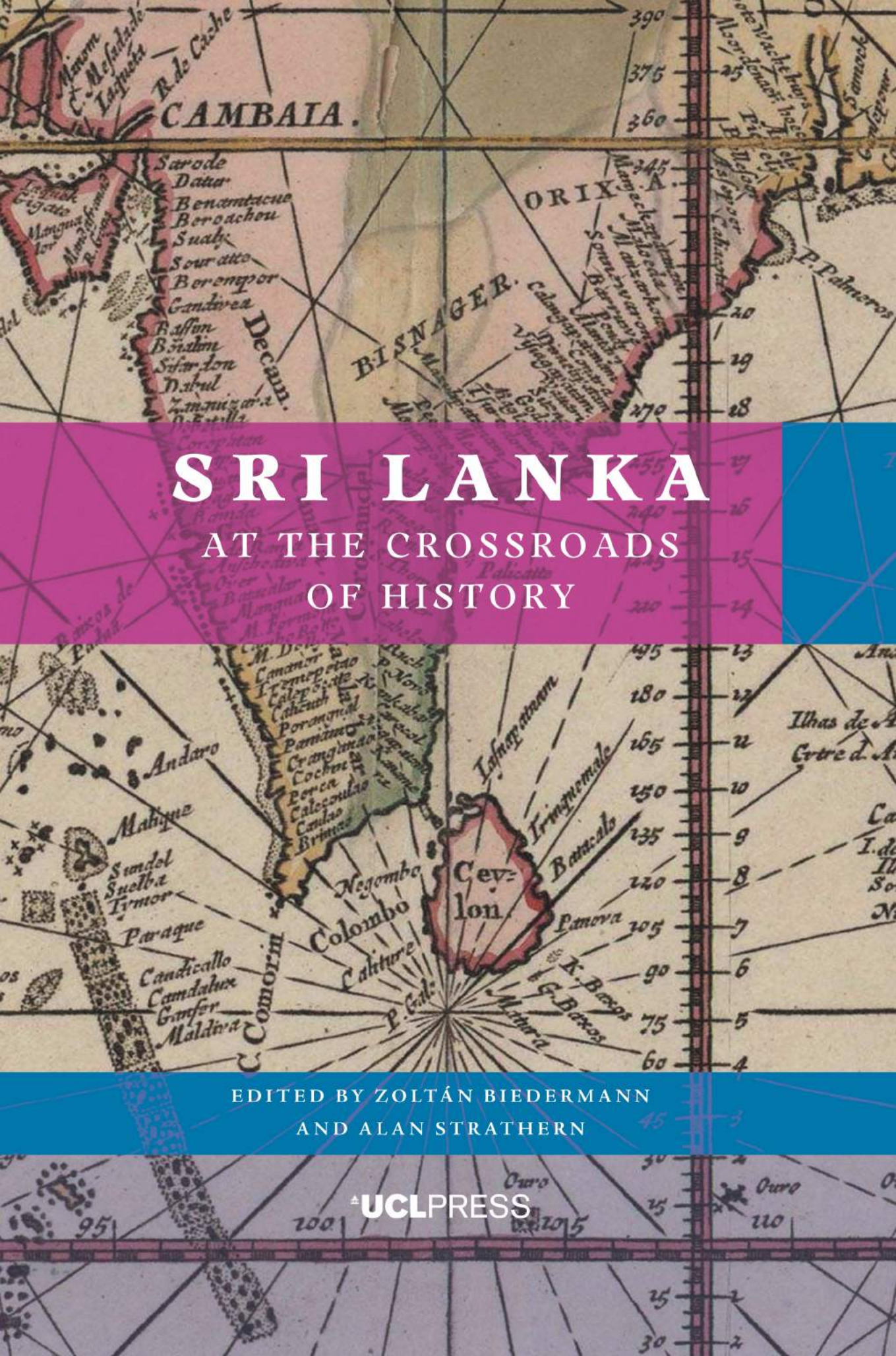

SRI LANKA

AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

EDITED BY ZOLTÁN BIEDERMANN AND ALAN STRATHERN

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Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History

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4

Beautifully moral: cosmopolitan issues in medieval Pāli literary theory

Alastair Gornall and Justin Henry

This chapter explores the extent to which we can speak of medieval Pāli literary culture as a cosmopolitan formation, with particular focus on its moral and political dimensions.[1] As an ecclesiastical koiné – a monastic language used to compose literature addressing exclusively Buddhist concerns – at first glance, medieval Pāli would seem to have little to do with cosmopolitanism. The model of literary cosmopolitanism in premodern Southern Asia was supplied originally by Sanskrit, the inscriptional discourse, grammar, lexicography and poetry of which articulated a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' – a community of literary producers and consumers united not by any single geography or polity but through what Sheldon Pollock identifies as a 'self-assumed cultural universalism', supra-regional in its extent, and close in its political associations.[2] The Sanskrit cosmopolis was further characterized by a shared 'care for language', wherein literature and literary theory were imagined as recapitulating the social and political orders. Well-composed literature was a reflection of good governance and ultimately of the rectitude of society in general. Thus according to Sheldon Pollock, the premodern Indian court's care for language was a genuine moral one, 'not a sham or a show but a core value of what it meant to be just and good'.[3] Later Sanskrit literary theorists advocated that literary education facilitated the moral education of the individual, thus assigning an essential place in social life to the sophisticated use of language.[4]

After 'more than a millennium of what seems to have been stubborn and self-conscious resistance to Sanskrit's cultural project' (to quote Pollock), Pāli scholar-monks became increasingly affected by cosmopolitan Sanskrit. Monastic literati writing at the end of the first millennium embraced Sanskrit literary forms, in particular *kāvya* – Sanskrit court poetry and its accompanying philological toolkit (poetics, grammar, metrics and lexicography) – despite the fact that Sanskrit was never a dominant literary or inscriptional language in Sri Lanka.[5] Monastic authors became increasingly self-aware of their participation in a broader,

transregional, multilingual literary milieu, and grew sensitive to the possibility that their work would be evaluated by Sanskritic literary standards (by those within their own monastic circles at home or by critics, sectarian and otherwise, abroad). Pāli literary culture at this time also became increasingly widespread, culminating in the rapid diffusion at the beginning of the second millennium of Sri Lankan Buddhist ordination lineages into Southeast Asia.[6] For these reasons, in terms of its geographical reach and literary style, medieval Pāli literature shares some important features with cosmopolitan Sanskrit. What is less clear is whether the introduction of cosmopolitan literary style into Pāli necessitated the adoption of a Sanskritic 'care for language' too. In this chapter we argue that this was indeed the case, and we examine the anxieties, compromises and innovations of Lankan Buddhist authors as they – along with the Pāli language – navigated their way into the literary world of their age.

