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In Lieu of Introduction On Locating Patronage in Space, Voice and Genre*

*Depending on the type of the vehicle-medium
the nature of the road-medium alters greatly*
Marshall McLuhan

The problem of outlining the *locus* of historical change may seem to be the sole preserve of historians. However, at the historic moment of opening knowledge production to the cross-pollination of academic fields, this volume brings a selection of case studies employing several different perspectives and drawing on history, textual criticism, philology, comparative study of religion and cultural studies, among others. All of them look at and examine the location of historical change from a variety of distinct positions connecting in one way or another to patronage or/and devotion. Just as devotion does not necessarily refer here to religious attitude towards the divine only, so the *locus* addresses not only place, space, or type of order (be it social, political, religious or cultural) where a change over time is to be located, but also voice and genre of inscrip-

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tion/record. I propose to understand the latter as a genre embodying specific social voice and elevated (or proposed to be elevated) to the position of historical record. Location of historical change (a task of the historian) connects in most of the essays to the re-location of patronage, which may come down to a shift in the agency of patronage dispensers or beneficiaries, else its reconfiguration in the economic and socio-cultural system that supports it as a necessary media environment. The turn of the 19th century, for instance, which witnessed fragmented and uneven growth of the East India Company as the agent of imperial type of patronage, also saw major shifts in the Company administration's views on information and its dissemination (Bayly 1996, Laidlaw 2005), included shifting from networks of personal relations to the increasing infrastructural communication by circulating a growing number of reports through an ever bigger number of impersonal channels of movement, all with a newly intensified speed. On the other hand, the same period of infrastructural change saw, for example, new genres of folk song registering historical processes of change in their own way, through heroic song poems (*pāṭṭū*) known as the so called “standalone poems” (*orra-pāṭṭū*) which formally and contextually break away with their own genre-tradition of *Northern Ballads*, or *Vaṭakkan-Pāṭṭū* of Malabar, and are even sometimes labeled as “modern forgeries of a traditional genre” (see Malayil in this volume).

Some of the essays in the volume take inspiration from the seminar “Changing patterns of patronage across South Asia in the early-modern and colonial period(s)” (2021). As the title of the seminar and of the project behind it¹ suggest, patronage tends to be understood here as a rather dynamic technique for predominantly cultural, social or religious processing, including media communication. As such, it remains sensitive to historical change, but also generative of impulses shaping that change, if not becoming such

¹ Cf. research project “Cultures of Patronage: script, print and performance in the making of regional and imperial spaces of communication and knowledge circulation across India 1674–1890” supported by the National Science Centre, Poland, research grant no. 2018/31/B/HS2/02328.

a change itself. Thus, patronage and historical change feature as connected throughout this volume.

One of the ambitions of the above-mentioned project and the present volume is to probe the concept of patronage, through selected case studies, as infrastructural medium of cultural reproduction and change. Additionally, the editors of the volume believe that thinking of media as basic infrastructures for culture and civilization breaks with the flat and often fruitless viewing of both the patrons and the recipients of patronage as just givers and takers, with barely visible historical consequences of much more complex practices involved in the process. That patronage—seen as a serial, socially expected, recurring concatenation of acts of distinct values—has always been constituted by collective practices rather than individual choices is another idea surfacing in the essays collected in this volume. The latter suggest, too, that, historically, patronage can only be communicated through inscription, be it handwriting, incising, print or image creating. And basically, it makes no sense whatsoever to detach patronage from communicating it to some third party who is there to acknowledge or at least witness it. By the same it makes not much sense to speak about patronage without addressing techniques and technologies of inscription, record, storing and processing through memory, oral performance, writing, printing or digitizing.

