We can gain a sharper sense of the peculiar nature of the cultural order that Sanskrit helped to create, and the kind of political order for which it was cultivated, if we consider both from an explicitly comparative perspective. There is a natural tendency, exhibited even (or especially) in social and cultural theory, to generalize familiar forms of life and experience as universal tendencies and common sense. Comparison offers an antidote to this by demonstrating the actual particularity of these apparent universalisms. Among those forms of life and experience, Latin literary culture and the Roman political formation, as well as their later histories in medieval Europe, have a special salience for our analysis. Both in themselves and for their contribution to the world against which modernity has defined itself, Latinity and the Roman Empire have importantly shaped contemporary conceptions of language, literature, transculturation, and the supraregional political form.

Other world regions might be deemed just as suitable for our purpose as the Latinate. Juxtaposing the cultural and political processes of Sinicization with those of the Sanskrit cosmopolis would be enormously valuable, most pointedly with regard to places like Champa and Dai-Viet, where the two great alternatives in premodern Asian globalization met toe to toe. But it will become clear in part 2 that in the most consequential later phase of the story told here, that of vernacularization, the East Asian parallel breaks down, or at least a very different historical trajectory manifests itself. In Vietnam, to continue with that case, regional individuation in the cultural-political sphere was asserted hesitantly in the late medieval period but then arrested, and vernacularization was consummated only under the vastly changed circumstances of colonialism. The same holds true for almost the entire periphery
of the Middle Kingdom, Japan excepted. In China itself, vernacularization in the full sense of the term used here never occurred (only something more like popularization, as in the vernacular novel), and as a consequence there never arose a “flourishing literary tradition” in Cantonese, Taiwanese, or Shanghaiese.\(^1\) The civilizational orders of the premodern world, whether Latinate, Hellenic, Sinic, or other, are of interest to a study of the Sanskrit cosmopolis not only per se but for the kinds of processes that led to their displacement by other orders of culture and polity—and it is these that are most clearly demonstrated in the Latin and later European cases.

The brief review that is called for of Latin literary culture and its political formation—which aims to assess, in a word, how \textit{latinitas}\(^2\) and \textit{imperium} compare with the \textit{kāvya} and \textit{rājya} of the Sanskrit world—can be presented most effectively by a broad consideration of four constituent features: the history and character of Latin as a cosmopolitan language, the beginnings of literature and its place in Roman society at the time of its beginnings, the processes of globalization and transculturation known as Romanization, and the style and work of the empire form.

Basic to a comparative assessment of the career of Latin as a cosmopolitan language is, first, the fact that we are able to observe it \textit{become} such a language and identify the specific conditions of this becoming, both in its initial phase and in its later revivifications. How Latin developed, very slowly and over the course of many centuries, from a local idiom spoken in the lower Tiber Valley into a supraregional language constitutes, as a distinguished student of the subject put it, “one of the surprises of history.”\(^3\) It may have been surprising that this happened at all, but there is little surprise regarding how it did happen: through an intimate and unambiguous dependence on a military-political project, first republican, later imperial, and then later Christian. Latin traveled where it did as a language of conquest: first, as the language of a conquest state, initially Roman but later Carolingian and Ottonian; second, as the language of a missionizing and eventually conquest church.

A second important comparative fact about the history of Latin is that for the first three or four centuries of its cosmopolitan career, the language stood in a relation of pronounced cultural inequality with Greek. Greek shaped the development of Latin in the formative years of its literary culture while also constituting a barrier to Latin’s advance in the eastern Mediterranean. In view of its subordination to Greek and the dramatic beginnings of its literary life (to which we turn momentarily), Latin itself embodies important

\(^1\) Mair 1994: 730 (a statement in some tension with the overall thrust and title of his article).
\(^2\) On \textit{latinitas} (“‘Latinness’ . . . and especially the literary style that marked the high literature of Rome and those who sought to perpetuate it”), see Bloomer 1997: 1–2.
\(^3\) So for example Hammond 1976: 39.
features of a “cosmopolitan vernacular,” that is, a vernacular aspiring to cultural dominance through the appropriation of features of a superposed language (a subject more fully explored in chapters 9.3, 10.1). The key difference, of course, is that Latin actually became cosmopolitan instead of simply aspiring to that status. Perhaps it was partly owing to this transformation into a language of high culture on the Greek model that Latin literary speech (sermo artificialis or sublimis) gradually grew more distant from everyday language (the so-called sermo vulgaris or humilis, “popular” or “earth-bound” speech), so far as we can say anything certain about this latter register. This seems to have been a simple, even mechanical, consequence of literarization and the self-elevation from the quotidian code that literary language strives to attain in most times and places—or at least in India and Europe before modernity—in order to constitute itself precisely as literary.

Starting in the fifth or sixth century, Latin’s distance from the everyday increased for entirely other reasons. In accordance with the process of historical imitation at work in shaping the empire form of medieval Europe (what one scholar has called the “nostalgia of ecumenism”), Latin was adopted as the sole medium of political and literary expression among Frankish kings and their descendants for some four centuries. The political imaginary of the Carolingian court around 800 was filled with visions of roma renovata, and Latin naturally became a basic component of that worldview. By that period also, the spoken forms of the language had so diverged from the written that it was difficult for speakers to recognize the everyday medium of communication as “Latin.” The gulf that had opened between spoken and written Latin (the latter now named, with increasing propriety, the sermo scholasticus) was acknowledged by both the court and the Church. Around 780 Charlemagne summoned the great scholar Alcuin from York, and the various treatises he wrote over the next few decades (De orthographia, On Spelling; De litteris colendibus, On the Care of Learning) sought to promulgate a new, supposedly more authentic and certainly non-Romance pronunciation of Latin—precisely the sort that would have been preserved by nonnative speakers (Alcuin was a Northumbrian). At the same time, the Council of Tours (813) required the translation of sermons into what had long since emerged as the early Romance vernaculars (see chapter 11.1). Similar reforms were made during the so-called Ottonian renaissance two centuries later, when the conception of a translatio imperii (transfer of power) once more necessitated a translatio studii (transfer of learning) and thus a revivification of Latin. Language was indeed the compañera of empire in the West, and continuously so for almost two millennia before Nebrija declared it to be so. In both Carolingian and Ottonian Europe, literary and even doc-

umentary production in regional languages was long discouraged in favor of an imperial-language textuality increasingly unfamiliar to the court, to say nothing of its distance from the speech of everyday life. The sociolinguistic biography of Sanskrit was entirely different. The historical record does not enable us to attribute to it any local roots at all. Whereas some regional languages such as New Persian achieved transregional identity through merit, and others such as Latin had it thrust upon them through military conquests, Sanskrit seems to have almost been born transregional; it was at home everywhere—and perhaps, in a sense, at home nowhere. In respect to everyday discourse Sanskrit was, from a very early date—indeed probably from its very beginnings—marked by distance and distinction. In general its relationship with actual local speech types was hyperglossic, as it has here been named, something to which the distance between Latin and its “earth-bound” register, a classic diglossic situation, bears no comparison. For all that, or perhaps precisely as a consequence, at no period before modernity do we find for Sanskrit the kind of widespread deterioration from the literary norm observable in the Latin of ninth-century or twelfth-century France and Germany (which is not to deny that there were always inexpert writers of Sanskrit). Moreover, Sanskrit was disseminated by a process that, if admittedly obscure, can nowhere be identified with the sort of military-political, or later, military-religious, project that we find compelling the dissemination of Latin.

In its general morphology the literary culture of the Latin world was conditioned by the history of the language itself. In this it shows considerable divergence from Sanskrit, albeit the two demonstrate substantial similarity in their later development. To understand the phenomenon of the literary in the Latinate world we need to grasp the fact that Latin literature, like Sanskrit literature, began, though it remains unclear how comparable are the circumstances of these two beginnings. There can be no doubt about the fact of invention in the case of Latin, so long as we are clear about what was being invented. As already noted, the theoretical problem of beginnings in general and literary beginnings in particular will be addressed in greater detail later, since it is fundamental to the question of vernacularization (chapter 8.1). For now it is enough to note that, however we wish to conceive of literature—as a universally or only a locally defined imaginative use of expressive, workly language; as an absolute or a relative phenomenon—literature was, in both the Latin and Sanskrit worlds, something committed to writing. And in Rome, the creation of written texts conforming to an already dominant local definition of literature—or what can be taken as literature in some universal sense of the term—commenced at a particular moment.

“Our knowledge of a literature written in Latin,” according to a recent

6. For medieval cultural-political developments see Banniard 1995 and Contreni 1995.
standard account, “begins abruptly in 240 B.C.” with the work of Livius Andronicus, a freed Greek slave from what is today Taranto in southeast Italy. Some three centuries of historical Roman existence prior to this, which were marked by such attainments as codified laws, have left no trace of “artistic composition” and only scraps of text evincing “linguistic satisfaction and emphatic solemnity” (these terms doing duty for a stipulative definition of literature that is lacking in the account). Even the few indications of oral heroic tales are wholly inconclusive and do little to establish a prehistory of an epic or another expressive verbal art. Evidence for literature prior to 240 B.C.E., the account concludes, is so meager as to suggest a purely “practical culture.” Indeed, evidence of writing itself before this period is meager in the extreme, and Latin literature no doubt “begins” in one sense by the application of writing to expressive language. But a second condition is set by the presence of a superposed Greek literary culture. Andronicus produced a translation from Homer’s *Odyssey* and adapted Hellenic drama, and at the same time created a specifically poetic language that would influence later Latin poetry. His use of precocious archaisms, the replacement of Greek divinities by Roman ones (as in the opening invocation of his *Odyssey*, where an ancient water deity, Camena, takes the place of Musa), and perhaps most important, his use of the Italic saturnian meter, can without difficulty be taken as enhancing the project of localization and authentication.7

One scholar of general literary culture who clearly grasped the importance of the historic rupture that occurred in mid-third-century Rome was Mikhail Bakhtin. As he puts it in his own peculiar idiom: “The purely national Latin genres, conceived under monoglottic conditions, fell into decay and did not achieve the level of literary expression.” Put in the terms used in this book, pre-Hellenic forms of Latin aesthetic expression, existing in the absence of a superposed cultural formation, never attained the state of inscription. But what is important about the beginning of Latin literature, in addition to the sheer fact that it did begin—and “with a sideways glance” at Greece, as Bakhtin expresses it, with misleading understatement—are the circumstances under which this beginning occurred. And here neither Bakhtin nor the standard account just cited is very instructive. Bakhtin con-

7. See Kenney and Clausen 1982: 53–58; cf. Gruen 1990: 82 and Goldberg 1995: 46 (for both scholars, the “conscious” invention of “literature” in the third century is an established fact). Nothing is offered in Conte 1994: 13–27 (largely a restatement of Kenney and Clausen) to support the claim that the “existence of a long prehistory” is “necessarily presupposed by the abrupt ‘creation’ of a national literature in the days of Andronicus” (p. 27, the mechanical response to cultural innovation; the presupposition is entirely unnecessary). Reflection on how “literature” is to be stipulated, as it must be if claims about its beginnings are to be made, is oddly lacking in the secondary scholarship, though see now Habinek 1998. Although writing is of the essence of literature, the most recent major work on writing and literacy in antiquity is oblique on the matter (Harris 1989, cf. p. 158).
ceives of the transformation as nothing more than a language question, the problem of bilingualism: “From start to finish, the creative literary consciousness of the Romans functioned against the background of the Greek language and Greek forms.” The standard account hesitatingly suggests that the Hellenization of Latin may have been an expression of a new cultural tendency analogized from the Hellenization of other languages and literatures, of which the Septuagint Bible (late second century B.C.E.) is a strong example. More recently, scholars have sought to relate the invention of Latin literature to the victory of the First Punic War (264–41), Rome’s growing hegemony in the western Mediterranean, and its evolving imperial self-understanding. Whatever the truth of this last argument for positivistic history—and there is admittedly something monocausal and reductive about it—it does enjoy ethnohistorical authority: the connection was one that later Romans themselves made. The second-century scholar Gellius wrote that at the time when peace was made with the Carthaginians (“Phoenicians”), the poet Livius Andronicus “taught Rome to make literature.”

In the case of Sanskrit, too, a radical break in the history of culture was effected by the invention of an altogether new form of textualized expression, in this case, what would come to be called kāvya. The circumstances under which this invention occurred—or under which processes already under way were consolidated—must have been shaped by a variety of factors, as we have seen, not the least being the invention of writing itself in the middle of the third century B.C.E., around the time written Latin first became common. One social factor that has seemed salient for our analysis is the presence of ruler lineages recently immigrated from western and central Asia who not only patronized a new Sanskrit literature but may themselves have been poets, as, for example, Rudradāman represents himself to be (chapters 1.3, 2.1). Here we find a potentially significant parallel with the cultural agents who invented Latin literature. Not only was Livius Greek, but the two great poets who succeeded him were neither Roman nor native speakers of Latin: Naevius (d. 204 B.C.E.), who came from the area of today’s Naples, and Ennius (d. 169 B.C.E.) from Calabria on the southeast coast, were Oscan-speaking Hellenized Italians. As the Sanskrit cosmopolis shows so strikingly


as well, there existed no cultural agents who were not always already tran-
scultured (see chapter 14.1).

Another parallel or possible connection is intriguing but difficult to es-
tablish: Was the new employment of written Sanskrit as a prestige language
for the creation of workly texts a reaction to superposed cultural forms then
manifesting themselves for the first time on the eastern frontier of the Hel-
lenic world, just as literature written in Latin was a response to the same cul-
tural phenomena on the western frontier? Some evidence suggests the pos-
sibility. A Greek theater was then in existence in what is today northern
Afghanistan (Ai Khanoum); bilingual intellectuals translated Aśokan edicts
into literary Greek in the mid-third century B.C.E., while interactions among
Hellenic and South Asian sculptors produced the unprecedented sculpture
of Gandhāra; four centuries later, in 149–50 C.E.—squarely in the middle
of the reign of Rudradāman—a scholar with the title Yavanesvāra (Lord of
the Greeks) prepared a Sanskrit prose translation of a Greek work (prob-
ably from Alexandria) on the casting of horoscopes, which with another (lost)
Greek text formed the basis of the Indian developments in the art of
horoscopy until the introduction of Islamic ideas a millennium later; a por-
tion of Mānasāraśilpaśāstra, a work on architecture of approximately the sixth
century, was adapted from Vitruvius (“a parallel almost down to every de-
tail”); the cult of the important south Indian and Sri Lankan goddess Pat-
tinī and that of Isis have recently been shown to be closely linked by cultural
transmission.¹⁰ Nineteenth-century Indology sought to demonstrate just this
sort of dependency, speculating for example that the Rāmāyaṇa must have
been translated from Homer and Sanskrit drama adapted from Athenian
exemplars (comparable to Livius Andronicus’s Latin adaptations, though
the parallel seems never to have been drawn). Such questions are certainly
not in themselves illicit so long as they are free of the arrogant presupposi-
tions of superior donor-cultures and inferior receiver-cultures that often un-
derwrote this kind of inquiry in the past. More positively viewed, these ques-
tions can stimulate exploration of the continuous circulation (rather than
“diffusion”) of cultural goods that we know marks all of cultural history. Re-
call that the Greek epic cycle itself did not emerge fully armed from Zeus’s
head but contained substantial Mesopotamian elements.

