

## *Introduction*

# *Persian as Koine: Written Persian in World-historical Perspective*

**BRIAN SPOONER AND WILLIAM L. HANAWAY**

### **I. THE HISTORICAL COURSE OF WRITTEN PERSIAN**

Persian emerged as the common language of court life and administration in the Islamic world east of Baghdad in the 8th and 9th centuries (2nd and 3rd centuries into the Islamic era). The process began in Khurasan, the large historical region of southwest-central Asia, which besides the northeast quadrant of modern Iran included most of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, and northern Afghanistan. Persian radiated out from the pre-Islamic cities that became new power centers, filling the vacuum left by the declining political (as distinct from symbolic) role of the Caliphate in Baghdad. Persian spread to its greatest extent five centuries later, under Mongol and Turkic administrations, when it stretched from the Balkans in the west to southern India in the south and along the trade routes into central China in the east. A century later, it began to give way to the rise of vernacular languages—first in the west, where the use of Ottoman Turkish increased in the 15th century. It finally declined significantly in the east in India in the 19th century, where the British replaced it formally with Urdu and English in 1835. Over the past century and a half Persian has undergone a process of functional transformation, passing into the status of a classical language, as locally people began to write in Pashto, Sindhi, Urdu,

and other vernaculars in the peripheral territories of the Islamic world. In the 20th century, at the expense of losing its unitary identity and universally standard form, Persian achieved the modern status of national language in three countries—in Afghanistan, (where it was renamed *dari*), in Iran (as *Fārsi*), and in Tajikistan (where it was renamed *tajiki*, or *tojiki* when transliterated from Cyrillic). It is still spoken widely in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf, and continues to flourish among post-revolutionary diaspora communities in America, Asia, and Europe.

Persian has always been known by native speakers as *Fārsi* (the language of Fars, an area in southern Iran, now a modern province), but *dari* (as it was officially named in Afghanistan's 1964 constitution) was also in common use for Persian in the early centuries of the Islamic era in the northeast (Khurasan)—appropriately so, since *dari* signifies the language of the court (*dar*) of the ruler, which was the site of its reemergence in the Arabic script. The name was changed from *Fārsi* to *tojiki* in Soviet Tajikistan in 1929, along with another change of script calculated to separate the Soviet language community from their non-Soviet co-linguals in Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>1</sup> The modern Afghan change from *Fārsi* to *dari* was a consequence of the competing 20th-century nationalisms of Afghanistan and Iran. Differences in written usage in these three countries has become significant only since they were separated by colonial boundaries, and is noticeable primarily in the adoption of Pashto official terms in *dari* and Soviet Russian terms in *tajiki*, which was also separated from the Persian canon by the change of script.

The advance of Persian in the Arabic script in the 9th century (known in Western literature as New Persian, in distinction from the Middle Persian and Old Persian of the Sasanian-Parthian and Achaemenian periods, respectively) heralded a millennium of Persianate civilization. It expanded quickly to supplant Arabic in a niche that had evolved in the civilizations of western Asia over the previous two and a half millennia. Other languages, and earlier forms of Persian, all of which had been written first in cuneiform and later in various forms of the Aramaic script, had served the needs of the succession of empires from the Assyrian to the Achaemenian in an administrative niche created originally in Mesopotamia with Akkadian, which (as the niche expanded beyond the plain) was joined first by Old Persian and Aramaic. Aramaic has continued in use in western Asia into the modern period. But after less than a century of Greek under Alexander and the Seleucids, Persian returned (as Middle Persian) with the rise of the Parthians

in the second half of the 3rd century BC. In AD 224 the Parthians were followed by the Sasanians, who administered their empire in Middle Persian (with some use of Aramaic) until the Arab conquest in 651. In the gradual process of political and administrative re-accommodation that followed the initial half century or so of the Arab-Islamic sweep through western Asia, Persian gradually resumed its administrative role re-outfitted in the Arabic script and incorporating extensive Arabo-Islamic vocabulary.

The newly universalistic social principles of Islam which were embedded in the new Islamic legal order, based on the principles of the *shari'a* (which was derived from the prescriptions of the Qur'an, supplemented by the record of the Prophet's life and sayings), facilitated the expansion of the administrative arena far beyond the extent of the earlier dynasty-based empires. Over the following millennium, and well into the 19th century, Persian provided the vocabulary that served as the medium not only for the continuation of protocols of administration, diplomacy, and public life (derived from Sasanian and possibly earlier practice), but also for important cultural features relating to administration and social norms for the whole society, and over a much larger area. It is worth noting that a similar relationship between language and organization was developing at roughly the same time in the West between Latin and the Christian Church in the newly established Holy Roman Empire, and in Tang China by the initial establishment of the imperial examination system that coincided with the advance of Buddhism. In the ensuing five centuries Persian became the language of one of the world's greatest literatures—in the sense of the extent and duration of its currency, as well as the variety and quality of its genres. Significant examples have been translated into the world's other major literary languages. Persian also served as the language of administration through Islamic Asia east and north of Mesopotamia. No other language has ever maintained such a monopoly of the medium of writing over so large a territory for so long a period.

The type of data needed to explain this phenomenon are hard to come by. But the explanation appears to lie in the uniqueness of the combination of the cultural heritage of Sasanian court life, administrative practice, and the social formation of its writing class on the one hand, and the canon of literature that developed in the sultanates of the medieval period on the other. Although Persian did change over the ensuing centuries and over that vast geographical range, as all languages change, nevertheless the change

was such that middle and upper-class Persian-speakers from anywhere in this vast region in the 20th century read, enjoyed, recited from memory, and used in conversation the classical literature written as much as a thousand years earlier. Even poorer illiterate people in rural communities recited and used passages of poetry from the medieval canon. The rather different awareness of Chaucer compared to Shakespeare among members of different social levels of English-speakers in the 20th century provides an illuminating comparison.

The essays in this volume explore various aspects of this historical phenomenon. They include illustrations of types of change that linguists would expect, while at the same time demonstrating the validity of the standard that extended from west to east Asia and from the 9th century to the 20th. It is the maintenance of this standard over such a vast area for so long a period that is interesting, particularly because it goes against the expectations of modern linguists, who assume that language changes at predictable rates irrespective of its social and cultural context. This book is based on the hypothesis that the relationship between spoken and written language differs according to historical context, that the differences are not all usefully explained by the linguistic terminology associated with the phenomenon of diglossia, and therefore the dynamics of change in written language may be different from those of spoken language in some cases. Our investigation of the Persian case is organized around a series of particular hypotheses concerning the relationship between the written form of the Persian language and the civilization that was identified with it. This civilization has been called Persianate (cf. Hodgson 1974, 2:293; see also Arjomand 2008:2–3), and we will follow that usage in order to indicate the culture embedded in the use of Persian over the past millennium throughout an area much larger than any territory we could call Persia or Iran.

A straightforward investigation of this type, focusing on another language and its culture, tends to lead readers to compare it unconsciously with their own general understanding of modern language and culture, particularly of English. In order to avoid this unconscious self-comparison, we have endeavored to set Persian in a premodern comparative context, specifically in relation to the other two most obviously comparable languages of premodern writing, in administration and literature, Chinese and Latin. We can expect that much of what is significant for Persian may also hold for other such widely used languages, but explicit comparison be-

sides bringing out similarities will also alert us to differences that would not appear from the study of any one of them alone. Moreover, we will also be able to show more clearly by this comparison that certain social and historical factors make Persian a special case, from which something new can be learned about the historical significance of writing in the organization of premodern society in general—a significance that still casts a shadow over modern times. These factors derive from the sociology of the recruitment and training of writers, and the understandings that facilitated their control of their professional status and the boundaries of their social class. In part IV of this introductory chapter we shall need to distinguish our conclusions from those of the voluminous discussion of literacy that has developed in English over the past fifty years.

Persian stands out among languages with comparable historical records by virtue of a combination of factors which arise not only from the extraordinary geographical and temporal extent of its currency, but also from the general organization of the society in which it was used in the eastern half of the Islamic world, east and north of Mesopotamia, where it was the medium of administration, trade, and intellectual and artistic activity, and even much religious writing—in fact, any interaction that involved writing—over varying proportions of the past millennium. The history of Persian is a function of the history of its use in society, in social interaction, in both speaking and writing (as distinct from the history of its grammatical and syntactical development), in the choice of literary and other content. It was shaped by the way its speakers understood their identities and social rights and obligations in relation to each other and to the non-literate. The cultural heritage of literacy in the Sasanian empire and the religious value of the text of the Qur'an in Islamic civilization merged to secure the status of the literate class of the Persianate world, most of whom were professional administrators of one type or another.

It is important to remember also that Persian has had a particular historical relationship with the West, different from that of any other non-European language. Renaissance humanism brought it within our horizons through the study of Herodotus. Written Persian has been an object of discussion and direct study in Europe since it was discovered by travelers and merchants in India as early as the 16th century. The idea that it was an Indo-European language, like Latin and Greek, with which it enjoys roughly the same historical depth, was demonstrated in greater and greater detail from

the 16th through the 19th centuries. The first English primers for it were published in the 18th century. Since the middle of the 20th century a number of Western scholars have sought to explain its unique historical role: from its re-establishment in Central Asia in the 9th century, to the various landmarks of its remarkable trajectory from then down to the present. In the wake of the development programs financed by the oil boom of 1973, interest in it spread beyond philologists and orientalists to consultants and travelers who brought its native name *Fārsi* into English. Finally, since the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, our understanding of the relationship between the various Persian-speaking areas of central and western Asia, conditioned by the nationalisms induced by opposition to late colonial administrations, has undergone some re-evaluation.

We have already had several occasions to use two terms—Iran(ian) and Persia(n)—in contexts where they appear to be interchangeable, which to a large extent they are. But since their connotations and associations differ, it is important to distinguish them. Moreover, in modern usage they have acquired additional connotations that we must be careful not to project back into the past. Both terms originated with the Achaemenians in the 6th century BC. Iran comes from Aryan (which English adopted from the Sanskrit), a term which Darius the Great used in identifying himself in the Bisitun inscription (viz. “I am Darius the Great King . . . son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage” in Kent 1950:138). Pars was already the name for the region in the southwest of the plateau where the Achaemenians had built their summer capital (which we know from the Greek as Persepolis). Herodotus called the people he was investigating “Persians,” the people from Pars, and that remained their only name in Western languages until 1935. (The Greeks seem to have assumed some relationship with their mythic hero, Perseus.) These same people called their language *parsi* (later Arabized as *Fārsi*) because it began as the vernacular of that area. In 1935 Reza Shāh Pahlavi, then reigning Shāh of Iran (1925–1941), introduced the requirement that in all diplomatic correspondence the country be referred to by the name its people used, Iran. His initiative was the earliest of several re-namings inspired by the emerging non-Western nationalism of the time (cf. Burkina Faso, Sri Lanka, Myanmar). Gradually general Western usage began to shift: Persia is now rarely used as the name of the modern country, but remains in common use for its cultural heritage.

This much is common knowledge. In the meantime, however, other initiatives had added significantly to the connotations of each term. As the genetic relationships between languages were worked out in the 19th century, historical linguists divided all those that could be traced back to a supposed proto-Indo-European original into subgroupings. Because it was already known in the West as a language with a long textual tradition, “Iranian” was used to designate one of those subgroupings. Among others, the Iranian subgroup includes such modern languages as Persian, Pashto, Balochi, Kurdish, and Ossetic, as well as others with fewer speakers. As a result of the contemporaneous rise of nationalist thinking, the implication that speakers of other languages in that subgroup outside Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan were also culturally or ethnically Iranian became difficult to avoid. Baloch, Kurds, Ossetes, Pashtuns were the most obvious candidates because their languages had acquired a written form and they were beginning to develop a sense of community identity. Second, at about the same time nationalism began to grow as a political force in western Asia generally. A little later the finer distinctions of ethnicity also began to appear. Consequently, any use of “Iranian” for any historical period tacitly acquired a nationalistic flavor, and implied at least a cultural association with communities that spoke other Iranian languages. “Persian” did not have this association. Instead any use of “Persian” implied an association with the cultural (monumental and literary) heritage of the area, by extension from what we know from Herodotus. The tendency to use Fārsi in English for the Persian language (by people to whom it would not occur to use *Deutsch* for German, or *hanyu* for Chinese) spread among Westerners who had visited Iran in the 1970s on business or tours (Spooner 1993). Throughout this volume we have avoided any phrasing that might appear to impute Iranian nationality or ethnicity to any community either on the basis of language or at a time before the emergence of nationalist thinking, but the modern tendency in this regard is so insidious that we may not have entirely succeeded.

Historically, Persian was not simply a language with an associated technique of writing; it was also a library of inherited textual models that continued not only to serve social needs but to condition social functions. The production and circulation of new text, derived to a large extent from these time-honored models, were in the hands of scribes (known by the Persian term *dabir*, but more commonly by the Arabic term *munshi*), who were a small elite minority distributed throughout the urban centers of the Per-

sianate world. They were among the literati who served as the arbiters of correct usage not only in language, but in all interaction insofar as it was legitimized by textual models. So long as they remained arbiters of correct usage they were also arbiters of the use of writing. This control of models through the control of writing tended to inhibit or retard socio-cultural change, including change in the written language and in forms of speech that continued to be modeled on written usage.

Finally, in order to avoid the impression that the Persianate millennium was somehow timeless, we would draw attention to the fact that its relationship to the rest of the world did change continuously. As Persianate civilization began it was at the vanguard of human achievement, political, legal, scientific, technical, literary, and artistic. The Persian language facilitated its rise by providing the medium for the formation of an unprecedentedly large arena of interaction, with a common market. Early scholars of the period, such as Al-Khwarazmi and Avicenna, have a secure place in world history. A millennium later Persianate civilization had been overtaken by the Latinate West. If Persian facilitated its rise, could Persian also be implicated in its decline? If the spread of the language was a function of the social organization of its use in writing, and the resulting forms stagnated rather than changing with the times, such a connection is possible. We will revisit this question at the end of the volume. Meanwhile, this chapter introduces the issues that arise in this Persian story: issues of continuity and change, of the organizational significance of writing, and of what distinguishes the historical functionality of Persian from other written languages.

## II. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The era of civilization that began with the Arab conquests under the banner of Islam in the 7th century contained the seeds of a logic of organization that was qualitatively new and different from what preceded it. In central and western Asia it was culturally Persianate while being religiously and legally Islamic. The Persianate features harked back to the empires of the Sasanians and their predecessors. The Islamic features were based on an elaboration, and universalization, of the conception of law that entered our history in association with the name of Hammurabi, and evolved in complexity and religiosity up to its written formulation associated with the name of Moses in the Hebrew Torah. This combination of administrative



experience and universalistic conception of society offered unprecedented opportunities. The organization of society, the universal rule of (Islamic) law, the legitimation of authority (though not, unfortunately, of political succession), the freedom of long-distance trade—all were differently conceptualized from what obtained before. But as with even the most categorical revolution, there were continuities. Our habit of classifying history by periods has led us to separate Islam from its heritage and its influences, which have become a separate academic specialization. As a result the continuities from earlier regimes that conditioned much of the substance of life in the following centuries, though not entirely ignored, are too generally passed over.

Writing evolved in a relationship to society. It was adopted for particular uses, developed and elaborated for those uses as the prerogative of the people socially allocated to them. The earliest extant writing is in records of commercial transactions that date from before 3,000 BC. These texts were written in the ancestor of Sumerian cuneiform on clay tablets. Later, in the 3rd millennium, writing was used more generally in administration. By that time it was in Akkadian cuneiform. After 2,000 BC a literary dimension developed. But it is important to note that literary texts were the records of oral literature. The Achaemenians, who took over the Mesopotamian world in the 6th century BC, used Elamite scribes in their court chancelleries (559–330 BC). The Persian term *dabir*, “secretary,” may be a borrowing from Elamite (de Blois 1994). But although their own language, which we know as Old Persian—a lineal precursor of New Persian (Persian in the Islamic era)—appears to have played a secondary role, the administrative apparatus of government must have been at least tri-lingual, since at least one administrative text written in Old Persian has come down to us (Stolper and Tavernier 2007).

