

Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries

Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances

Edited by

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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2011

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

This paperback was originally published in hardback under ISBN 978 90 04 14310 4 as volume 10 in the series *Medieval Encounters*.

ISBN 978 90 04 20577 2

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE-POWER IN INDO-EUROPE, 1000-1300

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ABSTRACT

While it is no easy matter to identify convincing and coherent Eurasia-wide transformations during the early centuries of the second millennium (section 1), it is possible to demonstrate unequivocally that much of South Asia and Western Europe underwent comparable changes in culture and power, with vernacular replacing cosmopolitan forms of language and literature in many areas of cultural production, and regional forms of polity replacing empire (this are briefly exemplified here by the cases of Hoysala Karnataka and Alfonsine Castile, section 2). Far more difficult is it to account for the peculiar structure and synchrony of these transformations. Any moncausal explanation for so complex a transformation is inherently improbable. A range of factors that may have contributed include the dynamic expansion of world trade and agriculture, the rise of the nomadic empires, and the spread of Islam on its western and eastern frontiers. Yet none of these factors is obviously causal, nor even as an ensemble do they fully explain why the culture-power complex changed the way it did only in South Asia and Europe (sections 3-4).

1. *Eurasian Transformations?*

If one thing is certain in scholarship it's that we usually find what we are looking for. If we set out to hear global harmonies amidst the cacophony of history we probably will. Large-scale world-historical generalizations, such as the postulation of an Axial age around mid-first millennium BCE, seem especially susceptible to such wishful thinking. Correlatively, we also tend to think something is new because we don't always know enough to know how old it may in fact be. The world system (or world-system) of the early second millennium CE, for example, as Janet Abu-Lughod conceives of it, has a tensility—or so it seems in

* I am grateful to the participants in the Workshop on Eurasian Transformations, especially Johann Arnason, Björn Wittrock, and Robert Moore, for their comments. All Indic diacritics have been eliminated from this version of my essay.

the hands of Andre Gunder Frank—enabling it to be stretched back six millennia earlier.¹

What is less certain than finding what we are looking for is explaining why we are looking for what we look for in the first place. It seems unlikely that only those such as I who are not professional historians feel haunted by the question of why we want historical knowledge at all any more, let alone world-historical knowledge, let alone world-historical knowledge of supposedly discrete ages where things are thought to have changed simultaneously and everywhere once and for all. No purpose is served even trying to address here the first part of this question, but surely the disfavor into which historical thinking has fallen should give us pause, as should the extravagant and unapologetic presentism of the social sciences today (in particular the meltdown of historical sociology in the United States), the repeated philosophical and especially hermeneutical assaults on the possibility of historiographical truth, the demonstrable irrelevance of knowledge of the past to practices of the future—except for those who like me continue to ascribe, vaguely and usually tacitly, a certain emancipatory value to the sheer awareness of the contingency, openness and alternative possibilities of cultural and political life as demonstrated in history.

Even assuming some acceptable response to the first part of the question, the two latter seem equally troubling. Global history is, I suppose, politically correct history for those who, again like me, see themselves as post-national, world citizens, since such history serves to facilitate—or at least William McNeil thinks so—"a tolerable future for humanity as a whole."² But why do we find it a compelling project to try to connect the whole world in a unified set of processes? There is no obvious reason to believe that anything that happens somewhere happens everywhere, and the point of attempting to prove otherwise is not entirely self-evident. Is it the impulse to find one of Hume's covering laws in history, or Kant's "universal history according to a natural plan directed to achieving the civic union of the human race" (this despite what he calls the "idiotic course of things human"), or a residue of Vico's stage

¹ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1989); *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand* ed. Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Andre Gunder Frank, "Immanuel and Me with-out Hyphen," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 6,2 (2000), 216-231. For some thoughts on Axial-age theory, see my "Axialism and Empire," *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. Johann Arnason et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill: 2004).

² In *World History: Ideologies, Structures and Identities*, ed. Philip Pomper et al. (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 40.

theory of economic or cultural development, or the relic of an evolutionary Marxism, or some other species of conceptual totalization?

Consider only the methodological delusions that threaten the Indianist who, inspired by conceptions of a twelfth century renaissance in Europe or Sung China, attempts to find South Asian homologies with an Aquinas and Averroës, or with the Neo-Confucians from Chou Tun-I to Chu Hsi. If, in accordance with some earlier reflections on this problematic,³ we were to examine Indian intellectual history in the domains of reflexivity, agency, historicity, textuality, or any other component of an Axial-like conceptual transformation, a number of apparently strong candidates do readily present themselves. Yet historical scrutiny shows how hard it is to argue for any sharp discontinuity and true innovation. This can be briefly illustrated by exploring several such candidates: philosophical redefinitions of *atman* (the self); *bhakti* (devotionalism); religious conversion and monasticism; and textualizations of Hindu life ways and their apparent transformation.

The time-space of my case study below—the region comprised in today's union state of Karnataka in south-western India over some three or four centuries beginning around 1000—was marked by what to all appearances was indeed astonishing intellectual ferment every bit as momentous as that of the twelfth-century renaissance in Europe. One notable component of this ferment was the attempt at fundamental reconceptualization of the self and its identities, which were variously deconstructed, rendered contingent, or reconstructed. In the centuries around the beginning of our period a radical monism was systematized and elaborated, especially by intellectuals at the Sringeri monastery in the far west of the region, achieving a certain finality with the scholar-abbot Vidyaranya (known before his renunciation as Madhava, d. 1386). With new discursive rigor this system argued for a radical metaphysical erasure of all difference and all contingent identities, and a fundamental unity of being (or at least at the theoretical level it argued such; in practice, social distinctions of caste were vigorously reasserted). In the period 1100-1300 two major variations on this *advaita* (non-dual) conception were developed. The first was the "qualified monism" of the Srivaisnavas, a sect of monastic and lay devotees of the god Visnu and his interceding consort Sri that had originated in Tamil country but was strongly present in the southern Karnataka region. Theologically, Srivaisnavas maintained a kind of personal individuality, with the

³ Björn Wittrock, "Social Theory and Global History: The Three Cultural Crystallizations," *Thesis Eleven*, 65 (2001), 27-50.

individualized souls constituting the body of God. Sociologically, they seem to have extrapolated the Advaitins' highly abstract monism toward a kind of social equality; reforms associated with the theologian Ramanuja (d. 1137?), the principal theoretician of the movement, may even have sought to establish Shudras, the lowest of the caste groups, as temple functionaries (eventually this egalitarian aspect, assuming it actually existed, was lost and the community eventually reverted to caste orthodoxy). The second major variation was a dualistic revision formulated by Madhva (d. 1317) in coastal Karnataka, which restored real selves ontologically different from God, real identities, new doctrines of predestination and election, and, for some of its history at least, a re-assertion of caste privilege. Yet what may appear in all this ferment to be new forms of philosophical or religious thought are in fact intimately linked to earlier breakthroughs without which they cannot be explained or understood: Vidyaranya in the fourteenth century to Sankara in the eighth to Gaudapada in the seventh and even to the synthesis of the core text itself of Advaita, the *Vedantasutras*, many centuries earlier. Similarly, one can trace the apparent innovations of Ramanuja in the twelfth century back to Nathamuni at the beginning of the tenth, the Alvars at the beginning the seventh, Bodhayana's third-century (?) commentary on the *Vedantasutras*, and so on. Worth stressing, too, is that in Sanskrit intellectual history, generally speaking, recovery was a far more dominant ideologeme than innovation, so much so that, within the interpretive horizon of the subjects of this history, "transformation" as such would probably have been denied, or have even been unintelligible as an explanation of what they were doing.

