

What Difference Does the *Harivaṃśa* Make to the *Mahābhārata*?

SIMON BRODBECK
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

The *Harivaṃśa* has usually been seen as a later addition appended to the *Mahābhārata*, and so the *Mahābhārata* has usually been understood without it. This article first introduces an alternative approach, whereby these two texts are viewed as a single whole, and justifies that approach on the basis of the details presented in Mbh 1.2. Then the *Harivaṃśa*'s narrative mechanics are summarized, to contextualize what follows. The main body of the article offers three kinds of answer to the title question of what difference the *Harivaṃśa* makes to the *Mahābhārata*. The first answer is theological: the *Harivaṃśa* emphasizes the divine level of the *Mahābhārata* story as the story of the gods descending to help the earth. The second answer is narratological: the *Harivaṃśa* continues and completes the story of Janamejaya begun in Mbh 1, thus emphasizing his role for the text as a whole. The third answer is structural: if the *Mahābhārata* includes the *Harivaṃśa* then the whole text (Mbh 1–18 plus the *Harivaṃśa*) can be studied and analyzed as a macrocompositional unit. The “*Mahābhārata* as a whole” has been the subject of collaborative study in recent years, and this article continues that study, with regard to a fuller whole. The article, unlike that whole, is short, sketchy, and provisional. It looks forward to further and corrective studies in all the sketched areas, and more.

INTRODUCTION

The title *Harivaṃśa* is collective shorthand for the *Mahābhārata*'s *khilas* (‘supplements, appendices’; plural, never dual). The word *khila* has been explained in this context by Couture, stressing the unity of the *khila* and whatever it is presented as a *khila* of (Couture 1996). Effectively, the *Mahābhārata*'s *khilas* are what remains after Vaiśampāyana has told the Pāṇḍava story. The word *khila* is used as a paradoxical joke in the *Harivaṃśa*, in passages quoted below. The nature of *khilas* is that they are distinguished from something, and thus left out of it; yet as *khilas* of that thing, they are also part of it. So the text with nothing left out (*akhilam, nikhilāni*) includes certain parts that were left out (*khilas*).

My initial reason for trying to understand the *Mahābhārata* as including the *khilas* is that the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata* makes it clear, at the start, that it includes them (Brodbeck 2011: 228–29; Brodbeck 2016: 393–95). After relaying Dhṛtarāṣṭra's partial summary of contents in Mbh 1.1, Ugrasravas the storyteller (*sūta*) presents two full tables of contents in Mbh 1.2, and both of them include the *khilas*. The first full table of contents lists the text's one hundred books (*parvans*, here the so-called *upaparvans* or ‘minor books’), and the *khilas* are included at the end, each *khila* as a separate book among the hundred (1.2.69). The second full table of contents is arranged according to the text's eighteen ‘major’ books (*parvans*), but after the end of the eighteenth book it also includes the *khilas*, which are not in any of the eighteen books (1.2.233).¹ The text says that the grouping into a hundred

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books was earlier than the grouping into eighteen larger books, which was not imposed until Ugraśravas's Naimiṣa Forest telling (1.2.70–71; Sukthankar 1928: 177 n. 8; Kosambi 1946: 111). It is as if the front matter contains prefaces to several editions.

We do not know how precisely the tables of contents, when they refer to the *khilas*, refer to the *khilas* in the form that we have them as per Vaidya's critical edition (Vaidya 1969; three *khilas*, Hv 1–45, 46–113, and 114–18). But this problem is not specific to the *Harivaṃśa*. Even where the second table of contents gives narrative summaries, these are not sufficient to confirm the contents of any part of the critically reconstituted text. Between the composition of the tables of contents as we have them and the split into the two recensions, passages may have been changed or added (Sukthankar 1933: xcvi–c; Kosambi 1946: 116; Austin 2011: 124–27). The *Mahābhārata* has expanded through time, and this expansion may have affected any part, even in periods of history that the critical edition project does not analyze.²

This article does not take issue with the idea that the *Mahābhārata* expanded through time. It assumes it. It takes no position on what the original *Mahābhārata* might have been like, or on whether its expansion was swift, or gradual, or proceeded in fits and starts with relatively stable interim stages, or, if the latter, on what the text might have been like at such stages. What this article does do is to take seriously the claim of the critical edition to have reconstituted the (or a) *Mahābhārata* more or less as it existed at one particular stage of its history. The text that existed at that stage may have been short-lived in comparison with the text that existed at other stages, and no claim is made here about how interesting or important that stage was in comparison with others. The point is that the lower-critical examination and comparison of manuscripts has given us a precise reconstituted text, and as a result we are able to study the text at that stage in a way that we cannot do for other stages. Being in possession of the reconstituted *Mahābhārata*, we can ask questions about how it works as a text, and how its compilers presented it. In the first chapter they presented it as something that “the twiceborn retain in all its parts and summaries”; “the wise wish to retain it for this world, in its parts and in its entirety” (*vistaraiś ca samāśaiś ca dhāryate yad dvijātibhiḥ*, 1.1.25cd; *iṣṭam hi viduṣāṃ loke samāsavāyāsadhāraṇam*, 1.1.49cd, tr. van Buitenen 1973).

Minkowski states his approach in 1989 as follows: “I intend to rely on the critical edition produced by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute” (Minkowski 1989: 402). But that edition includes the *Harivaṃśa* volumes (just as its text at Mbh 1.2 lists contents including the *khilas*), and yet Minkowski calls Mbh 18.5 “the end of the epic” (p. 403). The idea that the *Mahābhārata* ends at Mbh 18.5, as per van Buitenen's “*Mahābhārata* summary” (van Buitenen 1973: xlix), has usually gone unquestioned. It is still pervasive in a 2011 volume on the *Mahābhārata*'s “ends and endings” (Sullivan et al. 2011). Sullivan suggestively asks, at the end of the introduction to that volume: “Are there other endings on which these papers have not touched?” (p. 6). But in her recent book on the ending, Shalom follows Minkowski and takes Mbh 18.5 to be the ending (Shalom 2017: xi–xv).

Minkowski's position is thus emblematic of the scholarly view at a particular, recent stage of the *Mahābhārata*'s reception history. But there is a mismatch between that view and the reconstituted text that such scholars use, which includes the *Harivaṃśa*. This article thus attempts, in a preliminary way, to correct that mismatch. When the title question asks what

1. Belvalkar thus overstates the matter when he says that the *khilas* “are deliberately ignored in the detailed list”—that is, in Mbh 1.2's second, major-book contents list (Belvalkar 1946a: 303). The *khilas* are included, but not within Mbh 1–18 (and so their contents are not detailed).

