

FORUM:
TEXTURES OF TIME

4.

A PRAGMATIC RESPONSE¹

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ABSTRACT

In the years since its twin publication in 2001 (Indian edition) and 2003 (U.S. edition), *Textures of Time* has attracted a great deal more attention outside the United States than in the American academy. This, we suggest, is because its ideas and approach are rather at odds with the dominant trends in the area of “postcolonial studies.” In this response to three critical essays that engage with the book—by Rama Mantena, Sheldon Pollock, and Christopher Chekuri—we begin by setting out our principal hypotheses as well as the evidentiary structure of the book, which draws mostly on vernacular materials from South India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The former includes the claim that South India between roughly 1600 and 1800 (and thus in the centuries before the consolidation of colonial rule) possessed considerable and diverse historiographical traditions, though these histories came couched in a variety of genres, rendering them difficult for the uninitiated to recognize at first; the latter requires us to develop the significance of the concepts of “texture” as well as of “subgeneric markers” that help distinguish texts with a historical intention from those that are nonhistorical but have the same generic location. Our response then goes on to discuss why theoretical or *śāstric* texts in India do not themselves explicitly theorize the distinctions we make. Here, we posit a contrast between “embedded” and “explicated” concepts in the “emic” sphere, suggesting that “texture” belongs to the first category. We explicitly distinguish our views from the poststructuralist (and Barthesian) language adopted by Pollock in his critique of *Textures*, and the more predictable postcolonial vision of Chekuri. We once more emphasize the need to take the vernacular historiography seriously, and to refine our reading practices, rather than overly depending on normative materials in Sanskrit, or on a prefabricated theoretical schema that derives from a stylized (and impoverished) view of the nature of the transformations produced by colonial rule.

A breeze is blowing in the sky,
sweeping through the world.
Then it merges into space.
Is it illusion or is it truth?
Tell me what it means.
—Tallapaka Annamacarya (fl. 1424–1503)

I. SOME CONTEXTUAL REMARKS

From time to time, when one of us returns to read *Textures of Time*, it is admittedly—and let us confess it somewhat immodestly—with a sense of surprise

1. We are grateful to Caroline Ford for her perceptive comments on a number of drafts of this essay.

and even a *frisson* of pleasure.² This is a book quite unlike what we have each written otherwise, jointly or separately. There is, to begin with, the matter of its rather seamless triple authorship: the authors are Velcheru Narayana Rao, a literary scholar with a long additional investment in the study of oral performance traditions; David Shulman, who likes to think of himself as a philologist, with a specialization in the history of literature and poetics; and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a historian of South India, who has also spent considerable time studying the Mughal empire and early modern Europe (especially Iberia). The book was written by working out a consensus through extensive discussions among these three scholars of vastly different background, training, and disciplinary location. But, as we shall be at pains to argue below, this book cannot and should not be seen in isolation. Rather, it is part of our very large and complex collective investment in the study of this neglected period of South Indian history that goes back at least a quarter century. At that moment, the generation of K.A. Nilakantha Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya having passed on, the high ground of South Indian history in the period was disputed between two quite different historians: Burton Stein, whose interpretive skills were probably not grounded sufficiently in materials, and Noboru Karashima, who stayed very close to the inscriptional material and posed them in a traditional Marxist “stage theory” framework.³

The early fruits of our individual and collective reflections can be seen in Shulman’s work from the mid-1980s entitled *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry*, then in Narayana Rao’s translation and commentary on the fifteenth-century poet Dhurjati, entitled *For the Lord of the Animals*.⁴ In 1990, Subrahmanyam published *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650*, which set out in considerable detail the framework of a relationship between politics and courtly life, trade, and agrarian and manufacturing economy in this part of the world (further complemented by the publication in the same year of his work on Portuguese trade in the Bay of Bengal).⁵ In the next decade or so, a number of works appeared that moved this collective reflection forward, in particular *Symbols of Substance* (1992).⁶ These included translations and commentaries by Narayana Rao and Shulman on authors such as Kshetranya

2. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001; New York: Other Press, 2003).

3. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980); Stein, “State Formation and Economy Reconsidered,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 3 (1985), 387–413; Stein, *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from the Inscriptions, AD 850–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

4. David Dean Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Hank Heifetz and Velcheru Narayana Rao, *For the Lord of the Animals—Poems from the Telugu: The Kālahastīśvara Śatakamu of Dhūrjati* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

5. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1700* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka-period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

and Pingali Suranna, an anthology of Telugu literature from this period, as well as a further monograph by Subrahmanyam on the South Indian polities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries entitled *Penumbra Visions*.⁷ Most recently, since the publication of *Textures of Time*, Narayana Rao and Shulman have published further works on Pingali Suranna and Annamacarya, the great fifteenth-century poet from the temple-town of Tirupati.⁸ In short, what we have here is not a book but a small library, a fact of which some of our readers may not be aware. Further, this corpus of work is committed to viewing cultural production in a historical context, rather than as a free-floating body open to any form of more-or-less fanciful interpretation (as poststructuralists and their postmodernist heirs have tended to prefer). Nor do we propose a classic history of ideas, whether Indological in orientation or not, which is usually devoid for the most part of social, economic, and political context. This is a project, then, perhaps quixotic, perhaps chimerical, of a sort of total history from the grassroots up.

In such a context, there is obviously the question of the book's epistemological status in debates in North America, where South Asian studies has been dominated for almost two decades by the trend known as postcolonial studies, and which has as its principal focus the colonial period and its aftermath. *Textures* departs markedly from this current, in ways that we will specify below, and this is no coincidence. Far more than our earlier joint work *Symbols of Substance*, which was executed somewhat piecemeal, *Textures* is a reactive and coherently executed book that sought to provoke and to challenge what had become a new orthodoxy by the mid 1990s.