Naturally enough, patronage connects to inscribing (in individual and collective memory, on palm leaves, paper, discs, in cloud storage, etc.) also by its power of preserving, especially through those forms of patronage that tend to show as repetitive and ritualized. Patronage becomes an infrastructural medium of cultural and social reproduction through recurring practices. It has its own inscriptional value in terms of plotting the timeline, or signal generating, that produces patterns of rhythmical nature corresponding to the type of substrate vehicle in use and *modus operandi* of cultural techniques of inscription deployed for the specific medium to become effective. The historical genre determines each time the material form of inscription, like the *pratiṣṭha* genre of temple idol reno-

vation/disposal in the case of the pre-11th-century ritual manual called *Devyāmata* (see Mills in this volume), with patron's role inscribed internally in the work in the form of a prescriptive rule binding his potential munificence as one of the necessary steps in ritual procedure. Only with those repetitive patterns in mind may we speak of cultures of patronage in the sense of transcending individual acts.

Several contributions to the volume highlight, each in its own way, how techniques of registering, inscription and circulation, performance, writing and print helped to shape and consolidate religious identities while reinforcing those historically associated with oral or written order or shaping new ones by forging novel constituencies of listeners or readers taking to print. In the moment of change, printers and publishers (often the same persons) assumed in many respects the roles of princely or prominent families extending patronage to performing arts, projects of composing, translating and commenting on religious, philosophical, literary and other works. Like in the reworked rule of *remediation* (cf. McLuhan 1964; Bolter & Grusin 1999), the new medium of print took over in a protracted process of first substituting for the former, with all its socio-cultural context of patronizing while only slowly giving way to growing commercial commodification of its products and appeal. As indicated by book historians (e.g., Stark 2009), especially the relatively inexpensive early technology of lithographing drew huge part of its new appeal and authority from producing texts resembling manuscripts, but on paper. The situation was different in the areas where palm-leaf books rather than those using paper remained the preferred vehicle long into the 19th century as extremely elongated objects could not be effectively reproduced in print using lithography or moveable font. Another factor that should not be left out of the picture is the process of gradual embracing of various oral traditions of commenting and glossing the source text by writing and, especially, publishing in print (noted by Stark 2009). These in many instances, developed cultural techniques of embedding commentary, gloss or exposition of meaning within the body of the printed book

(see Cantú in this volume). Recent studies show how imperial patronage, dedicated and addressed to select recipients among religious communities, may polarize sectarian differences and processes of adaptation to the patterns of the beneficiaries on the part of other religious communities and their institutions (cf. Stoker 2016). On the other hand, some of the essays in this volume suggest that ritualized forms of repeated patronage (often patterned on yearly calendar recurrence) represent a type that effectively steered away from such a polarization.

Each in its own way, the contributions to the volume tap on a variety of specific aspects of patronage in distinct socio-historical settings. One such is gift-giving as part of a general ideology of patronage. An illustration for that is the religious patronage among Sant communities of the 17th century, and more specifically, the rich textual tradition exemplified by the Sant *paracāīs* of Anantadas of North India (see Zapart in this volume) where the ritualized form of gift-giving (*dāna*) can be seen as operating not only on social but also on proselytizing and soteriological levels while taking the unusual form of huge spectacles of mass feasts (*mahochau* < Skt. *mahotsava*). An otherwise promising study of genre-specific correlation between the *dāna* and a particular community remains a *desideratum* too. The socio-religious dynamics of *mahochaus* as a medium of gift-giving includes such elements as: claim to the agency for dispensing the generosity, repeated series, challenge, risk of failure or bankruptcy, unpredictable consequences of acceptance and rejection of patronage—all viewed against the cultural economy of *bhakti* and the genre of *paracāī*. The gift theory that seems to naturally offer its terminology here stands in need of extension or modification, since “Even if directly not reciprocated, *dāna* remains a circulatory process: (...) put[ting] into motion a movement of grace (or mercy, kindness) (*kṛpā*) of Hari.” Interestingly enough, the same dynamics of gift-giving includes the ambivalent social face of *dāna* as an obligation towards brahmins that proves to be disruptively positioned against the type of *bhakti dāna-dāya* circulation of an entirely different and eventually emancipatory or salvific promise.