A similar argument could be made with respect to the congeries of phenomena too often and too misleadingly grouped under the heading of bhakti. The (vernacular) poets of *saguna* bhakti (devotion to a personalized god) in sixteenth-century north India (the followers of Vallabhacarya, for example, as well as poets like Surdas) were closely linked to (Sanskrit) south Indian Vaisnavism in the tenth century (the doctrines of the *Bhagavata Purana* preeminently) and indeed to the *Bhagavad Gita* itself from seven or eight centuries earlier, where the "path of devotion" is first clearly spelled out. Not as prominent an object of historical inquiry as bhakti, though it certainly should be, is what seems to have been the upsurge in conversion that occurred in our period. The conversion of Brahmins to Jainism appears especially prominent, but conversion from Jainism to other forms of theistic Hinduism is noticeable, too. For example, the king of the Hoysala dynasty of Karnataka, Bittideva (afterwards known as Visnuvardhana, "Promoter of Visnu"), is thought

to have been converted to the Srivaisnava order around 1100 at the hands of Ramanuja himself.⁴ But we have in fact no way at present to know whether this “upsurge” is anything more than an artifact of our data; one could easily point to an increase of conversion to Buddhism—if “conversion” is the appropriate category here—in the seventh century, or indeed in the last centuries BCE.⁵

One might likewise be inclined to find a resurgence of monasticism paralleling what was occurring in Europe (especially the dramatic expansion of monastic power and prestige emanating from Cluny). The Vedanta reforms mentioned above were accompanied by the founding or strengthening of *mathas*, or monastic institutions, across the region. Sringeri has already been mentioned; it was complemented by other so-called Dasanami institutions founded (at uncertain dates) at the cardinal points of the compass of South Asia: Dvaraka in today's Gujarat in the west, Bhadrinath-Kedarnath in Gharwal in the north, Puri in Orissa in the east. Similarly, other Vedanta reformers established new monastic institutions, including Madhva in Udupi, and Ramanuja in Tamil country. Yet it is entirely unclear how well-organized, let alone how powerful these institutions were. To be sure, Sringeri had demonstrably close ties to the rulers of the early Vijayanagara empire (founded 1365), but it is hard to believe, from the evidence available, that they were anywhere near as socially or politically significant as the Cluny network in Europe, which around 1100 controlled some 1500 monasteries across Europe organized into what some have called a shadow empire, or even as the Lingayat *mathas* in present-day Karnataka. Moreover, like the religio-intellectual reforms themselves, the twelfth century monastic movement (if it was such) in Karnataka was again linked in a chain of movements reaching back in time, from radical Saiva and Pancaratra Vaisnava sects to far older Jaina and Bauddha institutions of the late centuries BCE.

⁴ Pampa, the great pioneer poet in Kannada (fl. 950), the Ganga minister and general Camundaraya (975), and Nagavarma II (1040), a poetician and grammarian at the Kalyana Calukya court, were all either themselves converts to Jainism or sons of families that recently were. The phenomenon is known elsewhere, too (e.g., the family of Dhanapala, the celebrated Jaina court poet of the Paramara kings). On the conversion of Bittideva see B. R. Gopal, *Sri Ramanuja in Karnataka* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan 1983), 14-17, but the matter needs more study. Another celebrated royal conversion, outside Karnataka, was that of King Kumarapala of Gujarat by the Jaina scholar Hemacandra around 1170.

⁵ On the concept of conversion in connection with early Buddhism see the cautions in Pollock, “Axialism and Empire,” n. 15. Any future study would want to address the history and character of the process by which conversion—among Jainas, Srivaisnavas, and Madhvases—simply ceased and these communities closed themselves to outsiders.

A final component is what appears to be a new wave of textualization of core cultural material as witnessed by the invention of the *dharmanibandhas*, encyclopedias of Hindu life ways, along with what might be thought to have been a transformation of social practices. I once argued that it was during this period, indeed, just in advance of the temporal and spatial progress of the Khalji Sultanate (1290), that these enormous compendia achieved “perhaps their first and certainly their most grandiose expression. Totalizing conceptualizations of the society, one can argue, became possible only by juxtaposition with alternative life-worlds; they became necessary only at the moment when the total form of the society was for the first time believed, by the professional theorists of society, to be threatened.”⁶ But the continuity of the *dharmanibandha* genre with earlier commentarial literature is unmistakable, so that, once again, talk of a truly radical break seems misplaced.

So, too, with respect to the more specific components of this literature. In what would be a striking parallel with contemporaneous Europe, the question of inheritance appears to have been raised anew and answered in what, retrospectively at least, became its quintessential textual formulations in Hindu law: Vijnanesvara’s *Mitaksara* (The Breviloquent), composed at the Kalyana Calukya court between 1100-1120, and Jimutavahana’s *Dayabhaga* (Division of Inheritance), written sometime between 1090-1130 (if not produced in Bengal, it eventually became restricted to Bengal). To reduce a complicated matter to a phrase, for the *Mitaksara*, a son becomes an owner of the paternal estate by (and presumably at) birth; for the *Dayabhaga*, he becomes so only after the father has died (or is otherwise disqualified to own property). Yet it is not in the least clear how new this distinction was: earlier commentators than Vijnanesvara accepted inheritance by birth.⁷ And in any case the real-world implications of these textual innovations, if there were such, are exceedingly difficult to determine. The *Mitaksara*’s guidelines affects who inherits, and when, and to what extent family property may

⁶ Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 52,3 (1993), 286.

⁷ Such as Visvarupa and Medatithi. Contra Ludo Rocher and Rosane Rocher, “Ownership by Birth: The *Mitaksara* Stand,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29 (2001), 241-255, see Gautama cited on p. 249 and cf. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmashastra*, vol. 3 (Pune: BORI, 1993), 557. The second major work of the period is now available in Ludo Rocher, *Jimutavahana’s Dayabhaga: The Hindu Law of Inheritance in Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2002). I am grateful to my student Ethan Kroll for helping me think through and formulating some of the key issues involved here.

be disposed of during the lifetime of the father, even whether a son can seek to divide the property against his father's wishes (something that could never happen under *Dayabhaga* doctrine). In principle, all this should have had some social resonance. Yet we have no data whatever to determine if this was ever so or if the new formulations marked a change in practices. At all events, there seems no reason to suspect that innovations occurred in India that were remotely comparable to the major social consequences of the introduction of primogeniture in Europe.⁸

It is of course easy to throw this kind of dust in the eyes of any historian who wants to extrapolate from particular known cases to other unknown cases in order to frame higher-order generalizations—as any non-trivial history seeks to do. But how does one proceed without falling victim to the thought-fathering wish, without starting to perceive meaningful figures in a meaningless carpet? And how does one avoid the pitfall of mistaken novelty without being prepared, as few of us are prepared either professionally or temperamentally, to hunt down a fugitive innovation by following its track back in time, hypothetically ad infinitum? No doubt the questions of generalization and beginnings have to be addressed, and can be successfully addressed, in any historical work. But they seem especially debilitating when the problematics themselves are generated, not from within the local historical stuff itself, but imported from outside.

Those who want to write a world history of the period 1000-1300 might instead proceed by expecting at the very start of the inquiry to find more dissimilarities across areas than similarities, fewer similarities across fewer areas, and more continuities with the past within each area than true discontinuities. To be sure, there is a use in what, to the world historian, might appear to be an adversity: it is precisely in its extensive set of differences from processes elsewhere, its few commonalities, and its forms of stability in the face of episodes of rupture in other parts of the world, that the specificity of each region may be located. (A good example here from a later period would be the absence in South Asia of the supposedly global "seventeenth century crisis.")⁹ The history of South Asia during the early centuries of the second millennium illustrates these postulates rather well. It would not be very interesting to show, though it could be shown, that, for example,

⁸ Robert Moore, this volume.

⁹ John Richards, "The Seventeenth-century Crisis in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 24,4 (1990), 625-38.

urbanization during this period evinces stronger continuities than in other places.¹⁰ I prefer instead to concentrate here on what I believe to have been the critical transformations, those emerging out of the primary materials of specific local history. But these turn out to be by no means *Eurasia-wide* transformations: they bring South (and parts of Southeast) Asia into close, indeed astonishingly close, comparison with western Europe, but at the same time they mark off these two cases sharply from western and eastern Asia. In previous studies I have referred to these transformation processes collectively as the *vernacularization* of culture and power.¹¹ Included here are a number of innovations in the practice and theory of both literature and polity that become manifest around the end of the first millennium, and that by the middle of the second had achieved full development more or less everywhere in the two areas. Through these processes transregional modes of cultural communication (that is, Sanskrit and Latin) and transregional ideologies of rule (that is, empire) were replaced by newly regionalized forms: recently invented vernacular styles of expressive writing and rescaled conceptualizations of the nature of polity.

In a recent contribution to discussions on the Axial age I explored the components of the imperial culture-power complex in Eurasia in the first millennium BCE (Achaemenid, Maurya, Roman, Gupta). Here I want to sketch out what the vernacular culture-power transformation looked like in southern Asia, concentrating on one particular region in southern India. The comparable transformations in Europe during this period will be far more familiar to readers, so I need provide only a very brief account of an exemplary instance, Alfonsine Castile, by way of preface to the Indian case with which it was contemporaneous. I

¹⁰ A case could be made for a powerful new phase of urbanization *after* our period, from 1400-1600, see David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge U. Press, 1999), 120, as well as for a demographic explosion. The population of South Asia nearly doubled between 1400 and 1650, increasing from some 46 million to 80 million; cities like Agra, Delhi, and Lahore had over 500,000 inhabitants, many others had 200,000, and some 15% of the population lived in urbanized areas of over 5000, see Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1998), 168.