We do not know under what circumstances Old Persian became a written language or who read it, but it appears to have been associated with the identity of the kings because it was used for royal inscriptions. Aramaic was also beginning to be used (Vallat 1994:274n74). In fact for communication throughout the empire a form of Aramaic known as Imperial or Achaemenid Aramaic soon became the common language. But under later empires of the Parthians and Sasanians, after the disruption of Alexander’s invasion and the Seleucid interlude that followed it, a new form of Persian, which we know as Middle Persian, gradually replaced the non-Iranian languages in all

formal functions, oral and written (Frye 1974:63–64). Where Old Persian emerged in association with Akkadian cuneiform on clay tablets, Middle Persian was written in a simplified form of the Aramaic alphabet (an alphabet without vowels) on papyrus. The rate of change throughout this period appears to have been steady and continuous.

Writing was similarly important in the administration of the Egyptian empire, where the ability to write was similarly associated with membership of a class that had a particular function and relationship with political authority. Only people from certain backgrounds were allowed to train to become scribes, in the service of temple, pharaonic, and military authorities. Like the cuneiform and Aramaic systems of writing, the hieroglyph system was also difficult to learn—not intellectually, but socially. In later centuries the social boundaries of the class were reinforced as a means of preserving the writers' social status.

Starting in the late 3rd millennium Akkadian had been the first language to serve as a medium for advancing administrative and commercial activity beyond southern Mesopotamia. It was the first common language (cf. Gr. *koine*), and its cuneiform script enjoyed a long steady decline into the 1st millennium (cf. Cooper in Houston, Baines, and Cooper 2003). But long before the demise of its cuneiform script Akkadian was replaced by Aramaic, the use of which overlapped in the Eastern Mediterranean with Greek well into the medieval period. It would appear that rulers who needed things written hired the writers who were available, but the writers began by using the language they were trained to work in, and only later adapted to working in the new language. Achaemenian royal texts were apparently dictated in Old Persian by the king, translated into Elamite, and then retranslated and reformulated in either Old Persian or Akkadian or both. Writers became a professional class early on. But at the end of the 4th century BC, in the wake of Alexander's campaigns and the administrative reorganization that succeeded them, these languages all gave ground to Hellenistic Greek, known at the time as the *koine* or common language. It is worth noting that Greek writing did not support a professional class; neither did Latin, but Chinese did. Should we seek the reason for this in the nature of the language, the way it was written, or in the way the society was organized?

Although the evidence is sketchy, each written language was probably used over a larger area for a broader set of functions and by a larger number of writers than its predecessor. But we can assume that the proportion of

the population in western Asia that created written or textual materials continued to be very small, even though written material was probably being handled by increasing numbers of people, and increasing numbers were learning how to distinguish the significance of different types of documents without being able to read. There appears to have been a steady rise in the cultural value ascribed to anything in writing from the Sumerians to the Romans, and again from the early medieval through to the modern period. But the rise was uneven, and varied inversely according to the proportion of those who could write in a particular language to those who could not. People who could not read understood the significance of writing and ascribed value to written texts because they lived in societies that depended on writing for more and more of their organization, and for the legitimacy of any authority.

In the age of Greek, which at its apogee under the Seleucids extended from the Mediterranean into central and south Asia, the ability to read and write became more widespread—due partly no doubt to the range of textual material from the Athenian past that extended far beyond the functions previously served by writing in Mesopotamia and elsewhere. But it is important to note also that post-Athenian Greek society was structured very differently from the communities of western Asia. It was more egalitarian and more mobile, as well as being more literate. Could there be a relationship between these qualities? People in Athens were more socially mobile, and writing was not associated with any particular class. Everyone with a certain level of social awareness assumed they should be able to write. It may be partly due to this type of social orientation that whatever the final sum of Greek migration to the eastern parts of the Seleucid world was, Greek did not take root in the east because Greek social formations did not percolate into local societies. Neither did Greek entirely supplant Aramaic further west. It was a language that went with a different social structure, a different mode of social interaction. If you spoke Greek you did Greek. If you spoke Aramaic you did Aramaic. Learning a new language was one thing—people do it all the time. Multi-lingual arenas of interaction are not uncommon. Learning a new way to interact, or fitting into a new social niche, is more problematic. Achieving acceptance in a community with different interaction patterns is even more difficult. With the rise of the Parthians in the late 3rd century BC Greek actually receded westwards along with the culture embedded in it and with Seleucid power. In the 2nd cen-

ture the wars between Rome and Parthia led to the irrevocable association of Greek with the enemy (by the Parthians), first in the form of the alien invader from the West, and later more generally with Christianity in distinction from Islam.

Meanwhile, the use of pre-Islamic forms of written Persian had expanded. After the introduction of Old Persian cuneiform under the Achaemenians, a related form of the same language (a Middle Persian language written in a simplified form of the Aramaic consonantal alphabet) continued as the vehicle of administration under the Parthians. Although we know little of Parthian administrative practice we may assume it provided the basis for the Sasanian administration that followed it in a closely related form of Middle Persian, and in a related script, in the 3rd century AD. The emergence and quick spread of Persian in the Arabic script in the 8th and 9th centuries was simply a continuation of this long trajectory of expanding administrative practice. The larger the empire, the greater the dependence on writing for administration. The displacement of the rulers by new people who brought new ideals and a new plan for organizing society hid the social continuity of the bureaucratic class, who despite their conversion to Islam resumed their customary procedures in ways very similar to what has been documented in the post-Roman kingdoms of 5th and 6th century Europe.<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing Persianate civilization public life was an arena in which people not only spoke and wrote Persian, they did Persian.

It is important to remember, however, that in the pre-Islamic period under the Achaemenians and the Sasanians writing may have been used only for government activities. Religious texts were transmitted breast to breast (*sina ba sina*). No one thought of writing them down until well into the 3rd century AD. The point was to know them by heart (Tafazzoli 2000). This pattern has three significant implications: from the beginning the Persianate written tradition was primarily a court tradition relating to formal behavior. Our current understandings of the crucial importance of the textual tradition in religious and other non-administrative functions may date only from a similar late period everywhere, when the use of sacred texts spread beyond local communities, led by Greek speakers. But did Greek lead in this function because of the unprecedentedly analytical character of its adaptation of the Phoenician alphabet, taking the hint from the use of *matres lectionis* in the earlier consonantal alphabets and introducing vowels on a level with consonants, or because Greek writing was not associated with class or occupation?

In the process of routinization that set in within a hundred years of the Arab-Islamic conquest, the Persian language slipped easily into the niche that was developed in western Asia first by Akkadian, then Aramaic, then Greek, and finally (under the Sasanians, 224–651) by Middle Persian or Pahlavi. The language had acquired the vocabulary and protocols for this role from the usage of earlier administrations, especially the Achaemenian and Sasanian, and since the writers were the same people they simply continued their role doing what they knew how to do. Although the language of supreme value in Islam is Arabic, and Arabic was the dominant language throughout the Islamic world well into the 2nd century of Islamic history, beginning in the 8th century in the core areas of the earlier Sasanian empire Arabic was gradually reduced to a status comparable to that of Latin in later medieval Europe. Why should Persian have supplanted Arabic at all, let alone achieve nothing less than parity with it everywhere outside the formal environment of the *madrasa*? And why should this achievement be geographically limited to the east? West of the Zagros mountains and south of the Fertile Crescent the use of Persian diminished, even though large parts of these western areas had similarly experienced Persian rule and the activity of Persian bureaucrats before Islam. Although no earlier use of Arabic had developed a comparable range of administrative vocabulary and protocol, Persian did not supplant Arabic to any significant extent west of the Plateau, probably because fewer writers with Persian experience were involved in the new administration or court life of those areas. Once again the stage may have been set for this linguistic divide by earlier usage, since there is a correlation between the historical distribution of Aramaic followed by Arabic on the one hand and the failure of Greek to take root and the resumption of the role of Persian on the other. Persian hegemony had already begun to give way to the Eastern Roman Empire, and Aramaic was more deeply rooted. The general populations of greater Syria and Egypt did not become mainly Arabic-speaking until centuries later, well after the emergence of Persian in the east.

From Baghdad to Morocco and the Sahel, Arabic functioned comparably to the way Persian functioned from Hamadan to Kashghar and beyond in the east, and eventually Hyderābād in the south and the Ottoman Balkans in the northwest. Together the two languages constituted the medium of communication, organization, and cultural integration of the entire Islamic world, a larger area and a larger population by far than had been interrelated

into a single community, at any level of cultural integration, at any earlier period, or perhaps even since. This Arabo-Persian world was politically fragmented, but there was freedom of movement and trade throughout its length and breadth, facilitated, perhaps even encouraged by the common languages. What is most remarkable is the lack of any central authority to govern usage or establish models of correctness. It is interesting that there was also no central authority to interpret or enforce the *shari`a*, which provided the legal framework for social interaction everywhere. There was, however, a universally recognized structure of procedures for interpreting it. There was similarly no central authority for Arabic usage. But there was a single fundamental text that provided the final authority for all Arabic usage as well as for everything Islamic, the Qur`an. For Persian, on the other hand, there was neither a primary text nor any other type of authority besides the heritage of Sasanian bureaucrats, which was gradually succeeded by the evolving canon of secular Persian literary texts. In this connection it may be worth noting that Islamic civilization in general was characterized by a lesser degree of centralization than other parts of the world, until perhaps the later emergence of what Hodgson (1974) calls the Gunpowder Empires: the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals.

Although the relationship has not been static, Arabic and Persian were more intimately intertwined down to the 19th century at least than even Greek and Latin in the Roman Empire, or Latin and English in the 17th–19th centuries, or English and French in early modern international diplomacy. Not only had Persian adopted its Islamic vocabulary from Arabic, but Persian (in its Middle Persian form) had influenced Arabic before Islam, and both languages had been influenced by Aramaic. (In this connection it is interesting to remember that one of the earliest converts to Islam was Badhan, the Sasanian governor of San`a in Yemen in 621.) Moreover, the written forms of both Arabic and Persian were standardized during the same period in closely related and overlapping communities of writers.

The canon of literary texts that appears to have served as the anchor for Persian writing was the product of the court life of the Sultans who had introduced Persian as their language of administration, beginning with the Samanids in Samarqand in 851, and the ever broadening circle of interaction among them down to the Safavid and Mughal periods in the 16th–18th centuries. Whereas Akkadian had spread from Mesopotamia, Aramaic from Syria, and Greek from the northeast Mediterranean, Persian (in Middle Per-

sian forms) had already been in use throughout western Asia, and (as New Persian) emerged in the eastern part of that area where the earlier written languages had not taken root. It was therefore much better situated to spread eastwards. (Its modern exclusive association with the state of Iran, separate from Afghanistan, along with the current borders between them is a historical irony, dating only from the period of British and Russian interference in the region in the 19th century.) Despite these historical complications, from the 9th to the 19th century, over a vast area of Eurasia, Persian had the status of a common language comparable to the earlier role of the Hellenistic koine. But in the case of each of these languages the extent of their spatial and temporal homogeneity and continuity would not have been possible without writing: usage was anchored in the language as written, by means of constant reference to the written materials that circulated. Authority resided in the text. The supreme authority was in the text of the Qur'an. The social value of Persian writing and the status of those who wrote it was a major feature in the organization of Persianate society, which finally gave way to local languages only as the result of expanding socio-political horizons which broke down class barriers. The first successor language was Ottoman Turkish which emerged as the Ottoman horizons extended beyond the Islamic world into Europe. The replacement of Persian by successor languages in the east took off only in the 19th century when horizons were expanded by Western imperialism.

Until the end of the medieval period, perhaps as late as the 18th century, the rate of change in Persian written usage continued to be held in check by the power of written texts, the use in everyday life of the protocols embedded in them, and the interests of the writing classes. But the rise of social awareness reflected in the spread of printing and the Reformation in 16th–17th century Europe eventually expanded into Asia and broke down the social boundaries of writing everywhere. The cultural value of writing was so well established that it eroded only slowly. But as the skills of reading and writing began finally to spread much faster after the Industrial Revolution, first through each Western society and then later throughout the world, a qualitative change set in. One of the consequences of the emergence of mass writing has been a steady reduction of the social value of being literate. When (almost) all are literate, there is no longer a literate class to create peer pressure for conformity to the codes and confirmation of the canon that were the foundations of the symbolic value of the text.

Today language in general is no longer anchored by any socially established rules. This change is reflected in changing emphases in education and the academic enterprise. For example, philology, which grew out of classics as the study of language through texts, has been replaced in the 20th century by linguistics, which grew out of anthropology and focuses on the dynamics of spoken language. Linguistics has shown us that in the modern situation, now that the written word has lost much of its power to define correct practice and correct speech, there are no longer any built-in constraints on the rate of linguistic change. Not only English, but now Turkish and Hindi, as well as Persian and other languages previously rooted in a written tradition, have changed at unprecedented rates since the middle of the 20th century. If change in general throughout the Persianate world was slower than elsewhere, the social function of writing may have had something to do with it.

### III. PERSIANATE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The long-term stability of Persianate language and culture over such a vast area was made possible, perhaps uniquely in world history, not by a power center or other political institutions, but—to list the significant factors in the order they emerged—by a combination of bureaucratic heritage, the status of a secretarial class, a universally accepted legal framework (the *shari`a*), and a literary canon. So long as the *shari`a* continued to be the overall organizing framework for social life, and its function was not questioned, this universal revealed law ensured stability and standard practice. Linguistic stability goes hand in hand with social stability. All the continuities from the past were reinterpreted within this new expanding framework. The adverse effects of recurrent political instabilities were mitigated by the confidence of faith in the validity of the Islamic legal framework. Islam finds its justification in past historical events, and does not expect change. It is essentially conservative. (The Western world on the other hand is conditioned by Christianity to see nothing ideal in the past. Although it was launched by an historical event, this event was soon understood as promising something better in the future, rather than providing a blueprint for the day-to-day management of society.) Within this Islamic framework the Persian language and Persianate civilization were spread and maintained by ritualistic repetition of institutionalized activities, mostly rooted in or associated with textual models. These models



were elaborated in the course of the millennium. Styles evolved. Arrangements became more complex. But the semblance of innovation was deprecated, and nothing needed to be consciously discarded.

At no time was the use of written Persian dominated by a single administration, or an institution, such as the papacy. Neither was it controlled by any pre-eminent group of users either within or outside the secretarial (*munshi*) profession. There was no Roman Curia, no Chinese Imperial examination system, no academy. Social and political organization in the Islamic world in general differed in this way from what we are familiar with in Western history. The only formal organizational framework in any part of the Islamic world that extended beyond the bureaucracy of the particular local ruler was the conceptual-legal framework of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The most important duty of the ruler, that alone justified his tenure, was the maintenance of public order under this framework. Everything that happened had to be rationalized in terms of the *shari`a*, and it was taken for granted that the *shari`a* was interpreted by scholars (*ulama*), whose training was certified by their seniors in the *madrasa* where they were trained. Although neither the *shari`a* nor the *ulama* were related in any formal way to the standards of Persian usage, they represented and legitimized the larger framework of social order within which Persian spread. This social order was in principle egalitarian. Villagers and trade apprentices from the bazaar could enter the *madrasa*. The names in medieval biographical dictionaries show that senior scholars commonly came from rural backgrounds. But it was also conservative in that it protected private property (though it also provided rules for its redistribution in inheritance), and it encouraged trade. Under this framework, despite the enormous sparsely populated distances between cities and the very slow speeds of long-distance travel (cf. Knauer 1998), widely distributed networks of interaction in Persian were sustained by travel and by correspondence. The models for correct Persian usage emerged in the 9th century from the pre-Islamic heritage of the epistolographic practices of the Sasanian Empire (AD 224–651), and were maintained through the interaction within and between chancelleries and the court communities of multiple sultanates that were widely separated geographically, and represented different underlying vernacular traditions. The historical dynamics of change in written Persian were the product of routine interaction over great distances through the medium of writing and travel. Possibly the universalism implicit in the new Islamic orientation to

the world may have played a part. But there was no formal or recognized framework to ensure correct usage or inhibit change over time, and no political reinforcement.