2. For hypotheses concerning the expansion of the *Harivaṃśa* part before the archetype, see Ingalls 1968: 382–83; Vaidya 1969: xxx–xxxix; Brinkhaus 2002: 159–64.

difference the *Harivaṃśa* makes to the *Mahābhārata*, the difference that is envisaged is the difference between one kind of scholarly view and another, in the here and now. I will be talking about new ways to think about the text that we have. It is important to be clear about this at the start, because according to the common scholarly view (whose origin and history I will not trace here), the *Harivaṃśa* was added at a certain stage of the *Mahābhārata*'s development, and so one might also wish to ask what kinds of difference that addition made, many centuries ago, to the expanding text. That is not the question that I am asking or attempting to answer. Although it is a very interesting question, it would be difficult to answer it with much confidence or precision, because we do not have access to the *Mahābhārata* as it was before the (or a) *Harivaṃśa* was added. Indeed, there might reasonably be some dispute over whether such a thing even existed. The Spitzer manuscript, which contains “the oldest extant *parvan*-list of the *Mahābhārata*,” mentions *khilas* (Schlingloff 1969: 337–38; Brockington 2010: 85; Shalom 2017: 125–26); and “the notion of *khila* does not imply later or earlier dating” (Couture 1996: 134). But as stated above, this article takes no position on what the text may have been like at any stage prior to its becoming the text that the critical editors reconstituted.³

THE *HARIVAṂŚA*'S NARRATIVE MECHANICS

In the last chapter of Mbh 18, Vaiśampāyana completes his narration:

etat te sarvam ākhyātāṃ vistareṇa mahādyaute |
kurūṇāṃ caritaṃ kṛtsnaṃ pāṇḍavānāṃ ca bhārata | Mbh 18.5.25 |
sūta uvāca |
etac chrutvā dvijaśreṣṭhāt sa rājā janamejayaḥ |
viṣmito 'bhavad atyarthaṃ yajñakarmāntareṣv atha | 26 |
tataḥ samāpayām āsuh karma tat tasya yājakaḥ |
āstīkaś cābhavat pṛitah parimokṣya bhujamgamān | 27 |
tato dvijātīn sarvāṃs tān dakṣiṇābhir atoṣayat |
pūjītās cāpi te rājñā tato jagmur yathāgatam | 28 |
visarjayitvā viprāṃs tān rājāpi janamejayaḥ |
tatas takṣaśilāyāḥ sa punar āyād gajāhvayam | 29 |

I have now related in detail, radiant heir of Bharata, the tale of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, entire and complete.

The Sūta spoke:

This was the tale that King Janamejaya heard that best of Brahmins tell in intervals during the sacrificial rite, and he was filled with the greatest wonder. Then the ritual priests completed that rite for him, and Āstīka rejoiced that he had saved the snakes from destruction in it. All the Brahmins were delighted with the fee-gifts given by the king; receiving honour from him, they returned to their homes. As for King Janamejaya, after giving the priests leave to depart, he returned from Takṣaśilā to Hāstinapura, the City of the Elephant.

(*Mahābhārata* 18.5.25–29, tr. Smith 2009)

How does the *Harivaṃśa* fit in? Well, at the start of the first *khila* (the *Harivaṃśaparvan*), Śaunaka asks the *sūta* or *sauti* Ugraśravas to tell him more about the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas (Hv 1.5), and Ugraśravas says that that is just what Janamejaya asked Vaiśampāyana, and then Ugraśravas relays to Śaunaka what Vaiśampāyana told Janamejaya in response. So this material, which extends until Hv 113, is fitted into the frame that has just closed, appearing

3. This approach includes not taking a position on the historical veracity of the claim that the grouping into a hundred books was earlier than the grouping into eighteen larger books (1.2.70–71).

after and alongside “the tale of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas” as something else that was told to Janamejaya at the snake sacrifice. The effect of being fitted in afterward is compounded when twice amid this material (at Hv 11–19 and 101–4) Vaiśampāyana narrates events set in the long scene on Bhīṣma’s deathbed, the previous narration of which ended at Mbh 13.152.

When Vaiśampāyana has answered Janamejaya’s questions, he concludes:

eṣā te vaiṣṇavī caryā mayā kārtsnyena kīrtitā |
prcchatas tāta yajñe ’smin nivrte janamejaya | Hv 113.81 |
āścaryaparvam akhilaṃ yo hīdaṃ dhārayen nrpa |
nāśubham prāpnuyāt kiṃcid dūrgham āyur avāpnuyāt | 82 |
sūta uvāca |
iti pārīkṣito rājā vaiśampāyanabhāṣitam |
śrutavān amalobhūtvā harivaṃśaṃ dvijaṣabhāḥ | 83 |
evaṃ śaunaka saṃkṣepād vistareṇa tathaiva ca |
proktā vai sarvavaṃśās te kiṃ bhūyaḥ kathayāmi te | 84 |

Janamejaya my boy. At this rite that is now over, I have narrated Viṣṇu’s entire career, as requested. If a person thinks about this whole (*akhilam*) Book of the Marvel,⁴ your majesty, then they will have a long life and nothing bad will ever happen to them.

The Sūta said:

In this way, brahmin bulls, by the time Parīkṣit’s son the king had listened to Vaiśampāyana’s narration of Hari’s lineage (*harivaṃśa*),⁵ he had been purified. And so, Śaunaka, I have now narrated all the lineages for you, in brief and also in detail. What shall I narrate for you next? (*Harivaṃśa* 113.81–84)⁶

In Hv 114 Śaunaka asks and hears about Janamejaya’s descendants. Then, in Hv 115,

śaunaka uvāca |
ukto ’yaṃ harivaṃśas te parvāṇi nikhilāni ca |
yathā puroktāni tathā vyāsaśiṣyeṇa dhīmatā | Hv 115.1 |
tat kathyamānam amṛtam itihāsasamanvitam |
prīṇāty asmān amṛtavat sarvapāpaprāṇāśanam || 2 ||
janamejayas tu nrpatih śrutvākhyānam anuttamam |
saute kim akarot paścāt sarvasatrād anantaram || 3 ||

Śaunaka said:

You have recited Hari’s lineage (*harivaṃśa*), including all of (*nikhilāni*) its sections (*parvans*).⁷ And you have done it just as they were formerly recited by Vyāsa’s learned disciple. It is nectar, it is full of true stories, and as it is recited it delights us just as nectar would, and destroys all our sins. But son of a Sūta. After King Janamejaya had heard the unsurpassed tale, what did he do then, immediately after the snake sacrifice?

(*Harivaṃśa* 115.1–3)

4. The “Book of the Marvel” (*Āścaryaparvan*) would be an alternative name for Vaidya’s *Viṣṇuparvan* (Hv 46–113), but presumably beginning earlier, at Hv 30 when Janamejaya ends his long question by repeating the word *āścarya* (Hv 30.56–57; Matchett 1996: 145–49; Brinkhaus 2002: 162–68; Hildebeitel in press).

5. See n. 7 below.

6. *Harivaṃśa* translations are adapted from Brodbeck 2019a.