¹⁰ See Schlumberger and Bernard 1965; Benveniste 1964; Pingree 1978: 3–5 (Yavane-
śvāra as someone “exercising some sort of authority over Greeks settled in the domains of
the Western Kshatrapas in those areas of India later known as Gujarat, Mālwā, and Rajasthan”; on
Mānasāra see Goetz 1959: 178 (his words are quoted in the text); on Pattini, Fynes 1993. Pe-
ter Green has argued against any “genuine literary interpenetration between Greek and other
cultures” (1990: 316), but the absence of word-for-word translation that he seems to have in
mind is largely a modern invention and can hardly be used as an argument.
Until more data become available to decide the matter, it remains an open question whether or not India and Rome participated at the eastern and western frontier, respectively, in the same system of literary-cultural circulation. But whatever may be the brute facts of Sanskrit literary beginnings, cultural memory in South Asia has acknowledged nothing superposed to Sanskrit either in its origins or in its later history. This is the first in a number of stark contrasts with Rome. Rome’s cultural debt to Greece was the source of continuous, anxious literary reflection verging on shame; Cicero’s defensiveness, for example, about the use of Latin for philosophical discourse when previously only Greek had been used (and which prefigures the vernacular anxiety we meet in the early-modern European treatises) has no parallel in the Sanskrit world. Another striking dissimilarity is the fact that Sanskrit literary culture, until a very late period (Vijayanagara), was never harnessed to a political project in so direct and instrumental a way as we find in both republican and imperial Rome. Naevius, the second major poet after Andronicus, composed a now-lost epic combining Rome’s prehistory (Aeneas’s settling in Latium) with contemporary triumph (the First Punic War) and told an even more archaic tale of political origins in his work on Romulus and Remus. The historicist project of empire intensified further with Ennius, who turned the klea andrōn, the glorious acts of men of the Greek epic, into the maxuma facta patrum, the deeds of the empire-building Roman ancestors, in his Annales and so claimed for himself the title homerus redivivus (according to some, his being a Pythagorean gave him an additional reason for the assertion). And this is to say nothing of the supreme example of imperial poetry, Vergil’s Aeneid. The whole conceptual universe of Sanskrit, its placelessness and universalism, strongly discouraged such productions, though they were not entirely unknown; something like Kalidāsa’s Rāghuvrīṣṇa might qualify as a counterexample, though as an allegory of the imperial Guptas, even when it borrows directly from their records (as in the Allahabad inscription), its touch is so light as to be all but imperceptible.

In Latin’s later history, however, as it became increasingly severed from its Roman roots, its historicism and localization—and indeed, its engagement with the real—became ever more attenuated. Servius, the most important commentator on Vergil in late antiquity, already referred to a “law of poetic art” prohibiting treatment of historical matters openly. It was in part this tendency that prompted the Romance philologist Erich Auerbach to characterize medieval Latin as a “purely artificial language written according to ancient models and often degenerating into a kind of pedantic puzzle...
incapable of expressing the life of the times.” Recent scholarship rightly argues that Auerbach’s evaluation ignores the fact that some literatures do not aim to express the life of the times, indifferent as they are to any simple mimetic enterprise. This in fact seems to be especially the case with many cosmopolitan languages, which seek transcendence of time in the same degree they achieve transcendence of space, and which accordingly invite special attention to their expressive capacities as the element that makes them different from quotidian local idioms and preferable for certain kinds of cultural work. Given these objectives, their avoidance of the everyday real, even when it is readily accessible in parallel—say, vernacular—aesthetic contexts, is clearly a choice and not a failure. What remains unclear, however, is whether these tendencies suffice to explain the complexities of the history of political historicism in the two literatures in question: how the political acted as midwife at the birth of Latin literature but was more and more marginalized in its later rebirths, and how it was excluded from the Sanskrit cosmopolis at its commencement only to gain admittance at its culmination.

Another remarkable disparity lies in the fact that explicit care for language, in the Roman grammarian as in the Roman overlord, seems to have never attained the conceptual coherence and centrality it acquired in southern Asia. Grammar was a relatively late intellectual enterprise in classical antiquity, and it was a consequence of, and always remained a component of, forensic rhetoric, or the arts of public persuasion (though Servius, Cassiodorus, and others in the fifth and sixth centuries would enunciate a homology between grammatical and political rule and discipline). Rulers, for their part, were more often patrons than producers of literature; few Roman emperors are credited with poetic creativity. Although the topos of the rex doctus, the learned king, makes its appearance in late antiquity, literacy among the nobility was exceptional and came to be reckoned as pertinent to kingly virtue only much later, it seems: in the time of Charlemagne, when the powers of grammar and imperium first became continuous and the ideal emperor was first represented as both soldier and scholar.

As for the poets themselves, they had always cared deeply about language discipline—latinitas was from the beginning a virtue of the writer—and as a result, a transregional normativity in grammaticality, metric, genre, and the rest was widely cultivated. In the universalization of a set of standards for literary language, Latin cosmopolitanism bears striking similarities to its Sanskrit counterpart. Consider this suggestive description:


The leading features of the literary culture of the later Roman Empire are its conservatism, its uniformity, and its widespread geographical diffusion... Based on the same classics and an identical technique, the education system produced a literary culture which was... completely uniform; there were no regional schools of literature. Whether he lived and wrote in Gaul, Africa, or Illyricum, in Thrace, Cappadocia or Egypt, the training of every aspirant to literary fame was identical, and the exemplars which he strove to emulate the same. This uniform culture was, moreover, remarkably widely diffused.15

Because of this standardization of training and diffusion Horace could boast of readers of his work in Dacia (Romania) and on the Black Sea; Martial could claim that his work circulated as far as Britannia, and that in Vienne on the Rhone men young and old, and girls as well, were reading his epigrams—precisely the sort of boast and claim we have seen the Sanskrit poet Bilhaṇḍa making a millennium later. Although Latin certainly varied over its cosmopolitan space in its spoken registers, it was not perceived to do so by grammarians largely because variation was minimal across its textual registers. “In texts of all kinds, literary, technical, and all others,” according to a leading authority on vulgar Latin, “the written Latin of the first five or six centuries C.E. looks as if it were territorially homogeneous, even in its ‘vulgar’ registers. It is only in later texts, of the seventh and eighth centuries, that we are able to see in the texts geographical differences that seem to be the precursors of similar differences in the subsequent Romance languages.” As its ties to living speech weakened, latinitas was increasingly regarded as a changeless and (in a Hegelian sense) virtually self-identical phenomenon; the unconcern with prescriptive grammar in late antiquity gave way, not unexpectedly, in Carolingian times to the intellectual preeminence of grammatical thought.16

Comparable at least in its effects, though deriving from a more profoundly theorized vision of human existence and language, was the Sanskrit grammarian’s sense of his language’s historical existence as a “panchronistic flatland.”17 What in the early period may have been encountered as dialectal or regional variation and described as difference was transformed by the beginning of the first millennium (in Patañjali) into prescriptive option. The archaic epochal distinction between sacral and nonsacral language found in Pāṇini’s grammar (chandas, “Verse,” or the Veda, and bhāṣā, the learned

“discourse” used for scholastic discussion and disciplines of the Veda) lived on in medieval India only in the term ārṣa, the “language of the seers,” a euphemism for justifying solecisms. Concomitantly, no grammarian or literary scholar during the cosmopolitan period ever conceived of Sanskrit as changing according to geographical location the way the so-called regional Prakrits were thought to change in their phonology, morphology, and lexicon. On the contrary, we find what might be called a “panchoristic flatland” too—where no variation is found across space—which was a basic component of Sanskrit language ideology. Recall how the tenth-century thinker Rataśrijñana put it: “Whereas the Prakrits are multiform, Sanskrit is uniform.”

To return to a question raised at the start of this account, a variety of Sanskrits, perhaps even what we might want to designate as “vernacular Sanskrits,” admittedly existed in spoken and certain written registers, but their use for the production of kāvyā and prāṣāti was completely restricted; the “conservatism” and “uniformity” of Latin literary culture were as characteristic of Sanskrit as its “widespread geographical diffusion.”

The parallels adduced so far suggest that in many of its components cosmopolitan literary culture was something replicable across the ancient world. But with respect to the processes of transculturation—the degree of compulsion to conform to the new culture, say, or the tolerance of diversity—radically different modes can be observed in the Latin and Sanskrit worlds. The ways in which and the reasons why peoples throughout Eurasia adopted unfamiliar cultural practices and thereby fundamentally reshaped their lifeworlds and histories are questions critically important to a history of culture and power before modernity, especially when viewed comparatively. And yet one cannot tell this from reviewing the scholarly literature on the subject. It is astonishing how little the process has been studied for either side of the world, but the lack is especially curious in the case of Romanization. Although central to the creation of a supraregional culture and polity in the premodern West, one contributing to the very conceptualization of “Europe” and “Western civilization,” Romanization has only recently and tentatively become the object of serious study. Not so long ago a leading historian of the Roman Empire, contemplating the history of scholarship on what the “choice” to Romanize signified, declared that “there seems to have been no scholarly attention paid to anything but the symptoms” of Romanization and that in one “richly informed” work “there are only two or three lines devoted to the motives for cultural change; and I recall noth-


19. On “vernacular Sanskrit” see chapter 1.3. It is not clear to me that scholars are always fully awake to some of these distinctions (cf. Deshpande 1993b: 38–40).
ing more than that in all my reading.”20 While studies of the acceptance of Roman political and economic practices by conquered peoples have proliferated over the past decade—archaeology in particular, with its interest in urbanization, trade, agricultural development, and the like, has become increasingly interested in Romanization21—it is hard to find anything that would make this statement less true today for the most dramatic instance of transculturation: the history of literary culture. The fact is, if one wrote literature at all in the Roman Empire, one wrote in Latin.22 Nowhere in the vast expanse from Mauretania and Lusitania in the west to Dacia and Syria in the east was literature ever produced in a local language (even the production of non-Latin inscriptions, as shown below, becomes increasingly rare), and what this absence meant, and how it may have meant differently across the Roman world, are basic questions that have rarely been raised.

We may not have any strong models for the adoption of Sanskrit culture either, but what we do know suggests how little the process had in common with Romanization. Nowhere do we see the conqueror’s prestige providing the catalyst for cultural change, since nowhere in the expansion of the Sanskrit cultural order can we point to military conquest. Nowhere can we demonstrate that there was bureaucratic compulsion to adopt Sanskrit as there often was to adopt Latin, given the place of Roman law in the administration of the provinces. Whatever the status of dharma in the Sanskrit cosmopolitan conceptual order, practical law remained resolutely local (exemplary here, if at the end of the cosmopolitan epoch, is the localization of dharmaśāstra in Thailand as thammasat). The supposedly built-in afflictions of Sanskrit culture—caste, patriarchy, Brahmanical power, and the like—are hard to demonstrate as necessary concomitants of the cosmopolitan package. The Khmers, who, to judge from the spectacular political poetry they composed, were full participants in the Sanskrit cosmopolis, developed nothing on the order of the caste practices found in India and were blithely indifferent to Indian gender inequality.23 Nor do we find in the Sanskrit cosmopolis anything comparable to the influence exerted by a core culture in a center-periphery world-system relationship that we find in Rome. There was no actual center to the cosmopolis, only a conceptual center—and precisely for this reason it was one that could be and was replicated in many dif-


21. For Romanization as an archaeological problematic see Blagg and Millett 1990, and more recently Woolf 1998.

22. In the eastern empire, Latin had to contend with another transregional language, Greek, which was to have its own complex interactions with Slavic vernaculars in the later Byzantine Empire (Sevcenko 1991).

23. Notwithstanding assertions about gender to the contrary on the part of some Southeast Asian historians (chapter 3.1 and n. 25 there). For the question of caste, see Mabbett 1977.
ferent places. The progressive Sanskrit transculturation eastward was not a matter of much interest to the Indian mainland—neither an object of political ambition nor a source of cultural hubris—if we are to judge from the paucity of references in Sanskrit literary texts or geocultural knowledge systems to the world of Southeast Asia.

It is in the modes of interaction with local culture, however, given the unidirectional transculturation that Romanization seems to have represented, that the differences between Latin and Sanskrit appear the most pronounced. This is above all visible in the fate of local languages. In Italy itself, and later in the western provinces of Gaul and Iberia, the same combination of military conquest and administrative co-optation of the native elites engendered profound and lasting transformations of local cultural systems. By the end of the first century B.C.E., all the languages of Italy other than Latin (including Oscan, Umbrian, and Etruscan) had disappeared from the inscriptive record; they had no continuing documentary, let alone literary, existence. A similar fate awaited the regional languages of the larger Roman world. While many of these apparently first became literized under the influence of Latin (the rest under the influence of Greek), they did not long preserve a written existence.

The Celtic languages of Gaul and those of the Iberian peninsula, the languages of North Africa including Punic (Phoenician) and Libyan, and most of those of the Roman Near East—all of these may have maintained an oral vitality for some centuries after Roman conquest, but they did not become, or perhaps were not permitted to become, part of literary culture of any sort and all eventually died out (Greek of course excepted). It is not because the literary works in Oscan, Umbrian, or Libyan of the Oscan- or Umbrian- or Libyan-speaking poets Naevius, Ennius, Plautus, and Terence have all vanished that we have not a scrap of literature in their native language; it is because none was ever produced. Thus while it may be true that Latin “defines[d] a civilization without filling it” insofar as nobody outside the core areas spoke that language at home, it is writing that counts in civilization, and Latin defined writing and wrote the rest out of the record.24 As Pliny the Elder (d. 79 C.E.) put it, Italy was “chosen by the power of the gods . . . to gather together the scattered realms and to . . . unite the discordant wild tongues of so many peoples into a common speech so they might understand each other,

24. The quotation is from MacMullen 1990: 32. On the disappearance of the languages of Italy, see Brunt 1990: 276–79; on Celtic and Celto-Iberic, MacMullen 1990: 62, 293 nn. 14, 17, and 294 n. 24; Blagg and Millett 1990: 231; Drinkwater and Vertet 1992: 25; for North African languages Millar 1968; on the eastern provinces Millar 1993 passim. See also Harris, 1989: 175–85. Our concern here is not with the survival of local languages as such (of which there is clear evidence in many places) but with literary culture; nor with the low rates of literacy outside the Roman world but with the fact that local languages were never allowed—as they were from Karnataka to Java—to enter the record of the literate.
and to give civilization (*humanitas*) to mankind, in short to become the homeland of every people in the entire world.”