¹¹ The lineaments of this are sketched in Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, A.D. 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology," in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. J. E. M. Houben (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 197-247; "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500," *Daedalus* 127,3 (1998), 41-74; "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57,1 (1998), 6-37; "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol Breckenridge et al. (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2002).

then go on in greater detail to ask what historical explanations are available to account for these homologous and synchronous changes in western Europe and South Asia, and what these might tell us about the larger problematic of "Eurasian transformations."¹²

2. *The Paradigm of Culture-Power Transformation in South Asia: Hoysala Nadu, 1100-1300*

An actualization of the ideal-typical process of the vernacularization of culture and power in Europe—showing the trends that had been underway at the Anglo-Saxon court in the ninth to tenth centuries, at the Anglo-Norman court in the eleventh, at the Capetian court in the eleventh to twelfth, at the Occitanian and Sicilian courts of the same period—is found in thirteenth century Castile. Its basic components can be delineated in the broadest strokes: literization (*Verschriftlichung*), or the initial inscription of the vernacular in a documentary mode; literarization, or adjustment toward the norms of a superposed literary culture; and the transformation of polity into an order of power that takes seriously both the vernacularization of culture—the court was almost everywhere the prime mover in this process—and its new limits, its regionality.

It has recently been demonstrated with great precision that the vernacular documentary state in Castile had its birth at the start of the thirteenth century, when court functionaries for the first time began to write intentionally in the vernacular for political purposes. The inaugural instance, a treaty between Castile and Leon, is actually extant and can be dated exactly to Palm Sunday, 1206. Drawn up in the Castile chancery, the document would have appeared, in that context, to be a revolutionary if not heretical act: The archbishop was in charge of the chancery *ex officio*, Romance was still largely denied validity in its written form, and any reform of spelling (in the service of vernacularization) bordered on sin.¹³ From that point on, however, despite periodic interruptions in the first decades, vernacular political culture

¹² The material that follows is adapted from my forthcoming book *Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: U. of California Press).

¹³ Fundamental is Roger Wright, "Latin and Romance in the Castilian Chancery (1180-1230)," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (Liverpool) 73 (1996), 115-28, on the struggle between Latin and Castilian proponents in the chancery, and the simultaneous development of political and literary texts; for the treaty itself, Roger Wright *El Trabajo de Cabreros (1206): Estudio sociofilológico de una reforma ortográfica* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College), 2000. A decree of 1214 (read 1254) mandates the use of Castilian

and, closely dependent on it, vernacular literary culture developed with an extraordinary intensity. A telling example is offered in the year following the treaty document, when the sole surviving manuscript of the *Cid* was prepared. Central to the consolidation of this process were the innovations at the court of Alfonso X el Sabio ("the Learned," r. 1252-82).

The meaning and memory of the historic break that Alfonso's reign signaled—and "break" is much more appropriate than the usual descriptor "renaissance," since textual vernacularity was being generated, not regenerated—are recorded two centuries later when Antonio Nebrija remarked in the celebrated preface to his grammar of Castilian (1492) that it was at Alfonso's court that Castilian first "began to show its powers." Again this was what I have called a cosmopolitan-vernacular idiom, but one shaped as much by Arabic culture, which was now being translated into Castilian rather than as earlier into Latin, as by Latin (in particular Roman jurisprudence) and Romance (the works constituting the models of literarization for the author of the *Cid* included the French *chanson de geste*, *Roland* in particular, and, to some degree, classical rhetoric); and it was cultivated across the full spectrum of textual production, both political and literary. Vernacularization in both areas was clearly seen as related and mutually supportive, and the chancery and the scriptorium have rightly been viewed as united. The use of the vernacular for all state documents (except international diplomacy) was now becoming a matter of royal policy. Well-known is the remarkable Castilian redaction of the laws of the realm, the *Siete partidas* (Seven Divisions [of Law]), which aimed to extend royal control over all judicial and legislative activities. Of a piece with the vernacularization of law is the invention of a Castilian-language historiography, which sought to narrate the past of both the local geopolitical space, in the *Estoria de Espanna* (The Chronicle of Spain) and the world as a whole, in the *General Estoria* (The Chronicle). Although the vernacularization of political communication commenced under Alfonso VII (d. 1214), these grand prose works had no predecessors; the history of Spain commissioned by Alfonso VII's father, for example, had been produced in Latin (written by the archbishop of Toledo). Instead, they were born, as one scholar puts it, in a trope figuring forth the astonishment of the sudden invention—and not the "evolution"—of the

in royal communications, see Colin Smith, "The Vernacular," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, v. 5, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 2000).

literary vernacular here as, say, in Anglo-Norman England, "full-fledged like Minerva, with Alfonso assuming the role of Jupiter." The impetus given to the creation of unified culture in both the literary and the political domain was unprecedented and irreversible. And it maps closely against Alfonso X's peninsular political aspirations. His desire to unify all forms of knowledge and the Castilian language finds its analogy in his quest for the political centralization of Castile: "dominating everything, centralizing everything around himself," very much as in Alfred's England four centuries earlier, or the France of François I two centuries later.¹⁴

The Hoysala kingdom, which once ruled much of what is today's union state of Karnataka in southern India, constitutes an exemplary case of the new culture-power order of South Asia. The two defining transformations become visible here in all their details: At the level of culture, a powerful stimulus was provided by the court for the creation of political and literary works in the Kannada language (rather than as previously in Sanskrit), along with a wide range of other texts to complete the corpus of a cosmopolitan vernacular (grammars, prosodies, dictionaries, poetry anthologies, and the like). At the level of power we can observe the creation of a new and very self-aware regionalized territorialization of the political domain, finding expression in the public poems commissioned by the Hoysala kings and inscribed on copper plate land-grants and dressed stone plaques in temple precincts.

It is the latter dimension of the practice of power that I concentrate on here since it constitutes the most prominent of the *differentia specifica* distinguishing vernacular polity from the earlier world of empire. The development of a vernacular political discourse, literature, and philology at the Hoysala court in this period requires only the broadest outline, since I have discussed similar material elsewhere.¹⁵ Unlike the literati of thirteenth century Castile, the Hoysala poets and scholars were not the actual inventors of a vernacular tradition—this was already some three centuries old, having commenced at the court of the Rastrakuta

¹⁴ See especially Socarras cited in *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and his Thirteenth-century Renaissance*, ed. Robert I. Burns (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 11. On Alfonso see Smith, "The Vernacular," and Burns, *Emperor of Culture*, especially 1-18, 90-108 (chancery-scriptorium), 141-58 (historiography), 183-4 (law); the citation on the origins of Alfonsine prose is from p. 38. For Nebrija's quote see Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramatica Castellana* (Madrid: Edición de la Junta del Centenario, 1946), 8. On Anglo-Norman literary beginnings see David Howlett cited in Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," 32.

¹⁵ See especially Pollock, "Cosmopolitan Vernacular".

dynasty of northeast Karnataka in the early ninth century, pursued with ever-increasing vigor by their successors, the Calukyas of Kalyana and by the Gangas of southern Karnataka. But they were the proud inheritors and conscious consolidators of what should still be seen as a nascent tradition. The three paradigmatic features of cultural vernacularization are dramatically present here: the dominance of a vernacular (as opposed to a Sanskrit) political discourse; the intensified production of belles-lettres in the vernacular, and the perfection of vernacular philological theory. These components may be illustrated by cursory reference to a few representative texts and persons, all kinsmen or close associates and all members of the royal court.

The percentage of vernacular to Sanskrit political texts—those records issued by the court that typically commence with a historical account of the dynasty and the achievements of the ruling lord (the *prasasti*, or praise-poem), and the conditions of the benefice that the text was produced to record—underwent a complete inversion from the time of the early Rastrakutas (c. 800) to the Hoysalas. Most of the great *prasastis* of the Hoysalas are in Kannada, and many were the work of the foremost court poets of the day. Preeminent among these is Cidananda Mallikarjuna, who wrote the grand eulogy of the dynasty carved onto the walls of a temple in the town of Basaralu (dated 1234 and 1237). The same poet also prepared for the Hoysala king Virasomesvara (r. 1234-54) the *Sukti-sudha-arnava* (Nectar Ocean of Poetry), the foremost anthology of early Kannada literature, and perhaps the first anthology of vernacular literature in India (outside the Tamil tradition). What is above all remarkable about this work is its completely *laukika*, or this-worldly, character (its dominant organizational principle is derived from the eighteen *katha-vastus*, or thematics, of Sanskrit court poetry). Massive evidence could easily be added to this one small datum to prove that for most of South Asia, and contrary to every account available in scholarship to date, it was not demotic religious insurgency against a supposed Sanskrit spiritual hegemony that propelled the transformation of literary culture in South Asia, but the aspirations of a vernacular aesthetic state. Even works like *Yasodhara-carita* of Janna, court poet to Viraballala (1173-1220), while a story of Jaina inspiration, has little of the religious about it. The kinds of cultural issues of importance to Janna are made fully manifest in the prelude to his *Anantanathapuramam* (1230). Here, in his praise of poets past, the criteria of literary judgment and standards of taste include clever language (*jannudi*, in reference to the poet Gunavarma), sweetness (*impu*, Pampa) quality of thought (*bage*, Ponna), erudition (*bahujnate*, Nagavarma), formal and affective bril-

