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Giuliano Boccali S.R. Ranganathan: Brief Note on "Intuition"

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S.R. Ranganathan: Brief Note on "Intuition"

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Abstract

The paper aims to highlight one of the fundamental aspects of the vast cultural background of S.R. Ranganathatan's work, as well as of traditional Indian culture: the relationship intellection *vs* intuition. The theme is investigated here mainly through the distinction between classificatory language and the language of literary exchange – to use Ranganathan's terminology. The further level of communication highlighted by Ranganathan and called "mystic communion" by him is also examined. Mention is made of the extension and fulfilment of the poetics of *dhvani* in Abhinavagupta's (10th-11th century), the decisive movement that Sheldon Pollock recently (2016) compared to a "Copernican revolution". The analysis highlights the significant parallelism of this process with the relationship envisioned by Ranganathan between classificatory language, literary language and mystical communion.

1. Ranganathan on Literary Exchange

One of the fundamental aspects of the vast cultural background of S.R. Ranganathan's work, as well as of traditional Indian civilization, is certainly the relationship *intellection* vs. *intuition*. The theme is investigated here particularly using the distinction – using Ranganathan's terminology (1951: 174-182 *passim*) – between *classificatory language* and the *language* of *literary exchange*.

Classificatory language, that is to say, that of Indian *śāstra* or modern science "should have one-to-one correspondence with the thought represented by it. It should admit of no stratification in meaning. It must yield its meaning in its entirety in one instalment. It is therefore totally unsuited to serve in the communication of the transcendental experience of a literary artist". It is therefore not intended to convey the "beauty of form", nor to exert "aesthetic appeal" (Ranganathan 1951: 176). Not only that: the relationship between an artistic literary text (e.g., the $R\bar{a}m\bar{a}yana$) and the user is susceptible to a dynamic layering of meanings depending on the latter's experience, which changes with time and

diversity of circumstances. Which of course is not the case with the fruition of a treatise or scientific text.

Again according to Ranganathan, one of the essential requirements of literary language is emotional appeal; true, even the language of political languages is meant to excite emotions, but that of the literary work of art and its language is on the contrary "to purge the audience of all lower passions and to sublimate them. It is the unexpressed suggestions in literary communication which do this task. But classificatory language is designed to be expressive of all the facets and phases involved. It cannot therefore transmit emotional appeal" (1951: 176-177; this aspect will be examined further below, see 113-114). It follows that literary communication is, by its very nature and purpose, incomplete: therein lies its power; while the attempt to complete it would be the source of paraphrases, glosses and commentaries, against which Ranganathan launches an attack as vehement as it is rare or even unique in an Indian scholar (1951: 177):

It is notorious how all these devices merely swell verbosity, achieve little, and often misdirect and inhibit the native capacity of the audience to pick up the original communication by repeated attempts in the light of growing experience over a long range of years.

2. Mystical Experience and samādhi

Another consequence of the characteristics of the language of literary communication is the impossibility of translation except in the case of perfectly bilingual authors who, like Tagore, translate themselves (1951: 178). At this point Ranganathan's conclusion, marking the checkmate of classificatory language over that of literary language, is as personally courageous as it is radical (1951: 178):

Though I have devoted a large part of this life-time of mine to the building up and improvement of classificatory language, I am second to none in declaring that literary exchange is a forbidden realm which classification should never enter. It must stop with individualising authors and works and never presume to classify the thought-contents.

A further level of communication, even more subtle than literary (aesthetic) communication, is that of "mystical experience. Indeed literary communion is only a distant approximation to mystical communion. Mystical experience is in fact 'unspeakable'" (Ranganathan 1951: 179).

To testify to this conclusion, Ranganathan adduces the experience of the great mystic Rāmakṛṣṇa (1836-1886) reported by one of his disciples: when questioned about his condition one certain day of great sadness, the guru had

attributed this state of mind to the impossibility of communicating to his pupils and humanity the bliss of *samādhi*, of the state of identity with the absolute (1951: 179-180):

[...] up to a point he could be conscious of the various factors and of the varying qualities of the delight but when it reached beyond a certain degree of intensity he was enveloped with the sense of Identity so completely that there was nothing to see or sense. There was nothing structural. There was no pattern which is the very essence of what calls for expression.