The crucial role in these networks was that of the *munshi*. *Munshis* constituted a professional class with high social status, political involvements, literary talents, and wealth. In her study of the historian Bayhaqi, Waldman has commented interestingly on the professional rigor of *munshis* in the 10th century. Bayhaqi was himself a *munshi*. He continued to use the pre-Islamic Persian term *dabir* for his profession. What he writes about the role and heritage of the *dabir* evinces a recognizable snobbishness. Being a *dabir* had been a very special way of life since pre-Islamic times. The great empires of the past had depended on their bureaucracies. In Bayhaqi's time the Ghaznavid empire (centered in Ghazni in southeastern Afghanistan, 975–1187), even though it was the first to be established by Turks, was no different. Being a *dabir* was not simply a nine-to-five job; it was social position, a style of thinking and acting, based on years of education, apprenticeship, and cultivation. *Dabirs* spent much of their time at the palace, living there or nearby; their apprenticeship in the secretarial arts was long; all their work was done in a special section of the palace; much of their socializing, during and after hours, was with other palace officials. The office of *dabir* accrued a much higher status than would be associated with a civil servant or bureaucrat in modern states. Any particular *dabir's* success depended on his facility in Arabic and Persian style, including his conciseness of expression, the niceties of his turns of phrase, and the accuracy of his technical vocabulary. In short, *dabiri* was also an art, and a very important one, in which experience counted more than anything else (Waldman 1980:40–41, cf. Alam 1998:326–27).

Consideration of this professional situation in a comparative perspective raises some interesting questions. Is reading or writing Persian essentially the same sort of skill for those socialized in the tradition as, say, reading or writing English is for people in the English-speaking world? Or are there qualitative differences that might be significant for this inquiry? Are there factors specific to reading and writing Persian in the *nasta'liq* or *shekasta* styles of the Perso-Arabic script that should be taken into account in assessing the history of Persian? It is easy to see how this question would apply to the Chinese character-based tradition, but since *nasta'liq* is closer to our own Roman in being alphabetic in structure (though not fully analytical) we have not asked the question about Persian.

We may begin to develop an answer to these questions by noting that the Arabic script generally works in practice not by letter but by penstroke, in that it has only a cursive form, with no majuscule-minuscule options like medieval Roman. One penstroke might include from one to four or even five connected letters with less change of direction than in cursive Roman. The variation results from the fact that not every letter can be joined to the next. For this reason the relation of penstroke to word is not always one-to-one as it is in a fully cursive Roman hand. This characteristic is somewhat modified in the *nasta'liq* style of writing (which is governed by calligraphic models), more so in the *shekasta* style (which is essentially a shorthand of bureaucrats).

This form of reading and writing, by pen-stroke (as well as by word), offers different possibilities for organizing writing on a page: straight, even lines are less important. The activity of scanning—speed-reading—a document works differently. While writing is not an interactive medium like speech, it was nevertheless practiced in a dialectical relationship with reading. The writer, especially the professional writer, wrote for a particular set of consumers of writing. Learning to read and write can be by rote, by association, by use of mnemonic strategies, or by logical induction. But the experienced reader does not read analytically. However reading might have been taught, mature reading is always in practice not analytic but pictographic. One reads by shape and scans common indicators. These shapes and indicators are learned not consciously, but rather subconsciously, differently in different communities of writing. Examples of indicators in Roman are upper case, ascenders and descenders, period-space, paragraph breaks, and particular common words (which vary to some extent according to the experience of the reader). In Persian such subconscious recognition works differently because it is by pen-stroke rather than by word or letter. Each letter in the pen-stroke can appear differently according to which letter is on either side of it and whether it is at the beginning or end of the stroke. One reads, therefore, by retrieving subconsciously from a repertoire of pen-strokes that is much larger than the number of letters in the alphabet. (It should be noted, however, that reading *bad* handwriting in English may work essentially the same way.) But since the *nasta'liq* style exaggerates the pen-stroke, we must ask which pen-strokes are common enough to function as signposts to enable the eye of the experienced reader to take in the overall shape of an area of writing? Some are obvious: for example, in Per-

sian *ast*, *ke*; in Urdu *hai*, *ka*. Urdu works differently from Persian because it has additional letters, and different frequencies of particular letters, and allows longer pen-strokes. The fact that the *ka* structure is so conspicuous on an Urdu page makes it much easier to see how this might work in Urdu than in Persian or Ottoman which do not have comparable linguistic features that stand out so prominently in the script (cf. *ra*, some particular Turkic agglutinations, the *ezafe* mediated by *ye*).

What it takes to produce the succession of strokes in a configuration that a reader will scan with ease differs with different scripts. How many signs fit on a line, on a page, is different. Consequently, how the reader reads—the relationship between reader and text—not only differs according to script, and again according to the particular language he is reading in that script, but it is conditioned by the reader's own relationship as a writer. This is a field for comparative study that has so far received little or no systematic attention, despite the fact that it is crucial to any program designed to promote writing in the modern world. Go back a hundred years or so to the time when, although printed texts were available, handwriting was the primary form of the written word. Look at the styles of handwriting in (a) Roman: English, French, German, (b) Cyrillic: Russian, (c) Greek, (d) Hebrew, (e) Chinese, Japanese, Korean, (f) Arabic, Ottoman, Persian, Urdu. In each case, beyond the personal style and other idiosyncrasies of the particular writer, aesthetic considerations come into play in the models by which the writer learned to write, that lend a particular style to each written language. Among these, Persian stands out in the following ways: each stroke forms one or more letters, where most languages need one or more strokes for each letter or sign; many letters take up very little if any space because they are implied in the form of the pen-stroke that encompasses several (mostly one to four) letters—certain strokes may be written one above the other, or diagonally from upper right to lower left. The same is true to some extent for other languages in the same script, e.g., Arabic and Urdu, but not to the same degree as for Persian written in the later *shikasta* form of the script (cf. Hanaway and Spooner 2007).

The skill of reading also involves the skill of knowing what is written, and being able to anticipate it. The fast reader starts from considerable earlier experience in reading and being ready to recognize subconsciously most of what *might* be written. Then, in the same way that body language and suprasegmentals (pitch, stress, juncture, loudness) supply complementary

information in face-to-face interaction, the organization of the document supplies information beyond the words of the written communication. Court protocol is a formalization of the former, chancellery documents of the latter. We may assume in general that the organization of words on a page, and of whole documents, evolves among users in ways that amplify information and signal intentions (viz. the subject matter of the subfield of diplomatics in European medieval studies). Examples include conventional opening and closing formulae, or phrases such as *va amma* to signal a change of topic. There appear to have been cross-cultural influences in court behavior in relation to writing between (for example) the Safavids, the Ottomans, and the Tudors, and there are organizational parallels between Islamic documents and Western medieval documents. Handwriting was not just putting spoken language on paper. It was the writing of particular words and phrases that were institutionalized for particular purposes. The practice of writing involved awareness of an expansive cultural community. Persian in particular played a role in the cultural awareness of the eastern Islamic world that Arabic could not have played in the same way because Arabic did not have the same historical protocols.

The academic discussion of Persian writing has been complicated by the distinctive cultural value of calligraphy. We have found it very difficult to engage native readers and writers in any objective, value-neutral discussion of writing, outside the value scheme of calligraphic appraisal. In this inquiry, therefore, we must also take account of the significance of this value scheme in the areas we are investigating. The fact that no word for calligraphy was used at the time (*khwosh-nevisi* is a later coinage in response to the Western conceptualization) makes the discussion more difficult. Models of artistic writing were taken for granted. It is likely that much of the recent discussion in Persian of calligraphy is influenced by Western definitions. If we look at medieval sources we find, for example in the *Dastur-e Dabiri*, written in the 12th century and discussed in chapter 3, the statement that a scribe should possess a good hand (*khatt-e niku*), as well as the other technical skills such as spelling, grammar, knowledge of Arabic, etc. There is nothing here to suggest any more than that they were trained to write intelligibly and gracefully. Writing for a public purpose, whether in a decree or letter or an inscription, was done clearly and gracefully according to accumulated models, the power of which was greater than in other traditions because of the peculiar cultural status of the written Qur'an and the

avoidance of figurative artistic expression. The boundary we now recognize between calligraphy and simply “good writing” or “a nice hand” is a later modern development resulting from interaction with other non-Persianate and non-Islamic traditions. Any writing that is in a consistent form or style inevitably draws attention to itself. “Good” writing, in the sense of consistently and easily legible writing, is not necessarily the same as “beautiful writing,” in the sense of being self-consciously stylized. The actual words of the *Dastur-i dabiri* make this clear:

Know that the first resource that is necessary for the secretary is good handwriting. There are many conditions and customs to do with handwriting and the pen but those that appertain to this craft are: first, command of a hand in which the letters are proportional to each other, which makes letter-writing appropriately fluent.

*Bedān ke nakhostin ellati ke dabir-rā bedān hājat ast khatt-e nikust, va sharāyāt va ādāb-e khatt va qalam besyār ast, ammā ānche bedin sanā`at ta`alloq dārad ān ast ke: avvalan dast bar khatti mansub ke tarassol-rā shāyad ravān gardānad... (p. 2)*

Models of good writing were known throughout the Persianate world. They may have added to the ritualistic aspect of written language discussed in the previous section, in that they generated culturally centripetal forces, and played a part in reinforcing Persianate cultural identity.

The various centers of writing in the Persianate world were related both socially (through the relationships formed in the education and organization of the ulama, through the application of the *shari`a*, and through trade) and culturally through the content of their interaction. The centers differed to the extent that the underlying local vernaculars and other local conditions differed (as of course did the experience and historical memory of both the writing class and the community as a whole). They also differed to the extent that the spoken language of the writers’ local non-literate community differed from the language they were writing. Towards the end of the period, as fewer writers of Persian in India and other peripheral areas spoke the language they were writing, the written language changed even more slowly, and usage became more conservative than in the core areas such as the territory that became modern Iran, where it continued to be a spoken

language among the urban elites (cf. the example of Latin in the medieval West). Persian was influenced less and less by the normal processes of linguistic change of a speech community. The activities of the Literacy Corps in Iran in the 1960s led to an acceleration of linguistic change in the ensuing decades, which has ironically contributed to the fragmentation of Persian as koine and of the Persianate world. The part that writing played in the social identity of the writing class also militated against change, as did the interaction (in writing, but also by travel) with members of the writing class in other centers. However, despite these forces for uniformity, we should not assume absolute uniformity throughout the region. The possibility of uniformity came to an end when Western imperial spheres of interest divided up the Islamic world. Domination by culturally alien powers (whether or not accompanied by colonial administration) disrupted the institution of writing in its administrative function of organizing the society, and accelerated the processes of social and cultural change. Similar effects can be seen in late Mughal India, Qajar Iran, the Ottoman empire during the *tanzimāt*, and late Qing China.

Language is a cultural artifact. Every language conveys cultural concepts, models, and orientations. Being proficient in a language carries with it not only the ability to speak in a particular speech community, but also the unconscious performance of all the dimensions of the culture of that community. This integrity of language and culture has been admirably explicated for Latin by Farrell (2001; cf. chapter 11 of this volume). But the groundwork for a similar cultural characterization of Persian is unfortunately not yet available. Latin has been intensively studied. The social history of Persian and the later consequences of its hegemony in west, central, and south Asia have been very different, but the studies necessary to illustrate this difference are sparse. Its speakers and writers in the east and west of this vast Persianate area were comprehensible to each other because the models they drew on for their interaction came from the common canons of administrative, commercial, and literary usage. The language of texts written in the 9th century was still readable and recognized as standard in the mid-20th because although the canons evolved, the rate of change was slow. Moreover, both the spatial and temporal ranges of mutual intelligibility were a function not simply of lexicon and syntax, but of a broad range of related behavior relating to kinesics and public interaction, from the choice of wording, the arrangement of words on the page, and the

style and order of expression, to the choice of writing materials, and the use of the language-as-written in public oral interaction, including body language and the choice of occasion. Very early on, the literate class in the Islamic world began to produce aids to writing such as mono- and bi-lingual dictionaries, grammars, and biographical dictionaries of scholars and the literate class. Later, self-conscious collections of letters appeared. All these activities must have reinforced the hold of the literate class on writing itself, and on society. The corpus of behavioral models that were embedded in the use of Persian are referred to as *adab*.

*Adab* had obvious pre-Islamic roots, and the memory of the old Sasanian class system promoted the perpetuation of professional classes, with significant consequences for both writing and cultural communication generally. A major factor in this phenomenon was provided by cumulative regularities in the recruitment, training, and the accepted norms of writers' interaction between various parts of the region and the expectations thus generated. The language and the social dynamic became interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The norms of writing were embedded in a larger administrative structure, which in turn was embedded in the norms of a geographically vast, largely non-literate cultural community. This process may be seen in the emergence of letter-writing as one of the cultural norms and ideals of *adab* that extended throughout the society, and helped to structure it. Beginning under the Umayyad Caliphs (661–750), it developed rapidly under the early 'Abbasids, and evolved into a literary genre, especially in the Eastern Caliphate.

*Adab* covers the larger cultural framework of the historical use of written Persian. We need to investigate the sociology of its emergence, development, and maintenance. Compared to Latin and Greek, the community of Persianate writing was smaller and highly fragmented but much more widely distributed. For over a millennium Persianate high culture was embedded in the texts of written Persian. Written Persian was not only a means of communication—administrative, epistolary, and literary—but also the legitimizer of public behavior in general over this vast culturally diverse area. In order to understand how this worked we need to consider the writers of Persian throughout west, central, and south Asia as a community of subcommunities of writers. We must isolate the subcommunities and investigate how they participated in the historical dynamic of standardization and adaptation over the centuries. Each subcommunity would



have been broken down again into *munshis* and courtiers, poets and other literati, including the professional administrative elite. Complementary to these literate classes were the non-literate majority who knew Persian and listened to it being read out or recited, but did not write it, and whose lives were framed by the texts they did not read, but whose cultural status they recognized and subscribed to. It is these implications that we must investigate in order to understand more fully both the stability and the cultural power of written Persian.

From the Ottoman west to the Uzbek east and the Deccan south public interaction in Persian followed the unwritten rules of *adab*. At its furthest extent “It was customary for young Venetian noblemen to be sent off to spend their teenage years learning both Arabic and Persian, as well as the business of trade, in the Venetian trading settlements in the Levant, and a number of Venetian doges, such as the longest reigning of all, the fox-like Doge Francesco Foscari (r. 1423–1457), were actually born and grew up there. Doge Andrea Gritti (r. 1523–1538) fathered three illegitimate children in his youth in Istanbul, one of whom later became the close friend of Suleyman the Magnificent’s grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha. It was in this way that a remarkable number of Arabic loan words (as well as some from Persian and Turkish) entered Venetian dialect, including the Venetian term for their gold ducats—*zecchino*—from the Arabic *sikka*...” (Dalrymple 2007). Both language and culture were rooted in the textual tradition.

*Adab* is a cultural continuation of pre-Islamic models which were known by Iranian words such as *frahang* (culture) and *ayin* (custom). They are rooted in Sasanian usage. The change from these Persian terms to the Arabic *adab* parallels the change from *dabir* to *munshi*. By the time *adab* gained currency, it must already have been understood to be rooted in literature (*adabiyāt*). The essence of *adab* is its service in the role of ensuring the security of public interaction. Herein lies the essential difference between Persianate culture and the Western cultural environment of our discussions, which make it very difficult for Westerners to interpret Persian behavior correctly (medieval or modern). Although our society has changed in recent generations, our heritage is that of a society in which everyone knew their place, and most people stayed in more or less the same social position throughout their lives. It was a stratified society, with a structure derived historically from land ownership. The stability of Persianate society rested on different principles, which were egalitarian rather than hier-

archical. These principles were enshrined in Islamic law. It was rare for any family to retain high social status for more than three generations. Public life involved continuous competition for status. The forms of behavior that fall under the general heading of *adab* not only provide respectability but disguise the underlying competition. What we refer to today as “the position of women” in Persianate society is a special and perhaps extreme case of this cultural style. Independent of the history of its development and its formal justification today in response to Western objections, *adab* functions (and therefore persists) in Persianate culture to the extent that it removes conflict with and over women from the public arena and sequesters it in the private sphere. All behavior associated with the concept of *adab* ensures the smoothness of public interaction; any behavior that disrupts smooth public interaction is contrary to *adab*.

