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Verbal and Visual Texts of the Rāma Narrative

ABSTRACT: This article examines what we mean by a text: is it verbal (whether written or oral), mental, visual, or a combination? All of these forms are found within the various types of artistic expression centred on the Rāmāyaṇa tradition. I start with the relief sculptures, some of which are centuries early than any extant manuscripts. After a brief comment on the evolution of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text, I then survey in turn some prestige illustrated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts, less notable *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts, illustrated manuscripts of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and other vernacular versions, and sets or series of paintings illustrating the Rāma story (including some single paintings), showing the diverse range of forms it has taken over time and something of the adaptations it has undergone.

KEYWORDS: reliefs, recensions, manuscripts, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, paintings

What do we mean by a text? A common answer would be that it is written or printed words on a page and indeed dictionary definitions are often along the lines of "a book or other written or printed work," to which a qualification may be added that this applies to content as well as to physical form. But folklore scholars would certainly add the concept of an oral text, one handed down by word of mouth, and would supplement that with the concept of a mental text, an outline or framework on which the bard or story-teller builds his actual performance. In the realm of

art, representations intended to narrate the episodes of a story visually should also be regarded as texts, whether accompanied by any written words or not, as should all forms of theatre.[1]

All of these forms are found within India in the various types of artistic expression centred on the Rāmāyaṇa tradition. In the visual field, we find both relief sculptures and paintings, with sculpture series and friezes extant centuries earlier than paintings or even manuscripts (the earliest manuscript used for the Critical Edition belongs to the 11th century but others are from the 16th century or later).[2] Besides purely written texts, the many manuscripts of the various Rāmāyaṇas include a limited number of illustrated manuscripts; there is a much larger number of sets or series illustrating the Rāmāyaṇa narrative which are quite often termed manuscripts, although they lack any more text than a caption or brief description of the scene depicted; and less often we find single paintings, some of which may be the last remnant of otherwise lost sets. While for the sake of clarity we need to be careful to distinguish manuscripts in the strict sense of written texts (which may have illustrations) from series of paintings, either captioned or uncaptioned, they clearly are related and can indeed together be regarded as forming a continuum. In addition, there are the material accompaniments of live performances, both the paintings produced for and used as an aid or backdrop by itinerant storytellers and the puppets or masks used in theatrical representations of the narrative.

Sculptural reliefs relating to the Rāma story on temple walls, mostly in stone but some in stucco or terracotta, are extant from as early as the Gupta period.[3] From the late 7th or 8th century come a set of

[1] My own interest in the topic of the interplay between verbal and visual representations goes back over more than two decades (cf. Brockington 1998: 496–499 and 523–524, Brockington 2002).

[2] The priority of sculptural over written texts applies also to Southeast Asia, with the limited exception of the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin* of the 9th–10th century and *Uttarakāṇḍa* of c. 1000 A. D. (Brockington 2021).

[3] Even earlier single instances occur but I exclude these unless they clearly illustrate or name a specific episode, in particular reliefs of Rāvaṇa shaking Kailāsa

eight stucco relief panels on a brick temple at Aphsaḍ in Bihar which illustrate the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* narrative from the crossing of the Gaṅgā up to the meeting with Bharata. A sizable proportion of the terracottas found at various sites have identifying captions or labels; this is a feature of this early period but for reasons that are unclear is not common again until the Vijayanagara period. For example, a perhaps 4th-century terracotta panel from Jind of Hanumān destroying the *aśokavana* is captioned *hanumān aśokavāṭikāhantā* and several panels most probably originating from a 5th-century temple at Katingara all feature Hanumān, on one of which the two figures shown are labelled in Brāhmī script as Siṃghikā (i.e. Siṃhikā) and Hanumān (Greaves 2018). Stone temples of the Gupta period were also decorated with panels showing the Rāma story. Best known are the ten panels which once ornamented the plinth of the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogaṛh, a Vaiṣṇava temple of probably 5th-century date.[4] Outside the territories of the imperial Guptas and their subordinates or allies, evidence for the popularity of the Rāma story is mostly rather later. In Orissa, a number of temples constructed between the 7th and 10th centuries carry Rāmāyaṇa friezes. At Bhubaneśvara alone a group of five blocks on the Śatrughneśvara temple (c. 600 A. D.) carries scenes leading up to the death of Vālin, the Svarṇajāleśvara temple has two sequences, and there are also scenes on the Paraśurāma temple (late 7th century) and the Śiśireśvara temple (c. 775 A. D.). But all these Orissan temples are Śaiva, apart from the Śākta Vārāhī temple at Caurāsi, and none is Vaiṣṇava.

