we have now a clear photograph: Muzaffar Ansari and M. Willis, Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh), Bansa, inscription dated VS 1415, ZENODO (2021), retrieved January 2022. Other examples could be cited. The best overview of the transformations of this period is Simon Digby, “Before Timur Came: Provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate through the Fourteenth Century,” *JESHO* 47 (2004): 298–356.

As this movement accelerated it sometimes assumed an aggressive tone, as we read in the Jain text *Vajjālagga* of Jayavallaha.²⁸

डङ्गउ सङ्गअकव्वं सङ्गअकव्वं अ णिम्मिअं जेण ।
 वंसहरं व पलित्तं तडअडतट्टत्तणं कुणइ ॥
 [दह्यतां संस्कृतकाव्यं संस्कृतकाव्यं च निर्मितं येन ।
 वंशगृहमिव प्रदीप्तं तटतटतट्टत्वं करोति ॥]

A pox upon Sanskrit
 And those who write poems in it.
 It sounds like a house of bamboo on fire –
 Crackling, popping and spluttering.

Concurrently, vernacular commentaries on older texts increased the currency of spoken language.²⁹ The devotional movement that began to sweep through central and northern India shortly before the Mughals came to power also sought expression in the spoken. This religious development – to which we will return later in this book – used Hindi, notably the Braj dialect, and culminated in texts by Tulsī Dās that are still sung and regarded as inspired.³⁰ This literature was not, however, the focus of reproduction and translation into Persian at the Mughal court in the time of Akbar.³¹ Rather, the desire was for a rendering of a special

28 M. V. Patwardhan, *Jayavallaha's Vajjālaggam with the Sanskrit Commentary of Ratnadeva* (Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1969), 217 (31: 3). The *Vajjālagga* is not dated but has a Sanskrit *chāyā* of Ratnadeva dated 1393 (1336–37 CE); quotations are found in works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (ibid., xxi), making this the likely chronological horizon.

29 Deven M. Patel, “Source, Exegesis, and Translation: Sanskrit Commentary and Regional Language Translation in South Asia,” *JAOS* 131, no. 2 (2011): 256–66, and more recently Patel, *Text to Tradition: the Naiṣādhīyacarita and Literary Community in South Asia* (Columbia: University Press, 2016).

30 A useful introduction is Heidi Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), more recently Busch, “Hidden in Plain View: Brajhasha Poets at the Mughal Court,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 267–309 and Imre Bangha, “Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the Ramayan of Vishnudas,” in *After Timur Left*, ed. Orsini and Sheikh, 365–402.

31 Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” provides an innovative exploration of Hindi, which was present at court but here we are concerned with translation in Akbar's time. Girdhar Dās composed a 5,900-verse adaption of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsī Dās in AH 1033/1623-24 CE and dedicated it to Jahāngir. There are copies in the British Library, one Or. 1251, for which Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 56. This copy, dated 1804 CE, belonged to Charles Stuart and was acquired by John Bridge, for whom see Willis, “Sculpture of India,” in A. W. Franks: *Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. Marjorie Cargill and John F. Cherry (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1997), 252. Two more copies are IOL no. 1965 and 1966 (IO Islamic 803 and 1694), see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1095–99; further discussion in Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 77,

sort, namely, the creation of a unique Indo-Persian literature, drawing on the Sanskrit classics, most notably the *Mahābhārata*.

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was commissioned by Akbar and named the *Razmnāmah* by him. The king then ordered Abū al-Faḍl, one of his most prominent courtiers, to write a *Preface* to the translation. The goal of the present volume is to explore Abū al-Faḍl's *Preface*. This is termed a *khuṭbah* by Abū al-Faḍl, a word that often refers to the Friday sermon, but more generally means any speech, oration, treatise, introduction or preface. In this book we use the term *Preface* throughout.

Abū al-Faḍl's *Preface* is a unique document in the literary history of Mughal India. Its importance lies in the fact that it is the only Akbar-period introduction that is an integral part the translation to which it refers.³² As the author of the *Preface*, Abū al-Faḍl documents the reasons why the translation was undertaken and discusses the potential readers of the translation along with their likely criticisms. Abū al-Faḍl also describes the difficulties of dealing with textual sources and their interpretation. Finally, Abū al-Faḍl uses the *Preface* to reflect on the challenges he faced when charged with writing an introduction to a large work that was of particular interest to the king. Because of the king's interest, Abū al-Faḍl built his *Preface* around his vision of kingship, embodied in the person of emperor Akbar. This gives the *Preface* historical and political interest beyond its literary scope.

1.1 Abū al-Faḍl ibn Mubārak

Abū al-Faḍl is well known to historians as one of the leading figures at Akbar's court. In addition to Saiyid A. A. Rizvi's *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* – effectively a study of Abū al-Faḍl and his times – we have biographies by Nurul Hasan in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and Richard M.

n. 5. Direct translations of Tulsi Dās come later: Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts* 1: 56, no. Or. 1249, dated 1804 CE, is the oldest copy we have traced. An abridged version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and Tulsi Dās in Persian was published in the late nineteenth century: Parameshri Sahaya Masrur and Lalah Chanda Mal Chand, *Vazifah-yi Faiz* (Agra: Matba'-yi Mufid-i Am, 1893).

32 Introductions merit comprehensive exploration and our search has not been so, but we located a translation with introduction in E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale [etc.], 1905): 182, no. 222. The translation is by كوتال بن ستری which should likely be گوپال; the last name Satri is found in Andhra and probably represents Śastri. The manuscript is dated AH 1095/1683 CE but has a year in the Kollam era according to Blochet; this points to Kerala, see Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 189–90.

Eaton in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.³³ These publications obviate the need here for a detailed account of Abū al-Faḡl's life. Yet for the individual who is the *de facto* protagonist of this book, a brief outline will not be out of place.

Abū al-Faḡl was born in Agra, but his family came from the Yemen and first settled in Sind. Abū al-Faḡl's grandfather shifted to Nāḡawr and it was there that Abū al-Faḡl's father, Shaykh Mubārak, was born in 1506. Moving to Agra in 1543, Shaykh Mubārak established himself as a teacher of philosophy, developing expertise in the thought of Ibn Sīnā and the Ishrāqī wisdom tradition.³⁴ This school attracted notable scholars, among them 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'ūnī – an individual whose name will appear repeatedly in the pages that follow. Shaykh Mubārak's two sons, Abū al-Faḡl and Fayḡī, were well educated by their father thanks to the unique atmosphere of the household. Abū al-Faḡl, the younger son, was born in 1551. His devotion to learning became legendary: by fifteen he is reputed to have acquired an understanding of the Ishrāqīs, Sufi thought and the subtleties of the Greek philosophers whose works had been translated into Arabic.³⁵

Entering royal service, Shaykh Mubārak realised that the court was the best place to introduce reforms and strengthen the cause of the faith as he saw it. Abū al-Faḡl himself was introduced at court by his brother Fayḡī in 1574. Although enjoying favour, the Mubārak family had difficulty when faced with their traditionally-minded contemporaries. Shaykh Mubārak – who once expressed views in favour of the Mahdawi teachings of Muḥammad Jawnpūrī – was castigated by the 'ulamā' as a heretic. It may have been this personal attack that made Abū al-Faḡl see the need for toleration and the peaceful coexistence of religious ideas. According to Badā'ūnī and other learned men at the court, "Shaykh Mubārak, in as far as he pretended to be a Mahdawi, belonged to the class of innovator, and was not only himself damned, but led others to damnation."³⁶ This harsh attitude among the orthodox jurists and their allies continued until a senior noble came

³³ Rizvī, *Religious and Intellectual History*, published in 1975; Richard M. Eaton, "Abu'l-Faḡl 'Allāmī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I, no. 3 (2011): 287–89 and Nurul Hasan, "Abu'l Faḡl (Faḡl) 'Allāmī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., from both of which we have drawn for the present sketch.

³⁴ A school of philosophical and mystical thought, founded by Suhrawardī (1155–91 CE), with Graeco-Oriental roots built on a critique of Aristotelianism and advocating a Neo-platonic method that considered philosophy more than rational inquiry. Ishrāq is commonly used to refer to the 'internal illumination' or acquisition of knowledge based on a mystical unveiling. See Mehdi Amin Razavi, *Suhrawardī and the School of Illumination* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997).

³⁵ Rizvī, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 91. More recently and more generally see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian," *JAOS* 127, no. 3 (2007): 315–38.

³⁶ Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, 2: 266 (hereinafter cited as *MT*).

out to support Mubārak and asked: “Has the world come to an end or is the Day of Resurrection at hand that in his court malicious fanatics have their way and good men are confounded?”³⁷

The capacities of Abū al-Faḡl and Fayḡī were brought to Akbar’s direct attention through Mīrṣā ‘Azīz Koka.³⁸ Abū al-Faḡl subsequently presented the king with commentaries on the *Āyāt al-Kursī* and *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and gained Akbar’s appreciation.³⁹ An active participant in the well-known debates at the *‘Ibādat khānah* or House of Worship, Abū al-Faḡl came into contact with Hindu philosophers who influenced his thought. He particularly refers to Madhusūdāna, about whom we give further details below.⁴⁰ Abū al-Faḡl also conversed with Zoroastrian religious leaders, Jesuit missionaries and developed links with the Jains. It was with an air of contempt after hearing the discussions in *‘Ibādat khānah* and the disparity of views among the *‘ulamā* about their own faith that Akbar decided to be free of their influence. He was quoted as saying to Shaykh Mubārak “Since you are my teacher why do you not free me from dependence on these Mullās?”⁴¹ It is in this light that Abū al-Faḡl mentions in the *Ā’in-i Akbarī* that justice was the way to establish peace and prosperity in the empire.⁴² As Blochmann remarked many years ago: “Abū al-Faḡl led his sovereign to a true appreciation of his duties and from the moment that he entered the court, the problem of successfully ruling over mixed races . . . was carefully considered, and the policy of tolerance was the result.”⁴³ In Rizvi’s estimation, Abū al-Faḡl was an outstanding intellectual figure and a versatile scholar who was cosmopolitan in his outlook and even-handed in his dealings with the religious communities of India.⁴⁴ Rizvi did recognise Abū al-Faḡl’s limitations as a political philosopher, however, and we will return to this in Chapter 4.

During his time at Akbar’s court, Abū al-Faḡl composed the *Akbarnāmah*, his most important work. This is a comprehensive source for the history of Akbar’s time and consists of a three-volume record of Akbar’s ancestors to the reign of to Humāyūn. It continues to Akbar’s 46th regnal year (1602). The *Ā’in-i Akbarī*, the third volume of the *Akbarnāmah*, is itself three volumes and contains an administrative account of the empire and the apparatus of the court. It was completed in

³⁷ See AA 3: 505.

³⁸ The epithet Koka from Turkish *kokaltaş*, foster-brother. He was the foster-brother of Akbar and one of the leading nobles at the court.

³⁹ See MT 2: 198. Badā’ūnī adds the rumour that the commentary was actually written by Abū al-Faḡl’s father. It was completed in AH 983.

⁴⁰ See below, 1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation.

⁴¹ See MT 3: 127 mentioned under X. Shaikh ‘Abdu-‘n-Nabī.

⁴² See AA 1: 12.

⁴³ See AA 1: xxix.

⁴⁴ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 123.

the 42nd year of Akbar's reign (1597–98), with an addition being made in the 43rd year (1598–99) on account of the conquest of Berar. As well as the *Akbarnāmah*, Abū al-Faḥl's works include translations from the Bible, the *ʿIyār-i Dānish* (a revision of the *Anvārī Suhaylī*) and a preface to the *Tārīkh-i Alfī* (now lost). His letters and refined prose writing inspired collections, one being the *Mukātabāt-i ʿAllāmī*.⁴⁵

Abū al-Faḥl's close links to Akbar ultimately led to his death in 1602. Prince Salim – later emperor Jahāngīr – was impatient for the throne and conspired with the Bundelā ruler of Orrchā to assassinate him. This happened at Antri, near Orrchā, as Abū al-Faḥl was returning from a tour of duty in the Deccan. For such a distinguished Mughal writer, his tomb is a non-descript platform, without ornaments or a dome. We have not traced a separate portrait miniature of Abū al-Faḥl, but he does appear in the *Akbarnāmah* preserved in the Chester Beatty Library.⁴⁶ In this double page miniature, Abū al-Faḥl is shown presenting the king with a volume of his work.

1.2 Translation Bureau (*maktab khānah*)

To produce translations from Sanskrit and other languages, Akbar established a house of writing (*maktab khānah*) where court historians and scholars were instructed to translate works into Persian.⁴⁷ This Translation Bureau – as it has come to be called – was part of Akbar's policy of 'peace for all' and the implementation of Persian as the 'language of state' from 1582.⁴⁸ The Bureau produced a series of translations of works on astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, folklore and other subjects.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 108, IOL no. 271 (IO Islamic 2985).

⁴⁶ Linda Y. Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 1: 217 and colour plate 39–40, for which reference we are grateful to Emily Hannam.

⁴⁷ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, all of chapter 6 is relevant and is seminal historiographically.

⁴⁸ Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*; M. Athar Ali, "Ṣulḥ-i kull," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved January 2022, more recently and importantly, Rajeev Kinra, "Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility: The Global Historical Legacy of Mughal Sulh-i Kull," *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2014): 251–95.

⁴⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 206; Qāsmī, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Translations*. The online listing in *Perso-Indica*, ed. Carl Ernst, Fabrizio Speciale and Eva Orthmann is an essential source for translation literature in all periods.

An indicative example of the translation programme and its impact is the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, a version of the Rāma story that was composed in Sanskrit some time before the thirteenth century.⁵⁰ First translated as the *Jūg Bāsisht* for Akbar, it was retranslated for Jahāngīr and then again for Prince Dārā in mid-seventeenth century.⁵¹ The sublime philosophical and religious reflections in the *Jūg Bāsisht* drew the attention of Mir Findiriskī, who visited India in the 1600s and through whose agency copies are found in Iran.⁵² The most ambitious projects under Akbar in the 1580s were thematically related and focussed on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, taken up in detail below.

From an early age, Akbar had spent his time learning how to become a skilful ruler and – with less-than-diligent tutors by some reports – he had little opportunity to develop his reading and writing skills. Although this led Akbar to being functionally illiterate (a point addressed by Abū al-Faḍl, as we shall see in Chapter 2), he was always on a quest for knowledge and had books regularly read out to him.⁵³ Among the works that caught his interest were legends and works of history.⁵⁴ He also had the verses of Persian poets such as Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ and Firdawsī read aloud.⁵⁵ Among his known favourites was the *Ḥamzanāmah*, an Arabic collection of tales narrating the heroic exploits of Amīr Ḥamza, the uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad. He enjoyed the book sufficiently to commission a grand illustrated series of it. Now dispersed across collections world-wide, the *Ḥamzanāmah* is a unique monument of story-telling in the visual arts of Mughal India.⁵⁶

50 Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020) outlines and updates the scholarship on the text.

51 Heike Franke, “Akbar’s *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in the Chester Beatty Library,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 2 (2011): 359–75; Alam “In Search of a Sacred King: Dārā Shukoh and the *Yogavāsiṣṭhas* of Mughal India,” *History of Religions* 55, no. 4 (2016): 429–59.

52 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

53 Akbar’s illiteracy discussed in Ellen Smart, “Akbar, Illiterate Genius,” in *Kaladarsana*, ed. J. G. Williams (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 99–107, an opposing view in Annemarie Schimmel, Corinne Attwood and Burzine K. Waghmar, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art, and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

54 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 205.

55 Despite Akbar’s love of Rūmī, and an appreciation of him also by Abū al-Faḍl, a complete *Mathnawī* was not available in India at the time: Alam, “Mughal Philology and Rumi’s *Mathnawī*,” in *World Philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock et al (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 178–200.

56 Seyller and W. M. Thackston, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 2002); Seyller, “A Dated *Ḥamzanāma* Illustration,” *Artibus Asiae* 53, no. 3–4 (1993): 501–05.

Akbar's broad interests led him to appoint 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'ūnī as a translator and historian. Among the many tasks assigned to him, Akbar asked Badā'ūnī to translate the *Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne* (*Siṃhāsana Dvātriṃśikā*). This was a thirteenth-century Sanskrit story that took the throne of king Vikramāditya as its focus.⁵⁷ According to the legend, there were thirty-two little statues round the base of the throne and when king Bhoja of Mālwa attempted to sit on it, each statue posed a difficult question. After answering all the questions correctly, Bhoja was finally able to take his place on the throne.⁵⁸ After *Tales of the Throne*, Akbar ordered Badā'ūnī and Shaykh Bhāvan to translate the *Atharva Veda* (*Bed Atharban*), an anthology of hymns, incantations, and magical spells of great antiquity. Its translation went on until 1583 when it was abandoned.⁵⁹

Around the same time, Akbar's widening concerns led him to create the *'Ibādat khānah* at his new capital Fatehpur Sikri. This became a meeting place where spiritual leaders and people of different faiths – including Hindus, Jains and even Catholic Jesuits – gathered for discussion, creating an opportunity for an exchange of views in theological and philosophical matters.⁶⁰ The debates seem to have encouraged Akbar to see tolerance as means of resolving the problems generated by religious diversity in the empire. This was coupled with the creation of a new elite association, the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* or 'Faith of the Divine.' That was in 1581. Related to *Alfī* movements as Islam approached the end of its first millennium, the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* was an eclectic amalgam of practices and ideas drawing on Sufism, Hinduism,

57 The key work on the Sanskrit text is Franklin Edgerton, *Vikrama's Adventures: Or, The Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne, a Collection of Stories About King Vikrama, As Told by the Thirty-Two Statuettes That Supported His Throne, Edited in Four Different Recensions of the Sanskrit Original (Vikrama-Charita or Sinhasana-Dvatrinçaka)*. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1926). A relatively recent translation is A. N. D. Haksar, *Siṃhāsana Dvātriṃśikā: Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne of Vikramaditya* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998).

58 There was a long interest in Bhoja and his legacy, see R. Babagolzadeh, "On Becoming Muslim in the City of Swords: Bhoja and Shaykh Changal at Dhār," *JRAS* 22, no. 1 (2012): 115–27; for an entry into this problem, Daud Ali, "Bhoja's Mechanical Garden: Translating Wonder across the Indian Ocean, circa 800–1100 CE," *History of Religions* 55, no. 4 (2016): 460–93.

59 See *MT*: 212–13 and M. Athar Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works at Akbar's Court," *Social Scientist* 20, no. 232–33 (1992): 39 where the problems encountered by the translators are explained.

60 An early study is Vincent Smith, "Akbar's 'House of Worship', or 'Ibadat-Khana'," *JRAS* (1917): 715–22, but more recently see Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar's *'Ibādat khāna*," *Studies in History* 24 (2008): 195–209. On the Jesuits there is much literature; a starting point is Audrey Truschke, "Deceptive Familiarity: European Perceptions of Access at the Mughal Court," in *The Key to Power?: The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400–1750*, ed. Dries Raeymaekers and S. C. Derks (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 65–99.

Christianity, Jainism and Zoroastrianism.⁶¹ In this context and at this time, Akbar became interested in the Sanskrit epics and related works, ordering translations of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* and the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.⁶² These works allow for an understanding of the Mughal milieu, especially the translations of Hindu works from Sanskrit. They were built out of the linguistic and textual materials of both traditions and document the exchanges between them. As something new – at least in terms of the scale of resources devoted to their preparation – the translated Sanskrit texts are part of the dynamic literary and artistic landscape that was emerging at the time in northern India.

