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**New beginnings, old material: planning the rest of Rāma’s life  
  
Chapter 1**

**Inspiration, techniques and structure of the Wonder Tale**

The story of Rāma’s life was first told in the form of a traditional Wonder Tale: that of an attractive young man (in this case a prince), untried as yet, set a number of tests. In his case, the familiar test of a human confronted by a supernatural monster is first supplemented by an initial test of his integrity and loyalty to his father, and then culminates in a test of his faith in his wife’s virtue. At the end of its initial stages of growth, four or five centuries later, all three tests had been triumphantly passed. The Wonder Tale preserved in the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* Critical Edition (*VRm* CE) must have opened somewhere near the start of the current *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, and reached its fulfilment towards the end of what is now the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

Soon after the story was first retold, it rapidly became a highly successful popular narrative; through many transformations, it has remained so during something like two thousand five hundred years of repetition and recreation. It has lasted longer even than *The Archers*, it has its prequel and its sequel like *Star Wars*, and it has been translated into more languages than *Harry Potter*. Citing such popular modern analogues is far from underrating the compositional skill of its original author and his immediate successors; in its earliest recoverable form the vigorous, thought-provoking story is taut, coherent, and above all intensely enjoyable. Its appeal seems destined to become eternal.

I have examined the narrative structure and consequences of its development by many subsequent authors through their initial phases of the Critical Edition,[[1]](#footnote-1) where the aim was, broadly speaking, inward-looking: to consolidate the narrative and ornament the style. I now turn to the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, where the focus necessarily shifts outwards to ‘before’ and ‘after’, to ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ — to the ‘prequel’ and the ‘sequel’.

It has long been accepted by most scholars that these two *kāṇḍas* were composed later than the so-called ‘core books’, *kāṇḍas* 2—6. That is to say, the continuators’ scope for innovation was limited by the already well-known, well-loved traditional storyline and characterisation, but that it must be adapted, at least in part, to a later yet still developing ethos. In terms of narrative, authors of the two later books face different challenges and opportunities, to be examined more fully in chapter 4.

The untried, unlikely hero of a Wonder Tale must often undergo an initial validating episode, some physical, mental or moral test that will prepare him to overcome his foe. There is no need for any such episode in Rāma’s story. As the audience of this beloved tale already knows, Rāma can only triumph in the end. In narrative terms, the *Bālakāṇḍa* is redundant. Birth, education, prowess and marriage can all be assumed from the existing tale, but they are reproduced along conventional lines. Its authors may structure its detailed contents in any way they please. The ‘Old material’ is elaborated and ornamented, not supplemented, but always with the aim of preparing Rāma for his eventual role as an Ideal King. Little attention is given to Sītā, other than to note her mere existence (all that is necessary to the plot at this point).

Tellers who undertook to continue the narrative in the core of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* were able to exercise their creativity with greater freedom, exploring the conflicting pressures felt by Rāma as he undertook his new role, under a changing social structure. Nothing in their ‘New beginning’ has been foreseen by the audience.

By the time that both *kāṇḍas* were reaching the end of their period of growth the initial form was entering into a process of transformation. No longer was it focused on the romantic and martial deeds of a single human man, whose success or failure were centred on himself and his immediate family. As the hero eventually became a god, his achievement or lack of it would affect his whole nation, and principally the whole cosmos: Rāma must establish a dynasty (a crucial task with far-reaching consequences that seemed to have eluded his father) and the gods must be protected from Rāvaṇa. Rāma the human was now Viṣṇu the god; the Wonder Tale was turning into an epic. Accommodating the new concept to the old narrative was no easy matter.

Such a radical, but none the less gradual, change of genre sometimes produced surprisingly divergent results, a fate not uncommon among successful popular, traditional heroic narratives in many cultures: a champion starts by being lauded for his innate prowess — whether physical or moral — then ascribed supernatural powers or Satanic aid, and is finally subjected to degradation and mockery. Cu Chulainn or Medb of the Old Irish Ulster Cycle; Tristran, Arthur or Guillaume in Old French; Herakles in ancient Greek; the Pāṇḍavas in the *Virāṭaparvan*: all have been ridiculed in the later stages of their narrative’s development. All represent the decay or rejection of the heroic ideal. When the former or apparent idol is a politician or a respected religious figure such as a mediaeval cleric, the comedy may well degenerate into vulgar burlesque. Rāma’s story is no exception. As a man, he, his fellows and adversaries had always been taken seriously in the core text; their joys and sorrows had been portrayed, occasionally humanised by a little gentle humour, exaggerated even, but never mocked. When they become gods and their objectives are no longer personal but universal, affecting the well-being of the whole cosmos, the enhanced respect of narrators and audiences alike is interspersed with episodes of ridicule and irreverence amounting on occasion to derision. Examples of this tendency occur in the core narrative, but are developed in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, and more strikingly in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The much fragmented and lengthy development of Agastya’s post-victory narative (7,1—34) provides a **particular** example of this time-line.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The gradual change of genre means that the two additional books as a whole did not represent a single ‘New beginning’, or even a dual one (one for each book). There is no continuing narrative thread or style beginning with the first *sarga* and carrying on to the last. Each *kāṇḍa* has multiple ‘New beginnings’; neither book ‘starts’ at *sarga* 1. *Kāṇḍa* 1 may or may not be earlier than *kāṇḍa* 7, for it is a mistake to think of the *kāṇḍas* as units.[[3]](#footnote-3) They are both complex amalgams of material, brought together in an order that can be difficult to determine, but are nevertheless to some extent dependent upon the ‘Old material’ of *kāṇḍas* 2—6. Once again, both books reveal every indication of being the work of multiple authors, composed over a considerable time, and it can be difficult to define where those ‘New beginnings’ actually began, and how much of what had become ‘New’ material soon had to be counted as ‘Old’.[[4]](#footnote-4) This situation clearly raises formidable problems in determining the extent of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* text and its division into *kāṇḍas* at any one time; not the least of the questions to be probed are what constitutes a *kāṇḍa*, when the divisions were implemented, and whether additions were added piecemeal or collated *en bloc*. I hope to contribute some suggestions from the field of Narrative Studies to what has already been revealed by linguistic, manuscript and religious evidence in the hope that further inter-disciplinary co-operation may lead us all to an improved understanding.

**Allusions and other techniques of composition: examples drawn from 7,1—34**The new material added by these two books takes the narrative from just before the birth of Rāma and Sītā to their final departure from the scene. Rāvaṇa was already dead before they were added, so had no personal future to be explored, but that impediment is overcome at the beginning of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* in Agastya’s complex narrative of the rise and fall of the *rākṣasas*; the study of the re-creation of this long passage (34 *sargas* in theCE), the details of its composition and the techniques employed by successive authors attempted in chapter 6 may provide insights into the structure of the *VRm* as a whole. The majority of the passage (Sub-unit 2) can be identified by its content as part of the latest narrative strata, mostly added after the change of genre, when Viṣṇu had entered the narrative.

Much of Agastya’s ‘New beginning’ is not entirely new; it appears to have been developed and amplified out of fragmentary allusions found in the core text: that is to say, from ‘Old material’. The only totally new material in 7,1—34 concerns Rāvaṇa’s ancestors, particularly Sumālin; and even he has been developed out of a *rākṣasa* already named in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* (at 5,5.20a). With the exception of  *sargas* 7,5—9, most other episodes or references could have been suggested or inspired by allusions in *VRm* 2—6.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As is to be expected in a work as lengthy as the *VRm*, and with such a complex and long-drawn out textual history, such allusions must be treated with care. Determining how reliable they are as sources is not always a simple matter: some may have been inserted into an apparently-early passage by a later teller who knew what had already happened in the developed narrative. Distinguishing source from summary is rarely a straightforward matter based on known facts, for facts are scarce in the study of the Sanskrit epics; the task is painstaking, often frustrating, occasionally impossible, sometimes dangerously dependent on individual scholarly judgement; but at its best it can ultimately be rewarding.

Any suggestion that all the many allusions to Rāvaṇa and his fearsome prowess occurring before the end of Stage 2 (the core text, in *kāṇḍas* 2—6, not neglecting possible parts of *Bāla*) are dependent on Agastya’s connected narrative — that they are summaries rather than sources — is hard to sustain; linguistic and religious criteria rule firmly against its existence as an independent narrative, pre-existing the close of the Second Stage, and there are no references in the core *kāṇḍas* to more than a few of its episodes. Its narrative content anchors at least all of its second sub-unit firmly to a point post-dating the incarnation of Viṣṇu. The great majority of allusions in the core text share with their context the nature of the pre-Viṣṇu heroic Wonder Tale, a valid pointer to their comparatively early date compared with Agastya’s narrative. Exceptions, such as the complaints of the ordinary *rākṣasīs* bereaved of their husbands (6,82.34-36), with their references to Śiva and Vedavatī, and other identifiably very late features are planned to be examined in chapter 5.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In any case, the proposition “Once upon a time there was a fierce monster” generates no story; certainly not one that achieves such lasting popularity. Only if the monster is overcome by a hero (or, at the most, kills the hero) does it become a good story. The story of Rāvaṇa provided by Agastya cannot have been an independent narrative, standing alone, whether as part of an alternative version of Rāma’s story or elsewhere; it is unfinished without his defeat by some hero, as predicted *inter alia* by the episodes of Anaraṇya, Rambhā and Vedavatī, and foreshadowed by the increasing demonstrations of his vulnerability in the Arjuna Sahasrabāhu and Vālin episodes.

The possibility of some back influence from the later text cannot be altogether discarded. 6,7, with its puzzling reference to Madhu and Kumbhīnasī at v.7, could be excised from the text without interruption to the narrative flow, with 6,8 following on from 6,6 quite naturally; but excising 3,30 and 3,46 for example, without serious justification, would wreck the dramatic effect to no purpose.

It is a truism to assume that ‘allusions’ must ‘allude’ to something, but must this something necessarily be a connected narrative, known from some earlier part of the received plot? This is only the first of many questions posed by their presence and, crucially, by their nature in the narrative. Indeed, do they actually ‘allude’, or do they ‘suggest’ or ‘inspire’ the later narration? There are too many allusions to Rāvaṇa’s appearance and career in the core passages of the *VRm* for them simply to be excised as later interpolations. But why were they devised, if not in order to be developed later? By their very nature, allusions must always have some narrative base, even if it is not developed or even expressed in that text, but is present in the redactor’s mind (known to scholars of narrative technique as a ‘mental text’).

Other possible sources of allusions might be other extant narratives, such as the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*RU*); but on the whole the *RU* can be demonstrated to draw much of its diction from the *VRm*, and therefore to have been composed too late to have influenced the basic plot of the *VRm’s* early narrative.[[7]](#footnote-7) Other narrative redactions, unrecorded but familiar as mental text to traditional tellers, may have done so; that possibility must never be excluded out of hand, but cannot be relied upon without firmer evidence.

What must never be ignored is the creativity of individual tellers, inheritors as they are, not only of the traditional narrative, but of the talent of successive generations of their precursors. To refer to them as ‘oral tradition’ is a short cut that too often misses the point. Several significant indicators of such creativity, based on material already familiar from the core text, combine to demonstrate the validity of this explanation for Agastya’s ‘New beginning’ to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7,1—34). Nevertheless, even those who eagerly seized the opportunity to expand the details of Rāvaṇa’s career still found their imagination restricted by the pre-existent narrative.

The villain’s earlier history corresponds in outline to brief allusions already present in the core books. It is reasonable to assume that Agastya’s creator found much (but not all) of his inspiration in passages such as 3,30.7-21 (Rāvaṇa bursts on to the scene in his first appearance in person to hear Śūrpaṇakhā’s complaints), in 3,46.2-9 (where Rāvaṇa introduces himself to Sītā), and in 6,7 (sycophantic courtiers try to encourage Rāvaṇa, who is beginning to feel a little daunted by the prospect of war with Rāma and the *vānaras*). 3,30.20 and 6,7 list a number of Rāvaṇa’s previous conquests but lack any connected narrative content. 3,46.2-9 is even more slight; only vv.4-6 have any specific narrative reference (Rāvaṇa defeats Vaiśravaṇa,[[8]](#footnote-8) causes his flight to Kailāsa, and seizes his *puṣpaka*); vv.3+7-9 are mere bombast, claiming that all the gods fear him, from which the account of Rāvaṇa’s assault on the *devas* would have to have been newly created (rather than expanded or elaborated) to give it a narrative form anything like the one it possesses at 7,27—30. Various briefer allusions to Rāvaṇa’s prowess are also relevant. All consist merely of references to past glories; there is no narration. Whether the teller expected his audience to set these references into any existent context is unlikely; clearly they have been contrived to evoke a generally overwhelming atmosphere of awe and terror.

The creative talents of the author (or of one of the authors) of Agastya’s narrative are amply demonstrated by *sargas* 7,5—9 (Nārāyaṇa defeats the sons of Sukeśa). This passage replicates what is by now to be the basic focus of the ever-expanding Rāma tradition,[[9]](#footnote-9) his incarnation as a warrior-god for the benefit of the *devas*, its prominent location giving it precedence over the activities of Rāvaṇa. Significantly, no allusions to this passage have been detected in other parts of the text, presumably indicating that it was inserted at a very late date, when the rest of the narrative was already firmlyin place.

Agastya’s narrative draws many (but not all) of these hints together into a connected narrative, developed in great detail and at great length. If these allusions were to floating material already propagated in oral transmission but not yet included in any received text, might that account for the non-appearance of some in 7,10—34? There is no cogent reason why they should all have been selected for development, but this explanation would be more convincing if there were any passages of extended (or even single) allusions to any parts of Stage 3 other than 7,10—34. All points to Agastya’s narrative being the composition of a gifted narrator with close knowledge of a *VRm* text then current.

As was the case with the Second stage of the core books, the prime concern was consolidation of the received narrative rather than extension of it. In fact, the amount of new narrative content of both booksis sparse. The *Bālakāṇḍa* audience already knows that Rāma must have been born, must have grown up as a warrior, and had been married; the narrators worked out the details, and filled out the rest of the book with what purport to be ancient and educational tales. The *Uttarakāṇḍa* audience knows that Rāma is about to start on his second career, and are let into the difficulties besetting an Ideal King, again with some packing from In-tales. But once his dynastic responsibilities have been fulfilled and the eight representatives of the next generation are securely installed, at a late point in the development of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, we learn no more about them. This is not the family saga of the Rāghavas, which will be expanded and romantically explored by Kālidāsa a few centuries later in his *Raghuvaṃśa*. The *VRm* is the story of Rāma’s life. Its last book culminates in a new exploration of his personality: Rāma is no longer the human warrior prince, he becomes King Rāma the human man, and it is not an easy transition. Just how the new tellers accomplish this transition and its consequences — how they handle the Old Material to produce this New Beginning — will be explored in the remainder of this study.

**Chapter 2**

**The core narrative**

**Determining the early content: evidence from three summaries**The ‘New Beginnings’ to be explored in this survey, mostly collected together in the first and seventh Books, the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*,[[10]](#footnote-10) were created to supply such details of the earlier and later lives of the heroes and villains as would extend and elucidate the well-known story, within a changed and still changing social context, yet without distorting it beyond the audience’s recognition. Before examining the changes brought to the ‘Old Material’ in what are now called the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas,* regularly referred to as the ‘core narrative’, it is crucial to determine as exactly as possible what the narrative on which the revisers were working was at the relevant points; the situation proves to be a good deal more complex than simply adding two new blocks of material, as a whole, to a pre-existent core narrative, as a whole. Three summaries of the tale’s contents throw some light on its extent and contents at three different stages of composition, and on how far that text is reproduced by the current Critical Edition of the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* (*VRm*).

The three passages are now found at the beginning of the *Bālakāṇḍa*: *VRm* 1,1.18-76 (spoken by Nārada); 1,3 (sought through meditation by Vālmīki); and 1, App.1 (an additional narration, appearing in most N mss before the following *sarga,* CE 1,3).[[11]](#footnote-11) Vālmīki’s use of brief allusions to a well-known tale rather than Nārada’s narrative style packs more content into each verse in his shorter list (27 verses, compared to more than 50 of narrative relevance in 1,3). 1, App.1 is longer than the first two (over 300 lines), and alludes to most of the material now found in the CE. These three summaries are now embedded in the context of 1,1—4, a passage presented as the first part of a frame story for the whole narrative, a frame that remains unclosed in the present *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and is taken up again nowhere in the constituted text (unlike the complex structure of the *MBh*); the contents and structure strongly suggest that this Prefatory material was not composed until much of the present *Uttarakāṇḍa* was already in existence.

Nārada’s summary is in the form of a brief but highly detailed narrative now purporting to be addressed privately to an audience new to the tale (Vālmīki himself); Vālmīki’s own account at 1,3 is much less detailed, so less significance may be placed on absences. It is cast in the form of allusions, simple head words often indicating and relying on the audience’s or readership’s growing familiarity with the narrative inherited up to this point. Furthermore, the ethos it demonstrates is more aligned with that of Stage 3, suggesting composition at a later date than Nārada’s. It must be presumed to have been composed *after* the items listed have been at least thought about (and almost certainly after they have been composed). Like contents pages, summaries and abstracts of all kinds, they have nonetheless been placed *before* the material they summarise. This convention tends to plant the misleading idea in the readers’ minds that they were composed before what is to follow,[[12]](#footnote-12) with the unfortunate effect of colouring any unwary assumptions of what *ought* to be included in the summary; for instance, I believe that the characterisation of Nārada’s list at 1,1 as ‘detailed, if selective’ by R.P. Goldman (Princeton trans. 1984: 68) deserves closer examination. ‘Detailed’ it certainly is: so detailed that we should seriously consider the idea that its contents are a true representation of the *VRm* text at some particular point of its development. Of course, absence from a summary of a lengthy narrative can never confirm absence from the text itself; but if some details are not there, we must probe the reasons why not, when so many others are. Is it truly ‘selective’, implying deliberate omission by the poet? Is it possible that what is *not* absent from Nārada’s summary may truly indicate the whole content of the *VRm* core Books 2—6 at the time when the summary was being composed, and even illuminate when that time might have been? If so, how would that affect our understanding of the narrative’s development? The degree of confidence to be placed in these summaries can only be a matter for the judgement of the individual scholar.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Nārada makes no reference to anything now appearing in the *Bāla* or *Uttara kāṇḍas*, conforming to the long-held understanding of most scholars that theseBooks are later additions to the Rāma story. He starts his summary at the first major episode of the *VRm* *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, where Kaikeyī thwarts Daśaratha’s plan to consecrate Rāma as his successor (1,1.18-21), beginning in the present CE somewhere around 2,1.9 or 12,[[14]](#footnote-14) and ends it after Rāvaṇa’s death (6,97) with few of the subsequent events*.* There is nothing relating to the present seventh Book.

There are however two relevant points of contact with the *VRm Uttarakāṇḍa*. When the *kuśīlavau* sing before Rāma the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Vālmīki has taught them, they specifically mention Nārada’s summary, and its position at the beginning of the whole recitation: ‘It started first at the beginning, from the *sarga* containing the meeting with Nārada’ (7,85.11ab *cf.* 1,1—2.1-3).[[15]](#footnote-15) Clearly the summary and its position in the text had entered the tradition before that part — arguably part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core text —was in place. The other point is less conclusive, and concerns Rāma’s return to heaven. Nārada’s predictions that Rāma will eventually enter Brahmā’s world after establishing ‘hundreds of dynasties’ (1,1.75-76) is repeated at 7,50.13-14 by Durvāsas. The precise distinction being drawn, if any, between the worlds of Brahmā and of Viṣṇu (his ultimate destination at *VRm* CE 7,100) need not be explored here, but both prophecies appear to indicate that the persistence of an understanding of Rāma as an exemplary human (rather than as a god) was still not incongruous even at that part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

We may assume therefore that Nārada’s summary was composed before either of the present *kāṇḍas* 1 and 7, making it particularly valuable for our understanding of the core narrative, the themes they pursue of conflict with obvious evil, and the values of virtuous heroism that they salute. Nārada makes no suggestion that Rāma is a form of Viṣṇu, and none that he repudiates Sītā as found in 6,103—7; indeed, the summary ends with scarcely a mention of Sītā (v.70), presumably indicating the standard fairy-tale happy ending.

The lack of any mention of the exiles’ visit to Atri and Anasūyā (if deliberate) is particularly significant. The episode is narrated in the CE at 2,109.5—2,111, with no allusions elsewhere in the core Books,[[16]](#footnote-16) and it would be natural to expect Nārada to have placed the visit at or about 1,1.33, after the exiles had left Citrakūṭa and were visiting four other sages. The importance of this visit lies not so much in the identity of the sages, but in the conversation between Anasūyā and Sītā: Sītā narrates the circumstances of her birth and marriage, and Anasūyā presents her, incongruously, with magically produced cosmetic cream, ornaments and dress.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The relationship between 2,110.22-52 and Janaka’s own much briefer narrative of Sītā’s birth (1,65.14-15) leading to her marriage to Rāma has for many years been a subject of debate, mostly centring on the question of priority: did the *Bālakāṇḍa* passage precede and inspire the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* account, or did it repeat it?[[18]](#footnote-18) Vālmīki refers to the wedding alone in his summary (1,3.4), but its cursory nature needs no comment; by the time his summary was composed, Sītā’s birth and marriage are likely to have been well known to the audience from the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative. More significantly, however, he makes no allusion to Atri, but picks out for mention Anasūyā and her ointment (v.11).[[19]](#footnote-19) Ūrmilā is mentioned by name five timesin the *Bālakāṇḍa,* all in the context of her marriage to Lakṣmaṇa, but the only reference in the rest of the CE (Book 7 not excluded) is at 2,110.51b. Sītā’s report to Anasūyā that Rāma insists on asking Daśaratha’s consent before he will accept Janaka’s offer to marry him to his daughter hints at a slightly more developed standard of proper procedure between monarchs of equal status than merely sending messengers to inform him of a betrothal that has already taken place (2,110.49; 1,66.23-25). These hints further increase the likelihood that 2,110 is dependent on the *Bālakāṇḍa* account of the wedding, rather than *vice versa*. On the evidence both of contents and of the summaries the encounter with Anasūyā at 2,109—10 (previously thought to be part of the earliest stage of composition) should be reconsidered: 2,109 (merely not mentioned by Vālmīki) may perhaps, and 2,110 should definitely, be considered dependent on the relevant part of the *Bālakāṇḍa,* and so associated with stage 3[[20]](#footnote-20) (indeed, with a rather later part of the developing Stage 3 culture than the core text of the *Bālakāṇḍa* episode).

Another conundrum of the succeeding core narrative is considerably more difficult to resolve with any certainty: that is Mārīca’s recollection of his previous defeats by Rāma, firstly when he and Subāhu had attacked Viśvāmitra’s hermitage and again on a subsequent occasion in Daṇḍaka (1,18.5+1,29; 3,36—37).[[21]](#footnote-21) Has the *Bālakāṇḍa* account of Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice as a whole been copied in a late portion of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, or is the version recounted to Rāvaṇa by the terrified Mārīca in fact its origin? Nārada makes no mention of either previous encounter, giving the impression that Mārīca’s reluctance to aid Rāvaṇa in his plan to abduct Rāma’s wife are simply well-founded good advice (1,1.39-41). Viśvāmitra as a person, his sacrifice, and his relationship with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are completely absent from his summary, as is to be expected of an episode in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (at this stage evidently not in existence); nor are there any allusions to his sacrifice or to Rāma’s journeys with him anywhere in the *VRm* CE text (core text or added Books) other than these two locations; what is more noticeable in view of his prominence throughout the CE *Bālakāṇḍa* is Viśvāmitra’s rarity throughout the rest of the *VRm*, including the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Vālmīki’s reference to Viśvāmitra in his summary (1,3.4ab) cannot be interpreted with any certainty. He mentions only ‘the various other wonderful stories on the journey with Viśvāmitra’, not any of the narrative content — his sacrifice, and Rāma’s defeats of Mārīca or of Tāṭakā — but it is hard to imagine any other context for the journey.[[23]](#footnote-23) The most that can be said is that the figure of the story-telling sage is now established in the plot, providing the youthful Rāma (and, to a much lesser extent, Lakṣmaṇa) with martial validating episodes;[[24]](#footnote-24) when added to his superhuman strength demonstrated by breaking Śiva’s bow, Janaka can feel justified in his decision to contract a marriage alliance with the two boys; for he declares that ‘this daughter of mine not born from the womb is singled out as having heroism as the bride-price’ (1,65.15cd).

The absence of some other episodes from the summaries has much less significance for the structure of the core text. Nārada does not mention the visit of the *vānaras* to Svayaṃprabhā’s marvellous cave (1,1.57 *cf.* 4,49—52); at the appropriate place Vālmīki mentions a *ṛkṣabila* (1,3.18) that can only be a variant designation for the cave.[[25]](#footnote-25) The elaboration, unreality and inconsequence of the episode ornaments the narrative in a way consistent with a fairly late date of inclusion.

Saṃpāti’s visit to the sage Niśākara, who predicts that the disabled vulture will recover the use of his wings if he helps Rāma’s messengers (the *vānaras* searching for Sītā, 4,59—62) is absent from Nārada’s summary at 1,1.57, is also not included by Vālmīki (1,3.18), and does not even appear in the N insertion 1, App.1: 140-45. Its basic theme, the grace of Rāma to offenders and to those who help him in his efforts to recover Sītā is dependent on the concept of Rāma as a form of Viṣṇu — that concept itself restricted to a few, demonstrably very late, passages in the CE; here this theme has been extended and reduced almost out of recognition.[[26]](#footnote-26) The inspiration activating the early and middle stages of development seems to be failing.

The same cannot be said of the *madhuvana* episode at 5,59—62. It is a coarse, vulgar burlesque of the heroic values of the earlier stages of the poem, not present in Nārada’s summary (1,1.62-63), but reported briefly by Vālmīki at 1,3.23 and a little more fully at 1, App.1: 175-76. Nārada may have felt required to omit it from motives of prudery, but that consideration evidently did not apply to the author of the episode itself (5,59—62); composition at a later stage of development with a more permissive attitude — a marker of the decay of the *kṣatriya* tradition in many similar heroic and religious narratives in other cultures — may just as well be responsible, and there is plenty of evidence in Agastya’s post-victory narrative (*Outline structure* position VIII)[[27]](#footnote-27) that burlesque mockery both of the *devas* and of Rāvaṇa became acceptable alongside a period of incipient divinisation of Rāma. The joyous romp of the exuberant *vānaras* annoys only poor, dutiful Dadhimukha and the other guards, adding a delightfully picturesque note of triumph to Hanumān’s return from Laṅkā to report news of his success to the anxious Rāma — a warning to us all not to take ancient literature too seriously. Without this exhibition, the development of the plot would have been unimpaired, but with it the narrative as a whole is much the richer. The human heroes lose none of their dignity, and a welcome moment of relaxation and comedy is allotted to the *vānaras* before they embark on the horrors they are to face in the battle for Laṅkā.[[28]](#footnote-28)

These three heterogeneous episodes have no influence on the progress of the plot, but without them the narrative as a whole loses a certain amount of colour and verve; they are also of value as a warning against assuming boundaries between stages in the development of styles and ideas to be too rigid; the presence of all three framed in a largely unrelated context shows how fluid those boundaries are, and how tolerant of different approaches audiences of the Rāma story were at that time.

Far more significant for the development of the constituted text is the whole question of the last 19 *sargas* of the CE *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (from the death of Rāvaṇa at 6,97 onwards), to form a fitting climax to successive versions in a substantially developing social and religious climate, as partially demonstrated by the three summaries. The long hoped-for culmination is lacking, from the constituted text and from the summaries. Where is the happy ending — the passionate reunion of Rāma and Sītā? Both Nārada and Vālmīki avoid the issue, making no reference to Rāma’s astounding *volte face*, merely referring to the ‘recovery’ of Sītā (1,1.70; 1,3.26), as if no rejection and no vindication of any nature was then known. Nārada ends with a dramatically-reduced version of the present CE: a single *śloka*, 1,1.66, covers the whole of the battle, from Rāma’s arrival on Laṅkā to the consecration of Vibhīṣaṇa, including Rāvaṇa’s death. There is then nothing more than the congratulations of the gods, the resurrection of the *vānara* casualties, and the return via Nandigrāma in the *puṣpaka*. Sītā, her liberation the ostensible aim of the previous two-thirds of the text, is mentioned in only one *pāda*, her recovery subservient in the structure of the verse to Rāma’s regaining his kingdom (1,1.70cd, *rāmaḥ sītām anuprāpya rājyaṃ punar avāptavān*). Even for nothing more dramatic than a traditional ‘fairy-tale happy ending’ that climax would have been disappointing. The political element definitely now outweighs the personal, with 6 verses of *rāmarājya* (1,1.71-75) followed by a 3-verse *phalaśruti*; concerns apparent over the ritual purity of the new monarch, and his prudent insistence on Bharata’s consent to the imminent change of regime, testify to the pre-occupations of a society now interested in issues of sovereignty as well as romance.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Vālmīki’s summary of events subsequent to Rāvaṇa’s death adds nothing to Nārada’s account of events on Laṅkā (1,3.26-27): Sītā is not rejected by Rāma, and her chastity is neither vindicated by fire, nor by a simple divine declaration, nor even questioned. But Vālmīki — the fictive author of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* — carries the tale further and refers, in terms less clear-cut, to subsequent events which may plausibly be supposed to refer to the core narrative of thefinal Book, including the banishment of Sītā (v.28).[[30]](#footnote-30) This seems to place *any* suspicions of Sītā’s chastity on Laṅkā (not just her vindication by fire) later than *VRm* 1,3, which itself must be later than at least some of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative.

But what has happened to that original happy reunion, expected ever since Sītā had been abducted, but narrated nowhere at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* or at 1,3.26 (the appropriate position in Vālmīki’s summary)? Sītā is allowed to return to Ayodhyā in the *puṣpaka*, honoured as Rāma’s wife, evidently on good terms with her husband. Yet neither in the received CE text, nor in any of the three summaries,[[31]](#footnote-31) is the audience treated to an immediate ecstatic reunion of husband and wife — an episode that has been foreshadowed by the emotional and physical longings of both parties ever since the abduction; Rāma’s graphically symbolised lament at Lake Pampā (4,1) is but one of the many examples of the overtly sexual nature of his longings.

The issue is not what *is* now there, having been introduced into earlier material; the issue is what *was* (or may have been) once there, but now is *not*. The preparations for such a reunion are apparent from 6,101.40—102.1-4+18-28. The obvious conclusion is that the audience’s expectations are about to be fulfilled, and that this was how the tale ended for several hundred years until attitudes to female chastity became more rigorous,[[32]](#footnote-32) as they will begin to be when the final Book is added; in effect, that the earlier ending has been overwhelmed by much of what appears in the CE text from 6,102.15 onwards. The biggest problem with this assumption is: what has happened to that earlier ending? It is strange to be unable to find any hint of its existence, either in the constituted text, variants or excluded passages, or even in any of the *brāhmaṇic* recastings that I have been able to pillage for their narrative elements. It was not the general practice of the eager continuators of the *VRm* to discard material: they were content to compile differing versions of the same material, however contradictory, not to judge between them.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Can this shattering reversal of the hopes carefully aroused in the audience be yet another example of the pattern of surprises cultivated by the early authors (MB 2012)? This explanation would produce a putative core narrative on similar lines to that of the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*VRm* 6,102—103+106.4-20 *cf. MBh* 3,275.10-29; see below), with Rāma’s emotions, varying between ‘tears and sighs, and joy, sorrow and rage’ (6,102.5-6+16), calmed by Agni’s reassurance of Sītā’s virtue. As with other high points of the *VRm* narrative, such as the aborted consecration with which the narrative opened before the addition of the *Bālakāṇḍa,* this putative early passage will have been overlaid by later ideas.

In the Jain versions the evidence is prominent but conflicting. Eight of the most influential adapters record a joyful reunion, with no suspicion and certainly no vindication or purification by fire;[[34]](#footnote-34) none that I have found includes any suggestion that Rāma rejects Sītā before the *Uttarakāṇḍa* banishment. Does this mean that these Jain versions have preserved a lost ending to the *VRm Yuddhakāṇḍa*? Appealing though that idea is, it is highly unlikely in view of the Jain stated practice of retelling the Rāma story in a (supposedly) more realistic way adapted to Jain ideology (De Clercq 2016: 21-22) that often means reversing or even deliberately contradicting the received *brāhmaṇic* version; audiences are frequently treated to much more romantic or sentimental versions of episodes, such as the birth-stories of Hanumān and of Sītā’s long-lost twin brother. If Rāma was known to have reacted so harshly to Sītā at this point in the Vālmīki narrative, it is no surprise that the Jains should have modified it to accord with their own aims.[[35]](#footnote-35)

**Evidence from the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*RU*): a ‘New Beginning’ in the *Mahābhārata***The *Rāmopākhyāna* (*MBh* 3,275—76) is an extensive summary of the Rāma narrative, embedded within the *Mahābhārata*, and recited to the Pāṇḍavas by Mārkaṇḍeya in an effort to cheer up the despondent Yudhiṣṭhira. That it has been adapted from the *VR* (and is not the source from which the *VR* has been expanded) is not in question. Rigorous examination of the text, expanding on the findings of a number of earlier scholars, indicates substantial dependence by the adapter on the NE recension of the *VRm* (JLB 1978/2000: 288-325), not the reverse.[[36]](#footnote-36) A close consideration of precise details of the verbal correspondences identified can now shed light on some aspects of chronology, incorporation and development.

These verbal correspondences indicate knowledge of much of the *VRm* core Books 2—6, and of narrative parts of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, implying a position in our *Outline Structure* after position V.[[37]](#footnote-37) There are clear references to Sub-unit 1 of Agastya’s post-victory narrative,[[38]](#footnote-38) both in the narrative and the diction, *i.e.* approximately 7,1—3 and 9—10 and 12—26 (the pre-Viṣṇu passages)[[39]](#footnote-39) offering strong evidence for borrowing by the *RU*; but *kāṇḍa* 7 contains no examples of verbal correspondence of any significance as identified by JLB (1978/2000).

The specific relationship of the *RU* content to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative (position IV) is less clear-cut. It cannot be discounted that the highly gifted adapter of the *RU* knew details of the rest of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* plot but deliberately and sensibly decided to exclude any references to the post-victory problems of Rāma and Sītā, believing that they would not contribute to his stated aim of encouraging the depressive Yudhiṣṭhira, and would aggrieve the volatile Draupadī (whose brief abduction by Jayadratha and immediate release in the previous episode was the immediate occasion for the *RU*).[[40]](#footnote-40) Neither the Pāṇḍava heroes nor their wife would want the later experiences of the Rāghavas and Sītā contrasted with their own fates.[[41]](#footnote-41) In adaptations and *exempla*, context is always crucial.

However, there is nothing to indicate that the adapter necessarily did know and use the identifiably later content and style of the developed *VRm*. The allusion to the defeat and fettering of Indra by Indrajit can give little help in determining the relative chronology of the *RU* and Agastya’s narrative: both *RU* 272.1-7 and the full narrative at *VRm* 7,29.22-40 could have been developed from the allusion at *VRm* 6,67.1-3. The supposition that *VRm* 7,1 originally introduced a narrative genuinely including a straightforward account of the Indra/Indrajit duel as part of Sub-unit 1, later overlaid — indeed overwhelmed — by Sub-unit 2, would provide a suspiciously neat solution to the conundrum, but, without any evidence to support it, that idea should be dismissed as fanciful.

There is no trace in the *RU* of the coarsening of tone, mockery and lack of respect for the principal characters such as Rāvaṇa, found particularly in Agastya’s Sub-unit 2 and a few other episodes of the *VRm*: the *madhuvana*, for instance, is merely pillaged by the long-abstemious hungry *vānaras,* with no stress on their personal behaviour (*VRm* 1,3.23; 5,59—62; *Outline structure* positions II and VIII; *RU* 266.26-28). The conclusion is inescapable that 7,4—8 and 7,27—36 (Sub-unit 2) had not yet entered the *VRm* tradition, and that the adapter of the *RU* not only did not use it, but had no opportunity to do so.

Of greater significance to the development of the Rāma tradition as a whole is the fact that Sītā’s vindication by fire-suicide is also wanting from the *RU.* Evidence of absence, especially from a summary, must always be treated with caution, but other factors lend a certain amount of support to the supposition that the form of reunion of husband and wife on which the *RU* narrator has based his account was appreciably older than the one currently appearing at *VRm* 6,102—4; 6,106+107.34. The rejection of Sītā is mentioned neither in Nārada’s Summary (*VRm* 1,1.66-70) nor in Vālmīki’s (*VRm* 1,3.26-27), with joyful reunion, perhaps after an initial hesitation, presumably representing the earliest form of ending.

By the period of the Bridging Passage (*Outline structure,* position V) the issue of female chastity had become a sensitive one. In *RU* 275.5-35 the suspicious Rāma repudiates Rāvaṇa’s former captive at her release on Laṅkā, then, unbidden, a number of gods appear and the grieving Sītā addresses to them a dignified declaration of her chastity; a number of the principal gods uphold the truth of her declaration and instruct Rāma to accept her as his wife, and Daśaratha urges his victorious son to return and rule Ayodhyā. An analogous situation is presented towards the end of another of the *MBh’s* In-tales, the *Nalopākhyāna* (see MB 2012), lending credibility to the idea that this was the form of any vindication of Sītā’s conduct thought necessary in the earliest forms of the *VRm* itself (7,44.4-7; 7,88.3). If so, we can assume that the fire-suicide was not inserted until very late in Stage 3 (*Outline structure* position VIII, after the divinisation of Rāma).

A further significant discrepancy from the text established in the *VRm* CE is that Daśaratha’s participation in the *devāsurayuddha*, which leads him to promise Kaikeyī the boon that enables her to send Rāma into the wilderness, is absent from the *RU*. The only boon mentioned appears to have been wheedled out of the uxorious, aged, unwary king by the wiles of his pretty, young, cunning wife.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Finally, in the *RU* Rāvaṇa’s death is instantaneous and complete: he is incinerated by Rāma’s arrow, completely annihilated, with no ashes remaining (274.27-31). In consequence the laments of his many widows, and the contentious funeral rites found at *VRm* 6,98—99 are wanting in the *RU*. This striking lack may possibly indicate not merely the abbreviation necessitated by a summary, but a deliberate desire to strip Rāvaṇa of all post-mortem comfort or opportunities for further threat. He will not enter the heaven to which his death in battle entitles him. He will not enjoy the redemption sought and enjoyed in much of the later Rāma tradition by meeting death at the handsof Viṣṇu. Does this innovation imply that Rāma has by this stage become a deity?[[43]](#footnote-43)

The *RU’s* adaptation of the *VRm* story was not slavish. Narrative, as well as theological, innovation was employed when thought necessary by its author. Faced with a text that closes Agastya’s Sub-unit 1 with Rāvaṇa’s reaction to Nalakūbara’s curse (*VRm* 7,26.47) but lacks much now presented before 7,9, part of Sub-unit 2, authors from both traditions saw the need to open their tales with an explanation of the *rākṣasa* ancestry that would explain their anomalous descent from virtuous sages, as well as the differing characters of Vibhīṣaṇa and his siblings. In this interesting example of narrative technique, we can see that in the *RU* Rāvaṇa’s birth story at 258.12—259.8 is far more elaborate and fanciful than the one recounted by Agastya — a technique usually assumed to indicate a later style. The absence of Sumālin (anchor-man of the whole of Sub-unit 2) here, and indeed from the whole of the *RU,* confirms the independence of the two solutions.

Nalakūbara’s curse at *VRm* 7,26.24-45 will form an impressive climax to Agastya’s first account of Rāvaṇa’s boon-fuelled exploits, where verse 47, in which the threatened consequence robs Rāvaṇa of all illicit lust, provides the audience with a reassuring hint that Sītā had truly remained chaste during her captivity. Rāvaṇa himself promises to resist his lustful impulses if she persists in her rejection (*RU* 265.26-27), perhaps in reaction to the curse, rather than to have his cooks serve her up for his breakfast (*VRm* 5,20.9). The adapter of the *RU* even saw an opportunity to cause Brahmā to use this curse to bolster his affirmation of Sītā’s chastity (275.32), surely unnecessary for a speaker of such status. More clumsily still, he embellished his account by developing the character Avindhya, in the *VRm* a wise elderly counsellor whose advice to Rāvaṇa to return Sītā is reported to her by her *rākṣasī* friend in the *aśokavana*.[[44]](#footnote-44) In the *RU* this sympathetic portrayal is elaborated into a message he sends to Sītā via Trijaṭā (also now an active encourager of the captive) alluding *inter alia* to Rāma’s alliance with Sugrīva and to Nalakūbara’s curse, and specifically assuring her that resistance will not be required (264.53-59);[[45]](#footnote-45) by doing so, unfortunately the author robs his portrayal of the lone captive’s heroism of all dramatic poignancy, and his narrative structure of all tension.

A number of items wanting in the *VRm* are found in the *RU.* One such is Vaiśravaṇa’s curse that Rāvaṇa will never ride on *puṣpaka* and prediction that its rider will soon kill him (259.34-35); in the *VRm* CE that curse would conflict with Rāvaṇa’s immediately subsequent use of *puṣpaka* in his various attacks on gods throughout 7,13—34, presumably unknown to the *RU* adapter.

The episode where Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the *vānara* chiefs wash their eyes with consecrated water sent by Kubera to enable them to see invisible creatures such as Indrajit,[[46]](#footnote-46) may have been reworked from *VRm* 6,36.29-30, where Sugrīva’s tears are wiped by Vibhīṣaṇa, but why Kubera has been chosen as the saviour is not clear.

At the heat of the final battle a brief moment of tension is created in the *RU* when Rāma now momentarily distrusts the figure of Mātali sent to help him with Indra’s chariot (*RU* 274.15, wanting at *VRm* 6,90.4-13); his hesitation is justified by a new episode inserted immediately beforehand (274.5-11) in which Rāvaṇa has used his magic skills to resurrect the *rākṣasa* casualties, then to create a host of illusory replicas of the two Rāghavas.

One more notable distinction between the *RU* account and its *VRm* exemplar is the portrayal of Hanumān. In the later Rāma tradition as a whole the mighty *vānara* is much magnified, often by being associated with Śiva, until the contemporary Hanumān is granted a stature comparable to, and in some ways even rivalling, that of Rāma himself. In the *Mahābharata* tradition, however, his portrayal is strikingly diminished. In the *RU*, his role is underplayed throughout. The whole of the *VRm Sundarakāṇḍa* (66 *sargas*)is reproducedin a mere12verses (266.57-68), with no search of Laṅkā, no fights, no interview with Rāvaṇa. During the subsequent battle for Laṅkā he takes little individual part in the fighting: no flights for healing herbs; no bringing the whole herb-mountain; Lakṣmaṇa’s wounding by Rāvaṇa’s spear (a particularly dramatic episode in the *VRm* at 6,40; 6,61; 6,89) is wanting in the *RU*, perhaps as part of this process of diminution of his rescuer, Hanumān. The tendency increases throughout the *MBh* tradition; for Hanumān’s reduction in the *MBh* itself, see JLB 2004; and for his complete elimination in the *Harivaṃśa*, see MB 2005. A striking exception is provided by the only *MBh* passage other than the *RU* directly dependent on the *VRm* narrative, Hanumān’s encounter with Bhīma Pāṇḍava (*MBh* 3,146.59—150.15), in which Bhīma is ignominiously defeated by his elderly half-brother (both are presented as sons of Vāyu).

The teller who adapted the story of Rāma to serve the purposes of the *Mahābhārata* tradition was clearly an accomplished narrative poet; just as clearly, he possessed a mind of his own, and was prepared to use it.

In this New Beginning, one major issue remains to be addressed: the human or divine nature of Rāma and his allies. Only at 3,260 is the incarnation of Viṣṇu and his fellow *devas* mentioned and even there it combines the gods fathering sons with themselves incarnating (*cf*. Scharf 2003: 169). In addition, at a mere 15 verses, this *adhyāya* is uncharacteristically short (the average length of the 18 narrative *adhyāyas* of the *RU* is more than 37). It is also awkwardly placed: 258.6-9 have reported all that the core Books tell us of Daśaratha’s family (his four sons and his daughter-in-law, the daughter of Janaka *videharāja*), leaving us to infer that they must somehow have been born, and that Rāma and Sītā must have been married (*Outline structure* position II). Attention then switches to the birth of the sons of Viśravas and their acquisition of boons (*RU* 258.10—259.40); *adhyāya* 261 now refers back to 258.6-9: “Honoured *brāhman*, you have narrated the birth of of Rāma and the rest in detail, <so> I wish to hear the reason for their departure; please tell it” (261.1, with Yudhiṣṭhira making it clear in verse 2 that he means the banishment), before continuing with the boys’ education as found in the *Bālakāṇḍa*. This apparently continuous narrative is interrupted by *adhyāya* 260 with the report of the incarnation of Viṣṇu and the *devas*, but no mention of either form of the birth stories or any other episodes of the *VRm* Book 1, moving directly to Daśaratha’s proposal to consecrate Rāma as *yuvarāja* at 261.7. Apart from *adhyāya* 260, the whole of the *RU’s* plot is based on the concept of the extraordinary human who is able to defeat a monster, following the original Wonder Tale concept of the *VRm —* the concept that dominates almost the whole of the *VRm* — where the identity and activity of Viṣṇu are not introduced until a very late stage of development, after *Outline structure* position VI, but before position VIII (Sītā’s fire-suicide and coarsening of the tone.[[47]](#footnote-47) The only other possible allusion to Viṣṇu is ambiguous: at *RU* 275.65 the victorious Rāma is consecrated *vaiṣṇave nakṣatre* “under the constellation belonging to Viṣṇu” but is this simply honouring the heroic man, or is it a nod towards the concealed identity of that divine man? Are we to assume that the *RU* as a whole was not composed until after *VRm* position V, but shows no affinity with identifiably earlier elements,[[48]](#footnote-48) nevertheless retaining episodes such as the vindication of Sītā from narrative strata that had been abandoned by the CE? It is hard to understand what the purpose would be of what otherwise appears a taut, well-constructed summary of a long, complicated narrative at a particular stage of development, identified by the diction on which it relies for much of its version. The result would be muddled and inconsistent. The alternative, that *adhyāya* 260, with its abrupt intervention of Viṣṇu, represents a very late intrusion, inserted incongruouslybut not integrated into a previously well-organised *exemplum,*[[49]](#footnote-49) seems compelling. That explanation is supported by the incarnation in the same *sarga* of a previously unknown *gandharvī* Dundubhī as Mantharā, with specific instructions from Brahmā to provoke Kaikeyī’s malevolence (260.9-10, 14-15), which betrays its even further developed nature compared to anything now extant in the *VRm* CE. It is part of a growing tendency, attested elsewhere from the time of Bhavabhūti onwards, to exonerate any of the Rāghavas or their adherents from responsibility for Rāma’s exile: not Daśaratha, not Kaikeyī, and now not even Mantharā, can be held guilty, for it was all part of the purpose of the gods, in order to enable Rāma to free the cosmos from Rāvaṇa.

For the *RU*, the whole of the *VRm* then present, whatever stage of development it had reached, was ‘Old Material’; and the *RU* in its entirety or itself in stages, was a ‘New Beginning’ to be adapted to its purpose in the *MBh*, with new audiences or readerships, real and fictive. Presumably it satisfied the real audience of its time, for it has been preserved. But did it satisfy the needs of Mārkaṇḍeya’s fictive audience, Yudhiṣṭhira, his brothers, and Draupadī? The closing assurance that “Consoled in this way by the wise Mārkaṇḍeya, the king cast off his grief”(3,276.13) cannot long be maintained, given that Yudhiṣṭhira’s depressive personality, in common with those attributed to all the principal players in the *MBh*, is the mainstay of the whole narrative, before and particularly after the pivotal battle. The *RU* has no structural function: it is an In-tale, ornamenting but isolated, not affecting the basic plot, and is not mentioned again.[[50]](#footnote-50) This new beginning led virtually nowhere.