This orthodoxy was itself the paradoxical reformulation of an earlier one. This earlier orthodoxy was the view made popular in the colonial epoch that India had had no meaningful traditions of historical writing or thinking before the imposition of colonial rule. Such a view served two convenient purposes. First, it made the introduction of history into India part of the civilizing mission of the colonizers. Second, it helped drive a wedge between those who were entirely bereft of history (the Hindus), and those who were only somewhat devoid of it (the Muslims). In the reformulation as postcolonial orthodoxy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, expressed by writers such as Ashis Nandy (in this very journal), and the founder of *Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha, in a set of lectures, history had indeed been a gift of colonial rule, but a poisoned one.⁹ India had been far

7. A. K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Shulman, *When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Kṣetrāyā and Others* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (Delhi/Ann Arbor: Oxford University Press/University of Michigan Press, 2001); Pingali Suranna, *The Sound of the Kiss: Or the Story that Must Never be Told*, transl. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); to these, we should add Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Lover's Guide to Warrangal: The 'Kṛīḍābhīrāmamu' by Vinukonḍa Vallabharāya* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

8. Annamayya, *God on the Hill: Temple Poems from Tirupati*, transl. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Pingali Suranna, *The Demon's Daughter: A Love Story from South India*, transl. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

9. Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," *History and Theory, Theme Issue 34* (1995), 44-66; Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press,

happier without it, and would perhaps be so once more, if it could return to such a state of prelapsarian innocence. To “history” as a mode of dealing with the past, these writers opposed the idea of “myth,” viewed by them in true Eliadean fashion as sound and holistic. The story of the arrival of history in India, like that of the arrival of modern science, was thus comprehended within a diffusionist model, but one that was suffused with tragic overtones. What microbes had been to colonial Mexico, history was to India.

Of course, not everyone agreed with this view even in the 1990s, but most (including Sheldon Pollock) adopted it as a response to the earlier colonialist view.¹⁰ Those who disagreed typically adopted the weak view that materials of historical interest could nevertheless be extracted, by dint of diligent labor, from pre-1800 texts in Indian languages. Others pointed to the rich tradition of Persian-language historiography from the time of the Ghaznavids onwards, even though this was often dismissed as somehow alien to the real India. Still others used the framework of “ethnohistory” to argue that certain textual works from precolonial India could be thought of as a quasi-history, without specifying either the principles of inclusion and exclusion, or the exact content of the prefix “ethno.”¹¹ It was into these unpropitious waters (perhaps a whirlpool might be the best metaphor) that *Textures* was launched.

The book was organized into six chapters of over 300 pages, of which four were core chapters (the other two being an introduction and a conclusion). The book put forward the following propositions, set out here more schematically than they were originally:

1. That South India between roughly 1600 and 1800, thus in the centuries before the consolidation of colonial rule, possessed considerable and diverse historiographical traditions.
2. That these histories came couched in a variety of genres, rendering them difficult for the uninitiated to recognize at first.
3. That such histories could be distinguished from other nonhistories that used the same formal genres, by deploying a set of “subgeneric markers” that were summed up broadly by us under the notion of “texture.” “Texture” was thus a shorthand for the diagnostic elements that enable the reader to make distinctions within a genre. These were the clues that had been left for the reader to find.

2002); Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Times of Gods,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 35-60.

10. “History, one might thus conclude, is not simply absent from or unknown to Sanskrit India; rather it is denied in favor of a model of ‘truth’ that accorded history no epistemological value or social significance”; see Sheldon Pollock, “Mīmāṃsā and the Problem of History in Traditional India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989), 610.

11. Nicholas B. Dirks, “The Pasts of a *Paḷaiyakārar* [sic: for *Paḷaiyakkārar*]: The Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (1982), 655-683; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Phillip B. Wagoner, *Tidings of the King: Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the ‘Rāyavācakamu’* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

4. That such distinctions were not simply *ex post facto* impositions by present-day readers, but were deliberately created as part of textual (and perhaps individual authorial) intention that was comprehensible to its intended audience.

5. That the bulk of these texts were not composed within the elevated courtly milieu familiar to us from other circumstances (such as those of Mughal India), but in more humble circumstances by a scribal class whom we defined using the term *karaṇams*.

6. That these texts communicated across a variety of South Indian languages such as Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada, but also with Marathi, Persian, and even at times Arabic. The world of the *karaṇams* was hence a polyglot one.

7. That the same event or set of events could be treated in a historical and a nonhistorical mode in different texts, with the abstract truth-value of neither being necessarily subordinate to the other; however, that different notions and conceptions of truth operated when composing a historical or a nonhistorical text.

By way of demonstrating these propositions, the book set out two extensive case studies in chapters 2 and 4. The first of these compared a set of narratives in Telugu relating to an incident that took place in 1757 in the Andhra town of Bobbili, pointing to the significant differences in texture among them. The second example concerned a set of episodes relating to the fortress of Senji in the Tamil country in the 1710s, where once again an extended palette of texts was available. Sandwiched between the two, we proposed a historical sociology of the emergence and salient characteristics, as well as collective self-image, of the *karaṇams*. Finally, chapter 5 looked to link these materials up with a larger world of circulation, involving languages such as Marathi and Persian with which we had a more limited familiarity than those deployed in earlier chapters.¹²

On its publication in India in 2001, *Textures* met with a quite enthusiastic reception, and was widely read, reviewed, and cited, even entering the reading lists of some universities. In contrast, the publication in 2003 of an American edition was greeted by a frigid silence. In a comical episode, the *American Historical Review* decided not to review the work, on account of its alleged lack of historical interest, this at the same time that numerous works of postcolonial studies (and historiography) were being routinely reviewed in that journal. The publication by Sumit Guha of an essay on Marathi historiography in that journal (in 2004), in which he expostulated vehemently against the very idea of “texture,” eventually forced the *AHR* to let us have our day in court and a book review was published by Cynthia Talbot.¹³ In sharp contrast was the reception in France, where a translation appeared from Editions du Seuil as *Textures du Temps*.¹⁴ This version was reviewed extensively and very positively in *Annales HSS*; earlier it had been featured in the “Choix des Annales” as a landmark work on historiography.¹⁵

12. In view of our limited competence in Marathi and Persian, we have deliberately not entered into detailed discussions of “texture” with regard to these languages, instead contenting ourselves with accepting the views and judgment of scholars whose competence we trust in the matter.

13. Sumit Guha, “Speaking Historically: The Changing Voices of Historical Narration in Western India, 1400–1900,” *American Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (2004), 1084–1103; Talbot’s review appeared in *American Historical Review* 110, no. 5 (2005), 1477–1478.

14. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures du temps: Écrire l’histoire en Inde*, transl. Marie Fourcade (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

15. “Choix des annales,” *Annales HSS* 59, nos. 5–6 (2004), ix; also see the review by Gilles

The initiative to publish a review symposium on the book in *History and Theory* is hence gratifying to us. The three responses by Rama Mantena, Sheldon Pollock, and Christopher Chekuri assess the book from very different angles, and we shall turn to them now. In our view, Mantena's is the response that represents *Textures* and its arguments in the clearest and most cogent fashion. The clarity with which she brings out the principal arguments and links them to our concerns in the earlier *Symbols of Substance* is to our mind quite exemplary. Her thoughtful and critical comments toward the end of her essay will cause us to rethink our arguments in any future work on this theme. Her principal concern, however, as a historian of the nineteenth century, is to move forward from 1800 into the colonial period, to investigate the afterlife of these texts, as well as others that eventually came to displace them. Pollock's is perhaps the most complex and ambivalent of the three responses, often rather murky in its development, espousing what seem to us a series of mutually contradictory positions as well as a set of odd epistemological locations. We shall be at pains to clarify what we believe are the hidden prejudices and presuppositions behind his argument, which seems to include a very substantial dose of received antihistoricism. He is far more skeptical than Mantena regarding both the notion of "texture" and the idea that any group of "native speakers" could be defined for whom such texts were intended. (In both these matters he echoes earlier comments by Sumit Guha, on which more below.) Pollock draws heavily and significantly on the triumphalist rhetoric of poststructural literary theorists of forty years ago, notably Roland Barthes, in an attempt to deny ideas of both authorial intention and historical interpretation itself ("the death of the author" and "the death of history").¹⁶ Such ideas have in fact fared very poorly in the past two decades; placing oneself under the sign of Barthes is frankly a curiously archaic move. Reading him to the end, one may therefore wonder whether Pollock really even accepts the existence of historical texts and a historiography in precolonial South Asia at all, as he claims to do at the outset of his essay. Most radical (and most simplistic) in his response is Christopher Chekuri, whom we see as defending the postcolonial studies orthodoxy in a disturbingly predictable, but also often quite inchoate manner. He sees any attempt to introduce ideas of historicity into South Asia as a mere capitulation to Eurocentric modes of thought, and seems to insist on maintaining the radical difference of South Asia with regard to this (and other questions). In his vision, only colonial rule, and the deploying of colonial power, will introduce into India forms of historiography, individuality, or other features that are commensurable with developments elsewhere in the world. History has one sole mover in South Asia, and that is colonial power. Chekuri is also the most careless of the three in summarizing the chief propositions of *Textures*, which he often does in ways that to us bear no resemblance to anything that appears in the book itself. We shall return to these issues in greater detail below.

Tarabout in *Annales HSS* 60, no. 2 (2005), 331-333.

16. The Barthesian rhetorical figure centering on "death" still seems to mark Pollock in works such as his controversial essay "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001), 392-426. The term "pretextures" in his title also seems to be a Barthesian turn, a nod in the direction of *Prétextes*.

II. THE SANSKRITIST'S CHALLENGE

A preliminary question should be addressed here, and this concerns the problem of normative historiographical texts on history-writing. As we pointed out in the book, history-writing in South India was not considered a subject that required a set of normative rules that spelled out how it should be conducted (*śāstra*), and hence was not considered the legitimate object for the production of texts or reflections of such a normative order.¹⁷ Had it been so, the classic “history of ideas” position (which Pollock seems at times to favor) would have required us to look first into such normative texts rather than history-writing itself. But this is not a matter that need surprise us, as some analogies will show. Take the case of ship-building. We are aware that southern India possessed traditions of ship-building over long centuries, and that centers for the construction of ocean-going vessels existed on both the Tamil and the Andhra coasts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸ We are also aware that in such centers, distinctions were routinely made between different sorts of vessels, and that one would not confound a ship intended for trading elephants to Burma or Sumatra with a craft intended to sail in the delta of the river Godavari, carrying grain, indigo, or textiles. What allows us to make such distinctions? Certainly not the existence of normative texts on ship-building in Telugu or Sanskrit. Indeed the sole such text that exists in Tamil from the period, the so-called *Kappal cāttiram*, is notorious precisely because any ship built on its specifications would immediately capsize.¹⁹ The same argument can be made for a variety of other artisanal activities, such as weaving, mining, or even agriculture, all of which were clearly practiced but never regarded as subjects of *śāstric* knowledge. Indeed, the same is true even of warfare, which was a rather significant activity at the time. We must hence declare that our prejudices in the matter are pragmatic rather than radically culturalist and relativist. We find it hard to believe that shipwrights could not distinguish between shoes and ships and sealing wax, or tell cabbages from kings. If this flies in the face of received postcolonial wisdom, or the particular textual orientation of Pollock (for whom nothing without a *śāstra* is apparently worth discussing), so be it.

Pollock thus declares that, on the basis of his wide reading in the normative Sanskrit literature, he has “nowhere found . . . any indication that Indian thinkers believed the same genre could do multiple things” (this relates to our proposition 3 above). He qualifies this somewhat by noting that these essentially *śāstric* thinkers in Sanskrit did not necessarily articulate what was happening in “actual literary history.” But the cat is pretty much out of the bag. We cannot find Indian thinkers who believed (or at any rate who wrote theories about the fact) that swivel guns could be mounted on camels. But that is not very helpful in understanding how warfare was conducted. There is an important clue here regarding

17. On the scope of the *śāstras*, see, for example, *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, ed. A. L. Dallapiccola, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989).

18. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “A Note on Narsapur Peta: A ‘Syncretic’ Shipbuilding Centre in South India, 1570–1700,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 3 (1988), 305–311.

19. *Kappal cāttiram*, ed. T. P. Palaniyappa Pillai (Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1950).

what the “thinkers” who are Pollock’s primary concern as an Indologist actually did write and reflect about. Theirs was a very rarefied world, quite different from that of the Chinese literati of the same time, who would have been astounded that treatises were not written about significant societal phenomena around them. This is precisely the reason why a Joseph Needham would produce a work such as *Science and Civilisation in China* (based for the most part on such a literati tradition of treatises) while it has proved impossible to do so with regard to India.²⁰ Only a very limited number of subjects such as astronomy, limited medical traditions, and aesthetics repeatedly attracted the attention of the *śāstrīs*. No high texts on the principles of cartography can be found, but this does not predispose us in the least (from our pragmatic perspective) to believe that no maps existed, even if they did not look like Mercator’s Atlas.

We should clarify that Pollock’s very thoughtful and engaged response does indeed include statements with which we can easily concur, for example: “Although they [the authors] do not always make it clear, their interest lies not in what really happened, but rather in what people in the past think happened—which I readily agree is the first-order question for a history of history.”²¹ We were not in the business of sifting hard nuggets of reliable facts about the past from the chaotic mass of sources at our disposal. Generations of modern historians of India have done just that, often to little useful effect. Our concern was with the existence of a historical awareness in medieval and early modern South India, with the evidence we have to support a claim for such an awareness, and with the particular traits it may have had in relation to other modes available to the cultures involved and, to some extent, in relation to other, external historiographical modes.

