

THE DATE AND PROVENANCE OF THE *BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA*  
AND THE VAIKUṆṬHA PERUMĀL TEMPLE

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It is something of an inconclusive task to assign specific dates to the Purāṇas, as exemplified by the considerable variation in the dates assigned by scholars to the *Bhāgavata* itself. Not the least of the problems is that the Purāṇas are a fluid body of literature that went on transforming along the centuries through the process of transmission and adaptation.<sup>1</sup> These texts were composed for public oral recitation, often in specific ritualistic contexts, and their reciters openly modified them in accordance with time and place as well as sectarian considerations. Accordingly, there are several versions of most Purāṇas, some of them differing considerably, making the construction of critical editions a daunting prospect. Any datable piece of information that may be gleaned from the texts may only reflect the historical period of time corresponding to the insertion of that section of the text and may not reflect the date of other sections in the text.

While the present Purāṇas contain recent material that can be traced well into historical times, they also contain ancient narratives and anecdotes from the earliest period of protohistory in South Asia. It is thus futile to speak of absolute dates for any Purāṇa as a whole, since one would have to speak of the age of individual sections within individual Purāṇas. Much of the endless conjecture and differences of opinion amongst scholars results from the fallacy of assigning old dates to an entire text on the basis of an archaic reference—which might just be an ancient well-preserved fragment in a later compilation, or of assigning a much later date to an entire text on the basis of a more recent dateable reference such as a dynasty of the historical period—which might be a much later interpolation in an older

text.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Purāṇic scholars such as Rocher (1986) decline even to attempt to date them.

The date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* must be charted within this nebulous chronological framework. There has been considerable debate surrounding the date of the text, that is to say, the version of the text that has been handed down in its present form, although a number of scholars have considered it to be one of the much later Purāṇas, and the present *consensus gentium* holds the text to be the product of a Southern hand, written sometime after the 8th century C.E. In this paper, I will survey some of the more influential arguments that have surfaced in this regard, and consider whether Hudson's work on the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple in Kāñcīpuram provokes a revisiting of established views pertaining to the date and locus of composition of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

A number of early Indologists—H. H. Wilson, Colbrooke, and Colinder, to cite only a few examples—believed that the *Bhāgavata* was written in the 13th century by one Bopadeva (born in 1260 C. E.), a proposal made by the first European translator of the text, Burnouf.<sup>3</sup> Buhler, accordingly, felt impelled to call the text “a massive forgery,” owing to what he considered to be its pretension to antiquity and originality. This assignment of the text to Bopadeva seemed to rest merely on the fact that Bopadeva was the author of the *Muktāphala*, a work dependent on the *Bhāgavata*, and on the *Harilīlā*, an index to the *Bhāgavata*. But Indian scholars (e.g., Sharma, B. N. K., 1932) soon pointed out that the famous Vaiṣṇava theologian Madhva, Bopadeva's contemporary, wrote a commentary on the text in the 13th century, and referred to a number of different recensions and previous commentaries, which discredited that theory.<sup>4</sup>

A further lower limit for the date of the *Bhāgavata*, which goes back at least to Winternitz (1927), is still in circulation, namely, that it must have been posterior to another famous Vaiṣṇava theologian, Rāmānuja in the 12th century C.E. This supposition rests entirely on the fact that Rāmānuja never referred to the *Bhāgavata* in his corpus of writings, which, according to this line of thought, he would have done, as a Vaiṣṇava, had it existed in his time. However, one need only consider that Rāmānuja never referred to the influential devotional Vaiṣṇava Ālvār poets who preceded him in his own place of origin, and of whose existence he was undoubtedly very much aware, to see the limitations of *argumenta ex silentio*. One would therefore more fruitfully seek theological reasons for this lacuna—perhaps, as Fillizat suggested (1962), Rāmānuja was simply partial to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,

which he held to be the preeminent Purāṇa, or perhaps his dedication to Viṣṇu as the supreme Godhead made him uncomfortable with Kṛṣṇa's usurpation of this position in the *Bhāgavata*. As van Buitenen (1988) notes, Rāmānuja was very exclusive in his sources. In any event, the Muslim traveler Alberuni referred to the “Vāsudeva Bhāgavata” (i.e., the *Kṛṣṇa Bhāgavata*<sup>5</sup>), as part of a list read to him from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* itself in 1030 C.E. Does this mean that Rāmānuja, as an avid follower of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, would also have been aware of the *Bhāgavata*? In any case, Alberuni's date appears to set a definite upper limit for the text that is slightly earlier than Rāmānuja in the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup>

Although most other suggested chronological indicators are subject to criticism of various sorts, they are useful in illustrating the tentative and inconclusive nature of Purāṇic dating. Philosophical arguments supporting a hypothetical date for this text are particularly nebulous. While some have proposed an 8th- or 9th-century date based on their perception of the *Bhāgavata*'s *advaita*, “non-dualistic” philosophical orientation and the proximity it would suggest to the great monist philosopher Śaṅkara (e.g., Hacker, 128), others hold the contrary position, arguing for a pre-Śaṅkara date on the grounds that the text does not show awareness of important elements of his doctrine,<sup>7</sup> or maintaining that it was Śaṅkara who borrowed elements from the *Bhāgavata*.<sup>8</sup> In my own view, while the philosophy of the text is certainly not that of Śaṅkara, its lack of a uniform and cohesive overarching philosophical view, (*siddhānta*) speaks to a date prior to the rise of the sectarian exegetes on the Vedānta started by Śaṅkara, who, in comparison, were quite consistent and specific in their formulations.

Other rationales do not fare much better. Vaidya (1925), for example, argued that the text must have post-dated the demise of Buddhism in India, since, among a number of somewhat questionable reasons, it treats the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.<sup>9</sup> Jawahar Lal Sharma, however, pointed out that the *Mahābhārata* also knows the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and the present form of this text was known in the 5th century C.E. Moreover “there is absolutely no reason why the portions now relied upon by Mr. Vaidya to prove the lateness of the Purāṇa could not have been later interpolations.” (J. Sharma 1978, 68)

Sharma's own proposals, in turn, which preferred an earlier date, were not immune from criticism and, again, are useful in demonstrating the problems of textual dating. Sharma noted that the philosopher Gauḍapāda, writing in the 7th century C.E., mentions the *Bhāgavata* by name in

his commentary on the *Uttara Gītā* (2.46) and also quotes a verse from the *Bhāgavata* (10.14.4). However, Hazra objected that these references are not found in older manuscripts of Gauḍapāda's *Uttara Gītā*, and could thus have been added by later redactors.<sup>10</sup> Sharma also noted that the famous Śaivite philosopher and literary theorist of Kashmir, Abhinavagupta, referred to the "Vaiṣṇava Bhāgavata" in his commentary on the *Gītā* in the tenth century C.E., but Hazra questions this as well on the same grounds: the references are not found within the text of one old manuscript of this commentary, but are written in the margin, leaving open the possibility that they could have been transferred from the margin into the text by a later redactor, and imbedded in the text from that point on. Sharma's identification of *Bhāgavata* verses in texts prior to the 6th century C.E. met with similar objections.<sup>11</sup>

Most Indian Purāṇic specialists have tended towards relatively early dates. Perhaps the most prolific scholar of the Purāṇas, Hazra, argued that the contents of the *Bhāgavata* do not suggest it to be a late work and proposed a date in the first half of the 6th century C.E. (1938, 524), shortly after the composition of other texts featuring the Kṛṣṇa story that will be discussed below.<sup>12</sup> Dikṣitar (1951) went back further still, considering the *Bhāgavata* to be one of the most ancient of the Purāṇas. He noted similarities between the *Bhāgavata* and the religion of the Guptas,<sup>13</sup> and argued the text must have been composed at a time just before the imperial Guptas were rising into prominence. Since the Guptas ruled between 320-500 C.E., "there should be no hesitation in putting it down as a work of the 3rd century A.D." (xxix). Jawarhar Lal Sharma fortified this line of argument by drawing attention to the fact that the Gupta dynasty is not mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*, although the earlier dynasties of the Nandas and Mauryas are. He concluded that it therefore belonged to an era when the Gupta dynasty had not become the subject of history; rather, it was contemporaneous with it (70).