liance (*kanti*, Ranna), registers of feeling and emotion (*rasa-bhavam*, Nagacandra), excellence of tropes (*vakrate*, Aggala), the aesthetic of Place (*dese*, Nemi), and mellifluence of style (*mrdhubandham*, Puspabana). Janna was a student of this last poet (also known as Sumanobana), who had been a *kataka-acarya*, or “teacher of the royal camp,” of the Hoysala rulers. His nephew (and son of the poet Mallikarjuna) was Kesiraja, a *kataka-acarya* as well. More important, he was the author of the *Sabdamani-darpana* (Jeweled Mirror of Language, 1260), one of the supreme achievements of vernacular grammatical science in the premodern world. This work embodies the radically new paradigm of philological knowledge that differentiated the vernacular from Sanskrit: here the poet-grammarians and ultimately the patron king are the legislators of language correctness, and not, according to the Sanskrit episteme, the eternal grammar itself, which was thought to pre-exist and regulate all usage.¹⁶ Political eulogy, literature, and philology completed the toolbox of vernacular courtly culture. There were no histories as such of the dynastic realm, nor codification of laws in the Hoysala or anywhere else in the medieval Indic world, on the model of contemporaneous Castile (or earlier Britain or later France). Neither the quest of origins of a people (*Ursprungsparadigmen* or *mytho-moteurs*) nor the standardization of administrative practices of the nascent absolutist state could have found place in the conceptual scheme of premodern Indian polities.¹⁷

More important for our present purposes than the history of the transformation of culture—crucial though that is in itself and indissociable from the transformation of power—is the political self-identification of the Hoysala dynasty and the regional dimension of their political frame of reference. From the time the Hoysala dynasty decisively entered the historical record at the end of the eleventh century, with the royal inscriptions of Vinayaditya, until the disappearance of the lineage as a political power in the mid-fourteenth century (according to what seems nearly a law of political entropy in old India), the limits of their geopolitical sphere are articulated clearly, consistently, and even insistently in their public records. It is in fact immaterial whether these limits were actualized—as they most certainly were not always; the point is that

¹⁶ On Kesiraja's philology, see my “A New Philology: From Norm-bound Practice to Practice-bound Norm in Kannada Intellectual History,” in *Festschrift François Gros*, ed. Jean-Luc Chevillard (Pondichery: Institut Français d'Indologie, 2004), 399–417. Janna's *Anantanathapuram* 1.35 is cited in K. V. Puttappa, ed., *Kannada Kaipidi* (Mysore: U. of Mysore Press, 1988), 90. The Basaralu prasastis are found in *Epigraphia Carnatica (EC)* 7:211 ff. nos. 29 and 30.

¹⁷ See Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millennium,” 62–65.

limits were set. From his base in Sasakapura (in today's Kadur district) Vinayaditya is represented as ruling all the lands "bounded by the Konkan, Alvakheda, Bayala Nadu, Talakad, and Savimale," boundaries repeated in the inscriptions of his grandson Ballala (1101). The identification of several of these toponyms is uncertain, but some are clarified in the inscriptions of Ballala's brother and successor, the great Visnuvardhana. In 1117 he described the extent of his domain as follows:

By relying on the strength of his arms he guarded the earth bounded on the east by the lower ghat of Nangali, on the south by Kongu, Ceram, and Anamale, on the west by the Barakanur and other ghats of Konkana, on the north by Savimale.

In 1140 near the end of his reign Visnuvardhana provided a list of the provinces "united under the single umbrella" of his rule. These include the Gangavadi Ninety-six Thousand, the Banavase Twelve Thousand, the Palasige Twelve Thousand, and the "two [that make] Six Hundreds" (i.e., Belvola 300 and Puligere 300). This corresponds to the area extending from the southern Mysore plateau, north as far as present-day Belgaum, and eastward as far as Hampi between the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. In later records, such as those of Visnuvardhana's son Narasimha in 1143 and Narasimha II in 1228, although the urban core has shifted to Dvarasamudra, these boundaries reappear with only slight variations: Nangali in the east, Vikramesvara in the south, Alvarakheda in the west, the Heddore (or Perddore) river in the north. When we combine all this information, the zone that manifests itself is bounded by present-day Kolar district in the east (where Nangali is to be located), Coimbatore/Salem districts in the south (Kongu), Konkan and the ghats in the west, and the Krishna river in the north. Lastly, in a record of 1237 from the reign of Virasomesvara (the prasasti of Mallikarjuna referred to earlier), the king, "emperor of the south" (*dakṣinacakraṛvarti*), is said to have gotten "incorporated in the book of accounts" a dominion whose limits were Kanci in the east, Velapura in the west, the Krishna in the north, and Bayala Nadu in the south. The north-south limits remain the same, as apparently does the west, but the Hoysala power-sphere is now represented as having stretched further eastward.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Lewis Rice in EC 5.1, xii-xiii and note (Vikramesvara probably means Ramesvara;

Several aspects of the new political order are unequivocally manifested in these documents. First, over the course of some three centuries the Hoysalas represented their political power as contained within boundaries. Not only was this representation remarkably stable over the entire period, but the boundaries themselves and the conception of political territoriality they constituted had nothing whatever fuzzy about them. What will be less immediately obvious to most readers is that the demarcated zone conforms largely to a Kannada-culture region, one that was produced and continuously reproduced by the concrete distribution and discursive messages of the representations themselves. There was no longer any aspiration to extend political rule far beyond the Krishna northwestward into Marathi-speaking areas, or northeastward into Telugu land, nor beyond Kolar into Tamil country (the southern zone, to some degree, excepted), nor beyond the ghats into Kerala. Looting expeditions, so frequent in this world, would continue to be undertaken against polities considerably beyond this region. Thus the attack on Dhara in Madhya Pradesh by Vinayaditya's son Ereganga around 1095, which was described in one inscription as "the first deep draught in his feast of the lands of his enemies during his conquest of the north." Visnuvardhana in the 1130s could continue to claim to have defeated an epic array of capitals and kingdoms across the Sanskrit cosmopolis (Anga, Kuntala, Kanci, Madhura, Malava, Cera, Kerala, Nolamba, Kadamba, Kalinga, Vanga, Bangala, Varala, Cola, Khasa, Barbbara, Oddaha, Kach, Sinhala, Nepala). And in 1173 Narasimha could still be described—according to the ancient patriarchal trope that equated political dominion with sexual domination—as

a great swan sporting in the lake of the women of Andhra, a sun to the lotus faces of the women of Sinhala, a golden belt to the waists of Karnata women, a musk ornament on the cheeks of the women of Lata (Gujarat), saffron paste on the goblet-like breasts of Cola (Tamil) women, a moon to the waterlily eyes of Gauda (west Bengal) women, a wave on the [river] that is the beauty of the girls of Bangala (east Bengal), a bee to the lotus faces of the women of Malava (Malwa).¹⁹

the unknown Savimale is to be located somewhere around the Krishna). The epigraphs referred to in this paragraph are, in order: *EC* 4: Ng 32; *EC* 5: Bl. 199; *EC* 5: Bl. 58; *EC* 5: 270 (Ak. 18); *EC* 5: Ak. 55; *EC* 5: Cn. 204; *EC* 7: 215. 7-9. "Hundreds" and "thousands" refer to village administrative units that are still poorly understood.

¹⁹ For the citations see *EC* 5: xiv n., and p. 128; xix.

Yet by the thirteenth century this had become an entirely symbolic discourse, one deriving its power from the nostalgic and still-cultivated cultural memory of quasi-universalist power in cosmopolitan space, of which the most apposite communicative correlate is the magnificent Kannada inscriptive form in which it is promulgated—itself a supreme example of the cosmopolitan vernacular style, illustrated in the extended “garland of metaphors” in the above citation. Real political power now acknowledged new and narrower constraints, of a geocultural sort, in a way that previously had never, or never so insistently, been the case. And this is a limited domain that is fully aware of its place in the world. The Hoysala Nadu, or the Culture-land of Hoysala power, “a land that milks out every wish,” is placed, in the kind of telescopic or nested representation familiar from this period, within Kuntala-desa, which is within the land of the descendants of Bharata, Bharata-varsa itself being found to the south of Meru in the midst of Jambudvipa, hemmed in by the ocean.²⁰ Power, like language and literary culture, was now no longer quasi-universal as it had been for the whole previous millennium, but de-fined and firmly em-placed.