The first half of this chapter explores the transmission of Sanskrit literary theory into Lankan Pāli Buddhist monastic discourse, with special attention given to Saṅgharakkhita's thirteenth-century *Subodhālaṅkāra* (*Lucid Poetics*), the first manual of Pāli poetics. In this connection, we argue that Lankan authors also articulated their care for language in socio-moral terms, relying partially on antecedent Sanskrit śāstric conceptions of aesthetic acumen, and partially recasting Brahmanical vocabulary to better suit a Buddhist framework. The second half of the chapter addresses the function of Pāli in late medieval Sri Lankan courtly culture, exploring tensions between the often erotic and militaristic content of Sanskrit *kāvya* and the monkish concerns of Sri Lankan Buddhist literati. We conclude by speculating more generally on Pāli's relationship with the royal court, arguing that the unique status of Pāli as an ecclesiastical language affected its application as a cosmopolitan language on analogy with Sanskrit.

The Sanskrit cosmopolis and the *Kāvyādarśa* in Sri Lanka

Beginning in the fifth century but intensifying in the first centuries of the second millennium, Pāli[7] underwent a process of 'literarization' in which in terms of style and vocabulary it became increasingly influenced by Sanskrit. Treatises on Pāli grammar, lexicography, prosody and poetic composition modelled on older Sanskrit works circulated in abundance in Sri Lanka during this period, culminating in the scholastic achievements of the thirteenth century. In Sri Lanka, educational complexes administered by Buddhist clergy (*pariveṇa*-s) were centres of training in Sanskrit, prosody, rhetoric, history, logic and medicine.[8] Monks were then by necessity in touch with the cosmopolitan world of broader South Asia.[9] It is this milieu that gave birth to that which Steven Collins calls 'later Pali *kāvya*',[10] or, as we might simply call it, Pāli *kāvya*. It is true that verse compositions in Pāli date far back, the *Thera*- and *Therīgathā*-s, for instance, probably predate the Common Era. Two significant histories of Sri Lanka, the *Dīpavaṃsa* (third or

fourth century CE) and *Mahāvaṃsa* (the earliest portion of which dates to perhaps the sixth century), are also composed in verse.[11] One should note, however, that these works do not contain in abundance the rhetorical figures (pun, simile, alliteration, etc.) nor the chapter divisions or content that have come to characterize *kāvya*, and that make up the concerns of Sanskrit composition manuals on poetry.[12] It is not until the very end of the first millennium that Pāli *kāvya* – a poetic style imitative of Sanskrit antecedents – comes into being in its own right.[13]

One of the pivotal events in the development of second-millennium Pāli *kāvya* was the composition in the thirteenth century of the first work on Pāli poetics, the *Subodhālaṅkāra* of Saṅgharakkhita Mahāsāmi. Its main Sanskrit source was Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*, a work that had a large influence on poetics in medieval Sri Lanka in general.[14] This seventh-century manual of Sanskrit poetics has long been recognized as playing a pivotal role in the theorization of vernacular poetry in South Asia.[15] Its influence has been acknowledged in the production of poetry and poetical treatises in Sinhala, Tamil, Kannada and also Tibetan, among others.[16] In Sri Lanka, the work had a direct influence on the creation in the tenth century of the first poetical treatise in Sinhala, the *Siyabaslakara*.[17] Ratnaśrījñāna, a Sri Lankan monk, also wrote a highly influential Sanskrit commentary on Daṇḍin's work, the so-called *Ratnaśrīṭīkā*, while living in northeast India.[18] This transmission of Sanskrit poetical knowledge into the curricula of the Buddhist monastic literati not only formally codified new conventions of literary beauty, but also brought the Sanskrit attitudes to language into Pāli literary culture, in particular the idea that literature was a reflection of the social order.

In an early articulation of this connection between language and society, Daṇḍin in the *Kāvyādarśa* provides two verses (vv. 3–4) at the outset of his work expressing the eternal significance of language for the continuation of knowledge and the normative social order. Language is praised as the means by which society functions[19] and is likened to a light that ensures that the three worlds are not plunged into ignorant darkness.[20] After a famous verse glorifying the immortalization of kings in literature,[21] Daṇḍin creates a dichotomy between the proper and improper use of language and likens those who use language incorrectly to beasts: 'According to the wise, a correctly used word (*gauḥ*) is a wish-fulfilling cow. But when it is incorrectly used, the speaker reveals his own bovine nature (*gotva*).'[22] Daṇḍin wittily exploits the dual sense of the word *go* (cow/word) here to make a broad point about the correlation of verbal eloquence and social status: the cultured aesthete actualizes his or her humanity through the use of correct language. Similar physiognomic metaphors are also used by Daṇḍin to describe the quality of literature. He relates the beauty of poetry to the attractiveness of the human body by likening poetic defects to spots of leprosy, for instance.[23] Daṇḍin then turns in verse eight to the socio-moral importance of the rules that underpin beautiful literature – that is, the importance of literary theory (*kāvya-śāstra*) – and asks: 'How can people who do not know *śāstra* distinguish between qualities and faults? How does a blind man have the authority to discriminate between different colours?'[24]

In these opening verses on the purposes of literature and literary theory, Daṇḍin blurs the boundaries between the literary, ethical and social orders. By not being able to distinguish between right and wrong as defined in the *śāstra*s, one identifies oneself as an outsider to Brahmanical courtly society. The incompetent poet acquires a marginal social position, as a beast (v. 6) or blind man (v. 8), and his poems are viewed as bodies spotted with leprosy (v. 7). Daṇḍin ends his introductory section by stating that it is for the above reasons that the sages (*sūrayaḥ*) – and we must include Daṇḍin here by way of his emulation of their practices – sought to educate the people (*prajā*) in the ways of language.[25]