Clearly, judging by Pollock’s comments (and even more so, by those of Chekuri), we still have a problem with the meaning of the word “fact.” Even if we leave aside the etymology of the modern, Western term—*factum*, that is, something “made”—we see no reason to claim that a fact is a fact is a fact, everywhere and always the same sort of irreducible and familiar thing. What we do claim is that the distinction between factual and nonfactual modes is intrinsic to the mature ecology of cultural genres in South India (and very probably, to most rich cultures). Believe it or not, this is not such a radical claim. It is quite rare, as cognitive scientists will concur, to find a human being who does not make it intuitively. Nor is this distinction coterminous with that between “true” and “false.” *Pace* the logicians, whether from Navadvipa in Bengal or from Pisa, it is a matter of everyday experience that what is true is not always factual. It is, for example, quite true that the face of every beautiful woman is like the moon, but not even the Sanskrit poets treated this as “fact”—and the poets developed an amazingly sophisticated idiom to express the distinction (Ruyyaka and Vidyanatha go on to distinguish the “true” from the “real” in analyses of remarkable subtlety and

20. Joseph Needham (with Wang Ling), *Science and Civilisation in China*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1954–2004); compare this massive enterprise with Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India: The Beginnings*, 3 vols. (Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1986–1996), and *A Concise History of Science in India*, ed. D. M. Bose, S. N. Sen, and B. V. Subbarayappa (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1971).

21. Sheldon Pollock, “Pretextures of Time,” *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 372 (this issue). Subsequent citations to this article will be made parenthetically in the text.

consequence). Indeed, one reason the logicians warned people not to take poetry seriously (*kāvyaḷāpāṃś ca varjayet*) is that poetic statements very regularly elude their propositional analysis. In short, in the expressive ecology relevant to our sources, the category of “true statements” is definitely much wider than the subcategory of “factual statements,” and the latter is itself wider and deeper than the subclass of “historical statements.” We have argued at some length that the category “history” has highly specific diagnostic features in the medieval and early modern South Indian sources, as it does in other cultures; also, that it is not so hard to know when it is present, if—and this is undoubtedly significant—one knows the protocols of reading.

But here, it seems, we crash against a deep-seated resistance or reluctance, which generates some unnecessary confusion. The argument from “texture” does not provide a mechanical or absolute set of criteria. With all due respect to Eric Auerbach, who does come close, in a certain sense, to the kind of careful listening we are recommending, our notion of texture goes far beyond a sensitivity to syntax or style (for Auerbach, always primarily an extension of syntax). We would certainly never argue (as Pollock seems to believe) that in Indian texts “the historical is a register of language that is simple, direct, unadorned, factual.” The Telugu *kaifiyats* that we cited as historical works are very far from the “simplest unadorned literalism” that he rather mysteriously posits. Quite the contrary: their prose is often highly figurative, prolix, and melodramatic. It is, however, saturated with subtle subgeneric markers, some of them prosodic in the wider sense of the word, others lexical, quotative, evidential, and so on, that, together with the framing devices that are always integral to sensitive reading, tell us that we are in the domain of something that can only be called “history.” Such markers exist in our own very different generic ecology: in the days when there were still real bookstores in the world and you could browse happily among real books, did anyone ever have any real difficulty in knowing when he or she had picked up a historical novel rather than a work of history? Even Jonathan Spence’s celebrated *Death of Woman Wang*, which ends in a lyrical dream sequence, is immediately recognizable as history.²² It may not, of course, be the same kind of history that the authors of the *Kumārārāmuni katha* were writing—and that, indeed, is the deeper challenge that emerges from our thesis. We have at times suggested, but not fully defined, the particular expressive configurations that a seventeenth-century Telugu history may reveal. It seems we may eventually have to write another book.

Note that the distinction in modes allows us to distinguish elements, or layers, or types of awareness, even *within* a given text—and that such differential characterizations are by no means exotic or remote from the realm of a historian’s sensibility. (*The Death of Woman Wang* again offers a nice parallel.) That a *karaṇam* author might himself evaluate differently pieces of the traditions that he reports is entirely possible, even likely—as is also the case, by the way, for Herodotus, Gibbon, or even Foucault. There is no real problem with this unless one is looking for some sort of rigid, context-free rules. Thus a royal genealogy such as those we mention, whether from the later Kakatiya sources or from Peddana’s *Manu-carit-*

22. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang* (New York: Viking, 1978).

ramu, may indeed move from an earlier nonfactual mode—call it “mythic” if you must—into a far more grounded, detailed, and biographical one, which the genealogy’s author himself shows signs that he perceived as such. Such distinctions are, moreover, not, in the end, about “realism” as a new kind of fictional mimesis, and we must therefore, sadly, renounce the compliment Pollock pays us (“That would indeed be an interesting discovery. . .” [377]). It would, in fact, be possible to argue that a new category of literary fiction (let us leave out the “mimesis” here) was invented, or discovered, in sixteenth-century Vijayanagara and Tenkasi—a category quite distinct, in definable ways, from anything previously attested in India. “Realism,” too, as a literary orientation, emerges strongly in works such as Krishnadevaraya’s *Āmukta-mālyada*. But this has little to do with historiography, and nothing whatsoever to do with the “factuality of the fictive.” We readily agree with Pollock that people “have sought to live their lives in accordance with the paradigmatic” (this apparently means the “mythic” and/or the “fictional”; it would be good to go beyond such terms, or at least to define them more clearly)—and that, indeed, is precisely the kind of historical perception that we find, in striking profusion, in the *karaṇam* historiographies that underlie our work.