It should be unnecessary to insist that these newly crystallizing vernacular places must not be thought of as the bounded territories of nation-states *avant la lettre*. Before modernity, boundaries both of power and language, and, for the latter, both real and conceptual, were not knife-edged but broad, porous and not policed. Ruling lineages themselves were in some instances also far more mobile than this model of territorialization implies.²¹ Yet by the beginning of the second millennium, vernacular areas of the sort found in the Hoysala sphere—generated through a complex dialectical process with language-practices in general and literary-cultural practices in particular—had begun to constitute something like a limit of political enterprise, becoming perceptibly operationalized as such in royal communication, as the find-spot

²⁰ EC 5: 475 (Cn. 197 of 1233). For visions of Indian imperial space see Pollock, “Axialism and Empire”.

²¹ About forty ruling lineages are estimated to have existed in the subcontinent at the beginning of the second millennium. Whereas some of these were not necessarily tied to given territories (for example, Karnata kings migrated to rule in Mithila from around 1000 until ousted by the Tughluqs in the fourteenth century), Chattopadhyaya is right to speak in other cases of “lineage areas” e.g., Gangavadi, as being “integrated as administrative units to form supralocal power” (in *The State in India: 1000-1700*, ed. Hermann Kulke [Delhi: Oxford U. Press, 1995], 217-20).

maps of local-language inscriptions demonstrate, corroborating the royal representations themselves.²²

Whatever other interpretations such data may bear, they suffice to refute, for southern Asia at least, the broad scholarly consensus that only the modern map could have brought such geo-bodies to life in the political imagination and made discourse about them sensible; or that concepts of “country (*des*) and realm (*rajatva*)” are recent colonial imports; or, more grandly, that belief in the premodern existence of regionality as such constitutes “a curious misreading,” since “a sense of region and nation emerged together through parallel self-definitions—and this point is essential to any understanding of the distinctive, layered character of Indianness.” On the contrary, the layered character of Indianness cannot be understood without an understanding of the long-term production of its multiple spatial components, of which the Hoysala records are an eloquent example.²³ Precisely the same is true in western Europe, and in both areas the rise of vernacular power, and the culture that underwrote that power and was underwritten by it in turn, are the signal transformation of the early second millennium.

3. Making Historical Sense of Vernacularization

Is it possible to conceive of the gradual abandonment of transregional in favor of regional languages for the creation of literary and political texts, along with the transformations in political space that this choice both reflects and reproduces, as a connected Eurasian historical phenomenon? Can we identify any credible existing account, or provide any new ones, that might explain such transformations as a unified spatiotemporal process connecting Karnataka (and even Java) to England from the beginning of the second millennium and intensifying over the following three or four centuries, by which time the lineaments of vernacular literary cultures were set? This would be a very tall order in

²² Note that from the time the Hoysalas took firm control of the region from Kolar to Mysore, they issued records in the area in Tamil (far more in fact than the Colas), thus reinforcing the image and fact of language boundaries.

²³ Thongchai Winichakul, “Maps and the Form of the Geobody of Siam,” in *Asian Forms of the Nation*, ed. Stein Tønnesson and Hans Antlöv (London: Curzon, 1996), 76 (cf. Michael Biggs, “Putting the State on the Map: Cartography, Territory, and European State Formation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41,2 [1999], 374-411); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1993), 95 ff.; Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 153.

itself. But no less difficult are the theoretical questions such an account would have first to have answered, concerning among other things the relationship between culture and power, or whether very distinctive outcomes—the highly differential character of the emergent political orders, from vernacular polities in some places to national states in others—can be brought under a single historical explanation.

In my recent essay on the world that vernacularization replaced, no attempt was made to account for the consolidation of the empire-form of polity and culture across this same space during the first millennium (beginning with the Mauryas c. 250 BCE, and around the same period the Romans).²⁴ This, so it seemed, was the way things were. The end of the old empire era, on the other hand, and the consolidation of new, more localized cultural-political formations seem to demand some kind of explanation, both for what, relatively speaking, is the near simultaneity of these events, and for the many homologies across cases that can be perceived in everything from lexical choice between cosmopolitan and vernacular registers and ideologies of philologization to the production in literary texts of newly regionalized political landscapes and the growth of vernacular documentary states. There is far too much evidence of human choice and agency—made visible in the often substantial time-lag between inaugural inscription and the commencement of literary vernacularization, for example, or in the anxiety so many vernacular intellectuals experienced before deciding to write locally—to ascribe vernacularization to simple evolution (the very proposition that culture “evolves” is itself dubious). But how else do we explain it?

Even granting that all the multifarious instances I have adduced in earlier work as examples of vernacularization do represent related phenomena and a coherent and unified conceptual object, the very idea that one grand historical account can tie them all together must strike us as preposterous, notwithstanding the genre of popular world history that discovers moncausal explanations in ecology, technology, or whatever. The understandable antipathy of the scholarly age, except among some cultural and linguistic biologists, for such unified theories and totalizing explanations undoubtedly places constraints on us, as does abiding theoretical uncertainty about the very mechanisms of cultural change, once simplistic materialist models are questioned. More serious problems, again, are raised by the substantial lack of clarity about key developments in the historical period itself, especially in southern Asia from

²⁴ Pollock, “Axialism and Empire”.

about 900-1200, or even up to 1500. Most of our most significant positive data for this period are in fact supplied by the vernacularization process, and clearly that cannot be called upon to explain itself. But even here few hypotheses are on offer, beyond the now-discredited premise of religious reaction. Structures of economy and polity have been much less studied; admittedly the evidence for doing so is very thin (which may explain if not justify the fact that two major new scholarly projects have effectively written the most important centuries of the vernacular epoch out of the story of what counts in Indian history).²⁵ If, by contrast, European historiography shows fewer areas of darkness, the relationship of literary culture to social and political power has been largely ignored in all the grand syntheses. We have learned a great deal about the lineage of the absolutist state and the history of the civilizing process, but rarely in the impressive body of scholarship of which these thematics are representative are the language and literary medium of the political and social changes described or analyzed.²⁶ In view of these obstacles, it seems sensible here to attempt no more than a survey of some trends and tendencies that may have created conditions under which the new vernacular choices in culture and polity made better sense than the cosmopolitan choices that for so long had been the single option.

The first of several striking temporal conjunctures between the commencement and intensification of vernacularization in the first three centuries of the second millennium and Eurasia-wide developments relates to the global integration of trade and commerce. Originating in the eighth century and continuously developing through the eleventh, a new world system came into being that linked westernmost Europe, the Near East, and southern and eastern Asia in a network of material exchange on a vaster scale than anything previously known. This international trade economy reached its climax by 1350, and began to disintegrate after 1400 under a series of major disruptions, both socio-political and environmental, that produced world-wide recession (most significant among the former was the Ming Rebellion and China's ensuing isolation

²⁵ The *Cambridge Economic History of India* commences in 1200; the *New Cambridge History of India* begins almost two centuries later with Vijayanagara.

²⁶ I allude to Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974), and Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), in both of whom the silence on the vernacular revolution is deafening. The same can be said of such recent attempts at synthesis of late-medieval Asian societies as K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 1990).

from Central Asia; among the latter, the Black Death, which however spared southern Asia). The Indian subcontinent was fully integrated into both the Near Eastern and East Asian circuits. It profited greatly from the export of spices and finished cloth—with a balance of trade that would remain in its favor throughout the period and beyond—and like the rest of the system experienced at its height a powerful resurgence of urbanization, with more stable political cores.²⁷

Trade may not have played quite the same direct role for the agrarian communities of the central Deccan, where vernacularization was most intense during these centuries, than it did for southern Gujarat, Kerala, or the Coromandel coast, although the rise to power of the Rastrakutas in central Karnataka may be connected with the expansion of west-coast trade following the Arab conquest of Sindh in the eighth century, which marked the start of the new world system in the Indian ocean. We can point to the growing importance of overseas merchant guilds from this region. One such association from Karnataka, the Five Hundred Masters of the Ayyavole, was established about the time the vernacular transformation began and lasted until the fourteenth century, and with increasing reach throughout this period it participated in the huge international trading circuit mentioned above. Through its periodic meetings (called the gathering of “the Great Nadu”) it seems to have constituted a vernacular social formation of a regionally coherent kind, and, what is equally important, it announced its culture and its power in a set of remarkable inscriptions in courtly literary Kannada.²⁸

Yet trade had more indirect consequences for the new vernacularizing

²⁷ Much of this paragraph derives from the work of Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (especially 268 ff.) and “The World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead-End or Precursor?” in *Islamic and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order*, ed. Michael Adas (Philadelphia: Temple U. Press, 1993), 75-102; see also Andre Gunder Frank, “The Thirteenth Century World System: A Review Essay,” *Journal of World History* 1,2 (1990), 249-56. Kulke refers to “the resurgence of trade and urbanism around A.D. 1000,” and as the title of his book shows, he makes this a key point of periodization. Yet the year’s significance is scarcely discussed (1995: 13; cf. 226 n.), and it seems to have a largely numerological quality. According to Frank, the vitality of southern Asia continued into the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, see *ReOrient*, 234.