Writing in the tenth century, the Sri Lankan monk Ratnaśrījñāna elaborated on Daṇḍin's nascent socio-moral vision of literary appreciation, although he did so in terms that were not recognizably Buddhist, and in fact more germane to courtly life. Ratnaśrījñāna was active in northeast India during his early scholarly career and wrote his commentary on the *Kāvyādarśa*, the *Ratnaśrīṭīkā*,[26] under the patronage of a certain king Tuṅga, a scion of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and feudatory of the Pāla king Rājyapāla (r. 929–960s).[27] Commenting on verse three of the *Kāvyādarśa*, Ratnaśrījñāna argues that literature (*kāvya*), like society (*loka*) as a whole, needs theory or rules (*śāstra*) to keep it in tune with the aims of society; that is, the life-goals (*puruṣārtha*-s), namely, *artha* (material wealth), *kāma* (physical pleasure) and *dharma* (duty, personal responsibility with respect to one's station in life), to which is sometimes added a fourth, *mokṣa* (liberation, i.e., emancipation from rebirth).[28] Elsewhere Ratnaśrījñāna elaborates on the idea that the ability to use language correctly distinguishes humans from beasts and states, for instance, that 'one who is ignorant of *śāstra* lapses into nonsense and, as such, is declared by the wise to be a beast in human form'.[29] He continues to remark on the fact that knowledge of literary theory elevates one to divine status and brings about the life-goals:

> Even if there is no distinction in the matter of being a human, one who knows the *śāstra*s is worshipped as a god by those attracted to good qualities (*guṇa*), though the other [i.e. the one who does not know the *śāstra*s] is regarded as a beast, since everywhere the discrimination between merits (*guṇa*) and faults (*doṣa*) is only due to *śāstra*. And a merit connects one to the life-goals (*puruṣārtha*), whereas a fault joins one to the opposite (*itareṇa*). By relying on *śāstra*, therefore, a *kāvya* with good qualities is exclusively a fulfiller of the life-goals. But a fault, even if very small, is to be removed only with the help of *śāstra*.[30]

The merging of socio-moral and literary value systems implicit in Daṇḍin's opening verses is thus made explicit by Ratnaśrījñāna: being a connoisseur of literature and literary theory is a mark of one's own moral standing – the merits (*guṇa*) of literature join one to moral goals and the faults (*doṣa*) of literature separate one from them. Ratnaśrī summarizes his position well at the end of his commentary on Daṇḍin's introduction, stating: 'One should recognise all merits and faults

everywhere, for in reality [literary] merits are simply constitutive of the life-goals/ends of man (*puruṣārtha*).'[31] Although Ratnaśrī was a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, his work displays few indications of his monastic background, reflecting instead his courtly associations and the concerns of his royal patron. Yet it was this work that stimulated the study of Sanskrit poetics in late medieval Sri Lanka and introduced Sanskritic notions of the interconnection between literary and moral sensibilities.

The cosmopolitan care for language and the *Subodhālaṅkāra*

In the Sri Lankan poetical works that followed the *Ratnaśrīṭīkā*, the most elaborate and creative discussion of these ideas can be found in Saṅgharakkhita's *Subodhālaṅkāra* and his autocommentary, the so-called *mahāsāmi-ṭīkā*. Saṅgharakkhita's writings reveal that the acceptance of Sanskrit aesthetic theory within Buddhist monastic culture included its socio-moral ideas too. At the beginning of his work, Saṅgharakkhita devotes two verses in praise of śāstric learning, remarking first that 'those who have not amassed wisdom found in the various different *śāstra*s are afflicted by a cloud of ignorance and do not understand anything'.[32] He continues by stressing the importance of a teacher when learning the *śāstra*s: 'What is the use in this world of those who do not desire to listen at the feet of teachers? It is those who are covered with the dust of [their teacher's] feet who are good and discerning.'[33]

It is in his commentary on these verses that Saṅgharakkhita reproduces the social message of the *Kāvyādarśa* and the *Ratnaśrīṭīkā*, adopting the conception of the bestial person ignorant of literary theory found in verse six of the *Kāvyādarśa*. He remarks for instance that 'only those who know *śāstra* have what is called the [ability] to discriminate between the different merits and faults. Those who do not know *śāstra*s – the beast-like men (*purisapasu*) – do not'.[34] Echoing the sentiments of Ratnaśrī's commentary on verse eight of the *Kāvyādarśa*, Saṅgharakkhita elsewhere writes (regarding a man educated in the *śāstra*s) that

> such is the wise [one] who has the authority here (*ettha*) to discriminate between the different merits and faults. The other who is the opposite of this, a beast-like human,[35] is not [entitled to discriminate between merits and faults].[36]

It is significant too that Saṅgharakkhita very rarely refers to the *puruṣārtha*-s (life-goals) in his discussions. Instead he replaces the term with the more general ethical expression: 'what is to be rejected and what is to be accepted' (*heyyopādeyya*). This decision to omit the term *puruṣārtha* and to define the life-goals in a more capacious way has precedents in earlier Sanskrit Buddhist interpretive schematics. Dharmottara, for instance, also defines *puruṣārtha* in the more general sense

of 'what is to be rejected and accepted' when commenting on the use of the term in Dharmakīrti's first *sūtra* of the *Nyāyabindu*.[37] It is possible that some Buddhist authors looked towards a more general interpretation of the *puruṣārtha*-s, one that sought to establish meaningful 'ends of man' disentangled from equivalent Brahmanical Hindu terms.

Unlike Ratnaśrī, who makes no real attempt to integrate the socio-moral vision of Sanskrit poetics within either the Buddhist or Sri Lankan literary tradition, Saṅgharakkhita occasionally recasts the vocabulary of the Sanskrit tradition in a Buddhist light and makes allusions to well-known Pāli scripture to support his views. When commenting on the word 'wisdom' in verse four, Saṅgharakkhita defines it in terms of the ability to discriminate between 'what is to be rejected and what is to be accepted' and states that such wisdom is found in the *śāstra*s. He continues by delineating śāstric knowledge as that which is contained in 'the *tipiṭaka*, philosophy (*takka*), grammar and poetics'.[38] Saṅgharakkhita takes the moral goal that he had previously introduced in relation to the study of literature, ('knowing what is to be rejected and what is to be accepted'), and establishes it as the goal of all *śāstra*, within which he innovatively includes the *tipiṭaka* (the canonical Pāli Buddhist textual corpus).[39] Nothing is said here about the *content* of the *tipiṭaka* in relation to other pan-Indic sciences, and we are left with only the neutral assertion that all are equally valuable in directing one to moral ends.