Another scholar to adopt the time of the Guptas as the *Bhāgavata's terminus ante quem* is Tagare (1976). He notes that a Jain text, the *Nandī Sūtra*, was composed by 980 or 993 "after Vira," which is taken by scholars to correspond either to 453-466 C.E., or 512-525 C.E. A list of heretical texts is found in this scripture, including the *Bhārata* (*Mahābhārata*), *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Purāṇa Bhāgavata*. The fact that the *Mahābhārata* was simply called *Bhārata* is significant in evaluating the antiquity of this passage, since *Bhārata* was the older name for the epic text. Tagare presumes that the

*Bhāgavata* must have been in existence for at least a century for it to have been influential enough to attract the concern of the Jain author of the *Nandī Sūtra* in the 5th or 6th century C.E. Purāṇic scholars from India have thus presented a number of rationales for regarding the date of the *Bhāgavata* as being coeval with the bulk of the other Purāṇas produced sometime during or before the Gupta period.

While referred to in at least ten Purāṇas,<sup>14</sup> the Kṛṣṇa story is primarily preserved in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*; the *Harivaṁśa* (a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*); and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The belief that the *Bhāgavata* postdates the *Harivaṁśa* (usually dated between 1st-3rd century C.E.)<sup>15</sup> and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1st-4th century C.E.)<sup>16</sup> seems to be universally held, although not always accounted for. It seems to go back to a comment made by the influential H. H. Wilson (and subsequently echoed without further substantiation by Winternitz and Macdonell) that "the simpler style of [the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*] argues for its priority over the *Bhāgavata*" (lxviii-lxix).<sup>17</sup> Extending the argument, Ingalls read the simple rusticity of the *Harivaṁśa* as an indication of its temporal priority as a vessel of the Kṛṣṇa narrative. He argued that it was followed chronologically by the more theologically concerned *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which was succeeded, in turn, by the philosophical sophistication and literary erudition of the *Bhāgavata*. Since the publication of Ingalls' article (1968), the basic assumption that the *Bhāgavata's* more expansive and erudite treatment of the Kṛṣṇa story is indicative of a later period seems rarely to have been called into question.

Another way of accounting for this disparity between the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*, however, is to see that an ancient Kṛṣṇa story could have been interpreted and transmitted through different communities—the *Bhāgavata*, and to a lesser extent the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, being the preserve of men of letters, and the *Harivaṁśa* of more rural communities. From this perspective, the difference in genres between the texts might reflect synchronic sociological distinctions rather than diachronic differences. And the fact that any of these texts preserved either more elaborate or less extensive narrative details on particular incidents may simply reflect the inclinations of these different communities, or the anomalies of oral recension rather than the passage of time. The sophisticated literary features of the *Bhāgavata* could profitably be correlated with the emergence of these features in dateable Sanskrit sources. After all, the very influential treatise on dramatology by Bhārata, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which influenced all subsequent literary theory in the Sanskrit tradition—or at least a work

ascribed to Bhārata dealing with dramaturgy and *rasa*—was in existence before 300 C.E. (Kanc, 47).<sup>18</sup>

### The Two *Bhāgavatas*

Any contribution pertaining to the date of the *Bhāgavata* must unavoidably take a position on the debate as to whether the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* sacred to the Vaiṣṇavas and containing the story of Kṛṣṇa is the same *Bhāgavata* as that mentioned in the lists of the eighteen principal Purāṇas. The problem is that there is another *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Devī Bhāgavata*, which upholds the Goddess as the supreme absolute Being, and the Śākta followers of this text claim that the *Bhāgavata* noted in the lists refers to the *Devī Bhāgavata*, not to the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*, which in their view belongs to the later and less authoritative category known as Upapurāṇa ("supplementary Purāṇa").<sup>19</sup> This controversy surfaces repeatedly and goes back to at least the 14th century, since it is mentioned implicitly by the famous *Bhāgavata* commentator Śrīdhara, who says it is forbidden to regard any other Purāṇa than the Vaiṣṇava one as the true *Bhāgavata*.<sup>20</sup> This debate may also be implied in Alberuni's statement in the 11th century mentioned earlier, insofar as he makes a point of specifically referring to the *Vāsudeva Bhāgavata* as one of the Purāṇas read to him from a list in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. However, this reading of Alberuni is by no means certain.

The topic is relevant to any discussion of the *Bhāgavata*'s dating since the Bombay and Calcutta editions of the *Mahābhārata* mention the eighteen Purāṇas (18.5.46).<sup>21</sup> The Khoh Copper Plate inscription of Śarvanātha, in 532 C.E., refers to the *Mahābhārata* as having 100,000 verses, so if this verse was among them, the Khoh inscription would provide a *terminus ante quem* in the 6th century C.E. for the eighteen Purāṇas including the *Bhāgavata*. Unfortunately, like so much else, the matter is not absolutely settled, since this verse has been considered a later interpolation by the compilers of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute's critical edition of the text, who have seen fit to relegate it to a footnote.

Much of the controversy centers on a statement in one of the other principal Purāṇas, the *Matsya Purāṇa*, which gives a very brief description of the contents of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* referred to in the list of eighteen. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa*, the book which contains a detailed discussion of *dharma*, religious duty, in the course of a discussion about the *gāyatrī mantra*,<sup>22</sup> and which contains the story relating to the death of the demon

Vṛtra, is the *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. It also states that the *Bhāgavata* deals with accounts of gods and men who lived in the *sārasvata kalpa*,<sup>23</sup> and mentions the *brahmavidyā* ("knowledge of brahman") of Hayagrīva. Promoters of the *Devī Bhāgavata* case (e.g., Sanyal, 1969) draw attention to the fact that although both *Bhāgavatas* have the story of Vṛtra, and both discuss *dharma*, only in the *Devī Bhāgavata* is *dharma* discussed in the context of the *gāyatrī mantra*. Moreover, the only connection between the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* and the *gāyatrī* is the shared word *dhimahi* in the opening verse, while the *Devī Bhāgavata* contains two words from the *gāyatrī mantra*: *dhimahi* and *pracodayāt*, in addition to being written in *gāyatrī* meter.<sup>24</sup> Srikantha Sastri (1932-33) further noted that the Vṛtra story in the *Devī Bhāgavata* is closer to the older one in the *Taittirīya Saṁhita*, an ancient Vedic text,<sup>25</sup> thus suggesting its greater antiquity. Also, the *Devī* supporters pointed out that the Matsya reference indicated that the *Bhāgavata* was composed in the Sārasvata eon, which is the case with the *Devī Bhāgavata*, while the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* was recited to Brahmā by Viṣṇu in the Brāhma eon. Gangannath Jha (1936) added the further observation that another Purāṇa, the *Śiva Purāṇa*, explicitly states that the *Devī Purāṇa*, which describes the story of Goddess Durgā, is said to be the *Bhāgavata*.