²⁸ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1988), especially 45 ff. An epigraph in *Karnatak Inscriptions (KI)* 1:38 ff. reports that in 1186, a *maha nadu* meeting took place in a small town in the northwest of present-day Karnataka, consisting mostly of members from what is today’s Dharwar and Belgaum, but attended also by chief merchants from Lata (Gujarat) and Maleyala (Kerala) who were settled in Karnataka. Their extraordinary executive powers may be gauged in another inscription in *KI* 4: 118 ff.

regions, since linked with the new material abundance it generated was the expansion of agrarian territories all across Eurasia, and especially in India. Indeed, according to a recent authoritative account, the five centuries up to 1300 constitute "the crucial formative period for agrarian history in the subcontinent," when the "interactive expansion of agricultural and dynastic territories produced the basis for all the major agrarian regions of modern South Asia."²⁹

There is no reason to doubt, then, that this world system of trade and its consequences for agricultural production were real and new. What may be doubted is whether some necessary connection, in Karnataka or Castile, links the new wealth from trade and agriculture and the urbanization they may have stimulated to self-expression in the vernacular, whether in literary or in political texts, especially when this expression was not itself especially mercantile in character (indeed, the works of Pampa and the poet of the *Cid* are far more concerned with the old military aristocracy). Scholars who have theorized the precapitalist world system are completely silent about cultural change, and few cogent hypotheses are available even for Europe. One recent study, while correctly locating the key developments in the differentiation of the Romance languages in the period 1000-1300, is unable to offer any persuasive argument linking economic growth or political regionalization and centralization with developments in literary culture. Instead, vernacularization is seen as a functional response to a new need "to keep in touch throughout large regions," while the terminological identification of the new vernaculars, especially those that were "culturally and politically important," is vaguely ascribed to the changes in the "fabric of society."³⁰ The view of some historians of southern Asia that the expanding world system had an impact on the formation of states and regional cultures that constitutes a "second, medieval revolution," bumps up against the fact that regionalization and vernacularization began in earnest in many places, such as the Midlands, well after the fourteenth century, when this system is said to have weakened—or elsewhere, such as Karnataka, by the tenth century, before it had become strong.³¹ The place of the flourishing new world system of

²⁹ Ludden, *An Agrarian History*, especially 77 ff. and 106 ff.

³⁰ Tore Janson, "Language Change and Metalinguistic Change: Latin to Romance and Other Cases," in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Wright and Rosamund McKitterick (London: Routledge, 1991), 23.

³¹ David Ludden, "History Outside Civilization and the Mobility of South Asia," *South Asia* 17,1 (1994), 9-10.

trade in the origin and crystallization of vernacularization may therefore be one of concomitance rather than causality.

What is considerably more important, a functionalist theory of cultural change based on the late-medieval world system certainly cannot accommodate the very different developments of literary culture in East Asia. While the region was a crucial component of that system, with the sole exception of Japan there is complete absence of vernacularization as I define the phenomenon. In Vietnam in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, a demotic script was indeed developed (*chu' nom*, an adaptation of Chinese characters for the writing of Vietnamese sounds) by means of which Vietnamese literature was able to present itself in a non-Chinese form for the first time. But this innovation died on the vine as far as inaugurating a new cultural politics is concerned, and the breakthrough to vernacularization is absent elsewhere in the Chinese world. As for China itself, the full maturation of a written "vernacular Sinitic" does not occur until the May Fourth Movement of 1919, whereas "the amount of unadulterated writing in the other vernacular Sinitic topolects and languages is so pathetically small as to be virtually nonexistent."³² The full vernacularization of Vietnam (like that of Korea, despite a similar development of demotic writing system in the mid-fifteenth century) seems similarly to be derivative project of Western modernity. All this may arguably be ascribed to the very different character of imperial language and polity present in the Chinese sphere. At any event, the new world system of trade can hardly be counted as consequential to vernacularization if its consequences were so uneven.

The period 1000-1400 is not only the age of a great precapitalist world system, but also a time of emergence of new nomadic empires based in and radiating out from Central Asia. It would be unwarranted to define the entire epoch by these political formations, as a recent contribution to the periodization of Eurasian history invites us to do. They had little direct impact on any of the vernacularizing regions dealt with here; and unlike what occurred in Iran there was no "renomadization"

³² Victor H. Mair, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1994), 707, 725, 730 (his argument regarding Buddhist missionizing and vernacularization, see especially p. 722, is, however, false for many language realms in southern Asia, as is that regarding the perpetually "positive attitude" toward the languages of Place in India, p. 724). For Vietnam, see O. W. Wolters, *Two Essays on Dai-Viet in the Fourteenth Century* (New Haven: Council on Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 27, vii, 31-32, and Nguyen The Anh, "Le Vietnam," in *Initiation à la Péninsule indochinoise*, ed. P. B. Lafont (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 113-39.

of either South Asia or Western Europe. Yet the very existence of these empires may have had repercussions in Western Europe and South Asia. One of course was to secure the new world trading system itself. But the historic role of nomadic peoples was not limited to the mediation of international trade. The new spatial identities of western Europe and southern Asia may have owed something to the Eurasia-wide migrations of the nomadic peoples. Some scholars have spoken recently of a new "parcelization of space" in South Asia as a result of the nomadic migrations, producing new and mutually exclusive units of territory governed by ever more uniform political orders.³³

But of course the two regions differed completely in their ability to deal with the nomadic migrations: Western Europe succeeded in excluding them, precisely at the moment when South Asia became most open to their advances, which culminated in the establishment of a powerful new conquest state in the north of the subcontinent, the Delhi Sultanate. And if the analysis of literary and political vernacularization given here is even remotely correct, Europe and India would have to have reacted in similar ways in the face of these two very different kinds of stimuli, developing literary cultures that unified the language of the region through unprecedented works of imaginative power, and, so to speak, textualized the region of the language through new representations of territorial coherence. The outcomes are comparable, but the proximate causal factors—nomadic defeat on the one hand, and success on the other—are diametrically opposed.

Also left unaccounted for in an explanatory model based on trade, agricultural expansion, or the growth of the nomadic empires is the vernacularization of Southeast Asia. No direct role can be ascribed to the migrations of the nomadic peoples in the vernacular transformation of tenth century Java or fourteenth century Thailand. Moreover, while southeast Asia in general participated in the world system of trade from 1000-1400, recent studies now see in the period beginning in the fifteenth century developments in commerce, urbanization, political absolutism,

³³ Jos Gommans, "The Eurasian Frontier After the First Millennium A. D.: Reflections Along the Fringe of Time and Space," *Medieval History Journal* 1,1 (1998), especially 132-3, and for the new periodization based on nomadic empires, J. H. Bentley, "Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History," *American Historical Review* 101,3 (1996), 766-8. The "post-cosmic" polities of eastern Java (Kadiri, Singhasari, Majapahit), for their part, seem to show a different and new kind of economic organization—mixed agricultural-maritime—but I have not yet been able to find a good account of what other kinds of social or political transformations may have taken place in the so-called post-*pralaya* period, when the central plains were abandoned for the east.

and religious orthodoxy without earlier precedent.³⁴ Yet another objection to this model is the highly variable pace of vernacularization: While this whole set of factors—the expansion of trade, the development of agrarian regions, heightened urbanization, the consolidation and increasing centralization of dynastic realms—is in evidence across the entire Indian subcontinent during these five centuries, virtually no courtly vernacular literature is to be found in the Gangetic plain before the mid-fifteenth century at the earliest.