Another area in which Saṅgharakkhita shows sensitivity to his Lankan Buddhist audience concerns the relationship between guru and pupil in a śāstric education. Commenting on verse four, Saṅgharakkhita writes that the wisdom gained from the *śāstra*s is 'received from the refuge that is worshipping at the feet of such a teacher (*guru*) who does not direct one to useless ends (*aṭṭhānāniyojakatā*), etc'.[40] As noted by its late commentary, the *abhinava-ṭīkā*,[41] the description of the teacher as someone 'who does not direct one to useless ends' is in fact a canonical reference to a verse found in the *Dutiyamitta Sutta* in which the ideal *kalyāṇamitta* (a good friend) is described as one who 'is loveable, esteemed, respectable, speaks sensibly (*vattā*), listens patiently, is able to have serious conversations, and does not direct one to useless ends'.[42] Within the Pāli canon, a *kalyāṇamitta* is a soteriological helper who assists another on the Buddhist path. The use of this canonical passage to describe the qualities of the guru – even though that teacher may be imparting the knowledge of literary theory rather than knowledge from the *tipiṭaka* – serves to assimilate the function and role of the śāstric guru within the locally accepted model of the *kalyāṇamitta*.

When commenting on verse five, Saṅgharakkhita addresses the hierarchical and devotional nature of this relationship specifically. He defines the good (*sādhu*) pupil who is distinguished by wisdom as one: 'strewn, [i.e.] covered and furnished, with the pollen, [i.e.] the dirt, of their teachers' feet', maintaining that only such 'good, discerning people who are complete with the attainment of wisdom – which differentiates the different merits and faults that are to be rejected and to be accepted – can discriminate between merits and faults'.[43] For Saṅgharakkhita then the prestige of studying literary theory is equated here with

the honour of covering oneself in the dirt of the teacher's feet and it is this educational rite that qualifies one as an expert in moral and literary matters. Elsewhere Saṅgharakkhita cites a canonical verse from the *Sevitabba Sutta* to support his emphasis on devotional pupillage and the resulting hierarchy between śāstric guru and student:

> A man who associates (*sev*) with a lower descends,
> And [a man] who associates with an equal never fails.
> The wise one who attends upon (*upa-nam*) a superior rises,
> Therefore revere one who is superior to yourself![44]

This verse is used to support the śāstric intellectual hierarchy and to defend the reliance on a guru as a teacher, since 'the wise one who attends upon a superior rises'. Saṅgharakkhita connects the lesser man in the canonical verse with the idea of the beast-like human (*purisapasu*), unable to discriminate between merits and faults. In its canonical context, however, this verse is used to support a slightly different form of social order. The verse in the *Sevitabba Sutta* does not delineate an intellectual hierarchy but concerns a hierarchy of morality, meditative concentration and wisdom. The goal of esteeming and worshipping those of higher morality, concentration and wisdom is connected to one's interest in developing these three Buddhist virtues rather than out of a desire to separate oneself socially and morally from bestial people.[45]

While reproducing much of the socio-moral rhetoric of the *Kāvyādarśa*, Saṅgharakkhita along with other Buddhist theoreticians also recasts certain ideas of the Sanskrit poetic tradition in a Buddhist light. While Ratnaśrījñāna replicates the normative ideal of the Sanskrit care for language in emphasizing the link between *śāstra* and *kāvya* with the four classes (*varga*-s) and the four life-goals, Sangharakkhita supplants the *puruṣārtha*-s with more general (and less worldly) admonitions for the aspiring poet. Familiar notions of literary-moral excellence, wisdom gained from the study of systematic knowledge, and the ultimate objectives of human endeavour are subtly co-presented with, and made to allude to, well-known Pāli scripture and Buddhist religious tenets. Yet fundamentally, it seems Saṅgharakkhita accepts the view of one's *literary aptitude* as an index to one's *moral aptitude* derived from the Sanskrit poetic tradition.

Audience, anxiety and envy

At roughly the same time that Saṅgharakkhita was active in Sri Lanka, the Burmese Saṅgha also began to adopt Sanskrit literary practices and inherited many of the new śāstric intellectual lineages flourishing in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the second millennium. Perhaps the most iconic example of the Burmese Saṅgha's participation in this engagement with the Sanskrit cosmopolis is the *Saddanīti*,

a twelfth-century encyclopaedia of literary sciences that was composed a little earlier than the *Subodhālaṅkāra* by a certain Aggavaṃsa. A late Burmese tradition has it that upon its completion the work was brought to Sri Lanka and was praised by the monks there as unlike anything they had produced.[46] Of particular relevance to the reception of Sanskrit poetics within the Saṅgha is a passage in the *Saddanīti* that defends the fact that the older Pāli canonical literature does not conform to the standards of Sanskrit literary theory:

> The Buddha, furthermore, does not take into account the heaviness and lightness (i.e. the metrical weight) of his speech. He constructs his teaching according to the dispositions of those capable of enlightenment, without obscuring the essence of the Dhamma. The length or shortness of sounds is not to be criticised at all.
>
> Even so, why do previous teachers state here and there that: 'There is an elision of a syllable in the verses for the sake of guarding the metre,' 'also there is metathesis for the purpose of guarding the pronunciation,' and 'for the purpose of guarding the metre and for pleasant pronunciation'? […]
>
> This is true but where the metre and pronunciation are to be guarded, the Buddha has guarded the metre and pronunciation. Where both are not to be guarded, however, the Buddha has not guarded the metre and pronunciation. It is in this connection that it is said: 'The Buddha, furthermore, does not take into account the heaviness and lightness (i.e. the metrical weight) of his speech,' etc. Moreover, the Buddha does not guard metre and pronunciation like the poets who do it as part of their profession. Rather, those words – that have been perfected by his expertise in literary science (*akkhara-samaya*) from time immemorial, for countless, hundred thousands of births, when he was a Buddha-to-be – fall from his propitious, lotus-like mouth. Some of them have a form as if [they were intended] to guard metre and pronunciation and some do not. In connection with those that have a form as if [they were intended] to guard metre and pronunciation, it could be said that 'the Buddha guards metre and pronunciation.' In connection with those that do not, it could be said that 'the Buddha does not guard metre and pronunciation.' It should be understood that the Buddha is not anxious or fearful on account of the criticism of others and that he does not guard metre and pronunciation out of anxiety or fear.[47]

In this fascinating discussion, the author is clearly concerned that Pāli literature will be judged on the basis of śāstric literary theory and takes great pains to explain that, while the Buddha has mastered literary science for countless eons, he does as he pleases. His intention is the liberation of sentient beings and he is not concerned with the aesthetic preoccupations of poets. The unease of the author concerning the seeming incompatibility of śāstric literary theory and

the Pāli canon is made clear in his final lines. He states that the Buddha does not adhere to literary beauty out of an anxiety or fear of others. This statement intimates that some Buddhist authors at the time were fearful of the scrutiny of the śāstrins of the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

