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In praise of death : history and poetry in medieval Marwar (South Asia)

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2 Introduction to the Sources

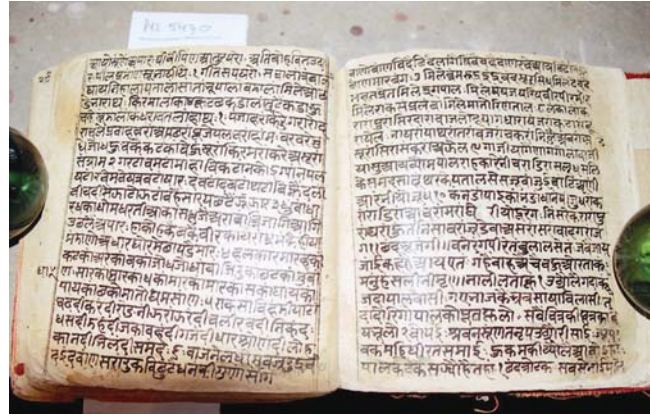
In the course of three consecutive periods of fieldwork (1998-2001) in western Rajasthan, I collected medieval and contemporary poetry which is part of the regional tradition about Pabuji and other protagonists of his story, in particular his Bhil companions, Charani Deval and Charan goddesses related to her. For this research, I worked in the archives of former princely states that were at one time or another ruled by Rathaur Rajputs, like the archives of Bikaner and Jodhpur (Rajasthan) and of Sitamau (Madhya Pradesh). The majority of medieval manuscript versions of poetry dedicated to Pabuji is now preserved in the archives of Rajasthan. Most of the medieval poems selected for this study were collected in the course of archival research at the Rajasthani Research Institute (RRI) in Chaupasni, the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute (RORI) in Bikaner, Jaipur and Jodhpur and private collections housed in Jaisalmer, Badriya and the *Sri Natnagar Sodh Samsthan* (SNSS) in Sitamau.

An overwhelming number of written and printed manuscript versions of poems dedicated to Pabuji is housed at the listed archives. The amount of medieval manuscripts, containing handwritten versions of heroic-epic poems dedicated to Pabuji proved to be daunting, especially since I had set myself the task of collecting as many versions of Pabuji's adventures as possible at the onset of my research. It soon became apparent that there exist more manuscripts versions of Pabuji's story than I could hope to collect during one lifetime. As will be discussed in more detail below, upon introducing questions of chronology, authorship, orthography and academic transliteration of the medieval sources, I have strived for a qualitative selection that represents the common themes, storylines, images and poetic forms of the medieval Pabuji tradition.

Medieval manuscript sources

The centre and reach of the medieval Pabuji story-telling tradition can no longer be established but it seems probable that the Pabuji temple at Kolu fulfilled as important a role for Pabuji's medieval devotees as it does for his contemporary worshippers. Judging from my archival research, and from the catalogues published by different archives and research institutes in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, only a few seventeenth-century manuscripts recording poems dedicated to Pabuji have been preserved while several more manuscripts can be dated to the eighteenth century. As one might expect, nineteenth and twentieth century manuscript versions

of Pabuji's story abound. In addition, numerous shorter and longer poems dedicated to Pabuji have been available in print since the nineteenth century.¹⁵ The *pābujī rā chamḍa* is the earliest medieval composition that is part of my selection. This poem was composed in praise of the Rathaur hero's martial deeds and can be traced to the second half of the sixteenth century. It is ascribed to the Charan poet Meha Vithu. This *chamḍ* knows dozens of manuscript versions preserved in the main archives of Rajasthan.¹⁶



Pābujī rā chamḍa (Ms. 5470).

For the present study, I examine two versions of the *chamḍ* ascribed to Vithu. First, an undated manuscript titled *atha mehā viṭhū rā kahīyā shrī pābujī rā chamḍa*¹⁷

¹⁵ For example, the probably nineteenth-century *Pābū kamadhā* in the *Shakti-suyash* edited by Bai (n.d.), the twentieth-century *Kavi pūṃjoṭī bārahaṭa haravecām virtī chamḍ pābujī raṭhaur rau* edited by Girdardan Ratnu (1997: 25-29) and *Pābujī rī velī* by Vidhadhar Shasthri (1997: 30). Tessitori (1916: 68f) purchased two versions of Pabuji's *chamḍ* and one version of the *duha* in 1915 and dated the oldest of these manuscripts to the end of the sixteenth century. More recent works include several poems titled *Pābū prakāśa* by twentieth century poets like Bhaktavar Motisar, Khanuji Barhat and Moraji Ashiya. The later work has been edited by N.S. Bhati in 1983. The most recent works to be inspired by Pabuji's tale include Chamd Dharana's 1992 poem *Laukik sūktiyām*, a devotional poem dedicated to Pabuji and Deval by the Charan poetess Nanhi Bai Samaur (1999) titled *Deval bāi dyo naiṃ pābū naiṃ āsīs*, and the nationalist play *Prāṇavīr pābujī* by Nirmohi Vyas (1999).

¹⁶ Like nineteenth-century versions of Vithu's *chamḍ* preserved in the archives of Jodhpur and Chaupasni, for example: RORI Ms. 17777-8, titled *gīta saṃgraha*, including a poem titled *pābujī ro chamḍa*, and RORI Ms. 25149, titled *etihasika kavittā saṃgraha* (including a composition named *pābujī rā chamḍa*, ascribed to a Motisar poet) and an undated, anonymous composition (RRI Ms. 3632) also titled *pābujī rā chamḍa*.

¹⁷ "Verses (dedicated to) Pabuji (and) recited (by) Meha Vithu".

referred to throughout this study as “*chamd* I”.¹⁸ Second is *chamd* II, an undated manuscript titled *atha pābujhī ro chamda mehaijhī rā kahyā*.¹⁹ As will become apparent in the next chapter, the narrative content and prosodic form of *chamd* I and II differs considerably, so much so that we may think of both *chamds* as very different outcomes of processes of transmission which may have (or may not have) commenced with a poem ascribed to Vithu in the sixteenth century.

The earliest dated manuscript at my disposal is *gūta pābūjī rau*²⁰ a short late seventeenth-century poem in praise of the Rathaur hero, which is referred to as “*git* I” in this study.²¹ This anonymous work (noted down in 1689) is part of a collection of praise poems dedicated to historical Rathaur rulers, titled: *rāṭhaurā guṇagānā*.²² The longest poem studied here is titled *pābūjī rā duhā*²³ composed around 1650. Most manuscript versions of this poem seem to include a shorter poem titled *pābū rā prāvārā*²⁴ appended to the last verse of the *duhā*. Both poems know numerous manuscript versions dated, as far as I could see, from 1770 onwards up to the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁵ My source manuscript, RRI Ms. 402, is an eighteenth-century manuscript attributed (by its scribe) to Ladhraj, the minister of the seventeenth century Rathaur king of Marwar, Jaswant Singh, and to the unknown poet Mohandas.²⁶ From the last verse-lines of the *parvaro*, it can be read that *duha* I and *parvaro* were noted down or copied from an older manuscript by a man named Pamdit Khusyal of village Cariasra in 1827 VS (1769 CE) while they were recited in 1778 VS (1720 CE).²⁷ Both the *pābūjī rā duhā* and the *pābū rā prāvārā* are part of Ms. 402 and will be referred to respectively as *duha* I and *parvaro* throughout this study. As shall become apparent in chapter 3, when I discuss the narrative content of the selected sources, the *pābūjī rā duhā* and the *pābū rā prāvārā* document how Pabuji has been worshipped at his temple in Kolu as one

¹⁸ Ms. 5470 is described in Catalogue 4-1027 of the Rajasthani Research Institute (RRI) (B. Sharma 1976). Neither manuscript nor catalogue contains any data about this poem’s scribe or its place and date of copying.

¹⁹ “Verses (dedicated to) Pabuji (and) recited (by) Meha Vithu”. (RRI) Ms. 9727(17) is described in RRI catalogue 8-164 (1989). Neither the manuscript nor the catalogue provides information about its scribe or place and date of copying.

²⁰ “Pabuji’s song”.

²¹ (RRI Ms. 15009) “Pabuji’s song”, listed in a handwritten, unpublished register of the Rajasthani Research Institute, dating this two-page long manuscript to 1689.

²² A praise poem composed in honour of the Rathaur rulers Raja Surya Singh, by an anonymous poet, Raja Gaj Singh, recited by Josi Gangadas and Rav Maldev, a poem written by Barath Harsur.

²³ “Couplets (dedicated to) Pabuji”.

²⁴ “Pabuji’s divine miracles” (or: “Pabuji’s heroic deeds”).

²⁵ For example: (RRI) Mss. 2271, 3271, 6499, all titled *pābūjī rā duhā*, and (RRI) Ms. 8216-262, *duhā pābūjī dhāmdhalot rā sorathā*. Nineteenth-century manuscripts preserved at RRI include Ms. 3550 (*pābūjī rī nisanī*) that contains a short composition titled *pābūjī rā duhā*, and Mss. 11013-27, 8823, two eighteenth-century versions of Ladhraj’s composition.

²⁶ (RRI) Ms. 402 described in RRI catalogue 1-717 (N.S. Bhati: 1967).