**The concept of segmentation introduced**The clearly very late date of *VRm* 1, App.1 (frustratingly difficult to specify any more precisely), puts the content of this long, detailed, passage largely beyond the scope of this study. As a whole, it agrees substantially with the full CE text up to the consecration of Rāma as king of Ayodhyā (1, App.1: 275 *cf.* 2,1—6,116).[[51]](#footnote-51) However, it closes its *Yuddhakāṇḍa* at the death of Rāvaṇa (1, App.1: 247 *cf. VRm* 6,97) and then places the whole series of subsequent episodes, from the *rākṣasīs*’ laments for their dead husband onwards, into what it calls the *Abhyudaya* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* (*atas tv abhyudayaṃ nāma sottaraṃ* *saṃpracakṣate* 1,App.1: 252, *cf*. 290). There are indications in the colophons of some N mss that this designation for the last part of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* was known more widely.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Dissociating all the post-battle narrative from the conclusion of the core — the ‘Old material’ of the martial stage of the Wonder tale (development Stages 1 and 2) up to the welcome for the exiles as they return to Ayodhyā, and Rāma’s consecration, approximately as found in the sixth Book of the CE — is not a simple matter of transforming it into a ‘New beginning’. Without making any alterations to it, this part of App.1moves towardsassociating its narrative with the values of the dynastic stage (the later part of Stage 3), which has a very different focus, by linking the narrative at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* with its resumption in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (much of *VRm* 6,98—116 plus 7,37—41) and so constituting a Bridging passage between the core narrative and its extension in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. In so doing it reminds us once again that the boundaries between stages of development must not be considered hard and fast. The stages are continuous, constantly evolving. Their boundaries are as real and as unsubstantial as contour lines on a map.

**Segmentation into *kāṇḍas***The date when segmentation was established cannot be specified more definitely than as after the varying recensions were being developed, but before the composition of 1, App.1. Late though this passage is, it has the earliest reference that we have come across either to the word ‘*kāṇḍa*’, or to the inherent concept of a segmented narrative. Neither in Nārada’s summary nor in Vālmīki’s, nor in any part of the critically constituted *VRm,* do they appear. Here verses (5 or 6 lines) signal the end of each *kāṇḍa* and the beginning of the next at the appropriate points in the passage, giving each *kāṇḍa* a recognisable name. In structure they are quite different from a conventional colophon, being both in verse and in being included within the text. The colophonson which the CE text relies for determining the present *kāṇḍa* boundaries need not be any older than the individual mss; those used by the editors of the CE for this purpose are typical of the Southern recension and place the division at different places from those of the Northern.[[53]](#footnote-53)

These colophons do not address the fundamental issue of when the narrative as a whole was divided into separate parts — on the very existence of *kāṇḍas* — an issue crucial to the narrative development of those parts composed later than the still undivided ‘core narrative’*.* The significant question raised by 1, App.1 is not so much: ‘Where do individual *kāṇḍas* begin and end?’ but rather, ‘When the concept ofsegmentationcame into existence, what were the results for an existing text?’ For want of evidence, the topic of the very fact of the existence of discrete *kāṇḍas* — or not — when the poem was being composed and revised has so far remained largely unexplored. Kālidāsa uses a quite different segmentation in his *Raghuvaṃśa* (4-5th century A.D.),[[54]](#footnote-54) but whether the discrepancy results from his own deliberate choice, or because the 7-*kāṇḍa* structure of the *VRm* was not then known or accepted (or not universally so) must remain a mystery.

Before the segmentation into *kāṇḍas* took place there can have been no difficulty in adding new material to the beginning or end of the traditional narrative in whatever quantity and at whatever date each individual composer wished. The first new episode to be added did not have to fill any artificially prescribed length to correspond to a whole *kāṇḍa* of the existent core text before that length (however fluid) had been conceived; it did not have to be as much as a whole new *kāṇḍa* if *kāṇḍas* did not exist. It need be no longer than a *sarga* or two*.* Just as *sargas* or passages of any length were freely inserted into the original Stage 1 to form the Second stage of the core development, the material now collectively called the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* could be added piecemeal, and clearly was.

In almost every respect, however, the purpose and position of the two bodies of new material — before and after the known story — has conditioned radically different structuring. Both are filled out by a considerably higher proportion of In-tales than now appear in *kāṇḍas* 2—6; however, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is a taut, compact narration of newly composed material, with fewer digressions than the unhurried progression of the *Bāla,* concentrating as it does on only a few narrative episodes detailing those to be surmised in outline from the events of the core *kāṇḍas* 2—6: the audience knew that Rāma had been born, that he was of superhuman strength, and that he had been married to Sītā; they do not yet know what happened to him after he reurned to Ayodhyā to take up the duties of a king. Much of the *Bālakāṇḍa* as now constitutedis dominated by a long series of In-tales uninterrupted by any significant narrative progress, stretching from 1,30 to 1,64. This structure, with its concentration on only a few narrative episodes, implies that they were added piecemeal (not as a whole *kāṇḍa*), to be filled out only later (probably even more piecemeal).[[55]](#footnote-55)

The *sarga* that ends the current *Bālakāṇḍa* is poorly integrated with the beginning of *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, and the precise point at which the original author opened his narrative has long been a matter for discussion. The abrupt, unexplained “but then after some time” (*kasya cit tv atha kālasya* 2,1.1a) as the opening to a major work can at the very best only be called awkward, if not truncated.[[56]](#footnote-56) Hermann Jacobi proposed an alternative opening based on a few verses now scattered in the CE at 1,5.1-9; 6.2-4; 17.10+11c-12d+14+13+17, culled from the start of the tale told to Rāma by the *kuśīlavau,* followed by their account of the birth of Daśaratha’s four sons. Apart from other considerations, those verses concentrate on matters of ritual and other elements of statecraft that play a role in the *Bāla* and the *Uttara kāṇḍas*, and so are in their place there, but those issues are little developed in Stage 1 of the *VRm* as a whole; the verses pointed to by Jacobi well justify their current location, and Yudhājit’s mysterious appearance to fetch Bharata and Śatrughna remains unexplained.

The purpose of the present *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* as a whole, as conceived by the original poet (MB 1999), is to contrive a situation forcing Rāma and Sītā to leave Ayodhyā and enter the forest. If Bharata were present when his mother claims her boons, it could not happen; he would be in a much stronger position to prevent the exile in Ayodhyā, in the presence of his father, than he is at Citrakūṭa with Daśaratha dead and himself under pressure to accept consecration. At all costs to the narrative, he must be absent, and at such a distance that he is beyond easy, rapid communication until Rāma has already left. A lengthy visit to his mother’s family adds to the drama (the distance emphasised by the hasty journeys detailed at 2,62.10-15 and elaborated at 2,65.1-13); Bharata is in a hurry, yet it takes him as much as seven nights to reach Ayodhyā. Like so many of the episodes in the First stage (MB 2012) it is unannounced. Later, when a need was felt to explain anything that could be thought of as an anomaly in the earlier text (usually by an author considerably less gifted than the original creator; MB 2007), the few verses briefly narrating his journey with Yudhājit now at 2,1.1-11 were clumsily added.

But where were they added? Surely not as the first words of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa*. The brevity of Daśaratha’s instruction to Bharata to leave Ayodhyā implies that they were added at a point where the affectionate family ties with his uncle and grandfather were already known. Such a place is provided, even more clumsily, by Yudhājit’s unexpected arrival at the wedding celebration in Mithilā (now located at 1,72.1-6); but of course, Bharata’s visit to Rājagṛha must already have been well-known by audiences at the time at which the *Bālakāṇḍa* passage must be assumed to have been added. The purpose of the first few verses of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa’s* current *sarga* 1, referring back to Yudhājit’s appearance at Mithilā, can only be explained in narrative terms once they are preceded by some part of the present *Bālakāṇḍa*. The concept of a continuous, unsegmented, text is a cogent solution to the problem. Just such a text, albeit late enough to be divided between the two *kāṇḍas*, is summarised in 1, App.1.55-56, where the entry of the wedding party into Ayodhyā (*cf.* 1,76) is immediately followed by Bharata’s departure and the rejoicing of the citizens of Ayodhyā, presumably for the four newly-married couples. The departure here envisaged is evidently the one currently located at the beginning of *Ayodhyākāṇḍa sarga* 1, transposed to an early point in the continuous narrative, following on from Yudhājit’s arrival at 1,72.1-6, and the four brothers’ arrival at Ayodhyā with their wives at 1,76.8-13.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Given the concept of an unsegmented text, the first few verses of CE 2,1 can without great difficulty be envisaged as belonging to the close of the current *Bālakāṇḍa*, but that solves only the problem of the incongruous position of the reference to Yudhājit; it does little to provide an original opening to the early *VRm* narrative as a whole.

**Conclusion: The core Books (*VRm* 2—6)**Nārada and Vālmīki reveal a text that presents a plausible, appropriate succession of episodes at particular, but different, stages of composition; this putative text also answers several perplexing questions about the development of *VRm* 2—6, the so-called ‘core books’ of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* as a whole. We are therefore prepared to view these summaries with a degree of confidence in their validity. As *descriptions* of existing narratives, indeed, is how we view them, composed after the narrative they describe was in existence, not as *sources* for the composite to which they are now added to form a double preface.

Nārada presents Rāma as an exemplary but human contemporary. His account begins with the *yuvarāja* consecration being aborted by Kaikeyī (1,1.20; *cf.* 2,10), raising the question of just how the original narrative opened. He mentions nothing now found in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, in the last parts of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, or in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* as a whole; indeed verse 76, predicting that Rāma will eventually be admitted to *brahmaloka,* indicates the end-point of a narrative and theological stratum strikingly different from the current Viṣṇu-oriented dramatic finale of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. It seems fair to attribute composition to the end of Stages 1+2, and to ascribe items found in the present *VRm* CE text *kāṇḍas* 2—6 not mentioned by Nārada to part of the revisions of stage 3.

Vālmīki’s account at 1,3 functions both as the opening part of an unclosed frame story for the whole *VRm* and as a more summary description of the text of *kāṇḍas* 1—6. It was composed after at least some parts of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (see1,3.3-5) had entered the tradition, allowing repetitions of them — wanting in Nārada’s description — to be incorporated into the core books: examples are Sītā’s back-story in her conversation with Anasūyā, and Rāma’s uncharacteristic but narratively-enforced failure to kill Mārīca at their first encounter. More significantly, vv.1,3.28-29 hint at uneasiness over Sītā’s purity after her return from Laṅkā, leading to a certain amount of the Vālmīki-centred parts of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Exactly how much the author had in mind by “And the blessed sage Vālmīki composed in the later poem (*uttare kāvye*) whatever had not yet happened to Rāma on earth” (verse 29) tantalises original fictive audience and modern scholars alike. Evidently Vālmīki’s summary at 1,3 was composed after a certain undefined amount of the current *Bālakāṇḍa*, and an even less-defined amount of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* were in circulation, probably after Sītā’s purity has been vindicated on Laṅkā by the testimony of the gods, but before the episode had been transformed into a vindication by fire, and still before the human Rāma had been identified with Viṣṇu.

The core Books tell us nothing about Rāma or Sītā occurring before what we must infer from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* account of their banishment. Sītā must be thought to have started her life in the narrative as the natural-born daughter of Janaka and his wife. No kind of miraculous birth is attributed either to hero or heroine in the core narrative. Nārada thinks Sītā is as human as her husband.

But what about that husband? If the only account of the marriage is also not original, he enters the narrative as a young prince, popular with the people (as most fairy-tale young princes are likely to be), virtuous but untried, with no military experience: in technical terms, there has been no ‘youthful validating episode’; see ch.4, pp.84-97. He enters the forest with his valour and superhuman strength unappraised, and with no experience of the ascetic forest life to qualify him for his heroic role. Early audiences must have trembled for the safety of the three exiles; such fears kill Daśaratha (2,53).

Even the subsequent encounter with Virādha (3,2—4), which may not even have appeared in the earliest text (JLB 1985: 335),[[58]](#footnote-58) is a poor substitute for a validating episode; Rāma is indecisive, he must be galvanized into action by Lakṣmaṇa, and it is only by their joint efforts that the *rākṣasa* is defeated (3,3.15). It is the sudden explosion of the whole Śūrpaṇakhā/Khara episode that convinces the audience of Rāma’s prowess, and prepares them for what is to come in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*: alone, he slaughters Khara’s *rākṣasa* armies, first 14 strong, then 14,000, finally its three leaders, in a display of his might, this time not shared with Lakṣmaṇa, who has been sent out of the way to guard Sītā in a cave. Early audiences are relieved and encouraged. At this point the structure of the early core text, the ‘Old Material’, was tight and coherent. Rāma’s might, valour and self-belief had been demonstrated.

What is not in question is Rāma’s truthfulness, in a poem built on the integrity of father and son. He and Sītā must have been married, as we infer from the narrative, but there is no word in the whole constituted text of the *VRm* CE core of Lakṣmaṇa having a wife, outside the wedding narrated in full in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and summarised to Anasūyā by Sītā in a single verse (1,68—72; 2,110.51). Indeed, Kausalyā effectively rules out the possibility even of a future wife for Lakṣmaṇa by lamenting: ‘[Sītā’s] father is aged and has but one child’ (2,60.10a *vṛddhaś caivālpaputraś ca*).

If Nārada is to be believed at 1,1.12, so is Rāma when he tells Śūrpaṇakhā that Lakṣmaṇa is unmarried and eager to find a wife (3,17.3-4), even if the second part of the statement is somewhat exaggerated; he admits a few verses later that his loutish joke has been a mistake (3,17.19).[[59]](#footnote-59) His behaviour is the narrator’s device for activating the subsequent narrative (abduction and recovery), but Rāma’s character is exonerated. He is not a liar. He is well qualified to uphold his father’s integrity.

**Chapter 3**

**Boons misused:  
from the domestic level to the cosmic**

The whole narrative of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, this simple tale of the triumph of good over evil, has from the first been founded on the interplay between two ill-advised boons: the one granted to Rāvaṇa, prompting him to become the fearsome villain of the plot, and the subsidiary ones granted to Kaikeyī that enable Rāma to take on the role of hero and conqueror. These boons are complementary, revealing much about the skilful control and careful planning employed by the original single, gifted, author — techniques that could not be effaced by the many generations of revisers who left their mark on the narrative before this ‘old material’ could be considered something of a unit. Boons of many descriptions are conferred on, and by, several other characters with no regard to their ethical content. Their meanings and purpose vary widely. Kaikeyī’s secures action by the donor; so does Indra’s boon to Rāma after the final battle (6,108.6, repeated at 1,1.69), when he asks for the *vānara* casualties to be resurrected. Those won by Vaiśravaṇa and his half-brothers constitute a characteristic of the recipient’s behaviour, good or bad. But is Kumbhakarṇa’s boon a gift, a reward, or a punishment? Does misuse have consequences for donor, recipient, or an innocent third party? How do boons such as the ones earned by Indrajit from sacrifice differ from those won by his father’s penance, or by his own skilful post-victory negotiation? And are they anything more than an extension of the magic powers always to be expected from supernatural creatures like *rākṣasas* — or even from the traditional fairy godmother?

In the *VRm* boons of all types are found at all stages of development, much more widely in the two later books, and often with no narrative attached.[[60]](#footnote-60) The one factor uniting the foundational boons granted to Kaikeyī and Rāvaṇa is the misuse to which both recipients put them; when the original author brings this misuse together as the mainspring of his plot, he is enabled to develop the moral qualities of hero and heroine that are such a feature of the beloved story. It is Kaikeyī’s malice that ends up by sending Sītā out of the security of the palace into the wilderness where the narrator can plausibly have her captured by Rāvaṇa; and it is Rāma’s virtue that sends him out with her to perform his appointed task of destroying her captor and reclaiming his wife.

**Kaikeyī**Appropriately, the events leading to the expulsion at the beginning of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* form the high point of what was then the opening to the whole narrative, quickly captivating the audience and firmly setting the context and characterisation throughout the rest of the tradition.[[61]](#footnote-61) Climactic episodes of this nature typically attract later elaboration that can obscure earlier material, and some dramatic new version may become so popular that it comes to be ingrained in the tradition, fixed for evermore in the minds and emotions of audience or readers as if it were original. It is clear that this part of the plot always comprised some form of rash promise wrung from the uxorious Daśaratha by his cunning young wife; too much of the rest of the narrative rests on the existence of such an episode for it all to be a later invention. The narrative reaches a powerful climax at *VRm* 2,10, where the wily, envious Kaikeyī traps the doting, uxorious, aged Daśaratha into promising to exile Rāma and appoint her son, Bharata, Young King (*yuvarāja*). The *sarga* is carefully and deliberately built up as Kaikeyī inexorably leads the unwary old man into committing himself with no escape, as he makes promise after promise of a boon, which she calls upon the gods to witness before, with dramatic force, she presents her shattering demands.

Kaikeyī has claimed her promised boon. The vital question is, which boon or boons has she claimed? And, crucially, when were these boons promised? Are we to understand that the boon or pair of linked boons she has claimed are those she has just been engineering so carefully throughout *sarga* 10? Or were they gained during the *devāsurayuddha*? In either case, the result on the story is the same, but the effect on our understanding of the process of the text’s composition is enhanced.

Objective analysis of the language and style can in this instance provide only limited help in distinguishing between any original and inflated parts of the fluid text of *VRm* 2,1—30,[[62]](#footnote-62) but narrative analysis — provided it be employed with equal objectivity — may reveal some clues.

As for the actual time-frame in which the boons were conferred on Kaikeyī, *VRm* 2,10 places it firmly in the then-present day, as the culmination of a domestic squabble brought about by Daśaratha’s clumsy thoughtlessness and Kaikeyī’s selfish but understandable fears for her own status when her aged husband should be no longer there to favour her above her co-wives. She throws a rather childish tantrum, he unwisely gives in, and finds to his horror that he cannot withdraw from the promises the gods have just witnessed.

This scene corresponds almost exactly with the advice given to the queen by her maid Mantharā in the previous *sarga*, 9.1-8+16-23; those two passages follow seamlessly without the intervening passage. Verses 9-15 are the source of the alternative explanation of Kaikeyī’s boons: this explanation sites the event improbably in the remote past, the *devāsurayuddha*, when Daśaratha goes to render help to Indra, is injured, and saved by Kaikeyī’s efforts, for which she is promised two future boons. A briefer form of the same information is repeated at 2,16.21, when Kaikeyī informs Rāma of his sentence of exile. It is no surprise that such a fanciful, dramatic tale would excite the audience’s imagination, and replace the more prosaic, domestic fable. All its inherent improbabilities must be ignored: that Daśaratha, up to that point presented as an earthly human king, should be called upon to aid the King of the Gods in a battle; that neither Indra nor Daśaratha come well out of the encounter; that the king’s wife should be taken on the expedition, let alone that she be able to rescue her husband; that king and queen (whose age is not mentioned in the *VRm* text) should be many thousand years old by now is not entirely beyond comprehension in a Wonder Tale such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but that she should still be acting the role of the pretty young seductress does strain credibility — as does being the mother of a son conceived and borne not many years before.[[63]](#footnote-63) Nevertheless, this is the form of the episode that has become fixed in the general imagination to the point of ousting the earlier version. What is more, if we take a unitary view of the text (a text that is particularly fluid at this point), it has appeared in the previous *sarga*, and our understanding must be accommodated to it. This cosy domestic quarrel has been transformed into an episode on a cosmic level, more suited to the tone of the latest parts of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*. Significantly, this implication is corroborated by the absence of the *devāsurayuddha* episode from the *RU* (*MBh* 3,261.16-24).[[64]](#footnote-64)

The awe-struck audience has undoubtedly been entertained, but the craftsmanship, objectives and characterisation of the original composer have been submerged. Submerged, certainly, but not entirely falsified, unlike Rāma’s improbable contention at *VRm* 2,99.3 that Kaikeyī’s claim to the throne for Bharata is based not only on the boon gained in the *devāsura saṃgrāma* (2,99.4-7 immediately following, employing a less usual term for the standard *devāsura yuddha*), but on a bride-price agreement previously negotiated with her father.[[65]](#footnote-65) There are a number of reasons why I consider this verse a clumsy interpolation by an author less gifted and of even later date than the one who supplied the *devāsurayuddha* interpolation; this putative author was intent only on salving Bharata’s conscience for supplanting Rāma (a task he knows to be futile, of course, when the plot has long been determined, and is known to the audience). They include the fact that the bride-price agreement is never mentioned elsewhere in the text, before or after, especially in the conversation between Kaikeyī and Mantharā and the subsequent quarrel with Daśaratha; that even Bharata seems to know nothing about it, despite just having returned from a lengthy visit to his maternal relations; that we are not told why this privilege should apply simply to Kaikeyī’s son, not to the sons of any of Daśaratha’s other wives (in *Realpolitik*, actually to the fathers of the princesses); that Rāma, whose personal integrity is the keynote of the whole narrative, and Daśaratha, who dies to preserve his own probity, and for the maintenance of whose reputation Rāma accepts so much suffering, should both have their characters destroyed — with Daśaratha being revealed as a perjurer and Rāma as a collaborator for accepting the expected wrongful consecration; that this incongruous revelation serves no conceivable purpose in this carefully planned, tightly structured narrative — and overriding all, that this resort to convention in a narrative famed for its reversal of expectations, is banal and boring.

A number of other brief allusions to the detailed narrative of *VRm* 2,9—10 also demand consideration. Allusions in the *VRm* are rarely as casual as they are made to seem, but are purposeful, with an important function to perform in enabling the narrator to tell his story more effectively. Allusions to Kaikeyī’s boon are all backward-looking. The event to which they allude has already happened, necessarily so when that event, the granting of the boon, occurs at the very opening of the story. They are there ostensibly to provide information to other characters still ignorant of what has occurred, or repeated later in the narrative to reveal someone’s reaction, or simply to remind the audience during such a long, complicated narrative.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Essentially, this narrative of a life-or-death struggle between a human and a monster starts out as a rather sordid little domestic squabble over the relative status of co-wives and their sons that does no credit either to Daśaratha or to Kaikeyī. It is the sons, rather than their parents, who determine the further progress of the narrative. Bharata refuses to co-operate in his devoted mother’s scheming, Daśaratha is now dead leaving Rāma feeling obliged to remain adamant, and Kaikeyī is forced to retire into the unremarkable domesticity that she shares with her co-wives for the rest of her life (all three leaving for heaven to resume their wifely duties at 7,89.11-13). As far as the *VRm* authors are concerned, Kaikeyī is now a spent force.[[67]](#footnote-67) She no longer drives the plot. Her job is done. Rāma and Sītā are now safely out in the forest, and the tellers can embark on the conflict with Rāvaṇa that is to be the chief focus of their narrative. Her ‘Old material’ receives no ‘New beginning’.

**Rāvaṇa**  
Rāvaṇa’s boon, equally fundamental to plot and characterisation, is necessarily treated rather differently. He does not enter the action in person until *kāṇḍa* 3, but the audience have already been subtly prepared by hints of the danger to come (2,104.4 and 108.11-12). By their focus on the threat posed to ascetics, rather than on the heroic narrative, both allusions suggest that they entered the text at a late stage in its development;[[68]](#footnote-68) the second, foreshadowing the episode with Khara, strongly implies that this narrator is addressing an audience to whom the narrative is already familiar.

Rāvaṇa is not mentioned again until the opening verses of the episode that is to provide the crucial turning point of the entire narrative in the core books, poignantly sited as the exiles are nearing the allotted end of their exile and their thoughts are beginning to focus on the longed-for return to Ayodhyā and their family (3,15); then Śūrpaṇakhā arrives on the scene (3,16.5+19), and soon Rāvaṇa himself bursts dramatically upon the audience’s attention when his outraged sister, mutilated by Lakṣmaṇa, hurries to Laṅkā to report that Rāma has annihilated the *rākṣasa* army led by their brothers Khara, Dūṣaṇa and Triśiras (3,30). There is no place in this fast-moving narrative for any extended explanation of his previous exploits, not even a flashback, and no possibility of locating the acquisition of his boon in the present day: both methods used in the case of Kaikeyī are now superseded by athird. The audience are tantalised by a number of unexplained allusions evoking an atmosphere of sinister dread that keep them on tenterhooks for the safety of the hero (3,30.10-20),[[69]](#footnote-69) telling us specifically that the arrogant *rākṣasa* had practised asceticism for 10,000 years, offering his own heads to Brahmā, and gaining a boon of limited invulnerability (vv.6+17-18) on which he had many times relied.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Throughout the rest of the core books tension mounts as a number of further allusions are made to Rāvaṇa’s boon and its consequences. At first we are told, with no details, that he was “deluded by a boon he had been granted*”* (*varadānena mohitaḥ* 3,52.18). Later, at the beginning of the assault on Laṅkā, Rāma bases his resolve to kill Rāvaṇa personally on the misuse to which the *rākṣasa* king has put his boon:   
 “But as for that savage who takes pleasure in hurting groups of *daityas* and *dānavas,* noble sages too, relying on the power granted him by his boon to roam all the worlds tormenting their inhabitants — as for that *rākṣasa* lord, him I am resolved to kill myself.”[[71]](#footnote-71)   
No explanation of how he knows this crucial fact is needed, nor any suggestion that his attitude is as arrogant as Rāvaṇa’s, for the audience accepts him as the pre-ordained hero, and have not yet learned to probe his ethics. Similar hints (some of them introducing new material, such as Hanumān’s addition of monkeys to the excluded category)[[72]](#footnote-72) increase the sense of doom and expectation overhanging the plot. Such anomalies are typical of oral construction and performance, and do not disturb the narrative flow.

At last, realism begins to break in on Rāvaṇa’s own mind: after defeat in his preliminary battle with Rāma, he remembers that men are excluded from his boon, and is thrown back on his own resources (6,48.4-8), a mix of determined fatalism and bluster. As the audience have been worked up into a frenzy of happy expectation that the culmination of the battle is approaching, they are given a poignant jolt about the cost of warfare paid by innocent non-combatants on the losing side: bereaved *rākṣasīs* lament their losses, bitterly placing the blame squarely on Śūrpaṇakhā, and on Rāvaṇa’s refusal to understand his limits (6,82.26+29-36). This is no mere tale of valour about to triumph over apparently insuperable odds — good defeating evil in the standard heroic pattern — but a more nuanced exploration of character in which supernatural creatures are shown to develop recognisably ‘human’ traits, and the arch-villain suffers a progressive deterioration in his own esteem and that of his subjects.

This is the position of the narrative about Rāvaṇa’s boon at the end of the core books, as it is now presented in the Critical Edition. Enlightened by a number of brief allusions, audiences now know that Rāvaṇa, a *rākṣasa* descended from known *brāhman* sages and half-brother and enemy of the god Vaiśravaṇa, had been granted a boon of limited invulnerability after a prolonged period of asceticism during which he had offered his severed heads to Brahmā. This boon had allowed him to rampage unchecked over the worlds of the gods, and on earth to slaughter sages and pollute their sacrifices. By stressing the religious values both of Rāvaṇa’s crimes and Rāma’s consequent role of saving the cosmos from his depredations, some of these allusions supersede the assumed earlier heroic framework of the loss and recovery of the staunch Sītā. Others achieve their effect by assuming the audience’s foreknowledge of the outcome, suggesting that they may have been absent from the earliest form of the tale. Just how many of these allusions genuinely appeared in the earliest forms of the fable is impossible to determine, but the boon itself and its limitations cannot be ignored as a factor in the rise to spectacular popularity of this fable of Man versus Monster.

Rāvaṇa’s boon, just as fundamental to the plot as Kaikeyī’s, has a quite different effect on Rāma: Kaikeyī’s enhances the hero’s moral stature (as well as the practical effect of setting the plot in motion), while the limitation placed on Rāvaṇa’s boon tends if anything to diminish his military triumph (the warrior-prince was always destined to triumph). On the whole, though, in the core books Rāma is depicted as outright victor over both misusers of their boons, and Rāvaṇa must join Kaikeyī as a ‘spent force’.

**Boons proliferate**Many a hero or villain of traditional narratives learns to his cost the folly of relying on predictions apparently guaranteed by a sybil or other oracle; the same is true of ambiguous oaths. The equivalent Indic motif, widespread in early narratives, is used in the *VRm* to trap Rāvaṇa, after a long period of impossible asceticism wins him a boon from Brahmā. Unlike the ancient Greek hero Oedipus — the innocent victim of his tragedy — his early Indian counterparts tend to be the villains, who are punished for having misused their hard-won powers: Kabandha, Kumbhakarṇa, and Mārīca, but not the faultless Vibhīṣaṇa, whose boon of immortality at 7,10.30 is duplicated by a similar boon from Rāma at 7,98.22.

The creator of Agastya’s narrative at the beginning of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7,1—34) is not deterred by the undeniable fact that the villain and virtually all his family and their progeny are already dead, annihilated by the hero and his helpers. In that sense it is ‘Old material’ certainly, but he manages to give it a ‘New beginning’.[[73]](#footnote-73) And he does it so skilfully that it takes a considerable effort for the audience or reader to realise that there is little that is truly new in the basic facts of his telling: we have met most of it before, albeit in briefer form, where the arresting nature of the context masks the lack of details, the list of Rāvaṇa’s exploits at 3,30.7-20 providing a particularly striking example. The full episodes have not appeared in any connected narrative in the core books, but have been recycled and expanded out of a number of allusions, and to a certain extent adapted to conform to their new setting. In effect, Agastya’s ‘New beginning’ has very little in it that is new.

Indeed, as has been noted, it should not be assumed that all allusions now found embedded in the generally older books are the source material for fuller versions found in the generally later material of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*. Some of the apparently ‘Old material’ may well be deceptive, and in fact itself be derived from the Stage 3 books — or from some even later external source. The pitiful lament of bereaved *rākṣasīs* with its reference to Śiva predicting that Sītā will be born to destroy the *rākṣasas* (6,82.26+29-30) is more typical of late Stage 3 than it is of Stage 2. It provides an alternative, revised version of the gods’ appeal to Brahmā that will lead to the incarnation of Viṣṇu, the incarnation itself not being found in the CE until late passages of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas.*[[74]](#footnote-74) It would be a mistake to assume that all these allusions genuinely constitute ‘Old material’.

Agastya’s narrative, necessarily set before the events of the core books, explores Rāvaṇa’s boon and its consequences in depth: his acquisition of the boon is narrated, with his own disdainful exclusion of men from its provisions (7,10.10-22), followed by two long series of exploits during which he grows ever more arrogant in his reliance on the boon to preserve him from the gods’ retaliation, and a contemptuous insult to Nandīśvara (here represented as Śiva’s monkey-faced *dvārapāla*) incurs a curse that now explains the prominent role of *vānaras* in his eventual defeat (7,16.1-16). Anomalies also begin to appear: earthly kings are defeated until the dying Anaraṇya of Ayodhyā predicts that a future Ikṣvāku king (Rāma) will avenge his death (7,19). The prophecy is, of course, anomalous; Anaraṇya is an ancestor of Rāma, a human, and so he himself is not prevented by the boon from killing Rāvaṇa, but this issue is — necessarily — not explored. The earlier part of Agastya’s account (identified as Sub-unit 1) reaches its climax with Nalakūbara’s curse acting as the triumphant guarantee of Sītā’s purity as Rāvaṇa loses his taste for raping unwilling women (7,26.41-47); the logical inconsistency that the boon protects the *rākṣasa* king from the curse of a god’s son, arises unnoticed.

Other consequences of the boon’s provision are not ignored, and must be dealt with. At some point in transmission of this convoluted time-frame Viṣṇu is persuaded to take birth on earth as a man, the only man able to kill Rāvaṇa (briefly narrated at 1,14.16-18), and so is placed in the rather embarrassing position of having to refuse Indra’s appeal for help to counter the *rākṣasa* attack on his heaven on the grounds that ‘the time is not yet right’ for him to kill Rāvaṇa; he promises to intervene later (7,27.6-19; *i.e.* when he has become incarnate as the human Rāma).[[75]](#footnote-75) Later in the narrative, it is Rāvaṇa himself who is humiliated in conflicts with Arjuna Sahasrabāhu and Vālin (7,31—34).[[76]](#footnote-76) They cannot kill him because of the boon, but their identities are forewarnings of his future downfall at the hands of Rāma.

**Kumbhakarṇa**Other anomalies affect Rāvaṇa, his brothers, and his non-*rākṣasa* half-brother Vaiśravaṇa. All please Brahmā with ascetic practices lasting thousands of years, and are rewarded with boons.[[77]](#footnote-77) The narration of Rāvaṇa’s boon merely fills out allusions already familiar from *VRm* 3,30;[[78]](#footnote-78) its purpose, misused before his asceticism is even conceived, is to please his envious mother and outdo the splendour of his half-brother (7,9.31-37). These new boons add nothing either to the narrative or the characterisation of the four sons of Viśravas, but merely confirm the way the three young *rākṣasas* have already been behaving, their natures determined by their father from before their birth (7,9.17-20+28-30).[[79]](#footnote-79) They may seem only to be unnecessary duplications, but a skilful teller integrates them into his narrative in the next *sarga*: it is news of the boons that encourages Sumālin to lead his followers out of Rasātala, and to reclaim their former home, Laṅkā, from Vaiśravaṇa (7,11.1-4), linking them to Rāvaṇa’s vow to his mother, and moving the plot on towards the war on Kailāsa.

Incorporating Kumbhakarṇa’s behaviour into the *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrative needed a certain amount of ingenuity. That he spends most of his life asleep has been well known since Śūrpaṇakhā first introduced him into the narrative (3,16.19), a character trait derisively attributed by Rāvaṇa to his being “addicted to vulgar pleasure” (*grāmyasukhe rataḥ*, 6,48.14). While Rāvaṇa also acknowledges Brahmā’s curse on his brother (6,48.9), only at 6,49 does Vibhīṣaṇa give Rāma (and the overall audience) a specific explanation of his sleepfulness, and a specific time-frame for waking naturally;[[80]](#footnote-80) in the comic episode of the difficulty with which he is awoken to help Rāvaṇa repel Rāma’s army (6,48.9-51) he is said to sleep for any length of time between six and nine months (v.12). Vibhīṣaṇa explains that Kumbhakarṇa was born with his present huge body fully developed, powerful by nature, not by any boon, and from birth creates such havoc among the gods that they petition Brahmā for relief. Evidently at his wits’ end to know how to give the world some peace from his rumbustious baby great-grandson Brahmā resorts to a remedy available only to him, and condemns the baby to perpetual sleep (no doubt envied by many of his fellow parents and grandparents in the audience); paradoxically, Rāvaṇa shows a merciful side to his nature, persuading Brahmā that he is wrong to curse his own great-grandson, and causing him to modify the curse to sleeping for 6 months, and waking for a single day (6,49.24-26). The precision with which the time-frame declared on the battlefield by Vibhīṣaṇa is implemented is not quite what may have been expected — in fact, it is a form of the widespread deceptive boon motif: Kumbhakarṇa is dead before the end of his one day of wakefulness.

Agastya’s account elevates this half-comic, half-terrifying drama from the domestic level to the cosmic, although the humorous patina with which heroic giants are generally covered in Wonder Tales continues to accompany this overgrown, overblown villain. He, too, performs severe asceticism in the hope of earning a boon from Brahmā, but the likely nature of the boon that he will seek is pre-determined to fit in with the long-familiar narrative as well as his immediately post-natal behaviour (7,9.29), and the prospect terrifies the gods. Unable to refuse a boon, they instruct Sarasvatī to enter him and muddle his speech, so that he is made to ask “to sleep for several years” (*svaptuṃ varṣaṇy anekāni,* 7,10.39c), leaving the miserable giant wondering how he could have made such a request (7,10.3-5+31-41).

Application of the muddled boon is mixed, perhaps because the terms do not specify any precise details: this time no intermission is promised. Sleep does not overtake Kumbhakarṇa until *sarga* 13, perhaps to keep him awake enough for Rāvaṇa to fulfil his fraternal duty of marrying him to Vajrajvālā (7,12.21). He is then said to sleep without waking for many thousands of years (7,13.7), but joins in the *rākṣasa* assault on Indra’s heaven as if he had never been to sleep, with no reference to the time-frame (7,25.30+34; 7,28.32). In a narrative governed by absolute consistency of detail throughout, by a punctilious author on a computer with an accurate search function, we might postulate that 6,49.24-26 were an interpolation; but that is not the way traditional narratives are composed, and absolute consistency should not be expected.

**Vibhīṣaṇa** has been known throughout the core books as virtuous, and the *rākṣasas’* non-*rākṣasa* half-brother **Vaiśravaṇa** has also been presented with a positive image in the core books and in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. That they too should now be made to engage in ascetic practices to receive boons merely completes the number of Viśravas’ sons, although a few points may still be made. Vaiśravaṇa’s rewards for his asceticism, immortality, wealth, a son Nalakūbara, his position as *lokapāla*, and sovereignty over the *rākṣasas* then in Laṅkā (7,3.8-19) add nothing to the picture of him already built up in the rest of the text. The ever-virtuous Vibhīṣaṇa is granted the boon of supreme righteousness at his request, supplemented by Brahmā with immortality as a reward, in striking contrast to the fact that the narrative’s whole plot is founded on the crucial limits of Rāvaṇa’s request for immortality (7,10.6-9+23-30; *cf*. 7,10.16-18).[[81]](#footnote-81) At almost the final point in the narrative, when Rāma’s new role as Viṣṇu has given it a new purpose (freeing the cosmos — rather than just Sītā — from Rāvaṇa), and he is preparing to lead his followers to heaven, he sternly commands Vibhīṣaṇa to remain on earth to govern Laṅkā properly (7.98.22-23), making certain that his efforts will not have been wasted. This version of immortality, unsought by its new king (and implicitly not welcomed) is no boon. But it ensures that the universe can be troubled by no new Rāvaṇa.

The core text has portrayed **Indrajit** as the possessor of fearsome magic powers, among them the power to become invisible and to overwhelm his opponents with his *nāga*-based weapons, rather casually said to result from one or more boons from Brahmā. For instance, he has earned divine weapons, including his noose, and the power to make himself invisible to his assailants, by propitiating Brahmā (5,46.2+37-42; 6,34.28-29). In Agastya’s narrative we are given fuller details of his acquisition of a new set of boons that go some way towards explaining parts of the already well-known story of Indrajit’s part in the battle for Laṅkā (7,25.2-15) and death (7,30.7-14). After a long and largely successful series of battles against the gods, Rāvaṇa returns to Laṅkā to discover that Indrajit has been performing an elaborate series of sacrifices to those very gods, thereby gaining (this time from Śiva) the powers he has used to such devastating effect in the core books: a magic chariot, weapons, and invisibility in battle. Times and aspirations have changed: Rāvaṇa now feels superior to the gods;[[82]](#footnote-82) he no longer approves of wastefully propitiating them, manipulating them to do whatever the sacrificer wants, but nonetheless he is content to allow his warrior son to use his powers in the forthcoming assault on Indra (7,25.14-15). Similarly, the impatient Indrajit has no wish to imitate his father’s 10,000 years of severely passive asceticism to gain his rewards, but prefers to gain them more quickly by the power of active might. To achieve these ends, when Brahmā offers him, not so much a boon as a ransom to release his captive, Indra, he negotiates the highest price he can get. When told that absolute immortality is not on offer, he reduces his bid to enable him never to enter battle without first worshipping Agni (as he does at 6,67.4-27), and to meet death only if he fails to complete the sacrifice (unwarily, in view of his death when Lakṣmaṇa and his companions prevent him from entering the Nikumbhilā sacrifice ground, 6,71—72). Indrajit’s boons, too, have been misused, but only in relation to himself.

The heroic **Hanumān** is the favourite character of every reader or member of every audience, and accordingly he comes to be blessed with a great number of boons. He had been introduced fairly unobtrusively, simply as one of Sugrīva’s loyal companions in his flight from Vālin, and had sat modestly by while the searching *vānaras* discussed who among them had the ability to fly to Laṅkā, until Jāmbavān urged him to undertake the vital leap, recounting the story of his birth and astonishing prowess. The relevance of his astonishing babyhood leap towards the sun is clearly the focus of this incident, rather than the two boons he earned by that leap. Brahmā’s “immunity from death by any weapon” (4,65.25c) rather detracts from the splendour of his future exploits, while the puzzling one by Indra (compensation for having wounded the baby with his *vajra*) — “your death should occur only at your own wish” (4,65.27ab) — seems to have no significance to the situation at that or any other point in the narrative. Jāmbavān’s prompting sweeps all Hanumān’s modesty aside; he displays his gigantic form and indulges in an outrageous bout of pre-exploit flyting that lasts 21 *ślokas* as he prepares for his mission to Laṅkā. But this prowess is evidently innate, not boon-induced (4,66).

Arrived on Laṅkā, he at last encounters Indrajit, and the issue of boons takes on a greater importance: *rākṣasa* and *vānara* each have divine powers, both granted by Brahmā, and both immutable. Indrajit finds himself unable to kill Hanumān, but this Brahmā-conferred invincibilty seems to be contradicted by his own possession of a Brahmā-granted divine weapon, his noose, which Hanumān knows he must respect; but he also knows he can rely on a boon from Brahmā not to be bound by any weapon.[[83]](#footnote-83) He resolves the conundrum by allowing himself to appear to be bound, with the aim of contriving a meeting with Rāvaṇa, and bursting free from his bonds later (5,46.31-51; 48.14-15).

By one of the latest stages of the *VRm*, Hanumān’s importance and popularity have grown so much that he is accorded not merely the approbation of Rāma, but a two-*sarga*-reprise of his birth-story and other exploits added to the end of Agastya’s narrative of the *rākṣasas* (7,35—36). The basic outline of his birth and leap towards the sun follows the established pattern, with an intervention by Rāhu inserted. The gods are so relieved when, placated, Vāyu withdraws his vulgar, burlesque vengeance for the injury to his son, that they readily fall in with Brahmā’s suggestion that they each confer a boon on the infant to help him accomplish the fearsome mission that lies ahead of him — that of helping Rāma to free the world of Rāvaṇa. Indra grants him invulnerability to his *vajra*; Sūrya: eloquence and mastery of *śāstras*; Varuṇa: immunity to his noose and to water; Yama: immunity to his rod (probably a metaphor for the perpetual life with which he is commonly either blessed or plagued), perpetual immunity to disease, and never to lose heart in battle; Kubera (here specifically called *varada*): immunity to his mace; Śiva: immunity to himself and his weapons; Brahmā: to be long-lived and noble (*dīrghāyuś ca mahātmā ca* 7,36.19c), and immune to punishment from *brāhmans*; and Viśvakarman: invulnerability in battle to any of the gods’ weapons fashioned by him (7,36.10-21). The possession of such a profusion of boons adds to the baby’s prestige but further detracts from the gallantry of his achievements as an adult warrior. More especially, it emphasises an enigma latent in the original plot: if Hanumān is so powerful, why has he not protected his friend and master Sugrīva against his enemy Vālin, leaving that task to Rāma?[[84]](#footnote-84) Constructing such a complex narrative is full of such traps for the authors. An answer to this conundrum is provided in Agastya’s account in a realistic cameo showing how the gods’ gifts have totally spoiled the unruly child Hanumān, who now starts exasperating local sages (in a way typical of monkeys even today at religious sites), in the knowledge that he cannot be punished by the *brāhman* sages. They tolerate his childishly mischievous pranks with relative good humour, but at last at 7,36.33 they impose the mild curse for him to be unaware of his strength for a very long time (*i.e*. until he has grown up and reformed his behaviour, and his innate prowess is needed); at vv.39-40 the consequence for his failure to deal with Vālin is spelled out.

Hanumān is perhaps better known for another boon, this one from Rāma; he is to live as long as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is known on earth, that is to say, so it seems, as long as the earth lasts. Exactly *why* Rāma insists on preventing his beloved acolyte from joining him in heaven is not specified; the implication must be that he will remain as some kind of witness to Rāma’s deeds on earth now that his master has shed his earthly identity and reverted to being Viṣṇu in heaven (7,39.14-19; 98.24-25).[[85]](#footnote-85)

The unintended consequence is played out in the humorous encounter between Hanumān and his half-brother, Bhīma Pāṇḍava (also said to be a son of Vāyu) in a passage in the *Mahābhārata* (3,147.37). The *MBh* is traditionally set many thousands of years later than the *VRm*, so the monkey is feeling the effects of his age, eternal youth not being part of the boon.[[86]](#footnote-86) Bhīma, the strong man in the *MBh*, often a figure of fun, comes out much the worse in a trial of strength, being unable even to lift the monkey’s tail, and is then treated to a long sermon and a brief résumé of the Rāma story. This passage is unusual in the *MBh* tradition, which tends not to emphasise Hanumān’s prestige.[[87]](#footnote-87)

The appearance of three other *Rāmāyaṇa* characters in minimal allusions in the *MBh* demonstrates a concern to ensure the literal efficacy of boons of immortality. Rāma has instructed Vibhīṣaṇa also not to accompany him to heaven, but to remain to rule Laṅkā as long as his people endure (no doubt as a precaution against the resurgence of a hostile *rākṣasa* dynasty); Brahmā, perhaps with this aim already in mind, adds immortality to the boons sought by Vibhīṣaṇa(*VRm* 7,98.21-23; 7,10.30). Accordingly, the virtuous *rākṣasa* is mentioned in the *MBh* as still ruling; he makes a treaty with Sahadeva Pāṇḍava (*MBh* 2,28.50-53+312\*). The *vānaras* Mainda and Dvivida, twin sons of the Aśvins, who are relatively minor characters in the *VRm* but have gained immortality by being allowed by Brahmā to drink *amṛta* (5,58.12-15), are alluded to at *MBh* 5,128.41 (Dvivida is unable to conquer Kṛṣṇa at the gate of Saubha), and the pair are conquered by Sahadeva Pāṇḍava in Kiṣkindhā at *MBh* 2,App.13.13-20.[[88]](#footnote-88) These allusions all occur in identifiably late insertions into the *MBh*. The relationship between the *MBh* and the *VRm* at each point in their development is a complex matter,[[89]](#footnote-89) unresolved and probably unresolvable, but it is interesting to note the meticulous care with which narrators in one tradition or the other (or both) have treated these fluid texts. The *VRm’s* mighty Hanumān is an easy target for reworking in the *MBh* and the direction of borrowing is obvious in his case, but the introduction of the other three into the *MBh* because of their boons of immortality — or the conferring of those boons in the *VRm* simply because their recipients are mentioned in the *MBh* (however arcane and inconsequential the parts they play) — is a striking example of narrational technique. A ‘new beginning’ is definitely involved, even if the precise identity of the ‘old material’ remains unclear.

During this transitional stage the old heroic culture, concentrating on human men and their superhuman exploits, was being submerged by a culture that preferred stories of gods, with supernatural boons replacing natural prowess, and wonders occasionally giving way to tasteless ridicule and vulgar burlesque. The Old Order had changed.

To return to the image of the Rāma story being ‘founded’ on the misuse of two boons, those granted to Rāvaṇa and Kaikeyī, on which the rest of the plot has been ‘built’: boons in general proliferate throughout the *VRm* text, although no others are so ‘fundamental’. The metaphor recurs again and again. The motif of the boon comes to function as a narrational convenience akin to the verbal formulae commonly used internationally and recognised as ‘building blocks’ for narratives presented and transmitted orally; if overused, both techniques may testify to the decay of the tradition (JLB 2000b: esp. 194-95).

**Chapter 4**

**A new core text**

*Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.*Shakespeare, *King Henry IV part 2:* 3,1.31

**The Third stage: new core texts in *Uttarakāṇḍa* and *Bālakāṇḍa***The first two stages of growth of Rāma’s story had come to a triumphant end with the return of the exiles to Ayodhyā and Rāma’s consecration as king amid universal celebration and rejoicing that prosperity had been assured for the kingdom. Prince Rāma’s career was complete; the young warrior had done what he had to do. Daśaratha’s wish to be succeeded by his eldest son had been fulfilled.

By the end of what is now usually called the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* the narrative had reached a position where audiences who had followed Prince Rāma’s struggles from the beginning of what is now called the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*,[[90]](#footnote-90) could be expected to provide a ready market for continued tales of Rāma’s career now that he had dispatched his enemies and assumed his rightful place as king of Ayodhyā. How would he pursue the duties and obligations of an Ideal King, and how had he prepared for them as a young boy? The core narratives of the so-called *Uttara* and *Bāla kāṇḍas* look forward and back respectively to present some answers, augmented by a large number of supplementary tales. The ‘Old Material’ was ransacked to inspire the tellers with new ideas, ideas that in their turn later became transformed into ‘Old Material’ for yet another ‘New Beginning’. To clarify any of these ‘New Beginnings’, we must try to discern where exactly the previous ‘Old Material’ ended; and that is no easy task.Defining the precise extent of the five Books constituting the first two stages of composition — a complex matter — has an even more complex effect on the task of defining the basic narrative core of the Third Stage. Where the *Ayodhyā kāṇḍa* once began cannot be determined: the same is true of the *Uttara*; the ends of *Yuddha* and *Uttara* are equally problematic, not only in extent, but in their content.[[91]](#footnote-91)

In both cases, the answers will determine the extent and nature of the core text of the whole Rāma narrative at this period; its limits and limitations differ substantially from those established by the compilers of the *VRm* Critical Edition as a whole. Determining the order in which various episodes were composed, and therefore became known to future narrators, is not a mere arid dispute between linguists, but a matter of fundamental importance to our understanding of the narrative and to its interpretation. What narrative was being continued? Even more pertinently, how was the original ending of *Uttara* envisaged? As triumph or tragedy? And where was that ending?