The particular cultural flavor of *adab* is centered in a form of civility, discernment, good taste, and the golden mean, which above all respects the privacy of the individual and avoids open public friction. The giver should be grateful to the recipient, not vice versa. It is very different from but culturally equivalent to *Latinitas*, and the foundation of a pre-nationalist historical identity. The relationship between *adab* and literature (*adabiyāt*) is comparable to the Chinese association of writing (*wen*) with culture (*wenhua*) and civilization (*wenming*) (cf. chapter 12 of this volume). The continuous elaboration of titles in Persianate administration as the medieval period wore on, and the inflation in their usage in recent times, should also be seen in this light (cf. Ashraf 1989).

Understanding historical sources requires a sensitivity to the assumptions and objectives of the writers at the time. The same is true for any historical period, including the modern, and any writing tradition. We began to study writing because however well our students learned to read and speak Persian, however close they might approach to native reading and speaking ability, their ability to write by hand was always behind, barely competent, like the writing of children. We sensed a general attitude towards handwriting that downvalued it as simply a substitute for printing in the unfortunate situations where printing might not be available. But if we are going to understand medieval writing we have to respect it for the essential form of communication it was at the time, embedded in a social context very different from our own. Because of the close (but changing and often misunderstood) relationship between speech and writing, the ap-

preciation of any use of language requires sensitivity to both media in their own right. The written word leaves a visual impression on the mind, in addition to any oral impression. Before the uniformity and commoditization of the printed word, not only the social value of the ability to produce an acceptable text but also the cost of producing a text imbued the text with a richer variety of meaning that most of us have been educated to see. Some of these textual models of the past continue to illuminate formalities that survive in modern life.

#### IV. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF WRITING

Linguistics is a relatively recent arrival in the academic curriculum. As the scientific study of language it has defined its subject matter primarily in terms of speech. Some of its roots extend back into anthropology, and the anthropological study of culture has found some of its most productive models in the study of spoken language. But the role of written language in cultural life, or in society, has received relatively little attention either from anthropologists or linguists, or even from their predecessors in the study of textual language, philologists. Our understanding of the history of written language and its relationship to society has been further confused by a failure to ascribe any significance to the difference of medium, and to be alert to possible differences of dynamic between them. However, since our reconstruction of the past depends mainly on textual sources, any differences that derive from linguistic features that may inhere in written rather than spoken language are of particular significance for any historical enquiry.

Writing has been understood to be the central defining feature of civilization. Consequently, in the study of each civilization we have expected the adoption of writing to have roughly the same consequences. But these expectations ignore the obvious historical differences between the various civilizations of the past five thousand years. They assume that the consequences derive from the skill of writing and the differences from the relative efficiency of each writing tradition. This assumption is only partly valid, for it misses the organizational dimension. On the one hand writing facilitated remote communication beyond local face-to-face interaction, enlarging the arena of interaction, both spatially and temporally. On the other hand, however, since writing was a skill that had to be acquired, its acquisition depended on relationships, and relationships could be controlled. In fact, writ-

ing provided the tool for controlling, and therefore also for legitimizing, the way society was organized beyond the face-to-face community. It facilitated both the formation of larger communities and (perhaps more significantly) the formal differentiation and discrimination within and between them. Although these consequences were the same for every writing tradition, they worked out differently in different societies, depending on how the relationships were historically configured and managed.

Before (or without) writing, social differentiation was based exclusively on criteria of descent and territoriality. Writing made possible a qualitatively new form of differentiation. It also facilitated all further forms of social differentiation that have evolved from then up to the 20th century. By extending the reach of administrative control, it also generated the need for further formal criteria for social differentiation, which in turn established inequalities. As a vehicle of documentation it also led to the development of a sense of time, of history, which fed into ideas of legitimacy. Writing provides a communicative framework that facilitates and may socially encourage uniformity (though not equality) and build standards. Societies without writing are tribal, in the sense that they lack firm organizational criteria beyond sex, age, descent, and marriage. They are organized in lineages and descent groups and think of relationships in genealogical terms. Societies with writing, on the other hand, are complex in that they can organize bureaucratically, on a larger scale, providing for routine interaction among unrelated strangers. Descent becomes pedigree and status is legitimized by title to property.

The adoption of writing was therefore a historical landmark no less significant in the historical development of social complexity than the domestication of plants and animals. It generated a revolution in the organization of human life no less significant than the Neolithic. But just as domestication did not spread quickly and evenly to every population throughout the world, and did not finish spreading until the 20th century, so writing did not come to provide the basis for the organization of every society until roughly the same time. The convergence of these two processes was due to the approaching culmination of a larger process—resulting from increasing population size and densities and expanding social awareness—that we have recently come to refer to as globalization. Meanwhile, the implications of literacy have played out very differently in different cultural traditions. Such differences as are recognized are generally assumed to derive from differences in the relationship of the written form of the language to speech:

the extent to which it is phonetically analytical. But this seems not to fit the Persian case. We shall return to this point below, but first we need to look at some other factors.

It is particularly important to note the way writing facilitated the extension of administration beyond local communities, and the building of larger and larger empires. Starting from the beginnings of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt five millennia ago, each empire was larger than the last as the bureaucratic potential of writing was gradually realized. This expansion occurred not only through the elaboration of bureaucracy, but also through trade (which Morgan pursues in chapter 4 in relation to the eastward expansion of Persian). The process continued through the ancient and medieval periods of history down to the 20th century, when the functions of writing finally began to be enhanced by new technologies that increased the speed of remote communication beyond what had been possible by means of the simple physical movement of written material.

In comparing how the function of writing played out in different civilizations we shall ignore the question of the origins of the various major scripts. For the questions we are investigating the fact that the Greek alphabet was derived from Phoenician is not relevant. The fact that Phoenician may underlie some stage of the development of many, perhaps most, of the surviving writing systems will not affect the current discussion. It will be more useful to classify writing systems in terms of historical script-families, groups of languages that have shared a common script historically, such as Arabic and Persian. Three major script-families have played particularly important roles in world history: Arabic, Latin, and Sinic. (Some may wish to add Brahmi or Sanskrit, which we have not been able to include here.) Many languages have been and continue to be written in each. Languages written in the same script are historically related, whether or not they are also genetically related. They may therefore share features of areal convergence. The world's major empires, and the most significant political and cultural players in world history, have depended on recording, communication, and expression in scripts from one or the other of these three families. But very little academic attention has been given to the comparative study of languages written in different scripts. Although comparative linguistics began with the definition of Indo-European on the basis of observed similarities between written languages, it barely progressed beyond classical languages before the modern expansion of the field into the study of non-

written languages, and it paid no attention to the study of writing per se, except with regard to origins and the historical development of alphabets.

As we shall attempt to demonstrate below, languages belonging to different script-families are likely to exhibit greater differences between their textual traditions than languages that use the same script. What we may learn from the study of reading and writing in one language may not be valid for the study of others, especially where the script is different. Because of the Persian preference for *nasta'liq* and *shekasta* styles of the Perso-Arabic script, with their distinctive combination of diacritics and multi-letter pen-strokes, we will argue that even differences in the style of script can be significant. Our study of medieval, early modern, and modern writing in Persian led us further into an appreciation of the significance of different genres and registers of writing and how the writer writes and the reader reads in different situations. Genres may differ culturally, but they are socially constructed. Just as what people understand in oral interaction depends to a large part on non-linguistic factors, such as the body language of the interlocutor, choice of situation, order of presentation, and the relation between what is said and what is left unsaid, so in reading much of what is assimilated derives as much from the medium, the organization, and the style and quality of the writing, as well as the genre, as from the sense of the individual words themselves. But beyond this appreciation of the similarity between speech and writing as media of communication, we became impressed more and more by what we perceived to be differences between writing and speech as media. The more we considered the specifics of writing, the more we saw that our understanding of it (and therefore also of our historical sources) had suffered from lack of attention to its distinctive medium. We noted how little it had been investigated beyond the textual issues that were dealt with by philologists. Over the past fifty years the study of written language has been neglected, while the study of language generally has forged ahead with a focus on language, and languages, as spoken.

Writing has been studied in two ways: the best known has been the connoisseurship of calligraphy, and this interest has tended both to distract attention from the study of everyday writing and to prejudice our evaluation of it. What goes into the physical production of texts, on the other hand, has been studied under the heading of diplomatics, which is a late 17th century formulation for an important subfield in European medieval studies devoted to the systematic study of documents (because early documents

were *diplomas*, i.e., folded pieces of paper). However, diplomatics has so far spawned only a very few and somewhat timid excursions into other writing traditions. Historians would be well served by a cross-cultural extension of diplomatics—which would help them to understand in what ways doing things correctly as an acceptable writer is very different from the kinesics of doing things acceptably as a culturally recognizable speaker. In what follows we aim to establish a cross-cultural framework for investigating the historical role of Persian writing as the vehicle for administration and cultural production, for bureaucratic and literary communication. In this sense writing is not simply a skill, or a means of expanding memory and awareness. In addition to these important features it is an institution, in the sense of being a component of a larger organizational system, and it is one of the key institutions of society as we know it, from the Ancient World to the present. Since the later 19th century, following the rise of numeracy in the West, we have grown so accustomed to focusing on statistics, what proportion of a given society (especially in terms of labor) can be directly managed through the written word, that we have lost sight of the significance of the enormous value of writing in societies where only a small proportion of the population can actually read and write. In these premodern situations, where the written word manages the society but is in the control of a privileged minority, knowing how to write alone is insufficient. To be accepted socially as a writer it is essential to write correctly according to established models that must be learned and certified through socialization and apprenticeship with the right people. As our modern writing becomes further removed from the social conditions in which our historical sources were produced, we stand in greater and greater need of a comparative diplomatics that would allow us to go beyond the translation of the words in the text of a document and understand the information that is embedded in the organization of the words on the page and the sociology of its production. Interaction between scholars working in different but parallel traditions would generate cross-cultural questioning and accelerate the research process.

The comparative study of textual traditions has so far barely begun. Initial attempts to pursue this type of enquiry in Islamic history first appeared only in the middle of the last century. Progress since then has been slow and uneven, and mostly in Ottoman studies, despite the potential value to other disciplinary fields of research (cf. bibliography in chapter 5). Writing is necessarily more conscious and less spontaneous than speech. Although

writing and speaking can now occur anywhere along a range from barely conscious to fully consciously articulate and considered, in the past, and certainly in the premodern world, we can assume that writing was always fully deliberate. Speech on the other hand can be, and often is, entirely spontaneous. In each case language is only one ingredient of the resulting communication. The parole of speech is not just conditioned, but clothed and provided with fundamental meaning by the kinesic dimension of the communication. Diplomatics is the key to similarly illuminating the meaning of the written text. Both have to do with the immediate mechanics of language in interaction and communication. Beyond this role that the performance of language plays in individual acts of delivery is the much more crucial function of these acts in the social and cultural processes that create history. Since premodern writing was never typically spontaneous, we need to understand better how it was culturally organized if we are to reconstruct historical processes correctly.

Written and spoken language have for the most part been seen simply as different expressions of a single cultural artifact: the particular language of study. In any given case it is assumed (depending on the date and discipline of the speaker) either that the spoken is an imperfect and ephemeral instance of the written, or that the written is a dead, fossilized version of living spoken language. The former opinion prevailed in the 19th century; the latter appeared a hundred years ago and has predominated since the middle of the 20th century. But written language has a different dynamic from spoken language. Its relationship to situation, and therefore also to the society that uses it, is different. It therefore changes according to a different set of factors. The relationship between the two media (speech and writing) has also changed historically, in accordance with the way the functions of writing have changed, and the ratio of writers to non-writers. (The function of speech has not changed, except to the extent that its function is affected by its share of the field: where the question was once about the relationship between what was said and what was left to be conveyed by occasion, social context, and body language, now not only is the arena of communication enlarged to contain potentially the global community, but the list of alternatives to direct speech, besides writing, is growing.) Since the mid-20th century the written word has begun to lose its precedence over the spoken. One important result is that only in the past half century, with rates of literacy approaching 100 percent in many parts of the world and few areas left



below 50 percent, the ability to read and write has begun to lose its social value, so that where we used to expect people to speak the way they wrote (and make sure they wrote correctly), it is now becoming normal to write the way one speaks. We are going through a period of re-accommodation between writing and speaking. In the Western world this transitional period began with the spread of public education in the mid-19th century. The transitional period will be far shorter outside the Western world, because the rate of social change generally over the past fifty years has been faster, especially in post-colonial territories. Now, with the rise of digital media everywhere, the relationship between speech and writing may currently be in the process of total transformation.

It would therefore be surprising if spoken and written language did not differ in dynamics. Each has no doubt always been affected by the other, but without being determined by it. However, the functional relationship between them and the way they affect each other has changed. The acceleration of social change and the increased demand for reading materials that facilitated the spread of printing set this relationship in the West on a new trajectory some five to four hundred years ago. In the Islamic world on the other hand, and possibly elsewhere, it appears to have been specifically the culture of writing that inhibited the adoption of printing (which barely began before the 19th century even in territories under colonial administration). As a result, now that printing is fully adopted the earlier relationship between spoken and written in the Persianate world, and the Islamic world generally, is more difficult to understand.

The study of language began as philology, which was the study of language as it was preserved in texts, and paid little attention to the social function of writing or the possible effects of writing on language. In the 19th century philology prepared the way for historical linguistics, which continued to focus on textual data. In the early 20th century the publications of Saussure launched modern linguistics and shifted the focus to speech and languages in general rather than languages with textual traditions. Before Saussure linguistic research focused on the grammar of written language, taking classical languages as models and specializing in the critical analysis and reconstruction of textual sources and of long-term change. The study of language since the 1940s, in new departments of linguistics, has focused more and more on the dynamics of spoken language. The study of written language has lost interest, and “philology” is rarely heard. As with all

change, there are losses and gains. But for the medievalist who depends on the analysis and interpretation of textual materials, of written usages and their implications and reflections in public life, it is important to take stock of the situation and to work out what types of work may be suffering from neglect. The same is true for the modernist who feels the need to understand how much of the present is a product of the past and needs to be seen in those terms if it is to be usefully understood. Most documents are produced in order to be read by people who know in advance most of what is written in them, and know how to elicit from them the part that is new information. They are therefore written in a conventional style that has developed for the purpose of conveying information in a form that can be quickly grasped. We tend to look for content. We should be looking just as intently for what we can learn from the conventions of style.

The focus on spoken language led rapidly to the collection of vast libraries of data, and changes of orientation towards language study in general. New ways of measuring linguistic change evolved, typified in lexico-statistics and glottochronology. All language was “stated to change its lexicon at an approximately constant rate of speed when investigated by use of a test list of basic words selected for universality of incidence and minimal cultural notation and connotation” (Zengel 1962:132). Although this has been a very useful research tool, it must be remembered that it does not take account of the way textual models may influence, and perhaps inhibit, change in written languages. However, Zengel did also suggest that written language might have a different dynamic:

A casual sampling of modern languages suggests that a leaning toward conservatism correlates to some degree with a literate tradition. This correlation may be inferred from observations of the various effects of a literary language on its co-existing spoken counterpart.

