

OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS

The People That Never Were

LINGUISTIC SCHOLARSHIP AND
THE INVENTION OF THE ARYANS

Christopher M. Hutton

The People That Never Were

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NOTE

Translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

On his 1783 voyage out from England to take up a position as judge in Calcutta, the philologist Sir William Jones (1746–1794) had a moment of epiphany: “*India* lay before us, and *Persia* on our left, whilst a breeze from *Arabia* blew nearly on our stern.” He expressed his delight at the challenge that lay ahead (1799a: 1):

It gave me inexpressible pleasure to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of Asia, which has ever been esteemed the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, customs, and languages, as well as in the features and complexions of men.

Jones remarked on “how important and extensive a field was yet unexplored, and how many solid advantages unimproved,” looking forward to the institutionalized scholarly enterprise that would become the Asiatic Society (Kejariwal 1988). William Jones’s philological journey was inspired by a universalist sensibility, grounded in a rational religiosity alongside biblical revelation. It was a journey of discovery, as uncharted domains of inquiry unfolded beneath his gaze. Parallels between European and Asian mythologies, and the similarities between Greek, Latin, and German on the one hand, and Persian and Sanscrit on the other, offered a window on the ancient past. Jones’s philology laid the foundations for the Aryan paradigm, though the modern concept *Aryan* itself is not to be found in his work.

For the Romantic scholar Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), in contrast to Jones, these affinities offered both a vision of the remote past, and, at the same time, a mirror in the present. Philology provided a deep genealogy for a collective identity, one that was in the process of self-creation. The roots of the Germanic people were to be found in their Aryan origins. So, at one

extreme, philology was a voyage of discovery, representing an openness to the vast storehouse of knowledge and the rich treasury of human languages. Or, at the other, philology was in essence a mirror in which individual and collective selves were to be found or fashioned. In this second sense, the outward voyage of philology would be ultimately a voyage inward to the individual or collective self.

Philology means here principally the historical study of languages and texts, though philologists also studied images, ancient artefacts, statues, and architectural structures such as temples. Philology was suffused with a sense of loss but also evinced great faith in the reach of its scholarly methods. The prelapsarian Adamic language was extinct or deeply concealed, the natural harmony between words and things disrupted. This “language of nature” (*Natursprache*) was subjected to arbitrariness as a corrosive force, eating away at the original natural signs. Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) viewed all the world’s languages as based in essence on this original language. What was required to see this was a special insight and mode of understanding, knowledge of “the signature of all things” (Boehme 1635). Humphrey Blunden (1609–1654), in the preface to *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*, said this of Boehme (1654: np):

Moreover he had the knowledge of that wonderfull Mystery (containing the Secrets of the whole Creation) *The language of Nature*, and that in his Native tongue; whereby the very name of every thing gave him clear Inspection into the Nature of it. This Knowledge had Adam in his Innocency, but by his Fall lost it: Else it had been understood (as our Author affirmeth) in the Language of every Nation.

Boehme’s universalist vision saw the primaeval language as providing the ontological foundation of all languages, whereas proto-nationalists argued the case for the relative proximity of their particular language to the *Ursprache* (Karabykov 2018). Philology entrenched certain concepts as universally valid, notably the concept of *Volk*. Knowledge in the present was attained by tracing the lineage of peoples, texts, and languages. The transmission and diffusion of ancient texts led to mistakes and corruptions, and philology was an exercise in reconstruction and rectification. A people or *Volk* was an ill-defined composite, made up of a shared genealogy or lineage, an original homeland, its own language, and unique world view. This paradigm had its roots in the biblical account of the origin of human diversity. Just as words were alienated from things, in the same way there was no natural force holding the composite *Volk* together. Migration, intermarriage, conquest, and all the contingencies of change meant that this composite was problematic as a guide to the divisions of humanity. The relation between language and genealogy

or lineage (later, race) was at the mercy of the vicissitudes of time. Original unities preceded complex amalgams. At the moment of ethnogenesis in the distant past, the different elements of the composite were aligned in an original congruence. Language was the primary criterion for identifying the boundaries of different *ethne*, but it was not seen as constitutive. The excitement of uncovering lost affinities through etymology was tempered by the anxiety intrinsic to deep reconstruction. Surface similarities in linguistic form or myth might be the result of coincidence or falsification. Etymology was a vital tool of analysis in the construction of narratives of the ancient past, but also the acknowledged generator of falsehood (Holwell 1793: 20). Scholarly polemics constantly invoked the boundary between true affinity and etymological fantasy, accusing predecessors and rivals of creating historical fictions and implausible connections.

Philology in effect personified nations and peoples, giving life and a life story to these postulated transhistorical entities, constructing them out of the inchoate assemblage of texts, languages, and artefacts. As believers in monotheism, philologists rejected the personified status of idols and deities, forces of nature, and processes of creation and destruction. Other personifications were downgraded into products of historical distortion or overactive philosophical or religious imagination (e.g., the Hindu triad of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva*). These were reifications or hypostatizations attributable to the seductive power of language and the imagination. Yet, at the same time, philology was eating away at the distinction between true revelation and myth. Textual criticism and comparative mythology suggested that texts had concrete histories, and that differences in world view and mythology could be described and compared in what was inevitably a process of levelling. Philology in this way demoted or deconstructed received forms of knowledge, both European and non-European.

Aryan as a category arose from the set of observed parallels or *affinities* between certain European and Asian languages. This led scholars to postulate an *Aryan* or *Indo-European* language family, derived from an original source (later termed, *proto-Indo-European*), which came to be associated with a community of speakers, a homeland, material culture, and spiritual world view. This model formed the basis for a diverse set of ideological correlates that can be termed *Aryanism*. Schlegel's subjective turn marks the definitive beginnings of *Aryanism* as an ideology. The primary promoter of *Aryanism* in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), was heir to both Jones and Schlegel. For Müller, the comparative method offered a vision of remote antiquity unattainable by any other method. Philology was able to lay bare the vital forms that historical contingency had wholly or in part obscured. Most importantly, it could tell “us” who we really were, by showing our pristine origin.

The centrepiece of Aryanism became the so-called Aryan Invasion Theory, the hypothesis that the Aryans originated somewhere in Eurasia and diffused westwards and eastwards. They invaded India from the northeast around 1500 BC, subduing and displacing the indigenous population, but also incorporating them into a hierarchical system that Western scholars termed *caste*. The modern understanding of the Aryan or Indo-European language family emerged gradually in the course of the nineteenth century (see Figure 0.1). One branch encompasses most of the European languages, that is, Baltic, Celtic, Germanic, Romance, and Slavic, as well as Albanian, Armenian, and Greek, though not Basque, Finnish, or Hungarian. The other branch is termed Indo-Iranian, a category that includes South Asian languages such as Sanscrit, Bengali, Hindi, Sinhala, and languages of Iran and Afghanistan, including Farsi, Pashto, and Kurdish. Today scholars continue to debate the location of the original homeland, using the traditional tools of text philology, historical linguistics, and archaeology, but now in addition big data and population genetics.

The origins of *Aryan* and *Aryanism* lie in a turbulent period, both politically and diplomatically. British colonialism, in the form of the East India Company (“a state in the guise of a merchant,” in Edmund Burke’s formulation; see Stern 2011) was tightening its grip on India, but the American War of Independence (1775–1783) led to the loss of the North American colonies. Colonial and Orientalist scholarship provided the materials for the development of the Aryan paradigm, but the French Revolution of 1789–1799 was central to its formation. The revolution, built on the ideas of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, became the founding moment of political modernity. Subsequently,

Words.			
Indic	Keltic		Graeco-Latin
Sanskrit*	Welsh	Irish	Greek
ê-ka (ê-na, <i>this one</i>)	un	aon	εις (= εν-ς)**
dva	dau	do	δύο
tri	tri	tri	τρεις
chatur	pedwar	ceathair	τετταρες, τεσσαρες
pánchan	pump	urig	πεντε
shásh	chwech	sé	έξ
sáptan	saith	seacht	έπτα
ashtan	wyth	ocht	οχτω
návan	naw	noí	έννεα
dasan	deg	deich	δεκα

Figure 0.1: A comparative table of Indo-European numerals (Attwell 1874: 10)

Napoleon established the world's first self-consciously modern imperium—in Europe, not Asia—which reached its largest extent around 1810–1811. The Napoleonic system involved the overthrow of feudal structures, imposition of a legal code, and civil equality for Jews. The primary target of this modernizing colonialism was the German states. German thinkers reacted by asserting the distinctiveness and autonomy of their culture, language, and heritage (Fichte 1808). Romanticism took a politically conservative direction, with French universalism seen as involving coercive induction into an alien modernity.

The so-called Oriental Renaissance (Schwab 1984) saw knowledge of Eastern antiquity as vital to a project of restoration and revitalization. The idea, associated with Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Friedrich Schlegel, was that

God imparted to primitive humanity a revelation that had been lost and dispersed through time, and it was now urgent to piece together again. The fragments of this divine lore were most likely to be found in antiquity and in the Orient, the cradle of the most ancient cultures, whose spiritual secrets scholarly work could unlock. (Armenteros 2011: 204)

Aryanism represented the attempt to contain, reassemble, and reintegrate a world threatened by new forms of knowledge and shattered by an aggressive politics of modernization. In France itself, Aryanism was one symptom of the rejection of the revolution and its model of citizenship. A long line of reactionary intellectuals, such as Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) and Vacher de Lapouge (1854–1936), defended hierarchy as the necessary foundation of an organic social order (Mohan 2016). August Schlegel (1767–1845) understood the Indian caste system to be the result of a meritocratic order, which emerged as the result of the unequal intellectual and physical endowments of individuals (A. W. Schlegel 1834: 422). Herder's vision of a world of distinct peoples pointed towards cultural relativism and the particularity of national values, making him “the intellectual father of historicism, and consequently of nationalism” (Sternhell 2001: 95). Sikka (2012) credits Herder with “enlightened relativism,” whereas for others the *Volk* paradigm, with which Herder is identified, is characterized by anti-Semitism (Rose 1990). Both Herder and Fichte were understood in this fashion in Nazi Germany, that is, as forerunners of the *völkisch* vision (Dennis 2012: 171–173).

The history of the Aryan question is essentially multiple variations on a theme, of a small number of oppositions, such as *Aryan* versus *Semitic*, and *Aryan* versus *Dravidian*. In Europe, the *Aryan/Semitic* duality represented the tension between Europe's origins in classical antiquity (Egypt, India, Greece, Rome) and its Judeo-Christian formation. In India, Aryanism is identified

with Hinduism and set against “Semitic” Islam. This opposition is also at work in the Islamic world. In Iran, Aryanism is identified with Zoroastrianism,¹ and in the case of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, with Buddhism as well as Zoroastrianism. In Sri Lanka, the opposition of *Sinhala* (Aryan) versus *Tamil* (Dravidian) emerged as a powerful political factor in the early twentieth century (Coperahewa 2009, Guneratne 2011). Interacting with these are dynamics of conquest and migration: indigenous versus invader; sedentary agriculturalists versus nomadic warriors; different models of conquest: assimilation of the conqueror into the language of the conquered, or assimilation, expulsion, or extermination of the conquered by the conqueror; superior/civilized versus inferior/uncivilized; and so on. These fault lines can be understood chronologically: Aryan civilization precedes Islam, pagan Greece precedes Christianity; geographically, in terms of indigeneity and migration; linguistically, in that Aryan languages are distinct from non-Aryan languages such as Dravidian and Semitic; in terms of world view or religion: Aryan cosmology is polytheistic, whereas Semitic religions are monotheistic.

Unlike with the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome, there is no direct textual or archeological evidence of an ancient Aryan civilization. This book makes the case that the category *Aryan* was brought into being by Western philology. Put simply, there never was such a people, race, or language. It analyses a selection of the (vast) textual history, focussing primarily on writings in English, French, and German produced by Western philologists in the long nineteenth century, that is from the French Revolution (1789) to the outbreak of World War I (1914). It seeks to explain the basic assumptions behind the scholarly edifice that was the Aryan paradigm, and to describe the processes whereby this paradigm was formed out of the comparative study of languages, in combination with the textual scholarship of ancient India and Persia.

One key to the emergence of the Aryan paradigm was the step-by-step integration of disparate sources and frameworks. These included (1) the story of Shem, Japheth, and Ham in Genesis 10, and the biblical model of *Volk* or *ethnos*; (2) the emergent recognition of a set of affinities between European and Asian languages and mythologies; (3) the postulation on this basis of an original ancient people, with a homeland; (4) accounts of Persia and India in classical sources such as Herodotus, including details of migration, conquest, and a range of apparently related ethnonyms and toponyms; (5) the philological study of, and translation of, the *Zend Avesta*; (6) the philological study and translation of the *Vedas* and *Institutes of Manu*; (7) Old Persian *airyō*, Sanscrit *ārya*; (8) the association of toponyms in ancient sources, such as *āryāvarta* and

1. See Laruelle (2007, 2021), Asgharzadeh (2007), Vaziri (2013), Motadel (2014), Zia-Ebrahimi (2011, 2014), Samiei (2014).

airyanəm vaējō, with the Aryan homeland; (9) the borrowing of variants of *airyō* and *ārya* into European languages; (10) *airyō* and *ārya* understood as collective *ethne*, on the lines of the European *Volk* model; (11) the use of variants of *airyō* and *ārya* as umbrella terms for the Indo-European language family and people; (12) the recognition of *Aryan* as a status belonging to the first three classes of the four *varna* system, known to Western scholars as caste (*Brahmins* or priestly class; *Kshatriyas*, administrators and warriors; *Vaishyas*, merchants and farmers, and *Shudras*, menial classes); (13) the assertion of some form of vertical kinship and affective bond between the ancient Aryans and one or more present-day groups of moderns, leading to the ideological formations of Aryanism. The focus in what follows is primarily on colonial representations of India, but also on the response of particular Indian scholars and activists to Aryanism, and to Western philology more generally. These issues remain contested in India down to the present day. India is by some distance the most interesting and complex postcolonial polity today, and, as such, it offers a profoundly important case study for the reception, appropriation, and rejection of colonial scholarship.

If the Aryans never existed, then it must be the case that each statement about their origins, homeland, and language is misconceived, or even erudite nonsense. In this sense *Aryan* is a construct or fiction of Western philology. The use of labels such as *fiction*, *construct*, and *reification* as analytical or critical tools is pervasive in contemporary academic discourse, and, given that, often less than informative, especially if used as a polemical device. Arguments that employ the notion of construct have a corrosive or contagious quality, in that, as in the *ur-computer* game Pac-Man, this approach to social knowledge leads potentially to all analytical labels and categories being devoured by the greedy jaws of constructionism (see [Hacking 1999](#)). If languages or peoples are social constructs, then they do not differ in status from races. Why should racial theory in particular be picked out as essentialist? If *Aryan* is a construct, what makes it different from other abstract or reified concepts such as *German* or *Hindu*? One response to this might be that one can actually study the process by which *Aryan* emerged, identify the forms of evidence and modes of reasoning from which it was constructed, and observe its diffusion into a range of extra-scholarly domains, all within a relatively restricted time frame. But in and of itself this does not imply anything definitive about its status.

The Aryan paradigm raises a challenging set of questions for the modern discipline of linguistics, one of the successor disciplines to nineteenth-century philology. One critical voice was that of Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938), who argued that the Indo-Europeans were just “those people whose language belongs to the Indo-European family.” The only “scientifically possible” definition was “that *Indo-European* is a purely linguistic concept, like *syntax*, *genitive*, *sound change*.” There were “Indo-European languages, and there are

peoples who speak them. The only thing that these peoples have in common is that their languages belong to the same language family” ([1939] 2001: 87). Reconstruction was a purely linguistic exercise, and there was no justification for extending its conclusions to “archeology, anthropology or ethnology.” The Indo-European paradigm had given rise to attempts at describing “the home, race, and culture of a supposed Indo-European proto-people that may never have existed” (Trubetzkoy [1939] 2001: 90). Trubetzkoy alluded to Johannes Schmidt’s (1843–1901) wave theory of language diffusion, pointing out that it held “not only for dialects of a language but also for unrelated but geographically neighbouring languages” ([1939] 2001: 94). Giles (1901: 8) and others had argued that colonial scholars had laid the groundwork for the idea of “a family of languages not derived from one another but all returning like gradually converging lines, to one mother language—the original Indo-Germanic.” Trubetzkoy objected to this model ([1939] 2001: 87): “The definition of a language family does not require the descent of the members from a single source.” There was “no compelling reason for the assumption of a homogenous Indo-European protolanguage from which the individual branches of Indo-European descended” ([1939] 2001: 88). On the contrary, “a language family can be the product of divergence, convergence, or a combination of the two (with the emphasis on either)” ([1939] 2001: 90). This reflected the notion of *Sprachbund*, associated with Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), namely, the idea that languages in a particular region may share structural features regardless of genealogy (see Schaller 1997). Similarly, the historical linguist Ernst Pulgram (1961: 20) argued that comparative reconstruction lacked “a built-in control mechanism” by which its evidential claims could be tested, pointing out that the attested evolution of the Romance languages could not have been predicted by means of reconstruction. In an analysis of the Aryan Invasion Theory, the anthropologist Edmund Leach (1990: 243) concluded that a series of origin myths were involved, in particular those generated by Indo-European philology, and “a lineage of wholly imaginary ‘protolanguages.’” The archaeologist J. G. Shaffer has raised the question: “Did the Indo-Europeans exist at all?” (Shaffer 1990: 356). For Bruce Lincoln (1999: 209, 211), “[i]f myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes.” It was scholarship that created the Aryans, through the “discursive construction” of a “hypothetical, even fictive “race,” “Volk” or “civilization.”

Linguistics generates specific forms of knowledge about language that are in tension with, or at odds with, non-academic understandings. Linguistics historically has been a universalist discipline, one that assumes that linguistic diversity can be captured within a unitary methodological frame. This universalism is based on the idea that all languages are the same kind of entity, the same sort of “stuff.” In modern linguistics, this is a progressive viewpoint, given that it represents a rejection of the idea that particular languages

stand out in virtue of their superiority or level of civilization.² On this point, Archibald Sayce (1845–1933) explicitly rejected a universal model (1880, I: 56). The Aryan languages were “the languages of a civilized race,” and its “parent-speech” would have been an inflectional language spoken by “men who stood on a relatively high level of culture,” such as Sanscrit or Latin. This language was not informative about “the early condition of language,” unlike “the Bushman dialects of our own day.” Therefore, to assume that the original Aryan language could give “revelations of the primitive state of speech, would be a serious error.” The Aryan/Indo-European paradigm was suffused with discussion of language and civilizational level (Gauthiot 1913: 61).

If we reject distinctions such as that between civilized and primitive, it follows that all languages, the marked differences between them notwithstanding, are governed by the same general laws and amenable to the same basic set of investigative methods (Whitney 1885: 766). Yet if all languages are the same kind of entity, then each language can be defined independently of the sociocultural world in which it is embedded. It follows that the nature of linguistic form and meaning can be understood independently of local assumptions and beliefs about how language can be described, analysed, and labelled metalinguistically, and about how words and discourses should be interpreted. It assumes that beliefs about meaning and interpretation are irrelevant to communication as social practice. One counter to this is the view that linguistics is based on a “language myth” powerfully entrenched in Western culture (Harris 1981). Linguistics is vulnerable to the charge that it disrupted the indigenous linguistic and cultural ecologies of colonized societies, thereby imposing an alien metalinguistic order. In alignment with this, postcolonial sensibilities call for respect for received tradition and non-Western interpretive practices (Sharma 1995: 176, Bryant 2001), but what this means in analytical practice is less than clear. In this spirit, a newer set of intellectual currents are impacting on linguistics, under headings such as: the decolonization of knowledge, indigenous knowledge, and Southern theory (Antia and Makoni 2022).

There are several basic possibilities in relation to linguistic reconstruction as a guide to ancient history. The first is that linguistic reconstruction is a valid method, and it offers a new set of insights for understanding ancient texts, as do new archaeological techniques, linguistic “big data,” and population genetics (Thapar 2014). The second is that it is a valid method within the presumptions and methodological framework of Western linguistics, but that its findings are irrelevant to the textual-ritual-hermeneutic space of non-Western societies such as India. The analogy would be with a reconstruction of prehistorical migration patterns in North America, set against the

2. On Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) and the distinction between “languages of civilization” and “little languages,” see Joseph (2024).

self-understandings of the origin and history of indigenous groups, that is, indigenous origin “myths.” The third is that linguistic reconstruction is simply invalid in its own terms, and by that reckoning its impact on understandings of ancient history it should be: (i) dismissed as a profound distortion; (ii) accepted to the extent that it is now integrated into the societal mainstream, that it, has become an indigenized myth; (iii) judged by its effects. However, the present status of *Aryan* is extremely tangled, given contemporary controversies within India itself. There is no single “indigenous” vantage point from which these questions might be judged, nor is there available a reliable external framework or methodology. The impact of Western linguistics and other forms of colonial knowledge production cannot be undone, not least because of the integration of the colonial framework within state modernity.

The concepts of *Aryan* and *Aryan race* continue to haunt the Western imaginary, yet the settled historiography is misleading at best. The paradigm of racialization, which understands *Aryan* as a linguistic category co-opted and misconstrued by racial thinking, itself lacks any foundation. It assigns “ownership” of these concepts to race theory, thereby freeing *Indo-European* of negative associations. The argument put forward by Trubetzkoy implies that the philological (and subsequently linguistic) classificatory project based on *Volk* involved languages, not speakers, but in practice this distinction has rarely been observed, nor could it be. For linguists and historians, Aryanism is a case of racialization, that is, the misappropriation of a linguistic category and its transformation into racial one, a discourse within which notions of superiority and inferiority were entrenched (Thapar 1996: 3): “The invention of an Aryan race in nineteenth century Europe was to have, as we all know, far-reaching consequences on world history. Its application to European societies culminated in the ideology of Nazi Germany.” The Nazis are held to have understood the original speakers as a racial group: “Nazi ideologues and their ilk regarded the speakers of the original tongue—Proto-Indo-European—as constituting the Aryan race, supposedly superior specimens of humankind” (Pereltsvaig and Lewis 2015: 11; see discussion in Hock 2011). But when Max Müller used the phrase *Aryan race* or Ernest Renan (1823–1892) referred to *race arienne*, the primary meaning was closest to Greek *ethnos*, Hebrew *am* and *goi*, Latin *gens* and *natio*, and German *Volk*.

The racialization model is a meta-myth of historiography, on top of the myth of the Aryans. *Aryan* has become the evil twin of *Indo-European*, and a dark chain of causality is assumed to link colonial and Orientalist scholarship to National Socialism. However, the category *Aryan* cannot be reduced to a simple linear model. Race science proper was an offshoot of eighteenth-century natural scientific taxonomies. Comparative anatomy emphasized empirical observation and the measurement of the human body, in particular the skull. This became the discipline now referred to as physical (or racial) anthropology. In its origins, comparative anatomy and racial anthropology lacked an

anti-Semitic focus on Jews. Mainstream racial anthropology never accepted *Aryan* as a racial term. *Caucasian* as a category included Jews, whereas *Aryan* not only excluded them but set up *Semitic* as its fatal other. In fact, rather than racialization, the reverse process took place, in that the anti-Semitism of the *Volk* paradigm eventually entered some strands of racial anthropology, for example, in the Nordicism movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Behind the topos that Nazism applied the unscientific concept of an Aryan race, there lies the further assumption that “pseudo-science” can be identified as such, and that, in virtue of its dubious status, it inevitably leads to toxic results. This is a non-sequitur. The reverse also does not follow. The philology that brought the Aryans into existence, together with the Semites, reflected mainstream scholarly methodology. One might accept that the Aryan/Semitic distinction is sound in philological terms yet nonetheless make the case that its impact was destructive.

Once the composition of a *Volk* became a political question, there was uncertainty about the interrelationship between language, race, territory, and what came to be termed *culture* (see, for example, [Bär 2000](#)). As this *Volk* theory developed its proto-nationalist form, it increasingly marked Jews as abnormal or unnatural, since, as a so-called diasporic people, they lacked an authentic relationship to territory and to language. Their belief system and identity were derived not from a relationship to a “mother tongue” but, rather, were expressed in the languages of sacred and legalistic texts (Hebrew, Aramaic) ([Hutton 1999](#)). It became apparent in the course of debates over language and race that the category *Aryan* was difficult to apply to contemporary populations. Physical anthropology as it developed through the nineteenth century viewed the composite notion of *Volk* as methodologically suspect, and, in its politicized forms, race theory offered a critique of the *Volk*-based nationalism of Greece, Italy, and Germany. Taxonomic race theory denied that nations defined by geography, language, and politics were racial unities, and it saw the modern nation-state as hybrid in its racial deep structure. Class structures and regional identities were held to reflect to a greater or lesser extent underlying racial realities, and there were superior and inferior races to be identified within the European nation-state, just as there were in the racial stratification of the European colonies.

Under scrutiny from racial anthropologists in particular, this misalignment of language and race was revealed, creating an unresolvable tension between scholarly concepts and popular terminology. The surface unity of concepts such as *Arier* or *arisches Volk* was held to be an inauthentic construct of language. In the emergent urban modernity, ordered diversity seemed to be giving way to a promiscuous and chaotic mingling. Imperial polities, by enabling the movement of peoples and spreading colonial languages, were further weakening the ties between language and race. According to academic race science, human groups as well as individuals were racially mixed. Racial purity was found only

in the deep past, or on the fringes of civilization. The scholarly frameworks available for the study of human diversity, in virtue of the genealogical model, fed fears that the ecology of human difference was threatened. Philologists and racial anthropologists engaged in fruitless terminological and theoretical disputes, returning repeatedly to questions of language versus race, and funnelling confusion and paranoia into the popular and political spheres.

Scepticism abounds in the Aryan paradigm (Demoule 2023), yet somehow the idea lives on (Hutton 2023). Ashish Kumar (2022) gives an overview of the debate about the river Sarasvari and its potential identification with “the now dry Ghaggar-Hakra.” This debate involves a controversy about the so-called Harappan civilization, and its contested relationship to Vedic-Aryan culture. One aspect of the controversy is the difficulty in reconciling linguistic and textual evidence with the findings of archaeology. Kumar’s conclusion is that the Aryan debate is more political than academic. Its primary focus is on the following question (Kumar 2022: 6): “*Who has a righteous claim over the Indian nation?*” Kumar adopts a distanced position, in effect undertaking meta-analysis of scholarly debate, on the assumption that the issues themselves cannot be resolved by conventional academic investigation. The case of India is arguably distinctive, in that scholarship, in particular the historical disciplines, is directly intertwined with faith, religion, and politics. Yet Kumar’s conclusion might also cast doubt on the ability of disciplines such as historical linguistics, archaeology, text philology, anthropology, comparative mythology, and religion, to answer basic questions about the ancient past. Given the entrenched positions, massive investment of intellectual capital, the paradigm’s role as an ideological proxy war, and the increasingly complex cross-disciplinary research being undertaken, these debates will no doubt continue. Be that as it may, the Aryan paradigm has been subject from its inception to direct, or barely mediated, influence from its immediate political context, from intellectual fashion, and the ebb and flow of ideologies.

Habib writes of the prehistorical invaders (2002: 65): “That the intruders, or some of them, were pre-Vedic Aryans, that is, speakers of some form of proto-Aryan speech (out of which the language of the Rigveda developed later), is not impossible, but cannot be proved.” Fosse points to a key problem (2005: 437–438): “Since there are no historical documents giving exact information about the geographical focal point of the Indo-Europeans, this focal point has to be inferred on the basis of incomplete and sometimes highly inadequate data sets which often permit more than one interpretation.” The lack of documents or other substantial forms of evidence “opens up a vast argumentative space which is able to accommodate a large number of hypotheses based on probabilistic and analogical thinking of various kinds.” This leads to “emotional arguments and contentious assertions” that challenge the norms of academic discourse (Fosse 2005: 438). Yet the problem goes deeper. The history of the Aryan paradigm does not fit neatly within the boundaries of normative or

mainstream scholarship. In the case of Aryan theory, the boundary between normative scholarship and pseudo-scholarship is unstable and contestable. In essence *Aryan* is a fictional category, without any basis in textual philology, historical linguistics, archaeology, or ancient history, unleashed by scholars into the world. *Aryan* is the Frankenstein's monster of the Western intellectual tradition: "Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence" (Shelley [1818] 2018: 169).

Philology ideally involves an openness to different textual traditions and modes of interpretation. Discussing the humanism of Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) and the study of world literature, Edward Said evoked *generosity* and *hospitality* (2004: 876):

Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and a different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign other. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important face to the interpreter.

As is well-known, Said also pointed to the darker history of philology in the colonial context (Said 1979), in relation to which he seemed to cast doubt on this form of interpretive empathy. The history of Indology has in similar fashion been subject to scrutiny in relation to Nazism (Pollock 1993, Epple et al. 2023). For good or ill, in humanities scholarship today, Jones's sense of unlimited possibility now seems somewhat naïve, or even alien. Linguistics long resisted the self-questioning that entered anthropology and other interpretive and textual disciplines in the 1960s and 1970s. But today the institutional marginalization of formal linguistics, together with the rejection of objectivist method in sociolinguistics, has brought the discipline to a turning point. Practices of linguistic description and analysis are now intertwined with issues of interpretive authority and objectivity, authenticity of subject position, and the relationship of knowledge to identity. Between the enlightenment universalism of Jones and the Romantic philology of Schlegel, there is no unproblematic position to adopt. Schlegel's neo-Romantic postcolonial and anti-colonial successors would regard his claims of kinship in relation to the ancient Aryans as inauthentic but defend their own identity claims in terms of lineage, culture, tradition, and self-ownership.

The notion that there exists a world of horizonless intellectual possibility is now seriously imperilled. The interpretive disciplines in their totality operate within a mesh of contentious reflexivity, theoretical manoeuvring, and the self- and other-surveillance intrinsic to the hermeneutics of suspicion. Viewed sceptically, not a single statement by a philologist or racial anthropologist to be discussed is unarguable. The hermeneutics-of-suspicion model in any case

assumes the presence of a latent bias or ideological agenda in Western scholarship, particularly in the age of high imperialism. There could be no better example of this than the interminable and futile Aryan homeland debate. With hindsight, each proposed location of the “Aryan cradle” reflected a broader ideological agenda or world view. Yet the meta-scholarship must in turn be vulnerable to the same criticism, creating a problematic explanatory regress. The complicating factor is that certain concepts or texts or even languages are understood to be “owned” (Hutton 2010), and thereby held to be excluded from the purview of external expertise or open-ended debate.

If the Aryans never existed, then all that would be left is historiography without history. Yet things are not that straightforward. As Birkvad points out (2020: 64): “ideas of Aryanism have multiple origin points.” The Aryan paradigm is woven into myriad narratives, and into the contentious politics of contemporary India and other polities: “In addition to its foundational role in European colonial knowledge production on the ‘East’ more broadly, Aryanism has provided creative inspiration for Hindu, Christian and Islamic mystic traditions, as well as those of Western esotericists and anti-colonial movements” (Birkvad 2020: 60). Philology brings states of affairs into being, since it involves ascribing meaning to words and texts. It has, to cite *Frankenstein* once more, “the capacity of bestowing animation” (Shelley [1818] 2018: 41). An ascribed meaning is a social fact, albeit potentially transient or contentious. The interpretation of a sacred text may lead to ritual practice and inform social organization. In the case of legal texts, the assigned interpretive meaning is enforced by the power of the state. Issues of social construction ultimately need to be concretized as historical accounts of the interaction between the world of scholarly ideas and extra-scholarly domains such as mass media, law, politics, or policy. There is a substantial lacuna in the scholarship: “Unless we consider the historical circulation, uptake and use of an idea, we are also likely to overlook the intricate relationship between ideas and policy innovations” (Salö and Karlander 2022: 165). One factor in that impact is the inability of many scholarly concepts to make the transition intact from academic debate to direct application in the social world. In the case of concepts for individual and collective identities, the gap between scholarly discourse and the political exigences of modern societies was highly disruptive or disorienting in many domains. Popularization was one form of mediation; political activism, another.

The problematics of *Aryan* eventually fed deep-seated anxieties about the nature of social cohesion and allowed for the reintegration and reimagining of long-standing dogmas such as anti-Semitism into the public discourse of Western societies. This was particularly the case in Germany, where, unlike common law states built on jurisdictional sovereignty such as the United Kingdom and the United States, or France, with its principle of republican citizenship, the concept of *Volk* was both animator and foundation of the nation-state.

CHAPTER 1

Philology and Physical Anthropology

1.1 PHILOLOGY AS A UNIVERSAL DISCIPLINE

Philology is the master discipline of the Western tradition, one that sought to grasp, evaluate, and restore to knowledge the history of humanity. Philology proceeded from the assumption of an original unity or set of unities, an ancient order that time and change had fragmented or erased (Turner 2014: 2): “Only by understanding the historical origins of texts, of different languages, or of language itself could a scholar adequately explain the object of study.” One can trace philology from its origins in the classical world, through its rediscovery in Renaissance Humanism, down to its professionalization in the nineteenth-century universities. However, to the extent that philology is concerned with the genealogy of humanity, its origins are to be found both in classical antiquity (Römer 1985: 9ff.) and in the Bible. Genesis describes two beginnings to human history: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and the repopulation of the earth after the Flood, as described in Genesis 10: 2–5:

Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

The Confusion at Babel (Gen. 11: 1–9) seemingly contradicts this account of the orderly colonization of the earth, since it represents the process of diversification as chaotic:

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

As Arno Borst points out (1995, I: 120), these two episodes merge providential intervention with divine punishment, and they present language and peoplehood (*Volk*) as interlocking. The account in Genesis implied that, at the moment of ethnogenesis, each people possessed a common language, had their own territory, formed their own lineage, and shared a common destiny. Fredriksen points to parallels in Herodotus (2017: 35): “Herodotus defined “Greekness,” to *hellēnikon*, in terms of shared blood (*homaimon*), language (*homoglōssa*), sanctuaries and sacrifices (*theōn hidrumata koina kai thusiai*), and customs (*ethea homotropa*; *Histories* 8.144.2–3).” The sons of Noah are distinguished at the outset by the covenant that God makes with their descendants (Gen. 9: 10): “God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.” Given these distinctive fates and roles, a presumption was created against the desirability of mixing between descent lines.

The three sons of Noah were the founding ancestors of the main branches of humanity, and consequently the terms *Semitic*, *Hamitic*, and *Japhetic* came to be used at different times to name the major groupings of humanity and their languages. While language was the primary criterion for dividing humanity into types, these were never understood as *constituted by language alone*. The underlying presumption was that there had been an original congruence between genealogy, territory, and language, but this had been partially disturbed, or substantially lost, due to migration, intermarriage, conquest, or enslavement. This biblical-philological model of a people is reflected in terms such as *am* or *goi* (Hebrew), *ethnos* (Greek), *gens*, *natio* (Latin), and *Volk* (German). Language became the primary diagnostic tool for identifying the divisions and sub-divisions of humanity. Leibniz repeatedly claimed in his letters that the investigation of language was the key to discovering “the origin of nations” (Vermeulen 2015: 63ff.). In early modern and modern scholarship, key terms included *affinity*, *stock*, and *primitive seat* (or *cradle*) for “original homeland”: “The affinity between the Greek language and the old Parsi and Sanscrit is certain and essential. The use of cognate idioms proves the nations who used them to have descended from one stock” (Prichard 1813: 525). Kennedy (1828: 11) conceded that the origin of nations was “buried in obscurity,” but language offered a potential means to trace “the filiation and migrations” of peoples. While etymology was unreliable as “ingenious speculations of no utility,” there was “the celebrity of the Greeks and Romans,

the high antiquity of the Chaldeans and Hindus, and the proud superiority of the descendants of the Gothic people,” which posed the question of why “identical terms” were found in these languages, “after a lapse of more than three thousand years, on the banks of the Ganges and the Thames.”

This was a universal genealogy, since all of humanity was the offspring of a single pair, Adam and Eve, and everyone, living, dead, and yet-to-be-born, was descended from Noah. In the Flood, “all mankind were drowned, except those 8 persons, of who al Nations of the earth are engendered” (Harry 1604: 1). In every genealogy of princes, “the very source of it all, it will be found, under whatever title he may come, that the first king in every country was Noah” (Bryant 1775–1776, I: xiii). These lineages represent “the idea of the totality of the family of man” (Frederiksen 2017: 13–14). Christian theology, following Saint Augustine, spoke of the Six Ages of the World (*sex aetates mundi*), with each age being 1000 years. Anglo-Saxon genealogies even added a further “ark-born” son of Noah, named Scaef, through whom the royal line could be traced to Noah, and then back to Adam (Anzelark 2002: 18). If Noah was “the first Monarch of the world,” then this legitimated those monarchs who through “lineall descent” could claim royal title in the form of “lawfull descent.” This was a reference to James I. Biblical genealogies could be extended down to the present (Reynolds 1739).

Hannaford (1996: 147) argues that it is “unhistorical” to speak of race “before the appearance of physical anthropology proper,” given that discussion of the human body up to the Renaissance and the Reformation “could not be detached from the ideas of *polis* and *ecclesia*,” that is, the Greek city-state, or the political unit of governance, with its political assembly. Notions of *pedigree* and *lineage* were, however, central to early modern understandings of “families, peoples, nations, institutions, church practices and doctrines”; provenance “was the keystone of legitimacy,” and lineage “was inextricably woven into the various discourses of legitimacy” (Kidd 1999: 287). With this emphasis on lineage came anxiety about the effects of time and change. Philology reflected a profound sense of loss and this generated a powerful drive to recapture or restore the past. The analogy would be with an antiquarian attempting to restore a vase from its scattered fragments. As Jacob Bryant put it, “My purpose is not to lay science in ruins; but instead of desolating to build up, and to rectify what time has impaired: to divest mythology of every foreign and unmeaning ornament, and to display the truth in its naked simplicity” (1775–1776, I: xiii). Behind “the rites and mysteries of the Gentiles” and their “symbolical representations,” there would be revealed great events such as “the ruin of mankind by a flood; and the renewal of the world in one family” (1775–1776, I: xiii).

Hebrew, it was traditionally argued, was spoken in the Garden of Eden. Isidore, Bishop of Seville ([636] 2006: 39), affirmed that Hebrew was “the mother of all languages and letters.” One abiding concern was the need to

align the horizontal variability of humanity into a single vertical narrative. The architect John Webb (1611–1672) in his *Historical Essay* (1669) proposed that Chinese was “the primitive language.” The Chinese had already been settled in their homeland and therefore had not been present at Babel. An alternative way of dealing with Babel was to argue that no great linguistic change had taken place; rather, it was people’s minds that “became bewildered” (Brett 1729: 62). This confusion in turn “caused dissension, dissension produced dispersion, and then time as naturally occasion’d a diversity of language.” This enabled Brett to argue that Hebrew was indeed the primitive language, and that there remained contemporary languages with a close connection to it (Brett 1729: 71).

During the Renaissance, proto-nationalist scholars began to propose European vernacular languages as the original language of mankind (Olender 2009, Kidd 1999: 31). In that context, the word *primitive* designated primary types, as opposed to derivative or mixed, and the greater the antiquity, the greater the legitimacy. *Primitive* also implied simple and unadorned, and this understanding of the origin of language in bare individual roots competed with the notion that morphological complexity, in particular a rich inflectional system, was the hallmark of a highly developed language. Genealogical thinking within a universalist framework presumed a common origin to language, and this model therefore required some form of overarching generalization about which type of language was prior, and the direction of change. For example, had Chinese lost its inflections or had the Indo-European languages evolved them? The German sinologist Carl Arendt (1838–1902), reviewing Louis Benloew’s (1818–1900) *De quelques caractères du langage primitif* (1863), poured scorn on the confidence with which the author asserted that the original language must have been monosyllabic. Evidence for this came from Chinese, which, according to Benloew, “offered an incomparable example of a primitive or primordial language” (Arendt 1865: 139).

The writing of universal history compatible with the biblical narrative and time frame required reliable sources. In the case of India, William Jones described “their civil history” as “a cloud of fables,” which left only four sources, “namely first, their *Languages and Letters*; secondly, their *Philosophy and Religion*; thirdly, the actual remains of their old *Sculpture and Architecture*; and, fourthly, the written memorials of their *Sciences and Arts*” (1799b: 25). Universal history also required a high degree of narrative compression. As the colonial scholar Alexander Hamilton (1762–1824) wrote in his *Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* (1820, I: xvi), “That the Buddhas of the Hindus were the prophets of the Hebrews is proved by the time of their birth, the events of their lives, and the periods of their deaths.” Alternatively, the Indian texts were simply valueless as history. In his *History of British India*, James Mill (1773–1836) ridiculed the exaggerated respect accorded by Orientalist scholars to Indian chronologies, given that they exhibited “the wildest pitch of extravagance” and were “utterly inconsistent” (1817, I: 97).

Philology represented a form of etymological thinking, according to which origin defined essence. Isidore, Bishop of Seville, stressed that etymology was a key interpretive tool ([636] 2006: 55): “for when you have seen whence a word has originated, you understand its force more quickly. Indeed, one’s insight into anything is clearer when its etymology is known.” But there is a proviso, in that “not all words were established by the ancients from nature; some were established by whim, just as we sometimes give names to our slaves and possessions according to what tickles our fancy” ([636] 2006: 55). At their origin, words are grounded in, or partake of, nature. They are not arbitrary. A word without an etymology is the artificial product of wilful caprice. Etymological thinking takes the side of *physis* (“nature”) in the *physis* versus *nomos* (“convention,” “custom,” “law”) dichotomy (see Joseph 2000). Isidore followed the tripartite division of humanity found in Genesis ([636] 2006: 193): “These are the nations from the stock of Japheth, which occupy the middle region of Asia Minor from Mount Taurus to the north and all of Europe up to the Britannic Ocean, bequeathing their names to both places and peoples.”

The effect of time and movement was to cover with accretions that original, authentic state. This created a sense of displacement, disorientation, or nostalgia, and, in some cases, a romantic melancholy found in contemplation of ruins. The restoration of a narrative with an obscure and incomplete beginning might be revealed in its end or telos. To borrow a phrase from T. S. Eliot, “The end is where we start from” (1943: 38). The aim was at the very least to know fully the point of origin and thereby to be able to imagine the direction of travel. Given that Scottish Gaelic (“the Galic”) was “an original language,” James Grant (1743–1835) argued that etymological analysis showed the trajectory from the ancient past to the present and might serve to throw light “upon the situation and circumstances of primeval man,” as well as “to mark the progress of the human mind from its simplest to its more enlarged conceptions in increasing society” (1785: 58).

1.2 EX ORIENTE LUX

Philologists searched for the origins of civilization in Egypt, China, and India, under the banner of *ex oriente lux*. Though this quest is redolent of antiquarian mysticism, the search for ancient origins did not preclude a universalist rationalism in the present, as was the case with the pioneering Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) (Messling 2023). James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714–1799) claimed that the ancient inhabitants of Greece were “a race of people that came from the East, and particularly from Asia” (1773–1792, I: 414). There was an evident relationship between “the Teutonic, the Persian, the Greek, and its most antient dialect the Latin.” The study

of these languages revealed “the same words, with less variation than could be expected in dialects spoken by nations living in countries so remote from one another, and that must have come off from the parent-stock at times so different” (1773–1792, I: 420). Authority for this was the work *De Hellenistica Commentarius* of Claudius Salmasius (Claude Saumaise, 1588–1653), who argued that “all those words which occur as the same in the Germanic, Greek, and Persian languages must also have the same origin” ([Salmasius 1643](#): 384). There were three possibilities: “Either the Greek must be derived from those other languages; or, secondly, those other languages must be derived from the Greek; or, *lastly*, they must be all dialects of the same parent-language” (1773–1792, I: 421). European civilization, “all the arts and sciences,” were the legacy of a great ancient migration (1773–1792, I: 421–422):

And to me it appears evident, both from the reason of the thing, and from history, that not only all arts and sciences came from the east, but even the race of men who peopled Europe, and brought with them those arts, and, among others, language, without which they could not subsist in the ruder climate and more barren soil of Europe [. . .].

His proposed origin of civilization was Egypt (1773–1792, I: 445ff.), where the common source of the Indian and Greek languages was to be found. It was probable that “all the languages spoken in Europe, all Asia, if you will, and some part of Africa, are dialects of one parent language, which was probably invented in Egypt” (1773–1792, I: 477). If there had been an original language, it was now “either totally lost in a great part of the earth, or so depraved and corrupted as to no longer be known” (1773–1792, I: 477). Monboddo was aware of the high praise that had been given to Sanscrit (1773–1792, IV: 25):

I will begin with the Greek, the language the most perfect that I know, or, I believe, that is known; though, from what we hear of the Indian Sanscrit language, we have reason to think that it is likewise a language of wonderful art, and we are sure that, in some respects, it resembles very much the Greek, particularly in the verbs [. . .].

In his *Antient Metaphysics*, Monboddo even put Sanscrit above Greek (1779–1799, IV: 321–322):

Now, the original language of India, of which all the other languages, spoken in that country are dialects more or less corrupt, is the Shanscrit, the most perfect language that is, or, I believe, ever was, on this earth; for it is more perfect than the Greek. This Sir William Jones, who is well known to be learned in many different

languages, and particularly in the Greek, has told us in one of his publications: But if he had not said so, we know so many particulars concerning the form and structure of it, as to be convinced that he is in the right.

The case for ancient India as the cradle of civilization was made by the surgeon John Zephaniah Holwell (1711–1798), who observed that “the *Mythology*, as well as the *Cosmology* of the *Egyptians*, *Greeks* and *Romans*, were borrowed from the doctrines of the *Brahmins*” (1766: 3–4). Holwell denied that “the people of *Indostan*” were “a race of stupid *idolaters*,” adding that “to our cost, in a political and commercial view, we have found them superior to us.” Negative views of the Indians were based on superficial observation and prejudice, particularly on the part of Roman Catholic commentators (Holwell 1766: 6). A deeper knowledge of the language would allow for the tracing of “the etymology of their words and phrases,” thereby “diving into the mysteries of their theology,” which would make clear “that such seemingly preposterous worship, had the most sublime rational source and foundation” (1766: 9–10).

Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778) argued that there were traces of India within the most ancient Chinese civilization, whereas there was nothing of China in India (1773: 7). The institution of caste had originated in India and was later copied by the ancient Egyptians (1773: 441). The Indian sacred texts were more ancient than those of the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, and the Chinese (1773: 79–80). Strangely, there was no mention of Adam, Noah, or Cain in the ancient myths of India, China, and other nations (1773: 46–47). In his universal history, Johann Eichhorn (1752–1827) located “the parent branch of humanity” in Hindustan, meaning in the elevated regions north and west of the Ganges (1799: 7–8). The Scottish historian and minister William Robertson (1721–1793) pointed to humanity’s origins “in the mild and fertile regions of the East,” identifying India as “one of the first countries in which men made any considerable progress” in the sciences and arts (1791: 2). The translator of Edward Ives’s *A Voyage from England to India* (1773), Christian Dohm (1721–1820), praised the fecundity and property of India, concluding that it must have been “the true fatherland, the cradle of the human species” (see Ives 1774: 41fn.). Herder’s “land rich in gold and precious stones” was India, which had been “known from all antiquity for these treasures” (1785–1792, II: 405). In similar vein, the Orientalist scholar Friedrich Majer (1772–1818) declared that “Asia was the cradle of the human race” (1798, II: 6). The Indians took pride of place among the civilized nations of the ancient world, and had a better claim than Egypt to be “the original land of civilization” (“das Urland der Kultur,” 1798, II: 12). Majer depicted a civilization that had endured over vast expanses of time, through the contingencies of foreign conquest (1798, II: 64, 74). He followed William Jones in tracing the origin of Sanscrit to Iran, where the ancestors of the Indians, the Arabians, and the Tatars may have been gathered (1798, II: 75).

In a letter dated September 13, 1802, addressed to the poet Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schlegel confessed that he felt himself “incredibly drawn to the Orient,” though he added, anticipating a dichotomy that would later divide philologists and prehistorians,

How are your Nordic studies going? I am more and more persuaded that in every way the North and the Orient, from the point of view of morality and history, represent the good elements of the earth—and that one day everything should become North and Orient. (Holtei 1864, III: 324)

Neither a recondite set of philological tools, nor great erudition, were required to identify affinities between European and Asian languages. After first being captivated by the apparent underlying unity between Persian and German, Schlegel then became entranced by his studies of Sanscrit (letter dated September 15, 1803, Holtei 1864, III: 329): “Here is actually the source of all languages, all thoughts and poems of the human spirit; *everything*, everything comes from India without exception.” In a letter to Karl Windischmann (1775–1839) dated December 18, 1806, the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) declared, “What is Europe but a trunk which is barren in itself, onto which everything had to be grafted from the Orient and which only in this way might be ennobled?” (Plitt 1870: 108). The Aryan paradigm itself epitomized *ex oriente lux*. Reinach (1892: 11) identified J. G. Rhode (1762–1827) as the first to propose a Central Asian location for the origins of the Indo-Europeans (Rhode 1820: 65–66, 108ff., Tzoref-Ashkenazi 2006, 2009). Turner (1827: 253, 254), noting that “former antiquaries had observed a few words in the Persian language to resemble some of the Saxon,” hypothesized that “the origin of our Saxon forefathers should thus be sought in Asia.”

The elevation of Sanscrit implied the downgrading of Hebrew from its status as “the parent of all languages” (Kennedy 1828: 10). The topic of the primitive language was beyond the scope of philology, as the Bible proved “beyond the power of controversy to dispute, that the primitive language of mankind was totally destroyed” (Kennedy 1828: 2). There was no evidence as to how to connect the progeny of Shem, Ham, and Japhet “with the nations that occupied the different countries of the world when they first became known to profane tradition and history” (Kennedy 1831: 369). From the later point of view of the professionalized discipline, this fixation on Hebrew had hindered the development of a rigorous science of language, distorting “the genealogical classification of languages generally and especially of the Aryan or Indogermanic languages” (Sweet [1900] 1913: 56–57).

The new focus on India did not go unchallenged. Modern German philhellenism or Graecophilia is generally traced to the figure of Johann Winckelmann (1716–1788), “the self-educated student of Greek literature who discovered

in Rome the sublimity of Greek art” (Marchand 1996: 7). In a discussion of the sculpture *Laocoön and His Sons*, Winckelmann wrote that the “universal, dominant characteristic of Greek masterpieces” was “noble simplicity and serene greatness in the pose as well as in the expression” (1756: 21). There were two contrasting levels: “The depths of the sea are always calm, however wild and stormy the surface; and in the same way the expression in Greek figures reveals greatness and composure of soul in the throes of whatever passions.” If Philhellenism represented a certain intellectual, aesthetic, and bodily ideal, it also took on political significance in advocacy for educational and constitutional reform. In this context, a controversy broke out about the work of Georg Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858), who traced the origins of Greek mythology to the East: “his emphasis on the oriental antecedents to classical mythology threatened the individuality of Greek culture, the very premise on which neohumanism was founded” (Williamson 2004: 136, see Marchand 2009: 67ff.). In a letter to the classicist Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker (1784–1868), dated May 6, 1819, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) expressed his reservations about locating the origins of Homer in India, and similar ideas. Whatever was the case, “beauty of form, grace, and taste were born first in Greece, and since then these have been only barely and with greatest of effort preserved in faint echoes.” It needed to be made clear that “everything non-Greek was with full justification to be described as barbaric” (“alles Nicht-Griechische mit vollem Recht barbarisch heißt”) (Haym 1859: 43). *Ex oriente lux* invoked a tension between the Judeo-Christian origins of European civilization as opposed to the classical paganism of the Greeks, alongside a clash between an increasingly Romantic “cultural” view of Europe, as opposed to the idea of an ancient and mysterious origin on some remote plateau in Asia.

Once the idea of an Indo-European language family became mainstream, this was initially understood to support the *ex oriente lux* model of the origins of civilization. Just as the Garden of Eden was to the east, so was the “Aryan paradise,” as Müller termed it (1888: 127). In 1829 the Royal Asiatic Society established a prize for translation, and the medal’s design included the *ex oriente lux* motto (Hansman 1984: 104). The philologist August Friedrich Pott (1802–1887) argued that the discovery of Indo-European was a turning point for the study of language as well as other disciplines (1833: xxi): “The peoples of Europe once lay at Asia’s breasts, and as children they played around her, the mother; in support of this we no longer need to rely on obscure, almost faded memories, but on factual, historically grounded evidence in the European and Asiatic languages.” The Sanscritist Monier Monier-Williams gave a lyrical account of *ex oriente lux* in the preface to his dictionary (1872: xv), proclaiming that “we English are not only Eastern in our origin” but “have received our religion and our Bible through an Eastern people,” and “our language is certainly Asiatic in its affinities.” Decimal notation and writing were Eastern in

origin: “The East is, we must candidly own, the first source of all our light.” The jurist Rudolf von Jhering (1818–1892) concurred, calling the Orient “the historical cradle of civilization” where “powerful kingdoms” had flourished, while “Europe lay in the deepest slumber” (1897: x). Jhering also saw “the Hindu and the European,” in spite of their differences, as “children of one and the same mother, twin brothers who originally were exactly alike.” One, the elder, “heir to his father’s estate, remained at home,” while the other set off into the world, “crossing every ocean, braving every danger.” As a result, “life has made such totally different beings of them” (1897: xv).

1.3 THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF PHILOLOGY

Historically, the impact of modern textual philology was to create a gap between the available text and the ideal or uncorrupted text. Dirk van Miert traces “the destructive power of philology” to the French scholar and polymath Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609). Biblical philology involved “the study of a (biblical) text by means of textual criticism, linguistic analysis, and historical contextualization” (van Miert 2018: xiii, italics omitted). Further, philology underlay the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* and served in the attack on the authority of the Church of Rome (van Miert 2018: xiv). The discipline of textual philology and classical studies, associated with Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), subjected both sacred and profane texts to the same set of analytical and historical techniques (Bolter 1980). Wolf’s *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) offered a philological history of the Homeric texts, closely modelled on Johann Eichhorn’s *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, the first volume of which was published in 1780 (Eichhorn 1780–1783; see Grafton, Most, and Zetzel 1985: 20). This created a new division of textual authority between the philologist and the theologian. The biblical text became at some level historically and philologically indeterminate, since the attempt to identify the authentic version was subject to both philological and theological dispute, raising intractable questions of individual and institutional authority.

The emergent specialist disciplines of language and text inevitably implied a further process of “disenchantment” in relation to sacred languages, given the objectification of these languages within the comparative method (Bopp [1816] 1820). A nascent secular science of language saw itself as disciplining or restraining the etymological fantasies of speculative philology, within which all kinds of fanciful connections between ancient languages and peoples had been drawn. The increasing reach of the European empires gave rise to an ever-growing literature of grammars, dictionaries, and ethnographic studies, produced by missionaries, travellers, soldiers, and scholar-administrators. Intellectual and political forces also threatened to undermine further the

biblical narrative. Scientific empiricism, coupled with growing disciplinary specialization as a model for inquiry, intersected with the emergence of modern geological concepts of time and the earth's age: "The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" (Hutton 1788: 304).

The emergent specializations in this evolving disciplinary landscape meant the fracturing of time, as no one time scale could capture astronomy, geology, natural history, and the ebb and flow of human cultures. It became more widely accepted that human history was but a tiny episode in the vastness of geological time. This loss of intimacy and connection also triggered reactive attempts to sustain and affirm affinities between the present and the past. While the premodern lineage had been much more proximate, tracing lines of affinity in short order back to figures in the Bible, modern secular nationalism in its own way made claims about the antiquity and lineage of nations. Issues of legitimacy and pedigree remained fundamental to scholarly understandings of the past and to the politics of modern nationalism.

A similar effect was to emerge in relation to the sacred texts of non-Christian traditions. Philology, with its wide comparative linguistic vision, its desire to accumulate, date, and compare textual variants, offered a set of tools that could challenge, subvert, or even reform the way that traditional interpreters understood "their" textual tradition. Print publication created authenticated versions in multiple copies, rather than manuscripts, and offered an editorial and textual apparatus. Modern philology, through comparative study of the vocabulary, adopted a vantage point unavailable to indigenous philology (Haug 1861: 7): "The secret briefly described consists chiefly in comparing all the parallel passages where the same word or phrase or form occur, and in searching after them in such cognate languages, dead or living in whose study we possess more aid for understanding them." In his address to the Aryan section of the Congress of Orientalists in London in 1874, Max Müller declared the triumph of the comparative method (Müller 1876: 184):

The *comparative spirit* is the truly scientific spirit of our age, nay of all ages. An empirical acquaintance with single facts does not constitute knowledge in the true sense of the word. All human knowledge begins with the Two or the Dyad, the comprehension of two single things as one.

As comparative mythology became institutionalized, it inevitably established a new level of intellectual reflexivity and thereby contributed to a process of demythologization (Miller 2014).

To call these new disciplines "secular" is not to imply that no questions of theological belief were implicated. The emergent disciplines of comparative mythology and comparative religion faced an inevitable tension between faith and scholarly method. The relativistic argument that each human type

had their own inherent religious cosmology was difficult to reconcile with the universalism of Christianity, as was the tension between the (perceived) polytheistic Aryan and the monotheistic Semitic elements of Christianity. Comparativism triggered debate about the relative moral standing and compatibility of different belief systems, and raised questions as to whether there was a lost universal religion from the primitive stages of human society, or whether Christianity had come to fulfil and complete the religious education of humanity (Farquhar 1913). The same primary intellectual impulse remained, even after the emergence of a more rigorous approach in the early nineteenth century, namely, the search for origins, and the desire to map those remote relationships onto the present diversity of language. The question became that of how to understand the relationship between European and Asian languages. The relegation of Hebrew from the status of the original language, and increasing dissatisfaction with the etymological and philosophical speculation on the origin of language, also correlated with a decline in advocacy of linguistic universalism or active scholarly engagement with the monogenesis of language. More rigorous comparative techniques focussed attention on isolated language families that were held to lack a deep historical connection.

1.4 THE GENEALOGICAL TREE

As noted, the traditional term in philology for kinship between words, languages, or peoples was *affinity*. In the Western tradition, there is a deeply embedded distinction between languages that are *cognate* and those that share features contingently, as a result of borrowing, influence, interference, coincidence, or, most problematically, *mixing*. Basque, conventionally regarded as a language *isolate* (i.e., a language without any cognate relations), was the subject of a long series of attempts to link it to languages near and far (see Trask 1997: 7ff.). In a letter dated November 1, 1821, to August Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt remarked (Leitzmann 1908: 15),

There is no doubt that there are Greek, Latin, German, and presumably words from other languages, in Basque. But once one is convinced that the language is not just a mixed language [*Mengsprache*], such as Romansh and Wallachian, but one with its own particularity, the question can only be whether all the words of this kind were taken up into the language as foreign, or whether some, and several, originally belonged to both languages, and therefore prove a relationship between both.

For the English philologist Hensleigh Wedgwood (1803–1891), the question was whether “a form common to two classes of language is directly borrowed by

one of them, or whether it may be part of a common inheritance” (1860: 281). Historical and comparative linguistics increasingly employed the genealogical tree diagram. The genealogical tree affords a visual analogy between representations of the ancestry of Christ (Bouquet 1996: 50ff.), the family of nations, the tree of life forms, the individual family genealogy, and linguistic affinity (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Charles Darwin, discussing the representation of affinities, noted that (1859: 422) “it is notoriously not possible to represent in a series, on a flat surface, the affinities which we discover in nature amongst the beings of the same group.” What was required was a tree diagram (1859: 422), in that “the natural system is genealogical in its arrangement, like a pedigree,” and “the degrees of modification which the different groups have undergone, have to be expressed by ranking them under different so-called genera, sub-families, families, sections, orders, and classes.” Darwin suggested a mirroring effect between language and race (1859: 422):

If we possessed a perfect pedigree of mankind, a genealogical arrangement of the races of man would afford the best classification of the various languages now spoken throughout the world; and if all extinct languages, and all intermediate and slowly changing dialects, had to be included, such an arrangement would, I think, be the only possible one.

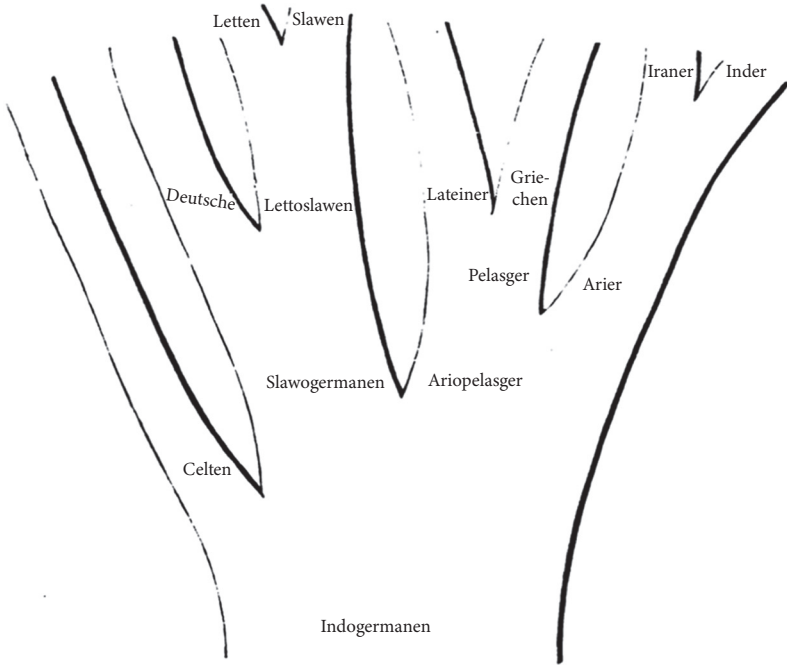


Figure 1.1: Schleicher’s tree diagram of the Indogermanic languages (1853: 787)

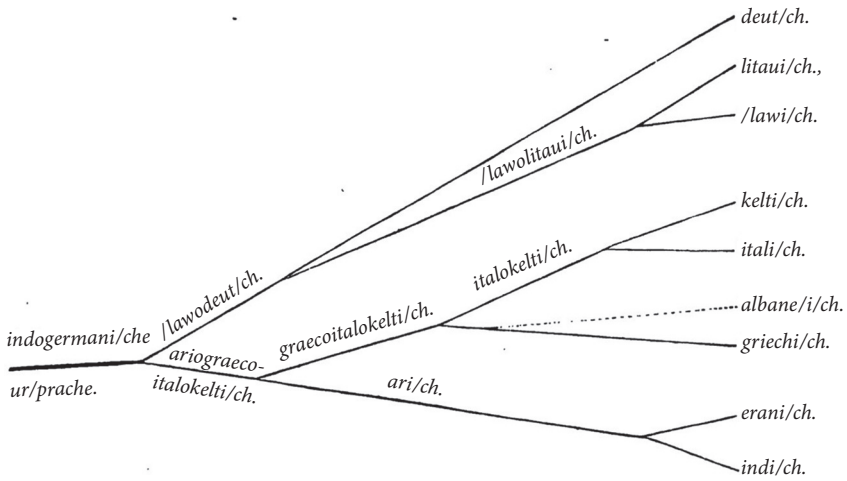


Figure 1.2: Schleicher's (1861: 7) Indo-European genealogical tree

In other words, only by classifying language on the basis of race can a true picture be obtained—a curiously static model, since it assumes that the genealogical tree could in theory be supplied with an objective set of labels for human racial diversity.

August Schleicher (1850: 26) stressed that the analysis of affinity needed to be made in terms of regularity of sound correspondences and grammatical role. Large-scale borrowing should be distinguished from genuine relatedness. Cases such as English, modern Persian, and Ottoman Turkish showed that such borrowing did not necessarily affect “the true essence of the language,” so that English remained fundamentally a Germanic language, in spite of its Celtic and Romance elements. There were no mixed languages (“Mischsprache ist kein Begriff”), just as every organism displayed strict individual unity (“eine strenge Einheit”) (1850: 27). This same kind of reasoning could be used in relation to mythology. Renan, denying that there was any personification of the sky or the earth among Semitic peoples, attributed the presence of this phenomenon in Phoenician cosmology to borrowing (Renan 1858: 271).

One challenge to the tree diagram came from so-called “wave theory” (*Wellentheorie*), associated with Johannes Schmidt (1843–1901) and Hugo Schuchardt (1842–1927). Rather than a tree with branches and sub-branches, the image was of a chain of language varieties or a succession of waves, originally in the form of a continuum. This continuum was only divided by “political, religious, social or other circumstances,” and inequalities of power (Schmidt 1872: 17, 26ff). Schmidt thought it highly probable that the original language existed in unitary form (1872: 31–32). Rendall (1889: 80), in

explaining wave theory, nonetheless identified an original homeland, “a European habitat, situate[d] west of the Caspian and north of the Caucasus” (1889: 80–81). Sayce (1880, I: 88) described Bopp’s method as “unshaken,” and “the existence of the Aryan family of speech, with all its consequences, is one of the facts permanently acquired for science.” Archibald Sayce (1845–1933) spoke of “the primitive Aryan speech” (1880, I: 298) yet also saw language as essentially in flux, as in “the dogma of Herakleitus” (1880, I: 299). The idea of a single parent language was an artefact of philology. The metaphor of “a family of languages” was acceptable, “except that the family was derived “not from two ancestors but from one” (1880, I: 216). As in geometry, parent languages were “ideal creations, never realized in the actual world” (1880, I: 216). By primitive speech, Sayce meant a dynamic and less categorical set of relationships, taking issue with August Fick’s (1833–1916) model of the genealogical tree: “it is better to follow J. Schmidt in tracing the later languages to co-existent dialects, which by the loss or absorption of intermediate dialects and the migration of the speakers became more and more distinct and divergent one from the other” (Sayce 1880, I: 306). This debate notwithstanding, the family tree model of linguistic (and racial) affinity became part of the common sense knowledge of the European educated classes.

1.5 COMPARATIVE ANATOMY AND PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The rise of comparative anatomy in the late eighteenth century came to pose a challenge to the traditional philological model of the *ethnos*. The French physical anthropologist Paul Topinard (1830–1911) located the origin of the modern discipline in the publication of the first volume of Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon’s (1707–1788) *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* in 1749 (Buffon 1749–1782, Topinard 1876: vii). Taxonomic schemes of natural phenomena (plants, animals) were extended to the human species (Linnaeus, Cuvier). For comparative anatomy, the human physical type was the object of comparison, in particular the shape of the skull. This became the subject of scientific theorizing and the primary focus of physical and racial anthropology, as well as phrenology. In the third edition of Johann Blumenbach’s (1752–1840) *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*, Blumenbach adopted the label *Caucasian* (*Varietas Caucasia*), for European (Blumenbach 1795). His analysis yielded five racial groupings: *Caucasian*, *Mongolian*, *Ethiopian*, *Indian*, and *Malay* (see Baum 2008). Anders Retzius (1796–1860) attributed this focus on the skull to the problematic nature of other potential dimensions of comparison, such as “skin colour, hair, facial features, body form, and language.” These could not be collected and stored in such a way as to facilitate comparison, in

the way that the skull could be ([1847] 1864: 27). Both physiology and phrenology were in agreement that the skull reflected the psychological character and individuality of each racial group (*Volksrace*) or tribe (*Stamm*) (A. Retzius [1847] 1864: 28). One can point to the “facial angle” of Petrus Camper (1722–1789) and the use of the *norma verticalis* perspective, that is, viewing the skull from directly above, by Blumenbach (Camper 1792, Blumenbach 1795, Marino 2022). Gustaf Retzius (1842–1919), however, objected that Blumenbach used *norma frontalis* (front face) and *norma lateralis* (side view) but overwhelmingly depicted skulls in half-profile, showing that he had not fully grasped “the real value of the *norma verticalis* of the crania” (G. Retzius 1909: 282).