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that the solutions I am going to suggest to these problems show the core material of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* to have been composed as a single more-or-less coherent entity, at a date relatively soon after the original end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* core text, and as its logical continuation; and that the core text of the *Bālakāṇḍa* is composed of a rather more diffuse collection of episodes, mostly subsequent to the *Uttara* core, and therefore to a limited extent dependent on it. Exceptions to both propositions abound, and must be explored.

In the case of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the position is further complicated by difficulties in establishing a credible text. At the beginning of the whole massive CE project the original editors drew up criteria, based on those established for the *Mahābhārata* CE, for establishing a text as close as possible to a presumed earlier form or even the archetype, based on a strict comparison of the manuscript evidence. This aim was followed throughout the first six volumes with, on the whole, a fair degree of success, despite the inherent difficulties of reproducing material that had once been orally transmitted, and then committed to writing in manuscripts that had been repeatedly recopied (and therefore revised in the process) for well over a thousand years; but even the aim itself has not wanted for critics. By the time Umakant P. Shah edited the seventh volume in the series, he felt obliged to consider less mechanistic options for inclusion or exclusion. A number of his revisions have been reversed as subjective by Robert and Sally Goldman in their monumental translation.[[92]](#footnote-92) My own approach is to explore whether the science of narrative composition and logic (aware that it too may be considered ‘subjective’ by those who are unfamiliar with its rigours) can help to untangle the complexities by studying a few of whatever scraps of narrative are available, without preconceptions, and without assigning them to any rigid structure that takes no account of the fluidity and multiplicity of the text in this generally late stage of transmission, and in the hope that they will reveal something worthwhile about the processes of renewal of a well-known, well-loved narrative.

Not only are these two new groups of material not units: as already discussed on pp.21-23, they did not originate as *kāṇḍas*, as that term is currently envisaged, but are simply disparate additions to the beginning or end of an existing unsegmented text. The creators of these new individual components were not subject to any consideration of length. Before the concept of segmentation into *kāṇḍas* was introduced, they merely added (in the case of the so-called ‘Further Book’), or prefixed (in the ‘Youthful Exploits’) to the existing text whatever new passages they deemed appropriate (or profitable); brevity posed no problem. The disparity with which differing recensions separate their material into *kāṇḍas* indicates the date of segmentation into discrete Books to be so late — after the establishment of separate recensions — as to be beyond the scope of this present study: we are compelled to continue to refer to individual portions of narrative in the now familiar terms, while bearing in mind the anachronism of those terms.

The bare plot outlines of both new *kāṇḍas* are compact and taut, but filled out with many additions: new episodes, new characters, and In-tales have been contributed at various dates up to about the fourth century A.D., their emphasis adjusted to the ever-developing social and religious context. Both groups of material now presented as the *Bāla* and *Uttara* *kāṇḍa* core texts, pre-planned and conceived as single units in terms of narrative, of sequence of composition, or of ethos, are now obscured or even distorted. Each has attracted insertions, redirection of purpose, and, in the case of the grand finale, considerable modification over time.

The core subject-matter in *Uttara* begins and ends with Rāma losing Sītā. It is a complete narrative (beginning, middle, and end); brief but creative, dramatic and tightly focused on its purpose, it portrays the personal effects for a king and his wife who find themselves still unable to escape the consequences of the struggles they endured in the earlier story. This shattering surprise, reversing all the expectations of characters and audience alike, continues the tradition set by the composers of the previous five *kāṇḍas*.

The composers of the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative were a little more circumscribed in their task. Their creativity was limited, but only by the need to present a hero conforming to the well-established image of the superb warrior: birth, education and validation as supreme were all required, but had to be devised afresh. The opportunities were wide, and these new composers exploited their freedom in an episodic structure that presents few surprises. Rāma is never in any danger; he must survive any test, any encounter, provided that he marries Sītā, and shows himself fit to confront the challenges that the audience knew would befall him. In terms of structural technique, however, the creators of the *Bāla* narratives were in a similar situation to those who added to the lives of the Dāśarathis after the consecration of King Rāma: they were not obliged to produce material to any particular length. They were not creating a new ‘*kāṇḍa*’ in the sense that we now understand it; their only constraint was that they were including a few items, of any length, creatively, to one or the other end of what was already known to the audience.

Neither the *Uttara* nor the *Bāla kāṇḍa* rely for their narrative on the fundamental structural technique that had driven the construction of books 2—6: the boons on which Kaikeyī and Rāvaṇa had relied so unsuccessfully to achieve their aims had been spectacularly defeated, and that old motif degenerated into a hackneyed standard cosmopolitan building block automatically used and overworked by minor poetasters to fill out the subsequent narrative. The authors of the core narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* rejected the unthinking use of this building block in favour of a newly creative, tragic, personal tale based on the human emotions of its main players.

**Obligations of a sovereign:** ***VRm* 2—6**Much had appeared openly in *kāṇḍas* 2 to 6 about the duties of a king, but there the basis was all theoretical. Rāma had always been well aware of the obligations of sovereignty, the role he had been destined to assume all his youth. Rāma was not yet king, and the story at that time was to be about Prince Rāma. Not until the newly expanded narrative do we see those duties related in practical terms to the two kings, Daśaratha and Rāma.

The sovereign duties of prudent statecraft that Daśaratha, Bharata, and eventually Rāma himself were expected to observe take many forms, including administering justice, and ensuring the military security, economic and agricultural prosperity, and general happiness of his subjects, all in a context of respect for orthodox religion (both in return for taxes, and to promote personal benefits of righteousness); an important further duty was the performance of sacrifices (whether to achieve military prosperity or control over nature is not specified).[[93]](#footnote-93) All these desiderata are dependent upon the king’s personal conduct (2,61.9-10). In the core text these duties are concepts discussed in a limited number of passages, not used to direct a narrative that was probably largely already in place before they were incorporated. It is hard to escape the conclusion that interest in the abstract conception of sovereignty and its obligations did not develop until the parameters of the narrative had been firmly fixed.

As the kingly role becomes temporarily unfilled at the death of Daśaratha and the unexpected disruption of the planned succession, the councillors meet hurriedly and make sensible arrangements to avert the Evils of a Kingless State that they fear (2,61—62); Daśaratha had clearly performed one of his duties by appointing a competent cabinet.[[94]](#footnote-94) Bharata’s initial refusal to co-operate merely prolongs the period of uncertainty, but none of the threatened Evils actually occurs, even before he loses his argument with Rāma on Citrakūṭa (nor even during the next fourteen years, while Bharata equivocates by carrying out Rāma’s instructions but withdrawing to Nandigrāma to imitate his brothers’ privations).

That Bharata would make a sovereign equally as good as his elder brother had been of no account either to composer or audience. Even the pleas made, both by Lakṣmaṇa and by Daśaratha himself, that Rāma should free his father from his disastrous pledge to Kaikeyī by deposing him and assuming the sovereignty are unable to divert him from his chosen path (2,18.1-26; 2,31.23-25); the narrative outline is already irretrievably established. Rāma must continue to go to the forest for fourteen years, during which time Bharata must replace him as king.

The duties of sovereignty are explored twice during Bharata’s abortive appeal: first in the so-called *kaccit* *sarga* (2,94.7-59) with which Rāma greets his brother, secondly when Rāma rebuts Jābāli’s advice to prevaricate, and vows, inevitably, to adhere firmly to his promise to Daśaratha (2,101).

That the *kaccit sarga* is intrusive in the text as it now stands is apparent from the fact that Rāma’s questions to Bharata seem based on the surmise that he is already king regnant[[95]](#footnote-95) — that Daśaratha is dead — although it is not until the next *sarga* that he is told of their father’s death, and reacts to the news with his customary display of emotion. Nor does Bharata make any attempt to answer the catechism in its details, standing up robustly to his older brother, vehemently pointing out the irrelevance of the interrogation to his own current position, and effectively accusing his senior of dereliction of duty (2,95.1-3), in an engagingly drawn picture of the relations between two brothers, affectionate but equally strong-minded, with the accident of birth order alone determining the outcome of their dispute: Bharata had been compelled to submit, but he was not defeated, retaining his stubborn resolution to share his brothers’ privations by covertly withdrawing the seat of his government to Nandigrāma. The pattern of statecraft that he tried to reject remained at the realistic, human level: the king was not expected to exercise control over the natural elements; crime was still envisaged and should be punished. The mainspring of the narrative remained the personal integrity of Daśaratha and Rāma.

In the second passage, Rāma had treated his tempter Jābāli with due respect, but had rejected his views as firmly as he overruled the arguments of his defiant younger brother. Nevertheless the emphases of his reply were subtly different. Details of statecraft and day-to-day administration were not mentioned. What was all-important here was the personal probity of the king; probity based on truth was more fundamental even than religious observance (101.10-18). Rāma might almost be setting out a manifesto for his conduct as Ideal King in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. His explanation ‘subjects will model their conduct on that of their king’ (2,101.9cd, *cf.* 7,42.19cd ‘For people always copy what the king does’) raised ominous, ironic hints of the problem that was to beset him and Sītā for the rest of their lives after their return from exile. Nonetheless, the core narrative was not, and could not be, affected; it would end in festivities and hopes for the future something like those recorded in 6,116. For now, on Citrakūṭa, as was only to be expected, Rāma would adhere to his promise.

Further through the narrative, royal duties were again mentioned, but still the episodes to which they relate generated no new narratives. At 3,5 a group of Daṇḍaka sages had appealed to Rāma to exercise his royal duty to protect them from aggressive *rākṣasas*, and with no hesitation Rāma had agreed (3,5.19-21); no opportunity for him to adhere to this particular promise occurred in that narrative. Sītā, however, was worried by the possible consequences on Rāma’s character of such an instinctive resort to violence (3,8), a worry that she was made to voice merely to allow Rāma to dismiss it in the next *sarga*. He justified his promise not so much out of royal duty to the ascetics as out of duty to his own nature: he had given his promise, and no consideration was worth breaking a promise (3,9.16-19). But he was given no chance to set his words into action in the narrative.

In the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* the narrative had reached a turning point when Rāma made a solemn alliance with Sugrīva that would enable him to kill Rāvaṇa and rescue Sītā. He seemed motivated more by simple sympathy with the similarity of Sugrīva’s plight to his own: both have lost a kingdom, and both have lost their wife. To gain the support of a *vānara* army, and to conciliate Sugrīva personally, Rāma had undertaken to kill his enemy Vālin without stopping to enquire into the merits of Sugrīva’s case against his brother; as part of the basic structure of the early *kṣatriya-*based romance, Rāma did it, and so it was right. Impulsiveness seems to run in the Rāghava family. A little later, the ethics of the killing began to be questioned, and by the Second stage of the text’s development, the dying Vālin had been allowed to question his killer’s behaviour, giving Rāma the opportunity to try to justify his actions. First he made a desperate attempt to invoke his vice-royal status: as Bharata’s agent he must punish Vālin’s incest with Sugrīva’s wife Rumā (4,18.18-25), an accusation that rather stretched the truth at a time when many cultures considered it not so much a sovereign’s right, as his duty, to marry the wife of a defeated enemy, or of a childless dead brother.[[96]](#footnote-96) Secondly (yet again) he must keep a promise once made, however wrong-headed (4,18.27). Thirdly, Vālin is only an animal, and animals do not matter (4,18.34-36), a contention that sits awkwardly with the respect and love that he displays towards his *vānara* allies during the whole remainder of the text. Vālin had been portrayed as being satisfied by Rāma’s excuses, but the episode has always remained controversial. More to the point, such specious retrospective self-justification can in no way be said to have influenced the narrative.

Needless to say, the villainous *rākṣasa* king is not portrayed as an exemplar of practical or moral sovereignty. Rāvaṇa’s sister Śūrpaṇakhā has some excuse for the rant with which she informs him of his many shortcomings as a monarch — lustful, uncaring, inattentive to his duties and therefore doomed to fail (3,31): she had just been mutilated by Lakṣmaṇa, and seen her brothers Khara and Dūṣaṇa and all of their army slaughtered in a failed attempt to avenge her. She it was who cunningly aroused Rāvaṇa’s lust, one of the very failings for which she criticised him, to incite him to abduct Sītā and motivate the whole of the rest of the narrative; Rāvaṇa’s practice of sovereignty is woven into the narrative from the beginning. Once the battle was under way, omens indicate his coming defeat as soon as 6,26.5-30, when Mālyavān warns Rāvaṇa that reports of disturbance of the natural order can be attributed to his unrighteous behaviour as sovereign.

Finally, when the battle is over and Rāma has been triumphantly consecrated as rightful king of Ayodhyā, the Second stage narrative (whatever the precise contents of the last few *sargas* of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* may be) is brought to an end with a joyful concluding passage, briefly presenting the deeds of Rāma in the final ten thousand years of his reign and the consequences for the kingdom (6,116.80-90). These years of *rāmarājya* are distinguished by many performances of a variety of sacrifices, producing morality, happiness, and control over natural disasters, crops and climate. Significantly, none of the narrative problems and heartbreak of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are yet envisaged: Sītā is not yet pregnant. The duties of sovereignty still exist only in theory. The duties of a king in the *VRm* do not yet include the foundation of a dynasty.

The creators of the next part of the story employ a different tactic, exploring the concept through a series of narrative episodes, not merely in aphorisms. King Rāma does not just talk about being a king; he is obliged to act within the constraints of his role, and perform the obligations of a monarch scrupulously whatever the personal cost. The *Uttarakāṇḍa* core text is concerned with the difficulty he experiences in reconciling the conflicting obligations of his role: setting an example of the highest conceivable standard of personal purity to his subjects, within the context of his personal love, need and desire for Sītā. Those who contributed material to create the *Bālakāṇḍa* had rather less flexibility, for they obviously had to get Daśaratha’s four sons born and Rāma married to Sītā.

But how would Rāma carry out his new role, that of Ideal King? In Stage 3, the present *Bālakāṇḍa* deals with his triumphant adolescent preparation for this final role, and the *Uttarakāṇḍa* with its inevitable tragedies: inevitable, because there would be no point in producing a mawkishly sentimental, unrealistic ‘Happy-Ever-After’ confection with no problems or challenges. The composer of 6,116.77-90 had given his successors a period of 10,000 years of bliss, sacrifices and righteous rule to fill. The emptiness had to be filled somehow.

***Uttarakāṇḍa* core structure**[[97]](#footnote-97)  
The daunting task of continuing the *VRm* needed an innovative approach, and found it in a reappraisal of narrative content and issues, not least in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core. In this romance Rāma has no monsters to confront, no humanoid animals to aid him, no superhuman heroics to perform, no boons to confound him. His return to Ayodhyā signals a return to domesticity and (as he and his audience all assume) to family life. The villainies of Kaikeyī and Rāvaṇa have been overcome, and future events are no longer directed by boons. Rāma’s trials are no longer physical — the King does no fighting — but the moral dilemmas he must confront on a personal level prove to be even more distressing.

**Personal purity: concept of pollution**  
By the time Rāma’s return to Ayodhyā was being narrated, concepts of sexuality and pollution were becoming more restrictive. Towards the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Rāma had been convinced that his wife had remained pure, and true to him alone, during her capture by Rāvaṇa, and not only on the emotional human scale; he had been assured by the gods that even when Rāvaṇa grabbed her violently during the abduction (3,47.15-16) she contracted no ritual impurity to transfer to her husband and pollute him too for ever.[[98]](#footnote-98) The religious ethos had developed somewhat since she had been seized by Virādha as they entered Daṇḍaka (*VRm* 3,2—3); that *rākṣasa’s* touch in itself had posed no problem, and Rāma’s concern had been only to soothe her terror.[[99]](#footnote-99) Just what form the couple’s sexual relations had taken before or during their 14-year exile had not been clear from the narrative of *kāṇḍas* 2—6 (nor, indeed, is it clear from the *Bālakāṇḍa*), for obviously the familiar plot could not have been conceived if any children had been born before the triumphant return to Ayodhyā. Motherhood was not the concern of those narrators. But we can be fairly clear that relations had not been celibate: Rāma’s yearnings for his missing ‘dark darling’ throughout such passages as his lament at Lake Pampā are couched in overtly sexual terms, coloured in particular by the imagery of mating peafowl (*VRm* 4,1.17-19). After such a period of enforced abstinence the audience could only expect that the new King and his innocent Queen should retire for a period to indulge their thwarted passions in Ayodhyā’s own significantly-termed *aśokavana,* its beauty (natural and erotic) emphasised by the elaboration of style in which 7,41 is described).[[100]](#footnote-100) But Rāma, like his father, had always been liable to act impulsively, without always thinking of the consequences. Only now that the question of perpetuation of the dynasty arose did it become necessary to take the vital question of sexual purity into account. The recreators of the story had to ensure that in adhering heroically to one obligation — providing a moral role model for his subjects — neither father nor son should thereby prevent himself from fulfilling the second requirement of the role, the foundation of a dynasty. Rāma, like Daśaratha before him, must remain righteous, whatever the cost. Like Daśaratha before him, the new sovereign feels trapped, and can fulfil his duty only by sacrificing the private happiness of himself and of the person he most loves. The core narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* explores and extends the tragic consequences for the royal couple when these twofold demands of sovereignty are almost immediately found to be in irreconcilable conflict, thrown into turmoil by past events.

The joy of the newly-reunited couple (and of the tale’s audience) is immediately shattered by the gossip of the townspeople about Sītā’s behaviour in Rāvaṇa’s custody, which is affecting the stability of Rāma’s rule; unfounded though he knows the suspicions to be, Rāma tries to hide the problem by banishing Sītā to Vālmīki’s hermitage, where she is accepted hospitably (7,41—48).[[101]](#footnote-101) For a fairly short time, unspecified but perhaps no longer than about a year, Rāma continues to carry out two further obligations imposed upon him by his position, appointing Śatrughna to attend to the security threat posed by the *rākṣasa* Lavaṇa, while he personally metes out justice to the over-ambitious *śūdra*, Śambūka. The whole concept of *rāmarājya* seems in danger of breaking down almost before it has started.

We are led to believe that, not until the very moment the consequences of the couple’s passionate enjoyment of the delights of Ayodhyā’s *aśokavana* became visible (7,41.21-22), did Rāma realise the full implications. As a future father, he was personally delighted, but as a king, he feared public opinion. Immediately he had made the discovery, he tried to distract himself with his courtiers’ enjoyable and humorous conversation, but could not listen, and interrupted one yarn with an anxious question to Bhadra to know what was being said about him in the town (7,42.4); Bhadra could not fob him off with conventional platitudes, and the anguished king had his worst fears confirmed. He had failed at almost the first hurdle of his sovereignty. He was setting a bad example of morality, an example that was already upsetting the good order and prosperity of the land in general, and was doing so almost as soon as he has taken up his kingly duties. His conduct in restoring Sītā to her royal position as his consort was already — after no more than a few months — being widely criticised, not just in words, but in action: the people had begun to copy their ruler (7,42.19). This was the very problem that Rāma himself had predicted fourteen years previously in his own rebuke to Jābāli (2,101.9cd). The theories of prudent statecraft propagated in *kāṇḍas* 2—6 had become personalised into narratives in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

The situation now immediately becomes clear to Rāma. What will be said, what will happen throughout his realm, when her pregnancy becomes known? At the very least, no son of hers, conceived so soon after she has left the clutches of Rāvaṇa, will be accepted as future sovereign. Rāvaṇa may be dead, but he has the more lasting victory. Something must be done, and done quickly; and Rāma must do it. Either the country must suffer, or his wife, his child, and his own everlasting happiness must be sacrificed. His personal delight, and his dreams of founding his own dynasty, must be abandoned: as for himself, he will remain polluted, for ever. It would be useless, and dishonourable, he seems to have thought, for him to marry again and try to father more children. Sītā, and his unborn child, must leave his life, for ever. He is confronted with the same choice that killed his father; and like his father, he cannot bear to tell the victim what he plans. Someone else must do that, and the ‘someone’, not surprisingly, is the horrified, disapproving, but ever-compliant Lakṣmaṇa.

As the hero of the core narrative established in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, Rāma’s two-fold task had remained constant: to maintain his father’s integrity, and to avenge himself on Rāvaṇa for abducting his wife, all within a human-based *kṣatriya* ethos. For the steadfast outcast warrior-prince, those tasks had proved difficult and hazardous, but relatively straightforward. He did whatever he believed to be right; that is to say, whatever would serve his supreme objectives. He had ambushed Vālin simply in order to gain Sugrīva’s much-needed aid. Rāma was righteous; Vālin’s objections could safely be cast aside (4,17—18).[[102]](#footnote-102) But he was also intensely fond of his wife, and devastated at losing her. His public duty, his support of his father’s integrity, was always in conflict with his personal desires. Public duty won, but sometimes the price was high.[[103]](#footnote-103) When the victorious prince takes up his *Uttarakāṇḍa* role of acknowledged monarch — still within a basically *kṣatriya* context, but in a social and religious ethos that was beginning to develop — the conflict between duty and desire remains, but the price is even higher. In the context of that developing understanding, the still human King Rāma is not a free agent. Nor are the poets who chose to continue the story of *kāṇḍas* 2 to 6, who had responsibilities towards the single, whole, unsegmented, and — above all — already well-known and well-loved narrative; they were obliged to accommodate it to contemporary understandings. The formerly simple tale of the triumph of good over evil was transformed into a complexemotional minefield; the demands of sovereignty are different from the demands of war, and often beyond the control of the titular ruler. The expectations of duty are again two-fold: one is to promote the welfare of his people in the present day; the other is to perpetuate these values by establishing a dynasty. In order to fulfil his first duty to his people, he has had to deny himself, and them, the opportunity of fulfilling the second. The *kṣatriya* Rāma does not yet benefit from the Divine Right of Kings (or gods): King Rāma is subject to the demands of sovereignty, however contradictory, not superior to them.[[104]](#footnote-104)

A very few months after the triumphant *abhiṣeka*, the period of personal happiness enjoyed by the Rāghava brothers is over. Sītā has been banished, supposedly for ever. Lakṣmaṇa has returned to Ayodhyā without her, to report to the miserable king that his command has been fulfilled; equally miserable himself, his first task is nevertheless to try to console his elder brother, and Rāma professes himself comforted (7,51.16). But the obligations of kingship remain, and the king must put personal cares aside. The next *sarga* of the CE (7,52 as constituted by its editor, U.P. Shah),[[105]](#footnote-105) will bring an immediate new challenge in its opening *śloka*.

**Military obligations of the new king: Śatrughna versus Lavaṇa: 7,52—56; 59—63.6**   
The first of these core-filler episodes is Śatrughna’s defeat of Lavaṇa. Unlike the problem presented by Rāma’s perceived impurity, this time the challenge is not to the moral behaviour of the citizens as a whole, but to the physical safety of one particular ascetic community feeling threatened by attack from a particular *rākṣasa*; military duty to preserve the security of a stable state, not without taking advantage of the opportunity for a little territorial expansion, merges with religious duty.[[106]](#footnote-106) In terms of narrative structure, it also balances the whole story by providing a role for the hitherto neglected Śatrughna.

A deputation of ascetics living on the banks of the Yamunā visits Ayodhyā to beg for protection against a powerful lance owned by the evil Lavaṇa. Their leader, Cyavana, explains the history and properties of the lance, as having been formerly owned by an *asura,* Madhu, father of Lavaṇa, at *sarga* 53. In the following *sarga* the rest of the group explain Lavaṇa’s aggressive conduct, and Rāma characteristically decides to take immediate action to protect the sages, by commissioning his young brother Śatrughna to undertake the task. In its essence, the episode as a whole is a rather trite, commonplace attack by a relative of the now dead Rāvaṇa (7,60.13-16), full of elaborations, often contradictory, producing a result that cannot be called complex; rather is it a haphazard conglomeration, with no clearly expressed narrative thread.

Rāma’s response, however, presents no puzzles. Given his prowess as a warrior, amply proved already, it is exactly what can be expected by the audience. No surprises this time. His personal happiness had been shattered, probably only a few days before,[[107]](#footnote-107) but he is bent on fulfilling his regal obligations. Impulsive as ever, his spontaneous, unconditional promise to the sages to grant all their as yet unspoken wishes recalls his untested promise of protection to the ascetics of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* (7,52.11, *cf.* 3,5.19-21) even more than his father’s disastrous vow that led to the exile, or his own unconsidered promise to kill Vālin. The name of the antagonist is new, but the structure of the episode is firmly rooted in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*.

However it is not at all clear why the sages are so worried about Lavaṇa’s spear. Their own leader, Cyavana, declares in his preamble to the complaint that it cannot be used against gods or *brāhmans*, or it will vanish (7,53.8); this appears to conflict with *śloka* 20cd: *saṃtāpayati lokāṃś trīn viśeṣeṇa tu tāpasān*, where its power allows Lavaṇa to torment the three worlds, *especially* ascetics; at 7,54.3 Rāma is told that it is ascetics who make up the majority of Lavaṇa’s diet. In fact the main fear is for Śatrughna: he is liable to be reduced to ashes merely for challenging the owner (7,53.9; 55.14-16). The more charitable of my readers may suppose that it is the explanation for other kings’ reluctance to support the ascetics (7,52.15; 53.22). Others may consider that it is this provision that makes the wily Rāma instruct his hitherto untried brother to ensure that the duel should take place while the lance is safely out of the way being worshipped in the palace (7,55.16-19), for Śatrughna is neither a *brāhman*, and — at this stage of the *VRm’s* development — not yet even one quarter of a birthof Viṣṇu. Quite how Rāma knows where the lance is kept, only the narrator knows; but we must assume that he means Rāma to realise that Lavaṇa is too sensible to take it with him when he goes out foraging, if he cannot use it for his favourite food, *brāhmans*. Of course, this narrator (surely there are several operators at work on this episode) also wishes such a devastating weapon not to remain at large, and takes care to have the request of Madhu (Lavaṇa’s father) for it to remain in his lineage to be modified into allowing it to be inherited by his son alone; Lavaṇa, with his evil ways, had at that point not yet been born. Accordingly the lance returns on Lavaṇa’s death to the control of its donor, Rudra (7,53.11-13; 61.37).[[108]](#footnote-108) Whether his threat to the ascetics was as great as they feared or not, Rāma still had a moral duty to have him eliminated from his kingdom on the grounds of his evil nature, a nature that his sorrowing father had found himself impotent to reform (7,53.17-20). Moral obligations could not be divorced from military action.

Was the whole episode in reality a revenge attack? Hardly, for Śatrughna is in fact the aggressor,[[109]](#footnote-109) inspired by the motive of punishing offences committed against Rāma’s rule. However, the similarity of the villain’s name, Lavaṇa, to Rāma’s defeated enemy Rāvaṇa, can only lead the audience to cast him as a relative anxious to settle a grudge. All other known possible performers of this role had already been killed in the battle for Laṅkā, so a new one, with a new family relationship, had to be found. Lavaṇa occurs nowhere in the *VRm* outside *sargas* 7,53—63, and has clearly been invented for the purpose. His relationship to Rāvaṇa via his parents is rather more complex, and is based on his mother Kumbhīnasī, whose close relationship to Rāvaṇa enables the author to introduce the vengeance theme towards the end of the episode (*VRm* 7,60.13-17).[[110]](#footnote-110) It is not until the duel is about to begin, as Śatrughna declares his name as part of his challenge, that Lavaṇa realises that his assailant is brother to Rāvaṇa’s killer.

The identity of Madhu, father of Lavaṇa in this episode and husband of Kumbhīnasī is tangled. Within Cyavana’s preamble to his complaint and throughout the account of Śatrughna’s attack itself, he is consistently identified as morally righteous; it is his righteousness that earns him the gift of the lance from Rudra, on condition of good behaviour (7,53.4-8). His is the name associated with Lavaṇa’s city Madhupura/ī (7,60.3c; 62.5a). The position is complicated by the identity of Madhu’s name with that of the demon, companion of Kaiṭabha, enemy of the *devas* traditionally created and killed by Viṣṇu.[[111]](#footnote-111) The two names occur in such close proximity, a mere 3 *ślokas* apart — Madhu and Kaiṭabha at 7,55.11 and Madhu father of Lavaṇa at verse 14 — that it is hard not to assume that the conflation was either intentional or due to lamentably clumsy lack of attention. I can think of no reason not to prefer the latter explanation. No narrative link between the two Madhus is suggested in this episode, nor elsewhere in the *VRm*.

A puzzling couple named Madhu and Kumbhīnasī had been mentioned in a stray allusion to Rāvaṇa’s exploits at 6,7.7, implying that Madhu had actually been defeated by Rāvaṇa, with no reference either to Kaiṭabha nor to any relationship to Rāvaṇa; this allusion is of very uncertain date. An account romanticising Kumbhīnasī’s relationship to Rāvaṇa, her marriage to Madhu, and his alliance to Rāvaṇa is found at 7,25.20-49, in Agastya’s detailed account of Rāvaṇa’s early exploits, as a counterpoise to Śūrpaṇakhā’s complaint that his recklessness has killed her husband (7,24.18-35). The alliance with Madhu is not further pursued, and we may assume that it is the marriage that is the main focus of that episode, foreshadowed *ex post facto* by Agastya, with Rāvaṇa’s admiration of Madhu’s warrior prowess a mere pretext, and again no hint of Kaiṭabha. Nonetheless the fruit of the marriage, Lavaṇa himself, does not appear; not until 7,53.17 is Kumbhīnasī identified as his mother.

As Rāma commissions Śatrughna to undertake the punishment of Lavaṇa, he presents him with an arrow in his possession created and used by Viṣṇu to kill Madhu and Kaiṭabha. This arrow is uniquely powerful enough to counter Lavaṇa’s lance; Rāma claims to have deliberately refrained from using the arrow to kill Rāvaṇa lest its use should create panic throughout the cosmos (7,55.9-13).[[112]](#footnote-112) Evidently his restraint was justified, for when Śatrughna uses it to kill Lavaṇa, Brahmā must indeed intervene to calm the panic-stricken gods (7,61.17-36). What is more interesting is the fact that Rāma has the arrow in his possession. If this is a hint suggesting that Rāma’s identity with Viṣṇu has already been established, it is strange to find it expressed only in the third person; as it is, that seems to indicate a rather earlier position than the prominence of Śiva/Rudra as donor of Madhu’s fearsome lance would suggest.

If the creator/s of this episode thought that contriving the fanciful image of having father and son killed by the same arrow, many thousands of years apart, would add to the attraction of their narrative, the muddled identity of the two Madhus is insufficiently clear; and if Śatrughna is therefore already to be viewed as a fourth part of Viṣṇu’s incarnation, his commendable tactic of winning by following Rāma’s advice to employ such an unheroic stratagem — waiting unannouced until he can prevent Lavaṇa from reaching his spear (7,55.16-18) — is definitely lacking in the expected divine panache. Indeed, it seems to have been inspired rather by his elder brother’s much criticised attack upon Vālin. Possession of the arrow is merely an unnecessary elaboration.

A further confusion is the linkage of Madhu (father of Lavaṇa) with a *madhuvana*, presumably the Honey Orchard owned by Sugrīva and earlier ransacked by the jubilant *vānaras*.[[113]](#footnote-113) The purpose of the allusion is unspecific, but unmistakably implies Madhu’s ownership; *madhu* simply means ‘honey’ or its derivative ‘mead’, and nothing in the *madhuvana* episode implies ownership by either of the Madhus (the father of Lavaṇa or the companion of Kaiṭabha). The only significant part of the allusion is that it confirms that the *madhuvana* episode had by this point been admitted to the text.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Much more intriguing is the name of the city, Madhupura or Madhupurī, founded by the righteous Madhu and inherited and loved by his evil son. The complaint against Lavaṇa is lodged by a group specifically stated to be Yamunā sages, and the similarity of the name of Lavaṇa’s city to Kṛṣṇa’s Mathurā at once raises the idea that some link between the two traditions is intended.[[115]](#footnote-115) That idea was to be adopted and exploited in the *Harivaṃśa,* where a narrative account appears at *HV* 44.21-53, the identification reinforced by the unequivocal naming of the city as Mathurā at 53b;[[116]](#footnote-116) later genealogies of the Ikṣvāku dynasty claim Śatrughna as a direct ancestor of Kṛṣṇa by virtue of his association with Madhurā/Mathurā (*HV* App. 18.214-24 and more briefly at App. 18.238 via the maternal and paternal lines respectively, though with no mention of any son of Śatrughna). Dating of this part of the *VRm* is still uncertain, and of the establishment of the Kṛṣṇa tradition even more so, meaning that the idea that Madhu’s name and his city could have been adapted from a rise of Kṛṣṇa devotion at this point must remain uncertain.

Viewed as a whole, the episode has much to intrigue and confuse the earnest scholar, but little to excite or even engage the audience for whom it was intended. The conquest is easy and unoriginal in nature, with little tension as to the outcome. The expected revenge theme is raised, in reverse, but not until it cannot be worked out: Śatrughna has his all-powerful missile, and Lavaṇa’s weak appeal to Śatrughna to wait while he fetches his lance is naturally unsuccessful (7,60.17).

Despite this harsh judgement of the quality of the episode as a whole, it is enlivened by a few vivid touches. Rāma’s response to the sages’ appeal is enlivened by a delightful cameo portraying brotherly life among the Rāghavas. One of the main themes developed in the *VRm* from its inception had always been the contrast between three families of brothers: the ever-quarrelling *vāṇaras,* the *rākṣasas*, villainous and for the most part compliant in their leader’s villainy,[[117]](#footnote-117) and the upright Dāśarathis, loving, devoted to each other, obstinate, but ultimately submissive to the eldest. Yet we can discern occasional glimpses of a relaxed, humorous, even perhaps burlesque relationship between Rāma and his realistically portrayed human brothers, who are not above laughing at each other, especially when one is ‘pulling rank’ to get what he considers his due. Lakṣmaṇa can be murderously suspicious of Kaikeyī’s son when he fears his own favourite brother Rāma may be threatened (2,90.7—91.9), yet he generously praises Bharata’s ascetic renunciation at 3,15.25-33. Śatrughna was certainly not going to be taken to task by his superior for a sluggard on the way to meet the exiles (may we even suppose that he had been awakened by a gentle brotherly kick at 2,83.1-3?).[[118]](#footnote-118) Bharata is prepared to argue at length with Rāma on Citrakūṭa, with Rāma lovingly laughing him to scorn for trying to gain his argument by a fast unto death — to the extent even that his driver Sumantra ignores his instruction to fetch him a pile of *kuśa,* and he has to fetch it himself(2,103.12-15).

Ever-loving the Dāśarathis may be, but in the newly-changed circumstances of his recent accession, King Rāma feels the need to intervene, using his superior status to prevent fraternal rivalry being taken too far. He modifies his promise to the sages slightly (7,54.6-8), asking his brothers, as befits a king, for a volunteer to carry out the task; Bharata jumps to claim the privilege, before Śatrughna (who has, after all, not yet had any starring role in the storyline to justify his Rāghava birth) is able to stake his claim. We may suspect that the youngest brother’s assertion that poor Bharata deserves a rest is motivated more by envy than compassion, from the speed with which Rāma, apparently sharing our suspicion (but no doubt with a broad smile on his face), intervenes peremptorily to settle any looming brotherly quarrel with an ironic mild rebuke to both parties: ‘Make Bharata stay, great-armed hero, if you think that’s better’ (7,54.16cd), effectively and judiciously separating them.

The editor of the text, U.P. Shah, evidently had a sensitive literary discrimination outweighing his respect both for inflexible legalistic rules of critically editing texts and for the preoccupations of much later mediaeval commentators, and was not afraid to use it occasionally. Without the intrusive passage *VRm* CE 7,971\*+973\*+977\* (demonstrating as it does, rather too strict adherence to rules of conduct not yet rigidly codified)[[119]](#footnote-119) there emerges from CE 7,55 an even deeper and more finely etched view of the relationship between Rāma and his youngest brother,[[120]](#footnote-120) and the rightness of Shah’s decision is confirmed. Shah’s text makes the diffident Śatrughna immediately realise himself to be ensnared by his own bravado; his nature must be as impulsive as those of his father and eldest brother. Not able to retract his rash offer, in his embarrassment he relies on the rule of unquestioning obedience to his king; before he can change his mind again, the considerate and affectionate Rāma seizes the chance to bolster his confidence by publicly consecrating him at once as king of Madhurā, a position from which he can hardly withdraw, capping the whole scene with the gift of an unfailing weapon and some cautious advice about how to deploy it to best advantage (7,55—56).

Rāma’s immediate brief stern injunction not to ‘uproot one lineage’ (that of Madhu and Lavaṇa) without replacing it with another, leaving the country bereft of strong leadership (7,54.18-19), may indicate his personal sensitivity to his own inability to produce an heir, but the delicate question of the ethics of incorporating Lavaṇa’s city into the Rāghava empire, with Śatrughna as non-resident client king (7,54.16-21; 7,55.3-7), rather than, as in the case of Laṅkā, restoring sovereignty to a legitimate family successor, is not explored**.**  This narrative was not concerned with such legal niceties. In fact, at this stage in the tradition the question of installing a dynasty into Madhurā is as irrelevant as it is in Ayodhyā. No son of Lavaṇa has been mentioned; the same is true of the Ikṣvāku dynasty. There has been no mention of a wife or any children either for Śatrughna or for Bharata in the core *kāṇḍas*, and the existence of a wife for Lakṣmaṇa has been specifically denied by the ever-truthful Rāma (3,17.3-5; see p.25). Rāma has now divorced himself from his one wife, and neither he nor the audience yet knows of the existence of any sons. Establishing a dynasty to oversee both kingdoms (plus four more, to be conquered *ad hoc* by Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa) is not raised until the Grand Finale, after Sītā’s withdrawal, and after Viṣṇu’s fourfold birth (7,90—92 + 7,97—98).

In an episode that comes close to being a poor reprise of the Rāma story in *kāṇḍas* 2—6 as a whole, Śatrughna carries out his allotted task, slays the enemy with no trouble to speak of, and leaves behind an appropriate group competent to oversee the recently-founded city’s administrative, military and religious needs (7,63.1-2), before returning to Ayodhyā in a well-deserved triumph. He has done what he had been consecrated to do, and returns to Rāma’s court to continue to make himself useful: at that point, he is needed to help organise Rāma’s fateful *aśvamedha* (7,83.6). The last verse fixes his absence firmly as at least twelve years, the time-span determined by the planner of the overall structure, reasonably enough, as needed for the boys to grow old enough to be able to fulfil their seminal role,[[121]](#footnote-121) and make his surprise climax credible. At this point in the tradition,[[122]](#footnote-122) there is no reason to suppose that Śatrughna had been consigned to Mathurā for life, either at the outset or after his triumphant and affectionate return. Śatrughna takes leave of Rāma once only, and any puzzle about his presence in Ayodhyā during the preparations for the *aśvamedha* melts away.

The narrative flow of the basic Lavaṇa episode, however unexciting, is straightforward and tightly constructed, despite a number of brief elaborations to the introductory *sargas* in Ayodhyā; one, from Cyavana, explaining the history of Lavaṇa’s fearsome lance (7,53), is complemented by Rāma’s similar tale about Viṣṇu’s arrow, which he presents to Śatrughna for use against Lavaṇa (7,55.9-20). These elaborations present no problems. On the outward journey, it is natural too that Śatrughna should call at Cyavana’s hermitage to rest and inform himself more fully about his adversary. But Cyavana’s reply, the In-tale of an Ikṣvāku ancestor named Māndhātṛ, who, having overreached himself, was incinerated by Madhu’s lance, seems hardly likely to encourage the untried prince in his mission (7,59).[[123]](#footnote-123)

There are cogent reasons, however, why *sargas* 57—59, and 63, should be considered as not being part of the original *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative, but as subsequent incorporations into the established CE text. These two passages, inserted incongruously into Śatrughna’s outward and return journeys, seriously disrupt and distort the otherwise compact construction. One is Śatrughna’s much less than plausible interruption of the journey by stopping to spend one night at Vālmīki’s *āśrama* (7,57—59), where his host recites the gruesome tale of Sudāsa’s son Mitrasaha (also known as Kalmāṣapāda), tricked by a *rākṣasa* into offering human flesh to Vasiṣṭha (7,57.8-35); the resultant curse is limited to twelve years (v.32).[[124]](#footnote-124) The tale itself is irrelevant, but the unexplained emphasis on an *aśvamedha* context (v.18), and the twelve year time-span — both irrelevant to this tale — may have been intended to focus the audience’s minds on future events. Far more relevant for that purpose, of course, is the birth of Sītā’s twin sons, an event fixing the journey to Madhupura as a very few months after Lakṣmaṇa’s return from leaving the calumniated queen at the *āśrama* at *sarga* 51 (a scarce year after Rāvaṇa’s death, once again emphasising the taut structure of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*). Unfortunately, the time factor tends to be obscured by all the many additions and insertions; even worse for the structure of a narrative based from its inception on the reversal of audience expectations, it ruins the skilfully created tension. Tactfully, perhaps, Śatrughna seems not to send news of the new mother’s welfare to the sorrowing Rāma; the king’s acquisition of not one heir but two would not have been good news to Rāma before their parentage had been affirmed by Vālmīki (7,87.16).

Twelve years later, the second passage, *sarga* 63, has Śatrughna revisit Vālmīki and hear a rehearsal of the Rāma story sung in his hermitage; the CE editor, U.P. Shah, rightfully in my judgement, placed this episode in App. 9.[[125]](#footnote-125) The singers are not identified (not as Kuśa and Lava, not as *kuśīlavau*, not even as disciples of Vālmīki), but the repeated and unnecessary emphasis on the twelve-year interval since the birth of Kuśa and Lava can only be intended to evoke in the audience’s minds the boys’ performance of it soon afterwards at the *aśvamedha*. The tension of the whole *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative is further destroyed by the intrusion of these two unnecessary visits to Vālmīki. The disparity in literary quality between App. 9 and the core narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* as a whole makes it legitimate for the thinking reader to wonder how — or even whether — they could have been conceived by the same mind.

What is more, in the rest of this passage (7,63.6-17) a significantly different view is cast on Rāma’s character and priorities. In the *VRm*, a narrative exemplifying the differences of family values between the three contrasting sets of brothers, and at a time when the personal had not yet been completely subordinated to arid legalistic rules, for Rāma to send his beloved brother away again after an absence of twelve years, when they had been able to enjoy each other’s company for only a few months out of the previous 26 — and after a mere five nights — on the grounds that adherence to his duties as sovereign of Madhurā must take precedence over family affection, seems unduly harsh and out of character, especially when, as we have just noted, it also conflicts with the established text. There is no discernible narrative function for Śatrughna, unlike Sītā, also to be exiled. All of which leads to the conclusion that the words *prasthāpya tu sa śatrughnaṃ* (7,64.1a) ‘Once he had sent Śatrughna off’ followed by *tataḥ katipayāhaḥsu* ‘then a few days later’ at 2a are intended to show that the Lavaṇa/Śatrughna and Śambūka/Rāma episodes took place more or less simultaneously.

The sum of these many discrepancies of time-scale, and the suspicion aroused by the efforts made to divert the audience’s attention from them by focusing unnecessarily on a ‘twelve years’ interval, suggest either an error uncharacteristic of the core text of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* — a position that I believe to be unlikely — or that the Śatrughna episode as it now stands results from the compilation of the work of more than one narrator. Some further significant consequences of this dual-authorship position will be explored below (pp.55-57 and 69-70).

**Justice: Śambūka and religious orthodoxy: 7,64—67**  
Ensuring his own sexual purity and the security of his realm are not the king’s only obligations: maintaining *varṇa* distinctions is now also of prime importance. In the various lists of royal obligations already discussed the king was expected to maintain religious orthodoxy (in particular, by combatting atheism), with *varṇa* distinctions other than absolute respect for *brāhmans* not explored;[[126]](#footnote-126) indeed, the Śabarī’s entry into the sacrificial fire after welcoming and feeding takes her straight to heaven (3,70.26).

At an earlier stage Daśaratha had carelessly shot a young non-*brāhman* ascetic: a serious crime with no element of judicial execution, for the boy had done no wrong in undertaking ascetic practices. On the contrary, the pious victim, sole supporter of his frail parents, had been at pains to assure his attacker of his non-*brāhman* status, considerately exonerating the horrified Daśaratha from the terrible charge of *brahmahatyā*.[[127]](#footnote-127) The episode is entirely realistic, and its hero is the boy victim, not the king. Daśaratha can do nothing to right the wrong he has done.

Śambūka’s crime,[[128]](#footnote-128) like Daśaratha’s, has caused the death of a cherished son, but this episode makes no attempt at realism. By the time it was incorporated into the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the cultural atmosphere had developed considerably. At *Bālakāṇḍa* 1,6.12d+17cd, during the Golden Age of Daśaratha’s rule, the mixing of the social classes is condemned, and *sūdras* are devoted to their proper duty, and serve the other three classes, but in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* the dictum is presented in narrative form. Śambūka has committed a terrible crime by usurping the privileges of the *brāhman* class in a misguided attempt to attain heaven in his body (7,67.1-4), and Rāma has no hesitation in doing his royal duty of inflicting immediate capital punishment.

Significantly, the child victim is the son of a *brāhman*, during the period of *rāmarājya*, when no untimely deaths at all were supposed to take place (6,116.85 *cf.* 7,40.14). The blame for this catastrophic event, heralding the breakdown of society, is placed unequivocally on Rāma by the bereaved father: the king cannot be fulfilling his proper function (7,64.9-15). Śambūka is the villain of the episode, but Rāma himself is condemned as not innocent. Not innocent, that is to say, of causing the young boy’s death, and therefore in duty bound to search out and eliminate the main criminal.[[129]](#footnote-129)

Nārada explains that the cause of the trouble must be a *śūdra* performing forbidden asceticism, and suggests that Rāma search his realm for the culprit and take forceful action (7,65.8-26); the king follows this advice scrupulously. It was not any active sin of Rāma himself, or any personal state of impurity, that had caused the breakdown of *rāmarājya*, but a dereliction of his duty as king to prevent a sin by a subject. By executing Śambūka, Rāma has now restored the *status quo*; the *brāhman* boy is revived (7,65.26) — Rāma had confidently ordered the corpse to be preserved in oil before setting out in *puṣpaka* on his long search for the culprit[[130]](#footnote-130) — and by the time the first New Beginning to the long established Old Material is drawn to a serene close at 7,89, *rāmarājya* has been resumed (7,89.10 *cf.* 1,1.72). Rāma’s career has not yet been affected by the new religious context by which it will be touched at the final part of the composition process;[[131]](#footnote-131) the king is still expected to adhere to the long-established principles of sovereignty of the Ideal King stated at 6,116.80-90, at 7,40.13-17 and 7,89.7-10, and at 1,1.71-75, to be worked out in practice under the rule of Daśaratha at1,5—8. That it is evidently inappropriate to expect Rāma to be made to take the softer, more forgiving and romantic approach to Śambūka demanded by sentimental modern readers helps to confirm the episode’s place in the earliest stratum of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. By the time of Kālidāsa (perhaps 4th or 5th century, very little later than the later parts of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*) the concept that death at the hands of Rāma cancels any crime and automatically admits the sinner to heaven was becoming accepted, but it is not yet apparent in the *VRm* CE.[[132]](#footnote-132)

***aśvamedha*: anomalies, discrepancies and hints from later tradition**The time-scale of Rāma’s *aśvamedha* as it is now presented defies rigid identification, a point that has already been explored on pp.52-54. *Either* the *aśvamedha* takes place soon after Rāma’s consecration *or* twelve years later: *either* soon after the birth of Kuśa and Lava, *or* not until they are eleven or twelve years old. Since I am loth to attribute such a stark discrepancy to mere authorial inattention the only way I can explain it is by postulating a compilation of two layers of composition, with the earlier, plainer one almost obliterated by the much more elaborate second.