7. Here, and in Ugraśravas’s preceding speech to which Śaunaka is replying, I translate *harivaṃśa* as ‘Hari’s lineage’. The possible implications are different in the two cases, because in the earlier instance *harivaṃśa* was what Vaiśampāyana had told Janamejaya, and here it is what Ugraśravas has told Śaunaka. This *harivaṃśa* (if singular) could potentially be the *Harivaṃśaparvan*, including all of (*nikhilāni*) its sections or books (*parvans*), or it could be the *Harivaṃśa*, including all of (*nikhilāni*) its books (*parvans*). If the *Harivaṃśa* is all the *khilas* collectively then the latter sense is odd, since the *Harivaṃśa*’s last *parvan* is just starting. Perhaps the *Harivaṃśaparvan* contains the *Āścaryaparvan* / *Viṣṇuparvan*, and does not end until after it has ended.

Ugrasravas says that Janamejaya resolved on a horse sacrifice, and then Vyāsa came and talked with Janamejaya, and then Janamejaya returned to Hāstīnapura.

This dialogue between Vyāsa and Janamejaya (Hv 115.10–117.51) is fitted into the end of Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice, since it is only after the dialogue ends, and Vyāsa leaves, that “the brahmins, great seers, priests, and kings,” and Āstīka and Janamejaya, also leave (118.6–10). So just like Hv 1–113, this dialogue is fitted into a frame that closed at Mbh 18.5. This time the flashback catches up with itself not when Vaiśampāyana’s narration ends again, but when Janamejaya leaves Takṣaśilā and returns to Hāstīnapura again. See Fig. 1 for a visualization of how the different parts of the *Harivaṃśa* mesh with Mbh 18.5.

That is where the story ended at Mbh 18.5. But now, in Hv 118, Ugrasravas continues and tells what Janamejaya did next, back in Hāstīnapura. As signaled before and during his dialogue with Vyāsa, he performs a horse sacrifice and it goes horribly wrong; but then he lives happily ever after.

So much for preliminaries. Now to the three aforementioned kinds of difference that the *Harivaṃśa* makes: theological, narratological, and structural. Even though the *Harivaṃśa* focuses on Kṛṣṇa, the main facts about who Kṛṣṇa is (and the appropriate responses) are already clear in Mbh 1–18, so I do not discuss increased focus on Kṛṣṇa as a specific difference made to the *Mahābhārata* by the *Harivaṃśa*.

Mbh		Hv
→ 18.5.26	Vaiśampāyana’s story of the Pāṇḍavas	
	Vaiśampāyana’s story of Kṛṣṇa and the Vṛṣṇis	1.15–113.82
18.5.27	completion of the snake sacrifice	113.81
	Janamejaya’s descendants	114
	dialogue between Janamejaya and Vyāsa	115.4–117.51
18.5.28–29	brahmins and Janamejaya go home	118.6–10

Fig. 1. Relationship between Mbh 18.5 and the *Harivaṃśa*

THE HARIVAṂŚA EMPHASIZES THE DIVINE PLAN BY DUPLICATION

The *Harivaṃśaparvan* introduces Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva’s life in genealogical terms, but Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva’s life is also introduced, from Janamejaya’s question at Hv 30 onward (and thus in the *Āścaryaparvan* even if not yet in the *Viṣṇuparvan*), in theological terms, as one manifestation of Viṣṇu among many. The theological terms of this particular manifestation were already set in advance by the description at Mbh 1.58–61 of a communal divine mission to rescue the earth from oppression by organizing a massive war; and now in Hv 41–45 that scenario is effectively repeated, with the addition of some extra divine tasks for Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva to perform apart from the war (Viethsen 2009).

The long *Harivaṃśa* passage that explains the communal divine mission stands as a closing and confirming mirror reflecting the *Ādīparvan* passage that explains the same. This is a major message to the listening Janamejaya. The upshot is that when his ancestors killed their cousins in the terrible war whose story is told in between the *Ādīparvan* and *Harivaṃśa* passages, they did so as a result of the divine plan.

This message is there already in the *Ādīparvan* and is alluded to at various other points, but it has been marginalized by some interpretations (Hiltebeitel 2018: 259–62). Van Buite-

nen referred to this aspect of the text in terms of “pious transformations,” “further elaborations,” and “inept mythification,” perhaps objecting to it on chronological grounds (van Buitenen 1973: xix–xx). More recently, Hudson has relativized it as just one attempt, among many within the text, to explain the Kurukṣetra events (Hudson 2013: 138–39). Distaste for this theological level of operations has a long scholarly history in Europe and America (Hiltebeitel 1979: 66–92). But the passage at Hv 41–45, in reflecting Mbh 1.58–61, highlights the theological aspect for Janamejaya and for us. The framing fore and aft by these passages means that, in this presentation, the story of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, and of Duryodhana, Śakuni, Karna, Kuntī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, Vidura, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Aśvatthāman, both as it is told and as it is thought about afterward, is a story in which these characters, and potentially any number of others, are to be understood, at least in part, as colleagues in Kṛṣṇa’s mission to save the earth by making the war happen, whether or not they are able to think of what they are doing in those terms at the time. It is as if the human characters are partially or intermittently possessed by specific (but sometimes unspecified) higher-level characters, and because we know there are two superimposed levels, we can enjoy the interplay between them.

Kṛṣṇa is the only one who usually knows what he is really doing. But late in the text, Kṛṣṇa’s uncle Akrūra, who is not listed among those who incarnate superhumans at Mbh 1.61 or in any of the *Harivaṃśa*’s shorter lists, makes this revealing comment:

yac chakrasya prabhoḥ kāryaṃ tad asmākaṃ viniścitam |
asmākaṃ cāpi yat kāryaṃ tac ca kāryaṃ śacīpateḥ | Hv 109.52 | ...
devatārthe vayaṃ cāpi mānuṣatvam upāgatāḥ | 53cd

We certainly have the same objective as Śacī’s mighty husband Śakra, and he has the same objective as us . . . It was for the sake of the deities that we became human beings.
 (*Harivaṃśa* 109.52–53)

This is a reminder of the two levels. But these levels are only opened up by the revelation of the divine plan to make the war happen for the good of the earth. For Janamejaya, this divine plan concluded several generations ago. Janamejaya’s great-grandfather was Arjuna, incarnation and genital son of Indra; but Janamejaya is just Janamejaya.

When the divine plan is highlighted through the repetition of Mbh 1.58–61 as Hv 41–45, this also highlights discrepancies between the two passages on the question of exactly how the earth was being caused problems. The solution was the same whatever, but since the principal theological problem that the divine plan throws up concerns the trade-off between the alleged benefit of the *avatāra* mission and the deep human suffering that the war causes, it follows that the overall interpretation of the text (and its divinities) is very sensitive to the theological, environmental, and cosmological terms of presentation of the initial problem (Reich 2011: 22–37). In the *Ādiparvan* presentation the earth’s problem is that thousands of demons have incarnated upon her, chiefly as *kṣatriyas*; but in the *Harivaṃśa* presentation the problem is rather overpopulation as a result of *good kṣatriya* behavior on earth, and while they are here, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva kill some demons on the side. There is also a partial revelation of the divine plan to Drupada at Mbh 1.189, which matches the *Harivaṃśa* presentation in that the earth’s problem would seem to be simple overcrowding. As I hope to explain in more detail in a forthcoming publication, the text’s theory of divine action has to do with the *avatāra*’s relation to the *yuga* cycle. Lifespan and *dharma* are correlated, and all goes well until human population (that is, lifespan) has to be reduced in order to stop the earth sinking, but then *dharma* declines and the gods suffer, so eventually there is a system reboot. The *avatāra* represents both types of intervention, the population reduction and the

dharmic reboot, at one and the same time (*kālo 'smi*, “I am time,” *Bhagavadgītā* 11.32). The *Mahābhārata*'s *avatāra* theology has yet to be fully appreciated, but the *Harivaṃśa* account is crucial in that unlike the Mbh 1.58–61 account, it presents the population problem and the dharmic problem as two separate problems.

