Veṅkaṭanātha and the Limits of Philological Argument

By the end of the thirteenth century, a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava reader would have had available to him a library of works unknown in his great-grandfather’s time. For many of these works’ presumed readers—Brahman men, comfortable in their lives lived out in the otiose leisure of the agrahāra or in the precincts of a temple—this no doubt summoned an experience of deep cultured contentment. Here, after all, were the teachings of gods, goddesses, and sages, neatly laid out and readily available for our inspection, on questions ranging from the fate of the embodied soul to the proper way to conduct the meticulous details of everyday life. It is from these self-satisfied ranks that the authors of the pseudepigrapha likely emerged, adding a detail here or a learned borrowing there, secure in their modicum of divine inspiration. It was also from among these ranks, I have suggested, that Śāradātanaya likely emerged: more ambitious than those of his confreres who were content to add to or reimage the stock of tantric and purāṇic texts, in the Bhāvaprakāśana he grafted his own perspectival articulation of literary theory and dramaturgical instruction onto the pseudepigrapha’s open and receptive frame. For other men learned in the śāstras, however, the experience of the newly transformed textual landscape was likely to have been one of Borgesian vertigo, at once thrilling and troubling. It was these figures who were compelled to write books of their own about their textual inheritance, and to whom I will devote the next two chapters.

The first of these was the great Veṅkaṭanātha, better known by his honorific title Vedāntadesīka (‘teacher of the Vedānta’) and traditionally said to have lived 1268–1369 CE. It is with real humility that one has to approach the enormous body of work attributed to Veṅkaṭanātha, which includes more than a hundred works composed in the highest registers of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and the hybrid Vaiṣṇava idiolect of Maṇipravālam, and masterfully bestriding a plethora of scholarly and literary genres, from classical poetry and dialectics to devotional lyrics and sermonizing commentaries. His successors in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition recognized him as a figure of real genius, indeed of divine provenance. Despite the often bitter intramural arguments that divide members of that religion, Veṅkaṭanātha is universally esteemed and worshipped as its foremost figure after its founder Rāmānuja; he is said to be the earthly incar-
nation of the bell that attends Viṣṇu in his heaven of Vaikuṇṭha. Even today he is invoked as kavitārkkakesarin, “The Lion among poets and philosophers”. To this, I would add another, unheralded field of expertise: Veṅkaṭanātha was also an innovative, even a revolutionary, textual scholar in practice and the promulgator of a remarkable theory of philological reading.

Some years ago, Roque Mesquita pointed out that in his Śatadūṣaṇī or Hundred Refutations, Veṅkaṭanātha turned the intimidating powers of his intellect on to some of the purāṇic sources cited by certain unnamed contemporaries, claiming these supposed authorities to be surreptitious interpolations that did not have wide acceptance.1 Mesquita saw in this a reference to Madhva, Veṅkaṭanātha’s Vaiṣṇava correligiousman and the founder of a new religious movement in what is now Karnataka. The identification is not certain: Veṅkaṭanātha only speaks of pāpiṣṭhāḥ, ‘terrible sinners,’ as the object of his polemic. While Madhva and his followers may have been especially flagrant in this—and, as Mesquita demonstrates, had the chutzpah to offer a whole theory of textuality in the service of their interpolations—but they were far from alone in so doing. Veṅkaṭanātha was in fact bringing up the elephant in the room of contemporaneous sectarian controversy: that whole new textual corpora had been introduced and placed within a canon of existing authorities, and that this was the work of interested human authors, not the gods or their supernatural deputies.

That the Śrīvaiṣṇava was well aware of this, and that he was able to turn his critical gaze to objects nearer at hand, can be seen in the opening chapter of his Pāñcarātrarakṣā, or Amulet for the Pāñcarātra.2 This is a remarkable

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1 Śatadūṣaṇī, 65: yāni cānyāni vākyāni sampratipannaśrutismṛtyu adṛśyamānāni svācārānurā-pamataparicaryayā keśucid aprasiddhesu vā naṣṭakośeśu vā purāṇeṣu prakṣipya paṭhanti pāpiṣṭhāḥ, tāni pratyakṣasyaśrutyaśādipariśīlanaśālinīṣu gariṣṭhagoṣṭhiṣu nāva-kāsām labhante. Mesquita’s translation: “There are other passages that are not found in acknowledged Vedas and smṛtis. Sinful people, because of their devotion to opinions that accord with their conduct, first interpolate them and then claim to find them in some Purāṇas that are not well known, or whose collections are lost or whose beginnings and ends are not determined. These passages are not admitted in venerable assemblies distinguished for their meticulous study of express Vedic and other authoritative texts [or rather ‘by their careful cultivation of valid sources of knowledge, such as direct evidence and authoritative textual warrant’ -wmc].” (Roque Mesquita, Madhva’s unknown literary sources: some observations (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000), 27–28).

2 Note that this title gives the name Pāñcarātra, with a long first vowel. Though this is the title given in the two editions of the text I refer to here, and is the usual term in modern scholarship, it does not seem to be the title used by Veṅkaṭanātha himself, nor by other early authors. I give the title as published for convenience’s sake.
Veṅkaṭanātha and the limits of philological argument

scholarly essay in Sanskrit prose, the beginning of which is devoted to establishing the overall legitimacy and authority of the Pañcarātra scriptures. This was not the first such effort: the Āgampūrūmāṇya (“On the Validity of Scripture”) of Yāmunācārya (writing two generations before Rāmānuja, and so traditionally dated to the early eleventh century), presented a classic case in defense of the Vaiṣṇava tantric corpus. Veṅkaṭanātha proudly announces his filiation to this earlier text when, in the Pāñcarātrarakṣā’s opening pages, he reproduces word for word Yāmuna’s own closing arguments. But the difference in scholarly method between the two works is profound: while Yāmuna’s text is a bravura display of dialectical logic, drawing heavily on the intellectual resources of Nyāya, Veṅkaṭanātha’s text is concerned with a rational enquiry into the internal coherence of the Pañcarātra scriptures’ own organizing logic. In the transition from one method to the other, we can trace here—to borrow the Senecan title of Elman’s study of early modern China—a move from philosophy to philology.3

Snakes versus Eagles

The influence of Yāmuna’s treatise extends beyond this quotation. For readers attentive to this predecessor-text, this can best be seen in the stunning piece of verbal artistry which opens the Pāñcarātrarakṣā. The third and final of the Pāñcarātrarakṣā’s invocatory verses presents a remarkable example of Veṅkaṭanātha’s poetry, at once characteristically oblique and dizzying in its suggested undercurrents:

ārohantv anavadyatarkapadāsīmāmadṛśāṃ mādṛśāṃ pakṣe kārtyuye nivesītapadāḥ pakṣe patadbhyah parān |
sarvānuśravasāradārśisaśīraḥkampadvijhāvāšana- 
kiḍakuṇḍalimauliratnaghṛṇibhiḥ sārātrikāḥ sūktayaḥ ||

May the eloquent teachings—their words set in place long ago, in the early years of the Age of Perfection—overwhelm the opponents of those who adhere to a position of men such as myself, we who have seen the outlines of the faultless path of reason,

3 Benjamin Elman. From Philosophy to Philology: Social and Intellectual Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China. (Cambridge: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1990).
as the rays from the crest-jewels of serpents, toyed with by eagles who dine upon their forked-tongued kind and shake their head in astonishment at those who see into the essence of the entire Veda, provide waving lamps to accompany their recitation.

Veṅkaṭanātha’s poetic writing possesses a power that is difficult to capture in translation, what Bronner and Shulman have attractively described as its ‘depth’, the way in which Veṅkaṭanātha could “condense within the space of a single work—even a single verse—an entire world of specific associations, contents, and meanings.”