The category of *Caucasian* was taken to include Jews (Römer 1985: 20ff.). This inclusivity was, however, subject to a special proviso, in that Jews were frequently held to have a specific racial or facial type, and to exhibit an unusual degree of invariance over space and time (Blumenbach 1795: 195–196). Jews were “remarkable for a racial character almost universal, which can be distinguished at the first glance even by those little skilled in physiognomy, although it is difficult to limit and express by words” (Blumenbach, as translated by Thomas Bendyshe, 1865: 233–234). Tellingly, Blumenbach’s authorities were drawn from the aesthetic realm. The first example is from the engraver Bernard Picart (1673–1733), who, Blumenbach reports, was able, in his *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1783), to represent a range of individuated Jews, but depict them as nonetheless sharing a common and distinctive character. The word used in Latin is *gens*, translated as “race” by Bendyshe. The second source was a conversation with the celebrated American-British artist Benjamin West (1738–1820), who had ascribed a “goat-like” appearance to the characteristic face, a feature that he identified “not so much in the hooked nose as in the transit and conflux of the septum which separates the nostrils from the upper lip” (1795: 234fn., as translated in 1865: 234). One further comment on Jews was a disagreement with Petrus Camper (1722–1789), who had opined that the Jewish nose was akin to the Mongolian (1792: 7). This was not translated by Bendyshe.¹ Blumenbach criticized Camper’s facial angle theory for being too narrowly concerned with one form of measurement.²

In his *Natural History of Mankind*, the English physician and scientist Stephen Henry Ward (1819–1880) identified *Semitic* as one branch or *stem* of the *Caucasian* family, “in reference partly to supposed descent, but chiefly

1. The painter West is also referred to by Camper, though he is quoted as finding the distinctive quality of the Jewish face in the curvature of the nose (“Krümmung der Nase”).

2. The widespread view that Camper’s facial angle theory was intended to serve racist ends does not survive the close reading in Meijer (1999).

to the affinities of the languages spoken by them” (1849: 10). The Semitic stem included “Jews, Arabs, Berbers, and the ancient Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Babylonians.” Ward pointed to “a peculiar physiognomy” of the Jews but dismissed how the “prejudiced and unthinking regard this scattered race as merely a money-getting people” and suggested that they came with the ancient Phoenicians to Cornwall. This was suggested by “Hebrew sentences and figures met with in the aboriginal Celtic languages, and also in the names of places found at the present day in Cornwall” (1849: 11). The second stem was the Indo-European (1849: 14), which comprised “a variety of races connected by the affinity of their languages, the Celts, Saxons, Slavonians, Graeco-Latins, in Europe, and the Hindoos, Affghans, Kurds, Armenians and Persians in Asia.”

A parallel discipline to physical anthropology was phrenology, founded by Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and developed by Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776–1832). Phrenology read skull morphology as indicating character or psychology. It was promoted in Scotland by George Stuart Mackenzie (1780–1848) and George Combe (1788–1858) and popularized in the United States by Orson Squire Fowler (1809–1887) and Lorenzo Niles Fowler (1811–1896). Spurzheim took Gall’s ideas further and “correlated brain structure with racial type” in an explicitly racist way, as did Mackenzie and Combe (Bank 1996: 388ff.). Combe, for example, gave this reading of the colonial situation in India (1830: 31): “The Hindoo brain, for example, is considerably smaller than the European, and it is well known that a few thousands of Europeans have subdued and keep in subjection millions of Hindoos.” While recognizing that Blumenbach was a critic of phrenology, Combe noted that there was some consensus between the two approaches in relation to the connection between mind and brain (1830: 9–10), as well as in aesthetics (1830: 619): “The European skull belongs to the Caucasian variety of Blumenbach, which he considers as the most beautiful and perfect of all the national crania in the world; and in this point he and the phrenologists agree.” For a period, phrenology developed in parallel to physical anthropology, but it faded away in mid-century, at least in the scientific domain, while physical anthropology established itself as an autonomous discipline. The two approaches shared a “common preoccupation with the human head” (Erickson 1977: 92) and also, largely, were seen by their practitioners as progressive in the sense of furthering the good of humanity. Blumenbach recognized that racial categories were to a degree arbitrary and were rather to be understood as divisions along a continuum of human difference. He argued that the diversity of type found in the human species was caused by environmental degeneration from an original *Urstamm*, which he identified with the Caucasian. This “devolutionary” model excluded the possibility of fully discrete physical types and placed the diversity of human types on a continuum (Blumenbach 1790: 81, Eigen 2005: 280).

The American polygenist Samuel Morton (1799–1851) noted that, as physical anthropology developed, there was recognition of the substantial “diversity of opinion” concerning “the grouping of mankind” (Morton 1839: 3):

The Count de Buffon proposed six great divisions, viz: 1, The Hyperborean or Laplander, which embraces the Polar nations.—2, The Tartar, which includes the eastern and central nations of Asia.—3, The Southern Asiatic, which embraces the South Sea Islanders.—4, The European.—5, The Ethiopian.—And 6, The American. At a subsequent period Buffon reduced the races to five, by grouping the Laplanders with the Tartars, inasmuch as he regarded the one as a degenerate branch of the other.

Blumenbach had adapted his system from Buffon, though making several improvements (Morton 1839: 3): “Thus, the Laplander and Tartar of Buffon constitute the Mongolian variety of Blumenbach; the Southern Asiatic of the one corresponds to the Malay of the other; and the European and Caucasian represent the same people in both arrangements.” Cuvier had proposed a three-race system: “the Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian,” whereas Malte-Brun had proposed sixteen. Then opinions differed as to the unity of the human species, with Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Cuvier, and others on the unity side, and the polygenists on the other (Morton 1839: 4).

Once Darwinism became mainstream, this further undermined the idea of purely static types, as the natural world was understood to be in constant motion. Confusion around racial terminology was frequently remarked upon, not least by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871, I: 226). Topinard, noting the divide between classifications that appear in the mind’s eye (“des groupes naturels qui se voient par les yeux de l’esprit”), even if the facts could not legitimate them, and those that were seen as “arbitrary,” nonetheless defended classification into types as a fundamentally important heuristic (1876: 20–22):

All classification in the sciences is provisional and arbitrary, so long as this science is not complete: that is the fact. Science limits itself, in reality, to introducing some order into the mass of individual cases that one has in front of one, to laying down markers whose correctness time takes care of by confirming or invalidating them.

The most influential measurement technique became the cranial or cephalic index, devised by the Swedish anatomist and naturalist Anders Retzius. Following his proposals in the mid-nineteenth century, this index became “a key factor in most of the numerous racial typologies that were put forward by European scientists over the next 100 years” (Kyllingstad 2014: 12). Retzius drew a primary dual distinction between *dolichocephalic* (long-skulled) and

brachycephalic (round-skulled), though he recognized that this was far from absolute and that there were intermediate forms (A. Retzius 1864). Subsequently the term *mesocephalic* (*mesocrania*) (medium-skulled) was used.³ The longer the head, the lower the index: 75 or 76 would be a long skull, and 80–87 a round skull. The term itself, *indice céphalique*, was devised by Paul Broca of the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* in 1861 (Blanckaert 2009: 208). One key observation was that this distinction between *dolichocephalic* and *brachycephalic* was observable within the European populations. It followed that Blumenbach's Caucasian variety brought together markedly different types: "The idea put forth by Anders Retzius first directed attention to the existence of considerable divergences of race even within the white variety, i.e., among the peoples of Europe itself" (G. Retzius 1909: 285). This had profound political implications. The assumption that the European peoples or *Völker* were substantially uniform was challenged by physical anthropologists, who emphasized diversity of type within Europe and in so doing suggested a racial hierarchy not dissimilar to that assumed to pertain between the Europeans and their colonial subjects.

The centrality of craniology was defended in the Huxley lectures by Gustaf Retzius. He evoked "the blond long-headed race in Europe which, from ancient times, has had its home in my native country of Sweden" (G. Retzius 1909: 277). Blumenbach's categories were too diverse:

To take an example: he placed in his Mongolian variety Lapps and Eskimos, races of men that are very divergent as far as the shape of the cranium, especially their length and breadth relation, is concerned. In the Caucasian group, too, he collected a number of people whose crania show very marked differences one from another. It is very remarkable, moreover, that he selected the name Caucasian as suitable for the peoples of Europe, with the Caucasus and its round-headed population as the central point.

Physical anthropology, to the extent that it was a science of measurement, faced the problem of relating the individual to type, both in the present and as a diachronic or panchronic issue, especially given debate about the permanence or otherwise of racial types. Then there arose the issue of labels and categories, and whether and how to use existing geographical, linguistic, political, or national categories. Morton used Latin in two of his titles, lending a medical air to the discussion: *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844). Similarly, Joseph Barnard Davis (1801–1881) and John Thurnam's (1810–1873) study of "the Aboriginal and Early Inhabitants of the British

3. "The degree of elongation is concisely expressed by the proportion between the antero-posterior diameter or length and the transversal diameter or breadth of the skull. Generally the latter diameter is expressed in percents of the former, and this value is called the cephalic index" (Boas 1899: 448).

Islands” was entitled *Crania Britannica* (1865). Morton’s focus was on brain volume or capacity rather than external measurement, under the assumption that capacity equated with racial type organized in a hierarchy, and that racial type was equated with intelligence.

The clash of frameworks between physical anthropology and *Volk* understandings of human diversity led to complicated academic politics. The Ethnological Society of London, founded in 1843, faced an intellectual challenge from the more narrowly physical and racial understanding of the Anthropological Society of London (1863), though that group also displayed marked internal divisions. The intellectual historian Jacques Barzun summed up the confusion. Physical anthropology was “the playground of historians, social theorists, and politicians, who surfeited the public with tomes, monographs, pamphlets, and magazine articles.” There was a jumble of terms: “Celt, Caucasian, Aryan, Saxon, Semite, Teuton, Nordic, Latin, Negro, Hamitic, Alpine, Mediterranean mingled with ‘cephalic index’—‘dolicho-,’ ‘brachy-,’ and ‘mesocephalic’—and other technicalities of the laboratory” (Barzun 2001: 577).

Physical and racial anthropology, like all disciplines, had its internal methodological and ideological divisions, but the dominant strand understood itself to be liberal, even progressive in its socio-political context, committed to evidence-driven empirical science, and to the unity of humanity, that is, monogenesis. Nor did debates between advocates of monogenesis versus polygenesis break down neatly into progressives versus reactionaries. Belief in monogenesis and the philological method did not equate with belief in the equality of human types. The historian Philip Smith (1817–1885) accepted the biblical account of the origins of human diversity (1865: 34): “That the magnificent Caucasian and the debased Hottentot, the noble Red Indian and the woolly Negro, should have sprung from the same stock, may seem incredible to that mere external view which is no safe test of truth.” In addition to the biblical account, there was philological evidence, which was the primary guide to affinities between peoples (Smith 1865: 34): “Comparative Grammar has been established as the surest guide to Comparative Ethnology.” Smith accepted that the Indo-Europeans were descended from Japhet, though he noted the possibility of language shift. However, “when we are able to ascend to the original speech of a people, we may safely infer their race from their language” (1865: 39fn.). In other words, there had been an original congruence, which time and contingencies might have obscured to a degree, but which could be discerned, as with the Celts of the British Isles who only recently had begun to speak English.

As a broad generalization, advocacy of polygenesis was correlated with support for slavery, particularly in the United States. However, Knapman (2016a) points to the case of the Scottish physician and ethnologist, John Crawford (1783–1868), a supporter of polygenesis, yet who was a passionate opponent of slavery and an advocate for political rights in the British Empire.

The leading French physical anthropologist and craniologist of his era, Paul Broca (1824–1880), denied any connection between the scientific study of race and political conclusions about slavery, given that each race had its own domain and therefore its own autonomy (Broca 1860).

1.6 THE VOLK AS IDEOLOGY

The late eighteenth century saw the rise of a more focused, explicitly political, and ideologically charged understanding of the philological *ethnos* or *Volk*, most notably in the German lands. The central figure in the intellectual history of modern nationalism is Johann Gottfried von Herder, who promoted the notion of the *Volk* as the fundamental unit of humanity (see Cowan 2010: 49–57). In one of the most frequently quoted sections of the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1785–1792), Herder made the argument for the ideal alignment of the *Volk* with the state (1785–1792, II: 315): “Nature educates families: the most natural form of the state therefore is *one* nation with *one* national character.”⁴ The idea of an imperial state was contrary to this: “Nothing therefore appears so directly contrary to the purpose of government as the unnatural enlargement of states, the untamed mixture of various races and nations under one sceptre” (1785–1792, II: 315). The sceptre of any sovereign would be too weak and puny, and any attempt to unite such disparate groups would create a monstrous polity of “incongruous parts,” which would be “glued together [. . .] into a fragile machine, termed a machine of state, but lacking any inner life and harmony [*Sympathie*] in its parts” (1785–1792, II: 315). These kinds of kingdom “appear in history like that type of monarchies seen in the dream of the prophet, where the lion’s head, the dragon’s tail, the eagle’s wings, and the bear’s paws are combined in one unpatriotic figure of a state” (1785–1792, II: 316). Such states were doomed to collapse: “history demonstrates clearly enough that these instruments of human pride are formed of clay, and, like all clay that exists, will dissolve, or crumble to pieces” (1785–1792, II: 316). In contrast to this vision of ideal types, physical type or race did not lend itself to discrete classification. Humanity was a single species (1785–1792, II: 86). Herder took issue with prevailing systems that divided humanity neatly into racial sub-divisions. Given Herder’s view that humanity had a single origin, physical differences were somewhat superficial (1785–1792, II: 94): “Race derives from a difference of origin, which in this case either does not exist, or understands race in each of these regions and under each of these complexions.” There was, however, original national character (1785–1792, II: 94):

4. In translating Herder I have drawn on the version by Thomas Churchill published in 1800.

For every nation is one people; it has its own national development, just as its own language: the climate of the region, it is true, soon makes its mark, and soon spreads over it a light veil, but this is not sufficient to destroy the original formation of the national stock. This originality of character extends even to families, and its transitions are as variable as imperceptible.

Racial variation existed on a continuum, and it made no sense to speak of four or five races. There was a continuum of skin colour. All human beings were “in the end but shades of the same great picture, extending through all ages, and regions of the Earth.” Human varieties belonged not “to systematic natural history” but, rather, to “the physico-geographical history of man” (1785–1792, II: 94). Herder’s particular target here is Kant’s essay on race, produced in 1775 and published in full form in 1777, which itself drew on Hume (Kleingeld 2007: 576).

On the history of the Jews, Herder diagnosed a disparity between their impact on the nations of the world, which he identified as coming largely through Christianity and Islam, and their failure as a political nation. Commenting on the Babylonian exile, Herder remarked (1785–1792, III: 110): “Thus, considered as a state, scarcely any nation exhibits a more contemptible figure in history than this, the reigns of two of its kings excepted.” The Bible had misled scholars into treating its cosmology and chronology as literally true. The impact of Judaism on Christianity had been in some respects harmful, as the laws of Moses were specific to a particular climate and a nation that was constituted in a fundamentally different way, and they did not adapt well to Christian peoples (1785–1792, III: 116–117). Here the underlying *Volk* model frames the influence of the “oriental idiom” on Christianity as pernicious. Under Christian oppression, the Jews became restricted to the domain of usury, a “system of exchange” that, though it did not originate with them, they soon perfected (1785–1792, III: 117). Jews had displayed a uniformity across all the nations and regions in which they had found themselves (1785–1792, III: 117):

If one were to gather a history of the Jews from every country into which they have been dispersed, he would exhibit a picture of mankind, equally remarkable from a natural and a political point of view. For no people upon earth has been so widely spread abroad as this; and no people upon earth has remained so distinctive and active in all climates.

The Jews had many positive qualities and had displayed courage in the face of oppression and in war; they did not excel in the arts, nor were they a seafaring nation. However, their national character was flawed, in that they never achieved in founding their own polity in their own territory. Herder then arrived at a damning conclusion (1785–1792, III: 120–121):

The people of God, whose fatherland was once granted to them by Heaven itself, has been for thousands of years, almost from their very beginning, a parasitical plant on the trunks of other nations; a race of cunning brokers, spread almost over the entire earth; which, in spite of all oppression, has never been inspired with an ardent passion for its own honour, for a habitation, for a fatherland, of its own.

Herder presents a modernized version of the biblical model, namely, the division of humanity into autonomous *ethne*. This implied a yes/no framework (which was disrupted by the Jews), in contrast to physical types, which existed on a continuum. Physical anthropology, in its universalist mode, did not present membership of a particular race as a yes/no matter, since racial types were assumed to be to a degree mixed as a result of environmental and climatic impact, migration, and conquest. Few physical anthropologists were essentialist to the point of denying the (in part) heuristic nature of racial categories.

1.7 CONCLUSION

Comparative philology adapted a pre-existing alphabetic system for a particular methodological purpose, that of representing languages as data for analysis. Alphabetic writing was reconfigured in the form of Romanization systems or phonetic alphabets in order to make this a more precise enterprise (Jones 1799s). Alphabetization is a form of methodological reduction. It creates a uniform and manipulable object of study; it offers an affordance for morphological and phonological analysis and allows for various forms of comparative representation, etymological analysis, and the identification of sameness and difference (Errington 2008). There is no parallel to this in physical or racial anthropology, where attempts to reduce the three-dimensional body to a two-dimensional representational system were mired in endless controversy about the most relevant measurement or set of measurements. The history of racial anthropology is replete with statements about the difficulty, or even arbitrariness, in drawing clear boundaries. For example, Hovelacque (1887: 221) pointed to the lack of absolute criteria in nature, including the study of the anthropological types.⁵

Language presents itself conventionally as having conceptual/semantic, pragmatic, textual, and social meaning, as well as indexing identity in a range of ways. Skull type does not have this quality, though some phenotypical features or characteristics do, such as physiognomy and its perceived correlation to character and/or race, together with the correlation of skin colour or hair

5. «Pas plus pour les espèces anthropologiques que pour les espèces végétales ou animales, il n'est de critérium absolu.»

type to race. The focus in physical anthropology on skull type allowed for panchronic investigation, affording the comparison of skull types across vast time scales, among living individuals and groups, and across the species line. But to make skull type “legible” some form of meaning had to be imposed, and divisions needed to be identified along the various continua of measurement, given the lack of a socially salient and culturally articulated set of conventions. If phrenology lacked scientific credibility, this cast suspicion on anthropological extrapolations from skull shape. On the one hand, this gave physical anthropology the air of a pure (or comparatively pure) natural science, since its object of study was abstracted from everyday categories; on the other, it inevitably drew on, or interacted with, pre-existing labels and identities, fomenting uncertainty as to how racial categories were to be understood in the overall landscape of peoples, nations, and states. The skull, like the unearthed pot, tool, or weapon, needed to be made “to speak” by linking it to a socially meaningful category. In default of this, the skull would be just a set of abstract numerical relationships. The more precise the measurement, the less fungible the results, in that, in detailed anthropometrics, the body itself dissolves into a mass of detail.

The charge of essentialism that is levelled at racial anthropology is to a degree false, given the disciplinary recognition that modern humans were inevitably the product of racial mixture. In that sense, races in the present were virtual in nature or constructs of analysis, since pure types were only to be found in prehistoric times and in the present, if at all, at the peripheries of the modern world. (This should not be read as denying or minimalizing the implicit and explicit racism that was embedded in the discipline, particularly that directed at people of African origin.) If we take Herder as the founder of modern *Volk* nationalism, and Blumenbach as the originator of racial anthropology, it makes no sense to use the framework of racialization to explain the anti-Semitism of the Aryan paradigm. The theological notion of the anomalous nature of the Jewish people within Creation was adapted into the secularized notion of the *Volk*. This marked the Jews as an outlier in the natural alignment of lineage, territory, and language. The political debate concerning the relationship of the Jews to *Volk* and *Staat* served ultimately to draw attention to the artificiality of the *Volk* concept. Anti-Semitism offered one way of redrawing the fictive boundary by excluding Jews as an alien element. At the same time, however, physical anthropologists pointed to the incurable racial hybridity and inauthenticity of states based on the notion of the *Volk*.

CHAPTER 2

Sir William Jones

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The origins of the Aryan paradigm are conventionally located at the close of the eighteenth century, with the work of Sir William Jones. Jones was a classical philologist, poet, translator, lawyer, and scholarly polymath who served as a colonial judge in India from 1783 until his death in 1794. Philology for Jones was both a means of ascertaining the deep realities of the ancient past and an instrument of revitalization. The literatures of Asia offered the possibility of reanimating Western literature, given that “our *European* poetry has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and the incessant allusions to the same fables” (1799t: 547). While the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans were “the standard of true taste,” these unfamiliar texts constituted “a new species of literature, which abounds in so many new expressions, new images, and new inventions” (1799c: 404–405, [Majeed 1992](#): 51).

Jones was essentially an antiquarian figure. However, his founding of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784 gave colonial philology institutional form, and the collation, standardization, and translation of indigenous legal texts applied philology directly as a tool of governance: “Law’s object is the improvement of his district, and my object is Law. I am, therefore, deep in Sanscrit: it is my last language; & I will know it perfectly or die in the attempt. If I live, I will make a Digest of Hindu & Muselman Laws of *Inheritances* and *Contracts*; the two hinges of all jurisprudence.”¹ Knowledge in a pre-modern polity is distributed across a wide variety of social, geographical, institutional,

1. Letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, dated September 11, 1787, in [Cannon \(1970\)](#), Vol. 2, pp. 772–775.

and ritual domains, and passed down through multiple lines of authority and commentary, meaning that this expansive ritual and (oral or written) textual culture cannot be grasped as a unity. Jones's legal philology is best understood as embedded in a pre-existing complex of authoritative texts and commentaries, both Western and non-Western. The task he set for his pandit in essence required them to re-engineer existing jurisprudence, against a background of social changes in Indian society (see [Tavakoli-Targhi 1996](#), [Mukherjee 1968](#): 137ff.). Ironically, Jones was philosophically hostile to codification in the form of statute law and idealized common law as a form of accumulated, incrementally acquired wisdom ([Patterson 2022](#): 296).

Jones's politics were liberal, even radical. He was an admirer of Voltaire, had republican sympathies, notably in relation to the American Revolution. He opposed slavery ([Jones 1799d](#): 498), though [Franklin \(2011](#): 295ff.) shows that this condemnation was less clear-cut in relation to indentured servitude in India. Praising the American model of governance with "grand and petit juries," and "senates and councils," Jones added: "I cannot think a monarchy or an oligarchy *stronger* in substance." However, unlike the Americans, "the deluded, besotted, Indians, among whom I live [. . .] would receive Liberty as a curse instead of a blessing."² While retaining faith in the Bible as revelation and as a guide to universal history, Jones pointed out that "many pious Christians deny that the doctrine of the Trinity is to be found in the Gospel"³ ([Patterson 2022](#), 2023). The Hindu doctrine of transmigration was superior to the idea of hell: "I am no Hindu, but I hold that the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious and more likely to deter men from vice than the horrid opinions inculcated by the Christians on punishment *without end*."⁴ Jones subscribed to monogenesis and a "primitive" rational monotheism that consisted in "the rational adoration of the only one true God" (1799e: 230). Humanity was powerfully drawn to idolatry and polytheism, yet the restoration of a rational belief system was possible, given that human beings had been endowed by God "with sufficient wisdom and strength to be virtuous," but also "freedom of will to be vicious and consequently degraded" (1799f: 131). Jones's universalism emerges in his vision of an ideal language, one in which "every idea, capable of entering the human mind, might be nearly and emphatically expressed by one specific word, simple if the idea were simple, complex, if complex," and a "perfect system of letters," which "ought to contain one specific symbol for every sound used in

2. Letter to Walter Pollard, dated September 20, 1789, in Cannon, ed. (1970), Vol. 2, pp. 845–847.

3. Letter to Thomas Pearce, dated June 17, 1787, in Cannon, ed. (1970), Vol. 2, pp. 737–738.

4. Letter to Thomas Law, dated September 21, 1787, in Cannon, ed. (1970), Vol. 2, pp. 764–769.

pronouncing the language to which they belonged” (1799g: 186). As this suggests, Jones was a pioneer in the development of Romanization systems for Asian languages (1799s).

2.2 IMAGINATION AND MYTH

Rationalism and universalism existed in tension with Jones’s embrace of the imagination, in particular with his rejection of the Aristotelian notion of poetry as imitation (Jones 1807: 64–65):

Poetry delights in *general* images, and is so far from being a perfect imitation, that a scrupulous exactness of descriptions and similes, by leaving nothing for the imagination to supply, never fails to diminish or destroy the pleasure of every reader, who has an imagination to be gratified.

This question of imagination became crucially important in the evaluation of myth (Majeed 1992: 31–40). Jones argued that the truth could be “perverted into fable by ignorance, imagination, flattery, or stupidity” (1799e: 230). Divinities were created “by the magick of poetry; whose essential business it is, so perfectly to personify the most abstract notions” (1799e: 231). In the introduction to his translation of the drama *Saccontalá*, Jones evoked “allegorical personages” such as Marichi, “the first production of Brahmá, or the Creative Power” who “signifies light,” and his offspring, Kashyapa, who “seems to be the personification of infinite space, comprehending infinite worlds” (Jones 1792: xii–xiii). This delight in the imagination leaves the question of historical truth unresolved (1799h: 149): “while the abstract sciences are all truth, and the fine arts all fiction, we cannot but own, that in the details of history, truth and fiction are so blended as to be scarce distinguishable.” One potential answer to the question of truth was biblical revelation: “Either the first eleven chapters of Genesis, all due allowances being made for a figurative Eastern style, are true, or the whole fabrick of our national religion is false; a conclusion, which none of us, I trust, would wish to be drawn” (1799e: 134). The Scriptures contained “genuine predictions” and were therefore “inspired” (1799i: 127). The biblical narrative had to be “more than human in its origins, and consequently true in every substantial part of it, though possibly expressed in figurative language” (1799i: 137). Yet the Hebrew Bible had “no higher authority than any other work of equal antiquity” (1799f: 133). The Mosaic narrative was “in a figurative style,” as opposed to allegory “as a mere assemblage of metaphors.” It was “in the symbolical mode of writing adopted by the eastern sages, to embellish and dignify the historical truth” (1799f: 134). This same validation could apply to any other ancient text, such as “the *Puránas* themselves, and

even from the *Véda*, which appears to stand next in antiquity to the five books of Moses” (1799f: 134). Jones was confident that Chinese legend, like those of the Hindus, provided evidence of a great Flood that separated “the higher from the lower age of mankind” (1799j: 106). Confirmation of such miraculous events was supplied by “the concurrent evidences of it” in the form of the Flood myths of different nations. A second answer to the question of truth was the comparative method. Given that the human imagination was potentially unlimited, if “features of resemblance, too strong to be accidental, are observable in different systems of polytheism,” it followed that “some connection has immemorially subsisted between the several nations, who have adopted them” (1799e: 229).

Discussing the “primeval religion of Iràn,” Jones remarked that such a “system of devotion so pure and sublime could hardly among mortals be of long duration” (1799k: 87). There was no doubt that “the first corruption of the purest and oldest religion was the system of *Indian* Theology, invented by the *Bráhmans*” (1799k: 88). Jones was attracted to mystical notions of the soul as an emanation of God, longing for reunion, but saw the imagination as prey to “metaphors and allegories, which it sometimes extends beyond the bounds of cool reason, and often to the brink of absurdity” (1799l: 446). There were parallels between Sufism and elements of Christian mysticism, in that “they concur in believing, that the souls of men differ infinitely in *degree*, but not at all in *kind*, from the divine spirit, of which they are *particles*, and in which they will ultimately be absorbed” (1799l: 450). God was the ultimate reality, and “nothing has a pure absolute existence but *mind* or *spirit*; that *material substances*, as the ignorant call them, are no more than gay *pictures* presented continually to our *minds* by the sempiternal Artist” (1799l: 450–451). This created a danger, namely, that “of attachment to such *phantoms*.” We should “attach ourselves exclusively to God, who truly exists in us, as we exist solely in him” (1799l: 451).

Personification was “easily misconceived by the multitude,” and this created “a strong tendency to polytheism” (Jones 1807: 62; Ganguly 2018: 31ff.). Polytheistic systems were distortions based on metaphorical processes such as personification and deification. This was illustrated in the worship of the sun (Jones 1799b: 30): “the one great spring and fountain of all idolatry in the four quarters of the globe was the veneration paid by men to the vast body of fire, which “looks from his sole dominion like the God of this world”⁵ and “the immoderate respect shown to the memory of powerful or virtuous ancestors, especially the founders of kingdoms, legislators, and warriors, of whom the Sun or the Moon were wildly supposed to be the parents.”

5. The quotation is from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Lines 32–37 ([1667] 2005: 106) where Satan address the “full-blazing Sun”: “O thou that with surpassing Glory crown’d, Look’st from thy sole Dominion like the God Of this new World [. . .].”

Sun worship was the “principal source of idolatry among the ancients,” leading to the loss of “the primitive religion of mankind.” Eastern mythology reflected this, in that “it is probable, that the *triple Divinity of the Hindus* was originally no more than a personification of the Sun” (Jones 1807: 92–93). From this basic concept, there was generated an entire cosmology, in that the sun produced “forms by his genial *heat*,” preserved them “by his *light*,” or destroyed them “by the concentrated force of his *igneous* matter.” Taken together “with this wilder conceit of a *female power* united with the Godhead, and ruling nature by his authority,” one could explain “nearly the whole system of *Egyptian, Indian, and Grecian* polytheism.” Deification was a specific form of personification, as Jones noted in discussing the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers (1807: 133–134). Polytheism reflected the seduction of the popular imagination, unable to grasp that “the whole Creation was rather an *energy* than a *work*,” by which the omnipresent Infinite Being “exhibits to the minds of his creatures a set of perceptions, like a wonderful picture or a piece of music, always varied, yet always uniform, so that all bodies and their qualities exist, indeed, to every wise and useful purpose, but exist only as far as they are *perceived*” (1807: 115–116). This was “as different from any principle of Atheism, as the brightest sunshine differs from the blackest midnight.” A lost “ancient purity” could be identified in the classical Sanscrit texts (Jones 1799b: 23, Sugirtharajah 2003: 5–6), as well as in Christianity. There was, however, no analogy between the Christian Trinity and the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesa (Shiva), who were originally merely personifications of creation, preservation, and destruction (1799e: 277). The Indian triad and that of Plato (Truth, Beauty, and Goodness) were “infinitely removed from the holiness and sublimity of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity” (1799e: 277–278).

Jones’s commentaries formed part of a substantial literature that argued that Hinduism was, in its elite original essence, monotheistic. Charles Wilkins (1749–1836), for example, read the *Bhagavad Gita* as a veiled attack on polytheism (1785: 24): “The most learned *Brāhmāns* of the present time are Unitarians according to the doctrines of *Krēśhnā*,” but even while believing in one God, a universal spirit,” they “comply with the prejudices of the vulgar” and perform the ritual prescribed by the Vedas. This is how they make their living, just “as the superstition of the vulgar is the support of the priesthood in other countries.” In his *Sketches of the Mythology and Customs of the Hindoos*, George Forster described the Hindus as “believing in one God, without beginning and without end; on whom they bestow, descriptive of his power, a variety of epithets” (Forster 1785: 10). It was wrong to condemn Hinduism for idolatry. The making of offerings, if “dispassionately examined,” was “a personification of the attributes of the deity” and was “not unfitly adapted to the general comprehension” (1785: 30). One way to understand this was that images took the place of text for the mass of believers. The figurative was

a mode of communication in the absence of literacy (1785: 30), so that the worshipper “can with facility conceive of an idea of his greatness, by contemplating a figure, sculptured with many heads and with many hands, adorned with every symbol of human power, and beheld by all classes of men with the utmost reverence and awe.” These figures preceded the invention of writing, and “it was evidently a more easy operation to convey an idea thro’ the medium of a simple figure cut in clay, than to invent an alphabet, and out of it compose an assemblage of words necessary for the formation of a language” (1785: 31).

For Edward Moor (1771–1848), the esoteric religion of the Brahmans contained “a considerable portion of unadulterated physical, and moral truths,” whereas the exoteric form consisted in “gross idolatry and irrational superstition” (1810: 1). The pure form of the Hindu religion was monotheistic: “They worship God in unity, and express their conception of the Divine Being and his attributes in the most awful and sublime terms. God, thus adored, is called BRAHM: the One Eternal Mind; the self-existing, incomprehensible spirit” (1810: 2). The entire cosmology of personified images and idols all pointed to, or represented in their diversity, an underlying unity—which was itself not directly represented. Moor quoted from the Vedas: “Of Him, whose glory is so great, there is no image.” This idea recurs in Quintin Craufurd’s (1743–1819) study of India, where the Hindu religion is presented as a form of deism, and Indian mythology the product of a “love of imagery in a people of fertile and lively imaginations,” which may have led to them personifying “what they conceived to be some of the attributes of God” (1817, I: 181). Alternatively,

such personification may have arisen from the idea which generally prevails, of the necessity of presenting things in a way better adapted to the comprehensions of the vulgar, than the abstruse idea of an undescribable, invisible being; and hence, probably, the invention of a Brahma, a Vishnu and a Siva.

Similarly, nature “in their mythology is personified, and frequently and beautifully introduced into their poetry under the name of Maia, and Prakali” (Craufurd 1817, I: 251).

Abbé Jean-Antoine Dubois (1765–1848) argued that the original form of idolatry was the worship of the three elements: earth, fire, and water, and this was transformed by personification into the worship of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. He cast doubt on any direct link to Greek and Roman mythology and discounted the idea that this was a version of the Trinity—noting that if this were so, the mystery had been “horribly disfigured” (Dubois 1825, II: 306). The allegories of the ancient Indians had become “an inexhaustible source of errors”; the original meaning of which having been lost, they were

further elaborated and taken literally, thereby invigorating “the extravagant and grotesque idolatry which today constitutes the religious system of the Indians” (1825, II: 308). Meditating on the origins of the “received mythology, or system of superstitious belief, with all the rites and ceremonies which it prescribes,” William Robertson distinguished true religion from superstition (1791: 313): “The former is the offspring of reason cherished by science, and attains to its highest perfection in ages of light and improvement. Ignorance and fear give birth to the latter, and it is always in the darkest periods that it acquires the greatest vigour.” When language had been in a state “so barren as to be destitute of names to distinguish anything not perceivable by the senses,” it was not possible to acquire understandings of causality, that is, “the relation between effects and their causes” (1791: 313). Nor was it possible to “form just conceptions of one Supreme Being, as the Creator and Governor of the Universe” (1791: 313). Rites and rituals were a response to natural disasters attributed to “invisible beings” with their own specialized domains, offering a feeling of protection in a hostile universe (1791: 315). The character of a society could be read off the antics of its deities and the nature of its rituals (1791: 316ff.). The effect of science and philosophy was to put such beliefs under scrutiny (1791: 322). In the case of India, the Brahmins were in essence theists, as had been asserted by “Abul Fazel” (Abu’l-Fazl ibn Mubarak, 1501–1602, Mughal high official and historian) and informed European observers (1791: 325).

Believing that colonialism represented “the moral enterprise of the age,” Protestant missionaries such as William Ward directed intense polemics against the Brahmin class and Indian ritual, painting it in lurid terms: “the temple itself being turned into a brothel, and the deity worshipped being the very personification of sin” (1815–1818, I: xvii, xxxvi). Ward allowed that “the Hindoos must be allowed a high claim to antiquity” and accepted that their mythology might contain “some fragments of real history, and some allusions to the state of primeval society” (1815–1818, I: i–ii). But he found Jones’s poems in honour of Indian deities objectionable: “should not a worshipper of God hold himself under a solemn obligation to abjure all tolerance of even poetical figures that can seriously seem, in any way whatever, to recognize the pagan divinities, or abominations, as the prophets of Jehovah would have called them?” The argument that these were merely literary personifications would not stand. If the prophet Elijah had been told that these divinities were “only personifications (with their appropriate representative idols) of objects in nature, of elements, or of abstractions,” his reply would have been: “Was not Baal, whose prophets I destroyed, the same?” (1815–1818, II: lxxiii). The Orientalist Nathan Halhed (1751–1830) also came in for criticism, in that he seemed “to prefer Hindooism to Christianity purely on account of its boasted antiquity” (1815–1818, II: lxxiii).

2.3 GENEALOGY AND LINEAGE

One key intellectual influence on Jones was the scholar of mythology Jacob Bryant (1715–1804) (see [Trautmann 1997](#): 40ff.). Bryant sought to trace the history of humanity “after the migration of families, and the dispersion from the plains of Shinar” (1775, I: v). On Bryant’s account, the Hamites were the first to renounce monotheism, and as such were “the first apostates from the truth” (1775, I: vii). They were the heathen creators of a cult of Ham, whom they made into a divinity and “worshipped [. . .] as the Sun” (1775, I: vii). The Hamites were pioneering seafarers, adventurers and explorers, inventors “of many useful arts” and “looked up to as a superior order of beings” (1775, I: vii). Jones expressed admiration for Bryant, but cast doubt on his etymologies (1799b: 20). Etymology had its uses, but it was “a medium of proof so very fallacious, that, where it elucidates one fact, it obscures a thousand.” It was not persuasive in itself: “it rarely carries with it any *internal* power of conviction from a resemblance of sounds or similarity of letters,” yet in the absence of this, “it may be indisputably proved *by extrinsick* evidence.”

Noah was “that just and virtuous man, whose lineage was preserved from the general inundation,” and his sons spread out in three divisions. The children of Japhet (YĀFET) “have produced the race [. . .] we call *Tartarian*” ([Jones 1799f](#): 134). The sons of Shem formed the Arabian peoples, while the descendants of Ham, “the most powerful and adventurous of whom were the progeny of CUSH, MISR, and RAMA (names remaining unchanged in *Sanscrit*, and highly revered by the *Hindus*), were, in all probability, the race, which I call *Indian*” (1799f: 136). Discussing the building of the Tower of Babel, that “presumptuous and mad attempt,” Jones noted that

this event also seems to be recorded by the ancient *Hindus* in two of their *Purānas*; and it will be proved, I trust, on some future occasion, that *the lion bursting from the pillar to destroy a blaspheming giant, and the dwarf who held in derision the magnificent BELI*, are one and the same story related in a symbolic style. (1799f: 136)⁶

The site of “ancient *Babel*” was “within the limits of Irān,” as the place names attested.

While sceptical of Bryant’s methods, Jones concurred in the belief that the Indians were descendants of Ham, speaking of an “ingenious and enterprising race, from which both Greece and India were peopled” (1799f: 33). Jones

6. Puranas are symbolic stories and legends covering a wide range of topics. The lion episode is from the Narashima legend, and the dwarf who humiliated King Bali is Vishnu (i.e., Bali) ([Rocher 1986](#): 108).

described them as “great adventurers” who “began an extensive commerce in very early times” (Jones 1799f: 137). The Hamites were, however, “arrogant, cruel, and idolatrous.” They had most probably created memorials of the Flood before the invention of writing, in Bryant’s words, “in rude sculpture or painting, and mostly in symbolical figures of the *ark*, the eight persons concealed in it, and the birds, which first were dismissed” (1799f: 137). However, Bryant went too far in reading “the beautiful allegory of CUPID and PSYCHE” as referring to the Flood, and Hymen as the veil “which covered the patriarch and his family” (1799f: 138). Bryant’s “etymological conjecture” lacked substance, especially given his ignorance of any Asiatick dialect,” with the exception of Hebrew (1799f: 137). Unable to find linguistic links between “the *Arabian*, *Indian* and *Tatar* families,” Jones declared that in his view “the language of NOAH is lost irretrievably” (1799f: 137). There were, however, “very obvious traces of the *Hamian* language.” Restraint was needed in etymological reasoning (1799f: 139):

I beg leave, as a philologer, to enter my protest against conjectural etymology in historical researches, and principally against the licentiousness of etymologists in transposing and inserting letters, in substituting at pleasure any consonant for another of the same order, and in totally disregarding the vowels.

There was no effective constraint built into this method: “CUS or CUSH” via “addition, transposition or metathesis of form,” as well as symbolic association in meaning, could lead to “the *goat* worshipped in Egypt” or “*Catos*, the great sea-fish of the *Dorians*” among other possibilities.

The postulation of etymological and mythological affinities was a high-stakes game. Moor (1810: 135–136) praised Jones for resisting the temptations of etymology: “although, among his earliest researches into *Hindu* mythology, he discovered this similarity of names and characters, he would not pronounce on the identity of the subjects.” Jones, however, supposed that “Lakshmi may be figuratively called the CERES of *Hindustan*,” since while it was unsurprising that two nations might have a deity for agriculture, there was no reason “why two nations should concur in supposing that deity to be a female” (Jones 1799e: 247, cited Moor 1810: 136). Doubts about the recoverability of the original language notwithstanding (1799f: 138), Jones was willing to speculate as to whether

ADAM be derived from *ádīm*, which in Sanscrit means the *first*, or MENU from NUH, the true name of the Patriarch [Noah]; whether the *Sacrifice*, at which God is believed to have descended, allude to the offering of ABEL; and on the whole whether the two MENU’s can mean any other person than the great progenitor, and the restorer, of our species. (Jones 1799m: 288)

In other words: Adam and Noah.

In terms of ancient history, Jones's focus was on Iran and the three primeval nations he believed were found there before their dispersion "about four thousand years ago" (1799j: 108). As humanity spread out after the Flood, they migrated "in separate families and clans" who "forgetting by degrees the language of their common progenitor, would form new dialects to convey new ideas, both simple and complex" (1799f: 131). These societies would develop their own forms of life and governance, both wise and depraved: "so that, in less than three thousand years, the world would exhibit the same appearances, which we may actually observe on it in the age of the *great Arabian imposter*" (1799f: 132). In that age there were five races to be distinguished: these were "five principal nations, who have peopled the continent and islands of *Asia*." Jones sought to trace "by an historical and philological analysis, the number of ancient stems, from which those five branches have severally sprung, and the central region, from which they appear to have proceeded." The method relied on identifying "a similarity of *language, religion, arts, and manners*" (1799n: 35). Jones (1799o: 71) suggested that in essence there were only three major nations, that is, those of Arabia or Egypt, India, and Tartary or China:

If they sprang originally from a common root, they must have been separated for ages: whether more than three primitive stocks can be found, or, in other words, whether the Chinese, Japanese, and Persians, are entirely distinct from them, or formed by their intermixture, I shall hereafter [. . .] diligently inquire.

It was unclear "to which of the three stocks, Hindu, Arabian, or Tartar, the first kings of Iran belonged, or whether they form a fourth race distinct from any of the others" (1799o: 74). The three great language families originated there. Before the Assyrian conquest, there had been a Hindu monarchy (1799k: 92). It followed that "the language of the first Persian empire was the mother of the Sanscrit, and consequently of the Zend and the Parsi, as well as of Greek, Latin, and Gothic." The language of the Assyrians "was the parent of the Chaldaick and Pahlavi." Further, "the primary Tartarian language also had been current in the same empire," but, given the absence of writing, there was no evidence of "their unpolished and variable idioms." From Iran, the three races spread out in all directions "at the earliest dawn of history," including the ancestors of the "first inhabitants of Britain." Though accounts differed in detail, it was evident that

Iran, or Persia in its largest sense, was the true centre of population, of knowledge, of languages, and of arts; which, instead of travelling westward only, as it has been fancifully supposed, or eastward, as might with equal reason have been asserted,

were expanded in all directions to all the regions of the world, in which the Hindu race had settled under various denominations.

Whether any additional “races of men” had emerged out of Asia, “distinct from the Hindus, the Arabs, or the Tartars,” or whether other populations were just mixtures of the three, required further investigation (1799k: 93–94). Lines could be drawn from Iran to these regions without intersecting (1799f: 132): “The three primitive languages, therefore, must at first have been concentrated in Iràn.” It followed that “the inhabitants of *Asia*, and consequently, as it might be proved, of the whole earth, sprang from three branches of one stem” (1799f: 133). Jones conceded that it might not be possible to trace every language and people back to these three, since small groups might break off and form new languages out of necessity, “with no perceptible traces, perhaps, of that spoken by their ancestors” (1799i: 114).

Comparative study of the “popular worship of the old *Greeks* and *Italians* and that of the *Hindus*” revealed a similarity also with the religions of “*Egypt*, *China*, *Persia*, *Phrygia*, *Phoenice*, *Syria*,” plus southern parts of the Americas, as well as with the “*Gothick* system” of Northern Europe (1799e: 239–240). When “features of resemblance, too strong to have been accidental,” were observable “in different systems of polytheism,” it was evident that “some connection has immemorially subsisted between the several nations, who have adopted them.” If this could be shown convincingly, “we may infer a general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of the primitive world, at the time when they deviated, as they did too early deviate, from the rational adoration of the true GOD.” Jones linked Indian mythology with Greece (1799e: 246):

I leave etymologists, who decide every thing, to decide whether the word MENU, or, in the nominative case, MENUS, has any connection with MINOS, the lawgiver, and supposed son of Jove. The *Cretans*, according to Diodorus of *Sicily*, used to feign, that most of the great men, who had been deified, in return for the benefits which they had conferred on mankind, were born in their island; and hence a doubt may be raised, whether MINOS was really a *Cretan*. The *Indian* legislator was the first, not the seventh, Menu, or SATYAVRATA, whom I suppose to be the SATURN of Italy [. . .].

It was probable that “*Egyptians*, *Indians*, *Greeks* and *Italians*, proceeded originally from one central place,” and that they carried “their religion and sciences into China and Japan: may we not add, even to *Mexico* and *Peru*?” (1799e: 274). On the basis of speculative etymology, Jones argued that priests from Egypt had settled in India in ancient times.

The Hindus, Jones argued, had an “immemorial affinity with the old *Persians, Ethiopians, and Egyptians, the Phenicians, Greeks, and Tuscans, the Scythians or Goths and Celts, the Chinese, Japanese, and Peruvians*” (1799b: 34). After the Flood, humanity spread out from present-day Iran, and the branch of Japhet (*Ya’fet*) spread over parts of Europe and Asia; that of Ham settled in Africa and India, and then onwards to Italy and Greece, Scandinavia, China, Tancut, and even Mexico and Peru; while “Shem’s progeny, some of whom before had settled on the red sea, people the whole *Arabian Peninsula*” (1799f: 141). Arabic “bears not the least resemblance, either in words or in the structure of them, to the *Sanscrit, or great parent of the Indian dialects*” (1799n: 39). Whereas Sanscrit, “like the *Greek, Persian, and German, delights in compounds,*” Arabic “and all its sister dialects, abhor the composition of words, and invariably express very complex ideas by circumlocution” (1799n: 39). Whereas in the case of “*Sanscrit and other languages of the same stock,*” the verb roots are “almost universally *bilateral*”; in the case of Arabic, they were “universally *trilateral*” (1799n: 39).

2.4 THE “PHILOLOGER PARAGRAPH”

In the case of Persia and its ancient language, Jones was clear that the fundamental link was to Sanscrit, in spite of “the intermixture of numberless *Arabick* words” (1799k: 80). Jones’s focus was not on modern Persian, but on “the ages that preceded the *Mohammedan* conquest,” looking back to a purer version of the language (1799k: 80): “I can assure you with confidence, that hundreds of *Parsi* nouns are pure Sanscrit, with no other change as such as may be observed in the numerous *bhāshā’s, or vernacular dialects, of India.*” There was no trace of Arabic “in the pure *Persian,*” other than through language contact (1799k: 80). All the evidence showed that “*Parsi* sprang from an *Indian, and not from an Arabian, stock*” (1799k: 81). Jones hypothesized that both Sanscrit and “*Chaldaick*” (i.e., the Semitic language of the ancient Chaldeans) were the original languages of ancient Persia (1799k: 83).

Jones’s so-called philologer paragraph is regarded both as the origin of modern historical and comparative linguistics, and as a key point of reference for the Aryan paradigm (1799b: 26):

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no

longer exists; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanscrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of Persia.

Connections between European and non-European languages had long been mooted, though in various configurations (Demoule 2023: 7ff.). Early recognition of these affinities has been attributed to Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588) (see Lindner 2016: 223) and to Marcus Zuerius van Boxhorn (1612–1653), and, in the immediate context of India, to the Jesuit Gaston Coeurdoux (1691–1779) (Godfrey 1967). In 1768, the French Orientalist Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) received a letter from Coeurdoux, asking why so many Sanscrit terms resembled Greek and Latin. Anquetil-Duperron replied that a common origin was the most likely explanation (Stuurman 2007: 266). “Japhetic” theories vied with and overlapped with the “Scythian hypothesis” of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. This saw Scythian as “the matrix language of, among other languages, Latin, Greek, Persian, and Germanic” (Van Hal and Considine 2010: 71). Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) commented on the number of words in common between German and Persian in a letter to Huldreich von Eyben, dated March 1691 (Vermeulen 2015: 66). He drew on established scholarship in distinguishing Japhetic from the Aramaic languages, dividing Japhetic into the Scythian and the Celtic (Leibniz 1710, Lindner 2016). The German Orientalist Samuel Wahl (1760–1834) divided the Japhetic languages into four sub-groups and included Greek dialects in the first category, Median (*Medisch*) and Persian in the second, and Sanscrit, Hindustani, and Bengali in the third (1784: 23–24).

Jones’s letters reveal his awareness of various proposed affinities between Celtic languages, Greek, Latin, Persian, and Sanscrit (Cannon and Franklin 2005: 54–55). In his letter to Prince Adam Czartoryski, dated February 17, 1779, Jones took a cautious tone (cited in Kejariwal 1988: 48):

How so many European words crept into the Persian language, I know not with certainty [. . .]. Many learned investigators of antiquity are fully persuaded, that a very old and almost primeval language was in use among these northern nations, from which not only the Celtic dialects, but even the Greek and Latin, are derived. We must confess that these researches are very obscure and uncertain.

Jones’s contemporary, Nathaniel Halhed, in his *Grammar of the Bengal Language*, had affirmed that Sanscrit was “the Parent of almost every dialect from the Persian Gulph to the China Seas”; Hindostani was “indubitably derived from the Shanscrit, with which it has exactly the same connexion, as the

modern dialects of France and Italy with pure Latin” (1778: iii, ix). There were striking parallels between European and non-European languages (1778: iii–iv):

I have been astonished to find the similitude of Shanscrit words with those of Persian and Arabic, and even of Latin and Greek; and these not in technical and metaphorical terms, which the mutuation of refined arts and improved manners might have occasionally introduced, but in the main ground-work of language, in monosyllables, in the names of numbers, and the appellations of such things as would be first discriminated on the immediate dawn of civilization.

Charles Wilkins, in his *Grammar of the Sanskrita Language*, presented Jones as corroborating Halhed’s remarks, though, in citing Halhed, he omitted Arabic from the list of languages enumerated, with the quotation becoming: “the similitude of Sanskrit words with those of Latin and Greek” (1808: viii).

Scanning the linguistic and textual horizon for clues to lost or partially obscured resemblances, parallels, and analogies left the philologist and Orientalist vulnerable to self-deception, as well as to accusations of fantasizing and worse from fellow scholars and rivals. This was an era marked by actual and perceived textual forgery, notably the case of Thomas Chatterton’s (1752–1770) adopted persona of Thomas Rowley, and the Ossian cycle of epic poems which James Macpherson (1736–1796) claimed to have translated from Scottish Gaelic. The line between translation and poetic reimagining was not clearly drawn, but there was an obsessive drive to find and collect authentic and original texts. An influential composition, supposedly a French translation of the original Sanscrit, was the *Ezour Veda* or *Ezourvedam*, conceived in the form of a dialogue between two Brahmin priests. This work profoundly impressed Voltaire among others. The work had been originally composed by French Jesuits who sought to support the argument that Indian religion had been originally monotheistic (App 2010: 27–28, 46ff.). The Orientalist scholar in the colonial context was in a vulnerable position, with the pandit as the primary conduit for textual sources as well as interpretation. Jones himself had accused Anquetil-Duperron of publishing a fraudulent translation of the *Zend-Avesta* (Jones 1771). Anquetil-Duperron’s publications were attacked by John Richardson (1777: 11) as carrying “palpable marks of the total or partial fabrication of modern times.” The German theologian and Riga professor, Johann Kleuker (1749–1827), took up Anquetil-Duperron’s cause, however, and translated his rendering into German. The debate was eventually settled by the publication of a comparative philological analysis (Eugène Burnouf 1833, Solleveld 2018).

John Zephaniah Holwell (1711–1798) and Alexander Dow (1735–1779) are now seen as having been involved in creative misappropriation and even

fraud in relation to published renderings of Indian texts (App 2010: 296–362, Patterson 2021). There was a fashion for quasi-translations from Eastern languages where there was no actual original to translate. Jones’s translations were themselves more akin to stylized adaptations, and he was defensive about his sources: “indeed, so many productions, invented in *France*, have been offered to the publick as genuine translations from the languages of *Asia*, that I should have wishes, for my own sake, to clear my publication from the slightest suspicion of imposture” (1799r: 411). Even if he were to produce the originals, “it would be impossible to persuade some men, that even *they* were not forged for the purpose, like the pretended language of *Formosa*.” This was a reference to George Psalmanazar’s (c. 1679–1763) fantastical description of Formosa, its language, and the writing system that he had devised himself (Psalmanazar 1704). Captain Francis Wilford (1761–1822) became a figure of controversy among his contemporaries, when he revealed that his extravagant speculations had been facilitated at least in part by forgeries fed to him by his pandit Vidyanda in Benares (Trautmann 1997: 90–94, Patterson 2021). Wilford observed a similarity between “Hindu legends and numerous passages in Greek authors” that was “so striking” as to “evince their identity, or at least their affinity” (1792: 296). One episode in particular concerned Satyavratá and his “miraculous preservation from a general deluge.” He had three sons: “the eldest of whom was named JYÁPÊTI, or *Lord of the Earth*. The others were C’HARMA and SHARMA, which last words are, in the vulgar dialects, usually pronounced *C’ham* and *Sham*” (1792: 312).

2.5 JONES IN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Jones is associated with Aryanism, though he had no such concept. Jones’s writings did, however, evince hostility to Jews, mixed with admiration for their maintenance of monotheism. Jones refers to a “Mr Malet,”⁷ who had given him an account of the Boras (Bohras),

a remarkable race of men inhabiting chiefly the cities of Gujarát, who though Muslemans in religion, are Jewish in features, genius, and manners: they form in all places a distinct fraternity, and are every where noted for address in bargaining, for minute thrift, and constant attention to lucre, but profess total ignorance of their origin. (1799i: 119)

7. Presumably this is Charles Warre Malet (1752–1815), diplomat and resident of the East India Company, who became a baronet in 1791.

Jones's theory was that Jews had come to India "with their brethren the Afgháns" (1799i: 119), and he took seriously the idea that the Afghans were descended from the Jews (1799p). Harsh rhetoric was directed against the "people of Judea, whose language demonstrates their affinity with the Arabs, but whose manners literature, and history are wonderfully distinguished from the rest of mankind" (1799i: 126):

Barrow⁸ loads them with the severe, but just, epithets of malignant, unsocial, obstinate, distrustful, sordid, changeable, turbulent; and describes them as furiously zealous in succouring their own countrymen, but implacably hostile to other nations; yet, with all the sottish perverseness, the stupid arrogance, and the brutal atrocity of their character, they had the peculiar merit, among all races of men under heaven, of preserving a rational and pure system of devotion in the midst of wild polytheism, inhuman or obscene rites, and a dark labyrinth of errors produced by ignorance and supported by interested fraud.

There is a parallel hostility to Islam, with Jones's use of the term "Savages of the North" to refer to "tribes of Babur," that is, to Zahir ud-Din Muhammad or Babur, who founded the Mughal Empire in 1526 (1792: v), as well the phrase "the great *Arabian* imposter" to refer to the Prophet Mohammed (1799f: 132).

Jones is often seen as the father of modern linguistics, though he had no special interest in technical matters of language study: "I have ever considered languages as the mere instruments of real learning, and think them improperly confounded with learning itself" (1799q: 5). As Trautmann suggests, Jones has become "a prisoner of the narrative of the rise of linguistics" (1997: 39). Edward Said positions Jones as the quintessential Orientalist, whose aim was "To rule and to learn, then to compare Orient with Occident: these were Jones's goals, which, with an irresistible impulse always to codify, to subdue the infinite variety of the Orient to a 'complete digest' of laws, figures, customs, and works" (Said 2004: 78).⁹ As Teltscher (1995: 194) points out, Jones's legal project was in reality an attempt at the re-codification of existing legal digests, as legal codes existed before this colonial intervention (see Halhed 1776). Further, the phrase "infinite variety" comes from Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra in *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Act 2, Scene 2): "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety," a speech that embodies "surely one of the most enduring of European myths of the Oriental Other."

The question arises as to why the philologist paragraph is so celebrated. One explanation for this may be that the Indo-European model remains accepted as authoritative in the scholarly mainstream. The idea that Jones postulated

8. The mathematician and theologian Isaac Barrow (1630–1677).

9. On Colebrooke, Sanscrit and the law, see Rocher and Rocher (2012: 33–60).

the Indo-European language family fits a wider narrative of a radical break in the humanities around 1800, including the shift from antiquarian philology to historical linguistics. The immediate impact of Jones's philologist paragraph was, however, rather uneven. Johann Kleuker edited a four volume edition of Jones's work in German, translated by Johann Christian Fick (1763–1821) (Kleuker 1795–1797). The direct link between British colonial scholarship and German Romanticism was provided by Jones's Sanscritist colleague, Alexander Hamilton, who, while in Paris between 1802 and 1806, taught Sanscrit to Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel subsequently published a highly influential work, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* ("On the Language and Wisdom of India") (1808). The proposition that there was an ancient affinity between the languages of Europe and Asia was unremarkable in the premodern paradigm, given the domination of *ex oriente lux*, and the assumption that the earth was a relatively recent creation. Nonetheless, at the end of the nineteenth century, Henry Sweet remarked that the findings of Jones and comparative philology represented a decisive break from received opinion ([1900] 1913: 59):

Learned Europe was scandalized at the idea of the classical languages of Greece and Rome being allied to that of a race of blackamoors—as the Hindus were popularly supposed to be. Then the very existence of Sanskrit was questioned—it was declared to be a fabrication of the Brahmins [. . .].

Franklin Edgerton pointed to Jones's argument for a common source as the key innovation (1946: 232). Trautmann emphasizes the notion that the study of language affinities could retrieve relationships lost to history and cultural memory (2006: 20):

Jones applies the figure of the Tree of Nations directly to language as a model of language history, and by his doing so language history becomes a remedy and substitute for the lost memory of the history of nations. Language, like the DNA in ourselves, contains, unknown to its speakers, the hidden history of the human race.

The comparative method could reveal the underlying ideal types obscured by the effects of time and language mixing (Trautmann 2006: 34):

This allows the historical relations among languages to be figured as the eradicating branches of a tree, since the borrowings or mixtures that would make the branches grow into one another have been discarded by analysis. It is well to keep in mind the conception of language that undergirds the genealogies of languages in historical linguistics.

Jones's essay was, however, neither original nor modern in method (see [Campbell 2006](#), [Lorenzen 2019](#)). There was in fact no methodology involved at all in Jones's assertion, beyond inspection and intuition. Rather than engage in systematic philological analysis, Jones exploited the parallels between Sanscrit and Latin while translating the *Sakontalá* (1792: vii). Latin "bore so great a resemblance to Sanscrit, that it is more convenient than any modern language for a scrupulous interlineary version." Philology by inspection hardly qualifies as a new rigorous method. The parallels between Persian and Sanscrit were no mystery to Mughal scholars such as Siraj-ud-Din Ali Khan (1687–1756) (see [Alam 1998](#): 341, [Tavakoli-Targhi 1996](#)). Noting the presumption that all languages had their origin in Noah's ark, the Protestant theologian and philologist Johann Eichhorn had described attempts to find criteria for distinguishing the Occidental (Japhetic) from the Oriental (Semitic and Hamitic) languages (1807: 40). Eichhorn criticized the Swedish scientist Olof Celsius (1670–1756) as well as the Orientalist Konrad Gottlob Anton (1745–1814). In the latter case this was for assigning Persian to the Occidental or Japhetic languages, while the "Hindustani languages" were under the Oriental (Hamitic) branch, even though the evidence suggested that these both could be traced back to a common source (*Urstamm*) (1807, V: 41). Anton himself insisted on the relationship between Persian and German, in spite of the scepticism with which that claim had been met ([Jones 1792](#): 77). Lord Monboddo set out the possible conclusions to be drawn from the relationships between European and Persian languages ([Burnett 1773–1792](#), I: 419–420):

Since therefore such capital words as the names of the elements, of numbers, and of such near relations, are common to the Greek, Teutonic, or Gothic, and Persian, besides a great many other words of which we can still trace the resemblance, one of three things must necessarily be true. Either the Greek must be derived from those other languages; or, *secondly*, those other languages must be derived from the Greek; or *lastly*, they must all be dialects of the same parent-language.

The exact configuration was unclear, but

if the affinity betwixt those languages be such as I am endeavouring to shew it is, and if the Celtic be originally the same language with the Gothic, it follows of necessary consequence, that the same language, or dialects of the same language, were spoken over the greatest part of Europe, and a great part of Asia. (1773, I: 422)

Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldaic, and Arabic were also related, so that "either one of them must be the parent language of the rest, or they must be all children of some common parent" (1773, I: 422).

Halhed's remarks were quoted at length by August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809) (1781: 161), prefaced by the comment that it had long been known that “in Persian there was a lot of German, or rather European in general” (1781: 161, 161fn.). Schlözer chided Halhed for his failure to give examples in relation to Sanscrit, given that this proposition was “so new, so unexpected, so important.” The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the parallel between Persian and European languages was a familiar trope, as [van Hal \(2011\)](#) shows, but, at least in the German context, the same claim in relation to Sanscrit was more of a novelty.

Comparativism in general inevitably levelled out the ancient languages, since the comparative method suggested that the languages or belief systems being compared were ontologically equivalent in some sense; that is, they were the same kind of entity to be studied using the same methodology. This is not to say that comparison resulted in pure relativism; some kind of hierarchy of value inevitably was maintained or emerged. Indeed, comparativism, in that it takes a step towards relativism, actually generates the reactive need for such a hierarchy of value. At the same time, from the European point of view, comparative philology and the attendant Indomania of German Romanticism downgraded Hebrew and elevated Sanscrit to the level of Greek and Latin, even as incipient colonial and administrative modernity was destined to sideline the classical languages of India.

On the genealogy of humanity, [Kidd \(1999: 56\)](#) characterizes the early Orientalists in India as seeking “not to establish Indian otherness, but its degenerate affiliation with the British through the universal Noachic family of nations.” However, Jones showed no particular interest in any special affiliation with the British. [App \(2009: 9\)](#), for example, argues that Jones's project was ultimately theological, rather than linguistic or genealogical. His aim was to understand the nature of “mankind's primeval religion before Noah and the deluge.” Colonial philology envisioned Sanscrit as the ancient ground, as more authentically Indian than the other classical languages, Persian and Arabic. On this point, traditionalist Indian critics of colonialism do not challenge colonial philology. [Malhotra and Neelakandan \(2011: 46\)](#) reject Jones's Christian re-engineering of Indian chronology and the way in which it was “selectively appropriated and used as evidence to argue in favour of Christianity,” but they accept that in Jones's work “the ancient wisdom in Sanskrit texts was given great respect in the context of humanity's shared heritage.”

For those who reject the modernizing and utilitarian, Anglicist, and vernacularist vision of India promoted by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), Lord William Bentinck (1774–1839), and James Mill, Jones is a sympathetic figure who “resuscitated India's ancient culture not only for Europe but for India itself” ([Kejariwal 1988: 74](#)). From this point of view, “Jones gave India a weapon with which to hit back whenever the European administrator-scholars

had attempted to belittle the Indian civilization” (Mukherjee 1968: 141). Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) credited Jones and his Orientalist colleagues with “the rediscovery of her past literature.” While it was not unknown, this “knowledge had become more and more confined to select and exclusive groups, and the dominance of Persian, as the language of culture, had diverted people’s minds from it” (Nehru 1947: 317).

In a discussion of the various meanings attributed to *ārya* in the *Rigveda*, Chaubey (1991: 181) asserts that it was William Jones “who for the first time mentioned Aryan as a race.” Yet Jones neither used the term *Aryan* nor offered an approximation to the modern conception of the Indo-European language family. There has nonetheless been a strong tendency to include Jones in the historiography of Aryanism. After noting the use of *ariens* and *Arier* in Anquetil-Duperron and the translation by Kleuker, Arvidsson (2006: 20) states that the term in English “probably surfaced for the first time in 1794 in Jones’s translation of the Indian legal text *Mānava Dharmasāstra*, the *Laws of Manu*,” as in the text “the word *arya* means roughly ‘noble’ and is a marker of high caste.” The other term that appears is the name of region named “*Ariāvarta* or inhabited by respectable men” (Chapter II: 22, Jones 1796: 20). But the Sanskrit term *ārya* at that time had no special resonance. The use of the term *Aryan* and variants in English as a category of identity is absent in colonial texts and English-language sources both in India and Britain up until the 1840s (Birkvad 2020).

2.6 CONCLUSION

Aryanism entered India in mid-century primarily via writings in English that drew on continental European scholarship. Jones’s work bears no relation to the Aryan paradigm as an identitarian or ideological formation. For Friedrich Schlegel, by contrast, what was at stake was the positioning of the Germanic peoples, and the Germans in particular. In Germany, Aryanism represented a claim to a particular ancient pedigree (Schlegel [1819] 1849, Tzoref-Ashkenazi 2009). The turn from the elite syncretic classicism of Jones to the Romantic nationalism of Friedrich Schlegel is of fundamental significance in the political history of Aryanism. This represented the subjective re-orientation to an ego-centric stance. The search for a coherent narrative to be constructed out of the philological fragments of ancient India and Iran somehow mirrored the quest for a unified German nation, one that had to be created out of its fragmented polities, blurred geographical identity, confessional divide, and linguistically disunited population (Zantop 1997). August Schlegel, in an 1822 letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt, noting the material and formal agreement of the verb paradigms in Sanscrit, Greek, and Gothic, commented (Leitzmann 1908: 69),

“I must confess that for me this has the strength of a geometric proof that the ancestors of the Indians, the Greeks and the Germans once constituted a single people.” August Schlegel’s understanding was that the special creative force (*Bildungstrieb*) or raw energy of the most noble languages was at its fullest in the very remote past, and the effects of time were not always propitious (Leitzmann 1908: 73):

The creative formation of language appears as a moment; then often followed long periods of oblivion and neglect, and finally some late assistance in producing a useful tool for handling the world of experience. I cannot help believing, therefore, that the common mother tongue of the Indian, Persian, Greek, Latin and Germanic languages must have possessed an infinite abundance of intuitive and imaginative riches in words and forms, even if dialectically it was still quite uncultivated.