Affected facets of speech include grammatical forms, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The conservatism of orthography is too obvious to require comment; yet in this connection, there would seem to be an additional correlation between the quantum of literate tradition among a given people at a given time and the degree of flexibility permitted in spelling. If it is true, as these things would indicate, that writing is attended by a linguistic conservatism, then the dynamics of vocabulary change among a wholly literate people should reflect his fact. (1962:132)

The first step is to recognize that while written language may be influenced by speech, its history has not been determined solely by its relationship to a spoken form so much as by the way the activity of writing is socially organized. The reason for this is that until recently in any of the major script traditions written language has been considered more authoritative than speech. There have been exceptions. Socrates' argument in Plato's *Phaedrus* is well known: that live dialectical enquiry is more valuable than the fossilized record of it in a written text. (We are lucky, however, that Plato left us the written record!) The Islamic "science of biography" (*'ilmu'l-rijāl*) which was developed to substantiate the written record of the oral tradition of the Prophet's utterances provides a further example. The interpretation of the Book par excellence, the Bible, along with its parallels in other religions that claim justification through revealed texts, has similarly depended on oral tradition controlled by the Church, at least down to the Reformation. Today, despite the idiosyncrasies of Anglo-Saxon law with regard to oral evidence, writing is still generally recognized as being more authoritative than speech (not only because of the importance of signatures in identification of responsibility), but not exclusively so. The interpretation of the text may change even though the text may not. Every text needs an interpreter, whether it be the Church for the Bible, your choice of *mujtahid* (qualified scholar) for the Qur'an, or a modern lawyer for the U.S. Constitution.

One of the major distinctions between writing and speech in premodern times was that writing followed models, while in speech there was always the possibility of spontaneity and innovation. In this way writing is comparable to ritual: innovation endangers its efficacy, but interpretation of what has been written, as of what is acted out in ritual, may change with time. Since the earliest and smallest human communities for which we have information have practices that fit our definition of ritual, it would appear that ritual is a normal organizational feature of human cultural life. Any action that is repeated to the point where it becomes by nature repetitive takes on the quality of ritual. In fact repetitive action may be a good minimal definition of ritual (cf. Wallace 1966:233). Such repeated action, including the recognized repetition of what Bohannan (1995) usefully calls particular "action chains," organizes and channels associations and generates meaning for the participants, and in the process introduces order into their understanding of day-to-day life. It also organizes and programs in-

teraction. It thus provides the necessary centripetal complement to the highly productive but uncontrollable process of random association, which dominates our mental processes. Any process of ordering (in the sense of reducing to order) is necessarily selective: order is achieved only by some degree of simplification; some data fit the patterning of the order and are canonized, some do not fit and are left aside. Ritual in this sense functions to organize memory, knowledge, and identity, as well as to channel action. At the level of each individual's cultural-psychological take on the world, for which the terms *habitus* and *propriospect* have been used, this organization is in the form of habit. If it becomes obsessive, it is addiction. At the cultural level obsessive organization becomes national, ethnic, or religious fanaticism. Premodern writing always involved the repetition of established formulas. This repetition had a ritual aspect.

Where all interaction is face-to-face, ritual is similarly face-to-face. As some communities became larger and more complex, they began to develop technological means of remote communication. Their ritual practice proliferated and diversified. Writing, from the time of its earliest invention through the period of its gradual assimilation into the culture of administration, historical record, and creative expression, gradually came to subsume many of the functions of ritual, and to serve as the legitimizing basis of others. Now, in complex society, when writing becomes an established organizational tool (starting not with the earliest writing, but by sometime in the 2nd millennium BC) for administration in government, and for memory and meaning in literature, writing begins to legitimize and even to supersede ritual. For some 2000 years now in most of the world's civilizations almost all ritual has been rooted in writing, in sacred or legal texts. Writing provides the dynamic for the heritage and the identity of a community. This force was particularly powerful at a certain stage of the spread of writing skills, which underlay the age of nationalism (cf. Anderson 1991). Writing was associated with identity before the age of nationalism, but the nature of the identity was different when only a small proportion of any community could write. The spread of nationalisms required the spread of writing skills. Now that the relationship between writing and speech is going through another qualitative change, and the authority of written language is declining, we may be within sight of the end of nationalism.

The relationship between writing and ritual is historical. Consideration of how this relationship has evolved will help to clarify some of the distinc-

tive characteristics of writing as a social function. The Axial Age (as Karl Jaspers, 1949, called the period from 800 to 200 BC which saw the emergence of the concepts that provided the core of all the major religions in world history since then) was the period when particular ideas about human life and how the world worked first began to move beyond the boundaries of local communities. This movement began with the circulation of people, which probably resulted from rising densities of population in the eastern Mediterranean, western Asia, northern India, and central China, and the consequent rise in social awareness. The concepts associated with Gautama, Confucius, Socrates, and Zoroaster, which gradually spread to every part of the world in the guise of Buddhism and Christianity, and later Islam, all date from this period and have served as the basis of all subsequent religious and moral thinking. Only later were these ideas understood to have been written (e.g., the Laws of Moses), committed to writing (the Avesta and the Bible), and finally, although revealed in speech, actually conceived as an eternal book (the Qur'an). Important ideas everywhere eventually became associated with writing as soon as they were adopted by the ruling class. Following this period speech continued to serve as the primary medium of communication, but significant utterances were always recorded in writing. Those who could not read (i.e., the majority) relied on those who could—not just to read, but to say what the text really meant, to interpret it. For the written text lacked the kinesics that frames the meaning of the spoken word. The interpretation of the written record was in the hands of the socially recognized writers. With the large-scale adoption of writing as a social value and a political vehicle, not at the individual level but at the level of the organization of communities, we had entered the age of religious communities, which lasted until the 18th century when it was superseded by the age of nationalism. But as is always the case with such social configurations, they cast a shadow over succeeding centuries, down to the present. The Church (which also subsumed the Socratic-Platonist heritage in its Neo-Platonist form) interpreted the written truth in the West, the *ʿulama* in the Islamic south, and the Buddhist monks and Confucian literati in east and southeast Asia. It is interesting that India, despite its contribution of Buddhism to the eastern half of Asia, remained apart from this development, except insofar as it was later included within the Islamic orbit. One possible explanation of this may lie in the distinctive *jati*-based organization of community life (understood in the West as caste) which inhibited the

large-scale demographic circulation that developed in other areas.

In all premodern societies with a socially established writing class important rituals have generally been rooted in written texts. Medieval religion was legitimized by texts. Modern religion continues to depend on them. In fact writing itself became a form of ritual: it was repetitive; the same words and phrases were repeated again and again, in the same combinations, with the same spatial configurations on the page. Just as innovation in religious ritual would endanger its efficacy, its authority, so with writing. Essentially, before the modern period writing was socially a very different type of activity from today, in that its primary function was to record for reference.

The study of the historical dynamics of spoken and written language has been hampered by pervasive assumptions about their interdependence. These assumptions need to be made explicit, so that they can be questioned. For most of the past four thousand years or so since writing became routinely involved in a variety of public functions, its development has been closely interrelated with speech, as well as parallel to it. But a brief discussion will illuminate the necessary differences between the dynamic of each—at least until the spread of writing skills in the 20th century which has finally exposed written language to the same variety of social pressures as speech.

The use of spoken language is one of the definitions of the human condition. It is commonly used as the primary criterion for distinguishing us from our primate cousins. It is the essential means of communication that facilitates the social interaction and group learning that makes us human. It is enjoyed by every full member of every human community, even in cases as unusual as that of Helen Keller. Written language, on the other hand, even in the modern world, has more restricted functions that extend beyond but do not fully overlap with speech.

The functions of writing have been different because rather than being acquired without conscious intervention in the process of socialization, writing was a skill that had to be acquired and its acquisition was socially managed. That management remained essentially the same until not much more than one hundred years ago. But since then it has changed, and the relationship of writing and the written language to other forms of communication and organization has transformed its function. The change was launched by the introduction of printing in the 15th century, but it took off with the spread of mass education in the 19th century. About forty years ago, with the spread not only of the written word but of new media, some

of which have encroached on the functions of writing, writing began to lose the cultural status that went with this social management. Even elite speech is no longer securely anchored by the written language. Shaw illustrates this in *Pygmalion*, which takes place not so long ago when there was truly an elite speech and a “correct” style of writing English. Shaw showed how elite speech could be manipulated to subvert the social hierarchy. In little more than half a century this relationship has been transformed, though it is not entirely forgotten. The standards of written language, and its relationship to elite speech, have been subverted by modern social change. The quality of writing as a medium now retains little of its ritual, and has changed and diversified in function.

In the course of ancient and medieval history, despite frequent setbacks, societies overall expanded and became more complex. Consequently, the literate class grew progressively larger and more differentiated. But the overall proportion of literate people in the population of the ancient world, and perhaps more so in the early medieval world, remained small. It is not surprising, therefore, that writing conformed more strictly than ever to established genres and ever more intricate codes, which acquired unique cultural, even symbolic, value. The combination of socially established codes and symbolic value reinforced the cultural status of written texts and inhibited change in the written language, irrespective of change in vernacular spoken language. Since the texts had come to legitimate administrative and other practices, they anchored the formalities of public behavior. Writing had taken on the function of a social stabilizer. In this connection, however, it is interesting to note that while the written language continued to supply models for the organization of behavior in formal public situations, local vernaculars gave way to one or another lingua franca, such as Turki in parts of the Iranian Plateau, and Hindavi in northern India. The continued growth and increasing density and intermingling of populations was presumably a contributing factor.

With the demise of the Western Roman Empire, the Sasanian Empire in western Asia, and the Sui Dynasty in China, within a period of less than 200 years, the quality of writing everywhere (different as it was in each of these three major divisions of the ancient world) changed and was reborn with similar differentiation in the medieval world of the Holy Roman Empire, the Caliphate, and Tang China. These were three distinctly different, but historically related, textual communities. They were textual communities

in the sense that being a part of them involved acknowledging an administrative framework that depended on writing. The new situation has been well described by Stock (1984:18): "What was essential for a textual community, whether large or small, was simply a text, an interpreter, and a public."

The populations of each of these three geographical divisions of the medieval world attributed a particular value to its texts. Stock continues:

The text did not have to be written: oral record, memory and re-performance sufficed. Nor did the public have to be fully lettered. Often, in fact, only the interpreter has a direct contact with the literate culture, and, like the twelfth-century heretic Valdes, memorized and communicated his gospel by word of mouth. Yet whatever the original the effects were always roughly comparable. Through the text, or, more accurately, through the interpretation of it, individuals who previously have little else in common were united around common goals.

Similar social origins comprised a sufficient but not necessary condition of participation. The essential bond was forged by means of belief; its cement was faith in the reality of belonging. And these in turn were by-products of a general agreement on the meaning of a text.

From textual communities it was a short step to new rituals of everyday life...It is one of the persistent scholarly myths concerning medieval civilization, fostered by an oversimplified evolutionism, that as writing and education increased, ritual declined. Certainly a number of rites were on the wane: physical symbolism was replaced by property law; elaborate gift transfers gave way to the market economy; and the sacral element in kingship was balanced by a sense of administrative responsibility. But while such rituals deteriorated, another sort of ritual was brought into being and given a social context by groups articulating their self-consciousness for the first time. Heretics, reformers, pilgrims, crusaders, proponents of communes, and even university intellectuals began to define the norms of their behavior, to seek meaning and values over time, and to attempt to locate individual experience within larger schemata. Ritual as a consequence did not die; it flourished in a different mode. The rites of a putatively oral society...began to be looked upon as survivals of an archaic age, while those more closely oriented around a textual presence gained legitimacy and increasingly determined the direction of group action (1984:18).



Once writing had come to enshrine the truth about the human condition, what was written was recited and the recitation was ritually repeated. We are used to it in the context of religious observance, but have already extended its use figuratively for repetitive activity that has more to do with self-expression, identity, or display than anything functional. In the medieval period all formal ritual was legitimated by written texts. The ritual use of texts in predictably repetitive events acts as a social magnet, and as participation in them expands they generate cultural meaning that inhibits change. Writing not only becomes ritual, but gradually subsumes all ritual. Then as traditional ritual becomes devalued, as orientations towards religion begin to change under humanism, some forms of repetitive ritual behavior that take its place are transformed into what we now understand simply as formality. Similarly, all public behavior that was considered significant was recorded in writing, with the result that writing became associated with formality. Writing in fact became the source of both ritual and formality. Writing worked as ritual so long as writing had high cultural value, and written language was different from and more highly valued than spoken language, so long as it was important to write correctly. Over the past century as writing everywhere has increased and spread more evenly through most societies, this role has diminished, but it still casts a shadow over current life and our understanding of the world, although the stratification on the basis of writing that has ruled social history for five millennia is fading. If we do not reconstruct the history of writing now, these important qualitative details will recede beyond our field of historical vision.

It is generally assumed that the number of people reading and writing in a particular society is a function of the intellectual difficulty of acquiring the skill. This assumption derives from another: that reading and writing becomes easier as modes of writing become closer to straightforward phonetic analysis of speech. But this argument ignores the statistical evidence of the past century (which shows high rates of literacy in, for example, Japan and Kerala), as well as any comparison between the spelling of English and French<sup>3</sup> which do not spell phonetically on the one hand and (for example) Italian or Turkish on the other, which do. It also ignores the historical example of Attic Greek. By the 8th century BC Greek had become the first language ever to be written in a fully analytical alphabet representing all phonemically significant components of speech with a one-to-one consonant and vowel relationship to various local standards of speech. The alphabet was

adapted directly from the Phoenician consonantal script. The development from consonant only to full consonant-vowel analysis may have been facilitated by the difficulty of adapting the Semitic values to Greek phonemes (cf. Havelock 1982:12). We do not know how long it took. But by the 5th century this alphabet had not only become standard but was being used throughout the Greek-speaking world of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and the Black Sea. Over the succeeding centuries, as its usage spread much further following Alexander's conquests, the pronunciation changed radically, in ways that completely changed the sound-sign relationship by reducing the number of vowel sounds. But little or no change was introduced to spelling or orthography. The orthography of modern Greek continues the spellings of ancient Greek with a different (scarcely recognizable) pronunciation.

The minor reform of English spelling by Webster in the early 19th century provides a similar, though less sensational illustration. It is obviously more important to English speakers in different parts of the world that they should be able to share written material than that they should write the way they speak. When a language becomes a medium of written communication its usage expands into a larger arena. The language of a speech community (insofar as it is unrelated to writing) is subject to no controls besides the desire for mutual intelligibility, and changes according to the spontaneity of speech. A written language, on the other hand, depends on the interest in holding together multiple speech communities in a single universe of communication. The close relationship between spoken and written Italian, or Turkish, is due to the recent date of the establishment of their orthography as national languages (compared to French and English), in addition to (in the case of Turkish, or Tojiki) an explicit interest in breaking certain continuities from the past. Even so, in neither case do their written forms represent country-wide vernacular pronunciation or speech. Writing has been a crucial factor in the history of large-scale organization. But the social organization of the uses of reading and writing and of recruitment or induction into classes of readers and writers has been a much more important factor historically than the nature of the relationship between written and spoken language. It is unlikely that the technical nature of the script, and the degree to which it was analytical, could have been a factor in the recruitment of writers, or any other aspect, positive or negative, of the historical spread of written Persian. Alphabets are anyway rarely 100 percent analytical (cf. the various applications of Roman to modern European languages), and

although they may inhibit change in vocabulary and syntax they will always eventually be left behind in the representation not only of phonetic, but also phonemic distinction. Written forms of language, even when launched as the best representation of a spoken vernacular (cf. Tojiki), are never changed in step with change in the spoken language.

Nevertheless, the functionality of writing was not static from 3000 BC to modern times. It evolved, slowly but steadily. It began as a way to record, and later to represent and to legitimate. The type of material it was used to record expanded in stages down to modern times. Its earliest uses were in trade (Schmandt-Besserat 1996), which soon expanded to administration, and only later to literature. Intellectual inquiry came much later. The numbers of writers increased but remained small. They wrote for interaction with each other, and their interaction was exclusive. By virtue of this exclusiveness writers became a new privileged class. If writing is useful and only few people can write to each other, they acquire social status in inverse proportion to their numbers. If, however, their numbers expand significantly, so that they cease to be a minority, and writing becomes a general skill expected of everyone, the value of writing changes. Hence our modern difficulty in understanding medieval society in general and other medieval societies, such as Persianate civilization, in particular. Since written texts represented powerful persons, writing took on power of its own, and soon became an important symbol of power. Its expansion then into the field of ritual and divine power was straightforward. But still its function was to record, whether data, instruction, or narrative. Since it always required a professional to interpret its meaning, the nature of its relationship to speech (phonetic and analytical, or analogical) was irrelevant. The use of writing as an independent medium not only of direct communication but of intellectual exploration, research, and innovation is relatively new, beginning probably in the late medieval period, but it did not become common until the rise of the diary and the novel (in English) in the 17th and 18th centuries. This change in function suggested the need for a direct relationship to speech, and (for the first time) to innovative expression. Martin Amis' *War against Cliché* (2001) could not have been written much more than a hundred years ago (cf. *OED Supplement*, "cliché").