The main proponent of the Vaiṣṇava claim was R.C. Hazra in 1953. He drew up a list of points that disqualified the claims of the proponents of the *Devī Bhāgavata*. First of all, many ancient authors going back to Ballālasena in the 11th century quote the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*, but not the *Devī*, and the *nibandha* commentarial writers<sup>26</sup> are all in favor of the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* without exception, and they too quote from it, but never from the *Devī*, except in one instance.<sup>27</sup> In addition, as noted above, Alberuni in the eleventh century mentions the *Vāsudeva Bhāgavata* in his list of Hindu Purāṇas, but says nothing of the *Devī* one. Moreover, there is no mention of the *Devī Bhāgavata* in the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*, nor does the latter make any attempt to establish its authenticity. The *Devī Bhāgavata*, in contrast, is much more self-conscious about its own status, and insistent on being the authentic *Bhāgavata*, and even makes a point of relegating the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* to the status of a supplementary Upapurāṇa. Thus, the *Devī* knows the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* and not vice-versa—hence, the *Bhāgavata* was in existence when the *Devī Purāṇa* was written. Hazra also notes that the *Nāradya Purāṇa*, chapter 96, gives the contents of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, which are undoubtedly those of the Vaiṣṇava one;<sup>28</sup> moreover, the contents of the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* are more befitting those of a Purāṇa. In addition, he

notes that there is no mention of Kṛṣṇa's consort Rādhā in the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*, while in the *Devī Bhāgavata*, Kṛṣṇa is subordinate to her. The emergence of Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa's consort is considered to be a relatively late development, and this fact alone calls into question the priority of the *Devī Bhāgavata*.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Hazra points out that the Śāktas are not even unanimous as to which Śākta Purāṇa is the *Bhāgavata*—some say the *Devī Bhāgavata*, some the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, and some the *Devī Purāṇa*.<sup>30</sup>

These are convincing arguments, the only obstacle perhaps being the *Matsya Purāṇa*'s statement that the *Bhāgavata* was written in the *sārasvata kalpa*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, on the whole, we may affirm the position recently taken by Mackenzie Brown (1983). He sums up what he considers to be the majority opinion and reiterates "the most obvious and perhaps most compelling argument: the *Bhāgavata* is largely innocent of any self-conscious attempt to establish itself as a Mahā-Purāṇa and is unaware of even the existence of the *Devī-Bhāgavata*, while the latter text devotes considerable effort to affirming its own claim to be among the canonical eighteen, while explicitly stating that the *Bhāgavata* belongs to the lesser class of Upa-Purāṇas" (553). One might also add that the term Mahāpurāṇa itself occurs only rarely in Purāṇa literature and so is probably of late origin. The *Devī Bhāgavata*'s conscious utilization of the term could therefore point to its lateness and add further support to the priority of the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*.

Yet Brown also reiterates a familiar caveat: old texts may contain new material, and new ones, old material. To say that the *Devī Bhāgavata* is later, simply means that old material is strung together under a new schema of coherence. Besides, a newer text may preserve an older version of a particular narrative than an older text. For example, as Brown notes, the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata*'s alterations of the circumstances leading to Parīkṣit's death are more extensive than the *Devī Bhāgavata*'s, which went back to what he considers to be an older source in this regard, the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>32</sup> From this perspective, the final date of editing is less important than the integrity of the ancient events recorded. Nonetheless, I concur with Brown that the Vaiṣṇava claim seems more compelling, and I have used the term *Bhāgavata*, herein, to refer to the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

### The Archaic Language of the *Bhāgavata*.

Another feature of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* relevant to issues of dating—one that is both unique and puzzling—is the fact that the text is permeated

with ancient Vedic linguistic forms that had become obsolete by the time of Purāṇic Sanskrit; in fact, Vedic archaism in classical Sanskrit is conspicuous by its absence. The R̥gvedic language is an oral one, recited by ritual specialists, not by literati, so there is very little literary influence from the R̥gveda on high Sanskrit literature. By the time it flourished, classical Sanskrit had completely supplanted the Vedic language, and the Veda was only known by rote; the archaic language had ceased to be a productive presence. How, then, to explain the language and style of the *Bhāgavata*, which is unique in the Purāṇic genre for its literary sophistication, yet is equally unique in being the only text in the classical period replete with Vedic archaisms?

Meier (1939) was perhaps the first to draw attention to the fact that, although the language of the *Bhāgavata* is primarily classical, there is a large amount of Vedic speech mixed in. He rejected the accusation by Buhler that this was the product of a massive literary deception, but remained puzzled by the phenomenon. The archaisms are sprinkled consistently throughout the text irrespective of the style or content of the passages. Meier initially entertained the possibility that the archaisms might have been caused by the exigencies of the meter—that is, if the archaic form contained a different number of syllables from more standard equivalent forms in the classical language, then the author might have adopted the archaic form when the restrictions of the meter demanded that particular number of syllables. This, however, did not account for many of the forms.<sup>33</sup> Meier was unable to suggest any plausible reason for this phenomenon.

Biswas (1968), who has completed the only extensive and comprehensive analysis of the entirety of these Vedic linguistic features, accepted the forms at face value, and considered them to be indicative of the antiquity of the text. He also pointed out that in addition to the Vedic grammatical formations, the style of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is extraordinarily difficult in places, to which any translator must attest: "on this ground of style itself, I venture to suggest that the composition of the Purāṇa should be considerably antedated than the twelfth century C.E. usually assigned to it" (xii).

Others have preferred to explain these Vedicisms as strategic affectations. Mehta (1942), who examined some of these linguistic traits, felt that the "author has purposely striven to give an archaic tinge to his expression" (40). The most influential proponent of this perspective has been van Buitenen (1988). He proposed that the author of the *Bhāgavata* was engaged in a very conscious process of "sanskritization," which he defined

as “a process in the Indian civilization in which a person or a group consciously relates himself or itself to an accepted notion of true and ancient ideology and conduct” (234).

Van Buitenen first sets out to prove that the followers of the *Bhāgavata* tradition were situated at the lower levels of the social echelon during the period within which he places the composition of the *Bhāgavata*—prior to Alberuni’s mention of it, and after the South Indian devotional movement of the Ālvār saints (the connection between the *Bhāgavata*, the Ālvārs and the South of India will be discussed below).<sup>34</sup> He then argued that the three prominent South Indian Vaiṣṇava teachers—Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, and Rāmānuja<sup>35</sup>—were engaged in: 1) accepting non-Sanskritic literature and institutionalizing it in traditional temple worship; 2) accepting and institutionalizing the Pañcarātra Āgama, the body of Vaiṣṇava literature outlining the details of temple rituals and other specifics of Vaiṣṇava practice, and 3) vedānticizing Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.<sup>36</sup> Van Buitenen pointed out that a fairly limited corpus of texts, including the Vedic corpus and the texts of the orthodox schools of thought such as the Vedānta, was considered to be authoritative at the time, and that current thought and practice were only regarded as valid if they could be shown to be in accordance with these authoritative texts. The developing influence of Vaiṣṇavism, from this perspective, required that the intellectual spokesmen of the Vaiṣṇava sects give a Vedic pedigree to their tradition. “[I]n the archaism of the *Bhāgavata* we have the expression of the same concern. The Krishna legend has to sound Vedic because it *was* Vedic. . . . [T]he high sounding language . . . gave appropriate notice of its Vedic orthodoxy” (238). In other words, by composing the text in archaic Sanskrit, the authors of the *Bhāgavata* were attempting to transform a popular non-elite devotional tradition into a mainstream brahmanical one by invoking Vedic prestige and authority through calculated and contrived usage of Vedic language.<sup>37</sup>

This interpretation, even though not explicitly expressed as such, is tantamount to bolstering Buhler’s charge that the *Bhāgavata* is a “massive fraud.” There are, of course, documented examples of Purāṇic “fraud” (if a distinction can be made between “pious fraud” as consciously constructing a text to appear to be something which it was not, and the more general nature of the Purāṇic tradition which, as noted above, maintained an oral fluidity that could adapt to time and place).<sup>38</sup> But one would have to note that there are no other examples in Sanskrit literature involving this type of extensive calculated manipulation of archaic language forms. Van Buit-

enen’s explanation would rest on more secure footing if there were other examples of this type of strategy on this scale, but as he acknowledges, “even the most doctrinaire texts of Brahmanistic orthodoxy betray hardly any trace of Vedic archaism. . . . It is therefore a unique phenomenon that far later in the history of literature, when Sanskrit letters were in fact on the decline, a text purporting to belong to the Purāṇic tradition consciously attempted to archaize its language” (223-224). Moreover, though I do not have space to discuss it here, the philosophical sections of the text, which are quite extensive in places, do not point to the type of sectarian consistency visible in the words of philosophers such as Rāmānuja. Hence, there are still reasons to question van Buitenen’s explanation of the specific situation that could account for the text’s unusual “archaisms.” Some of them are carved in stone.