An insight into the Translation Bureau is provided by an illustrated folio in the Free Library, Philadelphia (Figure 1). This comes from a dispersed *Razmnāmah* that had a large number of illustrations and was completed in 1598–99.⁶³ The painting bears an attribution to Dhanu, an artist from the imperial atelier whose work appears in a number of books such as the *Dārābnāmah* (British Library Or. 4615) and several versions of the *Razmnāmah*, including the portion in the British Library of which the Philadelphia page was once a part.⁶⁴ The colophon is discussed separately and illustrated below. Dhanu worked in a sub-imperial style for which various explanations have been put forward.⁶⁵ Losty stated the work

⁶¹ The foundational study is Makhmalal Roymchoudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi; Or, The Religion of Akbar* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1952), often reprinted and now in a fourth edition. For a more recent assessment, see Heinrich von Stietencron, “Planned Syncretism: Emperor Akbar’s Religious Policy,” in *Hindu Myth, Hindu History, Religion, Art, and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 173–93 and Aziz Ahmad, “Din-i Ilāhī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved January 2022. Insight into how the later Mughals regarded the new cult is found in Z. U. Malik, “The Eighteenth Century View of Akbar,” in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 249–53.

⁶² For the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 65–66; for the *Harivaṃśa*, Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1090, no. 1951 (IO Islamic 1777); for the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, see the fragment in Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1105, no. 1987 (IO Islamic 2410), but note the imperial copy and information about the translation in Heike Franke, “Akbar’s ‘Kathāsaritsāgara’: the Translator and Illustrations of an Imperial Manuscript,” *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 313–56.

⁶³ Seyller, “Model and Copy: The Illustration of Three ‘Razmnāma’ Manuscripts,” *Archives of Asian Art* 38 (1985): 37–66. Other publications of the Philadelphia page include Stella Kramrisch, *Painted Delight: Indian Paintings from Philadelphia Collections: Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 26 to April 20, 1986* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1986), 156; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 105 and figure 3.1.

⁶⁴ J. P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), 123. Seyller, “Model and Copy,” see Appendix A for a reconstruction of the miniature sequence.

⁶⁵ Pramod Chandra, “Ustād Sālīvāhana and the Development of Popular Mughal Art,” *Lalit Kalā* 8 (1960): 24–46 proposed calling this a “popular Mughal style,” a misnomer that has not helped

was “rarely of imperial calibre, and it must be assumed that they [the artists of the dispersed *Razmnāmah*] had left the court studio or were allowed to take on work from other patrons.”⁶⁶ However that might be, after a disquisition on the styles of the pictures, Losty gave the manuscript to the nobleman ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) on the basis of the names of the artists involved, a not implausible if so far unprovable attribution.⁶⁷

The page in Philadelphia from this *Razmnāmah* seems to have been the first illustration in the manuscript and carries text that is part of Abū al-Faḍl’s *Preface*.⁶⁸ The corresponding translation can be found in this volume in Chapter 2 where Abū al-Faḍl tells us that “the sublime decree went forth concerning the *Mahābhārata*” and that, as per the king’s command, “the learned ones of both factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression.”⁶⁹ Following this cue, the artist Dhanu has captured the interaction, showing two groups seated in the courtyard of a pavilion. The doors are shut, indicating this is a closed interaction. The scholars in the foreground are seated on a chequered floorspread in red and white, while those above sit on an arabesque carpet in the Persian style. The floor coverings not only make a distinction between Indian and Persian, they frame each group visually and define their spheres of communication – each is self-contained. The visual conventions of Mughal painting mean that ‘higher up’ is ‘further back’, but hierarchy is implied nonetheless with the Muslims at the top and the Hindus at the bottom. The Muslims are accorded attendants who fan them with gold-edged sashes. The representation of the books in the picture also follows established convention. Those at the top are of the Islamic type, in a vertical format with guard flaps. A storage box for books has three such volumes on its lid. Below, in the middle of the painting, is an Indian-style book in a rectangular format with a red cover, the loose folios evidently

explain the manuscript production and has had, consequently, no historiographical traction. Conclusions based on subjective assessments of style have often led to erroneous conclusions, for example see, Franke, “Akbar’s *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.”

⁶⁶ Losty, *Art of the Book*, 124.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 124. On the individual, Corinne Lefèvre, “The Court of ‘Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān as a Bridge between Iranian and Indian Cultural Traditions,” in *Culture and Circulation*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 75–106.

⁶⁸ Following Seyller, “Model and Copy,” Appendix A. Earlier pictures from the *Preface*, if indeed any were made, would have had Akbar as their theme, so perhaps this first picture is signalling what was most significant in the translation project for the patron of this manuscript.

⁶⁹ Chapter 2, 18 (printed text). Also see appendix 3 in this volume for the text from the Philadelphia page.

showing that it has just been flipped through in the course of the discussion. Two of the men in the lower group have further volumes of this type tucked under their arms. Indian books are often kept in cloth wrappers which may explain the bulging cloth bundles in the lower part, one of these held by the standing figure dressed in white who may be a Jain monk.

In clothing and physiognomy, the two groups seem indistinguishable at first glance. They are all shown seated on their knees, wearing a plain long tunic fastened diagonally and girdled by a richly decorated sash. Each member of the learned gathering wears a characteristic turban favoured under Akbar, formed by loops of plain cloth held in place by a band.⁷⁰ There is, however, a telling distinction between Indic and Persianate attires presented by an outlier in both groups: in the foreground, a standing figure dressed in a simple loincloth with a scarf over his bare torso and, right above him, a seated figure in a buttoned overcoat. There are also clear sectarian markers. In the group below, figures have sandalwood paste on their foreheads and necks, the two vertical stripes showing they are Vaiṣṇavas. As noted in our discussion of the translation team below, the Indic side was dominated by Vaiṣṇavas, so the painting conforms to the known facts in this respect. In the group above, two individuals wear beards as a marker of Muslim identity. A more subtle distinction is made by the rosaries which, though common to both Indic and Islamic traditions, are worn around the neck as garlands (*mālā*) by the Hindus and held in hand as prayer beads (*misbahah*) by the Muslims. Rather noticeably, the Hindus wear finger rings while the Muslims do not.

The awareness of difference in the otherwise unified assembly maps onto the ‘proto-ethnography’ seen in Abū al-Faḍl’s writing, but we must be wary of reading the miniature as a straightforward ‘document’ of social, religious or ethnic identities. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the artist has followed the pictorial cue in the text of *Preface* in order to represent the “Brahmins of India”. The translation of the *Mahābhārata* from Sanskrit proceeded through the intermediary language of Hindi, which was then rendered into Persian by Naqīb Khān. This important figure sits on the carpet to the left, recognisable from the portrait discussed in the relevant section below.⁷¹ This means, of course, that the figure opposite Naqīb Khān is Akbar. The likeness may not be as compelling as other known portraits, but the text above makes the identity explicit: Akbar issued a decree that skilled

⁷⁰ Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, “Representation of Middle Class Professionals in Mughal Visual Art,” in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books), 159–93, also Sylvia Houghteling, *The Art of Cloth in Mughal India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

⁷¹ See 1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation, section devoted to Naqīb Khān.

experts of ‘both factions’ should be assembled to translate the *Mahābhārata*. The Hindus with the necessary command of Sanskrit are shown with attitudes ranging from the reserved to the outspoken, emphasising that the translation was a matter of extensive debate and deliberation with consensus only emerging in Naqīb Khān’s final Persian rendering. The artist has chosen to portray an unresolved moment of clamorous exchange, animated by gestures of objection, interruption and disagreement. Meanwhile, a scribe diligently makes notes about the proceedings on a scroll. This carries a Hindi sentence written in *nāgarī* that appears to say: “wisdom from a group of good people is great indeed.”⁷² By thus making the vernacular visible and legible to the viewer, Dhanu has provided a tangible sense of the intermediary language that stood between the Sanskrit source and Persian product.

1.3 The *Mahābhārata*

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was part of a large cultural project and the most ambitious undertaking of the Translation Bureau. As India’s celebrated ‘national epic’, the *Mahābhārata* was named after Bharata, the legendary emperor who founded the Bhārata dynasty and established a mighty kingdom. His realm was called Bhāratavarṣa, the ‘country of Bharata’, a term that became a name for India itself from at least the sixth century.⁷³ The Bhārata story is known to have existed in about the first century CE, but a number of stories and poems were added to it over time, until it became the great story – the word *mahā* means ‘great’ – in the fifth century.⁷⁴ As it stands now, the *Mahābhārata* is a vast work, filling nineteen

72 Read: *satvia* (understand: *sāttvika*) *gane* (read: *gaṇe*) *se jñana* (read: *jñāna*) *mahāmahat*. We are grateful especially to Dániel Balogh for help with the reading. The Persian notation on the lower left of the painting is discussed below.

73 The oldest epigraphic testimony for the *Bhāratavarṣa* seems to be in Aulikara records, Salomon, “New Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Aulikaras of Mandasor,” *IJ* 32 (1989): 1–36, Dániel Balogh, *Inscriptions of the Aulikaras and Their Associates* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 151, inscription A9, verse 22: *lakṣma bhāratavarṣasya nideśāt tasya bhūkṣitaḥ | akārayad daśapure prakāśeśvarasadmayaḥ||*.

74 Dieter Schlingloff, “The Oldest Extant Parvan-List of the *Mahābhārata*,” *JAOS* 89, no. 2 (1969): 334–38, reappraised in John Brockington, “The Spitzer Manuscript and the *Mahābhārata*,” in *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dietrich Schlingloff*, ed. Eli Franco and Monika Zin, (Rupandehi [Nepal]: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), 75–87. From this document and the overall texture of the epic we reject Hiltebeitel’s ahistorical perspective, despite the currency it unjustly enjoys, see Bruce M. Sullivan, “An Overview of *Mahābhārata* Scholarship: A Perspective on the State of the Field,” *Religion Compass* 10, no. 7 (2016): 165–75. The shorter

volumes in the printed Sanskrit edition.⁷⁵ For this reason and for its content too, the *Mahābhārata* is rightly deemed an epic. It shares this term with its sister text, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Regional variants of both are many, and commentaries and derivative stories are found all over Asia. The secondary literature on the epics is vast and written in several Indian and European languages.⁷⁶

Like any text that is big, old and complex, there has been a long history of engagement, commentary and translation. The most well-known extract from the *Mahābhārata* is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This is a poetic and philosophical work of great importance that has circulated separately for many centuries. In a popularising book, Richard Davis has explored the history of the *Gītā*, charting how it came to be composed, how it was transmitted and what it meant to successive generations of readers.⁷⁷ How the understanding of the *Gītā* has evolved, and how the text has prompted response, also holds true for the *Mahābhārata*, the container in which the *Gītā* was often transmitted down the ages. The key point for this book is that like the *Gītā*, the *Mahābhārata* was an active text in the Mughal period, sufficiently known to draw attention at the royal court and to inspire translation.

James Fitzgerald, who has devoted much scholarship to the *Mahābhārata*, has outlined how the epic justifies itself in three ways: (a) as a work providing a vision of the ultimate reality as the supreme god Viṣṇu, (b) as a sacred scripture – one of the Vedas – that was endorsed, possessed and supported by Brahmins, the priestly class, and (c) as a law-book or *śāstra* that supported royal action

Bhārata is cited in the text itself, J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata: 1. Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University Press, 1973): 22, “First he composed the collection of *The Bhārata* in twenty-four thousand verses, without the minor narratives; this much the learned call *The Bhārata* proper.”

75 V. S. Sukthankar et al, eds., *The Mahābhārata*, 19 vols (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1933–66). A long project of translation into English was started by J. A. B. van Buitenen and continues under James L. Fitzgerald and others.

76 A useful starting point is John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics: A Comprehensive Guide to the Mahābhārata (and the Rāmāyaṇa) and Scholarship on them* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) and J. L. Brockington, Greg Bailey and Mary Brockington, *Epic threads: John Brockington on the Sanskrit epics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); more recently Sullivan, “An Overview of Mahābhārata Scholarship.”

77 Richard H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gītā: A Biography* (Princeton: University Press, 2015). There were, of course, medieval commentaries as well, an exemplary study being J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā: a condensed rendering of his Gītābhāṣya with copious notes and an introduction*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968); for other commentaries, Sukthankar, “Epic Studies: V. Notes on Mahābhārata Commentators,” *ABORI* 17, no. 2 (1935): 185–202 and P. V. Kane, “The Mahābhārata and Ancient Commentators,” *ABORI* 19, no. 2 (1938): 161–72.

after the example of Kṛṣṇa – himself an incarnation of Viṣṇu.⁷⁸ This places the work in theological terms: it is the ultimate point of reference. The narrative frame for this vision is rather more ordinary: the story itself is about two sides of a family that came to blows over who was the rightful heir to the kingdom. After many twists and turns, the conflict builds to such an extent that all the peoples of India are allied with one side or the other. In the end, two huge armies meet on the battlefield of Kuru, a location near Thānesar, north of Delhi. The result is a bloodbath of such awful proportions that it ushers in a ‘dark age’. The protagonists consist of five brothers, the sons of king Pāṇḍu – known by their patronymic as the Pāṇḍavas. They were opposed by the hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The sons of Pāṇḍu were each the children of a god as well and the gods play heavily in the story. The most important is Viṣṇu, who comes to earth incarnated as Kṛṣṇa, as just noted. He attempted to mediate between the sides but ultimately became the special advisor to Arjuna, one of the Pāṇḍava princes. Kṛṣṇa’s advice to Arjuna is found in the *Gītā*, a discourse delivered just before the start of the great war.

After the first book – the Ādi Parvan – has set the scene, the story proper begins with the exile of the Pāṇḍavas to the forest for a period of twelve years. This comes about because Yudhiṣṭhira gambles away the kingdom in a complex game of dice, an essential part of the king’s coronation rites or *rājasūya*.⁷⁹ The game is normally rigged – by the deployment of expiatory rites – so the king will win and then be crowned. In the *Mahābhārata*, however, Yudhiṣṭhira rolls the dice and loses everything.⁸⁰ He agrees to go into exile with his brothers and let Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons rule. After twelve years (and an additional year in hiding), the understanding was that half of the kingdom would be returned to them. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his cohort – the Kauravas – refuse to honour the agreement, the two sides are put on a collision course. The war that follows com-

78 James L. Fitzgerald, “India’s Fifth Veda: the Mahābhārata’s Presentation of Itself,” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 150–70; for the application of these ideas in specific contexts, see Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150–51.

79 J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata: Book 2: The Book of the Assembly Hall; Book 3: The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 27–30; the issue and indeed the whole *Mahābhārata* narrative is outlined with skill in van Buitenen, “On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata,” in *India Maior: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, ed. Jacob Ensink and Hans Peter Theodor Gaeffke (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 68–84. The *rājasūya* features prominently in the Persian summary of the text, see translation in Chapter 2.

80 The *prāyaścittiyam* karma or expiatory rites are among several ritual duties of the *purohita*, see Willis, *Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 169.

prises the bulk of the *Mahābhārata* and explains why the Persian translation is called *Razmnāmah*, the ‘Book of War’.

The *Mahābhārata* is not a happy tale. The Pāṇḍavas win the war but abandon all principles, slaying their relatives, father figures and many distinguished heroes. In the aftermath, Kṛṣṇa meets an unhappy end with his clan, while the mother of the Pāṇḍavas turns away from her offspring to become a recluse. The Pāṇḍavas themselves die off one by one as they travel north to the Himālayas. Only Yudhiṣṭhira is left in the end, with a dog as a companion. He makes it to the heavenly gate in the mountains but is asked to drive the dog away because it is unclean. He refuses because the dog is loyal. This turns out to be a test: the dog is, in fact, Dharma, his divine father. Yudhiṣṭhira is then ushered in but finds that heaven is inhabited by his old enemies, the Kauravas! The Pāṇḍavas are in hell, at which point Yudhiṣṭhira insists on being sent to hell to join his brothers. This also turns out to be a test: the Pāṇḍavas are actually in heaven. Having passed his last trial, Yudhiṣṭhira is allowed to enter.

The summary given here represents the overarching narrative and reflects the analysis of the story (and frame stories) favoured in Indological discourse. The work itself, however, is divided into eighteen books or Parvans and summaries of the *Mahābhārata* generally provide a Parvan-by-Parvan synopsis of the complex and varied contents of each section. This is true of ancient summaries and it is found also in the Persian version, given here in Chapter 2.

The word *Mahābhārata* is easy to use – as a title and label. It is quite another matter to determine what sort of manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* found their way to the Mughal court and were used to produce the *Razmnāmah*. While this problem has received preliminary attention from Audrey Truschke, much philological work remains to be done.⁸¹ Not surprisingly, the translation follows the northern recension, but departs from it in a number of ways. The fourteenth book is based on the *Jaiminiyāśvamedha*, a twelfth-century work, rather than the *Āśvamedha* Parvan of the northern recension.⁸² The *Anugītā* – a retelling of the *Bhagavad Gītā* – was excused in the process, not a particularly surprising decision considering the *Gītā* itself is given short shrift in the *Razmnāmah*.⁸³

⁸¹ Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 107–09; Truschke, “A Padshah like Manu: Political Advice for Akbar in the Persian *Mahābhārata*,” *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 2 (2020): 112–33.

⁸² Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 109, n. 45, citing J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Greece and India again: the *Jaimini-Asvamedha*, the Alexander-romance and the Gospels,” *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 22, no. 1 (1970): 19–44. This Parvan has a separate literary life as evidenced by the copy dated 1761 CE in the time of Shāh ‘Ālam, see Rieu, *Supplement*, 14 (Or. 4561).

⁸³ The distillation of the *Gītā* already in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59 (under Add. 7676), reiterated in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 285, n. 82. This treatment in the Persian

A major problem rests in the fact that the Sanskrit manuscripts are rarely as old as the Persian translation. In the first volume of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, V. S. Sukthankar gave an instructive account of the manuscripts used to construct the *editio princeps*: “The oldest dated manuscript of our critical apparatus is a Nepali manuscript (Ñs) which bears a date corresponding to A.D. 1511. The other dates are: A.D. 1519 (K3), 1528 (V1), 1598 (D2), 1620 (Da2), 1638 (K2), 1694 (K4), 1701 (DR3), 1739 (K0), 1740 (B1), 1759 (B3), 1786 (B5), 1802 (D5), 1808 (Dn2), 1838 (M3), and 1842 (M8).”⁸⁴ The Mughals were unlikely to have had access to manuscripts from Nepal, so the copies of interest to our concerns are those from the northern recension that are dated 1519 and 1598. The point here is not which manuscripts give us the most ancient or authentic version – a separate Indological matter – but rather those that might have been available to the Mughals. The manuscript of 1519 is from Gujarat and the copy dated 1598 was written in Benares.⁸⁵ The *maktab khānah* was rather far from Gujarat geographically and while connections with Gujarat cannot be ruled out given Mughal the conquest of the region in the 1570s, the procurement of manuscripts there for the translation project seems unlikely. The manuscript of 1598 looks more promising, but the copy should be removed from account because it can be understood as having been copied during the revival of Sanskrit studies at Benares under the Mughals and so produced in the context generated by Akbar’s translation projects in the 1580s.⁸⁶ On the face of the evidence, therefore, examples of the kind of manuscript that might have been used by the Mughals – never mind copies with notations or seals that show they were actually used – are non-existent. What we have are subsequent copies of copies, the number seeming to increase in the

has a direct bearing on the controversy about the insertion or not of the *Gitā* into the text: Oliver Hellwig, “Stratifying the Mahābhārata: The Textual Position of the Bhagavadgītā,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 132–69.