THE *HARIVAMŚA* COMPLETES THE STORY OF JANAMEJAYA

The purpose of this section is to review the story of Janamejaya step by step, to show how it frames the *Mahābhārata*. Much of Janamejaya's story is told in the *Harivaṃśa*, so studying it as a whole would seem to require study of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. Even if Mbh 1–18 were studied without the *Harivaṃśa*, Janamejaya would be the key character (Brodbeck 2009: 217–66).

In 1.1.1 Ugraśravas arrives in Naimiṣa Forest. The seers ask him where he has been, and he says he was at King Janamejaya's sacrifice, and that since then he has been traveling the *tīrthas*, including the battlefield *tīrtha*. The seers ask Ugraśravas to tell “the history of the Bhārata war” (*bhāratasyetiḥāsasya*)—the story of what the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas did on and in connection with that battlefield—just as he, Ugraśravas, heard it told by Vyāsa's pupil Vaiśampāyana to Pāṇḍu's heir Janamejaya, at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice (1.1.15–19, tr. Smith 2009).

After the lists of contents, the story of Janamejaya begins, in prose, in Mbh 1.3, the *Pauṣyaparvan*. We hear about Janamejaya and his brothers. His brothers beat a dog, Saramā's son, and as a result, Saramā cursed Janamejaya.

sa tayā krudhdhayā tatroktāḥ | ayam me putro na kiṃ cid aparādhyati | kimartham abhihata iti | yasmāc cāyam abhihatō 'napakārī tasmād adṛṣtaṃ tvām bhayam āgamiṣyatīti || Mbh 1.3.8 ||

Angrily she said to him, “This son of mine did nothing wrong here! Why was he beaten! As he was beaten without doing wrong, therefore an unseen danger will befall you!” (*Mahābhārata* 1.3.8, tr. van Buitenen 1973)

So Janamejaya sought a *purohita*. After finding one, he conquered Takṣaśilā; but then later, when he was king back home in Hāstīnapura, his old schoolmate Utaṅka,⁸ who had run into trouble with Takṣaka, told Janamejaya that Janamejaya's late father Parikṣit was killed by the bite of the snake Takṣaka, and told him to avenge him.

Janamejaya's story resumes as the story of the snake sacrifice, which is introduced in the *Āstīkaparvan* as the result of an ancient curse on the snakes in the context of a primordial opposition between snakes and birds, and as such as something predicted; and hence by the time the snake sacrifice happens, the prediction has prompted the discovery and application of a partial remedy (Earl 2011: 54–94). So Janamejaya, after questioning his ministers and hearing the full and fateful truth about his father's death, ordered the destruction of all snakes in an extraordinary snake sacrifice. Millions of snakes died, sucked into the sacrificial fire. Āstīka—who was carefully created for this moment—gained entry, won a boon for his praise of the sacrifice, and demanded, as that boon, a ceasefire. Janamejaya complied. Takṣaka, who was about to be killed, was spared.

During the snake sacrifice Vaiśampāyana told Janamejaya the story of his ancestors and their war. The hearing of this story seems to have been instrumental in Janamejaya's decision to halt the killing, and that effect seems to have been part of the point of the telling. Pointers to Janamejaya's change of heart are given in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of Mbh 12

8. For the suggestion that Janamejaya's first-mentioned visit to Takṣaśilā was not military but educational (involving the education he shared with Utaṅka), see Brodbeck 2009: 246–47.

(12.334.4, 10–11; Brodbeck 2009: 235–37), and this change of heart seems to be correlated with Janamejaya’s deepening understanding of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa’s nature, his role in the Kurukṣetra events, and his identity as the true recipient of all sacrifices (even, presumably, the snake sacrifice).

This is not the only aspect of Janamejaya’s story that is embedded within Vaiśampāyana’s narration. In Mbh 15 Vaiśampāyana narrates how, years after the Kurukṣetra war, Vyāsa let the aging war-widows meet with their dead husbands and Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra meet with their dead sons. Janamejaya intervenes to ask Vyāsa if he can meet with his own dead father, and he does. As Smith’s footnote says at this point, “Now both sacrifice and narrative are drawing to a close” (Smith 2009: 749 n. 1). Janamejaya takes the final ritual bath (already mentioned at 1.53.13) in the company of his sufficiently avenged father, and then he speaks with Āstika (15.43.4–17). In this exchange Āstika says:

*śrutam vicitram ākhyānam tvayā pāṇḍavanandana |
sarpās ca bhasmasān nītā gatās ca padavīm pituḥ | Mbh 15.43.13 |
katham cit takṣako muktaḥ satyatvāt tava pārthiva | 14ab . . .
prāptaḥ suvipulo dharmah śrutvā pāpavināśanam | 15ab*

You have heard a wonderful narrative, heir of Pāṇḍu; you have reduced the snakes to ash; you have followed in your father’s footsteps; through your truthfulness, O prince, I have even been able to save Takṣaka . . . By hearing this sin-destroying narrative you have gained immense merit . . .

(*Mahābhārata* 15.43.13–15b, tr. Smith 2009)

Thus when at 18.5.27 Ugrasravas says that “the ritual priests completed that rite for him, and Āstika rejoiced that he had saved the snakes from destruction in it” (tr. Smith, as quoted above), the latter circumstance has already been reported twice (1.53.14–17; 15.43.14). After the Mbh 15 report Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana to continue the stories of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira (15.43.18–44.1). So the rest of the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya after that point, including the *Harivaṃśa* portion of the dialogue, happens after Āstika’s boon has been granted.

As described above, the closure at Mbh 18.5 narratively contains the *Harivaṃśa* with the exception of Hv 114 and 118. Hv 113 re-ends Vaiśampāyana’s performance already ended at Mbh 18.5. Then, Janamejaya having resolved upon the horse sacrifice, there is the dialogue between Janamejaya and Vyāsa at Hv 115–17, and then Janamejaya returns to Hāstinapura from the snake sacrifice as in Mbh 18.5.

In the *Bhaviṣyaparvan* (Hv 114–18), in addition to the dialogue between Janamejaya and Vyāsa that is fitted into the Mbh 18.5 frame, Ugrasravas’s story of Janamejaya continues, back in Hāstinapura—and alongside the account of Janamejaya’s descendants (Hv 114)—with Janamejaya’s horse sacrifice (Hv 118).