What is nevertheless puzzling to us is the obstinate inconsistency of Pollock’s stance, both here and elsewhere. He begins by agreeing with us that to believe that no history existed in precolonial South Asia is a “remarkably tenacious misconception.” In this he agrees with Sumit Guha, in a recent essay on history-writing in the Marathi language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But then, like Guha, he refuses to engage with the problem of the criteria that are obviously needed to decide what is and what is not history in any textual corpus. Like Guha again, he finds the notion of “texture” unconvincing and perhaps unnecessary because the problem of distinguishing the historical from the nonhistorical is seemingly not an issue. If that is indeed the case, how does he conclude that a text like the *Kalaka-ācārya-kathā* is indeed a “remarkable *historical* narrative” (our emphasis)? This cannot, for obvious reasons that he will admit, be resolved by simple considerations of genre. Again, how do we know that some of the fourteenth-century *prabandha* literature in Gujarat is historical while other parts are not, to take up one of Pollock’s own claims? An embarrassed silence on this point also characterizes Guha’s work once he has dismissed the idea of “texture.” It is for him apparently self-evident what is historical, once one can give it a name (such as *bakhar*) and term it “a prolific genre”; the only question that remains then is why the historical text emerges in force at a particular time (for which he has a rather simplistic and functionalist explanation, on which more below).²³

Pollock’s own formulations seem constantly to retreat from his initial agreement with us. Thus, a good number of pages from the beginning of his essay, we are invited to consider the allegedly novel proposition that “instead of assessing whether Indian texts are history or myth, we might ask whether the texts themselves invite us to transcend the very dichotomy” (379).²⁴ In other words, there is

23. Guha, “Speaking Historically,” 1090-1091. Thus for Guha, history is still eventually a simple “genre,” but one whose characteristics do not require comment, definition, or elaboration. We find this silence on his part eloquent.

24. Pollock seems unaware of the fact that this is precisely what has usually been done by many Indologists; cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India’s Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among*

no history as such in precolonial India, merely some elements, or some aspects, of a historical sensibility that can be glimpsed occasionally, like nuggets in the rushing stream of textual production. Or, as he elsewhere phrases his counter-proposition, it is the attempt to identify “*a historical form of consciousness* rather than attempting, as *Textures* does, to identify *a form of historical consciousness*” (379). But this is no more than the wine of the old history of ideas decanted into a slightly new bottle (perhaps imported from Santa Cruz), for “consciousness” sounds more impressive than mere “ideas.” In other words, at this point we find Pollock in full retreat from his claim that we have identified as a “remarkably tenacious misconception.” Let us abandon the investigation of the possibility of history-writing in precolonial India, he seems to say, and simply investigate in terms of their (always *śāstric*) categories how Indians thought about the world and perceived it. Of course, this must then exclude all Indians who did not express themselves in treatises, and even more so, those who did not write in Sanskrit. This is a rather large and disturbing exclusion.

Why these pendulum swings and troubling inconsistencies? There is of course the anxiety on Pollock’s part that we might be stretching Indian historical experiences out on the procrustean bed of a received European model of change and the emergence of the modern (an anxiety also shared by Chekuri). We should rest assured, states Pollock, that there is “no shame in premodernity” or indeed in asserting that India was in most matters not even “remotely comparable” to any other part of the world. We find this rather curious as a strategy, in particular for an author whose own brilliant history of the world of Sanskrit literature is constantly, and anxiously, preoccupied with European parallels or the lack thereof, from “vernacularization” to “the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.”²⁵ We do not find that our attempt either here or elsewhere has ever been to argue that “the newness of the early modern world [was] experienced the same way everywhere” (383). Indeed, some of our writings on comparative historiography on a world scale have argued precisely the opposite.²⁶ It may thus not be redundant to assert, categorically, that we were and are not interested in discovering an Indian Vico or Montaigne. The argument about modernity is not in any way shaped by a set of uniform global (that is, Eurocentric) features. It is, on the contrary, driven by the sense of a significant shift specific to South India. One thing, however, has to be said: that European modernity invented self-reflexivity, as a collective temporal perspective, is a claim far more exotic than the apparently still unsettling one that great historians were at work in Telugu, Tamil, and Marathi long before the first European clocks turned up in Pondicherry.

But this takes us to a second major source of difference between our approach and that suggested by Pollock toward the end of his essay, at a point when he has

Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), which treats materials on Desingu Raja in exactly this fashion. From time to time, Pollock also seems to read texts that we have clearly indicated are nonhistorical as if we had defined them as historical (see his discussion of Desingu Raja).

25. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

26. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “On World Historians in the Sixteenth Century,” *Representations* 91 (2005), 26-57.

progressively and paradoxically painted himself into a corner of a quite extreme form of cultural relativism, which we might remind him—far from being the virtue touted by the HSBC in its posters at Heathrow airport—is actually “a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally.”²⁷ This is our explicit framing of problems historically, which means a great deal more than simply organizing a succession of texts in a chronological sequence. Pollock has clearly been heavily influenced by Roland Barthes, the philosopher and semiotician whose opposition to the practice of history as such was quite manifest. Barthes mounted his attack on several fronts, notably in his brief text “La mort de l’auteur” (1968), a sort of manifesto for an infinite variety of possible readings of a text, whereby “the pretension that one can ‘decipher’ a text becomes entirely useless.”²⁸ We may note, pragmatically, that this alleged death of the author that accompanied the birth of the reader did not prevent Barthes from collecting his royalties, or his successors from producing volumes (no doubt “aux guillemets incertains”) of “his” *Œuvres complètes*. The larger implication of this particular work was to attempt to set aside the idea of the historical agent, for one can hardly be the author of an act any more than of a text. However, the text that Pollock cites extensively and with approbation is an earlier one, “Le discours de l’histoire” (1967). Here, Barthes announced the “death of historical narration,” with structures replacing chronologies, reducing history in effect to a temporary aberration practiced by nineteenth-century savants such as Jules Michelet and their heirs who believed that unmediated access to the real was possible. At the other extreme, Barthes wrote (and Pollock quotes him approvingly) that history-writing did not “really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinct feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama.”²⁹ The fact that we allocate some text to the domain of history can, in this view, really be no more than wholly arbitrary.

Barthes is also Pollock’s talisman when the latter asserts that, “authorial intention has been pounded into dust for more than half a century” (372). This is to accept the Barthesian myth of its own definitive triumph over all forms of historical practice. But quite the contrary, Barthes never seems to have profoundly affected the practice of historians in his native France, who did not in fact commit mass suicide on reading his claims. Further, in the past two decades and more, literary studies have become more and more historically inflected, a trend in which the “New Historicism” is only the most conspicuous element. Any number of recent studies of Shakespeare, or Ibn Khaldun, or the Ottoman historian Mustafa Âli seem as unaware as we are that “authorial intention has been pounded into dust.”³⁰ More than a decade and a half ago, the semiotician Umberto Eco in his

27. Donna Haraway, cited in Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 21.

28. Roland Barthes, “La mort de l’auteur,” in Barthes, *Œuvres complètes, Tome II, 1966–1973*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 491–495.