4. *Islam on its Eastern and Western Frontiers*

To speak of the world system in the early centuries of the second millennium or the rise of nomadic empires as these impinge on South Asia is eventually to speak of the expansion of Islam as a factor in global change during this period. Scholars have long recognized that the first three or four centuries of the second millennium constitute a major watershed in southern Asian history, but this has typically been conceptualized in religious terms, as “the rise of Muslim power”; the new system of trade and the expansion and consolidation of agrarian regions have only recently come to be appreciated as shaping forces operating entirely outside the confines of religion. For other intellectual and political reasons there is a palpable reluctance among contemporary scholars to regard Islam as itself a substantialized agent of historical change (rather than particular trader groups or nomadic peoples who happen to be Muslim), to think of its advent as defining an age over against the archaizing Hindu and the modernizing colonial, or offering a universal solvent for all tough questions of history in medieval Asia. Undoubtedly the expansion of nomadic empires and the global trading network were fostered as much by non-Muslims (the Mongols) as by the recently converted Turkish tribes (Ghaznavids, Ghorids, Khaljis, and others) who were to transform India. Yet there unarguably did occur an expansive movement of Muslim peoples under the ideology of Islam—a movement, as one scholar has it, consisting of “well-executed military maneuvers

³⁴ Victor Lieberman, “Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350-c. 1830,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27,3 (1993), 475-572; “The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31,3 (1997), 449 ff. and Anthony Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce’ in Southeast Asian History,” *Modern Asian Studies* 24,1 (1990), 1-30 have argued most strongly for a historical break in mid-fifteenth century southeast Asia that would count as “early modern,” after the “classical era,” 1000-1350.

directed by a central command," "undertaken for quite rational purposes," and "driven by powerful religious forces"—that to some degree coincided with the vernacular revolution in Western Europe and South Asia.³⁵ What the expansion of Islam may have contributed to the conditions of vernacular possibility therefore merits consideration here, however brief the narrative must be and however inexpert the narrator.

Interactions with the carriers of Islam actually commenced in the two regions with striking simultaneity—around the year 711, when Arab and Berber armies under the Umayyad dynasty of Baghdad took Gibraltar and, half a world away, Arab forces rode into Sindh. The conquest of the western Mediterranean has been credited with profound and enduring consequences. Perhaps the first scholar to argue this out cogently was Henri Pirenne in the early decades of the last century. His general thesis regarding the economic history of Europe, which, broadly stated, posits a retardation of the Mediterranean economy through what he believed was an obstruction of trade routes by the Arabs, enabling the rise of northern Europe ("Without Mohammed Charlemagne would have been inconceivable"), has recently been reexamined and seriously contested. But Pirenne was also interested in the literary-cultural consequences of these events, and this component of his analysis has been entirely ignored, though it retains considerable interest.

As Pirenne rightly pointed out, previous movements of peoples into Europe, such as those of the Germanic tribes in the fourth and fifth centuries, resulted in their eventual assimilation into the literary culture of "Romania" (by a kind of Romanization I describe elsewhere). In this respect, the eighth century conquest was unprecedented. There was no such assimilation; instead, there occurred a complete redirection of literary culture, "a profound transformation where language was concerned." Much of what Pirenne goes on to argue can, in fact, no longer be accepted. Although it is true, and importantly true, that Arabic eventually replaced Latin in north Africa, Pirenne was wrong to believe that Latin and an educated clergy disappeared from Spain after the

³⁵ The quotation is from Richard Eaton, "Islamic History as Global History," in *Islamic and European Expansion*, 10-11. The discussion on 8 ff. usefully reviews the historiography of Arab conquests. Ludden, "History Outside Civilization" exemplifies the ambivalence about the role of Islam in explaining large-scale political and cultural change in South Asia: on the one had the "second medieval revolution" is clearly shown to be tied up with Muslim power (pp. 9-10 and 15), on the other, it is denied that the "rise of Muslim power" should function as the "one overarching theme" (p. 10).

conquest: ninth century Córdoba knew a vibrant and literate clerical culture, that of the Mozarabs, whose extant writings fill several volumes. Latin did not suddenly "cease to be spoken about the year 800," and people were not "beginning to speak Spanish." In Francia, Latin had long been changing as a spoken language, as all spoken languages change, but it continued to be spoken as "Romance," which for its part would only be conceptually constituted as something different from Latin after the Carolingian spelling reforms of the early ninth century. With respect to the decline of Latin literary culture, this had already been remarked on by Gregory of Tours at the end of the sixth century, long before the Arab conquests, a decline perhaps not unconnected with the decay of city life in the Mediterranean. As for Spanish (or rather Castellano), this would not even be created for another six centuries (and "Español" not until the sixteenth century). If it may largely be true that "By the most curious reversal of affairs, which affords the most striking proof of the rupture effected by Islam, the North in Europe [between the Seine and the Weser] replaced the South both as a literary and as a political centre," traditions of Latin textuality remained strong in the south. And at all events, the Arab conquests in the western Mediterranean were only one aspect of a vast movement of peoples in medieval Europe, including Vikings from the north and Slavs and Magyars from the east, all of whom left in their wake widespread disruption of educational institutions in England, France, and Spain. All that said, Pirenne is pointing toward something significant about these historical events in relation to the course and character of vernacularization. If the actual linguistic processes are more complex than he realized, the emergent Islamic states do appear to have constituted a new and enduring stimulus to language and literary-cultural development.³⁶

It seems reasonably clear that, in its initial stages, vernacularization in northern Europe, as in the case of England, developed for reasons that had nothing directly to do with the expansion of Islam on its western frontier. In southern Europe, by contrast, the creation of a continental French literary culture in the twelfth century or a Castilian one

³⁶ Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958 [1939], 274-8. No good critique of the Pirenne thesis on literary culture exists, to my knowledge. For the economic thesis, see R. Hodges and D. Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe: Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press), 1983; *The Pirenne Thesis: Analysis, Criticism, and Revision*, ed. Alfred F. Havighurst rev. ed. (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1976).

in the thirteenth took place within an environment that to an important degree had been marked by interactions with Arabic cultural-political formations in both the western and the eastern Mediterranean, most powerfully during the Crusades. Some scholars have pointed to the general upsurge in vernacular textualization at just this period. And of course the *chansons de geste* themselves, while addressing a range of local issues such as family prosperity and honor, explicitly thematize the Christian wars against the Saracens. Many of the songs in the important cycle *La geste du roi* (twelfth century) have to do with Charlemagne's battles against the infidel, which again have been said to embody the ideal of the Crusades;³⁷ the composition of the Oxford version of the *Chanson de Roland* itself is now generally dated to about 1100 (though admittedly it looks back imaginatively three centuries), and is closely connected with the spirit of the First Crusade (1095-99), strong echoes of which may be heard in the text (recall only the line *Paien [Sarrazins] unt tort / e chrestiens unt dreit*, "The pagans [Saracens] are wrong, and the Christians are right," l. 1014).

In Spain the Reconquista, which ended around 1250, conditioned the environment within which the kings of Castile, and especially Alfonso X, created Spanish as a language of culture and polity. The inaugural vernacular literary text, *Poema de mio Cid*, was shaped by similar forces as the *chansons de geste*, importantly, again, the Crusades. As one recent study describes it, "The example of Castile's great command in battle against the Moors was modernised and held up, very much in the way that the example of Charlemagne and Roland, campaigners against the Moslems of Spain, was held up by 'Tuoldus' [putative author of the *Chanson de Roland*] for the French of about 1100, as the barons and armies sought recruits to hold Syria and Palestine against the Moslems." The one extant manuscript of the *Cid* is dated to 1207, a year after a Papal Bull was issued to encourage Christians to unite against the Muslims of Spain, and it is arguable that the textualization of the poem was meant to contribute to the goal of attracting soldiers to the Christian armies fighting the Muslim south.³⁸

Such facts, though the tip of an iceberg, are still only one dimension

³⁷ Michel Zink, *Littérature française du moyen age* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), 78, cf. 78-87. On increased textualization, see Denis Hollier, ed. *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1989), 20.

³⁸ Colin Smith, *The Making of the Poema de mio Cid* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge U. Press, 1983), 96-9.

of a vast and complex picture of political and cultural interaction. Muslims had served among the forces of Christian kings (in Leon, for example), and vice versa; the *Cid* is anything but an anti-Muslim tract; part of the splendor of Alfonso's cultural world resulted from his eagerness to recreate something of the glory of the Córdoba caliphate, and from his appropriation of Islamic learning through translation. (One literary event that suggests this, as well as the structural homologies between European and Indian vernacularization, is the 1251 adaptation from the Arabic into Castilian of *Kalila wa Dimna*, the celebrated mirror for princes, the Sanskrit original of which, the *Pancatantra*, had been adapted into Kannada by Durgasimha in 1031 at the Kalyana Calukya court.) And features of Occitan literary culture, some argue, are unimaginable without literary communication with Arabic poetry.³⁹ Clearly nothing here (I leave out the Church) suggests an attitude of hostility toward Muslims qua Muslims. But all that it seems possible to assert with any confidence about Islam in relation to western European vernacularization is that it contributed to the creation of a political and communicative context within which speaking literarily from a regional position, a position in Place, so to put it, seems to have made far more sense than speaking from a cosmopolitan location. Something that corroborates this assessment appears at work in a later encounter further east in Europe, where Hungarian literati first produced a vernacular literary culture in response to the consolidation of Ottoman hegemony in the sixteenth century. The new cultural-political realities of the early second millennium seem to have been such as encouraged a multiple and hence vernacular response, rather than a unified and hence Latin one.