When presented with a discourse that regards those who are ignorant of Sanskrit aesthetics as animals, it is easy to see why these monks reimagined the Buddha as a perfectly accomplished aesthete who simply chose not to use his skills. The personal responsibility the monks felt for their irregular Pāli is made explicit in a variant of this passage found in R. C. Childers' notes to his translation of the *Khuddakapāṭha*. In Childers' manuscript of the *Saddanīti*, the author continues that 'in this work, with its confused syllables, [we] write in accordance with the tradition of the Pāli texts. We are not to be blamed (*dosa*) for this'.[48] The author of this interpolation makes it explicit that he is not to be held morally responsible for the 'irregularities' of Pāli literature. It is not his fault (*dosa*).[49] His use of the word *dosa* intimates that the merits and faults of literature were viewed not just as a matter of literary acumen but also one of moral aptitude for the Buddhist Saṅgha. The passage makes it clear furthermore that Buddhist monks felt compelled to conform to the standards of Sanskrit literary theory. The adoption of Sanskrit aesthetics into Pāli literature was, then, perhaps not simply a choice based on aesthetic attraction but was part of a wider concern or fear for the moral status of their intellectuals and literature.

In the *Subodhālaṅkāra* and other thirteenth-century Sri Lankan literature there is also an acute awareness of the scrutiny and critical gaze of other intellectuals. The mention of such an audience is important as it shows that there was a broader intellectual community (or at the very least the *perception of* a broader intellectual community) evaluating Pāli literary production on the basis of trans-regional, trans-linguistic aesthetic criteria. Verse eleven of the *Subodhālaṅkāra* offers another hint to that effect, when Saṅgharakkhita warns that a fool who attempts to use literary embellishments without the instruction of a teacher will face the mirth (*hāsabhāva*) of the wise.[50] A similar concern for censorship is expressed by Anomadassi at the beginning of the *Daivajñakāmadhenu*, his manual of court astrology written during the reign of Parākramabāhu II (r. 1234–69), wherein he boldly announces that he 'does not care about those envious demons who binge on quivering souls and cast scorn'.[51]

Such outbursts indicate the sensitivity in thirteenth-century Sri Lanka to the scrutiny of other intellectuals in Sri Lanka and possibly in other parts of the Sanskrit cosmopolis. The ethics of aesthetics that were brought into the Pāli tradition through the commentaries on the *Kāvyādarśa* were not simply reinforced according to the conscience of the individual author. Rather, fear of opprobrium from a broader intellectual community would ensure correct (e.g. normative from the point of view of the *Kāvyādarśa*) reproduction of literature and literary theory. What we have then is evidence not just of the spread of Sanskrit literary theory but more importantly of the acceptance of its socio-moral worldview, one that ensures the reproduction of its literary aesthetic.

Eroticism, kings and the Buddhist social aesthetic

While some monastics expressed anxiety over their foray into the cosmopolitan literary world, others denied that *kāvya* was a suitable medium of expression for Buddhists altogether. Monastic reluctance towards poetry is attested early on in Pāli Buddhist literature,[52] manifesting itself in medieval Sri Lanka as well. The *Daṁbadeṇi Katikāvata*, a thirteenth-century monastic encyclical, decrees that 'verses, etc., should be neither recited nor composed for laypeople'.[53] The document warns furthermore that, 'the despicable arts such as poetry and drama should neither be studied nor taught to others'.[54] The criticisms of the *Daṁbadeṇi Katikāvata* are all the more significant in light of the fact that Saṅgharakkhita himself was a leading figure in the reforms that brought about the composition of this edict.[55] Despite any such rhetorical opposition, the abundance of *kāvya* composed by Sri Lankan Buddhist authors indicates that, if these cautions were not entirely ignored, at least some efforts were made to accommodate Buddhist poetry within the cosmopolitan expectations established by Sanskrit authors.

Prima facie we can grasp some reasons as to why monastics would be anxious over the embrace of Sanskrit literary norms. Beyond defining literary education as a component in the fulfilment of *kāma* (physical pleasure in the broad sense), Sanskrit theorists in addition upheld the 'erotic mood', *śṛṅgāra rasa*, as the most appropriate thematic sentiment for a poetic work. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra* we are told: 'Generally, all emotions come from sexual love.'[56] Bhoja goes so far as to say: 'Passion alone is *rasa*, [and] the sole means of fulfilling the four life-goals.'[57] Thus the motivation to render the *puruṣārtha*-s within a Buddhist vocabulary (as do Saṅgharakkhita and Dharmottara) is perceptible: *kāma* and *artha* – the attainment of physical pleasure and material wealth – are both fundamentally anathema to the Pāli Buddhist monastic ideal. The sex act, *methunadhamma*, is reviled in the Pāli Vinaya and elsewhere in the canon as the greatest obstacle to the ascetic lifestyle (*brahmacariya*).[58] In order to abate male lust, Pāli works offer practitioners tools to grasp the ephemeral nature of physical beauty, and to perceive what is in reality the disgusting condition of the female body.[59]

The sensualism of Sanskrit poetic imagery is furthermore in tension with Buddhist monastic sensibilities. In early Buddhist literature, sexual imagery was often invoked with the expressed purpose of showcasing the futility of a life directed towards *kāma*. The scene of the night of Siddhartha's renunciation (ubiquitous in Pāli Buddhist literature and art) depicts him waking up amid his voluptuous servants and entertainers after an evening of feasting and presumed debauchery. The women are now asleep in contorted, unflattering poses – drooling and dishevelled. In the Pāli Nikāyas and Vinaya, they are explicitly likened to corpses, with Siddhartha's boudoir appearing 'like a cremation ground before the eyes'. In a similar fashion, early Buddhist poetry inverts the function of the 'erotic sentiment' to serve its own soteriological ends. Johannes Bronkhorst suggests that the Sanskrit works of the Buddhist poet Aśvaghoṣa (mid-late first or second century CE) represent something of a 'Trojan horse', designed to weaken