In commenting a little later on this experience, Ranganathan (1951: 180) very aptly defines it as the "direct experience of the thing-in-itself" that characterizes the highest state of meditation; one may also recall in this connection the last *anga* of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, the *samādhi* precisely which is realized in the categorical discrimination [*viveka*] between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, that is, in the knowledge of things as they are or (wanting) as they are not. The faculty that enables one to tap into this state is called by Ranganathan "intuition" and in Sanskrit *divya-cakṣus* ("divine eye"). The distinction between *intellection* and *intuition* marks the checkmate of classificatory language with respect to the dimension of mystical experience, sanctioned by Ranganathan with the lapidary conclusion put in the mouth of an unnamed mystic (1951: 181):

Clearness and definiteness are dearly purchased at the price of comprehensive and deep awareness. Clarity and simplicity are merely the result of superficiality and wilful narrowness.

3. Poetry as Resonance and Suggestion (dhvani)

The background of these reflections, in Ranganathan and in traditional Indian culture, is unimaginably broad and radical, encompassing the entire research on aesthetics and encroaching on the practice of *dhyāna*, meditation – as already mentioned – and, with it, mysticism. Underlying the former is the research into what constitutes *kavyātman*, the "soul of poetry", which lasted at least four centuries, from the fifth to the ninth CE and culminated in Ānandavardhana's famous *Dhvanyāloka* (1983), "The Light of Resonance", which identifies it in *dhvani*, literally "tone" and in full "resonance", "suggestion", "power to manifest" unexpressed meanings. In fact, Ranganathan refers to this school that his teacher Mahamahopadhyaya Professor S. Kuppuswami Sastri calls the "School of Overtones".

In summary, the specificity of poetic language consists in the "power of communicating" – *vyañjanā*, a concept to which Kuppuswami Sastri (1945: *passim*), returns several times with great acumen – meanings (*vyangya*) not directly expressed but alluded to, or rather "indicated" or indeed "manifested", by either the literal or the metaphorical meaning of the utterance, which are mutually exclusive¹. In other words, the *vyangya* is the true and proper poetic meaning that, without contradicting the literal or metaphorical one in place, conveys an additional one that expands and, as it were, transcends it.

An example, taken directly from the work of \bar{A} nandavardhana, serves to clarify the theory. The author examines strophe 944 of the *Sattasaī* (translated in Mazzarino 1983) where a young woman bitterly drives away her unfaithful lover:

Go away: for me alone be the sighs and tears and not for you, who, due to false kindness, stay away from her.

In commenting on it Anandavardhana notes that the explicit meaning is of exhortative form ["Go away"], while the vyangya is neither an exhortation nor a prohibition. In other words, the literal meaning of the strophe is perfectly acceptable and consists of a command: the woman speaker enjoins her lover to leave. From the text, however, thanks to the "power of manifestation" that distinguishes poetic language, there also resonates an additional meaning that is not identified with the literal one, nor in other cases with the metaphorical one (the two, as noted above, cannot coexist), though it does not contradict it. Here it actually communicates the woman's awareness of being betrayed by her lover, and this is ultimately the message the poet intentionally wishes to convey. It consists in the conflicting feelings of the protagonist: anger at the offense suffered and at the same time resignation to remain the only one who suffers; the companion is close to her, in fact, "out of false kindness", pretending perhaps to participate in her sorrow, but in reality he is distant, well pleased in his heart with his new, secret love. As in this case, everywhere poetry is essentially *dhvani*, "resonance, suggestion, manifestation" of unexpressed and implicit meanings that would not otherwise be communicable. These meanings, moreover, in the Indian concep-

¹ For Ānandavardhana, the common functions of language are two: *abhidhā*, "naming", which underlies utterances with literal value, e.g., "The hunter pierced the gazelle"; the second is *lakṣaṇā*, "indication", which underlies utterances having a metaphorical meaning, e.g., "Tarā is a gazelle", i.e. (the maiden called) Tarā is as quick and graceful as a gazelle. Clearly, this second meaning is permissible only by automatically excluding the first, i.e., that Tarā (proper name of an animal and not a maiden) is the animal called a gazelle and not, for example, a fawn. In other words, literal meaning and metaphorical meaning of an utterance are both possible but incompatible with each other, while poetic meaning conveyed by *vyañjanā* does not exclude that conveyed by *abhidhā* or alternatively by *lakṣaṇā*.

