

From conqueror to connoisseur: Kalhaṇa's account of Jayāpīḍa and the fashioning of Kashmir as a Kingdom of learning

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This article is primarily concerned with asking how we can read Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅgiṇī as historians, other than by mining it for facts and names or using it as a proof of some South Asian given. I conduct my investigation on a relatively small sample, a well-defined narrative sequence of about 100 verses from the fourth chapter, or 'wave', of the River of Kings (4.402–502), which narrates King Jayāpīḍa's first military campaign. I try to demonstrate that this section depicts a dramatic shift in Kashmir's investment in learning and the arts. Thus I argue that the Rājatarāṅgiṇī, despite its unifying poetic and moralistic framework, is acutely attuned to changes in Kashmir's history, including this region's special cultural and intellectual history, a topic that is clearly dear to Kalhaṇa's heart.

Keywords: *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, Kalhaṇa, Jayāpīḍa, Udbhaṭa, Kashmir, cultural and intellectual history

History or poetry? This question has dominated the discussion about Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (or *River of Kings*, hereafter *RT*) since the nineteenth century¹ and to be honest, I find this discussion largely tedious and dull, partly because of the inherently narrow nature of such either-or questions, and partly because the criteria invoked in support of either genre are often simplistic. For example, the question of the text's historicity is routinely reduced to its facticity, although it is clear that Kalhaṇa, not unlike a good historian, considered facts as a means to an end and was more interested in the way they fitted larger patterns.² Instead of labelling the *RT* either poetry or history, it is far more compelling to ask how we can read it as a poem and what we can do with it as historians. This article is primarily concerned with the latter question, although, of course, the two are not really separate.

Given the vastness of the *RT* and the limitations of this article, I will conduct my investigation on a small sample and the one I have chosen is a well-defined narrative

¹ See Zutshi, 'Translating the Past', for a good history of this discussion and of the centrality of the history-versus-poetry question.

² As Kalhaṇa says, merely recording new facts is not a worthy goal (*RT* 1.9–10). Slaje, 'In the Guise of Poetry', pp. 235–36, argues that getting the facts right was important to Kalhaṇa because this made his *rasa* scheme more effective; I do not find this argument fully convincing.

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sequence of about 100 verses from the fourth chapter, or ‘wave’, of Kalhana’s *RT* 4.402–502). This section, which narrates King Jayāpīḍa’s first military campaign, is of special interest to me because of the importance of this king’s reign in Kashmiri cultural history, which I believe, it highlights.

Synopsis of the Jayāpīḍa Episode

Let me begin with a brief summary of the passage. The story commences with Jayāpīḍa’s ascent to the throne after the demise of his elder brother.³ Jayāpīḍa is the grandson of Lalitāditya, whose glorious reign—when Kashmir reached the peak of its might—was followed by a period of political turmoil. The wish to restore the grandfather’s era frames Jayāpīḍa’s story and is mentioned at the outset as this king’s motivation for setting out on a military campaign of global proportions (*digvijaya*).⁴ But even before the campaign begins, when Jayāpīḍa asks the local elders at the border how his army compares with that of his famed ancestor, it becomes clear that his troops fall short (4.404–07).⁵ In fact, the local elders politely note that emulating the deeds of the past monarch is all but impossible.⁶ Jayāpīḍa takes this humbling observation in good spirit, realising that empires diminish rapidly over time.⁷ Noticing his reaction, the elders recognise that the grandson at least has Lalitāditya’s spirit (*bhāva*, 4.409).

And he certainly needs to rely on his zest, for the campaign quickly threatens to become a fiasco. As soon as the army leaves Kashmir, Jayāpīḍa’s brother-in-law, Jajja, seizes the throne by force and the king’s homesick soldiers defect *en masse* by the day (4.410–11). Jayāpīḍa is resolved to establish his fame somehow (4.412), but it is not entirely clear whether even he knows how he intends to do so. He soon sends his allies back to their respective homelands and proceeds with only a few loyal soldiers to Prayāga, where he donates 99,999 horses to local Brahmins. An inscription hailing this amazing feat is engraved as a challenge to all future kings to one-up Jayāpīḍa and give 100,000 horses (4.414–18). At this point Jayāpīḍa dismisses all the remaining loyalists. Roaming alone and incognito in the realm of a Gauḍa king named Jayanta, he reaches the flourishing city of Pauṇḍravardhana (4.419–21).

³ Although Jayāpīḍa is the younger of the two brothers, his enthronement is in accordance with the right order of succession (*kramāt*; *RT* 4.402). Unless noted otherwise, all textual references are to Stein’s 1892 edition.

⁴ *RT* 4.403: *pitāmahasamo bhūyād ity amātyavacaḥ smaran | jigīṣuḥ sambhṛtabalo digjayāya sa niryayau ||*. This echoes *RT* 4.359, where the aged Lalitāditya himself predicts that his grandson, who at the time is still a boy, will be his like: *pautreṣu me kaṇṭhān yo jayāpīḍo ’sti dārakah | pitāmahasamo bhūyā iti vācyaḥ sa sarvadā ||*.

⁵ Jayāpīḍa commands only 80,000 *karnīrathas*, in contrast to the 125,000 his grandfather possessed (*RT* 4.407). Stein, *Kalhana’s ‘Rajatarangini’*, Vol. 1, p. 159 (ad 4.407), suggests that *karnīrathas* are the palanquins that Alberuni has associated with Kashmiri military habits and has called *katts*.

⁶ *RT* 4.406: *vastu kaścid atikrāntaṃ nānukartuṃ kṣamo ’dhunā*.