Brahmanical religion from within.[60] In his *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarānanda* (in fact two of the earliest Sanskrit *kāvya*-s), Aśvaghoṣa uses erotic imagery not to excite the reader but as an instrument to make a point about impermanence.[61] The *Saundarānanda* is particularly arresting in that the Buddha actually uses Nanda's predilection for beautiful women to commit him to a life of religious practice. The Buddha transports Nanda to the enchanted land of the Himalayas, where he shows him divine young women of superlative beauty. Nanda entreats the Buddha to tell him how to attain these women, and the Buddha tells him that they can be won by practising the highest asceticism. Nanda eagerly assents, and in the course of his subsequent practice realizes that beautiful women are only a temporary pleasure, soon after which he attains *nirvāṇa*.[62]

That eroticism was one concern common to early second-millennium Lankan Buddhist authors is detectable in places. The *Subodhālaṅkāra* replaces most of the explicitly erotic verses of the *Kāvyādarśa* with devotional ones to the Buddha and treats the erotic sentiment in a cursory manner, briefly reviewing this *rasa* in its fifth and final section.[63] The *Siyabaslakara* attempts to redirect poetic enthusiasm towards worthwhile ends, stating that poetry should be used to narrate the lives of the Buddha.[64] Many Pāli poetic works do nonetheless contain stock sensual imagery of Sanskrit *kāvya*. The *Jinacarita*, a thirteenth-century Sri Lankan Pāli poem, describes the Bōdhisattva's mother with conventional *kāvya* tactile eloquence:

> Queen Māyā, whose lips were as red as the *bimba* fruit, whose eyes were like blossoming lotus flowers, with eyebrows curving like a creeper (*or, arched like Śakra's bow*) and conducive to the increase of passion (*rativaḍḍhana*); whose noble face was like the pure and splendid full moon, and whose charming breasts were like two golden swans.[65]

This verse does not attempt to reverse the reader's first cognitive impulse from sensuality to aversion (as does Aśvaghoṣa in his poetry). It is essentially ornamental, supplementing a biography of the Buddha with pleasant imagery along with pun (*śleṣa*) and simile (*upamā*). In reference to early Pāli literature, Steven Collins makes the distinction between images of beautiful women as merely 'aesthetic' as opposed to 'erotic'.[66] There is an argument to be made that it is possible for a poet to make use of sensual imagery without endorsing *śṛṅgāra rasa* or the pursuit of sense pleasure, with the *Jinacarita* as testament to such an intention on the part of its author.

There is one further aspect of the content of Sanskrit *kāvya* that may have given Buddhist authors pause. Pāli monastic regulations censure interaction with royalty and martial affairs quite severely,[67] and yet royal eulogy and descriptions of military conquest are often central themes in Sanskrit *kāvya* (indeed they are the thematic content from which Sanskrit *kāvya* derived its political significance and popularity in the first place, Pollock argues). Interaction with royalty is a longstanding theme in the Pāli Buddhist tradition. Gotama Buddha himself in the

Pāli Nikāyas is depicted receiving alms and places of residence for the Bhikkhu Saṅgha from kings, giving them a personal audience often in return. This reflects a fundamental empirical reality and tension: while the ideal of the monk involves a detachment from society, the reality was and is that large monastic corporations (in the case of Sri Lanka, with large landholdings and a complicated bureaucracy of their own) required extended interaction with governing bodies.[68] Most importantly, monastics needed to secure for themselves a steady supply of food and, to maintain the institution, a continuous supply of new initiates. The Pāli textual tradition portrays kings as central suppliers of the Buddhist Saṅgha in these respects.

Although Sri Lankan monks were custodians of a textual tradition mandating that a perfectly righteous king never exercise violence (the *Temiya Jātaka* goes so far as to portray kingship as criminal[69]), they are the authors of poetic texts (or at least in some instances historical texts containing poetic elements) sanctioning – in places we might even say celebrating – military force and royal prowess.[70] An inordinate portion of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, for instance, is devoted to the victory of King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi over the Tamil usurper Eḷāra, a triumphalist theme that grew even more pronounced in Pāli Buddhist historical works over time. The thirteenth-century *Thūpavaṃsa* devotes an entire chapter to Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's campaign against the Tamils, weaving in verses from the *Mahāvaṃsa* while offering exciting visual detail reminiscent of the battle scenes of Sanskrit epics. At the final battle of Anurādhapura, the great Sinhala and Tamil warriors engage one another:

> Sūranimmala, as he beheld [the Tamil warrior Dīghajantu] soaring into the sky over the King [Duṭṭhagāmaṇi], announced his own name and shouted it to him abusively. When Sūranimmala saw Dīghajantu, overcome with rage and leaping into the sky, intending to kill him first he descended upon him, holding out his shield. His opponent attacked, thinking to cut him down together with his shield, at which point [Sūranimmala] released his shield. Cutting it Dīghajantu fell to the ground, whereby Sūranimmala attacked him with his spear. At that instant Phussadeva blew his conch shell, which was like the roar of thunder, and the people seemed to become mad (with jubilation).[71] The Damiḷa army was routed and Eḷāra fled. At that time too they slew many Damiḷas.[72]

Amusingly, prior to this battle, unable to do for long without the recreation befitting a person of his social class, the Buddhist prince takes a holiday from vanquishing Tamils, excavating a pond at Kāsapabbata in order to indulge in water sports (*udakakīḷa*) for one month. It is noteworthy that the *Siyabaslakara* permits the composition of epic poetry (*mahākāvya*), insisting, however, that the protagonist be the Buddha in his final or previous incarnations (as Bōdhisattva or 'Buddha aspirant'). Duṭṭhagāmaṇi of course does not meet this qualification (he is not the Buddha), although he does represent in Jayawickrama's words 'the ideal hero and the ideal lay disciple'.[73]

By the second millennium, Pāli poetry furthermore celebrated royal power in the manner of Sanskrit court poetry by embedding *praśasti* (royal encomium). After three verses of invocation to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* (late twelfth or early thirteenth century) extols General Parākrama (not to be confused with Parākramabāhu I), Queen Līlāvatī (the author's sponsor), along with the Pāṇḍava prince appointed by General Parākrama to succeed Līlāvatī:

> The army commander Parākrama, compassionate and an ornament upon the lineage of Kālakanāgara, who steeps himself in the dispensation of the Buddha and who desires after the advancement and welfare of the people,
>
> Who placed on the consolidated throne of Laṅkā Queen Līlāvatī – she having been born of the pure, resplendent, stainless Paṇḍu lineage – highly devoted to the Buddha's dispensation, pleasant in speech, one who follows the path of good conduct,[74] like a mother to the people at all times, loving queen to King Parākramabāhu, possessed of discriminating intelligence and sought after,
>
> [Parākrama] appointed [as Līlāvatī's successor] the prince who is loved by councillors, kind-hearted, born of the lineage of Paṇḍu kings, faithful, named Madhurinda, well-learned in religious matters and worldly arts,
>
> [Parākrama] dispelled the disgrace of Tisīhaḷaṃ,[75] which was kingless for so long, and made the well-disciplined Saṅgha pleased with good meals, robes and other requisites.[76]