**First continuator: 7,82—83**The work of the first continuator follows Śatrughna’s defeat of Lavaṇa at 7,52.1—63.2, after which the prince returns permanently to Ayodhyā, to be active at the *aśvamedha* (7,83.6). Only a few weeks had passed since Rāma had been consecrated king of Ayodhyā amid universal rejoicing among his people, yet the splendour of his righteous rule had already been soured by three attacks on his ability to protect his subjects: he had been held responsible for the immoral and unseemly behaviour of his citizens’ wives; only a few days later he had had to order military action to preserve some imperilled ascetics; and at the same time he had also been blamed personally for the consequences of not enforcing the rules of *varṇa*. The whole basis on which *rāmarājya* was founded seemed in danger of breaking down. And it had not taken very long, realistically perhaps a year at most, for all this to happen. Meanwhile, the Śambūka episode had been taking place at 7,64.1—67.4/App. 11.1-25ab, followed directly by 73.15—82.1, leading via the brothers’[[133]](#footnote-133) discussions to the re-appearance of Vālmīki at 84.1, with the *aśvamedha* summarily abandoned and the story as a whole then brought to its triumphantly tragic close as narrated at 7,86—88, all within a few months of King Rāma’s consecration. As so often, the coherent progress of the episode as a whole has been interrupted and obscured by various later accretions and In-tales, including Rāma’s visit to Agastya (67.7—73.15); the visit actually lasts for one night only, but the tedious and unconvincing narrative is strung out through 120 or so verses, diverting the audience’s attention from his main purpose (clearing himself of the grieving *brāhman* father’s accusation of personal sin).

In this layer of narrative, no mention is made of any fruit of Sītā’s pregnancy; that is still a secret kept from king and audience alike. Exact details of how the tragic romance had first been resolved can no longer be determined; there is no reason to suppose that the first continuator’s work differed greatly from the one preserved in the present text in outline, but in outline only: the revelation cannot have been precipitated by Rāma’s own sons, who in this time-scale could be only a few months old. There is nothing to say that they even appeared in public at this point; and nothing even to say, or for us to suppose, that Sītā had borne more than one son.[[134]](#footnote-134)

**Second continuator: 7,84.1—7,88.4**   
Dynasty as a concept is introduced in tantalising fashion by the second continuator, hinted at only when the earlier layer of composition is enlivened and almost overwhelmed by two new characters, behaving as *kuśīlavau* but in truth young disciples of Vālmīki; even so, it is dynasty in prospect, rather than dynasty in practice. The stark focus is still on the personalities of Rāma and Sītā, and on the intervention of Vālmīki, last heard of in the core narrative as he welcomed Sītā into the sanctuary of his own hermitage, staunchly vouching for her purity (7,48.17-20). Apart from the two doubtful visits from Śatrughna his name has been absent from the text until the narrative’s climax at which point he then disappears from the narrative again.[[135]](#footnote-135)

The time-span chosen by the second continuator in order for his elaborations to be realistic, was at least twelve years, for the characters and their emotions portrayed at this stage of the narrative’s development are still basically human: Sītā’s twin sons were not to be born preternaturally accomplished, as so many heroes of tradition are. What is more, the first continuator’s succinct time-scheme seemed in danger of breaking down. The first of the three problems (Sītā’s pregnancy) was still outstanding, but the climax of the whole tight-knit core narrative of King Rāma’s travails as devised by the first continuator was now planned not to be implemented for another twelve years or so; it is only fair to assume that Rāma’s spectacular *aśvamedha* sacrifice, and Vālmīki’s appearance at it, had already been present in the first continuator’s work, and therefore rooted in the audience’s consciousness, long enough to make it impossible for it to be completely discarded from the narrative. It could only be elaborated with sufficient panacheto divert attention from the glaring anomaly that the eleven years long-delayed performance of the *aśvamedha* belies Rāma’s previous panic-stricken haste.

The sons of Rāma and Sītā reveal their existence by publicly singing the tale of Rāma’s tribulations as devised by their foster-father, Vālmīki. Only in the quite different time-scale of this second layer can the young sages who bring about the recognition and acceptance of Sītā have been Rāma’s own sons; this planner must wait for several years before he can spring that sensational ending on the unsuspecting audience, and on Rāma himself. The boys must have reached an age to have memorised such a long story, growing ever longer as it continued to be played out in the contemporary time-frame, and to be able to wander about unsupervised among crowds, attracting attention by their performance; their vital and sentimentally histrionic role can only be played with any semblance of realism if they are on the verge at least of adolescence, an age that would be ruled out by the taut, almost simultaneous time-scale for the earlier layer identified above. For this to be achieved, the audience have already been conditioned to expect a twelve-year time span, after Śatrughna has been sent back to govern Madhurā for life (see pp.52-54). However, the twelve-year interval that sites the Lavaṇa episode in its now-developed form firmly as the work of the second continuator, applies only to Śatrughna; Rāma and his hurried *aśvamedha* remain just as firmly as the first continuator had planned. Further poets of demonstrably later generations with differing values have worked hard to fill the eleven-year gap in Rāma’s life, plugging it *inter alia* with an irrelevant and intrusive attempt to distract the audience’s attention from the taut pacing set by the first continuator, consisting of Rāma’s awkwardly-placed and inconsequential visit to Agastya, trailing its long stream of increasingly fantastic In-tales, all growing more and more extravagant.

All this time the lonely king, his subjects, and — crucially, the audience — still know nothing about Sītā, and certainly even less about the outcome of her pregnancy. Is she alive, or dead? She has disappeared from the narrative, but not from the second continuator’s intertwined double plans: the surprise vindication of Rāma’s offspring, plus the revelation about the composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself.

Vālmīki indeed is the major figure directing the outcome of the whole *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative both by his presence and during his absence. As a sage, he is unfamiliar to the tradition. His role in the *Uttara* core, apparently created *ad hoc*, centres exclusively on his declaration of the banished Sītā’s innocence as he accepts her into his hermitage for protection, and then in contriving the subsequent public exoneration that permits her sons to enter Rāma’s court.

Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā have visited personally and lived for some time with a number of much more renowned sages during their fourteen years wandering in the wilderness (completed only a year since), and it seems strange that Rāma does not consign Sītā to one of these ascetics already known to her from Books 2—3, such asBharadvāja, Atri and Anasūyā, Sutīkṣṇa, or Agastya.[[136]](#footnote-136) Rāma, however, is said to know of this non-establishment nonentity already, and can tell Lakṣmaṇa how to find the hermitage to which he must escort and abandon Sītā (7,44.16-17). Lakṣmaṇa evidently knows the sage too, for he has been a firm friend of Daśaratha,[[137]](#footnote-137) and therefore is known to both brothers (7,46.16).

Unknown he may be, but the power of Vālmīki’s asceticism is great enough to enable him to recognise Sītā and her innocence (7,48.5-10), and the audience are able to leave her safely in his protection until his startling re-appearance at 7,84.1. Remembering Sītā’s pregnancy, the audience may justifiably be expecting a conventional happy ending, or even a tragedy. In a passage of little more than four *sargas* (7,84.3—88.4), their attention is redirected by the dramatic climax of Sītā’s withdrawal, overshadowing the identity of the *kuśīlavau* as her sons, while the real bombshell revelation slips by almost unnoticed: this is Vālmīki’s immediate, unheralded reference to himself as author of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* story (84.3-4, repeated by his pupils at 85.19-20).

True to type, a talented *VRm* poet has confounded the expectations of his audience. With this major innovation, he has lifted the newly-created sage out of obscurity and endowed him with a towering legacy. The significance of his declaration was not lost on future tellers, among them perhaps the earliest extant adapter of the *VRm* material, the Buddhist composer Aśvaghoṣa; he makes many allusions to the plot of the *VRm*, especially in his *Buddhacarita*, but with references to Vālmīki as the first poet and to Anaraṇya’s prosperous and powerful kingdom (Olivelle 2008 1.43 and 2.15), both drawn from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* — with the Anaraṇya narrative found only in the post-Viṣṇu material of the latest part (7,19) — that are hard to reconcile with the usual dating of Aśvaghoṣa to the first or second century A.D.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Within the *VRm* CE itself, it will be reworked within the Prefatory *sargas* 1,1—4; the first verse includes the fictive poet’s name, though he purports to be ignorant of the whole story. As for the name itself, *valmīka* is a common noun meaning ‘ant-hill’, but as a proper noun the *vṛddhied* derivative personal name Vālmīki ‘ant-hill man’ has not been recorded before *VRm*. Its application to the sage is of course no more puzzling than the question of why Daśaratha should be called ‘ten chariots’; but it has generated a much later devotional back-story of the reformed bandit’s recitation of the syllables ‘*rā*’ and ‘*ma*’ while becoming covered by an ant-heap.

***kuśīlavau,* Kuśa and Lava** Knowledge of Sītā’s whereabouts was brought about gradually via a number of startling revelations. The first hint had come with the unheralded reappearance of Vālmīki on the scene (7,84.1d), followed almost immediately when he selects two unnamed disciples to adopt the persona (but not the clothes, 7,85.8) of itinerant story-tellers, and wander among the crowd gathered for the *aśvamedha*, attempting to attract notice from the king by singing the tale of Rāma’s travails that he has taught them (*yathoddiṣṭaṃ mayā purā* 7,84.9d): this is the first reference to his composition of the *VRm*, unremarked and unremarkable. The attractive young boys bear a strong facial resemblance to Rāma himself (7,85.6-8), leading the king (and the audience) to guess that they must be Sītā’s sons (7,86.2-3), and to begin to hope for a suitably romantic climax.

No personal names are mentioned at this point in the Sanskrit text of either continuator (see chart on p.60). The boys and the singing are both completely absent from the work of the first. The second uses no personal names, opting instead to refer to them as *kuśīlavau* (or occasionally by some derivative of *√ gā*), presenting the boys *only* as the two singers who perform Vālmīki’s tale of Rāma, not as individuals in their own right. Not only in the episode surrounding Rāma’s aborted *aśvamedha*, but throughout the whole CE Rāma’s sons are referred to as ‘Kuśa’ or ‘Lava’ on two occasions *only*: in each it is unavoidable that they be separately identified. At their birth ritual (an episode already marked out for structural reasons at pp.52-53 as an insert to the Śatrughna/Lavaṇa episode), where Vālmīki names them individually, a reason for the names connected with their birth is explained (7,58.5-7); their profession as *kuśīlavau* is still about twelve years into the future. Perhaps two centuries later, at 7,97.7a+18b the designation *kuśīlavau* is retained, but, like their cousins, they will be allotted separate kingdoms and can again only be identified individually (names repeated at 98.4-5). Some time after the names had entered the tradition a N variant for 7,97.7a, *kuśalavau,* equates what now are seen as the individual elements of the term with the names of the two boys.[[139]](#footnote-139) This distribution pattern means that several generations of audiences were left not knowing the names of Rāma’s sons, or whether they even had any names at all. It should come as no surprise that one or more later poets seized the opportunity to introduce the anomalous accounts of Śatrughna’s two visits to Vālmīki’s hermitage. Furthermore, it confirms that use of the occupational common noun to designate the boys cannot have been suggested by their then-unknown personal names. More pertinently to this study, the absence of any personal names for the boys throws the audience’s attention on to the common noun, emphasising whatever significance their occupation may have been given by successive authors of three generations.

**CHART of the only occurrences in the *VRm* of the common noun *kuśīlava* and the names Kuśa and Lava to designate Rāma’s sons**

*kuśīlava/au* Kuśa and Lava

**Rāma’s** ***aśvamedha*   
 first continuator: 7,82—83   
 context absent absent**

**second continuator: 7,84.1—7,88.4**  
 *kuśīlavau* **absent**7,85.14b; 86.2b; 88.4b  
 *also 7,App.13.50+55*  
 *gāyakau, √ gā*  
 7,85.5d+6d+23c; 86.1b+2a

**birth story: 7,57—58   
 context absent** Kuśa and Lava named  
 7,58.5-7 (names explained)  
 **1, App.1: 278** *kuśīlavau* **absent**

**Śatrughna’s return to Vālmīki: 7,63/App.9.22-45   
 singers unidentified absent**

**Preface:** *kuśīlavau* **absent**1,4.3d,4a,15d,22b,26b *also 1,4.2-18 substituted in N:* 1,203\*6,24,36,41   
 *gāyakau, √ gā* 1,4.16a+21b

**installation in individual realms:** *either term as needed* ***kuśīlavau* Kuśa and Lava** 7,97.7a (***v.l.* *kuśalavau*),** 18b 7,97.7cd+17cd; 98.4a+5b

**terms used for similar professionals to *kuśīlavas* in other contexts:  
 *bandin*** 2,6.6b; 2,13.11d; 2,14.9c; 2,23.11a; 2,59.1c; 2,82.8a; 4,37.13b; 6,115.13f ***māgadha*** 1,5.11a; 2,6.6b; 2,14.26b; 2,23.11d; 2,75.1b; 2,82.8b; 7,42.2d ***śailūṣa*** 2,27.8c; 2,77.15c ***sūta*** occasionally compounded with other terms

The term *kuśīlava* is neither newly invented, nor exclusive to the *VRm*. Referring simply to a person of non-*brāhman* status, it was recorded in the *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* (3.3), a work appreciably earlier than the account of Rāma’s *aśvamedha*. By the time of other texts of much the same date as the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core*,* it had been widely particularised to apply to itinerant singers or actors, considered as undesirable, or at least as able to command no

respect from the higher classes.[[140]](#footnote-140) Yet noticeably, in the *VRm*, use of *kuśīlava* is restricted to the revelation of the role of Sītā’s sons; the term *kuśīlava* appears nowhere else in the CE. No derogatory sense is discernible to colour our opinion of these *kuśīlavau*. They are affirmed from their first appearance to be sages, acting under the direction of the sage Vālmīki.In other episodes, a number of different terms are used for similar professionals.[[141]](#footnote-141) When an indecent meaning is called for, *śailūṣa* is used: at the height of Sītā’s tirade against Rāma when he refuses to take her with him into exile, she uses it to accuse him of being no better than a pimp (2,27.8c); at 2,77.15c, an equally scandalous sub-text is applied to *śailūṣāś ca saha strībhir* ‘actors with their women’ (*sc.* ‘sex workers’), for a few members of Bharata’s diverse group of followers on his abortive expedition to bring Rāma back to Ayodhyā, a passage whose dating can be considered similar to Rāma’s *aśvamedha*. Other terms for similar professions, *sūtamāgadhabandin* (see Chart) simply designate lower class professionals entitled to associate with and serve their superiors; even a *māgadha* (1,5.11a and 7,42.2d) can be allowed to be jolly, but not too disreputable. It follows that the creator of those particular parts of the narrative used it consciously to convey these implications. The best that can be said for the first singers of the *VRm* is that the current audience know that they are two unidentified disciples of Vālmīki, behaving correctly as sages; even the first time of hearing this episode, we must assume that they would probably have some inkling of what they hoped would transpire; that audience can be expected to have clear ideas about fairy-tale endings and reversals of expectations.

Two episodes composed later than the core of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* have been included in the Chart. *Sarga* 4 of the *Bālakāṇḍa* Preface (a re-telling based on the *Uttarakāṇḍa* account), and the hasty succession ritual in the lead-up to the Grand Finale, where the boys are installed as Rāma’s successors (7,97 and 98), added to the work of the second continuator, make an overall total of three different narrative contexts, produced at three differing times chronologically and developmentally (the last being the Viṣṇu layer), and, crucially, by three different tellers; their evidence is conclusive that this positive view of the *kuśīlavau* had now become endemic to the *VRm* tradition, with the designation by profession so firmly entrenched as to be the almost-standard term, just as in modern parlance they might be robbed of all personality and dismissively called ‘the twins’. It may be argued that it is the sudden association with Rāma’s yet unknown sons that has robbed it of any tawdry image, in the *VRm* at least, leaving that role to *śailūṣa*. It is even not out of the question that the second continuator was in fact himself a *kuśīlava*, anxious (maybe for personal reasons) to raise the profile and respectability of his profession.

Thedifficulty in determining the names of the *kuśīlavau* is not the only anomaly to be seen in the twofold narrative of Rāma’s aborted *aśvamedha*. Here we are forced to consider the precise difference between two concepts: text and meaning. ‘Text’ is what the author says or writes; ‘meaning’ is what the audience or reader infers from the text. Both senses may be conditioning the audience’s understanding, whether by the author’s intention or not. The expectation of the fictive audience (Rāma and other witnesses of the events) may be different from that of the listening or reading public. Even the latter audience may well have modified their understanding by the second time they experience the narrative. The ever-widening Rāma tradition — if trawled with due caution — can sometimes give useful guidance to the reception of elements viewed by later scholarship as anomalies.

At this point in the narrative, the fictive audience (who had not had the benefit of eavesdropping on Vālmīki’s instructions to his disciples in 7,84) were still in ignorance of significantly more than merely the identity of the *kuśīlavau*; it had still not occurred to them that Sītā might have given birth to more than one child, and this secret was to be closely guarded until the second continuator could allow Vālmīki to reveal it in a surprise announcement (7,87.16-17). We may note, however, that the truth was beginning to dawn on Rāma, before that point (86.2-3), and with it the suspicion that the truth might be not what he wanted to hear. In early cultures, it could be assumed that twins represented at best some kind of a prodigy, and at worst that they could result only from two separate acts of intercourse: after Sītā had left Ayodhyā, the birth of twins could confirm her infidelity just as firmly as the birth of two separate children.[[142]](#footnote-142) The importance of the motif is emphatically confirmed when both Vālmīki and Rāma accept the legitimacy of the two boys (7,87.14-20; 88.1-4): both are made to draw attention to the single conception by use of the word ‘*yamajātakau/yamajātau*’ (‘twins’) rather than ‘*bhrātarau*’ (‘brothers’). The sweet little boys had been given strict instructions that even to Rāma himself they were permitted to identify themselves as nothing more specific than *vālmīker atha śiṣyau hi brūtām evaṃ narādhipam* (‘disciples of Vālmīki’, 7,84.11cd).

The text may say one thing, but its reception can evoke a different meaning. Must Rāma get used to the idea that his longed for son is not at all what he had hoped for, envisaged, or even desired, for twelve long years? And now there were two of them! Could they really both be his? Maybe this pair of disreputable *kuśīlavau* — still unacceptable buskers in his opinion and experience — were merely masquerading as a sage’s disciples? Overcome by emotion, and impulsive as ever, the excited king is trapped into committing the solecism of trying to reward two sages with magnificent gifts, unsolicited for their performance though they are. But as instructed by Vālmīki, the boys refuse the lavish reward he offers and explain, politely if rather pertly, that financial gifts are inappropriate to them as ascetics; these were strange buskers to be above such mercenary considerations. The shock of so many simultaneous discoveries might be greater than he could bear, but perhaps they brought forward in his mind some possibility that Sītā could be recovered to ease his pain. That was his idea of a happy-ever-after ending, and presumably that of the wider audience too. The confidence in her virtue engendered by the assurance of the gods themselves (7,44.6-9) that had sustained him for twelve years since his hasty and fateful decision to disown her publicly had at last been shaken by the devastating suspicion that she had subsequently given birth to twins.[[143]](#footnote-143) He needed proof, one way or the other, so he summoned Vālmīki, wording his message carefully to cover both eventualities (86.4). Once Vālmīki had vouched for her purity and the legality of the twins’ conception, there could be no more suspicion.

**The last reversal: Sītā withdraws**Unfortunately for Rāma, he will get what he asks for, without getting what he really desires: Sītā’s way with words is as careful as that of her untrusting husband. Retaining her image as the ever-obedient wife, she complies precisely with his demands, but then the sweet sentimentality of the recognition of the boys is swiftly shattered by the intensely emotional act of their newly defiant mother. In sharp contrast to her tearful, reproachful pleading at 6,104, when her clear suicidal intention at Rāma’s cruel rejection had been contradicted as she stepped into the fire by her prayer for protection from Agni *pāvakaḥ* (a prayer carefully inserted into this late passage to allow for her already well-known reappearance in the exiles’ return to Ayodhyā, 6,104.24-25),[[144]](#footnote-144) the *Uttarakāṇḍa* author expresses her defiance not in words but in a conclusive action, heralding the end of the whole Rāma story as it exists at this point. To prove her innocence Sītā must lose her earthly life.

This new-found assertiveness provides yet another reversal of expectations: Rāma’s longed-for wife performs an Act of Truth on her own fidelity to him, confirming her innocence but removing her irrevocably from the human realm into the care of goddess Earth (7,84—88). The author, and the audience, know that this time there can be no return. He could see no way of reconciling this loving couple, so he chose to make Sītā the skilful heroine of her own withdrawal from a tragedy where she could no longer play an active part. The oath with which she confirms her own purity and more crucially that of her husband, obeying his requirement but asserting her own independence, is a reversal of the traditional ‘ambiguous oath’ motif often used to conceal adultery.[[145]](#footnote-145) Here it is modified to confirm her purity in a triumphant, unequivocal appeal to the Earth goddess; the basis of her oath is her virtuous behaviour, and it is sufficient to take her out of any further danger. Two sons have been produced and handed over to their father’s care; the dynasty has been secured; but pure or not, Sītā cannot be reclaimed in this sad, triumphant climax: a climax that is sad for Rāma, but triumphant for Sītā.[[146]](#footnote-146)

Such a spectacular and emotional conclusion to the earliest form of this New Beginning has spawned an enthusiastic welcome from subsequent tellers, eagerly seizing the opportunity to develop their own elaborations. So confidently have some of their ideas been welcomed into the tradition that it is hard to see the text as we now have it in all the stark simplicity of its eight brief verses. It has become the *idée fixe* that Sītā has returned to her mother, the goddess Earth, from whom she had been born. There is no warrant, not even a hint, of any such birth story for Sītā in the CE *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrative. Sītā has not “returned” to any mother figure; she is not the daughter of a goddess in any part of the CE, and is mentioned cursorily as Lakṣmī *only* once, at 6,105.25, the *sarga* where Brahmā reveals to Rāma his identity as Viṣṇu (*sītā lakṣmīr bhavān viṣṇur devaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ prajāpatiḥ,* 25cd) with epithets which clearly reveals its very late insertion. The first suggestion of a divine birth of any nature for Sītā occurs elsewhere in the third stage, in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, in Janaka’s negotiations for a marriage contract with his superbly talented, desperately desirable, son-in-law’s family, and there is no reason to suppose that this part of the First Book was — or was not — circulating throughout the tradition by the time the early conclusion in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* was being composed. It is only safe to judge each individual element by its own contents, and nothing has yet implied that Sītā was considered anything other than Janaka’s natural-born daughter. In this part of the CE text Sītā, like Rāma, is wholly human.

It has been the misfortune of the *VRm* CE to have this scheme overwhelmed almost out of all recognition by over-enthusiastic additions throughout its protracted genesis. The simplicity and dignity of the original straightforward resolution has been masked by two later spectacles, the Grand Finale to *kāṇḍa* 7 and the Fire Suicide still to be inserted into *kāṇḍa* 6.

The New Beginning’s story of Rāma’s life ends with a brief, quiet, serene survey of the bereft king’s stoical adherence to his public duties during his allotted ten thousand years of life, with his missing wife represented where necessary, as before, by a golden statue. Daśaratha’s three wives eventually join their husband to resume their wifely duties in heaven, and the two young princes and their sage foster-father retreat into the background.[[147]](#footnote-147) This poet is more interested in wifely devotion in all its complexity than in dynastic concerns (7,89).

It may very well be that the same attitude is true of Rāma himself. His nature has suffered a drastic reversal since taking up his duties as king.

Throughout *kāṇḍas* 2 to 6, Rāma had been supreme. Supreme, and infallible. The eldest and favourite son of his father. Beloved by all three mothers, of all three brothers, and of all his father’s subjects. Supreme physically, morally and in status. From the triumphant beginning of his reign, he has had to accept a radical change in status, acknowledging that he is now subject to higher considerations. Three times within the first few months of his reign, his supremacy has been challenged. Twice he has been able to take action to meet the challenge. But he is only human, and the first and greatest challenge of all to his sovereignty, his relationship to Sītā, has finally broken him. The search for Sītā, the warfare on Laṅkā, his defeat of Rāvaṇa, have been insufficient and irredeemable. He is no longer universally supreme. He is now, potentially at least, fallible.

He is, indeed, only human.

**Rāma’s reaction to his sons**Such an intense denouement could reasonably be expected to produce an ecstatic response from the father of the newly-found boys, but Rāma’s reaction can hardly be called ‘ecstatic’. The new father seems largely unmoved by Vālmīki’s revelation that he has not merely one but two legitimate sons, dedicated sages on the verge of manhood. Understandably, he is still cautious, coming to the conclusion after hearing their account of his own deeds for many days that they must be Sītā’s sons. Not yet can he commit himself to believing what the assembled crowds have immediately recognised — the facial identity of the boys with himself. As he gradually succumbs to the temptation to think that his travails might at last be within sight of being resolved, he hesitantly asks Vālmīki to tell him the truth about Sītā’s purity, and, crucially, about the effect on his own status (7,86.1-6). The self-centred king elicits only a hint from Vālmīki (v.10) of the happy outcome he may expect from compelling Sītā undergo the ordeal of making a public oath; may we infer that the sage is a little irritated that his own word is not to be trusted? Not until the next day does he mention the boys, in the middle of an emphatic declaration of Sītā’s innocence and the legitimacy of her twin sons couched in language that constitutes a stern public rebuke to Rāma for his continuing suspicions (87.13-20). Rāma is cowed and apologetic, lamely declaring that he does indeed accept the boys as his sons, recalling that he had already been assured by the gods of his wife’s purity, but nonetheless insisting that Sītā make a humiliating public declaration of her virtue (88.1-4). Rāma and the audience alike prepare for the expected happy ending, unaware that the focus is about to be shifted from the unhappy king to his much abused wife.

Overall, the CE text, as conveyed and fostered by the author, makes Rāma seem cold and distant. He admitshis fatherhood in a single verse, referring to the boys only as *kuśīlavau* (88.4); in emphasis, the author devotes seven verses to affirming Sītā’s innocence, only two of which refer to the boys (87.14-20). We are not even allowed to know whether he takes them back to his palace when their mother disappears, or whether they resume their life as sages, although their presence among their cousins around their grandmothers’ death-beds must be inferred (7,89.11). It is not until the insertion ofApp.13.50–56, an insertion of the Viṣṇu stage with full mss support (App.13.25) that they will be mentioned again, but only in the context of continuing their interrupted recitation. Their relationship to their father is not thought worthy of comment. Indeed, so striking is Rāma’s detachment that Kālidāsa felt the need to counter the impression of coldness, claiming that Kuśa and Lava shared his particular affection since he had redirected his thwarted love for Sītā towards them (*RV* 15.86).

Just as Rāma and Sītā remain forever dogged by their past, it seems that their sons cannot escape their identity as *kuśīlavau* and take their legitimate place as Rāma’s royal princely successors. The apparent disengagement with his sons exhibited both by the fictive Rāma and the factualcomposers of the text themselves will continue to the end of the narrative. Not until the final new ending, to be composed much later, the Grand Finale, is about to reach its climax will the *kuśīlavau* be given any personality of their own; they will be at last identified (grudgingly) by the names Kuśa and Lava (see Chart on p.60):[[148]](#footnote-148) even at this late point the boys are still identified in the palace by their profession, *kuśīlavau,* as they must have been throughout the 10,000 years or so that have elapsed since they earned that title. More shockingly, Rāma will have to be galvanised by Bharata into remembering his duties towards his sons and to his realm as he prepares to return to heaven in his new form as Viṣṇu. He then organises a cursory, almost panic-stricken installation no more than five verses long, with noopportunity for a validating episode, in sharp contrast to the three *sargas* already devoted to four of his newly-devised nephews (7,90—92).[[149]](#footnote-149) Daśaratha’s joyful attitude when he is presented with quadruplets (1,17.20) stands in stark contrast to Rāma’s apparent lack of interest. All he wants is his wife.

Suggesting a simple explanation for Rāma’s unenthusiastic reaction to his new-found sons is anything but simple.

Perhaps it is an entirely personal matter. The impulsive Rāma had learned that he must control his emotions and act cautiously. Faced with these two boys, the very image of his lost beloved, he had scarcely dared to give way to the hope of a fairy-tale reconciliation — a hope initially rekindling his long-smothered grief at having felt obliged to exile his wife, and to do so in such a shabby way. That hope had now been cruelly shattered by his wife’s non-compliance, evidence of her resentment at his behaviour. These boy-sages are no compensation to their father for the loss of his wife; indeed, their presence reminds him of it only too keenly.

Rāma, however, is not merely a man; not even merely a man bereft of his deeply-loved wife. He is also a king with a strong sense of duty to his people. He has agreed to accept that these boys, on the verge of manhood, are his sons; but does that mean that they are suitable princely material for the new role that he has accepted they have the right to inherit?

This leads on to the less romantic, more realistic, point about how far these boys’ education for their expected role as wandering ascetics, so unlike the training to be recorded in the *Bālakāṇḍa* for all four Dāśarathis (1,17.14-22), had prepared them for their newly-imposed function as heirs apparent to their now celibate father, expected eventually to succeed to the duties of sovereignty that continued to afflict him. The indulgence and comfort that was the privileged lifestyle of their father and uncles described by Bharata in his lament at 2,82.1-15 cannot have been enjoyed in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* by Rāma’s young heirs-to-be, as they were educated for their uncomfortable role as wandering ascetic bards. For twelve years or so they had lived the strict, austere life of ascetics, studying the scriptures, learning by heart the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and being trained how to sing it in the style appropriate to professional *kuśīlavau*. Presumably they had their mother’s affection, but no known father to spoil them. All this must be inferred by the audience, then and now, for the very existence of the boys had been unknown to them, and to Rāma, until their irruption into his *aśvamedha* ritual.

The surprise must have been as great for the boys as it is for Rāma, for the massive crowd of onlookers, and for the original audience; but in true *VRm* style, any joy it produces lasts no more than 24 verses, and Rāma and the *kuśīlavau* are left to grieve for 10,000 years for the wife and mother they have lost; in the absence of any direct statement, the audience are left to assume that he takes the boys into his care. We may expect that the youths who had refused King Rāma’s lavish reward for their busking would now be expected to participate in the material luxury of the court of Ayodhyā; perhaps eventually they would become used to it, with neither Vālmīki nor Sītā to advise them. Whether they enjoyed any personal affection from their lonely, ever-grieving father is not recorded; the very sight of his sons must have reminded him of his loss. The more sentimental of us may assume that some emotional comfort for the motherless twins came from their three grandmothers, still alive but equally inactive in the narrative until, inevitably, *atha dīrghasya kālasya* (‘then after a long time’ they must resume their duties to Daśaratha in heaven (7,89.11-13).

Quite soon, even within the CE later adapters realised that the tender, romantic image presented by these *kuśīlavau* was unsuitable for young princes*.* Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa would perform their first military exploit at the age of fifteen, but they will have been trained in the martial arts since early youth (1,17.14-18); the *kuśīlavau* have only a short time to equal their abilities by that age. Will the dynasty really be safe in their hands? As early as the forthcoming Grand Finale the *kuśīlavau* will be lauded as *vīram* and *vīrau* (‘valiant’, 7,97.7cd = 17cd and 20a), although there is no word of how they have won this recognition.

While the growth of differing regional recensions was continuing to add ever more elaborations to the tradition now presented in the CE, independent composers in Sanskrit and regional languages began to produce versions in different genres where the authors felt, not merely permitted, but obliged, to interpret the traditional story in ever more inventive ways.[[150]](#footnote-150) Within the *brāhmaṇic* tradition, tellers including Kālidāsa and Dhīranāga perpetuate the romantic recognition-by-singing episode in their *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Kundamālā*, but as early as Bhavabhūti’s *Uttararāmacarita* the concept of the sons being recognised by their martial ability is being tentatively introduced alongside the earlier singing motif; the military persona comes to dominate and eventually eliminate the romantic image, and in the more extreme versions the sons are recognised by their unique ability to equal and defeat their father and his whole army in battle. No longer do they merely hymn their father’s deeds, they imitate them.

While this transformation was developing in the *brāhmaṇic* tradition, Jain tellers from Vimalasūri and Saṅghadāsa onwards had been following a quite different agenda of their own: their aim was not to replicate the *VRm* but to re-create its narrative in what purported to be a more realistic, Jain-favouring, setting that *inter alia* minimises the activity of *brāhmaṇic* sages such as Vālmīki. The Jain Kuśa and Lava were not brought up in a hermitage, but in the city of a new foster-father, king Vajrajaṅgha, where they were taught to grow up pugnacious and resentful of Rāma; their hostility leads eventually to war, where they are eventually recognised by their ability to equal Rāma’s prowess (to the point of being able to kill and resurrect their father) rather than by the gentle, romantic singing motif of the *VRm*.

It is hard to determine whether or how far the Jain motif of the belligerent sons stimulated the similar developments in the *brāhmaṇic*, now Hindu context, where the occurrence is not attested until slightly later; it would be perfectly understandable for the concept to have developed independently in each culture. However, differing understandings of the Śambūka episode, for example, demonstrate a degree of interplay between the two traditions amounting even to congruence.[[151]](#footnote-151) Theological values can easily be ignored in the interests of a good story.

**Legacy of Rāma’s *aśvamedha***The process of Sītā’s growth into maturity in the earlier stages of the narrative has been examined in MB 2012. This, her second exile, was more humiliating even than both the first and her captivity, and she has been sustained only by the confidence of Vālmīki and the female ascetics, by the remembrance of her vindication by the gods, and by her baby sons’ dependence on her; initially, that last consideration had been all that had prevented her from committing suicide (7,47.8).

The defiance with which she had resisted Rāvaṇa now enables her to affirm her role as the ever-dutiful wife within a developing independent personality that leaves her own status dramatically increased. Her endurance in forest exile had matured her, growing into the defiance that enabled her to survive the attacks of the *rākṣasa* king, and she was now strong enough to assert her own individuality. Her appeal to the Earth is no hysterical tantrum designed to get her own way, comparable to that attributed to her as an immature girl at 2,24—27. The relationship between Rama and Sītā is now a personal matter between the couple. She has done her duty by him, by their children, and therefore by the nation; the dynasty is safe, and in any case, her public demonstration of purity means that Rāma can now marry again, if he feels the need, to beget further heirs. She can choose for herself, and what she chooses is to withdraw from his life.

In the final episode of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core as it then stood, focused on the woman, threatening to eclipse even the heartbroken, human Rāma, Sītā has been allowed by the author to retire from the action with dignity and panache. The new removal of Sītā from the narrative is a shocking reversal of our standardised expectations of the ever-compliant subordinated wife. Her new identity, the greatest surprise of all, is a dramatic masterstroke, a final trick played by the author upon Rāma and audience alike; a trick that was to inspire a whole new conception of a robust Sītā in later tradition.

Rāma’s life is over. But he must continue it, doggedly doing his duty for another 10,000 years. There is no story there, good or bad. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is not a Greek tragedy, concealing the possibility of a future resolution at the hands of some latent vengeful successor to give hopes of a future happy ending activated by the *deus ex machina*. When the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core text was incorporated it became the tale of an essentially human hero struggling and failing to find personal happiness, and that would be the new ending for several centuries. A large number of additions and elaborations would be incorporated, obscuring the clarity and essential simplicity of the narrative. Society’s values changed. And then Viṣṇu intervenes, the focus changes from the human to the cosmic scale, and Rāma the man can only be made to leave the scene and go home to heaven, with his brothers, but still with no wife to console him (until he meets Śrī there, but that is a different story).[[152]](#footnote-152)

Before leaving the *Uttarakāṇḍa* to concentrate on its relationship to the *Bālakāṇḍa*, it is worth returning to reconsider the possibility that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core was composed in two successive stages, with the work of the putative First Continuator being almost overwhelmed by the poet who contributed the *kuśīlavau* episode; this hypothesis is based on the discrepancy of timescale noted on pp.55-56. The offspring resulting from this First Continuator’s episode would of necessity be a mere baby or babies only a few months old, left in the care of Sītā’s sage-companions and perhaps not even present at the *aśvamedha*, not brought to the attention of Rāma or the onlookers, and evoking less interest by their father than the adolescent *kuśīlavau*. That explanation is too tentative to be put forward as the whole reason for Rāma’s indifference, but it raises the further possibility that the conventionally expected birth of a single boy to Sītā may have deliberately been obliterated to make way for the greater surprise of the twin birth so prominent in the Second Continuator’s work.

A few hints from later genealogies add to the conundrum without resolving it satisfactorily. Kālidāsa reproduces the standard twin-birth, recognition-by-singing episode, but extends it by adding accounts of the lives of Kuśa and an indefinite number of his descendants — but not of Lava. Similarly, in the *Harivaṃśa*, Rāma is succeeded by his son Atithi and many named successors, with Lava mentioned once only, and as his brother’s *yuvarāja*.

A much further-reaching and more puzzling development in many later versions may also have its roots in the apparent persistence in local traditions that Sītā had originally given birth to one son only: when the plot-emendation found in the later twin-birth version became *de rigueur*, a putative attempt to accommodate both versions produced an entirely new, far-fetched motif in which one son is born to Sītā and the second is created artificially by a sage. In these cases the dominant role of Kuśa is often reversed. The first child is often called — not ‘Kuśa’, as might be expected from his prevalence elsewhere as transmitter of the dynasty — but ‘Lava’ (or a localised version of his name). This transposition allows the replica child, created in many versions from *kuśa* grass, to be given the name ‘Kuśa’, preserving the detail from the naming ritual described at the twins’ birth where the elder twin is named after the sanctified *kuśa* grass with which, physically and metaphorically, he has been cleansed (CE 7,58.5). This tale type is used in many later versions, and is particularly prevalent and much developed in SE Asian versions.[[153]](#footnote-153) The earliest versions reported of the motif are found both in Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgara* and in Tibetan fragments preserved at Dunhuang. Neither version can be securely dated, leaving open any question of priority.

The *Kathāsaritsāgara* is generally recognised to be a multifarious repository of local traditions composed for a Kashmiri queen in about the eleventh century,[[154]](#footnote-154) incorporating a few passages and allusions to characters from Rāma stories. One passage (Somadeva 9,51: Tawney 1880: I, 487-88)presents the motif in the form to become standard in most later adaptations that use it.

The version preserved at Dunhuang presents a very different narrative based on the same motif. The text is known not to have been subject to emendation since it was fastened into the Library Room early in the eleventh century, but current scholarship has suggested that it could have been placed there at any point from the end of the eighth century onwards.[[155]](#footnote-155) This realisation of the motif is particularly valuable, as it appears to represent a transition in the narrative tradition that may indicate an intermediate stage in its genesis. Here the two sons — one naturally born and the second artificially created in the temporary absence of Rāma — are already part of the plot *before* their mother is banished (de Jong 1989: 43-45). Rāma has accepted both boys as his sons, but while they are still young enough to feel more emotionally attached to their mother than to their father, Rāma decides to banish Sītā; she, however, is sufficiently independently-minded to agree to the separation and to consigning their sons to his care, but the boys are offended and magically prevent her from leaving until she agrees to take them with her. The three fugitives live together in a grove (this text has no hospitable sage motif) until Rāma eventually repents and calls them back. In this version there is clearly no place for the singing of the Rāma story in a contrived and sentimental recognition scene (and therefore for the *Rāmāyaṇa* to be identified as a composition of Vālmīki), but we may detect the germ of the conflict between father and sons found in so many later versions; we may note, however, that the eventual happy reconciliation for all the family in Rāma’s palace takes place in ‘Old Earth’, evoking by its name the Vālmīkian Sītā’s original exit from her men’s lives to seek the protection of the goddess Earth.

The curious motif common to both variants of the single birth artificially replicated has a number of anomalies of its own. It is usually based on the host sage’s clumsy attempt to hide his inattention to the child temporarily in his care, giving this down-graded sage baby-sitter little credit, except as a wonder-worker; the elder child has never actually been lost. It also presupposes that Sītā and the hospitable sage live in the same hut (which ought to raise further suspicions about Sītā’s conduct that are never explored), whereas the account in the CE has made it clear that the female sages have separate living quarters from the males. The most glaring anomaly of all, in the context of Rāma’s earlier unfounded suspicions about his wife’s fidelity, is that he shows no qualms about accepting this second son as a legitimate co-heir equal in status to the first, despite the sage’s explanation that he is an artificial creation. But it’s a good story, and we shouldn’t be too particular.

It seems after all that the story of Rāma’s troubled but triumphant life is going to degenerate into nothing more than a tear-jerking failure at its ending. The expectations of a glorious future, foretold so recently at the end of the triumphant *abhiṣeka*, must all have been illusory. That is the situation to be explored in the remainder of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core *sargas*. To attempt a solution in the style of previous narrators, an entirely unrecognised sage is created. But even Vālmīki can only reverse our expectations to a limited extent.

**Birth sacrifices in *Uttara* and *Bāla* core: sin, fertility, dynasty**  
To complete the additions to the core of the *VRm* as a whole, the central episodes of the core narratives of the *Uttara* and *Bāla kāṇḍas* were themselves enclosed by framing episodes based on three sacrifices, ranging over 7,74—83 and 1,8—17.12 respectively (each also including a certain amount of supplementary material): two performed for Daśaratha, but the third, for Rāma, left incomplete. The first two now open the narrative as a whole (not just of the *Bālakāṇḍa*), and the last introduces a newly added conclusion. Whether the *Bālakāṇḍa* poets and audiences yet knew any of the material in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* must be admitted to be less than absolutely certain, but I hope to demonstrate that Rāma’s *aśvamedha* (at least as it was initially conceived by its hypothetical First Continuator) has influenced Daśaratha’s birth ritual.

It cannot be remarked too often that the *VRm* is a narrative — a story — told for the enjoyment of its audience. It celebrates the virtue of its heroes without dwelling on any overt didactic purpose. It is not a handbook of ritual practice, and it is not a morality fable or parable (although some of the many In-tales in Stage 3 do have this function). Nonetheless, each successive narrator is conditioned by the culture in which he operates: the narrators of *VRm kāṇḍas* 1 and 7 were influenced by ethical and religious issues rather more than their predecessors in *kāṇḍas* 2—6 had been, but any rituals used were adapted if necessary to suit the context. The overall theme of both appears to be the birth of heirs to hitherto sonless monarchs, physically in the case of Daśaratha, metaphorically in the case of Rāma, with the intended pairing emphasised by the similar sacrificial setting;[[156]](#footnote-156) appearances, however, are deceptive. The sacrifices differ considerably in purpose, conduct and outcome. In the *Bālakāṇḍa,* two sacrifices are now intertwined. One (the *putreṣṭi*), is performed by Ṛśyaśṛṅga on his own; the other, the single-passage *aśvamedha* performed by Vasiṣṭha is inserted, not only as reinforcement of the result, but to point the ceremony explicitly in the direction of personal fertility.[[157]](#footnote-157) Those in the *Bālakāṇḍa* ensure the birth of Daśaratha’s four sons after a long period of childlessness; that in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* reveals the existence of Rāma’s twin sons, unknown for 12 years to Rāma, to the population at large, and (most important of all) to the audience. Each has a purpose personal to the sacrificer (Daśaratha or Rāma); they are not undertaken as a particular duty to their subjects. There the expected similarities end.

The abundant celebration of sacrifices, particularly *aśvamedhas*, was considered a prime responsibility of a monarch, often with the purpose unspecified; the convention was considered more or less obligatory, performed apparently as a matter of course, as demonstrated in the earlier part of this chapter (p.43). Rāma was conceived as a result of ritual activity.[[158]](#footnote-158) He starts his military career by ensuring that Viśvāmitra can conduct a sacrifice in safety. His marriage comes about at Janaka’s bow sacrifice. Now that he has responded to the three immediate duties thrust upon him in the first weeks of his reign, he finds it necessary to embark on a sacrifice in his own interest.

Towards the earliest part of the carefully-prepared twelve-year interval after the pregnant Sītā had been banished,[[159]](#footnote-159) Rāma had been faced in quick succession by two further challenges relating to disparate aspects of *rāmarājya*: the military security of the realm, and the maintenance of orthodox religious practices. The first had been (or was being) dealt with successfully by Śatrughna, but the second was only half discharged by Rāma’s summary execution of the over-ambitious *śūdra*; the *brāhman* boy had been brought back to life, but the disastrous breach of *varṇa* regulations was ruining his *rāmarājya*. He must urgently consider a suitable means to clear his own character of the grieving *brāhman’s* accusation of malfeasance (effectively of being personally responsible for the death of the child, 7,64.8-15). Such an accusation is too much for Rāma to bear. The taut nature of the narrative structure of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core is revealed by his rushed appeal to Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa,[[160]](#footnote-160) stung by the charge, almost before he enters his palace on his return from executing summary justice on Śambūka. He wishes to inform them of his decision to exonerate himself from his sinful negligence, and further to protect his subjects by performing a *rājasūya*, a violent form of sacrifice, to establish ‘a barricade of justice’ in his realm (*dharmasetum,* 7,74.3c). Lakṣmaṇa had previously been able to calm his senior’s impulsive nature, prone to violence when provoked beyond endurance by the abduction of Sītā (*VRm* 3,61), and when Bharata now joins in exploiting the king’s weak spot (his responsibility to his subjects),[[161]](#footnote-161) a brief discussion of Lakṣmaṇa’s suggestion of an *aśvamedha* as the most appropriate sacrifice to offer convinces the beleaguered monarch that it would be the one least harmful to his people and most beneficial to himself; all three brothers link it firmly with absolution from sin (7,75.2b).[[162]](#footnote-162) Rāma now begins the year-long preparations and releases the auspicious horse with Lakṣmaṇa in charge of the escort (7,82—83).

For Rāma, obtaining absolution from sin is his basic purpose. The idea of recovering his wife or creating a dynasty of his own does not enter into his calculations; he believed that he had lost Sītā and his unborn son irrevocably. The continuator thought differently, and worked in more practical terms, contriving the publicly spectacular *aśvamedha* to function as his opportunity to proclaim Sītā’s virtue in such a way that the legitimacy of her sons could no longer be questioned; bringing together a huge number of people to witness the vindication of Sītā’s behaviour in her captivity, he confirms Rāma’s consequential ritual purity and the legitimacy of his heirs. Before the long-planned climax had been reached and the horse been killed to confer the desired absolution on the sacrificer, Rāma’s attention had been caught by Vālmīki’s *kuśīlavau*, resembling himself and singing his own life-story, and he had lost all interest in anything other than Sītā (7,84—86). The *aśvamedha* setting no longer mattered. The original purpose of the framework had been served, so the sacrifice was peremptorily abandoned as no longer necessary to the excited monarch. Issues of sin and redemption are now ignored. In literary terms, the episode revives the tradition established by the earliest tellers of a narrative conducted by a series of surprises and reversals of carefully managed audience expectations (MB 2012).

So if the focus of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* episode is not to be the *aśvamedha*, now uncompleted, does that mean that Rāma was in fact not ‘sinful’? That he had been wrongly accused by the distraught bereaved father, and was not in need of ‘absolution’? Or had he perhaps already atoned for his failing by killing Śambūka? Was the aspect of ‘sin’ irrelevant, merely an elaborately prepared pretext of the continuator? I am much inclined to presume that once more the timeless values of telling a good story — the literary skills of the current author of the *VRm* — have outweighed the interests of new-fangled moral dogma. The important point to take from Rāma’s *aśvamedha* is that its fundamental purpose was to absolve the celebrant from sin.

Until eclipsed by the dramatic climax, the concept of absolution for sin had been at the forefront of Rāma’s mind in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* when he ordered the preparation of an *aśvamedha*. In the account of the *Bālakāṇḍa aśvamedha* the importance of this element is emphasised more by a few vague, unresolved hints than by its prominence in the story — as if the author felt that it had no real place in his own narrative but yet could not be ignored. Daśaratha is declared ‘sinless’ three times as the ritual is completed (1,13.30+39+44), yet nothing has been said to identify the sin for which he has needed absolution. His lack of a son is treated at 1,8.1-2 as a sorrow, overwhelming indeed, but not as any form of punishment; his reflective mood stands in stark contrast to Rāma’s panic-stricken anguish. No specific sin is mentioned in the *Bālakāṇḍa*. The uxorious sin on which the whole narrative had been founded can obviously not be committed until the son to be exiled has at the very least been born. Similarly, in his youth he had carelessly killed a young ascetic boy, incurring a curse to die grieving for a son, but obviously this too cannot be fulfilled after the perpetrator has already undergone ritual cleaning and obtained absolution.[[163]](#footnote-163)

Sagara, a prominent ancestor of Daśaratha at several points in the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative**,** encounters problems when he attempts to perform an *aśvamedha* but is prevented from completing it when the horse is stolen by Indra; not for four generations can the sacrifice be completed.[[164]](#footnote-164) The narrative begins with the childless king’s efforts to gain sons to preserve his dynasty (the Ikṣvāku dynasty, later to be adorned by Daśaratha and his sons). After considerable efforts he is promised sons for both his wives: one will bear 60,000; the other will bear one only, but he will carry on the dynasty. That son, Asamañja, is so sinful that Sagara disinherits him; fortunately the wicked prince already has a virtuous son who is destined to carry on the dynasty and it is at this point that Sagara embarks upon the *aśvamedha* that robs him of his remaining 60,000 sons (1,37.23-24). The concept of sin is in the background of 37.20-23, but there is no specific indication in the text that it is Asamañja’s behaviour that has prompted Sagara’s ill-fated decision to sacrifice.