Aryanism became about “us” (Laurie 1893: 265): “The races which chiefly interest us are the Indo-European or Aryan, to which we ourselves belong.” Sayce (1880, I: 1) described the *Rigveda* as “the most ancient monument of our Aryan literature.” The shift from the classicist Jones to Romantic subjectivity in Schlegel is symbolic of a further profound reorientation in European thought, namely, the placing of vernacular languages at the centre of political nationalism (Leerssen 2013).

The Aryan paradigm proper was shaped by a powerful reaction to the French Revolution of 1789, the Napoleonic conquests in Europe, and the intellectual dynamic that flowed from these events. This paradigm eventually impacted on India in the 1840s, without any specific reference to Jones. Jones belonged to an elite classicist period in colonial scholarship, and, while he postulated a lost affinity between European languages, Persian, and Sanscrit, he did not dwell on any shared origins in order to justify British colonial rule, nor did he invoke ancient origins in Asia to serve proto-nationalist or nationalist ends. One clue to this indifference is the fact that Jones accepted Bryant’s identification of the ancient Indians and Greeks with the sons of Ham, thereby contradicting the mainstream of European thought on the relationship between language and the lineages of Shem, Japhet, and Ham. The turn away from Orientalist sensibilities towards a modernizing form of colonialism meant that Jones’s legal codification project became largely irrelevant. Jones, however, was one of a line of scholars who emphasized the distinction between the (unnamed) group of European and Asian languages he identified, and the Semitic languages, Arabic and Hebrew. This in protean form was the Aryan/Semitic opposition that would occupy European philology for the next 150 years.

Jones’s key concern was with the status of language as tool and guide to ancient history. Language itself had seduced the primitive imagination

into personifying natural and psychological processes, thereby filling the universe with agents of creation, causation, preservation, transformation, reproduction, and destruction. Etymologizing, together with textual philology, was the path to knowledge of the past, but it had the potential to seduce the imagination, just as the ancients were seduced from the one true and rational religion. The outward forms of linguistic and mythological difference were a source of intellectual fascination. But the philologist risked falling into interpretive idolatry, creating false equivalences and parallels, thereby personifying and deifying. Self-deception was an even greater danger than deception by the over-obliging pandit, Hence Jones's need to stress that the observed affinities were more than random or haphazard resemblances, that there was "a stronger affinity [. . .] than could possibly have been produced by accident," a remark directed as much at himself as his scholarly audience. The problem that this created was that affinity was seen as an answer, rather than a question. One form of personification that Jones and traditional philology espoused was that of nations as historical personalities. This was intrinsic to the Mosaic paradigm, in which the lineage of biblical individuals was bound up with the history of nations, given that the *Volk* was a lineage group descended from a founding ancestor. Once this personification took on political meanings, the *Volk* became not only the bearer of personality, that is, national character, but also, potentially, a juridical person, as the European *Völker* rebelled against what Herder identified as the inauthentic dynastic order that constrained them.

CHAPTER 3

The Emergence of the Aryan Paradigm

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the central figures who contributed to the emergence of the Aryan paradigm were Friedrich Schlegel; Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), scholar of Buddhism; Christian Lassen (1800–1876), philologist and Indologist; Émile-Louis Burnouf (1821–1907), scholar of religion; Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), diplomat and cosmopolitan man of letters; and Adolphe Pictet (1799–1875), comparative philologist. For Schlegel, linguistic affinity constituted the primary evidence for tracing affinities in ancient history, superior in method to the observation of physical type: “Most importantly, however, there is the connection in respect of the inhabitants, which we cannot thoroughly judge according to physical comparisons, and where only the *language* can guide us with certainty” (Schlegel [1805–1806] 1960: 14). There was no way to trace the *Urvolk*, but linguistic comparison was the surest method to reconstruct the “genealogy of nations,” alongside “legislation, religion and mythology.” By these means one could show “a common affinity among all the civilized nations with the Indians; the Persian and German, together with the Greek and the ancient Roman language and culture are to be derived from the Indian” ([1805–1806] 1960: 14).

In his influential 1808 work, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, Friedrich Schlegel reaffirmed the relationship (*Verwandtschaft*) between Sanskrit and Latin, Greek, the Germanic languages, and Persian, both in the similarity of their roots but also in “inner structure and grammar.” As Jürgen Trabant emphasizes, Schlegel’s aim was to refashion the intellectual-spiritual foundations of Europe (2015: 32). Marchand sums up the three crucial aspects of this text, analyzing it

firstly as a contribution to the methods and prejudices of *Orientalistik*; secondly as a contribution to debates about the origins of religion and defence of historical truth against Kantian rationalism; and thirdly as an attempt to decenter the Greeks in the interests of promoting a Germanic, Christian, cultural history of humankind. (Marchand 2009: 59)

Echoing Jones, Schlegel stressed that these observed linguistic resemblances could not have arisen by chance, but he went further in declaring Sanscrit the older, parent language (1808: 3). According to Schlegel, the Armenian, Slavic, and Celtic languages showed some relation, but not of the same depth (1808: 3–4). Jones had thrown light on the study of language (*Sprachkunde*) and also on the most ancient history of nations (*älteste Völkergeschichte*), where previously everything had been “dark and confused” (1808: 85). But he had gone too far, “for the sake of unity deriving everything from one common source” (1808: 85). Schlegel explained the northern migrations of the Germanic tribes out of India from the fertile and luxuriant Asia to the cold of Scandinavia by reference to “a wonderful notion of the high dignity and majesty of the North” (1808: 194).

In subsequent work, Schlegel praised the grammatical structure of Sanscrit as “in every detail similar to that of Latin and Greek,” only its “grammatical development” was “far richer and more varied than those of the Latin tongue, and more regular and systematic than those of the Greek,” with “a very strong and remarkable affinity to the Persian and Germanic race of languages” (Schlegel [1828] 1846, I: 170). As proof, Schlegel pointed to the fact that the German form *Mensch* “agrees perfectly in the sound of the root and signification” with *manuschya*, though the latter was a regular derivation from the root *manu*, which meant “spirit” (*Geist*). In its primitive root *Mensch* therefore signified “the being who above all other earthly creatures is endowed with spirit, the one gifted with spirit.” It was clear that Latin *mens* (“mind”) was a cognate term ([1828] 1846, I: 170). Philological comparison of root words scattered across different languages allowed the one to illustrate or complement all the others ([1828] 1846, I: 170–171). Language was fundamental to understanding human history, both “the general history of peoples” (*Völker*) and that of its individual branches (*Stämme*). For the purposes of a philosophy of world history, it was necessary to adopt the point of view from above, rather than delve more deeply than necessary into “the whole labyrinth of the immeasurable richness of language” ([1828] 1846: 172). In this way one could avoid losing one’s way in what would otherwise be a “boundless chaos” (*unübersehliches Chaos*). Schlegel’s specific contribution to the formation of the Aryan paradigm, his 1819 review, will be discussed.

Though initially many German poets and thinkers were enthusiastic about the French Revolution, the long-term impact on German culture and

intellectual life was one of profound shock. Revolutionary France launched attacks on the German lands from 1792 onwards, and subsequent conquests by Napoleon inaugurated a period of French domination, including a radical reordering of the German territories, and far-reaching political reform. Constitutional and civic modernity, including Jewish legal emancipation, was imposed by what was in effect a modernizing colonial power. Aryanism in Schlegel was a reflection of anti-Enlightenment, anti-republican, and anti-French tendencies (Messling 2016: 135). However, Schlegel's designation of Hebrew and Arabic as "mechanical" rather than "organic" languages anticipated the later juxtaposition of Semitic versus Aryan, even if it was not motivated by anti-Semitism (see Tzoref-Ashkenazi 2017). Further, the notion of a Christian polity, which Schlegel among others was advocating, was by implication highly problematic for Jews (Beiser 2020).

3.2 LABELS AND CATEGORIES

The impact of the three-part division, the original Noachic triad of Shem, Japhet, and Ham, was felt throughout the nineteenth century. One way to understand this triad is that it is made up of a central category (*Japhetic*) and its fraternal opposite (*Shemitic*), with *Hamitic*, the third, in some cases marginal, inferior category, or an umbrella term that affords the symmetry of the Japhetic–Semitic duality. In mid-century, this became the Aryan–Semitic–Turanian triad, with Turanian serving as a catch-all for a diverse range of languages. Other models were four-part, or five-part, such as Blumenbach's typology of human types.

3.2.i Semitic

The modern usage of the term *Semitic* (*Semitisch*) to designate a language grouping is generally traced to the Göttingen scholar August Ludwig von Schlözer's piece "Von den Chaldäern" (1781: 161). As Vermeulen shows, this terminological innovation drew on Leibniz's understanding of linguistics as the key to classifying peoples and tracing their origins (2015: 283ff.). While he did not use the term itself, the Göttingen Orientalist and theologian Johann Michaelis (1717–1791), who was Schlözer and Eichhorn's teacher, had already identified this linguistic group in his prize-winning essay ([1760] 1769: 64). Arabic had "a very near affinity with the Hebrew," and Mohammed's errors were attributed to his inability to "distinguish letter from figure," that is, his interpretive literalism ([1760] 1769: 64). The University of Göttingen was at the heart of early modern taxonomies of humanity, as well as the beginnings

of modern Oriental studies in Germany (Stroumsa 2021: 67). In the case of *Semitic*, an existing term was adapted for a new meaning, whereas several terms used in the Aryan paradigm, such as *indogermanisch*, were artificially created (Baumgartner 1940: 597).

3.2.ii Hamitic

The earliest instance given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) of *Hamitic*, as a classificatory term for languages, is from a review of works in biblical criticism. The point being made in the source is that the Greek of the New Testament is not standard Greek (Anon 1839a: 69):

All languages take a colouring from the neighbouring tongues. Greek, a Japhetic language, was thrown into the neighbourhood of Coptic, an Hamitic language, and, were it not beside the subject, might be shown to have been influenced by it. Then the Jews of the Semitic race had it put into their mouths, so to say, in order to write the Septuagint version with it.

The German missionary and linguist Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881) coined the terms *Nigro-Hamitic* and *Nilo-Hamitic*, for West African languages (*Nigro* from the river Niger) and for languages spoken south of the equator, respectively (see Bagster 1848). In his *Outline of the Elements of the Kishuáheli Language*, Krapf defended the African languages, “which we may call the Hamitic in distinction from the Semitic and Japhetic.” While “deficient in pliancy and capability with respect to philosophical researches and deductions,” these languages had their own ‘beauty and dignity.’” In this they were well matched with the bodily constitution of the Africans (1850: 7):

We are aware, that they [the Hamitic languages] carry in their intestines an amount of massiveness and bulkiness, which is against the oriental and occidental taste, but still we maintain, that this is their characteristic beauty, quite in accordance with the bodily and mental complexion and with the final destination of the Africanic mankind.

One variant of the usual three-way distinction was proposed by the American philanthropist Charles Brace (1826–1890), whose work *The Races of the Old World* drew on Müller, Renan, and Bunsen. Brace argued for an ancient four-way division, *Aryan*, *Semitic*, *Hamitic*, and *Turanian*. He attributed the ancient Egyptians to the Hamitic race rather than the Semitic (1863: 35):

It should be understood by the reader that by the term *Hamite*, we do not necessarily mean people of black complexion, but those tribes whose language is

represented by the ancient Egyptian, a people undoubtedly of brown and swarthy, and sometimes black color, with European or Aryan features.

3.2.iii Japhetic and Other Terms

A range of terms have been used for the approximate grouping now known as Indo-European, including: *Scythian*, *Japhetic*, *Aryan* (*Arier*, *arisch*), *Indogermanic* or *Indo-Germanic*, *Indoceltic/Indo-Keltic* (*indokeltisch*), *Sanskritisch*, *Wiros*, and *Ario-European*. This last is found mainly in Italian sources, as in *ario-europea* (Ascoli 1854). The adjective *aryaque* was used in French as an alternative to the more common *aryen* or *arien* (Chavée 1878). Gobineau preferred to use *Arian/arian* on aesthetic grounds (Gobineau 1869: 3). German equivalents for *Indogermanic* include *indogermanisch*, *indisch-germanisch*, *indisch-deutsch*. The American surgeon and ethnologist Daniel Brinton (1837–1899) used the term *Aryac* for *Indo-European* or *Indo-Germanic*, arguing that these peoples had been in Europe “since the remotest historic times,” and noting that he would have preferred the term *Celt-Indic* (1901: 144–145, 144fn.). The term *Indoeuropean* was first used by the polymath scientist Thomas Young (1773–1829), in the course of a review and summary of Johann Christoph Adelung’s *Mithridates* (1806–1809). Young noted that for the purposes of classification, languages “require to be separately studied in order to be understood,” but there was difficulty in drawing a clear line: “It is however absolutely impossible to fix a correct and positive criterion of the degree of variation which is to constitute in this sense a distinct language.” It was not possible to definitively decide “whether Danish and Swedish are two languages or two dialects of one” (Young 1813: 252). Young did not follow unreservedly Adelung’s classification system, which was primarily based on geography, and chose a mixed method “more dependent on the nature and connexion of the languages themselves” (1813: 253). In spite of linguistic traces from “our common descent from a single pair,” there was no prospect of recreating the original language of humanity (1813: 253). The *Indoeuropean* grouping (Class II) was comprised of “the Indian, the West Asiatic, and almost all the European languages.” These languages were listed as “Sanskrit, Median, Arabian, Greek, German, Celtic, Latin, Cantabrian, Sclavic” (1813: 235–236). *Median* refers to a language of ancient Persia, and *Cantabrian*, presumably, is equivalent to Spanish. *Arabian* includes Hebrew and other Semitic languages (1813: 258): “The *Arabian* family is called by our author [Adelung] Semitic, from Shem the son of Noah, as having been principally spoken by his descendants” (1813: 267). The resemblances among the Indo-European languages as “a single class” were too great to be “merely accidental” (1813: 264–265).

Young was mildly critical of the boldness of Jones’s assertions (1813: 265): “The Sanscrit, which is confessedly the parent language of India, may easily be

shown to be intimately connected with the Greek, the Latin, and the German, although it is a great exaggeration to assert any thing like its identity with either of these languages.” Adelung regarded Sanscrit as a very ancient language, which, since it arose in close proximity to the cradle of humanity (which he located in Kashmir), would likely have retained “components of other languages” (Adelung 1806–1809: 141). The anomaly here is the presence of Semitic in the Indo-European group. On this point, Young was, however, far from definitive (1813: 267): “Though not intimately connected with the European languages, it is well known to have afforded some few words to the Greek and Latin: and it has also some terms in common with the Sanscrit, though apparently fewer than either the Greek or the German.”

Indo-Germanic and its variants seem to have originated with *indo-germanique* (Malte-Brun 1810, II: 577), in English translation, *Indo-Germanic*, and Julius Klaproth’s *Indo-Germanen* (1823: 42) (see Siegert 1942, Shapiro 1981, Koerner 1989: 159, Van Driem 2015). Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed the term *Sanskritisch* (1830: 176). However, Bopp’s *indisch-europäisch* or *indo-europäisch* became the most popular in the medium and long term. Heinrich Link (1761–1851) employed the term *Caucasian* (*kaukasisch*), designating Sanscrit the “mother, not just of the dialects [*Mundarten*] presently spoken in Hindostan, but also of Greek, Latin and the Slavic languages” (Link 1821, I: 162). However, the Zend language was even older (1821, I: 167), and the Germanic language was “the daughter of Persian” (1821, I: 169).

Scythian has a long and complex history, and it remained in circulation through the nineteenth century, typically as a third term in opposition to *Aryan* and *Semitic*. Monier-Williams (1861: 2fn.) defined Scythian as “a convenient term widely applicable to all wandering tribes migrating from central Asia who may have found their way into India, either by the Panjáb on the west, or by Asam on the north-east, at various times previously to the Áryan immigration, or even subsequently.” The Hindu race and Hindi were the results of mixing (1861: 3):

It was thus that the fusion of the Áryas with the Scythian tribes gave rise to the Hindú race which constitutes the mass of India’s population. It was thus, too, that the blending of the Áryan Sanskrit with the various Scythian dialects gave rise to the Hindú dialects now current in India.

Japhetic (and its variants *Japetic*, *Japetick*, *Japhethitic*, *Japhetan*, *Japhetite*) likewise has a long history, with Japhet generally understood as the ancestor of the Europeans. The English physician James Parsons (1705–1770) in his *Remains of Japhet* (1767) suggested that some of the descendants of Japhet’s son Gomer went eastwards, so that “*Togarmah*, one of Gomer’s sons, went

off north-eastwards and peopled *Eastern Tartary*, great part of the Mogul's country, and other parts of *India*" (1767: 43). Parsons also observed that many German words had "the same sound and meaning with the Persian." This was not due to an invasion; rather the words in common had "the same source," being "truly *Magogian* or *Gomerian*" (1767: 198). Magog, along with Gomer, was one of the sons of Japhet. Parsons came close to the later understanding of Indo-European (1767: 336):

Let us compare the Magogian names, with those of the *Persians* and *Bengalians*, and their affinity and agreement will be astonishing, and a very strong auxiliary to our former sentiments, upon the originality of the *Gomerian*, or *Magogian* tongue, and the great list of words, common to the *Persian*, *Bengalian*, and *German* dialects, at this time.

"Originality" refers to a language variety that is close to the source, that is, a pure type.

In the early nineteenth century, the term *Japhetic* continued to be used, but the instances are scattered and dwindle as the century progresses. The Irish scientist and philologist Richard Kirwan (1733–1812) argued that the respective languages spoken by the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japhet each retained a distinct identity (1808: 148): "Thus, the languages, spoken by the descendants of Japhet, differed more, from those spoken by the descendants of Shem or Cham, than the Japhetic languages did from one another." This was due to settlement patterns, in that "the progeny of *each* of the original Patriarchs, Japhet, Sem, and Cham, settled at a great distance, from that of the other Patriarchs" (1808: 152). In the introduction to his *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), Daniel Webster (1782–1852) argued that the vernacular languages of Europe were no less ancient in substance than Chaldee or Hebrew (1828, I: xxxv):

The truth is, all vernacular words in the languages of Europe, are as old as the same words in Asia; and when the same words are found in the Shemitic and Japhetic languages, it is almost demonstrably certain that these words were in use *before the dispersion*; the nations of both families have them from the common stock, and the words, like the families of men, which use them, are to be considered as of the same antiquity.

A further source for *Japhetic* is the Reverend William B. Winning's *A Manual of Comparative Philology* (1838). Winning evoked comparative philology as a new and rigorous science, at the same time as seeking to integrate its findings into the narrative of Genesis. He treated the problem of Babel in an appendix, arguing that it was "the infidel Hamites" who were "alone engaged

in the structure of Babel” (1838: 285). Winning divided the world’s languages into the traditional triad, though with an idiosyncratic take: *Japhthitish* or *Indo-European*, *Hamitish* (which included Arabic and Hebrew), and *Shemitish*—this last being a catch-all category, embracing both Polynesian languages and Chinese (Winning 1838: 282). Charles Meyer found support for the study of Celtic languages in the fact that Celtic was “a highly important member both of the family of human languages in general, and more particularly of the so-called Japhetic or Indo-Teutonic stock” (Meyer 1848: 313). Comparative philology had shown that “every language remains connected as well through the physiological unity of the human race as through the historical unity of the family to which it more especially belongs” (1848: 313). Of these, the “most beautiful portion is undoubtedly that which has fallen to the lot of the Japhetic family; but this again has been divided amongst several nations, each of which possesses but one dialect of the great Japhetic language” (1848: 313). A late use of the term *Japhetic* by a mainstream scholar was Danish philologist Rasmus Rask’s (1787–1832) open letter to the Scottish historian and colonial administrator Mounstuart Elphinstone (1779–1859). The Danish term was *japetisk*. The contrast was with the *Scythian* languages, understood as a vast extended language family broken up by the “people of our race” (Rask 1834: 525).

Arier in German and *Arian* in English were used initially in references to ancient Persian sources, as well as to the Eastern languages, that is, Persian and Sanscrit as a sub-group, as will be discussed. Schleicher (1850: 125) used *Arier* in the sense of the modern category Indo-Aryan, that is, to refer to the Persians and the Indians, who he argued had left the original homeland subsequent to the other groups (1850: 125). He rejected this as a term for the linguistic group as a whole (“Inder und Iraner das arische Familienpaar bilden,” 1850: 125), using *Indogermanisch* for the language family. Schleicher pointed out that this name had initially expressed the two geographical extremes, but with the acceptance of Celtic as Indo-European this was no longer the case (1850: 123). Schleicher also rejected Humboldt’s *Sanskritisch* on the grounds that it suggested that these languages were all derivatives of Sanscrit (1850: 123). As for Japhetic (*Japhetisch*), he declared it “Biblical foolishness” (“eine biblische Spielerei”) (1850: 123).

3.2.iv Aryan in English

Given its absence in the writings of William Jones and contemporary scholars in India, the question arises as to when the term *Aryan/Arian* first appeared in English as a synonym for Indo-European. There was no serious discussion of Aryans and Aryanism in English before the 1840s (Leopold 1970, 1974). In the second edition of his 1813 work, *Researches into the Physical History of Man*,

James Prichard (1786–1848) did not even mention *Aryan* or *Arian* ([1813] 1826, I: 492fn.):

Schlözer has proposed to term this class of languages *Japetic*, in imitation of those philologists who have given the appellation of Semitic class. . . . The nations who speak the Indo-European dialects might, I believe, be termed Japetic with fully as much propriety as the other class are termed Semitic, but both these designations are objectionable. The term Indo-German is adopted by Klaproth. The German philologists do not appear to be aware that the Celtic dialects belong as decidedly to the same stock as the German.

Indo-European was the preferable term. Prichard, along with Pictet, was generally credited with gaining acceptance for the Celtic languages within the Indo-European grouping, and in this way promoting the use of *Indo-European* rather than *Indo-Germanic* (Latham 1860: 144). The affinity of Celtic to other European and Asian languages had long been remarked upon, though it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that Celtic was definitively incorporated into Indo-European (see van Hal 2005).

The OED offers the entry on “Language” in the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (Anon 1839b) as its earliest source for *Aryan/Arian* in English. The piece is anonymous, though it was likely written by the classical scholar Thomas Hewitt Key (1799–1875). There the author denounced the abuse of etymology in “puerile trifling.” This had created widespread suspicion that it was “nothing else than a dextrous play upon words,” and that etymologists were “little better than indifferent punsters” (Anon 1839b: 306). The rigorous methodology introduced in the preceding decades had led to the discovery of the relationship of Sanscrit to other European languages (Anon 1839b: 306). The similarity observed here, and in the case of Semitic languages, had led to the use of the term “affinity of languages” for those descended from a common source. The confusion at Babel was merely transient, and in any case “it could only have had any effect upon that branch of Noah’s descendants who remained in the land of Shinar” (Anon 1839b: 319). The term used by this author was *Indo-Germanic*. He refers to one branch of Indo-Germanic as *Medo-Persic* or *Arian*, the others being *Indian*, *Teutonic*, *Graeco-Latin*, *Slavonic*, and *Celtic* (Anon 1839b: 309). The first usage of *Arian* in this sense in English is most probably from William Beloe’s translation of Herodotus 7: 62 (1791, II: 113).

The second citation in the OED is from Prichard. In his *Natural History of Man*, Prichard used the term *Indo-European* as well as introducing *Arian race* (1843: 162). The OED cites a piece by Prichard in the *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (1848), where Prichard invokes a category described as: “The Indo-European, sometimes termed Indo-Germanic, and by late writers *Arian* or *Iranian* languages” (1848: 241). Prichard noted that some preferred to use *Arian* for the Eastern languages: “It includes all the idioms of

the ancient Medes and Persians, who named themselves Aarii, and their country Eeriéné or Iran, and likewise the Sanskrit with all the Prakrits, properly so termed, and the Pali of India” (1848: 242). He noted that R. G. Latham (1812–1888) used *Indo-European* (1848: 158), while Baron Christian Bunsen (1791–1866) referred to the *Indo-Germanic* (1848: 254). The mid-century English sources attest to a mix of references to the colonial scholarship on language affinities (Halhed, Jones), and to Prichard, as well as extensive resort to the new continental philology. But much of this literature is framed by traditional speculation about the causes and nature of human linguistic diversity, with the biblical text as a fundamental reference point. Anglican ministers formed a majority in the Philological Society when it was founded in 1842 (Aarsleff 1983: 211).

The term *Aryan* (*Arian*) as equivalent for *Indo-European* was definitively popularized by Max Müller, the dominant figure in nineteenth-century philological Orientalism. Müller’s 1847 lecture to the British Association for the Advancement of Science was entitled “On the Relation of Bengali to the Arian and Aboriginal Languages of India” (Müller 1848). In Müller’s 1851 overview of comparative philology, *Arian* is used alongside *Indo-European* in a discussion of “the component members of the great Arian family” (1851: 312). In his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Müller argued that *Aryan* was a genuine self-designation (*endonym*) (1861: 226): “The Aryans would seem to have chosen this name for themselves as opposed to the nomadic races, the *Turanians*, whose original name *Tura* implies the swiftness of the horseman.” Given this, *Aryan* was the appropriate term for scholarship (1861: 236):

As Comparative Philology has thus traced the ancient name of *Ârya* from India to Ireland, as the original title assumed by the Aryans before they left their common home, it is but natural that it should have been chosen as the technical term for the family of languages which was formerly designated as *Indo-Germanic*, *Indo-European*, *Caucasian*, or *Japhetic*.

Müller took the main credit “for the use of the term *Aryan* in the technical sense of *Indo-European*” (1881a: 204).

One work that illustrates both the diffusion of the term *Aryan* and the substantial gap that existed between the professionalized scholarship of continental Europe and the British antiquarian amateur is Edward Pococke’s *India in Greece; or, Truth in Mythology* (1852). Pococke argued that there was an Indian origin to Greek civilization. Myths needed to be read for their factual-historical core (1852: viii): “They are now proved to be fables, just in proportion as we *misunderstand* them; truths, in proportion as they were once *understood*.” Historical fact formed the basis of mythological narrative (1852: x): “Whenever an important mythus has existed, an important fact

has been its basis” (1852: 3). Similarly, the apparently endless variability of language masked underlying unities: “beneath disguises ever-varying, the strongest likeness; beneath dissimilar nationality, a unity of parentage” (1852: 4–5). Pococke paid tribute to William Jones and others who had elaborated “Indo-Classical affinities.” However, etymology had become too particular in method, and speculation could incur “the wrath of the philological guardians of the treasure-house of time,” yet there was gold to be discovered (1852: 5). Pococke took issue with the celebrated historian of Greece, George Grote (1794–1871), who had used the metaphor of a curtain hiding a painting to elucidate his inability to provide the facts behind the myth (1846–1856, I: xii–xiii):

If the reader blame me for not assisting him to determine this—if he ask me why I do not undraw the curtain and disclose the picture—I reply in the words of the painter Zeuxis, when the same question was addressed to him in exhibiting his master-piece of imitative art—“The curtain is the picture.”

Pococke countered that (1852: 8): “The PICTURE is INDIAN—the CURTAIN is GRECIAN; and that Curtain is now WITHDRAWN,” to reveal the true picture of the ancient past of Greece.¹

Pococke’s theory of an Indian origin of Greek civilization rested on the notion that the Pelasgians (Pelasgi), who preceded the Greeks up until the twelfth century BC, were of Indian origin. For Pococke, the “undeniable fact” was that Greek was “a derivation from the Sanscrit; therefore, Sanscrit-speaking people, i.e. Indians, must have dwelt in Greece” (1852: 18). Evidence for an “Indian colonisation of Greece” included not only language, but also “her philosophy, her religion, her Rivers, her Mountains, and her Tribes; her subtle turn of intellect, her political institutes, and above all the Mysteries of that noble land” (1852: 19). Geographical names had meaning, and if this meaning was not transparent to the present-day inhabitants of a country (in this case, the Greeks), the names must have had a meaning to an earlier population, that is, the Sanscrit-speaking Pelasgi. So the name *Hellas* derives from *Hela*, a mountain range in Balochistan, and the ultimate etymology was *Heli* “sun,” showing that “the chiefs of the country,” the *Hélâines*, were “of the genuine race of the Rajpoots, who were all worshippers of that luminary” (1852: 48–49).

1. The legend of Zeuxis involves a contest between Parrhasius to see who could create the greatest realism in a painting. In the version recounted by Pliny, Zeuxis painted grapes so realistic that birds flew down to peck at them; Parrhasius, not Zeuxis, painted a curtain that fooled Zeuxis into thinking there was a painting behind it.

Pococke's theory did not gain much traction, though it reflected what had previously been the mainstream *ex oriente lux* paradigm. An anonymous review in *The Leader* took aim at Pococke's "ingenious futilities," now having been "banished by the Positive Conceptions which now reign in science" (Anon. 1852: 304). The reference is to August Comte (1798–1857) and his positivist philosophy of science. With etymology, there was "no absurdity which cannot have its erudition," and it was "difficult to affix the line where the legitimate use of etymology ends" (Anon 1852: 304). The volume was "very erudite and absurd," even though "it remains true that traces of India are abundant in the Greek language, and that scholarship is worthily employed sifting them" (Anon 1852: 304).

The second edition incorporated the term *Arian* into its narrative. The "derivation of the Hellenic from the Sanscrit type of the Arian tongue" was now "beyond controversy" (Pococke [1852] 1856: 1). Pococke again emphasized that geographical names were not "fabulous," but, rather, their explanations were "fictitious," in ignorance of the true meaning (1856: 3):

The Tamar, and the Thames, and Britain itself, are names undeniably English; but they are names which no Englishman—*quoad* Englishman—can interpret; they belong to an ancient race, and he is thus the inheritor of a title, not of an estate that he can enjoy. Just so was it with the Greek: before him came the Arian and the Celto-Arian, and then the pure Ario-Hellenic stock.

Language had the power to draw disparate peoples or tribes together, while retaining their distinct characters and titles, so that "the Hellenic as that dialect of the great Arian tongue" served as a "universal solvent by which, while tribal titles remained unchanged, all these various clans were marvelously blended into a people speaking one general language." Pococke gave this account of the origin of *Aryan* (1856: 3):

ARIA, whence the modern name of Iran, takes its name, as is well known, from the ARII, an ancient Median people. It is a name derived from the Sanscrit vocable "Arya," "venerable," hence descriptive of the "Noble Race,"—a term which has even penetrated the Celtic tongue under the form of "Aire" and "Aireach," expressive of an ancient privileged nobility, as well as of the class possessed of wealth. Nor is the vocable less distinct in the German *Ehre*, *Ehren*.

This illustrates one route whereby the Aryan paradigm, in more or less its modern form, entered English language writings in the mid-nineteenth century, that is, primarily via European linguistic scholarship (Bopp, Pictet). This otherwise obscure text was republished in revised form in 2003, with an Indocentric foreword by Ravi Prakash Arya: "India is the cradle of human civilization. [. . .]

Manu the first law giver of humankind clearly points out that humans originated in India were the first born ones on the globe.” India was the origin of global civilization and science, and, as, Pococke’s work made clear, “various regions, cultures, mythologies and religions of the world speak of their roots in India” (in Pococke [1852, 1856] 2003: 1, 5).

Canon Frederic Farrar (1860: 188–189) declared the term *Aryan* to be unobjectionable, though apart from its use in Sanscrit and Persian, “the traces of it among the other branches of the race are few and dubious.” However, it was probable that *Aryan* would prevail, as “Rask’s term Japhetic involves an unwarrantable assumption” (1860: 189). The term *Pataric* had been proposed by an author in the *Saturday Review*, but this was not likely to catch on. The piece referred to was a review of Volume 1 of Adolphe Pictet’s *Les Origines Indo-Européennes* (1859–1863) by the Celtic scholar Whitley Stokes (1830–1909). Stokes asserted the original racial homogeneity of the Aryans or Indo-Europeans, who were a sub-division of the Caucasian race: “This unity is, in the first place, a strictly genealogical one—real unity of blood” (1858: 615). On the name question, Stokes described *Indo-European* as “unwieldy, and not wholly accurate,” and *Indo-Germanic* was “rather worse.” *Japhetic* as used by Rask “involves an unwarranted assumption.” Pictet, like other “great scholars” had concluded that the original name was *Arya* (1858: 615). This was, however, unknown in the Western branch, and “the identification of *Arya* with *Erinn* was dubious.” Bopp had missed the chance to invent a new name. Stokes suggested that “the Fathers” would have been appropriate, using “their own original word PATAR,” which was common to each language. Then it would be possible to speak of “Patar language, the Pataric stock, the Patarian degree of civilization, &c” (1858: 615).

In a letter to the historian Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892), Viscount Strangford (1825–1869) argued that Müller’s term *Aryan* would be better kept for the Indian and Iranian languages ([1864] 1878: 40):

The Germans are apt to call the Eastern group *Arisch*, and the Pan-Aryan set *Arisch-europäisch*, which is definite, but clumsy. Whitley Stokes’s *Pataric* for the whole set is absurd. Perhaps it is best to keep *Aryan* as at present, and call the Easterns *Aric*. But then the special marked character of the latter must be brought forward as prominently as possible, and as often as possible; for people are very apt to forget the importance of old Persian, and its peculiar affinity with Sanskrit.

Wiros was the suggestion of Peter Giles (1860–1935) in the *Cambridge History of India* (1922: 65). Given that there was no certainty that a speaker of a particular language was “by lineal descent the representative of its speakers at an earlier period,” it would make sense to abandon the terms *Indo-European*

or *Indo-Germanic*. These were ambiguous as to language and people. *Wiros*, being the word for *men* in many Indo-European languages, was appropriate as an “entirely colourless word which would indicate only the speakers of such languages.” This quality was advantageous, “since all we know regarding the physical characteristics of the first people who spoke languages of this nature is that they were a white race” (Giles 1922: 66). Giles’s terminological innovation was greeted with scepticism, though it gained some limited currency in the ensuing debates, as did his theory that the origin of the Indo-Europeans lay in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian empire (Finot 1922: 244). The British Egyptologist H. R. Hall (1873–1930) preferred the term (1928: 268fn.), as did Harold Peake (1867–1946) in his *The Bronze Age and the Celtic World* (1922: 131). Peake held that *Aryan* was misleading, given that “the Aryas were the noble caste among the Vedic Indians and the early Persians.” Giles’s proposal of *Wiros*, however, had “much to recommend it,” as a term for “the first users of this speech.” The archaeologist V. Gordon Childe (1892–1957) agreed that *Aryan* was problematic, as “only the Indians and Iranians actually designated themselves by this name.” Giles’s term, *Wiros* was “certainly accurate,” but “the reviewers have laughed it out of the literature.” *Aryan* by contrast had “the advantage of brevity and familiarity” (Childe 1926: xi).

3.2.v Turanian

The term *Turanian*, which, like *Aryan*, was popularized by Müller, was a catch-all category for languages not included in the Aryan or Semitic categories. Following Müller, the colonial philologist John Beames (1837–1902) argued that “at an early period the whole of India, in common with all eastern and southern Asia, was held by races speaking the languages of the Turanian family” (1868: 7–9). This was disrupted by the invasion of the “Aryan race, speaking a language of the Indo-Germanic family,” which had entered India from the northwest, and pushed most of the Turanians southwards and to the hills. In subsequent centuries there was a civilizing process, though inhabitants of “the hill range remained in their original savage state.” In his opening address to the Turanian section of the 1874 International Congress of Orientalists (the Congress also had an Aryan and Semitic section), Walter Elliot (1803–1887) noted that Turanian was originally a term used in Persia for the surrounding non-Aryan populations (1876: 53). But Baron Bunsen (1848) had proposed “to include under this designation all the languages of Europe and Asia which are neither Semitic nor Aryan” (1874: 54).

Monier-Williams warned against conflating the “wild Aborigenes” with “the powerful pre-Āryan races of the south,” that is, “the great Dravidian races occupying the Madras Presidency and speaking Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, and Malayalam, with the uncivilized aboriginal tribes found on the hills and in

the jungles of India” (1875: 312fn.). He presumed that the Dravidians had also entered India from Central Asia, whereas the aboriginal groups were “the present representatives of numerous wild Tartar tribes who swarmed into India at various epochs, some of them probably coming from Chinese Tartary and Tibet, and taking the course of the Brahma-putra into Bengal” (1875: 312fn.). The label *Turanian* was wrongly used to cover both groups (1875: 312fn.): “If the term Turanian is to embrace races so widely separated by language and customs as the Dravidians and various hill-tribes of India, the sooner it is expelled from the vocabulary of philologists and ethnologists the better.” At the time of the *Rigveda* there would have been conflict in the north between the Aryans and the Dravidians (1875: 313):

They are there called Dasyus, Yatudhinas, &c., and described as monstrous in form, godless, inhuman, haters of Brahmans, disturbers of sacred rites, eaters of human and horse flesh [. . .]. In the epic poems they are generally called Rakshasas or evil demons, the relentless enemies of gods and good men and of all sacred rites.

Turanian is a now defunct macro-category (van Driem 2004: 227): “The Turanian theory of linguistic relationship divided all languages of Eurasia into just three language families, i.e. the Afroasiatic or ‘Semitic,’ the Indo-European or ‘Arian,’ and the rest, collectively called ‘Turanian,’ ostensibly named after the descendants of Tur.”

3.3 ARTHUR DE GOBINEAU

One figure who was instrumental in spreading Aryanism beyond the boundaries of specialized scholarship was Arthur de Gobineau. In his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–1855), Gobineau offered what is generally characterized as “a racial interpretation of history” (Biddiss 1966: 256). However, his work is very far from a systematic study of race (Seillière 1903). In this sense, he remained conceptually in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century composite paradigm of *Volk*. Gobineau is generally understood as offering a critique of the contemporary French republican order and of political notions of equality and democracy, linking race to class through his defence of elitism and aristocracy (Kale 2010). For Gobineau, “degeneration” was the cause of the downfall of nations, in particular the adulteration of its bloodline. Gobineau accepted the original unity of humanity and opposed environmental explanations for human difference, reconciling this with monogenesis by arguing for an early separation of the three major races: *white* (Caucasian, Semitic, Japhetic), *black* (Hamites), and *yellow* (Altaic, Mongol, Finnish, and Tatar). Racial degeneration was an aesthetic phenomenon. Within the white race, the

Aryan type, derived from the Japhetic branch, was superior and encompassed the Aryan language family. On Gobineau's racial reading of human history, much of humanity had been proven unable to attain the step towards civilization, such as the yellow and black races. Conquest and empire building, however, led to the erosion of distinctions of race, and their replacement by distinction of caste, as can be seen in the case of India. The survival of a polity depended on maintaining the original bloodlines, but in this model racial mixing is also paradoxically the dynamic factor in the life cycles of human history. All the achievements of the world's major civilizations could be attributed to an admixture of Aryan blood. Gobineau's model is not based on an Aryan–Semitic duality; rather, Jews are white, though not Aryan. Gobineau was the target of an extensive critique by August Pott (1856), though Pott himself was disoriented by the problem of relating language to race. The ideal congruence of *Volk* and *Sprache* was tested by the phenomenon of a racially homogenous group speaking different languages (Pott 1856: 146–147), by the mixed polity (*Mischreich*) of Austro-Hungary (1856: 179–180), and the racial mixing of the modern *Grossstadt* (1856: 28–29).

Gobineau found a receptive audience in the United States, where his *Essai* was translated, in heavily redacted form, by Henry Hotze (1833–1887) under the title *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races* (Gobineau, translated by Hotze, 1856). Gobineau's diagnosis of the ills of contemporary France was adapted for those who feared miscegenation in the United States (Hotze, in Gobineau 1856: viii):

The troubles and sufferings of his native country, from sudden political gyrations, led him to speculate upon their causes which he believes are to be traced to the great variety of incongruous ethnical elements composing the population of France.

As Richter (1958: 4) comments, Gobineau in his lifetime “enjoyed his greatest and almost his only fame among the slaveholders of the United States (though, as he himself noted, they omitted translating what he wrote about the racial degeneration of white Americans).” Gobineau looms much larger in the historiography of Aryanism than is warranted by his actual influence. Poliakov argues that Gobineau, and the similarly notorious Germanophile Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), were “minor characters only,” serving “the role of scapegoats” in the Western tradition (1974: 5). It is much easier to assimilate a pessimistic aristocrat such as Gobineau or a *völkisch* Wagnerite into a progressive/reactionary duality, than figures such as Renan and Müller (to be discussed later), who were in important respects political liberals and self-conscious moderns, while being advocates of the civilizational benefits of colonialism.

3.4 ARYAN VERSUS SEMITE

Aryan became an increasingly elaborated concept, crossing multiple domains, and also shaping the notion of *Semitic* as its defining opposite. *Aryan* in this sense brought *Semitic* into being as a fully articulated concept. Christian Lassen paired the Indo-Germanic and Semitic peoples of the Caucasian race as the two most gifted, ahead of the Egyptians and the Chinese. Of these two, the Indo-Germanic peoples were at the highest level, whereas the Semitic peoples suffered from a lack of harmony in their psychic drives (1843: 414). The Semitic individual lacked the capacity for separating the ego from the world: “his way of looking at the world is subjective and egotistical” (1843–1852, I: 415–416). Lassen evoked a struggle for world domination between the Indo-Germanic and the Semitic peoples, in which the Semites, though inferior, were a formidable foe, characterized by great diversity in abode and historical destiny (1843–1852, I: 417).

Émile-Louis Burnouf argued that the core of religion was “metaphysical” and constant, while ethical and political considerations were later accretions that varied by time and place. In the case of the Aryans (“la race aryenne”), it was well established that the religious system had declined as it passed to inferior races, “given the physical and moral make-up of these populations” (1868: 679). Christ saw his doctrine not in terms of an extension of Judaism but, rather, “the re-establishment of a theory” which had been “hidden since ancient times” (1868: 680). Genesis was not the central text, when set alongside the Avesta and the Vedas, which were the legacy of “our real ancestors” (1868: 680). The Aryans were the inventors of true religion, which involved an “absolute unity” of thought and life (1868: 683). They possessed a common mythology, which had arisen in Central Asia and spread out from there (1872: 3). Many of the motifs of nineteenth-century Aryanism are found in Burnouf’s work, including the two-layered model of population. This states that the Aryans were not indigenous to India, nor to Europe, and that the original inhabitants were inferior. The Celts might be Aryans, but the Basques were not (Burnouf 1868: 686). There was the notion of an Aryan fall from past greatness, and the potential of British colonial rule to be a restorative project, to the extent that there was a shared Aryan heritage (Burnouf 1863: 1–3); the notion that Christianity was fundamentally an Aryan rather than a Semitic religion² (1868: 684, 1876); and a hierarchy with Aryans at the top, followed by the Semites, the Chinese, and then the Africans (1872: 311ff.).

The mainstream scholarly view became that the Aryan and Semitic languages were fundamentally distinct, and no common ancestor could be

2. On the Aryan ancestry of Jesus, see Haupt (1909) and the analysis in Heschel (2008).

reconstructed (A. W. [Schlegel 1834](#): 432). Nonetheless, there have been a long series of attempts to maintain a bridge between these two linguistic worlds, in keeping with biblical universalism and the pre-modern status of Hebrew. Baron Bunsen proposed ancient Egypt as a common point of origin ([Bunsen 1844–1857](#), [Benes 2017](#)); others sought to find etymological affinities ([Stratton 1872](#), [McCurdy 1881](#)). Two key figures who promoted this dichotomy and entrenched it in popular scientific as well as scholarly discourse were Max Müller and Ernest Renan. These were profoundly influential scholars, and the length and complexity of their careers have given rise to contradictory ideological assessments. Renan argued that the division in language corresponded to a division in the human species ([Renan 1855](#): 160, [Caquot 1979](#)). The character of a people was mirrored in their language. The Aryan character was abstract in nature and prone to metaphysical thought, whereas the Semite displayed realism and sensuality ([Renan 1855](#): 160). In order for scientific progress to be achieved, the Semitic, monotheistic element in European thought need to be constrained. In Renan's view, the Semitic peoples had an instinct for a purist monotheism (see [Stroumsa 2021](#)). Renan's thinking operated at a high level of generalization (1855: 4–5; see [Kouloughli 2007](#)):

It would be pushing pantheism to excess in history to put all races on an equal footing, and, under the pretext that human nature is always beautiful, to seek in its various combinations the same plenitude and the same richness. I am, therefore, the first to recognize that the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, really represents an inferior combination of human nature. It has neither that loftiness of spiritualism that India and Germany alone have known, nor that sense of proportion and perfect beauty that Greece bequeathed to the Romance peoples, nor that delicate and deep sensibility which is the dominant feature of the Celtic. Semitic consciousness has clarity, but it lacks expansiveness; it marvelously understands unity, it does not know how to attain multiplicity. MONOTHEISM sums up and explains all its characteristics.

Heymann Steinthal (1823–1899) mocked Renan's use of the term *instinct* as a universal explanation. Renan had made empty assertions about an instinct for monotheism, which pertained so long as the Semites were in the desert, but which, however, strangely lapsed once they became urbanized ([Steinthal 1860](#): 330–331).

In contrast to Renan, Müller believed that humanity had been originally monotheistic ([Nash 2014](#)). Lacking a transparent morphology, the Indo-European languages, unlike the Semitic ones, tended to mislead by metaphor and personification, leading to a kind of polytheistic corruption (Müller 1861: 11): “Mythology, which was the bane of the ancient world, is in truth a disease

of language. A myth means a word, but a word which, from being a name or an attribute, has been allowed to assume a more substantial existence.” Müller was insistent on the distinction between the Semitic and the Indo-European language families (1861: 269): “It is impossible to mistake a Semitic language; and what is most important—it is impossible to imagine an Aryan language derived from a Semitic, or a Semitic from an Aryan language.”

The term *anti-Semitism* itself effected the merger between the Semitic peoples as imagined by philology and the Jews of the modern world. Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904) used the term *Semitismus* (“Semitism”) to denote the pervasive influence of Jews throughout history, arguing that the lack of national sentiment and pride in the German territories had made it easier for “Semitism” to take hold there (1879: 11). Hermann Hirt (1865–1936), a proponent of an Indo-European homeland in north or northeastern Europe (Hirt 1895), used the term *semitisches Blut* (1905: 27). The Swiss Bible scholar Walter Baumgartner also offered a comment on the status of *Semitic*. It was difficult to determine the extent to which what was initially a linguistic category also implied a racial one (1940: 597): “Because even if, as was evident, the linguistic and the anthropological originally coincided, this often changes very drastically in the course of history.” This was shown by the case of Latin and, now, English. For the present purposes, *Semites* were simply “peoples who spoke a Semitic language” (1940: 597).

3.5 CONCLUSION

The Semitic type was not strictly understood as characterizing the modern Jew, the resident and citizen of the European states, but inevitably both Renan and Müller contributed, through their promotion of the Aryan/Semitic duality, to the framing of European Jews as somehow partaking in, or formed by, or answerable to, an Oriental otherness: “Much more than Arthur de Gobineau, Renan popularized the Aryan versus Semite distinction in France” (Rodrigue 2004: 8). As a result of the “displacement of Hebrew origins,” that is, the discredited idea of Hebrew as the universal language, there was increasing saliency to the “opposition between an Aryan Europe and a Semitic race” (Sharpe 1993: 27). Pictet in his work on Indo-European origins (1859–1863) coined the term *paléontologie linguistique* (“linguistic paleontology”) for the study of prehistoric material culture. This involved “making inferences about the cultures of language users on the evidence of reconstructed languages” (Mallory 2021: 273). The result was highly detailed accounts of Indo-European society and material culture (Schradler 1893). The opposition between Aryan and Semitic became institutionalized as a salient duality, as a distinction in linguistic typology, a contrast in sensibility, world view, morality, character.

Pictet's method allowed the linguist to fill in the lost details of the Aryans' way of life, their material culture, modes of subsistence, and environment, including flora and fauna, domestication of animals, and diet. The American philologist Edward Evans (1831–1917) ridiculed Pictet and his offspring, linguistic paleontology (1884: 616):

He soon lost control of his precocious charge, indulged its wildest whims, admitted its most extravagant claims, nursed its budding vanity, mistook forwardness and frowardness for marks of genius, never questioned its assertions, and resented the slightest reprimand or suggestion of chastisement as an insult, until his pampered and over-petted godchild became the tyrant of the philological household and *l'enfant terrible* of the scientific world.

Given that the Semitic spirit could not be erased from the Western tradition, it became an intellectual problem that needed to be addressed. One result was high-flown rhetoric about the Aryans' superior intellectual and moral qualities, their historical destiny towards world domination (Pictet 1859–1863, I: 1ff.; II: 535ff.). Pictet argued that even though Christianity had Semitic origins, it only became the universal religion of humanity once it was taken over by the Aryans (Pictet 1859–1863, I: 9). *Aryan* became a key category for race mystics and ideologues, who rejected the materialism of physical anthropology, as well as the perceived Semitic elements of Western civilization. The Islamic conquest of India could likewise be presented within these dichotomous terms, in that the Aryan invasion was followed by “the Semitic conquest by Islām” beginning about AD 700, which held India under “this alien despotic sway for more than seven hundred years” (MacDonell 1927: 3). However, “though unifying India politically,” Islamic rule “did not essentially modify its civilization, in spite of the fact that one-fifth of the entire population professes Islam at the present day” (1927: 3).

One fundamental set of problems with these binary, triadic, tetradic, or pentadic models concerned labelling and definition, and this became a favourite subject for scholarly dispute. Differences in terminology did not always reflect underlying scholarly disagreement, whereas use of the same term was no guarantee of alignment on the key issues. Terminological squabbles were the symptom of a deeper malaise, not just of the arrogance and overreach of scholars in relation to their own conceptual and methodological tools, but also—at best—their indifference to the potential impact of their stipulations on the public and political spheres, or—at worst—their use of philology as wish fulfilment and narcissistic fantasy land. In combination with this, the increasing amounts of information available to European scholars threatened to destabilize or overwhelm established taxonomies. This created pressure to develop an underlying model capable of maintaining a

comprehensible linear narrative, rather than the intellectual shambles that emerges in retrospect. As the century progressed, fractious scholarly infighting became entangled with contemporary political and ideological conflict. This funnelled confusion and disarray into public discourse and the popular imaginary and fed uncertainty and even paranoia about the fundamental categories of social and political life. Given its complex patterns of circulation between mainstream scholarship and the public sphere, it is important to keep in mind that *Aryan* is primarily a social object worthy of study as such: “linguistic theories and concepts, and the practices through which they were conceived, must be treated with the same analytical detail as any other sociolinguistic object” (Karlander and Salö 2023: 3).

CHAPTER 4

Philologies Collide

4.1 THE CREATION OF A SYNTHETIC CONCEPT

By mid-century a synthesis was emerging in the scholarly mainstream. This was a model in which the textual philology of India and ancient Persia was integrated into the comparative philology of the Indo-European or Aryan languages, within the framework of the increasingly politicized concept of *Volk*. This synthesis created the path by which Aryanism entered Indian society, as well as the beginnings of its impact on European culture and society. This integrated model would have greatly puzzled William Jones, for whom there was no particular connection between the affinities that existed between Sanscrit and other languages, and the Sanscrit term *ārya*. Reflecting this synthesis, the Indologist John Dowson (1820–1881) remarked that “[c]omparative philology and mythology go hand in hand,” meaning that “as the language of the Vedas has proved the great critical instrument in the construction of the science of philology, so the simple myths of the Vedic hymns furnish many clues for unravelling the science of mythology” (1879: ix). Ancient Hindu myths, found in “the Āryan hymns of the Veda,” reflected the ideas of the “Indian immigrants” as “inherited from their forefathers” (1879: ix): “They were originally the property of the united progenitors of the Aryan races, and the offshoots of this great human stock have spread their primitive ideas over a large portion of the earth.” Writing in the *Calcutta Review*, Bireswar Goswamy described how from “the very earliest times when our Aryan ancestors were settling in India from their common camping-ground in Central Asia, and were progressing step by step and conquering the dark-skinned aborigines,” their military science was improving constantly. Subsequently, after the “barbarous Non-Aryans” had been “reduced to bondage,” there were struggles among rival Aryan dynasties, as depicted in the Mahabharata (1901: 98–99).

4.2 WHOSE PHILOLOGY?

The fundamental question for textual philology was the status of traditional commentary and hermeneutics, in particular in relation to the Vedic texts. Western Indology operated on a continuum between philological and textual formalism at one end, which threatened to dissolve the text into a forest of variant readings and learned footnotes, and, on the other, what amounted to a re-presentation of the readings of the traditional commentators. In the background was the emergent narrative of Aryan origins, and the Aryan conquest of, or migration into, India, together with the rapidly expanding comparative linguistic and textual data within which the Sanskrit materials could be set. As [Dodson \(2007\)](#) notes, the Sanscritist Horace H. Wilson (1786–1860) generally favoured following the traditional commentaries in cases of doubt. In his translation of the *Rigveda*, he made use of the fourteenth-century *Sāyana* commentary, though he recognized that the author “expresses the received impressions of his own age” (1850: xliii). By contrast, “orientalists working within the philological tradition forged by Franz Bopp had little patience for accepting analyses of Sanskrit on the authority of the Indian sources” ([Dodson 2007](#): 48). Rudolf von Roth (1821–1895) argued that Indian commentators were excellent guides to theological treatises and ritual practice, but not in relation to the Vedic hymns, which were “products of the most ancient form of religious lyricism.” These texts came from a world not bound to artificial liturgical practices, nor to family or caste. They reflected a world of the gods (*Götterwelt*), a cultic or sacred order that was remote in time and in language from the age of the Brahmins (Böhtlink and Roth 1855, I: v). It was necessary to use the scholarly tools provided by the study of language (*Sprachwissenschaft*) (1855, I: v).

Between 1849 and 1856, Max Müller published a six-volume edition of the *Rig-veda-Sanhita*. In the preface to the third volume, he advocated a middle position with regard to interpretation. This involved the use of the traditional commentary, in particular those of *Sāyana*, as a first step and point of reference. He noted the approach in Adolphe Regnier’s *Étude sur l’idiome des Védas et les origines de la langue sanscrite* (1855) ([Müller 1849–1856](#), III: ix). There was no question of adopting the Indian interpretive tradition uncritically (1849–1856, III: viii): “As the authors of the *Brāhmanas* were blinded by theology, the authors of the still later *Niruktas* were deceived by etymological fictions, and both conspired to mislead by their authority later and more sensible commentators, such as *Sāyana*.” *Sāyana* was “the most modern,” and the majority of his “etymological absurdities” were due to the ancient grammarian and commentator, *Yaska*, the author of the *Nirukta*. Müller saw *Sāyana* as giving “the traditional, but not the original sense” (1849–1856, III: vii). H. H. Wilson’s translation offered a particular perspective drawn from the Indian

tradition, and Sāyaṇa in particular: “For the history of religion, which in India, as elsewhere, represents the gradual corruption of simple truth into hierarchical dogmatism and philosophical hallucination, his work will always remain the most trustworthy guide” (Müller 1849–1856, III: vii). But this interpretive tradition had blurred the sharp meanings of the ancient text (Müller 1849–1856, III: vii):

But no religion, no poetry, no law, no language, can resist the wear and tear of thirty centuries; and in the Veda, as in other works, handed down to us from a very remote antiquity, the sharp edges of primitive thought, the delicate features of a young language, the fresh hue of unconscious poetry, have been washed away by the successive waves of what we call *tradition*, whether we look upon it as a principle of growth or decay. To restore the primitive outlines of the Vaidik [Vedic] period of thought will be a work of great difficulty.

In the cases of textual obscurity, the issue was not just philological (1849–1856, III: viii): “We must be able to translate our feelings and ideas into their language at the same time that we translate their poems and prayers into our own. [. . .] When the scholar has done his work, the poet and philosopher must take it up and finish it.”

Commentating on this debate, the Indologist John Muir (1810–1882) reported Müller’s views as well as those of Theodor Goldstücker (1821–1872). For Goldstücker, the key was tradition, on which the “whole religious life of ancient India” was based (Goldstücker 1861: 242). The voice of the commentators “re-echo the voice of their ancestors, how the nation, from immemorial times, understood the sacred texts, what inferences they drew from them, what influence they allowed them to exercise on their religious, philosophical, ethical,—in a word, on their national, development.” This was “the real, the practical, and therefore the truly scientific interest they have for us; for all other interest is founded on theories devoid of substance and proof, is *imaginary* and *phantastical*.” Muir was, however, sceptical about the value of the traditional commentaries for the interpretation of the Veda and made the case that “all the other available resources of philology should be called to requisition” (1866: 304).

In their *Vedische Studien*, Richard Pischel and Karl Geldner (1889: v) reviewed the controversy over the Sāyaṇa commentary and took a mid-position. No serious scholar would accept the “grammatical and etymological devices” of Sāyaṇa; yet, the texts contained a treasure house of glosses, which in some cases offered superior insight to dictionaries such as those of Böhlingk and Roth (1855–1875) and Grassmann (1873). The British Sanscritist Arthur MacDonell (1917: xxx) argued that, in the study of the Vedas, the detailed philological method propounded by Roth, with its use of etymology,

the Avesta, and the findings of comparative philology, “undervalued the evidence of the native tradition.” However, “a reaction arose which, in emphasizing the purely Indian character of the Vedic hymns, connects the interpretation of them too closely with the literature of the post-Vedic period and the much more advanced civilization there described.” A synthesis of all the available methods was the best way forward (1917: xxx–xxxii):

It is important to note that the critical scholar has at his disposal not only all the material that was open to the traditional interpreters, and to which he is moreover able to apply the comparative and historical methods of research, but also possesses over and above many valuable aids that were unknown to the traditional school—the Avesta, Comparative Philology, Comparative Religion and Mythology, and Ethnology.

One reaction to this external scholarly framework has been to deny the accessibility of the Vedic texts. In his *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) observed, “It is an undoubted fact that some Vedic texts are yet unintelligible, and, therefore, untranslatable” (1903: 6). The Dutch Indologist Jan Gonda has argued that the Vedic texts were created at such a great remove from our present understandings that it is not possible to render them in a modern idiom (1975: 62):

The very plurality of meanings so frequently given in our dictionaries shows that a modern language cannot in many cases offer one single equivalent of an ancient Indian term—intelligibly enough, because the speakers of different languages, whilst organizing through their semantic systems the world of experience in which they live, traditionally define, analyse and categorize this experience differently.

Rajiv Malhotra (2011: 222) makes of this issue, not a contingency, but a fundamental principle:

In order to understand why Sanskrit is unique and non-translatable and why the civilizations rooted in it differ from others, we must look more deeply into the understanding of sound and language in the Vedas. Throughout the ages, Indian rishis and grammarians have believed that primordial vibrations comprise all reality, that vibrations are the heartbeat of the cosmos. The reverberations of the cosmos “pulsing,” as discovered, constitute the alphabets of Sanskrit, which does not associate meanings with sounds arbitrarily. Human language and the concepts and objects it represents are the tangible outer manifestations of these vibrations at varying levels of concreteness.

A related controversy broke out in the mid-nineteenth century concerning methodology and the *Zend Avesta*. The question was whether the *Avesta* should be interpreted primarily through the traditional commentaries, or in relation to the Vedic texts and comparative philology (Darmesteter 1880, I: xxvff.)

4.3 FROM ĀRYA TO ARYAN

The primary elements of the Aryan paradigm were in place by around 1840. The adoption of *ārya* as the name of an *ethnos* identifiable in ancient Sanscrit texts and its domestication into the European languages as *Aryan*, *Arier*, and so on, both in its narrow meaning as what is today termed *Indo-Aryan* (i.e., Sanscrit together with its derivatives plus the ancient Persian languages) and as a term for the language family as a whole, conjoined the textual philology of ancient India and Iran with the abstract comparison of language forms in comparative philology. By mid-century, the idea of an Aryan *ethnos* expressed by the Sanscrit term *ārya* is present in the work of H. H. Wilson. Wilson described the *ārya* as “foreign invaders of India,” in whose favour the god Indra “divided the fields among his *white-complexioned* friends, after destroying the indigenous barbarian races.” These races were referred to as *Dasyu* (1850: xliii), a term used “to signify one who not only does not perform religious rites, but attempts to disturb them, and harass their performers.” The latter were “the *Āryas*, the *Ārya*, or respectables, or Hindu, or *Arian* race.” Wilson offered in addition a social and ritual reading of these terms (1850–1888, I: xlii–xliii):

Dasyu, in later language, signifies a thief, a robber, and *Ārya*, a wealthy or respectable man; but the two terms are constantly used in the text of the Veda as contrasted with each other, and as expressions of religious and political antagonists, requiring, therefore, no violence of conjecture to identify the *Dasyus* with the indigenous tribes of India, refusing to adopt the ceremonial of the *Āryas*, a more civilized, but intrusive race, and availing themselves of every opportunity to assail them, to carry off their cattle, disturb their rites, and impede their progress; to little purpose, it should seem, as the *Āryas* commanded the aid of INDRA, before whose thunderbolts the numerous cities, or hamlets, of the *Dasyus* were swept away.

There is an echo here of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites, which involved a similar process of divinely sanctioned plunder and murder (see Joshua 2: 1–24, and further discussion in this book).

On Thursday, April 21, 1853, the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society held its monthly meeting. On the agenda was a lecture by Professor Niels L. Westergaard (1815–1878) of Copenhagen University, entitled “On the Origin and Elements of Early Aryan Mythology.” His talk was read for the audience by the Scottish missionary and Orientalist, the Reverend Dr. John Wilson (1804–1875). John Wilson’s own work, *India Three Thousand Years Ago*, was published in Bombay in 1858, with the sub-title *The Social State of the Āryas on the Bank of the Indus in the Times of the Vedas*. Wilson dated the Vedas “to a period stretching probably between the fifteenth and twelfth centuries before Christ,” a period at least “three thousand years ago” (1858: 16). He offered a corrective to Brahmin readings of ancient texts, stating that the status of *ārya* as an *ethnos* has been missed. The term had been misunderstood (1858: 17):

On opening the Vedas we find that the people of whom they treat, or rather whose religious services they embody, are called Āryá. This word, the Brahmanical commentators on the Vedas, and subsequent literary works, render by “respectable men.” The text of the Vedas proves, however, that it is not, as there principally employed, a simple qualifying denominative, but a patronymic name, simply indicative of an *Aryan people*.

The *ārya* were not native to India: “That the Āryás, in the time of the Vedas, were not in their primitive country is, I think, evident from several considerations” (1858: 18). For example, they counted the years in winters, “indicating a country in which the cold season was particularly marked,” shared a culture of horse sacrifice with the “northern tribes,” and had a relatively “white or fair complexion” (1858: 18–19).

These examples suggest that the term *Aryan* was first used in India in Western scholarly contexts, drawing on academic sources in Indology and comparative philology. Uptake of *Aryan* by Indian scholars followed. In 1868, Pandit Bhatta Yajnesvara published a Sanscrit work, *Aryavidyasudhaka* (“Moon of Aryan Learning”), for which an additional subtitle was provided in a *Times of India* review: *Being a Sketch of the Social, Political and Philosophical Literature of the Aryans of India*. Goldstücker (1869: 430) commented that Yajnesvara’s account of the “oldest history of the Āryas” was “doubtless the weakest part of his labour.” Archibald Gough (1845–1915), a professor in the Sanskrit College at Benares, reviewed the work in the periodical *The Pandit* (Gough 1869: 188). Gough noted that the work sought “to provide native students, whose time is much occupied in the study of modern science, with a short review of the revelation, tradition, and philosophy of their ancestors.” The first section “treats of the creation of the world, the origin of the Aryas and of the four castes, the antiquity of the arts of civil life and especially that

of writing.” The aim of the work was “to vindicate Hindu orthodoxy against modern objections.” Gough’s main complaint was that the author did not engage properly with Western scholarship: “his only failure is the attempt to disprove or to reconcile with religious dogmas, adverse facts relating to the early Aryans, which we owe to the free research of European scholars.” The *Laws of Manu* had one version of the origin of caste, namely, that “all other races of men” were “sprung from the four castes, whose original seat was Kuru-kshetra¹ and other parts of India,” and that “their languages resemble Sanskrit by retaining some of its words in a corrupt form” (Gough 1869: 188). However, from the point of view of philology, the situation looked different (1869: 188):

Of course it is well known that languages other than Sanskrit belonging to the Indo-European group exhibit occasionally grammatical forms more organic than those of Sanskrit, as, for instance, in the case of nouns of agency and relationship and of the substantive verb.

Further, the interpretation offered of the phrase पञ्च जना (*pancha-janah*) (variously glossed as “five tribes,” “five races,” “the five men,” “five classes of beings,” etc.) was “an inadequate reply to the mass of evidence respecting the origin of caste collected in Dr Muir’s Sanskrit texts.” In his *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Muir had given this overview of Hindu views on the origin of caste (Muir 1858: 42):

The sacred books of the Hindus contain no uniform and uncontroverted account of the origin of castes; but, on the contrary, present the greatest varieties of opinion on this subject. Explanations mystical, mythical, etymological, and critical, are all in turn attempted: and the freest scope is given by the writers to fanciful and arbitrary conjecture.

As Muir had remarked (1858: 175): “It appears to be the opinion of Manu [. . .] that there was no original race of men except the four castes of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras; and that all other nations are derived from these.” Gough added that linguistic evidence could cast light on the level of civilization of the ancient Indians, so “the earliest Aryans” would not have been “destitute of skill in science and art and merely brutish,” and it was clear from “the testimony of the various Aryan languages” that there was developed agriculture before the Vedic period (Gough 1869: 188). In this way, comparative philology was seen by Western scholars as able to act as an external point

1. Kurukshetra in the state of Haryana. In the Vedas the term refers to an area in Haryana and southern Punjab.

of reference and corrective, beyond the confines and hermeneutic methodologies of the traditional interpreters. However, Gough recognized that resistance to this philological knowledge arose “from strong religious feelings” and concluded that the book was potentially of great value for foreign learners of Sanscrit.

Muir was the author of a religious tract in Sanscrit, *Matapariksâ: A Sketch of the Argument for Christianity and against Hinduism*, written in the form of a dialogue. This was first published in 1839, with a revised edition appearing in 1840, and then a further rendering in 1852. Three Hindu scholars offered responses to this work (see [Young 1981](#)). The 1852 edition had an introduction in English, in the form of a dialogue between a pandit (Vedavidwan) and Satyarthi (“seeker of truth,” the mouthpiece of the author). One aspect of the dialogue was the juxtaposition of the findings of comparative philology with the authority of the Veda, to the detriment of the latter. The “eternity of the Veda” was refuted by the narrative offered “by learned men of the present day skilled in various languages” (1852: 8). Muir drew in particular on Lassen’s *Indische Alterthumskunde*. Comparative philology was here invoked in a process of desacralization, though here in the service of Christian doctrine, rather than a purely secular history (1852: 8):

The castes of Brahmans and others which now dwell in India sprung of old from a certain race (of men) called Àryyas. These people named Àryyas descended from the same as that from which the Persians and other races were descended. Their community of origin is understood from the study of history, and from the similarity of the languages of these several races.