84 Sukthankar, *Prologomena* [to the critical edition of the Ādiparvan, Book 1 of the Mahābhārata] (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1933), vi. Aside from the problems posed here, there is a developed historiography (and attendant controversy) about the critical edition, from Sukthankar “Epic Studies: III: Dr. Ruben on the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 11, no. 3 (1930): 259–83 (to give an early citation), to M. A. Mehendale, “The Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata: Its Achievement and Limitations,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 88 (2007): 1–16 (to cite something more recent). The substantial problems that need to be addressed are noted in Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* (London: Anthem Press, 2018).

85 Sukthankar, *Prologomena* Ibid., xii and xvii.

86 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, chapter 2 outlines the context in Benares.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸⁷ Manuscripts were certainly there to be had, but their assumed availability needs to be tempered with Badā'ūnī's remark about the *Mahābhārata*: "... the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and to copy it. And they keep it hid from Musalmāns."⁸⁸ So manuscripts were known to be around, but they were kept under wraps. And however the Mughals managed to put their hand on copies, none of these are available to us now.

Whatever the obstacles may have been, the Mughals secured manuscripts and the translation was made. In the painting of the *maktab khānah* from the dispersed *Razmnāmah* discussed above, we see those involved with their books (Figure 1). At the top, four individuals discuss the translation, an open copy to hand. Those at the bottom are engaged in a lively discussion, while a scribe makes notes on a scroll. Directly in the middle, between the two groups, is a partially open Sanskrit manuscript. It is rectangular in format and has the usual red cover. This is surely part of the *Mahābhārata*, a picture of the very text used by the translation team. That book taunts us mercilessly: we can see it but we cannot reach out and turn the pages – it is in plain sight but forever beyond our reach. Abū al-Faḍl was wont to enrich his *Preface* with borrowed verses, as we shall soon see. His example and this miniature painting prompt our own quotation from the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (translation by Agha Shahid Ali).

جس نے آفاق پر پھیلایا ہے یوں سحر کا دام
دامن وقت سے پیوست ہے یوں دامن شام
اب کبھی شام بجھے گی نہ اندھیرا ہوگا
اب کبھی رات ڈھلے گی نہ سویرا ہوگا۔

آسمان آس لئے ہے کہ یہ جادو ٹوٹے
چپ کی زنجیر کٹے، وقت کا دامن چھوٹے۔
دے کوئی سنکھ دبائ، کوئی پابل بولے۔
کوئی بت جاگے، کوئی سانولی گھونگھٹ کھولے۔

Some terrible magician,
hidden behind curtains,
has hypnotized Time
so this evening is a net
in which twilight is caught.

⁸⁷ Sukthankar, *Prologomena*, viii lists the MSS of the northern recension. It is difficult to speak of a "widespread currency" of the northern recension, as in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 108, because it is difficult to gauge whether copying was as prolific in the sixteenth century as it became later.

⁸⁸ See MT 2: 219. The passage is given in full below.

Now darkness will never come—
and there will never be morning.

The sky waits for this spell to be broken,
for History to tear itself from this net,
for Silence to break its chains
so that a symphony of conch shells
may wake up the statues
and a beautiful, dark goddess,
her anklets echoing, may unveil herself.

A shadowy proto-history of the *Mahābhārata* – hidden behind the curtain of time if you will – can be traced archaeologically and epigraphically. The earliest representations in terracotta and stone sculpture belong to the Gupta period and the distribution of these remains are an important indication of where the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* took shape in north India.⁸⁹ The oldest textual references come from concurrent copper-plate charters. The Katni plates state: “And it is said in the *Mahābhārata* by Lord Veda Vyāsa (*uktañ ca mahābhārata bhagavatā vedavyāsenā*).” There follows an imprecation defending the grant of land registered in the document.⁹⁰ As noted in an earlier study, the verses that appear in the plates are found only in late Malayalam copies of the *Mahābhārata* in the southern recension of the Āśvamedhika Parvan; in the critical edition the material is relegated to an appendix.⁹¹ So, do we have texts from the fifth and sixth centuries? In some ways, yes, in other ways, no. The copper-plates charters belong to the genre of legal documents pertaining to land ownership. They were buried in

89 Laxshmi Greaves, “Pawāyā: An Early Terraced Brick Temple,” *South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2014): 181–205; Greaves, “Locating the Lost Gupta Period *Rāmāyaṇa* Reliefs from Katingara, Uttar Pradesh,” *Religions of South Asia* 12, no. 2 (2019): 117–53; Greaves, “The Enigma of the Centauress and Her Lover: Investigating a Fifth-century Terracotta Panel from Ahichhatrā,” in *Framing Intellectual and Lived Spaces in Early South Asia: Sources and Boundaries*, ed. Lucas den Boer and Elizabeth A. Cecil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 13–50; Greaves, “Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti or Sage Nārāyaṇa? Reconsidering an Early Terracotta Panel from Ahichhatrā,” *Papers Presented at the Twenty-Second International Conference of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art held at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities/National Museums of World Culture, Stockholm*, ed. E. Myrdal and S. A. Abraham (New Delhi: Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2020), 135–52; Greaves, “The ‘best abode of virtue’: Sattrā represented on a Gupta-Period Frieze from Gaṛhwa, Uttar Pradesh,” in *Primary Sources and Asian Pasts. Beyond Boundaries*, ed. P. C. Bisschop and E. A. Cecil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 64–105.

90 For text and illustration, see Dániel Balogh et al, *Katni Plates of Jayanātha*, SIDDHAM (2019), retrieved January 2022.

91 Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 86. The argument here appears also in Muntazir Ali et al, “The oldest manuscripts from India and their histories: a re-assessment of IO Loth 4 in the British Library,” in press.

the ground and entirely forgotten until modern times, at which point they passed to museums and Sanskrit scholars. Texts otherwise – literary, scientific and religious works – are much later copies, as the perusal of the introduction to any printed edition will show.

We happily examine the available edition of the *Mahābhārata* thinking we have access to an ancient work and the minds that created it. But we have no such thing or experience. What we are reading is a redacted text that has passed through innumerable hands and copies until, finally, it reached the desks of the modern editors. This edition contains bits and pieces from many periods assembled around an old core – effectively it is an assemblage built by many individuals over the *longue durée*. This rather spoils the fun, but critical historicism tends to do that: as Johannes Bronkhorst has pointed out, the historian will, sooner or later, fall out with pious orthodoxies and received wisdoms.⁹² So while people have got used to the idea of Indian Sanskrit texts being ‘ancient’, there is a distortion on two sides. Firstly, texts like the *Mahābhārata* may be set in hoary antiquity and recount the interactions of gods and men, but there is no actual trace of the *Mahābhārata* before the fifth century CE, as the epigraphic and artistic evidence shows. The manuscripts themselves are a thousand years later, their date telling us just as much about the sixteenth century as the sixth (CE or BCE, depending on your disposition). By the time we reach the eighteenth century, there are many copies of both the Persian and Sanskrit versions. It is indicative and ironic that the oldest complete copy of the *Mahābhārata* in the British Library is dated 1776 and was collected by Nathaniel Halhed, the same individual who owned the sixteenth-century *Razmnāmah* that is at the heart of this study. Written in a vertical format following the precedent of Mughal books, this *Mahābhārata* is not actually a coherent single copy, but rather a bundle of Parvans by different scribes.⁹³ The earliest printed versions of the whole epic, the first of which appeared from 1834 as far as we are aware, were based on anthologies like this, and perhaps also on complete manuscripts with all the Parvans, but the history of the later transmission of the epic, in parts or in whole, and its entry into the early print culture of India, are subjects that await exploration.⁹⁴

⁹² Johannes Bronkhorst, “Indology, What Is It Good For?” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 1 (2011): 115–22.

⁹³ Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1902), 22 (Add. 5569–76).

⁹⁴ Anindita Ghosh, “An Uncertain ‘Coming of the Book’: Early Print Cultures in Colonial India,” *Book History* 6 (2003): 23–55.

1.4 Sources and Dates for the Translation and Preface

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was commissioned by Akbar in 1582 and finished in 1584.⁹⁵ Badā'ūnī informs us that Akbar bestowed the title *Razmnāmah* or 'Book of Wars' on the translation and that "Shaykh Abū al-Faḍl . . . wrote a preface of the length of two quires (*juzv*) for that work."⁹⁶ With his usual acerbity, Badā'ūnī could not help adding that this was "contrary to the dictates of the commentary on the *Āyāt al-Kursī* that he had composed."⁹⁷ The tone of this remark adds weight to Badā'ūnī's testimony that Abū al-Faḍl composed the *Preface*. Any doubt in the matter is removed by Abū al-Faḍl's own statement that the task was assigned to him by the king:⁹⁸

they made me – who has lost the thread of speech – the trustee of the keys of discourse. I received permission from the audience-hall of the source of overflowing bounty to say a few words appropriate to this subject.

Aside from the *Preface*, the business of writing down the translation of the *Razmnāmah* was entrusted to Naqīb Khān. According to several manuscripts, he took one and a half years and finished the task in Ramaḍān or Sha'bān 992/ September 1584 CE.⁹⁹ He was helped in the matter by several scholars. The account of this team and the translation process in our sources are not as consistent as we

⁹⁵ This according to the calculations of Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 41, citing the account and dates given by Badā'ūnī. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210 says the project started in AH 990 without citing his source; Yael Rice, "A Persian Mahābhārata: The 1598–1599 Razmnāma," *Manoa* 22, no.1 (2010): 126 says the process took four years to complete, from 1584–88 but also does cite no source for this information.

⁹⁶ See *MT* 2: 321.

⁹⁷ See *MT* 2: 321. Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation," 198 sheds useful light on Badā'ūnī's critical remark.

⁹⁸ See translation in Chapter 2, 2 (printed text). The word "they" refers to Akbar, the plural used in deference.

⁹⁹ Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1087, no. 1944 (IO Islamic 1702) also mentions Naqīb Khān and the time he took. As Ethé notes, this manuscript is almost identical to IO Islamic 2926 which dates to 1737 so it is likely that IO Islamic 1702 is also of the mid-eighteenth century. Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation of the Mahabharat," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 13 (1950): 198 gives completion as "Monday 27 Sha'bān 992H/September 4, 1584" following an early-nineteenth century manuscript in the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh. (The calculators we have used give the date 3 September 1584). The Aligarh MSS are catalogued in Shailesh Zaidi, *Hinduism in Aligarh Manuscripts: Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Mss. of Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., Aligarh* (Delhi: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, 1994). BL Or. 12076, a six-

might like. Avoiding the temptation to explain away the differences – in a modern version of the old Hindu doctrine of *ekavākyatā* – and avoiding also the hopeful assumption that a factual core can be located somewhere in the evidence, we are obliged to accept that our sources are sometimes removed from the events they describe and were written by people who perceived or understood events in different ways. Equally important is the subsequent transmission of the information: the evidence may have been distorted, misunderstood or redacted. Acknowledging all these possibilities, we look here at what is known about the translation from the Persian side, reserving an examination of how the Persian intersected with Sanskrit and Hindi for the next section.

In his account of the life of Ḥājī Sulṭān Thānesarī, Badāʾūnī says that “he was employed for four years, alone and without any co-adjudicator, on the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, which is known as the *Razmnāmah*, and what was begun by him was finished by Naqīb Khān.”¹⁰⁰ Somewhat later in his work, Badāʾūnī gives an account of the *Mahābhārata* translation, a passage that provides useful documentation of the process outside the *Preface* of Abū al-Faḡl. We give his text here in full.¹⁰¹

Among the remarkable events of this year is the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, which is the most famous of the Hindu books, and contains all sorts of stories, and moral reflections, and advice, and matters relating to conduct and manners, and religion and science, and accounts of their sects, and mode of worship, under the form of a history of the wars between the tribes of the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, who were rulers in Hind, according to some more than 4,000 years ago, and according to the common account more than 80,000. And clearly this makes it before the time of Adam: Peace be upon him! And the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and to copy it. And they keep it hid from Musalmāns.

The following considerations disposed the Emperor to the work. When he had had the *Shāhnāmah*, and the story of ʾAmīr Ḥamza, in seventeen volumes transcribed in fifteen years, and had spent much gold in illuminating it, he also heard the story of Abū Muslim and the *Jāmiʾ al-Ḥikāyāt* repeated, and it suddenly came into his mind that most of these books were nothing but poetry and fiction; but that, since they were first related in a lucky hour, and when their star was in the act of passing over the sky, they obtained great fame. But now he ordered those Hindu books, which holy and sober sages had written, and were all clear and convincing proofs, and which were the very pivot on which all their religion, and faith, and holiness turned, to be translated from the Indian into the Persian language, and thought to himself, “Why should I not have them done in my name? For they are by no means trite, but

teenth-century manuscript with paintings by artists from the royal studio, gives the month as 9 Ramaḍān, so Friday 14 September 1584. The discrepancy is taken up in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁰ See *MT* 1: 173, under XXXVII Ḥājī Sulṭān of Thānesar. This noted in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1078. Rizvi, “Abūʾl Faḡl’s Preface to the Persian Translation,” 198, n. 8 notes that Badāʾūnī corrects himself in his memoir with regard to the completion date.

¹⁰¹ See *MT* 2: 219–21, under events for year AH 990/1582–83 CE, here with part of the translation following the revisions offered in Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 40.

quite fresh, and they will produce all kinds of fruits of felicity both temporal and spiritual, and will be the cause of circumstance and pomp, and will ensure an abundance of children and wealth, as is written in the preface of these books.”

Accordingly, he became much interested in the work, and having assembled the learned men of India, His Majesty directed that the book *Mahābhārata* should be translated. For some nights, His Majesty personally explained it to Naqīb Khān.¹⁰² On the third night His Majesty summoned me, and ordered me to translate it, in collaboration with Naqīb Khān. In three or four months, I translated two out of the eighteen chapters (*fan*) of that stock of useless fables, at which the eighteen worlds may remain in wonderment.¹⁰³ I wrote out two chapters. And what censures I did not hear (from Akbar), so that the accusations that I am ‘an unlawful earner’ or ‘a turnip eater’ [apparently expressions used by Akbar] meant as if my destiny from these books was just this. Destiny is Destiny!

Thereafter Mullā Shīrī and Naqīb Khān completed a section, and one section Sulṭān Ḥājī of Thānesar brought to completion by himself. Shaykh Fayzī was then appointed to write it in verse and prose, but he too did not complete more than two chapters (*fan*). Again, the said Ḥājī wrote out two sections and rectified the errors which were committed in the first round, and fitting one part with another, compiled a hundred fasciculi. The direction was to establish exactitude in a minute manner so that nothing of the original should be lost. In the end upon some fault, His Majesty ordered him to be dismissed and sent him away to Bhakkar, his native city, where he still is. Most of the interpreters and translators are in hell along with the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, as for the remaining ones, may God save them, and mercifully destine them to repent . . . His Majesty named the work *Razmnāmāh*, and had it illustrated and transcribed in many copies, and the nobles too were ordered to have it transcribed by way of obtaining blessings.¹⁰⁴

In essence, Badā’ūnī records here that Akbar became interested in a translation of the *Mahābhārata* because he thought it would produce temporal and spiritual benefit, as indeed the text itself says. Accordingly, he directed a group of learned men to undertake a translation and then reviewed the text with Naqīb Khān. Badā’ūnī was then called on to translate the *Mahābhārata* “in collaboration with Naqīb Khān.” In three or four months Badā’ūnī managed to translate two of the eighteen Parvans. After that, Mullā Shīrī and Naqīb Khān finished a portion. Meanwhile Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī completed another portion by himself, and turned his hand to a round of corrections. While we cannot reconcile all these

¹⁰² Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 40 extrapolates and inserts “had it” in this sentence, thus: “His Majesty personally (had it) explained . . .” but we have removed this. Our point, explored in Chapter 4, is that Akbar already knew the story.

¹⁰³ Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 208 notes a counterpoint in this sentence with Abū al-Faḥrī’s opening verses in the *Preface*.

¹⁰⁴ The comments at the end of the passage show that Badā’ūnī was writing after the event: most of the team are dead, and copies were being made, a horizon that suggests the 1590s, as discussed in Chapter 4.

details with what Badā'ūnī says earlier on the matter, it would at least seem safe to say that some of the parts by Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī represent those portions on which he worked alone for several years.

Abū al-Faḍl offers a slightly different version of events. In his account of the royal library and its contents he says:¹⁰⁵

The *Mahābhārata* which belongs to the ancient books of Hindūstān has likewise been translated, from Hindi into Persian, under the superintendence of Naqīb Khān, Mawlānā 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'ūnī and Shaykh Sulṭān Thānesarī. The book contains nearly one hundred thousand verses: His Majesty calls this ancient history *Razmnāmah*, the 'Book of War'. The same learned men translated also into Persian the *Rāmāyaṇa*, likewise a book of ancient Hindūstān, which contains the life of Rām Candra, but is full of interesting points of philosophy.

As can be seen from this quote, Abū al-Faḍl excuses Mullā Shīrī from the project and passes over the solo enterprise of Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī. Mullā Shīrī's disappearance may be due to the fact that Abū al-Faḍl credits him with a translation of the *Harivaṃśa*, a poetic appendix to the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁰⁶ But Badā'ūnī, in his summary of Mullā Shīrī's life, reiterates that he participated in the *Mahābhārata* translation.¹⁰⁷ The differences can be rationalised by saying that the *Harivaṃśa* is integral to the *Mahābhārata* according to some, while others see it as an appendix and separate work. While it is possible to harmonise the accounts in this way, we are more inclined to accept Badā'ūnī's report. He was closer to the actualities and the actual translation. Abū al-Faḍl's omission of Thānesarī was probably due to the simple fact that he did not want to invoke the name of a person who had fallen from royal favour.

It is worth touching on the complexities of the Persian rendering of the *Mahābhārata* and the manuscript copies because they show that the translation was not a stable text. Just as the *Rāmāyaṇa* completed by Badā'ūnī did not acquire absolute authority, so too the *Mahābhārata* translation was subject to adaptation, simplification, versification and abridgement.¹⁰⁸ For example, British Library Or.

¹⁰⁵ See AA 1: 96–7 under *Ā'in* 34.

¹⁰⁶ See AA 1: 106.

¹⁰⁷ See MT 3: 345, under LXVI Shīrī

¹⁰⁸ Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 77, n. 3 summarises the discussion surrounding the completion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* translation. Fathullah Muṭṭabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations* (New Delhi: National Book Bureau, 1978), 68–71 gives a useful listing of the Persian versions. Badā'ūnī (MT 2: 346–47) says he started in AH 992/1584 CE and later (MT 2: 278) reports he finished in Jumādā I 997/March–April, 1589 CE. But Seyller reports that a photograph of the colophon of the Jaipur manuscript which he studied clearly shows the date as (Dhū al-Ḥijjah) 996. So either there is a scribal error in the Jaipur manuscript (unlikely) or Badā'ūnī is (a) not remembering correctly, (b) the edition of the MT is faulty, (c) Badā'ūnī continued to tinker with

4561, dated 1761 CE, follows part of the version prepared for Akbar but is shorter and couched in a simpler style.¹⁰⁹ Another manuscript – prepared at Akbar’s request in AH 1011/1602-03 CE – combines abridged prose translations in Persian of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* (called the *Ācārya Parvan*).¹¹⁰ In a subsequent translation by Prince Dārā, the *Bhagavad Gītā* was interpolated as an episode in the sixth Parvan (Bhiṣma Parvan) of the *Mahābhārata*.¹¹¹ The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsī Dās and *Mahābhārata* were even combined, as in British Library Or. 1249, which has four folios added at the end containing an abridged Persian version of the episode of Duryodhana and Durvāsas from the *Mahābhārata*.¹¹² Ethé commented on subsequent variations, a significant case being the metrical re-working of all eighteen Parvans of the *Mahābhārata* by Badī‘ al-‘Aṣr, a prolific author who wrote under the poetic name Anjab.¹¹³

Setting aside the fluid nature of the translated text, we return to the sixteenth century and the first royal copy. This is the *Razmnāmah* kept in the palace at Jaipur, made with many miniature paintings.¹¹⁴ Internal evidence from the paintings shows that it was well underway by 1584, the year in which Daswant, a gifted artist and court favourite, committed suicide.¹¹⁵ Scribal notes in the margins, studied by art historians, indicate paintings continued to be made for the manuscript until

the translation after the Jaipur copy was made, or (d) a combination of all or any of these possibilities.