#### The *Bhāgavata* and the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl Temple

Dennis Hudson’s (1995) study of the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl Temple in Kāñcīpuram establishes a new upper-limit date for the *Bhāgavata* that considerably precedes the testimony of Alberuni. This temple was completed in *circa* 770 C.E. by the Pallava emperor Nandivarman II Pallavamalla. The sequence of the panels situated in the temple specifically follows that of the episodes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. While each of these episodes may occur individually in other Purāṇas, the fact that these panels follow the specific sequence of the episodes in the *Bhāgavata* precludes the possibility that the craftsmen were using some other textual source for the narratives they were engraving. The text, then, must have preceded the date when the temple embodying its narratives was completed—in the 8th century C.E. Similar evidence may be found elsewhere. Panchamukhi (1947) claims similar data from temples in Pattadakal, also in the South, in the State of Karnataka: “[T]he Pattadakal sculptures help to fix the age of the *Bhāgavata*, *Harivamśa* and some Śiva Purāṇas which in their present form are assigned by some scholars to the late tenth century C.E. It may be pointed out that the story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa depicted on some of the pillars in the Virūpākṣa, Mellikārjuna and Kāśīviśvanātha temple follows the order and sequence of the events in the *Bhāgavata* and we have no other recognized popular work except the *Bhāgavata*, on the subject, which must have furnished material to the Chalukyan artist of the 7th-8th century C.E.” (42).<sup>39</sup> One would have reasonable grounds to suppose that the *Bhāgavata* must have been in

existence for at least two or three centuries before it could generate the necessary royal patronage for the construction of several temples depicting its narratives by the 8th century. Clearly, the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple precedes the South Indian Vaiṣṇava teachers noted by van Buitenen and any project of sanskritization in which they may have been engaged. It provides a new and solid *terminus ante quem* for the *Bhāgavata*.

Hudson is prepared to venture much further back in time in dating sections of the *Bhāgavata*: "I do not think it likely that archaic Sanskrit was used sometime between 800 and 1000 C.E. to make a new text appear old, but instead that genuinely ancient materials gathered texts around them as the *Bhāgavata* religion developed over many centuries" (143-144). He argues on various grounds that books 7-10 are esoteric sections of the *Bhāgavata*, and feels that books 9-10, the latter of which contains the Kṛṣṇa story, are probably its oldest stratum—older than the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Harivamśa*. "In sum," he says, "the evidence suggests that the archaic language of the Purāṇa's esoteric division needs to be taken seriously as reflecting an archaic body of teaching that may go back to c. 400 B.C.E." (172). This early date corresponds to some of the earliest evidence of the Kṛṣṇa story, and will be discussed further below, as I respond to Hudson's more recent reflections on the matter.

To repeat, then, the Kāñcīpuram temple of the 8th century of the common era arguably provides an upper limit for the date of the *Bhāgavata*, and one would have a right to allow a couple of centuries for the text to have gained the circulation necessary for it to have attracted royal patronage. The iconographic evidence suggests that the *Bhāgavata* is not the late Purāṇa it was initially held to be, but might well have reached its final form by the Gupta period along with the other major Purāṇas. Such a date is further suggested by the fact that the *Bhāgavata*'s list of post-*Mahābhārata* dynasties (12.1) ends before the Guptas. This same lacuna, actually, has been the very rationale utilized since the time of Winternitz (1927) to situate the other major Purāṇas in the Gupta period.<sup>40</sup> Such a revised dating, of course, would need to be substantiated by additional iconographic evidence of the *Bhāgavata* from a Gupta context. I reserve a full discussion of the Kṛṣṇa iconography of the Gupta period for a work in progress,<sup>41</sup> but will note here that the few claims of exclusively *Bhāgavata* motifs in this period have been brought into question.<sup>42</sup>

### The Author and Geographical Point of Origin of the Text

Two other features of the *Bhāgavata* have caught the attention of a number of scholars. The first pertains to the author of the text. By "author," of course—given all that has been said about the fluid nature of the Purāṇic genre—the final redactor of the text is intended. But we may actually have a relatively strong justification for using the term author rather than redactor in the specific instance of the *Bhāgavata*, since a number of scholars since the time of Winternitz (1927) have noted that this text "is the one Purāṇa, which, more than any of the others, bears the stamp of a unified composition" (556). This is not to say that the text does not contain layers of inherited tradition, as suggested by Hudson, nor that there were no interpolations.<sup>43</sup> It may even have been subject to reductions, since the *Bhāgavata* describes itself as having 18,000 verses in the colophons at the end of each chapter, and is universally described as containing such in all other Purāṇas, while in actuality it only has 16,256 (despite innovative efforts to account for this).<sup>44</sup> But the nature of the extant text suggests to a number of scholars that at a certain point in time, the entire collection of material associated with the *Bhāgavata*—or much of it—was comprehensively compiled by one hand, a hand that is conspicuous by its literary erudition and consistent style.

Regarding the location where the text was composed, a number of geographical references, as well as personages mentioned in the text, seem to be from the South of the subcontinent, leading to the almost universally held supposition that the author of the *Bhāgavata* was a Southerner. Govindacharya (1902) was perhaps the first to interpret verses 38-40 of the fifth chapter of the eleventh book as a reference to the South Indian devotional saints, the Āḷvārs, and the reference was soon brought to wide scholarly attention by the influential Bhandarkar (1913). The verses in question state that in Kali-yuga, the present world age, the devotees of Viṣṇu will be rare, but will be found along the rivers—the Tāmraparṇī, Kṛtamālā, Payasvinī, Kāverī, and Praticī—in the Draviḍa country (i.e., South India). As Vaidya (1925) puts it, "had the writer of the *Bhāgavata* not belonged to Draviḍa he would not have praised it so strongly, ignoring his own country; for Vāsudeva worship is tolerably prevalent in other places also" (158). Vaidya felt that the *Bhāgavata*'s mention of Vaiṣṇava sacred places in the South of India—Veṅkaṭa, Śrīraṅga and the southern Mathurā—confirmed the text's southern provenance, as well as pointing to a relatively recent date of composition. In addition to this argument, Farquhar (1967) drew attention to a verse in a section in the *Padma Purāṇa* called the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya*, "the

Glorification of the *Bhāgavata*,” in which the personification of *bhakti* states that she was born in Drāviḍa (South India), and then grew and matured in Central and North India consecutively. This verse is generally taken to trace the progression of the spread of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* from the Ālvār saints in South India starting in the 6th century, to the Maratha saints in Central India starting in the thirteenth century, to the explosion of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* across the North of the subcontinent in the 16th century.