A similar change of values associated with the advance of modernity lies in the rise of numeracy (cf. Porter 1995). Only since the 18th century did it gradually become important to use numbers for the demonstration of significance. If the ability to write were important, we began to need sta-

tistics to demonstrate it. The term “literacy” therefore became most commonly associated with the statistical distribution of levels of reading and writing skills in various populations. Data of this type would of course be invaluable for the larger understanding of what we now call “civil society” in premodern times, but unfortunately for the period before the rise of numeracy it is not available.

The requirements and consequences of being able to read and write began to attract academic interest at about the time when it appeared to be within universal reach, in the middle of the last century. A number of studies of the relationship between writing and speech in ancient Greece in the first half of the century were followed in the 1950s by inquiries into what purported to be the significance of literacy in general. Anthropologists became major players in response to a paper by Goody and Watt (1963). Goody alone authored five books on the subject in the following twenty years. This work contrasted literacy with orality, especially literate modern societies with the non-literate societies of the ethnographic literature. It has certainly succeeded in greatly expanding our understanding of the ways in which the ability to record in writing and retrieve from written material, not only data and opinion, but all forms of research and literary work, has changed the quality of human life, in particular the orientation towards time, truth, and logical argument. However, it is surprisingly occidentocentric: it pays little serious attention to the question of whether writing might have functioned differently under different writing technologies, or indeed other differences in social or cultural context. Although it contains references to historical societies that employed non-Western scripts, there is scarcely any contribution from scholars who were socialized in the use of these other scripts, or trained in the academic study of them. Were the consequences of literacy different according to the ratio of writers to non-writers in a given society? What were the differences in the ways people became writers? Are these differences correlated with civilizations, or particular languages, or with what we have called script-families? (These questions are after all obvious anthropological, as well as historical, questions.) Instead the interest throughout, whether the discussion is of ancient, medieval, or modern society, is in the intellectual consequences of the use of writing. Perhaps Margaret Thatcher’s famous dictum (talking to *Women’s Own* magazine, October 31, 1987) that “there is no such thing as society” represents modern Western cultural orientations to the extent that even an-

thropologists have been swept up in it. However, our own experience in the study of Persian has convinced us that irrespective of differences in spoken language, there are differences not only in the way people write but also in the way they read—comprehensive differences in the function of literacy that depend on the mechanics of script and even script style (since Persian is written in a distinctive style of the Arabic script, different from other Arabic-script languages except Urdu and some Ottoman). This situation began to change with the introduction of printing, but the conditions of the past continue to cast a shadow over the present and have conditioned the way things worked out later. Since printing spread through the rest of the world unevenly, the shadow of the past is darker in some parts of the world than others—especially in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan where the historical sociology of the writing class before printing still remained an important factor—until the recent introduction of the cell phone.

It is time to look more carefully at the discussion of literacy that has evolved over the past half century. It is worth noting to begin with that the concept “literacy” was coined only recently: the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first usage in 1883—as a back-formation (ironically) from “illiteracy” that is cited over two hundred years earlier, in 1660, shortly after the initial acceleration in the spread of writing skills in the wake of the post-Reformation bible-printing boom. In both cases, illiteracy and literacy, it is important to note that the implications were of social status. In the 17th century “illiteracy” was used to exclude the *hoi polloi* from the elite by indicating lack of general education and suitability for citizenship. By the end of the 19th century on the other hand, it was useful to have a word like “literacy” for the inclusion of an increasing proportion of the working class into the fast-evolving modern economy which with the approach of Taylorist systems of production depended more and more on the written word in bureaucratic organization. Obviously these terms carry a historical burden which still colors our understanding and use of them.

Over the past forty years or so the term “literacy” has acquired an iconic quality as one of the major goals and indices of international development. Studies of literacy since the 1960s have been generally lacking in historical and cross-cultural perspective, and have been motivated by a different range of questions from those addressed in this volume. Rather than attempt to exorcise the spirit of this literature, we have considered it preferable to eschew the use of the term literacy as far as possible in our

own arguments, except where it is necessary in the discussion of published work. The questions we address deal simply with the medieval sociology of writing and written language. The connotations of our modern terms literacy and illiteracy would be confusing for the arguments we wish to make about the past, as of course any suggestion of a need for statistics would be. However, since we realize that these connotations may suggest themselves to readers anyway, we have thought it necessary in addition to review the products of this literature so that we can distinguish our objectives from it more explicitly.

By the late 1960s the ideas developed by Goody, Watt, and Havelock had come to be known as “the literacy thesis.” The arguments seemed to culminate in a number of synthetic publications in the 1980s (see especially the items by Graff) and then disintegrate under criticism in the 1990s (Halverson 1991, 1992, Collins 1995). The general argument was that writing is a technology that transforms human thinking with regard in particular to its relationship to language, to tradition, and to the past in general. This argument projects the functionality of literacy in the 20th century back into the past before the term was coined, and into other writing traditions in which writing has different histories. Little attention was given to the fact that in the ancient world before writing transformed thinking, it transformed and extended the organization of society, and that to a large extent it was its transformation of organization that facilitated the transformation of thought. Despite plentiful references to earlier times and other civilizations by well-known anthropologists as well as other social scientists, it is quite ethnocentrically based on assumptions that have to do with full participation in modern society as we know it in the West, and the difference such participation makes to the quality of life in terms of intellectual awareness. It does not make any serious effort to question or investigate current implicit assumptions such as (a) literacy is good, (b) phonetic alphabetization makes it easier to acquire (to the extent that it is optimally analytical), and (c) other ways of writing (*sc.* all non-Western scripts) are a barrier to progress, because they are considered (sometimes erroneously) to be in varying degrees less analytical. Examples of societies with high rates of participation in text-based communities, using scripts which are less analytical (such as Japanese, Malayalam) are ignored.

The actual thesis begins with the claim that the spread of writing facilitated a fundamental transformation in the nature of knowledge and the qual-

ity of culture, including the way people think. In particular, arguments have been made about changes in (a) the understanding of history in relation to myth, (b) understanding of truth (based on logic or systematic critical enquiry) in relation to opinion, and (c) the criteria for skepticism about received tradition. This way of thinking is in tune with the general Western intellectual climate of the time. For example, Derrida (cf. Collins 1995:81) argued for a different purpose that the way thoughts are recorded in writing strongly affects the nature of knowledge. Overall the results are understood to lead in the direction of analysis, logic, individuation, and of changes in attitudes towards authority, favoring democratic tendencies in all social and political situations (Collins 1995:77). Halverson (1992:301) puts it succinctly: “the principal claim of the literacy thesis is that the development of logical thought (syllogistic reasoning, formal operations, higher psychological processes) is dependent on writing, both in theory and in historical fact.” The importance of alphabetic writing in this process is also emphasized (Olson 1994).

Goody’s work emphasized differences in the quality of thought. This led to a continuous series of publications with similar emphases over the following three decades. Even where Goody addresses the organization of society in relation to writing (1986) he subordinates it even in the title to “the logic of writing.” But it did not take long for criticism to begin to appear. Halverson (1992) has very usefully summarized the obvious objections. What remains is no longer a difference in the quality of thought (which would have put us back with Lévy-Bruhl’s 1925 characterization of the difference between civilized and primitive thought), but factors that have to do with organization. It is clear that writing adds a new quality to our ability to communicate. It extends both space and time. Speech leaves no record; writing is a record. Moreover, although speech can be formal, even as formal as writing, written communication can never be as spontaneous as speech. Usage in written communication changes according to a different dynamic because the medium is different. Writing also releases the literate, and potentially their whole society, from the sociolinguistic monopoly of oral communication and allows the development of a completely different sociolinguistics, of written communication (see discussion of diplomatics, above). Communication by writing is different because (a) it works in a different quality of relationship, and (b) it facilitates communication beyond the boundaries of group membership. As a result, whereas oral communication is conditioned by the relationship of the interlocutors

(authority and other personal factors and needs), communication through writing is conditioned by the symbolism of the way the semantic content of the text is materially presented, and may appear differently in different texts. The term “restricted literacy” has been introduced for the discussion of situations where only a minority can read and write, but without distinguishing between modern situations where writing is encouraged or expected and medieval situations where it was not. The possible association with a difference in the quality of thought remains in the background but the case against it is supported by the argument that if we were able to test IQ cross-culturally (we know we cannot) we assume we would find ranges of IQ in small technologically simple societies without writing similar to those in large modern technologically advanced societies. This argument is supported ingeniously by Wallace (1961).

In the final analysis writing is a different form of communication from talking. Speaking is not only relatively spontaneous and (before electronic recording and stenography) not possible to store or recreate. Of equal importance is the fact that it can be adapted in interaction with the interlocutor while in progress. Writing is relatively planned and subject to more conscious structuring and is available for re-reading, study, commentary, and interpretation, and for use as evidence. It is not interactive. The meaning of speech (before the telephone, cf. Ronell 1989) is incomplete without its accompanying body language, on which it largely depends. Although interlocutors commonly misunderstand or talk past each other, they are always to some degree interacting directly. The meaning of the written text can carry with it only part of the context needed for its interpretation, and that context can be carefully prepared and managed.

We may add that writing also facilitates analysis, both of text and of language itself. (If the 4th century BC Sanskrit grammarian Panini really was unlettered, his work is for that reason unique among studies of grammar.) Since it is in the nature of written languages to be written for communication beyond the immediate spatial and temporal situations of their texts, they expand cultural universes and standardize the expression of all intellectual activity within that expanded cultural framework. Writing in this sense became an integral conditioning feature in our cultural common sense. For this reason it is very difficult for us to reconstruct preliterate cultural processes and the effects on them of what we call the institutionalization of writing. The situation is made much more difficult by the fact that



the great majority of people interested in the subject are modernists and Westerners, and do not have personal experience of non-Western forms of writing, or empathy with premodern situations where writing was valued very differently from today.

It is surprising to find that most of the ideas advanced in the discussion of literacy initiated by Goody, Watt, Havelock, and others, in the 1960s, as well as the criticisms summarized later by Halverson, may be found juxtaposed in a publication of the much more widely known author Lévi-Strauss from a decade earlier. Interestingly Lévi-Strauss starts with the social arguments and casts them negatively:

Writing is a strange thing...[It] might be regarded as a form of artificial memory, whose development should be accompanied by a deeper knowledge of the past and, therefore, by a greater ability to organize the present and the future...The one phenomenon which has invariably accompanied it is the formation of cities and empires: the integration into a political system, that is to say, of a considerable number of individuals, and the distribution of those individuals into a hierarchy of castes and classes. Such is, at any rate, the type of development which we find, from Egypt right across to China, at the moment when writing makes its debuts; it seems to favor rather the exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind. This exploitation made it possible to assemble workpeople by the thousand and set them tasks that taxed them to the limits of their strength: to this, surely, we must attribute the beginnings of architecture as we know it. If my hypothesis is correct, the primary function of writing, as a means of communication, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings. The use of writing for disinterested ends, and with a view to satisfactions of the mind in the fields either of science or the arts, is a secondary result of its invention—and may even be no more than a way of reinforcing, justifying, or dissimulating its primary function.

Yet nothing of what we know of writing, or of its role in evolution, can be said to justify this conception... (1961:291–92)

There is in fact a serious flaw in all the arguments that make any claim of causality for writing. If writing were really the cause of something, how will we explain how writing appeared and evolved as it did, differently in

particular locations, before becoming more generally distributed? In order to resolve this problem it is necessary to suggest that the phenomena Havelock, Goody, and Olson ascribe to writing are in fact together with writing the consequences of something else that may be evident in the historical record. Jaspers' formulation of the Axial Age—a period during which writing spread significantly—is a useful indication. What was unprecedented about the function of writing in 5th century Athens was its social context, not the fact that it was alphabetic! Writing became more important in China, India, and the Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean and western Asia in the second half of the 1st millennium BC because of the expanding horizons, rising socio-political awareness, now referred to as imaginaries, that underlay the Axial Age. Earlier stages of the historical development of writing similarly coincided with stages in the historical development of civilizations. We should also remember that when we talk about the beginning of writing at the end of the 4th millennium, we are talking about the earliest writing on materials durable enough to have come down to us. Presumably less permanent records were being made on whatever materials came to hand for current purposes long in advance of this date, in association with other unrecorded stages in the rise of social awareness, which began with the steady increase in the size of communities after the Neolithic transition.

We can now continue with our discussion of the development of writing as an organizational tool, the changing relationship between writers and non-writers in particular medieval societies, and the historical consequences, both formally in government and administration, and informally in trade and other social relations. Writing in this rather different sense—social and societal, rather than individual and cultural (though it is a question more of emphasis than analytical distinction)—replaced genealogical rationalization (which was still an important factor in 5th-century Athens) with bureaucratic administration, and direct and indirect exchange with financial liquidity. It facilitated the separation of social role from family or clan relationship, position from personality, the first step in the development of the idea of the corporation sole, and later the corporation in general, which is the hallmark of modern society. Writing seen in this light was a technological innovation associated with the human ability to organize. Without the will to organize larger and larger numbers of people, writing would have remained no more than an interesting historical curiosity. Who could write and how many could write was a less important question than

whether and how writing could be used to organize the society. The illiterate Mongols used writing to organize and administer their (only partly literate) subjects (Brose 2000:397). Even Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, may not have been literate himself. All these sophisticated uses of writing were facilitated by the expansion of social horizons that came with increasing population densities and increasing rates of change accelerated by the disruptions caused by recurrent warfare.

The significance of the idea of writing as an institution in a premodern society is that in any given population, irrespective of the distribution of functional writing, the norms of interaction through writing provide the institutional base of expectations not only for administration but also for formal cultural conceptualization, and even the norms of public behavior. Since the written word, along with the physical document that conveys it, embodies administrative authority, it structures social interaction. Further, through its capacity to formulate and enshrine complex concepts, and to order them hierarchically, written language also structures culture at the level of the civilization in which it is the common form of communication and formal interaction, the koine. In this function writing plays a role in premodern society which is comparable to what in the modern world we might recognize as a national culture. Colonialism disrupted the functions of the institution of writing because it changed the field of awareness by disrupting and expanding it beyond the civilization it was historically associated with it. Disruption always causes change. The institution of writing progressively extended not only the temporal but the geographical awareness of civilized life. It provided organizational time-depth as well as geographic expansion to civilized society. It stabilized administrative practice and standardized the idioms of expressive culture throughout the population that supported the sense of identity. It is an irony of history that the writing of vernacular languages (Ottoman Turkish, Pashto, Sindhi, Urdu, etc.) at the end of the medieval period, which was also a product of rising awareness, actually created boundaries to the field of awareness and facilitated the emergence of nationalism and the division and conflicts associated with it in the modern world.

Besides the literacy debate of recent decades, there is one other modern debate from which we wish to distinguish the objectives of this volume, the idea of diglossia. In the sense in which the term diglossia has been developed by linguists to categorize languages that share a social arena with one or more other languages, Persian is not a diglossic language (see Perry,

chapter 1, this volume). The term diglossia was introduced from the French *diglossie* by the linguist C.A. Ferguson (1959) to facilitate discussion of the relationship between two languages used in the same speech community, one for formal or public situations, the other informal or non-public use. This term, which has proved useful for general discussion of many language situations in different parts of the world, especially India, is also extended by some writers to cover the status of written Persian in relation to various other spoken languages in Persianate society. But the use of the term diglossia brings with it all the other assumptions of linguists which because they assume writing to be secondary to speech are unhelpful in the study of the historical role of written Persian. It not only hides the importance of writing as a distinct medium, but suggests a framework for its discussion that is incompatible with the idea that written language may have a distinct dynamic of its own. The point is subtle. Diglossia is typically understood to signify relative social status of language use, but not because of the social function of writing. What is different about the Persian case is the special form of the written language, in that it remained intelligible for so long over such a vast area, and that its relationship to the spoken language varied from place to place and from time to time from something close to a one-to-one relationship to almost no relationship at all. We are concerned with different dynamics of change between written and spoken language. The diglossia discourse is insensitive to this issue and distracts attention from it.