109 See Rieu, *Supplement of the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1895), 14.

110 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1092, no. 1955 (IO Islamic 753). Prepared by Ṭāhir Muḥammad bin I‘mād al-Dīn Bakhsh (or al-Dīn Sabzwāri), for whom see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 137–39.

111 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1949 (IO Islamic 1358). This manuscript came into the hands of Richard Johnson in July 1778 as noted on the first folio. The text is the same as BL Add. 7676, Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59.

112 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 56. The manuscript is dated 1804 CE. The paper and hand of the added folios are different, but our point here is that the texts were seen as kindred. As an aside, we find also abstracts made of Fayzī’s version: Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1042 (folios 112–18).

113 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 711; Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1081. Anjab flourished in the mid-eighteenth century.

114 For which see Ashok Kumar Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama: The Book of War* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2005).

115 Ibid., 12. As Das notes, the death of the artist is reported by Abū al-Faḍl. See further, Das, “Daswant: His Last Drawing in the *Razmnama*,” in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies* (Bombay: Marg, 1998), 52–67. The passage dealing with this, and Ā‘in 34 as a whole, were studied and re-translated by C. M. Naim in Pramod Chandra, *Ṭūṭī-nāma of the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Origins of Mughal Painting* (Graz: Akad. Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1976), appendix C.

December 1586.¹¹⁶ The *Preface* came at this time or slightly later, as shown by several remarks embedded in the *Preface* itself. The most precise statement about the date comes where Abū al-Faḡl refers to regnal year 32 and states the equivalent is AH 995.¹¹⁷ The Hijrī year 995 ran from 12 December 1586 to 2 November 1587. As a consequence, there can be little doubt that the *Preface* dates to the final month of 1586 or the first ten months of 1587. The year 32 is confirmed by another remark from Abū al-Faḡl:¹¹⁸

He is favoured by fortune to such an extent that from the start of his kingship and accession to the throne of the caliphate – since which thirty-two solar years have elapsed – whoever from among the nobles, Sufis and theologians, or other classes of people, out of inner blindness, challenged him, or thought of opposing him, [divine] will resulted in the immediate nullification [of their plotting] and their disgrace in front of the elite and the common folk.

The final chronological clue is less precise. In the section where Abū al-Faḡl praises Akbar's stellar qualities he states:¹¹⁹

He possesses such an intelligence that he has complete awareness [of everything], as it befits him, from the age of one year old to the present when his exalted age is in the middle of forty and fifty years – and God (glory to Him!) willing, having fully enjoyed physical life for the sake of the order of the world, he will attain eternal life.

If we take “the middle of forty and fifty years,” to means Akbar's forty-fifth year exactly, then this would be toward the end of 1587.¹²⁰ But the foregoing considerations show that this statement has to be understood in a general way. With the last confirmed date for work on the royal *Razmnāmah* being December 1586, and the *Preface* itself giving a timeframe between 12 December 1586 to 2 November 1587, it seems likely that Abū al-Faḡl finished his script at the end of 1586 or the early part of 1587.

116 Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama*, 13. The colophon, taken up in an appendix in this volume, is discussed in M. A. Chagatai, “The Illustrated Edition of the Razm Nama (Persian Version of the Mahābhārata) at Akbar's Court,” *BDCRI* 5 (1943): 281–329.

117 Chapter 2, 22 (printed text), appearing in the BL manuscript on folio 22v. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 212 notes Abū al-Faḡl wrote the *Preface* “in 995/1587,” but does not cite his source. The year is already mentioned in Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1081.

118 Chapter 2, 16 (printed text).

119 Chapter 2, 14 (printed text).

120 Vincent Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 11 (retained in 2nd revised edition), corrected in S. K. Banerji, “The Birth of Akbar, the Prince, October 15, 1542 AD,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 3 (1939): 1002–12; Banerji's date already given in Thomas William Beale and H. G. Keene, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary: Founded on Materials Collected by the Late Thomas William Beale* (London: W. H. Allen, 1894), 46.

After it was finished, the *Preface* was then transmitted with copies of the *Razmnāmah*, some of which were being illustrated by court artists into the 1590s and beyond.¹²¹ The royal copy in Jaipur is out of reach, however, and the text-proper of that manuscript has not been available for more than a century. As a consequence, scholars have depended on other copies. Rizvi used the lithograph *Tarjumah-i Mahābhārat*, published by Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow.¹²² As this work is not accessible to us, we do not know which manuscripts were used to shape the edition. More recently, the most important work was undertaken by Muḥammad Riẓā Jalālī Nāʾini and N. S. Shukla who drew on five manuscripts to prepare an edition that was printed in Tehran between 1979 and 1981.¹²³

- 1) A manuscript in two volumes dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1023 [i.e. January 1615 CE] in the British Museum [now British Library], based on a copy of AH 1007. [There is no manuscript with these particulars in the British Library and we assume the authors mean BL Add. 5641–5642 which is indeed dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1007 as noted before. The source of year 1023 may be the death date of Naqīb Khān.¹²⁴]
- 2) A manuscript with miniatures in the British Museum [now British Library] in three volumes dated AH 1177. [This is British Library Add. 5638–5640, dated between AH 1175 and AH 1177/1761–63 CE.¹²⁵]
- 3) A manuscript belonging to the National Museum library in Delhi from the year AH 1233/1817–18 CE. [According to the published hand list there are two *Razmnāmah* MSS in the National Museum, accession numbers 683 and 63.47, but it is not known which one is dated and which was consulted.¹²⁶]
- 4) A microfilm of a manuscript in the collection of the late A. Shadravan, written in *shikastah* by one ‘Dr Tarachand’ but without a date.

¹²¹ Truschke, “The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31 (2011): 507; Das, *Paintings of the Razmnāma*, 16 deals with the paintings, some as late as 1617 CE.

¹²² Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210. He does not give the date of the publication but a copy of it is held in the University of Chicago and catalogued as *Mahābhārat-i Fārsī* from the same press [between 1880–1910?], also noted in Truschke, “Naqīb Ḥān, Razm-nāma,” *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022.

¹²³ Muḥammad Riẓā Jalālī Nāʾini and N. S. Shukla, *Mahābhārat* (Tihārān: Kitābkhānah-i Ṭahūrī, 1979–81), 32–33, the listing here with our comments in brackets.

¹²⁴ Mentioned at Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57. It is fruitless otherwise to investigate the cited date of AH 1023.

¹²⁵ Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57–58, also discussed below.

¹²⁶ Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, *Persian Manuscripts of National Museum, New Delhi* (IGNCA: New Delhi, 2021). It may have been 63.47 given that MS is cited in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 27.

- 5) A manuscript dated 1871 in Nā'īnī's personal library with the *Bhagavad Gītā* included. [Prince Dārā's *Gītā* was included accordingly in the printed edition, displacing the truncated treatment of the *Gītā* that this is given in the 1580s translation, as noted above.]

Nā'īnī and Shukla's printed text is disappointing to the extent that it lacks the sort of apparatus we might expect in a work of this type. The editors made use of the sources just listed but there are no comments on or justifications for the readings. This led us to suspect that the text printed in the Tehran edition and the British Library manuscript dated 1599 might diverge, the 1599 copy giving us a clearer picture of the *Preface* as it stood in Akbar's time. These suspicions were allayed by a comparison that showed no substantial differences in terms of general content and the order of the composition. The printed text thus gives us a reasonable working version of the *Preface* as it was in the sixteenth century. As a consequence, our translation of the *Preface* in Chapter 2 uses the Tehran edition and throughout we refer to this as the 'printed text'. In addition to the printed text, we have referred to the British Library manuscript at each step and have signalled in the footnotes where the differences lie. The *Preface* in the British Library manuscript is illustrated at the end of the volume.

A comparison of the manuscript and the printed text – restricted to the *Preface* itself – also allows us to see if copyists brought in material from elsewhere to elaborate the work, adding what they thought might be helpful or necessary for readers. The approach was prompted by the British Library copy which was given a summary of contents in the 1680s. At the end of this summary, the author Basant Rāe (more on whom below) makes an instructive comment about his effort. Here we give Halhed's translation of the passage:¹²⁷

Whereas the Mahabharet is of prodigious length, & it contents are not quickly to be discovered without an Index to clear it up, therefore the Humblest of the Slaves of the Court, Vesent Ray, some of Kāshee Rām, son Ray Mal Kait . . . in the time of his service with the Excellent Nevāb Shaisteh Khān took great pains to arrange this Summary of contents which he finished on the first day of the month of Rāmāzān in the 31th Year of the prosperous reign of Mohee ed deen Muhammad Aurangzeeb Alemgeer – the King and Defender of the Faith. The composer hopes that those who shall discover errors herein, will have the Good sense to correct them.

This shows that the text was circulating without a synopsis and that there was a need – in some minds at least – for an introduction to deal with the “prodigious length” of the work. Moreover, we know that an abridged version of Abū al-Faẓl's

¹²⁷ Halhed, *Translations from the Sanskrit* (BL Add. 5657), folio 4.

Preface was being transmitted in the eighteenth century, as evidenced by a copy with parts dated 1734, 1735 and 1742.¹²⁸ A number of manuscripts also give the *Preface* in an incomplete form, while others omit it entirely. These differences show that while the *Preface* was not subject to intense reworking like the translations proper, changes were made nonetheless. These changes are indicative of the concerns of readers over time.¹²⁹ Our interests being the sixteenth-century shape of the work, it will be for others to chart the reading and understanding of the *Preface* in the late Mughal and colonial periods.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the organisation and content of the *Preface*, a few observations on the British Library manuscript will not be out of place. Nathaniel Halhed (1751–1830), an employee in the East India Company, acquired the manuscript in India sometime before 1785 when he returned to England. Halhed had a good working knowledge of Persian and wrote *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776) and *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (1778). The British Museum purchased Halhed's collection of manuscripts on his death in 1830. The *Razmnāmah* was then registered under the numbers Add. 5641–5642.¹³⁰ With the separation of the British Museum and British Library in the 1970s, the *Razmnāmah* went to the British Library but kept the same numbers.

The manuscript is in a western binding in two volumes and is dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1007/June–July 1599 CE. The first volume has Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface* and Parvans 1–11 of the Persian translation. The second volume has the remaining text, with the date 1007 appearing at the end of several Parvans (Figure 4).¹³¹ The location of this manuscript in the Mughal library from 1599 to 1609 is shown by the notations on the closing folio (Figure 5).¹³² A reading of these notations was generously provided by John Seyller and is given here in an appendix by him. In addition to showing that this copy was in the royal library – the names of the librarians are known – the notations record that the whole text was copied by Nāṣir al-Dīn Lāhawrī.

128 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1083 no. 1931 (IO Islamic 762). See appendix 2 in this volume.

129 The issue of changing concerns of readers, and so texts, are discussed in Michael Willis and Tsering Gonkatsang, "An Archaeology of the *Dbā' bzhed* Manuscript," in *Bringing Buddhism to Tibet: History and Narrative in the DBA' BZHED Manuscript*, ed. Lewis Doney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 42–43.

130 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 58.

131 The date is also written in the colophon, see below.

132 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1078 corrects the date to AH 1107. The notations in the MS, for which see appendix 1 in this book, suggest that the date AH 1007 should be retained.

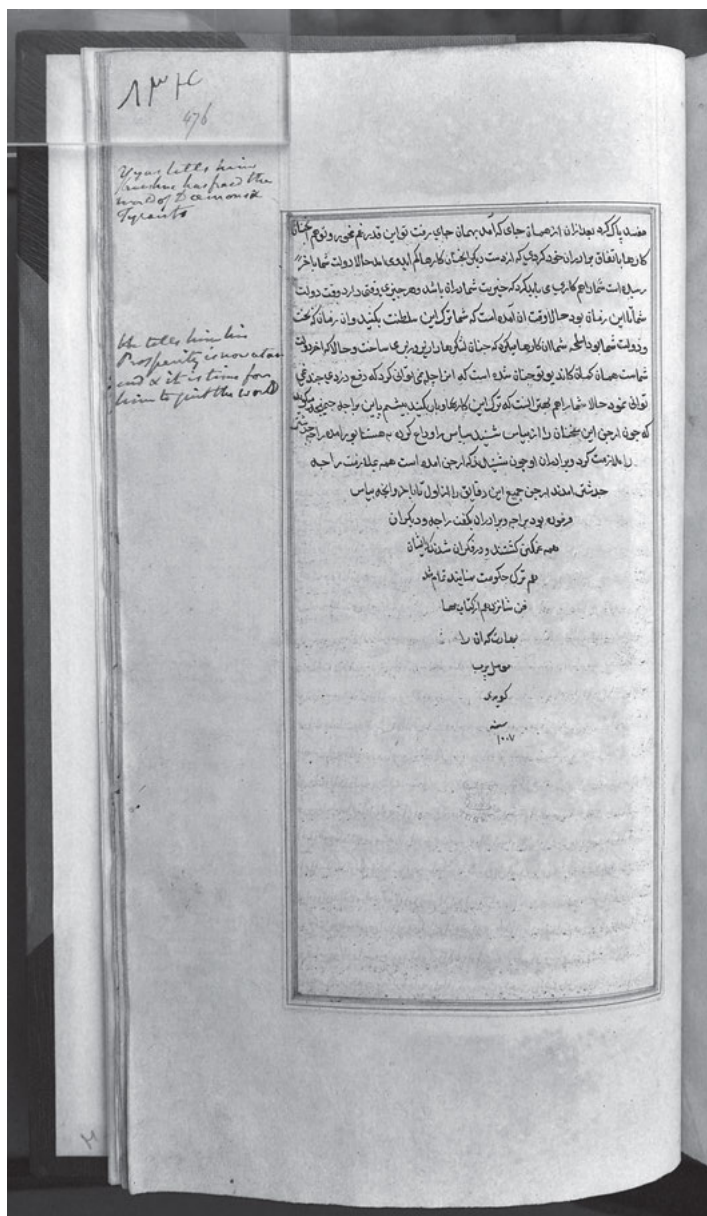


Figure 4: *Razmnāmah*. BL Add. 5641-5642, folio 476r, showing Parvan ending and the date AH 1007 with notations of Nathaniel Halhed. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

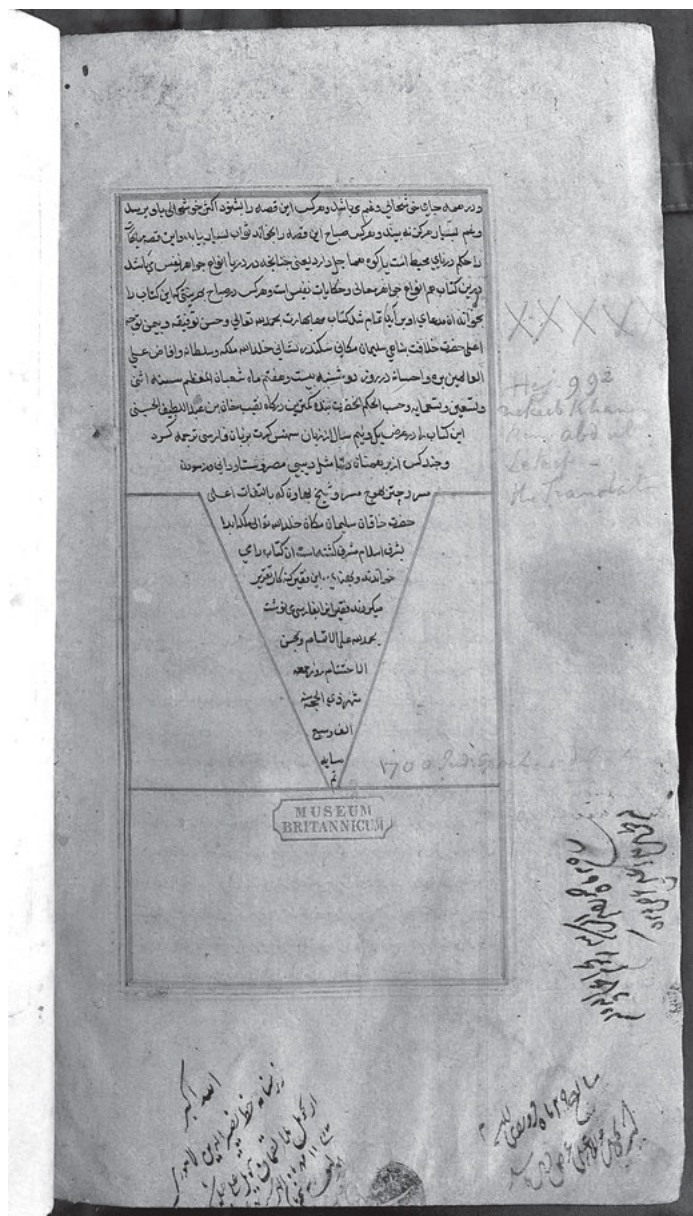


Figure 5: *Razmnāmah*. BL Add. 5641-5642, folio 481v, showing colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān, his collaborators in the translation and the date 27 Sha‘bān AH 992, with notations of Nathaniel Halhed and Mughal librarians, for which see Appendix 1. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

Sometime after 1609, the manuscript left the royal library and passed to Mirzā Abū Ṭālib, more generally known as Shā'istah Khān (d. 16 Shawwāl 1105/10 June 1694 CE).¹³³ He was the grandson of I'timād al-Dawlāh and governor of the Deccan and then Bengal under Aurangzeb (Figure 6). His possession of the manuscript while in Bengal is shown by a synopsis of the work in Persian, already mentioned above. This contains cross-references to folios in the self-same copy. According to the colophon of this part, the synopsis was prepared by Basant Rāe, son of Kāsīrām, son of Rāemal, a Kāyasth in the service of Shā'istah Khān in AH 1098/1686-87 CE.¹³⁴ The synopsis is important because it shows that readers of the *Razmnāmah* valued the work sufficiently to commission guides to its content in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Readership subsequently burgeoned in the eighteenth century, the date of many copies, as noted before.¹³⁵

As the library inspection notes show, the British Library *Razmnāmah* of 1599 was a royal manuscript, made at a time when the dissemination of the text was a concern of emperor Akbar. The making of multiple copies in the last decade of the sixteenth century is documented directly by a letter from Akbar to his son Murād – preserved in a version of the *Akbarnāmah* in the British Library – that states a copy would be sent to the prince for his edification.¹³⁶ The copying and distribution of the *Razmnāmah* in the 1590s is further shown by an

133 Beale, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, 372.

134 This data given in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 58.

135 Peter Hardy has warned about drawing decisive conclusions given how little is known about how Abū al-Faḍl was received after his time, see Hardy, “Abū'l-Faḍl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India – or a Personal Puff for a Pal?,” in *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*, 2 vols., ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas, 1985), 136. Since Hardy wrote, a start has been made in Malik, “The Eighteenth Century View of Akbar,” in *Akbar and His Age*, 249–53 and Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Also note Arthur Dudley, *A Desire for Meaning: Khān-i Ārzū's Philology and the Place of India in the Eighteenth-Century Persianate World*, Thesis (Ph.D.)--Columbia University, 2013. In this context, we note that Basant Rāe's synopsis was used to make a further copy in the India Office collections which is based on British Library Add. 5641–5642. It has Basant Rāe's text entire and was finished in 1774 by a scribe working for the East India Company. See Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1082, no. 1929 (IO Islamic 2517). This manuscript belonged to Sir Charles Wilkins, the Sanskrit scholar. The circumstance shows that BL Add. 5641–5642 was in the collection of Halhed by the time IO Islamic 2517 was made. The exemplar, as Ethé noted, is shown by the date AH 1007 which has been taken from the original and appears at the end of several Parvans.