Other much more questionable indicators of a southern origin for the text were added to these observations. Ray’s (1932) list incorporates most of the arguments that have surfaced in this regard. Ray drew attention to the fact that in the tenth book, Balarāma performed an extensive pilgrimage all over the South (10. 79. 9-29). Ray further pointed to two references to the Pāṇḍyas, a South Indian dynasty of the 12th-13th century C.E.,<sup>20</sup> two other references to the South,<sup>21</sup> and noted the usage of the word *gopura*, which refers to the gateway of South Indian temples. He claimed that no other part of India is mentioned so often, except for Vraj, and that with Vraj the descriptions of the places of Krishna’s pastimes are not detailed but vague, as would be expected from someone who knew the stories only from books. For example, in the first line of chapter 29 of book 10, there is mention of *mallikā* flowers blooming in Vraj in autumn, which they don’t. He noted that book 5, chapter 19, describes the hills and rivers of India, and these start with the South but end in the North, whereas this description in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* begins in the North. In addition to these observations, Ray found the writing of the text to be stiff and inelegant, like that of someone writing in a foreign language. Finally, Ray considered the most conclusive evidence to be the rhyming pattern of the two *gopī* songs (10. 31 and 10. 35). In most of the lines of the first song, the second syllable of all four lines of the stanzas remains identical, a feature that is universal in Tamil prosody but unknown in classical Sanskrit poetry. The slightly different pattern of the second *gopī* song also can be seen as a Tamilian feature. Hardy (1983) has added to these points by claiming, in connection with the story of Kṛṣṇa’s winning the hand of Satyā by overpowering seven bulls (10.58.32ff.), that the bullfight was exclusively a southern event.<sup>47</sup>

It is useful to draw attention to such arguments not only because they have greatly influenced the perspective of scholars regarding the origin of this text, but because they further illustrate the incompatibility of the Purāṇic genre with the exact notions of time and place that are so important to western concepts of history. Most of Ray’s arguments turn out to be

questionable on closer scrutiny: Balarāma’s pilgrimage tour to the South can simply be understood as stemming from his reticence to take sides in the conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurus, and his desire to avoid the preparations for war that had engulfed most of the North of the subcontinent. Had he remained in the North, he would have been approached by both sides—as, in fact, was the case with Kṛṣṇa as well as grandfather Bhiṣma—and been placed in an awkward situation (as is implied in 10.78.17). Furthermore, Ray’s observation that the *Bhāgavata*’s awareness of Vraj is vague is certainly questionable to my mind, but even if one allowed this to be the case, the author could just as well have lived anywhere in India outside of the immediate environs of Vraj, not just in the South. He was, after all, repeating a well-known story. Moreover, Ray’s contention that the awareness of the land of Vraj seems vague is even more applicable to Balarāma’s journey to the South, where numerous places of pilgrimage are counted off as if by rote in twenty-odd verses, with a few principal features noted very cursorily, as if from hearsay (see 10.79.9ff.). No southern reference gives any indication of prolonged familiarity, so the argument works both ways.

That no other part of India is mentioned as often as the South is simply unsubstantiated: the one comprehensive topographic list that has been compiled for the *Bhāgavata* (Abbott, 1892) seems to reveal a well-rounded representation of many areas of the subcontinent. I am not aware of any quantitative comparison between northern references and southern ones—the scanty list of southern place names provided by Ray seems to contradict his own case in terms of quantity—but clearly most of the “historical” Purāṇic stories in the *Bhāgavata* are well established throughout many traditional sources as having taken place in the North. These dwarf any events connected to the South. The author’s obviously vast erudition makes it quite plausible that he could have been a well-traveled individual, but even if he traveled only little, he could have been familiar with the principal geographical details and dynasties of various parts of India, including the South, from textual sources alone.

All in all, the few references to the South, or the Pāṇḍyan dynasty, seem to be exceeded by a far greater number of references to the North and northern dynasties. The South-to-North listing of places in the *Bhāgavata* (as opposed to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) does not present a serious argument, and as for the *mallikā* flowers, these could well be one of the standardized literary ingredients enhancing the setting of an amorous scene (see below), and hardly compelling evidence of a seasonal gaffe on the part of a south-



ern author.<sup>48</sup> As will be discussed later, in classical *kāvya* poetry, a poet describes natural settings in order to heighten *rasa*, the mood of the poem, and not as a historian or geographer. As for the observation that the bullfight is a southern event, even if one allows the assumption that such feats never took place in the North (presumably on the grounds that they are not mentioned in textual sources), southern sources borrowed northern motifs extensively, and one would have to produce compelling evidence as to why the reverse could not be the case on occasion.

Ray's observation concerning the usage of the southern meter patterns, in contrast to many of the other proposals, seems to be a somewhat more convincing piece of evidence. But here, too, one would have to note that it is well-established that the *Bhāgavata* is a far more sophisticated piece of poetic literature than any other Purāṇa; with 35 meters, it uses more different poetic meters than almost any other text in the history of Sanskrit literature, as will be discussed below. Thus it is by no means inconceivable that its author, as a very erudite man-of-letters, might have had access to southern poetic forms without necessarily being a native of the South himself. As noted above, the southern literati certainly borrowed from the North. Perhaps the most persuasive evidence, then, is the exaltation of the great devotees of Viṣṇu residing in the South. But even this is not determinative. Krishnaswami (1920) points out that this rather promotional reference could be a later interpolation.<sup>49</sup> Filliozat (1962), while accepting the scholarly status quo—that the *Bhāgavata* was a text of a southern origin post-dating the Ālvārs, whom he connects with these verses—nonetheless acknowledges that it could have been the Ālvārs who were inspired by the *Bhāgavata* rather than vice-versa, and that this supposed reference to them could have been interpolated *post facto*. He points out that Sanskrit sources were undoubtedly known to these southern saints, given the number of Sanskrit expressions in their vocabulary.

The most extensive analysis of the *Bhāgavata*'s relationship with the southern Ālvārs is that provided by Hardy (1983). Hardy finds that emotional *bhakti* surfaces for the first time with the Ālvārs, and contrasts it with the more intellectual *bhakti* of the North. He holds that the confluence of the two streams in the South between the 6th and 10th century C.E. resulted in the creation of the *Bhāgavata*. By using Vedic archaisms, the text attempted to relate itself to the most powerful symbol with which northerners had been challenging southern culture: the *Vedas*. At the same time, the high portion of lyric meters shows that the author of the *Bhāgavata* wanted

his text to be heard not as a simple epic narrative but as a *kāvya*, a classical poem displaying the canons of *alaṅkāra śāstra*, the texts dealing with poetic embellishments (see below):

The BhP [*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*] is an attempt to harmonize the various complexes involved in this encounter and to resolve the tensions it had given rise to. Simplifying issues considerably, we can say: Northern culture orientated itself by a social system. . . and an ideology (the Vedānta. . .), while Southern culture was characterized by an emotional religion (the Ālvārs) and by great aesthetic sensibility (the old *caṅkam* poetry). . . . The BhP tries to integrate all four complexes, and it uses the symbol of the *Vedas* to achieve this, while adopting the purāṇic literary form. Thus, as authors have time and again pointed out, the BhP stands quite apart from other purāṇas—it is an *opus universale* attempting to encompass everything (489).

Hardy's thesis, while extensively argued, runs into chronological difficulties on account of the Kāñcīpuram temple evidence revealed by Hudson. Hardy holds that the bulk of the Purāṇa must be later than the eighth century C.E., because the work betrays knowledge of the poems of Nammālvār, Periyālvār, Āṇṭāl, and probably also Kalikanri: "it is quite unlikely that these Ālvārs, except Nammālvār, lived before the eighth century A.D.—the ninth century would be more likely. Thus, the ninth or earlier tenth century would appear as the most reasonable date for the BhP." (488) However, this temple embodied *Bhāgavata* narratives in the 8th century, and thus predated these particular Ālvārs.<sup>50</sup> One is thus forced to take seriously Filliozat's consideration that it could well have been the Ālvārs who borrowed from the *Bhāgavata* rather than vice-versa. In sum, there is certainly no *a priori* reason why the author of the final redaction of the *Bhāgavata* might not well have been a southerner, and there are some grounds to argue this, but most of the references brought forward in support of a southern origin are too inconclusive to demonstrate this convincingly; it is not clear to my eye whether one can make any convincing statement about where in the subcontinent the Purāṇa received its present form.