tion are not subjective either on the part of the author or on the part of the user: the *vyangya* are imbued in the text by the poets consciously, conveying sentiments carefully catalogued and described by tradition, which listeners endowed with sensitivity and preparation are expected to take in objectively. Thus, in the strophe studied, in Indian terms the sentiment aroused by the text is uniquely and exclusively "love in frustration" (*vipralambhaśrngāra*) of the sort caused by "separation" in turn due to "anger" due to jealousy, or rather "envy" not existing in Sanskrit a term exactly corresponding to our "jealousy". In other words, in poetic communication subjective impressions are inadmissible in India: although entrusted to the subtlest power of the *dhvani*, *vyangya* are for Ānandavardhana objective textual data and, as such, not susceptible to personal coloring or even less equivocal.

Ānandavardhana not only elaborates the fundamental notion of *dhvani*, but applies to the whole of literature another fundamental notion, that of *rasa*, literally "juice", then "essence", "flavor", then "essence of a feeling", and later, as we shall see, "aesthetic experience". For him, rasa represents the most important species of *dhvani*, the feeling conveyed through the power of "resonance", "suggestion", such as that evoked just above in interpreting the stanza under consideration. Feeling, it must be emphasized, of a different nature than that experienced in personal experience rather than in poetic tasting. At the time of Anandavardhana, research concerning rasa already has several centuries of elaboration behind it, having started in the third century CE from the theatrical theory set forth in the celebrated *Nātvaśāstra* attributed to Bharata. It is not possible to reconstruct here this event, which is decisive in the cultural history of traditional India, where it represents the development of the dimensions that in the West are called poetics and aesthetics². Here, we can only mention that the completion of this complex and exciting research is accomplished by two later authors, with whom the investigation reaches the most advanced conclusions giving rise to the most significant original aesthetics of India: Bhatta Navaka (10th century) and Abhinavagupta (10th-11th century). In their work that deepens the notion of rasa, they accomplish what Sheldon Pollock in an important work likens to "a true Copernican revolution" (Pollock 2016: 16) in that it shifts the locus of inquiry into rasa from the drama or work in poetry to the elaboration that takes place within the *connoisseur*. In Pollock's precise words (Pollock 2016: 16), "the subjectivity of the reader became the central concern". And again,

The aim of his [Bhatta Nāyaka's] critique of traditional aesthetics was to redirect attention away from the formal process by which emotion is engendered in and

² The bibliography on this subject is endless; for initial guidance one can refer to the related discussion in Lienhard 1984; Warder 1989; Boccali 2000 and 2009; Gnoli 2023.

made accessible through the literary work, toward the reader's own experience of this emotion: $[...]^3$.

For Abhinavagupta, who continues along the path opened by Bhatta Nāyaka, rasa is no longer the fundamental poetic meaning, as it was for Anandavardhana, though still imbued in the text, but it is the state to which the work of art (not only literary) elevates the user: a state of contemplation – we might say – where, simultaneously suspended the reductive constraints of space, time and causality. dissolved the subjective drives of desire and aversion, that is, temporarily suppressed all the limitations that characterize current life, one "tastes" and knows in universal form the feelings of the human being. In this state, one loves without the tension and then regret of enjoyment; one suffers without the piercing and gnawing of pain; one smiles without the sarcasm, rancor or wink; and one thus savors as aesthetic feelings the universal essences of love, sadness, hilarity... and the other fundamental emotions (eight for the Indians) experienced by human beings. But whatever the causes or manifestations of the raw emotion from which each feeling takes its cue, the state to which the work of art⁴ introduces is unique: the state of beauty and freedom that approximates and prefigures that of "liberation" (moksa) from the painful cycle of re-birth and re-death.

4. On the Concept of pratibhā

The formidable research carried out in India on theatrical theory, rhetoric, stylistics, poetics, and finally aesthetics, here only hinted at and very schematically condensed, would deserve, as in fact it has deserved, attention and studies of incalculable breadth by both Indian and Western scholars between the late 1800s and the present day. Here, however, rather than on the dynamics of aesthetic fruition, it seems interesting to delve into another aspect to which classical Indian

³ Without in any way detracting from Pollock's book, which is especially useful for its extensive systematic collection of materials, it cannot be kept silent that the trajectory and "revolution" he highlighted had already been indelibly determined by Raniero Gnoli (1968) over fifty years ago. Indeed, even a few years earlier if one takes into account the first edition (1956) of his seminal, and universally appreciated (see for example Warder 1989: 21-22), *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta*. Very appropriately, this decisive work has recently been re-presented by Raffaele Torella translated into Italian (Gnoli 2023). It is regrettable to note that Pollock merely mentions in the bibliography Gnoli's book, which instead already identified with extreme clarity (Gnoli 1968: XX-XXVI) in the work of Bhatta Nāyaka the point of the reversal of perspective (the "revolution").