Janamejaya’s horse sacrifice was first mentioned at 1.53.15 when Janamejaya, after granting Āstika’s boon, invited Āstika to be a *sadasya* at it. Thereafter, within Ugrasravas’s report of Vaiśampāyana’s narration, at 12.334.10–11 Vaiśampāyana incidentally suggested that Janamejaya should perform a horse sacrifice, and so Janamejaya turned his attention to the necessities (*tato yajñasamāptyarthaṃ kriyāḥ sarvāḥ samārabhat*). That was after Yudhiṣṭhira had been told to perform the horse sacrifice, by his brothers, Kṛṣṇa, and most particularly, Vyāsa (Mbh 12.8–34); and it was also after Vaiśampāyana had told Janamejaya the story of a previous King Janamejaya in the Kaurava line, who killed a brahmin but was rehabilitated through a horse sacrifice (Mbh 12.146–48).

At Hv 115.5 Janamejaya, having finished the snake sacrifice, again turns his attention to the necessities for the horse sacrifice (*yaṣtuṃ sa vājimedhena sambhārān upacakrame*). Vyāsa comes to talk with Janamejaya, and Janamejaya knowingly says to him—having heard about the divine plan at Mbh 1.58–61 and Hv 41–45 and multiple points in between (Hiltebeitel 2011: 488–93, 571–78):

hetuḥ kurūnām nāśasya rājasūyo mato mama | Hv 115.14cd
duḥsahānām yathā dhvaṃso rājanyānām upaplavaḥ |
rājasūyaṃ tathā manye yuddhārtham upakalpitam | 15 | . . .
tasya mūlaṃ hi yuddhasya lokakṣayakarasya ha |
rājasūyo mahāyajñāḥ kimarthaṃ na nivāritaḥ | 20 | . . .
te kathaṃ bhagavan netrā buddhimantaś cyutā nayāt |
anāthā hy aparādhyante kunetāraś ca mānavāḥ | 23 |

In my opinion, the cause of the destruction of the Kurus was Yudhiṣṭhira’s *rājasūya* rite. Since the unstoppable warrior-princes have come to ruin and grief, I suspect that the *rājasūya* was arranged in order to cause the war . . . But if the war that destroyed the world was rooted in the great *rājasūya* rite, then why was that rite not prevented? . . . Why did the man who was guiding those sensible people let them fall away from prudence, my lord? For it is when they are unprotected and poorly guided that people make mistakes. (*Harivaṃśa* 115.14c–15, 20, 23)

Janamejaya is criticizing the divine plan here, and Vyāsa.

Vyāsa blames time. The Pāṇḍavas would not have been able to avoid the war even had they been told about it in advance, so he did not tell them, and they did not ask. Regarding this kind of non-avoidability, a case in point is Janamejaya’s horse sacrifice, which Vyāsa now tells him will be attacked by Indra with significant consequences, as if to prove that there will be nothing Janamejaya can do to stop this—which there will not. At Janamejaya’s request, Vyāsa then describes the end of the *kalīyuga* in some detail, ending his address by emphasizing the importance of *dharma* and the Vedas, and the power of time (Hv 117.47–51).

Within this dialogue, Janamejaya’s questions to Vyāsa are the crucial questions of the primary listener to the author. And Janamejaya the listener has been set up as the main character by Mbh 1.3.

After his great audience, the last chapter of Janamejaya’s story is the predicted horse-sacrifice debacle. All goes well until Indra possesses the suffocated horse and has sex with Janamejaya’s most beautiful wife, Vapuṣṭamā. This is presumably the “unseen danger” that was foretold by Saramā’s curse in the first chapter of Janamejaya’s story.

Janamejaya takes it badly. He sacks his priests and sacks his wife. Then a king of the *gandharvas*, Viśvāvasu, speaks up (Hv 118.24–38). Viśvāvasu tells Janamejaya to take Indra’s intervention as a compliment and take his wife back, because she is—and women are—not to blame. By implication, Janamejaya punishing a blameless wife would be like Janamejaya’s brothers beating a blameless dog. Viśvāvasu says:

mā vāsavaṃ mā ca gurum ātmānaṃ mā vapuṣṭamām |
gaccha doṣeṇa kālo hi sarvathā duratikramaḥ | Hv 118.33 | . . .
bhānoḥ prabhā śikhā vahnere vedīhotre tathāhutiḥ |
parāmṛṣṭāpy asaṃraktā nopaduṣyanti yoṣitaḥ | 37 |
grāhyā lālayitavyāś ca pūjyāś ca satataṃ budhaiḥ |
śīlavatyo namaskāryāḥ pūjyāḥ śriya iva striyaḥ | 38 |

Do not lay the blame on Vāsava, on your guru, on yourself, or on Vapuṣṭamā, for the power of Time cannot be overcome in the slightest.

. . . The light of the sun, the flame of the fire, and the offering upon the sacrificial altar remain untainted even after they have been touched by someone else, and it is the same with women: they remain uncorrupted. Wise men should always honor women of good character: they should accept, caress, and revere them. Women should be revered like goddesses of fortune. (*Harivaṃśa* 118.33, 37–38)

Janamejaya's response zooms back into a widening closing shot:

sūta uvāca |
evaṃ sa viśvāvasunānūnītaḥ
prasādam āgamyā vapuṣṭamāyām |
cakāra mithyāvryatisāṅkitātmā
śāntiṃ parāṃ tatra sa dharmajuṣṭām || Hv 118.39 ||
śramam abhivinivartya mānasam sa
samabhilaṣaj janamejāyo yaśaḥ svam |
viśayam anuśaśāsa dharmabuddhir
muditamanā ramayan vapuṣṭamām tām || 40 ||
na ca vīramati viprapūjanān
na ca vinivartati yajñāśīlanāt |
na ca viśayaparirakṣaṇāc cyuto 'sau
na ca pariḡarhati vapuṣṭamām ca || 41 ||
vidhivihitam aśakyam anyathā hi kartum
yad ṛṣir acintyatatapāḥ purābravīt saḥ |
iti narapatir ātmavāṃs tadāsau
tad anuvicintya babhūva vītamanyuḥ || 42 ||

The Sūta said:

So, persuaded by Viśvāvasu,
 he forgave Vapuṣṭamā.
 And with a mind free of false suspicion,
 he fostered a perfect peace conducive to virtue.

Janamejaya turned his back on mental turmoil,
 and seeking his own fame
 he ruled his realm with duty in his mind,
 and made love with Vapuṣṭamā with joy in his heart.

He never stops receiving brahmins,
 he never stops performing rituals,
 he never stops protecting the realm,
 and he never finds fault with Vapuṣṭamā.

The sensible king stayed free of angst
 by remembering what Vyāsa said earlier.
 The inconceivably austere seer had claimed
 that what fate fixes cannot be changed.

(*Harivaṃśa* 118.39–42)

In Mbh 1.3, after the preface and contents, the initial focus was on Janamejaya. This is linked to and underlined by the closing focus on Janamejaya in the *Bhaviṣyaparvan*. Janamejaya is cursed but eventually lives happily ever after, and his is the story of the Pāṇḍava story's first royal listener (since when it has been passed on to other listeners—Śaunaka and his guests, and eventually you and me among them).