It is probably prudent to hesitate before drawing too negative a conclusion from so complicated an epigraphical and literary record. Yet there is no doubt that the expansion of the borders of Latinity and the reduction of language diversity that followed were in fact viewed throughout history as closely linked with the expansion of the political borders of Latium. And this view would have consequences of its own for those who sought to imitate Rome. To many vernacular literati of the High Renaissance, for example, the historical model of cultural politics they found in Rome was one they strove to apply in the crystallizing nation-states. Thus a counselor to Louis XII wrote in the early sixteenth century, “What did the people and the Roman princes do when they ruled as monarchs over the world and sought to perpetuate their rule and make it eternal? The most sure and certain means they found was to magnify, enrich, and elevate their language, Latin . . . and afterward, to teach it to the lands and provinces and peoples they had conquered.” In fact, the author was only echoing an ancient conviction found already in Augustine, for whom Rome “imposed its language upon the subject peoples at the same time as it imposed its political yoke.” These are, to be sure, expressions of observers from thought worlds quite distant and different from those of late-Republican and imperial Rome, and they almost certainly misinterpreted as policy what may have been instead the unintentional outcomes of process. Other kinds of evidence—from Galicia, for example, with respect to Celtic religious practices over a three-hundred-year period—suggest toleration or at worst indifference. But the fact remains that the expansion of Latin was accompanied by a stunning eradication of local language, and the observation that Romanization represented “a sort of decapitation of the conquered culture” seems apposite.

The southern Asia case is as different in the domain of culture as we will see it to be in the exercise of power. Instead of being effectively proscribed, local language everywhere achieved written expression first through the mediation of Sanskrit and thereby embarked on the path that lead ultimately to Sanskrit’s supersession. To be sure, literacy in local languages would be confined to the realm of the documentary and excluded from that of the expressive for centuries. But this was only because the literary function was coterminous with the political, and the political, given the supraregional ideal that informed it, was reserved exclusively for the supraregional code of San-

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skrit. The subliterary domain in which local languages were first and most vigorously put to work across much of southern Asia—specifying the boundaries of a deed or the precise conditions of a gift and its disposition—nonetheless retained substantial cultural significance. That such use as a language of record hardly renders a code culturally inferior is shown again by the contrast with later developments in the West, where Latin did not cede its documentary primacy until the late medieval period, since it was, or was thought to be, the sole eternally invariant language. In southern Asia, on the other hand, the terms of land grants and donations were also meant to be binding “as long as the sun and moon shall last”—the formula that closes so many of these documents—yet apparently no contradiction was felt in using the languages of Place, changeable though they were thought to be, to express these terms (see further in chapter 13.1).

The linguistic symbiosis of Sanskrit and local language in India is a complex topic not easily summarized, but there was certainly a history of convergence between them, both in phonology and lexicon. This history was continuous and began when Sanskrit began, for it is visible already in the oldest stratum of the Vedic corpus. (Southeast Asia offers an important contrast here, since, as epigraphy shows, the entire flow of influence was one way; as we have seen, Sanskrit may have massively invaded Khmer, to take that example, but it remained entirely impervious to any reciprocal influence.) Perhaps a more suggestive index of Sanskrit’s relation to local styles of culture is the remarkable adaptability of the Sanskrit graphic sign itself, a “substitutability” that made it unique among the various “immense communities” of premodernity.28 Latin carried the Roman script with it wherever it went and tolerated no fundamental deviation from the metropolitan style for centuries to follow (no later development, of uncial, minuscule, or anything else, ever constituted a cognitive break). And the script was indivisible from the literature: Vergil could have written the opening words of the Aeneid, arma virumque cano, only in a single alphabet, and from then on the words would be written only in that alphabet. In southern Asia, no writing system was ever so determinative of Sanskrit (until, ironically, Devanagari attained this status just as the cosmopolitan era was waning). Whereas early Brahmi script ultimately shaped all regional alphabets in South Asia and many in Southeast Asia (Burmese, Lao, Thai, Khmer, and probably Javanese), that script tolerated modification, often profound modification, wherever it traveled. Through this process, which appears to have occurred more or less synchronously across the Sanskrit world, scripts quickly began to assert a regional individuality in accordance with local aesthetic sensibilities, so much so that by the eighth century one self-same cosmopolitan language, undeviating in

its literary incarnation, was being written in a range of alphabets almost totally distinct from each other and indecipherable without specialized study. Kālidāsa could have written the opening words of the Rāghuvaṃśa, vāgarthau īva sāmpyktau, in Javanese, Thai, or Sinhala script, in the Grantha script of Tamil country or the Śāradā script of Kashmir. Perhaps no better sign than the graphic sign itself shows how clearly one could be in the Sanskrit cosmopolis and simultaneously remain at home.

7.2 IMPERIUM ROMANUM

All the dissimilarities in cultural modalities just discussed—in language ideology, practices of literary culture, and transculturation processes—ultimately cannot be dissociated from the profound differences in the orders of political power of which Latin and Sanskrit were the expressive instruments. One of the most serious conceptual impediments to understanding the specific character of what is usually called “empire” in southern Asia results, as suggested earlier, from the fact that our ideas of premodern transregional political formations have been shaped by Western exemplars in general and by the historical construction of the Roman Empire in particular. But imperium, to the degree that we can take its measure against the very imperfect image we are able to form of the southern Asian rājya, appears to have constituted a radically incommensurate political formation. At the same time, our image of the Roman Empire, archetypal though it may be, is also far from perfect. Even specialists disagree on its character as a structure of governance—this is something that seems to lie entirely in the eye of the scholarly beholder. Thus Francophone scholars are prone (perhaps unsurprisingly) to perceive a far more standardized and bureaucratic structure than Anglo-Saxon scholars, who stress (perhaps unsurprisingly) the limited aims of the empire, such as peacekeeping and taxation—or rather, peacekeeping in the service of taxation—and find a more passive and very much undermanned form of rule.

It is undoubtedly hazardous to take sides where the experts themselves differ, but to the observer looking across from South Asia, the Roman Empire does appear to have striven for and achieved a degree of centralization and strong governance for which concrete parallels in premodern India (the ideal visions of Kautilya aside) are hard to find. Rome’s bureaucrats and mil-

29. Dani 1963 remains the only detailed survey of the development of regional scripts, though he ignores all cultural questions. On Java, see de Casparis 1975: 28 ff.; 1979. Regionalization of graphic as well as linguistic identities is considered briefly in part 2 of this book. On professional “multiscriptism” see chapter 3.3 and n. 89 there.

30. This point is well made by Woolf 2001, esp. pp. 311 ff. On the problem of historical language more generally see Ricoeur 1965: 27.

itary apparatus, spread across an immense territory, seem to have exercised control over everything from garrisons to the standardization of legal forms, currency, and weights and measures. To impose its will the Roman state employed coercion (far more than persuasion); taxation and the enumeration of its subjects for purposes of taxation (six million were counted in 48 C.E.); widespread use of uniform legal practices; and, on occasion, techniques of active Romanization, uneven but real, in cultural and political behavior, with a selective awarding of the coveted status of citizen that was designed to incorporate elites of the periphery. Equally important is the fact that there was indeed a periphery. The development of cartographic representation under conditions of imperial governance in the Roman world contrasts strongly with what we find in South Asia, where such mapping appears to have been completely nonexistent despite the presence of densely detailed and complex representations of space—a contrast hardly to be dissociated from differences in the exercise of military power. That the *imperium* also knew exactly where the outside was—knew its own spatial form, so to put it—is shown very concretely by Hadrian’s Wall in northern Britain, designed as a twelve-foot-high, ten-foot-thick, seventy-five-mile-long barrier to “separate the Romans from the barbarians.” There was a single and irreproducible center, too—no toponymic mimicry here, the sole and anomalous exception being the creation of “Renewed Rome” (*roma renovata*) with the founding of Constantinople in the fifth century.

All these features of empire—the coercion, the state apparatus, the metropole-hinterland relationship—find expression in a remarkable document from imperial Rome, “The Accomplishments of the Divine Augustus,” which was engraved on bronze pillars set before the emperor’s mausoleum sometime after his death in 14 C.E. The tablets have long since vanished, but the text is known from copies distributed to the various temples dedicated to the Divine Augustus across the empire (at Ancyra, Apollonia, Pergamon, Antioch, and very likely elsewhere). Even a brief selection points up crucial differences over against the practices of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order:

1. The achievements of the Divine Augustus by which he brought the world [lit., the circle of the lands] under the empire of the Roman people (*quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Romani subiecit*) . . . 3. I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world, and as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy. When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them . . . 26. I extended the

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32. See Nicolet 1991, especially 95, on the development of imperial Roman maps; contrast chapter 5.1.

33. Imperial control and the uniformity of instruments of governance are discussed in general in Brunt 1990 (contrast Woolf 2001: 311); Sherwin-White 1973: 200ff. deals with citizenship as reward. For Hadrian’s Wall, see De vita hadriani of Aelius Spartianus 11.1.
The Roman imperial order was not about expanding the center to the periphery—as so often occurred, however unprogrammatically, in the symbolic political practices of southern Asia—but about incorporating the periphery into the single Roman center. If some Romans (the Stoics) may have thought of themselves as kosmou politai, citizens of the world (though the phrase is Greek and was never translated into Latin), this seems partly owing to the Romans’ ability to transform the kosmos into their polis, or rather—as the poet Ovid put it on the eve of Augustus’s eastern campaign—to transform the (ingens) orbis into their urbs, the vast world into their own city. Pulakeśin II, we recall, ruled the “whole earth as if it were one city,” expanding the city to the world, as it were, rather than the reverse, while the very concept of “subjecting the world to the power” of one people is nowhere at any time attested in the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Indeed, the very idea of ethnicized power—the populus romanus of whom Augustus was the “leading citizen”—and its construction as a unitary political subject is entirely absent from the southern Asia cosmopolitan order. The kind of sentiments used to describe this subject—typical is Cornelius Nepos’s Life of Hannibal (c. 50 B.C.E.): “No one doubts that the Roman people (populus) are superior in virtue to all peoples (gentes) . . . that they take precedence over all peoples (nationes) in courage”—are equally foreign, having never been enunciated in reference to any political collectivity in premodern South Asia.34

Absent from cosmopolitan southern Asia is the kind of sentiment Augustus expressed in declaring, “When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them” (para. 3) — words written, as one scholar put it, to make known to foreign peoples Rome’s “powers of collective life and death.” Absent, too, is its complement, the political demonology attached to peoples who could not easily be incorporated, such as the Parthians, Rome’s eastern enemies. Contrast for a moment the very different practices in these two universalist orders at the point where they nearly met in western Asia in the early centuries of the millennium. Here Rome sought to contain if not destroy the region’s inhabitants—the *parthos ferocius*, the murderous Parthians, as Horace referred to them—while at exactly the same time groups akin (if distantly) to the Parthians, the Sakas as well as the Kušāṇas, were migrating into the southern Asian subcontinent to a far different destiny. The Sakas contributed to the creation of the great cosmopolitan cultural order by producing the first royal public inscriptions that made use of the Sanskrit language and, according to some scholars, by stimulating the invention of new genres of Sanskrit literature (chapter 2.1); the Kušāṇas patronized new and highly influential forms of Sanskrit Buddhist culture, especially a Sanskrit Buddhist literature—the great poet Aśvaghoṣa was very likely associated with the court of Kaniṣka in the mid-second century—and established a remarkable transregional political order that would link South and central Asia.

The practices of empire in the two worlds were as different as their principles. No imperial formation arising in the Sanskrit cosmopolis ever stationed troops to rule over conquered territories. No populations were ever enumerated. No uniform code of law was ever enforced anywhere across caste groupings, let alone everywhere in an imperial polity. No evidence indicates that transculturation was ever the route to imperial advancement in the bureaucracy or military. Even more dramatic differences are to be seen in the domain of political theology. Evidence for the providential character of the Roman state—the belief that it was universal and willed by the gods—is abundant in Latin literature and is a constituent of Roman thinking from the end of the third century B.C.E. on. That no full political theology may ever have been elaborated does not mean that the sentiments of poets and thinkers were merely court flattery. When Cicero later wrote that it was “by the will of the gods that we have overcome all peoples and nations,” he was expressing

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37. See Hardie 1997: 46–56, who calls attention to the long afterlife of the images created here.
38. The demonology I have described for late medieval India (Pollock 1993b) seems to have few if any explicit predecessors in the cosmopolitan era.
an idea long and widely resonant in the minds of Romans—there is no reason not to take him at his word.\textsuperscript{39}

The providential nature of the empire was not just a heavenly mandate; it was actually embodied in the notion that the emperor was divine. The temples throughout the empire in which copies of Augustus’s \textit{Res gestae} were placed were dedicated to his worship, and cities competed keenly for the honor to build them. Historians who address the important if vexed question of the cult of the emperor typically speak of a Roman strategy of deploying the emperor’s divinity and the imperial cult—the subject of annual celebration “in every city and province and army camp of the empire”—for the purposes of legitimation of the political order and the consolidation and pacification of the populace.\textsuperscript{40} Whether or not such notions as strategic deployment and political legitimation are entirely apposite and not anachronistic even in the Roman context may be questioned; for southern Asia it is doubtful that such practices can be said to have ever occurred or that the very concepts are even relevant (chapter 13.3).

Indeed, once we learn to look free from the prejudgments derived from Roman and later European experience that tend to obscure our vision, there is no cogent evidence that any remotely comparable instrumentality was attached to the numinous status of the overlord in Sanskrit cosmopolities. Here is perhaps the most surprising difference from Rome, given the lingering Orientalist presuppositions of premodern Indians as priest-ridden and religion-besotted. To be sure, kings in India were constructed as “consubstantial god-men,” as I once called them, but the logic and political effects of this construction were, I suggest, entirely different from what was found at Rome. In his inscriptions Samudragupta may be said to be “equal” to the divine guardians of the four directions (no mere rhetoric here, since it was old doctrine that the king in his very being was an amalgam of “shares” of these lordly powers). He may be equated with Puruṣa, the Primal Being (like other kings, as we have seen in chapter 3.2). His very status as a man may be discounted: “He is a human being only insofar as he performs the rites and conventions of the world—he is [in fact] a god whose residence is this world.” However, the king seems to equal the Primal Being only in his practical functioning—“because of the prosperity of the good and the destruction of the bad” that he brings about—not because of his religious centrality. Indeed, he himself is a worshipper, the “supreme devotee of Bhagavān [Viṣṇu].”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} For evidence on the providential state and its interpretation see Momigliano 1987: 144; Brunt 1978: 162, 165 addresses the universality and divine order of the empire (perhaps forgetting the Achaemenid ancestry of the ideas, see Pollock 2005a).