The twelfth-century extension of the *Mahāvaṃsa* also famously celebrates posthumously the accomplishments of Parākramabāhu I in highly poetic style.[77] Ironically, the Sinhala *Daṁbadeṇi Katikāvata* – the very same thirteenth-century document prohibiting monks from composing poetry – offers a verse of praise for its royal sponsor in the classical mode of Sanskrit *praśasti*, replete with simile and other conspicuously *kāvya*-esque motifs:

> The noble son of Vijayabāhu, the great king Parākramabāhu, who, like the autumn sun which dries up mud completely destroys his enemies, and who possessed abundant strength as does the full moon in illuminating the milky ocean of Buddha-sāsana, brought the entire surface of Laṅkā under his domination, having settled the various disturbances of the Draviḍas, Keraḷas and Yāvakas through the splendour of his meritorious accomplishments.[78]

Although the tone of Pāli and Sinhala poetic manuals and monastic guidelines is cautionary with respect to *kāvya*, in practice Pāli poetry and history finds room to celebrate royal prowess, violence and recreation. This seems to be admissible, however, only if it is portrayed to be ultimately for the benefit of the Buddhist religion, the *buddha-sāsana*. Such a caveat was easily enough accomplished as the subject matter of stand-alone Pāli poems is exclusively Buddhist, and the kings

recorded in Pāli chronicles were generally patrons of Buddhist institutions (conspicuously remembered as having not been when they were not).

One might perceive the celebration of monarchy and warrior culture as a tacit endorsement of the Brahmanical caste system, or the portrayal of courtly recreation as an allowance for the pursuit of *kāma*. Although royal eulogy and descriptions of battle might be regarded as a concession to the Brahmanical, monarchical status quo of Sanskrit *kāvya*, as noted throughout this section, Lankan Pāli authors were keen to maintain a Buddhist frame of reference in their work. Eroticism is at no point the *telos* or governing sentiment of poetry. The *puruṣārtha*-s are redefined in a more capacious light or ignored altogether in favour of the narration of the Buddha's life, his asseverations to Buddhahood in former lives, and the religious history of Sri Lanka.

The Pāli cosmopolis?

Can we speak of a 'Pāli cosmopolis' – of a transregional community of literary producers and consumers valuing Pāli literature for its ability to ennoble social and political life – on analogy with Sanskrit? Certainly, as the previous section of this chapter highlights, Lankan Buddhist monastic authors were not exempted from interactions with royal courts (they depended on royal patronage, supplied and updated dynastic chronicles, and composed secular *praśasti*). Steven Collins submits, for instance, that sophisticated Pāli Buddhist authors and their literary products were intimately connected with political power, helping to solidify rule by conferring prestige on kings and courtly elite:

> Monks and their texts, as also their relics and images, are prestige objects, circulating in an exchange system of precious goods: law-texts, for example could be and were put together with other power-objects by kings in impressive displays. In the perspective of socio-historical analysis it is an element in the rhetorical, theatrical constitution of civilization-bearing state-systems: symbolic capital contributing to the prestige of both the *maṇḍala*-organizing king and his clients […] Premodern literati, like virtuoso musicians, were embodiments and indices of high culture.[79]

Yet while *kāvya* and other elite Sanskrit literature circulated largely within learned audiences associated with royal courts, Pāli literary activity was limited almost exclusively to Buddhist religieux. Collins' proposal necessitates a basic inquiry into the question of audience: if Pāli was a literary language known only to Buddhist monks, how could royal patrons be sure that they were getting their money's worth? In other words, how would they ever be able to judge the quality of the contents of literary works, or show them off to their competitors for symbolic capital?

There is the possibility that any sponsor who knew Sanskrit could have understood Pāli with ease, and could have listened to or read the works for

themselves. King Parākramabāhu II was himself, for instance, a Pāli scholar, to whom is attributed a Sinhala commentary (*sannaya*) on Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* as well as a translation of the *Vinaya-vinicchaya* of Buddhadatta.[80] At present however there is little evidence that Lankan kings commonly knew Pāli, although further research on this issue is a desideratum. Another possibility is that the prestige conferred to court sponsors (to 'the *maṇḍala*-organizing king and his clients') from sophisticated Pāli literature was only epiphenomenal in relation to prestige earned between competing monastic institutions, examples of which may be found in the work of Alastair Gornall and Anne Blackburn.[81] Gornall shows that debates over the intricacies of Pāli phonology among Buddhist grammarians in the twelfth century were one manifestation of competition for ritual authority between South Indian and Lankan monastic orders. Blackburn draws on twelfth- and thirteenth-century documents to demonstrate how Lankan monks able to present themselves as forest-dwellers (members of an *araññavāsi* lineage) consistently benefited from royal patrons during a time of political uncertainty and monastic reorganization.

A third hypothesis (not incommensurate with the previous two) is that Sri Lankan lay Buddhist sponsors may have had a chance to enjoy the fruits of monastic labour when works were written in Sinhala, or translated into it from Pāli. From the twelfth century – coincident with the development of highly literate Pāli – Sinhala texts were for the first time composed with a general lay audience in mind. Many *baṇa pot* ('preaching texts'),[82] like contemporary Pāli poems and works of history, copiously incorporated *kāvya* conventions and tropes, as well as a heavily Sanskritized vocabulary. While *baṇa pot* were written with the explicit purpose of public recitation, there is epigraphic and internal textual evidence that Sinhala historical works were read aloud to lay audiences as well.[83] In fact, works of history seem to have been imbricated in a complex and ongoing project of translation, elaboration and oral performance between Sinhala and Pāli.[84] The *Mahāvaṃsa* claims to be a reworking of earlier Sinhala historical material (its *ṭīkā* lists a now lost *Sīhala Mahāvaṃsatthakathā* as one of these). Later, heavily *kāvya* influenced Pāli *vaṃsa*s – the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* (tenth century), *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* (late twelfth or early thirteenth century) and *Thūpavaṃsa* (thirteenth century) – say the same thing with respect to themselves.[85]

While the Sinhala source materials for these Pāli works are now lost, new Sinhala versions were created in the thirteenth century and first half of the fourteenth century.[86] Following the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsaya* and *Daḷadā Sirita*, the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* was enlarged and re-translated into Sinhala as the *Elu Bodhivaṃsa*. Pāli and Sinhala *vaṃsa*s had different authors, but were produced within the same literary milieu (the Pāli and Sinhala *Thūpavaṃsa*-s most likely even at the same court).[87] There is a sense that court-sponsored, monastic intellectual production in the Poḷonnaruva and Daṁbadeṇiya periods (including *kāvya* quite centrally) was on display to broader lay audiences in one form or another, whether merely in Sinhala, or in Pāli and Sinhala both.