There were similarities between Greek and Sanscrit, as well as other languages. The Aryans came from Persia, and the time of their arrival in India could not be determined, though it seemed “that a period of years somewhat short of five thousand has elapsed from that time to the present day.” The Aryans were not the earliest inhabitants of India; rather, the earliest inhabitants were known as Dasyus “and at that time war raged between them and the Àryyas” (1852: 9). Muir cited from H. H. Wilson’s translation of the Rigveda, where the Dasyus are presented as in need of compulsion to join religious rites, and as having their cities destroyed,² with remnants being found among the mountain tribes. Muir also referred to textual criticism “by discerning foreign scholars” on the early distribution of the Aryans, which showed that the early Aryans at the time of the Vedas “did not then dwell on the banks of the Ganges, but far to the west of it” ([Muir 1852](#): 10). There were originally no castes: “[t]hat there is naturally no difference of caste among mankind, is

2. Rigveda, 51 sukta, eighth verse and 103rd sukta, third verse (H. H. [Wilson 1850–1888](#), I: 137).

known by reason and other proofs” (1852: 10–11). Caste was a later accretion: “Thus it is inferred that the distinction of castes, though not at first existing among the Àryyas, grew up gradually by the efforts of the priests” (1852: 14). The Vedic hymns were “of human origin” (1852: 17). In passing down historical knowledge the narrative of ancient origins had become overlaid with error and falsehood: “The early history of the people of the Àryya race is not, O Pandit, narrated as it occurred in the *Puránas* and similar works” (1852: 26). Of the classical sources, Herodotus was reliable only as far as he narrated events of his own time; likewise, Plutarch’s history of ancient kings was “not considered trustworthy” (1852: 49). Philology here integrates the ancient Hindus into the wider history of humanity and into a relationship with other peoples, so that, according to Muir, “both the Sanskrit language and the Hindu people have an affinity with certain other races in the west.” This supported the conclusion that the ancient Hindus were not indigenous to India (Muir 1858: 3).

4.4 TRANSLATIONS OF ĀRYA

It is instructive to trace how Sanscrit *ārya* and related terms are rendered over time. Translations of *ārya* frequently involved variants and transmutations of the word itself. In terms of translation strategy, there is a continuum of glosses between generic terms relating to personal qualities, such as *noble* and *virtuous*, terms relating to doctrine (*twice-born*), the use of the Sanscrit term itself, usually capitalized (*Ārya*), and then *Aryan* itself, in some cases with a superscript, and therefore marked formally as a foreign term (*Āryan*, *Āryan*), or without superscript, suggesting definitive integration (*Aryan*, *arien*, *Arier*, etc.). There is also additional glossing using brackets or footnotes.

4.4.i The Laws of Manu

This process of integration can be followed in the translations of the Laws of Manu (*Manusmṛiti*), a text now generally dated to between the first and third centuries AD. In the first set of extracts that follow, the key term is *Āryāvarta*. In William Jones’s version, Chapter II: 22 reads as follows (1796: 20):

[A]s far as the eastern, and as far as the western oceans, between the two mountains just mentioned, lies the tract, which the wise have named *Ariāvarta*, or *inhabited by respectable men*.

Auguste Loiseleur-Deslongchamps (1774–1849) followed this reading, translating *Āryāvarta* as “seat of honourable men” (1833: 30):

Depuis la mer orientale jusqu’à la mer occidentale, l’espace compris entre ces deux montagnes est désigné par les sages sous le nom d’Āryāvarta (séjour des hommes honorables).

Lassen (1843–1852, I: 5) explained that *āryāvarta* (*Ārjavārta*) was the indigenous name for the region (*Bezirk*) of the *Ārja* “or the honourable men, the people from good lineage [*Geschlecht*].” This was the term for one who was observant of sacred and civil law, a conforming member of the polity, in contrast to the *Mlêk’ha* or barbarian, who despised the holy law. This was also a linguistic distinction, between the *Ārja* and *Mlêk’ha* languages. In this way the term became one that designated that part of the people who were committed to the laws of the Brahmins, and who were distinct in lineage (*Abstammung*) and language.

In the extracts translated in Monier-Williams’s *An Elementary Grammar of the Sanscrit Language*, there is no reference to *ārya* or variants thereof (1846: 39–48). By the time Franz Johaentgen (1834–1899) published his commentary on the *Manusmṛiti*, the term *ārya* was now equated with *Arier*, with *Āryāvarta* glossed as “abode of the Arya” (1863: 110):

Das Land von dem östlichen zu dem westlichen Meere, zwischen den beiden Gebirgen (Himālaya und Vidhya) nennen die Weisen (budha) āryāvarta, Wohnsitz der Ārya.

In a footnote to this, he added (1863: 110fn.): “This last designation could of course only be added once the Aryans [*Arier*] had taken possession of the entirety of Industan.”

The Orientalist and occultist Louis Jacolliot’s (1837–1890) rendering has “Āryāvarta—pays des hommes honorables” (1876: 41). In a later comment on this section Jacolliot explained that this was the “homeland of the Aryans, i.e. of Hindous of noble race” (“pays des Aryas, c’est-à-dire des Indous de race noble”; 1881: 50). Jacolliot’s version was greeted warmly by Friedrich Nietzsche (Etter 1984). In a letter dated May 31, 1888, to Peter Gast (Johann Heinrich Köselitz, 1854–1918), he wrote (Gast 1908: 381, as translated Middleton 1969: 296–297):

I owe to these last weeks a very important lesson: I found *Manu*’s book of laws in a French translation done in India under strict supervision from the most eminent priests and scholars there. This absolutely Aryan work, a priestly codex of

morality based on the Vedas, on the idea of caste, and very ancient tradition—not pessimistic, albeit it very sacerdotal—supplements my views on religion in the most remarkable way.³

The 1884 translation prepared by Arthur Burnell (1840–1882), and completed by Edward Hopkins (1857–1885), did not gloss *Āryāvarta*, just referring to the land “the wise call *Āryāvarta*” (Burnell and Hopkins 1884: 18). This is also true of Georges Strehly’s (1851–1906) version (1893: 24):

De la mer Orientale à la mer Occidentale, entre ces deux montagnes (s’étend la region que) les Sages appellant *Āryāvarta*.

Georg Bühler’s (1837–1898) translation used the term *Aryan* as a gloss (1886: 34):

But (the tract) between those two mountains (just mentioned), which (extends) as far as the eastern and the western oceans, the wise call *Āryāvarta* (the country of the Aryans).

Manmatha Nath Dutt (1855–1912) rendered this as: “The tract of land [. . .] is called *Āryavarta* (the country of the *Āryans*) by the wise” (1909: 38). Ganganath Jha did not directly translate *Āryāvarta* (1920–1939, I: 235–236): “The country extending as far as the Eastern Ocean and as far as the Western Ocean, and lying between the same two mountains,—the learned know as ‘*Āryāvarta*.’” The Medhatithi commentary added (as translated there): “It is called ‘*Āryāvarta*’ in the sense that the *Āryas* live there (‘*Āryh vartantē tutra*’); *i.e.*, it is they that are born there again and again, and the Barbarians, even though attacking it repeatedly, do not remain there” (1920–1939, I: 236). In Doniger (1991: 18–19), this region is given as “what wise men call the Land of the Aryans,” and Olivelle (2005: 95) translates this as “what the wise called ‘*Āryāvarta*’—the region of the *Āryas*.” This toponym is mapped by Olivelle onto a broader insider/outsider distinction (2015: 40):

Alongside Śūdras, we have the Mlecchas. Manu is cognizant of the regions occupied by the foreign barbarians, for at 2.23 he defines the areas outside the central *Āryāvarta* as the region of Mlecchas. Manu, however, does not have much to say about the Mlecchas in the rest of the book; his focus is on the

3. In the letter Nietzsche portrays the Vedas as the fundamental code on which the ancient Indian-Aryan society (“*indische-arische Gesellschaft*”) was based. Other moral orders were derivative and inferior. The Jews for example were mere intermediaries and not originators. On Nietzsche, Hinduism, and Jacolliot’s texts, see also Figueira (2002: 52–54) and Smith (2004).

Śūdras. Or, is the code “Śūdra” meant also to encompass these other outsiders as well?

The translations that appeared in the first decades of the nineteenth century included the word *Shudra* (in various spellings), untranslated, for the fourth caste or *varna*, and used a variety of terms such as “the first three classes” (Jones 1796: 20) and “twice-born,” for the other superior castes. So Jones translates Chapter II: 103 as (1796: 30): “But he who stands not repeating it in the morning, and sits not repeating it in the evening, must be precluded, like a Śūdra, from every sacred observance of the twice born classes.” Bühler by contrast reads the other three *varnas* as equivalent to *Aryan* (1886: 49): “But he who does not (worship) standing in the morning, nor sitting, in the evening, shall be excluded, just like a Sudra, from all the duties and rights of an Āryan.”

Chapter VII: 211 includes the term *āryatā*, which means “honorable conduct.” This verse was translated by Jones as (1796: 186): “Goodnature, knowledge of mankind, valour, benignity of heart, and incessant liberality, are the assemblages of virtues, which adorn a neutral prince, *whose amity must be courted*.” Bühler has (1886: 250): “Behaviour worthy of an Āryan, knowledge of men, bravery, a compassionate disposition, and great liberality are the virtues of a neutral (who may be courted).” By contrast, Dutt translates *āryatā* as “urbanity” (1909: 251). Ganganath Jha has “gentlemanliness” (1920–1939, V: 213). Doniger has “Aryan nature” (1991: 150). Olivelle renders *āryatā* as: “Conduct worthy of an Ārya” (2005: 165).

One further set of interesting renderings are those of Chapter IX, Verses 253 and 260. Jones has (1796: 278):

253. By protecting such as live virtuously, and by rooting up such as live wickedly, those kings, whose hearts are intent on the security of their people, shall rise to heaven. [. . .] 260. These and the like thorny weeds, ever-spreading the world, let the king discover with a quick sight, and others who act ill in secret; worthless men, yet bearing the outward signs of the worthy.

Other versions likewise make no reference to *ārya* or *Aryan* in translating these verses (Loiseleur-Deslongchamps 1833, Strehly 1893: 293–294, Ganganatha Jha 1920–1939). However, Burnell and Hopkins equivocate (1884: 290–291):

253. By protecting those who follow the good customs of noble men (Ārya), and by clearing out thorns (from his kingdom), kings (who are thus) wholly devoted to the protection of their people attain the threefold sky. [. . .] 260. Those and other undisguised thorns among men the king should learn to know, and (also all)

others who act in secret, bearing the marks of noble men (Ārya) (while in reality they are) ignoble.

In a footnote to the first use of “noble men” (1884: 291fn.), this is glossed as: “Priests, or ‘those who have an honourable means of support’ (Medh.);⁴ or simply the twice born.” Bühler gives this rendering (1886: 386–387):

253: By protecting those who live as (become) Āryans and by removing the thorns, kings, solely intent on guarding their subjects, reach heaven. [. . .] 260: These and the like who show themselves openly, as well as others who walk in disguise (such as) non-Āryans who wear the marks of Āryans, he should know to be thorns (in the side of his people).

Dutt uses “virtuous” in 253 (1907: 353) and in 260, “non-Āryans” and “Āryans” (1907: 354). Doniger (1991: 225) likewise has “non-Aryans” and “Aryans,” while Olivelle (2005: 203) translates these as “those who follow the Ārya way of life” and “the non-Āryas wearing Ārya masks.” In a footnote, this is explained as a reference to “low-caste or tribal people attempting to pass off as Āryas by assuming clothing or other marks normally associated with Āryas, e.g. the sacrificial cord” (2015: 333).

In 10: 43–44 there is a list of twelve Kshatriya tribes (“Paund’racas, Odras, and Draviras; Cāmbójas, Yavanas, and Sacas; Páradas, Pahlavas, Chinas, Círátas, Deradas, and Chasas”) who have “sunk among men to the lowest classes.” Jones renders 10: 45 as follows (1796: 225):

All the tribes of men, who sprang from the mouth, the arm, the thigh, and the foot of BRAHMĀ, *but* who became outcasts *by having neglected their duties*, are called *Dasyus*, or *plunderers*, whether they speak the language of the *Mléchech’as*, or that of *Āryas*.

This passage suggests that the *Aryas* have a specific language, but that it is not correlated with the insider/outside dichotomy that is based on conduct. Loiseleur-Deslongchamps (1833: 379–380) has “honorable men (Āryas)”:

Tous les hommes issus des races qui tirent leur origine de la bouche, du bras, de la cuisse et du pied de Brahmâ, mais qui ont été exclus de leurs classes pour avoir négligé leurs devoirs, sont appelés Dasyous (voleurs), soit qu’ils parlent le langage des Barbares (Mlétchhas), ou celui des hommes honorables (Āryas).

4. The Medhātithi commentary.

Strehly's version just uses the term *Âryas* (1893: 24):

Toutes les races en ce monde qui sont en dehors de celle qui naquirent de la bouche, des bras, des cuisses, des pieds (de Brahmâ), qu'elles parlent la langue des Barbares ou celles des *Âryas*, sont appelées Dasyous.

Bühler's renders this as (1886: 413):

All those tribes in this world, which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet (of Brahman), are called Dasyus, whether they speak the language of the *Mlekkhas* (barbarians) or that of the *Âryans*.

4.4.ii Bhagavat-Gita

A second case study is the translations of the *Bhagavat-Gita*. The first version in a European language was published by Charles Wilkins in 1785. In Chapter II: 2–3, in a famous scene in which Krishna berates Arjuna for weakness, the term *anârya* or the compound *anârya-jushṭam* is translated as “contrary to duty” (Wilkins 1785: 34). A footnote explains this further, as “contrary to the duty of a soldier” (1785: 140). Wilkins's translation was the basis of the 1846 missionary edition (Garrett 1846). Friedrich Schlegel (1808: 290) has “nicht rühmlich” (“not honourable”). The clergyman Carl Peiper's (1790–1879) 1835 translation gives “bears no glory” (“keinen Ruhm gebiert”). Peiper's foreword makes reference to the notion that ancient Indian philosophy was the source on which “the Chinese, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and, in early and later times, directly or indirectly, the Germans drew.” This language came from the same stock as the languages of “our oldest religious documents” (1835: iv). August Schlegel's Latin translation renders this phrase “unworthy of the honourable” (“indigna honestis”) (1823: 133), and this is preserved in Lassen's revised edition published in 1846.

Integration into the Aryan paradigm can be observed in the case of the translation by the British Indologist Cockburn Thomson (1834–1860). Discussing the conflict between the Kurus and the Pandavas, which is at the centre of the text, Thomson integrated it into the framework of comparative philology (1855: cxxxvi):

Viewing these facts together, we should be inclined to draw the conclusion that the name [Kuru] was originally that of a race inhabiting Central Asia, beyond the Himalaya, who emigrated with other races into the north-west of the Peninsula,

and with them formed the great people who styled themselves unitedly Ārya or the Noble, to distinguish them from the aborigines whom they subdued, and on whose territories they eventually settled. These Aryans are the people who brought Brahmanism and the Sanskrit tongue into India, and whom etymologists and antiquaries know to be of the same blood and origin as the races which people the whole of Persia, and almost all the continent of Europe, in short, the Indo-Germanic or Indo-Scythic class.

Anārya is rendered as “unworthy of the honourable” (1855: 9). Subsequent translations are inconsistent on this point. Burnouf (1861: 19) renders this as “confusion unworthy of the Aryas” (“ce trouble indigne des Aryas”), whereas Franz Lorinser (1821–1893) just has “unworthy” (1869: 11): “So unwürd’ger, unhimmlischer, ruhmraubender, o Ardschuna?” Davies (1882: 32) combines the notion of nobility with *Aryan* as a racial designation: “unmeet for one of noble race.” Further versions without direct reference to *Aryan* include that of Kāshināth Trimbak Telang (1850–1893) (1882: 42): “How (comes it that) this delusion, O Arguna! which is discarded by the good, which excludes from heaven, and occasions infamy, has overtaken you in this (place of) peril.” Richard Karl von Garbe (1857–1927) (1905: 72) invokes the concept of nobility: “Woher ist dieser Kleinmut in der Gefahr über dich gekommen, der Edlen missfällt, den Weg zum Himmel verschliesst und Schande bringt, o Arjuna?” (“Where does this faintheartedness in peril come from, which is ill-suited to the noble, seals the way to heaven, and brings shame, O Arjuna?”). Swami Swarupananda (1871–1906) (1909: 25): “The Blessed Lord said: In such a strait, whence comes upon thee, O Arujuna, this dejection, un-Arya-like, disgraceful and contrary to the attainment of heaven?” In the textual apparatus, *anārya* is glossed as “un-Arya-like” (“unworthy of a religious man”).⁵

The theosophists Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Bhagavan Das (1869–1958) produced a bilingual edition with notes and commentary. The founder of theosophy, Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), had developed an evolutionary model of “root races,” within which the fifth root race, modern humans, was divided into seven sub-races, with Aryans in superior position (Prophet 2018). In the introduction, Besant and Das made reference to the notion of an Aryan language family, while giving it a theosophical twist (1905: xii):

5. For subsequent readings of this text, see Adluri and Bagchee (2014: 27), who analyze: “the ‘pan-theistic Gītā’ of Adolf Holtzmann Jr., the ‘theistic Gītā’ of Richard Garbe, the ‘epic Gītā’ of Hermann Jacobi, the ‘Kṛsna Gītā’ of Hermann Oldenberg, the ‘trinitarian Gītā’ of Rudolf Otto, and the ‘Āryan Gītā’ of J. W. Hauer. To these six ‘Indological Gītās,’ we also add a final one: the ‘Brahmanic Gītā’ of Georg von Simson.”

If the whole list of the 2343 roots were carefully examined, very many more roots would be found to be common between the several Âryan languages than are now noted. But, as said before in connection with the alphabet, the genius of each later language has selected out of the roots what were most suited to it, and the older race, the root-race, has correspondingly dropped them in its later career. It is as if there had been a partition of patrimony between heirs so that what one took the others could not retain.

In their version Chapter II: 2–3 reads as follows (1905: 23–24):

The Blessed Lord said: Whence hath this dejection befallen thee in this perilous strait, ignoble, heaven-closing, infamous, O Arjuna? Yield not to impotence, O Pârtha! it doth not befit thee. Shake off this paltry faint-heartedness! Stand up, Parantapa!

However, in the apparatus, they gloss *anâryajuṣṭam* as “by non-Âryans, rejoiced in (practiced)” (1905: 24). W. Douglas Hill (1884–1962) (1928: 111) renders this as “unmeet for nobles.” In Winthrop Sargeant’s translation, the narrative is placed into the context of Indo-European philology ([1979] 2009: 27):

The India portrayed in the Mahabharata still retained some of the warlike traditions of the Aryans who had invaded the subcontinent less than a thousand years previously. It was also a country comprising a wide variety of races: Dravidians (the inhabitants at the time of the Aryan invasion), Persians, Scyths, Mongols, Greeks and many primitive tribes that may have originated in the pre-Dravidian races—the Australoids and paleolithic Negritos.

In the interlineal translation, *anârya* is glossed as “not honorable, unaryan,” and *anâryajuṣṭam* as “not suitable to an Aryan, not acceptable in an Aryan” ([1979] 2009: 87). A biography of Swami Vivekananda (to be discussed further) translated these lines as (Nikhilananda 1953: np):

In this crisis, O Arjuna, whence comes such lowness of spirit, unbecoming to an Aryan, dishonourable, and an obstacle to the attaining of heaven? Do not yield to unmanliness, O Arjuna. It does not become you. Shake off this base faintheartedness and arise, O scorcher of enemies!

In a contemporary version prepared by Swami Mukundananda,⁶ this section reads as follows:

6. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/2>.

BG 2.2: The Supreme Lord said: My dear Arjun, how has this delusion overcome you in this hour of peril? It is not befitting an honorable person. It leads not to the higher abodes, but to disgrace.

The editor comments:⁷

The word *Ārya* in our sacred books does not refer to any race or ethnic group. The Manu Smṛiti defines an Aryan as a highly evolved and cultured person. “Aryan” connotes goodness, like the term “perfect gentleman.” The aim of the Vedic scriptures is to induce humans to become Aryans in all respects. Shree Krishna finds Arjun’s present condition in conflict with that ideal, and so reprimands him by calling attention to his confusion in how to live up to this ideal state of being under the current circumstances.

This reflects the neo-traditionalist project of Sri Aurobindo (to be discussed further), where the concept of *Aryan* was to be reclaimed from its perceived distortion in European racial ideology.

4.4.iii The Upanishads

In Max Müller’s translation of the set of texts, *Aitareya Aranyaka* (The Upanishads), we read (Chapter III, 2 *khandā*, Verse 6) (1879: 264):

6. He who knows this lute made by the Devas (and meditates on it), is willingly listened to, his glory fills the earth, and wherever they speak Aryan languages, there they know him.

Arthur Keith’s (1879–1944) translation has: “wherever they speak Aryan tongues, there he is known” (1909: 255). In a footnote (1909: 255fn.), Keith cited a variant reading as “an early piece of evidence for the existence of several dialects of the early Indian language, which we know must have existed.” Keith also referenced discussions of the term *ārya* and its relation to *Aryan*, including Heinrich Zimmer’s (1851–1910) *Altindisches Leben* (1879).

4.4.iv Rigveda

The *Rigveda* was in part translated by Friedrich Rosen (1805–1837), with the title *Rigvedae specimen* (Rosen 1830). Alexandre Langlois (1788–1854), in the

7. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/2>.

preface to his translation, linked the originators of the Vedic hymns to “that great branch of the human race known under the name of *Arya*.” Their language was “the unknown and revered trunk of the Indo-Germanic tongues” (1848–1850, I: ix). These *Aryas* had driven the indigenous population before them, into the forests and the mountains, and “at the head of the first colony would have been a prince of the nation of *Aryas*, called *Manu*, whom tradition represents as the father of humanity” (Langlois 1848–1850, I: ix). In his introduction to the *Rigveda*, H. H. Wilson described the entry of the *Aryans* into India (1850–1888, I: xliii):

That they had extended themselves from a more northern site, or that they were a northern race, is rendered probable from the peculiar expression used, on more than one occasion, in soliciting long life,—when the worshipper asks for a hundred *winters* (*himas*); a boon not likely to have been desired by the natives of a warm climate [. . .]. They appear, also, to have been a fair-complexioned people, at least, comparatively, and foreign invaders of India; as it is said [. . .] that Indra divided the fields among his *white*-complexioned friends, after destroying the indigenous barbarian races: for such, there can be little doubt, we are to understand by the expression *Dasyu* which so often recurs, and which is often defined to signify one who not only does not perform religious rites, but attempts to disturb them, and harass their performers: the latter are the *Àryas*, the *Àrya*, or respectable, or Hindu, or *Arian* race.

In the translation itself, Wilson then read into the text references to these terms as group identifiers, as in this comment (1850–1888, I: 90): “*Vritra*, the *Dasyu*, literally a robber, but apparently used in contrast to *Àrya*, as if intending the uncivilized tribes of India.”⁸ (1850–1888, I: 266):

Armed with the thunderbolt, and confident in his strength, [Indra] has gone on destroying the cities of the *DASYUS*. Thunderer, acknowledging (the praises of thy worshipper), cast, for his sake, thy shaft against the *Dasyu*, and augment the strength and glory of the *Àrya*.⁹

This passage is explained as follows (1850–1888, I: 266fn.):

We have here the *Dasyu* and *Àrya* placed in opposition; the one as the worshipper, the other, as the enemy of the worshipper. *Dás'ih*, as the adjective to *Purah*, cities, is explained “of, or belonging to, the *Dasyus*.” The mention of cities indicates a people not wholly barbarous, although the term may designate villages or hamlets.

8. First Ashtaka, Third Adhyaya, Anuvaka VII, Sukta III, Varga I, para 4.

9. In the First Ashtaka, seventh Adhyaya, Anuvaka XV, Varga XVI, para 3.

This duality runs through the text (1850–1888, I: 318):

21. AŚWINS, causing the barley to be sown (in the fields that had been prepared) by the plough, milking (the clouds) for the sake of MANU, destroying the *Dasyu* with the thunderbolt; you have bestowed brilliant light upon the *Ārya*.¹⁰

In a footnote this is glossed as follows (1850–1888, I: 318fn.):

Āryāya. The Scholiast [commentator] explains this, *vidushe*, “to the sage,” that is, to, or upon, *Manu*; but the previous occurrence of *Dasyu* appears to warrant the understanding of *Ārya* as its contrast, and to treat it as a national appellative. It may also be observed, that the text has *Manusha*, which, the Scholiast says, is, here, a synonym of *Manu*, but which, more usually, designates *man*.

We can see here a process of *reading down*, whereby mythological beings are read as human types, *reading up*, whereby terms such as *robber* are likewise understood as standing for group identities or “national appellatives,” and *levelling out*, which is the effect achieved by translating *ārya* as *Ārya*, with result that the term acquires a seemingly stable meaning across the different contexts in which it is used. This levelling effect can be seen in the following (1850–1888, II: 99):

The divine VISHNU, the best of the doers of good deeds, who came to the pious institutor of the rite, to assist (at its celebration), knowing (the desires of the worshipper), and present at the three connected periods (of worship), shows favour to the *Ārya*, and admits the author of the ceremony to a share of the sacrifice.¹¹

Further examples of the duality are as follows (1850–1888, II: 234): “19. Let us honour those men, who, through thy protection, surpass all their rivals, as the *Dasyus* (are surpassed) by the *Ārya* [. . .]”; (1850–1888, III: 56: 9):¹² “He gave horses, he gave also the sun, and INDRA gave also the many-nourishing cow: he gave golden treasure, and having destroyed the *Dasyus*, he protected the *Ārya* tribe.”¹³ In a footnote, Wilson gives this explanation (1850–1888, III: 56fn.): “*Āryam varṇam*: *Śayaṇa* considers this as implying only the best tribe, or order, *uttamam varṇam*, or the first three castes collectively.”

10. First Ashtaka, eighth Adhyaya, Anuvaka XVII, Varga XVII, para 21.

11. Second Ashtaka, second Adhyaya, Anuvaka XXI, Varga XXVI, para 5.

12. Second Ashtaka, fifth Adhyaya, Anuvaka I, Surta XI, Varga VI, para 19.

13. Third Ashtaka, first Adhyaya, Anuvaka III, Surta V, Varga XVI, para 9.

Adopting the Aryan invasion framework, Zimmer (1879) scrutinized early Sanskrit texts for the usage of *ārya*, its relationship to the caste system, to virtues of loyalty, honour, devotion, and the emergence of a united *ethnos* or *arisches Volk*. In the *Rigveda*, Zimmer sees the *Dasyu* and the *Aryans* (*Arier*) as “two peoples who are in every respect hostile to one another” (1879: 100). *Ārya*, started out as meaning “one of our own kind” (“Mann des eigenen Stammes”), as a collective term (*Gesamtname*) for tribes or groups who worship the same Gods, just like the term *deutsch* originally meant “belonging to the people” (“zum Volke gehörig”). The Sanskrit terminology is in this way refracted through the *Volk-Stamm* (“people-tribe”) distinction in German, terminology so culturally specific that it cannot even be translated adequately into English.

The formulation “one of our own kind” was drawn from the definition of *ārya* in by Böhlingk and von Roth’s Sanskrit dictionary (1855–1875, I: 696):

[T]he one who counts among the faithful, the devoted, i.e. one of our own kind: sometimes also understood as being loyal to the gods of the tribe: N., which the Indian as well as the Iranian branches called themselves: Aryans [. . .]. Later [. . .] Aryan becomes—the member of the ruling stock in India, the man belonging to the three upper castes.

If we look at the definition for *dāsa* in the dictionary, it has a demonic meaning, as well as characterizing “barbarian” (*barbarisch*) (1855, I: 606):

However, as with *दार्श* *dasa*, it should be noted this is not necessarily to be seen as a relationship between peoples, rather seeing it as a contrast between the pious Aryans and the demonic ones, under which designation the enemies of the Aryans were also included, would suffice.

The entire hermeneutic enterprise took on an almost perfect circularity, as the comparative philological account was read into the ancient Sanskrit texts, and the texts were adduced as evidence in fleshing out the philological narrative. This can be illustrated by this quotation from the British Sanscritist Arthur MacDonell, where he uses the term *historical data*, with *varna* translated as “colour” (1917: xxvii):

The *historical data* of the hymns show that the Indo-Aryans were still engaged in war with the aborigines, many victories over these foes being mentioned. That they were still moving forward as conquerors is indicated by references to rivers as obstacles to advance. Though divided into many tribes, they were conscious of religious and racial unity, contrasting the aborigines with themselves by calling them

non-sacrificers and unbelievers, as well as “black-skins” and the “Dāsa colour” as opposed to the “Āryan colour.”

Here we can see echoes of the fall of Jericho once again ([MacDonell 1917](#): 44):

As the destroyer of demons in combat, Indra is constantly invoked by warriors. As the great god of battle he is more frequently called upon than any other deity to help the Aryans in their conflicts with earthly enemies. He protects the Aryan colour and subjects the black skin. He dispersed 50,000 of the black race. He subjected the Dasyus to the Aryan, and gave land to the Aryan.

Western Indology ended up inserting the meaning of *Aryan* as *ethnos* into Sanskrit scholarship. August Schlegel put this succinctly: “ĀRYA, *honestus*, is the proper name of the Hindus, an honorific title that they gave themselves as opposed to the *Mlécchas*, that is to say, the barbarians,” and this was the same distinction that the Greeks made, that is, between Hellenes and barbarians (A. W. [Schlegel 1834](#): 410). [Müller \(1851](#): 315) gave this overview of the meanings of *ārya*:

“*Arian*” is derived from *ārya*, which, as it seems, is the oldest name by which the nations speaking these languages used to call themselves. Traces of this name are found scattered in the most distant quarters of the world, and it is but lately that it has been recognised and adopted for scientific purposes. In the later Sanskrit literature, *ārya* means “of a good family,” “venerable,” “a master”; but it is no longer used as a national name, except as applied to the holy land of the Brahmins, which is still called *Ārya-āvarta*, the abode of the Āryas. In the Veda, however, Ārya occurs very frequently, as a name of honour, reserved to the higher classes, in opposition to the Dasyus, their enemies.

Similarly, Émile-Louis Burnouf’s Sanskrit-French dictionary defined *ārya* as a noble, conquering race, the ethnonym of the white invaders in the time of the Veda (1866: 49): “Vd. noble, de race noble. Surnom d’Agni, d’Indra, etc. Np. des populations blanches qui envahissaient l’Inde au temps du Vêda.” In Dowson’s reference work, *Ārya* and *Āryan* share an entry (1879: 24):

“Loyal, faithful.” The name of the immigrant race from which all that is Hindu originated. The name by which the people of the *Rig-veda* “called men of their own stock and religion, in contradistinction to the Dasyus (or Dasas), a term by which we either understand hostile demons or the rude aboriginal tribes” of India, who were An-āryas.

Monier-Williams's Sanscrit dictionary has a long entry on *ārya* that begins (1872: 129):

A loyal or faithful man, a man of one's own race; one who is faithful to the deities of his country; N., of the Hindū and Iranian people (opposed to *an-ārya*, *dasyu*, *dāsa*); in later times N. of the first three castes (opposed to *śūdra*); a man highly esteemed, a respectable, honourable man; a master, an owner; a friend; a Vaiśya [member of the merchant caste]; Buddha; (with Buddhists) a man who has thought on the four chief principles of Buddhism and lives according to them [. . .], Āryan, favourable to the Āryan people, behaving like an Āryan, worthy of one; honourable, respectable, novel; of good family; excellent; wise; suitable [. . .].

The fusion of these originally separate frames had dramatic consequences for the understanding of the ancient Indian past. The prime mover of this process was Max Müller, who claimed that *ārya* was the self-designation of the ancient people postulated by comparative philology. In translating *ārya* as “Aryan,” Indologists in effect shoehorned the idea of an ancient people with its origins in Central Asia into the narrative of the Vedic texts, and postulated a parting of the ways between the ancestors of the Europeans on the one hand, who headed west, and the first Persians and Hindus on the other, who travelled east (Kaegi 1886: 11):

To comparative philology we owe the indisputable proof of the fact that the ancestors of Indians and Iranians and Greeks, of Slavs and Lithuanians and Germans, of Italians and Celts, in far distant ages spoke one language, and as a single people held dwelling-places in common, wherever that home may have been situated; and further, that for a considerable period after their separation from their brothers living further to the west, the Indians and Iranians lived together, and distinguished themselves from other tribes by the common name of Aryan.

4.5 THE “PERSIAN LINE”

The fundamental source for ancient Persia is the *Avesta* (*Zend-Avesta*), a set of sacred texts that record the words of Zarathustra or Zoroaster, whose dates and history have been a perennial source of controversy (Marchand 2016). In its current form, it was compiled between the third and seventh century AD. It consists of liturgical texts or *Gāthās* (part of the *Yasna*), and the *Visp-rat*, a further liturgical text. The *Vendidad* (*Vidēvdāt*) is primarily a legal text, though it also contains mythical elements. The twenty-one *Yashts* are mythical hymns. The *Gāthās* have been dated to around 1000 BC. The so-called

Khordeh Avesta or Small Avesta consists of short prayers. In Fargard I, the *Vendidad* speaks of a location *airyanəm vaējō* and an all-creating deity, Ahura Madza (*Ahurō Mazdā*), lord of the sky, also known as Ormusd (Ormuzd), and referred to as the Good Spirit. Key figures include: Jamshid, a legendary king empowered by Ahura Madza, and Ahriman, the lord of darkness. The pioneering European scholar in the study of Zoroastrianism was Thomas Hyde (1636–1703). Hyde argued that Zoroastrianism was in essence monotheistic, and that Zoroaster was in receipt of divine revelation (Hyde 1700). Hyde’s work was one of the sources co-opted by Voltaire in his polemics against Judeo-Christian religious belief (Méricam-Bourdet 2021). The first rendering of the *Avesta* into a European language was by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1771). *Iran* is nowadays often glossed as “Land of the Aryans.” It is assumed that speakers of an ancient Iranian or Persian language invaded or migrated into this region “at the end of the second and especially of the first millennium B.C.,” displacing a previous civilization (Herrenschmidt 1996: 70): “Linguistically, politically, and culturally, the Iranians in the strict sense—whom one ought to call Aryans—overlaid the ancient Elamite civilization.” In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the tendency was to read toponyms and ethnonyms into, and through, the Aryan paradigm (see Figure 4.1 for an overview).

By the 1840s, the explicit link between the Sanscrit *ārya* and the Persian ethnonyms and toponyms was mainstream scholarly knowledge. H. H. Wilson, commenting on the Persian toponyms, declared (1841: 122), “It cannot now be reasonably doubted that Aria and Ariana, and a variety of ancient denominatives, of which Aria is a component element, are, as pointed out by M. [Eugène] Burnouf, connected with the Hindu term Arya, ‘excellent, honourable.’” There was a geographical and historical reality behind these and related terms (1841: 122):

Now, whatever doubts may be suggested by much that is given in the religious text-books of the Parsees of India as Zend, it is highly probable that their ancestors carried with them the genuine names of places, persons, and things; and that all such terms, still preserved in their extant sacred writings, are genuine relics of ancient nomenclature. We may therefore admit that Airya, or Airyana, are old Persian words, and the names of that region to which the Hindus extended the designation of Arya, which the coins of the Sassanian princes denominate Iran, and which the Greeks of Alexander’s time understood by Ariana.

Lassen (1843–1852, I: 5) distinguished *Ārja* from *Arja*, with the first having a narrower meaning in referring to the two superior castes, and the second referring to the third caste. His discussion drew on the tangled account offered by Eugène Burnouf of the common origin and subsequent divergence in meaning



Figure 4.1: Achaemenid Empire c. 500 bc (CC BY 4.0, Wikipedia)

of these terms between ancient Persian and Sanscrit (1833–1852, I: 460fn.). But in any case the fourth caste would never be called either of these terms. They also had the meaning of “lord,” “master” (*Herr*), or “owner.” The historical importance of this term was that it was also found in a similar meaning in old Persian (Lassen 1843–1852, I: 6). *Airja* was the name for the inhabitants of the ancient Iranian lands and meant “honourable” as well as referring to the Zend people (*Zendvolk*). This was also documented in Herodotus, who recorded that Ἄριοι (*Arioi*) was the original name of the Medes (7: 62), and the Persians called themselves Ἀρταῖοι (*Artaios, Artaei*) (7: 61)—which had a common root with *Ârja*. The ancient Persians seemed not to have called themselves *Ârja*, though it had the meanings of “noble” or “honourable.” Lassen also listed a number of related toponyms: *Airanem Vaëg’o* (*airyanəm vaējō*), the sacred land of the Avesta, which had been later located erroneously to the west in Medea. This form with a different meaning emerged in the time of Alexander as *Ariana*, for a large territory centred in Eastern Iran. This reflected the inhabitants’ notion that this was an honourable designation (1843–1852, I: 7). It was important to be clear about the distinction between *airja* and *anairja*, between *Arianer* and *Nicht-Arianer*, between peoples such as the Persians, the Medeans, and other tribes (*Stämme*), who were of Iranian stock and language on the one hand, and other nations or peoples (for example, under the Sasanian Empire); otherwise Persians might end up being designated as *Nicht-Arier* (1843–1852, I: 9). These terms were only used by the eastern branch of the Indogermanic family, with the exception of one Germanic people, as described by Tacitus, namely, the *Harii* or *Arii* (*Tac Germ* 43) (1843–1852, I: 9fn.). In the second edition, this reference to “ein deutsches Volk *Arii*” was integrated into the main text (1867, I: 11).

The primary classical authority for ancient Persia is Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BC). Central to discussions of Herodotus are the Medes (or Medeans), a people who inhabited an area southwest of the Caspian Sea around the eleventh century BC. Following the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the Medes expanded their territory between the seventh and fifth centuries, before succumbing to Cyrus the Great (Cyrus II).¹⁴ Their language is referred to as Median or Medean. However, it is not directly attested, and its characteristics have been primarily inferred through loan words. The Medes were assumed to be descendants of the son of Japhet, Madai, and therefore, members of the “Japhetic branch.” Their language was “Indo-Germanic” (Löwenstern 1849: 491). The term *Medo-Persians* was also used (Laurie 1894: 130).

14. Cyrus II of Persia (c. 600–530 BC), Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Empire, the First Persian Empire, which conquered the Median Empire; Achaemenid Empire: 550 BC–330 BC; Darius I (the Great): ruled 522 BC–486 BC; Xerxes I c. 518–465 BC; Artaxerxes I 465–424 BC; Darius II: 423 BC–404 BC; rebellion by the Medes 409 BC; Darius III: 380 BC–330 BC; 330 BC Alexander; the Sasanian Empire (c. 224–651 CE).

A large number of toponyms and ethnonyms are engaged in discussion of ancient Persia. For example, Rüdiger Schmitt defines *Aria* as “a region in the eastern part of the Persian empire, several times confused with Ariane”; Ariane was a much broader region, the “designation of the eastern countries of Iran, next to India, which were in possession of the Persians, the Macedonians, but later partly also the Indians” (Schmitt 2012: np). The theme of confusion in relation to these terms can be found in William Smith’s (1813–1893) *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (1854, I: 209): “[Aria’s] limits seem to have varied very much, and to have been either imperfectly investigated by the ancients, or to have been confounded with the more extensive district of Ariana.” However, both *Aria* and *Ariana* are linked by Smith to *ārya* and its cognates (1854, I: 211): “The names *Aria* and *Ariana*, and many other ancient titles of which *Aria* is a component element, are connected with the Hindu term *Arya*, ‘excellent,’ ‘honourable.’”

Fargard I of the *Vendidad*, in the translation by James Darmesteter (1849–1894), reads as follows (1880: 4–5):

I, Ahura Mazda 1 spake unto Spitama Zarathustra, saying: 2. I have made every land dear to its dwellers, even though it had no charms whatever in it: had I not made every land dear to its dwellers, even though it had no charms whatever in it, then the whole living world would have invaded the Airyana Vâegô. 3. The first of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Airyana Vâegô, by the good river Dâitya. Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft the serpent in the river and winter, a work of the Daêvas. 4. There are ten winter months there, two summer months; and those are cold for the waters, cold for the earth, cold for the trees. Winter falls there, with the worst of its plagues.

Key sections from Herodotus for these discussions are given here in George Macauley’s (1852–1915) translation (1890: 52):

I: 101: Deïokes then united the Median race alone, and was ruler of this: and of the Medes there are the tribes which here follow, namely, Busai, Paretakenians, Struchates, Arizantians, Budians, Magians: the tribes of the Medes are so many in number.

“Race” is the gloss for *ethnos* ἔθνος, and “Arizanti” is in the original *arizantoi* Ἀριζαντοί.

A further much-commented section is 3: 93: “The Parthians and Chorasians and Sogdians and Areians three hundred talents: this is the sixteenth division.” “Areians” is the gloss for *areioi* Ἄρειοι (Macauley 1890: 257).

Godley (1928–1938, II: 122–123) has *Arii*. Two further relevant sections are in Book 7. The first is 7: 62 (Macauley 1890: 155–156):

The Medes served in the expedition equipped in precisely the same manner; for this equipment is in fact Median and not Persian: and the Medes acknowledged as their commander Tigranes an Achaimenid. These in ancient time used to be generally called Arians; but when Medea the Colchian came from Athens to these Arians, they also changed their name. Thus the Medes themselves report about themselves.

“Arians” is the rendering of *arioi* Ἄριοι. 7: 65 reads as follows:

The Arians were equipped with Median bows, and in other respects like the Bactrians: and of the Arians Sisamnes the son of Hydarnes was in command. The Parthians and Chorasmians and Sogdians and Gandarians and Dadicans served with the same equipment as the Bactrians. Of these the commanders were, Artabazos the son of Pharnakes of the Parthians and Chorasmians, Azanes the son of Artaios of the Sogdians, and Artyphios the son of Artabanos of the Gandarians and Dadicans.

“Arians” is the gloss for *arioi* Ἄριοι; “Artaios,” for *artaaios* Ἀρταῖος. In a footnote to *Arians*, Godley (1928–1938, III: 377fn.) remarked, “Modern philology gives the name ‘Aryan’ of course a very much wider extension; which indeed was beginning even in the time of Strabo.” The reference is to this comment by Strabo: “The name of Ariana is further extended to a part of Persia and of Media, as also to the Bactrians and Sogdians on the north; for these speak approximately the same language, but with slight variations.”¹⁵

Anquetil-Duperron (1763: 374ff.) engaged in a dense analysis of Herodotus and other ancient sources, in an attempt to reconstruct the geography as well as the history of Zoroaster’s period. *Iran-vedj* or “the pure Iran” lay between the rivers Aras and Cyrus. *Iran-vedj* was a rendering of *airyanəm vaējō*. Anquetil-Duperron hypothesized that Zoroaster had been born in *Urmi* (Urmia) in present-day Azerbaijan around 550 BC. Urmia was equivalent to *Arimat*, and there was support for this in the *Vendidad*, which praised a place called *Ariema eschio* (*airyanəm vaējō*). *Ariema*, *Urmia*, *Urmi*, *Arimat*, and *Arimah* were the same place—only the vowels were different, and these were changed arbitrarily in Oriental languages. The language Zoroaster preached in was the language of *Ariema*, that is to say, that of Azerbaijan or of Media (1763: 375). Diodorus Siculus (80–20 BC) in his *Bibliotheca Historica* or *Library*

15. Available at: www.perseus.tufts.edu.

of *History* (1933, I: 321 had noted the following: “Thus it is recorded that among the Arians Zathraustes claimed that the Good Spirit gave him his laws.” This was, Anquetil-Duperron argued, a reference to Zarathustra, lawgiver of the Medes, people of Iran. Anquetil-Duperron rendered the Greek term *arianoi* Ἀριανοῖς as *Areianiens*, people of Aria or Khorasan (1763: 376–377). Herodotus had settled the question, by mentioning two peoples named *Ariens*: the first were Ἄρειοι, Ἄριοι (3: 65 and 3: 93), neighbours of Sogdians (an Eastern Iranian civilization), the second was Ἄριοι, which had been the earlier name of the Medes (7: 62). Anquetil-Duperron then comments that the Arians, who were known subsequently as Medes, correspond to the inhabitants of “Iran-vedj,” neighbours of the Sogdians, and no different from the peoples found in the provinces of Iran.” Anquetil-Duperron also referenced Pausanias (fl. c. 160 CE):¹⁶

On the occasion referred to Medea went to Athens and married Aegeus, but subsequently she was detected plotting against Theseus and fled from Athens also; coming to the land then called Aria she caused its inhabitants to be named after her Medes. The son, whom she brought with her in her flight to the Aarii, they say she had by Aegeus, and that his name was Medus.

Anquetil-Duperron also noted that the Greeks termed the inhabitants on the west of the Caspian Sea *Arimaspi* (*Arimaspoi* Ἀριμασπός, Ἀριμασποί) (1763: 376). Details aside, Anquetil-Duperron was intent on identifying an underlying unity to this range of similar forms. In Guillaume de Sainte-Croix’s (1746–1809) commentary on the (fabricated) *Ezour-Vedam*, he had used the term *Arianiens* for the people who, according to Diodorus Siculus, had received the law from Zoroaster (1778, I: 38, 40, 42, 44fn.). The German translator rendered this *Arianer* (*Sainte-Croix* [1778] 1779, I: 18, 19).

The reverend William Beloe’s (1756–1817) translation of Herodotus is interesting from the point of view of ethnonyms and toponyms. Paragraph (1.101) lists *arizantoi* (Ἀριζαντοί) as one of the six tribes of the Medes, along with Μάγοι *magoi* (Magi, Magian). He renders this list as (1791, I: 109): “the Busæ, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, and the Magi.” In 3: 93, Beloe rendered Ἄρειοι (*areioi*) as *Arians*, in the context of the rule of Darius the Great (1791, II: 113): “Three hundred talents were levied from the Parthians, Chorasmians, Sogdians, and Arians, who were the sixteenth satrapy.” This might be the first use of the term *Arian* in English. The translation of 7: 62 has *Arii* for Ἄριοι (1791, III: 196):

16. Description of Greece, Book II, Chapter 3, para 8: Corinth; <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pausanias-bk2.asp>.

The Medes had the same military dress; indeed, properly speaking, it is Median and not Persian. Their leader was Tigranes, of the family of Achæmenides. In ancient times the Medes were universally called Arii: but when Medea of Colchis went over to these Arii from Athens, they changed their name; this is what they say of themselves.

Medea was married to Jason of the Argonauts. The same term occurs in 7: 65 (1791, III: 197) for Ἄριοι (*arioi*): “The Arii had bows like the Medes, but were in other respects equipped like the Bactrians, and were under the command of Sisamnes son of Hydarnes.” The Göttingen professor Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) took issue with Arnold von Heeren (1760–1842), who wished to paint a picture of broad Medean Empire, with Bactria as an ancient centre of civilization but including Aria, noting that Herodotus distinguished the *Arier* from the *Meder* (Meiners 1813, II: 30).

Some sources from this period rendered these terms with a single form. Joahnn Degen (1752–1836) and Pierre Larcher (1726–1812) have *Arier* (1794: 55, 56) and *Ariens* (1786, III: 81; V: 50, 51) respectively, whereas Jacobi (1801, I: 363; III: 50, 51) gives *Areier* for 3: 93, and *Arier* for the other two passages. Whether this set of similar names referred to the same underlying place and/or people was a matter of extensive and involved debate. Guillaume de Sainte-Croix, in a discussion of historical sources relating to Alexander the Great, analyzed the definitions of *l’Arie* and *l’Ariane*, and the distinction between *Arianiens* and *Ariens*, which he said were later confused. Place names were conservative and contained compressed meanings. The place name *Arie* he derived from *Are*, which meant “person, man” in *Calmuque* and *Mungale* (Kalmyk, Mungala), and was found in place names such as Herah, Herat, Heri, or from *Ere* or *Ære* in the Tatar language (Mongolian) (1775: 220). Strabo had insisted that the *Ariens* were a civilized people and placed them on the same rank as the Indians, the Romans, and the Carthaginians (1775: 220–221). They were called *Are* or *Ærw* (“men,” “people”) to mark their superiority over the neighbouring nations. The ancient Medeans were named *Arii*, according to Herodotus, but this was distinct from the Ἄρειοι of 3: 93, who were similar to the Assyrians. More discussion followed (1775: 221–222). *Arran* or *Aran* was a province between Azerbaijan and Georgia (de Sacy 1793: 47). A. F. Miot, in reviewing this discussion (1822: 630ff.), was inclined to integrate the variants (*Ariens*, *Aréiens*, *Aréianiens*). The Medean *Aréianiens* at the time of Zoroaster and the *Ariens* mentioned by Herodotus were variant spellings and pronunciations (1822: 631). This was rejected by Niels Westergaard: the term Ἄρειοι (*areioi*) had nothing to with *Arier* as in the ancient Iranians (1845: 57, 57fn.). This synonym for the ancient Medes or Medians became *Arier* in German translation. Kleuker glosses “das ganze Geschlecht der Arier” as

“d.i. der Perser oder Meder” (1781–1783, II, iii: 141fn.).¹⁷ The term *Arier* was also used in August Christian Borheck’s translation of Arrianus Flavius’s (95–175 AD) account of the campaigns of Alexander (1790–1792, I: 302, 399, 400–401, 412, 420).

Comte de Volney Constantin François de Chassebœuf’s *Recherches nouvelles sur l’histoire ancienne* was published in two volumes in 1814. Volney (1757–1820) was critical of the genealogies set out in Genesis 10, in particular the apparent personification of groups, “giving them also the appearance of an individual” (1814: 218, as translated 1819: 204). Genesis 10 had suggested an orderly distribution of the sons of Noah and their offspring ([1814: 220] 1819: 205–206):

These expressions: after their tongues in their countries, are the more remarkable, as after placing each nation according to the best geographical indications, we find them all distributed in a methodical order of neighbourhood and proximity, and that those of each branch have a common system of language: for instance, among all the nations of Japheth, the origin of the language is that Scythian idiom called Sanscrit, which recent inquiries prove to have reigned formerly from India to Scandinavia, and which we find today to have been one of the elements of the ancient Greek and ancient Latin.

The tripartite division of Genesis (Shem, Japhet, Ham) was mirrored in “the three grand divisions of the ancient world,” and “the three divisions of the earth, by Zoroaster,” and the division of the world among the three gods: Jupiter, Pluto, and Neptune ([1814: 220–221] 1819: 206). There was an underlying parallelism: “*Cham*, or rather *Ham*, which signifies *black*, *burnt*, and is translated into Greek by *asbolos*, soot-colour, is synonymous with Pluto” ([1814: 221] 1819: 206). Volney suggested that one of the lineages descended from Japhet, the *Medi* (Medes), had, following Herodotus, previously been known as *Arioi*, meaning “the courageous” (“les braves”). This term was used in Persian texts from the time of Zoroaster, and the name Medes was adopted following the Assyrian conquest ([1814: 225] 1819: 208).

One way to understand ancient Persian history was that an Aryan polity was shattered by a Semitic (Assyrian) invader. This was the underlying message of Johann Gottlieb Rhode’s (1762–1827) *Über Alter und Werth einiger morgenländischen Urkunden* (1817). Rejecting Jones’s view that the Bible and classical mythology were the proper starting point for Oriental history, Rhode insisted

17. The footnote continues, “Die Meder, von denen Zor. ausging, führten in den ältern Zeiten blos diesen Namen (Herod. VII, 62.); nachmals blieb er nur einem Stamme, den eigentlichen Ariern; (Herod. I. c.65.), welche hier vermuthlich gemeint sind, wenn nicht Damascius diesen ältern Namen aus dem Eudem beibehalten hat.”

that the religion and mythology of Asia should first be presented on its own terms, free also of contemporary philosophical points of view (1817: v–vii).¹⁸ Rhode focused on the opening sections of the *Vendidad*, in which the names of sixteen provinces of the empire are listed. These were taken into possession serially by the ancient Persians. Rhode dates this process to the legendary Pershadian dynasty (1817: 20): “The original land of the people is called *Eeriene-veedjo*, i.e. the actual pure Eeri, or Ari.” Rhode located this in Tibet. The original inhabitants had only left this paradisaical abode of perpetual warmth because Ahriman introduced winter. They migrated south to Sogbo (Sogdiana). The Medes and the Persians lived together as one people in Bactria, up until the Assyrian conquest, and the *Zend Avesta* must date to this pre-conquest period (1817: 37). Zoroaster was a real historical figure, who lived with the then united Aryans or Zend people (“Zoroaster lebte unter den noch vereinigten Ariern oder dem Zendvolk”) (1817: 41). In a footnote, Rhode noted Herodotus’s report that the Medes (*Meder*) were originally called *Arier*. The Zend texts revealed that *Arier* was without doubt the original term for the people who subsequently became the Bactrians, Sogdians, and Persians. This division of a previously united and autonomous people was triggered by the Assyrian conquest, which destroyed not just the state, but the unity of the people, and brought Semitic elements into the Pahlavi language (“das Volk hörte auch auf ein Volk zu sein,” 1817: 45). There was a close affinity in terms of the original homeland and language between the *Zendvolk* and the ancient Hindus. Rhode discussed and rejected William Jones’s hypothesis that the Chinese were descendants of expelled tribes of the warrior (*Kshatriya*) caste (see [Jones 1799j](#): 97–98, [Kleuker 1781–1783](#), I: 138). He noted that in the Book of Manu the twelve tribes belonged to two separate peoples or spoke two different languages (“die Sprache der Mlechas und die Sprache der Aryas,” [Rhode 1817](#): 65). These *Aryas* brought to mind the Aryans (*Arier*) from the Zend texts.¹⁹ He continued: “As we have seen, the real Ari or Eeri was Tibet, and it is surprising to see this country bearing the same name in our lawbook.” This was *Aryaverta*, found in the Book of Manu II: 22. That the ending *verta* meant a territory was clear from the *Brahmaverta*. Rhode then found links to the Persian world, in the names *Páradas* (related to *Parsi*) and *Pahlavas* (as in *Pahlavi*), which represented the Aryan-speaking territories. He hypothesized that the language of the Mlechas was spoken to the east of the Ganges, where people of the one-syllable language were located, linking *Chinas* and *Yavanas* to China and Japan. These Mlechas

18. “Das Altherthum kann nur aus sich selbst erklärt werden, wenn es Altherthum bleiben soll” (1817: viii).

19. “Diese Aryas erinnern uns so gleich an die Arier, welche wir eben in den Zend-schriften haben kennen gelernt.”

were in close contact with the Hindu states, and hence there was a prohibition on intermarriage (1817: 67). Rhode proposed an early division of peoples, setting out from the original homeland in Tibet, with the Chinese heading east, the Hindus to the south, and the Aryans (*Arier*) moving to the south-west. Aryans were the closest continuation of the original people (*Urvolk*), since they stayed longer in the original homeland (*Urlande*) than the Chinese and the Hindus (1817: 69). In *Über den Anfang unserer Geschichte* (Rhode 1819: 69), Zend, Pracrit, Sanscrit, and Pali are presented as descended from a single “mother” (“waren gewiss ursprünglich wenig abweichende Dialecte einer Mutter”).

This was a tangled debate, which involved a mini-controversy over the homeland associated with *Airyana Vaeja* (*airyanəm vaējō*). One source of dispute was whether the toponyms and ethnonyms found in these texts referred to historically ascertainable realities. A second was the desire to find through etymological and narrative compression an underlying unity to these names, that is to say, an Aryan people whose identity was reflected in geographical names. In his 1819 review of Rhode (1817), Schlegel discussed Rhode’s distinction between the “artificial” monosyllabic languages (such as Chinese) and the organic polysyllabic ones, such as “the Indian, the Latin and Greek; then in a somewhat more remote line the German and Persian; still more remotely and partly in another manner the Arabico-Syriac and Slavonic tongues” ([1819] 1849: 386). Monosyllabic languages were unsophisticated, employing an “apish vocal imitation of the external object,” whereas polysyllabic languages were characterized by a “dynamical or vitally spiritual mode of taking up and appropriating the elements of speech,” and this also had an intimate connection with alphabetic writing ([1819] 1849: 385). Schlegel felt he had been misunderstood in relation to the idea that Sanscrit was the parent of Indo-European, and he now stressed “the one grand family of tongues” ([1819] 1849: 388). The question was “which of them is the most organically formed, which least have lost this structure, and have most preserved that character in simple regularity” ([1819] 1849: 389). This was more significant than speculation about “the common parent and radical language itself as it was spoken in the land of Eri, or in any other primeval country,” though the Sanscrit as well as Latin and Greek seemed closest ([1819] 1849: 389). Schlegel discussed somewhat sceptically Rhode’s claim that Zend was an Indian dialect, seeing it more as a sacred variety ([1819] 1849: 392–393). Rhode had claimed that the speakers of this language had their homeland in the land of Ari or Eri. There was, however, no instance of the term *Zendvolk*. Rather, “The ancients named them after the land itself, the people of the Arians” ([1819] 1849: 393):

There is no doubt that the land Eirene is identical with the province Aria, or Ariana, of the Greeks, the modern Chorasán. [. . .] The province Aria is also, no doubt, a mountainous country, such as Eirene is described, and the streams which water Bactria and Sogdiana partly descend from the Paropamisus [northwest Afghanistan].

Schlegel suggested that this Aria region may have had greater importance historically than for the Greeks. He then referred to [Creuzer \(1819–1822, I: 698 fn.40, 763 fn.90\)](#), where there is a reference to “the whole Arian race” (*Stamm*) being “a great and widely diffused people” ([1819] 1849: 394). He noted that in the Indian law code of Menu (Manu), “the Indian northern mountains, as far as the East and West seas, is assigned to Ariaverta, the land of the Arians” ([1819] 1849: 394). It was now clear that Zoaraster was a member of the Medes, and the Zend language might be better referred to as the Arian language (“or East-Median, in opposition to the West-Median Pehlvi language.” It might well emerge that the Zend language, that is, the Arian, was “an original language” rather than a mixed one ([1819] 1849: 394):

The Indian root, Ari, which derivation seems to be the best, signifies something admirable and distinguished, glorious, that which is “egregium.” A warlike, heroic people is always inclined to give itself epithets of a like nature, and in this sense. Thus the other West-Median name, Pehlavian, signifies a hero. The Aryans called their heroic ancestors Artaeans, which name has some resemblance to Arians, but which we by no means wish to ascribe any etymological value.

More significantly, there was a direct line to German ([1819] 1849: 395):

That Indian root, Ari, is decidedly and indisputably a German one also, actually existing in the language, and still obtaining in life, if we can speak in this manner of “Ehre” (honour). According to our analogy of language, and to the present form of this root, that popular name would be tantamount as it were to the honours, that is, the honourable, the noble. Precisely in this way the West German tribes were named “Erben” (heirs), or “Wehren” (defenders), as conveying the idea of free inhabitants of the land and men wearing arms, with the right to do so; this name, indeed, was applied to the whole people.

There was a deep historical link to the Germans ([1819] 1849: 395):

In the earlier and Gothic form that root was similarly pronounced in German, *ari* or *ario*. All those who have attentively observed how widely spread and how prevalent this root, *ari*, or *ario*, is, in the old German history

and mythic tradition, among so many heroic and generic names, and elsewhere, will not be surprised when I add, that I have for a long time entertained the historical supposition, and for which I have found confirmation from many sources, that we should seek for our German ancestors while they were still in Asia, especially under the name of Arians; or to express it more appropriately, with the Greeks, as cited above, under “the whole great Arian family.”

This insight cast new light on received ideas about the relation between the German or Gothic tribes and the Persians. This was not only or primarily a question of observed resemblances between German roots and Ari or Zend words, since this was observable “among nations very remote from and entirely unconnected with each other” ([1819] 1849: 395–6), and similarities of names might be accidental, for example, Chovaresm being known as Jermania, especially as the name Germania originated later on the western frontier of the Roman Empire ([1819] 1849: 396). Schlegel was confident in the assertion that the lands of Chovaresm and Bokhara were “the first historically known dwelling-place, shown at least to be probable, of our Teutonic ancestors in Asia” ([1819] 1849: 396). In addition to etymological relationships, Schlegel also paid attention to the distinction between a predominantly *priest-people* as opposed to *warrior-people* ([1819] 1849: 396). The same emphasis on warrior caste was to be found among the Medes and the Germans ([1819] 1849: 397):

A similar signification is conveyed by the two most comprehensive names of the old German tribes: Teutons, that is, Thuidans, which in the Gothic means kings, princes, masters, lords; and Goths, that is, nobles (as Gothakunds of noble descent). Now precisely in this way the old Medes were called Pehlvan, that is, heroes, as then it is certain the Medes of Zoroaster were a noble heroic nation of this description. The name of Arians means the same, from whom the Medes descended, as we explained above from the Indian root the signification of this name, and proved it even in the old German language.

It was important to distinguish the universal history of descent from the three “main parent stocks” and the particular origin of the Arian people. *Eeriene* as designated in the *Zend Avesta* was “the parent land of the Arian people, as the main land of their origin” ([1819] 1849: 400): “Now, according to the author’s own rule we must carefully discriminate before all things in every old historical tradition the Universal from what is special, nationally peculiar and geographically local.” It was possible to identify a plausible geography surrounding the original homeland ([1819] 1849: 400):

Everything, however, seems to be local in the geographical views given of the world and various lands in the Zendavesta. First of all, Eeriene, or the Ari land, is accurately defined as the original country of the Arians, the precise Aria of the ancients. Among the fifteen blessed regions and spots that are ranged around this centre, the first are evidently, and without a shadow of doubt, Sogdiana and Bactria.

More philological clarification was required. In Kleuker's translation of the *Vendidad*, where there was a list of place-names, Rhode had only selected two, implying a double origin (Ari and Eeriene) ([1819] 1849: 401):

One, according to the author, is the north or north-west part of Sogdiana; but which is as yet hypothesis. The other is the main central land of the Median empire, founded by the parent stock of the Arians, the Aria of the ancients, and which is both historically and geographically certain.

There was a textual link to India (*Indias*), which the *Vendidad* described as surpassing "all other kingdoms of the world in size and extent," so this suggested the compilation of these texts in nearby India ([1819] 1849: 402): "The Arian race, however, is also described in an Indian source, quite clearly in my eyes as closely allied to the Indian, both by descent and language" ([1819] 1849: 402). The *Institutes of Manu* made reference to a distinction between Mlecchas and Aryas (as discussed by Rhode). That passage showed "the alienation from the Brahmins, the neglect of Braminical manners and usages, the warrior-castes that had thrown off the yoke of civilization, and the nations that sprang from them." It concluded by saying, "All these are Dasyus (or predatory tribes living in a state of war), whether they speak the language of the Mlecchias, or that of the Aryas." Schlegel comments ([1819] 1849: 402),

The Mlecchas are barbarian tribes, alien to the Indians, both in race and language. Now since these are mentioned in evident contradistinction to the Arians, it is tantamount to saying, they are all savage and desperate robber tribes, whether they are barbarians, or even Arians, the latter being actually allied to the Indians both in race and language.

Schlegel's overall argument in relation to Rhode is to prefer a more unified, expansive, and inclusive concept of *Eeriene* and *Arian*. Rhode had raised the possibility of a second homeland in the Caucasus, but Schlegel expressed a preference for "one primitive land a greater extent, and not confining it within such narrow limits," especially given the vastness of the high mountain chains of Eurasia ([1819] 1849: 403). Schlegel's other underlying point was that that the Mosaic narrative was the most authoritative and should be taken into account

when assessing other ancient sources. There was no contradiction between “writ” and “nature,” science and religion ([1819] 1849: 404). The terms Schlegel uses in German to refer to the Aryans are *Volk* or *Stamm*. The word *Rasse* does not appear.

An interesting text in this “Persian line” is Bernhard Dorn’s comparative study of Persian, Germanic, Greek, and Latin (1827). Dorn distinguished between contingent similarity among word forms or languages and deep relationships of affinity (*Verwandtschaft*). These relationships were analogous to blood ties. Dorn called the Indo-European group the *indisch-medisch-slavisch-germanischer Stamm* (1827: 49). In a discussion of the Ossetian language, which he attributed to the Medean branch, Dorn noted that the Ossetians called themselves *Ir* or *Iron*, and their homeland *Irinistan*, as in the modern Persian *Iran*. Herodotus had reported that the Medes were originally termed *Arier*, which added support to this link to the Medes. The Ossetian language of the *Medisch-Germanischer Stamm* was a remnant in the Caucasus of the old division of peoples into an Asian and a European branch, and represented a bridge to Old Medean and Old Persian (1827: 50). Dorn discussed the question of whether the term *Germanen* was of Persian origin or some other language, noting that Tacitus had considered it indigenous but had been unaware of the earlier history. For example, Bernard Picart had argued for the “brotherhood” of Persians and Germans (1827: 131). Others, including Leibniz, had found evidence for a common Scythian origin to Persian and German, meaning that “our forefathers” might have been Scythians (1827: 132). It was evident in any case that *Germanen* did not come from the Romans (1827: 130fn., 131):

From the paradisiacal highlands of Arieme, and specifically from the eastern part of the same, which in the writings is called the land of Chavila (Chawaresm), descended the tribes of the Aryans, Ermans, Dschermans, or Germans, who therefore do not owe this name initially to the Romans.

The homeland of the Germanic peoples (“Wohnsitz der Germanen”) was to the east (1827: 131). In terms of etymology, the forms *Ar*, *Er*, *Ir*, *Or*, *Ur* represented the identical root, so our ancestors (*Stammväter*) could be called *Arman*, *Erman*, *Irman*, *Orman*, or *Urman*. The *Armanen* were the Aryans of Herodotus (“die Arier des Herodots, d.i. Ehrenmannen”), and a large set of German words could be traced to this root (1827: 130fn.).

This tangled web of sources and etymologies gradually emerged into a linear narrative. August Schlegel, citing Herodotus on the name change of the Medes, stressed the ancient unity of the Hindus and the Persians (1834: 437):

The whole of Persia was without doubt termed *Ariana*, after the name of the nation, while the Greek geographers restrict this name to several oriental provinces. The proof is in the books of Zoroaster, where one reads *Airaiéné*. The modern name *Irân* is merely a contraction of this; though it was already inscribed in the same form on the medalions of the Sasanians, whose legends are in Pahlavi.