⁷ *RT* 4.408: *bahu mene na nirjyam | kṣipraṃ kṣiteḥ saṃkucantyāḥ kālasya balavattayā ||*

Here Jayāpīḍa enters a Kārtikeya temple to watch a dance (*lāśya*). The people in attendance notice his charisma with awe and from the stage a dancer named Kamalā is not blind to his good looks. Moreover, from his habitual and involuntary gesture of putting his palm on the back of his shoulder in anticipation of a betel-nut treat from a servant, she surmises that he must be some nobleman under cover, perhaps even a prince or a king (4.422–28). She sends a friend to stand behind him and place the betel nut in his palm. Jayāpīḍa takes the treat, puts it in his mouth and, startled, turns around and notices the friend, who then leads him to Kamalā's private quarters (4.429–32). The attraction is mutual and immediate, but when Kamalā shows him to her bedroom and begins to undress, Jayāpīḍa gently asks for a rain check. It is not that he does not find her attractive, he says (*na tvam padmapalāsākṣi na me hr̥dayahāriṇī*, 4.437), but there is an urgent mission that requires his attention before any romance can commence (4.433–39). Jayāpīḍa sighs, taps his finger on the bedside and recites a verse about a determined (*manasvin*) person who has to conquer the world first and only then worry about women: even the Sun first overruns the entire world and only then unites with his consort, Twilight (4.440–42).

Jayāpīḍa does stay at Kamalā's house as a guest and when he returns from bathing in the river the next morning, he discovers that his absence made her panicky. The reason, she explains, is a ferocious lion that has been terrorising the city (4.443–47). That night Jayāpīḍa silently slips out of Kamalā's residence, ambushes the enormous beast and challenges it. When the lion charges at him, Jayāpīḍa places his elbow in its maw and uses his other hand to kill the beast with one stroke of his dagger. He then bandages his elbow, returns to Kamalā's house and goes right back to bed (4.448–55).

In the morning King Jayanta is informed that the terrible lion has been found dead. Delighted, he rushes to the scene to observe the cadaver himself and is handed an armet found in the beast's jaws with the name Jayāpīḍa engraved on it. It turns out that Jayanta already had intelligence that a king by this name was hiding in his realm. The sonless Jayanta considers Jayāpīḍa's appearance a wonderful, serendipitous occurrence akin to finding a treasure in one's backyard after having searched for it in exotic lands. He has already decided to give Jayāpīḍa his daughter and he immediately sends his people to find and fetch him. Within the span of a few stanzas, Jayāpīḍa materialises, weds Jayanta's daughter Kalyāṇadevī, leads the army of his new father-in-law to war against some Gauḍa rivals, makes Jayanta their overlord, reunites with his Kashmiri troops and marches back home to Kashmir with his two new consorts, Kalyāṇadevī and Kamalā, sacking the majestic city of Kanauj on his way (4.456–71).

Jayāpīḍa still has to reclaim his own throne and his enemy, Jajja, confronts him on the outskirts of Kashmir. Jayāpīḍa is joined by a coalition of disgruntled forest people, but the fierce battle that ensues reaches stalemate until an untouchable named Śrīdeva arrives on the scene. Soldiers point out Jajja to Śrīdeva, who then shoots him with a sling. Once Jajja is dead, Jayāpīḍa finally resumes power after a hiatus

of three years (4.472–82). The king and his wives found new cities and institutions and the king recruits a large number of international poets and scholars, whom Kalhaṇa lists. Jayāpīḍa now adopts the lifestyle of an intellectual (4.482–502).

Genre and Texture of the Jayāpīḍa Episode: Initial Observations

What is the best analytic framework with which to interpret this narrative? With regard to its structure and ‘texture’, to borrow a term from Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, it reads like a tightly built short story with a marked beginning and ending and a sustained focus on the adventures experienced by its hero, the challenges he faces and the changes he undergoes. Indeed, it bears an affinity with the *kathā* genre, which was clearly not composed or read as history, even when it occasionally echoed historical events. Think, for example, of the coming-of-age stories that make up the bulk of Daṇḍin’s *Daśakumāracarita* (*DKC*).⁸ Like Daṇḍin’s ten young men, Jayāpīḍa is a prince whose mission is to restore the lost kingdom of an ancestor and like them, he acts undercover in a foreign land, demonstrates great resourcefulness and wins the hearts of a variety of young ladies.⁹ We also notice in Jayāpīḍa’s story elements of a dominant South Asian epic template, that of the exiled and disguised hero who strives to repossess his true self as a precondition for regaining his consort, royal seat and kingdom.¹⁰

But the resemblances to the narrative templates of the *kathā* and the epic are partial. Even if we ignore the crucial linguistic and stylistic factors that set the *RT* apart from a prose *kāvya* like the *DKC*, on the one hand, and the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other, key aspects of the Jayāpīḍa story distinguish it from those of Daṇḍin’s heroes and the epic protagonists. For one thing, the story of Jayāpīḍa is firmly rooted in the human realm and, for the most part, steers clear of the upper and nether worlds. Unlike the *kathā*, we find here no heavenly voices, magic horses and talking birds, and unlike the epic and the Purāṇas, the gods and the *nāgas* play a minor role in the main portion of the *RT*.¹¹ Think, in this context,

⁸ Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 259, say that the plot of the fourth book of the *RT*, with the Jayāpīḍa episode at its centre, is ‘novelistic and belongs together with works such as Daṇḍin’s famous courtly romance, the *Daśakumāracarita*’.

⁹ See Onians, ‘*What Ten Young Men Did*’ by Dandin, pp. 15–17, on the bildungsroman and on different kinds of *digvijaya* in the *DKC*. See also Roy, ‘Making of a Mandala’, p. 60, for a mention of folkloristic elements in the Jayāpīḍa story. For an argument about the possible historicity of one of these stories in the *DKC*, see Spink, *Ajanta*, pp. 119–62.

¹⁰ For a discussion of selfing in the epic and later poetry, see Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, pp. 71–75, 242–45. Particularly interesting in this respect are the comparison of Jayāpīḍa with the sun in a manner reminiscent of the depiction of Arjuna in the epic and later poems (*RT* 4.441; cf. Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, pp. 74–75) and the identification of Kalyāṇadevī with Jayāpīḍa’s Rāyjalakṣmī (*RT* 4.467).