We can imagine then regents and other wealthy patrons in literate circles (such as the sponsor of the original Sinhala *Thūpavaṃsa*) investing in a literary work as a source of personal prestige, anticipating its recitation as a public event. So as not to reduce the entirety of medieval textual production to the material-political, we should qualify that such motivation could have been one among a host of others: a moral care for language, genuine devotional feeling, efforts to accrue merit (*pin*, *puñña*), appreciation and personal respect for a given monastic intellectual. That is, for much the same reasons that a Buddhist today might donate a *tipiṭaka* to a monastery, hold a large almsgiving with friends and family invited, or pay to have their name recited by a monk leading a pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya.

While Sinhala could have provided monastic authors with a means of showcasing their work within Sri Lanka, this situation was possible only within the island's shores. Regionally, Pāli texts circulated within the restricted sphere of the Buddhist monastery. To what extent *praśasti*s of Sinhalese kings embedded in Pāli poems would have impressed foreign readers or found their way to the attention of the rulers of distant lands must remain within the realm of speculation, although there is some evidence that learned monks themselves were highly prized. *Araññavāsi* monks were sought from Sri Lanka by Thai monastic leaders in the fourteenth and fifteenth century for their erudition and literary ability, for instance.[88]

Discussing the extent of a Pāli cosmopolis becomes then a complicated affair. Its contours appear differently depending on the degree of geographical magnification. One might preferably view Pāli poetry as one facet of a broader emerging cosmopolitan literary culture in late medieval Sri Lanka – as one literary language and one form of literary expression among others. Sinhala, as discussed briefly above, underwent a similar process of literarization at approximately the same time as Pāli. Sanskrit learning and literary production continued from the first millennium,[89] and even Tamil works were sometimes financed by Sinhalese kings. In addition to Sinhala, Pāli and Sanskrit, the *Daṁbadeṇi Asna* records that Parākramabāhu II was also accomplished in Tamil.[90] The *Caracōtimālai*, a Tamil astrological text, was completed and recited in the court of Parākramabāhu III (grandson of the aforementioned) in 1310.[91]

Conclusion

In his own theorization of the 'poetry of polity', Sheldon Pollock stresses the voluntary nature of the adoption of Sanskrit literary practices within the Sanskrit cosmopolis, emphasizing that 'literarization' was a process that did not involve political coercion.[92] Certainly in the case of the transfer of Sanskrit aesthetics to Pāli we can agree that this was true (Pāli literary production was diffuse, temporally and geographically, and no single political formation was responsible for 'imposing' Sanskrit literary standards on Buddhist monastic authors, if indeed such a thing ever occurred at all). Sanskritic literary discourse held a more subtle allure for Lankan monastic authors. Pāli Buddhist authors felt a twofold anxiety over the

reception of their literary products: at the most elementary level, they were concerned simply that their work conform to cosmopolitan literary standards so as to avoid derision at the hands of religious and/or intellectual competitors; at a deeper level, as we have endeavoured to show, monastic authors worked to render assumptions regarding the *moral* stature of effective authors and aesthetes in the Sanskrit *alaṅkāra-śāstra* tradition in line with those of Pāli Buddhist canonical literature.

Armed with their own treatises such as the *Subodhalaṅkāra* and *Siyabaslaraka*, no longer could anyone say that a monk writing in Pāli or Sinhala was a 'beast' rather than a 'god' (like a rival steeped in Sanskrit learning). The shared aesthetic of Sanskrit court poetry and late medieval Pāli poetry reflected a common moral vision. The choice to retain the vocabulary of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* and its commentary in terms of the correlation of *moral* and *aesthetic* aptitude signals that the attraction of Sanskrit aesthetics was not merely a matter of fashion, but rather indicative of a wider concern for the moral status of Lankan monastic intellectuals and their literature. This moral care for language was cosmopolitan insofar as it transcended religious and linguistic boundaries, though importantly it only allowed a privileged and elite few to be called true human beings.

Sanskritized Pāli prose and poetry in Sri Lanka was also employed in the service of political discourse, amplifying and expanding upon the role of Pāli in statecraft (which prior to that point had come principally in the form of the Lankan Buddhist chronicles (*vaṃsa*-s)). In this way, despite its limited readership, Pāli *kāvya* was employed in a similar capacity as Sanskrit and other vernacular literatures in a 'workly' fashion – eulogizing Lankan rulers and their ancestors, 'enhancing reality' through figures of speech (*alaṅkāra*-s) 'by coding reality in the apparent impossibilities of poetic configuration'.[93] Yet participation in the Sanskrit literary cosmopolis was at once a magnetic and repellent notion for late medieval Lankan Buddhist monastic authors. Sanskrit itself, as the ecclesiastical and academic language of Hindu competitors and continental Buddhist sectarian rivals, had to be treated with caution. Lankan Buddhist authors felt anxiety over acculturation – both with the very notion that Pāli should be expected to conform to Sanskrit literary norms, and with respect to the content of Pāli *kāvya*. The erotic and martial aspects of Sanskrit *kāvya* were also mitigated in Pāli (and, while not dealt with in any detail in this chapter, also Sinhala) *kāvya* in order to serve religious, historical and political purposes, sometimes simultaneously.

Does it make sense then to speak of a Pāli cosmopolis in the same way as we speak of a Sanskrit cosmopolis? Medieval Pāli literary culture shared many features with the Sanskrit cosmopolis, in terms of its style, geographical reach, common socio-moral literary sensibility and its political associations. Unlike Sanskrit, however, Pāli could never truly separate itself from its ecclesiastical functions. Its most salient role continued to be as a language of the Buddhist monastery rather than the royal court. As such, medieval Pāli literary culture can be viewed as a form of qualified cosmopolitanism, one that advanced many of the cosmopolitan literary ideals of its time but also staunchly protected its exclusively Buddhist identity.