Eugène Burnouf (1833–1835, I: lxii, lxiii–lxivfn.) uses terms such as “la langue ancienne de l’Arie” and “les langues de la famille arienne.” There is an urge to generalize the geographical terms, so the term *airyô chayanëm* from the “Iescht Mithra” (*Mihr Yašt*, one of the twenty-one yashts of the Avesta) meant the location or homeland, Aria, in other words, that of the Aryans (“tunc omnem constituit Arioë locum,” 1833–1835, I: lxj). Burnouf also stressed the distinction between insiders and outsiders (1833–1835, I: lxij):

By the words *airyô chayanëm*, the Iescht of Mithra designates, apparently, Aria proper, or the province which the ancients, and after them the modern geographers, represent as distinct from Ariana, in Zend Airyana. But I have reason to suppose that the word Airya was also to be used in a very general sense and with as wide an acceptance as that attributed to Airyana. The exposition of this hypothesis would lead me much too far. I will only notice that the word Airya joins the noun *daqyu* (province) [. . .], and that it serves to form an expression which can only be collective, and which signifies “the Arian provinces,” or, according to the Persians, Iranian. There are also provinces that are not included in Iran, named [. . .] *anairyâo danyhâvô*, words that Anquetil wrongly translates as “the provinces of Iran,” and which mean “the non-Arian provinces.”

In the second, revised, edition of his *Symbolik und Mythologie* (1819–1822, I: 698fn., 728 fn.), Creuzer echoed Rhode’s view of a likely relation between *Arier* and *Ari*, together with the idea that *Arier* was a designation for an originally unified people who were subsequently divided into the Bactrians, the Medes, and the Persians. Creuzer also noted Rhode’s view that there was a link to the *Aryas* of the Hindu sacred texts. The Greek philosopher Damascius (480–c. 550 AD) had made a connection between the Aryans and the Magi (1819–1822, I: 736fn.). In support of this, Damascius quoted Eudemus of Rhodes, using the phrase *to areion genos* (“Iranian/Aryan tribe”). This passage in Damascius is translated by de Jong as follows (1997: 336): “The Magi and all the Aryan race, as Eudemus writes, call the whole intelligible and unitary universe either

Space or Time from which a good god and an evil demon were separated out or, according to others, light and darkness before these.”²⁰

Eusèbe Baconnière de Salverte (1771–1836), in a discussion of ancient names, also made reference to Herodotus and the Medes who had been called *Arii*. He added (1824: 110, translated in 1864, II: 87),

To this day the Armenians call the Persians Arik’h, and in their language Ari mean valiant or strong; in Zend, Aeriao is used in the same sense. This also, if I mistake not, is the root of the word Aria, which, in the sacred books of Hindustan, describes all those countries where the national religion prevailed.

De Salverte discussed possible etymological relationship with *Asia*, given that *s* and *r* were often interchangeable ([1824: 110] 1864, II: 87):

The Armenian Ari and the Arioï of the Medea have the same meaning as in the Pehlv’i dialect; it is most likely that the change of *r* into *s* took place in the radical word, and that As and Ari are, in point of fact, identical the one with the other.

Whatever was the case, it was evident that ([1824: 110] 1864, II: 87–88)

an enormous tract of country was formerly included under the name Aria, that it comprehended even Egypt and the island of Crete; that the root of this word has been repeated in a great number of men’s names, Scythians, Medes, and Persians; also, in the names of places, such, for instance, as in Aria and Ariana, mentioned by Greek historians, and in Ariema, the scene of Zoroaster’s earliest teaching.

These links could be traced further, “in the names of people who are separated from each other by great distances of time and place” ([1824: 110] 1864, II: 88). Salverte ([1824: 460] 1864, II: 401) also commented on Anquetil-Duperron’s hypothesis:

It was in *Iran-Vedj*, or *Eerièné-véedjo*, or *Irman*, or *Ariéma*, that Zoroaster began to promulgate the pure law. Anquetil-Duperron and Saint-Martin think that *Iran-Vedj* is *Aran*, the part of Armenia that the Kura (Cyrus) and Araxes water, or even all of eastern Armenia, bounded to the north by Georgia, and to the east by the Caspian Sea.

20. Damascius, *Dubitaciones et Solutiones*, 126 bis.

In his study of the *Vendidad* (1829), Arnold Hölty (1800–1957) left the ideal homeland *Eeriene veedjo* (Airyana Vaeja) untranslated but glossed it as “Arierland” in the section heading (1829: 6). Hölty took issue with Rhode’s account of the ancient history. Zend was the language of the ancient Medians, so if the city of Ver (Varena) built by Jamshid was identical with Persepolis, then the language of the sacred texts (“die heiligen Bücher der Arier”) would have been Parsi or Old Persian, which had not spread out until later, rather than Zend (1829: 18fn.). On the question of the location of Eeriene veedjo (“das Stamm-land des Volks”), Rhode had put the Aryan homeland (“Urland der Arier”) next to Sogdiana at the source of the river Oxus, at the foot of the “Hindu-Gebirge,” in the high mountains of Asia. Hölty took issue with this, arguing that the location was not necessarily adjacent to Sogdiana, even if they occurred in sequence in the text (1829: 20). One of Rhode’s arguments for putting the homeland further east was the affinity between Sanscrit and Zend, but Hölty countered that the direction of influence could have been from west to east, as much as from east to west. He pointed to William Jones’s hypothesis of an eastward movement, given the distinct nature of the languages in southern India, and Rask’s argument for the existence of remnants of the aboriginal languages in northern India (1829: 27–28). The homeland had been to the west of the Caspian Sea, where the name *Iran* had been retained down to the present (1829: 29). The Indus formed the eastern border of the Aryan homeland (“Arierland” (1829: 31). Hölty’s polemics against Rhode continued in a later work, where he disputed that the collectivity of Meder (Medians), Persians, and Bactrians had the name *Arier*. Herodotus made a distinction between the Medians and the Persians. There was no mention of Persians and Medians in the *Vendidad*. They emerged as already distinct peoples out of the general “night of the Aryans” (*Ariernacht*) (1836: 68). In the midst of the Medes, Persians, Indians, Assyrians, Scythians, and Egyptians, the obscure Aryans “disappear like a dream story, as once the obscure Hyperboreans disappeared.” The Hyperboreans were a legendary people from the far north (1836: 68–69): “it should be remembered that such sacred texts were not composed as historical treatises.”

There is extensive discussion of the Medes/Medeans in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s (1837) *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. Hegel’s interest is in the broad-brush narrative rather than philological *minutiae*. The Medes, as noted by Herodotus, were previously called *Arier*, and this name is connected with the name of *Iran* (1837: 180). The language of the Zend (*Zendsprache*) was the original language of the Persians, Medes, and Bactrians. On the original homeland of the *Zendvolk*, nothing was certain, though Zoroaster termed it “das reine Ariene” (“the pure Ariana”) (1837: 180). It was in all probability in Bactria, since by the time of Cyrus the pure and original religion had been lost. The teachings of Zoroaster represented the awakening of the *Zendvolk*, namely, that “the absolute truth must have the form of generality (*Allgemeinheit*), of unity (*Einheit*)” (1837: 181). This was also the nature of

Brahma in Hinduism, though there the achievement of generality was destructive of consciousness, rather than representing positive awakening, as it did for the Persians. The Persian religion was not idolatry but, rather, a unified form of sense perception (1837: 182). Hegel uses this narrative to distinguish the Persian religion, both from Hinduism as based on negativity and destruction, as well as from the Assyrian mentality “of superficial wealth, the opulence of trade” (1837: 186). In this way he created a hierarchy within the Aryan religions, but also an Aryan–Semitic dichotomy. The 1861 English translation of Hegel by J. Sibree has *Arii* for the former name of the *Medes*, and *pure Ariene* for the legendary homeland (1861: 184). The 1899 edition retains *Arii* but uses *pure Aryan* (1899: 176).

From these philological discussions there emerged an integrated narrative. The Persian and Indian branches of the Indo-European family could not be traced definitively to a centre, but “in the very infancy of nations, from two principal foci at no great distance from each other” (Prichard 1843: 163). They had a name in common (1843: 163):

Arians, or Aryas, is the ancient national designation both of the Persian and Indian branch. The ancient Medes called themselves Arii, a name which survived in the Aria and Ariana of the Greek geographers. Aryavarta was the Holy Land of the Brahmans, the country lying between the Himalaya and the Vindhya mountains, which was the ancient abode of the Hindoos. In the north-western part of that region, in countries watered by the Saraswatí, the earliest traditions of the Brahmans place the ancestors of the Indian race [. . .].

There was an underlying unity to the Persian branch, as explained in the third edition of *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (Prichard 1836–1847, IV: 32):

The Medes and Persians, the people of Sogdiana, Bactria, and the Ariana of ancient geographers, had, as we have reason to believe, one language, a language which differed only in dialect in the different provinces of the extensive empire over which it was spread. The people termed themselves, as we learn from Herodotus, Arii. In the remains of the Zoroastrian writings, which contain the oldest traditions of the race, all these nations are considered as one people, the people of Ormuzd; and the people, as well as the country, bear, in the Zendavesta, the designation of Aria, or of Eeriene, the primitive seat of the Arian race.

In addition to Herodotus, Prichard and others drew on Strabo’s comment (quoted earlier) on the language situation in Ariana (Prichard 1836–1837, IV: 13): “The proper appellation of the ancient Median people, was Arians

or Ἀριαί. This name appears to have included the whole Persian race, or the whole assemblage of nations who spoke dialects of the Median language.” The sources indicated that in ancient times the Arians were called *Ariani* and “the whole people of Iran spoke one language” (1836–1837, IV: 14). Prichard characterized the first section (*fargard*) of the *Vendidad* as listing “the towns or habitable tracts which were first created by Ormuzd, and successively became the dwelling-places of the Arian race,” having left their “original dwelling-place, Eerïené Véedjô, the pure Iran” (1836–1837, IV: 47). The term *Arian* took on increasingly general meanings as the century progressed, eventually merging with *Aryan*. The integration proceeded further (Farr 1850: 7):

Herodotus says, that the Persians were once called Cephenees by the Greeks, but by themselves and their neighbours Artaei, or heroes; which is a proof of that national vanity in which people of different countries are prone to indulge. The latter word, probably, contains the same root as Aarii, the original name of the Medes, and Arya, by which the followers of the Brahminic religion are designated in Sanscrit. The same root occurs in Aria and Ariana, from the latter of which the modern Persian name Iran, seems to be derived.

The transcription and gradual decipherment of inscriptions gave additional impetus to this process. In 1765, Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815) had copied several inscriptions in Persepolis (Harper 1893). These trilingual Achaemenid royal inscriptions (dated sixth to fourth century BC) were deciphered by the mid-nineteenth century (Lassen 1836, Eugène Burnouf 1836, Salisbury 1847). One strand of debate was whether the middle inscriptions were in Medean (de Saulcy 1850, Löwenstern 1850). The philologist and archaeologist Julius Oppert (1825–1905) (1876a: 2) asserted that the middle inscription was in Medean, conceding that he had been caught up in the whole Aryan concept, which focussed on language, and had neglected the fact that each inscription logically represented a different people. Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895) argued that “the Arian origin of the Medes is now universally admitted,” though they had close Scythian connections (1846–1849, I: 36).

There are inscriptions that contain the term *ārya* in three different contexts, including the Bisotun inscription (Gnoli 1989a: 13). Of special relevance here is the second section of the DNa inscription of Darius the Great, on the tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam, dated c. 490 BC. A modern translation reads as follows: “I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, King in this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.”²¹ Much discussion has been devoted to an analysis of the interrelationship or possible hierarchy

21. See: www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Languages/aryan/inscription_of_dariush_grt_rstm.htm.

between *Achaemenan* (or *Achaemenid*), *Persian*, and *Aryan*, for example as an ordering of “family, tribe, and people or race” (Andreas 1904: 96, Lecoq 1997: 31, Frye 1993: 144). Gnoli (1989a: 16) offers: family, clan, tribe, country or people. Briant (2002: 182) sees the “pedigree of Darius” as defined by “family (Hystaspes), royal stock (Achaemenids), ethnic group (Persian), and ‘ethnic’ stock (*arya*).” Westergaard took the form *ârija* to be the same as Sanscrit *ârja*, which distinguished the Indians from barbarians. This was also the ancient name of the Medeans and of the Iranian peoples in general. As was known, it meant “honourable,” and this meaning was also present in the Persian context, even where it was not also the name of the people (“wenn es auch nicht ihr Volksname war”), so they would not have been called *anârija*. In the inscription, *ârija* referred to the nobility of their kind (“Adel des Geschlechts”), to the status as off-spring of honourable ancestors (Westergaard 1845: 87–88). Henry Rawlinson rendered the final epithets as: “a Persian, (and) the son of a Persian, an Arian, and of Arian descent,” noting that he was “by no means satisfied of the sense of the concluding phrase” (1846–1849, I: 292). However, he concluded that *Ariya* referred to “the Arian race,” rather than “an abstract idea of nobility,” using evidence from the Median copy. It was unclear, though, “whether the Persian and Arian races are here brought together with an immediate view to their identity or contrast” (1846–1849, I: 293). In his second volume, Rawlinson stressed the point about race or nationality (1846–1849, II: 46):

When Darius applies to himself the epithets *Ariya*, *Ariya chitâ*, I cannot doubt but that he alludes to the nationality of his family. “An Arian and of Arian descent,” he asserted the supremacy of his race over the Scythic and Semitic nations which composed the greater portion of his subjects, and it is a further confirmation of this intentional discrimination that in the passages where Darius speaks of Ormazd and the other gods, the Median transcript interpolates after the name of Ormazd, “God of Ariyanam” or “of the Arians,” in exact accordance with the statement of Eudemus, which restricted the recognition of Ormazd to the Arian race, and in evident contradistinction to the gods of the Scyths and Semites.

Benfey (1847: 47) renders the text as: “Achämendie, Perser, Sohn des Wahrhaftigen, Hochwürdiger (Arier), hochwürdigesspendender.” Von Spiegel (1852: 51) by contrast has: “ein Perser, Sohn eines Persers, Arier, von arischen Saamen” (“Aryan seed”). Benfey defines *ariya* as an honorific (1847: 73). However, von Spiegel (1852: 184) characterizes it as an ethnonym, as the name the ancient Persians called themselves by, and therefore the origin of the name *Erân* or *Irân*. Tolman translates the latter part as follows (1893: 146): “a Persian, the son of a Persian: an Aryan, an Aryan off-spring,” and then subsequently as (1908: 43): “a Persian, the son of a Persian, an Aryan, of Aryan lineage.” Roland Kent (1939: 164) has a similar rendering: “a Persian, son of

a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage.” Weissbach (1911: 87) retains the idea of “Aryan seed” (“ein Arier, von arischem Samen”).

In von Spiegel’s edition of the *Zend Avesta*, the Indo-European framework dominates the introduction, in particular the link to Sanscrit. Persians are described as a branch of the original people, who had their seat in the high plateau of Central Asia, in this way integrating comparative philology into the interpretation of the text (1852, I: 4). Fargard I: 71 is translated as “Bad times and unaryan plagues of the region” (“Schlechte Zeiten und unarische Plagen der Gegend”) (1852, I: 66). The German Orientalist Martin Haug (1827–1876) referred to “the Arian population of Persia” (1861: 2). However, his main argument concerned original monotheism and “the primitive forms of worship common to the whole Arian race, being principally worship of fire as the symbol of the darkness dispelling might of the God of light, who is the fountain of life, truth and all good things in the creation” (1861: 9). Zoroastrianism was “a struggle against idolatry,” and the word *deva* (Latin, *deus*), which was the name by which “the Brahmans and other Arian tribes denote their supreme beings,” signified evil spirits; *Devavam devo* was “in the Zoroastrian language the devil of the devils, arch-devil” (1861: 11). During the early migrations from “the more northern point of Asia,” the ancient form of fire worship “totally degenerated,” and subsequently conflicts broke out between the sedentary Iranians and the wandering Hindus (1861: 14). The text concludes with the assertion that Zoroaster was “amongst the greatest men who ever lived” (1861: 18).

As the “Persian line” gradually blurred with discussions of Sanscrit *ārya* and with the emergent Indo-European paradigm, more and more ethnographic detail was integrated (Tagore 1863: 374²²):

The colonists who came into Media, according to Herodotus, called themselves Arii, which is manifestly the same word as the Sanskrit Arya, which signifies pure and honourable men. The north-western parts of India were called by the Brahmans Aryavarta, or the country of honourable men. The Brahmans designated themselves the Aryas in the Vedic period, in opposition to the Mletchas, or the barbarians. The Arii of Herodotus were a mixed priestly and warrior class, and owed their early military success to their skill in horsemanship.

The evidence was that “the Aryan race were located in Media after they had left their original habitation, and exercised their supremacy there as a ruling caste.”

The Romantic conceit of a shared original paradise for the Aryans could be integrated easily into the notion of *airyanəm vaējō* (Ragozin 1889: 37):

22. “Tagore was a Christian convert and the son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore, a founder of the British Indian Association and *The Reformer*” (Leopold 1970: 276fn.).

There was a time when Eranians and Hindus were not yet, but the ancestors of both lived, an undivided nation, in a pleasant country, of which the race retained a dim but grateful remembrance in the shape of tradition, since God himself is made to say in the Avesta: “The first of the good lands and countries I created was the “AIRYĀNA-VAËJA,” i.e., the “Aryan Home.”

A striking example of philological Aryanism is to be found in James Hope Moulton’s (1863–1917) writings. Moulton made the ritual distinction between language and race (1903: 38):

It must not be forgotten that race and language cannot be treated as necessarily going together. Two totally distinct races may very well speak closely related languages, and the difference of speech may be the result of the fact that one race learnt the language as a foreign idiom.

As in other cases, this distinction has no effect on the analysis of ancient *ethne*. In Moulton’s *Early Zoroastrianism*, textual explanations are embedded in assumptions about an underlying ancient Aryanism or “old Aryan” set of beliefs and practices. Moulton writes that the “proto-Aryan nature-worship, with *Dyauš*, the sky, at the head of the pantheon,” as described by Herodotus, was the “popular religion of Persia” before the separation of the Indo-Europeans (Moulton 1913: ix). In relation to Herodotus 1: 101, he remarks that the *Arizantoi* “were clearly the Aryan nobility.” The Behistun inscription explicitly called Ahura Mazda “God of the Aryans” (1917: 14), a situation that predated Zarathustra. Accordingly, it was plausible that “Zarathushtra may have been born in the small clan of Aryan nobles whose special divinity was “the Wise Lord”” (Moulton 1917: 14). Alternatively, he may have been a member of the “agricultural community, the religious value of whose occupation he preaches so strenuously” (1917: 14).

The integration of frames into a unitary narrative has continued into the modern era. In R. C. Zaehner’s writings the concept of *Aryan* is a fixed point of reference (1961: 20):

Both the Indian and the Iranian branches of the Indo-Iranian family called themselves Aryas—Aryans, a word later used to mean simply “noble” or a “gentleman”; and the word “Iran,” derived from an earlier form *Aryanam*, simply means “(the country) of the Aryans.” These Aryans or Iranians, though differing in dialect, formed a self-conscious national whole which must have felt itself racially one since they were careful to distinguish themselves from the *an-āryas*, peoples “not Iranian.”

Gershevitsch (1959: 14) argues that the *Avesta* reflects “the religious experience of only one Iranian people, namely the one whose language was Avestan,” and who occupied “a country called Aryana Vaējah, which partly or wholly coincided with the Greater Chorasmanian state abolished by Cyrus (559–530).”

The issue of what *ārya* and its variants mean remains current (Gnoli 1989a, 2002). In a footnote to *Aryan* in his translation of the DNA inscription, Silverman comments, “‘Aryan’ is etymologically the same as ‘Iranian,’ although it is unclear whether here it is meant to be an ethnonym or a class, meaning something like ‘noble’” (Silverman 2019: 91). Lecoq considers it an ethnic designation, distinguishing the Aryan invaders from the populations encountered (1997: 33). Gnoli offers an analysis of the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld’s (1879–1948) postulation of a political concept corresponding to *airyanəm vaējō* in the Achaemenian period, concluding that it would be unwise to give a political meaning to a “mythological and legendary form” (1989a: 2). Herzfeld had argued that *Ariani* “was an ethnic derived from the political name of the country” (Herzfeld 1947, II: 699),²³ but in actuality it was “a purely geographical one” (Gnoli 1989a: 2–3). There was no concept of an “Empire of the Aryans” in the Achaemenian period, dating back to 550 BC. He concludes that Old Persian “*arya-* is a definition of *Gesamtvolk*” (1989a: 17, see also 2002: 86). Gnoli dates the political concept of Iran to the early third century AD, under the Sasanians, with its roots in earlier religious and ethnic ideas. The political idea was integrated into cultural heritage, so that “the idea of Iran was able to survive not only the waning of Zoroastrianism, but also the downfall of the monarchy” that had brought it into being as tool of propaganda (Gnoli 1989a: 174). Briant foregrounds “the pair Persia-Media” as bound “not only by a common history but also by the closeness of their ethnocultural and linguistic links.” This reflects how the word *Aryan* is used in the royal inscriptions (Briant 2002: 180):

Darius and Xerxes are presented as “Aryan[s] of Aryan stock” (*arya arya chiça*; DNA, DSe, XPh); at Behistun, Darius issues an order “to copy onto tablet and parchment the text that already exists in Aryan” (DB §70); finally, the Elamite version of Behistun describes Ahura-Mazda twice as “the god of the Aryans” (*nap harriyanam*; DB Elam. §§62–63). Thus the word *arya* refers to a cultural, religious, and linguistic entity.

23. “The adj. ‘airyanam’ changes the topographic-descriptive name into one of political geography. For, as a ‘Dutch portion of the Rhine’ presupposes not only the existence of Dutchmen but of a Dutch state, and at the same time the existence of portions belonging to other states, thus the complex term ‘the Aryan overflow of the Datiya’ presupposes the political notion of *āryānām* [. . .]”

Lincoln (2007: 122–123) speaks of “a self-referential ethnonym of great antiquity, as evidenced by its cognates in Avestan *airya* and Vedic *arya*.” He also points to Herodotus 1.101, glossing *Arizantoi* as “of Iranian/Aryan birth,” as well as to the quotation from Eudemus of in Damascius, where the phrase *to areion genos* (“Iranian/Aryan tribe”) occurs. Ahbel-Rappe (2010: 418) avoids the Aryan reference

As for the Magi and the entire Iranian race, as Eudemus writes about this, some of them call the intelligible and unified universe Space (Topos), and others call it Time (Chronos), from which are differentiated either a good deity or a bad demon, or light and darkness before these, as some say.

Gnoli (1989b: 284), noting that the passage does not simply refer to the Magi, argues that the expression used by the neo-Platonic philosopher, who was writing at the time of Justinian and Xusrau I, is “nothing other than the literal reproduction of a far more ancient expression: the Greek translation of an Iranian form of speech dating back to the Achaemenian era.”

H. R. Baghbidi resists any attempt to give a range of meanings to the term (2009: 55): “the word *ariya*- means ‘Aryan’ in all its usage in Old Persian inscriptions, whether in isolation or in combination with the word *ciça*- ‘seed, lineage.” This is in criticism of Rossi (2000: 2093), who, in relation to the Bisotun (DB) inscription, does not translate *ariya* as “Aryan” but, rather, in that context as relating to the medium, not the language, that is, to Persian terms for granite (*xaār*, *xaāraā*, *xaāre*). Baghbidi contends that Old Persian was dear to the heart of Darius (Baghbidi 2009: 56): “Adding an ‘Aryan’ (i.e. Old Persian) version to the Elamite and Babylonian versions of the Bisotun inscription, in spite of the limited use of Old Persian in his vast empire, shows his emotional attachment to his lineage and his mother tongue.” Rossi notes that this understanding of *ārya* in the DB inscription as the name of a language is rather recent, with its roots in German scholarship of the 1940s (2020: 2.2.1).

4.6 CONCLUSION

The Aryan paradigm needs to be understood as a series of converging lines meeting in the 1840s and 1850s. One underlying problem with the paradigm is the assumption that the past was somehow simpler than the present, so that the interpretive task becomes that of identifying the primary order, and

of providing an account of a small number of basic categories. In a discussion of the notion of *anārya*, Deshpande comments (2012: 124),

The present study, though it deals with a somewhat later epoch, should make us aware of the ancient politics of knowledge involved in the use of these terms by various traditions, and the possibility that the earlier use of these terms in the Vedic literature may have occurred under similar complex traditions.

The philological detail, etymological and textual uncertainties, and the inherent difficulty of reading sacred texts as geographical guides and historical narratives, represented a significant obstacle in the search for a linear account of *Aryan*. There was interpretive pressure to read geographical and other names with as general meanings as possible, thereby maintaining an overall coherence at the level of category between the ancient texts and the postulated Aryan language family, and to triangulate between the sources to identify the original homeland (Kiepert 1856: 621). The methodological problems remain today, in particular: the lack of constraint on identifying underlying sameness (i.e., etymological speculation) and the conflation of glossing practices with analysis. Toponyms and ethnonyms are especially problematic as objects of etymological analysis, given that, in general, there is no non-circular way to identify the relevant linguistic data for comparative analysis.

In his discussion of *ārya* as an ethnonym, Pictet resorted to listing forms, on the assumption that there was an underlying historical relationship (1859–1963, I: 27ff, 54ff.). A reviewer pointed to this lack of discrimination (Anon 1863: 235–236):

That the connexion between the Ἄριοι, Iran, and Ireland is a real one, and that the name of Aryan which we give to the whole Indo-European family is a justifiable one, is an opinion very generally held. If the name is really a common one, what does it mean? *Arya* means in Sanskrit a *master* or *Lord*, also *excellent*; *ārya* is a term used for men of pure race, of the dominant class. Or has the name of the race to do with the root-verb *ar*, to plough, Latin *arare*, English to *ear*, as distinguishing the Aryan race as cultivators of the soil, from the Turanian or nomadic races? Or is it something else, equally plausible, and equally uncertain? Quien sabe?

Sacred texts provide mythical accounts of origins, but these cannot be translated into secular history and geography. At best this exercise is pointless, in that, for example, a hypothetical, reconstructed homeland tells us nothing of significance, or at worst, it represents ideological wish-fulfillment. Schlegel's egocentric turn is fundamental to the subsequent political and ideological development of Aryanism, in that it became a question of how to understand the relationship between a present self or "us" and a distant "them," also in some sense "us." If the line of vision back to the past was blurred, this

was because alien elements had intruded. The task of philological scholarship became that of bringing clarity to that perspective back through time. But that scholarship, even while it sought clarity, ended up sowing confusion, lost in an intellectual maze created by an open set of tantalizingly similar forms. If scholarship could not achieve this, then visionary thinking and, ultimately, acts of will in the form of decisive political action, were required.

CHAPTER 5

Invasion Theory and the Aryan/Dravidian Dichotomy

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Aryanism offers narratives of migration and conquest, social hierarchy, intermixing of peoples, decadence, and decline. At the same time, certain strands of Aryanism looked forward to renewal and revitalization. The nature and effect of conquest was a key concern of philology, given the problem it posed for tracing the genealogy of peoples. Conquests create the need for narrative continuity or symbolic reconciliation in the face of rupture and usurpation. Giles Fleming (d. 1665) in his *Stemma Sacrum* (1660) sought to show that Charles II was connected by descent to “all the Kings that ever reigned in this Nation,” that “the Stem Royal of those that have come in, have still fall’n in to mix themselves with the Royalty of the former inhabitants, that we have rather been enriched and increased, than absorbed by them” (1660: 10–11). The King was “bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh” (1660: 11). Fleming’s argument was that, in spite of “all contempt, which is usually thrown upon the Aborigenes of every Nation, though without any reason or justice,” it was from this population that in times of tyranny that a “Usurper” had emerged, the first of the Stuarts from whom “so many glorious Kings of Scotland” were descended, including King Charles II (1660: 15), who was also related by descent to the royal lines that had entered later.

The archetype of the conquering people has a biblical origin, namely, the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, as described in the Book of Joshua. After crossing the Jordan and taking Jericho, every living creature found there was massacred by the Israelites, with the exception of Rahab, who had helped the invaders, and her family members. In Deuteronomy 20:13–14, God ordained two distinct policies. One was for cities that lay outside the domains promised to the Israelites:

And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

The second involved a scorched earth policy for those lands promised to the Israelites (20: 16–17): “But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth. But thou shalt utterly destroy them [. . .].” There are in essence two strategies here. The first suggests “complete conquest”; the other, various forms of co-existence (Japhet 1979: 206–207).

Reviewing the historiography of the Israelite/Canaanite dichotomy, Koert van Bekkum (2011: 7–13) identifies three models: (i) peaceful infiltration; (ii) conquest; (iii) an internal peasant revolt against an oppressive Canaanite state. The first and third options represented a definitive rejection of the biblical account, whereas the second required confirmation in the archaeological record. The third option aligned the Hebrews with a narrative of indigeneity and egalitarian revolution from below. The subsequent breakdown of these models, van Bekkum explains, led to an almost complete divorce between the textual philology of the Bible and the archaeology of the Southern Levant (see Finkelstein and Silberman 2002). One argument from archaeology pointed “to an indigenous Canaanite origin for the Israelites, with no suggestion that a group of foreigners from Egypt comprised early Israel” (Barmash 2015: 4). The ethnogenesis of the Israelites may have occurred following “the coalescence of a number of groups into one shared ethnicity” (Barmash 2015: 4). The same mix of textual philology, archaeological evidence, and contemporary politics can be found in debates about the ancient history of India, with scholars in both cases now looking to population genetics to provide more definitive answers (Ostrer and Skorecki 2013, Mahal 2021, Thapar 2014). The conquest of Canaan was preceded by the Exodus from Egypt. As a political parable, this narrative suggests that liberation from oppression is ultimately a destructive process, in which others may be killed, displaced, subjected, or forcibly assimilated. By contrast, narratives of migration and diffusion, or of the integration of diversity from below, are more palatable to contemporary tastes. As productions such as the Hollywood movie *Avatar* (2009) show, the politically progressive form of identification today is with indigenous people, rather than with the conqueror or colonizer.

The status and interpretation of the conquest of Canaan is a politically sensitive issue in Israel today (Havrelock 2020). An intellectual movement in Israel that began in the 1940s rejected mainstream Zionism in favour of a prebiblical model of the region’s population, based on linguistic and cultural affinities (Diamond 1986: 3, Shavit 1987). The movement, dubbed

Canaanism, was founded by the poet Yonatan Ratosh (born Uriel Halperin; Hebrew name, Uriel Shelach, 1908–1981). While the non-Arab minority groups were seen as the most suitable candidates for assimilation in the initial stages, ultimately the aim was to bring the Moslem Arabs back into this Semitic national movement (Diamond 1986: 37). For the Canaanites, Judaism represented a religious community without boundaries, whereas this confederated state would be an authentic nation imagined as a “Fertile Crescent” (*Eretz ha-Kedem*) grounded in its own ancient territory, united by the link between territory and language, a “spatial civilization” displaying “non-Jewish Hebrew authenticity with Canaanite roots” (Ohana 2012: 75, 86), as a “Semitic Space” (Nocke 2009: 175). One way to understand Canaanism is as the stepchild of movements such as pan-Slavism, pan-Germanism, pan-Celticism, pan-Iranism, pan-Turkism, and pan-Turanism, with parallels in the post-war movements such as pan-Arabism and, to a degree, pan-Africanism. The movement drew on a notion of autochthonous pan-Semitism, a claim to indigeneity analogous to, or conceivably as a response to, claims that the Aryans originated in Europe. The notion of a shared homeland of Jews and Arabs (“Sons of Shem”; see Mark 2021) was mooted in the early twentieth century, then in the interwar period by Rabbi Benjamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldmann), a founder of the Brit Shalom movement, and by Haim Margolis-Kalvaryski (1868–1947). The General Zionist leader Pinhas (Peretz) Bernstein suggested that there was a racist element to Rabbi Benjamin’s views, “since to cite pan-Semitism was to justify the Nazis’ pan-Aryanism. Judaism, to which these theories were alien, wanted to return to its land and to create the kingdom of God and not ‘a Semitic kingdom’” (Gorny 1987: 275). While the Canaanite movement had little direct political impact, a small political grouping called Semitic Action was founded in 1956 and in this revived form argued for an alliance with Arabs within an anti-globalization anti-colonial framework.

5.2 BARBARIANS AND ROMANS

Nineteenth-century Aryanism was bound up with the developing politics of indigeneity, that is, the claim of authentic ownership of territory based on continuity of possession and occupation. On the one hand, colonialism involved the rejection of indigeneity and its relationship to sovereignty; on the other, European Romantic nationalism was grounded in the authentic ownership of territory. The English might understand themselves as plain, honest, Anglo-Saxons, doughty yeomen subject to the Norman yoke, or, alternatively (and simultaneously), as the new Romans, bringing order, free trade, and the *Pax Britannica* across their empire. The nineteenth century saw vast expansion of the European empires, while closer to home, *Volk*

nationalism threatened the foundations of the Austro-Hungarian, Czarist, and Ottoman Empires. The homeland question, the issue of the “Aryan cradle,” thus took on a powerful political subtext, expressing the tension between conquest as a mark of destiny and superiority, and rootedness, continuity of settlement as underpinning claims to ownership of territory by birthright.

There were two conflicting models of historical destiny and superiority at work. The first was the worship of the barbarian, of the warrior caste formed out of egalitarian bands, living by a code of honour, lacking in pretence, artifice, and the decadence of luxury (von See 1994). In their most extreme form, these bands might fall upon and conquer vast swathes of territory, subduing sedentary populations, as in the image of the ancient Aryans erupting into India, or that of Viking raiding parties. Seliger refers to “the primitivist admiration of the *bon sauvage*, the interest in primitive peoples and their tradition” that “engendered a nostalgia for the national past” (Seliger 1958: 273). The Germanic tribes, as described by Tacitus, were “freedom-loving barbarians” chafing under Roman rule (Momigliano 1990: 119). The second was the ideal of a civilizational elite, capable of producing the highest levels of achievement in the arts, sciences, and technology, with advanced systems of governance, as well as a structured, highly trained military. This would be the Romans at the height of their imperial power enforcing the *Pax Romana*. In the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (*Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald* or *Hermannsschlacht*) in AD 9, Germanic tribes inflicted a catastrophic defeat on the Roman army. This became known from the Roman point of view as the Varian disaster (*Clades variana*). By 1500, Tacitus’s *Germania* “had become a mirror in which the Germans liked to look at themselves” (Momigliano 1990: 121).

For the German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), author of *Hermannsschlacht* ([1808] 1871), there was a parallel between the Roman imperial attempt to conquer the German lands, the Napoleonic invasion and conquest of Europe, and French colonial oppression in Haiti (Angress 1977). In the case of the Roman Empire, a widely held belief was that “virtue had subsequently been restored in a barbaric form by the Gothic and Germanic invaders, who had set up primitive but effective communities of armed freeholders, to which feudal relationships had been no more than marginal” (Pocock 1977: 292). This view is reflected to a degree in Edward Gibbon’s (1707–1770) *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published between 1776 and 1788. Stability of rule carried with it the seeds of its own destruction (1776–1789, I: 37): “This long-peace, and the uniform government of the Romans, introduced a slow and secret poison into the vitals of the empire. The minds of men were gradually reduced to the same level, the fire of genius was extinguished, and even the military spirit evaporated.” Gibbon picked up a metaphor from Cassius Longinus (c. AD 213–273) (1776–1789, I: 59):

This diminutive stature of mankind, if we pursue the metaphor, was daily linking below the old standard, and the Roman world was indeed peopled by a race of pygmies; when the fierce giants of the north broke in, and mended the puny breed. They restored a manly spirit of freedom; and after the revolution of ten centuries, freedom became the happy parent of taste and science.

The idea of European imperialism as the eruption of a barbarian force into Asian societies was integral to the politics of the Scottish physician John Crawford among others. This was “the belief that barbarians introduced freedom into decadent societies,” though in British India Crawford saw this process as corrupted by ruthless mercantilism (Knapman 2016b: 5, 26).

In the case of France, the dichotomy between the conquering Germanic Franks, who founded the Capetian dynasty in the late tenth century, and the indigenous Celtic and Belgae people (Gauls or Gallo-Romans) was understood to distinguish the “Germanic nobility” from the “Celtic bourgeoisie.” From one point of view, this followed the natural order of things, whereby class reflected hierarchy of type. Alternatively, this was best understood as “political inequality created by conquest” (Seliger 1958: 277). This view of the Franks is associated with Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658–1722), a defender of the rights of the nobility against the monarchy, as well as against the bourgeois estate (see Ellis 1986). As explained by Michel Foucault, François Hotman (1524–1590) understood the Franks and the Gauls as fraternal peoples, aligned in their interest in seeing the expulsion of the Romans. The subtext was the desire to put limits on the power of the French monarchy. In this model, the Gauls were viewed as an inert layer of the population, requiring liberation from without. But from the eighteenth century onwards, it was sometimes the Gauls who were presented as the motor of French history (Foucault 1997: 105–197, Marks 2000). The historian Augustin Thierry (1795–1856) followed Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) in understanding the foundation of nation-states as the dynamic interaction of conquered and conqueror. Saint-Simon defined the class of *industriels*, the Gauls, as the core of French society, that is, those whose work met the practical needs of society and who should by right be the governing class, rather than the descendants of the Franks, who believed that the nation should be governed in their interest (Thierry 1841: 59).

One pervasive set of questions involved the continuities or discontinuities of national character, institution, physical type, or language, in the aftermath of conquest. The French botanist François Gabriel de Bray (1765–1832), in exile following the French Revolution, observed (1817, III: 240) that a change of language did not necessarily mean the decomposition of a people, and on the other hand a change in the make-up of the population did not automatically mean the loss of the language. The Chinese and the Russians “maintained the

integrity of their language, despite the frequent and numerous admixtures of foreign peoples, who not only mingled with them, but even subjugated them.” For the British ethnologist John William Jackson (1872: 36), the Frankish conquest of Gaul involved a “body of comparatively rude, though brave warriors” who then settled “among a people not only more civilised, but also more nervous and organically refined than themselves.” The result was that they “soon adopted both the religion and the language of their subjects,” and “unfortunately, in process of time they also adopted their manners and morals.” In this way, they became “the most gallant and accomplished, and perhaps, with the exception of the Italians, the most profligate nobility in Europe.” French music, for example, was “obviously the product of a mental constitution less vast and massive than the German” (1872: 37).

5.3 FROM GOLDEN AGE TO FOREIGN CONQUEST

Eighteenth-century colonial scholarship generally emphasized the antiquity of Indian culture, within the diffusionist model from Genesis 10. Humanity was assumed to have spread out from a single point after the expulsion initially from Eden (often located in Mesopotamia) and subsequently after the Flood, with the Ark traditionally located on Mount Ararat in Armenia. According to Robert Orme (1728–1801), India had (1763–1778, I: 2) “been inhabited, from the earliest antiquity, by a people who bear no resemblance either in their figures or manners with any of the nations which are contiguous to them.” In spite of a history of conquest by neighbours and then rule by “the Mogul Tartars under Tamerlane and his successors” [. . .] the original inhabitants have lost very little of their original character.” *Hendoo*, from which *Indian* was derived, was used “to distinguish the original natives from all who have intruded amongst them” (1763–1778, I: 2).

For the Scottish historian William Robertson, the caste system offered evidence of an indigenous origin in the remote past (1791: 257). Robertson reported that, according to the “ancient Heathen writers,” the Indians “were reckoned among those races of men which they denominated *Autochthones* or *Aborigenes*, whom they considered as natives of the soil, whose origin could not be traced.” As evidence for this, Robertson identified “the separation of professions,” which even “prior to the records of authentic history” had been institutionalized in the system of “four orders or casts” (1791: 258–259). While this system was apparently “extremely repugnant,” it had its own rationale and was “better adapted” to achieve its aims than “a careless observer” might realize (1791: 260). This caste system reflected “the permanence of its institutions and the immutability in the manners of its inhabitants,” which neither the “violence and illiberal fanaticism of its Mahomedan conquerors, nor the power of

its European masters” was able to alter (1791: 261). It was no wonder “that the ancients should describe the Indians as a most happy race of men” (1791: 268). They had “treatises concerning the laws and jurisprudence of their country, of more remote antiquity than are to be found in any other nation.” These were written in Sanscrit “which has not been spoken for many ages in any part of Indostan, and is now understood by none but the most learned Brahmins” (1791: 274).

William Jones took up Orme’s description of the ancient wealth of India, and in this vein cited a section of the Geographical Poem from Dionysius Periegetes¹ (1799b: 25). India’s “sources of wealth” had been retained “even after so many revolutions and conquests,” and the population remained of the same type: “their features have, most probably, remained unaltered since the time of DIONYSIUS.” There was no doubt that however “degenerate and debased so ever the Hindus may now appear, that in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge.” Jones noted that conquerors generally assimilated linguistically to the conquered (1799b: 26): “the general effect of conquest was to leave the current language of the conquered people unchanged, or very little altered, in its ground-work, but to blend with it a considerable number of exotick names both for things and for actions.” His view was that “the pure Hindi” was “primeval in Upper India, into which the Sanscrit was introduced by conquerors from other kingdoms in some remote age.” Jones believed that the Chinese and Indians “were originally the same people,” but they had been long separated and retained “few strong features of their ancient consanguinity.” Unlike the Chinese, the Indians had preserved their ancient language and ritual. The Chinese had diverged in type: “the *Chinese*, by a mixture of *Tartarian* blood from the time of their first establishment, have at length formed a race distinct from both the *Indians* and the *Tartars*.”

Elizabeth Hamilton (1756–1816), in her *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, drew on Jones’s account of Hindu belief, among other sources. She argued that the Hindus were “the Aborigenes,” and “so remote, so far beyond the date of European chronology, as to be rejected by European pride” ([1796] 1811: vii). She painted a picture of an ancient state ruled under paternal yet enlightened rulers, and the system of caste as a source of stability and harmony ([1796] 1811: viii–x). Hamilton set out the familiar duality between “the sublime notions of the Hindoo deity” and “the religion of the vulgar,” which had “degenerated into the grossest idolatry” ([1796] 1811: xxiii). This “mild and auspicious government” was overthrown “by the relentless fury of fanatic zeal,” following “the imposter of Mecca” and his injunction to spread his doctrine “by persuasion, or the sword” ([1796] 1811: xxxv). The cruelties of the “Mussulman

1. Dionysius Periegetes’s dates are unknown, but he is generally understood to have been writing in the time of Emperor Hadrian, who reigned from AD 117 to 138.

rulers” towards the Hindoos and their law is then contrasted with British rule, under which “their ancient laws have been restored to them” ([1796] 1811: xliii). Following Jones, Prichard declared (1813: 433), “No nation on earth appears to have made such extravagant pretensions to antiquity as the Hindus.” He identified a “common origin of the ancient Indians and Egyptians,” though on the basis of close mythology and institutional analogies (1813: 318).

The deep identity ascribed to Sanscrit and the European languages gave credence to the idea of an ancient invasion, as it was consistent with a point of origin to the west of India. In a review of Charles Wilkins’s *A Grammar of the Sanscrita Language*, Alexander Hamilton (1809) noted that Jones’s conception of the relationship between Sanscrit and Hindi had been refuted by Henry Colebrooke (1765–1837). Colebrooke had given “incontrovertible proofs, that where similar words are found in both languages, (that is nine tenths of the whole), the Hindi has borrowed from the Sanscrit” (Hamilton 1809: 369). Hamilton added, “That the Brahmans entered India as conquerors, bringing with them their language, religion, and civil institutions, is no improbable hypothesis” (Hamilton 1809: 369). Hamilton also cast doubt on the idea that the portion of Hindi that was not related to Sanscrit was necessarily “the remains of an aboriginal tongue,” pointing to waves of foreign conquest: “It appears to us much more probable, that these languages have furnished the anomalous part of the Hindi, than it was the original language of the country” (Hamilton 1809: 370).

Contemporary critics of Aryan Invasion Theory like to quote Mounstuart Elphinstone, whose *History of India* asked rhetorically, “Where [. . .] could a central point be, from which a language could spread over India, Greece, and Italy, and yet leave Chaldea, Syria and Arabia untouched?” (1841, I: 98). However, Elphinstone argued that the question was “still open” and offered a model of how the caste system might have originated, following occupation by “a conquering tribe” (1841, I: 98). Keppens and de Roover (2014: 4) locate the origins of invasion theory in the early nineteenth century, pointing to two contexts: the College of Fort St. George in Madras (see, for example, Wilks 1810–1817) and the *Société Asiatique de Paris* (Langlès 1821). Wilks rejected any notion of a lost golden age and painted the history of India as a long sequence of “wars, revolutions, and conquests” (1810, I: 2). Langlès (1821: 170) described the caste of Pariahs as “probably the sad debris” of the autochthonous population. In an open letter to Mounstuart Elphinstone, translated from an 1826 Danish publication, the philologist Rasmus Rask speculated that the aboriginal peoples found in the south and eastern extremes “were driven into that situation by the torrent of warlike people from the west.” These were remnants of “that one great race of men, which may be stiled the Scythian,” which had in antiquity (1834: 525)

extended from the Frozen Sea to the Indian Ocean, until the chain was broken by a great inundation of people of our own race, which for want of a convenient name, I shall venture to call the *Japhetic*, issuing from Eastern Persia, and taking possession of somewhat more than *Hindústán*.

These indigenous languages, named as Telugu, Tamil, Carnatacá (Kannada), and Malayal'ma (Malayalam), were similar in grammatical structure to the "Finnish and Tartar dialects in Northern and Central Asia" (1834: 525). The notion that the caste hierarchy had arisen as a result of a previous conquest was seen as a plausible explanation (Rémusat 1822: 223–224, reviewing Langlès 1821; see Keppens and de Roover 2014: 6).

In his study of the *Avesta*, Hölty commented on the relationship between Zend and Sanscrit, read together with the different characteristics of the Southern Indian languages. Hölty agreed with Jones that Sanscrit had entered India from Iran. A conquering people ("ein eroberndes Volk") had driven the ancient Indians to the south and southeast. This was reflected in the white skin colour of the Brahmins and the dark or black skin of the other castes. There were elements of the Northern languages that were shared with the Southern varieties, and these were remnants of the language of the original inhabitants (1829: 28). In the introduction to his translation of the *Meghadūta* or *Cloud Messenger* by Kālidāsa, H. H. Wilson talked of "[t]he antiquity and excellence of the sacred language of the Hindus" (1814: ix) and noted the parallels between Greek and Hindu mythology (1814: xix). His 1835 textbook of world history made no mention of a foreign origin for the Hindus: "In ancient times, a small part of India only was occupied by the Hindús," though he did remark that Sanscrit was "very remarkably connected in grammatical structure with Greek and Latin" (1835: 16, 27). However, in the preface to his 1840 translation of the *Vishnu Purana*, H. H. Wilson noted the general consensus that "the Brahmanical religion and civilization were brought into India from without" (1840: lxxv), referencing William Jones's "On the Hindus" ([1786] 1799b), Klaproth's *Asia Polyglotta* (1823), Colonel Vans Kennedy's *Researches into the Nature and Affinity of the Ancient and Hindu Mythology* (1831), and August Schlegel's "De l'origine des Hindous" (1834). Taking issue with Tacitus, Schlegel had no doubt that the ancestors of the Germanic peoples came from Asia. The Hindus were not indigenous to their homeland either and came in, like other conquerors, from the east through the area of Attock in the Punjab (1834: 408, 409ff.). Vans Kennedy located the origin of Sanscrit in Babylonia (1831: 368): "Although I do not derive all the nations of the earth from Shem, Ham, and Japhet, I still think that the Babylonia was the original seat of the Sanscrit language and of Sanskrit literature." Wilson argued that there were tribes "on the borders, and in the heart of the country, who are still not Hindus," and the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Manu* pointed to "a period when Bengal, Orissa, and the

whole of Dekhin, were inhabited by degraded or outcaste, that is, barbarous tribes" (1840: lxvi). He then added (1840: lxvi),

The traditions of the Puránás confirm these views: but they lend no assistance to the determination of the question whence the Hindus came; whether from a central Asiatic nation, as Sir William Jones supposed, or from the Caucasian mountains, the plains of Babylonia, or the borders of the Caspian, as conjectured by Klaproth, Vans Kennedy, and Schlegel.

It became scholarly orthodoxy that, in the words of John Wilson, "India is not the cradle of the Brahmanical faith," and that "the predecessors of the Brahmans" came from "beyond the Indus, or exterior to the Himalaya mountains," though there was no agreement as to the exact place of origin (Wilson 1843: 14). August Schleicher followed Lassen in placing the original Indogermanic population at a high elevation west of the Mustag and Belurtag mountains² stretching to the Caspian Sea (1850: 124). The linguistic continuum primarily reflected migration west, so that Celtic deviated most from the original model of Indogermanic (1850: 124). The Indogermanic origin could not have been in India itself, even though the linguistic evidence might suggest this, "because the Aryan population of India can evidently be recognized as one that entered through migration, and by whom the aboriginals already present there were driven back" (Schleicher 1850: 125).

Henry Beveridge (1799–1863), in his *Comprehensive History of India* (1862, I: 1), argued that "[t]he Hindoos, though now forming the great body of the population of India, do not seem to have been its earliest inhabitants." They had entered India from the north-west, and the original inhabitants were most likely the hill tribes "who after contending in vain against foreign invaders, quitted the plains, and found an asylum among mountains and forests, into which the conquering race could not or cared not to follow them." Beveridge suggests that the "best physical type of the Hindoo," which he finds in "the upper basin of the Ganges," "may probably owe part of his superiority to his greater purity of descent from the original stock," but also to "the intimate relations into which he was early brought with conquerors from the West" (1862, I: 167–168). By contrast, "[t]he Bengalee, though undoubtedly belonging to the same original stock, looks as if he had been dwarfed. His stature is diminutive and slender, his complexion of a darker hue, and his whole appearance effeminate" (Beveridge 1862, I: 168).

2. Mustag is in Kemerovo Oblast, southern Russia; Belurtag (Belur-Tag) is a range of mountains that meets with the Himalayas, otherwise known as Pamir. See also Muller, lectures, I: 239, as cited in Taylor (1888: 238–275).

The Madras military officer Lieutenant-General George Briggs (1808–1875) gave a summary of one version of this theory. He noted that he was using the term *Hindu* to refer to “the race termed by Blumenbach *Caucasian*; by Prichard *Iranian*, the section of which that invaded India being called by their sacred writers and legislators *Arian*; and which race brought with it the language of which Sanscrit appears the most polished type” (Briggs 1852: 276). His argument was set out as follows:

1. That the Hindus entered India from a foreign country, and that they found it pre-occupied by inhabitants.
2. That by slow degrees they possessed themselves of the whole of the soil, reducing to serfage those they could retain upon it.
3. That they brought with them the Sanskrit language, a tongue different from that of the aborigines.
4. That they introduced into the country municipal institutions.
5. That the aborigines differ in every respect from the Hindus.
6. Lastly, that the aborigines throughout India are derived from one common source.

Briggs (1852: 304) argued that the aboriginal peoples had entered India in the very remote past, and that “their language, their features, and their customs, point them out as a branch of the great Scythian family, which from time to time emerged from the Himalayan mountains on the east, and peopled India before the western or Arian race arrived and conquered them.” He drew on the writings of Brian Hodgson (1801–1894), formerly resident in Nepal, who shared Briggs’s opinion “that there is an identity, both in physiognomy and philology of the several aboriginal races of India, which, while it stamps them of one stock, distinguishes them from the Arian” (1852: 308). Briggs credited the institution of caste for having made it possible “to have traced the origin of these two races” (1852: 304).

In a study of “the languages of the non-Aryan tribes and peoples who dwell within or border upon the British Empire of India,” William Wilson Hunter (1840–1900), a senior member of the Indian Civil Service, saw them as “broken and scattered fragments of that unrecorded world which was before the dispersion of the Indo-Germanic stock” (1868: [i]). In the lowlands, these “pre-historic races succumbed so completely beneath the Aryan invaders, as to lose all remembrance of their separate ethnical existence.” They nonetheless “permanently affected the language, religion, and political destiny of the composite Hindus whom they combined with their conquerors to form.” Given the long history of warfare between the highland population who had “preserved their nationality intact” and “Aryan, Affghan, and Moghul” invaders, it fell to the British rulers to adopt policies that would integrate these non-Aryans into the polity (1868: [i]): “But in order to civilise, it is necessary first to understand them; and this book, for the first time in the history of India, places the governing race in direct communication with eighty millions of its non-Aryan

subjects and neighbours.” This population was (1868: 4) “an ignoble element, destitute of letters, of historical relationship, of religious conceptions, of all that renders the study of a race attractive, and for the most part buried away in forests fatal to European life.” The treatment of these groups as outcasts, together with encroachment by the Hindus on their territory, had led to a series of conflicts (1868: 4): “Aryan aggressiveness, mercantile or territorial, has been found to lie at the bottom of almost every non-Aryan rising whose causes have been carefully ascertained.” Hunter criticized the treatment of this population at the hands of the Hindus, Muslims, and British, but saw an opportunity for recruitment into the military and for civilizing them (1868: 12, 13). He speculated about a Chinese link to the pre-Aryan population of the interior (1868: 20).

Hunter then turned to “those who were crushed before the Aryan advance, and have merged as serfs into the Hindu population.” These were termed *Sudras* and *Chandalas* in the Sanskrit texts and were characterized “as non-Aryan helots.” As Rudolf von Roth had noted, they were outside the “Sanskrit scheme of society,” and “while the other three natural Aryan castes clearly derive their names from Aryan roots, all attempts to establish a Sanskrit origin for the nomenclature of the fourth or non-Aryan servile caste have failed” (1868: 29). A pragmatic policy based on an understanding of the highland aboriginals and the lowland outcastes would improve administration, converting them “from a source of weakness to a source of strength” (1868: 30). Beneath the Aryan layer there was hidden a great narrative from the past (1868: 30–31), in that “these now fragmentary peoples form the *débris* of a widely-spread primitive race.” These peoples had extended “from the northern shores of the Indian Ocean and the Chinese Sea,” and one could discern the remnants “of ethnical evolutions and the ebb and flow of human speech, far more ancient, and on a grander scale, than the prehistoric migrations of the Indo-Germanic stock.” Missionary work involved “not only the propagation of the Christian faith, but also the civilisation of whole races, and the winning back of long lapsed peoples to a new life” (1868: 31).

The invasion narrative became the standard textbook account, namely, that a “mighty stock” descended “at some very remote period” and “at successive intervals” from Central Asia “bringing with them civilization and the sword, displacing the aboriginal dwellers, and furnishing the land with a new race and all its concomitants—a new language, a new religion, new manners and customs, and a new complexion of things in general” (Pearce 1876: 31). This invasion was explained in terms of the superior “physical qualities” possessed by the Aryan invaders, as well as the “exquisite beauty of their Sanskrit muse” together with their more sophisticated religious beliefs and social organization (1876: 32). Cases where a conquering race transmitted its language to the conquered population, but then lost its racial distinctiveness, opened up the possibility that “Persia, Northern India, and even parts

of Europe, may be Aryan in speech, though they may not, to any appreciable extent, be Aryan in blood" (Taylor 1890: 203). Arthur MacDonell argued that the Aryan speakers had "lost their ethnical type by intermixture with the numerically predominant aborigines, but the languages themselves have preserved their identity by superseding the indigenous non-Aryan forms of speech" (1927: 196). In the south, however, "where the aboriginal languages were associated with a comparatively high degree of culture, and where the number of their speakers was greatly superior to that of the immigrants," it had been possible for "the indigenous speech" to hold its own. If the Aryans were invaders, then Sanscrit was, in terms of Romantic nationalism, a foreign idiom.

5.4 VERNACULARISM AND THE STATUS OF SANSCRIT

John Cleland in his *The Way to Things by Words, and to Words by Things* (1766) reported that Sanscrit was a language "so admirable for its harmony, copiousness, and energy" and "was formerly the living language in the country inhabited by the first Brachmans." However, it subsequently became corrupted and difficult to understand. The grammar of Sanscrit involved the operation upon roots or "primitive elements," so that "a scholar, who knows only grammar, may, by OPERATING according to the rules on ONE ROOT or primitive element draw from it several thousands of true *Sanscort* words." Hence the name *Sanscort*, "which signifies *Synthetic*, or compound" (1766: 91–92). The Brahmins had their own special vocabulary but took the desire to preserve "an air of mystery" to an extreme, so that "not content to have terms unknown to the vulgar, they have dignified the most common things under mysterious names" (1766: 93). Alexander Dow seemed conflicted about Sanscrit (1768, I: xxii), speaking of the great difficulty there was in acquiring it, and "the impenetrable veil of mystery with which the Brahmins industriously cover their religious tenets and philosophy." Whether Sanscrit was originally "the vulgar tongue of Hindostan" or whether it was "invented by the Brahmins, to be a mysterious repository for their religion and philosophy" was unclear. Whereas other languages arose in a haphazard fashion, being "casually invented," Sanscrit had a "regularity of etymology and grammatical order" greater than Arabic and appeared to be the result of planning. It bore "evident marks, that it has been fixed upon rational principles, by a body of learned men, who studied regularity, harmony, and a wonderful simplicity and energy of expression" (Dow 1768: xxx).

By contrast, Friedrich Majer praised Sanscrit as an authentic speech form, noting that the Brahmins called it "the language of the Gods," and, given its harmony, richness, energy, it was in all probability once "the living language of the country." Whether it was formed out of one of the original languages of

Hindustan, or whether it was the mother of all the languages found there at present, was unclear (1798, II: 130–131). Majer took issue with Dow and his view that the language had been invented to maintain a veil of secrecy for the religion (1798, II: 132). It had been a full language, capable of meeting all the practical and expressive needs of its speakers, having been “the living language of a whole people” (“die lebende Sprache eines ganzen Volkes”) (1798, II: 133). Like Jones, Franz Bopp appealed to aesthetic criteria in evaluating Sanscrit, talking of its “refinements of grammatical construction,” and describing it as “polished” ([1816] 1820: 1, 2). For Bopp, the investigation into “the analogy of Sanskrit” with European languages could show “the higher or lower degree of affinity by which nations, who in the remotest antiquity wandered from the land of their ancestors, are connected with the present inhabitants of India” ([1816] 1820: 1). It could also demonstrate that ([1816] 1820: 1) “those refinements of grammatical construction by which Sanskrit is so advantageously distinguished from all the spoken dialects of the Indian world, already existed in that remote antiquity, when colonies, leaving their Asian seats, transplanted into Europe their native tongue [. . .].” This could be seen from the fact that “the same refined grammar” was absent in the contemporary Indian languages (Bengali, Tamul, Hindustani, Mahratta, etc.), yet Sanscrit showed a connection with Greek, Latin, and “the ancient Teutonic dialects,” especially Gothic. This was of significance, since it allowed the conclusion that ([1816] 1820: 1–2)

the beauties of Sanskrit are not the work of the learned or the priesthood, as some might be inclined to suppose; but that they really were in daily use in the mouth of the people, and were so strongly impressed upon their minds, that they did not forget them in their transmigrations beyond distant mountains and seas.

It was likely that a nation with such a polished language “must be able to boast of a very ancient literature.” It was “probable that what we call Sanskrit was spoken also in its primeval form by the ancient Persians and Medes,” and that they would have sought “means to preserve in their purity the tenets of their religious and civil institutions,” such as the invention of writing. This led substantial credence to Hindu claims about “the high antiquity of part of their literature” ([1816] 1820: 2).

One sceptical commentator was the Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart (1753–1828). According to Stewart, Sanscrit was a legacy of Alexander’s invasion. It was an elite demotic, invented initially by Brahmin priests (1829: 85):

May I be allowed to conjecture farther, that the Sanscrit was not formed in consequence of any deep and systematical design, but began in a sort of slang, or *Gypsey jargon*, (a sort of *kitchen* Greek) in which the priests conversed with one another on topics not fit for profane ears?

This medium served a useful purpose, so this “naturally suggested the employment of it in their written communications,” which “would gradually lead to its cultivation on grammatical principles.” The resemblances between Greek and Sanscrit were artificial, and not the result of changes analogous to those undergone by Latin in the development of the Romance languages (1829: 87). Sanscrit was “an artificial language, emanating solely from the priesthood” (1829: 92). Stewart took issue with Nathaniel Halhed’s argument that Sanscrit was the parent language “of almost every dialect from the Persian Gulf to the China seas” (1778: iii), as well as with Henry Colebrooke’s notion that Sanscrit was once the vernacular language “universally spoken” in India (Colebrooke 1803: 201). He questioned “how a tongue which was once spoken over regions of such vast extent, should have *ceased* to be a living language” (1829: 88). Stewart also disputed Hamilton’s assertion about the role of Brahmins as ancient conquerors (1829: 89, citing Hamilton 1809: 369). Sanscrit had been created by the Brahmins and was “always confined to their order” (Stewart 1829: 90). It had been based on a Greek model: “the Greek tongue not only served as a model for its syntax and system of inflections, but supplied the materials of its vocabulary on abstract and scientific subjects.” Rather than the conjectures of common origins, it was more likely that “foreign idioms” as well as “the vulgar tongues of India” contributed to the vocabulary of Sanscrit (1829: 91). In an appendix, Stewart reproduced a long quotation from Frances Wilford (discussed earlier) on the fraud perpetuated against him by “certain Bramins” or pandits, as well as a report from Mr. John Bently on the unreliability of astronomical texts, and the question of the ongoing revision of ancient texts by scribes (1829: 98–105).

The idea that Sanscrit is an artificial or invented language might seem far-fetched. But it aligned with the Protestant missionary view that high ritual or “priestly” language was an alienated medium, in that it was remote from the vernacular and designed to obscure rather than enlighten. Monier-Williams (1872: xiii) saw Sanscrit as “a certain form of the language brought by the Indian branch of the great Āryan race into India.” It was, however, not “the ancient spoken language” of the Hindus. As in other “civilized countries,” there was a bifurcation of the spoken vernacular, with “the one elaborated by the learned, the other popularized and variously provincialized by the unlearned.” In India the gap between these two became extreme, due to “the greater exclusiveness of the educated few, the greater ignorance of the masses and the desire of a bigoted priesthood to keep the key of knowledge in their own possession.” The grammar of Sanscrit was “treated by Indian Pandits as the end itself” and “subtilized into an intricate science, fenced round by a bristling barrier of technicalities.” The natural name of the language should have been *Hindu-i*, which means “the speech of the Hindus,” but instead “an artificial

designation, viz. Sanskrita,” meaning “the perfectly constructed speech,” was used “to denote its complete severance from the common tongue (called by contrast Prakṛita), and its exclusive dedication to literary and religious purposes.”

From this vernacularist point of view, it followed that Sanscrit was an artificial or ritualized language, whether or not it was consciously designed. This vernacularism is sometimes reflected in how the word *Sanscrit* itself is glossed into English. Doniger’s *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009) opens with this statement of intent, namely, that her book offers an alternative to that “constituted by the most famous texts in Sanskrit (the literary language of ancient India)” and seeks to tell “a story that incorporates the narratives of and about alternative people—people who from, the standpoint of most high-caste Hindu males, are alternative in the sense of otherness, people of other religions, or cultures, or castes, or species (animals), or gender (women)” (2009: 1). Doniger sets up an opposition between Sanscrit, for which she gives the etymological meaning of “perfected, artificial,” and its spoken analogue, Pracrit, which means “primordial, natural.” Even in the time of the Vedas, Sanscrit was not a vernacular variety, “a kitchen language,” but “those male Sanskritists had to be bilingual in order to talk to their wives and children,” so that “Sanskrit and oral traditions flow back and forth, producing a constant infusion of lower-class words and ideas into the Brahmin world, and vice versa” (2009: 5). Contrary to the idea that spoken varieties are derived from Sanscrit, Doniger argues that Pracrit must have preceded it: “the vernacular came first, while Sanskrit, the refined secondary revision, the artificial language, came later” (2009: 5). Indian history can be understood as an endless back and forth between Sanscritization (Srinvas 1952) and what Doniger terms *Deshification* (from *deshi*, meaning “local”). These local varieties are marked at origin ideologically:

The bad news is that some of the vernacular literatures are marred by the misogynist and class-bound mental habits of the Brahmins, while the good news is that even some Sanskrit texts, and certainly many vernacular texts, often break out of those structures and incorporate the more open-minded attitudes of the oral vernaculars. (2009: 7)

On this view, the vernacular is open textured and freethinking, while the formal and ritual register of Sanscrit represents misogyny and exclusion. Appealing though this vision is, this is the language politics of the Protestant Reformation, nineteenth-century Romantic *Volk* nationalism, and post-1970s identity politics applied retrospectively to ancient India. By contrast, Rajiv Malhotra glosses Sanscrit etymologically as “elaborated, refined, cultured, civilized” and envisages a “web of interconnectedness” between Sanscrit and “local

culture and language” (2011: 239, 241). Doniger’s framework is at core a binary one, whereas Malhotra seeks to articulate an ideal, holistic vision of India’s linguistic order.

5.5 VERNACULARISM AND THE ARYAN/DRAVIDIAN DIVIDE

Vernacularism as a socio-political and ideological formation was destined to have a profound impact on Indian society. In addition to Arabic, Persian, Sanscrit, and Turkic languages, Urdu had been the literary language of the Mughal Empire, and there were literary and philosophical works in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Oriya, Assamese, Bengali, and so on (Kejariwal 1988: 3ff., Doniger 2009: 549). However, political vernacularism as an explicit ideology, with its roots in Protestantism and Romantic politics of identity, was an imported belief system. William Jones had given both administrative and intellectual priority to the classical languages (see Steadman-Jones 2007: 47–60). There was no serious sociological dimension to Jones’s thinking about India and its languages. Henry Colebrooke understood linguistic variation in India in terms of closeness or distance from Sanscrit. Of the Tamil language, spoken in “the county of Drávira which terminates the peninsula of India,” he remarked that “the *Támila* contains many Sanscrit words, either unaltered or little changed, with other more corrupted, and a still greater number of doubtful origin” (1803: 226–227). Two decades later, August Schlegel by contrast discussed the contemporary idea that states had naturally given boundaries, creating a “national homogeneity” based on “language, customs, and character” (1834: 411). It followed that the vast extent of India suggested the possibility of a plurality of states (1834: 412).

The Sanscrit-centered vision stood in marked contrast to the incipient sociological interest in contemporary custom and linguistic usage found among Protestant missionaries. In William Ward’s *Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos* (1807–1811), the author took what Pennington (2005: 79) describes as “an ethnographic stance.” Protestant missionaries were much more attuned to the vernacular present of India (see Ward 1807–1811, II: 39). William Carey’s preface to his *Grammar of the Sungskrit Language* (1806: iv) reflected belief that Sanscrit was the origin of Indian vernaculars, but it showed an awareness of their different composition:

The Hindoosthanees and the Tamul, with the languages of Gujerat and Maluyala, are evidently derived from the Sungskrit, but the two former are greatly mixed with foreign words. The Bengalee, Orissa, Mahratta, Kurnatu, and Tilingu languages are almost wholly composed of Sungskrit words.

Following a vernacularist logic, [Marshman \(1815: 3–4\)](#) argued that the Gospel needed to be translated “and put into the hands of the various tribes of India, whose dialects differ so much from each other, (though most of them originate in one common source).”