Janamejaya would listen in particular for stories of past kings, and as king of Hāstīnapura he would listen in particular for the stories of kings Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira (whose completion he requests at 15.44.1). The presentation to Janamejaya, of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his advisors and Yudhiṣṭhira and his, must put him in mind of himself.

The implications of almost everything here remain to be explored. But in terms of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, if one thinks about Janamejaya, then the *Harivaṃśa* makes a considerable difference, since so much of his story is contained in it. If the structure is (a) Janamejaya before hearing the Pāṇḍava story, (b) that story, and (c) him after hearing it, then Mbh 18.5 is a kind of halfway house. See Fig. 2 for an expanded version of Fig. 1, including the beginning and end of Janamejaya’s story.

Mbh		Hv
1.3	Janamejaya before the snake sacrifice	
1.47ff.	Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice (including:)	
1.55.1–18.5.26	Vaiśampāyana’s story of the Pāṇḍavas	
	Vaiśampāyana’s story of Kṛṣṇa and the Vṛṣṇis	1.15–113.82
18.5.27	completion of the snake sacrifice	113.81
	Janamejaya’s descendants	114
	dialogue between Janamejaya and Vyāsa	115.4–117.51
18.5.28–29	brahmins and Janamejaya go home	118.6–10
	Janamejaya’s horse sacrifice	118.11–38
	Janamejaya’s wise reign	118.39–42

Fig. 2. Story of Janamejaya

THE *HARIVAMŚA*’S INCLUSION ALLOWS NEW STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

This includes all kinds of structural analysis. If the text is complete as presented by the critical editors including the *khilas*, and is not complete without them, then research on the macrocompositional structure of the *Mahābhārata*-including-*Harivaṃśa* may be fruitful. In terms of the fuller text, two pointers have been given above: the repetition of a passage detailing the divine plan at the beginning and end of the presentation to Janamejaya; and, outside that presentation, the continuation of the story of Janamejaya started before and ending after it. These two doublings frame the text into a ring.

Van Otterlo coined the term “ring composition” in 1944 in connection with Greek literature (van Otterlo 1944, 1948),⁹ since when this kind of ring-textual effect has been identified in a variety of early literatures, including Old Avestan literature (Schmidt 1968, 1974; Schwartz 1998, 2006; Hintze 2002) and, most importantly for our purposes, Indian literature from the oldest period onward (Söhnen 1979; Watkins 1995: 331, 354; Brereton 1997: 1–5; 1999; Johnson 2001: xi–xiv; Hock 2002; Jamison 2004; Brodbeck 2006; Jamison 2007: 78–89; Hui-feng 2015; Balkaran 2019: 88–117, 131–36).¹⁰ Drawing on some of this schol-

9. Watkins identifies van Otterlo as the originator of the term and of this interpretive method in modern times (Watkins 1995: 34 n. 11).

10. For links between such textual structures in Indian literature and ritual structures, see Witzel 1987; Minkowski 1989; Brereton 1997: 2; Jamison 2004: 239.

arship and her own work on the Hebrew Bible, Douglas has popularized ring-composition through a study that spans a variety of traditions and periods (Douglas 2007).

Following Watkins's work on Pindar, Jamison has written of the "omphalos" structure in Vedic hymns, whereby the central verses encapsulate the message of the whole (Jamison 2004; Jamison 2007: 80–87). Speaking more generally, Douglas says "There has to be a well-marked point at which the ring turns, preparatory to working back to the beginning," and emphasizes "the central place where the keys to the main theme are gathered together" (Douglas 2007: 1–2, 10). This is a promising line of enquiry for the *Mahābhārata* as a whole.

Imagine a piece of paper being folded: after the two edges are brought together, it is smoothed flat into two halves, at a center. But the analogy is misleading. The extension of space and time is reliably proportionate: time repeats in ring-units of days, months, and years, and space is in league with it. Look at a reflection in still water. But a text possesses non-proportionate dimensions. A text is delivered in time and space, but it is free to arrange and announce its own divisions. Metrical division into syllabic lines maps time in notional delivery, but beyond that, the *Mahābhārata*'s divisions into chapters, minor books, and major books are irregular and contain units of wildly disparate syllabic size. If a framing match between beginning and end seems to imply a center, the location of that center has to be constructed by the text.

This textual self-construction would be like what the *Mahābhārata* does when within itself it sometimes organizes into discrete eighteen-chapter units (*Bhagavadgītā*, *Sauptikaparvan*, *Nārāyaṇīya*; Tubb 2002), or small ring-compositions using chapters as units (Mbh 1.121–28; Mbh 3.50–77, the story of Nala, modeled on the lunar cycle; for others see Brodbeck 2006: 26–27). But here we are thinking on a holistic scale. As a potentially illuminating exercise, I will discuss a center suggested by the division into major books. I will then mention, much more briefly, some other possible centers.

If we include the *Harivaṃśa* as Mbh 19 (even though it is not called that in the text), the major-book ring would be 9 + 1 + 9 books. Then the center would be the *Sauptikaparvan*. This book narrates the effects of the rage that Aśvatthāman felt against the Pāncālas and Pāṇḍavas because of how his father Droṇa was killed, which caused him, possessed by Śiva, to murder almost all of them in a concerted dark deed. The night massacre at the text's center would match the snake sacrifice at the edge, with Aśvatthāman matching or mirroring Janamejaya as the filial avenger. Aśvatthāman's attempt to destroy whole lineages without remainder would have succeeded had Kṛṣṇa and Vyāsa not intervened. Their intervention is mirrored by the intervention of Āstika and Vaiśampāyana to modify Janamejaya's genocidal intention, but there is also a significant contrast between the effects of these interventions. Aśvatthāman, who cannot master his rage, is cursed and banished, but Janamejaya, who masters his rage, is rehabilitated. This center fits Minkowski's comment that the *Mahābhārata* "has as its dominating theme vengeful, apocalyptic practises" (Minkowski 1991: 391).

Janamejaya would be unable to identify the major-book ring. The text he hears begins only at Mbh 1.55, and thus although he hears nineteen major books, including the two framing presentations of the divine plan, he does not hear about the division into eighteen major books at Mbh 1.2, which is said not to have occurred until the Naimiṣa Forest telling. But Janamejaya would not need to identify the major-book ring in order to compare himself with Aśvatthāman. And regardless of what Janamejaya thinks, we can think about him through it.

The major *Sauptikaparvan* contains two minor books, the *Sauptikaparvan* and the *Aiṣṭikaparvan*.¹¹ Each of these is nine chapters long, so the chapter center of the central major book would be the two adjoining chapters at the junction, or the silent junction itself, or (switching to verses) the two adjoining verses there. We will focus on the two central chapters, then on the two central verses, and then on links with the front matter.