Certainly this remarkable compression is in evidence here, ranging over a densely interconnected network of intertexts, mythic references and recondite allusions. First of all, there is the intertext: Veṅkaṭanātha directly echoes the Āgamprāmāṇya’s final verse; though this is identical in metrical form and many points of phrasing, the overall effect is strikingly different:

ākalpaṃ vilasantu sātvatamatapraspadhuddhātī-
vāmugdhoddhataurvidagdhaparishadvaigdhvāmsināḥ  |
śrīmannāthamunindravarddhitadhiyo nirdhūtavīśivāvāh  
santah santatagadyapadyapadavīhrādyānavadyoktayah ||

Laying waste to the clever arguments of the arrogant, ill-bred assemblies who are utterly deluded by their false path of opposition to the Sātvata doctrine; their minds opened by the revered Nāthamuni, they have cast off all the evils of the world; with their constant stream of faultless teachings, charmingly crafted in prose and verse both:

May those good people flourish until the end of the cosmic age.

For a reader alive to the nuance of this reference, the implicit statement is remarkably bold. Just as in the direct quotation of Yāmuna’s text a few pages later, this opening gambit not only links Veṅkaṭanātha’s work with a classic authority of his tradition, it openly declares itself to be an advance upon it, extending further the points seemingly settled centuries before. Veṅkaṭanātha

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4 Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, trans., Poems and Prayers from South India (New York: J.L.C Foundation 2009), 9 et passim.

5 Āgamprāmāṇya, 171.
wants his readers to know that his own defense of the coherence of the Pāñcarātra goes well beyond Yāmuna’s.

Paradoxically, but fully in keeping with Veṅkaṭanātha’s wider literary aesthetics, this extension into the present takes the form of a look into the deep past.6 This is sensitively keyed as a response to its textual precursor; for all that it invokes the living memory of Yāmuna’s paternal grandfather Nāthamuni, the Āgamaprāmāṇya’s final verse is a muscular declaration to the future, signaled by its opening words ākalpaṃ vilasantu “may they flourish until the end of the cosmic age”. In studied contrast, Veṅkaṭanātha’s verse plunges its reader back into the primordial past, pakse kārtayuge (“in the [first] half of the Kṛtayuga,” the first and most perfect of the world’s four eras), when the ‘eloquent teachings’ (sūktayah), took on their present form. Unspecified, these are clearly meant to refer to the Pañcarātra tantras; they echo Yāmuna’s anavadyoktayah (‘faultless teachings’), which fall at an identical place at the end of the verse. The basic structure of Veṅkaṭanātha’s invocation thus embodies an opening argument, at once asserting the antiquity of the Vaiṣṇava scriptures as a mark of their prima facie validity and framing his efforts in terms of his predecessor’s own poetic reasoning.

Things then take a vertiginous turn. Once again, comparison with Yāmuna is instructive. The earlier philosopher unleashes a broadside against those who would doubt the truth of his religion; Veṅkaṭanātha the poet-philologist (/philosopher-theologian-preacher-polemicist…) adopts a different course. The eagles and serpents—proverbial enemies in Indic literature—found in the translation are not explicitly present in the Sanskrit text. Instead, in a bravura display of allusive suggestion, they are summoned up for the reader through periphrasis: in the long compound that fills most of the verse’s second half, the totemic Vaiṣṇava bird is called dvijihvāśana “whose food is the forked-tongue one”; its adversary—already elliptically present in the eagle’s identifying kenning—is picked out later in the same compound as kuṇḍalin, the ‘curved one.’ The image is itself an atypical and playful one: as they listen to the Pāñcarātrika āgamas, the eagles shake their heads in approval and wonder at how their doctrine so perfectly accords with the Veda, like connoisseurs in a concert-hall. As they do this, they worry the prey that dangles from their

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6 Cf. Bronner and Shulman, Poems and Prayers, esp. 10–16, 18–22 on the temporal ‘loops’ built into the structure of the Hamsasandesā. See here also these authors’ translation of the text (Poems and Prayers, 3–80) and Steve Hopkins, “Sanskrit in a Tamil Imaginary: Sandeśakāvyā and the Hamsasandesā of Veṅkaṭanātha,” in Passages: Relationships between Tamil and Sanskrit, ed. M. Kannan and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: Institut français d’Indologie/École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2009).
beaks, which are serpents crested—as they are habitually imagined to be—by inset gems. As light scatters from these gems—and as the eagles continue to play with their food\(^7\)—this stands in place of the lamp waving (ārātrika) that is a standard part of the ritual repertoire of temple worship. That is to say, this densely imagined verse calls to mind a typical scene to be found in a Vaiṣṇava temple, precisely the social space that the tantras, whose authority the work will labor to defend, seek to regulate.

Veṅkaṭanātha’s play of implication does not end there. The verse turns on the wish that the Pāñcarātra teachings might, in an unusual turn of phrase, “overwhelm” (ārohantu, literally “mount upon”) those opposed (parān, often ‘enemies’) to the proponents of the author’s own position (mādṛśāṃ ... pakṣe patadbhyaḥ), reworking the standard idiom of pakṣapāta “partisan, adopting one side of an argument”.\(^8\) His periphrasis of this idiom, however, itself suggests “those flying [patadbhyaḥ] on the wing [pakṣe],” and so—in light of what follows—there is once again a suggestion of birds and of their paras, the serpents. The identification is, as it were, transitive (the figure of speech in question may thus be pariṇāma, the metaphorical ‘transformation’ of the subject of comparison\(^9\)): the opponents of Veṅkaṭanātha’s views are retrospectively seen as snakes, whose attribute “forked-tongued” possesses the same nuances

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\(^7\) As Gary Tubb—to whom I am very grateful for an enlightening discussion of this verse—suggests, the phrase saśiraḥkampa (‘with their heads shaking,’ i.e. in approval) in the context of an invocation bears further suggested significance: as Ingalls has noted (Ingalls, An anthology of Sanskrit court poetry, 466 and esp. 475) derivatives of the verbal root √kamp (‘to shake’) further suggest anukampā, ‘compassion,’ one of the principle modes of describing a deity’s relationship with the created world. The eagles, who themselves call to mind Garuḍa (‘The Eagle’), Viṣṇu’s cosmic mount, are thus at once aggressive and gracious in their actions.

\(^8\) As a model here, Veṅkaṭanātha may have had in mind Śrīharṣa’s Naśadhīya 2.52 (again, I am indebted to Tubb for this suggestion):

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\text{na suvarṇamayī tanu paraṃ nanu vāg api tāvakī tathā } |
\text{ na paraṃ pathi pakṣapātitānavałambe kimū mādṛśe ‘pi sā } || \text{ in which Nala addresses the golden goose: “It is not just your body that is made of gold [suvarṇa], but your words also have a lovely sound [suvarṇa]. So too you do not just fly by wing [pakṣapātitā] in the unsupported path [of the sky], you are also a partisan [pakṣapātitā] for the likes of me, who has no other recourse.” The Pāñcarātrarakṣā’ś pakse patadbhyah parān, with its ablative construing with the final noun, rather than a genitive, is a little unusual, and may have been motivated purely by the exigencies of the meter. It may, however, been deliberately chosen to suggest “those other than” instead of “enemies of,” especially given that Veṅkaṭanātha’s opponents here are, as we shall see, his coreligionists.

\(^9\) As defined in Ruṣyaka’s Āloṃkārasarvasva, sūtra 16 āropyamānasya prakṛtopayogīte pariṇā-

mah, “When the standard of comparison—the thing that is being superimposed—is applied to the immediate context, the figure is pariṇāma, metaphorical transformation.”
in Sanskrit as it does in English. But once again in strong (if subtle!) contrast to Yāmuna, whose intellectual adversaries were hostile to the very existence of the Pāñcarātra as a legitimate religion, it seems that Veṅkaṭanātha's forked-tongued opponents may have lain closer at hand.