¹¹ Roy, ‘Making of a Mandala’, p. 53, divides the *RT* into three strata or parts: remote or mythical history (books 1–3), the recent past, consisting of ‘real time’ (4–6) and contemporary events (7–8). My characterisation applies primarily to the second and third portions of the text. I will say more about this division later.

of shrines. Whereas other accounts place the building of temples in ‘purāṇic time’ and credit gods, sages, *nāgas* and other mythical heroes with their construction, the *RT* routinely describes how officeholders such as Jayāpīḍa, his queens and his ministers underwrite the establishment and refurbishing of shrines at certain moments in remembered political history (often in the context of a political or military victory) and typically have the shrines or their images bear their names.¹² Nonhumans, of course, do appear in the text, but they are relegated to anecdotal vignettes that are typically inserted between the main narrative portions.¹³ But the central political drama in the *RT* is not driven by divine blueprints, preordained curses, or creatures from the upper or nether worlds. Rather, it is humans, with their morals, beliefs and behaviours, who decide the course of the key events.¹⁴

¹² Consider *RT* 4.484, 4.208–09 and 4.52–77, to give but a few examples from book 4 of the work (the last example involves a case where a temple built by King Candrāpīḍa’s officials led to disputes over real estate in the chosen building site). Contrast such accounts of temple building with that found in, say, Śrīnātha’s *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇamu*, where the construction of Śiva Bhīmeśvara’s temple is strictly outside human agency and is the work of gods and sages (see Narayana Rao and Shulman, *Śrīnātha*, pp. 73–113, for an excellent description of this work). It would seem that there are two distinct modes of recounting temple pasts: one that traces them back to divine and mythical times and another that places them in human and political contexts, as we find in royal inscriptions. It is palpably clear that the historical part of the *RT* prefers the latter. This is not to say, however, that the two frames necessarily cancel each other in the *RT*, as an example from the Lalitāditya narrative can demonstrate. When this king digs under a temple one day, he finds Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa’s handwritten dedications on older and decaying shrines. He and one of his wives then construct new shrines on this location, one of which carries the name of the relevant queen (*RT* 4.272–76).

¹³ An example of such a short vignette appears immediately after my sample, where Jayāpīḍa recruits from Vibhīṣaṇa, king of Laṅkā, five *rākṣasas* who assist him in building a large water project (*RT* 4.503–06). A similar vignette that allows the gods a place in the story appears in the portion of the text dedicated to his grandfather, Lalitāditya. A messenger from Indra brings this king a fruit that he demanded but that no human could supply, thereby demonstrating his universal command (*RT* 4.223–40). Another such vignette actually thematises the reluctance of the gods to intervene in human affairs in the Kali age, when Candrāpīḍa threatens them with a fast unto death if they do not help him solve a murder mystery (*RT* 4.100–105). Indeed, there is an indication later in the text that with continued moral degradation, Kashmir is becoming increasingly godless (*RT* 5.394). Magic plays a similar role in the text. Sorcery is certainly not alien to the characters and black magic is often credited with deaths. But again, the major events are driven by the desires and clever ploys of the heroes (as in Jayāpīḍa’s overcoming of the lion) and magic is often used to highlight the results of more mundane human behaviours and misbehaviours. Think, in this context, of Jayāpīḍa’s eventual death as the result of an angry Brahmin’s spell after this king has turned evil (*RT* 4.653; more on this episode later). True, some of the accounts of the relatively older kings in chapters 1–3 abound in stories of *nāgas*, gods and demons, as can be seen in the episodes about Meghavāna (*RT* 3.16–26, 31–71 and 72–81, respectively). But Kalhaṇa himself flags the unease with which he narrates such events, since they pertain to kings from relatively recent history and since ‘ordinary people’ find them hard to believe: *ityādy adyatanasyāpi caritaṃ tasya bhūpateḥ | prthagjaneṣv asaṃbhāvyam varṇayantas trapāmahe ||* (*RT* 3.94).

¹⁴ Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 122, make a similar point about some Karaṇam texts from late premodern South India, which give voice to and occasionally thematise a shift from divine-ordained (*daiva śakti*) and fate-driven models of human action to volunteerist and human-driven (*mānuṣa śakti*) explanations; see also Pollock, ‘Pretextures of Time’, p. 369.

Indeed, there is something surprisingly mundane and this-worldly about Jayāpīḍa and his seemingly fantastic adventures in Bengal.¹⁵ To begin with, the names of all the characters are real, common names, unlike the allegorical sobriquets that abound in the *DKC* and other *kathās* (e.g., *arthapati* for a tycoon). More important, Jayāpīḍa has remarkable strengths but also glaring shortcomings. Being bold and crafty and having nothing to lose, he overcomes a ferocious lion. But unlike the typical epic hero, his martial capabilities are limited, his triumphs are few and fragile, and he often benefits from flukes, such as Śrīdeva's chance appearance on the battleground and his lucky slingshot. Finally, the narrator is frank and even cynical about politicians, a sentiment that is rare in earlier *kāvya* but can be traced to the work of Kalhaṇa's predecessor and compatriot Bilhaṇa.¹⁶

From these various humanising aspects, we are instructed to pay special attention to Kalhaṇa's portrayal of Jayāpīḍa's vulnerability. Not only does this king lose both his throne and his control over his army as soon as he leaves Kashmir, but even after he somehow recovers them—thanks, in part, to an unlikely group of helpers—his power is rapidly and repeatedly undermined. In the passages that follow my sample, Kalhaṇa narrates the story of two additional missions, in both of which Jayāpīḍa is captured, is imprisoned and escapes only with difficulty, again thanks to unlikely sidekicks and a lot of luck.¹⁷ This, in other words, is not the story of a hero who can shoot down a whole army, like Arjuna in the *Mahābhārata*, or rob an entire town of its riches, like Apaharavarman in the *DKC*, but of a politician about whose weaknesses the author is forthright, if not blunt.