136 The letter to Murād was written in 1591 when he was appointed to Mālwa (for which AN 3: 911) but mention of the *Razmnāmah* is found only in *Akbarnāmah*, BL Add. 27247, folio 403r-403v (last line of the recto and first lines of the verso); the passage is taken up in Chapter 4.



Figure 6: Shā'istah Khān (d. 1694). BM 1920,0917,0. 230, detail of Mirzā Abū Ṭālib, maternal uncle of Aurangzeb and governor of Bengal, one time owner of *Razmnāmah* BL Add. 5641-5642 during whose time a synopsis was added by Basant Rāe Kāyasth in AH 1098. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

illuminated version, also dated 1599 and also preserved in the British Library. We will return to this copy in the appropriate place (see 1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation).

Turning back to the content and order of the composition, Abū al-Faḍl has interspersed his text with numerous poetic quotes, some drawn from earlier poets and some apparently composed by himself. He has used these to illuminate his argument and elevate the tone of the work. The *Preface* also displays breaks and discrepancies that point to parts being written by different hands and assembled to complete the essay. A number of sutures are visible. The first comes at the point where Abū al-Faḍl introduces the four great ages of traditional Indian cosmology. He opens this section with the phrase: “The transmitters of sayings declare . . .”¹³⁷ Even without Abū al-Faḍl flagging up that this is a report that he has collected and inserted, the matter-of-fact style of the passage departs from what he has written earlier. The subject then shifts from the Indian ages to equivalents in a range of

¹³⁷ Chapter 2, 21 (printed text); such attributions appear elsewhere and are noted below.

other calendars, including Akbar's regnal year 32, a subject analysed above in our discussion of the date of the *Preface*.

The next suture comes at the beginning of the summary of the epic story.¹³⁸ After a poem – which seems to be the work of Abū al-Faḍl – the synopsis of the story starts with a description of how the throne passed for six generations from Bharata to Vicitravīrya. As before, this too is signalled as reported speech: “The narrators of this story and the transmitters of this tradition . . . relate . . .”. The eldest son of Vicitravīrya was Dhṛtarāṣṭra but he did not come to the throne on account of his blindness and Pāṇḍu became king in his place. The narration of these particulars is once more in a matter-of-fact style unlike that of Abū al-Faḍl, showing that he borrowed the account or took over information supplied to him without adding his usual literary embellishments. The likely source – the experts assembled to effect the translation – are discussed in the following section.

After a number of awkward transitions introduced by phrases such as “it should not be hidden,” “in short” and “after many happenings which this book undertakes to recount,” the next notable suture is seen at Chapter 2, 33 (printed text). There the epic story is summarised and it is said that: “When thirty-six years passed . . . Yudhiṣṭhira, guided by divine grace, realised the faithlessness of this . . . world.” On folio 26r (line 6), the British Library manuscript says thirty-six years, but the digit 7 is written above and the same written again in the margin. The printed text, meanwhile, gives thirty-two.¹³⁹ Whatever the number of years, Yudhiṣṭhira made preparations to leave his cares behind and journey to the next world. We are then told: “Along with his four brothers, he took the path of renunciation and journeyed to the Abode of Safety in the world of nonexistence – as will be described in this book.” Some verses from Khāqānī and Kamāl al-Dīn Ismā‘īl follow by way of conclusion.

After this, the story is summarised all over again. The text once more says: “Yudhiṣṭhira ruled the earth for thirty-six years,” but this time the years are part of a larger sum: the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas ruled together for seventy-six years, Duryodhana ruled for thirteen independently and, after the war, Yudhiṣṭhira for thirty-six. Then the text says: “the total years of the sovereignty of the two sides comes to one hundred twenty-five.” This adds up as follows: $76 + 13 + 36 = 125$. The number thirty-six has not attracted annotation here, even though it appears just eight lines down on the same page (folio 26r, line 14, illustrated at the end of this volume). This shows a common pattern in manuscript practice when pas-

¹³⁸ Chapter 2, 26 (printed text), as also the quotations from the *Preface* immediately below.

¹³⁹ Chapter 2, 33 (printed text). We have not traced the source of this editorial decision because all the manuscripts available for the printed edition are not available to us and, as explained before, the printed text lacks explanatory apparatus.

sages repeat closely related content. Normally the first account attracts redaction or correction, while the second is passed over.¹⁴⁰ Apart from this, the repetition of the same information, with the years given in different ways in quick succession, shows that this section of the *Preface* is a compilation of passages assembled for the purpose with no time given to shape them into a unified account.

Toward the end of the *Preface*, Abū al-Faḡl turns to a curious etymological exploration of the name of the *Mahābhārata* and some observations about Vyāsa.¹⁴¹ The second paragraph about Vyāsa contains the legendary account of how the work was reduced from an initial six million verses to its present size, and how blocks of the text were handed to the gods, ancestors, demi-gods and men during the process. This technical information, set out in the first book of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, could only have come from Abū al-Faḡl's unnamed informants. In the end, he takes issue with the verse count because it does not add up to the oft-repeated statement that the epic is 100,000 verses long: "Thus, it is better if the intelligent person does not trust such written accounts but rather follows his foresighted intellect on the paths of this life."¹⁴² This device neatly sidesteps the problem of where we stand if we set aside written accounts. Abū al-Faḡl cannot resolve the numbering, so simply bats the problem away, but is happy to refer in the very next paragraph to "the 100,000 *ślokas* that are narrated in this book."¹⁴³ The statement becomes especially odd when we realise that the *Razmnāmah* is largely in prose. In the *Preface* itself, the only verses are those composed by Abū al-Faḡl or borrowed by him from the Persian literary greats of the past.¹⁴⁴

These problems, and the different style of the Parvan summaries which also betray that they are borrowed, gives a sense of urgency to the compilation, as does the hurried and inferior literary style of some of the passages.¹⁴⁵ This may be due to the fact that Abū al-Faḡl was compelled to produce other work, notably the *ʿIyār-i Dānish*, completed at Akbar's order in July 1588.¹⁴⁶ Abū al-Faḡl himself

140 Seen not just in Persian manuscripts; for other examples, Willis and Gonkatsang, "An Archaeology of the *Dbā' bzhed* Manuscript."

141 Chapter 2, 35–36 (printed text).

142 Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

143 Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

144 Many of the verses are identified by Hajnalka Kovacs in Chapter 2. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 118 notes their use as part of the process of embedding a new prose work in the Persian literary landscape.

145 Chapter 2, 31 (printed text) with comments by Hajnalka Kovacs.

146 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 220.

admitted – albeit using conventional expressions of self-abasement – that he lacked ability but would quickly finish the task:¹⁴⁷

In conformity with the sublime decree, I hurriedly penned a few sentences and made this summary about the origin of this book the frontispiece of the page of my entreaty, so that by specifying [the contents] from the beginning to the end, it somewhat quenches the thirst of those who are eager to find out about the contents of this book.

Abū al-Faḡl closes the *Preface* with a somewhat muddled comment on the Parvan summaries, saying he was “not content with the details and the summary that is in the original book,” an abnegation that confirms he has borrowed these parts and had little time to digest them.¹⁴⁸ He then returns to some of his earlier themes and an apology for his shortcomings. The conflicted nature of this conclusion is analysed later in this volume.

1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation

Although Abū al-Faḡl enjoyed a reputation as a translator after his death, he did not actually know Sanskrit and he did not translate the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁴⁹ He admits this – more or less – in his introduction where he explains the how the translation team was formed.¹⁵⁰

Therefore the sublime decree went forth concerning the *Mahābhārata* . . . that the learned ones of both [Muslim and Hindu] factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression, under the scrutiny of expert judges and just inspectors.

Badāʾūnī also refers to the translation team. As detailed above, he reports how he became involved and mentions that Akbar “became much interested in the work, and having assembled the learned men of India, His Majesty directed that the book *Mahābhārata* should be translated.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Chapter 2, 20 (printed text).

¹⁴⁸ Chapter 2, 41 (printed text).

¹⁴⁹ In AA 2: 2 Abū al-Faḡl says that he was not familiar with Sanskrit and that “laborious work went into repeated translations.” He cannot help adding that “by a turn of good fate and the strength of my own will, I obtained my goal,” cited Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 151. His lack of Sanskrit is contrary to attributions in later MSS, taken up below.

¹⁵⁰ Chapter 2, 18 (printed text).

¹⁵¹ See above, where we have given the full quotation.

Some members of the translation team have already been discussed. The names of the others involved are not given in the running text of the *Razmnāmah*, but the colophons in several manuscripts preserve their names. The information in British Library Add. 5642 (folio 481v) has been known for more than a century thanks to the catalogue entry published by Charles Rieu.¹⁵² A number of authors have subsequently used this data, notably Truschke in *Culture of Encounters*.¹⁵³ For this study, we have taken the opportunity to revisit the reading and translation based on manuscripts not used by Rieu. The first is the *Razmnāmah* acquired by the British Library in the 1950s.¹⁵⁴ This has not drawn much attention, in part because the text is fragmentary and in part because the accompanying miniature paintings have proven an art historical distraction.¹⁵⁵ The manuscript, registered as BL Or. 12076, consists of the final portions of the text, including the colophon, folio 138v (Figure 7). On an earlier page, folio 136r, this text is dated AH 1007 like the other *Razmnāmah* in the British Library (Figure 8). The page has sustained damage but is written more clearly than BL Add. 5642 and the manuscript otherwise was illustrated with miniatures by artists who are known to have worked in the imperial atelier. The texts give the same account of the translation team and this allows us to conclude that both copies relied on the same exemplar, at least as far as the names of the translators are concerned. A third copy of the *Razmnāmah* with a well-preserved colophon is in the India Office collection. The manuscript is not dated but Ethé noted that the text agrees almost verbatim with a copy of 1737 (Figures 9, 10).¹⁵⁶ This colophon is the same as the sixteenth-century versions but

152 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57 and illustrated above in figures 04–05.

153 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 27 and before that Truschke, “The Mughal Book of War,” 507. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 209–10 read the names without citing his manuscript source as: “Debi Misra, Satuwani, Madhusudhan Misra, Chaturbhuj Misra and Sahikh [sic] Bhawan.” In Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 41, the transcription of the names is problematic, as noted by Das, *Razmnama*, 11, but Das does not advance the reading or identification of the individuals.

154 G. Meredith-Owens, *Handlist of Persian Manuscripts [Acquired by the British Museum] 1895–1966* (London: British Museum, 1968), 37 for a brief description. The complete manuscript is visible online at the British Library, retrieved December 2021.

155 Meredith-Owens and R. H. Pinder-Wilson, “A Persian Translation of the Mahābhārata, with a Note on the Miniatures,” *BMQ* 20, no. 3 (1956): 62–65, illustrations in J. P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), 55–56; Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, 124 where Losty suggests on the basis of the artists involved that the manuscript was commissioned by ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) which, if true, coordinates the manuscript with Badā’ūnī’s statement (given above) that nobles were ordered to have copies transcribed.

156 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1087, no. 1944 (10 Islamic 1702), folios 410v and 411r.

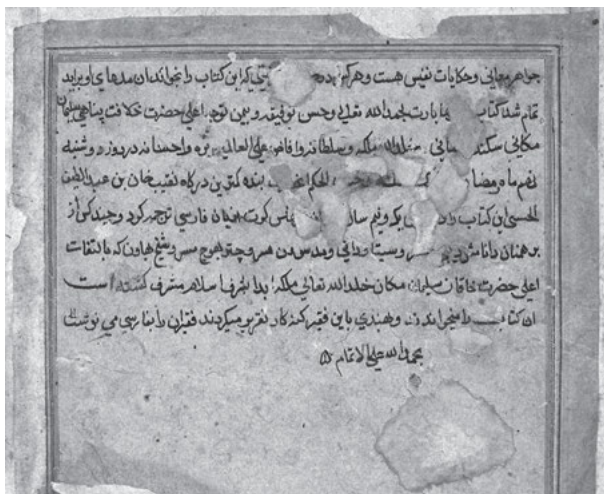


Figure 7: *Razmnāmah*. BL Or 12076, folio 138v, detail of the colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān, his collaborators in the translation and the date 9 Ramaḍān AH 992 in lines 3-4. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

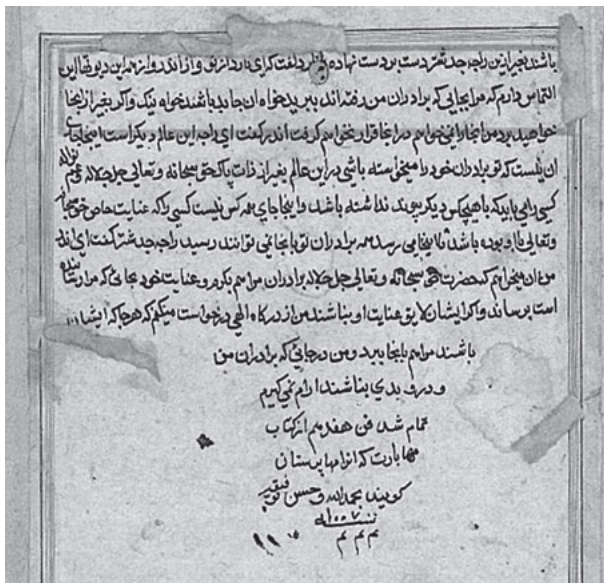


Figure 8: *Razmnāmah*. BL Or 12076, folio 136r, detail of the colophon showing Parvan ending and the date AH 1007. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

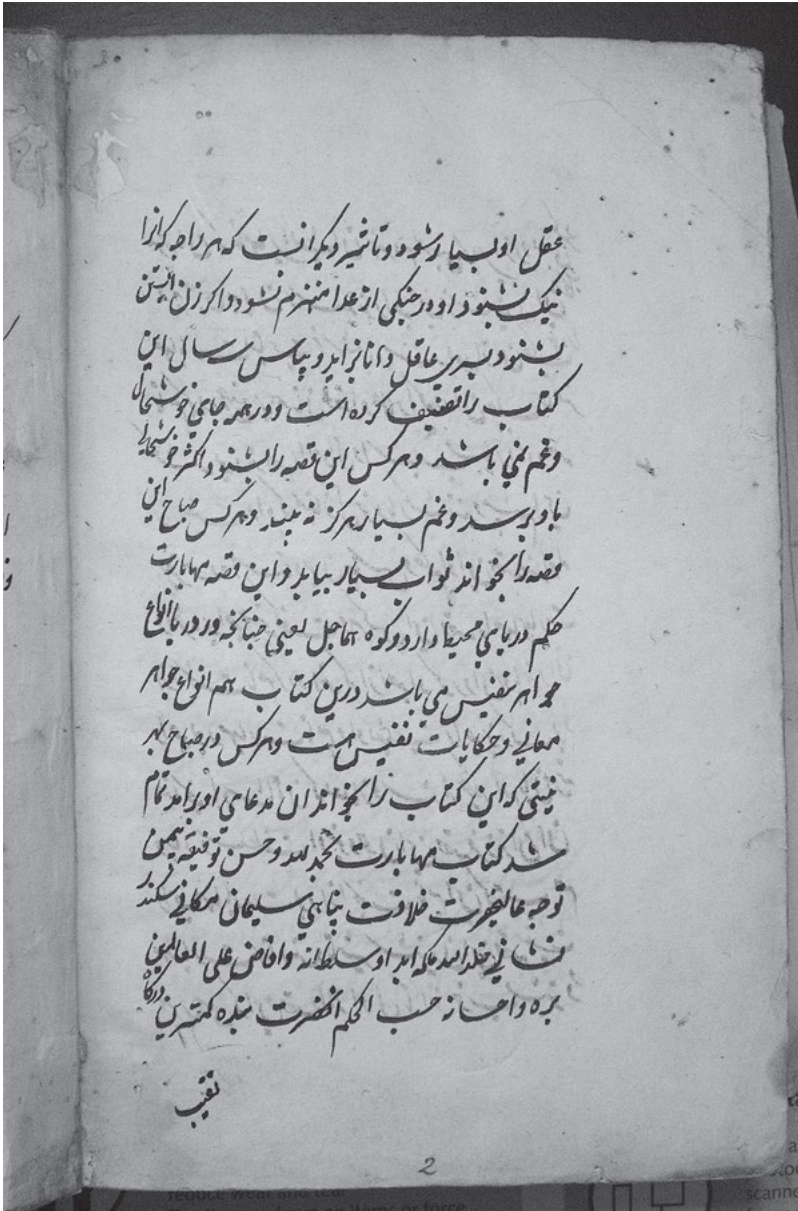


Figure 9: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 1702, folio 410v, with the closing colophon mentioning Naqib Khān and his collaborators in the translation, mid-eighteenth century. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

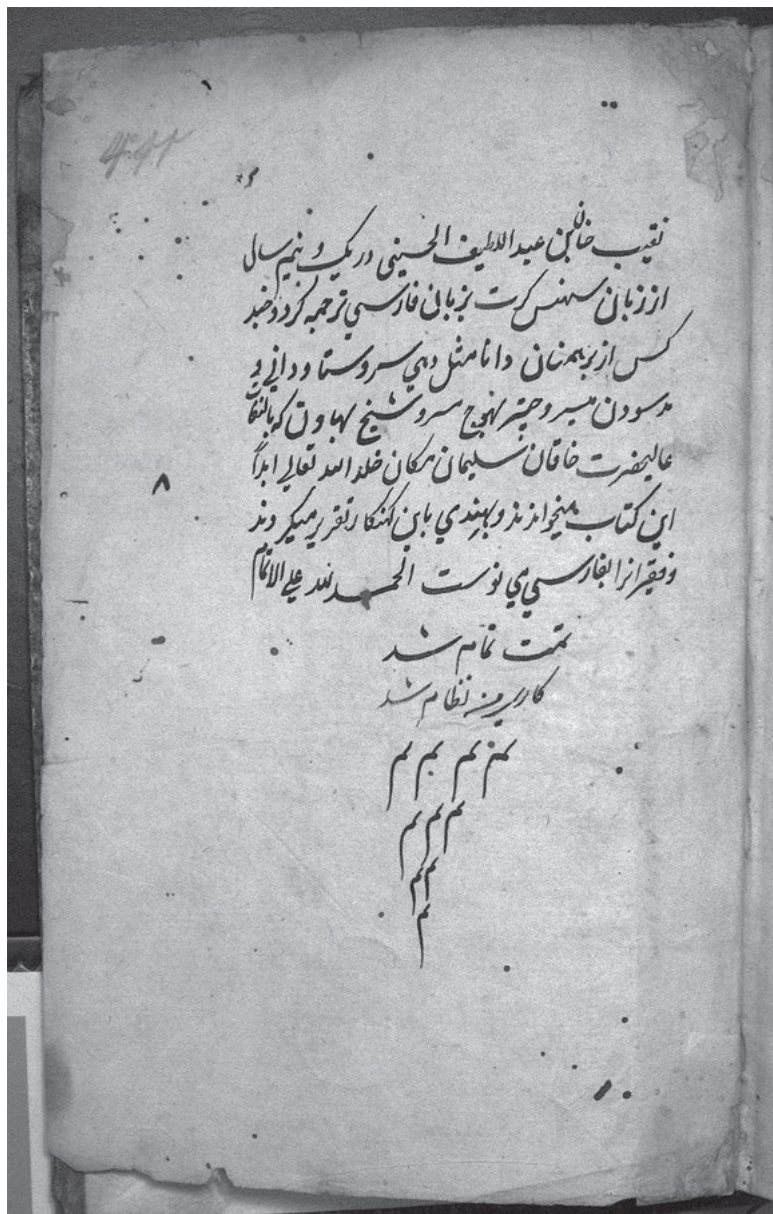


Figure 10: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 1702, folio 411r, with the closing colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān and his collaborators in the translation, mid-eighteenth century. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

simplifies the text, dropping mention of the fact that Shaykh Bhāvan converted to Islam, as does a copy in the Royal Asiatic Society dated Rabi' I 1126/March 1714 CE in the reign of Farrukhsiyar.¹⁵⁷ Based on this evidence, we conclude that the basic historical data in the colophon was transmitted with some redaction into the eighteenth century. The text has not been published analytically and is thus given here. After stating the work was complete in AH 992, the relevant passage runs as follows (here with names highlighted):