In South Asia, too, vernacularization in its inaugural stages developed without any direct connection with the expansion of Islam on its eastern frontier. Like England, Tamil and Kannada country had well-developed literary cultures of Place by the end of the first millennium. Moreover, the effects of the Arab conquest of Sindh seem to have been of a much different order from those in the western Mediterranean. While its economic impact turned out to be substantial, especially in bringing the region into denser networks of exchange than had previously been the case (in particular by mediating the transfer of southern Asian crop species to the West), Arab political power was largely confined to

³⁹ On the last point, see for example, Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

Sindh and seems at all events to have had little measurable cultural impact. It would be another three centuries before vastly more transformative interactions took place with competitors for power from Central Asia (starting around 1000), leading to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the early 1300s. And the events of these later centuries did have cultural consequences in northern India, at least, that bring them into closer comparison with developments in southern Europe.

To be sure, not all these consequences are related to the problem of vernacularization. In both southern Asia, as to a lesser extent in Europe, the very presence of Islam seems occasionally to have prompted new constructions of transregional identities among cosmopolitan literati (something that stands in some tension to the regionalization of consciousness noted earlier). The term "Hindu," for example, is used for the first time in fourteenth century Sanskrit inscriptions as a (contrastive) self-identification in response to the presence of Turkic power. Similarly, it was in reference to Charles Martel's defeat of the Arabs at Tours and Poitiers in 732 that the term "Europeans" (*Europenses*) was first employed by an anonymous Latin chronicler of Córdoba, "Europe" thereafter coming into frequent use in reference to Charlemagne.⁴⁰ The cosmopolitan culture that underwrote the new, and surely very thin, transregional collective identities in southern Asia was undoubtedly eroding in many areas in the north of the subcontinent, though not necessarily as a result of these political events. In Kashmir, for example, the production of most major forms of Sanskrit court poetry ceased after the twelfth century, but this seems to have resulted from internal processes of civic disintegration unrelated to the Central Asian power seekers, whose control over the Valley would not be consolidated until the fifteenth century and who in fact sought thereafter, though unsuccessfully, to revitalize Sanskrit culture.⁴¹

With the collapse of some important urban sites of cosmopolitan learning in the Midlands such as Kanyakubja at the end of the twelfth century, the center of Sanskrit culture can be said with some justice to have shifted southward to the sphere of the Vijayanagara empire from

⁴⁰ Cynthia Talbott, "Inscribing the Self, Inscribing the Other: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37,4 (1995), 700; Klaus von See, *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. v. 6: Europäisches Frühmittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Aula-Verlag, 1985): 42.

⁴¹ See Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43,2 (2001), 395-400.

the late fourteenth century on, in a way not unlike the apparent northward shift of Latin culture in the ninth century. Few areas in northern India, outside of what then came newly to be seen as the frontier zone of Mithila on the Nepal border, would show quite the same level of Sanskrit cultural production as had earlier been in evidence until a revival set in during the early Mughal period, and this diminution is hardly surprising given the widespread enfeeblement of the courtly culture required to sustain it. The fate of Sanskrit learning more broadly construed, however, remains for north India a matter of scholarly disagreement and requires far more serious empirical study than it has yet received. There seems little reason to believe that reproduction of *pandita* lineages, the real educational infrastructure of Sanskrit culture, was disrupted during this period to any degree serious enough to create a vacuum for the consolidation of vernacular literary cultures, in a way that would be analogous to the weakening of Latin education in western Europe (assuming for the sake of argument that there was indeed such a weakening). The fact that those who first produced these cultures were trained, and trained seriously, in Sanskrit, suggests that the transmission of Sanskrit knowledge had not diminished in any appreciable sense, as the various renaissances seem to suggest was indeed the case in Latinate Europe.

While the impact of these events on vernacular literary cultures also awaits in-depth research, it may well have been substantial. It is only from the late thirteenth century at the earliest that evidence is found for literary production in any of the north Indian vernaculars (those now named Gujarati, Marathi, Bangla, Brajbhasha and the other varieties of Hindi); what we do not know is exactly how this development relates to the social and political events of the epoch. There are, to be sure, instances of dramatic vernacularization largely contemporaneous with the expansion of Sultanate power, and which actually remark on its presence; just this seems to have occurred in Maharashtra. Reverberations of the rise of the new political powers, quite like that in the *chansons de geste*, may be heard in a wide variety of early vernacular works. These are sometimes very explicit and hostile, as in one of the earliest western Rajasthani texts, the *Kanhadade-prabandha* of Padmanabha (1455), which purports to describe the events of Mahmud of Ghazni's sack of the great temple of Siva at Somnath (Gujarat) four centuries earlier. Sometimes they are very muted, as in the vernacular *Ramayanas*, whose composition around the periphery of the Sultanate—like the creation of the *dharma* encyclopedias mentioned earlier, which sought to totalize an entire way of life—have seemed to me a comment

on its expansion.⁴² But all these cases may once again mark historical coincidence rather than consequence.

What is likely to have been far more consequential than all this is the example provided by those Muslim literati who themselves, perhaps as actual inaugurators, composed literature in South Asian languages of Place—something unexampled in Western Europe, incidentally, where Muslims did not participate directly in the nascent vernacular literary cultures (there is no premodern French Muslim literature, as there is a premodern Bangla and Hindi and Kannada and Tamil Muslim literature). There are indications that this aesthetic accommodation or convergence might have begun as early as the eleventh century with Mas'ud Sa'd Salman of Lahore; it was certainly part of the oeuvre of Amir Khusrau in the early fourteenth century and of the collection of Baba Farid's texts a little later. At all events, the great Hindavi Sufi works of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (often exemplary instances of the cosmopolitan vernacular style), including Daud's *Candayan* and Jayasi's *Padmavat*, are unlikely to have gone unnoticed by non-Muslim communities of readers and listeners, as adaptations outside Sufi communities suffice to indicate. That said, there is admittedly little evidence of true cross-community literary communication during this epoch in other areas, such as Gujarat or Andhra.⁴³

The expansion of Islam on its western and eastern frontiers may accordingly be an additional piece in the complicated puzzle of historicizing the vernacular millennium, though one generating additional puzzles of its own. In some cases the consolidation of vernacular cultural-political orders may have been a consequence of the presence of

⁴² Here, too, however, alterity may not always be what it seems. The patron of the Bangla Ramayana, for example, is now thought to have been a Muslim, Rukannuddin Barbak Sah, 1459-74, see W. L. Smith, *Ramayana Traditions in Eastern India* (Stockholm: U. of Stockholm, Department of Indology, 1988), 38. The character of the political-military environment of early Marathi vernacularization may be captured by a passage from the *Smrtisthala* translated in A. Feldhaus and S. G. Tulpule, *In the Absence of God: The Early Years of an Indian Sect* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii Press, 1992), 92 ff.

⁴³ Intercommunity literary communication is another important and under-researched problem of South Asian literary history. No one seems to have studied the question whether the Gurji poetry of Shaikh Baha ud-Din Bajan (d. 1506) was read outside the Muslim community in Gujarat, or whether Dakani poetry found any resonance among Telugu writers. Certain religious poets such as Qazi Qadan in Sindhi or Bullhe Shah in Punjabi were more amenable to such circulation, as noted by Ali Asani, "At the Crossroads of Indic and Iranian Civilizations: Sindhi Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2003), 639.

the new competitors for power: war may have made vernacular polities as much as the vernacular polities seem to have made war.⁴⁴ Other kinds of interactions with Islamicate cultures suggest that more strictly literary processes were at work: emulation of and appropriation from literati who provided fresh forms and themes, as in twelfth century Sicily or Occitania, or who first demonstrated, as in fifteenth century Avadh, the very possibility of vernacular literacy, much as the imitation of the declining imperial formations helped make possible the English and Kannada vernacular worlds beginning in the ninth century.

Summary and Conclusions

The precise weight of the contribution of globalizing Islam cannot, however, be easily calculated because as we have seen it was part of other larger-scale forces at work in the period, above all the new world network of trade that enriched both South Asia and Western Europe and helped make possible the burgeoning development of agricultural regions and urbanization. All these Eurasia-wide factors may well have conditioned, in ways that await adequate clarification, the development of vernacular literary cultures. What is puzzling however is that they did not effect such developments evenly across Eurasia itself, but only in particular regions. How we explain this unevenness is a very difficult problem in its own right, and would require a far more intensive comparative study of civilizational structures, communication practices, cultural presuppositions and the like than we now possess. Puzzling, too, are the conceptual and political variations found in the outcomes of the vernacularization process. Like the imperial political and cultural formations that preceded them and upon whose foundations they were built, these vernacular formations show that people in Europe and India reacted very differently to the various forces in play, and in these differences lie important implications for political and cultural theory.

⁴⁴ I here adapt a phrase from *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1975), 42.