Thus, Hudson's work, to me, provokes a serious reevaluation of the date and provenance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Ironically, Hudson himself only partially arrives at such a conclusion, at least for the compilation of the final layer of the text. His most recent reflections on this issue convince him that the *Bhāgavata* contains four distinct layers: books 9-10, datable to about 700 B.C.E. (somewhat earlier than his initial estimation quoted previ-

ously); book 7-8, dateable somewhat later, but still in the early centuries B.C.E.; most of books 1-6 and 11-12, which he hesitates to date; and the "Jain" stories of R̥ṣabha and Bharata from book 5, chapters 1-15, which he feels can be placed in the 9th century C.E.<sup>51</sup> In arriving at the latter date, Hudson is persuaded by Jaini's (1977) correlation of the *Bhāgavata's* heretical king Arhat with the Rāṣṭakūṭa king Amoghavarṣa I, who ruled in Karṇāṭaka in the 9th century. Arhat, of course, is simply a generic term for a Jain saint, but Jaini argues that this does not preclude the possibility that it might refer to a real Jain king. He searches Jain sources for a possible fit with the *Bhāgavata's* king Arhat within the range of dates that have been accepted for the text, which he accepts at face value—namely, between the tenth and eleventh centuries C.E. Given these constraints, he finds Amoghavarṣa I to be the best fit. Since it is this very date that is under reconsideration, the Arhat correlation with Amoghavarṣa I becomes circular, and comes under question to the extent that the *consensus gentium* about the date for the text itself comes under question.

I submit that this consensus may not be tenable, and offer the following additional considerations in this regard. First, I support Hudson's call for a Sanskritist to determine whether the Vedic archaisms in the text cluster in what he regards as its two early layers. I share his sense of the importance of further rigorous linguistic investigation of these Vedic traits, but, as the matter stands at present, the extensive analyses by Biswas (1968), as well as the work undertaken by Meier (1939), indicate that these archaisms are scattered consistently through the text, including book 5, chapters 1-15. If we accept the archaisms as genuine Vedicisms, as Hudson is inclined to do, rightly in my opinion, then how to explain their presence in book 5 if the latter were indeed written in the 9th century C.E.? In addition to this, if, as per Hudson's schema, the entirety of the *Bhāgavata* as we now have it was not written down in its present final form until the 9th century C.E., we would have to suppose that, during its process of development, it was being handed down orally from the time of the compilation of its core in the 8th century B.C.E., since there is no evidence that earlier, more truncated versions of the text corresponding to the earlier core had ever been committed to writing. This means that for almost *two millennia*, there is no evidence that the text achieved a written form. While this is by no means unprecedented in the Indic context, most of the other primary Purāṇas seemed to have attained written form by the Gupta period. Why would the *Bhāgavata* have been an exception in the Purāṇic genre, especially given that its sub-

ject matter was far more popular than that of the other Purāṇas? In the later period, after all, the *Bhāgavata* inspired 81 Sanskrit commentaries where most other Purāṇas have none, and others only one or two. The only easy escape from this quandary is to suppose that hypothetical earlier written segments were lost, but that seems highly unlikely given the popularity of the Kṛṣṇa stories. Moreover, a number of Purāṇas contain lists of eighteen Purāṇas, and these include the *Bhāgavata*; so the other Purāṇas themselves bear testimony to a *Bhāgavata* prior to the 9th century C.E., and apparently mean a written text when they do so.

I am not questioning Hudson's proposal that the *Bhāgavata* contains layers, but I suggest that a 9th century C.E. date for the final version of the text calls for reconsideration, particularly given the circularity of Jaini's rationale for arriving at such a late date in the first place. From the various data discussed in this paper, it seems to me that Hudson's work on the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple argues for an earlier *terminus ante quem* for the *Bhāgavata* in its final form. In this, it joins with the still unexplained and ubiquitous presence of the Vedic archaisms throughout the text, and the fact that the *Bhāgavata's* list of the *post-Mahābhārata* war king dynasties ends before the Guptas. The latter, as I have noted, has been one of the rationales utilized to situate the other major Purāṇas in the Gupta period. In my view, while the case is by no means closed, all these indications point in the direction of the Gupta period as the latest probable date at which the final, complete version of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* could have been written, and to the North of the subcontinent as a possible, perhaps probable, locus of its composition.

#### Endnotes

1. There is abundant evidence for this: there are differences in language between different sections of the text; some of the stories in the texts are manifestly late and deal with incidents occurring in later historical time, some of them cast as prophetic; different and sometimes inconsistent doctrines sometimes coexist in the same Purāṇa; sometimes the same story is repeated in different places in the same text; and the very fact that many Purāṇas refer to eighteen Purāṇas indicates that such references must have been inserted after the eighteen Purāṇas had already been divided.
2. Colebrooke (n.d.) was one of the first to articulate this attitude, which still underpins most commonly accepted dates for the Purāṇas: "Among works, the authors of which are unknown, and which, therefore, as usual, are vulgarly attached to some celebrated name, many contain undisguised evidence of a

more modern date. Such are those parts of the Purānas in which the prophetic style is assumed, because they relate to events posterior to the age of the persons who are speakers in the dialogue" (466). See Rocher (1986) for an overview of opinions in this regard for individual Purānas, and for the Purānas as a genre.

3. In India, according to Durgashanker Shastri, the Bopadeva theory was promoted by the influential Dayānanda Sarasvatī since his mission, the Ārya Samāj, was "ever inclined to discard the Purānic authority" (129). The Ārya Samāj rejected Epic and Purānic narratives as the accretions of a later, degenerate age, and advocated a return to the supposed pristine monotheism of the Vedic texts. Much of this type of discourse was obviously derived from early Orientalism.

4. Moreover, Bopadeva himself states at the end of his commentary on the *Muktāphala*, that he had produced three works to elucidate the *Bhāgavata*, and that he had read the latter twenty times before composing these books. Moreover, he extols the *Bhāgavata*, and its author, the sage Vyāsa.

5. Vāsudeva is another name for Kṛṣṇa.

6. Sharma, to the approval of Hazra (1983), notes that Rāmānuja does, in fact, quote the *Bhāgavata* in the *Vedānta Tatva Sāra*. However, Rāmānuja's authorship of this text has been disputed. Durgashanker Shastri (1941) argues that a predecessor of Rāmānuja, in the 10th century, quotes from the *Bhāgavata* in his *Āgamapramāṇa*, and his predecessor, Kulaśekhara Āḷwār quotes a verse in his *Mukundamālā* (although this verse is absent from the southern recensions of this text). Shastri feels that there are striking resemblances with Śaṅkara's thought in the 9th century, and that therefore the author of the *Bhāgavata* knew Śaṅkara, but that since Rāmānuja and another important Vaiṣṇava theologian, Nimbārka, both ignore the *Bhāgavata* it could not have been a major work in the 12th century. He notes that the sacred site of Śrīraṅgam is mentioned in the text, and historical records of this place are available from the 10th century onwards, and opts for a date in the first half of the 9th century C.E. Shastri also finds reason to suppose that the text refers to the clashes between Jains and Buddhists, and the rise to power of the Śaivites (although none of these occurrences are by any means explicit in the text); the former took place in the 7th century C.E., and the latter in the 6th.

7. Amarnath Ray (1934), for example, argues that the *Bhāgavata* does not show any awareness of Śaṅkara's *anirvacanīya* doctrine, and thus is pre-Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara had to account for the relationship between *māyā*, illusion, and *brahman*, the absolute truth, in order to avoid the charges that either *māyā* was a part of *brahman*, which would mean that *brahman* was subject to illusion—a contradiction to the definition of *brahman*—or it was a separate entity, which would mean that ultimate reality contained a duality—a contradiction to his radically non-dualistic system. Śaṅkara's response was that the relationship was *anirvacanīya*, "inexpressible." Ray then argues that the text is post-Gauḍapāda, because it does seem to know Gauḍapāda's *ajātavāda* doctrine. The *ajātavāda* is a doctrine of non-origination, considered to have

been adapted by Gauḍapāda from Buddhism. Hazra (1938) dismissed Ray's perceived similarities between the *Bhāgavata* and Gauḍapāda since the ideas in question were common and could just as well have been borrowed by the *Bhāgavata* from sources used by Gauḍapāda.

8. Jawahar Lal Sharma also opts for a pre-Śaṅkara origin, arguing that the *vyūha* doctrine known to Śaṅkara was that of the *Bhāgavata* rather than of the Pāñcarātras. The *vyūhas* are the quadruple manifestations of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) in the forms of Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, each of which has cosmological functions. The Pāñcarātras are a sect mentioned in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the *Mahābhārata* characterized by a theology featuring the *vyūhas*.