In Mbh 10.9 the dying Duryodhana, who is lying where Bhīma felled him, hears about the night massacre, and dies. That was the point at which Saṃjaya came to tell Dhṛtarāṣṭra news of events in the final stretch of the war, including the night massacre and Duryodhana's death. This final installment of Saṃjaya's war report to Dhṛtarāṣṭra began at Mbh 9.1, and now that it has finished, Saṃjaya loses his divine sight (10.9.58; Belvalkar 1946b: 321–22). So the end of Saṃjaya's war report—the war report that was announced at 6.2.9–11, began at Mbh 6.14, and included as an early highlight the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa's special song for Arjuna, Janamejaya's ancestor (Mbh 6.23–40)—is just before the dead center of Mbh 10. In Mbh 10.10 Yudhiṣṭhira hears about the night massacre—the massacre of his sons and all his in-laws. He swoons, and after coming round he hastens to the site of the massacre, where he swoons again.

The *Sauptikaparvan*'s two central verses juxtapose Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira:

vaiśampāyana uvāca |
iti śrutvā sa nṛpatiḥ putrajñātivadhaṃ tadā |
nīḥsvasya dīrgham uṣṇaṃ ca tataś cintāparo 'bhavat || Mbh 10.9.59 |
vaiśampāyana uvāca |
tasyāṃ rātryāṃ vyatītāyāṃ dhṛṣṭadyumnasya sārathih |
śaśaṃsa dharmarājāya sauptike kadanam kṛtam || 10.10.1 |

Vaiśampāyana said:

At the news of his son's death, and the
 Deaths of his kinsmen, the king¹² sighed long and hot,
 And then was lost in thought.

Vaiśampāyana continued:

When the night had passed, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's charioteer
 Relayed to Dharma's king, Yudhiṣṭhira,
 The slaughter done on the warriors as they slept.
 (*Mahābhārata* 10.9.59–10.10.1, tr. Johnson 1998)¹³

Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira are fathers hearing the news that their sons have been killed. This might relate to possible results for Janamejaya of completing his snake sacrifice, Takṣaka and all: some snake might survive, and take revenge. After all, Takṣaka's attack on Parikṣit, for which Janamejaya is taking revenge in the snake sacrifice, was itself revenge for the slaughter when Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa destroyed Khāṇḍava Forest, killing Takṣaka's wife and cursing his son for escaping (1.218.4–11).

In view of the feud with the snakes and other *Mahābhārata* cycles of violence, Minkowski identifies a repeating pattern of annihilation, intervention, and survival (Minkowski 1991: 397–400). Rāma Jāmadagnya is also a paradigm of this pattern: in the front matter he is connected to the Kurukṣetra battlefield, which was where his merciless deeds had formerly made lakes of blood (1.2.1–12), and thus he is also connected to Janamejaya's snake sacrifice at

11. "It will be noticed that 17 (out of the aggregate of 19) names of the (major) parvans . . . are identical with the names of the *initial* (sub-)parvan of each group" (Sukthankar 1928: 177 n. 8).

12. Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

13. For *Sauptikaparvan* translations, cf. Crosby 2009.

which the story of the Pāṇḍavas was told (Fitzgerald 2002: 106), and to Aśvatthāman's massacre within the Pāṇḍava story. Perhaps the message to Janamejaya is: If you kill Takṣaka, your own sons may be killed. And thus,

The horror of the main narrative is mitigated by framing, encompassing, or containing the stark vision of the main plot. A lighter, more forgiving mood prevails, which Āstika calls “untying the knot of the heart.”

... [T]he interruption of Janamejaya's sacrifice by Āstika (with which the epic begins) ... calls forth the possibility of the cessation, or at least the mitigation, of the kind of competitive and vindictive worldview and social patterns that perpetuate violence. (Reich 2011: 43)

It is significant that at the end of Saṃjaya's narration Dhṛtarāṣṭra is placed almost dead center, because this communicates with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's lament as presented by Ugraśravas in Mbh 1.1 (Hudson 2007). Chronologically, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's lament is placed just after he has heard about the Pāṇḍava victory (*jayatsu pāṇḍuputresu śrutvā sumahad apriyam*, 1.1.95ab). The lament spans 1.1.96–159, with a sequel—after a brief swoon—at 1.1.161, where Dhṛtarāṣṭra resolves upon suicide. The lament functions as the first table of contents. It features Dhṛtarāṣṭra's recurring refrain, after he remembers each successive step in the story: *tadā nāśamse vijayāya saṃjaya*, “Then, Saṃjaya, I lost hope of victory” (tr. van Buitenen 1973; last *pāda* of consecutive verses 1.1.102–55).

The lament at the edge seems to match the central moment. There is some slight imprecision here, because near the end of his lament (1.1.154–56) Dhṛtarāṣṭra mentions events that took place during the showdown with Aśvatthāman, which is narrated only in the second half of the *Sauptikaparvan*. We never hear Saṃjaya telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra of these events: they are told to Janamejaya directly, by Vaiśampāyana (the change of listener aligning Janamejaya into Dhṛtarāṣṭra's, and now Yudhiṣṭhira's, position). Nonetheless, on the whole Dhṛtarāṣṭra's initial lament fits well at the end of Mbh 10.9. At the center the focus is on the deaths of sons, the communications of those deaths to the fathers, and the fathers' reactions. The linking of the center with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's lament reveals the lament to be, apart from anything else, a table of contents of roughly the text's first half.

These thematic discussions exemplify the kind of interpretive contribution that can be made by analyzing the text as a ring with a center. The major-book center is one of several possible centers, any of which might repay further exploration; but since it is relatively easily locatable, it serves as a convenient test case.

If one were to seek a center within the minor books—Sukthankar argues that there are one hundred of them (Sukthankar 1928: 172–77), but there may be one hundred and one (Brodbeck 2011: 229 and nn. 20, 22)—then that center might be the *Sanatsujātaparvan*, particularly if the first two books of the *Mahābhārata* were set aside as front matter. In the four-chapter *Sanatsujātaparvan* (Mbh 5.42–45; see De 1940: 192, 214) the seer Sanatsujāta tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra mysteries about the soul, its seekers, the *brahman*, the Veda, the rite, and the true meaning. This book links thematically to the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, and the *Anugītā* (Telang 1882; Edgerton 1965; Wynne 2009); its final chapter contains the refrain, repeated twenty times: *yoginas taṃ prapaśyanti bhagavantam sanātanam* “the yogins behold the sempiternal blessed Lord” (tr. van Buitenen 1978). The *Sanatsujātaparvan* at the center would promote yogic interpretations of the whole. Here one might think historically of a *brāhmaṇya* claim on soteriological territory.