Let me clarify that I am not claiming that Kalhaṇa's humanising of Jayāpīḍa necessarily lends the story credibility and makes every part of it true. What I am arguing, rather, is that the narrative is based on a certain worldview, according to which the capabilities, shortcomings, values and actions of influential political actors are the dominant forces that shape human history and often dramatically change its course. Moreover, I believe that the text I have sampled chronicles what it deems an important change of direction in the history of Kashmir.

¹⁵ Stein, *Kalhana's 'Rajatarangini'*, Vol. 1, p. 94, observes that the episode has 'so fantastic a colouring that we might be tempted to class Jayāpīḍa with semi-mythic kings . . . were it not that we possess in his coins an unquestionable proof of his historical existence'.

¹⁶ See Bronner, 'Poetics of Ambivalence'; Cox, 'Sharing a Single Seat'; and McCrea, 'Poetry beyond Good and Evil', for discussions of Bilhaṇa's approach to the political. Of course, Bilhaṇa is not the only possible model. We know that the *RT* was probably part of a larger genre (Zutshi, 'Translating the Past'). For more on Kalhaṇa's cynical view of power, see McCrea in this issue.

¹⁷ The first mission (*RT* 4.514–29) involves his imprisonment by King Bhīmasena, an event that the text explicitly ties to his older enmity with Jajja back home (*RT* 4.520), and his escape after pretending to have contracted a dangerous plague. In the second (*RT* 4.531–81), he is jailed by the king of Nepal after being captured in battle and is saved only thanks to the astounding self-sacrifice of his minister Devaśarman, who kills himself and allows Jayāpīḍa to use his body to soften the impact of the water when the jailed king jumps into a river from his tower-top cell.

Jayāpīḍa's Cultural Makeover

To realise the change that the text may be documenting here, we need to examine the *RT*'s account of Jayāpīḍa's cultural activities at the end of my sample and view it in the context of the passage as a whole and of Kalhaṇa's statements and silences about Jayāpīḍa's predecessors (in particular Lalitāditya) and successors. Let us, then, take a close look at the relevant passage reproduced and translated below (*RT* 4.486–99):

utpattibhūmau deśe śmin dūradūratirohitā |
kaśyapena vitasteva tena vidyāvātārītā ||
vaco mūrkhō 'yam ity eva kasmaicid vadate sphuṭam |
sarvajñānaṃ¹⁸ dadac cakre sarvān vidyābhīyogināḥ ||
deśāntarād āgamayya vyācakaśāṇān kṣamāpatih |
prāvartayata vicchinnaṃ mahābhāṣyaṃ svamaṇḍale ||
kṣīrābhīdhāc chabdavidyopādhyāyāt sambhṛtaśrutāḥ |
budhaiḥ saha yayau vṛddhiṃ sa jayāpīḍapaṇḍitāḥ ||
bhūpater ātmanā spardhāṃ cakṣame na sa kasyacit |
ātmanas tu budhaiḥ spardhāṃ śuddhadhīr bahv amanyata ||
tāv paṇḍitaśabde 'bhūd rājaśabdād api prathā |
tais tair doṣair na tu mlāniṃ kālāntaravad āyayau ||
nṛpatau vidvadāyatte rājasāmṃmukhyakāṅkṣibhiḥ |
grhā babhūvur viduṣāṃ vyāptāḥ sevāgatair nṛpaiḥ ||
samagrahīt tathā rājā so 'nviṣya nikhilān budhān |
vidvaddurbhikṣam abhavad yathānyanṛpamaṇḍale ||
adhyakṣo bhaktaśālāyāṃ śukradantasya mantriṇaḥ |
vidvattayā thakkiyākhyas tena svikṛtya vardhitāḥ ||
vidvān dīnāralakṣeṇa pratyaḥaṃ kṛtavetaṇaḥ |
bhaṭṭo 'bhūd udbhaṭas tasya bhūmibhartuḥ sabhāpatih ||
sa dāmodaraguptākhyam kuṭṭanīmatakāriṇam |
kaviṃ kavim balir iva dhuryam dhīsacivam vyadhāt ||
manorathāḥ śaṅkhadantaś caṭakaḥ saṃdhimāms tathā |
babhūvuh kavayas tasya vāmanādyās ca mantriṇaḥ ||
sa svapne paścimāsāyāṃ lakṣayann udayam raveḥ |
deśe dharmottarācāryam praviṣṭam sādhu amanyata ||
sacetāḥ saṃstavavyaktavivakṛtvo¹⁹ babhūva saḥ |
bhāvānāṃ bhujyamānānām āsvādāntaravin nṛpaḥ ||

¹⁸ I am following the reading from Vishva Bandhu's critical edition for pāda c, on the difficulty of reading and translating which see Stein, *Kalhana's 'Rajatarangini'*, vol. 1, p. 165 (ad 4.487).

¹⁹ The reading in Vishva Bandhu's critical edition is *saṃstavavyaktavivekṛtvo*.

After knowledge took cover in far-off lands,
 he brought it back to this place, its homeland,
 just as Kaśyapa once reinstated the Vitastā River
 back to its soil.

To whoever came forth and declared,
 loud and clear, 'I'm a fool',
 he offered a complete education
 and made everyone knowledge seekers.

The king recruited exegetes from abroad
 to reinstate the *Mahābhāṣya*—
 the study of which had been interrupted—
 in the place where it belongs.

He accumulated knowledge by studying under Kṣīra,
 an authority on grammar, and his progress
 was on a par with that of his professors.

He was now 'Pandit Jayāpīḍa'.

He would not tolerate a challenge from any other king,
 but welcomed challenges from his professors,
 which allowed him to refine his intellect.

The fame he earned in his capacity as pandit
 was even greater than in his capacity as king,
 and hence it did not diminish, despite his various shortcomings,
 like other things that are subject to time.

Because he immersed himself in his work with his scholars,
 kings who came to pay him a visit
 laid siege to the homes of scholars
 in hopes of an interview.

The king looked high and low
 and assembled every single intellectual,
 draining all other kingdoms
 of their brains.

Impressed with the scholarship of Thakkiya,
 who was running Minister Śukradatta's Pilgrimage Housing Programme,
 he co-opted him to his staff
 and made him prosper.