The association of sin with *aśvamedha* sacrifices, so basic to Rāma’s aborted sacrifice in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and present but unexplored in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, is differently worked out in the *MBh’s* account of Lomapāda’s sin (*MBh* 3,110.20—113.25),[[165]](#footnote-165) where it forms the foundation for the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, a floating motif with a popularity no doubt increased by its moderately salacious nature. A terrible drought is endangering the land, a drought caused by a sin committed by its king himself: he had improperly imposed his wishes on *brāhmans*.The drought is remedied by the seduction of the chaste and simple-minded Ṛśyaśṛṅga by a group of prostitutes: rain recommences, the young seer is married to Śāntā, the king’s daughter, and the fable ends with the moral that destroying the boy’s chastity has unlocked his power over fertility, whether agricultural or human.[[166]](#footnote-166) The *MBh* episode contains no reference to the *Bālakāṇḍa* birth sacrifice or to any other external consequences; the focus is all on Lomapāda’s sin.

Determining the priority of these two adaptations of a floating motif can never be a simple matter. Both appear in passages that can be accounted moderately late, but not the latest, strata of their host compendia: the *Tour of the Sacred Fords* in the *MBh* corresponds roughly to the same period as this part of the *VRm*. Narrative logic, however, suggests that the *Bālakāṇḍa* has imported the seduction episode from the *MBh* into its own frame story of the birth sacrifice, rather than that the *MBh* episode, which has no reference to the *VRm* at this point, has dropped some such ritual from its own text. The *Bālakāṇḍa* continuator, however, was aware that Ṛśyaśṛṅga was associated with some royal sin with consequences severe enough to arrest agricultural fertility, and adapted it to suit his own purposes. Some unspecified sin by Romapāda is mentioned but not identified (1,8.12-14). Nothing is made of this sin; it is passed over without comment, but it is there, its very presence and brevity emphasising the importance of the concept in the narrative. When it is included in the birth ritual, though, its penalty and remedy are redirected to personal rather than agricultural consequences.

Twice more the concept of sin appears in the account of the *aśvamedha*. At 13.30d, after the horse has been killed and Daśaratha’s three wives have been symbolically fertilised by each spending a night alongside its corpse, the horse’s fat is ritually offered, and the king sniffs the fragrance from the smoking fat, and so expels his sin. Shortly afterwards, at 13.36, we are told that the king’s objective has been achieved, and he is now able to increase his family. Near, or perhaps at, the end of the same *sarga*, at the end of the ‘sacrifice [that] cleanses from sin’ (13.44), the *aśvamedha* ends, with Daśaratha now apparently sinless. The function of the several ‘sinless’ remarks is not made clear in the context of the current CE; no explicit consequences for the narrative are mentioned, and it is plausible to assume that they have been inspired by the prominence of the concept in Rāma’s *aśvamedha*.

**Dynasty in the *Uttarakāṇḍa***The composers of the core narrative of *kāṇḍas* 2—6 had been concerned only with the present generation: which son, or rather, which mother, should assume power on Daśaratha’s death? After the abduction, the issue ever-present in Rāma’s mind had been his own longings for sexual fulfilment;the imagery of his pathetic laments is not focused on the effects on the Ikṣvāku dynasty. Any question of dynastic succession, focused entirely on Rāma and his wife, had been considered settled when they returned happily to Ayodhyā, until Sītā’s pregnancy impelled Rāma to banish her, effectively privileging his present public duty to his subjects over the personal happiness of the king and his wife.

The addition of Rāma’s two sons to the narrative might have been expected to have introduced the theme of dynasty into the CE. Surprisingly, perhaps, this is not the case in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core. The concept of dynasty and Rāma’s attitude to it comes to a climax when the *aśvamedha* is abruptly abandoned, left incompletewhen all attention is diverted to two of Vālmīki’s young disciples who bear a striking facial resemblance to Rāma himself, and moreover have an uncanny knowledge of the precise details of the king’s career. The horse is left unkilled; Sītā is summoned. Rāma had undertaken his *aśvamedha* as a cleansing ritual, but he has now lost interest in his own attempt to be proved sinless, in favour of the need to have Sītā’s sinlessness publicly and authoritatively declared. Indeed, the whole purpose of the *Uttara* core — to confirm Rāma’s ability to continue the Ikṣvāku dynasty through the purity of his wife — has almost been lost to sight, as at last his own struggle to reconcile his new duties as king to his deeply emotional personality comes to the fore. The core narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is still basically that of a romantic Wonder Tale, based on recognisable and credible actions and character, even if much exaggerated. As a person, the still-human Rāma is glad to have his sons declared legitimate by the authoritative Vālmīki, in order that they should exonerate their mother, but once that declaration has been made public, he seems to take no further interest in them. They represent only dynasty, as far as he is concerned, and he is not concerned about dynasty. As an abstract concept, perhaps it was developing only slowly in the values of his current re-creators, and, more relevantly, in the values of the society at whom the account of Rāma’s *aśvamedha* had been aimed. Not until considerably later, when the new Grand Finale with its focus on Viṣṇu was being devised, does it seem sufficiently unavoidable to be introduced, with a hurriedly new-created generation and their unconvincing activities — albeit a generation that virtually ignores the sons of Śatrughna as well as those of Rāma.[[167]](#footnote-167)

Rāma’s attitude to his sons remains a personal matter. Of course, in reality that attitude is not the fictive Rāma’s: it is that of his creator, the poet who chooses to focus the climax of his narrative on the high point of Sītā’s withdrawal, not to draw it out indefinitely by introducing a new, open-ended story. The theme pursued is not dynasty, but sin, as reflected on the lives and personal happiness of Rāma and Sītā. It is the task of Vālmīki (another character newly created *ad hoc*)[[168]](#footnote-168) to exonerate Sītā and her sons, and thereby Rāma himself, from the charge that has dogged them ever since their return to Ayodhyā: the charge of sin, that has caused Rāma firstly to repudiate Sītā and then to undertake the purifying *aśvamedha*. When his task is done, Vālmīki silently disappears from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrative and is not heard of again in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* text after 7,88.1a. The wonder is not that this poet draws his story of the core text of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (and therefore, of the whole Rāma story as it then existed) to a close after Sītā’s dramatic withdrawal, but that so few later tellers accepted the challenge to address the issue of succession.[[169]](#footnote-169) At a slightly later date a *Bālakāṇḍa* poet would see it as his opportunity, or even his duty, to include an *aśvamedha* episode of his own, based on the developing values of the dynastic concept, while nevertheless feeling the need to incorporate a few inconsequential and unexplained references to sin.

As I see it, the real point is that Rāma’s sons are simply not part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* composers’ plans. The whole focus of the *VRm*, from its inception in the heroic age, perhaps as early as the fifth century BC, throughout all the expansions and attempts to accommodate the tale to the developing values of successive generations for something like seven or eight hundreds years, the story has focused on the personal character of the dutiful Rāma (human, out of fidelity to the basic plotline) and his relationship to his father, brothers, friends and, above all, his wife. When he finally loses Sītā, this time with no prospect of recovering her, or even of avenging his loss, he is emotionally shattered; there is nothing left for him now except to carry on, as before, doing his duty to his subjects, promoting their welfare by conducting sacrifices for 10,000 years.

Daśaratha’s needs were completely different. He had no sons, and he needed a son.

We are told (for the first and only time) of a Golden Age adorning Daśaratha’s monarchy (to be explored more fully onpp.82-84), and then that it is in danger of being tarnished by just this one defect (*nāsīd vaṃśakaraḥ sutaḥ,* 1,8.1d); the importance of establishing a dynasty was now tormenting the aged king. In the next verse, Daśaratha decisively raises the question of performing an *aśvamedha* (specifically identified as a *vājimedha*)[[170]](#footnote-170) as a fertility ritual. A suitable officiant, a seer named Ṛśyaśṛṅga, is immediately proposed by the *sūta*, Sumantra. Various lengthy elaborations explaining his identity and his qualifications to perform the role now introduce the main components of the child-producing episode.[[171]](#footnote-171) The seer is brought to Ayodhyā and performs the *aśvamedha* jointly with Vasiṣṭha in a lengthy, elaborately detailed ceremony concluding at 1,13.44, immediately supplemented by a brief *putreṣṭi* performed by Ṛśyaśṛṅga alone. His task completed, Ṛśyaśṛṅga leaves Ayodhyā at 1,17.5, as part of the general dispersal of witnesses.

Determining the overall structure of Daśaratha’s intertwined birth sacrifice/s has long been a matter of difficulty for scholars;[[172]](#footnote-172) it is scarcely any easier now. Even the number of sacrifices involved is not entirely clear: are the two different rituals separate episodes, or do they constitute one, dual event, to be interrupted later by the insertion of Viṣṇu’s incarnation?

What is significant, however, is that, however crucial it may be to the *aśvamedhas* in both the *Uttara* and *Bālakāṇḍas*, the concept of sin is not mentioned in the second sacrifice, the *putreṣṭi*; the focus of Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s ritual is on the dynastic aspect of fertility, an intention declared by the term *putrakāraṇāṭ* (1,14.2b+3b). Whether physical or metaphorical, the fertility sought in the *Bāla* and achieved in both *kāṇḍas* is focused personally on the two kings, not on their responsibilities towards the agricultural and animal-husbandry essentials of their subjects’ lives; their purpose is not to ward off famine or other natural disasters by ensuring a favourable climate.[[173]](#footnote-173) Any wider, public, relevance is connected with the concept of dynasty and rooted in the engendering of sons. Even before Daśaratha is first named at 1,5.9a, the audience have been alerted to that concept by being reminded of the travails of an earlier Ikṣvāku monarch, Sagara, and four generations of his successors, in their efforts to re-establish the dynasty interrupted by their inability to perform the appropriate funerary rituals for his 60,000 dead sons (1,5.2a).[[174]](#footnote-174)

The *Bālakāṇḍa’s* audience are now treated to two conflicting accounts, an *aśvamedha* and a *putreṣṭi*, telling how, in practical terms, Daśaratha’s desired objective was achieved. As is only to be expected in a narrative dependent on personal fertility, the theme is played out in terms of sexuality, both in the performance of the *aśvamedha*, with its simulated copulation of the three queens with the dead horse, further emphasised by the significant role played by Ṛśyaśṛṅga in both rituals; he it is who not only conducts the *putreṣṭi*, but is also named as the leader of the *brāhmans* responsible for conducting the *aśvamedha* at 1,11.2+11; 1,13.2. He had been asexual in his youth, with his induction into sexuality by prostitutes narrated in an In-tale; the successful outcome, bringing much-needed rain to ease a drought, is crowned by marriage to the king’s daughter Śāntā, perhaps to redirect his sexuality. His reputation is great enough to persuade the aged Daśaratha to undertake the arduous journey to Aṅga to beg his help personally (1,10.12-22).

The active participation of all three queens increases the probability that the *aśvamedha* is being undertaken as a fertility ritual, rather than, like the *Uttarakāṇḍa aśvamedha,* to cleanse Daśaratha of any unspecified but actual sin.[[175]](#footnote-175) In its current form in the CE, the *VRm* sacrificepresentsan anomaly: all 3 queens, rather than only the traditional chief queen, spend a night with the horse corpse (1,13.27-28). This modification allows all three queens (and therefore their offspring) to share equally in the conception of the sons, the distinction lying in the order of precedence (Rāma’s mother being first). It is also noteworthy that not until this point does the concept that Rāma and his brothers were born more or less simultaneously, with its corollary that Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna are twins, enter the tradition;[[176]](#footnote-176) neither idea has any place in the core text of *kāṇḍas* 2—6, where Rāma’s right of succession had been based on his seniority rather than on his outstanding character, in which he is amply matched by Bharata.

After the completion of the *aśvamedha*, however, a complication immediately arises in the narrative as the CE text is moved on in *sarga* 14 to the description of a second ritual (generally known as the *putreṣṭi*),[[177]](#footnote-177) this time conducted by Ṛśyaśṛṅga alone, with no participation from either of Daśaratha’s two family priests (1,7.3). The structure of this episode is complex. Even its core is of two parts, 1,14.1-4 leading to 15.9-28; the narrative flow is then interrupted by the intervention of the gods at 14.5—15.8, plus the whole of *sarga* 16 to close the episode. Compared to the *aśvamedha*, it is brief in the extreme: a mere 24 verses giving minimal details of the procedure, contrasting sharply with the 99 devoted uninterrupted to the *aśvamedha*. As the gods assemble to receive their shares of the offering, the climax is reached when an auspicious figure rises from the fire and presents Daśaratha with the fertilising agent, in this case a bowl of *pāyasa*, to be consumed by the king’s principal wives (1,15.9-28). Again, the stated objective seems to have been achieved.

In the *putreṣṭi* ensuring its ultimate success is the responsibility of poor Daśaratha, faced with the daunting arithmetical task of deciding how to share out the fertilising *pāyasa.*[[178]](#footnote-178)Theoretically, of course, his difficulties are unnecessary. He has no reason to believe that he is to generate four sons of unequal status, despite being told of Sanatkumāra’s prophecy (1,10.10, a clear suggestion of the late date of insertion of Sumantra’s recollection of that whole passage). The audience, of course, know better than Daśaratha, for they have been brought up on stories of Rāma and his three brothers, and it is to their knowledge, (including his own, not the fictive king’s) that the continuator accommodates his tale. Rather than being allowed to take the easy way out and divide the *pāyasa* into three equal parts,[[179]](#footnote-179) knowing, as he does, only that he has three wives to fulfil his initial longing to be succeded merely by one son, he is treated as if he knows he must allow for four, and even contrive for them to be of not quite equal status.[[180]](#footnote-180)

Despite the disparity in length and relative prominence, it is the *putreṣṭi* rather than the *aśvamedha* that was chosen (much later) to enclose the incarnation of Viṣṇu, no doubt because the division of the *pāyasa* could be related to his fourfold not-quite-equal birth narrative more appropriately (as well as more decorously) than it could to the symbolic fertilisation of the three queens.

From Daśāratha’s resolution up to its achievement, the framework of the birth stories is dominated by the figure of Ṛśyaśṛṅga; he is the chief actor throughout the whole episode, active from 1,8.5 to 1,17.5.[[181]](#footnote-181) He it is who directs operations for the *aśvamedha*, even leading the ‘other *brāhmans*’ at 11.2cd+11a, 12.34c and 13.2a, with his status also implied at 11.9. Although responsibility for the *aśvamedha* is declared by Daśaratha to be the prerogative of Vasiṣṭha alone at 12.4, he works jointly with Ṛśyaśṛṅga at 12.33 and 13.42, where it is natural that throughout *sarga* 12, Vasiṣṭha (the ‘priest-in-residence’) should undertake the subordinate role of local ‘quartermaster’, with the daunting task of organising the logistics to ensure the smooth working of the whole massive operation. Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s status is further emphasised by the inclusion of his father-in-law Romapāda (not known in the *VRm* except in this context) among the honoured guests at 12.22. In the *putreṣṭi* he works alone, and is escorted in state from Ayodhyā by the grateful Daśaratha at the conclusion of the episode (1,17.5), without waiting to see the results of his labour 5 verses later.

With its unidentified auspicious figure presenting the fertility medium — food — for all three queens, the *putreṣṭi* shares the characteristics of a standard Wonder Tale,[[182]](#footnote-182) related in this case to a *kṣatriya* layer of composition; in terms of the *Bālakāṇḍa* that composition need not be counted as particularly late. In its basic form, without the interruption by the distressed gods, the episode is straightforward, unoriginal, banal even, and particularly brief, so it comes as no surprise that it has attracted a considerable amount of supplementation.

The exact limits, however, are uncertain. At 1,13.44 it appears that Daśaratha’s *aśvamedha* has been completed and the king is now in a position to generate sons. Viewed as the closure of that ritual, the final two verses of *sarga* 13 are too obtrusive and repetitive as the text now stands, but would make more sense as the introductory verses of the *putreṣṭi*, following on directly from Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s arrival at Ayodhyā at the end of *sarga* 10: argument for the *aśvamedha* being a later addition to a narrative where Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s *putreṣṭi* is original, with the end of the *putreṣṭi* at 15.28 concluding the whole account of the conception of Daśaratha’s four sons. However, the account of the return to Ayodhyā and the dispersal of witnesses at 17.1 specifically closes the *aśvamedha*, with the fruit of at least one of the sacrifices being realised at 17.10. One ritual or the other seems superfluous: but which?

The *aśvamedha* is a single, unitary episode, enclosed within an existent frame including, but not limited to, the *putreṣṭi*; in practical terms, it would have been much easier to insert than the diverse account of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, his history, his qualification, and his *putreṣṭi*. Vasiṣṭha’s status as Daśaratha’s court priest surely would have been expected to guarantee him the role of performer of such an important ritual, and indeed, at 1,12.3-4 the king confers on his dear friend and supreme *guru* (3cd, *bhavān snigdhaḥ suhṛn mahyaṃ guruś ca paramo bhavān*)sole responsibility for its performance. Yet the sporadic inclusion of Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s name throughout the *aśvamedha* ritual[[183]](#footnote-183) can be explained as a rather clumsy attempt to assimilate newly inserted material, padded to the point of flamboyance, into a basic, pre-existent framework. The whole episode seems to be the work of an unskilled craftsman, over-anxious to impress his audience with his knowledge; the exact position and nature of the posts (1,13.17-18) was surely not the chief consideration of an audience still more anxious for the new narrative promised by the *Bālakāṇḍa* rather than for tedious details of procedure. Rāma’s story was not a manual of ritual. Linguistic evidence identified by JLB also confirms the particularly late date of at least one part of 1,13 (vv.10-31): a significant number of verbal parallels with *Āśvamedhikaparvan* 90.24-91.5 + 91.40, a *parvan* widely accepted to be itself one of the latest parts of the *MBh*.[[184]](#footnote-184) The use of forms such as the 3 long compounds to be found in *Bāla* 13 but nowhere else in the *VRm*, but used several times in the *MBh*, demonstrates the direction of borrowing, and therefore the chronology of insertion into this late part of a *kāṇḍa* already widely accepted to be an addition to the *VRm* core material.

Identifying the opening of *sarga* 17 (the closure of the whole sacrificial episode) has caused compilers and editors of the text, past and present, considerable difficulty.[[185]](#footnote-185) The details in verse 1 do not fit clearly with any sequence of sub-episodes that can be postulated. The reference to a Horse Sacrifice in 17.1b cannot close the immediately preceding sub-episode, Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s ritual, ending in the CE at 15.28. Even if applied to the whole episode (*aśvamedha* plus Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s ritual), it would be loose and imprecise. As it appears in the text, it can only apply to somewhere towards the end of *sarga* 13, implying that the whole of *sargas* 14—16, not just Viṣṇu’s intervention (see below)*,* are later additions. A suitable location for the rest of 17.1, ‘the gods accepted their portions and departed as they had come’ is equally awkward to define in *sarga* 13 (where there seems no obvious position), as opposed to its narrative relevance at 14.4. The whole passage has been much remodelled, and displays a poor attempt to join separate versions into one.Whether the two sacrifices should be seen as separate and composed successively — and in which order — or whether they should be considered as two elements of the same ritual event, *aśvamedha* leading to *putreṣṭi* for the purpose of cleansing Daśaratha from an unidentified sin, to enable the following son-producing *putreṣṭi* to be performed and produce the promise of offspring, may be a puzzle incapable of resolution, but based on its narrative structure, I consider the individual episodes as structurally separate, with the *putreṣṭi* the earlier of the two.

Whatever may be the answer to so many conundrums, Daśaratha had been given hope of a splendid remedy to the problem he had faced at the opening part of the *Bālakāṇḍa*.

In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, even in a period of slightly more restrictive values than the core text of *kāṇḍas* 2—6, when the obligations specifiedfor a king had not yet included the foundation of a dynasty, any theme of continuing personal fertility had become incompatible with the newly-extended narrative once Rāma had abandoned all hope of further sexual activity. Sītā had been exiled until her innocence could be re-affirmed. Once this had been decisively proclaimed, however, and Rāma thought briefly that he was on the point of regaining his wife, he had apparently lost all interest in his progeny (see above, pp.64-68).

**Structure** **and core texts of Stage 3**By their very position at the beginning and end of an already existent and well-known narrative, the tasks undertaken by the authors of the new material now collectively known as the *Uttara* and *Bāla kāṇḍas* were radically different. Despite the uncertain textual status of some of the last sixteen or so *sargas* of the CE *Yuddhakāṇḍa* it must be assumed that the core text had culminated with some account of the triumphant exiles’ joyful return to Ayodhyā and Rāma’s consecration as king, such as lies behind the equally uncertain beginning of the present *Uttarakāṇḍa*. But once the *abhiṣeka* has been concluded in due form as part of the Bridging passage, the core of *Uttara* material, detailing the further trials of the human Rāma, reverts to the narrative style of the *kṣatriya* Wonder Tale that has characterised the *VRm* core as a whole, giving grounds to assume that it was added to the Rāma story only a relatively short interval after the original end of *Yuddha,* and considerably before the latest additions to Book 6 (Sītā’s vindication by fire and the declaration of Rāma’s divinity). The *Uttara* core consists basically of a single plotline, composed of several subsidiary episodes, all leading up to a final, shattering conclusion. It is independent of the previous narrative, but inexorably conditioned by it.

The New Beginning of the early *Bālakāṇḍa* shows signs of having been composed at a period of values slightly more developed than what must now be considered the Old Material of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core, and it seems that it had become appropriate to introduce these new concepts and their practical applications.

The account of one part of Daśaratha’s birth ritual — significantly, his *aśvamedha* — is pervaded by the concept of sin. The sins, and their relevance, are left unexplained, and seem to have no place in the author’s plans for his narrative. Rāma’s *aśvamedha*, however, had been initiated specifically to absolve him from sin; it is not too daring a conjecture to consider one *aśvamedha* to have been composed in full knowledge of the other. It is my contention that the evidence laid out above indicates the priority of Rāma’s aborted sacrifice, with its basic concept of absolution from sin leading to personal fertility; this concept evidently slightly later felt to be *de rigueur* and built into Daśaratha’s *aśvamedha* despite its irrelevance.

However, this order of composition must be seen as confined to the two *aśvamedhas* only, not necessarily to Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s *putreṣṭi* as well; certainly not to the whole of each birth or son-producing episode, and even more emphatically, not to the whole of each *kāṇḍa’s* core. To apply it even more widely to the whole of each Third stage *kāṇḍa* can be considered little less than wrong-headed. What it does conclusively confirm is that the Old Material of the core text of *kāṇḍas* 2—6 has been succeeded in piecemeal fashion by new, relatively short passages, composed at varying dates and in ever-developing social and religious contexts, and with different purposes; each passage represents a New Beginning, but soon becomes Old Material. The concept of the *kāṇḍa* as a unit had yet to emerge.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Some time, arguably, after the *Uttarakāṇḍa* had given the Old Material of the Rāma story as a whole a continuation with its spectacular New Ending (one that would retain that role for a couple of centuries or more), audiences were presented with a New Beginning to the whole narrative; this beginning may confidently be assigned to the *Bālakāṇḍa’s* fifth *sarga*, which can be reconciled with the scenario posited by the four prefatory *sargas* only with difficulty. At this point, there is a straightforward narrative spoken by a single voice: the ‘I’ inherent in the *vartayiṣyāmi* of 1,5.4a, after which verse it becomes a third-person narrative.

The free hand accorded to the *Uttara* poets to devise their own new plotline is not available to the *Bāla* composers, who can only elaborate on what they and their audiences have already inferred from the existing text of the core *kāṇḍas* 2—6. Its core is structured around a series of individual episodes through which the heroes move consecutively in a progression that is straightforward, taut and purposeful, but essentially circular, leading only to the return to Ayodhyā to commence the familiar narrative. In both cases, unlike the 2—6 core, this progression will later become obscured by the high proportion of inserted In-tales.

Unlike the creators of the Stage 1 core, ever leading their first audiences astray with surprises, the task of the *Bālakāṇḍa* poets was to arouse and anticipate the well-founded expectations of their audiences, not to confound them. Audiences could infer a certain amount of the early story from the existing core text: that King Daśaratha had four splendid sons borne to him by three wives, with their names and their groupings (Rāma + Lakṣmaṇa; Bharata + Śatrughna), and that Rāma was married to Sītā, daughter of King Janaka of Videha. These basic details could not be revised; they could only be elaborated. Accounts of those two rites of passage could be considered almost obligatory: a miraculous birth-story and a *svayaṃvara* with no doubt as to the outcome were called for, and the new composers took advantage of the opportunity to embroider the bare assumptions they had inferred with imaginative and memorable accounts of Daśaratha’s sacrifice for a son, and Janaka’s search for a son-in-law. Whenbetween these two foundational elements there was interposed a newly created double youthful validating episode, exciting and vivid, recounting Rāma’s killing of Tāṭakā, followed by his defence of Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice, it produced a regrettable effect on the already existent core narrative. By appropriating the early tension created by previous authors in the *Ayodhyā* and *Araṇya kāṇḍas* and transferring it to this new validation episode, it significantly reduced the suspense and growth of Rāma’s character that had already been so carefully prepared.[[187]](#footnote-187) In terms of structure, the *Bālakāṇḍa* is, theoretically, unnecessary; Rāma has proved himself already in *VRm* 2—6.

In effect, the *Bālakāṇḍa* opens at *VRm* 1,5 with an encomium of Daśaratha and his rule of Ayodhyā, clearly detached from the preceding 4-*sarga* Preface.[[188]](#footnote-188) This *sarga* was now the opening not only of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, but of the whole narrative as by that time conceived. As experienced by the audience, it set the scene, not only for whatever new material was added to form the eventual *Bālakāṇḍa*, but to all the Old Material of the existing core text itself. The whole *VRm* had a New Beginning.

By this very position, therefore, the opening passage must have had an immediate effect on the audience’s understanding of the succeeding narrative, unlike the core narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, which, at the end of the established text, could not disturb the impressions that had been built up throughout *kāṇḍas* 1 to 6. It is clear that *sarga* CE 1,5 maintained its privileged position until it was succeeded by a further New Beginning, the Preface, 1,1—4 (part of which does include a veiled reference to some events of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*). The temptation on presenters to add their own marks on the narrative had always been, and still remains, irresistible. It is the consequences on our understanding of the work as a whole that is important.

Whether a few of its verses might have constituted the original opening to the *VRm* (*i.e.* to Stage 1 of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*) has already been covered in chapter 2 (see pp.22-23); to those arguments we may now add that the length and fulsome nature of the description of Daśaratha and his rule of Ayodhyā (1,5-7) accords ill with the tenor of the taut structure of the vivid narrative at its earliest stage.

Daśaratha is an Ideal King. He embodies all the virtues, as do all his people. His statecraft, conducted in the public interest by competent personnel corresponds to what is demanded of Bharata by Rāma (2,94)[[189]](#footnote-189) and of Rāvaṇa by Śūrpaṇakhā (3,31); its result is a society comparable to the Golden Age of *rāmarājya* repeatedly attributed to his son,[[190]](#footnote-190) but lacking the problems of implementation encountered by Rāma in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

Agnostics are absent (1,6.8 and 14), and the *varṇa* system has been developed and works well (1,6.16-17). It is noteworthy that *śūdras* all know their duties and serve the three superior classes, perhaps indicating that the story of the sinful Śambūka is already known. But just what lies behind the insistence at 1,6.13 that *brāhmans* are not rapacious? Had the comic impecunious *brāhman* memorably caricatured as Trijaṭa Gārgya at 2,29.22-27 already become a commonplace figure of fun?

Plentiful sacrifices are performed (1,6.2b+12ab), just as was expected of Rāma’s reign when he is consecrated king immediately after his victorious return to Ayodhyā (6,116.80-90). Such sacrifices produce morality, happiness, and control over natural disasters, crops and climate. The people are contented and have long lives (1,6.16d) just as, under Rāma’s rule, no untimely deaths are supposed to take place (6,116.85 *cf.* 7,40.14).

The importance of practical governance is also brought out. Daśaratha’s city is well-planned, well-constructed and well-fortified; the king’s expansion of his realm has supplied him with many neighbouring tributary kings to finance a profitable merchant-based economy (1,5), overseen by his effective direction.

Can this Daśaratha, this prudent, efficient, practical monarch, be the rash, uxorious, weak dupe of *kāṇḍa* 2 the audience have long known? His portrayal there had been unflattering, and seems unworthy of the wondrous sons he was about to engender. It was now far too late to change the basis of the whole story, but perhaps the image might be adjusted, or even evaded, in this New Beginning. Characterising as ‘far-seeing’ and ‘with his senses under control’ (1,6.1c+3b) the man whose behaviour has directed the whole well-known plot from its inception to its first conclusion is worthy of a modern politician’s spin-doctor[[191]](#footnote-191) — but spin-doctors typically adapt their presentation to the needs of the moment only. The character of Daśaratha is tested twice more in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, in his reaction to Viśvāmitra’s demand for Rāma’s aid (1,17.23—21.3) and in his reaction to the appearance of Rāma Jāmadagnya (1,74.5-10 and 76.2-5). Both show the king in the traditional poor light, only slightly ameliorated by his protective attitude to the youthful Rāma. The first episode starts as a replica of the indulgent king’s betrayal by Kaikeyī. In the second case the timorous king’s pleas are ignored both by the assailant and by Rāma. The image created in the Old Material cannot be effaced.

What was needed to open the New Beginning was an impressive first episode to capture and hold the audience’s attention: by the time that the *Bālakāṇḍa* was composed, the Old Material had made the new *kāṇḍa’s* contents, strictly speaking, redundant. They had long ago formed their opinion of the character of King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā; but they also knew that he had four splendid sons,[[192]](#footnote-192) the most splendid being Rāma, and they have now been treated to the newly-composed details of the boys’ conception. As befits the hero and heroine of a Wonder Tale, Rāma and Sītā have been presented throughout the *VRm* as equally matched in status, their position now to be confirmed in the *Bālakāṇḍa* by both being produced ritually by paranormal birth stories: Daśaratha’s wives have eaten fertilising *pāyasa* emanating from a birth ritual, and Janaka will report finding Sītā (*ayonijā*) as a result of his ritual ploughing.[[193]](#footnote-193) At 1,17.10 we learn of the success of Daśaratha’s birth sacrifices; four great, worthy, and virtuous sons [are] born to the king, one after the other ... and the narrative of their upbringing continues.

**Validating the young hero: Viśvāmitra**Once Daśaratha’s four sons had been born, they had been educated as was thought by their father to befit their future roles. Much can be inferred of the privileged lives of Daśaratha’s young sons*.* No doubt, until the age of almost sixteen, they were surrounded by all the luxury and indulgence their fond, proud father could provide. As early in the well-known tale as 2,82.1-15 Bharata, viewing with Guha the place where Rāma and Sītā had slept on the ground in the forest, had contrasted what the three exiles now endured with their previous opulent lifestyle; in his distress at the sight, he laments ‘... how can the Rāghava make his bed on the ground?’ (v.17) The agony of that situation is lessened, if not obliterated, when the *Bāla* authors introduce the episode where Viśvāmitra takes the young Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa away with him to live the harsh life of a forest-dweller for what may be several months, giving the two adolescents some training in hardship; the tender feelings of the audience can be soothed — at the price of ruining the impact of the original telling.

Daśaratha’s ideas of their future roles, however, conflict markedly with those of the overall composers of the *VRm*. A new, more appropriate, tutor must be found for them. When this Ideal King turns his thoughts to his next major duty, that of arranging and overseeing suitable marriages for his sons (1,17.21-23), his idyllic complacency is abruptly shattered by the arrival of Viśvāmitra (1,17.23). Daśaratha welcomes him effusively, praising his progression from an initial status of ‘royal-seer’ (*rājarṣi*) to that of ‘*brāhman*-seer’ (*brahmarṣi*), a status achieved by the *tapas* of the *kṣatriya* warrior-king. No further details explaining this change of *varṇa* are given at this point in the narrative (1,17.35). Daśaratha evidently regards the achievement as highly meritorious, if not unique or impossible, and meeting its performer as conferring great benefit on himself. At this time, that much of Viśvāmitra’s previous career was clearly common knowledge, knowledge shared by author and audience alike, but perhaps little more. Adheesh Sathaye points to a number of Vedic and post-Vedic texts that demonstrate “plenty of ambivalence about Viśvāmitra’s social status” before a “change of opinion about Viśvāmitra’s caste [that] appears to be linked to the development of *varṇa* as a social ideology.”[[194]](#footnote-194) The portrayal of the Śabarī who, despite being a woman and a tribal, is praised by Rāma for her asceticism, and achieves entry to heaven by immolating herself (*VRm* 3,70) demonstrates a similar flexibility, before the harsher, more rigid system already seen operating in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* Śambūka episode had set in (see pp.54-55).

As far as the *VRm* core is concerned, the focus throughout has been on Rāma; even in episodes where he is not active and the central role is played by other characters (Hanumān, for instance, and Sītā occasionally), Rāma and his interests and personality dominate the narrative. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* the situation is rather different. Rāma is still the hero (despite accompanying Rāma in all his adventures, here and later, poor Lakṣmaṇa is scarcely mentioned). But the 15-year old Rāma’s personality is not yet fully formed when he first becomes active in the plot. He seems to be absent from the discussion between his father Daśaratha, his tutor Vasiṣṭha and the visiting sage Viśvāmitra. The purpose of the whole Book 1 narrative core is to demonstrate the formation and growth of the protected adolescent into independent manhood, a state that will enable him to perform the role already allotted to him in the five *kāṇḍas* to follow. And while he is the focus of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, it is Viśvāmitra, his new tutor, who dominates and directs the whole action.

Viśvāmitra’s demand for Rāma to guard a sacrifice he is trying to perform that is being jeopardised by the attacks of two *rākṣasas* shatters the unwary king’s complacency. True to type, the demand provokes a horrified reaction, until this time Vasiṣṭha persuades him to reconsider his inital refusal,[[195]](#footnote-195) reminding him of his obligation to keep his word and grant Viśvāmitra’s request, coupled with the assurance that Viśvāmitra will supply Rāma with powerful weapons;[[196]](#footnote-196) Vasiṣṭha’s brief intervention effectively prepares the way for the main theme of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, that of upholding Daśaratha’s integrity. The *purohita’s* responsibility for the next stage of Rāma’s education is now entrusted to, and virtually usurped by, Viśvāmitra, who acts *in loco parentis* throughout the next episode (1,25.2-5), and then takes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Mithilā to witness Janaka’s bow sacrifice and meaningfully introduces them to their future father-in-law. Daśaratha is presented with a *fait accompli* by the messengers sent by Janaka from Mithilā to Ayodhyā (1,67), contrasting this seemingly*fainéant* king, perhaps unfairly, with the proactive Janaka, who has made great efforts and rigorously sought out a supremely worthy son-in-law (1,65.14-25). The cosy domestic setting of the early part of the *Bālakāṇḍa* has been abruptly shattered by Viśvāmitra’s disruptive demand.

Education for this new role demands a new, unconventional tutor for the two boys. Viśvāmitra is a strange character, but rather less incongruous in the *Bāla* core than might perhaps be supposed. From his dramatic irruption until his retirement to the northern mountains at 1,73.1 — a mere four *sargas* short of the ending of the *kāṇḍa* as it is now presented in the CE — he directs and dominates the narrative; the first *kāṇḍa* as a whole could well be called ‘the Viśvāmitra *kāṇḍa*’. Yet this towering figure plays no active role in the whole of the rest of the plot of the *VRm*. In stages 1 and 2, and in the *Uttarakāṇḍa,* his only uncontested appearances[[197]](#footnote-197) had been an allusion to an incident in Śatānanda’s back-story, irrelevant to the *VRm* narrative, and the occurrence of his name in two lists of sages, undistinguished from his many companions.[[198]](#footnote-198) What is more, it seems almost as though different *Bālakāṇḍa* poets portray two different sages. One interacts with Daśaratha, then with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and finally with Janaka; he then disappears from the scene, his job done, before the post-wedding party sets out to return to Ayodhyā; the ‘other Viśvāmitra’ is found in the long tale of his history and his efforts to abandon his *kṣatriya* status to become a *brāhman,* narrated by Janaka’s priest Śatānanda.

If we try to distinguish between these two (metaphorically speaking) distinct — and distinctive — figures, we find that the one first experienced by the earliest audience of the *Bāla* narrative is portrayed as irascible, certainly, as many sages are; but Viśvāmitra is not destructively violent. In this episode there is no emphasis on any danger to the youngsters. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa must survive largely unscathed to perform their pre-determined roles; the creators of the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative have no licence to distort or ruin the long-familiar plot. Nor is there any danger to Ayodhyā as a whole, should the city be threatened by a curse from this sage. The situation is the exact opposite from the threat to be faced by Lakṣmaṇa in the terminal episode of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, whose author is hampered by no pre-existent narrative; the threats of competing destructive curses from Durvāsas or Kāla are all too real, and so appalling that Lakṣmaṇa must avert them by redirecting them on to himself (7,93.12-15; 95.6-7). Viśvāmitra, however, threatens no curse on the obstructive king or his country; he merely attempts to frighten him into changing his mind by angrily walking out of the discussion. This standard negotiation ploy is successful, for he has had the perception to direct his anger to where it most hurts, towards Daśaratha’s character for integrity, should the king not fulfil his hasty and ill-considered promise (1,17.34-38; 20.1-3+ 6-8). It is the same danger that the audience already knows besets Daśaratha at the beginning of the *Ayodhākāṇḍa*; and they are well aware that averting that danger is going to cause Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Sītā much suffering throughout all the rest of the narrative.

Vasiṣṭha’s intervention persuades the king that he can safely allow Rāma to leave with his new tutor, and Viśvāmitra leads the two boys away from the safety of Ayodhyā and their sheltered palace life to complete their education, as the continuators return the audience into the fantasised narrative scene portrayed in *kāṇḍas* 3—6. The youths are on the brink of manhood, but still evidently considered too young to be involved in their elders’ decision-making.

Viśvāmitra’s perceptive sensitivity is now revealed also to have a positive side to it. Once they are a safe distance from home, and their resolve has not failed them, he judges them worthy of a little help, and confers on Rāma a pair of spells (referred to in 1,21.10-18 as both *mantras* or *vidyās*) to protect him from all possible ills, including (significantly) attack from *rākṣasas*, and (an even more practical consideration, given that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are fifteen-year old boys) hunger and thirst (1,21.9-18). The author of this *sarga* seems more concerned to fulfil Vasiṣṭha’s assurance to Daśaratha in the previous *sarga* than to consider its effect on the audience’s perception of the human Rāma’s astonishing innate prowess as already established in their minds from the text of the surprise-ridden books 2—6. Was Rāma’s prowess then really not as great as they had been led to believe? The weapons, formerly of divine ownership, bestowed on him by Agastya (3,11.29-34), had proved perfectly adequate for him to slaughter the Daṇḍaka *rākṣasas* led by Khara single-handed, and to annihilate Rāvaṇa and most of his troops on Laṅkā (if in fact these weapons had actually been used). Viśvāmitra’s supplementary weapons represent unnecessary elaboration, ostentatious display, and we hear no more about them in the *VRm*.[[199]](#footnote-199)

After the party’s first night sleeping rough in the forest without incident, the sensitive new tutor, appreciating that his charge may well be missing his home, and particularly his mother Kausalyā, praises and encourages him as he wakes him to his new duties with a deserved “Well done!” (1,22.2). This kindly side to the otherwise stern sage’s nature should not surprise us, for it had long been recognised in his championship of Śunaḥśepa, abandoned by his birth family, but adopted by Viśvāmitra.[[200]](#footnote-200) It begins to seem that he is a well-qualified, considerate and appropriate choice to supervise the vulnerable young Rāma as tutor, or facilitator, for the manifold royal duties that will face him in later life. At least some of these duties are well-known from the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddhakāṇḍas*; whether the severe trials of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are yet in the consciousness either of poets or of audiences is less easy to determine.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have been sent off into the forest with their parents’ reluctant blessing; in terms of construction, the episode is a re-run of the already familiar main core text, dressed up as preparation for it. Of course, this time Rāma’s wife is absent; acquiring Sītā will come later in an episode apparently contrived by Viśvāmitra as the culmination of their education. He leaves Mithilā and the *VRm* narrative immediately it has been completed, when he has returned his charges to the care of their father. During the long journey with Viśvāmitra, Janaka’s new son-in-law-to-be and his ever-faithful companion will have learned to endure the hardships and dangers of forest life that they will have to face together in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*. They will have had their education completed with a number of history lectures and creation myths about their legendary forbears, particularly Sagara and his descendants. Their proficiency with weapons will have been been tested, no longer just against animals, but (significantly) against new, non-human, enemies; Subāhu and a band of *rākṣasas* will all have been killed when trying to attack Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice, and Mārīca, the leader, will have been repulsed.

Mārīca’s role as the decoy golden deer the audience know of old, but a major uncertainty revolves around his appearance in the *Bālakāṇḍa* as one of the aggressors. A passage at 3,36.1-18 in which Rāvaṇa enlists his timid ally and Mārīca uses this previous experience against Rāma and Viśvāmitra (similar to that at 1,17.23—20.19 followed by 1,29), to warn Rāvaṇa of the likely consequences of his foolhardy plan to abduct Sītā, has been much discussed in the hope of determining priority of composition.[[201]](#footnote-201)

For Mārīca to survive this first encounter is, of course, essential; for him to carry out his main function in the plot he must remain alive. But Mārīca must be the only character in the whole Rāma story who *does* survive a contest with Rāma; being unable to kill his assailant in his first ever battle diminishes the young boy’s spectacular achievement, the purpose of the *Bālakāṇḍa* reconstruction; in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* passage the focus had been entirely on the frightened Mārīca. So why should a *Bālakāṇḍa* author contrive to introduce Mārīca of all *rākṣasas* at this point *ex nihilo*? It would have been so much simpler (but excite the audience so much less) if he had given this attacker another name. Narrative logic suggests that he was constrained by existing tradition, that is to say, that the episode was based on an account already-existent and well-known. The conclusion is inescapable that the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* episode was indeed already part of the received narrative, and must be the source of the *Bāla* episode, not a summary of it; 1,29.4-20 is an elaborated form of 3,36.1-18, with Rāma now relying on the divine missiles bestowed on him by Viśvāmitra after he had proved his worth by killing Tāṭakā*.* We need not be unduly worried by the inconsistency — glaring though it apparently is — that the *Araṇyakāṇḍa’s* Mārīca has no way of knowing what passed between Viśvāmitra and Daśaratha, even to purporting to quote their words verbatim (3,36.3-9 are elaborated in extent but not in purpose at1,17.23—20.4); the original author must be allowed to use his imagination to set an unknown scene. I now consider that there is a strong case for declaring Mārīca’s recollections at 3,36—37 to predate and inspire the *Bālakāṇḍa* passage.

**Validating the young hero: education**In common with the creators of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core, and with very few exceptions, the creators of the preparatory *Bālakāṇḍa* still retain in principle the *kṣatriya* ethos and structure used by their predecessors in *kāṇḍas* 2—6. They are chiefly concerned to present the preparations for manhood of the four paragons: almost exclusively of Rāma, with Lakṣmaṇa playing a supporting role, and the other pair virtually ignored. No attention is paid to their infancy or any childish exploits,[[202]](#footnote-202) and attention is switched abruptly to the adolescent validation episodes.

One significant lesson that the young princes learn is that in warfare they must not be too scrupulous, but must put aside their inbuilt compunction, even to killing the menacing Tāṭakā, a female (1,23.23—25.17).[[203]](#footnote-203) Viśvāmitra, revered for his independence of mind, well-known for being willing to defy the conventions, is the ideal tutor to guide his young students through the complexities of the adulthood that they are just entering. He teaches them that it is no crime, but a duty, to use their own judgement to overturn inherited ethical standards in favour of the overall greater good; it can be seen as a covert excuse for the adult warrior Rāma’s pragmatic but now-contentious behaviour in killing Vālin, without justification, according to later standards (4,16.25—18.57). This new tutor, and the long-established audience, know that necessity must occasionally overpower chivalry. Rāma’s forest experience, killing Tāṭakā, repelling the *rākṣasas*, receiving from Viśvāmitra the gift of magic weapons and the *mantras* to control them, culminating in breaking Śiva’s bow, will all equip him to retort to the fearsome Jāmadagnya’s challenge with the age-old self-confidence of the adolescent; his boast of his own unexpected strength is tantamount to “Don’t treat me like a child!” (1,75.3). At this point Viśvāmitra will have left him, the doting father’s natural protective instincts will be swept aside, and Rāma can no longer be coddled. The presence of the nervous Daśaratha can be, and is, ignored by aggressor and defender alike (1,73.10+74.5-10). The father is now in his son’s care. Viśvāmitra has validated the young hero, and Rāma will give due respect to his now-absent tutor (1,75.6).

**Validating the young hero: he gains his bride**First, though, the young hero must gain his bride. An early heroic romance of the style established in the core narrative of *kāṇḍas* 2—6 can be expected to include some dramatic episode introducing the hero’s startling prowess (see ch.2 pp.24-25). True to type, the traditional Wonder Tale being developed by the later authors to elaborate the otherwise redundant *Bālakāṇḍa*, introduces not one ‘youthful validation episode’ but two major such episodes: Rāma’s protection of Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice against Tāṭakā, Mārīca and Subāhu, followed by his spectacular winning of his bride. Proving himself stronger than all previous contestants, he will exceed Janaka’s requirement to string the bow by ostentatiously breaking it.[[204]](#footnote-204) As if these three episodes, Rāma’s birth, his validation as a warrior, and his feat at the *svayaṃvara* were insufficient proof of the future hero’s physical and spiritual capabilities, the account of his youthful exploits in the *Bālakāṇḍa* is supplemented by two minor validation episodes: his redemption of Ahalyā, and his defeat of Rāma Jāmadagnya both provide further evidence of his supreme status.

In defeating the *rākṣasa* attack, the two young Rāghavas have enabled Viśvāmitra to complete his sacrifice unobstructed, and become a Perfected Being; his purpose achieved, he can leave the scene, and announces his intention to retire to the Himālaya. But it soon becomes apparent that he has one more project to see completed first, as he leads the boys and a host of his fellow-sages northwards towards Mithilā to attend a bow-sacrifice being celebrated by Janaka (1,30.7-12). The distance is long, and it is realistic to assume that such a journey would have been enlivened by some tale-telling. The origin myth of the Rāghavas’ ancestors Sagara and four generations of his descendants fits the purpose admirably: their efforts to bring down the Gaṅgā to earth to create the oceans and their tributaries, including the Gaṅgā itself, in the spaces at each edge of India dug out by Sagara’s 60,000 sons, is educational, and appropriate to the location of its narration on the shore of the river.

Sagara’s 60,000 sons are killed before they can engender any sons; his one surviving son, Asamañja (conceived explicitly *putraṃ vaṃśakaraṃ* ‘to carry on the dynasty,’ 1,37.13c) is wicked and banished by his father, but replaced by his virtuous son Aṃśumant, whose grandson, Bhagīratha, succeeds in completing the *aśvamedha* that had been halted by Indra’s mischief in stealing Sagara’s horse (1,38.7-10). By inducing Śiva to bring down the Gaṅgā to earth, he is able to perform the funeral rites for his ancestors. No mention is made here of exactly how Brahmā fulfils his pledge that the hitherto childless Bhagīratha will continue the Ikṣvāku line (1,41.19-21)*,* despite later declaring that the Gaṅgā shall be known as his eldest daughter (1,43.6); in the genealogies Kakutstha succeeds Bhagīratha without further comment (1,69.26: *cf.* 2,102.22).