\textsuperscript{40} On the imperial cult see Sherwin-White 1973: 402–8; the quote is from Woolf 2001: 321. See also Lendon 1997: 168–72.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{ClI} 3: 228 and 203 ff. especially 24. The king as god-man in the Indian epic is discussed in Pollock 1991: 15–54. Something of the bivalence in attitude here is captured by Somade-
Whatever the complexities of such political-theological positions and views, three points can be made with reasonable certainty: First, if the Indian king was widely, perhaps invariably, viewed as a god-man, and if his icon might be displayed in temples—like the icons of the Pallavas in the Vaikuntha-perumal temple in seventh-century Kāñcipuram—he was never the center of a royal cult and never the object of religious worship. Second, the supreme deity was irrelevant as a source of royal authority. A talismanic presence or apotropaic force? Yes, without doubt—from Viṣṇu in the fourth-century world of the Guptas (whose seal was marked with Garuḍa, the eagle of Viṣṇu) to Virūpākṣa in sixteenth-century Vijayanagara. But a granter of heavenly mandate, a justifier of rule, a transcendent real-estate agent awarding parcels of land? Never, not for Samudragupta nor for anyone in South Asia who followed after. Last, and concomitantly, the king’s transcendent god was never the god of a political ethnie. Many royal cities in India indeed had their divine myths of foundation (as late as Vijayanagara, 1340), and virtually every dynasty claimed divine origin. But no one, ruler or people, ever claimed anywhere at any time that God had chosen them or given them a land or provided them with guidance or enabled them to conquer other peoples and lands.

We approach the core of this large contrast between the two cosmopolitan formations when comparing their two “foundational fictions,” whose opening words have been quoted earlier and which offer the most concentrated expressions of their respective thought worlds. At the beginning of the Aeneid, Vergil “sings of arms and the man,” the flight from Troy to Italy, the origins of the Latin people (genus latinum), the high walls of Rome, and imperium sine fine, power without limit. In his Rāghuvaṃśa, Kālidāsa bows down to the mother and father of the universe, who are “fused together like a word and its meaning,” in order that he might more deeply understand word and meaning when he tells the story of a universalistic political power—diganta rāja, power as far as the horizons—and the dynasty of the mythopoetic Rāghus. Two visions of “cosmo-politan” order are offered here, and they differ profoundly.

First, consider the character of the polis each one projects: The one is comprised of a particular people whose historical origins are of fundamental concern to the narrative of the poem and who are clearly placed in time and

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vasūrī in his treatise of political theory, the Nātivākyāṃṭa (tenth century, Karnataka): “The king is a supreme divine power (paramā daivatam), he bows to no one—except to his gurus (guru-janebhyaḥ, i.e., parents and teachers)” (5.70; see also chapter 10 n. 87).

42. Or at least not until the seventeenth-century, if we accept the recent analysis of Nāyaka kingship in Narayana Rao et al. 1992. The statements holds true even for the devarāja cult instituted by Jayavarman II of the Khmers in the early ninth century; see Mabbett and Chandler 1995: 90 and Jacques 1994: 8.
space. The other is centered not on a particular people but on a lineage of
mythic status (the sūryavamśa or solar dynasty) so inclusive that half the kings
of India could, and did, claim descent from it, while the place (Ayodhya), if
a real piece of land in eastern Uttar Pradesh, could just as easily be conceived
of as located in central Thailand (Ayutthaya, whose kings traced their lineage,
att least nominally, to the solar kings, especially Rāma). Second, observe
how different are the frames of reference for the cosmos as it is meaningful
for human life: In the one case, it is the city of Rome expanded to embrace
the whole world—again as Ovid put it: “The land of other nations has a fixed
boundary, but the space of the city of Rome is the space of the world”—com-
plete with its high walls of the sort Hadrian and other emperors were later
to replicate elsewhere in the empire. And the expansion of the frame hap-
pened by the will of God: indeed, the divine proclamation was later made
openly in the Aeneid (“I have granted empire without end,” declares Jupiter)
and to a fully ethnicized political community (“Romans, masters of the world,
the people of the toga”). In the other, the frame is instead “all that moves
with life” (jagat), where the father and mother of the universe choose no
one people for rule over others, and where, in historical fact, no ruler ever
proclaimed his identity in ethnic terms. Last, note how markedly different
are the conceptions of the relationship between culture and power in the
cosmopolis. In the one case, literature works as a verbal instrument for cel-
brating power: the Aeneid is clearly mapped against the imperial present
and the text is virtually addressed to Augustus. In the other, literature is a
celebration of the power of the verbal instrument itself; accordingly, the his-
torical present of the imperial Guptas shows through the veil of allegory only
on the rarest of occasions.\footnote{See Aeneid 1.1 ff., 279, 282; Raghuva-
śa 1.1; Ovid Fasti 2.684.}

This brief exercise in comparative cosmopolitanism is intended to point
up how variable are the ways in which culture and power have related to
each other—through language, literary practices, transculturation, political
order—in the empire forms of premodernity. There has been, it would seem,
not just one cosmopolitanism in history but several, and this fact will be of
considerable importance when we ask (as we do later in this book) about
the uses of such historical comparativism for future cultural and political prac-
tices. Furthermore, many of these same distinctions are visible in the regional
worlds that superseded the cosmopolitan formations, and having identified
them will help us make better sense of the very different paths these worlds
followed in the course of the vernacular millennium.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Europe Vernacularized

11.1 Literacy and Literature

To an outside observer, the vernacularization of Europe as a literary-cultural process in itself and, even more so, in relation to political processes appears to be one of the great understudied topics of Western history. The editor of a recent edition of the *Oxford History of Medieval Europe*, while observing that a major factor in “the new diversity” that marked the late Middle Ages was “the exploitation of a variety of languages in important writings,” confesses himself at a loss to explain the development itself; the origins of the vernacular turn are for him as “mysterious” as its results are “obvious and spectacular.” A historian of communication in the medieval world complains that the whole question of the relationship between oral culture and literate vernacular literature needs rethinking; while a new edition of the standard work on the transition to written culture in late-medieval England records the same puzzle in a different formulation: “[So] much remains speculative about the beginnings of writing down vernacular languages in Europe. The hardest question to answer precisely is why a growing number of patrons and writers in the twelfth century ceased to be satisfied with Latin as the medium of writing and experimented with ‘Romance’ and ‘French’ instead.”¹

That the problem should seem so mysterious and the answers so speculative must stem in some measure from the fact that European vernacularization has apparently never been studied synthetically, as a unified problem meriting comparative historical analysis in its own right, let alone as a question with social or political ramifications of potential importance for social

theory. Nor is it surprising, given our ignorance about the major issues, that a number of minor but consequential ones remain obscure as well—not least, who did what and when they did it. We are left to follow our party affiliations, so to speak, when trying to adjudicate among the different social-historical analyses. Antonio Gramsci, one of the few writers to have thought clearly and carefully about vernacularization as a cultural-political problematic, offers one strong formulation from the perspective of progressive pre–World War II internationalism. Vernacularization, he believes, came from the “national-popular” below: the vernaculars were raised up “against Latinizing ‘mandarinism’” and came to be written down “when the people regain[ed] importance.” This position should by no means be taken to represent a political man’s lack of scholarship, for it is close to the view of the greatest comparative Romance scholar of the period, Erich Auerbach, for whom the manifestation of vernacular literature marks a “liberation from clerical Latin culture” and a popular if not populist impulse. E. R. Curtius, by contrast, representative of a conservative intelligentsia searching for a usable European past amidst the rubble of World War II, is convinced that vernacularization derived from re-Latinized elites above: “Without this Latin background, the vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages are incomprehensible.” For value-neutral centrists of the present, who subscribe to a kind of cultural naturalism (chapter 13.1), agency disappears altogether: people do not actively choose to create literary script vernaculars under dynamically changing political conditions; instead, these just “emerge.”

So large and intricate a subject as the history of European vernacularization, especially when framed as a problematic—the conjuncture of specific forms of culture and power—that is itself insufficiently synthesized in specialist scholarship, requires a book of its own and knowledge far deeper than an Indianist could possibly possess. All that can reasonably be done here is to sketch some basic features—as least those that appear basic to a non-specialist—that may have some bearing on the issues of South Asian vernacularization. These features include, first, the problem of literary beginnings and the role of a superposed literary formation, in this case Latin, in the creation of vernacular cultures (comprising the nature and place of literacy, the elaboration of demotic language, the definitions of literature, and the pro-

2. For western Europe, a range of works chart the cosmopolitan-vernacular dialectic in literature (e.g., Jones-Davies 1991) and in scientific discourse (e.g., Chartier and Corsi 1996). But I find none that investigates the culture-power problematic over time, across polities, and in depth.

duction of philological appurtenances appropriate to literary culture, such as lexicons and grammars); second, the anxiety of creating new vernacular literary cultures; and third, the relationship, if any, between these cultural developments and the institutions of political power of the late medieval world in which they occurred. We can best proceed by examining a few exemplary cases that have benefited from the attention of recent scholarship.

As in South Asia, the nature, control, and dissemination of literacy crucially affected the creation of vernacular European literary cultures; and, as in South Asia, literacy in western Europe had a specific history, inflected by factors peculiar to that world. We noticed earlier how Roman imperial practices led to the near-total elimination of regional languages (Celtic, Punic, and so on) from the inscriptive record of North Africa and western Europe (chapter 7.1); as a result, from around the beginning of the Common Era literacy as such in the western Mediterranean always meant Latin literacy. The very term litterae signified not just letters but Latin letters, in the same way that grammatica meant the grammar of written Latin, indeed, the Latin language itself, for vernacular intellectuals as late as Dante. Accordingly, in the very episteme inherited from the cosmopolitan literary culture of antiquity, “vernacular letters (or literacy, or literization),” to say nothing of “vernacular grammar” or “vernacular literature,” constituted a virtual contradiction in terms—until it was remembered, by vernacularizing writers like Joachim Du Bellay in the sixteenth century, that Latin itself had once been a vernacular (section 2 below).

The place of literacy in the medieval world is a topic of extensive, sophisticated ongoing research that is challenging long-held opinions about how widespread was the cultural darkness of the post-imperium “Dark Ages.” There remains little doubt, however, that the critical and distinctive determinant in the history of medieval literacy lies in the Church’s control of literary culture for most of the first millennium after the fall of Rome and into the thirteenth century. This means that, in addition to such obvious if complicated technical problems as adapting the Latin alphabet to non-Latinate phonologies, there are substantial ideological issues that impinge on our understanding of the history of vernacular literacy. Decisions as to what might or might not be committed to writing, for example, were made within the shadow of the Church and its religious values. The limits of what was thought to be worthy of inscription and diffusion—in the useful terminology of one scholar, what was literaturfähig, or capable of literary existence—were very narrow even through the Carolingian period. Moreover, in the self-understanding of the clergy, the production and reproduction of texts were a form of monastic, even ascetic, practice, and writing as such was intimately bound up with religious education and custom, all of which tended to favor the copying of religious materials in Latin. Add to this a certain Christian unease in taking pleasure in “literature”—basically, any non-Christian textuality—perceptible
already in the works of the early Church fathers and still consequential at the end of the millennium. Thus, despite some evidence of interest at Charlemagne’s court in the literization of Germanic heroic narratives, vernacular poetry was largely ignored if not repudiated. As the cleric Alcuin famously put it (albeit while addressing what should be read and heard in a monastery), “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” Besides these ideological matters concerning the norms and practices of the Church, other, material factors also played a role in constraining vernacular literary production. One was the simple cost of parchment. The paper revolution in Europe, by way of Muslim Spain, would begin only in the twelfth or thirteenth century. (In India, by contrast, palm leaf and birch bark were everywhere and continuously available and were often preferred even after paper became common in the later medieval period.)

Two closely related problems for vernacularization follow from this state of affairs: one pertains to the authorization of the vernacular for the creation of literature and the degree of its self-confidence, so to speak, given the added weight of the Latin tradition; the other pertains to the transition from oral to written culture. The former comes to expression itself in the complex anxieties of vernacular intellectuals that are examined in section 2. The latter merits consideration first, since it is not only fundamental but especially thorny, given that the breakthrough to vernacular literacy occurred in a world where the vernacular was by definition oral and the written by definition Latin.

As was true in the sphere of Sanskrit culture, vernacular writing systems in Europe were by and large adaptations from the cosmopolitan (Latin in the West, Greek in the influence zone of Byzantium). Here, however, their development was largely dependent on clerics and their churchly projects, while in the Sanskrit cosmopolis the first instances of vernacular literization were documents of political transactions, durable deeds, records of endowments. The dates of vernacular inscription vary widely across western Europe, and the circumstances under which it occurred are just as variable. Britain experienced several moments: an initial vernacular literacy was erased by Danish invasions at the end of the eighth century, to be resuscitated, or reinvented, by King Alfred in the ninth. Iceland in some ways presents a model instance of the entire process in telescoped fashion: vernacular literary culture was absent until the twelfth century when missionaries developed a local writing system, and within two centuries a notable and relatively large body of literature and philology (especially phonology) had been created. In Romance Europe

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4. On medieval literacy, see McKitterick 1990, Doane and Pasternack 1991; on litteratus Grundmann 1958 and Irvine 1994: 2 ff. The religious and material constraints on medieval literary culture are discussed in Schieffer 1985 (who uses the term literaturfähig for what was thought to be worthy of committing to writing and of diffusion, p. 72). Alcuin is cited in Irvine 1994: 332 (Ingeld is a hero of Germanic legend).
we can point to specific moments of breakthrough for the documentary vernacular and the literary vernacular, such as in Castile, where we know with uncommon precision that the first occurred in 1206, the second in 1207 (see section 3). What is becoming increasingly clear from recent research on primeval moments of vernacularization is that new literary cultures were created by intentional acts of writing; the image of a gradual, almost accidental textualization of poetry composed orally by poets utterly unfamiliar with literate—that is, cosmopolitan—culture seems to be largely an illusion.

New studies suggest that a range of inaugural works of vernacular European literature were produced from within a literate world but one still bearing the memory of orality. The popular view of Cædmon (fl. 680) as the very model of the Anglo-Saxon oral singer—an illiterate cowherd filled with a divine afflatus, pouring forth his full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art—is far from likely to have been the case. In fact, one scholar has persuasively characterized him as an “exemplum of grammatical culture.” The world of written textuality is constitutive not only of the account of Cædmon’s literary invention in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 731–32) but of Cædmon’s primal poem itself, which constructs a “written image of orality.” Cædmon exercises his divine gift by listening to holy writ as it is read out to him and then transforming this into verse—which in turn, according to Bede, was “so delightful to hear, that even his teachers wrote down the words from his lips and learnt them.” Moreover, the verse he composed essentially belongs to the genre of interpretive glosses on scriptural texts. Whereas such glosses may have a formulaic quality to them, and Cædmon himself may have been unable to read, his poetry was not an entirely preliterate oral composition; on the contrary, it is unthinkable in the absence of a literate literary culture. Similar arguments have been adduced to prove that *Beowulf* represents a series of oral songs subjected to literization and redaction within a monastic (specifically, an aristocratic monastic) environment. The texts of the *chansons de geste* as well—and here a century-long dispute seems to have finally been resolved—far from being the consequence of a gradual literization of folk culture, represent primary literate products on the part of court literati of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Like the prologue of Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* (chapter 2.1), these works have been seen as “staging” an oral communicative situation with a comparable, almost wistful retrospection; the character of orality in the texts themselves is artificial (except insofar as it mimics the oral practices that really did once exist, and often continued to exist).5 Everywhere, and quite predictably, the new literary vernacular felt compelled by a common if unacknowledged law of technological preservation to present itself as a continuation of the ar-

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chaic oral—the way in India rock-cut cave temples preserved the now-non-functional pillars of their wooden predecessors and the first books printed in the nineteenth century preserved the shape, including representations of the string-holes, of their palm-leaf antecedents.