He appointed Professor Bhaṭṭa Udbhata
 president of the Royal Academy,
 with a payment of 100,000 dinars per diem.

He made poet Dāmodara Gupta,
 author of *The Madam's School of Thought*,
 his chief adviser,
 just as Bali once did with Kavi.

Manoratha, Śaṅkhadanta, Caṭaka, and Saṃdhimān
 were appointed poets laureate,
 while Vāmana and the others
 landed the jobs of ministers.
 Once, in a dream, he saw the sun
 rising in the west,
 and he rightly understood that Professor Dharmottara
 had entered the country.
 This king was naturally bright,
 his skill in lucid exposition evolved with time,
 and he became a connoisseur
 of everything relishable.

This passage throws light on several important themes. The first is the tension between the idea of Kashmir as a major cultural centre and the reality at the time Jayāpīḍa took power. Kalhaṇa believes that Kashmir is the ‘homeland’ of knowledge and ‘the place where [the *Mahābhāṣya*] belongs’ (*utpattibhūmi, svamaṇḍala*).²⁰ But he acknowledges that erudition ‘took cover in far-off lands’ (*dūrādūratirohitā*) and that the scholarly tradition of studying Patāñjali’s text was ‘interrupted’ (*vicchinna*),²¹ so much so that intellectuals had to be imported en masse and the citizens had to come out as fools (*mūrkho ’yam*) to receive a ‘complete education’ (*sarvajñāna*).

Second, Kalhaṇa uses this tension to depict a cultural sea change: under Jayāpīḍa’s rule all citizens became ‘knowledge seekers’ (*vidyābhiyogin*) and the inflow of academics was so massive that it left all other lands with an acute brain drain (*vidvaddurbhikṣa*). Indeed, the list of scholars and authors appointed and recruited by Jayāpīḍa stands out in quantity, quality and diversity. Consider, in this context, the boost to the disciplines of grammar and logic given by Kṣīra and Dharmottara, respectively, the thriving of poetry—note the plethora of poet laureates named by Kalhaṇa and the powerful position enjoyed by Dāmodara Gupta, whose *The Madam’s School of Thought* (*Kuṭṭanāmata*) is given a mention of honor—and the growing preeminence of literary theory under the leadership of Vāmana and, more important, Bhaṭṭa Udbhata, who is made ‘president of the Royal Academy’ (*sabhāpati*) and whose profound impact on Sanskrit poetics is yet to be acknowledged by modern scholars. Note also that Kalhaṇa portrays an intellectually

²⁰ On the long history of close connections between Kashmir and the study of the *Mahābhāṣya*, see also *RT* 1.176, as well as Aklujkar’s ‘Gonardīya’, ‘Patañjali’, ‘Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya’; and Bronkhorst, ‘Note on Kashmir’.

²¹ For earlier instances of interruption of the study of the *Mahābhāṣya* in Kashmir, see Aklujkar, ‘Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya’.

pluralistic and highly diverse picture of Jayāpīḍa's court, with Vaidikas, Buddhists and possibly even Cārvākas inhabiting the same realm.²²

Third, this turnaround is described as a top-priority state programme, massively funded—note, for example, the deliberate mention of Udbhaṭa's astronomical salary—and personally led by the king. Kashmir's cultural revolution is portrayed as Jayāpīḍa's pet project and unlike his military campaigns, building ventures, or donations to temples, no official but he is credited for the dramatic investment in learning and the arts. Moreover, the text describes in detail Jayāpīḍa's self-immersion in the study of grammar with Kṣīra, his growing academic capabilities, his evolving tastes and the fact that his scholastic pursuits filled his dreams, to say nothing of his waking hours. Kalhaṇa thus narrates a surprising twist in the plot, whose hero abandons his allotted role as conqueror and king and assumes that of a paṇḍit. Indeed, our author misses no opportunity to contrast governance and scholarship, stressing that for his hero the latter came at the expense of the former. Jayāpīḍa, we are told, preferred scholarly to military pursuits, hung out with academics to the point of making himself unavailable for political and diplomatic work, had his cabinet staffed by scholars and appointed poets as his chief advisers. As the text straightforwardly puts it, the fame he earned under the title 'scholar' (*paṇḍitaśabda*), an area in which he demonstrated a natural gift and an impressive ascent, was greater than his fame in his capacity as king (*rājaśabda*), an area in which his flaws were abundant (*tais tair doṣaiḥ*).

These explicit themes are further underscored by comparing Jayāpīḍa with Lalitāditya, as the text repeatedly asks us to do. Kalhaṇa describes Lalitāditya primarily as a savvy general and an adventurer, but also as somewhat uncultivated.²³ Accordingly, we hear a great deal about his sweeping conquests and monumental building projects, but we find no mention whatsoever of poets or scholars in his court.²⁴ There is, likewise, no mention of Lalitāditya as a patron of the performing

²² It is not unlikely that Bhaṭṭa Udbhaṭa is identical with an important Cārvāka, also named Bhaṭṭa Udbhaṭa and a native of Kashmir (this possibility is noted by Solomon, 'Bhaṭṭa Udbhaṭa', pp. 991–92 and Bronkhorst, 'Udbhaṭa', p. 297). If this is indeed the case, then his high standing at Jayāpīḍa's court is indicative of the court's tolerance of such nonorthodox affiliations, if not of more general tolerance of the Cārvākas (on which see McCrea, 'Desecularization').

²³ It is with a hint of irony that he tells us, for example, that Lalitāditya traded a Buddha image taken from Magadha for a magic gemstone that allows a river to be crossed and that was in the possession of his clever prime minister, Caṅkuṇa (RT 4.244–63). As Caṅkuṇa puts it, almost condescendingly, he is handed 'the key for crossing the ocean of existence' in return for 'the key for crossing some dribble' (RT 4.260: *salilottaraṇopāyo mañi devena grhyatām | saṃsārottaraṇopāyaḥ sugato mahyam arpyatām ||*).