²⁷ *Parvaro* (v. 80-81): “pābū krīta puṇīha, satrau(m) sai āṛhāro tarai. cavadasa cāmda raṇīha, caitra māsi citrāna kṣatra”, and *parvaro* (v. 85) “saṃ 1827 vi sai rā vaisākha vada 10 dine likhatu paṃ khusyala carī āsarāmadhye”.

of the numerous folk-gods of Rajasthan from the seventeenth century onwards, and probably even earlier.²⁸

To my knowledge, one published edition of the *pābūjī rā duhā* (including the *pābū rā prāvārā*) is available: a critical text edition of three manuscript versions edited by N.S. Bhati (1973). This version is based on [a] RRI Ms. 634 (dated 1687), [b] RRI Ms. 402 (the manuscript studied by me), and [c] an unnumbered manuscript from the private collection of one Deva Karanji (dated to 1731). I have consulted this 1973 transliteration and Hindi rendition by N.S. Bhati for my own academic transliteration and interpretation of RRI Ms. 402. However, my approach to the manuscript rather differs from N.S. Bhati's reading in that I (unlike Bhati, who aimed at a philological reconstruction of the manuscript text) transliterate the actual scribal form of the *duhā* and *prāvārā* and note the manuscript's actual spelling, orthography and punctuation to present a historical transliteration of Ms. 402. Below (under the heading *Oral-cum-scribal culture*) my approach to the historical transliterations of the selected manuscripts will be further explained.

Of the many short compositions dedicated to Pabuji and kept in the Rajasthani archives or published in Rajasthani anthologies, I selected five *gits* and one short *duha*. As mentioned just now, Ms. 15009 (*gīta pābūjī rau*) is referred to as *git I* throughout this study. *Git II* refers to the untitled Ms. 8234, a poem about Pabuji's wedding.²⁹ *Git III*, titled *gīta pābūjī rai vivāha samai rau sāmdu cainajī rau kahiyo*³⁰ and ascribed to the poet Samdu Cainaji is a printed version of a poem very similar to *git II*. Though the manuscript version (*git II*) and the printed text (*git III*) of this Dimgal *git* do not vary greatly, except for the different titles and apart from the use of a few different words and distinct spellings, I do treat *git I* and *II* as different "versions" of a same or similar poem, and offer a historical transliteration of both the scribal and printed form of the poem as one of many possible outcomes or products of the historical process of oral and scribal transmission (see my definition of oral-cum-scribal cultures below).

Git III, *IV* and *V* were all published by N.S. Bhati (1973: 83). *Git IV* is the *gīta pābūjī raṭhaurā bhārahāṭa amaradāsajī rau kahiya*³¹ and was also published in 1973 by N.S. Bhati (1973: 78) just like *git V*, titled *gīta pābūjī rau āsiyā bāmḱīdāsa rau kahiya*³² (N.S. Bhati 1973: 85). Last is the nineteenth-century

²⁸ The Rajasthani chronicler Nainsi mentions the worship of Pabuji by sixteenth-century Bhopas (Smith 1991: 72). A seventeenth century chronicle of Marwar's history furthermore refers to the grant of Kolu to Pabu's Bhopas by Gamga, a sixteenth-century ruler of Jodhpur (Tessitori 1916: 109).

²⁹ Ms. 8234, RRI catalogue 6-390 (V.S. Rathaur: 1991). This manuscript gives no information about its scribe nor about its place and date of copying.

³⁰ "Poem (about) Pabuji's wedding recited by Samdu Caina".

³¹ "Poem (about) Pabuji Rathaur recited by Amardas Bharahat".

³² "Poem (about) Pabuji Rathaur recited by Asiya Bamkidas".

manuscript *duha* II (RORI Ms. 14458) titled *pābūjī dhāṃdhala āsthāṃnauta rā dūhā*.³³

Compared with the amount of manuscript sources available, the presented selection of poetic sources for this study is limited, especially from a quantitative point of view. However, the above-listed selection does represent the commonest storylines and plots of those compositions most regularly preserved in the archives of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh visited by me. My selection is also representative of the most customary poetic forms of poems dedicated to Pabuji, in particular the *chāṃdas*, *duhās*, *prāvāṇos* and *gītas*. This selection was in the first place intended to give an evocative, though evidently partial, impression of the historical background against which the medieval Pabuji tradition may have grown by documenting which narrative themes the selected poems have in common, and by giving an idea of the historical and contemporary functions that can be ascribed to them. The poets' evocation of Pabuji's warrior status and his elevation to divine status through their compositions has proved to be of particular interest for a description of the poems' historical context and function.

The customary poetic forms that are part of the medieval Pabuji tradition illustrate the use of *chāṃd*, *duhā* and *gīt* metrical structures by the poets of this tradition while the word *prāvāṇo* may be translated as "battle", "heroic deed" or "divine miracle" and is a genre that is most commonly defined by its heroic and devotional content, comprising heroic battle deeds and divine miracle tales.³⁴ The *prāvāṇo*'s metrical structure (as shall be argued further in chapter 4) somewhat resembles the structure of *duha* I. In chapter 4, I shall discuss the prosodic rules that govern the form of all the selected poems and illustrate how a discussion of Dimgal prosody assists in documenting the politico-military function of the selected poems. The above selection has (lastly) also been inspired by the wish to better understand the socio-religious background of the tradition with a study of the different sectarian interpolations in the poems that help in documenting the different worship practices that have been (and in most instances still are) part of the Pabuji tradition.

Dimgal

All selected poems are part of the medieval tradition of Dimgal heroic-epic poetry, also referred to as the Charan tradition after the poets of the Charan communities. Of Charan poets, coined "The Homers of the Rajput bravery" by Tessitori (1915: 375), it is said that they stood at the cradle of Dimgal, the poetic language, dialect or style of the region. The medieval *chāṃdas*, *duhās*, *prāvāṇos* and *gītas* dedicated to Pabuji

³³ "Couplets (dedicated to) Pabuji (the son of) Asthan's son Dhamdhal". (RORI) Ms. 14458 is described in the RORI catalogue number 128-4 dating the manuscript to the nineteenth century. The manuscript itself contains no information about its scribe or the place and date of copying.

³⁴ In the medieval prose-tradition, *pravāṇā* refers to descriptions of battles, like in "Manoharadāsārā pravāṇā", a list of battles between the Rajput Manoharadas and his adversaries (Sakariya 1984: 103).

can also be thought of as part of Rajasthan's Dimgal *vīrakāvya* tradition, a genre classification that defines the tradition according to its main subject matter: martial heroism.

Dimgal is a New Indo-Aryan (NIA) poetic language or style. The linguistic status of Dimgal and its origins at present gives rise to heated debates: the main questions relating to the origins of Dimgal and whether it should be seen as a proper language or as a poetic style, a counterpart of the prose language of the region coined "Pimgal". There exists no consensus on this subject among linguists. In what follows, I therefore limit my description of the debates about Dimgal to an overview of secondary studies of Dimgal poetry (i.e. studies not based on primary sources), Dimgal grammar and prosody, and published manuscript annotations in Hindi. It should be kept in mind that the partial overview of historical data available thus far is not intended as an up-to-date or authentic linguistic analysis of Dimgal or its literary forms, since this kind of analysis has yet to be undertaken and modern studies of Dimgal manuscripts inspired by manuscriptology or epigraphy lack.

In Prabhakar's (1976: 64) oft-cited study of the Charan tradition (to a great extent based on Tessitori's fieldwork) one reads that Dimgal existed from the late fourteenth century onwards. Kaviya (1997:1-7), on the other hand, opines that Dimgal has been in evidence from circa the ninth century onwards when it developed from the local language of Marwar, Marubhasha, which is believed to have replaced Apabhramsa as one of the literary languages of the region and became known as Dimgal, a name first mentioned in the eighth-century *Kuvalayāmāl* composed by Udhyotanasuri. As further proof for the early existence of Dimgal, Kaviya (1997: 4f) also cites thirteenth-century Dimgal poems about Rava Sihaji of Marwar and the (to me unknown) *Lakh Phulavāṇī* of Gujarat. The implications of this standpoint are unclear since I have no access to Kaviya's sources and his argument has yet to be confirmed. The same can be said of Tessitori's (1915: 375-76, 1917a: 229-231) dating of Dimgal to the early-medieval period, from approximately the thirteenth century onwards, as he does little to document his suggestion that Dimgal *gīts* may have existed in oral form from the thirteenth century onwards. Since earlier primary Dimgal sources have not been the subject of serious study as yet, it is also difficult to judge the likelihood of Tessitori's distinction between early-medieval "Old Dimgal" and, from approximately the sixteenth-century onwards, "Later Dimgal" (1914-1916: 21-25).

Smith's limited but up-to-date study of Dimgal seems the most reliable in this respect since his findings are based on primary research of original Dimgal poetry. On the basis of this research, Smith dates the coming into existence of Dimgal as a poetic language to a later period, defining it as vernacular "Old Rajasthani", which began to supersede "Old Gujarati" as the poetical language of Rajasthan in the fifteenth century (Smith 1975: 434). According to Smith (1975: 434f), Dimgal distinguishes itself from other NIA languages since it contains older language forms and also incorporates novel grammatical and lexical constructs, adding that "a grammar of

Dimgal would consist less of a set of forms than a set of possibilities". If further linguistic research would prove this thought to be true then it is easy to see why an in-depth study of Dimgal remains lacking till date.