⁴ Introduced and elaborated in the context of theatrical and literary theory, the *rasa* aesthetic was soon applied in traditional India to all art forms.

scholars have also devoted much attention: the symmetrical and complementary aspect of the dynamics of poetic creation. It is thus intended to make a contribution to the broadening of the notion of "intuition", a contribution inspired by Ranganathan's position and closely related to other topics discussed in this volume. We therefore dwell on a term of absolute prominence in classical Indian scholarship: *pratibhā*(*na*), literally "light, blaze above [thought]"; as the translation suggests, the term is very close to "intuition" or, if one prefers, only apparently (as it will be seen) to the Western term "inspiration"; it can also be translated as "(poetic) genius" and has to do with the fundamental notions of poetic creation and originality.

The two essential requisites of the classical poet are, according to leading writers, *vyutpatti* "culture" and precisely *pratibhā*, as it results from the specific application in the aesthetic sphere of a notion of absolute prominence in the philosophies of India (the benchmark essay on *pratibhā* in general still remains Kavirai, 1923-1924, reprinted in 1966: 1-44). We will not deal with the former here now, merely mentioning that it consists of many different disciplines all of which are considered necessary for poetic activity. These include logic ($ny\bar{a}ya$), fine arts (kalā), the science of love (kāmaśāstra), politics (arthaśāstra), familiarity with the main sources of literary materials (especially Mahābhārata, *Rāmāyana*, *Purāna*) and the earlier masterpieces of classical literature, as well, of course, as the fundamental linguistic and literary sciences such as grammar, metrics, rhetoric (alamkāraśāstra, "science of [poetic] ornaments" i.e., figures and tropes), lexicography, etc. It represents a fundamental component of the apprenticeship to which the poet, even the most gifted, must undergo before he can begin to compose, an apprenticeship described with great precision by Rajaśekhara (9th-10th century) in the 10th chapter of his $K\bar{a}vyam\bar{m}a\bar{m}s\bar{a}$; while Ksemendra (11th century) deals with it extensively in his Kavikanthābharana, a veritable propaedeutic manual for the exercise of poetic practice.

The determining faculty of poetic creation, as it is evident, cannot, however, consist in the cultural and technical training of the author, it must instead reside in a more elusive and elevated dimension, in a kind of power analogous to that of the seers (the *r*,*si*), a power identified precisely in *pratibhā*. On the general philosophical level, the meaning of the term is that of "wisdom characterized by immediacy and freshness. It might be called the supersensuous and suprarational apperception, grasping truth directly, and would, therefore, seem to have the same value, both as a faculty and as an act in Indian Philosophy, as Intuition has in some of the Western systems" (Kaviraj 1966: 1). In the course of Indian research on poetics, the term has a long history and is used by all the early (and famous) leading writers of this discipline, namely Bhāmaha (7th century, but IV-V according to Warder), Daṇḍin (7th century) and Vāmana (8th century). In the concise and effective words of Raniero Gnoli (1968: L):

According to these authorities, *pratibhā* is, in brief, a sort of unborn genius, imagination or quick-wittedness, etc. conceived as the primary cause of excellence in literary art, as <u>the very seed of poetry</u>".

(My underlining noting the expression used by Gnoli literally translating Vāmana's "kavitvabījam pratibhānam", *Kāvyālamkāra* 1, 3, 16).

Research on the dynamics of poetic creation is mainly developed by Ānandavardhana and Bhatta Tota, then by his direct pupil Abhinavagupta. For the former, as early as one of the opening stanzas (I, 5) of his *Dhvanyāloka*, "This meaning alone [the *vyangya*; see above] is the soul of poetry", the goddess of which, Sarasvatī, "reveals their [= of the great poets] extraordinary genius, of exceptional splendor, not at all common in this world" (*Dhvanyāloka* I, 6, Italian translation from this work are due to Mazzarino 1983: 9).