(*Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti*) which develops a largely separate distribution from any other episode linked to the Rāma story. Fuller details for this survey of sculptural reliefs, including further references, can be found in an earlier article (Brockington 2020).

[4] Most of these panels are now in the National Museum, New Delhi. They include Rāma's transformation of Ahalyā, Rāma crossing the river with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the visit to Atri's *āśrama,* Lakṣmaṇa mutilating Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāma killing *rākṣasa*s, the abduction of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa garlanding Sugrīva, Tārā with the dying Vālin, Rāvaṇa threatening Sītā in the *aśokavana.* Also, a *caitya* window slab seems to show Rāvaṇa offering his heads to Śiva (Agrawala 1994).

In the Deccan, during the 7th and 8th centuries, a number of the temples erected in Karnataka by the Western Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi and in Andhra Pradesh by the Eastern Cāḷukyas of Veṅgi provide frequent instances of carved Rāmāyaṇa scenes. Among temples with Rāmāyaṇa reliefs erected under the Cōḻas between the 10th and 12th centuries the majority are Śaiva. Most of the 12th-century Hoysaḷa temples with Rāmāyaṇa friezes are also Śaiva, as well as the slightly later Mallikārjuna temple at Basarāḷu (1234 A. D.). An episode occurring very frequently on Hoysaḷa temples is that of Lakṣmaṇa slashing bamboos and accidentally decapitating Śambūka, Śūrpaṇakhā's son; this episode is characteristic of the Jain verbal narratives from Vimalasūri onwards, including the Kannaḍa *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* by Nāgacandra (late 11th to 12th century), which follows the standard Jain version (specifically subverting the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*) and may well be the ultimate source for these visual representations.

Probably in many instances the aim was implicitly to equate the local ruler with the universal sovereign, Rāma. Certainly, it seems that the scenes from both epics which cover the outer walls of the Pāpanātha temple at Paṭṭadakal, built by the Western Cāḷukyas in the first half of the 8th century, were designed to bolster the dynasty's legitimacy shortly before its fall to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. On the other hand, at Vijayanagara it was not until the early 15th century that the first Rāma temple was built, so the Rāma cult here is not a direct reaction to the Muslim presence in the Deccan, as sometimes suggested; indeed, various local sites have been popularly associated with Rāmāyaṇa episodes from at least the 11th century. Nevertheless, the shift in placement of the reliefs from basement friezes to the main walls gives them greater prominence and suggests that they are intended to celebrate royal power. Eight temples in total are dedicated to Rāma at Vijayanagara itself, all built in the 16th century.

The relationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes can be complex. An obvious problem for visual representations is how to show invisibility. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (1.47.11–48.22), followed by Kṣemendra and Bhoja, Ahalyā is cursed

to remain in the *āśrama* invisible but in most other versions from Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* (11.34) onwards she is cursed to become a stone until released by Rāma. Ahalyā turned to stone is universal in visual representations but the earliest examples are roughly contemporary with Kālidāsa. So did visual requirements prompt this innovation, as logic perhaps suggests? But would it have been intelligible to viewers without some basis in a verbal narration?[5] Again, a 5th-century relief in the National Museum, New Delhi, shows Rāvaṇa with an ass's head (Sivaramamurti 1974: fig. 56); this motif is found sporadically in reliefs from now on and later very frequently in miniature paintings but the earliest verbal reference is apparently that to a horse's head, in the possibly 9th-century extra-Indian Khotanese version.

Bālakāṇḍa episodes are very well represented; the martial scenes of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* are also frequent but the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is under-represented, as is the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, apart from the extremely popular *saptatālabhedana* and the combat between Vālin and Sugrīva; *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes are almost unknown before the Vijayanagara period. Whereas many earlier sculptural series seem basically to follow the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* increasingly, over the centuries, the scenes depicted show versions of such episodes that depart from the form of the narrative occurring in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and approximate to those found in later vernacular adaptations, often providing our earliest evidence for such innovations, which may well have originated in oral tellings in any case or may even have generated them.

The substantial divergence of the text of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* into the Northern [N] recension (further divided into the Northeastern [NE] and Northwestern [NW] recensions) and Southern [S] recension is generally recognised by scholars working on the verbal text as one indication of a long period of oral transmission before its commitment to writing but its significance for the identification of episodes has often

[5] A much later instance is Mānaku (see below) failing to solve the problem of how to show Indrajit becoming invisible and instead showing him running away, thus distorting the narrative.

been insufficiently understood, as instances noted below demonstrate. The text of the Critical Edition (based primarily on the S recension, shorn of most material not also supported by the N recension) attests the form that the narrative reached probably early in the Gupta period, while later additions found in limited numbers of manuscripts are recorded in its apparatus.[6] However, extant manuscripts are significantly later, coming with one exception from no earlier than the 16th century.