9. Vaidya also argued that the text post-dated Śaṅkara in the ninth century, on the questionable grounds that he was pivotal to the overthrow of Buddhism. (In fact, Śaṅkara does not devote excessive attention to Buddhist philosophy in his commentaries.) Vaidya finds some other equally unconvincing grounds to hold that it is post-Śaṅkara, the primary one being that the Kapila who founded the Sāṅkhya system is an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the *Bhāgavata*, while Śaṅkara holds the incarnation Kapila to be different from the founder of Sāṅkhya. However, Sharma and other scholars pointed out that there have long been two types of Sāṅkhyas, one theistic and one not, so Śaṅkara and the *Bhāgavata* could have drawn on different sources with no bearing on the relative chronology between Śaṅkara and the text.

10. The same objections can be raised against another *Bhāgavata* reference (1.3.1) noted in the *Uttara Gītā* (Upādhyāya, 1965; J. Sharma, 1978). This reference appears in the colophon of one or two manuscripts of the *Uttara Gītā*, and thus is open to the same charge of possibly being inserted in a later redaction.

11. Along the same lines, Sharma noted that the Māthara commentary, which is regarded as the original of the Gauḍapāda commentary on the *Sāṅkhya Kārikās* of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa, quotes two verses from the *Bhāgavata* (but without noting their source). Since this text was translated into Chinese by Paramārtha between 557-569 C.E., the original must have predated this date. But, here too, Sharma himself acknowledged that the *Bhāgavata* verses occurring in the Māthara commentary do not actually appear in Paramārtha's Chinese translations, leaving open the possibility that they, too, could have been the interpolation of a later hand (although he adds that Paramārtha was not strictly literal or faithful in his translation).

12. Hazra considered the text to have been composed shortly after the *Viṣṇu Purāna*, which he places in the 4th century B.C.E.

13. Dikṣitar argued that the *Bhāgavata Purāna* was composed after the Vāsudeva-Saṅkarṣaṇa cult had disappeared, and when the Vāsudeva cult was fully formed, namely during the Gupta period. He also pointed to the prominence given to Varāha, the boar incarnation, in both the *Bhāgavata* and the Gupta dynasty (v). Dikṣitar specifically opposed the views of R. G. Bhandarkar and Pargiter. Pargiter (1962), who wrote extensively on the Purānic king lists, felt that the *Bhāgavata* "probably belongs to the 8th or even 9th century" (xxviii), without outlining his

grounds for this assertion. On the basis of the king lists, Pargiter proposed that, along with the *Viṣṇu*, it drew its material from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, retaining some of the old verses, but mostly condensing the material into new Sanskrit verses. The influential Indologist Bhandarkar drew attention to the assumed reference in the 11th book of the *Bhāgavata*, to the Ājvārs whom he placed in the 5th or 6th century C.E. (and who will be discussed below). He considered that the style of the texts often looks modern, and that it made mistakes in copying from other Purāṇas. He therefore felt that the text cannot be earlier than a couple of centuries before Madhva, who wrote a commentary.

14. See Tadapatrikar (1930) for full details.

15. The *Harivaṁśa* is certainly prior to the 5th century C.E., when an inscription, discussed later, mentions the *Mahābhārata* of 100,000 verses, which would indicate the epic at a date when it included the *Harivaṁśa* as supplement. The date of the *Harivaṁśa* is to a great extent predicated on the fact that the text mentions the Greek *denarius*, which was introduced into India sometime around the beginning of the common era (Jackson, 1908; Keith, 1915; Bhattacharya, 1956; Ingalls, 1963; Mirashi, 1975). Needless to say, the inclusion of this term could have been a later insertion and thus not reflective of the text as a whole.

16. Dikshitar (1931), argued that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* must pre-date the Tamil *Maṇimekhalai*, which is dated in the 2nd century C.E., and refers to "one versed in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa;" Hazra (1937) believed the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* pre-dated the *Harivaṁśa*, since the latter included a number of episodes not found in the former, and it contains more elaborate versions of a number of the stories it shares with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

17. Wilson's beliefs that the *Bhāgavata* was the product of the hand of Bopadeva in the 13th century, and that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was to be dated to around 1045 C.E. on the logic that it must post-date the various king lineages contained in it, are no longer tenable, as was his belief that the *Harivaṁśa* was indisputably later than these other two texts.

18. Pāṇini (4.3.110-111), in *circa* the 4th century B.C.E., mentions two works on dramaturgy.

19. Traditional sources refer to eighteen Upapurāṇas, supplementary Purāṇas, which are not included in the category of principal Purāṇas, or Mahāpurāṇas, and are generally considered later and of lesser authority than the latter.

20. See Sanyal (1969) for the references to the participants in this debate over the centuries.

21. I am grateful to Ekkehard Lorenz for this information.

22. The *gāyatrī mantra* is a sacred and secret *mantra* to the sun god recited silently by *brāhmaṇas* at dawn, midday and dusk.

23. A *kalpa*, or eon, is a period of time corresponding to one day of Brahmā. Each day of Brahmā, in turn, corresponds to 14 Manvantaras, or lifetimes of the Manu lawgivers. These each consist of 71 *caturyugas*. A *caturyuga* is 4,320,000

human years.

24. The word *dhīmahī* means 'may we meditate' and *pracodayāt* means "may [the deity] inspire."

25. The *Taittirīya Samhitā* is a text connected with the black school of the *Yajur Veda*.

26. The *nibandha* writers composed digests on such things as *dharma*, etc.

27. In defense of the *Devī Bhāgavata* case, Sanyal argues that while there are very few references to *Devī* in the medieval age, most of the texts or verses stating that the *Devī Bhāgavata* is a Mahāpurāṇa are early medieval, whilst those promoting the Vaiṣṇava one as such are late medieval. He acknowledges, however, that it is surprising that the *nibandha* authors do not mention the *Devī Bhāgavata*.

28. Sanyal, an advocate of the *Devī* case, claims that the section in chapter 96 of the *Nāradyīya Purāṇa* mentioned by Hazra is a much later interpolation.

29. Rādhā gained prominence in Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* in the 12th century. She is first attested in literary sources as the consort of Kṛṣṇa in Hāla's *Sattasāi*, which is dated between the 1st and the 7th century C.E.

30. Hazra considers the *Devī Bhāgavata* to be much later on internal grounds as well. It mentions Cīna and the Hūṇas, but these could have been later interpolations (and anyway the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* also mentions the Hūṇas).

31. Jīva Gosvāmin quotes the *Agni Purāṇa* (216.1.2) which notes that *Sārasvatī*, is another name for *gāyatrī*. The *Sārasvatī kalpa*, from this perspective, is thus a reference to *gāyatrī* under the name of *Sārasvatī*, rather than to the eon of the same name. This observation was pointed out to me by Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa (personal communication; see also S. Dāsa, 1995, 108). Hazra attempts to account for this reference by proposing that there was an earlier Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* preserving reference to this *kalpa*. As an aside, it has been suggested (e.g., Durgashankar Shastri, 1941 and R. Sharma, 1996) that the assignment of the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata* to Bopadeva might be traceable to the Śāktas in their attempt to undermine the antiquity of this text.