Another question, which none of the studies consulted by me answers, is whether Dimgal is a language or a "dialect". Tessitori (1915: 376-77, 1914-1916: 24) is most outspoken on this subject, defining Old Dimgal as a "dead language" that originated with "Old Western Rajasthani" or "the old local speech of Western Rajputana". Smith (1975: 437) also defines Dimgal as a language, i.e. a stylized literary language, the characteristics of which were drawn from several dialect-areas and embedded in a "Marwari under-structure". One of the main distinctive features of Dimgal vocabulary apparently is that it consists of words derived from languages like Sindhi, Persian and Sanskrit and from various regional languages or dialects of Rajasthan, including Marwari, Marubhasha and Jaisalmeri.³⁵ Another distinctive feature attributed to Dimgal is that it preserves archaic words that are not contained by Pimgal, the prose language of medieval Rajasthani chronicles and semi-historic tales. As Smith proposes: Dimgal (like Pimgal) is a form of Western Rajasthani or "Middle Marwari" that "does not answer to any single geographically definable form of speech, but is rather a compilation of features drawn from several distinct dialect-areas", (Smith 1975: 436).³⁶

The third question asked about Dimgal is whether it should be seen as a proper language or as a poetic style. Tessitori (1915: 375) held that Dimgal and Pimgal, as used by Charan poets, were not "mere" poetic styles but "two distinct languages, the former being the local *bhāṣā* of Rajputana, and the latter the Braja *bhāṣā*, more or less vitiated under the influence of the former". It does seem to me, however, that Sohan Dan Charan's argument that Dimgal is not so much a language as it is a poetic style with its own poetic idiom does deserve some serious linguistic study (personal communication S. D. Charan, Jodhpur 2000). All the more so when one takes into account the existence of a Gujarati tradition of Dimgal poetry composed in Gujarati and according to Dimgal prosodic rules, a fact which perhaps

³⁵ Tessitori (1917c: v-vi) explains the archaic vocabulary of Dimgal poets as follows: "The bards have been more conservative in the matter of lexicon than in the matter of grammar, and most of the poetical and archaic words which were used by them five hundred years ago, can still be used by the bards of the present day, though their meaning may be no longer intelligible to any of his hearers or readers, but the initiated. This fact of the preservation of archaic words in *Ḍiṅgaḷa* is easily explained by the existence of the poetical glossaries such as the *Hamīranāmamālā* and the *Mānamañjarināmamālā*, etc., and the large part they have been playing in the curriculum of the studies of the bards for the last three centuries or more. A great part of these obsolete words are borrowed from the vocabulary of the Sanskrit poetry, and it is chiefly to these that the extraordinary richness in synonyms of *Ḍiṅgaḷa* is ultimately due".

³⁶ Compare Grierson's survey of South-Asian languages defining Marwari as a language that is a mixture of a number of forms of speech, especially Marwari and the Dardic subfamily of the Aryan languages as spoken in Sindh. Grierson (Varma 1973: 980) holds that Marwari, Mewari, Jaisalmeri, and so forth, form a group amongst themselves and are entitled to being classed as a separate language and adds that *if* the Rajasthani languages are dialects, then they are dialects of Gujarati. See also Shapiro's (2003: 254f) description of Dimgal as one of five "pre-modern Hindi literary dialects", listed together with Braj, Avadhi, Sadhu Bhasa and Maithili.

signifies that Dimgal is best seen as a style employed by the speakers of different regional tongues. As a historian, I am clearly not equipped to settle such linguistic issue. For the purpose of this study, suffice it to note that, Dimgal, like other specialized language-registers, has been used by Charan poets to voice the heroic-epic heritage of different communities in various periods of time, employing a distinctive vocabulary and prosodic style.³⁷

Socio-linguistic data indicate that Dimgal and Pimgal have been most commonly portrayed along communal lines. Late-medieval sources, like a nineteenth-century poem by Udairam Bharath, stress that Charans were proficient in Dimgal while Bhat genealogists and chroniclers (who asserted Brahminical status) laid claim to Pimgal (Kaviya 1997: 15). However, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Tessitori got the impression that “by far the most influential class of bards in Rajputana (...) are the Cāraṇa (...) In the Marwar State, where their influence is most felt, they continue to enjoy not less than about 350 villages, whilst the villages of the Bhāṭas are only seven or eight. And their superiority is not less in literary achievements. Whilst the Bhāṭas are nowadays generally confined to keeping genealogies and possess no literary education, Cāraṇas are still found who are good composers, and besides having command of Dīṅgaḷa and Pīṅgaḷa, have also some knowledge of Sanskrit language and literature” (Tessitori 1915: 378).

The differences attributed to Dimgal and Pimgal in the eighteenth century can be read from a heroic poem dedicated to Rathaur Ratan Singh by the Charan Khidiya Jaga and edited by K. Sharma and S. Singh (1982). In this poem Jaga sheds light on the different services performed by Charan, Bhat and Brahmin protégés of Rajput warriors in late-medieval Rajasthan. The poet describes how, at the beginning of the battle between Rathaur Ratan Singh and the joined forces of Mughal princes Aurangzeb and Murad, Charan and Bhat poets, and Brahmin Pamdits come to “brighten the war-scene” at Ujjain. The Brahmins are portrayed while performing a ritual to invoke the gods’ blessings for the battle, while the Charan poet Jasraj is shown to recite heroic verses to praise his patron and fire up the assembled warriors, and the assembled Bhat poets offer the combatants encouragement by praising the deeds of the heroes of the *Mahābhārat* and by reciting befitting Vedic verses (Sharma & Singh 1982: 28-31, 37-39, 65).

I have not yet located sources that document the aforementioned division in earlier times (i.e. before the eighteenth century) but it is clear that Dimgal poetry traditions, when portrayed as the “solid”, “strong”, “rustic”, “authentic” tradition of Charan poets, have commonly been considered as inferior to Pimgal, the “refined, literary language” of the Bhat at Rajput courts (Prabhakar 1976: 45f) or, as Tessitori

³⁷ On specialized bardic languages in general, see Blackburn (1989: 79), Ong (1999: 23, 1982: 92-120). With regard to the unique status ascribed to the prosodic features of Dimgal, see Kaviya (1997: 1-6). For a description of the distinctiveness of Dimgal grammatical and lexical constructs see Smith (1975: 434) and Tessitori (1914-1916: *passim*, 1915: 374-379, 1917c: iv-vii).

(1919b:xiii) coined it: “emasculated” Pimgal.³⁸ Along these lines, brawny Dimgal is the language most suitable for the versification of the battle deeds of valiant Rajput heroes, while Pimgal prose works, in particular late-medieval chronicles, are seen as works of true literary and historical qualities (Banerjee 1962: 17). Vaudeville (1996: 274), on the other hand, is of the opinion that Dimgal was a literary language, an archaic form of “old Marwari” that never had a “popular” character.³⁹

The idea that Dimgal was considered inferior to Pimgal can also be read from Motilal Menariya’s contention, as quoted in Kaviya (1997: 17), that Pimgal was the learned language of Pandits who considered Dimgal an ignoble language, its poetical style too flowery and its content rather farfetched. Accordingly, the word Dimgal is thought to derive of Rajasthani *diṃga* (“exaggeration”) while Dimgal poetry is described as “fakelore” full of hyperbole.⁴⁰ Tessitori (1917a: 228) commented on this aspect of Dimgal poems by writing that “(...) generally speaking, there is probably no bardic literature in any part of the world, in which truth is so masked by fiction and disfigured by hyperboles, as in the bardic language of Rajputana. In the magniloquent strains of a Cāraṇa, everything takes a gigantic form, as if he was seeing the world through a magnifying glass; every skirmish becomes a Mahābhārata, every little hamlet a Laṅkā, every warrior a giant who with his arms upholds the sky”. Tessitori (1919b: xii) did however endorse the historical value of Charan “bardic literature” written in the “literary bhāṣā” of Marwar. He believed that a “kernel of truth” was “lurking” inside Dimgal poems, in particular those composed during or immediately after the event that they record (Tessitori 1917a: 229). All one needs to do is tone down the poetical, “magnified” view of events by “reducing things to their natural size, and at the same time denude the facts of all the fiction with which they are coated” and thus glean the poems’ historical “truth” (Tessitori 1917a: 228). As I have argued in the introduction to this study, and hope to show in the chapters ahead, the literary-historical value of Charan Dimgal poetry should not be limited to the factual data that may or may not be at the heart of this kind of compositions.

At the root of the conflicting evaluations of Dimgal and Pimgal is the rigid distinction between oral folk-traditions and written classical traditions, or oral (or orally derived) “little traditions” and “folk-art” on the one hand, and classical written legacies of “High Culture” or “Great Tradition” on the other. From this

³⁸ In contrast to his opinion of the early-medieval Charan tradition as the craft of mere “parasites”, Prabhakar (1976: 45) describes the Charan heritage of later medieval times as a “classical tradition”, when the medieval vernacular of the desert, influenced by Persian historiography, was “elevated to the dignity of a literary language”, the aristocratic court language Dimgal.

³⁹ Vaudeville (1996: 247) supports this contention by rendering the meaning of Dimgal (from *diṃga*) as “arrogance”, which, it seems, is thought to connote “unpopular” and by implication “not folk”.

⁴⁰ Tessitori rather condescendingly spurns such and other “fantastic etymologies proposed by the bards and pandits of Rajputana” and thinks of “dimgala” as a “mere adjective meaning probably “irregular”, i.e. “not in accordance with the standard poetry”, or possibly “vulgar” was applied to it when the use of Braja Bhāṣā (Piṅgala) as a polite language of the poets was in general vogue” (Tessitori 1915: 376).

angle, Rajput “Great Tradition” is thought of as a heritage of classical, written texts, elaborating on elite Rajput dharma, while oral traditions are understood to mirror the “folk reality” of marginalized communities. As I hope to show in the course of this study, it is not very constructive to contrast Dimgal oral and written poetry in this manner.

Chronology

Here, and in the next chapters and in the appendix, the selected poems will be presented in a (to a very limited extent) chronological manner, based on the selected poems’ hypothetical date of composition and not on their assumed date of notation. This means that I will first look at the different story-lines, episodes, themes and images of the two selected versions of Vithu’s *chamd*, probably composed at the end of the first half of the sixteenth century and written down in the eighteenth-century (*chamd* I). Next is the undated *chamd* II, followed by the late-sixteenth century *git* I (*gīta pābūjī rau*). Subsequently, I study the eighteenth-century manuscript version of Ladhraj’s seventeenth-century composition, *duha* I, followed by the *parvaro*, a version which appears to have been recited (and perhaps composed) in the early eighteenth century. Next, the undated manuscript poem *git* II will be discussed together with a printed version of this poem as represented by *git* III, followed by a study of the undated poems published by N.S. Bhati (1973: 78-85): *git* IV and *git* V. Last of all, *duha* II will be considered. This *duha* (together with *git* V) is the most recent composition at my disposal, in all probability composed in the late eighteenth century and/or beginning of the nineteenth century.