The oldest illustrated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript, that produced for Bīr Singh Bundela, ruler of Orchā and Datiyā, around 1605–1610, is therefore among the earlier manuscripts extant. Though clearly inspired by the illustrated copies of the Persian translation commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar and copying the vertical format of Mughal paintings, its paintings occupy the whole of one side of the folios, which were kept as separate leaves, with corresponding text from the N recension on the verso. Contrary to the general assumption that the Sanskrit text consists of selections, on the majority of versos I have examined it is broadly continuous (Brockington 2019). Moreover they were written by several different hands, implying that the project was envisaged as being larger than is apparent from the number of extant folios. That Bīr Singh's Rāmāyaṇa was a prestige project is obvious both from the sub-imperial Mughal style of the paintings and from the choice of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* as the text to be written on the versos (Fig. 1). This choice was no doubt influenced by the precedent set by Akbar but it would also have coincided with Bīr Singh's own Vaiṣṇava leanings.

When *mahārāṇā* Jagat Singh of Mewar (r. 1628–1652) set about restocking the royal library, destroyed in 1568 during the Mughal sack of Cittaurgaṛh, the highlight was the Jagat Singh or Mewar Rāmāyaṇa, now mounted on the web in a joint project of the British Library and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.[7]

[6] The relationship between the recensions is too large an issue to deal with fully here but see Brockington 2018c and my earlier articles referred to there.

[7] The artistic aspects of this manuscript have been well covered in various publications (especially Losty 2008) and in the material on the British Library website

This was clearly one product of the propaganda campaign by the Śiśodiyā dynasty to bolster its image in the wake of the humiliation of recognising Mughal sovereignty in 1615 and to assert its descent from Rāma. The illustrations to the *Ayodhyā* and *Yuddha kāṇḍa*s were painted mainly by Sāhib Dīn in a style showing some popular Mughal features, those to the *Bāla* and probably *Uttara kāṇḍa*s by Manohar in a style showing influence from Bundi, the *Araṇya* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍa*s by a third unnamed painter or group of painters influenced by Deccanī painting, and the fragmentary *Sundarakāṇḍa* in a similar style to the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* but rather mixed in style and quality.[8] The entire text, still complete for most *kāṇḍa*s, was written between 1649 and 1653 by a Jain scribe, Mahātmā Hīrāṇanda, who evidently had to turn to several sources for the manuscripts he copied and in some instances these were defective (in which case Hīrāṇanda carefully put dashes for illegible *akṣara*s)—an eloquent comment on the previous troubles (Brockington 2014; 2018a: 207–208).

In the first quarter of the 18th century comes the most monumental of Pahāṛī illustrated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts. One part is the "small Guler Rāmāyaṇa" of around 1720, which is the only major series of paintings ascribed to Paṇḍit Seu (Fig. 2); extant folios illustrate episodes from the *Araṇya* and *Sundara kāṇḍa*s. The brief text extracts on several folios from the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, all in the Rietberg Museum, Zürich, nonetheless follow the N recension (indeed mainly the NE recension) despite where it was produced. The *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* comprises another series in a very similar format, datable between 1710 and 1725, that has been called the "Mankot Rāmāyaṇa;" it is not known where exactly it was painted but it was not in Paṇḍit Seu's own workshop (Fig. 3). This series also has *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text on the versos, which consists of a skilfully made

"The Mewar Ramayana: a digital reunification" (http://www.bl.uk/ramayana), so I will not discuss them further here. Two *Bālakāṇḍa* folios (ff. 14 + 18) from the Moti Chandra collection not included there have now been published (Losty 2020: 62–67, nos 23–24).

[8] In relation to the Jagat Singh Rāmāyaṇa it is relevant to note that a little earlier, around 1645, Sāhibdīn had worked on a *Sūryavaṃśa* series, since this bardic work outlines the legendary ancestral history of the Śiśodiya dynasty back via Rāma to Sūrya.

sequential selection of verses from the text forming a condensed but fuller narrative relating to the painting on the recto which seems planned to be read continuously (one verso has continuous text). The most spectacular part of the set is the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, the "Siege of Laṅkā" series by Mānaku, Paṇḍit Seu's older son, produced probably around 1725 in a monumental format (c. 60 × 83 cm.) but abandoned with most of its forty folios left just as preliminary drawings. The text on the versos of the first four folios forms a continuous text from the start of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* in the N Recension (CE 6.16.1–22.4cd) in a major shift from the practice on the versos in the other *kāṇḍa*s towards a manuscript of the complete text. Establishing the nature of the text followed enabled Mary Brockington to correct the identifications of several of the paintings or drawings through recognition that the text being illustrated was aligned with the N recension (Brockington and Brockington 2013). It seems that the scale on which the work was planned steadily increased from one *kāṇḍa* to the next and equally that plans for the amount of text on the versos became steadily more ambitious, from the limited selection of relevant verses on the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* versos, through the sequential selection of verses on the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* versos and the fuller continuous text on some *Sundarakāṇḍa* versos, to the complete text found across the first four versos of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, the "Siege of Laṇkā series" (Brockington 2021b).