While following their respective trajectories of interest, each and every essay in the volume embraces a distinct object of patronage mediated, conditioned and shaped by the vehicle genre involved: mass feasts of *mahochoaus* (Zapart), *tumuli* or meditation halls (Cantú), temple idol renovation rituals (Mills), ritualized Vedic recitals in temples (Galewicz), collective memory of a cultural hero (Malayil), modern literary biographies of famous figures of the past (Mangraviti). Thus, the object can be constructed as material, institutional or processual. Conspicuously enough, the selection avoids simple personal patronage by means of intentional decision. The latter holds true, too, for a preference given to cases where the medium of the inscriptional genre appears to circumscribe, if not define, that of patronage.

Some *loci* of patronage tend to remain tied for their articulation to one specific place or type of space, like that of imperial court (Podlasiński) or temple (Mills; Galewicz). Others appear to be movable sites shifting across a cultural zone or territory of claimed influence (Zapart; Mangraviti; Malayil), still others, to form networks (of *tumuli* associated with Sabhapati's teachings) capable of attracting patronage of pilgrim devotees (Cantú).

One more dimension traceable to all contributions can perhaps be labeled as strategies for inviting, attracting or (ritually) binding patronage. Some of them, indeed, deserve being classified as cultural technics of securing patronage. Among those we may see such as: inscribing patron's role as part of the prescribed ritual procedure (Mills), using the symbolic capital of the previous gurus' religious prestige (Cantú; Zapart), self-assertion of the textual vehicle of inscription (Cantú; Galewicz; Malayil; Podlasiński; Zapart), patronized tradition as founded on a text claiming to be a hidden instruction for individual emancipation (Cantú; Zapart) or community's social elevation (Galewicz), an inter-sectarian consensus-building agenda of the author (Cantú; Mangraviti).

Time and again we get hints to the effect that the linkage between the agenda of the teaching and the patrons requires a specific genre to effectively vehiculate it. The genre-vehicles featuring in

this volume range from an 11th-century temple ritual manual of *pratiṣṭha* type (Mills), through a 17th-century *paracāi* (Zapart), an 18th-century autobiographical narrative, or *ātmakatha* (Galewicz), a 19th-century standalone *orra-pāṭṭū* vernacular song (Malayil), a late-19th-century hagiography (Cantú), to a late-19th-century *jīvnī*, i.e. modern biography (Mangraviti).

Last but not least, each and every essay rises questions concerning relationship between the form and mode of patronage and historical process. Thus, we can see the rise of the late-19th-century Hindi public sphere and print market as related to political and religious patronage (Mangraviti). We can make sense of the growth of the Sant communities of the 17th and 18th centuries as related to the patronage ideology of gift-giving and staging spectacular feast of *mahochoas* (Zapart). We may better understand puzzling dynamics of historical conflict between royal power and brahmin communities of the 18th-century Malabar through the temple patronage economy of prestige (Galewicz). We are given a chance to grasp the historical logic of the yoga-consensus project envisaged by the late 19th-century pan-Indian mission of Sabhapati as related to the strategy of attracting patronage through networking of *tumuli* halls of meditation (Cantú). We can judge historical probability of relating cases of the post-11th-century temple idol renewals in North India as guided by the ritualized relation to the imagined patron inscribed in the prescriptive manual. And finally, we can follow yet another essay of this volume in its trajectory of traces left in the extent repertoire record of folk genre of *orra-pāṭṭū* as embodying a historical voice of hitherto unacknowledged locus of recording and preserving a historical perspective otherwise given over to the acknowledged genres of officially patronized historical vehicles of preservation (Malayil). All of them remained not only propelled in one way or another by forms and modalities of historical dynamics of securing and losing patronage, fishing for and missing patron's preferences, reversed strategies of paying court to and ridiculing patrons, accepting and rejecting patronage. They also—and this is more interesting for the make-up of this volume—took shape by looking for alternative new

vehicles of genre-oriented inscription of articulating and recording patronage in order to better fit and indeed shape historical change.²

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² “Inconspicuous vehicular transformations can have gigantic historical effects” (Peters 2015: 25, following Kittler 1999).