By presenting the selected poems in a, to some extent, chronological manner, I hope to give some idea of the sequence of Pabuji’s deification as represented by the selected poems. The study of Pabuji’s deification as a chronological process helps in imagining what the initial stages of Pabuji’s medieval tradition may have been like, even if the dating of the selected poems remains rather uncertain. As shall become clear in the course of this thesis, this kind of study raises several new questions regarding the development of the Pabuji tradition that assist in broadening our understanding of the way in which the tradition may have grown. I will ask whether a developmental view of regional manuscript traditions like Pabuji’s (including poetry that was composed orally or in writing) is the best way to evaluate the different genres that are part of the medieval and contemporary tradition.

Since the poems do not represent a body of texts linked to each other through an unbroken “chain of transmissions” or the sequential transmission of written texts, matters of dating and authorship have proved difficult to resolve. The best way to appraise the transmission of the selected poems is by thinking of them as fairly loose collection of texts transmitted in different or concurrent periods of time. This view can be documented, if only in a rather indirect way, by quoting the Italian linguist Tessitori who published wide-ranging reports of his fieldwork in Rajasthan

in the *Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, the *Bibliotheca Indica* and the *Indian Antiquary* between 1914 and 1920.⁴¹ In his still often quoted “Bardic and historical surveys of Rajputana” (1917b, 1917c, 1918a, 1918b, 1919b, 1920), Tessitori attempted to piece together the chronology of heroic-epic poetry composed in Dimgal, by describing the manuscript tradition according to what he understood as “the elementary canon in philology” of his time. The Italian scholar soon discovered that his efforts to trace different versions of a Dimgal poem to one archetype were in vain, for he wrote: “I have tried hard to trace the pedigree of each of these (...) manuscripts and ascertain the degree of their dependency on the archetype and on one another, but have been unsuccessful. The reason of the failure is to be sought partly in the great number of manuscripts in existence, and partly in the peculiar conditions under which bardic works are handed down, subject to every sort of alterations by the copyist who are generally bards themselves, and often think themselves authorized to modify or, as they would say, improve, any text they copy, to suit their tastes or ignorance, as the case may be” (Tessitori 1917c: ix).

Though contemporary studies of traditional poetry make clear that questions about the origins and poetic originality of chirographic sources are of little importance when discussing poetic genres that were composed and transmitted orally and in writing, it does even so seem important to stress the indefinite character of the time of composition of most Dimgal poetry here, bearing in mind that relatively recent contemporary studies of the Rajasthani heroic-epic tradition continue to be inspired by Tessitori’s remarks and quests for early beginnings and original material.⁴² Tessitori (1915: 377, 382-87, 1916: 82, 1919b: xiii) felt that there ought to exist original versions of the Dimgal poems collected by him and he continued his attempts to trace medieval “versions” of such poems to original, older texts. Disregarding the many manuscript-versions and oral versions of poems, the confusion about composers, and the differing opinions about dates, Tessitori continued to believe in textual archetypes even though he was well aware of the fact that this undertaking held little interest for the Charan poets and scholars who were his contemporaries and who, instead, strived to “update” the content and form of the transmitted texts to the tastes of their audiences. Tessitori, troubled by the many different forms a composition could take, charged the poets of Rajasthan with “barefaced plagiarism”, “lack of common sense”, “absurd interpretations”, and so on (Tessitori 1915: 376-377, 1917c: vii, 1919a: 48, 1919b: 92, 107-111). Tessitori (1919b: i, 1921: x) did, even so, also acclaim the “poetical ingenuity” of the bards in

⁴¹ Tessitori’s report of his work done during 1918 was published in 1921, after his death (*Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. XVI/6 (n.s.): 251-279).

⁴² For contemporary discussions of questions about the origins and originality of heroic-epic and other oral and written literary sources see: Beissinger (2002: 236-258), Colm Hogan (1995a: 14), Ebbesen (1995: 47-62), Finnegan (1992: 27-32, 1977: 30f, 266), Nagler (1979: 451-59), Pollock (2003: 76), Todorov (2000 193-210) and Yashachandra (2003: 568). For discussions about the origins of medieval Rajasthani heroic-epic poetry see, for example, Kaviya (1997:1-7) and Prabhakar (1976: 45f).

many other instances and he also recorded that he considered “minor poetical inaccuracies and exaggerations” excusable.

Tessitori’s at times censorious judgment of Rajasthan’s “bards” is plainly beside the point today. His remarks do, however, help in further illustrating the shared character of the Dimgal tradition and will for this reason be quoted below at some length to document the “peculiar conditions” (Tessitori) of Dimgal manuscript poetry transmission. Tessitori’s views help understand why a Dimgal composition attributed to a certain poet or period does not inevitably refer to an “original” work composed by only one author, or to one particular point in time. This can, for example, be understood from Tessitori’s (1917c: viii) observation that “[I]mitations and plagiarisms have always played an important part in the bardic literature since the earliest times, a fact that is not at all surprising in the case of hereditary poets who transmit their literary profession from father to son”. Clearly, the observed “plagiarism” as well as variations in content and form between different manuscript versions of what appears to be one poem, attributed to one poet, should be, as Smith (1979: 353f) notes, attributed to the fact that Rajasthani manuscript texts contain orally-derived literature. As we shall see in the next section, the poems dedicated to Pabuji are best seen in this light as well, that is, as texts that have been composed orally and written down later by their poets, by subsequent generations of scribes and/or poets who felt free to add their own verse-lines to a composition.

Oral-cum-scribal culture

Medieval Charan heroic-epic compositions are best thought of as orally-composed or orally-derived scribal texts that used to be part of a culture where literate and illiterate forms of transmission exist simultaneously (cf. Finnegan 1992: *passim*, Ong 1999: 11f, Reynolds 1999: 155-168 and Schipper 1989: 11). Different elements of authorship are explicit in oral-cum-scribal traditions informed by performance, which result in “mixed forms”, including texts composed orally or in writing by a poet individually or as the result of “corporate authorship” in the context of a performance when a received poem may be improvised upon with the active input of audiences (Novetzke 2003: 221f). The fact that medieval oral-cum-scribal vernacular traditions were created and preserved by various agents (including poets, scribes, audiences and patrons) and transmitted in oral and written forms throughout different periods of time means that the approach to the academic transliteration of manuscript versions of vernacular poetry dedicated to Pabuji is different from classical philological reconstructions of scribal texts. It should therefore be stressed that I do not aim to address what classical philologist see as “corrupting processes of transmission” that lead to textual “contaminations” like incongruent orthography and punctuation or anachronistic additions (cf. McGann 1983: 40-42). Rather, the

transliterations⁴³ of the selected poems offered in the following chapters and in the appendix should be seen as an attempt at a historical transliteration of the manuscript texts, representing the actual scribal form of the selected poems by departing as little as possible from the written text.

My historical approach to scribal texts is inspired by the idea that each of the selected manuscripts represents one of many authoritative and possible versions of a poem (or several poems), the result of varying historical purposes, intentions and contexts. To preserve the historicity of the selected compositions, the actual medieval spelling practices and orthographic and punctuation usages are transliterated, including the mistakes or slips of the tongue (and pen) made by poets and scribes in the process of noting down an oral poem or copying a scribal manuscript version of a poem.⁴⁴ As a result, the transliterations offered in this study document the poets' and/or scribes' actual spelling practices, historical orthographic and punctuation habits. And I also note scribal additions in the manuscript margins and blotched letters and words or letters which were crossed out. By offering such a factual (as opposed to reconstructed) transliteration of the manuscript texts, I aim to underline that the scribal forms of the poems are one of many possible outcomes or products of historical processes of oral and scribal transmissions and that the selected scribal forms exist side-by-side with other (scribal, oral and/or oral-cum-scribal) outcomes of the same transmission processes (cf. McGann 1983: 62, 103f).

Academic transliteration

Now, let me introduce the standards employed for the academic transliteration of Rajasthani manuscript sources and contemporary oral poetry. As shall become clear, a straightforward reading or even interpretation of the selected sources is encumbered by the deliberate ambiguity inherent in the special use of poetical vocabulary, the occurrence of metrically derived forms and by unintentional ambiguities that result from unclear handwriting or blotched and/or faded letters and words. If the gist of a word or verse-line remains unclear, because the writing is blotched, or because a letter is hard to decipher or could be read in different ways, alternative possibilities have been listed in the footnotes. The deliberate ambiguities that result from Dimgal and contemporary Rajasthani poetic use of words and/or exceptionally conflicting interpretations of verse-lines that impede an appropriate assessment of a text's gist, are also commented upon in the main text or through

⁴³ In writing "transliterate" and "transliteration", I refer to the standard academic transliteration of Rajasthani and Hindi as proposed by (respectively) Sita Ram Lalas (1962-1988) and McGregor (1993) and further discussed below under the heading *Academic Transliteration*.

⁴⁴ Textual critics apply this approach to reproduce scribal or printed texts with as much fidelity as possible to arrive at a historical edition or "Überlieferungskritische Edition" as Kraft (1990: 40) terms it or the reconstruction of the historical form and transmission of a text including its historical orthography and punctuation.

footnotes. When in doubt, I most often follow Subh Karan Deval's interpretations of a word, at least when his interpretation assists a logical interpretation of the verse-line as a whole. For the same reason I also at times refer to Shekavat's (1968: 25) publication of a version of *gīta pābū dhāṃdhaḷauta rāṭhaurā rau* and N.S. Bhati's (1973: 78-85) Hindi translation of manuscript versions of *duha* I, the *parvaro* and to the poems published by N.S. Bhati (*git* III, *git* IV and *git* V).