29. Barthes, “Le discours de l’histoire,” in Barthes, *Œuvres complètes, Tome II, 1966–1973*, 417–427.

30. Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Zaid Ahmad,

Tanner Lectures sounded the retreat once and for all from the position of Barthes by conceding the existence of “the intention of the text.”³¹ Indeed, if we are to accept the position that historical narration has been entirely replaced by structures that are “less [about] the real than the intelligible,”³² it is impossible to understand Pollock’s own attempt to produce a narrative history of ideas in Sanskrit.

Of some relevance for us is a brief work by Carlo Ginzburg (which we unfortunately did not consult while writing *Textures*), in which he explicitly confronts and confounds the claim by Barthes (and later Hayden White) that historiography can be reduced to rhetoric. The key, Ginzburg argues, lies in the forms and notions of “proof” that are deployed in historiography as opposed to other rhetorical structures, which are underpinned in turn by the forms of truth-claims that they make. “Proof” here is thus deployed by Ginzburg precisely as what we would term a “subgeneric marker.”³³ This is somewhat related to Sumit Guha’s view that historical texts came into existence in the Maratha country precisely because they were meant to be deployed and accepted “in judicial disputes over heritable property.” While this may have been so in a limited number of cases, we find highly reductionist the causal claim that history-writing essentially arose as a function of needs in the context of dispute resolution (or as Guha puts it, “narratives of this type had their beginnings in two related sources: lawsuits tried by the local community and inquests by incoming royal authority”³⁴). Clearly, these were not the motives behind a complex historical text such as the *Bhāusāhebāñci bakhar*, discussed at some length in *Textures*.

Ginzburg’s demonstration is manifestly aided by the fact that he can deploy “proof” as an “emic” concept available from within an erudite textual tradition from Aristotle onwards (as the Greek *enthymeme*). On the other hand, it would seem that the concept of “texture” we have used is not an “emic” one, a point that appears to lie at the heart of objections to it: where is the *śāstra* that speaks of “texture,” say in its Telugu equivalent of *pākam*, alongside *racanā* (composition) and *prakriyā* (inflection, praxis)? Here, we need to make a general observation regarding South Asian history and historical forms of knowledge-production there, bearing in mind our earlier remarks concerning China. We are aware that the principal social location for the production of normative textual knowledge in Ming and Qing China was the literati class, which existed in constant interaction with the imperial state, in fair measure on account of the so-called “examination system.”³⁵ This was in part because the Chinese state of the time (and this became particularly acute with the Qing) saw itself as having a strong didactic role, overseeing, classifying, reflecting upon, and periodically reforming the “customs”

The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn (London: Routledge, 2003).

31. Umberto Eco (with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brooke-Rose), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation: The Tanner Lectures*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); also the useful discussion in Lars-Olof Åhlberg, “Understanding and Appreciating Art: The Relevance of Experience,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33, no. 1 (1999), 11-23.

32. Barthes, “Le discours de l’histoire,” 427.

33. Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*, 38-40, *passim*.

34. Guha, “Speaking Historically,” 1090-1092.

35. *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

of its people over an enormous range of social activities.³⁶ The parallels with South Asia in general are rather weak, and those with South India particularly so. Contrary to what Chekuri claims in his remarks, the place of state power and politics in defining the collective identities and projects of the South Indian *karaṇams* was only rather limited, given the weakly articulated claims of even the strongest of these states (such as Vijayanagara), when compared with the Ming or pre-1850 Qing. There was no drive then to produce a comparative mass of normative texts, explicating and assessing in a constant fashion what society was fabricating, in either material or ideational terms. Key concepts that underlay such social practices thus remained implicit or embedded in routines of practice themselves, rather than being elevated to become direct objects of elite discourse.

In other words, it is our contention that we need to render more complex the notion of the etic/emic divide.³⁷ As we shall argue below, contrary to what Chekuri seems to presume, none of our own history-writing can in point of fact (or indeed should it) be conceived in purely “emic” terms, and we are prepared to assume full responsibility for deploying “etic” concepts in our analysis. However, it is useful, we believe, not only in the analysis of historiography but of a vast variety of other forms of knowledge—especially those that do not come sanctioned by the high Brahminic tradition in Sanskrit—to conceive of the “emic” field itself as bifurcating into “explicated” and “embedded” emic notions. The former are those concepts that are named, openly defined, discussed, and may even have lengthy treatises devoted to them. The others, whether dealing with the conduct of war, the making of maps, the building of ships, the weaving of silk, or indeed the writing of history must be teased out with subtlety, for the received textual tradition does not necessarily give them an exotic-sounding name.

Evoking the etic/emic divide takes us inevitably to another question that appears to trouble several of the commentators, as well as earlier discussants of *Textures of Time*. For speaking of the “emic” immediately suggests the existence of a “native” inhabitant of a cultural complex whose own concepts are being deployed in the explanatory framework. Pollock, like Sumit Guha before him, is on the one hand highly skeptical of this very notion, but on other hand also goes on to use it to claim, for example, that “it has been estimated that perhaps upwards of three-quarters of those who wrote in Persian were non-native speakers” (372). This latter claim is, we are afraid, simply transmitted Iranian prejudice, a latter-day recycling of a canard set out in the eighteenth century by that disdainful savant Shaikh ‘Ali Hazin, and heavily contested already at that time by Khan-i Arzu.³⁸ One supposes that those who are so excluded would include Shaikh Abu’l Fazl and Mirza Bedil. But the more serious denial is that the category of “native speaker” does not exist

36. We are grateful to R. Bin Wong for discussions on this point. On the implications for philology and historiography, see Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monographs, 2001).

37. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*, ed. Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike, and Marvin Harris (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

38. On Hazin and his views, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1700* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 226–239.

at all, since these characters have presumably died along with authors, narratives, history, and other things we once believed in. However, a little reflection on the reality of philological practice in South Asia may be useful here. Pollock contrasts our approach to that of Auerbach, who “needs no native speakers . . . only careful philologists” (373). Indeed, the conceit of the philologist in the European modern tradition that Pollock himself somewhat (and to our mind, correctly) denigrates in his opening pages is precisely that a direct relationship can be constructed between himself and the text, with no “native” mediation. Indeed, if “natives”—such as the *paurāṇikas*—had altogether ceased to exist, it would be all the more convenient, since they might have other—at times awkward—ways of reading the text that challenge that of the distant philologist.³⁹ Yet the history of modern European philology in India shows precisely the constant recourse to “native” mediation, as the texts in question were usually transmitted within an interpretive framework, rather than as some lost Geniza fragments re-examined under infrared vision. We cannot, and should not, confound our reading practices with regard to the *karaṇam* texts at hand with the attempts to decipher the Harappan seals. Rather we need to ask ourselves why it is necessary to invent such an alibi for what are clearly quite problematic reading practices.⁴⁰