The *Pāñcarātrarakṣā*’s relationship to the logical-epistemological tradition embodied by Yāmuna’s work is further alluded to in its opening prose sentence, which immediately follows this final invocatory verse:

First of all, the absolutely regnant validity of the teachings of the Blessed Viṣṇu has been argued for in works such as the *Mahābhārata*, by such figures as Vyāsa, men who have themselves directly perceived the actual state of reality, as it is conveyed in all of the Vedic revelation.¹⁰

The appeal here is again to the *prima facie* authority of the Pañcarātra, here based on the testimony of mythic luminaries like Vyāsa, whose own reliability depends upon a concatenation of the *pramāṇas*, or kinds of valid knowledge accepted by orthodox philosophy. Their understanding is founded, Veṅkaṭanātha tells us, on the fact that they have directly perceived (*pratyakṣita*, from *pratyakṣa* or ‘perception’) reality as it congrues with the truths of revelation (thus invoking *śabda* or *āgama*, ‘authoritative testimony’). Their trustworthiness thus enables a further inference (or *anumāna*, the third member of the set of widely admitted *pramāṇas*) buttressing the authority of the Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Here we have the classical terms of Nyāya epistemology, turned towards an exclusively textual object, in a neatly sketched shorthand that casts a retrospective glance at Yāmuna’s lengthy logical proof.

**Rite and Contamination**

For all of its linguistic and scholarly brilliance, the *Pāñcarātrarakṣā* was not the only such effort to rationally approach the question of the Pañcarātra canon. We have already briefly touched upon one effort by an anonymous coreligionist of Veṅkaṭanātha’s to organize his scriptural canon and to situate it in space, in the interpolation found in the opening of the Pañcarātra *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*. This passage evidently took its final shape at some point close to Veṅkaṭanātha’s

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¹⁰ *Pāñcarātrarakṣā* [hereafter *Rakṣā*], 2: atra tāvat pratyakṣitasamastavedārthatattvasthitibhiḥ pārāśaryaprabhṛtibhiḥ mahābhāratādibhiḥ bhagavacchāstrasasya sārvabhaumam prāmāṇyam pratayapādi.
own lifetime, judging from the architectural details it presumes about the Varadarājāsvāmin temple in Kāñcīpuram, near to the Śrīvaiṣṇava polymath’s natal village.\(^\text{11}\) This effort, however, was one of several, and despite its wide currency in modern secondary scholarship, the *Jayākhyā*’s notion of the *ratnatraya* seems largely to have been limited to the text itself (though Veṅkaṭanātha, notably, is aware of it).\(^\text{12}\) Evidently the most relevant, from Veṅkaṭanātha’s perspective, was the organization of the Pañcarātra religion as a whole into hierarchically ranked *siddhāntas* or ‘rites.’\(^\text{13}\) Like the Veda, he writes (3), these are four in number, each divided, as the Veda is into śākhās, into numerous *tantras*: the āgamasiddhānta, the mantrasiddhānta, the tantrasiddhānta, and the tantrāntrarasiddhānta. This system provided precisely yet another of the philological, bibliographic schemes that we have seen were operative in the new scriptural corpora of the South.

Unlike the anonymous *tantra* author-compilers, Veṅkaṭanātha set himself the task of rationalizing the often discordant statements of the system of the *siddhāntas*, as it had earlier been presented in works composed in different times and places and for distinct audiences. There was a real urgency to this need for rationalization, owing to a second presumption built into the system. The system of the *siddhāntas* and of their component *tantras* was premised

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11 See references in pg. 42, fn. 34, above.

12 On this point, and on the scriptural history of the four *siddhāntas* discussed in this and the following paragraphs, I rely on the excellent discussion in an unpublished essay by Robert Leach, “The Three Jewels and the Formation of the Pāñcarātra Canon”. As Leach notes, Veṅkaṭanātha refers in passing to the Three Jewels in a way that congers with the *Jayākhyā*’s presentation (*Rākasā*, 47: *ratnatrayam iti prasiddheśu jayākhyasāttvata-pauṣkareśu*, “... among those texts widely known as the ‘three jewels,’ that is the *Jayākhyā*, the *Śāttvata*, and the *Pauṣkara* ...”). However, Veṅkaṭanātha does so not in the context of the discussion of scriptural authenticity, but instead in the introduction to his presentation of the five daily observances that are incumbent on all Pāñcarātrika initiates, where he proceeds to quote *Jayākhyā* 22.64cd–81ab. Pointing to Veṅkaṭanātha’s early life in the environs of Kāñcī, Leach suggests (“The three jewels”) that “it might not be wholly implausible” that the *ratnatraya* idea was Veṅkaṭanātha’s own innovation that was subsequently incorporated in the *Jayākhyā*’s opening. I find this unlikely; perhaps Veṅkaṭanātha was aware of an earlier version of the *adhiḥkāḥ pāṭhaḥ* interpolation, or both texts may be drawing on another authority.

13 Neither Leach, Rastelli, nor any of the scholarship they draw upon has offered a translation for this Pañcarātra-specific usage of *siddhānta* (which usually connotes an ‘authoritative conclusion’ in śāstric argument, though cf. the Śaivasiddhānta, the ‘authoritative [or orthodox] religion of Śiva’). I propose the English equivalent ‘rite’ on analogy with the Christian Latin rite or Byzantine rite.
on the avoidance of *saṃkara* or ‘mixture’. The practice of an individual temple or household could, it was presumed, only be performed according to the rule of a single *siddhānta* and following the ordinances of a single *tantra*: to do otherwise is, in the language of the sources Veṅkaṭanātha draws upon throughout, to invite disaster. The appeal to the avoidance of *saṃkara* was thus a powerful tool for the bibliographic organization of the *siddhānta*—a sort of scriptural firewall—that possessed palpable consequences in the social life of their adherents. Veṅkaṭanātha’s principle authority for his presentation of this doctrine is the *Pādmasaṃhitā*, which he cites extensively (10–16), giving in effect a running commentary on long quotations of the text. This is the same text, as we have seen, that the composers of the *adhikaḥ pāṭhaḥ* interpolation link to the *Jayākhya*, as a commentary is connected to its root-text. However, for the *Jayākhya* interpolators, who were likely near-contemporaries of Veṅkaṭanātha’s, the risk of *saṃkara* could be dismissed by fiat: as he instructs Brahmā in the liturgy he is instituting, that text has Viṣṇu simply declare that the priests in Kāñcipuram “should always worship me according to the *Jayākhya* accompanied by the *Pādma tantra*. As these form a root-text and commentary, there is in this case no problem of scriptural mixture between these two *tantras*.14 Veṅkaṭanātha, writing in his own voice and not that of his deity, could not resort to such arguments from authority. While he thus shares his anonymous coreligionists’ rationalizing philological project, Veṅkaṭanātha is led to employ substantially different methods.