When divergent spellings cause confusion, I adhere to the alternative forms of Rajasthani spelling for one word as documented by Sita Ram Lalas throughout his dictionary and in his introduction to Rajasthani notations in part one of the reprint of his unabridged Rajasthani-Hindi dictionary (1988: 61-62). I transliterate words according to Hindi spelling standards as recorded by McGregor (1993) when this spelling is in fact used in Dimgal manuscripts or modern Rajasthani oral texts and/or secondary literature, or by referents in the field (or, obviously, when I quote Hindi sources). Not transliterated are anglicized Hindi, Urdu, Persian or Sanskrit words that have become part of common English usage like *dharma*, *guru*, *raja*, *sadhu* or *saree*. Nor do I transliterate proper names, geographic names, caste names and/or occupational titles in the aforementioned languages. I transliterate Rajasthani and Hindi titles of poems, books and articles but not Rajasthani, Hindi, Urdu, Persian or Sanskrit words that are part of the English titles of books or other texts. And in references to the selected sources, I quote their short title in italics but without diacritics throughout the subsequent chapters (*chamd* I, *duha* I, *paravaro*, and so forth).

I do not quote the mute or inherent "a" at the end of words, except in the transliteration of primary sources and in the chapters when I cite words or verse-lines from primary written and oral sources. Thus direct quotes from primary sources are represented through transliteration and italics, including their inherent "a", while this usage is not followed for transliterations from secondary sources. This usage may now and then lead to puzzling usage, for example, when I refer to *chamda troṭaka* (as written in the *chamd* I and II) and *chamḍ troṭak* (as written in medieval poetry manuals) in one sentence. On the whole, however, the retention of the mute "a" at the end of words in quotes from manuscript sources alone does assist in distinguishing these quotes from secondary Dimgal, Rajasthani and Hindi sources. Within all transliterated words, whether from primary or secondary sources, the mute "a" is retained throughout.

In Dimgal and contemporary Rajasthani verse-quotes and in the transliterations in the appendix, I do not employ capital letters at the beginnings of verse-lines nor for the names of people or gods, place names, and so forth, thus reflecting the nonexistence of capital letters in the studied texts. I also do not follow the scribes' numbering of the manuscript poems since most poets employed irregular or nonexistent numbering. Instead, all manuscript poetry has been numbered per verse-line and will be referred to thus: *chamd* I (v. 33), *duha* I (v. 34),

and so forth, to allow easy reference between cited verse-lines and their transliteration in the appendix.

Spelling

In trying to keep my transliteration of the selected manuscripts as factual as possible, I remark on words and letters which the poets inserted or crossed out and note blotched letters or words in the footnotes to my transliterations. I transliterate Dimgal and contemporary Rajasthani texts according to their spelling as documented by the studied manuscript and oral sources. Variant spelling practices in different manuscripts are noted as are the different notations and spellings encountered within one manuscript. Apart from difficulties arising from different and/or unclear notations or blotched handwritings, complications also surface because of the different spellings that the scribes employed for one word, at times in one sentence; like the scribe and/or poet of *chamd* II (v. 5-6), who spelled: *jhagajheṭhī*, *jhagajaiṭhī* and *jagajheṭhī* and *jagajēṭhī*. I have tried to keep to the spelling as noted down in the medieval sources and to represent “inconsistencies” or non-standardized notations and spellings inspired by different chirographic practices and metrical needs to reflect the fact that the poets and/or scribes of the manuscripts did not know (or feel the need to employ) one standardized form of written language. The variant spellings also illustrate that the metrical needs of the verse-lines dictated the spelling of words to a great extent. Dimgal poets often shortened vowels for prosodic value or added an *anusvār* for prosodic value to metrically determined forms (cf. Smith 1992: 268 n.11, Tessitori 1916: 77, 1917c: 87f).

The fact that more than a few manuscripts are rather blotched and that some manuscripts appear to have been written over an older text, perhaps in order to save paper, and that the *anusvārs* of older texts still shine through subsequent texts, makes it difficult to establish whether a dot should be read as an *anusvār*. At times, it also proved difficult to establish whether, if a dot does indeed represent an *anusvār*, it has been added for grammatical or prosodic reasons. When in doubt, I have bracketed indistinct notations of *anusvārs* thus: *kā(ṁ)la*. I bracket blotched or faded letters or unknown notations in the same way: “*aṁgi(da)*”. These unclear notations are remarked upon through footnotes. Whole words or sentences between angle-brackets refer to words or sentences that have been inserted when insert signs were added by the scribes in the manuscript margins to indicate that a word or sentence needs to be incorporated. For example (*duha* I v. 50): “*kava[lā]*⁴⁵*de tata kā(ṁ)la, vīkhāṁ bhari coṛe viṛaṁga*”.

⁴⁵ An insert-sign follows *kava*, indicating “*lā*” in the manuscript margin.

Historical orthography

The orthography of the Rajasthani alphabet differs from Hindi in a few respects (see Lalas 1988: 21-36 and Metzger 2003: 17-22). Specific Rajasthani usage includes “ḷa”, “ja”, “jja” and “jjha”, and “cca”, “ccha”. The latter are at times used interchangeably.⁴⁶ However, neither the orthography described by Lalas, nor Metzger’s rendition of different Rajasthani scripts, is at all times reflected by the scripts of the manuscripts under review. Hindi “ṣa” and “śa”, according to Lalas (1988: 31), are represented by “sa” in Rajasthani, are indeed hardly ever employed in the manuscripts under review but they are not entirely unknown either. In the first verse-lines of *chamd* I (ms. 5470), “śa” appears four times.⁴⁷ In this instance, this usage can be explained as inspired by the use of a Sanskritic grammatical form (*gurabhyau*), but this explanation does not shed light on the usage of “śa” in *chamd* II (v. 47) “nikṣatra” or in *chamd* I (v. 23: “sihaśām”).

The notation of “ḍa” and “ḍha”, “ṛa” and “ṛha” is ambiguous in most manuscripts since these are not always distinguished from each other by a dot next to or underneath the letter (cf. Metzger 2003: 20). See, for example, *git* I in which the scribe differentiated between “ṛa” and “ḍa” in a variable manner, spelling “camels” as *sāmḍhaḍiyā* (v.2) and *sāmḍhīṛiyā* (v.4). In addition, “ṛa” appears to have two different written forms, at times representing “ḍa” and “ṛa” that can be read as either in most manuscripts under review. When no clear distinction can be made between “ḍa” and “ṛa”, or “ḍha” and “ṛha”, I transcribe “ṛa” and “ṛha” since “ḍa” and “ḍha” have not been included in the reprint of the first part of Lalas’s dictionary (one only finds the lemmas: “ṛa”, “ṛha” and “ṇa”). In some manuscripts the difference between “ṛa” and “ḍa” (and so forth) is clear, like in *duha* I and the *parvaro*. The difference between “ṛha” and “ḍha” is, however, not at all times clear in this manuscript either since “ṛha”, which is used throughout *duha* I and the *parvaro*, now and then seems to signify “ḍha”.⁴⁸

In most manuscripts (but especially in *chamd* II) it is at times difficult to distinguish between “gha”, “dha” and “tha”. Moreover, as noted above, “ca”, “cca”, “ccha”, and “ja”, “jja” and “jha” are at times used interchangeably and are written in several different ways. Likewise in most manuscripts it is difficult to distinguish between “va” and “ba”, like in *duha* I (v. 28), where it is unclear whether “vasai” or “basai” was meant. When both readings (“va” or “ba”) result in the same meaning, this usage has not been commented upon through footnotes. When the different notations affect the meaning of the words (which they as a rule do not) this is remarked upon in footnotes, using “blotched” to signify blemishes or faded signs,

⁴⁶ For example: “Caraṇ” or “Charaṇ” or “Ccharaṇ”.

⁴⁷ *Chamd* I (v. 1-2): “śrī rāmāya nama, śrī sarasvatya nama, śrī gurabhyau nama, atha mehā viṭhū rā kahīyā śrī pābujī rā chamḍa”.

⁴⁸ In the *parvaro*, for example, *ṛhola* seems to be a clear reference to the Bhopa’s drum (*ḍhola*) (v.4): “dhāṃgaravā thī ṛhola, māḍāṃ vāghai māṃgārīyo”.

“unclear” to signify unknown notations or unclearly written or otherwise unidentifiable letters, and “probably” to signify probable readings.

Other specific notations include the use of *daṃdas* within words, for example when a *daṃda* separates syllables within one word. This usage is also noted in the footnotes, like in *duha* I (v. 236) “devaladehā”, where a *daṃda* precedes “de” and “hā” is followed by two *daṃdas*: “devalade/hā//”. This usage was probably inspired by the need to stress the metrical pattern and/or meaning of the verse-line, for the same notation is found in the next verse-line (v. 237) where *daṃdas* precede and follow “ha”, reading “marade/hā//”. And a *daṃda* in the manuscript margin (outside the text proper) often signifies, as noted in footnotes, the completion of the letters “ā” and “ī”, like in *duha* I (v. 248), where one reads “vīsari”. If the *daṃda* in the manuscript margin is interpreted as completing the “a” (which it most probably was intended to do) one reads: *vīsāri*.

Tentative dating

In view of the lack of modern linguistic or literary studies on the subject, it is not at all clear how much value can be attributed to the above-quoted tentative dating of the selected manuscript poetry and printed material by, for example, scholars of the Rajasthan Research Institute. Bhalcandra Sharma’s dating of the copying of *chamd* I to the eighteenth century in RRI catalogue 4-1027 (1976) represents a date which is not contained by the manuscript itself. Perhaps this date was arrived at on the basis of a linguistic, prosodic or orthographic study which may have helped in establishing the given date. However, the RRI catalogue, like the catalogues of most archives visited by me, does not document the criteria upon which the dating of the manuscripts has been based. Thus there is no saying (at least not with much certainty) when most of the selected manuscript versions of poems dedicated to Pabuji were really fixed in writing. The available chronological accounts of the development of Dimgal poetry do not offer much assistance either since they frequently contradict each other and often consist of rather unsubstantiated compendiums of the names of poets, their works and the time of composition, recurrently based on unverifiable references to manuscripts kept in private collections or based on nineteenth and early-twentieth century research that still awaits up-to-date linguistic scrutiny.⁴⁹ Matters of chronology have been further complicated by the conflicting claims that have been made, and are still made, about the historicity of Dimgal as a language or the antiquity and distinctive features of its body of texts and prosody.