III. THE POSTCOLONIAL DEFENSE

Sheldon Pollock’s detailed reading of *Textures* provides us with much food for thought, and has also obliged us to clarify some of our own concepts and usages. It puts us quite paradoxically in mind of other challenges, in particular from high-German Indologists, when the book was under preparation, including the moment when Pollock resorts to the hoary claim that nothing is in fact new in the period: our materials are not “qualitatively different from what can be found earlier” (380), and their greater profusion may simply be because they refer to recent rather than older events. This is the familiar argument *ex silentio*. So, for the Indologist too, in the first and last resort, nothing is ever new in India—until the *deus ex machina* of colonial rule that is. To be sure, there may have been some material changes in domains such as money-use, tobacco-smoking, or the varieties of venereal disease (in all of which high Indology is largely uninterested), but whatever happened in those other spheres, it is even for Pollock (who would, we believe, want to distance himself from the mainstream of Orientalist Indology) quite “uncertain . . . what, if anything, in the sphere of thought may have marked it as such” (382). Here, despite their many differences, Pollock’s conceptual scheme partly joins forces with that of postcolonial studies, for which Indian history before 1750 is pretty much an indifferent procession of one damned thing after another.⁴¹

39. For a development of the distinction between the “recorded text” and the “received text,” see Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Purāṇa,” in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World* (London: Routledge, 2004), 97-115.

40. Indeed, Guha’s attempt at a sarcastic riposte to us (“Where does one get a domiciliary certificate for an eighteenth-century culture?”) might better be read as a plaintive admission of the poverty of his own reading practices, which apparently cannot begin to approach the texture of the materials he addresses; cf. Guha, “Speaking Historically,” 1090.

41. Pollock’s profound ambivalence is nowhere clearer than in his essay “New Intellectuals in

Christopher Chekuri's response to *Textures* in this forum is an example of such an attitude. It is a particularly telling example, because Chekuri is ostensibly a historian of Vijayanagara, and thus the most proximate of the three essayists to the materials discussed in our book. But one would scarcely know it from reading his text, or from the fact that he mistakenly believes that *karaṇams* are "courtly intellectuals."⁴² Chekuri's response is largely about epistemological concerns deriving from his reading of European postmodernists and postcolonial theorists such as Timothy Mitchell. Chekuri begins by reproaching us for our alleged "unconscious repetition of some of the very norms of modernity and history that [we] seek to challenge," and in particular for ostensibly taking politics out of history. This explains the title of his essay, a genuflection one supposes to a certain Marxist sociological tradition ("bringing the State back in"). However, even before this, he begins with a rather serious misstatement of the book's intentions. The book, he claims, would have it that there was "an early modern intellectual outlook that distinguishes between fact and fiction, between the literary and the historiographical, and most importantly *between reality and its representation*" (384-385, emphasis added). This last claim is in fact nowhere made. A second major error follows. Chekuri writes: "In *Textures*, early historians are merely representing reality; they are not authors whose practices are political" (385). Both parts of this statement are wholly incorrect. Nowhere do we speak of "merely representing reality"; on the contrary, we begin our book by stating that, "writing history is *not* a simple matter of generating non-literary facticity" (*Textures*, 4). We would like to disassociate ourselves entirely from any default representational semiotic of the type Chekuri posits, for we believe we have done far better than that. Further, Chekuri's claim that our *karaṇams* are authors whose practices are not political is a distortion of an order sufficiently gross to make us wonder whether he has read our book, or—like a character in Borges—purchased a book with the same title but entirely different contents. It is, however, a distortion that is eminently necessary to set the stage for Chekuri to present himself as the one "writing politics back into history."

The chief sections of his essay then go on to take issue with us on a series of points, on most of which we believe Chekuri is simply destroying straw men of his own construction. But they also reveal his own conception of Indian history and its practice in ways that are rather astonishing, and even somewhat saddening. He writes, for example, of how concerns of causality, realism, sequence, and motivation have been "seeping into" the writing of late precolonial India (like a leak from a rusty pipe of European manufacture under the indigenous woodwork)—as if there were any kind of historiography, anywhere in the world, in which such

Seventeenth-century India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (2001), 3-31. Here he reproaches us (p. 4) for pursuing (in *Symbols of Substance*) "an obsessive search for historical dynamism" which is "at all costs, but often with diminishing returns," and then astonishingly confounds our work with that of the neo-Marxist "modes of production" historian Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*. He clearly prefers, at that point, what he terms the "remarkable essay" of Chakrabarty, "The Time of History and the Times of Gods," which represents precisely the position that Pollock claims to distance himself from.

42. Christopher Chekuri, "Writing Politics Back into History," *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 383 (this issue). Subsequent citations to this article will be made parenthetically in the text.

concerns were irrelevant. A first major charge, then, is that we assume that “texts were transparent to Indians before the impact of the nineteenth century” (388). This is conjugated into a repetition of his previous claim: “In the authors’ view, the task of writing is merely a task of representing reality. This would mean that power is absent in the production of representational practices. Might this not be an ultimate reading of Indian history as ahistorical” (388)? Let us begin with the culminating *non sequitur*. If power and relations of power are not at the center of an analysis, is it automatically “ahistorical”? This seems to be an extravagant claim even stemming from a facile reading of Foucault. As for the first claim, the fact that Chekuri here has us stating that all writing (and not merely that of historians) is “merely a task of representing reality” does not make it any more our position than it was earlier. Nor can we trace the source of the claim that, in our view, texts were transparent, and were read in only one way, or that they did not have their own “listening communities” (in our phrase) which by definition excluded some and included others. However, whatever helped to constitute such listening communities, it was most certainly not power and the field of politics alone. To assume the contrary would be to render the very idea of “politics” so all-encompassing as to leave it devoid of any analytical content.

In the following section on *karaṇams*, we learn from him that “there can be no other way to access reality as independently existing except through representation” (390), a statement that will undoubtedly be of abiding interest for cognitive scientists. In a decidedly constructivist and postmodernist mood, we are then led to a discussion of the “history of facts” in Europe, taking as our guide the work of the literary scholar Mary Poovey on seventeenth-century England. This is a particularly unfortunate choice in view of the scathing critique to which Poovey’s work has been subjected by historians of science such as Margaret Jacob.⁴³ Chekuri now demands peremptorily whether the place of “fact” in *karaṇam* historiography can measure up to the high standards that Poovey sets for early modern England. We are, for our part, quite bewildered by the alleged importance of this question, which only underlines for us Chekuri’s own Eurotropicism. We have dealt with the problem of “facts” above, and do not believe this requires further development here.