The distinction between Aryan and Dravidian languages was initially elaborated by colonial and missionary scholars, who broke with the assumption that all Indian languages were descended from Sanscrit ([Carey 1814](#), [Sreekumar 2009: 79](#)). On the basis of the distribution of language types, it was argued that the Dravidians were the original inhabitants, or, alternatively, preceded the Aryans as invaders or migrants. The extensive Sanscrit component in the Dravidian languages was understood to be a consequence of Sanscritization, that is, the borrowing of terminology reflecting ritual and religious, political, or administrative concepts. The articulation of the Aryan/Dravidian distinction is credited to Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819), a colonial civil servant in Madras, who argued for the non-Sanscritic roots of Telugu, a language spoken in southeast India. Ellis argued that “neither the Tamil, nor the Telugu, nor any of their cognate dialects” were derived from Sanscrit (Ellis, in [Campbell 1816: 7](#), [Trautmann 2006](#)). Sanscrit may have had an impact on these other languages in terms of “polish,” yet they constituted “a distinct family of languages, with which the Sanscrit has, in latter times especially, intermixed, but with which it has no radical connexion” (Ellis, in [Campbell 1816: 7](#)). Beneath the Sanscrit accretions was to be found “the pure native language of the land.” This language was described by Ellis in terms of vernacular self-sufficiency, in that it was deemed “capable of expressing every mental and bodily operation, every possible relation and existent thing; for, with the exception of some religious and technical terms, no word of Sanscrit derivation is necessary to the Telugu” (Ellis, in [Campbell 1816: 19](#)).

The category of Dravidian became mainstream in colonial linguistics with the work of Robert Caldwell and his 1856 *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (see [Trautmann 2006](#), [Sreekumar 2009](#)), and with a series of contributions by the Reverend Dr. John Stevenson (1798–1858). Stevenson argued that the vernacular literature of the Marathas (Marathi, present-day Maharashtra), a form of Sanscrit-derived *Pacrit*, had been unjustly neglected. This *Pacrit*, and “all the languages of Northern India,” appeared initially to be entirely Sanscrit in origin. But there was “another aboriginal language of India, different from the Sanscrit, which has united with the language of the Brahmins in forming the different dialects now spoken in Hindustan, and in the island of Ceylon.” Stevenson urged recognition of the vernacular languages of India, applauding the government for “yielding to the voice of reason” by decreeing that “in every province the language of the people shall be the language of their rulers.” In this way,

“the speech of the common people instead of being despised as a jargon, is every where cultivated as a language” (Stevenson 1841: 84). He argued that “Telugu, Kannadī and Tamil” were “radically different from the language of the Vedas,” comparing the role of Sanscrit to that of Latin in European languages:

The same I conceive, though in a less degree, to be the case with the Maráthi; and also, most probably, with the Hindú, Bengali, and all the languages of Northern India. The Sanskrit proportion becomes less and less as we advance southward, and is least in the Tamil; just as the Latin proportion of the modern languages of Europe decreases as we advance northward.

Stevenson observed “a strong family identity” (1842: 109–110) among languages whose characteristics were not derived from Sanscrit, yet it was observable in “languages spoken by people having so little intercourse with one another, as for ages the Hindu inhabitants of the north and south of India have had.” They must have been “originally all of one family,” with “one primitive language, the grammatical structure of which may be, in some measure or other, traced throughout the whole.” Before the arrival of the Brahmins, the whole of India (1842: 104) “was peopled by the members of one great family of a different origin.” There had been an original unity, even though time had led to change and divergence (1842: 104): “yet oneness of language would seem to point to oneness of origin, especially since both history and tradition are silent as to any widespread influence exercised in ancient times, by any foreign tribe except the Braminical.” Following the logic of indigeneity, Stevenson turned the idea of an Aryan invasion against the purported invaders (1842: 104). The Brahmins were in physical type and language “a foreign tribe,” which made them “foreign to the whole of India, except perhaps a small district to the north-west upon the Ganges.” Even in “the time of Manu,” the populations living in the south “did not submit themselves to the Braminical institutions.” By mid-century, the argument for the vernaculars as a tool of governance had become self-evident to many colonial scholars: “a knowledge of provincial languages like the *Bengali*, *Marathi*, *Telugu*, *Tamil*, *Carnatika* [Karnataka] and *Cingalese* [Sinhalese], was of no less importance and necessity than that of the more fashionable Persian and Hindustani” (Müller 1848: 319).

The Aryan/Dravidian model was a binary one (with the third category reserved for tribal or aboriginal languages), though it seemed that descriptively there was a continuum from north to south, and methodology and analysis were both unclear. In conceptualizing this continuum, Latham (1851: 152–153) rejected the notion of an organic integration of Sanscrit into the Indian vernaculars, noting that “[e]very spoken dialect of Hindostan has a

percentage of Sanskrit words in it; just as every dialect of England has an amount of Anglo-Norman.” There was a difference in percentage, but in general the proportion of Sanskrit was “smallest in the isolated Tamulian tongues; larger in the Tamul of the Dekhan; and largest in the tongues about to be enumerated; these being the chief languages of modern Hindostan.” These were “Marathi, Udiya, Bengali, Hindú, Gujeratthi, Scindian, Multani, Punjabi.” Latham sought to distinguish as far as possible between Sanskrit and the Indian vernaculars, since his view was that Indo-European originated much further to the west than the conventional view (to be discussed). He denied that a language like Bengali was originally Sanscritic, arguing that the percentage of Sanskrit terms was uninformative (Latham 1851: 153): “What do they prove as to the character of the language in which they occur? Do they make the Sanskrit the basis of the tongue, just as the Anglo-Saxon is of the English, or do they merely show it as a superadded foreign element, like the Norman—like that in kind, but far greater in degree?” Depending on the answer, Bengali was “either Tamul, with an unprecedented amount of foreign vocables, or Sanskrit, with a few words of the older native tongue retained.” It could not be assumed that (Latham 1851: 154) “whenever the modern and ancient tongues have any words in common, the former has always taken them from the latter—an undue assumption, since the Sanskrit may easily have adopted native words.” The evidence from the inflectional system suggested that Bengali was basically Tamil. The fact was that “the highest authorities consider the languages of northern India to be related to the Sanskrit, just as the English is to the Anglo-Saxon, and the Italian to the Latin,” while the contrary view was that “the real relations of the Sanskrit are those of the Norman-French to our own tongue, and of the Arabic to the Spanish.” In the whole of Hindustan, there was no variety descended from Sanskrit, nor “a spot whereon that famous tongue can be shown to have existed as a spoken and indigenous language” (1851: 154). Latham’s views never became mainstream, however.

According to Max Müller, the impact of Ellis’s work and the recognition of Dravidian was profound (1848: 323): “Afterwards, whenever a question arose about the languages now current in India, the constant answer has been, without contradiction, that the languages spoken in the north are of an Indo-Germanic descent, while those in the south belong to a different stock.” The “Brahminical people” were of “Arian origin” and came originally from Iran, “the birthplace of their language, religion and civilization” (1848: 328). The hostilities that accompanied their advance into India, and onwards to the south, were described in ancient literature (1848: 329–330):

In the hymns of the Rigveda [. . .] we see the Brahminical tribes advancing step by step along the rivers of the *Panjáb* into the plains of the Holy Land (Brahma-varta);

we see them at war with mighty kings, and often engaged in hostilities with each other, each immigrating tribe pushing their predecessors successively more and more down to the south.

Müller (1848: 330) explained that “although the Arian conquerors seem to have crushed and extinguished the great mass of the aboriginal inhabitants in the north of India,” some of the “Autochthones,” who the Brahmins considered “as impure and unworthy to partake of their religious sacrifices,” withdrew to the “thick forests of the mountainous districts, and in the countries south of the Vindhya range,” while others remained “in a state of slavery, constituting the class of Sudras.” While “not considered as twice-born, like the three other classes,” a few civil rights were granted to them, and “in latter days even a Brahminical origin was attributed.” However, “ethnological philology” still had many unanswered questions (1848: 347), since though the population of India was generally considered to be “one great branch of the Caucasian race, differing from the other branches of the same race merely by its darker complexion,” there was a “difference of colour, perhaps due to climate,” and certain tribes of India seemed to be of a different type, “which, by its physical and intellectual type, resembles closely the negro” (1848: 348). There was an underlying racial unity to the Indian population (1848: 348):

There is also some difference between the Brahminical inhabitants of the north and the south of India, the latter being rather short in their stature and dark in their complexion, not however so much as not to show still on both sides the noble stamp of the Caucasian race.

This raised the question of language, since if the “great mass of the inhabitants of the Dekhan [Deccan Plateau] belong to the Caucasian race, one would expect to find also amongst them a Caucasian or Indo-Germanic language” (1848: 348). However, “the Southern languages were entirely and originally different from the Arian languages spoken in the north” and appeared to resemble “the dialects spoken by the savage tribes like the Bhillas and Gondas, which we considered as having a Cushite origin.” In the north, the Aryans came “as a warrior-like people, vanquishing, destroying, and subjecting the savage and despised inhabitants.” In the same way, more generally, the “negro race,” when “brought into hostile contact with the Japhetic race,” was either destroyed or enslaved, from which it might recover “by the slow process of assimilation.” In this way, some of the former aboriginal inhabitants had “risen to a new social and intellectual independence” and undergone “a complete regeneration,” while others remained in degradation. In areas untouched by the Aryans, there remain aboriginal tribes who “preserve together with their rude language

and savage manners the uncouth type of their negro origin” (Müller 1848: 348). In the present, a new set of Aryans had arrived to complete the civilizing mission and “prevent their pillage and human sacrifices” (Müller 1848: 349). Now “the descendants of the same race, to which the first conquerors and masters of India belonged,” had returned, “after having followed the northern development of the Japhetic race to their primordial soil, to accomplish the glorious work of civilization, which had been left unfinished by their Arian brethren” (see Chakrabarti 2019).

Müller’s model assumed kinship between the British and the Aryan strata among the Indian population and also allowed for the civilizing effect of assimilation, and, by implication, intermarriage. The move southwards had been peaceful and free of armed conflict, as the northerners had gradually “overgrown” the first inhabitants, “so that physically only few marks of a different blood remain.” This allowed for the preservation of some features of “Brahminical science, when it was banished from the north by the intolerant Mohammedans” (Müller 1848: 349). The lesson to be drawn was that (1848: 349) “the beneficial influence of a higher civilization may be effectually exercised without forcing the people to give up their own language and to adopt that of their foreign conquerors,” as this would result in the destruction of “every vital principle of an independent and natural development.” This was evidently a lesson that Müller hoped the British would learn.

Aryanism and Aryan Invasion Theory, it should be stressed, were also co-opted and reworked in a variety of ways by elements of the emergent Indian elite, such as the religious reformer Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884), who stressed identification and alignment with the colonial class (Banerjee 2019: 51ff.). At least as far as this elite was concerned, “the governing discourse generated a nationalist counter-discourse characterized by matching articulacy rather than by traumatized denial” (Rajan 1998: 490). The idea that the British and the Indians (or at least some Indians) were long lost siblings, and the arrival of the British was the intervention of a younger, more vigorous branch of the family in the fate of the elder, had evident attractions (Sen 1886: 252): “All Europe seems to be turning her attention in these days towards Indian antiquities, to gather the priceless treasures which lie buried in the literature of Vedism and Buddhism. Thus while we learn modern science from England, England learns ancient wisdom from India.” British rule meant “a re-union of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race,” and “under an overruling Providence,” this was “destined to promote the true interests and lasting glory of both nations.” The Aryan paradigm represented a framework of assumptions and concepts, onto which were projected a range of intellectual and ideological positions. Even for those who rejected the Aryan paradigm wholly or in part, it inevitably structured debate and informed rhetorical strategies. *Aryan*

was equated with the three “twice-born” castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas; Dravidians with the Shudras; and the hill and tribal peoples, as casteless (*avarna*). Garbe (1896: 11) speaks of “the three Aryan castes” (“die drei arischen Kasten”).

Aryanism afforded a means for the Indian elite to claim recognition and status from the British colonizers. However, the implication of the Aryan narrative was that there had necessarily been a decline from ancient glory. The Bengali scholar Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay (1833–1897) accepted the division of Indian history into a Hindu, Muslim, and then a Christian period, and the division of the population of ancient India into two groups, one that resembled the Hindus of today, whereas “[t]he people of the other community were short, dark and extremely uncivilized” (Chattopadhyay 1858, cited in Chatterjee 1994: 96). The Hindus had gradually subdued the south. But now they were fallen from this past glory: “In earlier times, foreign travellers in India marvelled at the courage, truthfulness and modesty of the people of the Arya *vaṃśa*; now they remark mainly on the absence of those qualities” (cited in Chatterjee 1994: 97). In ancient days, the Hindus were a conquering people, yet “now a few soldiers from a tiny island long away are lording it over the land of India.” Hindus used to look upon “all except their own *jāti* as *mleccha* and treat them with contempt; now those same *mleccha* shower contempt on the descendants of Aryans.” The Hindus had been seafarers; now “the thought of a sea voyage strikes terror in the heart of a Hindu, and if anyone manages to go, he is immediately ostracized from society” (cited in Chatterjee 1994: 97).

The Aryan framework nonetheless offered impetus for projects of national revival and modernization. In this, the assumption that the origin of the Aryans lay outside of India was (and remains) problematic. Opening his *Short History of Aryan Medical Science* (Simhaji 1896), Sir Bhagavat Simhaji (1865–1944) stressed that his use of the term *Aryan* was distinct from the wider meaning that it had acquired according to “Western Ethnologists,” for whom it denoted “Celts and Teutons, Italians and Greeks, Persians and Hindoos,” with their common origin in the Caucasus. This theory was “not accepted by the Indians in general, who call themselves autochthonous” (1896: 12). Ancient Aryavarta was “a cradle of learning for the whole world” and an “intellectual storehouse” that was advanced in the sciences and arts (1896: 14–15). One should add, however, that figures as diverse as M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948), V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966), and Jawaharlal Nehru accepted some version of Aryan Invasion Theory. In his dealings with the government of Natal, Gandhi made rhetorical use of the argument that “both the Anglo-Saxon and the Indian races belong to the same stock” ([1884–1896] 1958: 97). Savarkar, the main originator of Hindutva ideology, accepted that the Aryans came to India from the outside, entering the northwest and then moving onwards ([1923] 1969: 10–11; see Chaturvedi 2022):

The vast and fertile plains farther off stood out inviting the efforts of some strong and vigorous race. Tribe after tribe of the Hindus issued forth from the land of their nursery and led by the consciousness of a great mission and their Sacrificial Fire that was the symbol thereof, they soon reclaimed the vast, waste and but very thinly populated lands. Forests were felled, agriculture flourished, cities rose, kingdoms thrived,—the touch of the human hand changed the whole face of the wild and unkemp nature.

The moment at which the nation was brought together was when the “valorous Prince of Ayodhya [. . .] brought the land from the Himalayas to the Seas under one sovereign sway” ([1923] 1969: 11). The boundary between Aryan and non-Aryan was dissolved ([1923] 1969: 12):

It was truly our national day: for Aryans and Anaryans knitting themselves into a people were born as a nation. It summed up and politically crowned the efforts of all the generations that preceded it and it handed down a new and common mission, a common banner, a common cause which all the generations after it had consciously or unconsciously fought and died to defend.

Nehru argued that (1947: 61–62) “the first great cultural synthesis and fusion took place between the incoming Aryans and the Dravidians, who were probably the representatives of the Indus Valley civilization.” Many other races followed, but this Indian culture remained, as it had “an astonishing inclusive capacity to absorb foreign races and cultures” (1947: 62).

The dual model of conqueror versus conquered offered a broad template for understanding ancient history and for creating analogies across different regional contexts. The Egyptologist and ancient historian H. R. Hall compared the Dravidians of India with the Minoans, using Giles’s term *Wiros* for the Indo-Europeans (1928: 289):

In both lands the invading *Wiros* found a previously-existing non-Aryan race with which they mingled, the Hindus with the Dravidians, the Greeks with the Minoans, and in both cases while the language of the conqueror prevailed, that of the conquered supplied innumerable names and words to its vocabulary.

Conquest initially took the form of separate co-existence (1928: 289): “In both countries the conquered race continued to exist side by side with the conquerors, the dark *Dasyus*; with the fair Aryans, the dark Minoans with the fairer Hellenes.” However, the racial barriers eventually broke down, initially leaving “fair and dark Greeks” existing “side by side,” with “the fairer being regarded as the nobler and more beautiful” (1928: 289). The situation

was the same in India, where “the fair *varna* (colour) of the Aryans continued among the Brahmans and Kshatriyas, and was the foundation of the caste-distinction between them (with the Vaisyas) and the Sudras.” In both cases, “the fair *varna* has practically disappeared,” as was also the case “in Italy and Spain, in spite of reinforcement by Gauls, Lombards, and Visigoths.” This led to the almost complete disjuncture between language and physical type: “The dark people have conquered in the end, but they speak the speech of their ancient conquerors,” just as “the Bengali, who has hardly an ounce of Aryan blood in his veins, talks an Aryan language.” The language of his “Mongol-Dravidian ancestors” was unknown, but it was presumably “something akin to Tamil or Telugu, or something Mongoloid” (1928: 289).

The “Dravidian proof” has been hailed as an intellectually important discovery (Trautmann 2006, Sreekumar 2009), yet it relied on an imported ideology, namely, European vernacularism, together with the “family tree” model of language affinities, within which language varieties either share a common origin or are at most contingently related. This model relies on a particular reification of abstract types and brackets out the actual dynamic flow of mundane interaction in which such categories may disappear from view, lack contextual relevance, or lack analytical purchase. The saliency of language types is intertwined with the labelling requirements of modernizing polities. One assessment of the impact of colonial linguistics, and the category *Dravidian*, is that it created new forms of political solidarity and offered a focus not just for lower castes and excluded groups, but for all non-Brahmans. Hovelacque and Vinson (1878: 59–60) found in the Aryan/Dravidian dichotomy not just the juxtaposition of conqueror to conquered, but two different points on the evolutionary scale of language. Whereas the Aryans spoke an inflected language, the Dravidians remained at the agglutinating stage. The Dravidian languages were also impoverished in terms of abstract vocabulary, before contact with Sanscrit (1878: 64). The primordial Dravidian language was (1878: 66–67) “of a stunning grammatical simplicity and an almost unimaginable poverty of vocabulary.” Nonetheless, it possessed underlying qualities that meant that it was not fully overwhelmed by the arrival of the Aryans (1878: 67): “All that is left of the primitive Dravidians is the language, mutilated, in an altered state, invaded by the idiom of the civilizers, but tenacious enough, still rebellious enough to have conserved the most important of its original characteristics.” There were those who dreamed of a Dravidian confederation within a future Indian Republic (“la Republique des Indes”) (1878: 64–65). The authors seem caught between their assessment of the intellectual and moral superiority of the Aryan languages, and admiration for the primitive vigour and tenacity of the Dravidian languages. The locus of linguistic-identitarian movements was in Maharashtra, but also Madras (Metcalf and Metcalf 2006: 141):

Following the lead of mid-century British scholars of the Dravidian languages, these non-Brahmans, in the emerging linear narrative of India's history, identified themselves as the original "Dravidian" inhabitants of the south, in contrast to the "Aryan" Brahmans who had supposedly entered from the north and set themselves up as a superior ruling elite.

Vernacularism directed attention to the landscape of languages spoken in contemporary India, rather than to classical Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit as a set of ideal types defined in relation to high-culture texts. While critics of British imperialism have directed their ire at Thomas Macaulay (1800–1859) and his infamous 1835 Minute (Young 1935), together with the English Education Act (1835), they have generally missed the double revolution that the Minute represented. A rejection of classical languages in the Indian context meant the promotion of the vernaculars, with a small elite of Indians identified as linguistic brokers between the British and their Indian subjects. The promotion of the vernaculars was slow in coming, but this was an inevitable consequence of the modernizing approach. Vernacularism as a method and as an ideology implied that each identifiable language or autonomous variety was linked to a latent *ethnos* or *Volk*, and that each *ethnos* had an original homeland or territory, a history, and a world view. Vernacularism profoundly shaped the historiography of India, beginning with debates about the relative merits and utility of the classical Indian languages (Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit), English, and the regional vernaculars (Ramaswamy 1997). But vernacularism is not merely about policy. It is a mode of perception that affords the identification of an authentic or original demotic core. This core is juxtaposed to non-cognate formal or ritual registers. Vernacularism is also full-fledged ideology of how history should be narrated and modernity should function. Yet any inductive attempt by survey to record labels for linguistic varieties from informants opened up a Pandora's box of variation and categorical uncertainty. This was the experience of George Grierson (1851–1941) in his vast *Linguistic Survey of India* (Majeed 2019: 73–87). The Survey promoted a view of India as a linguistic zone with "a series of gradations rather than a neatly bordered entity." Given its focus on mapping vernacular languages, it promoted "the emergence of linguistic regions, in which standardised languages provided the basis for a bounded and territorialised shared identity in individual and collective consciousness" (Majeed 2019: 200).³

3. The Survey "played an important role in the creation of affectively charged fields around some regional languages" (Majeed 2019: 202). Grierson's insistence that there were "indistinct boundaries between languages" played a role into debates in post-independence India about the linguistic regionalism and state boundaries: "the LSI was useful in the Commission's attempt to contain linguistic sub-nationalism in the aftermath of Partition while at the time giving it some leeway" (Majeed 2019: 202–203).

5.6 THE REJECTION OF EX ORIENTE LUX

Aryan Invasion Theory, together with the idea of a Central Asian homeland, has been the target of sustained polemics since the emergence of Indian proto-nationalist or nationalist scholarship (Lai 2005). It also posed a conundrum for European scholars of a nationalistic bent, as it was equally challenging to emergent nationalisms founded on the Romantic *Volk* model. The intellectual influence of Blumenbach and other early scientists of race was one factor in undermining the philological model of *ex oriente lux*, though there was no unanimity on the Caucasian origin. A further factor was the impact of prehistorians and archaeologists, whose disciplinary inclination was to reject an Eastern origin as fanciful speculation. Favouring Northern Europe as the Aryan homeland was a way of reconciling the rhetoric of superiority with ideological claims to indigeneity. The assumption generally had been that similarity between Western and Eastern linguistic forms indicated an Eastern origin (Ward 1849: 17): “The eastern or Asiatic origin of the Slavonians [Slavs] is proved by the affinities which their language presents with the Sanscrit, and by the resemblance between the superstitions of their ancestors and those of the Hindoos.”

Doubts about the Eastern origin of the Europeans were expressed from the inception of the Aryan paradigm, though they went largely unheeded (Poesche 1878: 60). Heinrich Schulz (1826: 221–222) saw the postulation of an Eastern origin as denying the dignity of Europeans by presenting them as lacking their own racial identity (he used the term *Menschenart*, glossed as *Raçe* in brackets), something that was accorded to every other people. He rejected the Caucasus as a place of origin, noting that it was inhospitable and a notorious “den of thieves” (*Raubnest*). This could not be the original homeland of the most noble type of humanity. Any idea that language, customs, religion, and agriculture could have come from the Orient would make Europe the home but not the “fatherland” (*Vaterland*) of the Europeans. Brinton ([1890] 1901: 146, 146fn.) identified the Belgian geologist J. J. d’Omalius d’Halloy (1783–1875) as a pioneer in rejecting an Eastern origin of the white race (*race blanche*). D’Halloy adopted a five-race model (white, yellow, brown, red, and black), though he stressed that these were general types rather than absolute divisions (1845: 3–4). The white or Caucasian (*caucasique*) race was believed to have originated in the Caucasus and was the dominant race in terms of history and level of civilization (1845: 19, 1864: 189–190). The linguistic evidence did not prove an Eastern origin, and the likelihood was that Eastern varieties related to European languages (such as in Bactria, Central Asia) were the result of influence for West to East, rather than the reverse.

Latham observed that an Eastern origin had always been assumed (1851: 157), “that the Lithuanic, Slavonic, and the allied languages of Germany, Italy,

and Greece numerous, widely-spread, and unequivocally European are Asiatic in origin; the Sanskrit being first referred to Asia, and then assumed to represent the languages of that Asiatic locality." The question was (Latham 1862: 611) "Has the Sanskrit reached India from Europe, or have the Lithuanic, the Slavonic, the Latin, the Greek, and the German, reached Europe from India?" Since there was no clear evidence, the presumption had to be that of "the smaller class having been deduced from the area of the larger rather than *vice versa*." This would mean that "the *situs* of the Sanskrit is on the eastern, or south-eastern, frontier of the Lithuanic; and its origin is European." The historian Philip Smith (1817–1885), in his *History of the Ancient World*, rejected the central role assigned to India and "Indic." It was well-known that "the Aryan race in Northern India displaced an earlier Hamite or Turanian population." The tendency "to regard the Indic as the prototype, and even the parent of the whole family," should be resisted (1865: 44). It was false reasoning that led to "the cradle of the human race" being placed in the Hindoo Cush rather than "the highlands of Armenia." Smith then quoted Latham on the need to distinguish the primary diffusion of humanity from a central point, from subsequent migrations. Latham questioned the "tacit assumption that, as the East is the probable quarter in which either the human species or the greater part of our civilization originated, everything came from it" (Latham 1862: 612). The American Sanscritist Dwight Whitney (1827–1894) later echoed this point (1875: 194): "The separation of Aryan from European *may* just be due to a spread and migration of the former into Asia as of the latter into Europe" (see McGetchin 2009: 159).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, more systematic arguments were made for an Aryan homeland closer to, or even within, Europe. The social Darwinist Clémence Royer (1830–1902) saw progress as driven by inequality, through conflict between individuals and races (Royer 1870). Royer rejected the biblical framework that would place Noah's ark in Armenia, and the philological arguments that located the Aryan homeland in Asia (Demoule 2023: 83–84). She sided with D'Halley's thesis of a Western origin. The idea of an origin in the high plateaus of Asia was a legend, spun out of the ancient sacred texts (1880: 3–5). The origin of the Aryans was to be found at the central point of their dispersion, which would be in the "the west of Asia and the east of Europe" (1870: 29–30). The three great divisions of humanity in this hemisphere were the black race, which originated in Africa; the yellow race, which came from Asia; and the white race, which was from Europe. The Semitic branch was from North Africa, and the Basques possibly had links to the Libyan mountains or to the American race: "Within these limits, anthropological groups generally correspond exactly to linguistic groups, and tend in this way to offer proof of how, in exceptional cases only, a few ethnic branches borrow the language of neighboring branches which have subdued them" (1870: 31).

Theodor Poesche (1825–1899) rejected an Asian origin, given that the Indo-Europeans were blond and blue-eyed (1878: 41). Their origin was likely in Eastern Europe, in the area of the Rokitno Marshes. Karl Penka (1847–1912) argued for a Scandinavian homeland (1883). Schmidt (1890: 10) traced support for a European origin to the 1850s, chiding [Latham \(1862\)](#) and [J. G. Cuno \(1871\)](#) for the weakness of their argumentation. [Cuno \(1871: 29\)](#) had rejected Jacob Grimm’s evocation of the migration of the European peoples out of Asia in distant times, calling it a “myth.” Ernst Ludwig Krause (1839–1903), writing under the pen name Carus Sterne, argued from mythology and material artefacts that “the axiom of philology” was wrong in pointing to “Central Asia as the homeland of the Aryans” ([Sterne 1918: 450–451](#)). His scepticism about philology had arisen in the debate about the alleged blue-blindness of Homer. Philologists had been shown to be fallible (1918: 451): “If their infallibility got a fall from such a simple obstacle, what was then its status in the fields of prehistoric man and of comparative mythology which had till then been almost exclusively cultivated by philologists and from philological angles?” Philology had been misleading as to the direction of travel ([Sterne 1918: 451](#)):

Were really all peoples, as they asserted, whose languages belonged to the Indogermanic family of languages, of the same race? Had the original stock, to follow out their further conclusions, really come to Europe with bag and baggage, domestic animals and seed stocks and everything, from the Plateau of Central Asia? And if that was all correct, why had it been impossible up to then to get much certainty in respect to the relationship of the religious ideas of the various Aryan branches?

Max Müller rejected these scholarly challenges to *ex oriente lux*, in particular Penka’s theory (1888: 107): “we are asked to believe that our earliest forefathers were dolichocephalic, had blue eyes and blond hair, though nothing is said as to how they became brachycephalic, and how their hair became brown and their eyes black.” He insisted nonetheless that “the Aryas were originally strangers in India” (1888: 93–94). *Ex oriente lux* constituted an expansive claim of ownership in that (1876: 183): “Two worlds, separated for thousands of years, have been reunited as by a magical spell, and we feel rich in a past that may well be the pride of our noble Aryan family.” This was no mere poetic idea, since now “all the most vital elements of our knowledge and civilisation,” including “our languages, our alphabets, our figures, our weights and measures, our art, our religion, our traditions, our very nursery stories, came to us from the East.” Europe without “the rays of Eastern light, whether Aryan, or Semitic, or Hamitic,” might have “remained for ever a barren and forgotten promontory of the primeval Asiatic continent.” Now “the barrier between the West and the East, that seemed insurmountable, has vanished.” This was a

question of ownership (1876: 183): “The East is ours, we are its heirs, and claim by right our share in its inheritance.” However, the tide was running against the Eastern origin, with Archibald Sayce and Isaac Taylor (1787–1865) both converting to the Western hypothesis (Sayce [1880] 1885, Taylor 1888).

Scepticism regarding *ex oriente lux* also meant an attack on the philological model of scholarship in general. The East had borrowed from the West (Sterne 1918: 454): “Egypt, Syria, and Phoenicia borrowed infinitely much from the northern Aryans who had crossed their boundaries in a hoary antiquity.” The Aryans “migrated from northern Europe to India and not the reverse.” Sterne’s primary focus was on the story of Troy, for which he found evidence in place-names, personal names, stone artefacts, and myths from northern Europe. He also detected an Aryan origin for artefacts in Palestine (1918: 453):

The stone monuments of Palestine so often mentioned in the Bible displayed a similarity to those of northern Europe [. . .]. How many Bible antiquities would be more easily explained if people were willing to look more sharply at this Aryan original stock of Palestine?

5.7 MOHENJODARO AND HARAPPA

In the case of India, archaeological findings threatened to disrupt the invader/invaded dichotomy central to the Aryan paradigm. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), founded in 1861, developed in the shadow of philology and was “dependent on the written word to provide the main outline of the past” (Trautmann and Sinopoli 2002: 500). However, the domination of philology over archeology was threatened by the excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa in the Indus valley, carried out during the 1920s by John Marshall (1876–1958) and Daya Ram Sahni (1879–1939), following the discovery of pre-Buddhist artefacts by Rakhil Das Banerji (1885–1930). These sites are today in Pakistan, in the Punjab and Sindh regions, respectively. Marshall wrote that the received image of the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India had been of “a race so servile and degraded, that they were commonly known as *Dāsas* or slaves.” They had been understood to be “on an altogether lower plane of civilization” than the Aryans (1931: v):

The picture of them gleaned from the Hymns of the Rigveda was that of black skinned, flat-nosed barbarians, as different from the Aryans in physical aspect as they were in speech and religion, though at the same time it was evident that they must have been rich in cattle, good fighters, and possessed of many forts in which they defended themselves against the invaders.

The discoveries at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro showed clear evidence of “an advanced and singularly uniform civilization of their own, closely akin but in some respects even superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt” (1931: v). There was a wide gulf between the Indus and the Vedic civilizations, and Vedic civilization was neither “the progenitor or the lineal descendant of the Indus civilization” (1931: 111). Marshall rejected any suggestion that this was evidence that the Aryans were indigenous to India (Marshall 1931: 107fn., Guha 2005: 412). Banerji argued that the “Neolithic phase of culture,” which included “brick-built, well-planned and highly-organized cities of agriculturalists and traders,” was the creation of “Dravidians, or proto-Dravidians” who appeared to be “representatives of the Mediterranean race” mixing with the Alpine race and perhaps “proto-Mongols” (Banerji 1934: 9–10). Subsequently, Mortimer Wheeler (1890–1976) re-integrated the collapse of Harappan civilization with the arrival of marauding Aryans: “The Āryan invasion of the Land of the Seven Rivers, the Punjab and its environs, constantly assumes the form of an onslaught upon the walled cities of the aborigines” (1947: 8). Indra, the Aryan god of war, was the archetype: “His opponents, the city-folk, are the *dasyus*, who are black, noseless (flat-nosed), of unintelligible speech, and worship strange gods,” hence “the dark flat-nosed people whom we saw in the streets of Mohonjo-daro” and “the hints of non-Āryan religion” (1950: 32). Wheeler described this civilization’s destruction by “an insurgent barbarism, instinct with the heroic qualities which barbarism is liable to assume but not sympathetic to the vestiges of urban discipline” (1953: 95). He later resiled from this position: “I once light-heartedly blamed Indra and his Aryans for this phenomenon” (1966: 73). This model showed the conquerors to be “less civilized than the conquerors” (Piggott 1950: 258). For Pearce, the Indus civilization was founded by Dravidians, who entered India via a southern route into present-day Sind and whose material culture suggested a relationship to the Sumerians (Pearce 1965: 25).

Debate among archaeologists about the relationship between the Aryan and Harappan civilizations continues (Shaffer 1984, Kenoyer 2005: 22). Kenoyer sets out three possible positions: (i) the Harappans were the pre-Aryan indigenous population whose civilization was destroyed by marauding Aryans; (ii) the Harappans were themselves Vedic Aryans, and “they were the ones to introduce the domestic horse and iron technology in the northern subcontinent”; (iii) the Harappans were not Aryans, but they left an “important Harappan legacy in later cultures.” For B. B. Lal (2005), there is no evidence of an invasion, an assertion that forms part of a wider polemic against the identification of the Saravati river of the Rigveda with the river Helmand in Afghanistan (see Sharma 1995). There is a profound disjunction at work here. Bryant (2001: 157) quotes the Indian historian R. C. Majumdar to this effect (Majumdar 1959: 6): “There is one curious fact in regard to the beginnings of Indian

history. For the Indus valley culture, we have abundant archaeological data, but no written evidence. For the early Vedic culture we have abundant written evidence but no archaeological data.”

5.8 CONCLUSION: MODIFYING AND REJECTING ARYAN INVASION THEORY

The extreme version of Aryan Invasion Theory, according to which marauding blond Aryans conquered a sedentary culture of dark-skinned indigenes, but fell into civilizational decline because of racial intermixing, offends against modern sensibilities (Robb 2002: 5). One strategy is to allow for a foreign origin, but to reject the racial interpretation (Thapar 1992: 3):

The word *ārya* which occurs in both the Iranian Avestan and Vedic Sanskrit texts, was given a racial connotation, as referring to the race of the Aryans. [. . .] It was held that large numbers of Aryans, described as a branch of the Indo-European race and language group, invaded northern India in the second millennium BC, conquered the indigenous peoples and established the Vedic Aryan culture which became the foundation of Indian culture.

In the Vedic texts, *ārya* did not have a racial meaning, as “it refers merely to an honoured person of high status and in the Vedic context this would be one who spoke Sanskrit and observed the caste regulations.” What may have given rise to the racial connotations was the opposition between *ārya* and *dāsa* in the *Rig Veda*, “where the *dāsa* is described as physically dissimilar to the *ārya*” (1992: 4).

Between hordes of nomadic warriors descending in waves on a sedentary civilization and the gradual and peaceful diffusion of a population over millennia, there are a thousand scenarios and time frames. The notion of the gradual movement or diffusion of populations is in general more appealing than violent conquest. This allows those who wish to defend a pluralistic vision of India’s past to argue for a foreign origin, without endorsing the more rebarbative features of the Aryan paradigm. The modern take on Aryan Invasion Theory is Aryan Migration Theory (AMT). Instead of waves of conquest by ruthless warrior bands, there is the ebb and flow of peoples across millennia. The idea of ancient movements of peoples and cultures negates a purist narrative of Indian history: “[t]he boundary of the territories of British India cannot be the criterion for what is indigenous and what is alien to India” (Thapar 2006: 31). For the Dutch Indologist Jan Gonda, Indian civilization is “anthropologically a mixture of immigrant Aryans and ‘autochthonous’ peoples of other descent.” India is best understood as characterized by “unity in

diversity, by homogeneity notwithstanding the utmost variety and complexity of its ethnic composition” and its “multitude of languages,” cultural diversity, and “enormous differences in religion and social customs, beliefs and practices varying widely both regionally and, within a given region, from class to class” (1975: 1). Gonda offers a mixture of conflict and integration (1975: 24). There was conflict with “the indigenous inhabitants (*dāsa* or *dasyu*)—often but without sufficient evidence identified with the survivors of the Indus culture.” These were subjugated, “not always distinguishable from demoniac beings.” There was, intertribal rivalry notwithstanding, “a sense of solidarity springing, not only from common interests but also from a conscious view of common Aryan religion and culture.” There was no doubt a steady process of integration between invaders and aborigines. In the Vedic era “the Aryans were warlike herdsmen, stockbreeders and agriculturalists, organized in tribes ruled by chiefs rather than in kingdoms,” and “they had not developed anything like a city civilization.” Gonda wonders whether a particular Vedic hymn was “ever recited when Aryan troops were actually marching into battle” (1975: 110fn.). In recent decades, the Out of India theory (OIT) has been proposed, as a further development from nationalist attacks on the Aryan Invasion Theory (see [Bryant 2001](#): 140–156). One of its major academic proponents is Shrikant Talageri (see [Hock 1999](#), [Elst 2005](#), [Talageri 1993](#), [2005](#)). Talageri locates the original homeland “in the interior of northern India” (1993: 368). This represents an inversion of the “classic” Aryan paradigm, in the service of the politics of indigeneity.

CHAPTER 6

Language and Race

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The conundrum of reconciling linguistic affinity with the genealogy of human races has shaped the Aryan paradigm from its inception. The emergence of two distinct frameworks, the philological model of *ethnos*, in particular the Romantic concept of *Volk*, and the materialist notion of *race*, raised important questions for any comprehensive account of human history. If physical type was permanent, then linguistic type was a mere epiphenomenon. If linguistic type was the more persistent, even following alien conquest, then it made better sense methodologically to track human history by means of language (Oppert 1884: 33):

The real point at issue is, therefore, not whether the language one speaks indicates the race to which one belongs—as long as that race has been preserved in its purity—which it surely does not; but whether a language, if used by foreign individuals and nations, retains its original character. There is no doubt of it. A language preserves, as it were instinctively, its peculiar construction, and if it does not always coincide, either with the particular nation or person who speaks it, it certainly indicates the race of those who spoke it first, and this, in spite of all apparent change, and it retains the mode of thought of those among whom it first sprung up as their natural means of communication, though that race itself might exist no longer.

If both types were subject to the contingencies of time and change, and there was no general truth about how language and race were related over time, then the deep pre-textual past was a closed book. The philological model, and its *Volk* successor, operated with the assumption that at the point of ethnogenesis, there had been an original congruence between language, lineage, and

territory. Physical anthropologists often accepted this but were disturbed by the mixing of incompatible methods and criteria in the philological paradigm. Philology, with its assumption of an Eastern origin, suggested an Aryan invasion of Europe as well as of India, with the Basques sometimes assigned the role of the indigenous “Dravidians.” This was problematic for physical anthropologists, who had their own reconstructed history, and, subsequently, for archeologists, who struggled to fit their findings into this framework. However, if the Aryan homeland turned out to be in Northern Europe, then this allowed for an ideologically acceptable and coherent framework, aligning territory, physical type, language, and material culture.

James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, hypothesized a single language “antiently spoken all over the north, north-east and western parts of Asia,” arguing further that “if it could be proved that the Celtic and the Teutonic languages were originally the same, it would go far to prove that the two races of people were likewise the same originally” (1773–1792, I: 414). In his *Asia Polyglotta*, Julius von Klaproth (1783–1835) argued that language was more reliable evidentially than mythology, given that, in the case of India and other ancient nations, religious myth had overwritten historical knowledge (1823: vii, 5–6). However, Klaproth also stressed the need to distinguish linguistic affinity from lineage (1823: 43): “It is correct to say that the German language is derived from the same roots as Sanscrit, but it would be absurd on this basis to derive the German people from the Hindus.”¹ Language was also a source of political legitimation in emergent nationalism: “Identity of language may safely be admitted to prove identity of origin; and in the absence of more direct evidence constitutes a criterion of political union, less liable to change from the influence of time than any other test that can be proposed” (Wilks 1810–1817, I: 4). In Jean Jacques Huot’s re-rendering of Conrad Malte-Brun’s (1775–1826) *Précis de la géographie universelle* (first published 1810), Huot added a paragraph on language arguing that (Malte-Brun 1832, I: 521) “languages can only offer uncertain characteristics for the classification of *species or races* of men.” By contrast, “physical characteristics, which are much less vague moreover than the philosophers claim” were “the most permanent, and consequently are the surest means of arriving at recognizing and distinguishing between the major groups of the human race” (“les plus sûrs moyens d’arriver à reconnaître et à distinguer les grands groupes du genre humain”).

A long line of scholarly commentators heralded the methodological superiority of the comparative method in linguistics for tracing historical affinities between peoples (see, for example, A. W. Schlegel 1834: 407ff.). Writing in French, August Schlegel distinguished between *race* and *peuple* (i.e.,

1. “Es ist richtig zu sagen, die deutsche Sprache stammt von denselben Wurzeln ab als das Sanskrit, aber unsining darum *das deutsche Volk* von den Hindu abzuleiten.”

Volk). One race might contain several families of peoples, but “it is impossible for the members of the same family should belong to different races” (1834: 415). The logic seems to be that if a racial grouping contained several *Völker*, then the original alignment had not been lost, since the *Völker* would be both racially and linguistically cognate, whereas if one *Volk* contained several races, that congruity would have been destroyed. Skin colour was, however, a superficial characteristic, as George Forster had shown in his critique of Kant (1834: 421). Blumenbach, by contrast, focussing on the skull, had assigned the Hindus to the Caucasian race (1834: 421). Racial classification had been confirmed by the comparative study of language affinities (1834: 422).

The early nineteenth century saw reactive attempts to maintain an alignment between the study of human physical variation and the study of language, thereby maintaining a unitary account of human types. In this, James Prichard was a key figure (Stocking 1987: 49, Augstein 1999). Prichard rejected the polygenism of Lord Kames (1696–1782), laid out in his *Sketches of the History of Man*, 1774), and denied any contradiction between “the truth of the Mosaic records” and “the diversified characters of the several races of men” (1813: ii). His Edinburgh M.D. thesis on human physical variation, *De generis humani varietate* (1808), formed the basis of his 1813 work. For Prichard (1813: iii), “all mankind constitute but one race or proceed from a single family.” As William Jones had shown (Prichard 1813: 461), “the Zend, the old language of the Magi, bears a close affinity to the Sanscrit.” Zend, Pali, and Pracrit were “three cognate dialects of the Sanscrit, differing from each other and from the common parent only in trifling modifications.” The inference was that (1813: 463) “the ancient Persians and Indian were branches of one kindred stock.” The origin was to be found to the east (1813: 505): “A remarkable affinity has been traced between the Gothic dialects and the Persian.” These were both “connected with the Greek,” and “all these languages were nearly allied in their original structure.” This was definitive proof “of the Eastern derivation of the German nations, and of their descent from the ancient Asiatics.” Linguistic affinity pointed to a common origin in terms of *stock* (1813: 525). The Thracians were “of the Getic or German stock” and therefore they spoke “a German dialect.” Close analysis revealed that German and Greek were “radically the same.” There was an “affinity between the Greek language and the old Parsi and Sanscrit.” This was an established fact, “certain and essential” (1813: 525). In a footnote, Prichard stated that “[t]he use of cognate idioms proves the nations who used them to have descended from one stock” (1813: 525fn.). Prichard (1813: 525) noted Jones’s account of the parallel “affinity of religion” (Jones 1799e) and argued that it ought to be extended to the Celtic nations (1813: 534). There was “historical proof of the connexion of the Sclavonian, German and Pelasgian races with the ancient Asiatic nations,” and the relationship to

Celtic was strong enough “that we may with certainty pronounce them to be branches of the same stock.”

Prichard’s contemporary, R. G. Latham, used the term *ethnographical philology* (1848). He argued that there were two ways of classifying languages. The first involved an assessment of similarity in terms of “characteristics” and the extent to which they coincide. This method—we might today term it *language typology*—was not that of ethnographical philology, which was concerned with a shared origin (1860: 146). Descent trumped similarity: “similarity of grammatical structure, and glossarial identity are recognised as elements of classification only so far as they are evidence of such community of origin.” The key term was *descent*: “In ethnological philology, as in natural history, *descent* is the paramount fact” (1860: 147). It was possible to get at the sequence of separation from the common mother tongue and thereby get an approximate chronology: “Languages are allied, just in proportion as they were separated from the same language in the same stage” [italics omitted].

August Schleicher was clearly provoked by contemporary discussions into a defence of the traditional understanding of *Volk*, *Geist*, and *Sprache*. According to Schleicher, there was an initial phase in language development in which sound (*Laut*) was dominant over *Geist*; that is, *Geist* was dominated by nature. But then *Geist* freed itself and became self-aware (1848: 17):

The spirit of mankind in general, and that of each branch of humanity in particular, appears in language in its otherness, hence the interrelationship of nationality and language; the same spirit that later produced nationality in its historical freedom formerly produced language in its submission to sound.

Nationality (the individuality of the *Volk*) was the product of *Geist* acting on the materiality of language, after sound had acted upon *Geist*. The two ideas of language, the natural and the historical, were distinct. In discussing the linguistic landscape of Europe, Schleicher stressed that linguistic divisions in no way corresponded to variation in physical type, that is, “the so-called races.” For example, the Turkish language family included two distinct races, the Caucasian or European and the Mongolian. The Laplanders, who were linguistically close to the Magyars, were quite different in physical type. The cause of this was to be found in the influence of climate, diet, and way of life in general, rather than racial mixing and language shift. These factors had a greater impact on the constitution of the body (*Körperbeschaffenheit*) than on the language (Schleicher 1850: 36). Schleicher concluded that the apparent racial division of the Turks was due to a form of domestication (though he did not use the term), in that those Turks who remained true to the nomadic lifestyle retained the Mongolian type, whereas those who lived under milder conditions came to be more like the Europeans (1850: 37). In his 1865 *Die*

Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen, Schleicher briefly considered whether differences in physical type, in particular the brain and the speech organs, might have an influence on language, but without reaching a firm conclusion (1865: 7ff.). Given that speech constituted the essence of the human, it seemed to follow that language could supply the criterion and rationale for dividing up humanity (1865: 16). Racial differences (*Rassenunterschiede*) did not map onto language, and were continually in flux, whereas language was always a fully constant characteristic (“stets ein völlig constantes Merkmal”) (1865: 16). In a remarkable piece of circular reasoning, Schleicher pointed out that the unreliability of race as a criterion was shown by the fact that people who belonged to one and the same linguistic stock (*Sprachstamm*) could display varying racial characteristics. In addition to their lack of consistency, racial characteristics were difficult to systematize in a scientific system, whereas languages could be classified in terms of their morphological forms into a natural system, just like other living entities (*Lebewesen*) (1865: 17).

For the philologist, original congruence implied that the further back in time one went, the clearer the vision (Anon. 1858: 487): “Farther back than even myth and tradition, comparative philology penetrates into the darkness of pre-historic time.” Added to this was faith in language as a mirror of the social world: “As words are the symbols of thoughts and things, so they give us a picture of the ideas and activity of the people who use them” (Anon. 1858: 487). Discussing Adolphe Pictet’s notion of *linguistic palaeontology*, McCormac argued that evidence from language could penetrate “through the night of time.” It followed that, “by the means afforded by language alone,” the scholar was able “to determine the primary seat of the nation or people from whom the widely spread Indo-Germanic or Aryan races, one and all, have sprung” (1860: 58). Ulick Bourke, who argued for an Eastern origin of the Aryan languages, and viewed Irish Gaelic as the closest daughter language to the “primitive Aryan,” used a range of metaphors for the same idea (1876: 175):

Comparative philology is a pillar tower of light on the highway of ancient history. It is like photography: nay, it is a stereoscope of past and forgotten events. Under its view the hidden periods of the past are flung out in the fulness of their reality, and in the light which clothed their forms in the days of their actual existence.

For William Hunter, the discovery of Indo-European was a profound moment of illumination (1897: 142): “The study of Aryan speech has done more in half a century to explain the history of man, than all the previous efforts of fifty generations of scholars.” The legal academic, William Hearn (1826–1888), described the existence of the ancient Aryans, who were “of one blood, spoke

one language, had a common stock of beliefs, of manners, and of customs,” as “an ultimate fact” (Hearn 1879: 277). To understand this “primal Aryan polity” was to find the roots of modern civilization (Hearn 1879: 278): “The roots of the present are deep down in the past; and modern civilization must be affiliated to the thoughts and the actions of the tribes that, under their elders, used to roam, thousands of years ago, over ‘Airyanem Vaejo,’ the cradle of our race.”

6.2 F. MAX MÜLLER ON LANGUAGE AND RACE

The most influential proponent of the superiority of the philological method was F. Max Müller. As his career progressed, the supremacy of philology was increasingly challenged by new intellectual developments, notably Darwinism (of which Müller was a critic; see Knoll 1986) and physical anthropology. The influential anatomist and physical anthropologist Paul Broca (1824–1880) insisted that, while linguistic evidence might be a “witness,” it could never be a “judge” (1862: 55). In situations of contact between races, languages did not mix, but, rather, one supplanted the other, often the language of the minority, whereas in the case of physical type, it was the majority type that would eventually dominate (1862: 55).

In an 1848 piece on Bengali, Müller declared (1848: 324) that it was now possible “to arrange the most prominent nations of the world into great families, on the ground of the connection between the languages spoken by them, and particularly according to the grammatical genius of these languages.” The fundamental grammatical character of a language was evidence for both “ethnographic and linguistic relations.” Müller conceded that if it could be proven “that the grammatical elements of the Bengali are not originally Sanscritic, but belong to another system of languages, this would change entirely the view which we have taken of the ethnographic and linguistic relations of the inhabitants of India” (1848: 327). The English language was classified as “Teutonic” even after the Norman Conquest because it had preserved “its original grammatical system.” Under Roman rule, “the Teutonic race” had a “strongly developed nationality,” allowing it to incorporate into its language a great number of Latin words, without giving up the essentially Teutonic form of its grammar.” However, “the Celtic nations yielded to the overpowering influence of the Roman civilization, and adopted not only the substantial but also the formative element of the Latin language,” to the extent that their languages must now be considered “as branches of the Latin language, modified and developed by Celtic elements” (1848: 327). Müller then referred to the researches of John Stevenson, and the argument that the southern Indian languages belong to a different category. He agreed that the “Brahminical religion” came to India from outside (1848: 328), since the Vedic texts

“put it beyond all doubt that the Brahminical people was of an Arian origin, who, from Iran, the birth-place of their language, religion and civilization, immigrated into India.” But Müller rejected the idea that Bengali was of a different origin.

Comparative philology could show how

tongues, spoken in the most distant regions of the world, and by nations apparently unconnected by any historical intercourse, may yet belong to the same family, while, in other cases, languages, spoken in one and the same district, can be shown to be of a totally different origin. (Müller 1851: 305)

On this point, Müller cited (and translated) a passage from the scholar and explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1869), arguing that philology was the key to understanding ancient history (Müller 1851: 298–299fn., A. von Humboldt 1847: 141ff.):

The comparative study of languages shows how races or nations, now separated by wide regions, are related to each other, and have proceeded from a common seat; it discloses the direction and the path of ancient migrations; in tracing out epochs of development it recognises in the more or less altered characters of the language, in the permanency of certain forms, or in the already advanced departure from them, which portion of the race has preserved a language nearest to that of their former common dwelling-place. The long chain of the Indo-European languages, from the Ganges to the Iberian extremity of Europe, from Sicily to the North Cape, furnishes a large field for investigations of this nature into the first or most ancient condition of language.

Comparative philology (Müller 1856: 11) had “placed in our hands a telescope of such power that, where formerly we could see but nebulous clouds, we now discover distinct forms and outlines.” It provided evidence as to “the state of thought, language, religion and civilisation at a period when Sanskrit was not yet Sanskrit, Greek not yet Greek, but when both, together with Latin, German and other Aryan dialects, existed as yet as one undivided language.”

In an essay entitled “On the Classification of the Turanian Languages,” Müller rejected the view that “ethnological race” and “phonological race” were commensurate, “except in ante-historical times, or, perhaps, at the very dawn of history.” Migration, wars, and colonization had been much more violent “in the ethnic than ever in the political periods of history,” so it was “impossible to imagine that race and language should continue to run parallel” (1854: 89). Given this loss (1854: 89),

[t]he physiologist should pursue his own science, unconcerned about language. Let him see how far the skulls, or the hair, or the colour of the skin of different tribes admit of classification; but to the sound of their words his ear should be as deaf as that of the ornithologist to the notes of caged birds.

The “physiologist” should take no account of language: “If his Caucasian class includes nations or individuals speaking Aryan (Greek), Turanian (Turkish), and Semitic (Hebrew) languages, it is not his fault.” Likewise, “[t]he phonologist should collect his evidence, arrange his classes, and combine as if no Blumenbach had ever looked at skulls, as if no Camper had ever measured facial angles, as if no Owen had ever examined the basis of a cranium.”² If Bengali speakers were “of Tamulian extraction,” did it follow that “the grammar of their language” was Tamulian? Were the original inhabitants of Assam *Arians*, given that “the language at present spoken in that country is Sanskritic in its grammar?” (Müller 1854: 91).

Müller ([1853] 1902a: 144) argued that the truth could only be ascertained “by stating the glaring contradictions between the two.” There might be Persians “whose forefathers were Turanian or Semitic” but who “acquired Persian just as the Normans acquired Saxon,” but “the Persian language has always remained the same.” In the classification of languages, it was irrelevant who the speakers were, in the same way that a botanist was unconcerned “to know whether a potato has grown in Europe or America.” But Müller nonetheless felt able to describe the characteristics of ancient types. He described “belief in Immortality” as “the other side as it were of the God-Consciousness,” both being “originally natural to the Aryan race” ([1855] 1902a: 173).

Müller (1859: 13) insisted that linguistic evidence was “irrefragable” and “the only evidence worth listening to with regard to ante-historical periods.” Without it, the “relationship between the swarthy natives of India and their conquerors, whether Alexander or Clive,” would never have been discovered. Philology had shown this beyond doubt (1859: 13):

What authority would have been strong enough to persuade the Grecian army, that their gods and their hero ancestors were the same as those of King Porus,³ or to convince the English soldier that the same blood was running in his veins and in the veins of the dark Bengalese?

Given the linguistic evidence, no English jury “would reject the claim of a common descent and a legitimate relationship between Hindu, Greek, and Teuton.” The many words in common between India and England were “witnesses not

2. The reference here is to Sir Richard Owen (1804–1892).

3. An ancient Indian king from the third century BC.

to be shaken by cross-examination.” Müller did not stray far from the Noachic model of Genesis (1861: 32–32). The *Aryan*, *Semitic*, and *Turanian* languages, this last “comprising the dialects of the nomad races scattered over Central and Northern Asia, the Tungusic, Mongolic, Turkic, Samoyedic, and Finnic,” were “all radii from one common centre of speech.”

In his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Müller sought to mark clearly the disciplinary boundary (1861: 277):

The science of language and the science of ethnology have both suffered most seriously from being mixed up together. The classification of races and languages should be quite independent of each other. Races may change their languages, and history supplies us with several instances where one race adopted the language of another. Different languages, therefore, may be spoken by one race, or the same language may be spoken by different races; so that any attempt at squaring the classification of races and tongues must necessarily fail.

Müller’s model of affinity was controversial in the context of India. The Scottish physician and colonial administrator John Crawford, who became president of the London Ethnological Society in 1861, objected to this evocation of unity (1861: 314):

I must come to the conclusion that the theory which makes all the languages of Europe and Asia, from Bengal to the British Islands, however different in appearance, to have sprung from the same stock, and hence, all the people speaking them, black, swarthy, and fair, to be of one and the same race of man, is utterly groundless, and the mere dream of very learned men, and perhaps even more imaginative than learned.

Müller’s account was implausible (Crawford 1861: 286):

I can by no means, then, agree with a very learned professor of Oxford, that the same blood ran in the veins of the soldiers of Alexander and of Clive as in those of the Hindus whom, at the interval of two-and-twenty ages, they both scattered with the same facility.

The Indians had never produced literature on a par with Homer or Shakespeare and had “never made a foreign conquest of any kind.” It was not possible that they were of the same type as “the nations who discovered, conquered, and peopled a new world.” In a discussion of Lyell’s *Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* (1863), Crawford disparaged Müller’s theory as (1863: 173) “founded on the detection of a small number of words, in a mutilated form, common to most, but not to all, the languages of Western Asia and Europe.”

This “remarkable” discovery pointed “to an antiquity in the history of man far beyond the reach of history or tradition,” but on the basis “of these few words” and the assumption that language was “always a sure test of race,” a set of people “bodily and intellectually the most incompatible” had been “jumbled into one undistinguishable mass, and, with extraordinary confidence, pronounced to be of one and the same blood.” Aryan “was a language of the imagination” (Crawfurd 1863: 173). Charles Lyell (1797–1875) himself argued that racial genealogies were deeper than linguistic ones (1863: 345–457):

There can be no question that if we could trace back any set of cognate languages now existing to some common point of departure, they would converge and meet sooner in some era of the past than would the existing races of mankind; in other words, races change much more slowly than languages.

The phrenologist John William Jackson, while accepting that ethnologists had not yet succeeded in identifying the number of major races of humanity (though in what he termed “the Old World,” there was “the adult Caucasian, the childish Mongol, and the embryonic Negro,” 1863: 35), criticized the “exaggerated importance awarded to Philology” (1863: 5). Language “might be changed by conquest or culture,” while race “in its fundamental characteristics remained unaltered.” This was “a fact, of which, till recently, Ethnologists seemed to have no idea.” A people might show the traces of “religion, philosophy, laws and customs” of the conquering superior race, while their “physical type has wholly or nearly disappeared, by re-absorption into the numerically predominant mass.” In France, “the Celtic language and faith” had disappeared, but the “Celtic blood” remained (1863: 5–6). Jackson, however, saw racial mixing as invigorating, both for the inferior and the superior race. In general, the state of knowledge concerning the unity and diversity of humanity was in its infancy, and the meaning of terms like *race* or *nation* was unclear (1863: 28): “Politically speaking, a Nation is one thing—ethnically, it is another.” While philology was “a most serviceable handmaid to Ethnology,” it had to be kept “in due subordination.” However, Jackson accepted that philology could offer important insights into history (1863: 63), showing “the venerable shades of the Aryan patriarchs [. . .] ploughing and sowing, reaping and cattle tending.” Further, “we have seen them as husbands and fathers amid their primitive domestic circle in those far-off ages, when as yet Greek had no existence and Sanscrit was but an impending birth.” These “stupendous tongues” were “but conglomerates, constituted from the worn fragments of a previous degeneracy and decay.” They could be analysed “down to their very elements,” allowing us to “be present at their foundation, and watch the earliest processes of their growth.” Comparative philology had much more to contribute, in the search for answers to fundamental questions as to how languages related to one another (1863:

64): “And what is the ethnic indication of grammatical and what is the racial value of etymological similarity in the languages of geographically or chronologically separated nations? And yet, till these problems are settled, where is primeval history!” Jackson used the terms “Semitic and Aryan races” (1863: 64), as sub-categories of *Caucasian* (1869: 338). Jackson’s wider claim was that politics was now a racial question, rather than an imperial or dynastic one: “The wishes of peoples as well as the desires of their rulers have now to be consulted.” The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 was an iteration of the “almost pre-historic conflict between Celt and Teuton” (1872: 31).

A later critic of Müller on this topic was Isaac Taylor, who lamented the tendency to infer “a primitive unity of race” from “a primitive unity of speech.” Müller had used the terms *Aryan race* and *Aryan family*, evoking the early life of the Aryans in “picturesque” prose. However, “more mischievous words have seldom been uttered by a great scholar” (Taylor 1890: 4). There was “no such thing as an Aryan race in the same sense that there is an Aryan language.” Taylor invoked Broca’s *La linguistique et l’anthropologie* (1862: 259) and Topinard’s *L’anthropologie* (1876: 444). Topinard had made clear that “anthropological types” in Europe were constant over time. If the Aryans had indeed come from Asia, “they can have brought with them nothing but their language, their civilisation, and a knowledge of metals.” Their blood had “disappeared.” The philological paradigm and *ex oriente lux* were no longer persuasive: “The geographical centre of human history has now been shifted from the East to the West. The earliest existing documents for the history of mankind come not from Asia, but from Western Europe” (Taylor 1890: 18).

In the face of criticism, Müller repeatedly stressed that the “science of language” and “the science of ethnology” were independent. In a letter to Edward Freeman (Müller [1870] 1892: 396), Müller insisted that those who classified by blood should “use their own bottles for that, and not bottles that were labelled for the purpose of holding languages.” Blood was “an irrational and ungraspable quantity, but if people like to dabble in it, let them have their sanguinary amusement.” There was little that could be said with certainty about race in the distant past: “Before Caesar no one knew the difference between a Celt and a German, as little as many of our missionaries know the difference between a Hottentot and Bushman, or between a Tatar and Mongolian.” To rely on “the statements of the ancients as to race” was to build “on sand.”

The Franco-Prussian war brought many of these questions directly into the political sphere. Dr. Heinrich Abeken, Bismark’s personal aid in foreign policy, wrote to Müller (letter dated February 21, 1871) to stress the necessity of returning the people of Alsace-Lorraine, who were of “German race,” but with “French sentiments,” back to the German Empire: “It is inconceivable how, while German language and German morals remained unchanged, the love for the old German Fatherland has become almost extinct” (Müller 1902a: 413). Writing to William Gladstone about the war (letter dated February 27, 1871),

Müller commented: “The difficulties are doubtless very great, yet blood, language, and religion, are three powerful allies in the struggle which will now begin” (1902a: 414). This nationalism notwithstanding, at the end of the war (letter dated March 7, 1871), Müller adopted a universalist tone in a letter to Renan (1902a: 415):

We feel ashamed if we are told that our ancestors, our most distant ancestors, were simious; is there one race of animals so savage, so brutal, as man can be; nor does there seem to be any hope of progress, or improvement with regard to our ideas respecting war.

On the French republican view, nationality was essentially a civil status, and citizenship was not required to be isomorphic with race or language. The disjuncture between language and race was the major theme of Abel Hovelacque’s (1843–1896) writings (1867: 370): “Nothing is more serious than losing sight of this undeniable fact: peoples change language, different languages can be spoken by one single race, different races can speak the same language.” Hovelacque stressed that the unity of the newly created Italy was a “fiction” without a linguistic or racial basis (1875: 9). Italy was highly diverse in racial terms, as physical anthropology could show (1875: 12): “One of the most certain results of anthropology is precisely to have brought to light the multiplicity of European races.” The era of confusing language and race was safely in the past (1875: 12): “The time has passed when we can speak of dolichocephalic Celts, the Mongoloid Basques and other fine inventions of Germanic origin, even though they were produced in Paris.” Italy was no less diverse in terms of language. This unity of race and language was nowhere to be found in Europe, with the possible exception of the Basques of Spain (1875: 13–14): “The peoples who received the Aryan languages belonged to races established in Europe long before the importation of these languages, and it is clear today that an Aryan type, if it exists, is not to be sought in Europe.” The coincidence of language, race, and nationality was not to be found in the modern West (1875: 14): “As for the alignment of these three terms, races, languages, nationalities, one must not dream of encountering it in any part of our west; it is only amongst the lowest strata of humanity that can we hope to discover it today.” For Hovelacque, language and race were originally congruent only in the earliest period of human development, whereas in historical time there was no necessary link. In this he was followed by André Lefèvre (1834–1904), who argued that in the earliest stages of humanity the diversification of race, with its attendant inequality, had created diversity of language and determined the unequal evolution of different languages (Lefèvre 1877, Desmet 1996, 2001). The gap between language and race was exploited in the republican critique of *Volk* nationalism (Hovelacque 1875: 20–21):

German blood! One might as well speak of Latin blood or Slavic blood. Never has the confusion of languages and races been pushed further; there are Latin languages, Slavic languages, Germanic languages, but these linguistic families have nothing to do with the distribution of races. It is an almost puerile fiction, that of a Germanic race, of Germanic blood, just as much as that of a French race, of a Spanish race, of an Italian race, of a Slavic race.

The modern states of Europe had been created out of conflict. Nationality ought to be founded on social solidarity and consent (Hovelacque 1875: 37): “For those of us, who find our origin and our ideals in the Revolution, nationality is a SOCIAL ENTITY.” The principle binding together these “heterogeneous elements, populations speaking various languages, various races” should be “the common interest” and “the solidarity of the aggregated elements,” with “the will of the multitude” serving as “the sole source of law.” This position ran counter to a presumed equation of language and nationality in Germany, as noted by Paul Topinard, and the political consequences that flowed therefrom, such as the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war (Hovelacque 1875: 10). In the third edition of his *L’Anthropologie*, published in 1879, Topinard added a direct reference to the Germans to his account of Hovelacque’s notion of *raison sociale* (1879: 10): “Nationality, according to the Germans, is determined by language, a purely ethnographic and radically false doctrine; as Mr. Abel Hovelacque very happily said; it is only a social entity.” Nationality was a contingent creation of events and geography, which then created a sense of shared interests, sufferings, and triumphs. This unity was “cemented by blood spilled in the same cause, with hearts beating in unison from one end of the territory to the other” (1879: 10).

Given the political and intellectual difficulties that arose in talking about the present, Müller was most intellectually comfortable talking about the remote past. In a letter to the Duke of Albany, dated December 13, 1875 (1902a: 502), Müller praised the Veda as “the only book in Indian literature which is important, not only for India, but for the early history of the whole Aryan race, including Greeks, Romans, and ourselves.” Müller had done his utmost “to rescue the oldest book of our race from that destruction which would have been inevitable, unless it had been printed.” Müller took issue with Richard Church, the Dean of St Paul’s, who in *The Sacred Poetry of Early Religions* had argued that the Psalms were superior to the Veda (Church 1874). Müller countered that the principal value of the Vedic hymns lay “in the fact that they are so different from the Psalms, or, if you like, that they are so inferior to the Psalms” ([1874] 1881a: 38). They had a primitive vitality: “They are Aryan, the Psalms, Semitic; they belong to a primitive and rude state of society, the Psalms, at least most of them, are contemporaneous with or even later than the heydays of the Jewish monarchy.” The Vedic text was

what you may call savage, uncouth, rude, horrible—it is for that very reason that it was worthwhile to dig and dig till the old buried city was recovered, showing us what man was, what we were, before we had reached the level of David, the level of Homer, the level of Zoroaster, showing us the every cradle of our thoughts, our words, our deeds. ([1874] 1881a: 39)

Müller read from a Vedic hymn, declaiming “verses which thousands of years ago may have been addressed to a similar meeting of Aryan fellow-men” ([1874] 1881a: 39–40). The ancient Vedas were at the origin of a glorious historical process that led to Kant’s philosophy (Müller 1881b: lx): “In the *Veda* we watch the first unfolding of the human mind as we can watch it nowhere else. Life seems simple, natural, childlike, full of hopes, undisturbed as yet by many doubts or fears.” The Vedic hymns showed the beginnings of “belief in the real presence of the Divine in Nature, of the Infinite in the Finite.” They told of “the childhood of our race unfolded before our eyes, at least so much of it as we shall ever know on Aryan ground,” and offered lessons “which will occupy and delight generations to come.” The *Veda* represented the childhood, while Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* revealed “the perfect manhood of the Aryan mind.”