From the early 17th century onwards, instances of later Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇas, including their Persian translations, were created, alongside less notable illustrated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇas*. An illustrated copy of the *Jogbāṣiṣṭh*, a translation of the *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*, is dated in its colophon as early as December 1602; now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, it contains 41 miniatures among its 323 folios. A later successor of Jagat Singh, *mahārāṇā* Saṅgrām Singh II (1710–1734 A.D.), also commissioned many illustrated manuscripts, among which is a *Bālakāṇḍa* manuscript with 202 paintings on 212 folios, completed in 1712, given to James Tod at the same time as several *kāṇḍa*s of the Jagat Singh Rāmāyaṇa, and now in the British Library (Add. 15295). Its paintings seem unrelated to those in the Jagat Singh *Bālakāṇḍa*

and it has been suggested that it could have been made as a replacement, if that had already left the royal collection (Topsfield 2002: 142). A *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript with oval illustrations in the centre of the leaf was produced in the late provincial Mughal style of Oudh around 1790. Many folios are extant from a 19th-century manuscript produced in Kishangarh style. The text of an illustrated Rāmāyaṇa manuscript in scroll form (of the type in vogue during the second half of the 19th century) from around 1860 is apparently that of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.* An illuminated *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* scroll manuscript was written in Vārāṇasī by the Kashmiri Paṇḍit Ghāsirāma in the 18th century (Fig. 4). Another *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* illustrated in Patna style was commissioned by Charles Boddam at Chapra in Bihar in 1803–1804 (BL Mss Eur C116/1–2 and C215/1–2). One folio of a Guler *Yogavāsiṣṭha* series ascribed to Khushala or one of his sons from c. 1800 is known (Rietberg RVI 2127). The so-called Nādaun *Rāmāyaṇa* in Kāṅgṛā style was painted around 1820 for Sansar Chand (r. 1775–1823), possibly by Gauḍhu or Purkhu, with text on the versos from the *Jaiminīyāśvamedhikaparvan*.

The total number of illustrated manuscripts of vernacular Rāmāyaṇas substantially exceeds those of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* even though that is probably the most frequent single text, they tend to be later in date and they are not usually in the more refined court styles but in more popular ones; the most frequent are manuscripts of Tulsīdās' *Rāmcaritmānas* (Brockington 2018b, where references and further examples are given). An early example is a manuscript of the *Laṅkākāṇḍ* of the *Rāmcaritmānas* probably datable to 1646 and produced in Vārāṇasī, of which at least sixteen folios survive out of over fifty, as the folio numbers show.[9]

[9] To the folios noted in an earlier article (Brockington 2018b: 76–78) can now be added four in the Salar Jung Museum (ACQ–72–39, ACQ–73–57, ACQ–79–10 and ACQ–80–25), another in the National Museum, New Delhi (75.511) and one in the La Salle University Art Museum (08–O–207), on which the text is *Laṅkākāṇḍa* 75 (*dohā,* middle of l.2) with *caupāi* 1–4. The folio offered at Christie's in 1979 is now in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (1982.2.71). Also, the folio now in the San Diego Museum of Art (1990.341) was in Jagdish Mittal's possession before Edwin Binney's.

An interesting feature here is the way that the text is written alongside, below or around the illustrations (after they were at least sketched out) in a way somewhat reminiscent of Mughal treatment of text but the format is horizontal and the painting style is more typical of Rajput painting, as well as more popular. A later manuscript which shows the same use of text and illustration on one side, but in this case with each in separate boxes (so closer to the Islamic prototype), is an *Ayodhyākāṇḍ* manuscript in the Jaipur style signed by Rāmcaraṇ Kāyasth and dated *VS* 1853/1796–1797 A. D.[10]