To give an idea of one of the proposed chronologies for the development of the Dimgal tradition, I will here quote N.S. Bhati’s (1989: 63-72) not always properly documented but best researched and consistent study based on primary

⁴⁹ See for instance (*passim*): Kaviya (1997), Maheshwari (1980), Mali “Ashanta” (1994), Menariya (1968), Prabhakar (1976).

Dimgal sources available at present. N.S. Bhati (1989: 61f, 70) traces the initial stages of the Dimgal tradition to the thirteenth century when Dimgal compositions are thought to have been part of a largely oral heroic-epic tradition. In the period between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Dimgal tradition expanded and more and more compositions were committed to paper. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are seen by N.S. Bhati as the time when Dimgal heroic and epic poetry reached maturity and when, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, the Dimgal tradition (that had been largely oral till then) started to develop into a written literary tradition, the domain of court poets who composed “high class narrative poetry”.

It is the marked proliferation of different poetical genres in the sixteenth century and (most importantly) the amount of compositions that were preserved in writing from that time onwards that leads N.S. Bhati to describe this period as the apex of the tradition. Subsequently, the beginning of Aurangzeb's rule till the end of the nineteenth century is seen as the period when, with the growing power of the British colonial regime, the Dimgal tradition began to wane and in due course became moribund since Dimgal poets could no longer find royal or other patrons for their poetry. It is thought that Rajput rulers and other patrons of Dimgal poetry began to look to more “modern” sources of legitimacy during British rule, and therefore no longer felt the need to patronize Dimgal poets. Erdman (1992: 174f), for instance, argues that royal patrons of Rajasthani artists no longer required traditional performers to substantiate their rule after their authority came to be underwritten through pacts with the British colonial administrators and imperial confirmation ceremonies (cf. Tessitori 1915: 379 and 1919b: 5).

The chronology proposed by N.S. Bhati accords well with the chronological description of the development of Hindi literature as put forward by McGregor (1984: 1-3). Maheshwari (1980: 20, 47, 193), on the other hand, dates the “early period” of Dimgal literature to 1050-1450, the medieval period from 1450 to 1850 and the modern period (in which Dimgal poetry is thought to have waned) from 1850 onwards. However, the written Pabuji tradition of Dimgal poetry continued to flourish until well into the twentieth century when the poet Modiya Asiya composed his *pābū prakāś* (1932), a truly epic poem dedicated to Pabuji and written in accordance with medieval prosody. Besides, as will also become apparent in the ensuing chapters, the contemporary oral and written tradition of poetry dedicated to Pabuji also documents that medieval prosody remains in use till today. Thus the modern period is not necessarily one of decline, as shall be documented further in chapter 8.

The many questions about the chronology of the Dimgal poetic heritage and its development will not be solved in the course of this study. I would like to note, however, that the above assertions, in particular those dating Dimgal to a very early period of history, seem to have been inspired by contemporary language politics: the felt need to shield oneself against what is seen as the imposition of Hindi on

speakers of regional tongues by the central government.⁵⁰ Till date, the regional varieties of Rajasthani (Marwari, Mewari, Dungari, etcetera), are classed as Hindi dialects under schedule eighth of the constitution. Though independent linguistic status was accorded to Rajasthani by the regional state assembly in 2004, Rajasthani has yet to receive national recognition. In this context, it seems good to note that by pointing out the problems of chronology that came up during my study of poems dedicated to Pabuji, I do not intend to add to the arguments involved in discussions about the antiquity of the Dimgal but merely seek to note the problems that a chronological account of medieval Dimgal poetry entails.

Authorship

Several of the selected manuscripts contain signature phrases or references to their poets' names, either in the title or elsewhere in the text, like in the title of *chamd* I and II or in the last verses of the *paravaro*. On the basis of a poets' names, the time of composition or the period when undated poems were fixed in writing (especially earlier works) is often conjecturally arrived at and made to coincide with the rule of a poet's Rajput patron. Thus the commonly held notion that Vithu composed his *chamd* somewhere "around 1550", appears to be based upon the idea that he was a contemporary of Rao Maldev of Jodhpur, who is thought to have ruled from circa 1532 till 1562. Such assumptions are perhaps also inspired by the consideration that Vithu was granted the village of Khedi by Rao Maldev, as can be gathered from an undocumented reference in Maheshwari's (1980: 59) history of Rajasthani literature, till date the most comprehensive (though not well-documented) literary history of Rajasthani poetry and prose traditions.

Other information cited about Meha Vithu suggests that this poet not only composed the *pābūjī rā duhā* but also composed poems in honour of Rajput heroes like the Rathaur Camda and deities like Goga and the Charan goddess Karni (Maheshwari 1989: 59, N.S. Bhati 1989: 78). And Kaviya (1997: 251) lists Vithu Padmo Patavat as the name of the composer of an eighteenth-century manuscript version of a poem titled *pābūjī rā chamda*. Likewise, Datta (1987: 58, 973) refers to one Vithu Meha Nagarajota as the author of *rāva jaitasī ro padhadī baṃdha chamda*. While "Nagarajota", as Datta suggests, may have referred to Vithu's place of birth or residence, this is not common usage.⁵¹ In addition, Datta's ascription of

⁵⁰ It seems to me that many of the assertions about the antiquity of the Dimgal tradition as proposed by Rajasthani scholars, poets and other interested parties mainly serve to strengthen the demand for an independent linguistic status for Rajasthani and its literary culture. In 2001, for example, D. Bhatia of the *Centre for Rajasthan Studies* (Jaipur) launched the movement for "The Self-Respect of Rajasthani" to campaign for the inclusion of Rajasthani as an Indian language under schedule 38 of the Indian constitution by ascribing it the status of a proper language, with a reputable, i.e. "very old", literary heritage.

⁵¹ Bhanavat (n.d.: 85) identifies the poet as Vithu Meha Dusalani, the son of Dusla, or a descendant of the (to me unknown) Dusla Charan lineage.

the *rāva jaitasī ro chaṃd* to Meha Vithu is also problematic for this attribution is based on the subtitle of the eighteenth-century manuscript preserved in the Darbar library of Bikaner fort that is reportedly titled: *jaitasī rā nai pābūjī rā chaṃda* (“Verses (dedicated to) Jaitasi and Pabuji”). While a manuscript title alone does not necessarily document that either or both compositions were indeed composed by, or can be attributed to, Vithu, the fact that the *rāva jaitasī ro chaṃd* is more commonly attributed to Suja Vithu (or: Vithu Sujo), a Charan poet from Bikaner, than to Meha Vithu, by Pranesh (1991), who edited one version of the *rāva jaitasī ro chaṃd*, also renders Datta’s ascription rather problematic.

The fact that “Meha” and “Vithu” are rather common Rajasthani poets’ names gives rise to further confusion.⁵² What is clear is that the Vithu branch of Charan poets has been connected with the Rajput Rathaur lineages of Bikaner and Jodhpur since the early beginnings of their rise to power. A tale recorded by Tambs-Lyche (2004c: 67) traces the Vithu lineage to Mangh Bhati, a Bhati-Rohadiya Rajput, whose mother was Charan by adoption. Mangh Bhati was forced to become the poet of one of the founding fathers of the Rathaur lineage, Dhuhad of Kher, when the latter was in need of a Charan and no one but Mangh Bhati was available for the position. The Vithu Charans are also connected to the ruling house of Bikaner through its tutelary deity Karni, a Charan goddess, who is believed to have married Depal Vithu thus furthering the socio-political and religious ties between Rathaur Rajput and Vithu Charan lineages (Tambs-Lyche 1997: 185, 2004c: 78, Westphal-Hellbusch 1976: 174). Several “foundation tales” of Rathaur rule in Bikaner commemorate how Karni helped the Rathaur establish their sway over desert territories (Samaur 1999: 520f). Karni is also worshipped as the clan goddess or guarantor and defender of Rajput supremacy by the Rathaur rulers of Jodhpur. In short: while the attribution of the above-quoted names and compositions attributed to Meha Vithu is possible, I feel one should, nevertheless, continue to be cautious and think of Vithu as one of the poets (not the only poet) to whom the above compositions could be attributed. In noting this, I do not mean to imply that all the quoted data are inevitably fictitious since these data do refer to rich and often accurate oral genealogies upon which much of Charan ancestral histories are based.⁵³ What I do intend to say is that not all data are verifiable or have been verified as yet.

⁵² Confusion exists about whether the poet was named Vithu Meha or Meha Vithu. In this study, the poet is throughout referred to as Meha Vithu since this is common usage in the manuscripts studied by me. It is also relevant to note in this context that in the contemporary oral and written tradition, many more titles have been attributed to Meha Vithu; titles which can not be traced to the medieval manuscript tradition, like the oral compositions *Sagatā tuma ambā* and *Ramata dharatī marha rānevā* noted down by Samaur (1999: 113-118) and the poem *Bīṭhu meha krīta* (Bai n.d.: 281-283).