The long journey to Mithilā has filled 35 *sargas* in the CE as now constituted before we briefly begin to suspect that this journey has a purpose other than primarily religious. How many of these intervening *sargas* can be counted as part of the *Bālakāṇḍa* structure as originally conceived is debatable; the exact point at which the tale of Sagara’s dynastic struggles was included in the narrative as a whole is not clear. The twin themes of dynasty and of *aśvamedhas* portrayed there both hint at the chief concerns of Stage 3. Both are imperilled but rescued; but did they suggest the *Bāla* narrative, or copy it?[[205]](#footnote-205) The inclusion of Indra as a mischievous trouble-maker starting off the whole problem by abducting the *aśvamedha* horse, added to Śiva’s role as saviour of the situation, suggest a date that is not particularly early, but nevertheless it is Brahmā who retains direction of the tale. Given the fluidity of the general ethos of Stage 3, and the process of piecemeal addition of plot elements to the beginning of the whole Rāma story at this point, its comparatively early insertion cannot be ruled out. What is more, it is ten *sargas* long (1,34—43), and gives the audience the impression of time passing, keeping them on tenterhooks about the intention of the wily Viśvāmitra in bringing the boys so far, rather than taking them home immediately to their worried parents after they had completed the task for which he had requisitioned them. At 1,18.17 he had merely asked for their aid for the ten nights of his own sacrifice. In more practical terms, the whole structure of the new narrative would be very spare and in need of further adjustment if it jumped the audience straight from Viśvāmitra’s hermitage to Janaka’s sacrificial site. Space fillers sometimes have their purpose, even in a piecemeal, if well-structured, narrative; or perhaps that aphorism should read ‘*especially* in a piecemeal, well-constructed, narrative’.

The overall narrative is resumed for a single *sarga* 1,49, when the party arrives at Mithilā and are introduced to an admiring Janaka: Daśaratha’s two sons have come to test the great bow. It is then not until 1,65 in the CE[[206]](#footnote-206) that the audience begins to suspect Viśvāmitra’s true purpose in bringing the boys to the bow-sacrifice, when he prompts the king to explain how the illustrious bow came into his possession, and the purpose to which it is now being put. Janaka replies that the first owner of the bow had been Śiva, who had given it ‘as a trust, or pledge’ (v.13), but the purpose and consequences of this ‘trust’ or ‘pledge’ are addressed nowhere in the *VRm* CE.[[207]](#footnote-207) A slightly different suggestion for the origin of the bow (as the one with which Śiva had destroyed the Three Cities) will be mentioned by Rāma Jāmadagnya (1,74.12; see p.96). A different owner and depositor of the bow, Varuṇa, is identified at 2,110.38:[[208]](#footnote-208) an attempt to resolve that anomaly is made in a few NE mss (2,2392\*) substituted for v.38, where Varuṇa is replaced by Śiva.

The two young boys (and the audience) learn what ‘testing the bow’ actually means: it is not the bow that is being tested, it is Janaka’s prospective sons-in-law. Only now do we learn for the first time of Sītā’s existence, of her supernatural birth, *ayonijā* (1,65.15cd + 27c), and, crucially, of the bride-price demanded by Janaka: ‘my daughter Sītā was not born from a womb, so I have displayed her as the prize of supreme strength’, defined simply as ability to lift Śiva’s bow (vv.15-19).[[209]](#footnote-209) None of the many suitors has yet passed this test, so Janaka offers Rāma the chance of becoming his son-in-law if he can lift the bow (v.27). Only now do we reach the high point of the *Bālakāṇḍa* as now constituted.

More significantly, not until the next *sarga* do we get any mention of stringing the bow. In response to Viśvāmitra’ request to show the bow to Rāma, Janaka’s servants drag it out on its iron trolley and the king says to Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa:

‘This best of bows, *brāhman*, <was> honoured by <past> Janakas and impossible then for kings of great prowess to string. Neither all the hosts of gods nor *asuras, rākṣasas,* leading *gandharvas* and *yakṣas* along with *kinnaras* and great *nāgas* <were able> to string this bow, to lift it, to fit an arrow, to brandish it or even <just> to raise it, let alone humans’.[[210]](#footnote-210)

Needless to say, the confident young Rāma finds this such an easy task that he ostentatiously exceeds requirements and breaks the bow itself with a loud noise:

While many thousands watched, the righteous joy of the Raghus lifted that bow as if it were play and, after lifting it, he fitted the string, and the heroic, glorious best of men broke the bow in the middle. Its sound was great, like the sound of thunder, and <there

was> a very great shaking of the earth like that of a mountain splitting.[[211]](#footnote-211)

The youthful bravado displayed in the episode will be replicated in his retort to Jāmadagnya at 1,75.3.

Daśaratha, of course, has no idea of what is going on, or that his vague thoughts about the marriage of his four sons (1,17.21-22) are about to be realised in such spectacular fashion, for the eldest at least. Janaka immediately sends messengers to inform him that the betrothal has taken place, and to summon him to Mithilā (1,66.24-26), and the delighted father hurries there with a great train of followers. The proper formalities are now observed, allowing the ceremony to take place.

No-one seems concerned about any retribution from the irascible Śiva for the destruction of his bow; Janaka, its guardian and trustee, can think only of the renown of the House of the Janakas (*janakānāṃ kule kīrtim,* 1,66.22a) that will ensue from Sītā’s marriage to Rāma. Much of the remaining *Bālakāṇḍa* CE narrative is riddled with anomalies of this kind, often introduced by subsequent narrators eager to fit the existing text to the demands of later developments.

The *Bālakāṇḍa* audience has been alerted to the concept of dynasty, hitherto absent from the narrative core of *kāṇḍas* 2—7, by Daśaratha’s *aśvamedha*, and reinforced by the creation myth of Sagara and his descendants, introduced as part of Viśvāmitra’s education of the two young princes immediately before the climax of the whole *Bālakāṇḍa*, the episode expected to enable Daśaratha’s hopes of continuing his dynasty to be realised: the hero contest, misnamed in Indian tradition the *svayaṃvara*. This, the most hackneyed, romanticised and overworked of all methods of providing a hero with a wife, is found in traditional tales known to most nations,[[212]](#footnote-212) including being widely used throughout the Indian epic tradition. Most lovers of the subsequent tradition find it hard to imagine a Rāma narrative from which it is completely absent; but the Rāma story had been created, and achieved ever-increasing popularity and influence for at least 500 years without it — possibly more.[[213]](#footnote-213) The roughly contemporary Jain Vimalasūri, whose *Paümacariya* transcreated the *brāhmaṇic* tale into one he considered more realistic, discarded the bow test episode as used in the *VRm*, replacing it with a promise to bestow Sītā on Rāma as a reward for his military help; nevertheless even he seized the opportunity to include a differently-situated bow test, with its result determined when Rāma, unnecessarily, wins a newly-devised bow-test in standard fashion (Vimalasūri, *Paümacariya*: 27—28).[[214]](#footnote-214) Evidently the bow motif, unhampered by any *brāhmaṇic* connotations, was now too popular to be lost.

**Subsidiary validating episode: Ahalyā, Indra and Rāma**Two further validating episodes are accomplished with rather less *éclat*. The first narrates Rāma’s release of Ahalyā from Gautama’s curse (a full narrative at 1,47.11—48.22, with a brief reference back at 1,50.1-11); the second concerns the submission of Rāma Jāmadagnya to the new champion (1,73.8—76.5). By this point the narrative can almost seem to be overloaded with youthful validating episodes, as if the audience had never learned from his exploits in the already existent *kāṇḍas* 2—6 that Rāma was of exceptional strength and status. The carefully-contrived structure of suspense created by the earlier narrators is thereby ruined. Another telling of Ahalyā’s rape appears in the latest section of the CE text (7,30.15-41) part of Agastya’s narration of Rāvaṇa’s origin and youthful exploits, studied in detail in chapter 6, pp.113-16. The three versions provide a tantalising series of contrasts: contrasts of focus, purpose, detail, context, personnel and narrative style. The episodes in the two *kāṇḍas*, while dealing with a similar narrative involving some of the same characters, are so dissimilarin narrative level in their individual reworkings of what may well already have been a familiar tale,[[215]](#footnote-215) that it seems fruitful to explore here the reasons for and effects of the differences. The two workings out of the same narrative frame in two widely contrasting genres make it likely that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* version was incorporated into the tradition at a later date, perhaps several centuries later, than the *kṣatriya*-based heroic tale of the *Bālakāṇḍa*; indeed, that the decay of respect that it typifies represents the latest stage of development even of Agastya’s narrative of the *rākṣasas*. The most that can be affirmed with any conviction is that the differences noted between the two styles illustrate the ease with which an age of transition can accommodate and tolerate a varied range of material side-by-side. What point were the poets making when they chose this particular tale to adapt into *exempla* and insert into their stories of Rāma and Rāvaṇa?

There is a fundamental difference between the Indra/Ahalyā encounter and similar narratives in which a god or superior person impersonates an absent husband in order to engender a hero: Zeus impregnates Alkmene, who gives birth to Herakles in Greek legends, and in early mediaeval romances King Arthur is born by means of a similar deception.[[216]](#footnote-216) The impersonation of the husband preserves the mother’s virtue, so that her son shall not be sullied by being conceived by a whore. Such a motif is not in question in the *VRm Bālakāṇḍa*: Ahalyā’s seduction by Indra is not the preliminary to the birth story of any hero (long before the rape by Indra occurred, she had borne several legitimate sons, including the devoted eldest, Śatānanda (now prominent as Janaka’s family priest, but otherwise unknown).[[217]](#footnote-217)

Throughout the Rāma tradition, whether Rāma is still regarded as a human hero, or as a birth of Viṣṇu, he is never a demi-god. The whole premise of the basic *VRm* is that he is, and must be, the hero with special powers of a traditional ‘Wonder Tale’, otherwise he will be unable to overcome his enemy, Rāvaṇa. At two points throughout the core books he encounters sinners who have been cursed to remain monsters until they have been killed by Rāma. Neither Virādha (3,3.16-21) nor Kabandha (3,67.3-6, 15-16) is forgiven or redeemed by Rāma. He learns the details of their history only after he has defeated them, thus fulfilling the terms of the curses, not by any salvific powers but by sheer strength and prowess. He is Rāma the hero, not yet Viṣṇu the redeemer. A similar benefit-conferring episode is based on fulfilling a prediction rather than on cancelling a curse. Saṃpāti was not at all sinful himself:[[218]](#footnote-218) quite the reverse, for it was in protecting his younger brother Jaṭāyus that he had been disabled. He is told by the sage Niśākara that his wings will regrow if he helps the *vānaras* searching for Sītā; this duly happens, with the involvement of Rāma’s grace being only implied (4,59.8—61.15). Not merely is there no mention of Viṣṇu, but the list of beneficiaries of Saṃpāti’s aid makes it clear that the narrative context — unlike its linguistic expression[[219]](#footnote-219) — has not yet fully developed beyond the heroic, even though Rāma’s ultimate success will ‘benefit the worlds’, suggesting the incipient development of the narrative from heroic romance to epic:

A king named Daśaratha, the delight of the Ikṣvākus, will appear, with a glorious son named Rāma. ... . ... by staying here you will do a service of benefit to the worlds. It is your duty to do that [helping the *vānaras*] for those two princes, for *brāhmans*, gods and sages, and for Vāsava.[[220]](#footnote-220) (4,61.4+13cd-14)

The same is true in the *Bālakāṇḍa’s* Ahalyā and Indra episode. Precisely when it was incorporated into the existing *VRm* narrative cannot be determined; its apparent omission from Vālmīki’s Summary (1,3.4) is meaningful but not conclusive evidence that it was inserted at a date later than the insertion of Vālmīki as a character in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core, but of nothing more.[[221]](#footnote-221) There is no suggestion that Rāma is Viṣṇu in the text of this *kṣatriya*-based episode. He is Rāma the hero-prince, the focus of a series of episodes steadily building up, through miraculous birth and education, to the climax of his validation tests: recognition at Mithilā and marriage. The progression is typical of a heroic Wonder Tale. In this episode he fulfils the terms of Gautama’s curse simply by arriving at the apparently deserted hermitage; this enables Ahalyā to return to her proper wifely duties of extending hospitality to guests. The emphasis is not on Rāma himself,[[222]](#footnote-222) but on her, as she fulfils the terms of Gautama’s curse:

You evil woman, you will be able to regain your own form, joyfully and free from greed and delusion in my presence, by extending hospitality to him.   
 (1,47.31; *cf*. 48.18-20; 50.5)

Her sin now expiated, she can be happily reunited with her husband, who has returned from the site of his Himalayan austerities (1,47.32; 48.21). When, immediately afterwards, Rāma is introduced at Janaka’s court, Śatānanda can scarcely contain his anxiety to know if his mother has fulfilled the conditions of Gautama’s punishment; only when reassured by Viśvāmitra that all is now well at home does the dutiful son turn to welcoming his guests Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (1,50.1-13).

The other half of the *Bālakāṇḍa* episode has shifted the focus to Indra, who naturally finds no place in Śatānanda’s catechising. The offender had been castrated by Gautama’s curse (the punishment then prescribed as appropriate for his offence);[[223]](#footnote-223) the visible fashion in which it is portrayed in Viśvāmitra’s narrative probably did not originally evoke the uncomfortable ridicule that it does in our more squeamish present-day society. Gautama himself can hardly be expected to perform the operation with a knife, but uses a sage’s power of causing an effect by willing it. Nonetheless, we can sense that Indra’s declared purpose in raping Ahalyā is a specious excuse he has hurriedly made up after the event: he claims that by releasing Gautama’s long-pent up anger and directing it exclusively towards himself he has prevented it from being directed more destructively at the gods in general. This explanation would be the more convincing if there had been any suspicion earlier in the narrative that Gautama’s and Ahalyā’s ascetic practices (1,47.16) were intended to be used against the *devas*. However, the indulgent gods believe him, and restore his fertility with an origin tale explaining and giving physical form to the ritual offering of rams’ testicles to Indra. The important point not to be masked by the sensational nature of Indra’s punishment and restoration is that the contrived excuse sites the episode firmly within a still heroic, anti-*brāhman,* context.

The episode of Ahalyā and Indra that has further validated Rāma’s status in the *Bālakāṇḍa* will validate no-one when it re-appears at *Uttarakāṇḍa* 7,30, to be considered in detail on pp.113-16. There, the context is notably different: in particular, *sargas* 30—34 (the latest part of Agastya’s narrative of the *rākṣasas* in terms both of position and composition) contain a considerable amount of mockery and parody directed at two great authority-figures, Indra and Rāvaṇa, representing a fairly extreme example of the decline in status throughout the epics noted by JLB (2001).

**Subsidiary validating episode: Rāma Jāmadagnya withdraws (1,73.8—76.5)**The trial imposed in this trite little reworking of the bow test imports a further dimension to the narrative, that of inter-*varṇa* conflict. At first sight another validating episode appears unnecessary: Rāma has already demonstrated his might as a warrior. He has protected the forest-dwellers against Tāṭakā, and then assured Viśvāmitra’s right to conduct a sacrifice unmolested by *rākṣasas*. His encounter with Ahalyā on his way to Mithilā has validated his moral status. His ostentatious performance of Janaka’s bow test has gained him his bride. This inconsequential encounter with Rāma Jāmadagnya on his return from Mithilā to Ayodhyā adds nothing to our admiration of his strength or character, except to contrast his confident attitude sharply with Daśaratha’s timorous reaction to this new adversary, showing the king in such an unfortunately negative light that his pleas are ignored both by the assailant and by the young prince.

Daśaratha’s terrors are rooted in events in the remote mythic past, when the *brāhman* Rāma Jāmadagnya, justifiably outraged at the murder of his father by the *kṣatriya* Arjuna Sahasrabāhu, had vented his fury in acts of unjustifiably exaggerated collective punishment that exterminated no fewer than twenty-one regenerations of the whole *kṣatriya varṇa*. Daśaratha has every justification for his fears of a resumption of his horrific antagonism towards all *kṣatriyas* (73.20; 74.6-7); even the *brāhmans* of his retinue are anxious about the reappearance of Jamadagni’s fearsome son.

Rāma Jāmadagnya, however, is interested in only one *kṣatriya* person, Rāma Dāśarathi. He can hardly believe rumours of his exploit with Janaka’s bow, and has come to challenge the young *kṣatriya* to repeat it, this time with a bow of Viṣṇu’s handed down to his own ancestors. Rāma takes offence at the implied slur on his youthful valour and inferior status, then easily, but politely, humiliates his elderly antagonist, and boasts of his valour as a *kṣatriya* (*kṣatradharma*, 1,75.3). Amazed and himself frightened of the consequences of his own presumption, Jāmadagnya goes to the other extreme in his attempt to placate the Rāghava prince, claiming that the skill with Viṣṇu’s bow that he is demonstrating makes him Viṣṇu himself (1,75.17). If this verse is to be taken seriously rather than as hyperbole (after all, Rāma is still holding the bow drawn and ready to fire), it conflicts with Vālmīki’s summary at 1,3.5, where Jāmadagnya’s withdrawal will be listed; the whole Preface (1,1—4) includes no mention of Viṣṇu, nor any other link to Dāśarathi’s later *vaiṣṇava* identity, still citing the human Rāma’s tale as a heroic romance.[[224]](#footnote-224)

The question of *varṇa* itself had not been an issue in the core of *kāṇḍas* 2—6 (see above, pp.40-43). The concept existed, and was accepted without comment. When discussing the obligations of a king, the so-called *kaccit sarga* and others stress *inter alia* his duty to perform sacrifices (2,61.12; 2,94.7-8; 6,116.80-82) and mention once only the importance of orthodox religious practices, with no explicit reference to upholding distinctions of *varṇa* (2,61.22). Even these passages cannot be considered particularly early parts of the narrative. The words *kṣatra/kṣatriya, vaiśya,* and *śūdra* all occur considerably more frequently in Books 1 and 7 than in the core Books; what is more, the contexts in which they do occur in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* are themselves late parts of these Stage 3 Books, or in lists of all four *varṇas*.[[225]](#footnote-225) By the time of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core text, questions of *varṇa* distinctions had started to be crucial to a well-organised society; the Śambūka episode plays a basic role in the narrative itself (7,64—67.4; 73.16—74.3), determining the setting for the dramatic new ending. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* a passage in the new beginning (6.12-17), declaring Daśaratha’s Ayodhyā to be free of agnostics and rapacious *brāhmans*, sets out clearly the duties of all four classes.

The adolescent prince has now fulfilled his duty as a *kṣatriya*, and saved his father, his bride, and the whole wedding procession from the threat of *brāhman* hegemony, in what may reflect an early reaction or protest, in a still pre-Viṣṇu narrative, against emergent *brāhman* dominance in contemporary society. Appropriately enough, this is the point chosen to conclude the account of Rāma’s youthful training for the role that has long been mapped out for him in the well-known tale. The audience had already known the outlines of the *Bālakāṇḍa’s* core text: that Daśaratha had four sons, splendid, valiant and principled, and that Rāma and Sītā were married. They now have that knowledge justified and elaborated, but unchanged. As the jubilant wedding party reaches the safety of Ayodhyā and the warm welcome of Daśaratha’s three wives, the new story has returned to Ayodhyā, to its Old Beginning (wherever that might have been).[[226]](#footnote-226)

**Similarities and differences**The core text of the Old Material has now been supplemented by the core texts of a New Begining and a New End, now parts of the *VRm* CE *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* — two bodies of material with differing purposes and structures, focused on the same main characters, charting their growth and development. The *Uttara* core material in essence is a single narrative, made up of several disparate sub-units, focused on the banishment and return of Sītā, and its effect on Rāma’s life. Its contents and focus appear to have been conceived and mostly composed very little later than the final *sarga* of the main core narrative, 6,116 (the triumphant Rāma’s consecration as king, closed by the recital of the benefits of *rāmarājya*), at a time before abstract ideas of sovereignty were being codified into a rigid theoretical structure. We find no *kaccit*-type inquisition in *Uttara* or *Bāla*, just repeated stress on the generally happy state of the populace under the benevolent and efficient rules of Rāma and of Daśaratha. At 6,116, at 7,89.7-10, and at the expansive 1,5—7 we learn of climate control, prosperity, absence of early death, illness or crime; rare exceptions to that rule are dealt with swiftly, but this happens in the succeeding narrative rather than in theoretical disputes. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* Rāma is far more concerned with the conflict between his duties and his personal happiness.

Even after the spectacular resolution of the complexities at 7,88 Rāma still has almost 10,000 years of rule stretching before him; he continues to offer a variety of sacrifices, resulting in a resumption of the state of bliss entered on immediately after his initial consecration.[[227]](#footnote-227) Little purpose is attached to these sacrifices, beyond the conventional ones of climate control; it is the king’s duty to ensure the fertility basic to a subsistence economy, with its subsidiary need to ensure the procreation of sons to conduct the funerary rituals of his subjects as well as of himself. For the remainder of his protracted reign he continues to perform his royal duties, as before conducting sacrifices with no new wife, and the golden statue of his lost beloved still at his side (7,82.19, repeated at 89.4). He shows little interest in his sons on a personal level, or in the idea of dynasty as a duty; that concept is not developed until it is raised by Daśaratha, who takes immediate and effective steps to remedy his failure to produce an heir.

There is still no word or suggestion of intervention by Viṣṇu into the story in the core narrative of *Uttara*, and a brief, easily identifiable and separable, and particularly inconsequential passage appears as a clumsy insert into the narrative of the birth of the Rāghavas. All in all, the structure of the *Bālakāṇḍa* core is looser, more diffuse, than that employed by the continuators of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, with a less immediately obvious aim.

Various other factors also contribute to the supposition that much of the *Uttara* narrative was composed rather earlier than that of the *Bālakāṇḍa*: that is to say, the core of Book 7 was available and known to audiences, and also to composers, of the *Bālakāṇḍa* — available to be pillaged or reworked. Determining priority of composition is not a mere academic exercise of concern only to linguists or specialists in manuscript transmission; it plays a vital function in explaining the development of the narrative. In particular, Rāma’s spectacular *aśvamedha* can be taken to have suggested the composition of Daśaratha’s own; and since the *Uttara* episode had been undertaken wholly to absolve Rāma from the accusation of sin, it now becomes likely that the random inexplicable references to sin in the *Bāla* account have been introduced automatically, and without relevance, simply because they were thought necessary to that context. Moreover, this confusion of purpose adds extra weight to the suggestion that the *aśvamedha* episode is an insertion into Daśaratha’s present two-part birth ritual, leaving as its original structure the simpler, older-style sacrifice (the *putrakāmeṣṭi*) conducted solely by Ṛśyaśṛṅga;[[228]](#footnote-228) a problem of this interpretation is that Daśaratha’s original intention (voiced decisively at 1,8.2) was to hold a Horse sacrifice, here called *vājimedha*.

If the *putreṣṭi* did indeed precede the *aśvamedha* in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, it may raise doubts about the order I have just mapped out for the two *aśvamedhas*, especially if even the *Uttarakāṇḍa* episode itself were admitted to have been composed in two successive stages. With all due caution, however, I propose that it solves more puzzles than just the question of sin and that we are now in a position to consider what the audiences of the material appearing in the core of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* have learned that audiences of Books 2—6 had not known.

Of necessity, the contents of the Final Book are all newly devised, and the new audiences have had their emotions and moral values challenged and stretched almost to breaking point by a narrative that has aroused censure and even hostility when viewed according to modern standards. Audiences of the new *Bālakāṇḍa* material were in a largelydifferent position. They already knew the outline situation and characterisation, and the composers’ ingenuity was limited to creating elaborate new episodes to justify the image of the heroes fixed over the last half-millennium. The new audiences have learned something about the early adventures of two of the young princes, but nothing much about the other two; only one of them, Śatrughna, has been allotted a slightly more emphatic role in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, with independent status, but he is still subordinate to Rāma*.* His character exhibits a certain growth, in his new-found ability to defy his erstwhile master, Bharata; he shares the Rāghava family’s impetuosity, and, like his father, he is liable to regret it when he realises its implications.

The focus of the *VRm* narrative remains firmly on the adventures of Rāma, whether prince or king. Throughout the early core text, Lakṣmaṇa has been active merely as his confidant and subordinate, with no independent role, and the new composers follow this pattern. Lakṣmaṇa carries out Rāma’s orders without question, albeit with regret when taking Sītā to exile in the *Uttarakāṇḍa.* In *Bāla* it is unquestionably Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (not the other two brothers) who are chosen to protect Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice, leading to their adventures throughout the rest of the new material in a narrative that is effectively a brief reprise of *kāṇḍas* 2—6.

**New figures, major and minor** give substance to the new core material. Lavaṇa functions as a conventional backdrop to Śatrughna’s development, but contributes little more. Śambūka plays a minimal role himself, but gives the impetus for the whole *aśvamedha* and its consequences. Of much greater potential interest in *Uttara*, the portrayal of the *kuśīlavau* presents an enigma; we must assume that they are Rāma’s sons, but their father’s cool reaction is as unexpected as the behaviour of their mother. The bombshell of their recognition and acceptance, so long hoped for by the sentimental audience, is turned into more of a damp squib by the composers, who do not even call the boys by their personal names, merely by their profession. Their relationship to Vālmīki as his disciples is given much more prominence. It is indeed Vālmīki, the unknown sage, who plays the major role in the whole *Uttara* core narrative, dominating and directing its inevitable course.

**Viśvāmitra**The *Bālakāṇḍa* too is dominated and directed by its own major sage, Viśvāmitra, to educate the next generation of Rāghava princes. Its composers have chosen a sage very different from Vālmīki, if rather more spectacular, and his name has been known to composers and audiences since Vedic times. Daśaratha is awe-struck by his knowledge that his visitorhad once been accorded the somewhat lower status of *rājarṣi* ‘royal sage’, but gained promotion by his own efforts to the superior rank of *brahmarṣi*. Adheesh Sathaye’s meticulously careful comment that “This would suggest that during most of the Vedic period being *both* Brahmin and Kṣatriya was not such a social impossibility” (Sathaye 2015: 35) gives credence to the supposition that the *Bālakāṇḍa* core is still a *kṣatriya*-based Wonder tale, but inserted at a time of increasing interest in caste restrictions, as presented by the semi-realistic Śambūka of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The composers of the *Bāla* core have moved on to a rather more fanciful concept, but still well short of the far-fetched melodrama later to be contrived in Śatānanda’s In-tale.

New minor characters are added, or existing ones embellished, but of course are unable to change or even redirect the course of the already well-known narrative. Mārīca’s role is predetermined for him, despite the effect it has on Rāma’s validation episode (see above, pp.87-88). Janaka is given a role of some importance to play in the narrative, whereas in the 2—6 core his only function is to be Sītā’s father (as suggested by his name).[[229]](#footnote-229) The Ahalyā episode is evidently either actually absent from the *Bālakāṇḍa* earliest core, or not considered worth mentioning by the author of the summary in 1,3, although he does mention the Rāma Jāmadagnya episode (1,3.5).

**Rāma and Sītā** of course retain their dominant roles in the Third Stage narrative but their portrayal is sharply diffentiated. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* we learn nothing material about Rāma’s capabilities and personality; they have already been mapped out in Books 2—6, and the focus is merely on their development as he matures from youth to adolescence. As for the child Sīta, the narrative offers no scope for any exploration of her personality.

In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the position is reversed. We learn nothing different about Rāma’s character; he is as steadfast as ever, despite being attacked by greater trials in the new context of his kingship and developing religious obligations; nevertheless, he remains staunch in his attachment to his adored wife, continuing his duties as sacrificer without her, even when she is lost to him for ever. Sītā’s is the personality that is developed almost out of recognition. Learning from her own experience of captivity, she has grown self-reliant, defiant, and decisive. She has been given a new status, equal to that of her devoted husband. As throughout the *VRm* ever since its inception, the best effect is achieved by not stressing the purpose too obviously, so that the planned outcome is all the more startling, yet all the more inexorable.

The Old Material — the proposed core texts comprising the *Bāla* and *Uttarakāṇḍas* — now had both a New Beginning and a New Ending, but they could not remain the two ends of Rāma’s story for long. Yet another New Beginning appeared in the form of a Preface (1,1—4); and further developments in the religious context, with Rāma now recognised as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, called for another New Ending, the Grand Finale, culminating in his spectacular ascent to heaven (7,93—100). Nonetheless, ambitious poets continued to direct their attention to the existing narrative, finding opportunities to introduce new episodes, such as the so-called Fire Ordeal (6,103—6), and an ever-expanding number of In-tales with minimal reference to the surrounding narrative; Śatānanda’s account of Viśvāmitra’s struggle to reshape his *varṇa* (1,50.15—64.30), and Agastya’s intrusive tales diverting Rāma from fulfilling his wish to purify himself at the end of the Śambūka episode (7,67—73) provide egregious examples of this tendency, often obscuring the earlier material, even to the point of distorting the careful, purposeful structure of the earlier composers. It is this mass of material and its effects on the Rāma tradition that I plan to study in Chapter 5.

**Chapter 5**

**(to be completed)**

**Topics to be covered include:**

Bridging passage from last few *sargas* of *Yuddhakāṇḍa* to resumption of narrative at 7,39

Preface: *sargas* 1,2 and 1,4

Viśvāmitra’s life story: 1,50.13—1,64.30

other In-tales in *kāṇḍas* 1 and 7

narrative elaborations: 7, App.1.8.313-465 and App.10.1-134: Rama’s kindness to a dog, justice for an owl, and redemption for a vulture

a new genre: the final ‘New beginning’? divinity of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sītā, and the *puṣpaka*

Sītā’s Fire Suicide: 6,104—106

dynasty established with new characters: wives and children

new Grand Finale

**Chapter 6**

**Looking backwards and forwards**[[230]](#footnote-230)

**Agastya’s post-victory narrative, Sub-unit 1: the rise of the *rākṣasas***  
**7,1.1-18; 7,2—3; 7,9—10; 7,12—26**

Agastya leads a number of sages from the southern region, together with others from the east and west, to Ayodhyā, to congratulate Rāma on his victory; he then replies to the king’s questions with successive lengthy accounts of the rise and downfall of the *rākṣasas*, followed by a history of the prowess of Hanumān (*VRm* CE, 7,1—36). His narratives sprawl suspiciously awkwardly between the *abhiṣeka* plus declaration of *rāmarājya* that now concludes the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*,[[231]](#footnote-231) and the departure of a number of kings and their armies from the celebration (7,37—38),[[232]](#footnote-232) before the narrative thread is resumed and the audience are introduced to the rest of Rāma’s life at 7,39. Until this point, Agastya has appeared in person in the *VRm* narrative only at 3,10.29—12.25, when the exiles visit him in his *āśrama*, and at CE 7,67—73 when he is visited by Rāma immediately after the Śambūka episode; in both cases the setting is the southern region. The mere presence of this beneficient sage in Ayodhyā, north of the Vindhya mountain, apparently in defiance of the traditional self-imposed prohibition recalled in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* (10.77-83), is a minor unexplained anomaly common in works of multiple authorship and oral transmission.[[233]](#footnote-233)

As a whole, this episode presents a glorification of the victorious Rāma by explaining and evaluating the might and nature of the defeated *rākṣasas*. It both extends and consolidates the earlier narrative, imparting to it a new focus, a new purpose and a new context, seeming to bestride several developments in the values of the society that produced it — some of which had not yet been reached by the rest of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrative. I propose that the narrative as a whole can best be considered as a compilation of two sub-units, charting the rise and fall of several generations of *rākṣasas* with Sub-unit 2 enclosing Sub-unit 1 in a fashion (common with continuations) that tends to obscure the boundaries in the process of accommodating them to the surrounding text. These 34 *sargas* are then supplemented with a further two extolling the might of Hanumān. In that sense, it is relatively easy to consider each of these many disparate elements as a ‘New beginning’, with each element built upon an ever-increasing amount of ‘Old material’. What is not so easy is to consider each element as the end of the new complex, at each succeeding intersection (bearing in mind that such junctions remain fluid). There is reason to posit that at some point in its development, after the composition of the core narratives of the present *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas,* but before the intervention of Viṣṇu into the narrative, and before a number of later developments in narrational style, sub-unit 1 may have been inserted to close the whole Rāma story. Just when this point was is hard to determine, but it was certainly pivotal.

The Rāma tradition had always been able to absorb disparate elements, blending them together into a tale of ultimate military triumph. Now that the narrative was to focus on the peacetime trials of an Ideal King, and a new set of cultural values was emerging from the heroic ethos — the Wonder Tale — represented throughout almost all of *kāṇḍas* 2—6, Agastya’s narrative as a whole was to show the human Rāma in the process of being transformed into an *avatāra* of the god Viṣṇu. The successive concepts do not always sit easily together. As is liable to happen in such cases, where a new narrative purpose entails a redirection, the necessary new material partially obscures or even obliterates the old, and the precise boundaries of the two Sub-units at the beginning of the passage are not entirely clear. However, the triumphant and reassuring climax of Sub-unit 1 (7,26.47), fully in tune with the issues to be addressed in most of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core narrative, would have provided Agastya with a finely-crafted conclusion before the composition and incorporation of Sub-unit 2.

Sub-unit 1examines how far Rāvaṇa conforms to the traditional *kṣatriya* values prevalent in the Rāma story from its inception, enlarging on a number of allusions and resolving some anomalies now perceived in the text of the core books, presenting a progressive deterioration in Rāvaṇa’s behaviour as a brother, as a sexual being, and as a warrior.

It opens, naturally enough, with the birth of Rāvaṇa and his siblings. Until this point, Rāvaṇa had been known only as the grandson of the humanoid, virtuous sage Pulastya or of his son Viśravas, with allusions to his ancestry in the whole of the core books, plus the *Bālakāṇḍa*,[[234]](#footnote-234) raising pertinent but never-stated questions about his *rākṣasa* appearance and nature. An answer, tracing his origin via the female line from Sumālin, is provided at 7,9. Mentions of Rāvaṇa’s conduct being safeguarded by a boon of limited invincibility had been made throughout the core text, but only now are details of how it was granted narrated; boons for Kumbhakarṇa, and for Vibhīṣaṇa,[[235]](#footnote-235) are added to explain their differing natures (7,9—10).

In*sarga* 12 Rāvaṇa begins his career responsibly by accepting Mandodarī in marriage.[[236]](#footnote-236) The couple then produce a son, Indrajit. Next, Rāvaṇa finds suitable wives for his two brothers, and marries his sister Śūrpaṇakhā to Vidyujjihva, son of Kālaka (7,12.2). However, his sense of family duty is not strong enough to include respect for his virtuous elder non-*rākṣasa* half-brother, Vaiśravaṇa,[[237]](#footnote-237) who reprimands him for his riotous behaviour (7,13). Rāvaṇa offends protocol and breaches the theme of statecraft and its obligations prevalent in much of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* by killing the unfortunate messenger,[[238]](#footnote-238) attacks Vaiśravaṇa in his realm on Kailāsa, and seizes Puṣpaka (7,14—15), giving narrative substance to the frequent allusions to some such episode throughout *kāṇḍas* 3 to 6.

Rāvaṇa now develops an unthinking addiction to conquest, his arrogance fuelled by reliance on the deceptive boon of inviolability. Carelessly, he bereaves Śūrpaṇakhā of her husband when he slaughters the Kālakeyas (7,23.15). This failure in his duty of protection is used by the author to explain what by then was seen to be an anomaly in the earlier narrative — the fact that Śūrpaṇakhā was wandering in Daṇḍaka forest under no male supervision: in the timescale of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* the widow has been placed by her brother under the protection of another brother, Khara, to whom she makes her first appeal for redress after she has been mutilated. However, it then introduces another anomaly: a *rākṣasa* called Vidyujjihva is active in Laṅkā in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, but whether he is to be identified with the Vidyujjihva of *kāṇḍa* 7 cannot be determined.[[239]](#footnote-239) Characterised as ever by a vehement lack of respect for her brother (7,24.18-35, *cf*. 3,31), she complains that he has made her a widow, so he sends her off to Daṇḍaka under the protection of Khara and an army of 14,000 *rākṣasas,* in preparation for the pivotal encounter with Rāma in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa.*

Anxious to repair a similar failure in clan duty in the next *sarga*, Rāvaṇa then immediately changes tactic and saves a more distant relative, Kumbhīnasī, from a similar fate, recruiting her abductor Madhu as an ally in another campaign of violence (7,25.20-49). It seems unlikely that this unexpected act of clemency has been introduced to show Rāvaṇa mending his ways; the characters involved are invented in a tortuous attempt once again to consolidate the narrative by giving some background to the equally clumsy revenge theme unnecessarily included in Śatrughna’s conflict with their son, Lavaṇa, earlier in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.[[240]](#footnote-240)

Rāvaṇa’s sexual prowess is now challenged, for his positive acceptance of his family responsibility to Kumbhīnasī is of short duration: in the very next *sarga* he catches sight of the *apsaras* Rambhā, rapes her despite her pleading (perhaps unwisely) that she is related to him via his hated half-brother Vaiśravaṇa, and incurs a curse from her husband, Vaiśravaṇa’s resentful son Nalakūbara, that is said to make him lose any further desire to rape an unwilling woman, lest his head burst into seven pieces (7,26). This attempt to explain why Sītā remains unharmed during her long captivity is part of the increasing insistence throughout the later Rāma tradition that she must be kept free from the most remote possibility of conferring pollution on her husband now that his earlier role as the “Ideal Hero” is being developed into that of the “Ideal King”. But it wrecks her image as a faithful wife, heroically resisting the threats and blandishments of her captor; she becomes a passive victim, no longer directing the plot.[[241]](#footnote-241)

Some time before this episode, Rāvaṇa had indulged in a series of attacks on women all over the universe; all had threatened him ineffectually with future revenge (7,24.1-16). More significantly Vedavatī, thwarted by his violation in her desire to marry Nārāyaṇa, had vowed to be reborn *ayonijā* as Sītā for his destruction (7,17). There is no indication in the text of the CE that Vedavatī equates Rāma conqueror of Rāvaṇa with Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa her desired husband; nor is her own reincarnation portrayed as the divine Śrī, but as the necessary instrument of her revenge for ruining her now impossible dreams.[[242]](#footnote-242) But after the curse of Nalakūbara Rāvaṇa is forced to take the matter seriously, presenting an appropriate and effective climax to this part of his career.

Doubts about Rāvaṇa’s physical prowess increase throughout Agastya’s narrative. Gods are inhibited from resisting his attacks only by their duty to uphold the boon, not by any lack of strength (7,18; 7,20—23). The audience already knew that men were excluded from Rāvaṇa’s boon, but a contemptuous insult to Nandīśvara incurs a curse that now explains the prominent role of monkeys in his eventual defeat. Nothing daunted, he retaliates by bragging that he will lift Kailāsa, an outrageous attempt thwarted by the mere pressure of Śiva’s big toe (7,16). This incident becomes a popular theme in later Śiva-oriented narrative, both verbal and visual. Earthly kings are defeated until the dying Anaraṇya of Ayodhyā predicts that a future Ikṣvāku king (Rāma) will avenge his death (7,19). The prophecy, is of course anomalous; Anaraṇya is an ancestor of Rāma, a human, and so he himself is not prevented by the boon from killing Rāvaṇa,[[243]](#footnote-243) but this issue is — necessarily — not explored. The anomaly is unlikely to indicate that the episode pre-dates acceptance into the narrative of the all-too-prevalent boon motif examined in ch.3; it is another simple error forced on an unwary but enthusiastic author by his knowledge of the pre-ordained outcome, possibly struck by the name (also found in the genealogies at *VRm* 1,69.20-21 and 2,102.8-10), with its fanciful suggestion of antithesis with the ‘forest-dwelling’ Rāma. There is a limit to the amount of meticulous logic we should expect the continuator of such a complex narrative to exercise.

Rāvaṇa continues on his series of outrageously arrogant attacks on the worlds of men and gods, all the time incurring curses from his helpless victims that envisage eventual punishment by Rāma — punishment that the boon of inviolability prevents the gods from inflicting. References to the boon are found throughout the earlier narrative layers, so Agastya’s audiences (both fictive and real) already know how it all ended. His narration exploits their knowledge, and a sense of doom pervades the recitation.

Doom, but only for Rāvaṇa. For Rāma the climax of Sub-unit 1 in *sarga* 26 is the triumphant guarantee of his wife’s continued purity with which it is closed. His decision to return to Ayodhyā to take up his responsibilities as Ideal King, accompanied by a wife who will confer no impurity on him and will bear him unimpeachable children, has been once more confirmed.

It is worth pausing to consider the structure and contents of the whole Rāma narrative at this point. The opening part (sub-unit 1) of Agastya’s tale, as now incorporated into the CE, spans the interval between Rāma’s triumphal return to Ayodhyā and installation at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* and the trials he is to face as he tries to fulfil his obligations as Ideal King in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. It unites the Old Material to the New Beginning. It looks forwards by looking back, and should be considered as a Bridging Passage, one of the motifs planned to be examined in chapter 5.

Filling out hints in the existent text of Rāvaṇa’s boon-fuelled rampage in the far-distant, mythic past long before the human heroes were born, its authors devised a new episode that nevertheless looked forward at what was yet to come: the likelihood that Sītā’s chastity as Rāvaṇa’s captive will be questioned, reflecting on the purity of her husband and the legitimacy of the sons she is destined soon to bear. This is not a matter of personal morality only: it is of crucial importance to the prosperity of the state. The evidence for the early ending of the *Rāmāyaṇa* already discussed on pp.14-17, that is to say, without the horrific episodes now found at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* CE, implies that a later ending, incorporating the accusations into the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core and culminating in Sītā’s triumphant public, but final, vindication of her strength of character, ratified and closed her life in splendidly climactic, romantic fashion. Once the *Uttara* core narrative was in place, would any continuator with the least shred of sensitivity have added the tame suggestion that her endurance — now prolonged by the extra years of her sons’ childhood — had been unnecessary? Could 7,26.47 conceivably have been inserted into a narrative already known to its audience to include *sarga* 7,88?

I can only assume that sub-unit 1 of Agastya’s narrative (but not yet sub-unit 2) was added as a new confirmatory close to a form of the text of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* that ended with a declaration of Sītā’s chastity by the gods (as testified by Rāma at 7,44.6-8 and 88.3; see also *RU* 275.17-34), followed by the triumphant return to Ayodhyā and Rāma’s installation and declaration of *rāmarājya*. And therefore that sub-unit 1 preceded the composition of the continuation of the narrative in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core.[[244]](#footnote-244) ‘New beginnings’ can very quickly become ‘Old material’.

**Agastya’s post-victory narrative**, **Sub-unit 2: the fall of the *rākṣasas*  
7,1.19-27; 7,4—8; 7,11; 7,27—34**The happy note of triumph with which Sub-unit 1 ended, so well-fitted to its context as part of the celebrations of the king’s long-postponed *abhiṣeka*, was not allowed to remain the closing episode of this newly extended, backward-looking account of Rāma’s life, after the story of his trials in his role as king and the costs he ran in overcoming them to establish the Rāghava dynasty had been explored in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core. By the time that Sub-unit 2 had finally been created and inserted to enclose the existing part of Agastya’s tale the continuous process of development in narrative style and religious culture had culminated in a *brāhmaṇic* context that fully embraced the concept of Rāma as a birth of Viṣṇu.

Sub-unit 2 gathers together disparate elements demonstrating some of the inescapable narrative consequences of trying to adapt the newly emerging incarnation concept into the narrative structure of the heroic Wonder Tale — a structure that had long been fixed and was now immutable. Elsewhere in the CE the concept is still almost absent,[[245]](#footnote-245) but Viṣṇu in person plays a substantial role in this Sub-unit, and it is here that we find the majority of the references.

The developed nature of the Unit as a whole is further demonstrated by the narrative style, with its emphasis on the burlesque and disrespectful portrayals of Rāvaṇa, of Indra, and even of the embarrassed Viṣṇu in his pre-incarnation divine form. ‘New Beginnings’ are not always easily compatible with long-familiar, well-loved ‘Old Material’.

At 7,4—8 an apparently original tale involving the defeat of Sumālin and his 2 brothers (sons of Sukeśa) is introduced into the overall narrative. The author makes apt use of already existent material on two of Sukeśa’s sons, Mālyavān and Sumālin; this addition to the plot provides an example of internal development, arising from a casual mention of the two brothers and their offspring in a brief passage in Sub-unit 1 in connection with Rāvaṇa’s duty to Kumbhīnasī (7,25.23-25). Mālyavān necessarily survives Viṣṇu’s onslaught because he is already active in *VRm* 6,26—27, giving the passage a spurious air of authenticity. Sumālin is named as the maternal grandfather of Rāvaṇa and his siblings (7,9.1-9, also ascribed to Sub-unit 1). He is virtually unknown in the CE text either before or after these passages,[[246]](#footnote-246) but plays the anchor role throughout Sub-unit 2, from which we may infer a link between 7,4—9 and 27—30. Unlike his brother Mālyavān, having no back-story in the core text means that he should not be allowed to survive Agastya’s narrative, and he loses his life heroically after a savage battle in the attack on Indra (7,27.31-42). Sukeśa and his third son, Mālin, are not mentioned outside this carefully-crafted passage, which seems to be unknown elsewhere in the text of the *VRm* CE; the absence of any tell-tale allusions elsewhere in the CE, together with the repeated references to Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa, locates *sargas* 7,5—8 towards the end of the tradition.[[247]](#footnote-247) In his coda to the incident (7,8.23-25), Agastya disparages Rāvaṇa compared to the sons of Sukeśa, but by firmly declaring Rāma to be Nārāyaṇa, he avoids the unstated corollory that he is thereby disparaging his conqueror.

The passage represents a major development reflecting the culmination of the gradual transition of the *VRm* as a whole from Wonder Tale to Cosmic Epic. The salient points of the whole *VRm* subsequent to the introduction of the concept of Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu are reworked: Viṣṇu’s task is primarily to save the cosmos (particularly the gods) from Rāvaṇa’s depredations, and the objectives of the original Rāma story (to preserve Daśaratha’s integrity and to rescue Sītā) become increasingly marginalised. The original tale of a human hero rescuing his human wife from a monster has been superseded, and Sītā — whether herself or an analogue from the earlier generation — is not even mentioned. The passage is nonetheless rooted in the earlier text, to the extent that the appeal to Viṣṇu to counter the threat to the cosmos from *rākṣasas* who profit from a divine boon (7,6.3), to be continued by a much reduced copy of the war narrated in Book 6, is closely modelled on the similar very late passage intruding into the account of the birth of Rāma and his brothers (1,14—16), which also mentions the assault on Indra (1,14.8). Not only does the Sukeśa episode present Viṣṇu in a heroic narrative role (in itself a mark of lateness in the tradition), but the corollory of the incarnation concept will be explored at 7,27.6-19: a rather embarrassed Viṣṇu has to refuse Indra’s appeal for help to counter the *rākṣasa* attack on his heaven on the grounds that ‘the time is not yet right’ for him to kill Rāvaṇa; he promises to intervene later (*i.e.* when he has become incarnate as the human Rāma). While simple mentions of Viṣṇu should not necessarily be considered as identifications of Rāma with Viṣṇu (*e.g.* in the Vedavatī episode in Sub-unit 1), narrative appearances are still rare and significant.[[248]](#footnote-248)

Allusions have been noted in the core text to other parts of Agastya’s narrative, but the absence of any specifically relating to Viṣṇu’s defeat of Sukeśa’s sons helps to confirm the very late date of that part of Sub-unit 2.

**7,1.19-27; 7,25.1-15; 7,29—30**Indrajit’s battle with Indra is one of only two episodes involving Indrajit to be narrated by Agastya; it is located as a tailpiece to the episode at 7,25.1-15 where he earns a mild rebuke from Rāvaṇa for offering a sacrifice to various *devas* (‘our enemies’) to gain spectacular weapons and powers.[[249]](#footnote-249) He then uses his powers almost immediately afterwards in the attack on Indra’s heaven (7,27—30.14), even imperiously taking over command from his exhausted father in an abrupt intervention that is uncharacteristic both of son and of father (Rāvaṇa has been/will be mortified and furious at 6,92.30—93.9 when his charioteer rescues him from similar danger). In the *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* Indrajit, though a powerful warrior, is respectfully subservient to his father. However, there are unspecific allusions in the core text (5,21.10 and 6,98.12) to Indra being defeated by Rāvaṇa himself, which may be nothing more significant than generalised references to his role as overall leader of the assault; equally well, the supposition that they may point to some form of an episode predating Indrajit’s intervention cannot be excluded. Indeed, other definite allusions in the *VRm* (attributed to Stage 1) at 6,35.22; 6,67.3; 6,78.46 (Śakra is especially delighted by death of Indrajit); and (Stage 2) at 6,60.17 and 6,73.32; 6,79.1 + 9 appear to confirm Indrajit’s role.[[250]](#footnote-250) The whole implausible episode appears to be a clumsy and specious attempt to explain the name ‘Indrajit’ (‘he who *would* be capable of defeating Indra’) — better understood as the basis for the later narrative, rather than its consequence — by relating it to an actual incident. The more specific meaning (‘defeater of Indra’) is subsequently conferred as a reward by the smooth-tongued Prajāpati when he negotiates the ransom of the captive Indra in exchange for the boon that Indrajit will be killed in battle only if he fails to complete a sacrifice to Agni (7,30.5; a foreboding, as the audience already knows, to Indrajit’s future death at 6,72—78).