بیمست و هفتم ماه شعبان المعظم سنه اثني و تسعين و تسعمایه و حسب الحكم آنحضرت بنده کمترین درگاه نقیب
خان بن عبداللطیف الحسینی این کتاب را در عرض یک و نیم سال از زبان سائنس کرت بزبان فارسی ترجمه
کرد و چند کس از برهمنان دانا مثل دیبی مصر و ستاودانی و مدسودن مسر و چتریهوج مسر و شیخ بهاون
که به التفات اعلی حضرت خاقان سلیمان مکان خلد الله تعالی ملکه ایدا بشرف اسلام مشرف گشته است ان کتاب
را می خواندند و بهندی باین فقیر گنه گار تقریر میکردند فقیر انرا بفارسی می نوشت بحمدالله علی الاتمام

... Naqīb Khān, son of 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥusaynī, translated [this work] from Sanskrit into Persian in one and a half years. Several of the learned Brahmins—such as Devī Mīśra,¹⁵⁸ Śatāvadhānī,¹⁵⁹ Madhusūdhana Mīśra, Caturbhuj,¹⁶⁰ Shaykh Bhāvan—who converted to Islam with the favour of His Most Exalted Majesty, the Khāqān whose station is equal to that of Sulaymān, may God Almighty make his reign eternal¹⁶¹—read this book and explained it in Hindi [to me,] a poor guilty man and this poor one would write it down in Persian. Praise God for its completion.¹⁶²

The manuscripts just noted provide evidence for the involvement of Hindu scholars in the explication of the *Mahābhārata*, a conclusion confirmed in the text itself where the Indian interlocutors are referred to directly – and in some places where their phrases in old Hindi have actually entered the text – as noted by Truschke.¹⁶³ What this means is that the Sanskrit was explained by learned Brahmins

¹⁵⁷ RAS Persian 14–15 Bequest of David Price (1762–1835).

¹⁵⁸ BL Or. 12076 مسر* becomes ديبي مسر in IO Islamic 1702; in RAS Persian 14–15 the name drops out and only سر is preserved.

¹⁵⁹ BL Or 12076 سيتاوداني which becomes ستاو دانی in IO Islamic 1702, then اشتاودنی in RAS Persian 14–15.

¹⁶⁰ Both sixteenth-century MSS have مسر which we take to be a lapsus following the gloss in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57.

¹⁶¹ The titles refer to Akbar.

¹⁶² The scribe Nāṣir al-Dīn Lahori of BL Add. 5642 (for his name, see appendix 1) adds the completion of the copy (و بحسن الاختتام روز جمعه شهر ذی الحجه سنه الف و سبع مایه تم) giving 1700 (الف و سبع مایه) to which Halhed has added a notation “1700 Ind: Epoch vid [word unclear]” which we do not understand; the reading should be 1007 (الف وسبعة). This phrase is also missing from IO Islamic 702, showing it was not transmitted into the eighteenth century; the scribe of IO Islamic 702 has anyway added: کاري من نظام شد then تمت تمام شد.

¹⁶³ Truschke, “The Mughal Book of War,” 108; elaborated in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 101–41. The intersection of Hindi and Persian is explored in Shantanu Phukan, “Through

in Hindi and that Naqīb Khān wrote down what he was told in Persian. The Philadelphia miniature shows this process in plain view: one member of the Hindu group is writing diligently on a scroll in Hindi.¹⁶⁴

One feature of the colophon that has remained unnoticed is the abrupt change in voice. This calls for examination. At the start, we have a report in the third person stating that Naqīb Khān translated the work from Sanskrit. Then we have a quote in the first person, a direct statement from Naqīb Khān saying that the Sanskrit was explained to him in Hindi and based on that he wrote the story down in Persian. We interpret this change of voice – and the switch between Sanskrit and Hindi in the account – as an extrapolation introduced by the individual who composed the colophon exemplar. Although this exemplar must predate 1599 because it is documented by two manuscripts of that date, it shows that the author of the colophon was already removed from the translation activities that took place in the 1580s and that he was attempting to explain the source language. This becomes clear from Abū al-Faḡl's statement in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*. The *Mahābhārata*, he says, is “one of the ancient books of Hindustan,” and “was translated from Hindi into Persian by Naqīb Khān, Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Qādir Badā’ūnī and Shaykh Sulṭān Thānesarī. It comprises some one lakh couplets. His Majesty named this ancient epic the *Razmnāmah*.”¹⁶⁵

The author of the *Razmnāmah* colophons echoes this statement but he has changed Abū al-Faḡl's ‘Hindi’ into ‘Sanskrit’ because he knew that the original text was in Sanskrit and felt obliged to register this fact. That this was the train of redactional events is shown by a flyleaf note in the *Rāmāyaṇa* kept in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. This has been studied by John Seyller who translated the relevant part as follows: “Naqīb Khān of Qazvīn . . . translated [this work] into Persian from Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at the time.” As Seyller has shown, this comment was written after Akbar's death in 1605 and cannot be taken as a direct witness of the *Rāmāyaṇa* translation project.¹⁶⁶ The key point for the moment is the phrase “. . . from Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at the time.”¹⁶⁷ This

Throats Where Many Rivers Meet’: The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian.” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (2001): 33–58.

164 A sense of the use of Hindi – and thus what was happening in our context – is charted in an innovative manner in Busch, “Hidden in Plain View.”

165 See AA, 1: 105, the passage noted above.

166 Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 73–74. Further discussion in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 211–14.

167 See discussion of Devī Mīśra in the next section for a further examination of the passage in the Freer manuscript.

shows that the author knew about Sanskrit and that he, like the author of the *Razmnāmah* colophon, felt obliged to mention it. For Abū al-Faḡl, however, the position of Sanskrit was clear and he knew that the Persian had passed through the intermediary language of Hindi. What Abū al-Faḡl recorded in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* was his immediate knowledge of the translation activities and the fact that Hindi was used as the link. And indeed this is what we see in the second part of the *Razmnāmah* colophon.

What can we conclude from all this? It shows that while the *Razmnāmah* colophon is certainly a sixteenth-century account of what went on during the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, the first sentence is an interpolation inserted to explain and introduce the direct quote from Naqīb Khān. One indication of when this happened is given in the colophon of the royal copy of the *Razmnāmah* in Jaipur wherein there is no parallel passage and no mention of the translation team.¹⁶⁸ As noted earlier in this chapter, the Jaipur copy appears to have been finished in December 1586, with Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface* added at the same time or shortly after in early in 1587. At some point after this, therefore, the colophon was composed and appended to the two manuscripts of 1599. The exemplar in which this colophon first appeared may be as early as the late 1580s, but it is more likely, in our view, that it was written in the 1590s.

Fayḡī

Naturally we should like to know the source and date for the account of the translation team. At least one precedent can be found in the work of Fayḡī. He was a prolific writer who excelled in poetry, elegant prose and philosophy, his poetic compositions earning him the title *Malik al-Shu'arā'* ('king of poets').¹⁶⁹ As the translation team worked toward a finished *Razmnāmah*, Akbar called on Fayḡī to prepare a version. As Badā'ūnī reports, the king asked him "to write it in verse and prose, but he did not complete more than two chapters (*fan*)."¹⁷⁰ Badā'ūnī mentions this under his account of events in AH 990/1582 CE, the implication being that it was completed then. However, a manuscript in the India Office collection gives the date 1 Rabi' I AH 997/18 January 1589 CE for the completion of the

¹⁶⁸ See appendix 2 in this volume for the text of the Jaipur colophon and its seals and notations.

¹⁶⁹ See AA 3: 469; Munibur Rahman, "Fayḡī, Abu'l-Fayḡ," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* IX, no. 5 (2012), s.v., retrieved March 2022.

¹⁷⁰ See MT 2: 321; we have quoted the full passage just above.

first Parvan of Fayḏī's version.¹⁷¹ Rizvi has noted that it is difficult to determine the share of the contributors in the final *Razmnāmah* and that "on the whole, the work is not disjointed. It seems that Naqib Khan finally rewrote it to make it a unified whole."¹⁷² Whether Fayḏī's work was incorporated into the final product is difficult to say, but his rendering is preserved separately in a significant number of copies, one being British Library IO Islamic 761 which consists of the first two Parvans.¹⁷³ For our concern, the key point is that Fayḏī completed his treatment of the *Mahābhārata* in the 1580s. In the conclusion of the first Parvan, Fayḏī offers high praise to Akbar, crediting him with the vision for the Persian translation and, more importantly, mentioning that he depended on the "translation of learned Brahmins" for his version.¹⁷⁴ He was also aware of the political dimension of the work and reflected on his role in terms of Indian and Persian poetic styles.¹⁷⁵ With Fayḏī's work finished between 1582 and 1589, we have, therefore, a high-status precedent that would have prompted people to collect available traditions about the translation of the *Mahābhārata* and add them to the manuscripts that were being prepared in the 1590s. This collection was both textual and visual, as we know from the painting of the *maktab khānah* in Philadelphia.

171 AH 990 fell entirely in a single western year, 1582, apart from the last 24 days. The manuscript is mentioned in Eduard Sachu and Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Part I: the Persian Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 808, under catalogue no. 1306; for the catalogue entry for IO Islamic 3014, in which manuscript the date 997/1589 appears on folio 171r., see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1088, no. 1946. The manuscript itself is dated 1730 CE.

172 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1588, no. 2923 (IO Islamic 3012) suggested that this particular manuscript represents the preliminary working version prepared by Naqib Khān that was subsequently subsumed into the finished work.

173 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1087–88, no. 1945 (IO Islamic 761); others include IO Islamic 3014, *ibid.*, 1088, no. 1946 and IO Islamic 3107, *ibid.*, 1587, no. 2922. The first Parvan, not quite complete in Oxford Walker 87, Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 812, no. 1313; the "same flowery version of Faiḏī" as Ethé puts it, in Oxford Ouseley 391, 392, Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 812, no. 1314. It is the fifth Parvan and dated 1632. C. H. Shaikh suggests that Fayḏī translated the entire text basing himself on a copy with all eighteen Parvans in the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, see Shaikh, "A Descriptive Handlist of the Arabic, Persian and Hindusthāni MSS belonging to the Satara-Historical Museum at present lodged at the Deccan College Research Institute, Poona," *BDCRI* 4, no. 3 (1943): 248. The attributions in later copies cannot be taken at face value and merit closer study; the Oxford and Bombay manuscripts at least show that Fayḏī's style was perpetuated in the 1600s.

174 Noted in S. C. Husain "Translations of the Mahābhārata into Arabic and Persian," *BDCRI* 5 (1943–44): 274, جَمْ بِرِ هَمَنانِ كَامِل.

175 This dimension explained in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 134–35.

We have, of course, no record of the motivation that informed the creation of that miniature, but there can be no doubt that discussions were had about how to represent the events that had taken place a dozen years before.

Naqīb Khān

Although our examination of the *Razmnāmah* colophons shows they are not the innocent factual documents they first appear to be, their collective testimony nonetheless indicates that Naqīb Khān was an important figure, leading the multi-lingual translation team assembled in response to Akbar's decree.¹⁷⁶ As an individual, Naqīb Khān is reasonably known. He was the grandson of the historian Mīr Yahya of Qazvīn and the son of Mīr 'Abd al-Laṭīf.¹⁷⁷ The latter left Iran for the court of Humāyūn because he was persecuted as a Sunni, but arrived in AH 963 after Humāyūn's death in January 1556. He was well received by Akbar who made him his tutor. His son Mīr Ghiyās al-Dīn 'Alī became one of Akbar's favourites and the king conferred the title of Naqīb Khān on him in AH 988/1580-81 CE. This was just before Akbar commissioned the translation of the *Mahābhārata*. Naqīb Khān lived a long life and died in AH 1023/1614 CE.

A portrait of Naqīb Khān, showing him in his later years, is included in an album in the Royal Collection (Figure 11).¹⁷⁸ This allows us to identify him in two other pictures. The most well-known is the one showing Jesuits visiting Akbar, preserved in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.¹⁷⁹ There Naqīb Khān is seated on a carpet, immediately below the emperor. An additional page with his portrait comes from the dispersed *Razmnāmah* of 1599, as noted before (Figure 1). Here Naqīb Khān is shown in direct conversation with Akbar in the centre of the picture. While the painting lacks the finish of the best imperial work, the other portraits of Naqīb Khān secure the sitter's identification. The person facing Akbar in the picture is not, anyway, Abū al-Faḍl. He is shown, as noted above, in a miniature in the *Akbarnāmah*: he had a heavy jowl and lacked Naqīb Khān's aquiline nose.

¹⁷⁶ Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 40, gives Badā'ūnī's account of further individuals involved and what they were able to achieve.

¹⁷⁷ The information here is drawn from Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57.

¹⁷⁸ Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 1005038, folio 38r. We are grateful to Emily Hannam for bringing this portrait to our attention.

¹⁷⁹ Chester Beatty Library, MS 03.263, folio 263v, published in Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols, 1: 152 and colour plate 41, also in Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, *The Indian Portrait, 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2010), 54 with further references.

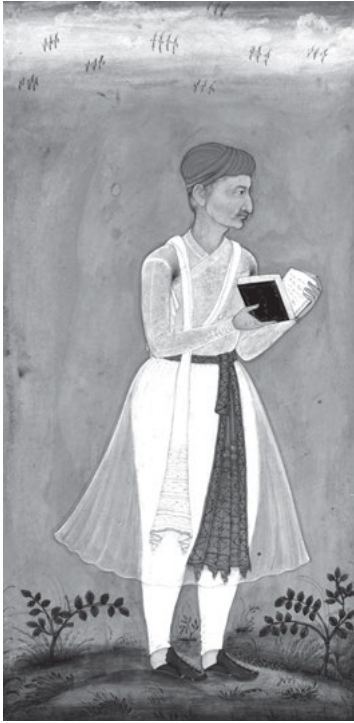


Figure 11: Naqīb Khān (d. 1614). RCIN 1005038, folio 38r, detail of Naqīb Khān in old age, from an album of calligraphy and Mughal portraits, seventeenth century with later additions. Courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust.

These identifications are important for textual and historical reasons because the Philadelphia page has text at the top pertaining to the scene. This is part of Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface*, as noted above in our discussion of the Translation Bureau. The marginal note at the bottom introduces Abū al-Faḡl and states: "The linguists of both groups, the Muslims and Hindus, wrote out the Mahābhārat together with Shaykh Abū al-Faḡl."¹⁸⁰ We know now, of course, that this statement is not correct and that it betrays a later understanding imposed – quite literally – on the picture. The date of the addition is difficult to determine, although the writing style suggests the eighteenth century. What the text demonstrates is the distance at which subsequent writers stood from the translation – even those with direct access to sixteenth-century manuscripts and the authority to intervene in them. We have noted this problem in the paragraphs just above: already in the late sixteenth-century copies of the *Razmnāmah*, the person who composed the

¹⁸⁰ Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 133, with transcription of the marginal note mentioning Abū al-Faḡl 289, n. 169. We read: زبان دانایان هر دو طایفه مسلمانان و هندو باتفاق شیخ ابو الفضل تصنیف مهابهارت می نمایند. Kramrisch, *Painted Delight*, 156; those who helped Kramrisch with the Persian (*ibid.*, p. ix) have accepted the veracity of the note.

colophon attempted to explain his sources. Other manuscripts add to our understanding of the rising reputation of Abū al-Faḡl in later times. In a large copy of the *Razmnāmah* with miniature paintings dated between 1761 and 1763, Abū al-Faḡl actually displaces Naqīb Khān in the colophon: “Shaykh Abū al-Faḡl translated the *Mahābhārata* from Sanskrit into Persian in one and half years.”¹⁸¹ Other manuscripts give the translation of the *Gītā* to Abū al-Faḡl.¹⁸² We will return to the *Gītā* below in our discussion of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, but before turning to him we need to review the other translators involved in the creation of the *Razmnāmah*.

Shaykh Bhāvan, Caturbhuj and Devī Miśra

Other than Naqīb Khān, the Indian scholars named in the British Library colophon have been noted on several occasions without, however, concerted efforts made to identify the individuals.¹⁸³ Shaykh Bhāvan is the least problematic and best known, having assisted Badā’ūnī in the attempt to translate the *Atharva Veda*.¹⁸⁴ He came from the Deccan, converted to Islām and appears in several Persianate histories of the period.¹⁸⁵

Regarding Caturbhuj, we must first deal with the individual named Caturbhuj Miśra, the author of commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, that on the *Virāṭa Parvan* titled *Vākyadīpikā*.¹⁸⁶ P. K. Gode tentatively assigned Caturbhuj Miśra to the period 1350–1550, so there is some chance that he could have been active in

¹⁸¹ British Library Add. 5640, fol 437v. Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57–8, illustrated online at: Razmnāmah [BL Add. 5640] رزم نامه. ZENODO (2022), retrieved March 2022. We read: تمت تمام شد کتاب مهابهارت که شیخ ابوالفضل این مهابهارت را در یک و نیم سال از زبان سپنس کرت بزبان فارسی ترجمه کرده چند کس از برهمنان دانا و ساودهان مصر مدموهن و مصر چتریهوج خرد سخن کاتب محمدخان ولد شجاعت خان قوم افغان سردانی ساکن تهته بتاریخ بیست

¹⁸² Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59, Add. 7676. Abū al-Faḡl’s knowledge of Sanskrit slips into some secondary literature from these traditions, for example A. K. Webb, *Deep Cosmopolis: Rethinking World Politics and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2015), 97.

¹⁸³ For example in Najaf Haider, “Translating Texts and Straddling Worlds: Inter-cultural Communication in Mughal India,” in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 121–22. The subject is broached in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 151.

¹⁸⁴ As mentioned above, this project was abandoned in 1583.