One should not of course draw too sharp a line between orality and literacy in Europe any more than in South Asia. Long after the transition to vernacular literacy, oral performance features continued to inform the textualization of early French literature. The case of the Occitan lyrics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is particularly complex, reflecting the dynamism of the moment when orality was being subsumed under a new culture of vernacular literacy. No one any longer seriously doubts that the troubadour poets were literati in the old sense: they knew Latin and some had read the works of Ovid and other classical poets, whom they actually cited on occasion and who in general formed an important frame of reference for their lyrics. At first they appear to have composed in a semi-oral mode—without inscription perhaps (at least no manuscripts from the twelfth century are extant) yet in a complex, nonextemporaneous way uncharacteristic of primary orality. Entire poems in fixed form may have been mentally fashioned for later inscription (perhaps in the manner reported for the twentieth-century Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, or for the Telugu poet Śrīnāṭhūḍu, chapter 8.2), while taking on something of a life of their own when diffused in oral performance by the **jongleurs**, thus generating the kind of textual variation that has been called **mouvance**. Within a couple of generations, however, the troubadours were committing their works to writing; by the thirteenth century a powerful compulsion to fix Occitan poetry in written form showed itself everywhere, and an identical process seems to have been activated wherever troubadour poetry spread, in northern France, Germany, Italy, and Iberia. Thus literacy—in a rather different form from what we find in Cædmon and others, but literacy nonetheless—provided a basic condition of possibility for Occitan cultural production from the start; indeed, in an obvious way, it marked the start.6

If literacy accompanied Christianity wherever it went (as earlier it had accompanied Romanization), the cultural and cognitive obstacles to the transition to a specifically vernacular literacy were still substantial. In part these derived, as just noted, from the clergy’s control of literacy and from the

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6. Bond 1995: 239 notes that “the significance of the conjunction in time, space, and social class of the spread of literacy and the appearance of the troubadour lyric has barely been raised with regard to the question of origins”; a question that pertains not only to the sudden rise but also to the sudden preservation of the poetry. See Paden 1995 and 1983: 87 ff., and Ferrante 1982 especially on troubadour learning and grammar as discipline; Zumthor 1987 on **mouvance** and oral elements embedded in the early French and Occitan literary texts. For Mandelstam’s oral composition see Mandelstam 1970: 269; 184 ff.
Church’s definition of what materials were appropriate for literization, but
they also derived in part from the continuing domination of Latin models
of cultural superiority, whereby to write literature meant to write Latin. Thus
the speciation of Romance itself was retarded for a number of specific rea-
sons (that of the various Romance languages was even later). One of these
was the difficulty of establishing vernacular orthographies in a world where
orthographical exactitude on a phonographic-alphabetic principle had
come to be invested with both religious and political significance (a valua-
tion that was to be intensified by the Reformation). Alcuin spoke to the lat-
ter concern from a location at the center of Charlemagne’s court when he
declared, “All uses of the written word in the king’s realm must display or
preserve the king’s dignity, and only correct [i.e., classicizing] Latinity is wor-
thy of texts produced in the king’s realm.” Another impediment was the nat-
ural habit—and recent scholarship suggests strongly that it was a habit—of
reading Latin texts aloud, especially during the sermon, in a vernacular
way, until the Carolingian language reforms of the ninth century required read-
ing literatim, “letter by letter” (this reform applied in France, at least; in Italy
a vernacularized pronunciation of Latin was to persist for some four more
centuries). For these reasons, literized literatures did not appear in any den-
sity until the twelfth century; the few texts from before that period were iso-
lated experiments that never engendered a continuing vernacular literary
practice. Though some early materials doubtlessly disappeared, Europeanists
have come to realize that loss is an altogether insufficient explanation for
what one scholar has characterized as the “meager corpus of vernacular lit-
erature in the continental West before c. 1100.”

The disparity in the pace of vernacularization for the Romance and Ger-
manic (the Latin-near and Latin-distant) languages is one familiar in South
Asia, as noted earlier, where Indo-Aryan and Dravidian (the Sanskrit-near
and Sanskrit-distant) show a similar difference. In fact, the time frames here
are remarkably close. Whereas the production of literature in Gujarati and
Madhyadeshiya began in the twelfth and the fifteenth century respectively,
precisely like French and Spanish, Tamil and Kannada had developed fully
outfitted vernacular literary cultures by the end of the ninth century, as was
the case in Ireland and England. This is not to claim that the linguistic
grounds for these historical developments were the same in both cases. (If

217 ff. charts some later developments and comments on the tension in the Reformation be-
tween orthographic reformers, who sought to make God’s Word transparent to the simple Chris-
tian, and conservative philologists, who sought to preserve etymology. The hypothesis of writ-
ing Latin and reading it aloud as vernacular is discussed in chapter 10.1.

some of the arguments mentioned in chapter 10.1 are accurate, written Germanic had to have a new form whereas Romance could long be written as Latin; whether such a situation might have obtained in South Asia is unclear.) But there are a range of remarkable homologies in the developments in these two worlds. Let us first look at Britain, where vernacularization had major consequences beyond its own narrow domain.

Tentative written vernacular gestures had been made in England prior to the ninth century, but these were modest and, as noted, were for the most part obliterated during the Danish invasions. The end of the ninth century, however, witnessed a moment of dramatic inauguration in the history of vernacularization, both in terms of the quality of intentionality and quantity of production, and by reason of the fact that English texts then written entered into a secure tradition of reproduction that would last at least into the twelfth century. The vernacular was made the object of discursive enhancement through an intensive, state-directed program of translation under King Alfred (r. 871–99) that included English versions of both ecclesiastical texts (such as Augustine’s *Soliloquies* and other works of the Church fathers) and philosophical texts (such as Boethius’s *Consolation*). Although vernacularization was obviously meant to serve primarily spiritual ends, the first major textualizations of poetry were also produced at this time, including *Beowulf* (1000), while several landmark historical and juridical texts were also composed. The authorization and magnification of the vernacular effected by the translation program were complemented in the tenth century by the beginnings of a philological tradition, including Ælfric’s English preface and glosses on his Latin *Grammatica* (995), which invented a new English metalinguage for linguistic description, and a range of other glossarial and encyclopedic works.9

The justification for such vernacularization that Alfred offered (in the celebrated “Preface” to his translation c. 880 of Pope Gregory’s seventh-century *Pastoral Care*) was the erosion of competence in Latin. Yet this argument seems to stand in tension, if not in contradiction, with the nature of the new vernacular literary culture itself, which was wholly modeled on Latin and only possible through the efforts of bilingual intellectuals mediating the textualization of English through Latin. The resultant texts themselves presuppose, according to one recent study, a “larger network of Latin texts and textuality for their very articulation and intelligibility.” It was the “authority and cultural purpose of both insular and continental *grammatica*” that Alfred appropriated “for a new, distinctively English grammatical culture.”10

More particularly, it was on the cultural and political model of Latinity available in Carolingian Europe (which was originally advanced by Anglo-Saxons anyway) that English vernacularization was promoted, and for political purposes that Alfred well understood. As shown by the predominance of translation over other kinds of literary production, Latin was viewed as the source of the new culture, but not by that fact its superior. Alfred’s explicit argument that Latin itself had once been a vehicle for translation (from Greek) was intended to assert the newly empowered vernacular’s equality with the cosmopolitan code. In addition to the literarization of the vernacular, Alfred projected both a new sociotextual community in the very act of translating Latin religious texts “into that language we can all understand,” as the “Preface” puts it, and also a new territorial sphere in which this language has communicative efficacy: Angelcynn—not just England but also, importantly, the English—where the Humber and the Thames no longer marked other kingdoms, was now endowed with a new unity of place, language, and people.\(^{11}\) No better illustration of the basic processes of the vernacularization dynamic is available than ninth- and tenth-century England—except perhaps for ninth- and tenth-century Karnataka. Through the initiative of court elites, the styles, genres, literariness, language discipline, and other “textual values” of a superposed cultural formation were appropriated and domesticated for the production of literary and political texts without precedent. These texts then entered into a tradition of reproduction, and by their very circulation and geocultural idiom increasingly came to articulate a new vernacular world.

The literarization of the vernacular languages on the Continent presents us with another situation strikingly comparable to that of southern Asia. Here, too, in many instances we can observe a significant time lag—testifying to actual impediments to or even hesitations about vernacular literariness—between the moment of the vernacular’s initial speciation in the documentary practices of the political elites and the moment when it was employed for creating a vernacular literature meant to rival the superposed Latin. Nothing illustrates this quite so well as the history of what we now call French.

It is almost common knowledge that the first documentary use of Romance was in the Oaths of Strasbourg (in connection with a dispute among the sons of Charlemagne over Lotharingia, today’s Alsace-Lorraine), which were drawn up in 842 and recorded at a later date in Nithard’s Latin history. What is not often recognized, however, is that this originary moment

\(^{11}\) On Alfred’s translation program see especially Irvine 1994: 421; he also notes how through the redeployment of the phrase *utraque lingua,* “both [written] languages,” originally applied to Latin and Greek, English was permitted to attain the authorized and even canonical status of Latin (417). Davis 1998: 614–20 calls attention to the new territorialization of ninth-century literary culture.
was followed by two and a half centuries of almost complete silence for the vernacular literary voice—just as happened with Marathi and a number of other South Asian languages of Place. As one literary historian has sensibly concluded, the mere existence of la langue romane was not sufficient cause for it to become a language of culture (that is, a language of literature), and “nothing ensured that it would then become such a language; or more exactly, nothing ensured that it would ever be committed to writing.”

The failure to achieve literization is a very real historical possibility: in South Asia, as we have seen, it occurred with Tulu, for example, and Konkani.

The observations just cited stand in conflict with the widespread belief, applied to French no less than to other literary cultures, in an infinitely receding temporal horizon of vernacular literature. This is grounded on various presuppositions, usually unexamined, such as the unreality of beginnings, the essential coextensiveness of language and literature, and the presumption that earlier and less successful prototypes must have paved the way for the high artistry of supposedly inaugural masterpieces. Consider the following formulation on beginnings in a recent French literary history: “Although debates about the origins of French literature are often confined to the few hagiographic texts that were actually copied before the Crusade . . . in a very real sense there were no discrete origins, since it appears that the oral literature of France came into being along with the French language as it developed out of popular Latin.”

The first assumption here, that something oral is to be considered “literature” without further specification, is as misleading as the second, that when this “oral literature” existed there also existed what could be called “French literature,” “the French language,” and indeed “France.” To challenge such assertions is not to raise a mere nominalist quibble. We cannot grasp the history of vernacularization at all if we fail to grasp the roles of, on the one hand, the breakthrough to literacy and, on the other, the production of expressive textuality according to the norms of the superposed literary culture. There are similar conceptual problems in hypostatizing “French literature” even though it was discursively created only centuries later, in representing “French” as preexistent to textualization rather than produced through it, and in ascribing to it boundaries any less factitious and constructed than those of the nation-state.

If we hold that a literature is forever copresent with a language (“the oral literature of France...
came into being along with the French language”), we cannot even raise questions about the choice of “French” as a vehicle of literature instead of Latin or any other idiom, or about the nature of this “literature,” let alone more pointed questions about the specific sociocultural factors that restricted early textualizations to hagiographies or that fueled the sudden proliferation of textualizations of oral songs after the First Crusade.

What did alter the situation, enabling la langue romane, or Old French, not merely to exist but to become a language of culture, was the conquering Normans’ encounter with the literary culture of England, the body of deeply rooted Old English as well as Anglo-Latin poetry whose genesis we have already described. It was through the emulation of that culture that “French literature”—expressive texts in a code understood to be different from other codes and given a new name in acknowledgment of that fact—began its life. And it indeed began, suddenly emerging, as David Howlett puts it in his recent study, “fully formed, mature, brilliant, with hardly a trace of false starts or hesitations or earlier experiments.” All the earliest extant texts in every genre of Old French literature, literate in every sense and many of them based on Old English models, were Insular productions, created in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England—and these were the first. “It is difficult to believe,” Howlett argues, confronting head-on the skepticism over vernacular beginnings, “that in the cultural centre of Western Europe...a Continental Old French literature once existed but disappeared with hardly a trace among extant manuscripts, with hardly a reference to the fact that it ever existed, and yet an extensive and varied Franco-Latin literature from the same time and place survived.” A far more reasonable assumption is that no such corpus did exist, that it was only in the twelfth century that the French vernacular was transformed, with astonishing abruptness, into a language of political record and courtly literature. Howlett deserves a full hearing:

The Francophones were drawn into a remarkable Insular culture which confronted them for the first time with the idea and the fact of an extensive and glorious vernacular literature... Many desired roots in the English past as well as a place in the Francophone present. It was only the encounters of Francophones with Insular literary traditions in both Latin and English that allowed the emergence of a mature literature in French, fully formed at its very beginnings...a sudden issue of imaginative cultural engineering.15

Such imaginative cultural engineering, once we acknowledge its possibility, can be found in evidence repeatedly—from the invention of Latin literature

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in Republican Rome around 240 B.C.E. (chapter 7.1) to the invention of Gwaliyari literature in Tomar Bundelkhand in 1435 (chapter 10.1)

Also part of a wider pattern is the political sociology of French vernacularization. Courtiers and clerics at the court of King Henry I were central to the process, and it was the coming into being of this newly literate aristocratic lay public that provided the context for the subsequent creation of literature in French on the Continent. There, in the north, the warrior aristocracy patronized the written chansons de geste from around 1100 (when one poet, perhaps named Turold, composed the literate Chanson de Roland). Almost simultaneously in the south, the same class underwrote the creation of a courtly culture that defined itself by a new aesthetic and a linguistically unified—or at least supradialectal—Occitan and produced a new literature with the lyrics of Guillem de Peiteus (1071–1127) and his followers. This, too, is something most scholars now regard as an abrupt invention (which seems to some to have arisen “as if from nothing”); Dante thought so too, two centuries later, as indeed did the troubadours themselves; at least they evince no literary memory of poets before Guillem. Assessments of this Occitan poetry in recent scholarship suggest that it was an unqualified expression of the kind of cosmopolitan-vernacular impulse we have seen across southern Asia: it strove to combine a “lyric drive” that was oral, vernacular, secular, and courtly with a “poetic drive,” or better, a literary drive, that had hitherto been literate, Latin, sacred, and church-schoolish.\(^{16}\) An epistemological as well as political context of the sort we have also seen before conditioned the philologization of French, a vast problem we can only glance at (and briefly return to in chapter 11.3). The first systematic grammaticizations of French, which date to the mid-fourteenth century and were produced at the court of Anglo-Norman England, include John Barton’s Donat français (before 1409). This work was modeled on the Latin grammar of the fourth-century scholar Donatus, which influenced the conceptualization of vernacular language systems even where (as in morphology) the Latin paradigm was entirely incompatible\(^ {17}\)—precisely as Sanskrit philology offered a grammatical model and terminology that were adopted even where the local materials, such as Kannada phonology or Marathi morphology, had to be shoehorned in.