The names chosen to designate Rāvaṇa’s son provide some corroboration of the late nature of the episode. Throughout 7,1—34 the indeterminate ‘Rāvaṇi’ appears 18 times (each time referring to the son to be known later in the narrative as ‘Indrajit’, once he has earned that title), with no distinction between the Sub-units; ‘Meghanāda’, the name given him in his birth-story, appears a total of 4 times, 3 times in Sub-unit 1, and only once in Sub-unit 2; the distribution of ‘Indrajit’ shows no difference in usage between the Sub-units, and indicates that the name familiar from the core books was still being used before the episode detailing the bestowal of the name became fixed in the canon.[[251]](#footnote-251)

As a tail-piece to this whole episode the focus is then abruptly shifted from the *rākṣasas* to the *devas*: Prajāpati subjects the miserable Indra to a lecture attributing his military impotence to punishment for his earlier rape of Ahalyā, a sin of which he can be absolved by performing a *vaiṣṇava* sacrifice (7,30.15-39). Evidently Indra is as open to punishment for rape as Rāvaṇa (7,17; 7,24.1-17; 7,26), although this punishment is rather more seemly — if less immediately effective — than the loss of his genitals meted out to him by the outraged Gautama in the *Bālakāṇḍa* account of his adultery (pp.95-97; CE 1,47.24-28; 48.1-10). Nonetheless, a consequence of this unexpected digression, presumably unintended, is that in diminishing Indra’s might it diminishes Indrajit’s triumph and therefore the glory of his ultimate conqueror.

**7,31—34**Agastya’s account of the *rākṣasas* reaches its climax when Rāvaṇa himself suffers two humiliating defeats, one by Arjuna Kārtavīrya Sahasrabāhu (7,31—33), followed by one by Vālin (7,34). As was the case in his duel with Rāma’s ancestor Anaraṇya (7,19), it is narrative necessity that saves Rāvaṇa from death at the hands of either assailant, for it is Rāma who is destined to kill him: in the first case Rāvaṇa is protected from premature death by his boon, and in the second from the operation of Nandīśvara’s curse, for Vālin is a monkey.[[252]](#footnote-252) Surely, however, the degradation he suffers in this successive pair of episodes must have been even worse. Both accounts reciprocate and even parody the capture and release of Indra, and both come loaded with unstated menace for Rāvaṇa to an audience well versed in epic narrative traditions.

Is the purpose of the Arjuna Sahasrabāhu episode limited to the humiliation of Rāvaṇa by indicating his vulnerability, or is it a more direct warning of Rāma’s ultimate supremacy? Arjuna is otherwise virtually unknown in the *VRm*, mentioned only in passing at 1,74.23, but better known in the *MBh* where he is known to be killed by Rāma Jāmadagnya in revenge for the murder of his father; Jāmadagnya submits to Rāma Dāśarathi at *VRm* 1,73—76;[[253]](#footnote-253) so for Rāvaṇa to be overcome by Arjuna, the *rākṣasa* villain must be of very little account as a warrior.

Vālin presents a similar case (7,34). His capture of Rāvaṇa, bringing to an end Agastya’s recital of successive defeats, is even more humiliating. Rāma is warned of his great strength (4,11.3-6 and 47), easily exceeds it in the ally test posed by Sugrīva, then kills him with a single shot; indignantly, the dying *vānara* king claims that he could have captured Rāvaṇa easily and restored Sītā to Rāma, a boast that may well have suggested the episode narrated with such gusto by Agastya (4,16.25-27; 17.1-3+41-42).

**Agastya’s post-victory narrative, characterisation:**A notable difference between Agastya’s narrative and the portrait of the *rākṣasa* family with which the audience of *kāṇḍas* 3 to 6 have become familiar is the almost complete absence of any attempt at characterisation. The Rāvaṇa who had burst on to the scene in the middle of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* is bombastic, arrogant, self-confident, buoyed up by sycophantic courtiers, and heedless of any advice that contradicts his own self-image as omnipotent. Yet as Rāma’s attack on Laṅkā proceeds, he becomes ever more wary, at first hiding his misgivings behind a screen of rage, eventually being overcome by grief after the death of one close relative after another, admitting regret at his banishment of Vibhīṣaṇa, and voicing his sorrow for the death of Kumbhakarṇa in terms strikingly similar to those in which Rāma laments his fear that Lakṣmaṇa has been killed.[[254]](#footnote-254) Despite his ten heads and ability to fly, the monster of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* is shown to develop an affectingly normal human personality, an appropriate foe for the still human Rāma.

Agastya’s Rāvaṇa shows no such subtle development, no such gradually unfolding emotions, indeed, no human feeling at all; yet subtle indications of the expected audience reaction can be noted. For instance, the epithet *lokarāvaṇa*:‘he who makes the world reverberate with his cries’ had been repeatedly applied to Rāvaṇa in the core narrative with a positive application to demonstrate his of the same fearsome nature.[[255]](#footnote-255) But in the episode of his failure to lift Kailāsa, thwarted merely by Śiva’s big toe (7,16.17-30), the cries of his own pain (*virāvaḥ* 23c, *ravataḥ* 26c, *ravato* 26c, *rāvitaṃ* 27b) are stressed as the build-up to Śiva’s declaration that therefore his name will be Rāvaṇa (27cd) and everyone will call him *rāvaṇaṃ lokarāvaṇam* (28d). This inversion of the context (rather than the meaning) of the same epithet, demonstrating Rāvaṇa’s potential vulnerability, should be regarded as one of the many *post mortem* hints in Agastya’s narrative of the future outcome of a story that has already happened.

Śūrpaṇakhā alone is allowed to retain the outspoken contempt for her brother she showed in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*,[[256]](#footnote-256) and the audience might be tempted to think that Rāvaṇa consigns her to Daṇḍaka for the sake of sheer self-protection; the real explanation, of course, is authorial necessity. Rāvaṇa is governed by anger, pride, lust (the lust modified at last by a certain amount of self-interest and, again, authorial necessity); even in the face of outright defeat by Arjuna Sahasrabāhu and utter humiliation by Vālin he is attributed no emotion. The fearsome human monster of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* is now nothing more than a pantomime villain, running riot with no humanity and no monstrosity.

Rāvaṇa is not the only hero defeated by mockery. Indra and others of his fellow-*devas* suffer the same banal degradation, as early as Sub-unit 1, when Rāvaṇa attacks Marutta. The *lokapālas* assembled for his sacrifice are treated with similar derision; inhibited by his boon of invincibility, they cannot resist the onslaught, and in their terror take ignominious refuge inside the wombs of various animals.[[257]](#footnote-257) Marutta cravenly uses his status as sacrificer to evade combat, abandoning the assembled seers to be devoured by Rāvaṇa (7,18). The whole burlesque episode is yet another demonstration of the fluid boundaries of all developmental stages.

Later on, in Sub-unit 2, after the incarnation episode (1,13.45—16.20) had become fixed in the tradition, Viṣṇu, the Supreme Spirit, the Lord Nārāyaṇa (7,27), is clearly embarrassed at having to refuse Indra’s request for aid to repulse another *rākṣasa* attack, and excuses himself by pointing out that the time (pre-ordained by the narrative) for him to fulfil his destiny has not yet arrived. Worse still, not only is Indra ultimately captured by Indrajit and taken prisoner to Laṅkā, to be ransomed by Prajāpati’s cajolery and bribery, but he is further humiliated by the lecture he receives on his sexual transgression with Ahalyā.[[258]](#footnote-258) In a fairly extreme example of the decline in status throughout the epics noted by JLB (2001), the Warrior-King of the Gods is portrayed as nothing more than a naughty schoolboy scolded by his headmaster.

Indra had not come out of this tale well in the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* versionthere is a shift of focus, and his divine status is completely destroyed by caricature: he is not even allowed the opportunity to offer an excuse for his conduct, but must suffer Prajāpati’s severe and humiliating scolding. For a king, let alone the King of the Gods, to have his sexual potency questioned and ridiculed is to open to question and ridicule his whole credibility as a warrior and as the protector of his people, of the fertility of his land and of his dynasty. These characteristics do not exist side by side as if by chance: they are more than complementary, they are inter-dependent.[[259]](#footnote-259) The focus of this telling, determined by its narrative context towards the end of Agastya’s post-victory account of the *rākṣasas*, where Viṣṇu and the *devas* as a whole are losing respect, is firmly on Indra at a low point of his progressive degradation. This is no Hero-tale; its genre has been transformed into that of a Morality fable, as part of a Creation Myth. Similar burlesque degradation of authority figures is common throughout declining post-heroic narrative tradition, whether in India or all over medieval Europe; a carefully developed example of this decay in respect for the former values is provided in the *MBh* by the *Virāṭaparvan*.

Ahalyā is much less prominent in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* version, a discrepancy partly conditioned by the differing time frames of the two episodes. In both *kāṇḍas* the offences and curses have taken place in the remote, undefined mythic past. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* the redemption by Rāma is set within the time frame of the Rāma story — narratively speaking, in ‘the present day’.[[260]](#footnote-260) Agastya’s narrative also brings the story within the *Rāmāyaṇa* context by accounting for Indrajit’s prowess, therefore siting it before the events of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* battle for Laṅkā at the absolute latest. No dating is specified, except that it is within the lifetimes of Rāvaṇa and Indrajit, but presumably before the redemption of Ahalyā by the youthful Rāma in the *Bālakāṇḍa.* Agastya recites his tale to Rāma, after his victory, and a number of years after he had redeemed Ahalyā from the *Bālakāṇḍa* curse, although no attempt is made to relate the two episodes. If the time-line of the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative should be taken seriously, Indra’s chosen victim — mother of Śatānanda and other sons — could be expected to have lost some of her youthful physical allure. Nor need we place too much stress on Agastya’s silence about Rāma’s role in the tale he is reciting, given that the purported main member of the fictive audience is Rāma. Such niceties have little place in traditional narratives, particularly if a pre-existent tale is being grafted into a new context.

The *Uttarakāṇḍa’s* Ahalyā is given a different creation myth, with her universally unique beauty fuelling Indra’s lust (7,30.17-21+30-31), an innovation that provides a further point of contact between Vimalasūri and the *VRm* CE: Gautama is preferred to Indra at a *svayaṃvara* for Ahalyā.[[261]](#footnote-261) Vimalasūri’s Indra molests the sage and is frustrated and humiliated as punishment, but no sexual impropriety is involved. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* Indra’s punishment is not sexual castration, but military impotence, from which he is freed by performing the appropriate *vaiṣṇava* sacrifice, setting the episode within a now brāhmaṇised, no longer heroic, context. Ahalyā’s punishment is to remain invisible within the hermitage, as in the *Bālakāṇḍa,* but she has no opportunity to expiate her sin, so is not redeemed and cannot be reconciled to Gautama; we lose sight of the couple. Her unique beauty is distributed among all people — another origin myth (7,30.34-37). There is no suggestion, and no likelihood, that the audience is expected to relate the two versions to provide a happy ending (with the *Bāla* redemption cancelling out the *Uttara* breach in the relationship), unless they are unrealistically romantically-minded.

An important point still to settle is the significance of Ahalyā’s name, an item that may be expected to be relevant in a creation myth. The obvious etymology would link it with *hala,* ‘plough’, to mean ‘not to be ploughed’, which seems particularly appropriate in the context, given the sexual connotations of the term; *cf*. the widespread metaphorical use of *kṣetra* ‘field’.[[262]](#footnote-262) However, the beautiful woman was evidently not created to remain a perpetual virgin: she had first been ‘ploughed’ by her lawful husband, Gautama (1,50.4-11; 7,30.24-25). Indra’s offence was clearly his usurpation of Gautama’s rights to the sage’s own *kṣetra*.

But just what was the precise nature of this offence? In each case the answer seems obvious: rape of a married woman, with or without her consent, deceived or not by impersonation of her husband, is certainly a sin. But against whom is this sin directed? Not primarily against Ahalyā, in such a traditionally male-centred narrative. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* the victim is straightforwardly presented as the outraged husband; Gautama curses his wife equally with Indra. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* the different setting of the offence alters the balance. Ahalyā here has no sons; she is not the typical housewife and mother portrayed in the *Bālakāṇḍa*. She has been created specially by Prajāpati (7,30.20) to be the unique embodiment of beauty, and as the direct result of Indra’s sin the vengeful Gautama feels obliged to destroy the beauty that had allured the god, and re-apportion it throughout all people. He is no ordinary human *brāhman*; evidently his ascetic power puts him on a level with the Creator, with similar creative abilities, perhaps enabling him to act as his agent. The Creator’s plan has failed, and Indra is to blame. When Prajāpati appears in person in Agastya’s narrative, his resentful reproaches of the culprit are doubly justified: firstly, Indra’s consequential defeat by Indrajit has caused him to undergo the humiliation of negotiating the malefactor’s release with a mere *rākṣasa*; secondly, the long-term scheme he had contrived has been ruined. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* version, Prajāpati is as much the victim of Indra’s lust as Gautama is in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, and he vents his anger on the sinner in no uncertain terms (even though he eventually mitigates it slightly by informing Indra how he should absolve himself, and is then considerate enough to reassure him that his son Jayanta has not been killed in the battle, 7,30.39-40; *cf*. 7,28.15-21). In the *Bālakāṇḍa* on the other hand, the assembled gods are sympathetic to Indra’s plight, and set about remedying it themselves (1,48.1-10).

The two workings out of the same narrative frame in two widely contrasting genres make it likely that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* version was incorporated into the tradition at a later date, perhaps several centuries later, than the *kṣatriya*-based heroic tale of the *Bālakāṇḍa*; indeed, that the decay of respect that it typifies represents the latest stage of development even of Agastya’s narrative of the *rākṣasas*. The link with the *VPC* raises the possibility of back-formation that could very well situate it at the very latest point in the structure of the *VRm* CE.[[263]](#footnote-263) The most that can be affirmed with any conviction is that the differences noted between the two styles illustrate the ease with which an age of transition can accommodate and tolerate a varied range of material side-by-side. If Indra, hampered by his past sin, is such a poor figure that Indrajit’s victory over him is no great achievement, how great is his killer’s triumph? And is Agastya’s whole account of the *rākṣasas* any more successful in extolling Rāma’s might for having triumphed over an utterly fearsome enemy who yet has no power, and is eventually presented as a figure of fun? Did Rāma enjoy hearing that his glory was tarnished, and his supreme exertions of body and spirit had been just not worth the bother? Worse still, now that he has been elevated to divine status as Viṣṇu, he and his fellow gods fare little better. At the hands of the creators of Agastya’s narrative of the *rākṣasas* — by comparison with successive creators of the core text, and with the characters they created — how are the mighty fallen!

**Structure and purpose of Agastya’s post-victory narratives:**The passage 7,1—36, with its two Sub-units and its appendix on Hanumān — with all their anomalies and unintended consequences — are a development out of the core narrative found in *VRm* 2—6, but not a departure from its main purpose: the exaltation of Rāma. As a whole it presents a succession of disparate episodes clearly, carefully and effectively structured to demonstrate the limitations of Rāvaṇa’s moral, physical and sexual prowess (founded as they are on his boon of invulnerability alone). It has been compiled from narrative elements of varied natures — military might, statecraft, familial obligations and respect, intervention by Viṣṇu, burlesque humiliation and ridicule of the villain — all overhung and welded together by a sense of doom based on the audience’s foreknowledge of the outcome, buttressed by reassuring narratorial interventions addressed to Rāma, the fictive audience.[[264]](#footnote-264)

The overall purpose of Agastya’s narratives as presented nevertheless poses a number of puzzles. In what purports to be an encomium on his glory, the newly-installed Rāma is praised for killing Indrajit, whose capture of Indra during Rāvaṇa’s assault on Indra’s heaven is said to prove him a greater threat to Rāma and the cosmos than was Rāvaṇa. Yet the death of Indrajit has regularly been presented throughout the *VRm* tradition as the most spectacular exploit, not of Rāma, but of Lakṣmaṇa, and by this point it should be far too well-established in the received text to allow such an apparently careless blunder to remain unchallenged by the audience. The matter is raised rather intemperately by a group of seers, so Rāma politely asks for an explanation. Agastya’s reply, presented as the whole purpose of his narrative from 7,2.1, strangely does not address the topic for another 27 *sargas,* towards the end, but before the present climax, of Sub-unit 2 (7,28—30); he eventually summarises his answer to Rāma’s question at 7,30.42. Whether the sages’ error (which the author does not cause Rāma to correct), together with a less decisive hint at 7,27.15, can be explained as really no more than authorial slips, or whether deliberate, the discrepancy is certainly glaring.[[265]](#footnote-265)

A more fundamental problem, as far as the structure is concerned, is that the current text leaves Sub-unit 1 (that is to say, the original beginning to the *Uttarakāṇḍa*) with neither an opening nor a purpose. Here a comparison with the wording of the *RU* may be helpful. This *MBh upākhyāna* not merely follows the narrative of the *VRm*, rearranging it if appropriate to its function as a summary,[[266]](#footnote-266) but is also closely aligned with the text of the NE recension (JLB 1978/2000). Significantly, its adapter used only expressions appearing in Sub-unit 1, strongly suggesting that Sub-unit 2 was not yet available as a model when the *RU* was being compiled; that is to say, it corroborates the suggestion that at least parts of the enclosing passage I have identified as Sub-unit 2 were added after Sub-unit 1 had already been in circulation for some time. One such expression, applied to Indrajit to explain the magnitude of the threat he had posed, occurs at 7,1.21c,[[267]](#footnote-267) and is in no way incompatible with the list of *rākṣasa* warriors named as killed in verses 16 to 18. Indrajit’s superiority to Rāvaṇa is mentioned only in verses 19 to 20, and picked up in Rāma’s request to Agastya for more information at verses 23-27; only in verse 27 is Indrajit credited with conquering Indra. If verses 19-27 are considered as having been inserted to facilitate the incorporation of Sub-unit 2 (i.e. they are in effect part of Sub-unit 2), the majority of *sarga* 7,1 (vv.1-18) falls into place as the original introduction to Agastya’s narrative, with a presumed question by Rāma for information about Rāvaṇa himself now overlaid by verses 23-27 forming the question mentioned at 7,2.1. The sage then opens his reply making no allusion to Indrajit, leading naturally into the description of Rāvaṇa’s lineage and early exploits forming the content of Sub-unit 1. To excise the whole of the speech of the importunate sages at 7,1.12-22, with Rāma’s response, would leave the whole of Agastya’s narrative, not just Sub-unit 1, with no appropriate opening or purpose. Nor can the capture of Indra (7,28—29), awkwardly introduced though it is, easily be separated from its present context in Agastya’s narrative; the passage is too integral to the structure of the text. It is firmly linked to other constituent elements by the figure and attributes of Viṣṇu, testifying to a particularly late stage of development in the text of the *VRm*. It seems reasonable to locate the Indrajit/Indra duel in the context of Viṣṇu’s defeat of Sumālin and his brothers (7,3.20—8.25) together with the whole of Rāvaṇa’s attack on the *devas* in Indra’s heaven that culminates in the Indrajit episode (7,27—30.14).

Indeed, the extent and cohesion of the component narrative elements comprising *VRm* 7,1—36 as a whole is not entirely clear. Somewhat discourteously, Agastya abruptly closes the conversation and leads his fellow-seers away at 7,36.45-46,[[268]](#footnote-268) seeming to refer only to *sargas* 35 and 36; only by forcing the wording could v.45 be stretched to cover 7,1—36 in its entirety. However, the conclusion of the account of the *rākṣasas* is even more cursory, with no suggestion of the seers’ departing.[[269]](#footnote-269) 7,30.42 closes the conversation in a much more satisfactory way, by referring back to the opening of Sub-unit 2 (the declared purpose of Agastya’s whole narrative)[[270]](#footnote-270) and raising the implication that Rāvaṇa’s encounters with Arjuna and Vālin (7,31—34), as well as the appendix on Hanumān, were conceived and inserted as further Sub-units of Agastya’s narrative.

During this transitional stage the old heroic culture, concentrating on human men and their superhuman exploits, was being submerged by a culture that preferred stories of gods, with supernatural boons replacing natural prowess, and wonders occasionally giving way to tasteless ridicule and vulgar burlesque. The Old Order had changed. The earliest form of the Rāma story that we can retrieve narrates the efforts of the virtuous young prince to uphold the integrity of his father Daśaratha, and to rescue his captive wife and punish her abductor, Rāvaṇa. When the gods became involved as more than mere admirers of the human Rāma, the purpose of the narrative was changed to a more universal one: Rāvaṇa was a threat to the whole cosmos (particularly to the gods themselves) and a hero must be found who would destroy Rāvaṇa and save the gods from destruction — the unintended consequence of boons conferred on the *rākṣasa* king by Brahmā himself, making the gods powerless to act in their own defence. Viṣṇu undertakes the task of becoming incarnate as the human Rāma, and narrative problems abound. Some, where heroes and villains alike are disparaged, have been discussed already.

This change of purpose prompts a number of simplistic questions, to which the answers are far from simple. Now that the concept of the heroic has been modified, who is the hero of the Rāma story? Of course, it remains Rāma. But is Rāma still himself, or is he now Viṣṇu? Some of the more highly developed adaptations call him exclusively ‘Viṣṇu’, and clearly think of him as Viṣṇu the god, not as Rāma the man (or former man). And we now know that whoever he is, he is not necessarily as great as we were led to believe, when he was a single human being ranged against an all-powerful supernatural enemy.

Even allowing for the fact that space is limited in such a brief summary of the whole complex narrative, the redirected focus has removed the need for any mention of some of the tradition’s most significant and prominent characters. Daśaratha now has no place in the plot and Sītā appears only as a hint — the means for the reborn Vedavatī to achieve her revenge. The mighty Hanumān supplants all Rāma’s other *vānara* allies. Lakṣmaṇa too is absent, but his position is rather more complicated. In the first *sarga* of the whole passage the audience is told that the killing of Indrajit had been the most crucial point of the battle, as the rest of Agastya’s narrative (or at least part of Sub-unit 2) purports to explain. So is Lakṣmaṇa, traditional killer of Indrajit, the real hero? In what I postulate as the first words of Sub-unit 2, Rāma himself is specifically said to have killed Indrajit.[[271]](#footnote-271) Rāma is by this time acknowledged to be Viṣṇu incarnate (7,8.25), so the implied hero must be Viṣṇu, who chose to be born to Daśaratha as his human father (*VRm* 1,15.7). An anomaly immediately arises when the childless king is given *pāyasa* to distribute to his three chief wives at the sacrifice that produces his sons (vv.17-18). It is part of the story that Daśaratha has four sons: is Viṣṇu to be born only as Rāma, or as all four? Daśaratha’s division of the *pāyasa* in unequal shares (vv.25-27) muddies a problem for which hundreds of subsequent tellers have struggled in vain to find a satisfactory resolution.[[272]](#footnote-272) Is the transfer of Lakṣmaṇa’s greatest exploit to Rāma at 7,1.19-21 another clumsy attempt to deal with the anomaly?

The reader will be aware by now that one of my biggest problems in preparing my text has been the question of what tense to use when comparing events in the core books 2—6 —fixed in the minds of audience or readers as ‘already in the past’ — with others in books 1 and 7, specifically in 7,1—36, as having occurred long before. This is not the trivial matter it may seem: it is symbolic of a whole host of dilemmas faced by subsequent tellers, of whom the fictive Agastya is only one of the earliest, when trying to introduce new material into a well-known tale.

The whole of Agastya’s post-victory narrative at 7,1—36 was demonstrably composed in several different stages, almost certainly at several different dates over an extended period, but the unifying thread linking all sections and sub-sections is the attempt to force the well-known, highly popular and carefully crafted ‘Old Material’ of the Rāma narrative into a new mould to make it conform to different standards and values. This is a hazardous occupation, especially when it involves disparaging villains, gods, allies and heroes alike. That such disparate elements could be tolerated in a single series of episodes is evidence that the culture that produced it was in a state of transition, with the process of evolution from the heroic, via the burlesque, towards full acceptance of Viṣṇu as supreme god just beginning. It is the quality and attraction of the original narrative that has enabled it to survive that process with its popularity unimpaired. Agastya’s repeated New Beginnings come dangerously close to ruining the concepts on which each part has been based. They are not a connecting ‘bridge’, rather a disturbing interruption to the narrative thread.

**Agastya’s post-victory narrative**, **the rise of Hanumān 7,35—36**A two-*sarga* appendix to Agastya’s narrative about the *rākṣasas* brings Hanumān to the fore. Rāma summarises his powers and exploits, declaring his heroic deeds to be greater than those of Vālin and Rāvaṇa (7,35.2), and greater even than a number of *devas* (7,35.8), asking Agastya to explain why he had not used them to rescue Sugrīva from Vālin’s rage (4,9—11 and 4,45). The request and Agastya’s answer presents the author with two anomalies which he is forced to ignore. One is that it seems that Hanumān himself is present in Ayodhyā until sent back to Kiṣkindhā with the other *vānaras* in 7,39, so it would have been logical for Rāma to have asked him himself. The other is that Hanumān’s inactivity in *kāṇḍa* 4 (where he is already prominent and characterised by his loyalty) is yet another narrative necessity, for it is not he but Rāma who must be made to kill Vālin, so that Rāma may claim the grateful Sugrīva’s aid on the basis of their parallel misfortunes. As always, logic must be subservient to an author’s desire to create a good story.

In his explanation Agastya reproduces much of the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* story of the monkey’s birth as son of Vāyu and his babyhood leap towards the sun, gaining him his name and a boon from Brahmā after the angry Wind God has been propitiated (*VRm* 4,65; allusion at 6,19.13-16). The author elaborates and augments the basic narrative with attacks on Rāhu and on Airāvata by the young monkey, incurring a much-intensified reaction from Vāyu (and some gratifyingly vulgar audience reaction, no doubt). It is now made plain that Hanumān’s earlier silence was not the result of bashfulness but because the unruly child had been cursed by some sages to forget his prowess for a long time (7,36.27-34). The sages had been provoked by his riotous behaviour (typical of real monkeys interacting with real humans at sacred sites even today, and adding a refreshingly realistic touch to the whole fantasy world of the *Rāmāyaṇa*); significantly, the undisciplined child’s arrogant behaviour was fuelled by his reliance on the boons he had been granted. The whole episode recalls and contrasts with Rāvaṇa’s behaviour in the earlier part of Agastya’s narrative, with his obsessive warfare recast to be appropriate for a hero figure, rather than a villain. The young culprit is lovable, and his punishment for misusing his boons is not designed to be permanent, unlike Rāvaṇa’s retribution; the sages merely protect their peace and their property, knowing that the boisterous child’s strength will be/has been needed (and used) later in the story.

Not only does this author augment Hanumān’s physical prowess; he introduces a new factor, his mental abilities, into the picture, in what seems to be an attempt to attribute to him a fully-rounded personality comparable to the human heroes. He could hardly be expected to have received an education similar to the one that made the young Rāghavas so accomplished (1,17.14-22), yet Rāma now attributes not only heroic virtues, but also wisdom and mastery of polity (7,35.3) to the monkey characterised in the core *kāṇḍas* as impulsive, excitable and simple, clearly indicating a rise in his status. Beside his traditional physical prowess, heroism and fortitude, Agastya now extols his upright, agreeable nature and his shrewd, penetrating intelligence, and tells how the eager Hanumān mastered the complexities of grammar: turning to the sun he followed it in its path from its rising to its setting — from the eastern to the western mountains — facing the all-seeing Sūrya (7,36.41-42).  This is an elaborated form of the boon already bestowed by Sūrya at 7,36.13-14, and it takes up hints already present in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, where he deliberates carefully about the best level of language to use in talking to the captive Sītā (5,28.17-19), and delivers a speech to Rāvaṇa appropriate to the role as Rāma’s ambassador he has decided to assume (5,48.10-16 and 49.1-36, particularly 49.15-19).

To laud Hanumān in this way has the same disadvantage that was noted in Agastya’s accounts of Rāvaṇa and Indrajit: his strength is great, and apparently limitless, but it is dependent on a boon conferred by Brahmā. At 4,65.25 the boon protects him from death in battle from any weapons, modified to the impossibility of being bound at 5,46.36-51 and 48.14-15 to suit the context at Rāvaṇa’s court. So Hanumān, like Rāvaṇa, is no longer quite so great personally as we have been led to believe. These two *sargas* also were composed in a culture where the heroic emphasis of earlier times was no longer all-important. It can safely be assumed that Agastya’s account of Hanumān’s back-story was composed at a late stage in the compilation of the tradition now known as the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* and in imitation of (and hence later than) *sargas* 7,1—34, to which it is connected only tenuously; the notably elaborate nature of some of its diction adds credibility to the supposition that the passage was not included until a late point in the compilation. 7,36.44 in particular was evidently composed in full knowledge of the *vānara* incarnation narrated in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1,16).[[273]](#footnote-273)

Hanumān is depicted in later tradition in contradictory ways. Some texts elevate him, until in modern times he reaches the status of a hugely powerful god, particularly in popular culture. Texts with a strong Śaiva emphasis adopt him, some even making him a son of Śiva, while those with different affiliations may diminish or even eliminate him completely. Agastya’s narrative reflects an early stage of the glorification process; the *Mahābhārata* tradition provides prominent (and contradictory) examples of all shades of opinion.[[274]](#footnote-274) The encounter with BhīmaPāṇḍava (the *Hanumadbhīmasaṃvāda*, *MBh* 3,146.59—3,150.15), in which Bhīma is ignominiously defeated by his elderly half-brother,[[275]](#footnote-275) extends the glorification process. When Bhīma is favoured with a display of Hanumān’s wondrously massive form, he declares that Rāma could have delegated the conduct of the war to Hanumān. Hanumān agrees, explaining that he forebore merely in order not to detract from Rāma’s glory (149.14-19). Rāma is acknowledged to be Viṣṇu (147.28), and a certain amount of affectionate mockery is directed at both parties; both features tend to indicate a late date for the passage. In the rest of the *MBh* tradition, however, Hanumān’s role is increasingly underplayed. In the *Rāmopākhyāna’s* substantial summary of the Rāma story found at *MBh* 3,257—76, many of his more spectacular exploits are eliminated or minimised: his flight to Laṅkā and search for Sītā (66 *sargas* in the *VRm*) occupies only 12 verses (*RU* 266.57-68). There is no search of Laṅkā, no fights, no interview with Rāvaṇa, and in the final battle he takes little individual part: no flights for healing herbs; no bringing the herb-mountain.[[276]](#footnote-276) Elsewhere, he is virtually absent from the *MBh* CE.[[277]](#footnote-277) As for its supposed continuation, the *Harivaṃśa*, he has been completely eliminated.[[278]](#footnote-278)

**Legacy**

With the Grand Finale of Rāma’s re-entry into heaven as Viṣṇu, the *VRm* narrative had already been closed, for the last time, not to be reopened by later tradition (see pp.76-77), before Agastya’s backward-facing narrative was accepted into the text of the *VRm* CE. At 36 *sargas,* it is by far the longest, and latest, insert into the story of Rāma, but its detailed elaborations add nothing material to the long-established plotline; they merely explain the rise and fall of the *rākṣasas*. They do, however, have a valuable legacy. They allow future scholarship to establish a little more firmly our understanding of the relationship between the *brāhmaṇic* tradition and the Jain refutation developed by Vimalasūri, who both used and transformed episodes extant in the CE in Agastya’s narrative alone; the direction of borrowing is quite clear, and provides some help in establishing the respective dates of both source and adaptation.

As for the familiar narrative, the equivocal portrayal of Hanumān’s role — magnifying, eliminating, or diverting it to a different purpose to suit the inclination of the new creator — is emblematic of the Rāma tradition as a whole, particularly of the *Uttara* and *Bālakāṇḍas*.As the values of society evolved, so would the understanding of the well-loved tale, but later generations have responded to the need they felt to accommodate its now contentious *kṣatriya* ethos to their new understandings.[[279]](#footnote-279) Any uneasiness evoked by these new values was combatted from an early date: Bhavabhūti (works dated to the early 8th century) counteracted the harshness of Rāma’s arbitrary execution of Śambūka with a positive gloss; his reconstruction of the consequences of Rāma’s kingly obligations to disown Sītā, of which both parties are shown to be equal victims is matched in romantic pathos only by the rather later dramatist Dhīranāga. The Supporting material *Reception of Stage 3 in later Rāma tradition* testifies to the abundant persistence of interest in the characters and episodes created in the Third stage; more evidence is provided by the number of versions where a subsequent author has felt the need to complete a version of the Rāma story left without an *Uttarakāṇḍa* by the incapacity or death of a usually superior poet, fulfilling a clear demand for the well-known sequel to Rāma’s triumph not to be lost.

The appeal of the ever-evolving characters of the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* appears destined to remain eternal.

1. MB 2012, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Examined in chapter 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See ch.2 pp.20-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See ch.6 pp.108-9 where the personnel of 7,4—8 (Sub-unit 2) have been based on a brief passage in Sub-unit 1 (7,25.23-25). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For details see Supporting material *Allusions*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See ch.5, p.103 for a list of some topics. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For the composition of the *RU* and an exploration of the relationship between it and the *VRm*, seech.2 pp.15-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The link with Agastya’s tale is confirmed by the victim being clearly identified by his patronymic as Rāvaṇa’s non-*rākṣasa* half-brother, rather than as his more usual manifestation, Kubera. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A list of later narratives showing some acquaintance with the *Uttarakāṇḍa* characters, at least Kuśa and Lava, refutes any idea that their transcreators were so shocked by Rāma’s actions that they deliberately rejected Book 7 as a whole; see Supporting material *Reception of Stage 3 in later Rāma tradition.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Later in this chapter (pp.20-23) we consider the segmentation of the narrative. The growth of the narrative makes designation of areas of the earlier parts by the traditional names, whether ‘*kāṇḍas*’, ‘Books’ or whatever, anachronistic; but unfortunately it is largely unavoidable. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For exhaustive details by JLB of the contents and textual authority of these passages, with various additional comments by JLB and MB, see B. Bibliographic Inventory, 2. *VRm* ‘*Stage 3: Bālakāṇḍa contents lists*’ and ‘Stages 4-5: *Summaries of App.1 passages*’. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The traditional French practice of printing the contents page at the end of their books is much more logical. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The summaries have also been examined by Renate Söhnen-Thieme (1978), who attributed the discrepancies between 1,1 and the *VRm* CE text to an alternative, unknown source. The multiplicity of versions of the well-known, well-loved story by this stage of its development is one of the greatest lessons to be derived from any study of Rāma’s story. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The first thirty or so *sargas* form a dramatic high point in the narrative and so are particularly liable to have early material overlaid by modifications of language and style in a way that resists disentanglement (JLB 1998: 383). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This and all other translations from the Sanskrit text are by JLB. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Atri himself (but not the exiles’ visit) appears in non-narrative allusions at *Uttarakāṇḍa* 7,1.5, 7,50.2 and 7,95.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 2,110.16-20; the CE makes no further mention of the gift, but later in the tradition it is a favourite and much-elaborated motif (see ORA C. *Narrative elements*). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. JLB 1985: 14 and n.18; 313; also JLB 1998: 384-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Similarly, it is Anasūyā who is the focus of 6 N mss (5 NE + D11) in a line (79\*) excluded from Nārada’s list between CE *ślokas* 34 and 35, in a late attempt to correct what was seen as an omission. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The brief mention of Viśvāmitra is entirely consistent with his appearance in the *Bālakāṇḍa* narrative (examined in ch.4). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The second attack, recalled at 3,37.1-13 is not narrated at the appropriate point in the CE text. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Viśvāmitra is mentioned only in Sītā’s account to Anasūyā of her marriage (2,110.43-44) and at 4,34.6-8, 7,1.5 and 7,87.2 (not referring to the Rāma story). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. G.H. Bhatt, Editor of the CE *Bālakāṇḍa*, takes a position directly opposite to that of the fictive author of 1,3.4ab, and suggests omitting the story-telling *sargas* 1,31—64 (CE 1: p.456). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Viśvāmitra’s role in the *Bālakāṇḍa* as Rāma’s tutor is examined in ch.4, pp.86-94 . [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *cf.* 4,1049\*2, a S insertion after 49.7ab; see Lefeber’s comments, 1994: p.324. This identification is confirmed by the third summary, which specifically uses the name Svayaṃprabhā (1, App.1: 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Saṃpāti needs no forgiveness: the loss of his wings results from no offence, but from his act of heroism in protecting his brother (contributing to the theme of brotherly love or non-love explored throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and allowing Jaṭāyus to play a part in the narrative by trying to protect Sītā); furthermore, Saṃpāti helps the *vānaras* as a tribute to his dead brother (4,57), at a point where he gives no indication that he remembers the prediction. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See ch.6 pp.47-48 and Supporting material: *Outline structure*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hermann Jacobi (1893:37) also regarded the destruction of the *madhuvana* as an episode interpolated in the text because its burlesque humour was amusing to its audiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The paucity of information in Nārada’s text is remedied by tellers of a later era, incorporating allusions to material now part of the CE. A well-attested addition of S and many N mss, 1,107\*, records Rāma’s rejection of Sītā, her entry into the fire and exoneration by Agni, now found at various points of CE 6,103—4 + 106. At 1,110\* Rāma sends Hanumān to prepare Bharata for his impending approach before he actually arrives at Nandigrāma (*cf.* 6,112—13). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The possibility that episodes that show Rāma in a harsh light (such as his initial repudiation of Sītā on Laṅkā 1,3.26-27) might have been omitted for reasons of delicacy would be more cogent had Vālmīki not gone on to mention her banishment. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. 1,1.66-69 refers only to the consecration of Vibhīṣaṇa, the congratulations of the gods, the resurrection of the *vānara* casualties and the return via Nandigrāma; 1,3.26d mentions ‘regaining Sītā in the enemy’s city’ and a few further episodes, none of them unfamiliar. 1, App.1: 241-81 is much more detailed, closely approximating to the end of the present CE *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (including Sītā’s vindication by fire). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. When Sītā is seized by Virādha, Rāma ‘embraced Sītā and comforted her’ without hesitation (3,4.1). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See, for example, Kabandha’s two incompatible explanations of his deformity at 3,67.1-6 and 8-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Vimalasūri, Raviṣeṇa, Saṅghadāsa, Svayambhū, Puṣpadanta, Abhinava Pampa, Hemacandra and Dhaneśvara. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The influence from Jain material on the later *brāhmaṇic* tradition is worthy of considerably closer attention than I can give it here. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The date at which the *RU* was composed (and presumably but not necessarily incorporated into the *MBh*), formerly suggested to be roughly the first century B.C. (JLB 1978/2000: 299-301), is now thought to be rather later on the evidence here indicated.

    The *RU* was also examined by Renate Söhnen-Thieme (1980)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tabulated on B. Bibliographical inventory: *3. MBh and Purāṇas*. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Detailed in ch.6, pp.104-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *VRm* 7,2.4bcd, 7,10.6ab and 7,10.10bcd. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The *Draupadīharaṇa* (3,248—56) is a clumsy and unconvincing adaptation of Rāvaṇa’s abduction of Sītā by a narrator lacking the inspiration and skill of the *RU’s* poet. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This view of the nature and purpose of the *RU* is shared by Virpi Hämeen-Anttila (2019: 232 and 238). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The ‘once’ appearing in van Buitenen’s translation (“You who are true to your promises, once you promised me you would grant me one desire”) does not appear in the text of *MBh* 3,261.21ab: *satyapratijña yan me tvaṃ kāmam ekaṃ nisṛṣṭavān.* The episode is examined more fully in ch.3, pp.27-28*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For the question of Rāma’s divinity in the *RU* see below, pp.19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Avindhya is so named at *VRm* 5,35.12-13 (mainly attested in N and read by just 4 S mss., T2, D7-9), at 5.759\*1 (read by most N mss.), where he refers to Rāma’s alliance with Sugrīva), and as Avidhya at 6,25.20a (called Aviddha in the CE text, but there are multiple variants for the name and 6 N mss. [Ñ B2-4 D2] have *avindhyena,* tending to confirm the identity), where Saramā reports his having urged Sītā’s return to Rāma. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. His sympathetic nature is further demonstrated at *RU* 273.28b, where he urges Rāvaṇa not to kill Sītā in his grief for Indrajit, and at 275.6c,39b where he urges Rāma to accept back the chaste Sītā. One begins to wonder how he had kept his position at the *rākṣasa* court unscathed for so long! [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. 273.8-14, taken up at *Bhaṭṭikāvya* 14.50; see also *RaṅgaRm* 6.2481-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Apart from a few isolated allusions, the incarnation motif occurs only as an insertion into the birth story of the Dāśarathis (1,13.45—16.20, the *putreṣṭi*), the last few *sargas* of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and Sub-unit 2 of Agastya’s post-victory narrative; the motif is planned to be explored in ch.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The only exception is the *madhuvana* episode (*VRm* 1,3.23; 5,59—62; *RU* 266.26-28). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Quite how the knowledge that its hero is divine is supposed to reassure the despondent human Yudhiṣṭhira I am unable to explain. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The use (or lack of use) of the *RU* in the rest of the *MBh* and the *Harivaṃśa* are examined in MB 2005 and MB 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Not mentioned are Aṅgada’s spectacular embassy to Rāvaṇa (*VRm* 6,31.50-79, *RU* 267.54, 268.7-22), and Indrajit’s need to conduct a sacrifice in the Nikumbhilā grove to escape his death (6,72.10-13; *cf.* 7,30.11-12); both surprising omissions may be casualties of the need for selection in a summary, but the absence of the supplementary spy Śārdūla(6,21) from 1, App.1: 205-9 is much more understandable. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. One NW ms (D2) ends its colophon for 6,97 *rāma* | *samāptaṃ yuddhaparva* | (and Ñ1 inserts a *phalaśruti* in the margin at this point); up to four N mss add after the *kāṇḍa* name (*laṅkākāṇḍe*) *ābhyudayike* in the colophons of most *sargas* between 6,97 and 6,116. The only indication that this designation might have extended into the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is that D2 adds to its colophon for 7,11 *ābhyudayike parvaṇi* after the *kāṇḍa* name.

    Believing that “Most probably the Ur-Rāmāyaṇa did not contain any Kāṇḍa-division at all,” Ganga Sagar Rai divides the unsegmented whole text then existent of the Rāma story into two parts, with the division at the point of Rāvaṇa’s death, and calling the second part up to the end of what is now recognised as the *Uttarakāṇḍa* ‘the *Rāmābhyudaya’* (Rai 1991: 104-7; see also Singh and Rai 2002). Significantly, he sees evidence of “link ślokas in the coronation sarga connecting it with the canto 37 of the present Uttarakāṇḍa”, but does not pursue its implication that the intervening narrative by Agastya has been inserted. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The only exception is the division between the *Yuddha* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* occurring uniformly after 6,116. The N mss generally place the division between the *Bāla* and *Ayodhyā kāṇḍas* after CE 2,1 (as well as in many of them using the name *ādikāṇḍa* and even in a few *ayodhyākāṇḍa* for *bālakāṇḍa*), they place the division between the *Ayodhyā* and *Araṇya kāṇḍas* after 2,107, and that between the *Araṇya* and *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas* after 4,1; the NE mss (except Ñ1) divide the *Kiṣkindhā* and *Sundara kāṇḍas* after 4,62 but the NW mss + Ñ1 divide them after 5,1; and the majority of N mss divide the *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* after 6,15 (but B1 after 6,12, D2 after 6,5 and D1.4 after 6,31). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. His tale of Raghu’s dynasty is presented in 19 untitled segments; Herman Tieken (1989) and Anna Bonisoli Alquati (2005) use differing terms for the segments (‘chapter’ and ‘*sarga/*canto’ respectively) underlining the lack of general recognition at this point. The first 8 and the final 4 relate to Rāma’s ancestors and descendants; the division of the 7 Rāma sections however bears no relationship to the 7 *kāṇḍas* of the *VRm* narrative. It may be relevant to remark that the first extant Jain transcreation, that by Vimalasūri, which can hardly be earlier than the 4th century, if not rather later, does not follow the *VRm* segmentation structure into *kāṇḍas*, whereas one of his later successors, Svayambhū, dated to the second half of the 9th or to the 10th century, uses a recognisable 5-*kāṇḍa* structure in his *Paümacariü* (De Clercq 2018- ; MB and JLB 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The narrative element of the basic *Bāla* core comprises the twofold birth narrative followed immediately by Rāma’s First validation (the defeat of Tāṭakā and Mārīca) as far as his Second validation (the bow test and his consequent marriage, and is concluded by the return of the marriage party to Ayodhyā (approximately 1,73.1-5 + 1,76.6-18); the rest is filled out with In-tales and the two subsidiary insertions (the encounters with Ahalyā and Rāma Jāmadagnya). In-tales of the whole CE are currently listed in Supporting material *Outline structure*. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. JLB 1998: 383: “Textual repetition between the last *sarga* of the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the first *sarga* of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* probably points to the separation of what once formed a single passage.” See also 1998: 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. It is worth noting that many S mss and Ś1 read 2,1.1-4 or 1-5 after 1,76.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. However, the fact that Sītā is physically seized without comment, rather than merely threatened, implies that it cannot be much later. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ancient heroic narratives should never be judged by the *mores* of two and a half thousand years later (regrettably still not universally practised). No doubt the sensibilities of early audiences would not have found this banter offensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. For examples, in addition to the boons from the core narratives of all three stages to be discussed in detail in this chapter, seeSupporting material *Boons*. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. For attempts to divert condemnation successively from Daśaratha, then from Kaikeyī, and finally from Mantharā, and conversely for Kaikeyī as a continuing source of malice in the later tradition, see ORA C*. Narrative Elements.* [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. [JLB]As its language and style reveal, the opening of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* has clearly been extensively reworked to such an extent that roughly the first thirty *sargas* bear little stylistic relationship to the core text. Several *sargas* contain high proportions of long compounds, *vṛddhied* derivatives or similes, all of which are commonly markers of the style typical of stage 2. In particular most of the instances of the periphrastic future and of the future participle in the whole *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* occur within the first thirty *sargas* (JLB 1985: 329-30 with fuller details; JLB 1998: 383). The features just mentioned are not found in *sargas* 2,9—10 but other indicators of a later style found there are the repetition of 9.3b-4c repeated at 7b-8c (and in the N v.l. extending to 4d = 8d), the occurrence of *mā* with an unaugmented imperfect at 9.16f, the pseudo-desiderative adjective *vaktukāma* at 10.13b, and a past active pariciple, *āpedivān,* functioning as a main verb at 10.31c. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Later tellers seize on the opportunities to explain and elaborate the *devāsurayuddha* episode; see ORA C. *Narrative Elements.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The significance of the *Rāmopākhyāna* as corroboration of the text of the *VRm* is discussed in ch.2 pp.16-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. For Sheldon Pollock’s discussion of the originality of v.3 from his standpoint, see *VRm* 2, Introduction pp.27-32 and Notes pp.507-8; his contention is discussed in greater detail in Supporting material *Boons.* [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Unambiguous references to boons granted in the remote past are found at 2,16.21 and 2,99.4; vaguer references occurring at 1,1.20; 2,10.26; 2,23.20 and 5,31.17-18 are more equivocal as to time-scale. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Later tellers are not always so reticent; for incidents of Kaikeyī’s continuing malice, in the fears of other characters, or in further hostile acts, see ORAC. *Narrative Elements.* [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. JLB reports much textual disturbance around 2,108.10-12, including one ἅπαξ λεγόμενoν at 108.11d, though with nothing conclusive. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. For his practice of basing his narrative style on repeatedly reversing the expectations he had carefully built up in his audiences, see MB 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. SeeSupporting material *Allusions* for a list of the more prominent of these allusions, comparing their occurrence in noteworthy locations. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. 6,28.28-29, in which Rāma reviews his cosmic task in the battle for Laṅkā without mentioning Sītā. This passage is more typical of the ethos of a late part of the Stage 3 narrative than of Stage 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. At 5,49.24-26 and 6,47.51-53 Hanumān taunts Rāvaṇa that he is vulnerable to both men and monkeys. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Explored in greater detail in ch.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The standard account, still only in outline, is inserted into the *Bālakāṇḍa* when the gods remind Brahmā of his grant of the boon to Rāvaṇa, appealing to him to protect them from its consequences; Brahmā counters the implied criticism by revealing that he has already done what they ask by limiting the boon (1,14.12-14; also at 1,15.2-6). The *rākṣasīs*’ version is planned to be examined in ch.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Viṣṇu’s incarnation as Rāma and its consequences are planned to be explored in ch.5. The war against Sukeśa’s sons (7,4—8, examined in ch.6, pp.107-9) introduces a parallel episode set within a much earlier time-frame that presents no problems to the incarnation motif. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Arjuna will be killed by Rāma Jāmadagnya, who will submit to Rāma Dāśarathi; Vālin will be killed by Rāma Dāśarathi. Keeping Rāvaṇa alive in order to play his ordained part in the Rāma story is of course, the author’s prime consideration. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Narrated at 7,3.8-22 (Vaiśravaṇa) and 7,10 (Kumbhakarṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Rāvaṇa). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Also appearing at 1,14.13-14+15.5-6; the relationship of this part of the *Bālakāṇḍa* to the other mentions is yet to be determined. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Boons to Vaiśravaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa in the true sense of the term are noted nowhere else in the CE. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *VRm* 6,49. The motif of the monstrously precocious new-born child (a presage either of virtue or of evil) is widespread in international traditional tales; see Thompson motifs F 611.3.2, T 585 and T 615, *precocious child* (similarly Thompson/Balys; Thompson motifs are subsequently referred to as *T, TB*). An inconsequential episode inexplicably inserted into the account of Sukeśa’s birth (7,4.30), where the compassionate Umā (wishing to prevent a recurrence of the *post partum* neglect she has just witnessed when his parents resume their marital relations immediately) gives all *rākṣasīs* the power to conceive and deliver at the same moment, and for the child to be the same age as the mother — and therefore be preternaturally independent — may perhaps be a clumsy attempt to explain the behaviour of the new-born Kumbhakarṇa at 6,49. If so, it would be a monstrous calumny against Kaikasī, the mother by more or less natural means (7,5) of Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Śurpaṇakhā, who remains devoted to their interests, whether for good (6,25.20-23 and developed in the later tradition: see ORA C. *Narrative Elements*) or for ill (7,9). In later tradition she experiences difficulty suckling baby Rāvaṇa’s ten squabbling heads, and supports Vibhīṣaṇa’s defection. Fortunately, Umā’s boon seems not to have entered the tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Already at this point a number of mss, mainly NE, make Brahmā specifically exclude immunity from death for Rāvaṇa by adding 7.163\* (noted by Robert and Sally Goldman in the Princeton trans. 2017: 532 and 536, *ad* vv.16 and 30). By the time of Sub-unit 2 the position is more strictly defined, and Brahmā refuses Indrajit’s request for immortality on the grounds that “Absolute immortality does not exist for any living beings on earth” (7,30.9). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. It is ironic that it is the boon granted by Brahmā himself that creates this deceptive feeling of security and superiority. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Like so many of such plot details, the possession of this boon seems to have been invented *ad hoc*. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Rāma himself is represented as being puzzled by this anomaly (7,35.11-12). Hanumān’s boons are also examined in ch.6 pp.119-20*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Rāma bestows a similar boon on Hanumān as a reward for fetching the herb mountain to heal the wounded Lakṣmaṇa in a late addition to the text (*VRm* 6, App.76). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *T, TB* motif D 1850.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See ch.2 p*.*19. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Presumably to make way for this possibility Dvivida and Mainda are told by Rāma not to join the mass return to heaven but to remain until the Kaliyuga in an insertion at *VRm* 7,1472\*. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See MB 2006 on narrative allusions, and JLB 1985 on convergence of language. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. For the introduction and consequences of segmentation, see above, ch.2 pp.19-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Planned to be examined in ‘Bridging Passage’, ch.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Princeton trans. 2017: 199-216. Their own decision to place so much weight on the opinion of mediaeval commentators can also be considered subjective; see also, for instance, their renumbered *sarga* 88\*, the lines from App. 7,13.52-56, prefixed to 7,89.1, also *sargas* 63 and 67, and the so-called *prakṣipta sargas* translated and annotated separately from the main text on pp.1285-1402; for detailed comments by JLB see B. Bibliographic Inventory, 2. *VRm* Stage 3: *Uttarakāṇḍa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Prudent statecraft: 2,94.9-23,29-31,42-46.