¹⁸⁵ Truschke, “Naqīb Ḥan, Razm-nama,” *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022. Further biographical information about Shaykh Bhāvan is in Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 38–39.

¹⁸⁶ Mentioned in Sukthankar, “Notes on Mahābhārata Commentators,” 197; more detail in Sukthankar and P. K. Gode, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata* (V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition) (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House for the V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition Committee, Poona, 1944), 145.

the 1580s.¹⁸⁷ However, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* states he belonged to circa 1412, so too early for our concerns, while Caturbhuja Upādhyāya Paṇḍita, who wrote on the *Ākhyātavāda* of Raghunātha Śīromaṇi belonged to the seventeenth century, so too late and, in any event, not an author in the genre of epic commentary.¹⁸⁸ The Caturbhuj mentioned in the *Razmnāmah* thus seems to be Caturbhuj Dās, the individual who made a separate translation of the *Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne* in addition to that prepared by Badā'ūnī.¹⁸⁹ This work is called *Shāhnāmah* in a manuscript kept in Oxford.¹⁹⁰ Further copies of Caturbhuj's translation are in the British Library. These give the title as *Singhāsan battīsī* and record, like the Oxford copy, that Caturbhuj Dās undertook the translation in the time of Akbar and that he was the son of Mihircand Kāyat of Sonpat.¹⁹¹ Kayāt is an abbreviated form of Kāyastha, the caste of writers in north India, while Sonpat stands for Sonipat, the town on the Yamunā river immediately north of Delhi. The general background of Caturbhuj is thus reasonably known on this evidence. He was a follower of the Vaiṣṇava religion, as shown by his name: Caturbhuj means 'four-armed', a common epithet of Viṣṇu, while Dās, meaning a servant or slave, was and is a frequent addition to names. The colophons of the British Library manuscripts, one of which was in the collection of N. B. Halhed in the eighteenth century, further report that Caturbhuj's translation was revised in the time of

187 Sukthankar and Gode, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, 167, n. 1.

188 V. K. Raghavan, K. Kunjunn Raja et al, *New Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors*, 8 vols. (Madras: University of Madras, 1966–74), 6: 315, where it is also noted that he was surnamed Aupamanyava. For Caturbhuja Upādhyāya Paṇḍita, we consulted PANDiT, "Caturbhuja (Upādhyāya) Paṇḍita," retrieved March 2022.

189 Badā'ūnī's translation of the text is reported in MT 2: 186, his title being a chronogram giving the date AH 989/1581 CE, see S. H. Hodivala in 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Mulūk Shāh Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-'t-tawārīkh*, vol. 2, trans. W. H. Lowe, revised by B. P. Ambashthya with commentary of S. H. Hodivala and foreword to the second edition of 1924 by Johan van Manen (Patna: Academica Asiatica, [1973]), xxvii; also Anna Martin, "Hīrad-afzā," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022. This text has not been traced so far and was reported as missing from the royal library at an early stage, see MT 2: 377. One can hardly resist thinking that Badā'ūnī himself was responsible for the copy's disappearance.

190 Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 815, no. 1324 (Walker 118); Anna Martin, "Čaturbhūjdās bin Mihrčand, *Šāhnāma* or *Singhāsanbattīsī*," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022.

191 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 763, Add. 6597; Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1106, no. 1988 (IO Islamic 1250), dated 1780 CE. There are seven other manuscripts of the *Singhāsan battīsī* in British collections (including one in Edinburgh dated 1776), but the texts do not agree and the relationship of the manuscripts awaits exploration. Among them may rest a copy of Badā'ūnī's missing translation.

Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and ‘Ālamgīr.¹⁹² Caturbhuj was thus an author of enduring importance in Mughal times, but his name has disappeared from the literary history of India.

Devī Miśra (Debi Misra) was an expert on the epics. From Badā’ūnī we have the following remarks about how he interacted with Akbar:¹⁹³

At other times, a Brahmin of the name of Debi was pulled up the wall of the fort, sitting on a *charpai*, till he arrived near a balcony where the emperor used to sleep. Whilst thus suspended, he instructed His Majesty in the secrets and legends of Hinduism, in the manner of worshipping idols, the fire, the sun and stars, and of revering the chief gods of these unbelievers, as Brahma, Mahadev, Bishn, Kishn, Ram, and Mahamai, who are supposed to have been men, but very likely never existed, though some, in their idle belief, look upon them as gods, and others as angels. His Majesty, on hearing further how much the people of the country prized their institutions, commenced to look upon them with affection.

Badā’ūnī’s comment that Devī Miśra told the king about the “legends of Hinduism,” confirms his expertise in epic literature and suggests he may be related to – perhaps a son or grandson of – Arjuna Miśra, the author of a commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, who flourished in Bengal in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁹⁴ Devī Miśra also appears from Badā’ūnī’s testimony to have been an expert in forms of ritual worship but we have not traced texts on this subject that are attributable to him.

Devī Miśra also seems to have played an important part in the translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* – at least at first glance. His involvement is reported in the flyleaf note in the illustrated version of the text in the Freer Gallery.¹⁹⁵ As noted already, this records that “Naqīb Khān of Qazvīn . . . translated [this work] into Persian from the Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at

¹⁹² Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 763, Add. 5652 is a re-translation by Kiśan Dās Bāsdev of Lahore in the time of Aurangzeb.

¹⁹³ See MT 2: 257. Devī Miśra is also noted in Rizvi, “*Dimensions of Šulḥ-i kul* (Universal Peace) in Akbar’s Reign and the Sufi Theory of Perfect Man,” in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 18 without, however, citing Badā’ūnī.

¹⁹⁴ P. K. Gode, “Arjuna Miśra,” *Indian Culture* 2, no. 1 (1935): 141–46. There is a link with Bengal among the prominent Hindu scholars at the Mughal court, see discussion of Madhusūdana below. Networks are introduced in Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, eds, *Religious Cultures of Early Modern India: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2012). The articles collected in this volume appeared in a special issue of *South Asian History and Culture* in 2011, each cited in the appropriate place in this book.

¹⁹⁵ Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 73–74, cited and endorsed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 29. Seyller shows that the reference to Akbar using his posthumous title shows this flyleaf note was added after the king’s death in 1605. We take this to show that Badā’ūnī’s contribution to the translation was not known at that time, at least to the author of the flyleaf note.

the time.” The document goes on to report that “There was a brahman by the name of Deva Miśra who would interpret the meaning of the verses and Naqīb Khān would translate [that] into Persian.”¹⁹⁶ The note then says that the work was completed in AH 1007. While this seems to confirm Devī Miśra as a person who knew the epics, John Seyller has cast doubt on the testimony and pointed to a number of contradictions with regard to the note’s statements and dates. We share his concerns and – going one step further – we observe that the flyleaf note appears to be a series of statements lifted from a variety of sources, one being, in fact, a *Razmnāmah* dated AH 1007 – perhaps even the British Library copies or their exemplar. The phrasing matches in places and is likewise contradictory, saying first that Naqīb Khān translated the text, but then immediately records that Devī Miśra explained the text to him and that Naqīb Khān wrote it down in Persian. We have already noted the same change of voice and pattern of information in the *Razmnāmah* colophon. That the information in the flyleaf note may draw on a *Razmnāmah* colophon helps explain why Badā’ūnī, and the key part he played in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* projects, is not mentioned. Thus, while Devī Miśra stands documented as an expert on the “legends of Hinduism” thanks to Badā’ūnī, the *Rāmāyaṇa* flyleaf note cannot be taken as supporting evidence for this.

Moving ahead in the list of individuals who helped in the translation according to the *Razmnāmah* colophon, we come to Śatāvadhānī. This is problematic, at least as a name. Sanskrit *śatāvadhāna* carries the dictionary meaning of “a man with such a good memory that he can attend to a hundred things at once.” The epithet is often applied to Rāghavendra, the well-known seventeenth-century exponent of the dualist system of Indian philosophy. His life was celebrated in a poem by his nephew Nārāyaṇācārya entitled *Śrīrāghavendravigaya*.¹⁹⁷ However, Rāghavendra is several decades later than the time of *Razmnāmah* translation and has to be excluded. The usage, however, is indicative and shows that *śatāvadhānī* is being used in the list as an adjective – it is not actually a name. This explains why the Persian has retained the Sanskrit masculine singular possessive adjective ending ī. The word must apply, consequently, to Madhusūdana, the name immediately following.

¹⁹⁶ Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 74 with slight changes.

¹⁹⁷ D. R. Vasudeva Rau, ed., with translation and notes, *Mahākavi Nārāyaṇācārya’s Śrī Rāghavendravigaya* (Viśākhapatnam: Śrīmadānanda Tirtha Publications, 1982). For Rāghavendra and the Dvaita school, B. N. K. Sharma, *A History of the Dvaita School of Vedānta and Its Literature*, 2 vols. (Bombay: Booksellers’ Publ. Co, 1960–61), 2: 274–81.

Madhusūdana and the Roster of Scholars in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*

Madhusūdana, the well-known advocate of Advaita philosophy, is the most celebrated Sanskrit scholar in the *Razmnāmah* list. Further clues about him and his relationship to the Mughal court are found in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*. In the first volume, Abū al-Faḍl gives a long table of the learned people. Among the first class of holy men, who “understand the mysteries of both worlds,” he includes a series of famous individuals. As might be expected, many are Muslim saints, but in the first class he includes the following Indians: “13. Madhu Sarsutī. 14. Madhusūdan. 15. Nārāin Asram. 16. Harijī Sūr. 17. Damūdar Bhat. 18. Rāmīrth. 19. Nar Sing. 20. Parmindar. 21. Ādit.”¹⁹⁸

Before turning to Madhusūdana, we will attempt to identify the individuals mentioned in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* as a way of exploring the Indian scholarly currents at the Mughal court. Harijī Sūri, to begin, has been identified as Harivijaya (1526–95 CE), the Jain pontiff who came to the religious talks at Fatehpur Sikri in 1578.¹⁹⁹ We will return to the Jain presence at the Mughal court later in this book.

Damūdar Bhat can be identified as Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa, the author of a text called the *Kalpācintāmani*, otherwise known as the *Yantracintāmani*.²⁰⁰ As the title indicates, the work deals with the use of diagrams (*yantra*) in the performance of magical rites (*abhiṣāra*). The applications include six rites, namely, appeasement (*śānti*), subjugation (*vaśīkaraṇa*) immobilisation (*stambhana*), enmity (*vidveṣana*), eradication (*uccāṭana*) and liquidation (*māraṇa*). Depending on their use, the relevant *yantras* are named ‘*yantras* for subjugation’ (*vaśyakarayantra*), ‘*yantras* for attraction’ (*ākaraṇayantra*) and so on. The significance of the *Yantracintāmani* can be judged from the fact that vernacular manuals on the subject are based on this text rather than any other. The work was first studied by Jean Marquès-Rivière and translated into French in 1939.²⁰¹ Gudrun Bühnemann briefly summarised the text and placed Dāmodara in the seventeenth century; a more

¹⁹⁸ See AA 1: 538–547 (*Ā'in* 30).

¹⁹⁹ Stietenron, “Planned Syncretism,” 185. See further Truschke, “Dangerous Debates: Jain Responses to Theological Challenges at the Mughal Court,” *Modern Asian Studies* 49 (2015): 1311–44, as well as Pushpa Prasad, “Akbar and the Jains,” in *Akbar and His India*, ed. Irfan Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 97–108 and Shirin Mehta, “Akbar as Reflected in the Contemporary Jain Literature in Gujarat,” *Social Scientist* 20, no. 232–33 (1992): 54–60.

²⁰⁰ Hans-Georg Türistig, *Yantracintāmaṇiḥ of Dāmodara* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988) which supersedes (the now reprinted and unreliable) Narendranath Sharma, *Kalpācintāmaṇiḥ of Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa: an ancient treatise on Tantra, Yantra and Mantra; Sanskrit text in Devanāgarī and Roman scripts, English transl., Yantr. diagrams, introd. and index* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1979).

²⁰¹ Jean Marquès-Rivière, *Rituel de magie tantrique hindoue : Yantra Chintāmani, le joyau des Yantras, traduit en français et précédé d'une "Etude sur le Tantrisme,"* (Paris : Librairie Vêga, 1939).

detailed background has been provided by Hans-Georg Tüerstig.²⁰² The high status assigned to Dāmōdara by Abū al-Faḍl – certainly out of step with modern rational taste – is due to Mughal interests in indigenous mathematics, astronomy, astrology and allied sciences of India, in which category were placed protective and magical rites that had the potential to protect both individuals and the state. The *Yantracintāmaṇi* is eulogised as the ‘quintessence of the Atharvaveda,’ which helps explain Mughal interest in the latter text.²⁰³ In any event, Abū al-Faḍl’s mention of Dāmōdara places him in the sixteenth century.

Rāmīrtha or Rāmāīrtha, like Madhusūdhana with whom we started this section, was an adherent of Advaita Vedānta. Our account of the personalities in this school can be read with the tables provided by Christopher Minkowski in his study of early modern Advaita.²⁰⁴ Rāmāīrtha – number 9 in Minkowski’s table – was author of several works; a useful biography and an account of his writing, with a list of disciples, was prepared by P. V. Sivarama Dikshitar.²⁰⁵ For present purposes, we note that Rāmāīrtha counted Jagannāthāśrama among his teachers and was responsible for the *Vidvanmanorañjinī*, a commentary on the *Vedāntasāra*. This is an important work that provided a summary of the doctrines of the Advaitavādins as set forth by Śaṅkara in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. Now the same *Vedāntasāra* also drew the commentarial attention of Narasiṃha Sarasvatī.²⁰⁶ This Narasiṃha, otherwise known as Nṛsiṃhāśrama and another pupil of Jagannāthāśrama, appears to be the Nar Sing who comes immediately after Rāmāīrtha in Abū al-Faḍl’s listing.²⁰⁷ While the identification is not absolutely certain, this Narasiṃha is probably not the Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyī who visited

202 Gudrun Bühnemann, *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 35; Hans-Georg Tüerstig, “The Indian Sorcery called Abhicāra,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 29 (1985): 69–117 which can be usefully read with the edition of the text of the *Yantracintāmaṇi* published by the same author.

203 Tüerstig, *Yantracintāmaṇi*, 11.

204 Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History,” *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 207–09 (table 1).

205 P. V. Sivarama Dikshitar, “Rāmāīrtha,” in *Preceptors of Advaita*, ed. T. M. P. Mahadevan, (Secunderabad: Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Sankara Mandir, 1968), 223.

206 G. A. Jacob, ed., with notes and indices, *The Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda, together with the Commentaries of Nṛsiṃhasarasvatī and Rāmāīrtha* (Bombay: Pāndurang Jāwajī, 1925); for the use of Sarasvatī as a title, see below. Regarding the MSS Jacobi says: no. 2833 IOL text only, well written but omits several passages in latter part; No. 2773 IOL, very accurate; No. 884 IOL, with N’s commentary in which the whole text is incorporated, beautifully written and fairly correct. From these manuscripts, it appears that Nṛsiṃha’s commentary enjoyed greater prominence.

207 N. Veezhinathan, “Nṛsiṃhāśrama,” in *Preceptors of Advaita*, 226–32. Dinesh Bhattacharyya, “Sanskrit Scholars of Akbar’s Time,” *IHQ* 13 (1937): 33 notes some further possibilities.

the Mughal court sometime in the 1560s and wrote some digests on ritual, the best known being the *Nityācārapradīpa*.²⁰⁸

According to Dikshitar's account of Rāmatīrtha, Puruṣottama Miśra was one of his disciples. This fact is worth mentioning because Badā'ūnī makes the following statement: "For some time His Majesty called on a Brahmin, whose name was Purukhotam, author of a commentary on the [*Samkṣepaśārīraka*?], whom he asked to invent particular Sanskrit names for all things in existence."²⁰⁹ This Puruṣottama, more generally known under the name Puruṣottama Sarasvatī, was the author of at least two known works: the *Subodhinī* on Sarvajñātman's *Samkṣepaśārīraka* – just mentioned – and a commentary on Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Siddhāntabindu*.²¹⁰ The connections given here show that Puruṣottama Sarasvatī was active in the last two decades of the sixteenth century.

The name Sarasvatī introduces a degree of confusion and calls for explanation because it was used by a number of the scholars known to the Mughal court. As noted by Phyllis Granoff – and earlier by P. C. Divānji – this is not a name as such but a title given to people who are especially learned.²¹¹ Sarasvatī in this context refers to the Indian goddess of speech who is thought to bestow learning on pious people; her sweetness of speech is often compared to honey (*madhu*).²¹²

208 Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyī is discussed in Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court*, Thesis (Ph.D.)--Columbia University, 2012, 34. For the text: Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyī, *Nityācārapradīpaḥ*, 2 vols. ed. Sadāśiva Miśra (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1903–28); see further, Gudrun Bühnemann, *Pūjā: A Study in Smārta Ritual* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1988), 14 and Kedarnath Mahapatra, "Some Forgotten Smṛti-Writers of Orissa: (2) Narasiṃha Vājapeyī," *Orissa Historical Research Journal* 2 (1953): 7 (cited by Truschke but not available for this book). As kindly pointed out to us by Truschke (personal communication, November, 2015), Vājapeyī was probably not in the court long enough to register in the Persian sources.

209 *MT* 2: 256. In the *MT* as published, the name of the text in the manuscript source is unclear but Puruṣottama is known for his commentary on Sarvajñātman's *Samkṣepaśārīraka* so we have inserted that. Puruṣottama names Rāmatīrtha as his teacher in a verse in his *Subodhinī*, see Dikshitar, "Rāmatīrtha," 223. Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta," 214 (table 2, no. VII) shows the relationship.

210 P. C. Divānji, ed., translated with introduction and comparative notes, *Siddhāntabindu of Madhusūdana with the Commentary of Puruṣottama* (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1933), all of sections V and VI of the introduction, dealing with the biography and date of Madhusūdana, are relevant but Puruṣottama is discussed only briefly (*ibid.*, cxi). Another translation of this work is cited below. For the relationships, see Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta," 207 (table 1, no. 6). Also, Karl H. Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, retrieved January 2022.

211 See Phyllis Granoff, "Sarasvatī's Sons: Biographies of Poets in Medieval India," *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 49 (1995): 351–76.

212 Further examples of Sarasvatī and Balasarasvatī in addition to those noted by Granoff are mentioned in Willis, "Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī," 130.

How Indian scholars propitiated Sarasvatī to gain knowledge and eloquence is revealed in one of the later sections of Merutuṅga's *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, a work completed in Gujarāt in the opening years of the fourteenth century. There we read of a fierce religious contest between the Buddhists and Jains, and how the Buddhists first gained the upper hand. An individual named Malla, born of the warrior caste, never forgot his enmity toward the Buddhists and vowed revenge. Studying a text with great zeal, Sarasvatī eventually appeared and granted him a boon. He asked for a logical treatise that would allow him to conquer the Buddhists. This was reported to king Śīlāditya who then gave permission for a debate to go forward and "Malla, by the help of Sarasvatī, who descended into his throat, quickly reduced the Buddhist to silence."²¹³ In a lovely verse by Nārāyaṇācārya celebrating the achievements of his uncle Rāghvendra, Sarasvatī is invoked in a similar way.²¹⁴

May the goddess Sarasvatī –
Who is the autumnal moonlight to the ocean of words and
Who dances on the stage of the tongue of the eminent Śrī Rāghavendra –
May she be my protector!

The importance of the goddess of speech, and her links to royal patronage and power, are usefully summed up in the following Sanskrit verse of the scholar Salakṣa who flourished, like Merutuṅga, in western India during the fourteenth century.²¹⁵

She adorns the entire world and
Fervently runs toward the glorious king,
Who is a portion of the divine here.
May that radiant speech grant me happiness!