Veṅkaṭanātha signals his awareness of this problem in the opening of the *Pañcarātrarakṣā* when he writes (4): *asaṃkīrṇā ceyaṃ vyavasthā pramāṇasa- hakṛtapāramparyaparyālocanayā vyavasthāpyā*, “And it is this arrangement [of the *siddhānta*] in its unmixed state that itself needs to be arranged, through a critical investigation of the textual tradition.” This serves as a statement of purpose for the entirety of the *Pañcarātrarakṣā*’s opening chapter, adumbrating Veṅkaṭanātha’s major contribution to the practice of scriptural philology. Set against the background of the work of bricolage and bibliographic synthesis that was the hallmark of the *tantra* and *purāṇa* composers, we can discern continuity at the level of terminology, but genuine innovation at the level of method. Veṅkaṭanātha preserves the bibliographic scaffolding of the system of the *siddhāntas* and the need to avoid their contamination, but takes this as the warrant for a completely different sort of scholarly project than can be seen

14 *Jayākhya, adhikaḥ pāṭhaḥ*, vv. 111cd–112: *jayākhyanātha pādmena tantreṇa sahitena vai mūlavyākhyanānapābhyām samarca-yatu mām sadā | na tantrasaṅkaro doṣas tantrayor anayor iha ||
in the *ex cathedra* prohibitions of the scriptural texts themselves. In consonance with his indebtedness to Naiyāyikas like Yāmuna, he explicitly gestures towards the *pramāṇas*, the criteria of valid knowledge that supply a watchword to the logical epistemologists. ‘Critical’ in the translation given above renders *pramāṇasahakṛtya*, more literally ‘accompanied by a valid means of knowledge.’ The study of the *siddhānta*-system could only be admitted as licit insofar as it accords with the accepted truth conditions established in a more widely accepted and acceptable knowledge system like Nyāya. The sense of *pramāṇa* here however, exceeds its strict sense of an epistemological criterion: the term indexes precisely Veṅkaṭanātha’s own scholarly self-understanding of what he is doing, in a way that extends from Yāmuna’s logical demonstration but is answerable to the evidentiary conditions of textual interpretation. By referring to his scholarly project as *pramāṇasahakṛtya*, Veṅkaṭanātha suggests that the *Pāñcarātrarakṣā* be understood as a critical enterprise, in a way similar to how the term has been used to distinguish the textual scholarship of the early modern and modern West. But this methodological leap that did not take place in a vacuum: Veṅkaṭanātha, the lion among philosophers and poets, was equally leonine in the company of a wider, if now almost entirely unknown, company of Vaiṣṇava critics and textual exegetes.

**Earlier Canons of Vaiṣṇava Textual Criticism**

When Veṅkaṭanātha actually sets down to the task he sets himself, carefully citing and adjudicating the testimony of these scriptures, what emerges is a quite new relationship to his textual object. This can be seen first of all in his approach to a problem that is collateral to the *siddhānta*-system as such. Veṅkaṭanātha addresses the troubling presence of passages in both the scriptures of the Pañcarātrins and the other great ritual tradition of the southern Vaiṣṇavas, the Vaikhānasas, in which each of the two religions of Viṣṇu appear to condemn the observances of the other. After first citing an unnamed Vaikhānasa work, in which the Pañcarātra is rejected on the grounds of its being non-Vedic, and the Pañcarātrin text *Tantrasārasamuccaya*, in which both the efficacy and the propriety of the Vaikhānas a work, in which the Pañcarātra is rejected on the grounds of its being non-Vedic, and the Pañcarātrin text *Tantrasārasamuccaya*, in which both the efficacy and the propriety of the Vaikhānasas is called into question, Veṅkaṭanātha turns to the yet more problematic appearance of such passages in major works of scripture.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^\text{15}\) Rakṣā, 23–24: yāni ca pādmapārameśvarādiṣv ativādavacanāni tāni nūnam ikṣubhakṣaṇa-
And as for the abusive statements found in such scriptures as the Pādma and the Pārameśvara samhitā-s, surely these were interpolated by those eager to eat sugarcane [ikṣubhakṣaṇacikīrṣubhiḥ¹⁶], or they were intro-

cikīrṣubhiḥ praksiptāni parasparasthānākramaṇalolupair *paṭubhir [Ed’s ms. ja; Ed. vaṭubhir] vā pūjakādhamair niveśitāni.

¹⁶ The text here is problematic. I adopt with some hesitation the reading accepted by the Pāñcarātrarakṣā’s editors, despite the strong attestation of a variant reading ikṣubhakṣaṇakartṛcikīrṣubhiḥ (this is found in the edition’s mss ka, kha, ga, gha, the last of these being the editors’ professed “best available” ms.). This latter reading was accepted by Virarāghavācārya in his edition of Veṅkaṭanātha’s rakṣā texts; he also supplies the explanatory note “vaikhānasān pāñcarātrikāṃ ca ikṣubhakṣaṇākārăna—sotsāhakalahaprayāttān kartum icchadbhiḥ”, (“... by those wishing to make the Vaikhānasas and the Pañcarātrins into performers of sugar-cane eating, [i.e.] be engaged in violent quarrels.”). This is nevertheless a strained phrase that is difficult to justify in the language of an author of such polished elegance as Veṅkaṭanātha. It is in fact typical of the author’s style that this compound seems to embed within it both a learned reference in Sanskrit and a turn of phrase borrowed from the spoken Tamil of his day: ikṣubhakṣaṇa recalls the grammarian’s example ikṣubhakṣika “a piece of candy” (thus Kāśikāvṛtti ad Pāṇini 3.3.11), while the underlying sense of the expression—that the dishonest interpolators were above all greedily self-interested in feathering their own nests—recalls the Tamil idiom karumpu tiṇṇak kūli (‘wages for eating sugarcane,’ said of a pleasant task by which one profits further). The idiom is available in the modern language, but it possesses a history stretching back before Veṅkaṭanātha’s own time: it can be found in the commentaries on Nammāḻvār’s Tiruvāymŏḻi of Pēriyavācārya and Vaṭukkuttiruvītippiḷḷai, both active in Śrīraṅgam in the late thirteenth century. Commenting on Tiruvāymŏḻi 9.1.8, both include the phrase karumpu tiṇṇak kūli kōṭṟupparāip pole ivarkaḷaïy apektikka venṭuve Ṇukku, “I must rely only on them, just as I would on those who give wages for eating sugarcane.” Both commentaries (respectively called the ‘24,000-unit’ commentary and the Īṭu or ‘36,000-unit’) are regarded as the written transcriptions of the Śrīvaiṣṇava master Nampiḷḷai’s oral teachings on the Tiruvāymŏḻi; on their mixture of literary and colloquial registers see K.K.A. Venkatachari, The Manipravāḷa literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas: 12th to 15th century A.D. (Bombay: Ananthacharya Research Institute, 1978), 72ff. I would like to record my gratitude to Dominic Goodall and Jean-Luc Chevillard for their suggestions of the interpretation of Veṅkaṭanātha’s phrase, and for directing me to these parallels in the Kāśikā and the Īṭu.

Further, a closely parallel expression also occurs in a contemporaneous inscription found on the second prākāra wall of the Raṅgasvāmin temple in Śrīraṅgam datable to the second decade of the fourteenth century, thus easily within Veṅkaṭanātha’s lifetime and in a location with which he is closely associated. This forms a short independent prāśasti text in honor of the king of Kerala, Ravivarman Kulaśekharadeva, attributed to one Kavibhūṣaṇa. The fourteenth of this sixteen-verse sequence reads (Epigraphia Indica vol. 4, no. 18, ln. 12) sevyas tais tair gguṇair eva sevitum yad dadāsi nah [[] esā

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duced by clever, unscrupulous priests, who wished to infringe upon each others' religious establishments.

The first of several arguments that Veṅkaṭanātha entertains here is that these verses are later interpolations into the pristine scriptures, and he presents a seemingly disenchanting argument for such an inclusion—the desire to traduce the texts' readers and to serve the interpolators' own selfish purposes. He is thus evidently willing to turn his critical eye onto the works he and his coreligionists see as divine revelation, not just onto the dubious authorities of a doctrinal opponent (as in his condemnation of the pāpiṣṭhāḥ found in the Śatadūṣaṇī).

It is by no means novel that Veṅkaṭanātha is alert to the fact that texts can so disfigured: the idea of prakṣepa or 'interpolation' long predates him, appearing, for instance, in the discussions of literary commentators in the rejection of spurious verses. What is remarkable here, however, is the counterfactual with which he continues:

On the other hand, after consulting the readings of multiple independent manuscripts, should we consider these passages in which the [two sys-
tems] revile each other to be genuine, they need nevertheless to be understood as intended only to praise the system in question. This is just like such cases as the condemnation of the practice of the morning oblation prior to sunrise, which is intended to praise the offering occurring after the sunrise, as [in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa]: “Those who offer the morning oblation before the sun’s rise speak untruth each and every morning.”