Just a few folios of a manuscript produced at Kishangarh around 1745 with paintings attributed to Rikhaji, son of Karam Chand, are extant. Several illustrated manuscripts of the *Rāmcaritmānas* were produced in eastern India. One such manuscript in the Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta (T.448), is virtually complete at 343 folios with 153 illustrations surviving; written in bold *nāgarī* by Ichārāmamiśra at Kamalapura (Mahisādal Pargana) for *rāṇī* Jānakī, it has colophon dates of 1773–1775. Another was copied in 1785 at Patna by Vaiṣṇava Dās, who calls himself a servant of Rāma (BL Or. MS. 12867). A manuscript of the *Uttarakāṇḍ* (often but wrongly attributed to Tulsīdās himself) dated *VS* 1869/1812 A. D. contains seven full-page illustrations among its 67 folios; these are in Pahāṛī, possibly Cambā, style and do not always follow the text in detail. Later still is an illustrated copy in the Wellcome collection dated VS 1874 (= 1817 A. D.) which may have been commissioned by the Maharaja of Benares. Also from the early 19th century is a *Bālkāṇḍ* in Jaipur style now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan.

One notable exception to the trend away from prestige productions is the large-sized illustrated *Rāmcaritmānas* manuscript in 91 folios produced at Jodhpur around 1775 in Vijay Singh's reign (1752–1793) which has a more devotional aspect than earlier court productions. Another, even later, is that commissioned by Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II (1835–1880) of Jaipur and copied at Vārāṇasī between *VS* 1914 and

[10] This was sold on 12th June 2018 at Christie's, London (sale catalogue 15504, lot 76).

1921 (1857–1864 A. D.); this contains 134 paintings (most half-page, 35 full-page) on over 500 pages (it is paginated rather than foliated and in a vertical format of 29 × 22.5 cm.).[11] The last painting shows Tulsīdās seated reading his work to a group of Vaiṣṇava ascetics.

Illustrated manuscripts of other vernacular versions are less frequent and seem also mostly to be later in date. An illustrated manuscript in *nasta'liq* script of Masīḥ's *Dastan-i Ram wa Sita* (a Persian verse adaptation dedicated to Jahāngīr; 132 illustrations, 218 folios) was produced probably at Bikaner between the mid 17th and mid 18th centuries. Upendra Bhañja's *Vaidehīśavilāsa* was illustrated on palm-leaf by several Orissan artists in the 19th century. A complete manuscript of 294 folios written in *ṭākrī* script with 16 paintings was produced in Jammu around 1820. Narottama Adhyāru wrote a manuscript of the *Ayodhyā* and *Araṇya kāṇḍa*s from Giradhara's Gujarātī version (in *devanāgarī* script) in 1838 with 48 paintings by an unnamed artist. An illuminated manuscript of Mādhavasvāmi's Marāṭhī version was produced at Tanjore in the middle of the 19th century.[12] A manuscript of the Jain Keśarāja's *Rāmayaśorasāyana* (now in Sri Dev Kumar Jain Oriental Library, Bihar) illustrated with 213 paintings in Jaipur style was produced at the same period. Among the most enigmatic is a folio from an early-19th-century Basohli painting with 6 lines of Gurmukhi script on the verso. Several others are also found (Brockington 2018a: 212–215). The history of illustrated Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts, which begins with the three lavishly illustrated copies in imperial Mughal style of the translation made for Akbar, in a sense is rounded off with an example in popular Mughal style dated between 1787 and 1791, of which at least 3 leaves are extant from what was originally a 65-folio text (Portland Art Museum 2011.131.5, 9 and 22).

[11] Information taken from http://www.mughalart.net/royal-ramayana-manuscript-made-for-the-maharaja-of-jaipur-circa-1860.html (last accessed 18th September 2019).

[12] Somewhat earlier, in the Nāyaka period, a *Citrarāmāyaṇa* in 3 painted sheets, one each to the *Bāla*, *Ayodhyā* and *Araṇya kāṇḍa*s, with captions in Telugu following Mādhavasvāmī's text, was produced (now in the Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal Library): this is therefore somewhere between a true manuscript and a set of paintings. A single folio of another unidentified Marāṭhī version produced at Nagpur in 1750–1775 is also extant.