²⁴ Again, it may be with a touch of irony that the only bard mentioned in the entire section dedicated to Lalitāditya is King Yaśovarman, whom Lalitāditya defeated. As Kalhaṇa points out, it is by virtue of being overpowered that Yaśovarman, who ruled from the cultural centre of Kanauj and whose literary salon was manned by poets such as Vākpatirāja and Bhavabhūti, became Lalitāditya's 'panegyrist' (RT 4.144). But we know of no Vākpatirāja or Bhavabhūti working in Lalitāditya's court. As for scholars, we are told that Lalitāditya imported many knowledgeable men (*vinnara*, RT 4.245), but the only one Kalhaṇa actually names is this king's capable minister Caṅkuṇa, the brother of a famous magician

arts or a student of grammar, or, for that matter, as receiving any education.²⁵ This king is hardly ever present at the court and prefers to be with his troops on the road.²⁶ On the other hand, the comparison between the two monarchs serves to highlight Jayāpīḍa's failure to repeat the military feats of his grandfather. The text does mention a handful of hard-fought victories and claims that at one point Jayāpīḍa's kingdom reached the four seas (RT 4.590), though without giving any detail, unlike the grandfather's thoroughly documented conquests. But as we have seen, Kalhaṇa explicitly points out that this king's army fell short in comparison with Lalitāditya's, an observation that is then corroborated by Jayāpīḍa's succession of near-catastrophic campaigns that land him either alone or in the prisons of his enemies.

In short, Kalhaṇa narrates a marked shift of personality and politics in the ruling lineage. The grandfather is described as a gifted commander and an empire builder who enjoyed military campaigns and ribbon-cutting ceremonies, but who demonstrated no intellectual propensity and shared responsibility for the severe intellectual drought in Kashmir. His grandson is portrayed as a person of great cultural refinement and keen intellectual skill who did not do as well in his military campaigns but turned Kashmir into a centre of science, poetry and literary theory. There is thus a clear move here between two models of kingship: from a conqueror of an almost unthinkable empire (*sārvabhauma*, RT 4.126) to a 'connoisseur of everything relishable' (RT 4.499). But there is also continuity. If Lalitāditya is portrayed as giving Kashmir a decisive political hegemony over the centres of Sanskrit learning, such as Kanauj with its legendary poets, his handpicked successor (RT 4.359), who displays his grandfather's signature zest (*bhāva*), gives Kashmir a cultural hegemony that is just as impressive, replacing Kanauj altogether.²⁷

Story and History: Lessons from the Jayāpīḍa Episode

How it is that Kashmir, a small and isolated Himalayan valley, far removed from the subcontinent's main political and agricultural centres, became such a subcontinental cultural hub? How is one to account for this vale's unique contributions to the disciplines of grammar, Mīmāṃsā, logic, Śaiva theology and poetry and

(RT 4.246), whose wizardry is later demonstrated (RT 4.249–53; see also note 23), but about whose scholarship the text has nothing to report. Thus we hear of no grammarian, literary theorist, or logician at Lalitāditya's court, let alone in the cabinet.

²⁵ The only mention of a teacher who is possibly connected to this king is of one Ācārya Bhappata, but he is mentioned merely as a temple donor (RT 4.214).

²⁶ As noted by Wink, *Al-Hind*, p. 244, Lalitāditya's *digvijaya* 'took up most of [this] king's reign'. Note also that he dies on the road in mysterious circumstances (RT 4.367–69) and that his death is thus explicitly said to befit his feats (RT 4.370: *atyadbhutāni kṛtyāni śrutāny asya yathā kīla | vipattir api bhūbhartus tathāivātyadbhutā śrutā ||*).

²⁷ For Kalhaṇa's fascination with Kanauj, see Roy, 'Making of a Mandala', pp. 56–61.

to explain the fact that Kashmiri-based thinkers came to dominate the discourse on poetics throughout the Sanskrit world for at least four centuries? We may discount as biased Kalhaṇa's description of Kashmir as the 'homeland' of science and learning, as well as Bilhaṇa's loving portrayal of the valley as the 'jurisdiction' of the goddess Sarasvatī, where men and women speak fluent Sanskrit and Prakrit in home after home, but a far more useful approach would be to historicise Kashmir's claim for cultural hegemony.²⁸ For there is no denying that between 800 and 1200 CE Kashmir occupied a distinctive position in the Sanskrit cosmopolis and was perceived as a major cultural centre even by outsiders.²⁹

If we look at existing scholarly literature for explanations of this unexpected cultural prominence, starting around the time of Jayāpīḍa's reign, and its possible relationship with the *RT*'s Jayāpīḍa episode, we are bound to be disappointed. Kumkum Roy, who perceptively describes an overall change in Kalhaṇa's historical sensibilities when he moves from a mythical past to a historical 'real time' and then to a more or less contemporary period, is nonetheless oblivious of the possibility that the Jayāpīḍa episode marks a shift within what she sees as the text's more historical section.³⁰ Sheldon Pollock, who has revolutionised the study of Sanskrit literary culture and has criticised the exclusion of the *RT* from the realm of historical texts, primarily uses Kalhaṇa's chronicle to portray the relationship between the political and cultural orders in the Sanskrit cosmopolis as universal and constant. He thus sees Jayāpīḍa's personal and institutional investment in the study of grammar as 'testifying to the larger pattern at work concerning the correlation of grammatical and political correctness'.³¹ Likewise, Ashok Aklujkar demonstrates that Kalhaṇa presupposed 'a close connection between a good, stable reign and the maintenance of [*Mahābhāṣya*] studies' because this was a steady feature of Kashmir's local culture.³² To the extent that it examines Kalhaṇa's story of Jayāpīḍa, then, recent scholarship emphasises the ways in which it corresponds to some larger and transhistorical pattern.