Here Veṅkaṭanātha explicitly demonstrates just what a ‘critical examination’ of texts constitutes for him: that we might through a systematic investigation establish the incidence of a given textual passage, “after consulting the readings of multiple independent manuscripts” (asaṃkīrṇabahukośapāṭhāvalokanāt). While there are certainly other references by scholars writing in Sanskrit to the investigation of the incidence of a reading in multiple copies of the same work, these are exceedingly rare. Veṅkaṭanātha’s expression here reveals his familiarity with methods of textual criticism as it was practiced by his co-religionists very close to his own era. For evidence of this, we can rely on the testimony of Uḍāli Varadarāja, the earliest extant commentator on the Rāmāyaṇa, whose Vivekatilaka (“The Ornament of Discernment”), was probably completed in the late eleventh or twelfth century. In the opening verses to this now-fragmentary commentary, Uḍāli writes:

20 See, for example, the sixteenth century commentary Vaiṣṇavatoṣiṇī on Bhāgavatapurāṇa 10.12.1: etac cādhyāyatrayaṃ kecit tattvadarśinaḥ vaiṣṇavāḥ vigītam ity āhuḥ. tac cāsaṃgatam, bahupustakeṣu dṛśyamānatvāt (“Some learned Vaiṣṇavas claim that these three chapters [i.e. 10.10–10.12] are inauthentic. This however does not stand to reason, as they can be found in many manuscripts.”) I draw this reference from Bhattacharya, “Use of Manuscripts in Textual Criticism,” p. 224 n. 3; see also his references to Gopālacakravartin’s commentary on the Saptasatī, (219, 221, and 223, nn.). This reference, though much later than Veṅkaṭanātha, suggests that this interest in collation may have been something more widely shared among scholars operating within a Vaiṣṇava theistic milieu. Prior to Veṅkaṭanātha’s time, though almost certainly unavailable to him, is Hemacandra’s statement in his Deśīnāmālā, ad 1.47: bahutarapustakaprāmāṇyāc ca niyate vartmani pravṛt-tāḥ smaḥ (“[As opposed to those who read avaacciam for ayatanciam], we are embarked upon the surer path, owing to the authority of a greater number of manuscripts.”) On this latter work—a remarkable product of twelfth-century Prakrit lexicographical philology—cf. Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out,” 402–405 (Pollock’s rendering of this same passage (403) somewhat differs from my own); see also Herman Tieken, “Hala’s Sattasaī as a Source of Pseudo-Deśī Words,” Bulletin d’Etudes Indiennes 10 (1992): 221–267, for a critique of the adequacy of Hemacandra’s methods.
Certain men, lacking sufficient ability with other scripts like the nāgara alphabet, have in certain places copied out a faulty reading of the text, following the traditional understanding. And as a result, in the present work, the corrected reading can be seen here and there, owing to the examination of many manuscripts that have been brought from many locales.\textsuperscript{21}

There is every reason to believe that this important work of scholarship by his fellow Vaishnava was known to Veṅkaṭanātha. While it is therefore possible to see a direct echo of Uḍāli's bahukośaparīkṣaṇāt (‘owing to the examination of many copies,’ written in verse) in Veṅkaṭanātha's bahukośapāṭhāvalokanād (‘after consulting the readings of many manuscripts’),\textsuperscript{22} it seems equally likely that both men were drawing on a piece of scholarly conventional wisdom, an implicit guideline of practice to check the written testimony of more than one copy in case of doubt. Uḍāli, moreover, not only not explicitly argued for such a proto-empiricist text criticism, he apparently practiced what he preached, rejecting as spurious the so-called Ādityahṛdayam or hymn to the sun from the Rāmāyāṇa's Yuddhakāṇḍa.\textsuperscript{23} If it is possible to generalize from our scanty testimony of Uḍāli Varadarāja's editorial and scholarly habits—and

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  \item \textsuperscript{21} nāgarādiṣu varṇeṣu nātyantaniṇpurānair naraḥ \n  \textsuperscript{*}khaṇḍasah [my conjecture; khaṇḍane, \n  ms.] skhalitāḥ pāṭhaḥ pāramparyena likhyate \n  \| ato ‘tra samyakpāṭhaś ca tatra tatra pra-\n  darśyate \n  \| bahudeśasamānītabahukośaparīkṣaṇāt \n  || I do not currently have access to the \n  sole surviving manuscript of this unpublished, lacunose work (GOM.1R3409). I rely instead \n  on the extract quoted in Raghavan, “Uḍāli’s commentary on the Rāmāyāṇa. The date \n  and identification of the author and the discovery of his commentary,” Annals of Oriental \n  Research, University of Madras 6, no. 2 (Sanskrit section, separately paginated) (1942): 6. \n  \item \textsuperscript{22} Not only does this direct invocation closely accord with Veṅkaṭanātha's counterfactual, \n  it also presages Nilakantha’s oft-cited account of his methods of Mahābhārata textual \n  criticism by approximately a half-millennium (on these, see Pollock, The Language of \n  the Gods, 230–231; and Minkowski, “What makes a work ‘traditional’? On the Success of \n  Nilakantha’s Mahābhārata commentary,” in Boundaries, Dynamics, and Construction of \n  Traditions in South Asia, ed. Federico Squarcini (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2005), \n  225–252). \n  \item \textsuperscript{23} So at least is he said to have done by the later Śrīvaiṣṇava commentator Govindarāja \n  (ca. 1475–1500, cf. Rangaswami Aiyangar, “Govindarāja,” Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental \n  Research Institute 23 (1943): 41). See Raghavan, “Uḍāli’s commentary on the Rāmāyāṇa.” On \n  Uḍāli’s rejection of the Adityahṛdayam see Robert Goldman, Sally Sutherland Goldman, \n  and Barend van Nooten Goldman, trans., The Rāmāyāṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient \n  India. Volume 6: Yuddhakāṇḍa (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1341– \n  1342, who report Govindarāja testimony about his silence on the independent hymn’s \n  verses, and that it is not reckoned in his enumeration of the sargaś that make up the Yud-
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Veṅkaṭanātha’s counterfactual suggests precisely that we can—then it is also possible to impute a preexisting tension finding expression in the Pāñcarātrarakṣā, between an emergent critical impulse that acknowledges the problem of authenticity in even the texts most valued by Vaiṣṇavas, and a desire to conservatively retain the shape of the Pāñcarātra canon.

Where Veṅkaṭanātha’s real innovation lies, then, is his insistence that these sources be asaṃkīrṇa, rendered ‘independent’ in the passage translated above, but literally ‘unmixed.’ This is a grammatical variation on the theme of saṃkara, the term used to characterize the system of the siddhāntas in the chapter’s opening statement on method; here, however Veṅkaṭanātha certainly seems to be referring to multiple unrelated copies of the same text. For the anonymous theorists of the siddhāntas, saṃkara needed to be avoided in order to retain the distinctiveness of each siddhānta at the level of its liturgical practice. In repurposing this, Veṅkaṭanātha focused in on a principle for adjudicating readings similar to the avowed methods of Uḍāli’s Vivekatilaka, but possessing a sharpened sense of the stakes of ascertaining the independence of individual manuscript witnesses as a means of assessing their shared text. A doctrine earlier employed by the anonymous philologist-compilers of the tantras to theorize the organization of their canon thus furnished Veṅkaṭanātha with the conceptual raw materials to think about the constitution of an individual text. While this may not have been original to him, his is the most sophisticated and self-aware reflection on such explicitly text-critical and text-historical principles that I have ever seen in a premodern Sanskrit author.24

Reading further in the Pāñcarātrarakṣā, we find yet more evidence of this expanded sense of a philological problematic. Veṅkaṭanātha’s project throughout is to argue for the hierarchized unity of the different siddhāntas within the ambit of a single Pāñcarātra religion, with the tantra- and tantrāntarasiddhāntas clearly subordinate to the two ‘higher’ siddhāntas, and with the āgamasiddhānta granted ultimate primacy.25 In the course of tracing down the subsidiary objections to this hierarchy, Veṅkaṭanātha turns to a passage that casts crucial light on the origins and wider context of his text-critical thinking. He

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24 P.K. Gode’s brief note (“Textual Criticism in the Thirteenth Century,” in Woolner Commemoration Volume, ed. Mohammad Shafi (Lahore: Meherchand Lacchmandas, 1940), 106–108) on the critical principles in Vādirāja and Hemādri forms a partial exception to this, but neither man evinces the same sort of methodological perspicuity seen here.