Until the end of the medieval period the rate of change in written Persian continued to be held in check by the cultural value of the canon of written texts and their codes of usage. For this reason now that the Persianate world is fragmented into nation-states, many of the literary figures of the high medieval period are claimed as natives of two, three, or even four modern states. The rise of social awareness reflected in the spread of printing after the Reformation in 16th–17th century Europe eventually broke down the social boundaries of writing. The cultural value of writing was so deeply rooted that it eroded only slowly. As the skills of reading and writing began finally to spread faster after the Industrial Revolution, first through each Western society and then throughout the world, a qualitative change set in. When (almost) all are literate, there is no longer a literate class to insist on conformity to the codes that were the foundation of the symbolic value of the text. Language in general is no longer anchored by any socially established rules. This change is reflected in changing emphases in educa-

tion and the academic enterprise. The spoken language has carried the written language with it—a process that never happened in situations where writing was still linked to the status of a special class.

The historical relationship between written and spoken language has passed through a number of changes since the emergence of writing five thousand years ago. The nature of the koine changed and developed in relation to other types of change: the language of the civilization was sometimes (but not always) a lingua franca (a second language for oral communication between speakers of different local languages); more recently it has become the national language in the new national-state arenas of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. In Afghanistan Persian shares its national status with Pashto, the written language of the Pashtuns who created the polity in the 18th century. Urdu has taken over from Persian in both these roles in Pakistan. The distinction between them is not always clear, because it depends to some extent on the degree to which the written form of the language continues to drive the spoken, which is a function of the rate of modern social change. It is in the nature of a koine (as the common language of a historical civilization) to work largely without the unrecorded element of body language, though the unwritten always lurks to some extent behind the written. A significant property of the koine—especially significant in the case of Persian because of the geographical and temporal extent of its currency—is that its users can and do draw on vast lexical resources and ranges of associations and connotations.

The differences between the organization of writing in Christendom and Islamdom are particularly interesting. Latin writing centered on the Church. Its practice was socially limited in various ways. Hellenistic writing had been built on the heritage of classical Greek. The central features in Islam on the other hand were the Qur'an and the *madrasa*. To these were added first a secular bureaucracy, which in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran was adapted from the personnel as well as the norms of the pre-existing imperial administrations, especially the Sasanian. The second significant development (particularly in the Persianate world) was that it spread from the rulers' courts, not from any central institution or even the *madrasa*. The political structure of the Islamic world was distinctively different from anything that preceded it. Beginning in the 9th century the rulers' courts, drawing on the Sasanian heritage but conditioned by the new Islamic ethos, generated new organizational forms, new ways of organizing ideas and nar-

rative or process, not only in protocol but in the various genres of belles lettres. In all these dimensions of writing there was continuity from pre-existing usage, stretching back in some measure to the Achaemenians and their Elamite and earlier Mesopotamian scribes. The overall distinguishing features of Islamic writing, in our sense, therefore, features that distinguish it from writing in the West and elsewhere, are (a) cultural orientation to the Qur'an as a written text, to be read and learned by all, (b) the scribal tradition, established in a social class in pre-Islamic Sasanian society, and (c) the combination of Arabic/Islamic and Persian/imperial concepts and the ordering of the result with New Persian syntax and word-building.

The central features in the West were the Church, the monasteries, and later the universities. In the Western medieval tradition, writing was grounded in and stabilized by the study of Latin and Greek, which continued as the primary source of new vocabulary. What the non-literate part of the population spoke is not always clear. Only later, when some of the vernacular languages began to displace Latin, was the basis of writing widened and the spoken language began to show through the new written languages. The Islamic tradition focused on the Qur'an. The latter produced the *madrassa* system of instruction in writing. As the first four or so centuries of the Islamic period wore on, the Iranian current supplied the administrative skills and organization to run the government, and especially the chancelleries. The professional secretaries were educated both within and outside the *madrassa* tradition, and maintained their class identity, the heritage of Sasanian social organization (cf. Dumezil in Littleton 1982), in the great scribal families who kept a grip on the profession. In the Islamic world the basis of writing was the study of the Qur'an and a tradition of memorizing a sacred text, all in a language that most people, to some degree or other, recognized visually but understood only imperfectly. The emergence of a social category of professional memorizers of the Qur'an reinforced the status of written language in a way that was peculiar to the larger Islamic civilization. As a result of these differences in organization, the process of vernacularization that would be comparable to the late medieval emergence of Italian and French did not emerge in the Islamic world until later, and it began on the peripheries with Ottoman Turkish, Pashto, Sindhi, and Urdu where Islamic governments ruled over non-Muslim populations.

In conclusion let us summarize the major points of our argument. We began the project which led to this volume because we wanted to work

out a way to teach our students, who were socialized to write in Roman, to write Persian in ways that would not immediately give them away as foreigners. We sought to understand the native learning process both as it is taught in today's schools and as the system has developed historically. As we learned more, we found ourselves questioning many of the assumptions we had internalized from reading work on literacy published over the past fifty years, both work on literacy rates in the modern world and how to improve them and work on the significance of literacy in world history. What we learned about Persian writing that challenged these assumptions included:

- the relatively low level of participation in any Persianate reading-writing community (beyond the ability to recite from a text of the Qur'an) down to the beginning of the changes induced by a closer relationship with the more widely literate societies of the West that began in the 19th century, and the relatively slow rate of increase from then until social change began to accelerate in most places in the 1960s.
- the impressive success of the Literacy Corps in Iran following the social change induced by Land Reform in 1963, compared for example with Pakistan which despite the disruptions of war with India in 1965 and 1971 did not experience a major acceleration of social change until later in the 1970s.
- the acceleration in the rate of change since 1963, and especially since 1979, in the relationship between spoken and written Persian in Iran.
- the neglect of Urdu script and the increasing use of Roman in Pakistan (and India), where since the 1980s Urdu is still associated with the social class structure of the past and Roman is the medium of new broader networks of interaction offered by the effects of globalization.

We therefore began to explore the historical relationship between Persianate literacy and its social context. Based on what we learned about the historical record of literacy in Persian, which is illustrated in the following chapters, we have sought in this introduction to shift the emphasis in the study of literacy in general away from an exclusive attention to its (cultural and psychological) role in the facilitation of systematic thinking and the expansion of knowledge to its (social) role in the facilitation of the growth of larger and more complex systems of community organization, imperial administrations, and modern nationalist movements (cf. Anderson 1991).

We would now argue that the latter, the social role, is foundational and serves as a prerequisite for the former, its role in the advancement of knowl-

edge and analytical thought. In this connection it is useful to consider writing in the context of the history of technology and compare the relationship between its invention and adoption with that of other technologies. In a discussion of very different types of technology at roughly the same time the literacy debate was getting underway, the Danish economist Ester Boserup (1964; cf. Spooner 1972) developed the argument that the emergence of new ideas is not predictably related to their adoption. Moreover, it is their adoption rather than their invention that is historically significant, and adoption depends on the relationship to existing social process. In her historical analyses Boserup emphasized demographic process, especially population growth. Demographic change (whether growth, migration, or decline) underlies most social change. Change in the numbers and densities and age-sex pyramids of populations modifies or disrupts relationships and opens up opportunities for spreading new technologies, which in turn facilitate further change. Stable relationships on the other hand inhibit change. As population grew in the ancient world, writing took off first in relation to expanding trade (five thousand years ago), then to expanding needs for administration (2nd millennium BC), more recently to the industrial revolution (19th century), and more recently still to the globalizing processes induced by the new densities of a world population approaching seven billion.

In the case of each of the major languages of historical writing we have touched on besides Persian, especially Latin, Greek, and Chinese, the relationship between the written and spoken has evolved differently. Efforts to explain this difference have always tended to favor arguments from the analytical power of the script. We are challenging such arguments by suggesting first that insofar as writing is learned analytically, it is not in terms of the analysis of the spoken word, but of the components of the writing process; that experienced readers scan pictographically, not analytically; and that a comparison of modern literacy rates does not support it. Secondly, we would argue that the ultimate determinant of literacy rates anywhere has been the way the society has been structured to restrict or encourage reading and writing.

Two further examples may help to clarify as well as support this argument. First, before the 1960s young people in Iran who were taught in *maktabs* (traditional schools) to read the Qur'an did not in general continue on to read and write Persian. Second, some of the Baloch Spooner worked with in Makran in the 1960s could read and write either Persian or Urdu,



but when confronted with a page of text in their own language, Balochi, were unable to read it and uninterested in learning. (Publication in Balochi, for which writing was introduced by missionaries a century ago, was at the time being promoted by the Baloch Academy in Quetta, and a number of publications were becoming available for the first time in Balochi written in the Urdu version of the Arabic script.)

At any given point in the history of any of these traditions the significance of literacy was a function of the relationship between the literate and the non-literate, and the relative numbers of each. As we know from Chomsky, there are essentially no constraints on the rate of change in spoken language, except perhaps in highly formal situations, which are only a very small proportion of all linguistic events. Although spoken language may be composed largely of customary expressions that continually recur in interaction, it can on any particular occasion include wording or phraseology that has never been used before, which in turn may or may not catch on. Other types of change—demographic or environmental—alter the context in which people speak to each other and induce linguistic change. But written language works differently. Before writing began to spread throughout whole populations, only a century and a half ago, not only was the number of writers small, but it differed from one script tradition to another, and to some extent within script families. The reason for this is that medieval societies generally were much more structured. People were born into social slots; each person knew their place. While some manipulated the structure and moved up the ladder, and some slid down, most lived their lives in the social station they were born into. People did not expect change. Progress in the sense we understand it today is a modern concept. Although writing was within the intellectual reach of all, it attached to only certain positions in the society; if you did not occupy one of those positions, being able to write was not only of no use to you, it was of no interest.

The smaller the writing class, the more jealously it guarded admission to its status. To a large degree it was able to control admission to its ranks, and so to govern the use of writing, because it could choose whom to recruit and whom to teach, and it was the arbiter of the established codes of the written language. Strict frameworks of rules were maintained for the use of language in writing. It was essential to be able to write things as they had already been written, both in terms of the choice and ordering of words and in terms of their arrangement in the document. New wording,

phraseology, or arrangement of words was evidence of lack of social qualification and lack of authority. Society did change in the course of the medieval period, but relatively slowly and unevenly. As populations grew urban communities became larger and denser, and social relations became more complex, with the result that gradually more people found a use in writing and became interested in doing it. Growth began to accelerate significantly only with the spread of printing, but the spread of printing was similarly a function of socio-economic growth and change. Throughout this period of change the status of the writing classes in various traditions relative to other classes of the population varied, but was universally high, because people who could read and write were not only closer to political and religious authority, but through the written word their awareness was opened up to broader horizons beyond the awareness of the non-literate majority, so that they could both think and do things others could not. By the middle of the 20th century the social structure that privileged correct writing was weakening in America and England and this weakening was spreading through Europe and (unevenly) into other parts of the world. The Literacy Corps of the Shāh's White Revolution of 1963 ironically hastened the rise of socio-political awareness throughout Iran which led to his ouster in 1979, and continues to facilitate democratic process in the Islamic Republic.

We do not argue that writing causes social change, but that the ability to read and write spreads hand-in-hand with the type of social change that expands social horizons. The countries with the lowest rates of literacy in the modern world, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, are those where social change was latest to accelerate. What we recognize as the mark of modern society in most parts of the world today, irrespective of cultural flavor, is an unprecedented fluidity in social relations and interaction. In these social conditions there are no longer any barriers to the spread of writing, whether visible or invisible. In Pakistan the rate of social change has accelerated so fast over the past decade, as a result of its strategic location at the crossroads of negative as well as positive forces of globalization, that ordinary people who barely saw the need to write Urdu now comfortably do text-messaging on their cell phones in Roman. They are using a combination of new technologies not because they have become smarter or received better education, or because these technologies have only now become available, but because they make it possible for them to do things they now want to do. A decade earlier would have been too soon. For simi-

lar reasons the Apple Newton (in the U.S.) was a flop in 1993, but five years later the Palm Pilot offering the same applications was a major success. The uses of writing, which survived the social and cultural change and recurrent disruptions from the 2nd millennium BC till the middle of the 20th century essentially unchanged, appear now to be moving into a completely new phase that could barely be foreseen as little as a decade ago. We shall return to this topic in the Afterword at the end of the volume.

## V. INTRODUCTION TO THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

The subject matter of the following chapters is diverse. Although each of the first ten chapters focuses on one or more aspects of the Persian language as it has been written over the past millennium, the discussion ranges not only from the ancient world to the present, but from Europe to China, dealing with the relationship of spoken to written language and the development of genres. The final chapters compare Persian with the Latinate and Sinic traditions to the west and east of it, which though contemporary and parallel are significantly different in ways that illuminate the trajectory and the historical significance of the Persianate case.

As the participants prepared for the meeting on which this volume is based we asked them to give special attention to the following questions:

- What factors underlay the stability and standardization of the Persian koine for so long over such a vast area? What factors might have affected the rate of change?
- How were writers recruited and how was the written language controlled?
- How were readers and other users of documents influenced by the writers and their texts, and vice versa?
- Does the formality of written usage throw light on the procedures of political and other cultural practice?

The discussion returned to these questions regularly throughout the three days of the meeting. Each contributor and discussant addressed them from a different angle, drawing on different research backgrounds. We looked first at the early period when New Persian became established, and then moved on chronologically through its spread east and west, and finally its recent fragmentation, all the time questioning the stability and homogeneity of written Persian in relation to other languages.

We have therefore divided the body of the book into four parts. Part One, Foundations, begins with a detailed account by John Perry of what can be known about how Middle Persian evolved over a space of a century and a half (beginning with the Arab conquest of the mid-7th century) into its function as the core feature of Persianate civilization, and (a millennium later) of Persian ethnic and national identity. Perry's chapter is a detailed inquiry into the issues surrounding the re-emergence of Persian as the primary written language in an Arabic-dominated Islamic world. He describes the relationship of the language that became the koine with the other dialects that were current at the time. In dealing with the challenge of explaining why Persian came to dominate, given the high status of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an and its monopoly of public life for well over a century, he gives special attention to issues such as diglossia which have become standard in the general linguistic literature but may be misleading in the Persian case, and offers other ideas about how Persian could have become so inclusive, so quickly.

The second chapter, by William Hanaway, deals with the writing class, especially the profession of *munshi*. Hanaway discusses the formation and professional activities of the writing class and its social configuration. The third chapter, by A.H. Morton, adds the dimension of the textual tradition, responding to questions about the relationship between different versions of the works that came to form the canon. He helps us understand the processes of continuity and change in the canon by reconstructing the processes of textual transmission over time, and comparing them to the classical record. He shows that we should not assume that once something is written it is unchanging. The cultural value of writing in the medieval period preserved the status of the literate, but paradoxically not the authenticity of what was written. Perhaps partly for that reason, down to the 16th century at least the authority to interpret the text was crucial, and the oral record continued to be important.