Fortunately, Chekuri eventually returns to South India and his tangential remarks on the *karaṇams* proceed further still. Ignoring the extended development in chapter 3 of our book (significantly entitled “Of *Karaṇams* and Kings”), he charges that we have exempted the *karaṇams* from the field of politics and its dealings with various forms of state power.⁴⁴ Setting aside our almost total indifference to a discussion of individual *karaṇam*-authors’ personalities as individuals, he finds us describing “eminent historians and their signature styles,” and

43. Margaret C. Jacob, “Factoring Mary Poovey’s *A History of the Modern Fact*,” *History and Theory* 40, no. 2 (2001), 280-289.

44. We would suggest that for a better understanding of the issues involved, Chekuri might wish to read such works as Komararaju Venkata Lakshmana Rao, “Āndhra brāhmaṇulaloni niyogi-vaidika-bheda-kāla-nirṇayamu,” in *Lakṣmaṇarāya vyāsāvali*, 2nd ed. (Vijayawada: Adarsa Granthamandali, 1965), 1-17; and Veturi Prabhakara Sastri, ed., *Cātu-padya-maṇi-maṅjari*, 2 vols. (Hyderabad: Veturi Prabhakara Sastri Memorial Trust, 1988) (reprint of the 1913 edition), *sabhāpati-vacanamu*, in vol. I, 283-289; section entitled *mantrulu*, vol. II, 251-308.

even has us depicting the *karaṇam* as “essentially a liberal, self-governing, modern individual.” These two claims contrast rather oddly with our own statement concluding chapter 3: “the confident tone is not that of an individual’s voice, with strong egotistic pretensions—as we so often find in nineteenth-century European historiography, for example—but of a collective culture carried by self-effacing individual authors” (*Textures*, 137).

The last section of his critique takes us to Chekuri’s understanding of debates regarding the emergence of the early modern world, a critique rendered rather curious by his indifference to the fact that one of the authors of this book is a central contributor to such debates.⁴⁵ Instead, the views of writers in a postcolonial mode, such as Timothy Mitchell on the interactive emergence of modernity in dealings between the West and the non-West, are cited at some length. Chekuri then thoroughly muddies the waters through his claims that modernity must be understood as an “embedding of [certain ontological] conditions within modern governmental modes” that are purely European in their origins and exported to India through colonial “administrative, revenue, and juridical discourses” (393).⁴⁶ He portrays markets and property rights—borrowing the deeply Eurocentric conception of C. B. Macpherson from nearly fifty years ago—as suddenly emerging in nineteenth-century India by the magic of colonial midwifery in place of a society where “power was organized around ever-shifting forms of kin, family, and kingship” (393). Chekuri’s own vision of the colonial transformations is thus little more than the usual hackneyed depictions of the passage “from status to contract” under colonial rule. The previous centuries are merely a set of “ever-shifting forms,” and “endemic features.” The specter of the Asiatic Mode of Production looms in the horizon. We are naturally saddened at his closing disappointment that the *karaṇam* histories did not produce a sufficiently exotic discourse, or “imagine a different conception of time and space,” and we trust that scholars of his generation will continue to regale us with an even more exotic India than that pictured by earlier generations. But even for this, they must apply themselves to the hard task of reading South Indian materials of the precolonial period and not merely the prefabricated conceptions handed down to them by postcolonial theory.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A book, even one of 300 pages, must have limited ambitions. *Textures of Time* does not adequately explore questions of the afterlife of *karaṇam* historiography as we enter the nineteenth century. We explored these changes in part elsewhere in tracing the career and impact of Cinnaya Suri (1806–1862) as Telugu pandit in Madras University.⁴⁷ Others such as Rama Mantena and Phillip Wagoner

45. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997), 735-762; Subrahmanyam, “Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400–1750,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998), 75-104.

46. Chekuri is apparently unaware of important, recent work that renders his views on the history of modernity questionable, such as that of Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

47. Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Print and Prose: Pandits, *Karaṇams*, and the East India Company in the Making of Modern Telugu,” in *India’s Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, ed.

have also traced some of these later transformations for Andhra, both in institutional and discursive terms, while the recent work of Prachi Deshpande sets out to trace the long history of Marathi historiography from the seventeenth century forward.⁴⁸ In particular, Mantena's remarks on the constitution of the Mackenzie collection, and the reading and interpretation of the Telugu texts used here and elsewhere, by colonial savants such as C. P. Brown, are obviously of the greatest relevance.⁴⁹ Again, a forthcoming book-length work by Kumkum Chatterjee aligns itself strongly with the hypotheses set out in *Textures of Time*, while examining the transformations in historiography in Bengal from Nawwabi times (the eighteenth century) onwards.⁵⁰ These authors, too, continue to challenge our views and methods, but we are quite confident that it is far less easy to assert today than it was a decade ago that historiography itself was merely a poisoned gift of colonial rule.⁵¹ On the other hand, we can hardly be certain that the intervention of *Textures* has been truly decisive. Resistance to its ideas and methods (including its peculiar form of collective authorship) will no doubt remain entrenched, both in some Indological and many postcolonial circles. But the possibility of a lively debate in a major journal such as this one does give us much cause for hope. It is one more reason for us to return to the fray and also to continue to promote the cause—still so unfashionable in history—of collaboration and joint authorship. The author has not died; he or she may now have been reincarnated with three heads instead of one.

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Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 146-166.

48. Phillip Wagoner, "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 4 (2003), 783-814; Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

49. See, in this context, Rama Sundari Mantena, "Vernacular Futures: Colonial Philology and the Idea of History in Nineteenth-century South India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42, no. 4 (2005), 513-534.

50. For an essay prefiguring the larger work, see Kumkum Chatterjee, "Communities, Kings and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal," *Studies in History* 21, no. 2 (2005), 173-213.

51. Christian Lee Novetzke, "The Subaltern Numen: Making History in the Name of God," *History of Religions* 46, no. 2 (2006), 99-126, especially 113-116. Novetzke surveys recent writing on historiography, including our work. Unfortunately, he is unable to distinguish between our point of view and the quite distinct one of Romila Thapar. Further, he suggests incorrectly that in our view, "where one finds history, one does not find religion"—hardly the point of our analysis of Senji Narayanan Pillai, for example.