Visible across the world of vernacularization was yet another important factor noticed at various points in South Asian history: literary-cultural, and perhaps even peer-polity, emulation. In south India, Telugu poets of the

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\(^{16}\) On the origins of the Provençal lyric, see Bond 1995, especially p. 250. Wolff 1982: 99 remarks on the elimination of dialectal particularities in the troubadour poetry; compare the unification of early literary Kannada by the eleventh century (chapter 9.2, 4) and Gujarati by the fourteenth (chapter 10.2).

\(^{17}\) Lusignan 1986: 95, 111 ff. (pp. 113–14 on the morphological retrofitting).
eleventh century were likely responding to the model of Kannada poets of the tenth, just as Kannada, Sinhala, and Tamil philologists produced vernacular versions of Daśādīn’s Sanskrit Mirror of Literature and Sarvavarman’s Sanskrit Brief System of grammar, with a widely shared sense that this was what everyone should be doing. Similarly, the production of Assamese, Bangla, and Oriya adaptations from the Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa in northern India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has about it a distinct air of imitation and competition. In Britain, it was the presence of a powerful model in English writing, both expressive as well as documentary, that suggested to the Normans the possibility of creating something comparable in their own vernacular; this new model of a literature in French led in turn to the invention of expressive textuality elsewhere on the Continent.

Emulation of neighbor literary cultures as well as sharp beginnings are visible in other instances of vernacularization in western Europe. Especially pertinent in this connection are the arguments concerning the creation of the Poema de mio Cid offered by the late Colin Smith. He takes issue with both the traditionalists and the oralists, as he calls them, the former supposing a long period of literary development—of which, however, we have no record whatever—and the latter believing that the early Spanish epic was oral and the surviving manuscripts are records of actual improvised (or memorized) performances. For the traditionalists authorship seems to be infinitely deferred, whereas for the oralists it is an unintelligible category; neither suffices to explain the appearance of a work like the Poema de mio Cid. For Smith, there is little to sustain belief in the existence of a “fully vernacular epic” in Spain before the appearance of the Cid sometime in the first decade of the thirteenth century (just as there is little that invites such an assumption for France before about 1100, the time of the Oxford manuscript of the Chanson de Roland). The Cid was “the first epic to be composed in Castilian” and “did not depend on any precedent or existing tradition of epic verse in Castilian or other Peninsular language or dialect.” And it was a written text, composed by an author who knew Latin (quite certainly) and French (very probably): his models for vernacular literarization were the French chanson de geste, Roland in particular, and, to some degree, classical rhetoric and the newly revived Roman legal studies. The circumstances surrounding the writing of the Cid—the creation of the literary work under the sign of a superposed culture, the invention of a new cosmopolitan vernacular register, the employment of writ-

18. The historical relationship among Mādhava Kandal’s Assamese Rāmāyaṇa (mid-fourteenth century) and Kṛtibāṣ’s Bangla and Bāḷarāmadās’s Oriya versions (both late-fifteenth century) remains to be explored. Smith 1988 is concerned largely with thematic questions.

19. Roger Wright (personal communication) suggests that this kind of imitation may account for the profusion of Latin writing in ninth-century Córdoba as an attempt to emulate the Islamic literary culture of the time.
ing for the first time and in a way that distances the work from preexistent oral culture, and the implementation of these changes with an eye clearly directed to parallel developments in other regional traditions—makes early-thirteenth-century Iberia in general and the poet of the *Cid* in particular a compelling instance of vernacular inauguration.20

The model of vernacularization developed here from the Germanic and Romance language materials of Insular and western-continental Europe has application in other regional worlds as well. A last example is drawn from the history of literary culture in Hungarian, which perfectly exemplifies the principal features already encountered: cosmopolitan superposition, vernacular beginnings, and political contextuality. Speakers of Hungarian lived in a purely oral world preceding King Stephen I’s conversion to (Roman) Christianity in 1000. Nothing of this oral pagan culture found textualization prior to what has been described as its “ruthless extermination” in the following centuries; in fact, literate vernacular culture was nonexistent aside from a stray funeral sermon (c. 1200) or hymn (a “Lament of Mary,” c. 1300). Literary production in these early centuries made use exclusively of Latin, most significantly the so-called Chronicles of Hungary (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and the first lyric poetry in the mid-fifteenth, that of Janus Pannonius (who seems to have seen no contradiction in using the ancient language of Rome to articulate his credo, “Look around and do not forget to be a true son of the present”). Two events combined to alter this situation fundamentally: the Reformation (recall that Martin Luther’s *Theses* were posted in 1517) and the victory of the Ottomans at Mohács in 1526. A *Four Gospels* in Hungarian appeared in 1536, an event that did much to advance the supersession of Latin not just for sacred writing but for all forms of literary production (here at least the Protestant presupposition holds). The philological disciplining of the language followed quickly: the first Hungarian dictionary was produced in 1536, the first grammar in 1539. It may be hard to decide which of the two events, religious reform or political threat, functioned as the main catalyst for this philologization, but the appearance of a vernacular history of Hungary (1575), the historical poems of Tinódi at the end of the century, and the lyrics of Bálint Balassi (d. 1594; his most important work, “In Praise of Frontierlands” was described recently as a tribute to the soldiers “who fought the Turks daily on the borderlands of Christendom and Islam”) leave little doubt that the new political realities contributed centrally to the vernacularization process.21

The difficulties of historicizing the vernacularization of Europe—of


21. See Czigány 1984 (on Balassi see p. 50, on Christianization p. 16), whom I follow for this brief sketch, while seeking to avoid the predictable eternalism in his account (e.g., p. 43).
grasping the fact of beginnings, the role of writing, the meaning and place of superposed models in the creation of literature—are clearly substantial. Yet there is no doubt that the early centuries of the second millennium witnessed in Europe what can only be described as a vernacular revolution, one that followed a time line closely approximating the analogous process in South Asia. There is no doubt, either, that the phenomenon proceeded across the whole of western Europe in something like a wave of emulative advance: late-first-millennium vernacularity in England influenced the creation of a new Anglo-Norman and then a continental French literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which influenced the vernacularization of Iberia, while simultaneously southern France developed an extraordinary new literature that prompted imitation and stimulated vernacularization from Italy to northern Germany. In the languages we now call French, Spanish, German, and Hungarian it was no longer a matter of one-off experiments in vernacular literization—here a German biography of Christ (the Heliand, 830), there a French saint’s hymn (the Sequence of St. Eulalie, 881–2) or a Hungarian funeral sermon (the Halotti Beszéd, 1200), virtually all transpositions of, or deeply informed by, Latin religious works. This was the commencement of whole literary traditions—intentional, reflexive, memorialized, circulating, continually reproduced, and philologized. The entire process, moreover, was one whose novelty and very commencement were fully apparent to the agents involved. This is shown not only by the vernacular anxieties examined below (section 2) but by the explicit historicist assessment of early writers. When, for example, in the De vulgari eloquentia Dante speaks of writers like Peire d’Alvernha (fl. 1150) as the first to use the vernacular for poetry (in ea primitus poetati sunt, X.2), or when Petrarch writes to Boccaccio (around 1350) that “Latin is of course the nobler (altior) language, in both prose and poetry, but for that very reason it has been so developed by earlier writers that neither we nor anyone else can add much of anything to it. The vernacular, on the other hand, has only recently been discovered [(vulgaris) inventus ad huc recens]. It has been mishandled by many and tended by only a few; rough as it is, it could be much beautified and enriched, I am sure,” they may be taken as speaking for all vernacular writers in the early centuries of the millennium, who were fully conscious of the cultural-political transformation in which they were participating.

Like Dante’s or Petrarch’s statement, the historical sketches we have just given testify in their different ways to the continuing dominance of Latin literacy and literature and the central role of the cosmopolitan code in the vernacularization process. There is no question that the vernacular literary

22. De vulgari eloquentia book 1 chapter 10; Machan 1991: 233 (whose translation is modified here on the basis of Petrarca 1965: 879). For Petrarch, literary Tuscan was a learned language; his notes for his vernacular poems are in Latin.
cultures of Europe, precisely like those of South Asia, not only borrowed from the cosmopolitan but also contributed to it: think only of the adoption of stress accent and rhyme from the vernaculars in some later Latin (as indeed in some later Sanskrit). The cosmopolitan, it bears repeating, can logically be nothing but a higher-order synthesis or generalization of local practices, though its homogenizing force is such that it rarely leaves behind historical traces to demonstrate this fact. Yet as a fully formed cosmopolitan culture when the vernacular epoch commenced, Latin (like Sanskrit) shaped the revolution far more profoundly than it was shaped by it. Vernacular literacy everywhere in Europe for centuries to come not only presupposed and was mediated by Latin literacy (being able to read and write the vernacular without being able to read and write Latin must have been a rarity), but the very sense of what literature meant as a cultural form was taken from Latin. E. R. Curtius was thus largely correct to characterize the beginnings of French literature in the eleventh-century *Song of St. Alexis* as a “well-considered composition of a scholarly poet who knew the devices of rhetoric and had read Virgil.” The same is no less the case with the Anglo-Norman poets, the poets of Occitan lyrics, the twelfth-century German *Minnesänger*, the author of the Castilian *Cid*, to say nothing of Dante and the other literary pioneers in Florentine. All of them, as one recent restatement of Curtius puts it (if perhaps too strongly) “are subsequent and secondary phenomena” to be analyzed “in terms of the primacy of Latin.”

To attempt, as vernacular intellectuals attempted, to displace the most powerful literary-cultural force in European history—the sole model of linguistic permanence, grammatical discipline, aesthetic depth and weight, artistic excellence, and authorizing tradition—must have seemed a stunning act of defiance. What this effort certainly revealed was a deep-seated anxiety about the vernacular’s very capacity for literary creation.

11.2 Vernacular Anxiety

It is wholly in keeping with the historical character of a vernacular culture, which must define itself and make good its claim to speak at all, let alone to speak the truth, that its authorization should sometimes be ascribed to a transcendent power. And such divine ascriptions are perhaps the best indicator of the anxiety provoked by the act of seeking vernacular literariness within

23. Godman in Curtius 1990: 650 (who also cites Curtius). On the mediation of vernacular literacy by Latin literacy in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany see Palmer 1993: 7. (Note that Dante states he entered into Latin through the vernacular but is silent about literacy, *Il Convivio* 1.13.) Cerquiglini seems the odd man out (1999: 20). No comprehensive account of European vernacularization in relationship to Latin seems to be available (as of 1990, Gröber’s *Grundriss* of 1902 was “still the only survey that extends as far as 1350,” Godman 1990: 607).
the power shadow of a cosmopolitan formation. In South Asia the felt need for the direct command of a god to underwrite vernacular literature persisted long into the second millennium; we saw this to be so in Maharashtra and Andhra even in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, when Tukarām, Śrīnātha, Kṛṣṇadevarāya—Shudra, Brahman, and even king—all needed to receive a divine commandment in a dream to be able to write in the vernacular, despite three or more centuries of ongoing vernacularization. Indeed, the same was true in the erstwhile vernacular tradition of Latin itself: Horace describes how Romulus, the demigod founder of Rome, appeared to him in a dream and forbade him to “join the vast ranks” of those who wrote poetry in Greek.24

The origin story of English poetry illustrates a similar exigency. Bede writes of Cædmon, whose role in the literate culture’s image of vanished orality we have already noted, that “having lived in a secular habit till he was well advanced in years, [he] had never learned anything of versifying”—presumably implying that only those who had some religious education and therefore knew Latin could create verse. For Cædmon to undertake the vernacular composition of poetry required divine intervention. One night, a being appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to sing. Cædmon did so, though against his will—and the result was English poetry. The next day he recited his creation to “many learned men,” who realized he had been visited by the grace of God. What he versified, as we noted earlier, was a recitation from scripture, a literate text in Latin. He adapted—or interpreted, glossed, or complemented—it in English: “He soon after put the same into poetical expressions . . . in English, which was his native language,” an accomplishment Bede further vindicates by confessing himself unable to successfully translate its “dignity and beauty” back into Latin. The dream thus defends the use of English, among the literati in particular (“even his teachers wrote down the words from his lips and learnt them”), for whom only Latin—plus ideally at least Hebrew and Greek, the languages inscribed on the Cross—had been considered appropriate for making verse in praise of God. Cædmon’s tale also leaves no doubt that vernacularization could occur only in dependence on the cosmopolitan Latin tradition.25

The themes of vernacular anxiety only just discernible in the Cædmon tale—the inferiority of the local language in general over against the cosmopolitan, particularly its morphological and semantic changeability and instability, its supposed lexical deficiency, its lack of “dignity,” and the absence of a tradition of great exemplars—would be produced across European traditions for centuries, demonstrating how very slow in coming was the ver-

24. Horace, Satires 1.10.31 ff. Note that Du Bellay recalls Horace’s dream (Du Bellay 1948: 188; see later in this section).
nacular’s success in acquiring literary-cultural self-confidence. Three moments in this long history, examined here in decreasing detail—the first comprising the literary-critical works of Dante that inaugurated Italian literature, the latter two, vernacular “defenses” in French and English—give us a sense not only of the persistence of the sentiment but also of the arguments used to contest it and their connection with larger developments in the spheres of literary culture and cultural politics.

A key text in the vernacularization not only of Italy (given that it is located near the commencement of that tradition) but of Europe as a whole (given that its key themes reverberated in France, England, and elsewhere into the seventeenth century) is Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Vernacular Eloquence, c. 1300). It is puzzling that such a theorization was produced first for a Latin-near language, when we might have expected it for the Latin-distant English or German (as in South Asia, where the first such treatises were written for the Sanskrit-distant Kannada and Tamil), and we return to the problem further (chapter 12.1). It is even more puzzling that the defense of the vernacular was made not in the vernacular itself (as again in Kannada and Tamil) but in Latin. But these are just two in a series of inversions, reversals, and ironies that mark Dante’s classic statement.

One vital aspect of Dante’s project is captured in its title: to offer arguments for the ennoblement of vernacular language in its written form (to which the term *eloquentia* refers in medieval Latin). The treatise begins by celebrating the vernacular’s domestic and natural character: it is acquired without rule and unmediated by thought; the rule-bound cosmopolitan language is, by comparison, secondary and artificial (1.1). Indeed, for Dante, *nobilior est vulgaris* (1.4), an astonishing transvaluation of cultural values, but one that is ironically self-limiting because, at that historical juncture, it could be expressed only in Latin and not in the vernacular. Furthermore, not only is the vernacular nobler than the cosmopolitan; in its nonliterary state it can actually boast of a greater antiquity: Dante regards Latin as a deliberate and comparatively recent creation, intended to enable communication across time thanks to its grammatical invariability (1.9). But another more obvious ironical reversal looms for the domesticity and naturalness of the vernacular: Dante’s treatise itself attempts to reduce nature to culture—the domestic and local to the courtly and translocal. The vernacular will be truly elevated to the level of literary competence only when its naturalness is defeated and the irregular, haphazard, and accidental nature of vernacular composition, as Dante describes it, is disciplined and controlled.