⁵³ During my fieldwork in Rajasthan, I noted that many data about their forefathers cited by different Charan poets proved to be rather consistent, especially when one asked a Charan of a particular lineage about his ancestry or consulted a Motisar, the poets who are patronized by the Charans and keep the genealogical records of different Charan lineages. Since these records (as the Motisars of Marwah village

A somewhat similar, though less detailed, account can be given of the data known about Ladhraj, the poet to whom the *pābūjī rā duhā* has been attributed. Apart from the fact that he was a contemporary of the ruler of Marwar, Jaswant Singh (1638-1678), not much is known about Ladhraj either. N.S. Bhati (1989: 15f) suggests that Ladhraj may have become Jaswant Singh's minister after his predecessor, the well-known chronicler Muhnta Nainsi, killed himself to protest against his imprisonment by Jaswant Singh.⁵⁴ This can be understood, N.S. Bhati (1989: 16) argues, from the fact that Nainsi does not mention Ladhraj in any of his historical works. Nainsi appears to have served eight years as the diwan of Marwar court, from 1658 until 1667, after which Jaswant Singh put him in prison. The fact that Nainsi successfully led military campaigns against Jaisalmer and Bikaner reportedly gained him the jealousy of other courtiers who conspired to turn Jaswant Singh against him (Qanungo 1971: 80-95).⁵⁵ Other, on the whole undocumented, references abound. Lalas (1988: 152f), for example, holds that Ladhraj wrote his *pābūjī rā duhā* in 1652 and notes that Ladhraj was a resident of Sojat and a Kocar, an Oswal caste-group portrayed as Rajput warriors converted to Jainism or as money-lenders and traders (Mahajans) who claim Rajput ancestry (Hardyal Singh 2000: 128f).⁵⁶ Both groups commonly found employment as court scribes.

The authorship of the *pābū rā prāvāṛā* poses yet another problem. From the last verse-lines of the *parvaro*, it can be read that *duha* I and *parvaro* were noted down by a man named Pamdit Khusyal of village Cariasra in 1827 VS (1769 CE) while they were recited in 1778 VS (1720 CE). In the concluding verse-line it becomes apparent that this work was noted down as an integral part of *duha* I, for it reads (v. 84): “iti pābūjī rā dūhā sampuraṇam”, here Pabuji's *duha* (not *parvaro*) ends.⁵⁷ I have not been able to establish the identity of one of the poets or reciters named in the *parvaro* as Mohandas Kavi. Mohandas Kavi is introduced in verse-line 26: “Mohandas Kavi praises the fame (of your) lineage. The son of King Dhamdhal, ‘pleased with’ (the poet's recitation) gave (him) a coin”. And from verse-line 28, it could be understood that it is Mohandas who recited verse-lines attributed to Ladhraj: “Pabu! There is no one like you, your fame (has spread) among the people. Hearing (about your) wisdom, I will complete (the praise of) the Lord (as) sung by Ladhraj”. This verse-line may suggest that Mohandas intended to finish his

told me during visits in 2000) can only be consulted by Motisars, I have not been able to study these kinds of sources.

⁵⁴ According to Lalas (1988: 152-53), Ladhraj's father also served as a minister of state during Jaswant Singh's rule.

⁵⁵ Nainsi is believed to have committed suicide after four years in prison in 1671. As historical rumour has it, Nainsi stabbed himself in the stomach with a knife.

⁵⁶ Tod (1972 II: 186, n4) describes the Oswal as a Jain merchant class of Rajput origin named after the merchants' place of origin, Ossi in Rajasthan.

⁵⁷ In these last verse-lines, the poet mentions that his recitation contains all 302 couplets dedicated to Pabuji. Though the script under review contains only 301 couplets; *duha* I counts 260 couplets, and the *parvaro* counts 41 couplets, it is, nevertheless, clear that both poems were thought of as one composition by the poet.

recitation of Ladhraj's *duha* by reciting his own composition, the *parvaro*. But in the subsequent verse-lines it is less clear whether we are here reading a poem attributed to or written by Ladhraj, like in verse-line 29: "O, Warrior! Your glory has been praised (with my) tongue," thus spoke Ladhraj". Maybe the poet Mohandas, or the scribe Khusyal, quotes Ladhraj, or perhaps this verse-line should be understood as the rendition of his own words by Ladhraj, speaking of himself in the third person? The reference to the ruler Jaswant in verse-line 39 gives reason to think that the *parvaro* was composed by Ladhraj too, granted that he was a poet or minister at Jaswant's court. In these verse-lines, the ruler Jaswant Singh is praised and the poet recounts how Ladhraj, a courtier of Jaswant, praises Pabuji's glory. Given that it was common for medieval poets to include the praise of their patron in their compositions, it may be imagined that it is Ladhraj who is here praising his patron.

Further references to historical figures in the *parvaro* are not so helpful either like when the poet narrates how Pabuji extended his help to the Rathaur ruler of Jodhpur, Rao Gamga (c. 1483-1531), in his battle with "Sekho" and "Daulat".⁵⁸ One could imagine that the reference to Rao Gamga in the seventeenth-century *parvaro* reflects the time of composition of earlier, sixteenth-century versions of the *parvaro*, i.e. after the year 1529 when Rao Gamga's battle is thought to have taken place. But there is really no way of establishing the probability of such a conjecture. Even if I could verify this assumption, the fact remains that I will still have to deal with the problem that there exists no consensus about the date when Rao Gamga battled with Rao Sekho and Daulat Khan.

In short, on the basis of the evidence provided by the manuscript versions of the selected poems, it is no longer possible to properly document who composed or recited them. I feel that the primary data available from the manuscript versions of *duha* I and the *parvaro* suggest three possible interpretations: (1) the scribe of this manuscript-version of the *parvaro*, Pamdit Khusyal, noted down a poem as composed by Ladhraj and recited by a poet named Mohandas or, (2), Khusyal copied the written work of a poet named Mohandas of whom it is unknown when he composed the *parvaro* and quoted Ladhraj's work or, (3), Mohandas began his recitation with Ladhraj's *duha*, and added his own *parvaro* to round off his account of Ladhraj's work. I have not been able to ascertain proper dates about Ladhraj's life and I do not know how long Ladhraj lived. But if Ladhraj did indeed compose his *duha* circa 1650 while, as it has been recorded in Ms. 402, *duha* I and the *parvaro* were written down in 1769 and recited in 1720, it seems most likely that the scribe Khusyal recorded a version of the *duha* and *parvaro* as recited by Mohandas who

⁵⁸ This reference to Sekho may refer to prince Shekha, the uncle of the Rathaur Gamga Vaghavat who ruled Marwar from c. 1515-1532), who battled with the Rao over the rights to Jodhpur's throne and lost his life in the battle at Ganghani. According to Nainsi, Shekha was the son of Rao Suja, who ruled from 1492 (or 1498) till 1515, and ascended the Jodhpur throne after the death of his brother, Rao Satal (1489-1492), the eldest son of Jodha. See also G.D. Sharma (1977: 7) and Tessitori (1919a: 70).

began his recitation with Ladhraj's *duha*, and added his own *parvaro* to the end of his recitation.

About some poets of the compositions selected by me, nothing seems to be known at all. I have not been able to uncover any data about Barhata Amardas to whom the authorship of *git* IV has been attributed. About the anonymous, undated *gits* I and II, all I can say is that it has been noted in the handwritten Catalogue 2 of the Rajasthani Research Institute that the first composition was committed to paper by an unknown scribe and/or poet in 1689. Somewhat more is known about the Charan poet Samdu Cain (or Cain Samdu), whose name has been mentioned in the title of *git* III (*gīta pābūjī rai vivāha samai rau sāmḍū cainajī rau kahiyo*). According to N.S. Bhati (1989: 300), this poet lived in nineteenth-century Marwar as the contemporary of three Rathaur rulers, Bhimsingh, Mansingh and Takhatsingh, for whom (it is said) he composed Dimgal poetry of great quality and in great quantity.⁵⁹

There is no dearth of data about the life and works of the poet Bamkidas (1781-1833) of the Charan lineage Asiya, to whom the short *git* V has been attributed by N.S. Bhati (1989: 85).⁶⁰ This poet wrote most of his poetry at the court of the ruler Mansingh of Jodhpur (1803-1843), where he was awarded the title Kavi-*raja* (king-poet). According to the tradition, Bamkidas was the poet-mentor of Mansingh, who also wrote poetry. Bamkidas lost favour in Mansingh's eyes when he backed Mansingh's son Chatrasingh in his quest of the throne and got himself exiled and stripped of his land-grant. But, or so it is said, Mansingh eventually reinstated Bamkidas and forgave him "since he was a Charan poet" (N.S. Bhati 1989: 289). Bamkidas was accorded considerable fame during his lifetime and by subsequent generations of poets and historians. Thus, much of Bamkidas's work and data about his life have been well-researched, in particular through the compilation of his religious poetry, eulogies and historical prose-chronicles intermixed with poetry published under the title *Bamkidāsa Graṁthavalī*, which continues to be an important source for the writing of Rajasthani history (cf. Shekavat 1987: *passim*, 1985: *passim*). Maheshwari (1980: 75) thinks of Bamkidas as one of the last great, traditional poets of the Dimgal tradition and one of the first "modern" poets who voiced nationalist sentiments, for Bamkidas apparently employed medieval martial ideals to express anti-British sentiments.

Yet another problem that can be mentioned regarding authorship is the fact that the poet to whom a Dimgal composition has been attributed was not necessarily the poet who did indeed compose that poem or all known versions of the poem attributed to him. The attribution of a poem to a particular poet can also reflect the

⁵⁹ The Rathaur Bhimsingh ruled Marwar from c. 1793-1803, Mansingh ruled from c. 1803 until 1843, and Takhatsingh from c. 1843 to 1873 (V.S. Rathaur 1991: 13, Dhananajaya Singh 1994: 45, 63).

⁶⁰ According to an undocumented reference in Menariya (2000: 116) Bamkidas was an *āśu-kavi*, an extempore poet who could compose poetry off-hand (i.e. without preparation). Bamkidas is also known as a chronicler of history and a knowledgeable scholar of Sanskrit, Dimgal, Prakrit, Pharsi and Braj Bhasa.

custom of performers and poets to cite the name of a contemporary or historical poet of popular acclaim to enhance the status and authenticity of their own performance or composition. A poet's name in the title of a poem may indicate a genealogy or a tradition while his name represents an "ideograph" or "a symbol that represents the idea of authorship within a particular tradition" (Novetzke 2003: 216).