Series of paintings which tell the Rāma story solely in pictorial form or with just a brief caption occur from quite early in the 17th century onwards, so they are in fact as early as illustrated manuscripts.[13] With these, to a greater extent than with those surveyed so far, it is reasonable to ask whether the artist was following oral tradition, his own mental text or a written text in his choice of incidents to illustrate and in how he represents them. The popularity of such purely pictorial versions highlights how widely known the Rāma story was, although the presence of captions or brief descriptions of the scene on many of them suggest that some help with interpretation of the scenes may have been thought necessary. Some of the earliest series of paintings are in the Mālvā style but many of the paintings formerly attributed to Mālvā have now been assigned by Konrad Seitz to the Bundela courts at Orchā, Datiyā and Panna from as early as the beginning of the 17th century, including what he terms the First Orchā Rāmāyaṇa series, c. 1600 (Seitz 2015). An extensive set of "Malwa" paintings, of which the largest number are in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, can be dated to around 1642–1645, since a later note on the first folio (BKB 6796) gives the name of Hirā Rāṇī, wife of Pahara Singh of Orchā (r. 1641–1653); in many cases, if not all, they have captions in *brajbhāṣā* and Sanskrit on their versos. At least three other sets of paintings in the "Malwa" style were produced during the 17th century; one is a dispersed series of 99 folios produced at Orchā (Seitz 2015: I, 317–319; Museum Rietberg, Zūrich, 2021.73–83; Bonhams NY 14.3.16: 84 which has text on the verso from *VR* 6.55.10–11) and another is a slightly later series of 98 "Malwa" miniatures without text in the National Museum, New Delhi (Nat. Mus. 51.65), but a further set from the end of the 17th century is widely dispersed. Other courts where sets of Rāmāyaṇa paintings were produced by about the end of the 17th century are Isarda and Kotah.

[13] The sources from which the information in the next few paragraphs are too diverse and too numerous to be listed here but full details can be found on our Oxford Research archive website (http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002–45ff-b37e-7effb669768b) in the document "10. visual (India)" within "B. Bibliographic Inventory."

Early in the 18th century a very large series based on the *Rāmcaritmānas* was produced for the Mewar court around 1710–1720. Upwards of 80 paintings are extant, widely dispersed, mainly from the first two *kāṇḍa*s with a few also from the third; yellow panels above each painting contain the *kāṇḍa* name (often abbreviated) and a number, along with a brief description of the episode depicted. Other courts in Rājasthān producing such series during the 18th century are Isarda (again), Jaipur (a set by the artist Guman based on the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*), Marwar, Mewar and Sawar. Sets continued to be produced at Marwar into the 19th century. From Jaipur around 1825 comes a *Rāmcaritmānas* set with bright yellow borders and several blocks of *devanāgarī* text in the margins.

Possibly the earliest Pahāṛī Rāmāyaṇa series of paintings was produced at Maṇḍi around 1630–1645 (the end of Hari Sen's reign and the start of Suraj Sen's) in a rather Mughal style by the "Early Master at the Maṇḍi Court," but only five folios are known. As many as three other sets were produced at Maṇḍi during the 18th century, around 1725–1730, perhaps in 1765 and around 1770; indeed, sets were being produced there as late as the 19th century. The very extensive but unfinished Shangri Rāmāyaṇa series, of which around 350 paintings are found in various collections, is named after the minor court of Shangri, a former dependency of Kulu, since it was once in the possession of Raja Raghubir Singh of Shangri; however, after an earlier attribution to Kulu around 1690–1710, it is usually accepted that part at least was painted at Bahu in the reigns of Kripal Dev (c.1660–1690) and Anand Dev (c. 1690–1730), although recently it has been again suggested that it was painted in Kulu in 1670–1690 but was the work of imported artists from Basohli, Nurpur and Bilaspur. Several other paintings in the Bahu style, c. 1690–1700, may belong either to this or to another incomplete series. A somewhat enigmatic but extensive series of double-sided folios in a rather naïve folk style has been variously assigned to Kulu, Nurpur or Mankoṭ and dated anywhere in the 18th century; they began appearing at various auction houses from 2007 onwards, share unusual dimensions (around 11.5 × 28 cm.) and

normally have both an indication of *kāṇḍa* and a number.[14] Other hill courts producing Rāmāyaṇa series of paintings in the 18th century are Chambā (a series of drawings, c. 1730–1740 and a painting series between c. 760 and 1785 in perhaps three phases, some by Lāharu), Guler and Kāṅgṛā (an *Uttarakāṇḍa* set of drawings c. 1790–1800), while 23 folios from a late-18th-century manuscript illustrated in a Pahāṛī style closer to Basohli than Kāṅgṛā arein the Baroda Museum.

A set of 28 paintings in the Guler style from the Cowasji Jehangir collection is firmly dated *VS* 1826 (≈ 1769 A. D.) and has a line of text from the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās on the verso of each painting. But the most notable series from Guler is the second "Guler Rāmāyaṇa" series, otherwise also known as the "Bharany Rāmāyaṇa," produced in a first section of c. 1770–1775 and a second section of c. 1790–1810 (probably by the second generation of artists after Mānaku and Nainsukh, possibly Gauḍhu). Descendants of Pāṇḍit Seu continued to produce Rāmāyaṇa sets into the 19th century. A Rāmāyaṇa drawing series by Rāñjhā (his nickname, his given name was Rāmlāl) dated 1815/16 and produced at Basohli is now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan; Chaitu (or Cettū), employed at Tehri Garhwal under Raja Sudarshan Shah, produced a Rāmāyaṇa painting series around 1820; a series in Kāṅgṛā style is attributed to the family of Purkhu (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 65.210–423); and another series in Guler-Kāṅgṛā style was produced around 1850 in the atelier of a master of the third generation after Nainsukh.