32. In the *Mahābhārata*, Parikṣit was hunting in the forest when he was overcome by thirst. He encountered an ascetic and addressed him, but the latter ignored him due to being immersed in meditation. As a result, Parikṣit placed a dead snake around his neck in frustration. When the ascetic's son found out about this, he cursed Parikṣit that he would die within seven days as a result of being bitten by the king of snakes, Takṣaka. Parikṣit, although repentant, attempted to protect himself by constructing a palace upon a pillar, which was fully guarded and equipped with physicians, medicines, and *brāhmaṇas* skilled in counteractive incantations. Takṣaka sent some snakes disguised as hermits to bring the king fruits, leaves and water. When the hermits had left their offerings and departed, an ugly copper-colored insect emerged from the fruit. Accepting his destiny and wishing to respect the curse of the ascetic's son, Parikṣit placed the creature on his neck to sting him, and was killed by its poison. In the *Bhāgavata* version of the story, there is no mention of

Parikṣit building a fortified palace; rather, he accepts his destiny from the outset, and sits on the bank of the Gaṅgā abstaining from food. Indeed, this is the setting for the entire recitation of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*: the sages assemble, Parikṣit inquires from them as to what a person should do at the point of death, and the great sage Śuka speaks the *Bhāgavata* in response. Also, in the *Bhāgavata* version of events, Takṣaka disguises himself as a *brāhmaṇa*; bribes Kaśyapa, a *brāhmaṇa* who knew how to counteract poison, not to intervene; and then personally bites Parikṣit (12.6.11-13). The *Devī Bhāgavata*'s version is essentially the same as that of the *Mahābhārata*.

33. Meier also examined whether Middle-Indo-Aryan might be the real source for these forms but, again, was only able to demonstrate this in rare instances.

34. Van Buitenen produced a quote from the *Manu Smṛti* law book (10.23), which states that from a tramp Vaiśya, the merchant, or third of the four social classes, issues a Sātvata, thus suggesting the lowly status of the Sātvatas. Sātvata is a term used more or less synonymously with Bhāgavata. Van Buitenen also produced another passage from Yāmuna, a predecessor of Rāmānuja, acknowledging that the Bhāgavatas and Sātvatas were deemed a low caste by the *brāhmaṇas*, the highest of the four classes.

35. Rāmānuja's dates are circa 1017-1137. He was the nephew of one of Yāmuna's disciples, and many of his positions were prefigured in the writings of Yāmuna. Yāmuna was the grandson of Nāthamuni (see Carman and Narayanan, 1989).

36. Yāmuna claimed Vedic affiliation of the Bhāgavatas through the Ekāyana-śākhā of the Vājasaneyins who represent the white *Yajur Veda*.

37. Van Buitenen suggests that similar concerns motivated a later Vaiṣṇava theologian, Madhva, to write his commentary on the *Rgveda*.

38. The best known instance of such fraud was documented by Captain Francis Wilson, who was committed to searching the Purāṇas for references to Śvetadvīpa, "the white island," thinking this to be a reference to the British Isles. He discovered that the paṇḍit he had hired for the job was erasing names in the original manuscripts and adding different ones, adding words and entire legends, and had indeed even written two voluminous sections of 12,000 verses to satisfy his employer's expectations and thereby prolong his own source of income (Rocher, 1986). While this example is an extreme one, there is a very different attitude towards Purāṇic transmission than the Vedic one; the Purāṇas are still a living and developing tradition. Indeed, as Rocher so rightly notes, this freedom can even be seen in Indian translations of the Purāṇas into English. Several of the English translations of the *Bhāgavata* that I have seen think nothing of consistently inserting major portions of Śrīdhara's commentary into the body of their translation with no indication to the reader as to what represents the original text, and what the commentarial exegesis.

39. Hawley, however, questions this interpretation (personal communication).

40. In addition to these, there are some grounds to suppose that the text was written before the rise of the sectarian Vedāntic commentators inaugurated by

Śaṅkara in the 9th century C.E., which will be discussed below.

41. Edwin Bryant, *In Quest of the Historical Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

42. See Hawley (1989) for a discussion.

43. Amarnath Ray (1932), for example, proposes that the unity of composition does not exclude the possibility of interpolations. The incarnations are listed differently in three places: 1.3 and 2.7 give varying accounts, while 6.8 names them differently again, and in a different order from the former two. Ray feels book 2.7 is the original, because the *Nāradya Purāna* summarizes the important material of the *Bhāgavata* book by book, and only mentions the incarnations in 2.7. Ray argues that these discrepancies are because Kṛṣṇa becomes identified as the highest Godhead after a certain time, and this transformation is reflected in the two other lists of *avatāras*. Also, prophetic dynasties are considered by most scholars to be interpolations.

44. I am grateful to Ekkehard Lorenz for the following information and calculations (personal communication): Gaṅgāśahāya wrote a commentary (1894-1897), wherein he attempted to argue that the figure of 18,000 verses for the *Bhāgavata* was accurate. His method was first to count all the syllables in the entire *Bhāgavata*, from prose as well as verse texts, add them up, and divide them by 32. This gave him the standard figure of 16,256 verses in *anuṣṭubh* (32 syllable) meter. Gaṅgāśahāya then approximated the total number of syllables in the chapter endings—the brief chapter bullets that occur at the end of each chapter—arguing that since the length of these are different in different chapters, one needed some convenient standard that could be representative for all 335 chapters. He selected 40 syllables as appropriate for this task, and multiplied this number by 335. This produced 418 complete verses of 32 syllables with 24 extra syllables. Next, he counted all the *uvācas* in the text (many verses are introduced by a short: "such and such a person said," e.g., "Śrī Bhagavān uvāca," or "Śuka uvāca"). This produced 1,320 *uvācas*. So far, so good. But Gaṅgāśahāya next decided to consider these short *uvācas* to be equivalent to 32 syllable *anuṣṭubh* verses, and added them to the 418 verses from the chapter endings and the 16,256 actual verses in the text, to arrive at a figure of almost exactly 18,000 (17,994 verses and 24 syllables). Needless to say, while assigning 40 syllables to the chapter endings might have some value, since some endings have more and others less than 40 syllables, assigning 32 syllables to the brief *uvāca* verses is much more contrived and unconvincing, since the majority have eight or less syllables. Indeed, Lorenz has added the total number of *uvāca* syllables together, divided them by 32, and arrived at a maximum additional 251 verses. If these are added to the 418 ending verses and the 16,256 actual verses, a total of 16,924 verses is produced.

In terms of the smaller number of verses in the actual text than the 18,000 claimed by it, Bonazzoli (1979) finds the same holds true for the not less than nine lists preserved in a number of Purāṇas. These lists give the detailed number of verses in all the Purāṇas, but many are more than is actually evidenced in the texts: "if

these figures are to be taken seriously, then contrary to what is commonly believed, the purāṇic literature is not increasing but decreasing. In other words, the figures given in the lists represent a stage when the purāṇic literature was more vast than it is now" (135). Alternatively, as Lorenz has suggested, at least in the case of the *Bhāgavata*, the number 18,000 may have been an idealized number that was adopted for its auspicious associations (there are 18 books in the *Mahābhārata*, for example, and 18 chapters in the *Bhagavad Gītā*).

45. Book 4, chapter 28, speaks of Malayadhvaja, the ruler of Pāṇḍyas, and in book 8, Gaṇendra the elephant is said to have been Indryadumna of the Pāṇḍyas in a previous life.

46. Kṛṣṇa's son by Jāmbavatī is called Draviḍa, and this is not mentioned in the *Harivaṁśa*; and Satyavrata performs the ablutions of water for the forefathers in Kṛtamālā in the Pāṇḍyan land.

47. Hardy (1983) also gives three instances of obscure word usages in the *Bhāgavata*, which point to a possible Draviḍian linguistic substratum, but these are not convincing to my eye, and far too insignificant a number to prove his case.

48. However, Bhāmaha's literary treatise, the *Kāvya-lāṅkāra*, holds that describing flowers, etc., in an amorous scene when they are out of their appropriate season, is a literary fault called *kālavirodhi* (4.31).

49. Krishnaswami adds that if this were the case, however, it must have been interpolated long before Vedānta Deśika, who quotes the passage in his *Rahasyatrayasāra* as authority for certain of his positions.

50. The period of the Ālvārs stretches from the 6th to the 9th century C.E.

51. Paper entitled "Textual Dating: Old Assumptions, New Reconsiderations," presented at the Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, October 16th, 1998.

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