The title *Sarasvatī* brings us back to the start of the list in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* where we have Madhu Sarsutī as a name. As pointed out by Dinesh Bhattacharyya, the name published in the English publication is wrong and the reading is actually

213 Jina Vijaya Muni, ed., with Hindi translation and notes, *Prabandhacintāmaṇi of Merutuṅgācārya* (Śāntiniketan: Siṅghī Jaina Jñānapīṭha, 1933), translated as C. H. Tawney, *The Prabandhacintāmaṇi or Wishing-stone of Narratives* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1901), 171–72.

214 D. R. Vasudeva Rau, ed., *Mahākavi Nārāyaṇācārya's Śrī Rāghavendrāvijaya*, 1: *śrīrāghavendraratnānāṃ rasanāraṅganartakī | śabdāmbudhiśarajyotsnnā śaraṇaṃ mam śāradā ||* 4

215 *Śabdavilāsa*, quoted in Truschke, "Defining the Other: An Intellectual History of Sanskrit Lexicons and Grammars of Persian," *JIP* 40 (2012): 638. The text was composed in 1365, thus subsequent to Merutuṅga.

Mādhava Sarasvatī.²¹⁶ This individual can be identified as the proponent of the Advaita system who lived in Varāṇasī in the sixteenth century. His teacher was Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa, a scholar whose biographical outline is known: he came from Paithan in the Deccan and, after periods of residence in Kohalpur, Vijayanagara and Dvāraka, settled in Varāṇasī, probably in the second decade of the sixteenth century.²¹⁷ He attracted students there, among them our Mādhava Sarasvatī.²¹⁸ Six works of Mādhava are known with two available in modern editions: the *Mitabhāṣiṇī*, a commentary on the eleventh-century text *Saptapadārthī* of Śivāditya, and his *Sarvadarśanakaumudī*.²¹⁹

As noted by Sanjukta Gupta in her monograph on the Advaita school of philosophy, Madhusūdana mentions Mādhava as his teacher in the *Advaitasiddhi*.²²⁰ This dates both individuals to the middle part of the sixteenth century and, more importantly, brings us again to Madhusūdana. He is the only individual listed in both the *Razmnāmah* and *Ā'in-i Akbarī*. The first gives “Madhusūdana Miśra,” while the second gives “14. Madhusūdan.” This is the person normally known in Sanskrit circles as Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. Abū al-Faḍl was familiar with the teachings of the Vedānta school of philosophy – the overarching system to which Madhusūdana’s Advaita belonged – and he gives a summary of it in his ‘Description of the Nine Schools’ in the third volume of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*.²²¹ Otherwise, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is recorded as the author of a substantial number of philosophical works, many of which have been edited and published. The *Siddhāntabindu*, for example, is a commentary on a work by Śaṅkara, the key

216 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, “Sanskrit Scholars,” 31, cited and supported in Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6. See Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta,” 214 (table 2, no. IV). Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, retrieved January, 2022.

217 Joya Chatterji and D. A. Washbrook, *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Rosalind O’Hanlon and D. A. Washbrook, *Religious Cultures in Early Modern India: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2012), 128–29, also Christopher Minkowski, “Learned Brahmins and the Mughal Court: the *Jyotiṣas*,” in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107–09.

218 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, “Sanskrit Scholars,” 32; Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 6.

219 The six works are listed in Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*; the published items are: Rāmaśāstrī Tailaṅga, ed., *The Saptapadārthī of Śivāditya: together with its commentary, the Mitabhāṣiṇī of Mādhava Sarasvatī* (Benares: E. J. Lazarus & Co, 1893) and K. Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī, ed., *The Sarvadarśanakaumudī of Mādhavasarasvatī* (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1938) who notes (p. iii) that there is “no confirmatory evidence to determine the date of Śrīmadhavasarasvatī,” but the problem is taken up in M. S. Bhat, “Date of Mādhava Sarasvatī,” *JIH* 40 (1962): 217–22.

220 Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 6.

221 See AA 3: 172–79.

figure in Vedānta who lived in the eighth century.²²² A philosophical counter to Madhusūdana came from Viśvanātha Nyāyasiddhānta Pañcānna who composed *Bhedasiddhi* as a refutation of monism and direct reply to Madhusūdana's *Advaitasiddhi*.²²³

Among his many works, Madhusūdana wrote a commentary on the *Gītā*.²²⁴ As noted before, the *Gītā* is a key religious text that has attracted much scholarly attention through the centuries. It is notable that Abū al-Faḍl seems to have known the *Gītā* in so far as a translation of it is ascribed to his hand.²²⁵ The source for this literary tradition seems to be the historical fact that Madhusūdana was in the Mughal court – as we know from the *Razmnāmah* colophon – and was likely known to Abū al-Faḍl.²²⁶ The interest was certainly a one-way affair. As outlined in his valuable contribution to our understanding of Madhusūdana, Shankar Nair observes that the early modern Sanskrit intellectuals under Muslim rule were remarkably confident in the resources of their tradition and “its ability to consistently realise its own, most central truth-claims, hence utterly without need, desire, or even curiosity to venture anywhere else.”²²⁷ This ‘Indo-centrism’ was described in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, as Nair notes, but already in the late nineteenth

222 K. N. Subramanian, trans., *Siddhāntabindu: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's Commentary on Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's Daśaśloki* (Varanasi: Rishi Publications, 1989). Ali's comment that Śaṅkara was “not represented” at court is thus slightly overdrawn. See Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works,” 44.

223 Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77.

224 Sisir Kumar Gupta, trans., *Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the Bhagavad Gītā: being an English translation of his commentary, Gūḍhārtha dipikā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).

225 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1949 (IO Islamic 1358) mentions a note on folio 1r showing the translator was Dārā Shikūh, noted in Muṭtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations*, 74. Further discussion of the *Gītā* translations in Y. D. Ahuja, “Some Aspects of the Persian Prose Translation of the *Gītā* ascribed to Abu'l-Faḍl,” *Indo-Iranica* 13, no. 3 (1960): 20–27, and references in following note.

226 Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 33 notes that Abū al-Faḍl's account of the 18 *vidyā* systems in the AA seems to be based on the *Prasthānabheda* of Madhusūdana; Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 273 cites the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* of Mādhava as an influence. As noted above, Madhusūdana had Mādhava as his teacher. The general run of these works – recalling that Abū al-Faḍl did not read Sanskrit – would have come to Abū al-Faḍl through Madhusūdana. Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, 61–62 gives a learned account of Madhusūdhana, but does not know the *Razmnāmah* colophon so finds no evidence to place him in the Mughal court.

227 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, all of Chapter 2 is relevant; also Nair, “‘Islam’ in Sanskrit doxography: A Reconsideration via the Writings of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī,” *JRAS* (2021): 1–26, retrieved January 2022.

century H. S. Jarrett observed that Abū al-Faḡl “found his Hindu informants, as he says, of a retrograde tendency, spinning like silk worms, a tissue round themselves, immeshed in their own opinions, conceding the attainment of truth to no other, while artfully insinuating their own views.”²²⁸

The Persian *Gītā* translation – made in fact by Fayḡī and later Prince Dārā and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī – became a popular work, with some authors arguing that more people in later centuries read the text in Persian than in Sanskrit.²²⁹ It remains to explain the name Misra or Mīśra. This is a common surname among Brahmins in northern India and because Abū al-Faḡl reports that Madhusūdana was a Brahmin, we should not be surprised if he was a Mīśra.

Valerie Stoker has given further information about Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. He was from Bengal but lived in the city of Vāraṇasī, where he authored the *Advaitasiddhi* in circa 1585. This responded to a work from south India by an author named Vyāsātīrtha. As Stoker says: “That Vyāsātīrtha’s criticisms of these rival Vedānta systems proved incisive is evident in the fact that for the duration of the sixteenth century, and even into the seventeenth, both direct and indirect responses to his works were being composed, not only in south India but as far north as Vāraṇasī.”²³⁰ The philosophical content of the debates is less historically important for the present book than the fact that this example shows how the intelligentsia had networks covering wide geographical areas. An invaluable insight into the mechanics of these networks comes from a Sanskrit letter between two scholars from Bengal – one of *jyotiḥśāstra*, the other of *nyāyaśāstra* – that dates to around 1535 CE.²³¹

228 See AA 3: viii.

229 Cole, “Iranian Culture and South Asia,” 22, citing Muḡtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations*, 65. For readership of the *Gītā* see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1950 (IO Islamic 614). The best work, so far unpublished as far as we are aware, is Roderic Vassie, *Persian Interpretations of the Bhagavadgītā in the Mughal period with special reference to the Sufi version of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī*, Thesis (Ph.D.) -- School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989.

230 Valerie Stoker, “Polemics and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara: Vyāsātīrtha and the Dynamics of Hindu Sectarian Relations,” *History of Religions* 51, no. 2 (2011): 131.

231 Samuel Wright, “Circulating Scholarship: A Note on a Sanskrit Letter from Bengal circa 1535 CE,” *JRAS* 27, no. 1 (2017): 83–91. Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 5 expresses surprise at the distance: “Vāraṇasī, the accepted place of activity for Madhusūdana, is far removed from Vijay Nagar . . . it is plausible to think that the fame of these two great scholars [Mādhava and Śāyana] may have taken a long time to reach Vāraṇasī.” The letter of circa 1535 gives actual manuscript evidence of how materials moved to which we can add the career of Shaykh Bhāvan, who came from the Deccan to the Mughal court. For networks otherwise, O’Hanlon and Washbrook, eds, *Religious Cultures of Early Modern India*.

To complete this round up of the first grouping of scholars listed in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, we turn to Nārāin Asram, Parmindar and Ādit. The first, more correctly Nārāyaṇāśrama, appears to be a pupil of Nṛsiṃhāśrama, already mentioned above.²³² He was a contemporary of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and wrote a commentary on Nṛsiṃhāśrama's *Advaitadīpikā*.²³³ The name Parmindar has been understood by Dinesh Bhattacharyya as Paramānanda.²³⁴ He suggested that this is Paramānanda Bhaṭṭācārya, yet another Advaitin and disciple of Rāmatīrtha, who wrote a commentary on the Mokṣadharmā section of the *Mahābhārata* titled *Mitabhāṣiṇī*.²³⁵ Āditi, finally, presents difficulties. But as Bhattacharyya has noted, he should be a follower of Advaita given the preponderance of this school in the list.²³⁶ He might therefore be Ādityapurin, the disciple of Haricaraṇapurī, and author of a text titled *Vedāntasaṃjñādīpikā*.²³⁷

There are no known portraits of the Hindu scholars listed in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, at least as far as art historians are presently aware. However, looking again at the *Razmnāmah* page in Philadelphia (Figure 1), we see a group of learned men at the bottom of the picture. All of these individuals have forehead marks, showing they are Hindus. One stands passively to the side, wearing white robes that suggest he is a mendicant. The remaining four, excluding the scribe, are shown speaking and gesticulating in an animated fashion. By coincidence or design, the colophons of the 1599 manuscripts name four scholars as assisting with the translation. Could we have here, therefore, portraits of Devī Miśra, Madhusūdhana Miśra, Caturbhuj Dās and Shaykh Bhāvan?

²³² Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 32; further context in Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānata," 214. To judge from Minkowski's account Nṛsiṃhāśrama was the greater light; Abū al-Faḡl's inclusion of Nārāyaṇāśrama appears to be due to the fact he was a contemporary.

²³³ S. Subrahmanya Śāstrī, ed., *Advaitadīpikā of Nṛsiṃhāśrama: With the Commentary Advaitadīpikāvivarāṇaṃ by Nārāyaṇāśrama* (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1982–87).

²³⁴ Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 33.

²³⁵ We have been unable to verify this information; Dinesh Bhattacharyya cites a manuscript of the text in Asiatic Society Calcutta. Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānata," 215 mentions one Paramānanda, follower of Nārāyaṇatīrtha, but this may be somebody else.

²³⁶ Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 33. Bhattacharyya continues with further individuals listed by Abū al-Faḡl, mostly followers of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. These individuals are outside the scope of the present study but see the useful discussion in Ganeri, *Lost Age of Reason*, 75–79 and Wright, "Circulating Scholarship: A Note on a Sanskrit Letter."

²³⁷ Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, retrieved January 2022.

1.6 State of the Art and Aims of the Present Work

The state of scholarship on Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface* has two interlocking strands: that dealing with the *Preface* itself and that dealing more generally with the *Mahābhārata* and other translations. Here we focus on the first for the sake of precision. The *Preface* drew little attention from historians of Mughal history until it was given a scholarly debut in Rizvi's *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*, a work already cited several times in this chapter.²³⁸ In the context of the Translation Bureau, Rizvi devoted four pages to the text, giving a summary of its key points but necessarily simplifying Abū al-Faḡl's thinking and omitting much detail.²³⁹ Rizvi also gave a translation of the passage dealing with the translation team; his source for the Persian was the *Razmnāmah* printed in Lucknow by Nawal Kishore Press.²⁴⁰ Published in 1975, Rizvi's book has become a landmark study that has shaped much subsequent scholarship on the Translation Bureau and the *Razmnāmah*. Indeed, later writers have normally followed Rizvi's analysis due to his meticulous attention to the sources and his well-balanced treatment.

After Rizvi, the first scholar to return to Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface* was Carl W. Ernst in a wide-ranging article called "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations of Indian Languages." In this piece, Ernst revisited the primary sources and for this used the Tehran edition of the *Razmnāmah* (published in 1979–81). Ernst offered translations of several passages from this edition, and deployed these to advance his reassessment of translation literature in the Indian milieu. The specific passages are noted in Chapter 2, and we will return to them again in Chapter 3.

Ernst's study, published in 2003, was more than a systematic re-examination of the *Razmnāmah* and related materials, however. He attempted to move beyond the terms of reference framed by Rizvi and specifically questioned the understanding of the translations as expressions of a 'liberal outlook' or exercises in 'religious tolerance'.²⁴¹ The idea that the translations were meant to build bridges between the Hindus and Muslims and to address Akbar's goal of reducing

²³⁸ We will not list earlier notices, for which see Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 174 and our bibliography.

²³⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 207–10, presaged in Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation of the Mahabharat," published in 1950.

²⁴⁰ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 208.

²⁴¹ As in, for example, John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36–40 and Rice, "A Persian Mahābhārata: The 1598–1599 Razmnāma," 126.

religious factionalism are certainly true and they have enjoyed emphasis thanks to Rizvi and his contemporaries. But as Ernst has said:²⁴²

Abu al-Fazl was interested in the philosophical and religious content of the epic, from the perspective of an enlightened intellectual whose cosmopolitan vision had moved him out of a strictly defined Islamic theological perspective. But I think it is fair to say that this intellectual project was thoroughly subordinated to the political aim of making Akbar's authority supreme over all possible rivals in India, including all religious authorities. The translation of the Sanskrit epics was not an academic enterprise comparable to the modern study of religion; it was instead part of an imperial effort to bring both Indic and Persianate culture into the service of Akbar.

The view that the translation project can be seen as an instrumentalist policy, and part of the imperial ambition of Akbar as an Indo-Persian king, is also seen in an article published by M. Athar Ali in 1992.²⁴³ Ali buttressed his interpretation with a close examination of the Persian texts and new observations on the date of the translations and the contributions of those involved. The value of his essay is underlined by the fact that it was reprinted in *Akbar and His Age* in 1999.²⁴⁴ The social context of the *Mahābhārata* translation was also taken up by Muzaffar Alam in his book *The Languages of Political Islam*. Given the magisterial scope of this work, it is not surprising that the *Preface* receives brief treatment, with Abū al-Fazl's passage explaining Akbar's motivation for commissioning the *Razmnāmah* introduced to illustrate Mughal concerns with morality and the king's interest in nurturing the conditions in which his subjects would appreciate each other's religious views.²⁴⁵

After a considerable hiatus, Audrey Truschke entered the field with a new study of the *Razmnāmah*.²⁴⁶ Extending the work of Ernst, Truschke argued that the creators of the *Razmnāmah* approached the *Mahābhārata* as a mixture of imaginative history, political advice and a great story that served as a vehicle for imperial ideology while making the work resonate with the Indo-Persian literary traditions of the time. In particular, she devoted several pages to Abū al-Fazl's *Preface*, the first in-depth examination of the text since the time of Rizvi.²⁴⁷ Truschke has also published articles on Sanskrit-Persian grammars, the Jain responses to the debates at Fatehpur Sikri and the accounts of Brahmins about

²⁴² Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 182.

²⁴³ Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 38–45.

²⁴⁴ The paper is reprinted exactly, and under the same title, see *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khān (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 171–80.

²⁴⁵ Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 64–5.

²⁴⁶ Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War," 506–20, published in 2011.

²⁴⁷ Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 126–33.

their engagement with the Mughals. These articles are listed in our bibliography and cited in those places where the information is relevant to our discussion. More recently, Jonathan Peterson has examined how the sixteenth-century historian Muḥammad Qāsim Astarābādī engaged with the *Mahābhārata* through Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface*.²⁴⁸ Translating several key passages of Abū al-Faḡl afresh, Peterson explored Firishtah's vision of historical narration and his critique of Abū al-Faḡl's reading of the epic. This led Peterson to question the prevailing framework used to understand the cultural encounter between Persian and Sanskrit, an issue that will draw our attention later in this book.

While the publications outlined above shed valuable light on Akbar's Translation Bureau and the *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*, we are left asking how Abū al-Faḡl positioned himself in relation to the translation and how he approached his task as an author. How Abū al-Faḡl understood the people for whom the translation was intended, and how he viewed Akbar as his king and patron also merit scrutiny. These issues can only be answered by a close examination of Abū al-Faḡl's *Preface*. Accordingly, we have provided a complete translation of the *Preface* in Chapter 2, and a commentary and analysis of its themes in Chapter 3. For justification we only add a remark from Truschke: "Most Indo-Persian translations are severely understudied; many moulder away in manuscript libraries, unpublished and in want of sustained philological attention."²⁴⁹ This observation – disheartening yet true – explains the scope and aims of the present work. The study of Abū al-Faḡl's script has barely begun – as the survey of the literature just given shows – and it has never been translated in full. This means that historians without Persian have resorted to English translations of the parts available, while even those with Persian have been deflected by Abū al-Faḡl's complex and difficult literary style.

By way of clarification and conclusion, we should note that our research questions do *not* embrace an exploration of the rich religious fabric of the Mughal empire or the general nature of translation activities in the Mughal world.²⁵⁰ Even the context of the translation of Hindu works into Persian is something we side-step for the most part given Truschke's overview in *Culture of Encounters*.²⁵¹ Our

248 Jonathan Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh: Rethinking Inter-Religious Encounter in the *Tārīkh-i Firishteh*," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 1 (2018): 155–82.

249 Truschke, "Indo-Persian Translations: A Disruptive Past," *Seminar* 671 (July 2015).

250 For these themes see the essays in Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqi, eds., *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*; Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory," *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 260–87 and Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

251 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*; all chapter 3 on the *Mahābhārata* is relevant.

concern is simply with what Abū al-Faḡl is saying in his *Preface*. This approach means that we take Abū al-Faḡl's writing as an indication of what the royal circle thought about the *Razmnāmah*. As a prominent courtier under Akbar, and the king's chronicler and avid supporter, Abū al-Faḡl is an important source. He is not, of course, the only source. But in view of his close connection to Akbar and his knowledge of court activities, his account provides a point of departure for a host of contexts that can be left for other to explore in the future.