In Part Two, which we have called Spread, chapter 4 by David Morgan follows the expansion of the Persianate medium to its limits to the east in Yuan China. Morgan begins with an account of the spread of Persian deep into China in the 13th and 14th centuries—which became known only recently. He demonstrates that Persian was the language of commerce as well as administration not only in Central Asia but even beyond. Next, in chapter 5, Linda Darling takes us to the western limits of the Persianate world in the Ottoman Empire, under which Persian spread to the Balkans. She ex-

plains the emergence of the first successor language, Ottoman Turkish, and makes an interesting distinction between the role of Ottoman scribes and their colleagues to the east: “Over the years the Ottomans employed scribes who wrote in Latin, Greek, Italian, Uighur, Persian, Arabic, Serbian, Hungarian, and other languages.” Within a century of the arrival of Persian in central China under the Mongols, the Ottomans in the West had begun to outgrow it, perhaps because of the variety of other bureaucratic traditions it encountered in the eastern Roman Empire. In the last chapter of this section, chapter 6, we return to the center of the Persianate world, where Colin Mitchell investigates the sophistication of the main prose genre of *insha*, and the elaboration of other prose models under the Safavids in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Persianate identity was beginning to evolve into Persian ethnic and eventually national identity. Mitchell explains with copious detail how the *munshi*’s social function evolved to become the ultimate vehicle for not only administration but the expression of Persianate high culture, *adab*, and provides a window on later stages of development.

Part Three, Vernacularization and Nationalism, takes us into the transitional period of the rise of peripheral vernaculars to general acceptance as vehicles of literacy. The process may have been accelerated by the intrusion of outside (Western) interests, which led to the emergence of nationalism. Four chapters illustrate different stages of the decline and breakup of the Persianate ecumene. The first, chapter 7 by Senzil Nawid, compares the writing of two historians spanning the late 18th to the mid 19th centuries. The second, by Aslam Syed, deals with the competition between Persian and Urdu in northern India in the same period, taking us further into the processes of vernacularization that took place during the British period. The third, by Anwar Moazzam, deals with the final official shift to Urdu in Hyderābād several decades later than northern India. Finally, in chapter 10 Michael Fisher takes us into the early teaching of Persian as a foreign language outside the Persianate world, perhaps the earliest appearance of the modern profession of foreign-language teaching before the emergence of the Levantine dragoman.

Finally, in Part Four, The Larger Context, Joseph Farrell and Victor Mair set the Persian record in a larger world-historical context by comparing it to Latin and Chinese respectively—both traditions of writing which were parallel to the Persian from the ancient world to the present, but which differ in significant ways in both the mechanics and the sociology of writing. The importance of Farrell’s contribution lies additionally in the com-

parability of Latinitas with *adab*. Mair's chapter concludes the argument of the volume by using the Chinese record to make a strong case for the separate study of speech and writing, explaining how the Chinese bureaucracy provided stability, over two millennia, even though many dynasties were non-Sinic (just as most Persianate ruling lines, besides the Mongols, were in fact Turkic). Stability depended on established forms of writing which were important for the illiterate masses as well as for the literate elite.

The relationship between Persian and Persianate civilization is perhaps too large a field for a single volume. What we hope to have achieved is the formulation of some important but neglected problems, with sufficient new analysis to whet some appetites for further exploration. The primary focus of our own work is the dynamic that underlay the particular record of Persian as a medieval koine whose use extended from the Mediterranean to China, and from the Central Asian steppe to India as a stable standard of administrative, literary, and commercial communication, and an explanation of what might be learned from the study of it that would illuminate historical processes more widely, especially insofar as they relate to the history of identities, cultural standards, modes of interaction, and rates of cultural change.

Our initial motivation arose from the sense of a need to explain the geographical and historical extent of a single cultural universe. To achieve its purpose such explanation requires a comparative context. What is it different from and why? We have emphasized the slowness of the pace of change, which allowed mutual intelligibility and a continued sense of common identity over such a vast area despite the exceedingly slow means of transportation, and over a whole millennium or more. However, Persianate civilization was an episode of world history. Despite the continuities of intelligibility and identity, the reader will find plenty of reference to change in the individual articles. All history is the story of change, but at different rates and of different qualities. What these chapters show is that change in the Persianate millennium was both quantitatively and qualitatively different from other regions and other periods of world history, and that the reasons for this difference of pace may illuminate other differences that have tended to be taken for granted. Following the final chapter the Afterword emphasizes the importance of seeing the whole episode as a process of change, but change at very different rates. During the Persianate era change was relatively slow, allowing the continuation of a standard medium of communication over a vast area. The Persianate era ends with the rate of

change picking up and becoming differentiated from one part of the area to another.

## NOTES

1. Changing the name of a language in order to distinguish it from the same language (as spoken) in a neighboring country suggests comparison with several other cases: e.g., Hindi and Urdu; Serbian and Croatian. In both these cases script is the significant factor in language identity, and the legislated change of script has facilitated divergence in usage between parts of a larger language community divided by non-linguistic factors.
2. Cf. "...Romulus Augustulus" [the last Roman Emperor in the West] removal did nothing to interrupt bureaucratic habits. All the kingdoms that emerged on the Continent during the fifth century relied directly on these inherited techniques of ruling. By appropriating traditional mechanisms of government for their own use, fifth- and sixth-century warrior kings asserted legitimacy, collected revenue, made law, and proclaimed their power" (Smith 2005:29).
3. "In French we write the same vowel four different ways in terrain, plein, matin, chien. Now when this vowel is written ain, I see it in pale yellow like an incompletely baked brick; when it is written ein, it strikes me as a network of purplish veins; when it is written in, I no longer know at all what colour sensation it evokes in my mind, and am inclined to believe that it evokes none" (quoted from Saussure by John E. Joseph in *Times Literary Supplement*, Nov. 14, 2007, p. 15).

## REFERENCES

- Alam, Muzaffar. 1998. The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics. *Modern Asian Studies* 32(2): 317–49.
- 2003. The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan. In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Alam, Muzaffar, Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau, eds. 2000. *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed. London: Verso.
- Arjomand, Said Amir. 2008. Defining Persianate Studies. *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1:1–4.
- Ashraf, Ahmad. 1989. Alqab va `anavin. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. 1, Fasc. 9, pp. 898–906. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Balmukund, Mehta. 1972. *Letters of a King-Maker of the Eighteenth Century (Balmukund Nama)*, trans. Satish Chandra, pp. 15–16. Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University; Asia Publishing House.
- Birney, William. 1905. Did the Monks Preserve the Latin Classics? *The Monist* 15:87–108.

- Bloch, Maurice. 1998. *How We Think They Think: Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Bohannon, Paul. 1995. *How Culture Works*. New York: Free Press.
- Boserup, Ester. 1964. *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Bosworth, Clifford E. 1968. Development of Persian Culture under the Early Ghaznavids. *IRAN: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 6:33–44.
- . 1969. AbdAllāh al-Khwarazm on the Technical Terms of the Secretary's Art: A Contribution to the Administrative History of Medieval Islam. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12(2): 113–64.
- Brose, Michael C. 2000. Strategies of Survival, Uyghur Elites in Yuan and Early-Ming China. Ph.D. diss. in Asian and Middle East Studies, University of Pennsylvania.
- Browne, E.G. 1928. *A Literary History of Persia*. 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See vol. 1, new introduction by J.T.P. de Bruijn (Bethesda, MD: Iranbooks, 1997), p. 109.
- Burke, Peter, and Roy Porter, eds. 1987. *The Social History of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chafe, Wallace, and Deborah Tannen. 1987. The Relation between Written and Spoken Language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16:383–407.
- Cicourel, A. 1985. Text and Discourse. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14:159–85.
- Clanchy, Michael T. 1983. Looking Back from the Invention of Printing. In *Literacy in Historical Perspective*, ed. Daniel Resnick, pp. 16–19. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
- . 2002. Does Writing Construct the State? *Journal of Historical Sociology* 15:68–70.
- Collins, James. 1995. Literacy and Literacies. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:75–93.
- Dalrymple, William. 2007. The Venetian Treasure Hunt. *New York Review of Books* 54(12), July 19.
- Daniels, Peter T. 1996. The Study of Writing Systems. In *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T. Daniels, and William Bright, pp. 1–17. New York: Oxford University Press.
- de Blois, L. 1994. Sueto, Aug. 46 und die Manipulation des mittleren Militäerkaders als politisches Instrument. *Historia* 43:324–45.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Editions de la Minuit.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. 1979. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Everett, Nicholas. 2003. *Literacy in Lombard, Italy, c. 568–774*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Farrell, Joseph. 2001. *Latin Language and Latin Culture from Ancient to Modern Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, C.A. 1959. Diglossia. *Word* 15:325.
- Fleischer, Cornell. 1994. Between the Lines: Realities of Scribal Life in the



- Sixteenth Century. In *Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of Professor V.L. Ménage*, ed. Colin Heywood and Colin Imber, pp. 45–61. Istanbul: Isis Press.
- Gelb, Ignace. 1952. *A Study of Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gladwin, Francis. 1781. *The Persian Moonshee*. Calcutta. Reprint 1801 (London: Wilson & Co.).
- Goody, Jack, ed. 1968. *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1977. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1986. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Studies in Literacy, the Family, Culture, and the State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1987. *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*. Studies in Literacy, the Family, Culture, and the State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2000. *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Goody, Jack, and I.P. Watt. 1963. The Consequences of Literacy. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5:304–45.
- Graff, Harvey J. 1981. *Literacy in History: An Interdisciplinary Research Bibliography*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 254. New York.
- 1987. *The Legacies of Literacy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1995. *The Labyrinths of Literacy. Reflections of Literacy Past and Present*. Rev. and exp. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Greene, W. 1951. The Spoken and Written Word. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 60:23–59.
- Halverson, John. 1991. Olson on Literacy. *Language in Society* 20:619–40.
- 1992. Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis. *Man* 27:301–17.
- Hanaway, William L., and Brian Spooner. 2007. *Reading Nasta'liq: Persian and Urdu Hands from 1500 to the Present*. 2nd rev. ed. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publications.
- Harris, W.V. 1989. *Ancient Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Havelock, Eric A. 1963. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 1982. *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1986. *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Heath, S.B. 1984. Oral and Literate Traditions. *International Social Science Journal* 36:41–57.
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart. 1990. Introduction. In *Studies in Neo-Aramaic*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs, pp. ix–xvii. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Helms, Mary W. 1988. *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- 1993. *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade and Power*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Hodgson, Marshall. 1974. *The Venture of Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Houston, Stephen, John Baines, and Jerrold Cooper. 2003. Last Writing: Script Obsolescence in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Mesoamerica. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45(3): 430–79.
- Ibn Khaldun. 2005. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, abr. and ed. N.J. Dawood, with new intro. by Bruce B. Lawrence. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jaspers, Karl. 1949. *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. München: Piper Verlag.
- Kent, Roland G. 1950. *Old Persian; Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*. American Oriental Series, 33. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society.
- Khaleghi-Motlagh, Djalal. 1983. Adab. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 4, pp. 432–39. Boston: Routledge.
- Knauer, Elfriede Regina. 1998. *The Camel's Load in Life and Death*. Zürich: Akanthus.
- Kosto, Adam J. 2001. *Making Agreements in Medieval Catalonia: Power, Order, and the Written Word, 1000–1200*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lazard, Gilbert. 1971. Pahlavi, parsi, dari: les langues de l'Iran d'après Ibn al-Muqaffa'. In *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. Clifford E. Bosworth, pp. 361–91. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1925. *How Natives Think* (Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures), authorized trans. Lilian A. Clare. New York: Knopf.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1961. *A World on the Wane*, trans. John Russell. New York: Criterion.
- Littleton, C.S. 1982. *The New Comparative Mythology*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Martin, Henri-Jean. 1994. *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Milroy, James. 1985. *Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Minorsky, Vladimir, trans. and ed. 1943. *Tadhkirat al-mulūk, a Manual of Safavid Administration (circa 1137/1725), Persian Text in Facsimile (B.M. Or. 9496)*. Gibb Memorial Series, 16. London: Luzac & Co.
- Mottahedeh, Roy P. 1980. *Leadership and Loyalty*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Muhiuddin, Momin. 1971. *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography, under the Mughals, from Babur to Shāh Jahan (1526–1658)*. Calcutta: Iran Society.
- Olson, David R. 1977. From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing. *Harvard Educational Review* 47:257–81.
- 1988. Mind and Media: The Epistemic Functions of Literacy. *Journal of Communication* 38(3): 27–36.
- 1994. *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writ-*

- ing and Reading. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ong, Walter J. 1982 [1988]. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen.
- Pei, Mario. 1949 [1960]. *The Story of Language*. New York: Mentor Books.
- Pollock, Sheldon, ed. 2003. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Porter, Theodore M. 1995. *Trust in Numbers. The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Resnick, Daniel P., ed. 1983. *Literacy in Historical Perspective*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
- Ronell, Avital. 1989. *The Telephone Book: Technology–Schizophrenia–Electric Speech*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Schams, Christine. 1998. *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Schmandt-Besserat, Denise. 1996. *How Writing Came About*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Scribner, Sylvia, and Michael Cole. 1981. *The Psychology of Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Al Akbar Shahabi. 1997. Āmuzesh va parvaresh dar makāteb va madāres-e qadim. *Farhang-e Irānzamin* 42(1375): 11–62.
- Smirnov, S.D., and N.S. Kamenskiy. 1948. *Sbornik Obraztsov Persidskikh Skoropisnykh Dokumentov i Obraztsov Epistolyarnogo Stilya (dlya starshikh kursov)*. Voennyi Institut Inostrannykh Yazykov, Kafedra persidskogo, arabskogo i afganskogo yazykov. Moscow.
- Smith, Julia M.H. 2005. *Europe after Rome, A New Cultural History 500–1000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spooner, Brian, ed. 1972. *Population Growth: Anthropological Implications*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 1993. Are We Teaching Persian? or Fārsi? or Dari? or Tojiki? In *Persian Studies in America*, ed. Mehdi Marashi, pp. 175–90. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Spooner, Brian, and William L. Hanaway. 2009. Siyaq: Persianate Numerical Notation and Numeracy. In *Oxford Handbook of the History of Mathematics*, ed. Eleanor Robson and Jacqueline Stedall, pp. 429–47. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stock, Brian. 1983. *The Implications of Literacy, Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1984. Medieval Literacy, Linguistic Theory, and Social Organization. *New Literary History* 16(1): 13–29.
- Stolper, Matthew W. 2004. Elamite. In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, ed. Roger D. Woodard, pp. 60–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Stolper, Matthew W., and Jan Tavernier. 2007. An Old Persian Administrative Tablet from the Persepolis Fortification. Persepolis Fortification Archive Project, 1. *Achaemenid Research on Texts and Archaeology* (ARTA 2007.001). Electronic resource; see <http://www.achemenet.com/document/2007.001-Stolper-Tavernier.pdf>.
- Strauss, G. 1984. Lutheranism and Literacy: A Reassessment. In *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. K. von Greyerz, pp. 109–23. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Street, Brian V. 1984. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tafazzoli, Ahmad. 1377/1998. *Tārikh-e adabiyāt-e iran pish az eslām*, pp. 294–95. Tehrān: Intishārāt-i Sukhan.
- . 2000. *Sasanian Society*. New York: Bibliotheca Persica.
- Tannen, D., ed. 1982. *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Wallat, François. 1994. Succession royale en Îlam au II<sup>ème</sup> millénaire. In *Cinquante-deux réflexions sur le Proche-Orient ancien offertes en hommage à Léon De Meyer*, ed. H. Gasche, M. Tanret, C. Janssen, and A. Degraeve, pp. 1–14. Mesopotamian History and Environment Occasional Publications 2. Leuven: Peters.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1962. *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Waldman, Marilyn Robinson. 1980. *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Wallace, Anthony F.C. 1961. On Being Just Complicated Enough. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 47(4): 458–64.
- . 1966. *Religion: An Anthropological View*. New York: Random House.
- Windfuhr, Gernot, ed. 2009. *The Iranian Languages*. London: Curzon.
- Woodard, Roger D. 2004. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yates, Francis. 1979. Print Culture. *Encounter* 52(4): 59–64.
- Zaehner, R.C. 1937–1939. Nāmak-nipesishnih. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 9:93–109.
- Zengel, Marjorie S. 1962. Literacy as a Factor in Language Change. *American Anthropologist* 64:132–39.
- Zilli, Ishtiyāq Ahmad. 2000. Development of Inshā Literature to the End of Akbar's Reign. In *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau, pp. 309–49. New Delhi: Manohar.