In an address honouring Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), delivered in 1883, Müller described him as “an Arya, belonging to the South-Eastern branch of the Aryan race,” who “spoke an Aryan language, the Bengâli” (Müller 1884: 11). Roy’s visit to England had represented “the meeting again of the two great branches of the Aryan race, after they had been separated so long that they had lost all recollection of their common origin, common language and common faith” (1884: 12). In his lecture series *India: What Can It Teach Us?* (1883), Müller returned to his theme of Aryan brotherhood. The identification of the Aryan language family was responsible for changing “millions of so-called barbarians into our own kith and kin.” Bonds of language were a powerful uniting force (1883: 27):

To speak the same language constitutes a closer union than to have drunk the same milk; and Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, is substantially the same language as Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon. This is a lesson which we should never have learnt but from a study of Indian language and literature, and if India had taught us nothing else, it would have taught us more than almost any other language ever did.

Müller had made an unpopular defence of a profound form of kinship between Indians and their British rulers: “They would not have it, they would not believe that there could be any community of origin between the people of Athens and Rome, and the so-called Niggers of India” (Müller 1883: 28).

The discovery of Sanscrit had “added a new period to our historical consciousness, and revived the recollections of our childhood, which seemed to have vanished for ever” (1883: 29–30). Philology could strip away the accretions of time, so that the Veda now offered a glimpse of this lost childhood (1883: 244):

In the Veda an ancient city has been laid bare before our eyes which, in the history of all other religions, is filled up with rubbish, and built over by new architects. Some of the earliest and most instructive scenes of our distant childhood have risen once more above the horizon of our memory which, until thirty or forty years ago, seemed to have vanished for ever.

The ancient Hindus were a people of high moral qualities (1883: 72): “I can only say that, after reading the accounts of the terrors and horrors of Mohammedan rule, my wonder is that so much of native virtue and truthfulness should have survived.” The Vedas were a corrective for European thought, which was “nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish.” The Vedas had the power “to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life” (1883: 6). There was no way for scholars to know the original language, “even if they discovered the private correspondence of Adam and Eve, or of the first *Homo* and *Femina sapiens*.” But if by *primitive* was meant “the earliest state of man of which, from the nature of the case, we can hope to gain any knowledge,” there was “the archives hidden away in the secret drawers of language, in the treasury of words common to all the Aryan tribes, and in the radical elements of which each word is compounded.” In addition, there was “no literary relic more full of lessons to the true anthropologist, to the true student of mankind, than the Rig-veda” (1883: 123). The Vedic poets were not primitive in the sense of uncivilized (1883: 133): “If we mean by primitive, people who were without a knowledge of fire, who used unpolished flints, and ate raw flesh, the Vedic poets were not primitive.” But they were primitive as “the first of the Aryan race to leave behind literary relics of their existence on earth,” and in this sense “the Vedic poets are primitive, the Vedic language is primitive, the Vedic religion is primitive, and, taken as a whole, more primitive than anything else that we are ever likely to recover in the whole history of our race.” There was no foreign influence, and arguments about Semitic or other influences were false. The Vedas were “a plant entirely grown on native soil, and entirely nurtured by native air,” and for this reason they were “full of lessons which the student of religion could learn nowhere else” (1883: 125). The phrase *Kindheit der Völker* (“childhood of the nations”) is found in the introduction to Paul Deussen’s translations of the Upanishads ([1905] 1921: vii). The French linguist Michel Bréal (1877: 74)

stressed that it was the Vedas rather than later myths that provided the key to the “racial identity of the Aryan peoples” (“identité de race des peuples ariens”) and their proper place in comparative mythology (“l’affinité de leur génie”).

Müller returned repeatedly to the theme of blood and language: “if I say Aryas I mean neither blood nor bones, nor hair nor skull; I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language.” To speak of “Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Celts and Slaves” implied nothing about “anatomical characteristics,” so that “even the blackest Hindus represent an earlier stage of Aryan speech and thought than the fairest Scandinavians.” Müller made this definitive assertion (Müller 1888: 120–121):

To me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar. It is worse than a Babylonian confusion of tongues—it is downright theft.

In an 1891 address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Müller looked back to the 1847 meeting of the same society, where it had been “taken for granted that the study of Comparative Philology would be in future the only safe foundation for the study of Anthropology.” *Linguistic ethnology* had been a term used by Baron Bunsen, James Cowles Prichard, Robert Gordon Latham, and others. Müller had been commonly associated with this theory, for which he had been “so fiercely attacked” (Müller 1892: 180). The problem was in part terminological: “Perhaps I was not entirely without blame, for [. . .] I allowed myself to speak of the Aryan or the Semitic race, meaning thereby no more than the people, whoever and whatever they were, who spoke Aryan or Semitic languages.” To clear things up, Müller had stressed that to speak of “an Aryan skull would be as great a monstrosity as to speak of a dolichocephalic language” (1892: 180). Müller reviewed the criteria used for racial classification: skin colour, eye colour, skull shape, hair type. It was evident that skull shape or hair type had no relation to language (1892: 182): “To imagine, therefore, that as a matter of necessity, or as a matter of fact, dolichocephalic skulls have anything to do with Aryan, mesocephalic with Semitic, or brachycephalic with Turanian speech, is nothing but the wildest random thought; it can convey no rational meaning whatever.” Even in ancient records, there was evidence of language borrowing (1892: 182): “So long as we know anything of the ancient Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian languages, we find foreign words in each of them.” Before their separation, there had no doubt been mixing (1892: 183):

If, then, we have no reason to doubt that the ancestors of the people speaking Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian languages lived in close proximity, would there not

have been marriages between them, so long as they lived in peace, and would they not have killed the men and carried off the women in time of war? What, then, would have been the effect of a marriage between a dolichocephalic mother and a brachycephalic father?

The homeland question could not be settled by the study of physical race (1892: 184): “no honest philologist will allow himself to be driven one step beyond the statement that the unknown people who spoke Aryan languages were, at one time, and before their final separation, settled somewhere in Asia.”

As noted, one of the intellectual provocations behind these remarks was scholarly claims about the origin of the Aryans in Europe and their racial type (1892: 185): “We may say, with Penka, that all Aryas are dolichocephalic, blue-eyed, and blond, or we may say, with Piétrement⁴ that all Âryas are brachycephalic, with brown eyes and black. There is no difference between the two assertions. They are both perfectly unmeaning.” However, Müller then made a surprising qualification (1892: 185): “It may be that in time the classification of skulls, hair, eyes, and skin may be brought into harmony with the classification of language.” It was a reasonable postulate “that the two must have run parallel, at least in the beginning of all things.” There had, after all, been an original congruence of race and language that was then to a degree disrupted by the contingencies of history.

The evocation of a shared (elite) British-Indian identity, of a kinship between a younger and older brother, appeared increasingly a Romantic fantasy. One loyalist was William Hunter, who evoked in lyrical terms the “splendid ARYAN or Indo-Germanic stock” and its triumphant progress across time and space. He declared that it was this stock “from which the Bráhmán, the Rájput, and the Englishman alike descend” (1881: 192). A shared belief system underlay this common origin (1881: 194): “The ancient religions of Europe and India had a similar origin. They were to some extent made up of the sacred stories or myths which our common ancestors had learned while dwelling together in Central Asia.” Several gods of the Veda were “also the gods of Greece and Rome,” and “the Deity is adored by names derived from the same old Aryan root by Brahmans in Calcutta, by the Protestant clergy of England, and by Catholic priests in Peru.”

Müller took it upon himself to educate Herbert Hope Risley (1851–1911), a colonial ethnographer and administrator, on the topic of language and race. In the context of the Indian census, one vexed question for colonial ethnology was the relationship between race and caste. Bates (1995: 241) describes the 1872 Punjab census as “the least structured census ever conducted in the subcontinent.” Sir Denzil Ibbetson (1847–1908) admitted (1883, I: 1), “An old

4. Charles Piétrement (1826–1906), author of a book on horses in ancient texts (Piétrement 1883).

agnostic is said to have summed up his philosophy in the following words:—“The only thing I know is that I know nothing; and I am not quite sure that I know that.” His words express very exactly my own feelings regarding caste in the Panjáb.” Ibbetson identified two difficulties in conducting a census in India: “the infinite diversity of the material to be dealt with, and our own infinite ignorance of that material” (1883, I: iv). This ignorance deprived “European science of material which it greatly needs, but it also involves a loss of administrative power to ourselves” (1883, I: v). Ibbetson understood caste to be “a tangled web of caste restrictions and distinctions, of ceremonial obligations, and of artificial purity and impurity,” preventing the “separation of occupation from descent” in Hindu society. Ibbetson’s use of the term “artificial” can be read together with his notion of original authentic congruence: inauthentic institutions and false notions of heredity had distorted the original state of affairs. Ibbetson accepted the division of languages into Aryan and Turanian, as well as Aryan Invasion Theory (1883, I: 132, 198). Caste was originally a universal institution (1883, I: 3): “William Priest, John King, Edward Farmer, and James Smith are but the survivals in England of the four Varnas of Menu.” Rejecting the Vedic understanding of caste as uniquely Hindu and as restricted only to four fixed and immutable classes, Ibbetson viewed it in contemporary India as “a social far more than a religious institution.” The terminology of the four castes lacked any clear reference to social reality (1883, I: 2): “Súdra has no present significance save as a convenient term of abuse to apply to somebody else whom you consider lower than yourself.” The basis of “diversity of caste” was “diversity of occupation” (1883, I: 2). In “priest-ridden” India, the Brahmins, who had no claim to separate descent “from among the Aryan community,” and who had become too great in number to justify their status, had therefore sought to maintain power by developing a hereditary principle (1883, I: 4).

Unlike Ibbetson, Risley was deeply invested in the racial reality of caste. Addressing Risley, Müller criticized “the vagueness of the ordinary ethnological terminology which has caused much confusion of thought.” He emphasized the need to avoid using “the terminology of Comparative Philology in an ethnological sense” (Müller [1886] 1902b: 257). He pointed out that in his 1853 letter to Baron Bunsen and subsequently, he had protested continually against this confusion, but to “little effect” ([1886] 1902b: 257):

Still it is an evil that ought to be resisted with all our might. Ethnologists persist in writing of *Aryas*, *Shemites*, and *Turanians*, *Ugrians*, *Dravidians*, *Munda*, *Bantu* races, &c., forgetting that these terms have nothing to do with blood, or bones, or hair, or facial angles, but simply and solely with language.

Müller again reverted to claiming that language was the sole constitutive factor in determining labels like *Aryan* ([1886] 1902b: 258):

Âryas are those who speak Aryan languages, whatever their colour, whatever their blood. In calling them Âryas we predicate nothing of them except that the grammar of their language is Aryan. The classification of Âryas and Shemites is based on linguistic grounds and on nothing else; and it is only because languages must be spoken by somebody that we may allow ourselves to speak of language as synonymous with peoples.

In addition to the “dark aboriginal inhabitants” and “their more fair skinned conquerors,” many other “neighboring races” had entered India, including Scythians, Mongolians, Persians, Greeks, “Mohammedans of every description,” Afghans, and Europeans. Here was a chance for the ethnologist to discover “some tests, apart from language, by which, even after a neighbourly intercourse lasting for thousands of years, the descendants of one race may be told from the descendants of the others” ([1886] 1902b: 258). However, Müller ultimately could not let go of his historical project. After the philologist and the ethnologist had completed their work of classification, “it will be time for the ethnologist or the linguist to compare their results, but not till then; otherwise we shall never arrive at truly scientific conclusions” ([1886] 1902b: 259).

Müller advised Risley to avoid this confusion in his surveys, as well as the further set of confusions relating to the term *caste*. This domain was full of terminological problems ([1886] 1902b: 260):

Caste is a European word, but it has become so completely naturalised in India that the vagueness of its meaning seems to have reacted even on the native mind. The Sanskrit word for caste is *varna*, literally “colour,” or *gâti*, literally “kith.” But though the original meaning of these words is clear, it is well known how much their meaning has varied during different periods in the history of Indian society.

The boundaries of caste had been historically fluid, with outsiders being admitted at various points, and there was also “the religious and social flunkeyism of the lower races of India” ([1886] 1902b: 261). Risley should seek the advice of “a really learned pundit” on ancient Sanscrit sources. This pundit might “give you a clear and full account of what can be known from these sources. Some of them are of very ancient date” ([1886] 1902b: 261). Müller also warned against transferring “terms which have their proper and well-defined meaning in one country to similar objects in other countries,” such as the Celtic stone pile or *cromlech*, or concepts such as *totemism* and *fetishism* ([1886] 1902b: 262). Echoing Maine and Freeman (to be discussed further), he observed that merged groups were able to create a fiction of common descent ([1886] 1902b: 260), and this included partially fictional accounts that had come to be reflected in reality ([1886] 1902b: 261): “Even if some of the statements set forth in these

Brahmanic treatises may seem to represent *pia vota* [pious affirmations] rather than real facts, we must not forget that such theories have often very powerfully influenced the later development of social life in India." Müller suggested to Risley that "with proper precautions you might derive most valuable help from educated natives," since they understood the native terms and knew "how far they really correspond with the terms which we use in English." *Caste* ought also to be "carefully distinguished from school, Karana—from race and family, *gotra* and *kula*" ([1886] 1902b: 261).

Risley's method involved mapping caste differences onto race, on the assumption that caste acted as a conservative factor in maintaining racial boundaries (1891: xxvii):

In Europe anthropometry has to confess itself hindered, if not baffled, by the constant intermixture of races which tends to obscure and confuse the data arrived at by measurement. In a country where such intermixture is to a large extent eliminated, there were grounds for believing that divergent types would reveal themselves more clearly, and that their characteristics would furnish some clue to their original race affinities.

Predictably, Risley was unimpressed by Müller's suggestions (1891: xxxi–xxxii):

But we must have some general names for our types: it is a thankless task to invent new names; and I trust to justify my invasion of the domain of philology by the universal practice of the Indians themselves, and by the example of Professor [Archibold] Sayce, who did not hesitate, on a recent occasion, to speak of the Aryan race as an established ethnic aggregate

Following the French physical anthropologist Paul Topinard, Risley (1891: xxxii–xxxiv) described an Aryan and Dravidian physical type, focussing on the nose. The Aryan type was dolichocephalic, had a leptorrhine nose, narrow face, high facial angle, was tall, slender, and well proportioned, and had light brown skin. The Dravidian type also "usually inclines to be dolichocephalic," but the nose was thick and broad, the lips fleshy (1891: xxxiv): "Thus, it is scarcely a paradox to lay down as a law of the caste organization in Eastern India that a man's social status varies in inverse ratio to the width of his nose." Risley rejected John Nesfield's (1836–1919) view that philology had no relevance to the study of caste, given that language "was no test of race, and the question of caste is not one of race at all, but of culture" (Risley 1891, xx–xxii, citing Nesfield 1885: 4).

Müller's own position was that there was a distinction between ethnological, political, and professional caste. Of ethnological caste, he observed that it

arose when “different races are brought in contact” (Müller [1858] 1890: 320). For example, there had always been “a mutual antipathy between the white and the black man,” and if they came together by conquest or migration, “the white man has invariably asserted his superiority, and established certain social barriers between himself and his dark-skinned brethren” (Müller [1858] 1890: 320). In the case of the Aryans and the Sudras, there was this same antipathy:

The difference of blood and colour was heightened in ancient times by difference of religion and language; but in modern times also, and in countries where the negro has learned to speak the same language and worship the same God as his master, the white man can never completely overcome the old feeling that seems to lurk in his very blood, and makes him recoil from the embrace of his darker neighbour.

Even where there was no obvious distinction of colour, the “feeling of race” would make itself felt, as between the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, the Saxon and the Celt, the Englishman and the foreigner.” There was something that could be called “hatred, or antipathy, or mistrust, or mere coldness,” which would lead to a system of caste “in a primitive state of society,” and this was one that “even in more civilized countries” would never be “completely eradicated” ([1858] 1890: 320).

One might argue that Risley was attempting to stave off the chaos that would result in separating rigidly linguistic from physical anthropological criteria, and in this he also appealed to indigenous practices and labels themselves. Müller’s advice was offered from a distant armchair. He had no real suggestion for navigating Vedic four-caste theory, categories relating to hereditary professions, other indigenous identity labels, regional and geographical terms, and the contested classification systems of Western linguistics, physical anthropology, and racial anthropometrics. The Punjab census official, Harikishan Kaul (1869–1942), rejected Risley’s framework in its entirety. Categories such as *race*, *tribe*, and *caste* were extremely vague: “There is apparently no equivalent for race in the Indian vernaculars” (Kaul 1912: 400). There was an inherent contradiction between the principles of common descent and endogamy, which Risley applied to caste: “people descended from a common ancestor, however distant, cannot intermarry according to the first principles of caste” (1912: 401). *Caste* was not an indigenous term, and it had been “applied to a complicated Indian institution” (1912: 401). As for the question of whether caste was racial or functional, Kaul denied a racial origin to *Aryan*: “The oldest authority on the subject are the Vedas, and as far as I can see, the term Arya is used there not in a racial sense” (1912: 404). There could possibly have been “an Aryan and a Dravidian race,” but the term Arya was used as “a distinction of merit” (1912: 404).

6.3 THE GREAT MUDDLE

As the case of Müller illustrates, during the second half of the nineteenth century confusion reigned on the question of language and race. Müller was increasingly out of his depth, faced with the challenge from Darwinism on the one side, and physical and racial anthropology on the other. Rather than offering a grand vision of the distant past, the debate about language and race led to a maze of confusion and contradiction. Dwight Whitney accepted that criteria of language and race were distinct yet argued nonetheless that there was an approximate correlation (1867: 379): “But upon the whole, in the light of our present knowledge, we are justified in regarding the boundaries of Indo-European speech as approximately coinciding with those of race; the tie of language represents a tie of blood.” Poesche contrasted the model offered by “physiologists” (*Physiologen*) of human diversity with that of the philologists. A shared language did not indicate a “natural unity” (*natürliche Einheit*) any more than a difference in language indicated a “natural distinction” (*natürliche Verschiedenheit*). He chided Müller for suggesting that a Greek-speaking Turk born in Athens was a Greek (1878: 7). He cited Julius Oppert to the effect that there were Indo-European languages, but no Indo-European race: “Es gibt indo-europäische Sprachen, aber keine indoeuropäische Race” (Oppert 1876b: 857–858).⁵ However, Oppert gave language a more important role than Poesche suggests, since he believed that substratum traces in the language could reveal the identity of the original inhabitants of a region (1876b: 858).

The biologist and comparative anatomist Thomas Huxley (1825–1895) offered a partial defence of Müller, though in less than coherent terms. The Aryan language family was one of the “permanent acquisitions of science” ([1890] 1915: 273): “when one speaks of ‘Aryan languages,’ no hypothetical assumptions are involved. It is a matter of fact that such languages exist, that they present certain substantial and formal relations, and that convention sanctions the name applied to them.” While the original Aryan tongue was hypothetical, it had “similar cogency to that employed about things biological” ([1890] 1915: 274). If these “primitive Aryan dialects” existed, “there must have been primitive Aryan people who used them; and these people must have resided somewhere or other on the earth’s surface.” In this way, one

5. The original quotation is in French: «Il peut y avoir des langues qu’on appelle indo-européennes, mais il n’y a pas de nations indo-européennes, parce qu’il s’est produit et se produit toujours un courant de peuples, qui, à différentes reprises, a envahi l’Occident, qui y a apporté l’organisme de la langue, et a formé, avec les populations déjà existantes, une population complètement nouvelle pouvant bien avoir des rapports avec les nations asiatiques, mais constituant pourtant un ensemble, un tout à part.» Oppert uses the term *nation*, which might be translated into German in this context as *Volk* rather than *race* (1876b: 858).

could conclude that there had been “a primitive Aryan people” and “a primitive Aryan home, or country occupied by them” ([1890] 1915: 274–275). A scientist who studied the question would “observe that, very early, the purely biological conception of ‘race’ illegitimately mixed itself up with the ideas derived from pure philology” (1890: 278). It was, however, unproblematic to speak of an Aryan people, given that a language implied the existence of a people who spoke it. However, it was doubtful if this people should be called an “Aryan race,” since it combined a philological with a zoological concept ([1890] 1915: 279). Given that language was “rooted half in the bodily and half in the mental nature of man,” it was possible that the speech apparatus could have a racial element, as, for example, “the voice of an American-born negro, however thoroughly he may have learned English, can be readily distinguished from that of a white man” ([1890] 1915: 280). But there was no evidence of any racial barrier to language transmission ([1890] 1915: 280). Under the influence of monogenesis, the early generation of “philological ethnologists” sought to defend this Aryan racial unity ([1890] 1915: 281): “Strong in the prestige of their great discovery of the unity of the Aryan tongues, they were quite prepared to make the philological and the biological categories fit, by the exercise of a little pressure on that about which they knew less.” The Hindu Kush and Pamir Mountain hypothesis for the origin of the Aryans was now discredited, according to Huxley. He then gave the classic Aryan invasion narrative ([1890] 1915: 282–283):

So far as India is concerned, the internal evidence of the old literature sufficiently proves that the Aryan invaders were “white” men. It is hardly to be doubted that they intermixed with the dark Dravidian aborigines; and that the high-caste Hindoos are what they are in virtue of the Aryan blood which they have inherited, and of the selective influence of their surroundings operating on the mixture.

In a footnote to this, Huxley then commented on criticisms of Müller ([1890] 1915: 283):

I am unable to discover good grounds for the severity of the criticism, in the name of “the anthropologists,” with which Professor Max Müller’s assertion that the same blood runs in the veins of English soldiers “as in the veins of the dark Bengalese,” and that there is “a legitimate relationship between Hindoo, Greek, and Teuton,” has been visited. So far as I know anything about anthropology, I should say that these statements may be correct literally, and probably are so substantially. I do not know of any good reason for the physical differences between a high-caste Hindoo and a Dravidian, except the Aryan blood in the veins of the former; and the strength of the infusion is probably quite as great in some Hindoos as in some English soldiers.

The use of the term *Aryan blood* would seem to imply a natural relationship between race and language (“a race in the biological sense”), not merely the existence of a primitive speech community (“people in the philological sense”). Huxley is unclear on this point ([1890] 1915: 283). The answer lies in original congruence. While the evidence from various disciplines was difficult to assess, there was good reason to assert “first, that the people who spoke ‘primitive Aryan’ were a distinct and well-marked race of mankind; and, secondly, that the area of the distribution of this race, in primaeval times, lay in Europe, rather than in Asia” ([1890] 1915: 284).

Huxley was under the influence of the German anthropological theory of that period. This identified the Northern European racial type as characterized by “tall and massive frames, fair complexions, blue eyes, and yellow or reddish hair.” This northern type was long-skulled, “in the sense that the breadth is usually less, often much less, than four-fifths of the length, and they are usually tolerably high” ([1890] 1915: 284–285). As one moved away from Northern Europe, the “tall blond long-heads” gradually gave way to the “short brunet broad-heads” ([1890] 1915: 286–287). The Aryan race was “much older than the primitive Aryan speech” ([1890] 1915: 298). Huxley’s conclusion was that ([1890] 1915: 305) “the characteristic modes of speech, termed Aryan, were developed among the blond long-heads alone.” The home of the Aryan race was in Europe and lay chiefly east of the central highlands and west of the Urals.

6.4 ARCHEOLOGY AND PREHISTORY

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, archaeology and prehistory became new participants in the Aryan debate, as the discipline began to professionalize (Demoule 2023: 45ff.). In some cases, this participation took the form of scepticism about philology. Isaac Taylor (1890: 332) celebrated the ending of the “tyranny of the Sanskritists.” It was now evident that “hasty philological deductions require to be systematically checked by the conclusions of prehistoric archeology, craniology, anthropology, geology and common sense.” Given the “diversities of race” and that “change of language” did not always imply “diversity of race,” ethnology was needed, as well as archaeology and philology, for solutions to fundamental problems of origins in prehistory (Birch 1876: 16). The German prehistorian and archaeologist Gustaf Kossinna (1858–1931), whose intellectual background was in Germanic philology, shifted his disciplinary affiliation after experiencing frustration with the philological paradigm.⁶ Kossinna introduced the notion of *Siedlungsarchäologie*, a spatially or territorially organized understanding of archaeology (Kossinna

6. See Demoule (2023: 123ff.) for further discussion.

1896, Heyd 2017). Kossinna denied that cultural change (*Kulturwechsel*) was automatically to be equated with population change (*Bevölkerungswechsel*) (1896: 190) and rejected linguistic arguments for an Eastern origin of the Indo-Europeans. Criticism from within, as well as from physical anthropology, had led to this model being abandoned by all notable scholars, with the exception of the Swedish archaeologist, Oscar Montelius (1843–1921) (Kossinna 1902). Kossinna also chided physical anthropologists for methodological dilettantism in their identification of Northern Europe and Scandinavia as the original homeland, while conceding that this view held a core of truth. He argued rather that Central and Western Europe north of the Alps should be identified as the site of the creation of the white race (“Bildung der weissen Rasse”) (1902: 161).

A piece by the geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) on the origins of the Aryans suggested that his discipline also had much to learn from prehistorians (Ratzel [1899] 1906, Kossinna 1902: 162fn.). Kossinna argued that prehistory had in recent years been able to provide an independent scientific framework, enabling an understanding of the remotest prehistory (“die fernsten Urzeiten”) (1902: 162). It was possible to identify a distinction between the transmission of cultural change and the migration of peoples. The original homeland of the Germanic peoples was around the coast of the eastern Baltic and the adjoining parts of the North Sea. With the emergence of archaeology, grounded in material artefacts, a properly rigorous approach to the Indo-European question had become available (1902: 162–163). Kossinna proposed Corded Ware culture (*Schnurkeramik-Kultur*) as a key criterion for identifying the boundary between prehistorical groups, equating Corded Ware with the Indo-Europeans. This was a form of pottery decorated with twisted cord impressions, which was found across much of the terrain of present-day Europe.

The archaeologist Gordon Childe (1926: 154) termed the corded Ware makers “our linguistic ancestors.” Mallory (1991: 108) dates the emergence and spread of this material culture from approximately 3200 to 2300 BC, predating the emergence of “specific proto-languages,” and therefore providing “a plausible foundation for a number of the Indo-European groups in Europe,” though not all. In relation to Kossinna, Mallory remarks that it is now a commonplace of archeology that “pots do not equal people” (1991: 108). Childe, a rarity in that he was a Marxist Aryanist, retained a belief in language as the key evidential criterion, and therefore as superordinate to racial classification. Archaeology could not grasp “the concrete person” who lay “beyond the sphere of prehistory” (1926: 4): “Language, albeit an abstraction, is yet a more subtle and pervasive criterion of individuality than the culture-group formed by comparing flints and potsherds or the ‘races’ of the skull-measurer.” The “parent language must have been spoken by an actual people,” who could be called Aryans, and they were distinguished by “a certain spiritual unity reflected in and conditioned by their community of speech.” This was a legacy to

their descendants, rather than “skull-types and bodily characteristics” (1926: 4): “Anyone who doubts this would do well to compare the dignified narrative carved by the Aryan Darius on the rock of Behistun with the bombastic and blatant self-glorification of the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal or Nebuchadnezzar.”⁷ Here Childe was drawing a distinction between Aryan and Semitic kingship. He argued that the Aryan languages were “throughout exceptionally delicate and flexible instruments of thought,” which meant that “the Aryans must have been gifted with exceptional mental endowments, if not in enjoyment of a high material culture.” In Childe’s evolutionary scheme from barbarism to civilization, the Aryans were the first to take steps towards an “abstract natural science.” It was the Greeks and the Hindus rather than the Babylonians and the Egyptians. This superiority was reflected in religion (1926: 5): “The first great world religions which addressed their appeal to all men irrespective of race or nationality, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, were the works of Aryans, propagated in Aryan speech.” Abstraction in religion was in this way correlated with monotheism (1926: 5): “Even the original Aryans themselves worshipped at least one deity, a Sky Father, who, although still anthropomorphic, materialistic and barbaric, was, nevertheless, exalted far above the nameless spirits and magic forces of mere savagery.” Childe imagined the Aryan/Nordic invaders of Europe as engines of progress, overrunning a static peasant culture to found European civilization, in this way offering a mirror image of the Aryan model of Indian history (1926: 212): “This is the truth underlying the panegyrics of the Germanists: the Nordics’ superiority in physique fitted them to be the vehicles of a superior language.” Childe’s model is a variant of the Aryan/Semitic duality, with the Babylonians and the Assyrians cast as the villains of history. By contrast, the British archaeologist Harold Peake (1867–1946), in his *The Bronze Age and the Celtic World*, saw philology as inadequate to the task of tracing the origin and trajectory of the Indo-Europeans (whom he termed *Wiros*, following Giles 1922). Previous attempts to locate the homeland had been made by philologists, “usually with little or no archaeological experience,” even while archaeological discoveries had “placed the inquirer to-day in a position which is vastly superior to that of most of his predecessors.” Peake pointed in particular to the distribution of leaf-shaped swords.

The Harvard classicist Joshua Whatmough, discussing the special connection between the Italic and Celtic groups of languages, argued that to speak of “Italo-Keltic unity” was to go too far beyond the evidence, yet Paul Kretschmer’s *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache* (1896) had shown “an unusually close relationship” (Whatmough 1927: 1). He remarked on the difficulty of “correlating the findings of archeological, linguistic and

7. Ashurbanipal was last Assyrian king, reigning from 669 to 631 BC. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylonia from approximately 605 to 562 BC.

historical research,” arguing that the attempt to correlate was “an invaluable means of reaching the truth.” If both disciplines were dealing with “the same people at the same date” (*italics omitted*) and failed to agree, then one or both must be wrong (1927: 2). Not only were archaeology and philology “vast and highly specialized,” but also “the archaeologist thinks of one series of ideas, the philologist of another, maybe totally different, when they speak, say, of Ligurians or *Italici* or Kelts” (1927: 3).⁸ There had been “a deplorable confusion between terms denoting race, language, and culture, which ought to be cleared away.” A term like *Indo-European* was neither ethnic nor cultural (1927: 3): “it is purely linguistic; but there are those who continually speak of ‘Indo-Europeans’ when they mean ‘Indo-European speaking peoples’—a cumbersome phrase for which Dr. Giles has substituted *Wiros*, a term which, however, has not yet proved acceptable to philologists.” The archeologists had not been respectful of the philology, and “treat it almost with scorn,” in particular “if the linguistic facts do not at once square with the archaeological,” whereas students of language” have shown appreciation for the importance of archaeology (1927: 3). Whatmough insisted that regarding race, “nothing is said here, or implied” and offered the ritual disclaimer: “Language is not a satisfactory criterion of race, nor race of language.” He added that “even anthropologists will admit that racial admixture has been going on from the earliest times, as it still goes on” (1927: 18). The habit of archaeologists of “attaching to certain kinds of culture certain ethnic names—or worse, certain linguistic titles, as Indo-European (or “Aryan” itself)—simply destroys much of the meaning of the archaeological record” (1927: 19).

The notion of Aryans as patriarchal and dominating or absorbing matriarchal cultures was a theme found in a range of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings. According to the Indologist Gustav Solomon Oppert (1836–1908), the original inhabitants of India were members of the *Finnish-Ugrian* or *Turanian* race. He designated the Indian branch as *Bharatas*, after a term from the *Rigveda*, and identified them with the Dravidian and Gauda populations of contemporary India. With the coming of the Aryans, there was a complex exchange between the Male and Female principles. The “non-Aryan Principle of the Female Energy was introduced into the Aryan system,” one that had its origins in ancient Babylonia. Likewise, “many ideas and many of the deities of the invader were received into their religion” (1893: viii–ix). The lesson to be drawn from this was that there was an underlying unity (1893: ix): “I trust now that the racial unity of the great majority of the Indian population has been established by this research based mainly on linguistic and theological evidence, as it has also been proved independently by ethnological

8. Ancient people from present-day northwest Italy. *Italici* refers to Italic peoples, assumed to be the speakers of an Indo-European language.

enquiries.” Oppert made a plea for this unity to be recognized by renaming the country (1893: ix):

In order to perpetuate by an outward sign the racial union of the overwhelming majority of the population of India, I venture to suggest that the inhabitants of this country would do well, if they were to assume the ancient, honorable and national name of Bharatas, remembering that India has become famous as Bharatavarsa, the land of the Bharatas.⁹

As a German-Jewish scholar, Oppert was no doubt sensitized to the rhetoric of purity of origins.

The archaeologist H. R. Hall identified this male/female opposition in the relationship between the Greeks and the Minoans. The Greeks understood the Minoan women as huntresses and warriors: “This feminism, if we may call it so, was probably a development of strong matriarchal ideas as opposed to the predominantly patriarchal ideas of the Aryan Greeks” (Hall 1928: 274). There was a similar opposition between the Aryans and the “matriarchal idea of the Dasyus or Dravidians of India” (1928: 274). Hall pointed to Lionel Burnett’s *Antiquities of India*, which described a dichotomy between the Aryans with their “fairer skin and Indo-germanic speech,” while at the other end “the lower strata were wallowing in savagery.” Burnett suggested that “Dravidian society was to some extent matriarchal.” The worship of the Mother Goddess was “dark and repulsive” (Burnett 1914: 3–4). A feminist inversion of the Aryan model was produced by the Lithuanian scholar Marija Gimbutas. According to Gimbutas, Indo-Europeans, the bearers of so-called Kurgan culture (a form of burial mound), had originated from Southern Russia, invading Europe in two waves (4400–4200 BC and 3400–3200 BC). The Indo-Europeans are presented as having imposed hierarchy and patriarchy on a previous female-oriented, peaceful, and egalitarian social order (Gimbutas 1997: xviii). A similar picture was painted by Mary Boyce (1992) of the ancient Zoroastrians, as egalitarian and peaceful pastoralists.

6.5 FICTIONS OF AFFINITY

Müller’s triumphalism notwithstanding, the disorientation effect of philology, in its uneasy relationship with physical anthropology and archaeology, was powerfully in evidence in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

9. The Sanscrit term *Bharat*, which is given as an alternative name in the Constitution (“Indi, that is Bharat”), is now the preferred name for the nation state among Hindu activists (Deepak 2021).

Even those elements of the Aryan paradigm that remained within the scholarly mainstream, such as Indo-European linguistics, had failed to extricate themselves successfully from the biblical framework, specifically the idea of reconstruction as restitution: “this preoccupation with the lost—and with the vanished, the disappeared, the hidden and the forgotten—is an inevitable, even irresistible, condition of modernity” (Ramaswamy 2004: 3). Speculative philology continued to flourish outside the scholarly mainstream. A form of Christian philological universalism persisted, even after the founding of Indo-European linguistics, according to which humanity at a deep level was a linguistic unity. Baron Bunsen had earlier identified in ancient Egypt the common origin of the Aryan and Semitic languages, though his universalism included an evolutionary bias towards an “Aryan religion” (Benes 2017). In an 1851 letter Bunsen advised his son to offer comfort to a Jewish friend, as, even though the Germans “give him as an Israelite the hindmost place,” the situation would not last (cited in F. Bunsen 1868: 176–177):

It is ever more becoming clear to me, in beholding the Jewish dispensation from the stand-point of universal history, that whoever will not give up the world’s history in despair, must assume in his own soul the future fact of the Christianising, Hellenising, Germanising, of the Jewish system; and say to himself, as a son of Israel, that he is thus brought nearer to Abraham than he was before. Such sons of Israel must, therefore, help the sons of Japhet to *Hellenise* Christianity, to raise it to the idea of entire humanity; in other words, to found the true Hero-worship with the *one* true Dionysos-Osiris at its head. That sounds absurd, but is yet true!

In remarks to the translator of *Theologia Germanica*, Bunsen praised the “school of Germanic theology,” which was (1860: liv, lv)

the first protest of the Germanic mind against the Judaism and formalism of the Byzantine and medieval Churches,—the hollowness of science to which scholasticism had led, and the rottenness of society which a pompous hierarchy strove in vain to conceal, but had not the power nor the will to correct.

The missionary sinologist Joseph Edkins (1823–1905) saw Chinese as being closest to the “primeval language” (1888: v). Edkins accepted that the Indo-European grouping was equated with a defined people with a certain way of life (1871: 385): “Before their separation into Hindoo and Persian, Goth and Sclave, Greek and Latin, the Aryan race had towns and fortified places, reared cattle, and ploughed the ground.” But etymology could reveal a much deeper set of correspondences between languages, and the underlying linguistic unity of humanity. Theories about the origin of the Maori people included a “Semitic Maori theory” as well an Aryan theory (Ballantyne 2002). Similar

claims were made about the Aryan origins of the Ainu, the indigenous people of northern Japan (Batchelor 1927). Vicente Fidel López (1871) argued that the Peruvian language, Quechua, was an Aryan language. Subsequently, Thomas Stewart Denison set out to show that in the “Mexican language” (Aztec) he had found “a very ancient language that might throw more light on the original speech of mankind.” He reluctantly concluded that he had merely succeeded in adding “another tongue to the Aryan group” (1908: 13). The language was “Aryan in vocabulary and in verb conjugation” (1908: 9), with its origins “in the highlands of East Iran” on the roof of the world (1908: 18).

This disorientation was in part a product of the new levels of reflexivity that accompanied social thought, as scholarly debate impacted on the public sphere, and the questions that modernity raised failed to find certain answers (Berman 1988). Between the 1870s and World War I, European understandings of collective identity were in a continual process of self-deconstruction. The disenchantment engendered by scholarly categories as they circulated in the popular imaginary created a whole spectrum of intellectual and ideological responses. Questions of definition were of particular significance for European Jews, given increasing demands for the creation of new states based on (perceived or actual) historical collectivities, nations in waiting currently submerged within larger, imperial polities. Since the Enlightenment, the dominant “liberal” position had been that Jews would be accepted as citizens if they renounced particularistic beliefs and practices and assimilated fully (see Rose 1990). Between empire and the modern nation-state, Jews were exposed to significant risks, as well as opportunities for political normalization.

One way to counter this sense of disorientation was to emphasize the subjective necessity of fictions of affinity. This required recognition that populations operate on the basis of beliefs, not scientific facts, and that notions of lineage and kinship were to a degree fictive in nature. In the context of the 1866 war between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy, issues were raised about the relationship of politics to demographics in Trentino and the Adriatic peninsula of Istria. In an 1866 discussion entitled “The Language Questions in the Tyrol and Istria,” Viscount Strangford (1825–1869) gave this pragmatic analysis ([1866] 1878: 253–254): “in all questions of practical ethnographic delimitation in Europe, language does happen to be the one recognised test for determining the race of any given people as it now stands, and for asserting its political rights consequent upon the principle of nationalities.” The issue was whether these regions should join Italy, and that issue was related to the question of whether they were, in some sense, essentially Italian. Strangford explained that in other regions there had been a shift from religion as a criterion to that of language. The Bulgarians had previously thought of themselves as Greek, whereas now they might consider themselves as Slavic. There was a tension between “abstract ethnological truth,” political opinion, and subjective

views, and “the final and superhuman authority of the Lords of the world, the Emperors of the East and the West, and of the Centre if there is to be one” (Strangford [1866] 1878: 254).

The legal notion of fiction was at the heart of the comparative jurist Sir Henry Maine’s (1822–1888) discussions of “the earliest ideas of mankind” (1861: 21–43). Maine’s evolutionist vision was based on a distinction between “stationary” and “progressive” societies (1861: 23): “We can see that Brahminical India has not passed beyond a stage which occurs in the history of all the families of mankind, the stage at which a rule of law is not yet discriminated from a rule of religion.” Fictions in progressive societies maintained a sense of continuity, while concealing change (1861: 26): “The fact is [. . .] that the law has been wholly changed; the fiction is that it remains what it always was.” One important fiction was “the Fiction of Adoption which permits the family to be recreated” (1861: 27). In his 1875 Rede lecture, Maine, looking back over the nineteenth century, declared that the study of Sanscrit had been “of prodigious practical importance,” including very serious political consequences (1875: 9). This illustrated how “no great addition can be made to the stock of human thought without profoundly disturbing the whole mass and moving it in the most unexpected directions.” In this case, “the new theory of Language has unquestionably produced a new theory of Race.” While no scholar would accept “without considerable qualification” that affinity of language implied a “common lineage,” this had been widely assumed (Maine 1875: 9). Philology had “suggested a grouping of peoples quite unlike anything that had been thought before.” This notion of a shared lineage had replaced established European conceptions of national identity (1875: 9–10). These had been: “common history, common prolonged subjection to the same sovereign, common institutions, common religion, sometimes a common language, but then a common vernacular language” (1875: 10). The belief that affinity in language, even without mutual intelligibility, proved “community of descent” had led to German nationalism and Pan-Slavism, though the idea was “perhaps stretched to the point at which it is nearest breaking when men, and particularly Frenchmen, speak of the Latin race.”

Fiction was a key term for Maine’s understanding of lineage and consanguinity. In ancient prehistory, the ruling body was generally a clan or kinship group: “In the ancient world, this group of royal kinsmen had often a purely fictitious pedigree, and pretended to be descended from a god” (1883: 132). Kinship was a mix of natural blood ties and fictitious elements (1883: 256): “It is to be remarked that every variety of fiction heretofore observed among ancient societies held together by the assumption of common descent is found among the Christian Slavonians of Eastern Europe.” There, kinship could be “created artificially by Adoption, and in this case the adopted member of a family or house community is assimilated into the naturally born kinsman for all purposes indiscriminately” (1883: 256). Social solidarity could not be achieved

by “mere sentiment,” so that “If it is to bear the ordinary strains of barbarous life, it must have a core of fictitious consanguinity” (1883: 259).

Drawing on the work of the colonial civil servant and scholar Alfred Lyall (1835–1911), Maine discussed the forms of tribal association found with the Rajputs, a large and distinctive set of interrelated patrilineal clans in India: “The social system of Rajputana is pure clanship; society is held together entirely by the tie of blood; nor is there any serious question that its kernel consist of Aryans, still barbarous, indeed, but of the purest breed” (1883: 269). But if dispersed by famine or war, the Rajput will maintain “memory of stock” and “pride of blood,” creating a new community with ties to the point of origin (1883: 270–271). This model of dispersion could be identified in the “ancient tribal organisation of the more northerly branches of the Aryan race” (Maine 1883: 271). Lyall (1882) had distinguished between *pure* and *impure* tribes. A *pure tribe* was “a tribe of descent, living together generally in the same local seat, and having a real genealogy” (Maine 1883: 272). An *impure tribe* was “not a body of kinsmen, but a body formed on the model or principle of an association of kinsmen” (1883: 274). A powerful leader or “hero,” in Thomas Carlyle’s sense (Carlyle 1841), could create a sense of unity among a disparate group, so that it integrated itself on the basis of a belief that it was a lineage, descended from a common ancestor: “A mighty man of valour, with his kinsmen and retainers, founds a clan [. . .]. It becomes therefore a pure clan, having a genuine pedigree, in which certainty of paternal descent from the famous founder or founders is assumed from the outset” (1883: 280–281). Lyall’s work consisted of extensive discussion of the notion of *fiction* and tribal affinity, as a means of maintaining continuity of lineage while “increasing the circles of affinity” (1882: 163). Lyall found George Grote, in his 1846–1856 work, to be overly sceptical as to the value of myth as a record of historical fact (Lyall 1882: 31). Edward Tylor (1832–1917), often seen as the founder of social anthropology, wrote of a “nucleus of actuality” surrounded by “an enormous mass of myth simulating its effects” (1889: 399):

The myth-maker, curious to know how any people or country gained its name, had only to conclude that it came from a great ancestor or ruler, and then the simple process of turning a national or local title into a personal name at once added a new genealogy to historical tradition.

Edward Freeman offered a similar analysis (see Hutton 2000). Like Maine, he recognized that there was no purely scientific way to define a nation, and modern peoples were racial hybrids (1879: 198–199). He saw notions such as race and language as imprecise, but also as extrapolations from the primitive family (1879: 199): “But all analogy leads us to believe that tribes, nations, races, were all formed according to the original model of the family, the family which starts from the idea of the community of blood, but which allows artificial adoption

to be its legal equivalent." Blood or race did nonetheless matter, since there was a "dominant element" that was "the true essence of the race or nation, something which sets its standard and determines its character, something which draws to itself and assimilates to itself all other elements" (1879: 199). The unity of the race was in this sense a powerful, constituting fiction, built on "primary facts." This made it possible to talk of "families and races, of the great Aryan family and of the races into which it parted." These groups "have a real, practical, existence, as groups founded on the ruling primaeval idea of kindred, even though in many cases the kindred may not be by natural descent, but only by law of adoption" (1879: 200). The issue was not one of academic rigour: "When the popular mind gets hold of a truth, it seldom gets hold of it with strict scientific precision." However, "the popular version may also have a kind of practical truth for the somewhat rough and ready purposes of a popular version."

While the scholarly distinction between physical race and linguistic identity was important, "The natural instinct of mankind connects race and language" (1879: 188). This is where the notion of adoption came in: "A continuous territory, living under the same government and speaking the same tongue, forms a nation for all practical purposes. If some of its inhabitants do not belong to the original stock by blood, they at least belong to it by adoption" (1879: 211). This was a concept known to Roman law, where an adopted child was granted "every privilege of the stock on which they were grafted," even though "in the sense of the physiologist or the genealogist, there is no kindred at all" (1879: 226). The exception to this semi-fictive national identity was the Jewish race. A Jew "may be sure of his own stock, in a way in which none of the rest of us, Dutch, Welsh, or anything else, can be sure." This was given "by birth, and not by legal fiction" (1879: 230). As an alternative to the hybridity of empire, Freeman set out the ideal of a federation of autonomous offshoots of England, on the Greek city-state model: "What is to become of the white-skinned, European, Christian, minority, outvoted, as it must always be, by millions on millions of dark-skinned Mussulmans and Hindoos who can hardly be reckoned among the English-speaking people?" (1886: 49–50). John Bagnell Bury, the editor of the third edition of Freeman's *The Historical Geography of Europe*, criticized Freeman in the preface for his use of the term *Aryan*. Bury found the term *Aryan speech* preferable:

For the truth is that in designating a people as Aryan, speech was his criterion, and the inference from Aryan speech to Aryan stock is invalid. How the Indo-Germanic tongue spread is still an unsolved problem, but it is certain that all European peoples who spoke or speak tongues of this family are not of common race and many of them probably have very little "Aryan" blood. (Freeman [1881] 1912: vi)

This missed the point of Freeman's argument, which was that these categories, although in part fictive, had a core that carried forward over time and shaped the character of the collectivity.

The fallout from the Aryan debate was one of the ingredients feeding into a specific genre of essay that flourished from around the 1880s onwards. This took the form of a discussion of key terminology in the domain of human collectivities, specifically the relationships between race, language, nationality, *Volk*, state, and other categories. It was in essence a more overtly political, reflexive, and present-oriented continuation of the language-versus-race debate that had emerged in the 1840s. Much of this literature was written by Jews, who had an obvious concern with how such categories were held to interrelate within modern states (e.g., Lazarus 1880), or by radical nationalists, who were responding to the perceived hybridization of modern political and social forms, as in Ludwig Wilser's use of the term *Fremdvölker* (1899: 84).¹⁰ The central question was the status of the concept *Volk*, a term that lacks a straightforward translation into English or French. It is possible to think of *Volk* in some contexts as a purely sociological concept (as in French *peuple*), yet it has dense associations with ancient history, notions of blood, lineage, soil, mentality, and *Geist*, and modern nation-building. In his 1888 work, the economist Friedrich Neumann (1835–1910) noted that questions of *Volk* and *Nation* were both of general public concern, as well as a matter for a wide range of academic disciplines. Neumann's work offers a useful guide to intellectual developments in that period. According to Neumann, the new principle of nationality (*Nationalitätsprinzip*) had now been added to the juridical understanding of the sovereign *Volk* as the legitimating source of law, as expounded by Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779–1861) and Otto von Sarwey (1825–1900). Savigny is associated with the notion that law should reflect *Volksggeist*, an idea that stood in direct contradiction to Napoleonic constitutionalism. Neumann cited von Sarwey to the effect that in any clash between the interests of the individual and the will of the *Volk*, the *Volk* must prevail (1888: viii). According to Neumann, the *Nationalitätsprinzip* had been first explained in Ludwig Gumplowicz's (1838–1909) work on nationality and language in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Gumplowicz 1879). The idea of nationality and "mother tongue" as a principle underlying state formation had been unknown in the Middle Ages (1879: 1ff.). Gumplowicz is associated with the idea that social evolution proceeds by conflicts between groups. As a believer in polygenesis, Gumplowicz rejected the idea of a family of Aryan peoples (1879: 48) and regarded the categories of Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian as naive restatements of the biblical triad. The divisions proposed by linguists

10. Lazarus 1880, Lefèvre 1894, Steinthal 1896, Renan [1882] 1990, Wilser 1899, Kirchhoff 1905, Schlüter 1906, von Luschan 1910, Brown 1912, Boas 1915, and many others.

were meaningless, given that the reference point was the language spoken by groups in the present (Gumplowicz 1883: 188). Gumplowicz in turn pointed to Joseph von Held's *Staat und Gesellschaft* for a statement about the novelty of this "nationality principle" (von Held 1860–1861, II: 506).¹¹

Renan's famous essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* ([1882] 1990) is the most widely received and discussed of this genre of essays, for reasons that are not immediately obvious. Renan's emphasis on the subjective constitution of the nation had a lineage of several decades and was very similar to Lazarus's 1880 essay, though Lazarus also directly confronted German anti-Semitism (Klautke 2016: 42). In mid-century, Lazarus had already developed a theoretical framework for thinking about the relation of the individual to the collective, with identity understood as a form of self-consciousness, combined with a holistic or organicist understanding (Lazarus 1851). This framework was set apart from the obsessive theorizing about the "true nature" of collectivities in terms of racial, linguistic, religious, and other criteria and anticipated Ferdinand de Saussure's systems-theoretical synchronic (ahistorical) idea of *langue* (Saussure 1916). The idea that the *Volk* is constituted subjectively can be found in Gustav Rümelin's essay ([1872] 1875: 103): "My nation is those whom I regard as my nation, whom I call mine, with whom I know I am connected by inseparable ties."¹²

On the surface, Renan's piece embraced a form of proto-social constructionism: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" ([1882] 1990: 11). The essay rejected naturalistic explanations of nationhood, denied the necessity of a "dynastic principle" ([1882] 1990: 13), and expressed scepticism as to any straightforward correlation between race, language, material interest, religious affinities, geography, and military necessity" ([1882] 1990: 19). The history of a nation was not a neat linear narrative; rather, a modern nation "is a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts" ([1882] 1990: 11) or "diverse elements" simmering together ([1882] 1990: 15). In similar terms to Müller, Renan sought to distinguish linguistic from racial criteria. There was "no pure race," and the "noblest countries, England, France, and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed." Germany was no exception; it was far from being "a purely Germanic country." This was an illusion. South Germany was once *Gallic*, east of the Elbe was *Slav*, and the purity of the remainder was doubtful. The terminology of race, such as *brachycephalic* and *dolichocephalic*, had no place in philology or history ([1882] 1990: 14–15): "In the human group which created the Aryan languages and way of life, there were already brachycephalic

11. "Neu, wenigstens in einem gewissen Sinne, ist in unsern Tagen nur das sogenannte Nationalitäts- oder Nationalitätenprincip."

12. "Mein Volk sind diejenigen, die ich als mein Volk ansehe, die ich die Meinen nenne, denen ich mich verbunden weiss durch unlösbare Bande."

and dolichocephalics. The same is true of the primitive group which created the languages and institutions known as Semitic" ([1882] 1990: 15). Renan argued that the political importance of languages lay in "their being regarded as signs of race" ([1882] 1990: 16). Even at the very beginning, the proto-Aryan and proto-Semitic tribes would have had slaves speaking "the same language as their masters" ([1882] 1990: 16): "Let me repeat that these divisions of the Indo-European, Semitic, or other languages, created with such admirable sagacity by comparative philology, do not coincide with the divisions created by anthropology" ([1882] 1990: 16–17). Languages were "historical formations," which had little connection to blood, and "which in any case could not shackle human liberty when it is a matter of deciding the family with which one unites oneself for life or death" ([1882] 1990: 17). The substance of a nation, Renan argued, was "a soul, a spiritual principle," the "possession of a rich legacy of memories," together with "present-day consent, the desire to live together." What was needed was "common glories in the past" and "common will in the present" ([1882] 1990: 19). The existence of a nation was a "daily plebiscite," so there was no right of nations or kings "to say to a province: 'You belong to me, I am seizing you.'" There was a right to be consulted. A nation was held together by a shared "moral conscience" ([1882] 1990: 20).

This was at one level a subjectivist re-formulation of the concept of *Volk*. The denial that race was the foundational principle of nations was a direct reflection of orthodox views within physical and racial anthropology, as was the assertion that there were no pure races. This was also true of Renan's denial that Jews constituted a single race (Renan 1883a). The essay was not a critique of physical anthropology, ideas of race, or racism but, rather, of its politicization, and of the politicization of linguistic boundaries. The essay is a scarcely veiled attack on German nationalism, since, in contrast to the French citizenship ideal, it reflected some form of Germanic ideology. This ideology had been reflected in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871. A common French critique of German nationalism in that period was that it was based on a fictive affinity, in particular the confusion of language and race. The voluntarism or contractualism of Renan's essay seems narrowly targeted at German expansionism and bears no relationship to how actual nations operate. The notion of a spiritual essence ("une âme, un principe spirituel") echoes (ironically) the German notion of *Geist*, and Savigny's and Herder's *Volksgeist*. However, it also suggests a democratic union of like-mindedness or shared civic values, given the element of consent. The place of the individual is unclear, though the model is collectivist. Moritz Lazarus in an 1862 essay had, for example, placed the collective before the individual, yet in a dynamic process of mutual constitution ([1862] 2005: 82–83).¹³

13. "In der Gesamtheit *entwickelt* und *findet sich* der Einzelne."

Strikingly, Renan's essay had nothing to say about European colonialism. In his earlier *La réforme intellectuelle et morale* (1871), Renan had argued for the necessity of European colonization, praised British rule in India, and expounded on the regenerative effects of conquest in general, pointing in particular to the martial prowess of "la race germanique" (1871: 27–28). The Martiniquan-French intellectual Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) points to a passage where Renan argues for colonization, as a means of preventing socialism and internal conflicts between rich and poor. Colonial conquest allowed for the channeling of the warrior energies of Europeans outwards, thereby preserving social stability at home, and establishing a caste hierarchy abroad, one within which each group took up their proper social function (Renan 1871: 93–94, as translated in Césaire [1955] 2001: 37–38):

The regeneration of the inferior or degenerate races by the superior races is part of the providential order of things for humanity. With us, the common man is nearly always a *declassé* nobleman, his heavy hand is better suited to handling the sword than the menial tool. Rather than work, he chooses to fight, that is, he returns to, his first estate. *Regere imperio populos* [to rule the people], that is our vocation. Pour forth this all-consuming activity onto countries which, like China, are crying aloud for foreign conquest. Turn the adventurers who disturb European society into a *ver sacrum* [a sacred source], a horde like those of the Franks, the Lombards, or the Normans, and every man will be in his right role. Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race. Reduce this noble race to working in the *ergastulum* [prison] like Negroes and Chinese, and they rebel.

Like Müller, Renan held racist views, while disavowing the link between linguistic collectivities and those of racial anthropology.

A less well-known example of the genre is Steinthal's 1896 piece "Dialekt, Sprache, Volk, Staat, Rasse." It does not, however, deliver on the promise of its title. The piece opens with a discussion of notions of dialect continua and languages, with dialects understood as a product of the people ("ein Product des Volkes"), and a standard language as an artificial creation (*Kunstproduct*) (1896: 48). Steinthal denied that race (*Rasse*) could have any direct influence on standard languages, arguing that race was a matter for physical anthropology (1896: 49). By contrast *Volk* and *Sprache* went together. Each *Volk* was of prehistoric origin and must have been made up of disparate elements. *Volkscharakter* and nationality (*Nationalität*) arose out of, and was also expressed in, language.

Völker were not racially defined, as could be shown by the Romance-speaking peoples, who belonged to different racial groupings. The assumption of an original congruence between race and language had led to debates about which element was the most stable or enduring, with linguists generally favouring language. In the case of the Bulgarians, the conversion to another religion had also led to the acceptance of a Slavic language. The Persians, however, while they had been conquered by an Islamic people, became Muslims, and acquired an Arabic element to their vocabulary, nonetheless remained Caucasian in race. There was no way to analyse ancient prehistory in the same terms (1896: 51). However, one thing had now been shown unconditionally, namely, the existence of an Indogermanic language family (*Sprachstamm*). It remained unclear whether there was an original Indogermanic people (*Urvolk*), speaking an original language (*Ursprache*) (1896: 52). Steintal emphasized the composite nature of *Volk*, each being the product of “a multitude of relationships, migrations, schisms, and new admixtures.” The conclusion was that there was no plausible way to talk about the racial identity of a *Volk*: “Von einer Rasse eines Volkes ist demnach schwer zu reden” (1896: 52). Steintal then mentioned different typologies of race and language, with different counts being offered. The Semitic language group was an “undeniable fact,” though it was unclear if each group who spoke a Semitic language was of Semitic race (*semitische Rasse*). The levelling of racial characteristics (*Rassen-Merkmale*) happened only through racial mixing (*leibliche Vermischung*), whereas languages may have come and gone through the will of the majority, or as a result of violence, necessity, or love (1896: 52). This piece lacks a concrete discussion of policy. One can find here a latent attack on certain strands of prehistory and philology, which identified the Aryans with a particular physical type, and also a plea for the acceptance of Jews as members of the German *Volk*. But the hedging on original congruence detracts from the potentially polemical force of this. The denial of the racial unity of the *Volk* was the mainstream position in racial anthropology, up to and including scholarship in Nazi Germany.

The tension between the invocation of blood ties and the perception of their uncertain or fictional status can be identified in the writings of the Hindu nationalist V. D. Savarkar ([1923] 1969: 85):

All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers, the Sindhus. We are well aware of the not unoften interested objection that carpingly questions, “but are you really a race? Can you be said to possess a common blood?” We can only answer by questioning in return, “Are the English a race? Is there anything as English blood, the French blood, the German blood or the Chinese blood in this world? Do they, who have been freely infusing foreign blood into their race by contracting marriages with other races and peoples possess a common blood and claim to be a race by

themselves?["] If they do, Hindus also can emphatically do so. For the very castes, which you owing to your colossal failure to understand and view them in the right perspective, assert to have barred the common flow of blood into our race, have done so more truly and more effectively as regards the foreign blood than our own.

On the one hand,

no word can give full expression to this racial unity of our people as the epithet, Hindu, does. Some of us were Aryans and some Anaryans; but Ayars and Nayars—we were all Hindus and own a common blood. Some of us are Brahmans and some Namashudras or Panchamas; but Brahmans or Chandalas—we are all Hindus and own a common blood ([1923] 1969: 90)

But this was also a matter of a shared sentiment ([1923] 1969: 89–90):

We are not only a nation but a Jati, a born brotherhood. Nothing else counts, it is after all a question of heart. We *feel* that the same ancient blood that coursed through the veins of Ram and Krishna, Buddha and Mahavir, Nanak and Chaitanya, Basava and Madhava, of Rohidas and Tiruvelluvar courses throughout Hindudom from vein to vein, pulsates from heart to heart. We feel we are a JATI, a race bound together by the dearest ties of blood and therefore it must be so.

Sexual attraction was a powerful force that perpetually tested the boundaries between races, yet no other peoples had a better claim “to get recognized as a racial unit than the Hindus and perhaps the Jews” ([1923] 1969: 90).

6.6 CONCLUSION

As his career progressed, Müller became hopelessly entangled in the problematics of race and language, and with him, unfortunately, the historiography of the term *Aryan*. Müller's use of the term *Aryan race* reflected his German *Volk*-oriented background, and an intellectual milieu within which the anti-materialist notion of *Geist* was central. His use of the English term *race* was quite distinct from its meaning in materialist physical anthropology. Within the *Volk* paradigm, a duality such as Aryan/Semitic made intellectual sense and was itself an iteration of the biblical opposition between Japhet and Shem. Race science was in effect a rebellion out of the composite *Volk* model. Racial anthropology privileged the study of the human body, in particular its comparative measurement, and postulated various groupings and sub-groupings on the basis of those measurements. This methodological and semiotic stance

destabilized the normative *Volk* model, which used linguistic affinity as its central diagnostic. In modern *ethnstates*, the state is understood as the property of a particular *Volk*. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century race theory embodied a powerful critique of European nationalism, targeted in particular at the assumptions of national unity based on a common identity, as promoted, for example, in Greek, German, and Italian nationalist discourse (to be discussed further). Taxonomic race theory denied that nations defined by geography, language, and politics were racial unities and saw the modern nation state as hybrid.

One of the lessons of this controversy is that intuitive notions collapse under attempts at rigorous definition. The philological notion of *Volk* could not withstand the level of scrutiny that the new self-declared scientific disciplines brought to bear. Scholarly attempts to define terms and distinguish frameworks merely led to a proliferation of texts and labels, and out of this arose the intense intellectual confusion that is there to see in the formulations of Max Müller, Thomas Huxley, and others. The biblical-philological notion of people or *Volk* became a Humpty Dumpty concept that could not be put back together again, but nor could it be dispensed with. The *Volk* model, with its composite comingling of language, genealogy, territory, and culture, became partly spectral, in that it remained the default concept in popular, public, and political discourse, while definitional scepticism was eating away at its intellectual foundations.

In a discussion of Pascale Rabault-F Feuerhahn's *Archives of Origins* ([2008] 2013), Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee dispute the account offered there of a racialization of Indology in the 1870s, under the influence of figures such as Theodor Poesche and Karl Penka ([Adluri and Bagchee 2018](#): np):

Rather than comparative linguistics giving rise to anthropology, the former borrowed its methods and ideas of science from comparative anatomy, botany, and paleontology. Comparative linguistics developed as an adjunct to racial anthropology: its founders were acquainted with and approvingly cited Soemmering's, Meiners's, and Blumenbach's racial theories.

In response to this, it might be objected that both of these views suggest a one-way, linear direction of influence. Genealogical thinking was fundamental to philology and modern linguistics, to Indology, as well as to physical anthropology. What created methodological and ideological confusion, as the century progressed, was the new discipline-specific scrutiny that fundamental concepts were subject to, amid the search for a clear and transparent philological narrative of ancient history, as well as for an explanation of how "we" moderns, now in our nation-states, were related to, or differed from, each other, as well as from the ancient "them."

Speculation and fantasy were increasingly the province of extra-scholarly etymological universalism, and of a heady mix of modernist poetics, fascist vitalism, and neo-traditionalist Aryan revivalism. Scholarly debate was at the same time increasingly entangled with the public politics of European nationalism, which was grappling with collective notions of authentic belonging, fictional or legalistic affinities, and the ideal of republican citizenship. To function politically, fictions of affinity could not be explicitly recognized as such. In the eyes of radical European nationalists, Jews as citizens came to stand for the artificiality of the European nation-state, in the sense that their presence drew attention to the fictive nature of the national narrative. In this and many other ways, the philological distinction between Aryan and Semitic turned toxic once it entered the public and political sphere. Aryanism increasingly represented a denial of, or revolt against, the intellectual fragmentation triggered by the emergence of parallel specialist disciplines, and the attendant loss of narrative coherence and cultural meaning. In the French context, figures such as Vacher de la [Lapouge \(1887, 1899\)](#), Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), and, later, Georges Dumézil (1898–1986; see [Dumézil 1939](#), [Lincoln 1998](#)) were prominent in the intellectual rejection of 1789 and its legacy. Le Bon saw Europe as enfeebled and therefore threatened by a rising India and Asia, given that traditional values and social structures remained strong there (1887: 723). Among these anti-moderns, there was a widespread sense that “trueness to type” was threatened on all sides, and that a whole host of forces, including urbanism, democracy, colonialism, capitalism, civic nationalism, social mobility, technologies of communication and transportation, internationalism, communism, and globalization, threatened to blur beyond redemption the clear lines of demarcation between types that had previously been established (G. [Retzius 1909](#): 313):

In connection with rapidly improving inventions in the domain of communications, population is becoming more and more mobile. If we are to learn to know the real characters and the present distribution of the race elements, it is necessary that the thorough anthropological inquiries above mentioned should be made as soon as possible. It will then be easier in the future to understand that mixture of the peoples, which certainly is going on with constantly increasing rapidity and intensity.

If, for example, criteria of language did not correlate with those of race, then this was a sign that modernity had disrupted the original congruence, the authentic alignment of categories. The academic confusion with regard to race and language was projected as a diagnostic onto the social world and its apparent blurring of categories. This fed into the long-standing “decline of the West” discourse from Gobineau and others, as well as proto-fascistic vitalism.

Political Aryanism was transformed into an anti-Semitic (and, to a degree, anti-Christian, especially anti-Catholic) quasi-religion of extreme Germanophilia, Teutomania, or Ariosophy. True believers looked to identify and revive a Germanic or Aryan civilization, which was held to be obscured by the mongrelized and artificial social order of urban modernity, with its inauthentic notions of equality and democracy, fed by a life-denying Judeo-Christian ethos. Many of these strands interacted with New Age cultic esoterism (Goodrick-Clark 1992, 2002). A radically restorative project fed rancour, paranoia, and, within modern state modernity, a search for total political solutions. If time and change tend to blend together what should be kept separate, and the natural order of things is undermined or domesticated within modernity, then acts of political will were required to restrain or undo the pernicious effects of this degeneration. For political race theory, the French citizenship model and the German *Volk* model both concealed and distorted an underlying “real” racial order and hierarchy.

CHAPTER 7

Anti-Aryanism and Revivalist Aryanism in India

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonial Aryanism, in tension with the modernizing impulse of British colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth century, provided the impetus for Hindu revivalism, as represented by figures such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883) and Har Bilas Sarda (1867–1955) (Jaffrelot 1997). Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu movement in 1875. Roy (2016) argues that Müller’s role in the “politicization of Aryan discourse” contributed to majoritarian dominance, both in India and Germany. Majeed (2019: 147–153) points out that George Grierson, editor of the *Linguistic Survey of India* (LSI), the first volume of which was published in 1898, saw Hinduism and Sanskrit as representing the essential India. Grierson equated *Aryan* with *Hindu*, using “a quasi-national language when pitting a monolithically conceived Hindu India against an equally monolithic and ‘Semitic’ Islam” (Majeed 2019: 136). Yet the Aryan schema affords multiple ideologically charged readings: the question of how we should understand the relationships between colonial Indology, Aryanism, and modern Hinduism is, unsurprisingly, a rich source of historiographical contestation.