Such regulation and normativity are precisely what Dante’s scientific account of the vernacular aims to secure. In addition, it seeks to create from the fourteen dialects of “Italian” (*vulgare Latium*, itself part of a tripartite *ydioma*, referring to the languages of the “Yspani, Franci et Latini”) a single “illustrious” or courtly vernacular that will encompass all these different forms;
this can be achieved only by turning away from the maternal dialect (2.14). The qualifications that Dante invokes in determining the courtly vernacular are multiple: one dialect is too crude, one too harsh and masculinizing, another too soft and feminizing; one is insufficiently courtly and too local (non curialia sed municipalia), another too foreign by reason of admixture of alien elements (it no longer has puras loquelas, pure speech items). The one illustrious vernacular will be a language that is common to all people of Latium, or Ytalie, but unique to none (16.4 hec nullius civitatis Ytalie propria sunt, et in omnibus comunia sunt). (Dante conceptualizes and describes this domain [1.10], as indeed he presents the language map of the rest of Europe [1.8], with the geocultural interest and clarity typical of the vernacularizing intellectual.) This vernacular will achieve distinction through linguistic centrality, social elevation, political presence, and literary history—with “literary” clearly defined according to cosmopolitan norms as worly textuality, a capacity ascribed so defensively to the vernacular that others must have doubted it could apply at all. But such a crystallization will only happen through discipline in the fine points of literary technique and through cosmopolitan emulation:

I frequently called those who write verse in the vernacular “poets”; and this presumptuous expression is beyond question justifiable, since they are most certainly poets, if we understand poetry aright: that is, as nothing other than a verbal invention composed according to the rules of rhetoric and music (fictio rethorica musicaque poeta [i.e., tropology and metrics]). Yet they differ from the great poets, that is, those who obey the rules [i.e., the Latin poets], since those great ones wrote their poetry in a language, and with a technique, governed by rules (sermone et arte regulari), whereas these write at random (casu). . . Thus it comes about that, the more closely we try to imitate the great poets, the more correctly we write poetry.\(^{26}\)

An equally remarkable defense—this time in the vernacular—is found in the first book of the Il Convivio, Dante’s autocommentary on his canzoni. Here the problem confronting the author is the defense of, not literary production in the vernacular, but rather scholarly production. The objective of the first book of the Convivio is to argue out why the commentary that follows is written in Italian, not in Latin, the language of learning. (The Eloquentia’s reasoned defense of the literary vernacular, on the other hand, could only be set forth in the language of reason, Latin.) Dante’s rationale is powerful and dramatic, and again, apparently unprecedented. The performative argument—a self-exemplifying vernacular discourse on vernacular discourse, precisely as in the Kavirājāmārgam—is already a compelling one.

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26. *De vulgari eloquentia* 2.4, tr. Botterill (who notes “‘the rules’ are those of Latin, and the poets who follow them . . . are those of the classical Latin tradition,” p. 97).
Others are discursive: For one thing, since the canzoni are composed in the vernacular, if the exposition were in Latin, with its greater nobility (note the ambivalence here), virtue, beauty, incorruptibility, and eternality—all virtues lacking in the corruptible, unstable vernacular—the roles of sovereign text and servile commentary would be reversed. For another, the reasons that prompted some contemptible men of Italy to denigrate the vernacular are all false (they blindly follow the learned crowd, they seek to blame their tools for their poor skills, and so on). But the most powerful argument of all is emotional: one has a “natural love for one’s native speech,” Dante asserts in the fifth chapter—and for perhaps the first time in the history of European thought. This bare assertion, however, hardly prepares us for the intensity of chapters 12 and 13. There he proclaims his love for his native language as the closest of friendships, both intrinsic, since the vernacular is the first language to enter his mind, and extrinsic, since through it “one is connected to one’s relatives, fellow citizens, and one’s own people.” The vernacular is the cause both of one’s own being (one’s parents conversed and so united through the vernacular) and of being good, since it is the entryway into learning (albeit Latin learning). In fact, everything that engenders and strengthens any true friendship works to strengthen Dante’s friendship with the vernacular, such that “Not simply love but the most perfect love is what I ought to have, and do have, for [my vernacular language].”\footnote{Dante, \textit{Il Convivio} 1.10.5; 1.13.10 (tr. Lansing).}

Many of the themes of vernacular self-assertion that we have seen in South Asia are assembled in these two remarkable treatises: the geocultural frame of reference of the vernacularization project, the catalyst that literature represents in the larger cultural transformation of this frame, the limiting condition presented by the cosmopolitan tradition both in the definitions and practices of literature it offers as well as in its grammatical and other philosophical forms of discipline. But there are European particulars too, above all, the emotional link to the vernacular as one of friendship, loyalty, even love. We can detect a certain ressentiment in Dante’s assertiveness. He describes vernacular writing at the inaugural moment as almost accidental (casu) given the undisciplined nature of the medium in use. If it is to become a vehicle for literature—an unambiguous, well-articulated category inherited from the Latin tradition, \textit{fictio rethorica musicaque poita} (Dante here cites \textit{magister nostert Oratius}, our master Horace)—and for the discourse of the courtly world that produces literature and is in turn reproduced by it, mastery of the superposed models and of grammar and poetics \textit{(sermone et arte)} must be attained. The natural, local, plebeian, unruly vernacular must become artful, translocal, courtly, and disciplined \textit{(illustre, cardinale, aulicum, curiale, 16.6)}—it must become, in short, cosmopolitan.
All these themes were restated with renewed energy in the sixteenth century, when the defense of vernacular literature became a veritable subgenre in European writing. It may seem curious that the most powerful cases of vernacular anxiety were presented at this point, some three or more centuries after the turn to local literary language across western Europe. In part this may reflect a continuing uncertainty about the very possibility of a vernacular’s survival. Thus Montaigne could acknowledge in 1585 that he wrote his collection of essays in French because it was meant “for a limited number of people and for a limited number of years. If it had been a subject destined to last, I would have had to commit it to a more stable language [i.e., Latin].” And he adds, “Given the continual variation which our language has undergone up to the present time, who can expect its present form to be still in use in fifty years’ time? It slips away from our hands day by day and in the course of my lifetime it has changed by half.” Yet a more cogent explanation for the rise of the defense genre may be the historical moment, for these texts appeared when a new form of polity, one defined in part by a new relationship between language and power, was coming into existence.

Joachim Du Bellay’s defense from mid-century France and Sir Philip Sidney’s celebrated English treatise from the following generation are exemplary of the whole genre. These works are distinguished from De vulgari eloquentia (which Du Bellay certainly knew) in several ways. Whereas Dante wrote his principal treatise on the vernacular in Latin, the later works (like the Convivio, though without either Du Bellay or Sidney being aware of the text) aim to demonstrate in their very practice the vernacular discursive competence they preach; they are at once constative and performative texts. There is also far greater hostility toward the superposed tradition of Latinity than one finds in Dante’s works, and a far more transparent political agenda. These latter two features are no doubt closely related: a new and more classicized, cosmopolitanized vernacular was being created in service of a new and more territorially expansive national-imperial project.

In La défence et illustration de la langue francoyse (1549), Du Bellay, a member of the circle of literati known as the Pléiade and a counselor of King François I, conceived of the vernacular as requiring not just elevation (illustration), in view of what he saw as its earlier humble rusticity, but also defense because it was seen as vulnerable, even under attack: the same natural law

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28. On Castilian, for example, see Darbord 1991: 63–65, and more generally Ferguson 1983 (whose psychoanalytic framework of interpretation I cannot accept, my chapter subtitle notwithstanding). I know no work that compares Du Bellay and Dante, though Du Bellay’s debt to Speroni’s Dialogo delle lingue (1542), and Speroni’s to Dante, are well known.

29. Montaigne, “De la vanité,” Essais 3.9 (partially cited in Lodge 1993: 129). The sentiment was still being expressed a century later (Fumaroli 1984: 142–43); the topos is as old as Dante, Convivio 5.4.7.
that commands us to defend our birthplace obliges us to defend the dignity of our language (2.12). Notions of dignité and honneur, however vigorously they may have stimulated earlier vernacularization processes, are here brought into the very center of the discussion. Languages are no longer to be hierarchized on the basis of their genealogies, a conception still alive for Dante; instead, they are by nature equal. Their virtues result from the desire and will of mortal beings with their varying degrees of artifice and industrie, and all that distinguishes these languages along a scale of value are the quality of the literature produced in them by such labor and skill, and the literary-cultural discipline of being more carefully reiglées (1.1 [a term of Dante’s, 2.4]; 1.10). The absence of neither morphological complexity nor quantitative metrics as such betokens inferiority; there is enough evidence testifying to the talents of the French (above all, their possession of what no classical culture ever had: printing and artillery, 2.9).

Latin nonetheless remains a spirit to be exorcised from French literary culture, having recently experienced a return from the dead, as it were, thanks to the humanists, in France no less than in Italy. Du Bellay seeks to do this by presenting Latin as itself a vernacular that succeeded by learning from Greek; and in just the same way French, like it or not, must learn from Latin. He does not wholly ignore the pre-sixteenth-century French literary past (if he underestimates its debt to Latinity): some great works were produced (Roman de la Rose, for example), and they remain a source for enriching the lexicon of literary French. But Latin is now the self-conscious model, and not only for literature but also for the relationship of literary culture to polity. The day of rondeaux, vyrelaiz, chantz royaulx is past; it is now time for a new classicism, for vernacular epics and historical chronicles, and for doctrine and erudition (2.3, 4), the scientification of the sort the Deffence itself proceeds to offer with respect to lexicon, rhyme, prosody, and the like, and in the absence of which a self-conscious cosmopolitan vernacular cannot exist. The purpose of all these works is to dignify the language so as to add to the honor of France (2.5). The final chapter is actually subtitled “Exhortation aux francoys d’écrire en leur Langue: aveques les louanges de la France” (Exhortation to the French to write in their language: along with praises of France), indicating how indissolubly joined vernacularity and polity had become for Du Bellay: his aim was to produce a “Gallic Hercules” who would “draw the nations after him by their ears with a chain attached to his tongue.” Again Latin provides the perfect model, since the glory of the Romans lay no less in the expansion of their language than in the expansion of their borders.

31. Du Bellay 1948: 197, 183. For his colleague Ronsard, balance was required (“I want to advise you again,” he wrote to a young poet, “not to overdo Latin, like our predecessors, who
Du Bellay’s call for a studied classicization of the vernacular was part of a much broader cultural and political movement, and what the age demanded. French literature moved from Rabelais in the 1530s to the first classical tragédie and comédie in 1552–53 to writers like Montaigne and Aubigné at century’s end (Latin was not killed in the process, however; Du Bellay himself continued to write in it). In England at nearly the same moment the conquest of the vernacular must have seemed wholly assured. The mid-sixteenth century saw an extraordinary proliferation of literary texts. More’s Utopia, written first in Latin in 1516, was available in English by 1551. And the efflorescence of lyric poetry from Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, and others, followed by the beginnings of Elizabethan drama and eventually works like Edmund Spenser’s Faerie Queen (1590), is a story too well known to need retelling here. Yet worry about possessing “a kingdome of our own language” continued to unsettle English intellectuals quite visibly at mid-century. It is this worry that Sir Philip Sidney seems to be addressing in his Apology for Poesie (written in 1583; published posthumously in 1595).

As the title declares, the purpose of the work is to argue in defense of imaginative literature as such, not of the particular language in which it happens to be written. Yet traces of the old vernacular anxiety persist. When Sidney analyzes “diction,” for example, or the “outside” of poetry, he asserts his preference for plain English and his aversion to “hony-flowing matron eloquence,” and “farre fetched words, that many seeme Monsters, but must seeme strangers to any poore English Man”— his aversion, in other words, to outlandish and alien Latinisms (what from an Indian perspective might be called the bhāṣā poet’s fear and loathing of the tatsama). And if plain-spoken English poets sometimes go awry, it is not the fault of their language, he defensively asserts, for “we may bend to the right use both of matter and manner: whereto our language giveth us great occasion, being, indeed, capable of any excellent exercising of it”:

I know some will say [English] is a mingled language. And why not so much the better, taking the best of both the other? Another will say it wanteth Grammer. Nay truly, it hath that prayse, that it wanteth not Grammer: for Grammer it might have, but it needes it not; beeing so easie of it selfe, and so void of those cumbersome differences of Cases, Genders, Moodes, and Tenses, which I think was a peece of the Tower of Babylon’s curse, that a man should be put to schoole to learne his mother-tongue.

quite recklessly adopted an infinite number of foreign words from the Romans. For there are perfectly good words in our own language,” Ronsard 1993: vol. 2, 1187).

32. See Helgerson 1992, especially pp. 1–18, and chapter 3 for the “chorographic” developments that accompany the victory of the vernacular.

Several important if somewhat contradictory claims are made at once here. Like Du Bellay, Sidney is eager to declare his vernacular the equal of any other in the world, but he must specifically deny the relevance of its historical origins. These origins are now understood within the new conceptual scheme of biology, which supplants the old quasi-historicist one of Babel. Languages (naturally implying Old English and Norman French) are thought of as originally pure stocks that can interbreed. The mixing of languages, however, unlike that of peoples perhaps (or horses, which provide the Apology with its opening trope), does not necessarily diminish their expressive capacity: the offspring can preserve the good qualities of both parents and even be greater than either. The absence of grammatical regulation—the eternal scandal of the vernaculars—is now represented as virtue rather than vice: the complex morphology of Greek and Latin is not the golden armor that preserved them from harm but mere baggage, and the very ease of learning that resulted when English disencumbered itself of such weight is a sign of its excellence. Nobody needs to go to school to learn one’s mother tongue except those still doing penance for a prehistoric sin.

The tensions in the text are not unlike those in Dante and Du Bellay, and need not detain us long. It is obviously inconsistent to argue so artfully for an artless English; Sidney did not learn the rhetorical, high courtly style of the Apology at his mother’s knee. Moreover, by the very production of a text that puts the mother tongue to school Sidney undermines his own argument, just as earlier Dante unwittingly forced his “natural” vernacular—precisely the quality that made it preferable to Latin—to become as cultured as Latin (and just as Thoreau several centuries later would turn the gentle mother tongue into the stern father tongue with the rod of philology in hand, chapter 8.3). And clearly biology and Babel cannot both be right on the origins of language difference. More important than these unavoidable contradictions is the new self-confidence in evidence here with which the vernacular was now beginning to speak. This was the result not only of three centuries of “defense” and an even longer period of “illustration,” but also of the vernacular’s status as the voice of a new vernacular state. What cured vernacular anxiety was power.