    Justice: 2,61.14; 2,94.47-59; 4,18.

    Security (personal): 2,61.16-17,21; (national): 2,61.19; (provision of an army): 2,94.23-28.

    Prosperity (personal wealth): 2,61.10; 2,94.14; (city): 2,94.34-36; (new building projects): 2,61.11.

    Prosperity of countryside: 2,94.37-41; (control over nature): 2,61.9; 6,116.84-90; (control over weather): 2,61.8.

    Celebrations, story-telling, amorous escapades: 2,61.13-15.

    Orthodox religion: 2,61.22; 2,94.7-8,32-33; security for sages: 2,61.18; 3,5; 3,9.

    Sacrifices: 2,61.12; 2,94.4,8; 6,116.80-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *MBh* parallels to the kingless state passage are noted by JLB (1985: 331; detailed at 2000: 168) and by Pollock (1986: notes to *VRm* 2,61.8, p.443). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. See JLB 1985: 333; Pollock too lists *MBh* parallels in his note on verses 2,94.7ff, p.495. Some further textual disturbance is indicated by the references to Guha’s presence at 2,92.15 and 2,93.40 (see notes on pp.492 and 494), an anomaly that generates elaboration by a number of subsequent poets. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Aṅgada’s role as one of the leading *vānaras* in the subsequent narrative obviates the need for the latter of these considerations in the *VRm.* [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. For a definition of the extent of the core narrative see Supporting material *Outline structure.* For *sargas* 1—36, Agastya’s narratives of the back-stories of Rāvaṇa and Hanumān, see ch.6. Throughout this chapter, the terms ‘late’ or ‘early’ refer only to chronology, not to hard dating. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. 7,44.6-9; confirmed by Lakṣmaṇa at 7,46.13. See also p.17 for the episode in the *Rāmopākhyāna*. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Some of the many different lengths to which ingenious post-*VRm* adapters go to preserve Sītā from Rāvaṇa’s touch are mentioned in MB and JLB 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. For the episode of the *Sītātyāga* explored from a different perspectivesee Princeton trans.2017: 82-86. Sītā’s pregnancy is examined in great detail by Sally Sutherland Goldman (2014); she comments on the lack of detail of the procedure presented, without explaining to her readers how the unrelentingly masculine author of the whole epic could be expected to know anything about how such matters were handled in the women’s quarters. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. For the figure of Vālmīki, hitherto unknown in the Rāma tradition, see below, pp.57-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See above, ch.4, pp.43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Rāma’s stoical adherence to his 14-year exile is complemented by many indications of his regret at losing the kingship; *e.g. VRm* 2,16.57+60; 2,17.1; 2,43.12-14; 2,89.17; 3,63.21; and 6,89.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. In this, I must differ from Sheldon Pollock’s undifferentiated view of the text’s development (Pollock 1991: 43-54). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. In the Princeton trans. 2017 the taut flow of the CE narrative is interrupted by a long passage from CE App.8, comprising the In-tales of Nṛga, of Nimi, and of Yayāti, inserted as part of their text between 7,51 and 7,52; In-tales as a whole will be considered in ch.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. In Jain rewritings of the *VRm*, every effort was made to eliminate references to Hindu sages and sacrifices. The absence of sages to be protected leaves Śatrughna with no excuse for his attack, turning its motivation into mere unprovoked aggressiveness and greed for territory. Paul Dundas drew attention to the aggressive nature of Jain kings in South India (Dundas 2002: 119). [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. In the CE as constituted by Shah, *sarga* 51.16 leads on immediately and naturally to 52.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. The prominence of Rudra throughout the whole episode, despite Śatrughna’s still-human status, is planned to be considered in chapter 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. In the *Harivaṃśa* it has been adapted into a true revenge attempt, when Śatrughna

     defeats Lavaṇa in response to his direct revenge-challenge (*HV* 44.21-53). Conversely, no family relationship to Rāvaṇa is claimed in the *HV.* [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. The apparently differing accounts of the parentage of Kumbhīnasī and her relationship to Rāvaṇa that generates the revenge component are considered in detail in the Princeton trans. 2017: Introduction p.48 and notes to 7,5.32, 7,25.23-25, and 7,53.16). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. 7,4.14; 7,6.15; 7,7.22; 7,22.22; 7,55.11,14; 7,61.27; 7,94.6 and 7,App.10.98 [Princeton trans. 2017: 1328]; also frequently found in the *Mahābhārata*. The *MBh* context makes no reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, and a fuller version of the *MBh* material is narrated in a late part of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*MBh* 13,14.133-34; *VRm* 7,59). The HV adapters make no mention of the Madhu associated with Kaiṭabha. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. There is no implication in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* text that Rāma had this arrow in his possession for the purpose of killing Rāvaṇa, for which his similarly pre-eminent *brahmāstra* proved perfectly adequate. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. 7,59.13c *cf.* 5,59—62. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See above, ch.2, pp.13 and 16-17. Its relatively early admission to the text is also corroborated by the references to the Madhuvana owned by Madhu (7,54.3; 56.7; and 59.13); these must postdate Sugrīva’s *madhuvana* episode, for it would make no sense to an audience of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* after that part of the Lavaṇa episode — itself probably intrusive — was already known. The mild vulgarity of the *vānaras*, typical monkey behaviour, shows no sign of the derisive mockery of gods and villains alike (not found in the *RU*) that characterises the cluster of examples found in *Outline structure* position VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. *imāṃ madhupurīm ramyāṃ madhurāṃ devanirmitām* (7,62.5ab). Whether the equation of the name of city with Śūrasenā at 6cd reinforces or distracts from this supposition is a moot point. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Imported for clarity from 559\* into verse 66 in Brodbeck 2019; a brief summary in a list of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras* also occurs at *HV* 31.127, locating the battle merely in Lavaṇa’s *madhuvana*. On the *HV* passages as a whole see MB 2005; on the late date of App. 18see JLB 2005: 351-52; for the roots of its wording in the *VRm* see JLB 1998: 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. The deviant behaviour of two of the sons of Viśravas (Vaiśravaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa) will be explained much later by Agastya: see chapter 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. The tendency of the elder brothers to disparage the youngest is mirrored by the composer of the Sanskrit text of 7,44.6: Rāma uses the metronymic *saumitri* (‘son of Sumitrā’) to apply to Lakṣmaṇa only, even in the presence of her other son, Śatrughna. It is no wonder that Śatrughna feels the need to assert his existence! [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Reinserted into the Princeton trans. 2017: 7,55.1-3 on grounds of manuscript attestation; see Notes, pp.948-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. The idea that the 4 half-brothers are the same age, in fact quadruplets, was not introduced into the *VRm* until the *Bālakāṇḍa* birth story, to be considered later in this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. 7,62.14; 7,63.1+7; ‘twelve years’ as a recurrent narrative theme even when irrelevant ensures that the audience do not lose sight of the time involved; *e.g.* 7,57.32. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. In the *VRm*, it is not until the new finale, the procession to heaven headed by the newly-divinised Dāśarathis, that Śatrughna is thought to be still in Madhurā (7,98.9-11). However, a number of later adapters, assuming him to be based in Ayodhyā, have given him a prominent role as escort of the horse, including the *Padmapurāṇa* (*Pātālakh.*), the *Jaiminibhārata,* the *Ānanda Rm* and versions in Hindi and Kāśmīri.  [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Māndhātṛ, *ikṣvākuvaṃśaprabhave,* ‘scion of the Ikṣvāku lineage’ (7,59.4-5), listed in the genealogies at 1,69.23 and 2,102.12 (with no mention of his fatal mishap). Again, Vākmīki makes no suggestion that this Madhu had an ally called Kaiṭabha. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Mitrasaha too is an ancestor of Śatrughna (7,57.10), named in the Ikṣvāku king-lists at *VRm* 1,69.27c as “Kalmāṣapāda the man-eater” and at 2,102.23c + 24a as “Kalmāṣapāda son of Sudāsa”, designations that clearly associate him with this episode. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. The fact that 1, App.1: 276-81 (studied in ch.2), though including both the birth of the *kuśīlavau* in Vālmīki’s hermitage, and Śatrughna’s subsequent killing of Lavaṇa, makes no mention of his presence at the birth or of any return visit, contributes further doubts about both visits.

     The episode as recorded in App.9 has been restored to the Princeton trans.; see sarga 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. 2,61.22; 2,94.7-8+32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. 2,57—58.47; see esp*.* 57.37. The episode and its subsequent developments are examined in MB 2010b. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. A similar episode, focusing on the revival of the dead *brāhman* boy, is alluded to at *MBh* 12,149.62, where the criminal’s name is spelled Śambuka [*sic*]. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Krešo Krnic takes a different view, contrasting Rāma’s summary execution of the *śūdra* with his previous approval of the Śabarī’s *tapas*, and examining his attitude in the context of various *śāstras* (Krnic 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. True to narratorial principles of creating tension, and confirming the unique nature of Śambūka’s infraction of the rules of *rāmarājya,* he searches the other three directions in vain before finding him in the South (7,66.10-12). The abode of Yama is ill-omened

     throughout the *VRm*, as the location of Laṅkā, and more specifically figuring in Bharata’s and Trijaṭā’s dreams of death at 2,63 and 5,25); in more practical terms, as the habitual home of Agastya, it allows subsequent continuators conveniently to introduce a passage of In-tales narrated to Rāma by the sage (7,67—72). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. That development will be the task of subsequent generations of adapters, to be examined in chapters 5 and 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. *Raghuvaṃśa* 15.53, and worked out more fully in the early 8th century by Bhavabhūti (*Uttararāmacarita* II, 70-93). By the time that App. 6,32.99 was added to the N recension of the *VRm* the concept that Rāvaṇa actively seeks death at Rāma’s hands had become widespread, to be developed to ludicrous proportions in the *Adhyātma Rm* as his motive for abducting Sītā. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The absence of Śatrughna from his three elders’ deliberations must be admitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. The hypothetical legacy of this episode is further explored below, at pp.68-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. His name is not mentioned, or alluded to, after 88.1a, until the colophon at 100.26d, where he is named only as the composer of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. For Śatrughna’s two intrusive visits to him in *sargas* 7,57—58 and App.9 see above, pp.52-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Śarabhaṅga, it will be remembered, had already left for heaven (3,4.23-36).

     A number of later tellers try to resolve this problem by introducing a visit to Vālmīki’s hermitage by the exiles, then represented as living, like them, on Citrakūṭa: *VRm* 2,2050\*2 (see also *VRm* 2,1200\*), *Adhyātma Rm*, *Ānanda Rm*, Tulsīdās (*RCM*), Eẓuttaccan, and *Rama Vatthu* (Myanmar). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Friendship with Daśaratha is a trope used to validate and guarantee the trustworthiness of unknown or newly invented characters, such as the potentially hazardous Jaṭāyus (3,13.1-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. 138 See JLB *pending.* [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. In fact, the etymology of *kuśīlava* is uncertain but is possibly *ku + śīla* with an adjectival suffix *-va* (so ‘of poor behaviour’). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. *e.g. MBh* 12,69.49b, 12,89.13c (context not Rāma-related), and 13,90.10e; Bharata’s *Nātyaśāstra* 35.106; the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* 1.2.13, 1.18.12, 1.21.16, 2.1.34 and 3.13.30; and the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 3.155a, 8.65b+102b, 9.225a. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. There are two exceptions to the exclusive use of *kuśīlava*: at 1,4.21b and 7,85.6d the term used is *gāyaka*, a synonym for ‘singer’, used possibly to relieve the monotony of five appearances of *kuśīlava* in *sarga* 1,4 and three in 7,85. *kuśīlava* is also used four times in 1,203\*, a N version of 1,4.2-18, with further occurrences at 7, App.13.50 (full mss support; repeated in the colophon at line 55, with the singers explicitly now called ‘Rāma’s sons’ at line 53). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. For the internationally widespread belief *Birth of twins an indication of unfaithfulness in wife* see *T, TB:* motif T 587.1, citing Elwin 1943: 85 for India. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. The possibility that this fear may be real will be confirmed when Bhavabhūti feels the need to ensure that Rāma was aware of the presence of twins in Sītā’s womb *before* banishing her (*Uttararāmacarita* VI, 108-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. This passage may well not have been devised when the *Uttarakāṇḍa* core was composed; see pp.14-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. An international narrative motif familiar from mediaeval European romances such as the tale of *Tristran and Iseut*, but, like many others, also shared by Indian tales; *T*, *TB* motif K 1513; the direction of transmission, if any, of such floating motifs can rarely be determined. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. A few later narrators work up the defiant aspect of Sītā’s nature, resentful, distrusting and newly self-sufficient after her long stay in the forest; others make unconvincing attempts to reconcile the couple. References are too many to list here, but can be traced in ORA: C. *Narrative Elements.* [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Vālmīki disappears completely after 7,88.1a, not to be mentioned again until the *explicit*, the final verse of whole CE, in the context of his composition of the Rāma story. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. The name ‘Kuśa’ is not unique, appearing as one of Rāma’s courtiers at 7,42.2b. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* it appears as one of Viśvāmitra’s ancestors in two In-tales (1,31.1-3; 33.2-6; 50.18), both of whose acceptance into the CE may well postdate the identification of Rāma’s elder son. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Consecration of Kuśa and Lava: 7,97.7+17-18 and 98.4-5; conquests of newly-created sons of Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa: 7,90—92. Śatrughna’s two *ad hoc* sons suffer a similar deprivation 7,97.20—98.1-11+14. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Readers are reminded that full references for all the non-CE material alluded to can be found by searching ORA: C. *Narrative elements*; tentative dates are suggested in D. *Ancillary material*. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. JLB, MB and Loizeau-Pajaniradja 2016: 79-83; MB and JLB 2024; for the Jain Śambūka episode see also De Clercq 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. For some of the effects of the Viṣṇu stage see MB 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Other South Asian versions include Sikh (Gobind Singh 2007: 89), the elaborate and imaginative *Ānanda Rm* (2006: 5,4.21) and Telugu tradition (1993: 83). An interesting analogue to the importance of the *kuśa* grass motif in infusing life into the replica boy is described by Frazer 1922: 413-9 (ch.46, section 2: “The Rice-mother in the East Indies”) on a widespread practice of venerating the soul inherent in rice, and if necessary recalling it if it has left, as practised in Indonesian ritual; see Supporting material *Frazer*.

     Full details of sources cited and the abbreviations used can be found on the relevant pages in our ORA folders C. *Narrative elements*, and B. *Bibliographic inventory*. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. For possible sources and analogues see ORA document ‘E. *Development of the tradition*’, p.50. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Roesler 2016: 49-57 and 64-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Robert and Sally Goldman emphasisethe flexible use of the *aśvamedha* motif: “It is generally used to ensure fertility and expand the sovereignty of the sacrificing king over territories ... However, one of its most important uses in the epic and purāṇic literature is to serve as a general expiatory rite to free a sacrificer from a variety of transgressions that he may have committed”(Princeton trans. 2017: p.677, *ad* 7,25.8) [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s sacrifice itself extends approximately from 1,8.1-4; 13.45-46+14.1-4; 15.9-28; 17.1-10, preceded at 1,8.5—10.29 by an In-tale detailing the seer’s history, and interrupted by the later account at 1,14.5—15.8 and 1,16 of Viṣṇu’s intervention; Vasiṣṭha’s *aśvamedha* appears at 1,11.1—13.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. ‘*mantras* and mortifications and all sorts of trouble’ (*yo mantratapasā labdho vividhaiś ca pariśramaiḥ,* 2,45.11ab, repeated almost verbatim at 2,80.12ab); and ‘great asceticism and good deeds’ (*mahatā tapasā rāma mahatā cāpi karmaṇā,* 3,62.3ab). There is no reason to suppose that the speaker is referring to either of the sacrifices celebrated in 1,10—15. Nor does Lakṣmaṇa include Bharata, Śatrughna or himself in the result; there was no reason at that point to consider them as born simultaneously. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. see pp.54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. 7,73.18-19; evidently Śatrughna is still absent at this point, and is not mentioned until 7,83.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. The discussion is now interrupted in the CE by two In-tales of contrasting relevance and quality, narrating Indra’s sacrifice after killing Vṛtra (7,75—77), and that of Ila in a more farcical situation (7,78—81), planned to be considered in ch.5.

     For the unidentified *vaiṣṇava* sacrifice with which Indra cleanses himself from his sin with Ahalyā (7,30.39+41, see p.95), and for the late date of its appearance in Agastya’s recital, see ch.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. In some later tradition, when much greater attention than before is paid to the paternal side of Rāvaṇa’sheritage, the accusation of *brahmahatyā* levelled at Rāma when his

     dereliction of duty led to the death of the *brāhman* boy, is redirected to his killing of Rāvaṇa. His descent from Brahmā via the sages Pulastya and Viśravas had been known since the *VRm* core text (*e.g.* 5,21.7); not until the very late passage at 7,9 is his maternal *rākṣasa* lineage detailed (see ch.6). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Recalled by Daśaratha at 2,57.8—58.46, where he explains the curse and attributes his misery at Rāma’s exile to its fulfilment (examined by MB 2010b); this episode was a late addition to the early text, but probably known by this time to the authors of the *Bālakāṇḍa*. Several later adapters see a connection between the two episodes (see*e.g.* *BrP,GM* 123.77-83 and *Ānanda Rm* 1,1.96-103). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Narrated by Viśvāmitra at 1,34—43. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. The king of Aṅga, friend of Daśaratha, is regularly named ‘Lomapāda’ in the *MBh.* [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. In Buddhist tradition, this floating motif is used to preach the reverse moral, that abandoning his ascetic lifestyle destroys (even if only temporarily) the simple boy’s power to promote fertility: see the *Alambusā* (J 523) and *Nalinikā* (J 526) *jātakas* and the *Mahāvastu*. The Sanskrit epics, however, abound with examples of ascetics powerful enough to threaten the gods with their hard-won *tapas*being trapped into sexual dalliance to maintain the *status quo* (*e.g.* Viśvāmitra at *VRm* 1,62.3-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. This concern is especially noteworthy in the *HV,* with its concentration of attention on the descent of major characters in the epic tradition, but not mentioning Śatrughna’s sons as part of the succession of Mathurā: MB 2005: 299-302 and 304-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. See pp.57-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvaṃśa* is the main one in the *brāhmaṇic* tradition, with some traces in the *Ānanda Rm*; Jain versions with their different agenda carry the story a little further, as do Thai and some other SE Asian adaptations. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. So many different words for ‘horse’ are used in the *Bālakāṇḍa* for the same ritual that the term *aśvamedha* seems more appropriate than any other Sanskrit term. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. A rather racy tale in *sargas* 8—10 of how the virginal boy had become capable of producing fertility enlivens the account of how he becomes son-in-law to Romapāda, said to be one of Daśaratha’s allies, but not otherwise known in the *VRm*. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. As early as 1866, Lassen had pointed out the awkwardness with which the *putreṣṭi* performed by Ṛśyaśṛṅga follows the *aśvamedha* (JLB 1998: 381-82). [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. On the ritual obligations of a monarch see above, pp.40-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. A lengthy detailed account, narrated by Viśvāmitra to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on the way to Mithilā, can be found at 1,37—43; a much abbreviated version of the tale is also mentioned by Vasiṣṭha at 2,102.16-22, but (wisely perhaps) he does not mention the interruption of the dynasty when he recites the impressive Ikṣvāku genealogy as part of the wedding negotiations (1,69). [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Indic occurrences of the Horse sacrifice as a fertility and absolution ritual are sited within the wider Indo-European context by Anders Kaliff and Terje Oestigaard (2020: 155-81), including at pp.170-71 an episode in the late *Bhaviṣyaparvan* of the *HV*, where the princess Vapuṣṭamā’s attempt to fulfil her duty of copulating with the still living horse is thwarted by the now-degenerate Indra’s jealousy, when he enters the horse and rapes her himself (Dutt 1897: 830-31). I should again thank Petteri Koskikallio for providing me with a copy of Dutt’s translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. This contrasts with Kuśa and Lava having been emphatically called *yamajāta(ka)* in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7,87.16b and 88.4b *see above,* p.62), where it is a crucial part of the exoneration process for Vālmīki to emphasise that the unknown boys are the result of a single act of conception, and are indisputably both Rāma’s sons: JLB 1998: 379 (followed in part by P.L. Bhargava, 2003: 58). Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna are later to be explicitly called twins by Kālidāsa (*Raghuvaṃśa* 10.71). [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Possibly introduced by the last two verses of *sarga* 13 (Daśaratha’s incongruous renewed plea for an action that must be assumed to have already been achieved). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. His first attempt (1,15.25) gives Kausalyā 8/16, Sumitrā 4/16, but Kaikeyī only 2/16, clumsily leaving him with 2/16 undistributed; this he gives additionally to Sumitrā at verse 26, leading her to produce the two subservient brothers, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna, endowed with 3/16 each (more now than Bharata). [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Some later adapters restrict his gift to two, or even to one, favoured wife or wives, then restore the traditional balance by making the recipients generously share some of their gift with their co-wife (*PdP* (*Uttarakh.*), *NarSP*); in the *PdP* (*Pātālakh.*) the problem is resolved more easily: Daśaratha there has four wives. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. The number of sons varies, and cannot always be determined.   
      No son: 1,8.1d; 15.8a.

     Plural: 1,10.8-9; 14.2-3; 15.18.

     Four: 1,10.10; 11.12; 13.46; 14.18 (Viṣṇu).  
      Number non specific: 1,8.2; 10.5+8-9; 11.2+8; 1,15.8 twice; 15.24-26.

     Similar discrepancy affects the number of sons to be married. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. At 1,11.2cd the *brāhman* greeted by Daśaratha is unnamed in the CE, but it is reasonable to assume that he is Ṛśyaśṛṅga, following on from 10.27-29, as indeed he is directly named in the corresponding NE text.Similarly, at 1,14.1, the decision silently to import Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s name from 439\* and/or 440\* in the Princeton trans. seems justified. At CE 1,12.33b and 34c, however, Ṛśyaśṛṅga’s name is included with some emphasis in an awkward construction, presumably in a clumsy attempt to match his prominence throughout the episode, but with all N mss replacing *ṛśyaśṛṅga* at 34c with *aśvamedhaṃ*. . [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. *T, TB* motif T 511; MB 2000; see also MB 1995, rev. and updated on ORAD. *Ancillary material, Publications,* item 11+12. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. 11.11a, 12.33b, 12.34c, 13.2a and 13.42c. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. For comparison of the two passages, see B. Bibliographic Inventory: 2. VRm, ‘vocabulary’ (within Stage 3: ‘linguistic and stylistic features’).  [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Noted by Robert Goldman in the Princeton trans. 1984, p.318. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. See above, ch.2, pp.21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. See above, ch.2, pp.2-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Problems of determining the early content and extent of the text as a whole have been discussed in chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. The *kaccit sarga* (see above, pp.42-43) isa floating motif incorporated into the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* at adate not necessarily any earlier than the composition of the *Bālakāṇḍa* passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. 6,116.80-90; 7,40.13-17; 7,89.7-10, and to be repeated at 1,1.71-75 in the forthcoming Preface. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. The term in use, at the time of writing, for the spokesperson employed specifically to divert attention from the failings of a government, without telling a provable lie (to be distinguished from ‘fake news’). [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. The widespread motif of the non-potent husband, and the methods devised universally to resolve the problem are manifold and hackneyed (occupying *T* and *TB* motifs T 500-599), emphasising the fundamental importance of the concept of dynasty, both for political and religious reasons, especially as the hopeful parents age; Daśaratha’s great age is repeatedly stressed, and he must feel that time is running short. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. See below, p.93; *cf.* also ch.2, p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Sathaye 2015: 35-107, esp. p.36. I have based much of my interpretation of his developing role in the *Bālakāṇḍa* on the insights revealed by Sathaye in his impressive and comprehensive analysis of the sage, but the conclusions I draw are mine alone. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* Daśaratha had seemed powerless to withdraw a pledge once given, but, of course, the constraints operating on the composers of the narrative override any such constraints directing the plot they are anxious to create. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. It is clear throughout *sargas* 1,18-20 that there is complete respect, and no state of animosity (current or past), between the two seers. At this point there is no suggestion of the much extended process to be elaborated by Śatānanda in the clearly later insertion detailing his fantastic and fantasised back-story (1,50.15—64.30), planned to be studied with other In-tales in ch.5. Unfortunately, this sprawling, much fantasised compilation is liable to distort our understanding by diverting attention from the earlier depiction of the sage. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. The episodes of Sītā’s conversation with Anasūyā, and Mārīca’s unavailing attempt to dissuade Rāvaṇa from abducting Sītā,have been examined in ch.2, pp.11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. The allusion occurs at 4,34.6-8, when Tārā tries to excuse Sugrīva’s forgetfulness to the angry Lakṣmaṇa by citing Viśvāmitra being seduced by Ghṛtācī (named Menakā in Śatānanda’s account of the incident at 1,62.4-13; the two names are evidently normally synonyms). The lists of sages are those brought by Agastya to congratulate the victorious Rāma (7,1.5, as one of the Seven Seers), and those summoned by Rāma to witness Sītā’s affirmation of purity (7,87.2-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Indeed, Indra’s declaration (1,25.19) that Rāma needs the weapons to help him accomplish a great task ‘on behalf of the gods’ — the redirected purpose of the Viṣṇu stage from freeing Sītā to protecting the cosmos — indicates a particularly late date of inclusion into the narrative. Later developers of the story, including Bhavabhūti, did put these weapons to narrational use as an identification tool (*Uttararāmacarita*: Pollock 2007: V,40-51). [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. This legend, now found in the *VRm* CE at 1,60—61, forming part of Śatānanda’s later In-tale but considered by Adheesh Sathaye (2015: 51-58) to have been long-current, arouses the royal sage’s fierce anger against his own unwelcoming sons. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. A preliminary passage at 3,36.1-18 in which Rāvaṇa enlists his timid ally and Mārīca uses his previous experience against Rāma and Viśvāmitra, similar to that at 1,17.23—20.19 followed by 1,29, to warn Rāvaṇa of the likely consequences of his foolhardy plan to abduct Sītā, has been much discussed in the hope of determining priority of composition; see JLB 1985; JLB 1998; MB 2002c + 2004 for earlier comments on this subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Some examples of this widely-diffused omission are examined by Danielle Feller (2012d). A number of their later successors would be far less reticent, perhaps impelled by the growing popularity of the child Kṛṣṇa, and present the unruly and undisciplined Rāma delighting his father with his antics, but provoking Mantharā’s future hatred with his cruel torments; for references, search ORA C. *Narrative elements*. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. I cannot see how the female Tāṭakā’s attack on Rāma and the threats of his male predecessor Jāmadagnya automatically qualify them as ‘sexually charged devouring mother’ and as ‘father’ figures to be destroyed (Goldman trans. 1984: 79-80), when the whole thrust of the already established narrative is Rāma’s insistence on forgiving his selfish step-mother and on upholding the integrity of the weak, gullible Daśaratha (who is actually present during the confrontation between the two Rāmas). In fact, Rāma agrees to overcome his compunction against killing Tāṭakā on the grounds that Viśvāmitra, who has commissioned the action, is acting throughout the *Bālakāṇḍa* as Rāma’s surrogate father (1,25.1-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. 1,65.7-13. For Sītā’s summary of her marriage to Anasūyā at2,110.33-52 see ch.2 p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. The In-tale of Sagara is preceded at 1,31—33 by Viśvāmitra’s recitation of his ancestry, in which Kuśanābha, despairing of continuing his own dynasty, performs a much emphasised and ultimately successful son-producing rite (*aputraḥ putralābhāya pautrīm iṣṭim akalpayat* 1,33.1cd). [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. The intervening 15 *sargas* are devoted to Śatānanda’s In-tale of Viśvāmitra’s achievements. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. *cf.* the similarly unexplained motif of a weapon left by Indra in the care of a sage as a ‘pledge’, corrupting him to abandon his ascetic powers at 3,8.15-17, which may have suggested the *Bālakāṇḍa* episode. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Sītā’s alternative account of her birth and marriage, to Anasūyā (see p.11) possibly retained from an earlier stratum from before the rise of Śiva. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. *vīryaśulketi me kanya sthāpiteyam ayonijā* (15cd): rather literally ‘my daughter Sītā, not born from the womb, <has been> set up by me with heroism/manliness as her bride-price’. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. 1,66.8-10:

     *idaṃ dhanurvaraṃ brahmañ janakair abhipūjitam* ||

     *rājabhiś ca mahāvīyrair aśakyaṃ pūrituṃ tadā* || 8

     *naitat suragaṇḥ sarve nāsurā na ca kṛkṣasāḥ* ||

     *gandharvayakṣapravarāḥ sakiṃnaramahoragāḥ* || 9

     *kva gatir mānuśāṣāṃ ca dhanuṣo ’sya prapūraṇe* ||

     *āropaṇe samāyoge vepane tolane ’pi vā* || 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. 1,66.16-18:  
      *paśyatāṃ nṛsahasrāṇāṃ bahūnāṃ raghunandana* ||

     *āropayat sa dharmātmā salīlam iva tad dhanuḥ* || 16  
     *āropayitvā maurvīṃ ca pūrayām āsa vīryavān* ||

     *tad bahañja dhanur madhye naraśreṣṭho mahāyaśāḥ* || 17

     *tasya śabdo mahān āsīn nirghātasamaniḥsvanaḥ* ||

     *bhūmikampaś ca sumahān parvatasyeva dīryataḥ* || 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. *T,* *TB* motifs 310-359 ‘Suitor tests’. For the distribution of the term in the Sanskrit epics, see JLB 2006, reproduced on ORA D. *Ancillary material*: *Publications and lectures*; many examples of its use in the later tradition may be found on ORA C. *Narrative elements*. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Similarly, the realisation that Sītā’s birth as Janaka’s daughter was not considered at all unorthodox until this similarly late stage in the tradition — that she had not been born in a ‘furrow’, whether at 1,65.14-15 or 2,110.27-28 — confutes any supposition that in origin she represents a reworked form of the minor Vedic goddess with whom she shares a name. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. For the significance of Vimalasūri’s version for the dating both of the later passages of the *VRm* CE and his own see MB and JLB 2024. I intend to pursue this point, and other evidence of Vimalasūri’s reworking of the latest parts of the *VRm,* in a contribution to the tribute now planned for the distinguished Jain scholar Paul Dundas (to be held at Birmingham University, 12-14 Sept, 2025). [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. For a detailed examination of many different versions of this tale, including some allusions in the *MBh,* and hints of the myth already in the Brāhmaṇas*,* see Söhnen-Thieme 1996. She sees the *Bālakāṇḍa* version as the “first explicit narrative of Indra and Ahalyā” and the first account of Ahalyā’s guilt and punishment (pp.39 and 48).

     See also Feller 2004: 130-34 on this point, and 142 for her discussion of possible Vedic antecedents. Feller also points out the many flaws she finds in Dumézil’s interpretative framework on Indra’s sin (2004: 142-45).   
      R.P. Goldman (1978: 360-61) links the episodes to a supposed Oedipal myth.

     Pradip Bhattacharya (2000 and 2009) gives his understanding of how Ahalyā can justify her apparently incongruous place at the head of the traditional list of *pañcakanyā* (five virgins). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. *T, TB* motif K 1311. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. It is interesting to note that in a number of Southeast Asian versions of the Rāma story, the episode is completely reworked to become the birth story of the *vānaras*: see ORA C. *Narrative Elements* under *analogues: sage’s wife in adulterous liaison with various gods*. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. On the late date of this episode see ch.2 pp.12-13*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. JLB 1985: 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Indra (*vāsava*) is mentioned here in the context of his visiting Sītā in the *aśokavana* to sustain her with *amṛta* (4,61.7-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Two brief, unexplored allusions to her story appear at 1, App.1: 45-46 and 266-75 (the third summary, apparently composed before Agastya’s version had become part of the Northern tradition). [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Here I cannot accept the interpretation of Rāma’s character put forward by Robert and Sally Goldman: “In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* [his harsh treatment of Sītā] seems to contrast starkly with the portrayal of Rāma in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, where it is he himself who is the cause of the redemption and purification of Ahalyā, who was an actual as opposed to a falsely accused adulteress” (Princeton trans. 2017: 14-15). The comparison seems to me to be strained. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Söhnen-Thieme 1996: 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. On the summaries see also ch.2, pp.9-15. The association of Jāmadagnya with Viṣṇu that was to lead at a much later date to his being identified as one of the god’s *avatāras* also plays no part in this episode. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Needless to say, Śatānanda’s lengthy account of Viśvāmitra’s struggle to raise his status from *kṣatriya* to *brāhman* provides an undue number of instances (1,50.14—64.30). [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Some of the difficulties and consequences of attaching the new material to the old have been discussed in ch.2, pp.22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. 6,115.80-90; 7,89.5-10+15; see also the 10 *aśvamedhas* attributed to him at *MBh* (*RU*): 3,275.69. Nārada, whose summary purports to be contemporaneous with the narrative during the 12-year waiting period, attributes to him ‘hundreds of *aśvamedhas*’ at 1,1.74,  
     a challenging feat, given that each one takes more than a whole year to perform. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. In his ground-breaking translation of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, Robert Goldman declares Daśaratha’s choice of ritual “peculiar”, adding that the “normal rite for the acquisition of a son is the Putrakāmeṣṭi” (note to 1,8.2, repeated as “unusual” at 11.2: Princeton trans. 1984pp.292, 298-99). The somewhat later summary in the Preface refers merely to *janma rāmasya* (‘Rāma’s birth’, at 1,3.3a), without naming the method employed. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. *Janakātmajā* and *Jānakī* occur frequently in 2—6, *Janaka* himself much less so, and it is attached to no narrative of his own. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. An earlier draft of this section appears at MB 2023b: 357-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. As already noted in n.53 (pp.21-22) this is the one place where N and S agree on the placement of *kāṇḍa* division. The obvious stylistic differences between Agastya’s narrative and the rest of Book 7 are explored by JLB in B. Bibliographic Inventory, 2. *VRm* *Stage 3*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. To be examined in ch.5, *Bridging passage.* [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. The *Ānanda Rm,* a popular and inventive mediaeval reworking, addresses the problem: returning from Ayodhyā, Agastya prudently takes care not to be seen by Vindhya (*Ānanda Rm*: Nagar 2006: 1,13.193). [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. 1,19.15+17; 3,64.16; 4,57.19; 5,21.4-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. A rather different account of how Kumbhakarṇa had acquired his sleep-pattern had been presented in *VRm* 6,49.21-26 (examined in ch.3, pp.33-35). An extended exploration of the role of boons in the *VRm* as a whole appears in that chapter, but it is worth expanding on some relevant details here*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. It is reasonable to assume that Mandodarī can be identified with the unnamed daughter of Maya mentioned at 6,7.6. An attempt at consolidation by attributing a family relationship to Maya, Hemā, Māyāvin, Dundubhi, and Mandodarī, in practice introduces new elements into the already complex pattern of discrepancies found in the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Identified by his attributes with Kubera, but not specifically named as such in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, where all references are in the context of his relationship to Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa. Elsewhere in the *VRm* the two names are used interchangeably; see in particular 5,2.20d, 5,7.11bc, 6,28.20a, and 6,109.9c, where ‘Kubera’ refers unambiguously to the *rākṣasas’* half-brother. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. In an episode already well-known to audiences, but technically yet to happen in the time-frame postulated by Agastya’s narrative, Rāvaṇa had been/will be persuaded by Vibhīṣaṇa against a similar breach of protocol when Hanumān is brought before him and proclaims himself as Sugrīva’s and Rāma’s accredited envoy (5,46.59; 5,48.16; 5,49.2-3; 5,50.1-9; 5,51.1-2). Such niceties, as with the anomaly of Vidyujjihva’s identity, typical of traditional narratives, are mere quibbles of no consequence. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. This episode is much exploited and developed in later versions (see ORA C. *Narrative elements*). [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. The parentage of Kumbhīnasī is explained at 7,5.1-2,31-32,33-36; 7,25.23-25; 7,53.16-17; and 7,60.14. The conflict with Lavaṇa has been narrated at 7,52—56 and 59—62; the revenge theme appears at 7,60.13-16; the episode has been examined in detail in ch.4, pp.48-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Some of the consequences of this tendency and the paradox it entails in later Vaiṣṇava versions of the Rāma story are explored in MB 2023a: 3-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Planned to be examined in ch.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. For the same motif treated more fully, and with the opposite outcome, see Rāvaṇa’s duel with Arjuna Sahasrabāhu, p.110 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. The lack of references back to Agastya’s account can be explained by the almost complete lack of interest in the defeated *rākṣasas* displayed elsewhere in the *Uttara* core. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. The concept is planned to be examined more fully in ch.5. Sporadic references to it are found elsewhere in the CE, at 1,14—16 (inserted awkwardly and unnecessarily into the story of the Rāghavas’ birth); possibly in the single verse 1,75.17 (Rāma Jāmadagnya realises Rāma Dāśarathi’s identity); overtly, yet in contradiction to the ethos of the whole preceding narrative, at 6,105 (his divine nature is revealed to the astonished Rāma when Sītā enters the fire); and — sporadically — in the last few *sargas* of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, specifically 7,94 and 99—100 (Rāma returns to heaven as Viṣṇu). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. The only other reference is to his house at 5,5.20a. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. JLB: The passage 7,4—8 is in general more ornate in style and language than other parts of Agastya’s narrative. It shows relatively few close similarities of phrasing with the *VRm* and has quite as many with the *MBh*, which is a feature of particularly late passages where the convergence between the two originally distinct traditions is greatest. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. The grandiose reference in the core text (3,30.10) to Rāvaṇa bearing the scars of wounds inflicted by Viṣṇu’s discus should logically refer to an episode otherwise unknown, but occurring within the time-frame of Agastya’s narrative; it must be assumed to have been composed before the idea of Viṣṇu’s earthly intervention had entered the narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. This puzzling episode was presumably conceived by its author to explain the allusions in the core text to Indrajit’s possession of divine weapons, won by propitiating Brahmā; for details see ch.3 p.36. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Definitions of the stages of composition can be found at JLB 1985: 329, or JLB 2000: 353, or JLB and MB 2006: 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. ‘Meghanāda’: this name is absent from *kāṇḍas* 2—6, with the only occurrences in the whole CE are in the latest parts of the Third Stage: 1,3.26b (Vālmīki’s summary of this incident); 7,12.26b,28d; 7,25.4d (all Sub-unit 1); and 7,28.2d (Sub-unit 2, at the beginning of his battle with Jayanta).

     ‘Indrajit’: is frequent in the core books, but the only occurrences in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are at 7,1.21b; 7,12.26c; 7,25.34a; and 7,30.5c,8b,10b,14c,42a, with only the occurrences in *sargas* 1 and 30 referring to the bestowal of the name (Sub-unit 2), while those in *sargas* 12 and 25 are found in Sub-unit 1, significantly *before* the bestowal of the honorific name, and confirming both the late adoption of the literal understanding of the name and the even later composition of the reference in *VRm* 1,3.26b. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. The thousand-armed Arjuna is thought of as human: he is explicitly called *nara* at 7,32.24c,53d,58d; for Nandīśvara’s curse that Rāvaṇa’s death will be caused by the action of monkeys, see 7,16.11-16. Rāvaṇa can only be disabled by virtue of the boons, not killed. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. The relationship (if any) between these two passages is uncertain; both are clearly very late, but Arjuna’s encounter with Rāvaṇa seems more likely to be a development based on the *Bālakāṇḍa* passage than the reverse. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Rāma’s laments for Lakṣmaṇa: 6,39.5-6; 6,89.6-8+28. Rāvaṇa’s lament for Kumbhakarṇa: 6,56, particularly vv.12 and 16-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. JLB 2000: 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. 3,31, *cf*. 7,24. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. An origin myth: afterwards, the grateful gods grant their hosts various boons relating to their appearance or nature. This episode presents a disgraceful parody Marutta’s sacrifice, compared to the respect accorded to Marutta at, *e.g*., *MBh* 12,20.13 and 29.16-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. A different account of the episode now appears at *VRm* 1,47—48, where there is no suggestion in the text that Rāma is Viṣṇu. He remains the hero-prince, the focus of a series of episodes steadily building up, through miraculous birth and education, to the climax of his validation tests: recognition at Mithilā and marriage. The progression is typical of a heroic Wonder Tale. When either account first entered the tradition is uncertain. Of course, the narrative structure is again complicated by the overall time-frame, literally interpreted. For a more detailed exploration of the relationship between the two accounts of Ahalyā’s redemption, see ch.4, pp.95-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. MB 2008: 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Robert P. Goldman takes the contrary view, commenting on the association of the tale with the ‘mythic and sacred significance [of] the landscape through which Viśvāmitra and the two Ikṣvāku princes pass on their journey from Ayodhyā ... to Mithilā. In this way the legend of Rāma is associated with and ultimately equated with the great myths of the brahmanic-purāṇic tradition.’ (Princeton trans. 1984: 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. This motif also appears, much later, in the *Gautamī Māhātmya* (*Brahmā Purāṇa* 87). [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. In following the commentary *Śiromaṇi* of Vaṃśīdhara Śivasahāya and giving her name a more prudish sense, “devoid of all imperfection”, Robert and Sally Goldman seem to us to be missing the point (Princeton trans. 2017: 7,30.20 and p.738). See also Söhnen-Thieme 1991: 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. A thorough examination of the growing relationship between the Jain and *brāhmaṇic* Rāma traditions, and the direction of influence, is much to be desired. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. 7,8.23-25; 7,34.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. This is not the only careless slip made by the authors of Agastya’s narrative; Kumbhakarṇa is “asleep for many thousands of years” at 7,13.7 (Sub-unit 1), but takes a full part in battles at *sargas* 25 (Sub-unit 1) and 28 (Sub-unit 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. That the context, Agastya’s recitation, is not reproduced is a straightforward adaptation to the *RU’s* nature as a summary. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. *avadhyaḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ* “unkillable by all beings”. Other parallels at 7,2.4bcd, 7,10.6ab and 7,10.10bcd (all in verses ascribed to Sub-unit 1) offer very strong evidence for borrowing by the *RU*. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. “I have told you everything you ask me about; I have described Hanumān’s childish deed. You have had sight and conversation with us, Rāma. We are going. With these words all the sages left as they had come.” (7,36.45-46)  
      In these two verses the poet has reverted to the *śloka* metre, after an interruption of four verses in longer metre. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. “Vālin’s incomparable strength was absolute, Rāma, and yet he was burnt up by you, like a moth in a fire” (7,34.44) [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. “Indrajit’s strength was as I have described to you, Rāma; he conquered the king of the gods, so what chance is there for other living beings?” (7,30.42) [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. “... when Rāvaṇi engaged in a duel with you, fortunately you killed him” (7,1.19cd) [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Many redistribute the *pāyasa* in ever more complicated ways, while many declare outright that Viṣṇu had undergone a fourfold incarnation, thus fulfilling the expectations before the *aśvamedha* (*VRm* 1,11.12); but never are the brothers given equal status in the narrative. The traditional tale evidently cannot be subjected to such a drastic transformation. Rāma is paramount in all traditions except the Jain, where from Vimalasūri onwards Lakṣmaṇa plays the superior role (even himself killing Rāvaṇa), but that is for sectarian rather than military reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. “He himself and these other great *vānara* chiefs ... were created by the gods for your sake, Rāma” (7,36.44). [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. JLB 2004, JLB 2009, MB 2005, MB 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Both characters are said to be sons of Vāyu. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Lakṣmaṇa’s wounding by Rāvaṇa’s spear, a particularly dramatic episode in the *VRm* (6,89) is wanting in the *RU*, perhaps also as part of this process of diminution of his rescuer, Hanumān. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. JLB 2004; JLB 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. MB 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Robert and Sally Goldman have devoted a whole chapter of the Introduction to their Princeton translation (2017: 82-113) to a consideration of these controversial episodes. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)