A later parallel to Akbar's interest in the Rāmāyaṇa as a key to his subjects' self-image is the album of Rāmāyaṇa paintings in the provincial Mughal style of Murshidabad with influence from folk Bengali art which was made around 1770–1780 for Sir Elijah Impey, the first Chief Justice of the Bengal Supreme Court, and from which around fifty leaves survive. A number of individual paintings on Rāmāyaṇa

[14] The *kāṇḍa* is indicated by the first *akṣara* only, with *laṃ* for the *Laṅkā* (i.e. *Yuddha) kāṇḍa*—a possible indication that the narrative is closer to Tulsīdās than to Vālmīki. Four folios are now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (2018: 360–363).

subjects (some possibly from unidentified sets) were also produced in provincial Mughal styles at Lakhnau, Oudh and Murshidabad throughout the 18th century.

Besides sets of paintings, a substantial number of single paintings or drawings of Rāmāyaṇa episodes are found in various collections but it is impossible to ascertain how many of these may be the last survivor from an otherwise lost set or come from a so far unrecognised set. Within all schools of painting a considerable proportion of the paintings and drawings cannot be categorised by *kāṇḍa*; most often such paintings are scenes of Rāma and Sītā enthroned and attended by one or both of Lakṣmaṇa or Hanumān but several are too general to be identified by the precise episode depicted and others are of episodes which only figure in some version of the Rāma story other than the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.* For instance, a 19th-century Chambā painting, in which Rāma and his brothers on horseback circle *rākṣasa*s abducting Sītā, according to the caption on the verso depicts an apparently undocumented episode from the Mahīrāvaṇa story.

Among single Rājasthānī *Araṇyakāṇḍa* paintings the life of the exiles in the forest is particularly popular and among *Yuddhakāṇḍa* paintings battle scenes are most favoured, including the visually distinctive episode of Hanumān fetching the herb mountain. Kāṅgṛā and Guler paintings seem more evenly distributed across the *kāṇḍa*s than is the case with other Pahāṛī paintings or with Rājput paintings as a whole. Nevertheless, events surrounding Sītā's *svayaṃvara*—again easily identifiable—are most frequent among *Bālakāṇḍa* paintings, while scenes of life in the forest are particularly favoured among *Araṇyakāṇḍa* items, including paintings of Lakṣmaṇa pulling a thorn from Rāma's foot as Sītā watches (of which there are three among Kāṅgṛā and Guler paintings, as well as several more in other Pahāṛī schools). The largest number of Kāṅgṛā and Guler paintings comes from the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* and consists mainly of battle scenes.

In even more popular styles are the scrolls or paintings used as a prop by itinerant story-tellers. Painted scrolls from Telangana, used by the hereditary picture-showmen, *patamuvaru*, are known from as

early as the beginning of the 17th century; though basically illustrating legends about various castes, in some cases they draw on stories from the epics, with the Rāma narrative incorporated in scrolls produced for certain castes. Similarly painted scrolls, *paṭ*, were used in Bengal from the 17th century up to the present by itinerant story-tellers, *paṭuā*s of the *citrakar jāti*, but the painted scrolls, *tipanu*, used in Gujarat by the Garoda picture showmen are found only from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. But illustrated storytelling in general has a much longer history, since the grammarian Patañjali mentions story-tellers using painted scrolls. In some regions a more recent development is the production of narrative boxes which open out to show scenes from various stories, among which the Rāma story is a popular one. The so-called Paiṭhān paintings from Maharashtra take that name from the place where the first sets identified were discovered, although the only known centre of production is the village of Pingulī and they are all assigned to around the middle of the 19th century; large-scale paintings of this sort (typically 30 × 42–43 cm) were also used by itinerant oral storytellers (*citrakathī*s) in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, being held up to illustrate the action to the audience. All these scrolls or paintings, whether from Bengal, Gujarat or Maharashtra, show the large format and bold lines appropriate to their use. South Indian *kalaṃkārī* temple hangings depicting scenes from the Rāma story are only known from recent times presumably because older examples have not survived. Though produced with a different purpose (as souvenirs for pilgrims and other worshippers), the lively and swiftly executed Kālīghāṭ paintings from the 19th century should also be mentioned in this context; their most typical depiction is that of Hanumān tearing open his chest to reveal Rāma and Sītā enshrined in his heart. Shadow puppets as a means of telling the Rāma story are probably more often associated with South-east Asia but within India they are a feature of popular culture in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; all extant examples are from the 19th or 20th centuries, although their use is undoubtedly considerably older, like that of painted scrolls: an inscription on a slab at the Candrāpuri entrance to Bāgūr (Hosadurga dist., Karnataka) records a grant of a village made

in 1543 to a certain Rāmayya by Kṛṣṇappa Nāyaka for the performance of a puppet show of the Rāma story.