7.2 ANTI-ARYANISM

One significant figure in the broad spectrum of anti-Aryan responses is the social reformer and anti-caste activist founder of the Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of Truth Seekers), Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890). Born in Maharashtra,

Phule attended a Protestant missionary school and became a pioneer in promoting the education of girls. Phule regarded Hinduism “as a relation based on *varṇa* and the caste system devised by the cunning *Brāhmins* to deceive the lower castes,” while his universalism rejected “all artificial divisions of social position, language, religion, and nationality” (Malik 2022: 67–68). In using the Aryan paradigm as a template for resistance, Phule made an analogy between caste in India and slavery in the United States. In this way he turned Aryan Invasion Theory upon its head (1873: 1):

Recent researches have demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Brahmins were not aborigines of India. At some remote period of antiquity, probably more than 3000 years ago, the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahmin Race descended upon the plains of Hindoostan from regions lying beyond the Indus, the Hindoo Koosh, and other adjoining tracts.

Phule cited James Prichard as authority that the Aryans were (1873: 2)

an off-shoot of the Great Indo-European Race, from whom the Persians, Medes, and other Iranian Nations in Asia and the principal Nations in Europe likewise are descended. The affinity existing between the Zend, the Persian, and the Sanscrit languages, as also between all the European languages, unmistakably points to a common source of origin.

The inversion was also a moral one. The Aryans had been drawn from their desert abode by the “extreme fertility” of India, following the same “cupidity” of the more recent conquerors. The Aryans were “a race imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning, arrogant, and bigoted.” This inversion of Aryan Invasion Theory, with its equation of *Aryan* with *Hindu*, continues in a line down to this day, with works such as S. K. Biswas’s *Autochthon of India and the Aryan Invasion*. Biswas depicts the Aryans as primitive barbarians who suppressed an indigenous religion of “equality and fraternity” (Biswas 1995: 210).

A less polemically dualistic, regionally inflected, understanding of Aryanism was developed by Srinvas Iyengar (1874–1941), lawyer and anti-colonial activist, who was born in the Madras Presidency. Iyengar offered an extended critique of Aryan Invasion Theory, though he did acknowledge that the “Vedic language” had come to India from outside (1912: 9). He followed Arthur MacDonell in describing Sanscrit as a “caste language,” a “scholastic dialect of a class,” and “an artificially archaic dialect, handed down from one generation to the other within the class of priestly singers” (MacDonell 1900: 20, 21, cited in Iyengar 1912: 3). Iyengar summed up Aryan Invasion Theory as follows (1912: 3):

This Vedic language is one of a group of allied languages, called Indo-Germanic, forms of which are used to-day for speech and for writing by the various races inhabiting Europe, Armenia, Persia and Northern India. Hence some people are of opinion that the ancient Vedic language was developed out of dialects spoken by hordes of invading tribes who poured into the valley of the Indus in the commencement of the age of the Mantras and who wiped out the pre-existing population.

There was nothing in the Mantras to suggest such an invasion, and it was possible that this Vedic language “drifted into the country in the wake of the peaceful intercourse between Indian and foreign tribes” (1912: 4). This modification of the Invasion Theory can be seen as an early instance of the Aryan Migration Theory (AMT). The stark model of waves of invaders was false (1912: 9):

Scholars have given the name “Aryas” to these tribes and till recently also applied the name to a supposed Aryan race which sent successive swarms of invaders to India, Persia, Greece, Italy, Germany, France, Britain and civilized those lands in pre-historic times. But the progress of anthropology has proved the invasion and civilization of Europe by the “Aryans” to be a myth.

There was no textual support for a racial reading of the Vedic mantras, and the single instance of the term *anāsa* (“noseless”) in the *Rigveda* should be understood as “devoid of (good) speech” (as suggested by the commentator Śāyaṇa) rather than given a racial meaning (1912: 9).¹ The interpretation of certain passages had led to racial readings: “On these passages in the Mantras, all of doubtful import, is based the far-reaching theory of the white “Aryan race” displacing the black Dasyu races of India” (1912: 10). Terms like *Arya*, *Dāsa*, and *Dasyu* referred “not to race but to cult” (1912: 11). The Dravidian languages had a profound influence on this language. The indigenous civilization had been at a high level, and “the Dravidian speaking races were sufficiently civilized and numerous to absorb completely the foreigners and enrich their speech with words relating to the professions which were highly developed among themselves” (1912: 16).

Iyengar’s model tipped the civilizational balance in favour of the Dravidians, while modifying the Aryan Invasion Theory. The tripartite division of India remained, with the dichotomy between the Aryans and the Dravidians, with the tribal and hill peoples forming the third element (1912: 6): “The third Indian family of languages is the Muṇḍā; this does not seem to have affected the growth of the Vedic language so much as the Dravidian.” On the Aryan race

1. On the meaning of *noseless*, see [Levitt \(1989\)](#).

question, Iyengar blamed Müller for “having propagated this fallacy,” though Müller had later recanted (1914: 1)—a common misunderstanding of Müller’s intellectual evolution. Iyengar also noted the contemporary impact of Aryan theory, in its influence on inequities in the law relating to property inheritance (1914: 10): “Thus the philologist’s fancy is inspiring the transference of property today in India.” Iyengar pushed back against the conventional view of the relationships between languages in India. The Dravidian languages had “affected Sanskrit profoundly,” and this was “quite as much as, and perhaps more than, Sanskrit has affected them” (1914: 9). The direction of borrowing needed to be inverted: “In fact whenever a word occurs in both Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages it is assumed that the latter borrowed from the former” (1914: 11). Terms in Vedic and classical Sanskrit that had no correlates in other Indo-European languages were “probably all Dravidian” (1914: 12). The accepted view seemed to be that when “an Indo-Aryan dialect came in touch with other languages, they [. . .] dissolve into nothingness” (1914: 13). Iyengar also rejected the idea that “the Vedic language was ever the vernacular of the upper Doab,” that is, the land between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. It was “the language of a cult,” analogous to Latin in Roman Catholicism and Pali in Buddhism (1914: 13). Grierson’s theory of “a continuous evolution of the Vedic language into modern Hindi or other North Indian dialects can, at best, be a pleasant dream” (1914: 13). It was problematic to classify vernaculars as “sanskritic,” since it was ultimately grammatical structure that determined affinity, and the lexicon could be almost entirely replaced without affecting this. John Stevenson and Robert Caldwell had noted “the grammatical affinities” between Dravidian and the Northern Indian languages (1914: 13–14). Philology had led anthropology astray, “with its fancy of an original homogenous Aryan race inhabiting and civilizing India, Persia, Armenia and the major part of Europe” (1914: 15). What Iyengar was in essence arguing was that colonial scholarship had created an artificial divide within Indian civilization, and the nationalist corollary of this was that the “old Indian culture of 4000 years ago” was indigenous. Excavations in Crete were restoring the early history of Europe, and the same process needed to happen in India (1914: 15).

7.3 VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda (Narendranath Datt, 1863–1902) remains highly influential in Hindu neo-revivalism today (Deepak 2020, 2021) as well as in what might be termed *liberal Hinduism* (Tharoor 2018). Vivekananda was a critic of what he saw as the divisive effect of Western philology. In his 1897 lecture “The Future of India,” Vivekananda stressed underlying unity (1944: 215):

There is a theory that there was a race of mankind in Southern India called Dravidians, entirely differing from another race in Northern India called the Aryans, and that the Southern India Brāhmins are the only Aryans that came from the North, the other men of Southern India belong to an entirely different caste and race to those of Southern India Brahmins. Now I beg your pardon, Mr. Philologist, this is entirely unfounded. The only proof of it is that there is a difference of language between the North and the South. I do not see any other difference.

In his brief essay “Aryans and Tamilians” (1955), Vivekananda argued for fluidity of caste, but caste required solidarity as a collective striving (1955: 298):

If you want to rise to a higher caste in India, you have to elevate all your caste first, and then there is nothing in your onward path to hold you back. This is the Indian method of fusion, and this has been going on from time immemorial. For in India, more than elsewhere, such words as Aryans and Dravidians are only of philological import, the so-called craniological differentiation finding no solid ground to work upon.

Vivekananda reread caste through a civilizational aspiration embracing India as a whole (1955: 300):

Then anyone who claims to be a Brahmin should prove his pretensions, first by manifesting that spirituality, and next by raising others to the same status. On the face of this, it seems that most of them are only nursing a false pride of birth; and any schemer, native or foreign, who can pander to this vanity and inherent laziness by fulsome sophistry, appears to satisfy most.

Vivekananda’s aim was to defuse or domesticate the impact of linguistic and racial categories on Indian self-understandings. In spite of caste, and some modern prohibitions on intermarriage, Indians were “a mixed race in every sense of the word.” Terms like *Aryan* and *Tamilian* had come from “outside the Western frontier,” and “the dividing line had been, from the most ancient times, one of language and not of blood.” The contempt directed at the Dasyus in the Vedas for their physical features had no relevance to “the great Tamilian race,” who could compete with the Aryans on this score: “in fact if there be a toss for good looks between the Aryans and Tamilians, no sensible man would dare prognosticate the result” (1955: 299). Linguistic differences afforded the implication of more profound divisions: “The super-arrogated excellence of birth of any caste in India is only pure myth, and in no part of India has it, we are sorry to say, found such congenial soil, owing to linguistic differences, as in the South” (1955: 301). What was needed was a “gentle yet clear brushing

off of the cobwebs of the so-called Aryan theory and all its vicious corollaries,” especially for Southern India, in order to create “a proper self-respect created by a knowledge of the past grandeur of one of the great ancestors of the Aryan race—the great Tamilians.” The word *Arya*, which was in the sacred texts, should be retained. It included “only the multitude we now call Hindus” (1955: 301):

This Aryan race, itself a mixture of two great races, Sanskrit-speaking and Tamil-speaking, applies to all Hindus alike. That the Shudras have in some Smritis been excluded from this epithet means nothing, for the Shudras were and still are only the waiting Aryas—Aryas *in novitiate*.

This was part of a wider, universal story “for us Vedântins and Sannyâsins”² who were proud of “our Sanskrit-speaking ancestors of the Vedas; proud of our Tamil-speaking ancestors whose civilization is the oldest yet known; we are proud of our Kolarian ancestors older than either of the above—who lived and hunted in forests.” *Kolarian* was a term employed by George Campbell (1824–1892), as a third category alongside *Aryan* and *Dravidian*, to designate certain tribal peoples of India (see [Campbell 1869: 130](#)).³ Further, there was pride in “our ancestors with flint implements—the first of the human race; and if evolution is true, we are proud of our animal ancestors, for they antedated man himself.” Finally, the vision becomes a cosmic one of unity ([Vivekananda 1955: 302](#)): “We are proud that we are descendants of the whole universe, sentient or insentient. Proud that we are born, and work, and suffer—prouder still that we die when the task is finished and enter forever the realm where there is no more delusion.”

7.4 SRI AUROBINDO

In his unfinished work, *The Origins of Aryan Speech* (c. 1912–1914), the Indian philosopher, anti-colonial activist, and publisher Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose, 1872–1950) rejected the Western intellectual framework (1971: 551): “I do not hold myself bound by European research & European theories.” Aurobindo was “a British-educated Bengali mystic” and interpreter of the Vedantic scriptures, who was familiar with Western philology and textual scholarship, as well as with traditional modes of interpretation ([Medhananda](#)

2. An ascetic who has renounced the world and all doctrinal systems of belief.

3. In relation to this term and the postulation of the language group, Müller later commented ([1888] [1902b: 259](#)): “Everybody accepted my discovery, but unfortunately very soon the term Munda or Kolarian, which was intended as a linguistic term only, was used ethnologically; and we now constantly read of a Kolarian race.”

2021). One can place Aurobindo and his Aryanism in the wider context of the syncretic religiosity or neo-traditionalism of the New Age. His Vedic humanism can be understood in the context of movements such as theosophy, and forums such as the World's Parliament of Religions (1893). This was attended by Swami Vivekananda and Protap Chunder Mozoomdar (1840–1905), a leader of the reformist Hindu movement Brahmo Samaj. Aurobindo was closely connected with Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973), known as The Mother, and her husband and collaborator Paul Richard (1874–1967). Alfassa founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in 1926.

In this essay, Aurobindo adopted a particular intellectual strategy, which K. C. Bhattacharya (1875–1949) later referred to as “swaraj in ideas,” that is, the necessity of Indian cultural and intellectual independence, alongside political independence (*swaraj*) (Puti 2022). Aurobindo's specific target was comparative philology and the science of language. While physical science had progressed “by the soundest and most scrupulous methods,” comparative philology had “hardly moved a step beyond its origins.” Aurobindo cited Renan as apologizing for having devoted his energy to “little conjectural sciences,”⁴ and Aurobindo mocked Müller for exulting in his “fatal formula, “*pitā, patēr, pater, vater, father,*” by which Müller illustrated the kinship of Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, German, and English. When Müller was writing, “the Science of Language seemed to be on the point of self-revelation,” but now it was clear, “as a result of a century's toil,” that “the very idea of a Science of Language is a chimera!”

The implicit reference here is to Sir William Jones and his famous 1786 lecture, frequently identified as the beginnings of modern comparative philology (Jones 1799b). The implication was that philology had not progressed beyond Jones's observations. Aurobindo did concede that one of its achievements was to have “swept out of existence the fantastic, arbitrary and almost lawless Etymology of our forefathers,” and to have delivered a greater understanding of processes of linguistic decay and renewal. This was an important concession by Aurobindo, since etymological hermeneutics play an important role in the Indian tradition, as they had done in premodern and early modern Western philology. However, Aurobindo continued, “scientific philology is non-existent; much less has there been any real approach to the discovery of the Science of Language” (1971: 552). In embracing the superficiality of these linguistic resemblances, Müller “was preparing the bankruptcy of the new science; he was leading it away from the truer clues, the wider vistas that lay behind” (1971: 553). Philology had created “the elaborate division of civilized humanity into the Aryan, Semitic, Dravidian and Turanian races, based

4. « Je fus entraîné vers les sciences historiques, petites sciences conjecturales qui se défont sans cesse après s'être faites, et qu'on négligera dans cent ans » (Renan 1883b: 263).

on the philological classification of the ancient and modern languages.” It was now clear that “community of language is no proof of community of blood or ethnological identity.” On the basis of linguistic differences, Indians had been divided “into the northern Aryan race and the southern Dravidian,” whereas observation showed “a single physical type with minor variations pervading the whole of India from Cape Comorin to Afghanistan” (1971: 553–554). Whatever the situation, linguistic criteria were not relevant:

The races of India may be all pure Dravidians, if indeed such an entity as a Dravidian race exists or ever existed, or they may be pure Aryans, if indeed such an entity as an Aryan race exists or ever existed, or they may be a mixed race with one predominant strain, but in any case the linguistic divisions of the tongues of India into the Sanscritic and the Tamilic counts for nothing in that problem.

Philology was also no guide to the state of early Aryan civilization. Thus, “even if India was ever invaded, colonised or civilised by northern worshippers of Sun and Fire, yet the picture of that invasion richly painted by philological scholarship from the Rigveda will prove to be a modern legend and not ancient history.” Aurobindo predicted “that the astonishingly elaborate modern descriptions of Vedic India will turn out to be a philological mirage and phantasmagoria” (1971: 555). Inferences “from words to culture and civilisation” did not belong to the domain of the philologist, unlike the “affinities of languages to each other” (1971: 556).

Aurobindo took issue with the superficiality of the comparative method. In a discussion of the relationship of Sanscrit (Aryan) to Tamil (Dravidian), Aurobindo suggested that the lack of “a common vocabulary for common ideas and objects” was not necessarily proof of a diverse origin. In the case of “Aryan vernaculars,” the lack of Sanscritic terms for everyday objects was deemed proof that they were “originally non-Aryan tongues linguistically overpowered by the foreign invader” (1971: 599–560). But this kind of reasoning led to a descent into “quagmires of uncertainty.” The extrapolation had no methodological justification: “Our shadow of a scientific basis, our fixed classification of language families have disappeared into shifting vestibules of nothingness” (1971: 560). On closer inspection, there were deeper parallels between Sanscrit and Tamil, but in the end nothing could be concluded with certainty: “The reproach of the real scientist against the petty conjectural pseudo-science of philology is just; it must be removed by the adoption of a sounder method and greater self-restraint” (1971: 561–562). This comes close to (but falls short of) a rejection of the distinction between languages that are held to have an essential affinity, in that they share a common origin (so-called “cognate” languages), and those that are judged to have been drawn into a relationship by contact, borrowing, and exchange.

A central feature of Aurobindo's philology was the assumption that modern speech was increasingly artificial, "not precisely a fossil, but an organism proceeding towards arrest and fossilisation." Modern forms were conventional ("mere counters and symbols of ideas," 1971: 564), whereas ancient Sanscrit terms were fluid and unfixd, "living entities" characterized by "extraordinary freedom and pliancy," so that "a certain object is expressed by a certain sound because for some reason it suggested a particular and striking action or characteristic which distinguished that object to the earlier human mind" (1971: 565). Words at their origin were not arbitrary. The example that Aurobindo gave was the term for "wolf," *vṛkaḥ*, which came from a root meaning "to tear": "We need not inquire why *vṛka* meant tearer; we shall inquire instead what the sound *vṛk* meant to the early Aryan-speaking races" (1971: 566). The pursuit of clusters of these primitive roots was much more informative than the conventional comparison of forms in identifying "the original type of the Aryan structure," which was still discernible in Sanscrit (1971: 570).

This discussion represents an inversion of vernacularism in the Indian context, which understood Sanscrit as an artificial, ritualized, and rigidified register and contrasted it with the vibrant authenticity of the regional vernaculars. Aurobindo understood the Vedic texts as belonging to a vital and creative age, where Sanscrit was not yet deadened by convention (1971: 51):

Even in its outward features it is less fixed than any classical tongue; it abounds in a variety of forms and inflexions; it is fluid and vague, yet richly subtle in its use of cases and tenses. And on its psychological side it has not yet crystallised, is not entirely hardened into the rigid forms of intellectual precision. The word for the Vedic Rishi⁵ is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history.

On one level, Aurobindo's philosophy of language can be read as an intellectual response to Western theory, and the reaffirmation of a traditional form of understanding, in particular that drawn from the Vedas. Vedic language is seen as primordially a form of energy or set of vibrations, one that eludes fixed form-meaning relationships. This takes the form of "Tantric resonance theory" in which the paradigm linguistic unit was the *mantra* (see Coward 1989). Put another way, Aurobindo's philosophy represented a vitalist response to the "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) that was perceived to accompany Western modernity (Weber 1919). To this was added a distinctive anti-colonial twist triggered by Aurobindo's classical education at Cambridge, and a turn to spirituality that followed his imprisonment on charges of treason in Alipore Jail,

5. This refers to a composer, poet, or sage.

Calcutta (1908–1909). Aurobindo found in the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus a kindred spirit and applied the same kind of double reading he used with the Vedas, where he identified an inner, mystical, or esoteric meaning beneath the surface of the texts: “Unless we bear in mind the pregnant and symbolic character of Heraclitus’ language we are likely to sterilise his thought by giving it a too literal sense” (1971: 319).

While he rejected comparative philology, Aurobindo did not reject the category of *Aryan*. However, he was anxious to make clear that this did not imply any particular view of linguistic relationships, racial categories, or “even of the ethnic origins of the Sanskrit speaking peoples.” There was still some relevance to studying Sanskrit “helped out by those parts of the Greek, Latin and Tamil tongues which are cognate to the word-families of Sanskrit.” This was the “significance of the word Aryan,” and it went no further (1971: 562). The inclusion of Tamil points to Aurobindo’s rejection of philology’s imagining of internal divisions within India, and to any historical extrapolations therefrom, concerning the identities of ancient invaders, of the indigenous conquered, and so on. Comparative philology, the science of language, was not a science in any real sense, so it followed that conclusions about ancient history and society were mere conjectures. Philological speculations as to history and society should not be allowed to influence the interpretation of ancient Sanskrit texts. Given that one of Aurobindo’s major publication ventures was entitled *Arya*, this raised some questions about the term *ārya* itself (Aurobindo [1914] 1998: 441):

Western Philology has converted it into a racial term, an unknown ethnological quantity on which different speculations fix different values. Now, even among the philologists, some are beginning to recognise that the word in its original use expressed not a difference of race, but a difference of culture. For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supraphysical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.

Later, *ārya* had come to express “a particular ethical and social ideal, an ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments” ([1914] 1998: 441). The Aryan combined the “ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatriya,” that is, the members of the priestly and warrior castes. The negation of this idea, the “un-Aryan,” was

“everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel, or false.” There was “no word in human speech that has a nobler history” ([1914] 1998: 442).

In seeking to cleanse the term *Aryan* of its perceived racial associations, Aurobindo offered in effect a vision of the new human type ([1914] 1998: 442):

Whoever makes that choice, whoever seeks to climb from level to level up the hill of the divine, fearing nothing, deterred by no retardation or defeat, shrinking from no vastness because it is too vast for his intelligence, no height because it is too high for his spirit, no greatness because it is too great for his force and courage, he is the Aryan, the divine fighter and victor, the noble man, *aristos*, best, the *sreshtha* [great man] of the Gita.

Aurobindo expounded his vision of the ideal Aryan figure in his essays on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which appeared in *Arya* between 1916 and 1918 (Aurobindo 1950). In a discussion of Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of *Übermensch*, Aurobindo rejected the idea that only a small number of individuals were capable of ascending to “heights of which the many are not capable,” thereby able “to concentrate moral and spiritual privileges and enjoy a domination, powers and immunities hurtful to a diffused dignity and freedom in mankind” (1920: 1). The Aryan figure was an ideal towards which humanity as a whole should seek to evolve.

One important strand in Aurobindo’s polemic is criticism of Max Müller, who had begun using the phrase *Aryan race* in the 1840s. A related issue raised by Aurobindo was the role of Western philology in the conceptualization of internal diversity within India, and the way in which this created a divide between North and South, between the Aryan and Dravidian languages. In this way a narrative of ancient India was constructed, in which the Aryan group conquered and subdued the indigenous Dravidian population. Hence Aurobindo’s reluctance to concede that Tamil (as a so-called Dravidian language) was in any way alien to Sanscrit, and his promotion of what was in essence a civilizational understanding of India. The question then became the identification of a level of generality that could embrace the totality of Indian civilization without blurring into a form of spiritual eclecticism. While he was sceptical about Western philology, Aurobindo’s comment about etymological conjecture reflected a belief that it had at least introduced some interpretive discipline into this particular domain. His discussion raised issues of Western knowledge production and possible strategies in response, including integration, adaptation, and rejection. Modern philology/linguistics was cause as well as symptom of this disenchantment, with its abstract, conventionalized view of linguistic form, its uniformity of method and scope, and its atomistic and positivistic approach to textual hermeneutics. At about the same time as

Aurobindo was working on his philological theories, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was lecturing in Geneva on the foundations of general linguistics, including the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign (see [Joseph 2012](#)). Drawing on his students' notes, Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was published posthumously in 1916. The principle of arbitrariness, which is one of the central axioms of the *Cours*, reflects a rejection of both Western and Eastern linguistic vitalism and sign mysticism, within which some form of natural harmony or inner connection is held to exist between signified and signifier. Saussure was a Sanscrit scholar, and his knowledge of the Indian textual and mythological tradition was not confined to comparative historical linguistics ([Saussure 1907](#), [Testenoire 2012](#)).

This dissatisfaction with arbitrariness is pervasive in anti-rationalist, mystical, or neo-traditionalist understandings of language. Though he was no mystic, V. D. Sarvaker opened his work *Hindutva* with a discussion of names, in dialogue with the “What’s in a name” scene in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 2: ii). Savarkar begins by agreeing that names are secondary ([1923] 1969: 1):⁶

For, things do matter more than their names, especially when you have to choose one only of the two, or when the association between them is either new or simple. The very fact that a thing is indicated by a dozen names in a dozen human tongues disarms the suspicion that there is an invariable connection or natural concomitance between sound and the meaning it conveys.

However, this is not the psychological reality ([1923] 1969: 1–2):

Yet, as the association of the word with the thing it signifies grows stronger and lasts long, so does the channel which connects the two States of consciousness tend to allow an easy flow of thoughts from one to the other, till at last it seems almost impossible to separate them. And when in addition to this a number of secondary thoughts or feelings that are generally roused by the thing get mystically entwined with the word that signifies it, the name seems to matter as much as the thing itself.

Some words have their own vital essence ([1923] 1969: 2):

Nay more; there are words which imply an idea in itself extremely complex or an ideal or a vast and abstract generalization and which seem to take, as it were, a being unto themselves or live and grow as an organism would do.

6. The scene is ambivalent, since the fact that Romeo and Juliet bear different names represents the harsh reality that cannot be wished away.

7.5 TILAK AND AMBEDKAR

The anti-colonial nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Keshav Gangadhar Tilak, 1856–1920) accepted an external origin of the Aryans. He promoted the idea that the Vedas were much more ancient than had been assumed. Tilak sought to link the Veda and traditional Hindu understandings of time to astronomical events, thereby pinpointing the ancient origin of the texts deep in pre-history. In his work *The Orion* he assigned the Vedic period to about 4000 BC, “in strict accordance with the astronomical references and facts recorded in the ancient literature of India” (1893: 220). His method involved “calculating the lapse of time required for the apparent shifting of the stars to their 1893 positions from the positions noted in the hymns,” a period in which the vernal equinox was in Orion, “when the Dog star (or the Dog as we have it in the Rigveda) commenced the equinoctial year” (Wolpert 1961: 65, Tilak 1893). Tilak concluded, “The bold and brilliant Orion, with his attendant Canis, preserves for us the memory of far more important and sacred times in the history of the Aryan race” (1893: 220). In *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903), Tilak acknowledged a previous work by American scholar William F. Warren (1833–1929), who, in a work dedicated to Max Müller, had placed the “cradle of the human race” at the North Pole (1885). Tilak identified “the Polar attributes of the Vedic deities, or the traces of an ancient Arctic calendar,” and referenced also the *Avesta*, which tells that “the happy land of Airyana Vaêjo, or the Aryan Paradise,” was located in a temperate region that “was destroyed by the invasion of snow and ice” (1903: vi). Tilak noted the recent trend of identifying the Aryan homeland in Northern Germany or Scandinavia, and presented his work as drawing on the discoveries of Western scholarship, but also going beyond it. This pushed the Vedic period back a further 4000 years. Geology together with “the traditions recorded in the ancient books of the Aryan race” pointed to “a period not much older than 8000 B.C. for the commencement of the post-Glacial era and the compulsory migration of the Aryan races from their Arctic home” (1903: 421). The Aryan race could be traced back to “interglacial times” (1903: xi). Whether other races were present there was not the subject of discussion, though Warren in *Paradise Found* had pointed to “Egyptian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Chinese and even Japanese traditions indicating the existence of an Arctic home of these races in ancient times” (Warren 1885: 137). There were “grounds to believe that the five races of men (*pañcha janâh*) often mentioned in the Rig-Veda may have been the races which lived with the Aryans in their original home” (Tilak 1903: 430). Theologically, the Vedas were understood to be “eternal (*nitya*), beginning-less (*anâdi*),” whereas “historically or scientifically” their origins “were lost in geological antiquity.” In recognizing these two distinct “methods of investigation,” one could say nonetheless that “for all practical purposes the Vedic religion can be shown to be beginningless even on strict scientific grounds” (1903: 457).

The constitutional lawyer Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), founder of the Dalit Buddhist movement, was hostile to the Vedas and denied their canonicity (Figueira 2002: 150–157). In 1946 he published an analysis of the caste system (see Sharma 2005). There, he made light of Tilak’s “very original” theory of an Arctic origin for the Aryans and set out a critique of Aryan Invasion Theory. In this, Ambedkar drew on Iyengar’s analysis of the Vedic literature and followed him in rejecting a racial reading of terms like *anāsa* and *Midhravak*, the latter having the meaning of “one who speaks crude, unpolished language.” These examples could not be evidence of racial difference (1946: 70–71). The theory of an Aryan invasion was an “invention” merely “based on a philological proposition,” which Ambedkar associated with Franz Bopp. From this assumption, two inferences had been drawn “(1) Unity of race, and (2) that race being the Aryan race” (1946: 73). The theory implied that the “Indo-Germanic race” was the purest, that it was superior, and that there was a prejudice against “the dark races” (1946: 73–74). Ambedkar then offered a double reading of the term *Aryan* (1946: 74–75):

The theory does not take account of the possibility that the Aryan race in the physiological sense is one thing and an Aryan race in the philological sense quite different, and that it is perfectly possible that the Aryan race, if there is one, in the physiological sense may have its habitat in one place and that the Aryan race, in the philological sense, in quite a different place.

There was no basis for the assumption that the Dasas and Dasyus were “aboriginal tribes” (1946: 75). The theory of this racial opposition was sustained by Brahmin scholars (1946: 76):

The Brahmin believes in the two-nation theory. He claims to be the representative of the Aryan race and he regards the rest of the Hindus as descendants of the non-Aryans. The theory helps him to establish his kinship with the European races and share their arrogance and their superiority. He likes particularly that part of the theory which makes the Aryan an invader and a conqueror of the non-Aryan native races. For it helps him to maintain and justify his overlordship over the non-Brahmins.

A further factor was the persistence of the belief among Western scholars that *varna* meant “colour,” a view that was also accepted by most Brahmins. Ambedkar cited William Ripley’s *Races of Europe* in support of the assertion that the earliest Europeans were actually dark (1899: 466). There was no clear racial message to be drawn from the Vedas. The underlying message of Ambedkar’s text was one of unity but also inversion, in the sense that the Shudras were not a separate caste, but “one of the Aryan communities of the solar race.”

In ancient times they had had a dominant position, in that they “ranked as part of the Kshatriya *Varna* in the Indo-Aryan society.” Their low status had arisen as the result of their dominance over the Brahmins, who subsequently denied them access to the *Upanayana* ritual.⁷ In this way, Ambedkar offered a further permutation on the invader/indigenous model, attributing to the Brahmins pride in their foreign origins, and asserting the underlying unity of the Indian population. Furthermore, for Ambedkar, portions of the Veda were “fabrications” (1946: vii), echoing ideas about the artificiality of Sanscrit.

7.6 NEO-TRADITIONALISM AND THE NEW AGE

The tension between what might be termed *theosophical universalism* and *elitist Aryanism* can be identified in the academic Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s (1888–1975) discussion of *dharma* (see [Minor 1997](#)). Radhakrishnan saw India as a place where global problems of race and religion might find a solution. He put an optimistic spin on India’s complexity ([Radhakrishnan 1922](#): 1):

If it be true that every people has its own distinctive note and brings out one particular aspect of the divine manifestation, India seems to have been selected, in the economy of things, for the purpose of offering solutions for racial and religious conflicts.

He defended caste as a necessary institution for social integration (1922: 10):

Those who criticize the institution from the platform of modern knowledge do not remember that in no other country were peoples belonging to stocks of very unequal value thrown together. The prevedic peoples with whom the Aryans had to mingle were of a lower grade of civilization and culture. They were constituted into the fourth estate of the unregenerate, the once-born, the *ekjādti*, in whom no quality of intellect, emotion, or will is particularly developed.

The Aryans were a civilizing force in relation to the indigenous population, in contrast to other nations, which eliminated or marginalized indigenous peoples (1922: 18):

From the time the Aryans met the peoples of a lower grade of civilization, they devised ways and means by which the different portions of the population could develop in social, spiritual directions. The Aryans even accepted a non-Aryan

7. The *Upanayana* is a rite of passage, coming of age, or initiation ritual.

representative of the “black” peoples and made him deliver the message of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Hinduism was not a colonizing force (1922: 21):

Without the employment of force or eagerness for exploitation, Hinduism has been able to civilize a large part of Asia. What has attracted it is not imperialist expansion, but the cultural conquest, the peaceful penetration of the thought and mind of the peoples to which it comes by its own spirituality.

In this way, India, “with her assimilative genius,” might “succeed in harmonizing the mighty currents of the world’s great religions that have met on her soil” (1922: 22).

Both Vivekananda and Aurobindo can be understood as neo-traditionalist, in the sense that they were reacting specifically against Western philology. In this sense, Aurobindo’s theory of the sign belongs as much to Orientalist modernism and vitalism as it does to the world of the Vedas. Aryanism in this form was essentially a rebellion against the confinement of conventional philological method, as part of modernism’s search for revitalization in the present. This project required not academic philology, but the reinstatement of an etymological poetics and a theory of the sign liberated from the confines of the form–meaning model. In a study of James Joyce’s investigations of the European philological tradition, Daniel O’Leary cites from the linguist Henry Sweet on the need for a *living philology* (Sweet 1906: 1). O’Leary then comments (1994: 42fn.),

Joyce’s work primarily reflects his interest in “antiquarian philology” in that it is as a “key to the past” that such studies engrossed him. But unlike the antiquarian philologist for whom such a key is an end in itself, for Joyce it was a key to a mine-shaft out of which ore was taken; not simply to reveal a lost past, but as language to be renewed or revived or reclaimed.

Joyce’s philology was therefore a living philology, but one that sought to re-animate and re-combine the deep historical resonances of language. More broadly, figures like Nietzsche, subsequently Heidegger, and much of the modernist (in its broadest sense) movement, took ancient or primitive concepts or forms and sought to revitalize and reanimate them, in a rejection of the “dead philology” of historical and comparative linguistics, and ossified genres of art and literature. In this spirit, Joyce embraced the legend that Ireland had ancient Aryan origins ([1907] 2001: 108):

Nations, like individuals, have their egos. It is not unusual for a race to wish to attribute to itself qualities or glories unknown in other races—from the time

when our forefathers called themselves Aryans and nobles to the Greeks who were wont to call anyone barbarian that did not live within the sacrosanct land of Hellas. The Irish, with a pride that is perhaps less explicable, love to refer to their land as the land of saints and sages.

The Irish language, although a member of the Indo-European family, was “as different from English as the language spoken in Rome is from the one spoken in Teheran” ([1907] 2001: 109). The language was ([1907] 2001: 110)

oriental in origin, and has been identified by many philologists with the ancient language of the Phoenicians, the originators of trade and navigation, according to historians. This adventurous people, who had a monopoly of the sea, established in Ireland a civilization that had decayed and almost disappeared before the first Greek historian took his pen in hand.

One of the products of *ex oriente lux* modernism was theosophy, a universalist spiritual movement founded on a belief in esoteric doctrine. The American theosophist Henry Olcott (1832–1907) offered the vision of an ancient golden age, of India as the origin of civilization, excelling in philosophy, grammar, and the sciences (1881: 125):

So then we see that thousands of years before a single spark of civilization had appeared in Europe, before a book had been printed, before the doors of a school had been opened, those great Aryan progenitors of ours were learned, polite, philosophical, and nationally as well as individually great. The people were not, as now, irrevocably walled in by castes, but they were free to rise to the highest social dignities, or sink to the lowest positions, according to the inherent qualities they might possess.

Today India was in a fallen state (1881: 126): “The flower of Aryan youth are turning materialists under the influence of European education.” Proof needed to be offered that “the Veda is the fountain-source, of all religions, and contains the indications of a science that embraces and explains all sciences” (1881: 126). Spiritual regeneration was required (1881: 126):

An Indian civilization resting upon the Veda and other old national works, is like a strong castle built upon the rocks: an Indian civilization resting upon Western religious ideas, and patched with imported ideas that are fitted only to the local traditions and environments of their respective birth-places, is but a rickety house of cards that the first blast of stern experience may topple over.

Thapar (2015) argues that it was the theosophists, and Olcott in particular, who first took the position that the Aryans originated in India, and that from there civilization spread to the West. This theory, she argues, has now been co-opted by Hindu nationalists without reference to its history.

Polemics by Indian thinkers against Western theory constituted an attempt to mitigate the harm perceived to have been done by racial and linguistic theorizing within the colonial frame. They argued that genealogical or affinity-based thinking had led to Indian civilization being divided internally in fundamental and harmful ways. They also sought to answer the modernizing critique of Indian civilization as oppressively caste based, and as constituted by a static hierarchy with status defined at birth. This universalism was grounded in a *dharma*-based civilizational understanding. On this view, *ārya*, and therefore *Aryan*, was a civilizational concept, associated not with physical type or mother tongue, but with civic virtues, moral qualities, and spiritual ideals. *Sanskrit* was a universal language, in the sense that it was held not to belong to any particular *ethnos* but, rather, to a civilization with an ancient origin, and geographical continuity understood as a sacred topography, recorded in traditional texts and marked by temple sites. The Islamic conquests, and subsequently British colonialism, with its Protestant-derived model of secularism, and taxonomic linguistic and social sciences, were held to have damaged the integrity of that *dharmic* world and distorted the term *ārya*. Vernacularism and Protestantism drew linguistic lines through the population, and the politicization of Aryan Invasion Theory promoted regional, especially Dravidian, identities, based on European *Volk* ideology, dividing the population into competing linguistic groups, offering an affordance, along with anti-Brahminism, for what emerged as the Dravidian movement. Activists among socially and ritually marginal groups appropriated Aryan Invasion Theory and applied it in order to de-authenticate the Brahmin-dominated social order, viewing Hinduism as an ancient form of colonialism. In the 1930s and 1940s there was an alignment between Soviet Indology and Dalit activism, involving a critique of the perceived alliance of the Brahmin class and British colonialism (Brandist 2022).

7.7 THE DEBATE CONTINUES

The Aryan paradigm offers a powerful template for its own rejection, in that it can be inverted in a number of ways. Giti Thadani, in her travels through India in search of a “forgotten cosmology, a lost matriarchy” (2007: 31), depicts Aryanism as a construct of colonialism and Hindu nationalism: “The nineteenth-century colonial and nationalist discourses both provided for a construction of ‘Hindu’ identity on the basis of a glorious ‘Aryan heritage’

which privileged the patriarchal Vedic, brahmanic [priestly] and *kshatriya* [warrior] traditions” (Thadani 2016: 68). An influential inversion is to be found in Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* (1987). Bernal viewed Aryanism as denying the non-European roots of classical Greece. His analysis constituted a return to the *ex oriente lux* model, and was likewise grounded in speculative etymologizing (Lefkowitz 1997). Berlinerblau (1999: 73) offers a critique both of Bernal and his academic critics, noting that: “our awesome lack of knowledge about the ancient world imprisons us within a discourse of plausibilities, not probabilities.” There was a need for a professional “etiquette of humility” given “the wracking gaps in the historical record” (1999: 73–74).

Historical questions are at the centre of the politics of contemporary India. Kaiwar (2003: 37) argues that an “enduring legacy of the Aryan model of history is the division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods.” On caste, Fárek et al. (2017: 7) argue that British colonialism established “this singularly artificial political system over the vast region” of India. The use of the term *artificial* brings to mind controversies concerning the authenticity of Sanscrit. A wide-ranging debate exists over the extent to which concepts such as *caste* and *Hinduism* itself are colonial reifications of what was a decentralized set of social, economic, political, and spiritual practices. The deployment of terms like *construct* or *reification* reflects a broadly Foucauldian approach to colonial knowledge production (Cohn 1996, Dirks 2002). But the Foucauldian critique suffers from its own acontextual universalism, in that it offers what is ostensibly a critique, but the diagnosis is always the same, regardless of context. State modernity, whether colonial or not, has its own logic. Nehru’s secular vision of parliamentary constitutionalism offered one model for governance in the face of the diversity of India’s population; yet, for its critics, *secularism* is a colonial concept, and thus alien to India’s *dharmic* civilization. British colonialism is condemned both for reifying and deepening the artificial and hierarchical institution of caste, but also for imposing an alien (and artificial) ideology of individualism and constitutionalism.

Koenraad Elst identifies seven positions that he contends make political use of Aryan Invasion Theory (2007: 76–81): “Dravidian separatism,” “Dalit neo-Ambedkarism,” “tribal separatism,” “Christian mission,” “Indian Islam,” “Indo-Anglian snobbery,” and “Indian Marxism.” The “common denominator” of these appropriations of Aryan Invasion Theory was that each “undermines or contradicts India’s sense of unity.” Post WWII, Dalit activism drew analogies between caste in India and race in the United States (Kumar 2018). More recently, terms like *Critical Caste Theory* and *Critical Dalit Theory* have emerged, modelled on the US-based Critical Race Theory.⁸ For Isabel Wilkerson in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (Wilkerson 2000), caste subsumes race, creating

8. For contrasting views, see Venkatesh (2022) and Sahay (2023).

a parallel between the United States, Nazi Germany, and India. Any analogy along these lines was rejected by the anthropologist Louis Dumont, as a form of Westernization in which social hierarchy gets misread in racial terms (Dumont 1966).

Interpretations of Indian history and culture deemed heterodox by Hindutva activists may be subject to virulent attack (Banaji 2018). Western Indologists have come under fire for the perceived inauthenticity of their readings of the Indian tradition, in an ideologically charged reworking of the nineteenth-century debate concerning the relative authority of the indigenous hermeneutic tradition in relation to modern philology. The hostile reaction to Jeffrey Kripal's *Kali's Child* (1995) and Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009) is a case in point (Flood 2014, Nussbaum 2009, Malhotra 2016). One aspect of these controversies is whether Freudian theory, or other so-called Western theories, can appropriately be applied to understand Indian traditions or sacred texts. Freudianism suggests after all that the self is in part blind to its own nature and that it takes an outside expert observer to see through the self's defence mechanisms. Ironically, US multiculturalism offers a framework for attempts to silence academic discourses or intimidate scholars deemed disrespectful of Hinduism, or who offer a non-normative vision of Indian history, as was the case with Audrey Truschke's *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (2016). Postcolonial theory, and the various contemporary decolonizing initiatives, including Southern Theory, can be invoked in support the idea that mainstream Western philology has no standing to characterize the Indian tradition or treat it within a comparative framework. J. Sai Deepak's *India That Is Bharat* (2021) carried an endorsement by the theorist of coloniality, Walter D. Mignolo. This was, however, later withdrawn by Mignolo after protests from South Asian scholars (Raza and Ali 2024), on the grounds that Deepak espouses an *Hindutva*-inspired vision of India. Deepak makes extensive references to Mignolo's work (Deepak 2021: 152):

Decoloniality, according to Walter D. Mignolo, is a political project which recognises that coloniality, modernity and rationality are inseparable and therefore, the relevance of decoloniality is determined by the presence or absence of coloniality. Its response to the modernity/rationality complex is indigeneity, subjectivity and relationality.

This apparent alliance of right and left, of neo-traditionalist nationalism with radical politics, finds its twin in the alignment of "Orientalism and Hindutva as perverse bedfellows" (Banaji 2018: 342ff.). Sen (2023: 378) criticizes Deepak for claiming "caste, tribe, or any hierarchy within and without the Hindu Indic as colonial constructs." Indigeneity itself is, strictly, a universal category and in its current form, is a product of colonialism and postcolonial globalism

(Singh 2023). More broadly, the use of *construct* in the service of ideological critique is result-oriented reasoning—whatever is ideologically unacceptable within a neo-traditionalist worldview must be ipso facto a construct of colonialism, or modernity, or Western rationality. The historian of science Meera Nanda has criticized the alignment between Western postmodernism, with its relativistic epistemology, and anti-Western Hindu nationalism (Nanda 2004, 2016; see Hutton 2019). The Indologist Michael Witzel has denounced what he sees as chauvinistic distortions in the scholarship of ancient India (2005). The counter-discourse to Hindu neo-traditionalism from secular constitution-ists and Marxists argues that the founders of the *Hindutva* ideology, figures such as V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar (1906–1973), adapted European ultra-nationalism and fascism to the Indian context (Habib 1997).

Bhatnagar contextualizes the Indian case in the wider context of postcolonial nationalism (1986: 5):

In effect the search for Aryan/Islamic/Semite origins becomes for the colonized people a longing for an impossible purity and a yearning for the fullness of meaning that is not only uncritical but also politically suspect in that it can unwittingly serve the reactionary forces of revivalism. Nowhere is this danger greater than in the Indian context, where the search for the source of Hindu identity in the Vedic times has almost invariably led to a loss of commitment to our contemporary plural/secular identity.

This view suggests that the line between the civilizational understanding of *ārya* and the exclusionary concept of *Aryan* is irretrievably blurred. *Dharma* is frequently defined with reference to Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism and distinguished from the foreign (monotheistic) Abrahamic religions in the Indian context, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In this way, the dichotomy between Aryanism and Semitism remains a powerful social and intellectual template, as does that between Aryan and Dravidian.

CHAPTER 8

Concluding Discussion

What is missing in the vast and complex literature on *Aryan* is a discussion of the fundamentals of linguistic affinity (*Verwandtschaft*, *Abstammung*, *affinité*, *affiliation*, *parenté*), that is to say, the intellectual, societal, methodological, and perceptual grounding of assertions that particular words, speech varieties, or languages are related or *cognate*, and the place of such assertions in identity statements, political ideologies, and historical narratives (Hutton 2012). The mainstream view is found in numerous texts on historical and comparative linguistics (e.g., Meillet 1908: 2ff.). The proposition that the German word *Hund* and the English word *hound* are cognate or related etymologically or, to use William Jones's words, "sprung from some common source," is difficult to sustain on close examination. Firstly, what are these entities that are alleged to be related, and how do we define them? The written citation form is itself the product of a set of representational conventions with their own history. The relationship between the two words depends on a set of complex judgments about similarity and difference, in terms of sound and meaning, and in relation to methodologies of identifying systematic as opposed to unsystematic similarity. There is the further issue of phonetic-phonological representation and the normalization that is involved in associating a written form with a spoken pronunciation. Within linguistics there is the unexamined assumption that both entities participate in the "Germanic language family" or some other similar category. But in what sense does any *utterance* of a word instantiate that set of assumed relationships? Is there some kind of linguistic "quasi-DNA" or ethnic materiality, some "Germanic substance," that attaches itself to the linguistic sign and is realized in all its contexts of use? At the level of language, what is the quality that *Hund* and *Katze* share, beyond the affirmation that they are both *German words*? The assumption is that signs are in some sense suffused with, or partake of, systems that are conventionally labelled English, German, and so on. These same

labels are also indicative of group identities with historical, political, and ideological meanings. Just how a word can partake of an identity that is assigned to human beings is unclear. Is the “Germanness” of *Hund* the same as the *Germanness* of a German person, or that of the German state? There is nothing in the science of language that entitles us to read off these identities as given or unproblematically present to us. Yet in linguistics, words are in effect seen as marked by national and ethnic identities and affinities, just as bodies are characterized and assigned identities in racial anthropology. The distinction between cognate and non-cognate languages puts genealogical thinking at the very centre of linguistic theory.

One crucial intellectual ingredient in the postulation of affinities is *vernacularism*. In order to distinguish historically contingent similarities from true cognate relationships, it was necessary conceptually to strip away later accretions and admixtures. The study of Sanscrit was key to the newly secularizing and comparativist disciplines of language and text, with their commitment to rigour of method. But it also created “the breach between Semitists and Indo-Iranian studies” (Rohling 2018: 769) and cleared the way to an obsession with comparing human sub-types in terms of fundamental world view and historical trajectory. This encouraged a form of scholarly pronouncement defining and contrasting these “ideal types,” and the creation of what were little more than erudite stereotypes. In the context of India, this meant that some languages were the offspring of Sanscrit, and others were Dravidian. The vernacular core was that component of the language that participated in the postulation of affinities, by analogy with the Anglo-Saxon as opposed to the Norman French and Latinate strata of the English language. There was presumed to be a point of ethnogenesis in time and space, following which the *Volksgeist* came to reside in this authentic core.

Texts are real, but *languages* are, relatively speaking, unreal. All human societies have texts, whether spoken or written, and all human societies have language, but the idea of *a language* as a discrete, bounded, articulated entity is just that, an idea. The activities of reciting or reading a text as opposed to speaking a language are at different orders of abstraction, since one cannot recite or read without citing or creating a form of text, yet one can speak and be understood without labelling that speech language X or Y. Speech and written texts can be assigned to a language, but that is an analytical process that presupposes a particular communicational, societal, and intellectual order. Texts are said to be *in a particular language*, but each text is unique, though of course it may be “mechanically reproduced.” As explained by Arthur Lovejoy in his *The Great Chain of Being* ([1936] 1964: 227), there were, “in the logic and natural history of Aristotle” and the late Middle Ages, two modes of thought: “The first made for sharp divisions, clear-cut differentiations, among natural objects, and especially among living beings.” The second view “tended to make the whole notion of species appear a convenient but artificial setting-up

of divisions having no counterpart in nature.” The wider philosophical question of whether and how we can “carve nature at its joints,” to use the Platonic metaphor (Slater 2013), has a patchy history in linguistic thought, though the idea of discrete languages as fictions or myths, or to use the contemporary term, constructs or social constructions, has moved to the fore in recent decades. If we accept that languages are not real objects, or at least not real enough, then projections or inferences on the basis of language are a further step removed from reality. Put more simply, the Aryan paradigm is a vast scholarly edifice built on an ontological gamble, namely, that languages are real, and the epistemological corollary of that reality, namely, that a set of truthful assertions follow from an accurate and rigorous description of the interrelationships between them.

The notion of a language is at a higher order of abstraction than that of text. There is no universality as to how texts are created and in what medium, whether and how they might be stored, circulated, and transmitted, what kind of ownership or sense of property attaches to them, and, most fundamentally, how they should be interpreted. There can be in this sense no universal hermeneutics, since practices of interpretation are embedded in socio-cultural context and have their own histories. Linguistics, by contrast, adopted a position analogous to the uniformitarianism of geology, in seeing languages as having a constant set of attributes, and in this sense not varying in their essence across time and space. Although individual languages differ, they differ in ways that could be captured within the universal methodology of linguistics. Each language can be reduced to, or represented in, an alphabetic writing system; each has structure, and form-meaning pairings or mappings. Languages are ontologically all the same kind of entity, or different realizations of a single underlying category. Linguistic relativism or Whorfianism relies no less on a universalist set of assumptions, namely, that languages were knowable in their differences, and these differences can be captured and understood.

One underlying problem that haunts modern linguistics, and that has contributed to this confusion over language and race, is that of the ontological status of language. As a discipline with pretensions to scientific status, one powerful tendency has been to treat language, and individual languages, as organic or quasi-biological entities, and linguists have drawn extensively on the vocabulary of biology in affirming the methodological rigour and scientific status of their discipline. Yet they are also aware that language is an individual and collective psycho-social, cultural, and anthropological phenomenon. In the second half of the twentieth century, language came to be increasingly understood as a mode of interpersonal action shaped by its use in context, by the demands and affordances of social spaces, and by the rules and conventions of institutional domains, such as education, law, religion, medicine, business, and social media. A third, related, development was the contention that belief in

discrete languages was an intellectual myth (Harris 1981). What seems certain is that if William Jones were to have taken a walk in the streets and markets outside his Calcutta courtroom, he would not have found a social world consisting of ideal linguistic types, with labels attached. Philology is a poor tool for understanding a social-political order, though this criticism is to a degree anachronistic in the case of Jones. Vernacularism operates on the assumption that such a categorical order is latently present, and as method, ideology, and praxis it works to bring that order into view as an object of policy. One way to understand this labelling process involves a categorial colonization of the fluidity of the life world. Yet that fluidity remains and abides, alongside the abstract categories, just as language policy advances into, and retreats from, the indeterminacy of actual language in use.

The decline of philology as a master framework and the emergence of a set of professionalized disciplines, each with its own autonomous domain, fragmented professional knowledge and proliferated confusion about the definitional status of key sociocultural categories. It also brought into focus the fundamental lack of clarity around the status of language, while increasing the evidential and explanatory load that language was required to bear. One way to understand the problem is that language is neither essentially organic nor a pure social construct but, rather, the *tertium quid* between the domains of nature and culture. The fundamental uncertainty as to the status of language has never been resolved (nor, arguably, could it have been), and indeed the issue has only sporadically been addressed within mainstream academic linguistics. Geoffrey Harpham concludes that language has no definitive ontological status at all. The study of language has involved “the displacement of the undiscussable onto the empty signifier *language*.” For this reason, “the adolescent or weanling period in our understanding of language is likely to be protracted indefinitely since the object under analysis fades under examination like the Cheshire Cat, leaving only a gently mocking smile” (Harpham 2002: 236).

The affordance of writing allows for boundary drawing between *ethne*, since writing allows for the objectification of multidimensional language (or languages) in a two-dimensional representational system. Speech can be reduced to writing, and writing allows for one-to-one comparison in lists, tables, and so on. Writing is embedded in the Western concept of a language, and the first step towards any form of linguistic analysis is representation through writing, be it in mainstream spelling conventions or a phonetic alphabet. Etymological investigation conceives of word forms as temporally layered, analogous to the study of geological and archeological layers in stratigraphy, an idea that was articulated in Charles Lyell’s principle of superposition (Lyell 1863). Since the concept of language was tied into the composite model of *Volk*, that model embedded notions of lineage and genealogy. This has been obscured to a significant degree by the apparent objectivity and fungibility of alphabetic writing,

which allows language to be objectified and decontextualized as a pure object of analysis.

The concept of *Volk* is a reflex of the genealogical model of language, under the affordances of alphabetic writing. In political terms, the framework of *Volk* has eliminationist potential, since membership of the *Volk* is, normatively, a yes/no matter. At the same time, the idea of each *Volk* having its own state is intrinsically anti-dynastic, anti-imperial, and anti-colonial. It affords a global economy of difference, in which nation-states are free to develop their own political institutions and cultural traditions, free of supernational coercion. The Israeli political philosopher Yoram Hazany has argued that nationalism has been wrongly tainted by the two World Wars and an association with National Socialism. He regards Nazism as primarily an imperial project. Nationalism by contrast offers a model for peaceful co-existence among nations, a model that has its roots in the Bible (Hazany 2018: 15–16):

The Bible thus puts a new political conception on the table: a state of a single nation that is united, self-governing, and uninterested in bringing its neighbors under its rule. This state is governed not by foreigners responsible to a ruler in a distant land but by kings and governors, priests and prophets drawn from the ranks of the nation itself—individuals who are, for just this reason, thought to be better able to stay in touch with the needs of their own people, their “brothers,” including the less fortunate among them.

Nazism is, however, better understood as both nationalistic and imperialistic. The common objection to nationalism is that it establishes a powerful norm marking the state as the property of a particular *ethnos*, and this claim of ownership is extended to territory and language. In modern states founded on a *Volk* notion, the exclusive quality of that ideology is restrained by, or in conflict with, the republican ideal of identity-blind citizenship. In extreme cases, nationalist and postcolonial rulers can justify oppression in terms of an ideology of ownership: their “brothers” become the property of the elite by virtue of a shared *ethnos*. Nationalism creates both an internal division within the state, between authentic members of the *ethnos* and others and, in the way of things, frequently gives rise to a problematic external border, should the boundaries of the state not follow closely the boundaries of the *ethnos*.

There was no racial fall from grace, whereby linguistic concepts were corrupted by racial theories, that is, racialized. Another way of stating this is that anti-Semitism was an intrinsic feature of the *Volk* paradigm, and, therefore, of the Aryan paradigm, while this was not the case with physical anthropology, at least in its origins. Racial anthropology as a discipline recognized hybridity—which did not preclude its practitioners from promoting notions of racial inequality and worse. But the exclusionary drive of the *Volk* paradigm follows

as a matter of logic, in that if the peoples of the world have their own languages and territories, any people that is held to lack that natural relation to space and language becomes an anomaly. Then, in the age of political nationalism, the debate begins about how and under what conditions this people can be normalized or otherwise dealt with.

A further underlying tension in models of human diversity was their legibility, that is, the extent to which they afforded a clear set of divisions, or a strong narrative that could be grasped, without following the debates down the many classificatory rabbit holes dug in pursuit of academic schemes. One of the abiding sins of scholarship is the desire to impose one's own terminological, definitional, and classificatory schema on academic debate as well as popular discourse. Schemas with three or five main divisions, such as those of Buffon or Blumenbach, or as suggested by the biblical trio of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, had the advantage of simplicity, in particular if "we" could be located unambiguously in one of the categories. Typically, such schemas had a fundamental opposition at their centre, and then a catch-all third category, as was the case with the Aryan/Semitic/Turanian schema that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. While the overt academic aim may have been to make diversity "legible," that is, to provide a clear set of divisions in terms of language, race, or other parameters, the overall result was generally an uneasy mélange of methodology and criteria, set within latent or explicit ideological frameworks, and applied across vast time periods and over immense geographical space. Scholars either co-opted existing lay terms and stipulated a specialist meaning, in which case the ordinary and the specialist meaning circulated at the same time, creating a blurring effect, or devised neologisms, which might or might not diffuse via journalism or scholarly activism into general usage. The result in either case was an unresolved tension, which scholars attempted to remedy by the further stipulation of definitions, by drawing terminological distinctions, or creating additional neologisms. In the case of *Aryan*, this term diffused far beyond the boundaries of specialist comparative philology and historical linguistics. Much of this was achieved by scholars such as Renan and Müller themselves, by periodicals and popular science publications, and subsequently by a range of polemical and activist ideologies.

The creation of Greece, the German Reich, and Italy represented a triumph for a particular understanding of *Volk* identity, but, for racially minded critics, such states were increasingly viewed as mongrel polities, as inauthentic mini-empires (Grant 1916). Further, in the early twentieth century, the impact of Mendelian genetics radically destabilized the idea that racial classification operated at the individual and community level. Post-Mendelian races were understood as virtual constructs, to be found in a set of features that were shuffled and reshuffled in mixture with those of other races. This was the intellectual innovation that launched Eugen Fischer's (1874–1967) career, following his Mendelian study of the so-called *Rehobother Bastards*, the mixed

population of German Southwest Africa (Fischer 1913). The logic was clear: pure races existed only virtually, in a remote past in human evolution, or at the far margins of the modern world. Civilization was in this sense a “mongrel” form. Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968), for example, conceded that almost all Germans were *Mischlinge* (Günther 1922: 14):

Racial anthropology is in the disagreeable position of having to pronounce the overwhelming majority of Europeans to be of mixed race, to be bastards. This renders it an awkward, disturbing science, making it something discomfoting in the manner of that exhortation to “know thyself.”

Considerable historiographical confusion in this area has been created by the caricaturing of academic race theory, especially in the context of Nazism. For German race theorists, it was problematic to ascribe individuals or populations straightforwardly to racial categories, and the presence of one set of features (e.g., Nordic phenotype) did not guarantee that the race-psychological correlates were also present. For this reason, Erwin Baur (1875–1933) rejected the idea of breeding out pure Nordic types by selection (1936: 93–94). Fischer later argued that skull types were constructs, and the north–south data that suggested that Northern Germans were “long-skulled” to a greater degree than Southern Germans should not be interpreted simplistically as a racial divide. This was the problem of “southern German brachycephaly” (Fischer 1940, Hutton 2005: 118–119).

Theories of eugenics, increasingly influenced by modern genetics, were increasingly sceptical as to race as a taxonomic category. The idea of a lost pure Nordic race (Deniker 1899) held little attraction for geneticists working within the neo-Darwinian synthesis. The translation of *Rassenhygiene* as “racial hygiene” is problematic for this reason, as it wrongly highlights taxonomic racial readings, whereas race in this phrase was generally used in the sense of “breeding stock” or “population.” This is not “race hygiene” in the sense of preferring one race to another but, rather, eugenics. This is a further example of how *race* serves as a convenient “dummy category” within the history of ideas. This needs to be understood in order to sort out, at least to some degree, the immense historiographical and intellectual confusion surrounding the concept of *Aryan race*. Enormous stigma has now attached itself to the notion of *race* and that of *Aryan*, and this is compounded in the phrase *Aryan race*, yet in German *arisch* collocates with *Volk*, and the term *arische Rasse* (“Aryan race”) is rarely found.¹ In German, there is a fundamental dichotomy between *Rasse* and *Volk*, which has no direct equivalent in English or French. To translate

1. One interesting exception is from the diaries of Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945): “Der Jude hat die schicksalhafte Mission, die kranke arische Rasse wieder zu sich selbst zu bringen” (Reuth 2003: 125).

arisches Volk as “Aryan race” in scholarly discussion short-circuits a century or more of intensive debate about the role and relevance of linguistic criteria versus race in defining human types. It is barely possible to document use of the term *Aryan race* (*arische Rasse*) in Nazi Germany, so one can safely conclude that this topos is a pure construct of the historiography.

The historian of anti-Semitism and the “Aryan myth,” Léon Poliakov, takes the confusion of language and race as his theoretical point of departure (1974: 2):

It is well known that the division of the European population into Aryans and Semites was originally based on a confusion about the nature of men (races) and their culture (languages). This confusion was pushed so far that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Aryan theory had achieved pride of place among men of learning alongside the theory of the spatial ether.

Poliakov’s reading of German intellectual history in this way adopts a line of critique by French intellectuals of the concept of *Volk* that can be traced back to the mid and late nineteenth century. It can be found, for example, in the works of Paul Topinard and Abel Hovelacque. Poliakov’s critique of the Aryan paradigm is a modern reproduction of that of French physical anthropologists (Topinard 1876: 453, as translated 1878: 430):

Linguists, finding that all the European languages, with the exception of Basque and the Finnish, are derived from the Sanskrit, that before the dispersion of these languages in Central Asia, they possessed words for the metals and for the various instruments of husbandry, mythologists also recognizing a reciprocal relationship between the various religious myths of the peoples of the West and those of the East, came to the conclusion, the former especially, that the large mass of the peoples of Europe were Aryan, and had come from Central Asia.

Topinard then noted that a reaction had set in (Topinard 1876: 453, as translated 1878: 430):

A comparison of the remains of ancient races found embedded in the earth in our own country with those of the populations which have succeeded them, shows a continuity of type more or less persistent, with the infusion of foreign blood from time to time interrupted, with here and there a mongrel, or disappearing altogether.

The struggle to disentangle racial and linguistic criteria did indeed take place, but the result was a racial critique of modern nationalism as being excessively generous in its racial inclusivity, hardly a line of argument likely to benefit

the Jewish citizens of European nations. If *Volk* had been a purely linguistic concept, then it would have embraced German Jews without reservation. It is hard to identify a sinister or toxic effect for the confusion of language and race, if that would have resulted in a race-blind notion of ethnic membership. The mainstream German notion of *Volk* was never a pure construct of language alone. By “confusion,” it is usually meant that Aryan was appropriated by racial theorists (*racialized*), who took a linguistic concept and transformed it into a racial one. But the sources for this are barely in evidence, hence the excessive attention paid to Gobineau (though not by Poliakov himself). But Gobineau was writing in French and was not a physical or racial anthropologist, so his term *race* does not map onto a modern scientific notion of physical race.

The racialization model adds nothing to our understanding of Nazism, given that Nazi scholars and administrators explicitly rejected the notion of an “Aryan race” (*arische Rasse*)—while at the same time Aryanism served as a fundamental component of Nazi ideology. “It is a fiction to speak of a German race,” wrote Franz Boas in his attack on the National Socialist misuse of the term *Aryan*. There was “no more a Semitic than there is an Aryan race,” since these terms “defined linguistic groups, not human beings.” The Jews were not “a uniform people” (Boas 1934: 8). Aryan was a “linguistic term” (1934: 4), and the Nazi understanding of race and the Jews was “built on a pseudo-science” (1934: 11). It had never been shown scientifically “that a human being, through his descent from a certain group of people, must of necessity have certain mental characteristics” (1934: 11). Boas concluded, “Just as the Germanized Slavs have become German in their culture, as the Frenchified Germans have become French, the Russianized ones Russians; so have the German Jews become Germans” (1934: 11). But for Nazi ideology this was the very crux of the problem. Margaret Schlauch’s *Who Are the Aryans?* (1935) likewise emphasized the fundamental distinction between racial and linguistic identity: “Strictly speaking, the word ‘Aryan’ should be limited to a certain group of languages. It has no real meaning when applied to race” (1935: 6). In terms of race as “physiological differentiation,” the “Indo-European or Aryan languages are today spoken by many different races. Even in Germany there are a number of races represented in the non-Jewish population” (1935: 22). Schlauch condemned notions of racial inferiority and superiority, citing extensively from Boas’s *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911). Yet no professor in Weimar or Nazi Germany would have argued that there existed an “Aryan race” or a “German race” (that is, *arische Rasse* or *deutsche Rasse*). Instant dismissal would have followed. Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (1936) used designations such as *der Arier* (“the Aryan”), *der arische Mensch*, (“the Aryan person”), *arische Völker* (“Aryan peoples”), *arische Stämme* (“Aryan tribes”), and *arisch-nordisches Blut* (“Aryan-Nordic blood”), but not *arische Rasse* (“Aryan race”). Hans F. K. Günther (1922: 7) was insistent on the distinction: “There are Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, but no Germanic, Romance or Slavic races.” The physical anthropologist Karl

Saller (1902–1969) lost his authorization to teach (*venia legendi*) at the University of Göttingen in 1935, on account of his advocacy of the idea of a German race. The term appeared in the title of one of his books, *Der Weg der deutschen Rasse* (1933). In his final lecture handout, Saller proclaimed, “Es lebe die deutsche Rasse in der Bewegung!” This cry of “Long live the German race in motion/movement!” was both a subtextual reference to Galileo’s defiance of Church orthodoxy, and to the “movement” (*Bewegung*), that is, Nazism itself (Hutton 2005: 150ff). Nazism was heir to the Aryan/Semitic binary in its most toxic form, but also to the scientific materialism represented by the paradigm of race science. That paradigm did not recognize the status of *Aryan* as a racial term.

The paradox of the modern humanities and social sciences is that in attempting to provide conceptual boundaries and give form to fundamental notions of social and cultural significance, they eroded their cogency as guides to the conflicts relating to the constitution of modern states. The claim to intellectual authority went together with profound uncertainty and confusion over human collectivities and identities, their history, and essence. Modern linguistics failed to escape the biblical paradigm with its deeply embedded genealogical framework, in spite of assertions that “linguistics is a free science and no longer a mere *ancilla theologia*” (Möllendorff 1896: 83).

The result of attempts to give definitional clarity to social concepts was to increase intellectual disorientation and thereby imply for radical ideologues the need for direct action, strong leadership, and conceptual clarification to take place at the political or policy level. For if the different frameworks for understanding identity were incommensurate, if language could not be mapped onto race, and race was orthogonal to nationality, there was an inevitable gap between the terminology of scholars, itself the subject of endless and inconclusive debate, and popular understandings of terms like *Volk* and *Rasse*. The subjectivist turn of academic discussion in the late nineteenth century offered one way out of the definitional morass. But this transferred the problem of identity from the scholarly journals to the socio-political domain, and thereby transformed the popular imaginary into an ideological forum where political slogans trumped scholarly caution. The gap between ideal and actual could only be bridged by political rhetoric, by stereotyping, by redrawing state boundaries, or through the re-engineering of the population, whereby the artificiality of social categories could be repressed or denied, and the ideal form of the lost organic order reinstated.

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