25 Again, see Leach, “The Three Jewels.”
begins this discussion quite remarkably with an exact textual reference: “in the twenty-second chapter of the Sāttvatasamhitā, in the definition of a religious teacher that follows immediately upon the definition of the samayin, putraka, and sādhaka classes of initiates.” Authors writing in Sanskrit are rarely so precise; this marks a little innovation, but a real one all the same. Venkatañātha evinces a similar precision elsewhere, both in the Pāṇcarātraraksā and in other texts; it appears that scholarly scruple possessed for him a certain rhetorical demonstration value. While his practice of citation cannot easily be generalized from this limited evidence, it suggests that Venkatañātha drew his quotations from physical text-artifacts, rather than quoting from memory; the density of his references further implies that he made reference to a collection of such texts—a nascent Pañcarātra archive—in order to support his argument.

The passage which he then goes on to quote here is highly significant:

26 Rakṣā, 29: srīsāttvate dvāviṃśe paricchede samayiputrakasādhakalakṣaṇoktyanantaram ācāryalakṣane.

27 Elsewhere in the first chapter of the Pāṇcarātraraksā, he cites “the divisions of the siddhāntas and their subdivisions, as they are illustrated in the revered Pauṣkara, in its chapter on the discrimination of different kinds of ritually qualified practitioners, with the intention of delimiting the domain of these practitioners” (Rakṣā, 6: śrīpauskare cādhikārinirūpaṇādhāvyaye pratiṣṭhitādhiqvāyasaṃsāh dātvāhīprāyenaiva siddhāntabhedas tadavāntarabhedaś ca darśitaḥ); more briefly, he cites by name the Pādma’s chapters on the disinstallation of old temple images (16, jīrṇoddhārādhyāye), and on penance (ibid., prāyaścittādhyāye); the Pārameśvara’s chapters on image installation (17, pratiṣṭhādhyāye), on penance (18), and on the order of the liturgy (p. 19 caturvidhāpūjānirūpādhyāye; he notes that these verses are repeated in the chapter on penances, ibid.). All of these citations are given in rapid succession, as a series of proof-texts for the avoidance of sāṃkarya; note that none are as exact as the reference to the Sāttvata. The only other text cited with such precision in the Pāṇcarātraraksā is the Bhagavadgītā (9, citing the eighteenth chapter), a work almost certainly known by heart by every one of its intended readers (contrast Maheśvarānanda’s citation habits, infra, pp. 142ff). He shows similar scruple in some of the citations found in his Saccaritraraksā, citing the adhyāya and section of quotations from scriptural works (Pārameśvara [137–139], Viṣṇutattva [139, 140], Kāloṭṭara [139]), the Gītābhāṣya of Yādavaprakāśa (141), and the Tattvanirṇaya of Nārāyaṇa (ibid), as well as smṛti texts (citing the eighty-second adhyāya of the Viṣṇudharma [164; the passage in question is found in the eighthieth chapter of its edition] and seventy-third chapter of the Nāradīya [p. 181]). This list is not exhaustive; it is striking that most of these references are closely clustered together.

28 Rakṣā, 29 (= Sāttvata 22: 22–27): tatra vai trividhām vākyāṁ dūryāṁ ca munibhāsitam | pauṛuṣaṁ cārvindākṣa tadbhedam avadhāraya || yad arthādhyāya asaṃditthāṁ svaccham alpākṣaraṁ sthiram | tat pārameśvaraṁ vākyāṁ ajñāsidhāṁ hi mokṣadām || praśamsakaṁ vai siddhināṁ sampravartakāṁ apy atha | sarveśāṁ rañjakāṁ gūḍhaniścayī-
[Scriptural] utterance is of three types: divine, the utterances of sages, and that of human origin. Lotus-eyed one, pay close attention to the difference between these. The utterance that is replete with meaning, uncontestable, clear, precise and fixed is a creation of God: it has the force of a command, and gives liberation. That which describes magical accomplishments or which gives instructions [in their acquisition], which is pleasing to anyone, and which capable of rendering clear hidden matters, should be understood as a sage’s utterance: it gives the results of all four stages of life. An utterance that is incoherent, disconnected, prolix yet spare in meaning, and which does not complete a more primary teaching is known to be a human utterance. It should be avoided, [since] it is a repository of accomplishments that yield no result, and it leads to hell. But a human teaching that congrues with widely-known subject matter, that is coherent in its teaching, and insightful may be accepted, just as it is were a sage’s teaching.

The philological interests of the scriptural author-compilers are here shown en clair, as are their concerns with controlling the textual proliferation all around them, a proliferation in which they themselves were of course active participants. The question of textual corruption and of interpolation is in fact something that the Pāñcarātra scriptural composers themselves provide criteria for recognizing: Veṅkaṭanātha’s anonymous predecessors were as concerned with separating good text from bad, as was he.

In a splendid irony, however, these verses themselves were condemned by certain Vaiṣṇava readers as interpolations, as Veṅkaṭanātha informs us, filling out in the process the larger institutional context of his philology:29

Here, ‘which does not complete a more primary teaching’ refers to having a meaning which contradicts either a divine utterance or that of the sages;

karaṇaṁ kṣamam || munivākyaṃ ca tad viddhi caturvargaphalapradam | anarthaḥ kṣamam asaṁbaddham alpārtham śabdādambaram || anirvāhakaḥ ādyokter vākyan tat pauruṣaṁ smṛtam | heyaṁ cānarthasiddhinām akārama narakāvaham || prasiddhārthānudsavādām yat saṁgatārtham vilakṣaṇam || api cet pauruṣaṁ vākyam grāhyaṃ tan munivākyaṃt

29 Rakṣā, 29–30: atrānirvāhakaḥ ādyokteḥ iti divyamunibhāṣitayor viruddhārthatvam ucyate. asaṁbaddham iti pārvāparaviruddhatvam. tad idam ubhayam api niκṛṣṭaṁ saṅhītātyāgena uktiṣṭaṁ saṅhītāparigrahavacane srisātvatapaṭaṅkaraṇārādyāpyādpādmiṃdvirodhāḥ sāmānyena sarvasaṁkaranisedhaparasvapūrvāparagranthavirodham avadhārayanto dhṛṣṭa-buddhayāḥ katicanānarthānāravādāpyvṛttasthānākramaṇalabdhāgamam-antrasiddhāntābhimānipuruṣakṛtaprakṣepo ‘yam iti manyante.
‘disconnected’ means that it contradicts what precedes or follows it [in its context]. Some bold intellects, noticing that both of these two [qualities ascribed to the pauruṣavākya] themselves contain a contradiction with earlier and later passages that aim to prohibit all scriptural conflation in general, in that they contradict the statements of such works as the Śāttvata itself, the Pauṣkara, the Nāradiya, and the Pādma in regard to their position of adopting a hierarchically superior scripture by way of rejecting an inferior scripture. They believe this to be an interpolation, committed by men who are arrogant partisans of the āgama- and mantrasiddhāntas, greedy to infringe on the religious establishments that are maintained under the tenets of the tantra- and tantrāntarasiddhāntas.