The frequency of such pictorial versions of the Rāma story not only demonstrates the narrative's influence on Indian culture as a whole, but is also a valuable testimony to the evolution of the many verbal texts from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* onwards under the influence of popular culture, while the choice of scenes depicted reveals which episodes were most favoured, either by the artists or by their patrons; in other words they tell us something about the reception of the story generally. Over the centuries, the scenes depicted tend more and more to show versions of such episodes that depart from the form of the narrative occurring in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and approximate to those found in later vernacular adaptations, often providing our earliest evidence for such innovations, which may well have originated in oral tellings in any case, just as the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* itself was originally oral. Comparison of such visual evidence with the verbal sources is therefore a potentially significant means of refining our knowledge of the evolution of the Rāma story over time, in addition to the value that it has in its own right. As we have seen, in the case of the Rāma story the ways in which it has been told, over an enormous span of time and space, stretching from around the 5th century B. C. to the present and from India through the rest of Asia, have included an enormously diverse range of forms, both verbal and visual.

So, to return finally to my initial question: what do we mean by a text? Essentially, I suggest, it is any method by which we tell a story or seek to express ideas.

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Fig. 1. Waking Kumbhakarṇa, from Bīr Singh Rāmāyaṇa, 27.6 × 18.9 cm; on verso text of VR 6. 48. 16cd–86cd and below ink stamp, reading *tasvirkhānā datiyā sṭeṭ* with handwritten 48. Metropolitan Museum, New York, 2002. 504

Fig. 2. Hanumān recrosses the ocean, from the small Guler Rāmāyaṇa, by Paṇḍit Seu of Guler, 19.5 × 26.5 cm. Museum Rietberg, Zürich, RVI 840

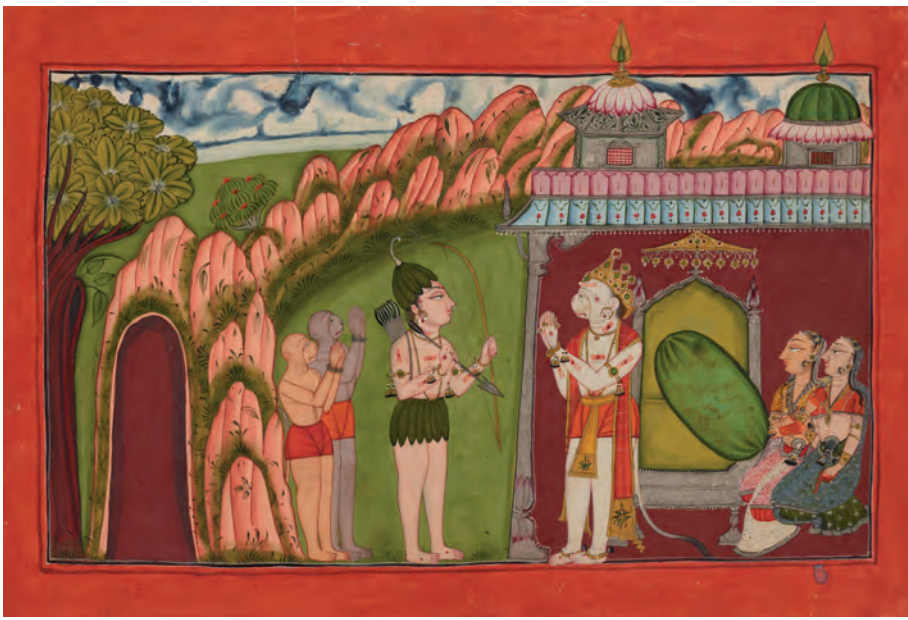

Fig. 3. Lakṣmaṇa warns Sugrīva, folio 30 from the small Mankot Rāmāyaṇa, workshop at Mankot, 15.4 × 26 cm. Museum Rietberg, Zürich, RVI 2101

Fig. 4. *Yuddhakāṇḍa* colophon followed by miniature of Rāma's *abhiṣeka*, from an *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* scroll ms, width 15.5 cm., written in Vārāṇasī by the Kashmiri paṇḍit Ghāsirāma. Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MS Sansk.e. 13(R)