My reading of the episode suggests that we can interpret it as an answer to the question put forward above by actually attempting to historicise Kashmir's lasting cultural preeminence. One would think, perhaps, that this remote valley's unlikely cultural hegemony dovetailed with its equally unlikely political hegemony in the

²⁸ For the Bilhaṇa references, see *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 1.21, 18.6. For more on Bilhaṇa's patriotism and belonging to Kashmir, see Bronner, 'Poetics of Ambivalence'. For a discussion of the dissemination of Kashmiri texts and ideas throughout the cosmopolis, see, for example, Cox, 'Saffron in the Rasam'. I am grateful to Sheldon Pollock for his insightful comments on this point.

²⁹ See, for example, the story of Śrīhaṛṣa's trip to Kashmir to receive Sarasvatī's stamp of approval for his poem. For discussions of this narrative, see Granoff, 'Sarasvatī's Sons', p. 361; and Bronner, Shulman and Tubb, *Innovations and Turning Points*.

³⁰ Roy, 'Making of a Mandala', pp. 59–60.

³¹ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, p. 172. See also Pollock, 'Pretextures of Time', pp. 377–79, for the demand to take Kalhaṇa's claim to be a historian more seriously.

³² Aklujkar, 'Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya', p. 72. See also Aklujkar's 'Gonardīya' and 'Patañjali'.

middle of the eighth century, under the aegis of Tang China.³³ But Kalhaṇa goes out of his way to show that the two hegemonies did not coincide. Kashmir, he tells us, started to fashion itself as an intellectual superpower only after its political and military sway began rapidly to dissolve and under an administration that had very mixed results in trying to subjugate other lands and that eventually relinquished conquest altogether (*kiṃ digjayādibhiḥ kleśaiḥ*, *RT* 4.621).³⁴ If we look forward in Kalhaṇa's chronicle, we discover that the discrepancy between the two hegemonies only intensifies in the following centuries under those kings who continued to fortify Kashmir's intellectual stature, but who never claimed anything like its extensive sovereignty under Lalitāditya.³⁵ Indeed, Jayāpīḍa's cultural makeover survives even after his own late-life change of heart, when he turns against his citizens and the Brahmin constituency under what Kalhaṇa describes as the bad influence of his corrupt Kāyastha bureaucrats. Although some Brahmins leave the country, those who remain challenge, defeat and outlast their original benefactor.³⁶

As my reading of the text implies, we should take Kalhaṇa's account as narrating a conscious, volitional shift on Jayāpīḍa's part between two kinds of governance and two very different avenues for hegemony. Thus his story is not a 'formulaic representation . . . concerning the philological preoccupation of rulers',³⁷ but a narrative about a deliberate break with the dynastic past and the adoption of a new and unique path of kingship. No other monarch in the *River of Kings* is credited with anything remotely similar to Jayāpīḍa's absorption in his studies and his investment in the community of the learned,³⁸ nor is this king's newly adopted scholarship presented as something that is inherently right and problem-free. Later in the story,

³³ For a good description of this unlikely political hegemony, see Wink, *Al-Hind*, pp. 243–44.

³⁴ This was when Jayāpīḍa turned bad and started to oppress his people; more on this shortly.

³⁵ An example is the reign of Avantivarman (r. 855–83). Under this king Sanskrit poetics and poetry again thrived with big names such as Ānandavardhana, Ratnākara and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (*RT* 5.34, 159), but Kalhaṇa credits Avantivarman with not a single conquest and instead praises his investment in water projects and agriculture inside Kashmir (*RT* 5.68–122). On the whole, the appetite for *digvijaya* of the Lalitāditya type basically disappears from later Kashmiri history. An example is the long reign of King Ananta, who ruled Kashmir for much of the eleventh century. His one feeble attempt at foreign campaigns is described as dangerous and ill conceived (*kṛcchragata*, *mantraśūnya*, *RT* 7.219) and his wise prime minister later uses his last words to warn him against any such expedition into foreign territory in the future (*mā kārṣṭha pararāṣṭreṣu rabhasārabdhisāhasam*, 7.270).

³⁶ *RT* 4.620–56.

³⁷ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, p. 176. Let me clarify that I am not disputing Pollock's valid and amply documented argument about the connection between kings and grammar throughout the Sanskrit cosmopolis. My point is rather that the Jayāpīḍa episode does more than connect a certain ruler with philological preoccupation in its generic form and, moreover, that Jayāpīḍa's total immersion in scholarship and investment in scholars is unique compared with other monarchs within the *RT*.

³⁸ In this context it is particularly interesting to compare Jayāpīḍa with Harṣa, the major figure in book 7 and surely one of the most important characters in the entire *RT* (for a discussion of the Harṣa episode, see the articles by Cox and McCrear in this issue). Like Jayāpīḍa, Harṣa is described as a particularly well-versed scholar, proficient in all knowledge systems (*kṛtsnavidyānidhiḥ*, *RT* 7.610; *vidvaccūdāmaṇiḥ*, 7.934; see also 7.941, 1424); he is also praised as a polyglot poet (*sarvabhāṣāsu*

when Jayāpīḍa turns evil, Kalhaṇa informs us that he uses his learning (*pāṇḍitya*) to methodically torment his subjects.³⁹

By way of contextualising this sea change, Kalhaṇa explicitly ties it to the shrinking political fortunes of Kashmir, thus narrating a midstory turn from imperial policies, whose fruits diminish quickly with time, to scholarly pursuits, whose fruits are more lasting (RT 4.408, 491). Hence the plot that began with Jayāpīḍa's attempt at a global conquest modelled after that of Lalitāditya surprisingly ends with his establishment of a government of scholars and poets and the attainment of a kind of intellectual *digvijaya*. But the account also insists that this change is rooted in the character and proclivities of Jayāpīḍa as a refined, self-possessed and poetry-loving person, whose repeated challenges to other kings to one-up his donations, the text explicitly compares to the poetic competition of *samasyā* (RT 4.619). This also explains why attending a dance show and an affair with a dancer—in