If one were to seek a center within the text's chapters,¹⁴ this would be a very uncertain business, because the chapter divisions vary within the manuscript tradition (Sukthankar 1933: xcix–c), and the critical editors took their guide from the manuscripts they saw, which were significantly later than the period of the retrojected reconstituted text. Data storage changed in the interim. Chapter totals are given in Mbh 1.2 for each major book, but in most cases these totals differ from the chapter totals of the actual reconstituted text of that book (Sukthankar 1942: 551, 556; Kosambi 1946: 113–14; Kulkarni 1946: 120–21).¹⁵

If one were to seek a center within the text's verses, one might imagine that this would avoid the problem of the chapter divisions; but again there are significant discrepancies between the verse totals given in Mbh 1.2 and the verse totals of the actual reconstituted text. Moreover, verses vary in length, and “Sometimes . . . where one or three hemistichs make a stanza, it is merely a matter of editing” (Hopkins 1901: 194); the same would be true of the division of prose passages into numbered units. But despite Belvalkar's objections (Belvalkar 1946a), Sukthankar and Kosambi have both opined that in Mbh 1.2 what is meant by ‘verse’ (*śloka*) is simply thirty-two syllables (a *grantha*), so that a major book's “verse total” would be the total number of syllables in that book, divided by thirty-two (Sukthankar 1942: 550; Kosambi 1946: 112–14; 1951). Thus it might be better to think of a syllable center than a verse center. In any case, it seems likely that a verse or syllable center would fall within the nocturnal battle of Mbh 7.123–62; which is curious, since there is also nocturnal activity at the major-book and minor-book centers.

In thinking about such centers, we confront the problem of perceptibility. The major-book center is probably perceptible, but the other centers are not, so it is difficult to imagine that the text's authors or editors were suggesting them to the audience. If we think about them at all, it must be as esoterica intended only for a tiny minority of cognoscenti. But the *Mahābhārata* was apparently a written text (Fitzgerald 2004: xvi n. 2; Hildebeitel 2001, 2005; Brodbeck 2019b: 29–38), and so, then as now, some people were in a position to study it very carefully. The text speaks of the benefits not just of hearing its individual parts, but also of studying, pondering, and repeatedly thinking in depth about the whole (*idaṃ mahākāvyaṃ ṛṣer mahātmanaḥ paṭhan . . . naraḥ*, Hv 118.43ab; *purāṇam etac caritaṃ mahātmanām adhītya*, Hv 118.49ab; *sthairyreṇa jātena punaḥ smarantaḥ*, Hv 118.50c). Ancient *Mahābhārata* scholars would also have been familiar with contemporary ring-compositional conventions in a way that we are not.

The above comments on the possibility of seeking various kinds of ring-compositional center in the *Mahābhārata* are preliminary, and have not proceeded beyond the question of the center. All they have done is try to triangulate beginning, middle, and end. They have not considered any further chiasmic parallelisms between the two halves of the folded text.

To conclude this section, we return to the title question. With regard to the major-book center that our exercise has suggested, how much difference does the *Harivaṃśa* make? The *Sauptikaparvan* is in the middle of the *Mahābhārata* whether or not the *Harivaṃśa* is included as the nineteenth book. So could one not reach the suggested interpretation regardless?

14. The chapter totals for major books 1–18 in van Buitenen's “*Mahābhārata* summary” (1973: xlix) are incorrect for Mbh 3 (actually 299 chapters, not 298) and Mbh 16 (actually nine chapters, not eight).

15. An example of uncertainty over chapter divisions is the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of Mbh 12, which has nineteen chapters in the reconstituted text, but should perhaps have eighteen. “The Critical Edition . . . against the majority of the manuscript evidence . . . divides 329 and 330 (24 manuscripts have no colophon at this point, while 6 read one)” (Brockington 1998: 293 n. 142).

With the *Harivaṃśa* included, the text would have a more precise and more striking symmetry in focusing on the full story of Janamejaya beginning at Mbh 1.3 and ending at Hv 118, bringing the *Sauptikaparvan* into convincing focus as a center in terms of Janamejaya, and allowing Dhṛtarāṣṭra to stand alongside Yudhiṣṭhira in his view. The seeking of a center is much more natural if there is an odd number of units, and in the exposition above it has only been put on the interpretive agenda because the beginning and end have been joined by the *Harivaṃśa*'s repetition of the divine plan and continuation of the story of Janamejaya. This is a key point: the search for a center is a *result of* the appreciable symmetry between beginning and end that is delivered in the full text that includes the *Harivaṃśa*. Although the centers thus suggested above are not far away from the centers one might find by bisecting Mbh 1–18, there are no comparable prompts that would lead one to bisect Mbh 1–18 in this way. González-Reimann has noted that “several verses that appear towards the end of the last book [i.e., Mbh 18] put forth ideas that had already been stated in the first book” (González-Reimann 2011: 109; see also Brockington 1998: 136, 155; Austin 2009; Hildebeitel 2018: 258), but such repetitions would tend to demarcate Vaiṣampāyana's story of the Pāṇḍavas rather than Mbh 1–18 as a whole. In Mbh 1.2 the division into eighteen books is detailed after the division into one hundred books, and is also said to have occurred later in time, and these indications of its secondary nature are confirmed by the extent of the text that we have; no text of Mbh 1–18 is evident except as a subsection of the fuller text ending at Hv 118. There is nothing to demarcate Mbh 1–18 in a way comparable to the story of Janamejaya that demarcates the fuller text.

CONCLUSION

Janamejaya can have victory—the kind of victory that Dhṛtarāṣṭra lost hope of, and that Yudhiṣṭhira could not have—because, even though he took good advice, he too was tied up by the gods, and so he even killed his brother. To have victory, Janamejaya must take the good advice offered to him if he possibly can, and halt the killing before Takṣaka dies. So that is what he does. And in Hv 118 this victory is re-presented, at the next stage of his career, in terms of Janamejaya taking advice from Viśvāvasu and not blaming his wife.

This article has tried to integrate the *Harivaṃśa* into the interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* by showing what kinds of difference its inclusion can make to our appreciation of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole.

We have seen how the passage at Hv 41–45 mirrors Mbh 1.58–61, stressing the divine plan as a determining force within the Kurukṣetra generation. This intensifies the theological problematic of a team of undercover gods (including God himself) swooping in, wreaking massive destruction and unbelievable sorrow, and disappearing with the claim—made on their behalf—that it was all for the good of the earth. It also weakens the possibility of meaningfully understanding the events of that generation in terms of normal human business.

We have seen how the *Bhaviṣyaparvan* (Hv 114–18) concludes the story of Janamejaya. Just as the story of Yudhiṣṭhira would be incomplete without his post-war horse sacrifice and long wise reign, so would the story of Janamejaya.

We have also seen how the correspondences between the two extremities of the text imply a center, the identification of which might then guide interpretation of the whole. Several possible centers have been briefly mentioned, and the major-book center has been discussed, underlining particular themes with encouraging results: the themes of avenging the father and of the king's potential loss of his sons. The major-book center relates Janamejaya to Aśvatthāman, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and Yudhiṣṭhira.

So this was a pointer to what considerable difference the *Harivaṃśa* can make to our understanding of the *Mahābhārata* as we have it. If we follow the text's account of its own extent (the two full tables of contents in Mbh 1.2), there are these immediate kinds of rami-
fication. It should not be surprising that a work of narrative art is more coherent when it is not cut short. The overall effect of restoring the ending is a tight focus upon Janamejaya.

ABBREVIATIONS

Hv	<i>Harivaṃśa</i>
Mbh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>

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