11.3 A NEW CULTURAL POLITICS

It should be apparent from the materials assembled thus far that the vernacular revolution in Europe was unthinkable without the central stimulus provided by the increasingly powerful royal courts of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. The idée reçu of an official Latin counterposed to a popular vernacular, or indeed, of a vernacular lay spirit of il popolo fighting a Latin churchly authority—a belief long cherished even by keen students of the age like Bakhtin and Gramsci—is contradicted by the substantial evidence of cler-
ical interests in the vernaculars to say nothing of the demotic popularity of Latin as demonstrated by the works of the Goliards, the Archpoet, and others. So also, the image of a democratic vernacularism fighting the forces of a Latinate feudalism is contradicted by the feudal promotion of the vernaculars and, in Italy at least, the cultivation of Latin in the free republics. The cases we have examined, with the exception of sixteenth-century Hungary, where the notorious instability of the court after 1300 may have been what retarded the turn toward regional-language literary production, show that vernacularization was a core concern of court intellectuals and elites, precisely as it was in southern Asia.

This is not to say that any one political logic attaches to vernacularization—that it is always and everywhere an exclusively centralizing political logic, for instance—or that the political is related to it monocausally. A range of other factors, including class, gender, and professional identity, undoubtedly contributed, too. It has been argued, for example, that the new vernacular prose historiography developed in thirteenth-century northern France was patronized by feudal aristocrats to counter the centripetal forces of the French monarchy; and that at the Anglo-Norman court it was above all the women who demanded vernacular literary texts as a consequence of the (supposed) inadequacy of their Latin learning. Whatever the particular modulations, however, vernacularity across Europe was to become a characteristic and consequential element in the practice of rulership and governance. Signs of its strategic deployment in the interests of a political principle can be observed from the very beginning of the vernacular millennium, becoming ever more distinct over time. A glance at a few cases we have already noticed—England in the ninth century, Castile in the thirteenth, Tuscany in the fourteenth, and France in the fifteenth and sixteenth—suffice to demonstrate this.

It was noted earlier that in late-first-millennium England, vernacularization was a project clearly and straightforwardly directed by the court in the interests of the political community. With the accession of Alfred in 871, and especially after the recapture of London in 886 from the Danes, which politically united all of England outside Danelaw, the project was powerfully accelerated, and English became for the first time an official language of the state. Although the court was certainly concerned with the enhancement of learning in the interests of spiritual betterment, the political objective was indissociable from it. While the greater part of literary production was straight translation of Latin works, two key political texts constituted an important ex-

34. As P. O. Kristeller reminds us, 1965: 122.
35. Marcia Colish (in conversation) called some of these instances to my attention (for the first see Spiegel 1993). Women’s access to Latin varied from place to place (Mathilda of England was evidently well educated, Bond 1995: 246). Gender as a factor in vernacularization varies, too, across cultures. If prominent in Japanese, it is irrelevant for Kannada and Telugu.
ception: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (890) and a law code, both of which were assembled partly from earlier materials (some of them possibly vernacular) under Alfred’s supervision from his capital at Winchester. These two bodies of text—the sort that would figure prominently in the creation of new vernacular cultural politics in Alfonssine Castile and elsewhere—equipped the vernacular polity with a deep history and a clear sense of its legal status, both of which were required in view of the imperial model that Alfred sought to emulate and supplant: that of Charlemagne, whose own genealogy and legal status were constantly put in evidence. In everything from Alfred’s biography—which Asser (893) closely modeled on Einhard’s Latin biography of Charlemagne (825) while recoding it for vernacular culture and polity—to the unification of the Anglo-Saxon kings (around 880), scholars have found evidence of a cultural-political program on the Carolingian model but expressing a new local cultural self-consciousness. If earlier it had been the responsibility of Christian rulers like Charlemagne to render Latin literary culture an “image of imperium and auctoritas,” it now became their responsibility to mandate this rendering in the vernacular. The renovatio of Roman culture and power on the Continent thus inspired the invention of an Insular culture and power. In short, within the context of the long-term and varying relationship between grammar and political power, where for almost a millennium the care for Latin had been intimately linked with the care for imperium, the new vernacular literary culture of the England of Alfred and his successors can hardly be understood except as tied to a new mentality and new modes of identification that had an unmistakable political resonance.

No less dramatic and unambiguous an instance of the court’s political management of the vernacular occurred in thirteenth-century Castile. It has recently been demonstrated with great precision that at the start of that century 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 extant and can be dated to Palm Sunday, 1206. Drawn up in the Castile chancery, the document would have appeared revolutionary in that context, if not heretical: the archbishop was in charge of the chancery ex officio, Romance was still largely denied validity in its written form, and the reform of spelling (in the service of vernacularization) bordered on sin.


37. Wright 1996 describes the struggle between Latin and Castilian proponents in the chancery and the simultaneous development of political and literary texts (for the treaty itself,
in the first decades, vernacular political culture, and with it literary culture, developed with an extraordinary intensity—for example, it was in the year following the treaty document that the one 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 more appropriate than “renaissance,” the usual descriptor, since textual vernacularity was being generated, not regenerated—were recorded two centuries later when Antonio de Nebrija remarked in the celebrated preface to his grammar of Castilian (1492) that it was at Alfonso’s court that Castilian first “began to shows its powers.” Castilian has all the marks of a cosmopolitan-vernacular idiom, but in this case one shaped not only by Latin (in particular Roman jurisprudence) but also by Arabic culture, which was now being translated into Castilian rather than Latin as earlier. Castilian was cultivated across the full spectrum of text genres, both political and literary; vernacularization in the two spheres was clearly regarded as mutually supporting, and chancery and scriptorium as united. The use of the vernacular for all state documents except international diplomacy became 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 sought to extend royal control over all judicial and legislative activities. Of a piece with the vernacularization of law was the creation of a Castilian historiography that sought to narrate the past of both the local geopolitical space (*Estoria de Espanna* [The Chronicle of Spain]) and the world as a whole (*General Estoria* [The General Chronicle]), both left incomplete at Alfonso X’s death in 1282. Although the vernacularization of political communication had commenced under Alfonso VII (d. 1214), these grand prose works had no predecessors; the history of Spain commissioned by el Sabio’s father, for example, was in Latin (written by the archbishop of Toledo). Instead, they were born, as one scholar puts it—once again using a trope that figures forth astonishment at the invention of the literate vernacular—“fully-fledged like Minerva, with Alfonso assuming the role of Jupiter.” Elsewhere in his literary-cultural production Alfonso observed, and perhaps helped to invent, the more pluralistic genre-language convention noted earlier, so that, for example, his *Cantigas* are composed in what has been described as troubadour-Galician. But 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’s peninsular political objectives: his desire to unify all forms of knowledge and the Castilian language.

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Wright 2000). A decree of 1214 mandates the use of Castilian in royal communications (Smith 2000).
is analogous to his quest for the political centralization of Castile, “dominating everything, centralizing everything around himself.”

The politics of Dante’s vernacular project are complicated, and the interpretive problems resist easy summary. *De vulgari eloquentia*, especially read in conjunction with his political tract, *De monarchia*, has elicited totally divergent interpretations even in specialist literature. A political scientist, for example, argues that the two tracts—and thus the very notions of culture and power—represent parallel and nonintersecting concerns for Dante, whereas a literary historian insists that Dante’s political, linguistic, and aesthetic theories are thoroughly intertwined and grounded in “national” thought of a decidedly modernist cast. What is not in dispute is the geocultural framework of Dante’s *vulgare illustre*, while the fact that the language is meant to be *curiale* and *aulicum*—related to a court and a palace—leaves no doubt about the political context he had in mind. Yet the kind of polity Dante conceived of as home to this literary culture is far less distinct. In fact, as he himself shows, there was a decided tension in his thinking: in response to the question what good is the creation of a courtly vernacular to Italy when there is no Italian court, he answers, “We have a court, though in the body it is scattered” (*De vulgari eloquentia* 1.18). The larger political goal Dante envisaged was the unification of Italy within a reconstituted Holy Roman Empire. How exactly the illustrious vernacular was meant to function in this Germanic kind of political formation is obscure in the text, but Dante leaves little doubt that it was for this new imperium that the language was intended. Or perhaps this is less obscurity than unfamiliarity, of a moment in European political-cultural history when the absolute symmetry of ethnic state and language had not yet become common sense.

The sudden emergence of courtly literature in French in Norman England was part of a larger transformation that included the beginnings of the creation of a French documentary state (albeit one never as rich as that of thirteenth-century Castile). The first written laws in French appeared soon after the conquest, in 1069 and 1080, the first charter in 1140, and while Latin was far from being displaced as a language of state, French came to be used more and more for the business of the polity. Political ends have been discerned as well in the first systematic grammatical description of French (mid-fourteenth century England): it was likely prompted by a perception

38. Socarras cited in Burns 1990: 11. For Alfonso see Smith 2000, and Burns 1990, especially 1–18, 90–108 (chancery-scriptorium), 141–58 (historiography), 183–84 (law); the citation on the origins of Alfonsine prose is from p. 38. For the genre-language convention see the earlier discussion in chapter 8.2 and n. 36. See Nebrija 1946: 8 for his quotation.

of ruling elites on the eve of the Hundred Years’ War that they needed to know French and demonstrate a certain Frenchness to strengthen their claims on northern France. In southern France, by contrast, while the earliest grammaticalization of Occitan (indeed, the first of any Romance language) the *Razos de trobar* (Account of Composition) by the Catalan Raimon Vidal (c. 1200), was likewise composed outside Occitan country—or better put, in an area that (after the battle of Muret in 1213 when Provence ceased to be ruled from Catalonia) was being politically created as outside Occitania—the project’s objective was pedagogical rather than political. Rather different circumstances surrounded one of the last such Occitan literary treatises, the *Leys d’amors* (Laws of Love), written in Toulouse around 1330 in an attempt to resuscitate the troubadour tradition and Occitan literary culture as such after the Albigensian Crusade had effectively annihilated both. Whatever the differences in the political motivations of vernacularization in northern and southern France, there is broad agreement on the fact that it was largely a consequence of the desires and needs of a “new aristocratic laity” with new cultural norms, where literacy was no longer an exception but rather a royal virtue.40

Yet the vernacular’s route to domination was by no means direct. True enough, in the Île-de-France itself, the oeuvre of Chrétien de Troyes offered a powerful example of a new imaginative literature at the end of the twelfth century, and a milestone in political-discursive French was marked by a new vernacular historiography, almost contemporaneous with Alfonso’s and based in part on translations from the Latin, the *Roman des rois* (Romance of the Kings, 1274, prepared at the royal abbey of Saint-Denis for Philip III) and the *Grandes chroniques de France*, of which the *Roman* forms the core. Still, such eloquent testimony to the achievements of the vernacular and to its political patronage notwithstanding, the felt need to wage its defense clearly remained. We have seen that as late as the sixteenth century writers like Montaigne were haunted by a sense of the vernacular’s instability and its uncertain future. At the same time they understood full well how critical political power was to its survival. Montaigne himself, in a passage cited earlier, goes on to make the point succinctly in a wonderful metaphor available only then, on the threshold of capitalism: it is the responsibility of good literature to try to “nail down” the vernacular in hopes of keeping it from changing, but

its credit—its trustworthiness and authority as well as solvency—will necessarily follow “the fortune of our state.”

It is in Du Bellay’s Deffence that the linkage between politics and the vernacular was first argued out explicitly: in due time, he declares, when France takes up the reins of imperial rule (monarchie), its language will spring from the ground and grow to great heights (1.3). The relationship between language and political power is mutually constitutive for Du Bellay: monarchie requires a great vernacular literature if it is to achieve its ends, whereas a literature requires a monarchie if it is to flourish at all. And he provides historical grounds for this claim: it was King François I who made it possible for the French language to advance. “Our language was crude and vulgar, but he rendered it elegant”; through a royally sponsored series of translations, philosophers, historians, orators, and poets have learned to speak French. Du Bellay’s main worry is whether François at his death might have taken French—that is, the court’s support of French as the language of state—with him to his grave.

Two decades after the Deffence, Du Bellay’s colleague Pierre Ronsard published an epitome of French poetic practices (1565) that everywhere reveals his close reading of Du Bellay’s treatise yet advances beyond it precisely in articulating the new cultural politics. Ronsard urges the young poet to whom his work is addressed to choose among the dialects of “our France” for the creation of his poetry. In the past, the rulers of provinces may have “desired the extreme honor of their subjects’ writing in the language of their native country”—“for princes, in imitation of the Romans, should be as eager to extend the boundaries of the language of their countries (pays) as the bounds of their realms (seigneurie).” But today, with France under one king, everyone speaks the courtly language; that is, the language of literature is now French, but a French that exhibits its supralocal presence by its capacity to accept, indeed to invite, the provincialisms of a Gascony or a Lyon. No doubt Ronsard is alluding to Du Bellay himself (who had died a few years earlier) when he praises “those of the moderns who have during the last fifteen years illuminated (illustré) our literature, now justly proud in this glorious achievement. Happy demigods, they who cultivate their own earth, nor strive after another, from which they could only return thankless and unhappy, unrecompensed, unhonored. The first to dare abandon the ancient Greek and Roman languages for the greater glory of their own truly must be good sons, not ungrateful citizens; worthy to be signalized in a public statue.”

The cultivation of the cosmopolitan vernacular is not only a project of literary culture; it is a central concern, or should be a central concern, of civil society and the state.

42. Deffence 1.3–4.
Du Bellay and Ronsard seem to be far less fawning courtiers than newly empowered vernacular intellectuals whose vision had been deeply stamped by recent political history, above all by the language policies of François I (r. 1515–47). It was at the instance of this king that a series of laws were promulgated that supply essential background for understanding the political moment of the *Défense* and of the Pléiade’s work in general. These include the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts (1539), the most important juridical act of the king’s reign and one that did much to ensure the victory of the vernacular. Among its many remarkable provisions for the reform of the state’s administrative and judicial procedures is the requirement that all civil and criminal judgments, in fact all procedures of the courts and all its documents, “be pronounced and registered and made over to the parties in the French mother tongue.” In part, as the Ordinance itself makes clear, this was a response to the growing incomprehension of Latin; yet it was also acknowledgment that a single courtly idiom could and did have application across the domain of France, including by then Occitania, as the Ordinance itself specified. Villers-Cotterêts thus effects a double erasure—one of superordinate Latin and of subordinate regional vernaculars—in the interest principally of administrative efficiency. The death of François and the ensuing uncertainty of the outcome of his cultural politics (and the poet’s own fortunes) may have induced Du Bellay’s melancholy. Be that as it may, clearly in France too, as in Iberia and Britain and increasingly everywhere in western and central Europe, there would be no turning back from the transition now under way. The vernacular polity was now unquestionably taking on the contours of the nation-state of modernity.44

44. See further on the relationship of the “Ordonnance” and the *Défense* in Dubu 1991, and Lodge 1993: 127, and for later cultural-political developments, Fumaroli 1983. Similar (if even earlier) edicts were issued to ensure the use of German in Silesia, of Czech in Bohemia, and of English in Wales (Bartlett 1993: 214, 220).