It is easy enough to detect a sarcastic undertone when Veṅkaṭanātha speaks of the “certain bold intellects” (dhṛṣṭabuddhayaḥ katicana) who had so athetized the passage, on both textual grounds of its disagreement with other scriptures and on the practical grounds that it seems yet another effort at self-aggrandizement, in this case intramurally within the Vaiṣṇava fold. These would appear to be scholars who were grosso modo inheritors of the sort of text-critical project that animated Uḍāli Varadarāja’s Rāmāyaṇa scholia. The heightened sensitivity that Veṅkaṭanātha demonstrates towards the contents of his religion’s canon was not his alone; he appears to have known fellow Vaiṣṇavas—above and beyond the anonymous tantra-authors themselves—who were willing to exercise their critical judgment over their scriptures. In the event, Veṅkaṭanātha rejects this effort to argue against the authenticity of this passage, perhaps because it supplies such a useful warrant for his own strictly text-internal critical efforts. As in the case of the mutual vituperations of the Pañcarātrins and the Vaikhānasas, Veṅkaṭanātha’s strategy is one of conservation rather than excision.30

Others, however, through the same line of thinking presented earlier, hold that these aim to praise the mantra- (or the āgama-) siddhānta. After all, in all the great extent of time since the Golden Age at the beginning of this cosmic era, the great Rṣis—whether in the Mahābhārata, or in any of

30 Rakṣā, 30: anye tu prāguktanyāyena mantrasiddhāntādīstutipatātām ātiṣṭhante. na khalv etāvatā kālena kalpārambhakṛtyugat prabhṛti saṃtanyamanēṣu sāttvataśāstrasamhitās-rotohedeṣu apakṛṣṭasamhitām pariṣṭhāsaṃhitāḥ kāṣcit pariṣṭhāsamḥitiḥ mahābhā-rate śrīmadvarāhahapuṇādiṣu vā parahśāteṣu pañcarātraprastāveṣu mahārṣayaḥ sūcayanti. na cārvācīnair āpy acāryair itaḥ pūrvaḥ tathā kṛtam iti sampradāyavaidāḥ śiṣṭā vidām āsuḥ. ataḥ śiṣṭānuṣṭhānabalād eva stutipatratvām adhyavasyāmaḥ.
the great purānas like the Varāha, or in the corpus of the Pañcaratra which numbers more than a hundred texts—have never indicated that someone has rejected one of the inferior scriptures amongst the various traditions that make up the scriptures of the extant Sātvata [i.e. Pañcaratra] system and adopted another, superior scripture. Nor, furthermore, do any of those learned men schooled in the tradition know of this being done at some earlier point, even by the later ācāryas. So it is that, in accord with the force of learned custom, we hold that this passage is meant to praise.

In the pedantic way that he rebukes these would-be critics, we can perhaps see whom exactly it was that the Pañcaratrarakṣā stigmatized as snakes in its opening verse: it is those members of his own religion who are bent on rashly cutting apart the fabric of the Vaishnava scriptures whom Veṅkaṭanātha wished to delegitimatize. His solution here is again a conservative one, relying on well-worn exegetical methods rather than text-critical excision: he takes implicit recourse here to the theories of Mīmāṁsā, the orthodox school of Vedic textual interpretation, to both defuse the passages' meaning (by taking away their injunctive force and claiming them to be praśastyarthā, only meant to praise, like the Veda's explanatory arthavādas) and to subordinate them to the authoritative realm of traditionally-sanctioned usage. The reference to "the force of learned custom," śiṣṭānusthānabalād, obliquely invokes the argument of the third section of the first adhyāya of the Mīmāṁsāsūtra, the so-called smṛtipāda, in which the injunctive force of non-Vedic but morally valorized religious practices are cautiously admitted by the ritualists.31 This argument is followed by a brief rehearsal of several others, couched in an appeal to the normative pramāṇas of direct perceptual experience and inference, centering on the question of the enduring presence of the hierarchically 'lower' siddhāntas in actually existing temple worship.32
This appeal—itself broadly empirical—really lies at the heart of his argument, as becomes increasingly clear in the final pages of the chapter. His treatment of the problem of the avoidance of samkara to actual temple worship is intricate, involving an attempt to rationalize several attested alternatives to the siddhānta scheme. There is even a suggestion of the turbulent wider world in which Veṅkaṭanātha wrote, in the wake of the breakdown of Coḻa imperial hegemony.\textsuperscript{33} In working through this argument—here his main text is an extended passage from the Pārameśvarasamhitā—Veṅkaṭanātha returns to a three-fold model of dīva, munibhāśita, and pauruṣa whose inclusion in the Sāttvata he had earlier labored to defend. While unpacking the Pārameśvara’s treatment of this model, he tellingly defines the last of the three terms as “a human utterance, something taught by a mere mortal not possessed of yoga which, differing from divine utterances and that taught by the sages, is potentially lacking in validity”.\textsuperscript{34} Here, in line with the theories of the earlier author-compilers of the Sāttvata and the Pārameśvara, Veṅkaṭanātha acknowledges the existence within his own tradition of that for which he castigates others in his Śatadūṣaṇī: the presence of works of human authorship mixed in with

\begin{quote}
should abandon hierarchically ‘lower’ scriptures in favor of those more highly ranked], then after all the time, tantra- and tantrāntara- [siddhānta] establishments would be overrun by the mantrasiddhānta and the āgamasiddhānta. And even if they had managed to endure prior to the present, the utter extinction of the tantra- and tantrāntara- siddhānta would eventually result, since the force of these [higher siddhāntas] would prevail. Now, you might think that the tantra and tantrāntara siddhāntas would possibly endure everywhere, since they are filled, in the first instance, with this-worldly results and since men overwhelmingly tend towards the three worldly goals of human life [instead of the fourth goal of mokṣa or final liberation]; but in that case, according to the same line of thinking just given, it would stand to reason that there would only be the observance of those two, the tantra and tantrāntara, in religious establishments devoted to the well-being of king and realm, inasmuch as they specialize in worldly goals. After all, it is not easy to find men devoted solely to spiritual ends among kings or their subjects.” I understand these counterfactuals to each be grounded in an appeal to pramāṇa: the absence of direct evidence of the obliteration of the lower siddhāntas in the first case, and the negative inference—grounded in an oblique appeal to human nature—about their lack of aggrandizement in the second.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} For instance, see Veṅkaṭanātha’s comments on the problem that arises “regarding those who are ignorant as to how they should proceed in the cases of those shrines in which the certain knowledge of the tradition has been lost, owing to such circumstances as long-standing disturbances in the realm” (Rakṣā, 41: cīrakālaśrāṭraśobhadinā vīchinnapāram-
paryapratyabhijñāneṣu sthāneṣu kiṃkartiṣvatiṁśādān prati).

\textsuperscript{34} Rakṣā, 39–40: divyāt munibhāśitac ca vyaṭiriktaṃ sambhavadapramāṇyaṃ ayogibhīḥ manujāmātraik praniṣṭaṃ pauruṣan vāyaṃ, my emphasis.
Veṅkaṭanātha and the limits of philological argument

divine revelation. For all that he is critical of other Vaiṣṇava efforts to exclude texts from the canon, he here acknowledges that some of the scriptures of his religion simply must have been composed by human beings. These deserve a place in the accepted list of works, but hierarchically ranked below works that (on strong text-internal as well as external grounds) Veṅkaṭanātha was certain were the teachings of Viṣṇu himself. Using the techniques bequeathed to him by his unknown Vaiṣṇava forebears, he was able to articulate a theory of his religion’s texts that asserted their supermundane origins while acknowledging their worldly, historical existence.