satkaviḥ, RT 7.610). However, Harṣa is consistently portrayed as a bon vivant who parties at night in the company of bohemian types, artists and courtesans and who sleeps during the daytime (*svapato dinayāmau dvau sarvakāḷam vilāsinaḥ*, RT 7.943; *ullāso rātriṣu dine svāpaḥ*, 7.1244), a far cry from the professorial lifestyle adopted by Jayāpīḍa, who spent his days hanging out with grammarians and his nights dreaming about logicians. In fact, there are several specific ways in which the text enables us to compare and contrast these two kings. First, whereas Jayāpīḍa staffed his cabinet with poets and men of letters, of whom, as we have seen, Kalhaṇa provides a long list, Harṣa's even longer list of appointees includes not even one and Kalhaṇa explains that this king basically reinstated the crooked ministers of his abusive father (RT 7.886–98). Second, although Harṣa is said to have been, initially, a generous supporter of the learned (RT 7.934, 952), Kalhaṇa does not name even a single scholar or poet laureate actually working at his court (we are told only that the exiled poet Bilhaṇa wished that he could join this king's services when he was still in his generous phase, a reference that seems mostly prompted by Bilhaṇa's own words in the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*; compare RT 7.935–37 with *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 18.64). Instead, Harṣa's true passion is for music, singing and dancing (in both singing and dancing he also takes students, RT 7.1116–18, 7.1140, 8.12–13), to say nothing of the dancing girls themselves, and it is only the names of such performers that Kalhaṇa mentions as associated with this king. Third, it seems no coincidence that Kalhaṇa mentions both these kings as handing out astronomical payments of exactly 100,000 dinars: Jayāpīḍa pays this sum to Professor Udbhaṭa per diem as part of what Kalhaṇa describes as his massive investment in higher learning (RT 4.495), whereas Harṣa gives the very same amount on a whim to a student who took singing classes with him, in the context of what the text portrays as a capricious squandering of state funds on his bohemian lifestyle (RT 7.1118). Fourth, it likewise does not seem random that Kalhaṇa says that the title 'king' (*rājasabda*) did not really capture the activities of both Jayāpīḍa and Harṣa, at points in the story when both are still portrayed positively by him, but it is only for Jayāpīḍa that he offers an alternative title: 'scholar' (*paṇḍītasabda*; compare RT 4.891 with 7.920). Finally, there is a crucial distinction between both kings' behaviours after they have turned evil in Kalhaṇa's eyes. Whereas Jayāpīḍa retains his scholastic penchant (*pāṇḍitya*) and even uses it to methodically torment his citizens (RT 4.625), Kalhaṇa repeatedly speaks of Harṣa's stupidity (*jaḍa*, *jāḍya*) and callowness (*mugḍha*, *maugḍhya*) during his long period of decay (see, for example, RT 7.1115, 1127, 1136, 1164, 1424).

³⁹ RT 4.625; see also 6.208 on learning as a double-edged sword. Notice also the way in which the king's learning is used in the criticisms against Jayāpīḍa, especially in the manner in which the Brahmins use grammar as a means for mocking the king in their fake praise of him as a latter-day Pāṇini (RT 4.635–37).

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which the king displays both refinement and self-control—form the core part of the story of his war campaign.

We do not have to accept every aspect in Kalhaṇa's narrative as fact (even if there is no reason to reject out of hand its seemingly more far-fetched particulars). We also need not necessarily adopt his historical framework, which ascribes great explanatory power to the personality of the individuals making up Kashmir's dynasties at the expense of other historical explanations and which has its fair share of biases and axes to grind. But we have to begin to realise, I believe, that this fascinating literary account, based on thorough research, is not blind to historical change and in fact sets out to record and explain it in a historical causal manner. Here I beg to differ from Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, who believe that the *RT* is entirely lacking in historical causality.⁴⁰ Despite its various literary concerns, political and moral agendas and chronological remove from the earlier events it narrates—limitations from which no history is free—the *RT* can do much more for us than merely to serve as a mine of names and facts or as a proof of some South Asian given. This text is acutely attuned to Kashmir and its unique nature and history, including this region's special cultural and scholarly history, a topic that is clearly dear to Kalhaṇa's heart. From the vantage point of this twelfth century man of letters, Jayāpīḍa's reign was a watershed in Kashmir's investment in learning and the arts. If we want to gain a better understanding of Kashmir's unusual intellectual stature and, indeed, further our comprehension of the relationship between knowledge and power in this world, which the text problematises in fascinating ways, Kalhaṇa offers us what is at least a very promising starting point.

This brings me back to the question 'History or poetry?' with which I began. I hope that the preceding discussion has helped to convince the reader that this either-or dilemma is false and that a both-and approach to the *RT* holds far more promise. Several of the articles in this issue rightly emphasise Kalhaṇa's artistic style and its use in the service of portraying a constantly chaotic and violent world (Cox), his view about the always-corrupting nature of political power as inspired by the *Mahābhārata* (McCrea) and the related wavelike, rise-and-fall structure of the political careers he describes (McCrea, Obrock). But within this poetic and moralistic framework that applies pretty much to all the waves in the *River of Kings*, Kalhaṇa is acutely interested in the different way each wave rises and falls and in the ways in which they are connected. Indeed, he keeps comparing and contrasting his characters, whether they are contemporaries or generations apart, and often the comparison is systematic and highly specific (at one point, for example, he engages in a detailed juxtaposition of Sussala and his brother Uccala, concluding that Sussala was better than his brother in all but three areas: generosity,

⁴⁰ 'One looks in vain for a strong understanding of causal linkages, or for a deeper, at least somewhat reflective organising principle of interpretation that makes sense of the pointillistic assembling of events' (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 259).

nonattachment and accessibility; *RT* 8.482–99). I believe that this fascination with personality is at least partly rooted in Kalhaṇa's keen interest in historical causality as he understands it. In the *RT*, it is the personal proclivities and decisions of each monarch that determine his political career and legacy and, hence, the course of Kashmir's political and cultural history. And despite the regularity with which kings crest and crash, they cause the river itself to twist and bend unexpectedly, and often, as in the case of Jayāpīḍa's cultural makeover, with consequences felt many miles downstream.

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