As will be made apparent in the next chapter, this practice is underlined by a study of the rather different narrative content of *chamd* I and II. The titles of both *chamds* indicate that they were attributed to Meha Vithu at the time of the writing or copying of the manuscripts.⁶¹ However, upon reading the two rather different versions of the *chamd*, questions about Vithu's authorship of both *chamds* arise. Although the *chamds* have some standard expressions and couplets in common, the narrative content and use of metaphors and prosodic rules in both versions are rather different. While it is not unthinkable that Vithu composed two or more different versions of poems in praise of Pabuji, the differences between the versions are such that it seems more likely that the content of both poems has been added to and was considerably changed through the centuries by several poets, reciters, scribes and/or other redactors. A more detailed discussion of the content of the *chamds* and the differences between the two poems will be undertaken in the next chapter.

Another example of problems which may arise when trying to establish the authorship of a Dimgal poem can be read from two versions of a poem about Pabuji's wedding; the untitled, undated and anonymous manuscript version of *git* II and, secondly, *git* III, a printed version of a very similar composition, titled *gīta pābūjī rai vīvāha samai rau* (N.S. Bhati 1973: 83-84). In the handwritten version, the name of the composer, references to the name of the scribe, or the date of the manuscript are all lacking. N.S. Bhati, however, attributes the published version of this poem to the poet Samdu Cain, as can be understood from the subtitle of the published poem: *sāṃdū cainajī rau kahiyo* ("Recited by Samdu Caina"). The manuscript version and the printed text of this *git* do not vary greatly, except for the different titles and apart from the use of a few different words and distinct spellings. The fact that, in the contemporary oral tradition, yet other versions of this composition are attributed to yet other poets and are known by some reciters to count 12 instead of 11 couplets, further underlines the notion that the written manuscript poems, like contemporary printed poems, represent a tradition of "orally-derived" poems that "belong" to many different poets, and should not in all instances be thought of as the composition of one originator. This thought is further underlined by the fact that, in the contemporary oral tradition, a couplet is commonly added to the 11-couplet printed version of Samdu's poem, which, according to the poets Subh Karan Deval and Lakshmandan Samdu, was not printed

⁶¹ *Chamd* I: *atha mehā viṭhū rā kahīyā shrī pābujī rā chamda* ("Verses (dedicated to) Pabuji, recited (by) Meha Vithu") and *chamd* II, *atha pābujī ro chamda mehaijī rā kahyā* ("Verses (dedicated to) Pabuji, recited (by) Mehai Vithu"), suggesting that both compositions were either recited or composed (or both) by Meha Vithu.

in full. Both poets agreed that the following lines complete the version of *git* II known to them: “sagata tha hukamī dhinojī dhāṃdhala sutana, jagata dhina māṭa piṭa jikāṃ jiniyo. kahai kālī giravarau ukata para māṃ raga katha, samāṃdrā lagga bārakāṃṇa sugiyau sabha” (personal communication of the poets, January 2001).

The ascription of dates and authorship cannot be relied upon too heavily for, as the above discussions illustrate and my summary of Rajput history in chapter 5 also documents, it is at present difficult to establish a consensus about the names of poets, the works ascribed to them, or the dating of the lives and times of their patrons, the Rajput rulers and other lords of Marwar. This does not mean that the poets listed above were not the composer of the selected poetry or of earlier or other versions of the poems. As remarked just now, though the above-quoted names of poets and the attribution of works to one particular poet can no longer be verified beyond doubt, they do refer to a rich and often accurate oral tradition of genealogies upon which much of Charan ancestral histories, including the history of poets and their works, are based. My fieldwork in Rajasthan clarified that many oral data quoted about forefathers by different Charan poets proved to be rather consistent when compared with written accounts. Thus, while I continue to treat the above and like data with caution, I do, nevertheless, think of the listed poets' names, their works and their patrons as representing reasonably accurate oral and written records of semi-historical and historical Charan traditions, which allow us to see the selected poems as versions of compositions ascribed to (and probably indeed composed by) Vithu, Ladhraj, Mohandas, Bamkidas, Caina and Amardas. Compositions that have been added to or changed by previous and subsequent generations of traditional poets, have all become part of the medieval Pabuji tradition over the last six hundred years. And so, while I continue to attribute the compositions under review to Vithu, Ladhraj and so on, I do in referring to the poets by name also refer to unspecified poets, scribes and other redactors who composed and re-composed, recited, modified, wrote and re-wrote traditionally received poetry. All the poets, scribes and other redactors who orally and/or in writing transmitted the selected manuscript versions of the selected poems were, I imagine, at one time inspired by a shared poetic heritage that each of them felt free to treat as his own.

Contemporary sources

Before turning our attention to the narrative content of the selected poems in the next chapter, let me add a few remarks about the contemporary Pabuji tradition. The above-mentioned medieval manuscript versions of poetry dedicated to Pabuji are the focus of this study. But since very little is known about the context in which medieval heroic-epic poetry about Pabuji grew, I have also studied some aspects of the extant Pabuji tradition, to better appraise the content, symbolic meaning and socio-political and religious function, which may be attributed to the medieval compositions. By combining the study of written data with oral sources I hope,

following Seneviratne (1997b: 3-23) and Vansina (1971: 442-268, 1980: 262-279), to add to the present understanding of the written tradition, in particular by asking people which function and meaning (or meanings) they currently attribute to the narrative content of their heroic-epic tradition and its performance (cf. Miner 1990: 51).

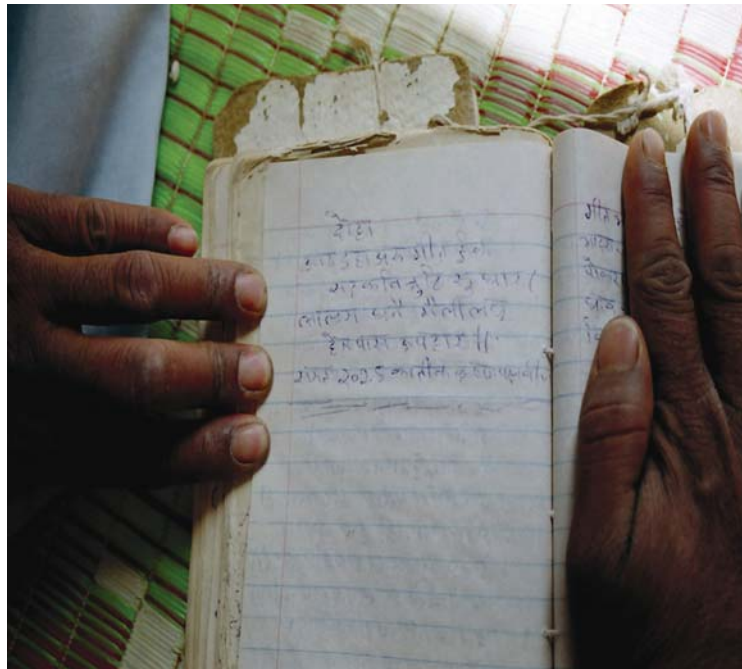
I collected written and oral poetry dedicated to Pabuji during anthropological fieldwork in Jodhpur, Kolu, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and surrounding villages. These data will not, in this or following chapters, be introduced in as much detail as the medieval sources. Instead, my recordings of the contemporary *mātā* epic dedicated to Pabuji, interviews with the Rathaur hero's Rajput devotees, and my study of contemporary Charan traditions about Pabuji and Charani goddesses will be briefly introduced in chapter 9 and 10 in which these data serve to document the meaning that may be ascribed to medieval and contemporary Charan and Bhil traditions about Pabuji. The selection of these sources for the purpose of this study has been motivated by the fact that they have proven most useful in interpreting some of the socio-political and religious, ritual aspects of Pabuji worship.

Most of the contemporary sources used for this study were collected in the heartland of the contemporary story-telling tradition about Pabuji, in Kolu, the desert village where Rajasthan's main Pabuji temple stands. Here, I collected data concerning the little-studied *mātā* (drum) epic tradition performed in the main Pabuji temple in Kolu today by the hero-god's Bhil Bhopas. The description of this tradition is part of chapter 10. In the appendix, I have included the transliterations of four contemporary *mātā* epic *paravāraus*⁶² recorded during visits to the Kolu temple (1999-2001) titled: *Jalama rau paravārau*, *Byāva rau paravārau*, *Vāhara rau paravārau* (also referred to as *Ḍhaimbā rai sūrāpaṇṇa rau*) and *Jhararājī rau paravārau*. These episodes commemorate the story of Pabuji's birth and marriage, the heroic deeds of Pabuji and his Bhil companions, the revenge taken by Pabuji's nephew Jhararo. My inquiry into the *mātā* epic tradition further included conversations with the *mātā* epic performers Asha Ram, Bonne Ram, Khumbha Ram, Rupa Ram and Jetha Ram, and with their patron, the temple priest Tulsi Singh Rathaur, and conversations with several Rajput and Jat, Rebari, Nath and Brahmin devotees of Pabuji.

This study is also based upon data about the contemporary Charan tradition gathered in Jodhpur, Ajmer and Deshnok (near Bikaner). I recorded recitations of heroic poems and the performance of devotional songs by Charan poets and singers, most notably the linguist and Charan poet Subh Karan Deval (Jodhpur), the composer of traditional and contemporary Charan poetry Lakshmandan Kaviya (Kemn) and the Charan poet Shivdatta Samdu (Shiv). At Charani goddess temples in and around Deshnok, Jaisalmer and Marhwa, I was able to study many

⁶² I use *paravārau* to refer to the contemporary *mātā* tradition and to differentiate between this tradition's *paravāraus* and the earlier-discussed medieval *parvaro*.

contemporary forms of poetry, epic performance, song, semi-historical and miracle-
tales and prayers transmitted by several poets, singers and other devotees of Pabuji.



Handwritten dohā (contemporary Charan tradition).



Makeshift altar with hero stones dedicated to Pabuji (Malunga).