On the Shores of the Milk Ocean: Veṅkaṭanātha’s Poetry as Philology

Not only was Veṅkaṭanātha a precise textual scholar, he evidently worked within a milieu in which other scholars were practicing similar methods with the Pañcarātra corpus. Given how little we know of the social world of medieval philology, it is difficult to draw wider conclusions about the institutional bases of such scholarship, but we can infer that in Veṅkaṭanātha’s immediate context, the task of scriptural philology extended beyond the authors and compilers of the texts themselves, while in his own scholarship we can see an apparent tension between the conservative defense of the canon and a thinking-through of a new conceptual basis on which philological scholarship might operate. The novelty of his approach can be seen first of all in the technical details of his argument—his care with citation and his awareness of the problems inherent in manuscript transmission—but also in the sense of the problematic itself, that the a priori arguments inherited from Yāmuna were not sufficient to the complex empirical situation with which he was faced, and that this situation called for methods of study that were rigorously reasoned and attentive to the verbal fabric of the samhitās. Philological methods and theological politics seem to have been significantly interanimating in the Pāñcarātraraksā: this can be seen above all in Veṅkaṭanātha’s adoption of the saṅkara model of his scriptural sources as a general organon of textual interpretation. Textual ‘mixture’ was to be avoided at all cost, whether in the hierarchy of authors, the teaching and practice of ritual observance, or in the adjudication of the reliability of a given scriptural passage. For Veṅkaṭanātha, these problems all possessed a single logic, and the methods of their avoidance were thus mutually reinforcing.

I would further suggest that Veṅkaṭanātha’s novelty extends beyond just philological technique and into something that might be called the transfor-
mation of philological consciousness. Practice and consciousness are in any case mutually constitutive, but here the work undertaken in this little treatise (when measured against such massive productions of Veṅkaṭanātha’s as the Rahasyatrayasāram or the Nyāyasiddhasaṅkha) suggests ways to look at other portions of his oeuvre in a different light. Yet it is not Veṅkaṭanātha’s other śāstric works that the Pāñcarātararaksā especially illuminates, but instead his literary writings. We saw earlier how the text’s opening verse—an exquisite little masterpiece in its own right—constituted a deeply intertextual, playful meditation on the central philological problem of an authoritative textual tradition and its fraught interpretation. This is a theme seen over and over again in Veṅkaṭanātha’s poetry, perhaps most acutely in his Hamsasamanḍeṣa, a reimagined sequel to Kālidāsa’s great Meghadūta. As Bronner and Shulman have characterized this remarkable poem, it is shot through with “a complex and sometimes ironic awareness of his unique place within a millennium-old tradition”, driven by the “radical and conscious reconfiguration” of intertexts found in Kālidāsa and the epics, in which their metrically keyed phrases, figures of speech, and recurrent themes are taken up and transfigured. This relationship to his literary sources, extending from integrative reinvention to something very much like intralinguistic literary translation, points towards a relationship with prior texts that amounts to a creative literary philology.

This can be seen most acutely, however, in the Dramiḍopaniṣattātparyaratanāvalī, Veṅkaṭanātha’s Sanskrit vade mecum to Nammāḻvār’s Tamil Tiruvāyommōḻi. Most of this text is devoted to a highly compressed tour of its mammoth precursor, virtuosically crafted into the regal sragdharā meter. Its opening verses, however, are programmatic: drawing on the foundational myth of the gods’ churning of the milk ocean for the nectar of immortality, Veṅkaṭanātha labors to describe his own effort at interpretation-through-translation. ‘Making a churning-rope of the tradition upon the mountain that is my own intellect’ (prajñākhye manthaśaile … netrayan sampradāyaṃ)—‘the tradition’ here referring to the vigorous habit of exegesis on the text which preceded his work, which he amusingly portrays as ‘lovely in its evident virtues’ (prathitaguṇaruṣaṃ; referring to the churning-rope, this perhaps means ‘bright with broad threads’)”—‘Veṅkaṭeṣa’ (in another low-key śleṣa, this refers to both the author and his deity) was entreated by wise men (vibudhaiḥ, also ‘the gods’); churning the milk ocean of Nammāḻvār’s esoteric work (which, parenthetically, provides the bed for the sleeping Viṣṇu throughout the cosmic night between the

35 See Bronner and Shulman, Poems and Prayers, xxiii–xlvii.
kalpa), he binds up the jewels that thus emerge from the thousand waves of the Tiruvāymōḻi’s sweet songs (the ocean being the proverbial birthplace of gems). The verse is typically dense with detail: all of the textual scholar’s raw materials are in evidence, ranging over his own intellect and learning to the inherited exegesis of his textual object. But above all, there is the text itself, the pregiven stock of authoritative language in need of interpretation, in this case the oceanic breadth of Nammāḻvār’s devotional Tamil masterpiece. Veṅkaṭanātha here reflects on his own situation when faced with this always-prior textual object, and so on both the pleasures of the text and on the sheer effort that making sense of it involves. It is perhaps as good a sketch of the inner workings of a philologist’s psyche as one is likely to find.

For an author so prolific and so epochal in his significance, it is a challenge for the interpreter to know what, if anything, can be said within the compass of the explanation of a single work. Here, at the meeting point between philology and poetry, and between the open acknowledgement of the priority of tradition and the urge to innovation, is perhaps a fitting place to end with Veṅkaṭanātha. That similar energies find expression in his technical scholarship and his literary effusions is interesting in its own right (I am not the first to notice this); it is more widely significant when set within the argument of this essay, on the vicissitudes of philology in the South India of his era. As we have already seen, an interanimation between poetry and philology drove the innovations of form and content in Cekkilār’s Pēriyapurāṇam. Veṅkaṭanātha probably knew Cekkilār’s work—he seems to have known everything—but he likely found it abhorrent, and would have for his part resisted any analogy

36 Dramidopaniṣattātparyaratnāvalī, vs. 2: prajñākhye manthaśaile prathitaghunarucim net-rayan sampradāyaṃ tattallabdhiprasaktair anupadhi vibudhair arthito veṅkaṭesahi | tal-paṃ kalpantayūnaḥ śaṭhjidupaniṣaddugdhasindhuṃ vimathnan grathnāti svādugāthalā-hirīdaśaśatīnirgataṃ ratnajātam ||

37 Unsurprisingly given the mammoth commentarial project of the Śrīvaishnava exegesis on the Tiruvāymōḻi, this question of the traditional fore-structure of understanding preoccupied Veṅkaṭanātha in the opening to his Ratnāvaḷī: in vs. 1, it is the transmission or tradition of Nammāḻvār’s work that mediates its saving power (satharipubhaṇitiḥ ... pāram pāram-parīto ... pratyak pratyakṣayen naḥ, “Śaṭhariṇu’s words through their tradition directly reveal the far shore right before our eyes,” I take the paradox of unmediated mediation to be a deliberate one of Veṅkaṭanātha’s); in vs. 3, his reflections on the aesthetics of the work’s eroticized devotion relies on an appeal to earlier scholastic authority (desīkās tatra dātāḥ, “on this point, the teachers are the messengers”).

38 See Friedhelm Hardy, “The Philosopher As Poet: A Study of Vedāntadeśika’s Dehalīśastuti,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1979): 277–325.

39 See above, 44ff.
with it. But just as certainly, there are subtle connections that unite the great Vaiṣṇava's work with his close contemporary Maheśvarānanda, to whom I now turn. These connections are especially prominent in the antinomian Śaiva's own idiosyncratic fusion of the poetic and the philological. I began my account of Veṅkaṭanātha with a mention of the title—*kavitārkikakesarin*, 'lion among poets and philosophers'—that his tradition had bestowed upon him, suggesting that it might be augmented to reflect his edgy brilliance as a textual scholar. What all of this suggests is that perhaps philology—undenoted, as we have seen, in Sanskrit or Tamil—is already there, by implication, and that it is at the juncture of the priorities, skills, and commitments of poetry and of systematic thought that we may locate a place for the philological.