Bhatta Tota (10th century), in a very famous passage taken up by Hemacandra (11th-12th century: Bhatta Tota's work, the Kāvvakautuka, has not survived, we know it only from quotations by others) highlights the two components of the creative dynamic already alluded to: "It has been said that no non-seer can be deservingly called a poet, and one is a seer only by virtue of his vision. Vision is the power of disclosing intuitively the reality underlying the manifold materials in the world and their aspects. To be termed a 'poet' in the authoritative texts it is enough to be possessed of this vision of reality. But in every-day speech the world accords that title to him alone who possesses vision as well as expression. Thus, though the first poet (i.e. Vālmīki) was highly gifted with enduring and clear vision, he was not hailed as a poet by people until he embodied it in a descriptive work" (Gnoli 1968: XLVIII-XLIX). Bhatta Tota, however, places special emphasis on *pratibhā*: "Intuition is a form of intuitive consciousness, *prajñā*, which is an inexhaustible source of new forms. It is by virtue of this intuition alone that one deserves the title of 'poet,' of one, that is, who is skilful to express" (Gnoli 1968: LI).

The direct disciple of Bhatta Tota, Abhinavagupta (10th-11th century), the great Kashmiri thinker with whom – as we have seen – aesthetic research culminates in India, in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, 1, 4, confirms this statement (Gnoli 1968: XLVIII):

Like the Creator the poet creates for himself a world according to his wish. Indeed, he is amply endowed with the power of creating manifold, extraordinary things, originating thanks to the favor of the Deity, the Supreme Vocality, called *pratibhā*, and continually shining within his heart.

How widespread such a view was in ancient India is evidenced, for example, by a very simple stanza (no. 983) from the corpus of Hāla's *Sattasaī*, "The Seven Hundred Stanzas", in Mahārāṣtrī, the oldest surviving anthology of the entire

classical literature: "Glory be to Vāṇī who, as if/ always smiling, having placed her imprint/ on the lotus of the poet's face,/ reveals a truly different world". Vāṇīis another name for the powerful goddess $V\bar{a}c$, literally "Voice; Word", the "Supreme Vocality" of the quotation, i.e. in this context precisely the *pratibhā*. This quatrain is not datable: a number of stanzas dating back to the archetypal *Sattasaī* do indeed belong to the 1st-2nd century, but of the many that along the tradition of the text were added later the era cannot be determined.

It is necessary, however, to dispel at this point a possible misunderstanding, easily aroused by statements such as those now mentioned: the impression – or even the belief – that Indian theory is similar to the Croce's theory; the misunderstanding has not escaped some great modern Indian scholars, such as Bishnupada Bhattacharya or S.N. Dasgupta (1885-1952), who reinterpreted the classical poetics of their country precisely in Croce's terms. Indeed, *pratibhā* is not to be understood as an insight of the poet capable – so to speak – of reinventing reality in subjective terms, of staging a "different for true" reality unique to each great author, untethered from any correspondence with the world "as it is", with things "as they are". Instead, it is an objective knowledge (*prajñā*, see above) that in the form of intuition grasps reality beyond its phenomenal appearance; as Bhatta Tota (see above) argues in a statement that leaves no doubt and which we take up here, it has "the power of intuitively disclosing the reality underlying the manifold materials in the world and their aspects".

As it can be seen, in both cases intuition represents an innate faculty⁵ of grasping reality as it is (and as it is not!), untethered from any relation to the knowing subject, i.e. free from any memory or prejudice or current perception, from any practical purpose or interest, from any relation of time, space, and causality. The ontologically radical conclusion reached by Abhinavagupta, masterfully highlighted by Gnoli (1968: LI), is that the "*pratibhā* does not exhaust itself in the poetical intuition, but is, in a broader sense, the same consciousness, the same Self". For thinkers such as Abhinavagupta and generally for exponents of monist currents of thought, gnoseology and aesthetics converge with ontology or even tend to identify with it.

On the level of poetic praxis, where *pratibhā* takes on an aspect that is in part necessarily different from that of pure philosophical theory, the difference between India and the West in the way "intuition" is conceived – we limit ourselves for brevity to using only this translation, having already pointed out above the

⁵ "Innate" in the non-dualist perspective of, for example, *vedānta* or Kashmiri Shivaism; in the perspective of *yoga*, which is based on the dualism of the *sāmkhya*, this faculty is prepared through the path of physical, psychic and mental discipline carefully established by Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* and culminating in the "discriminative knowledge" (*vivekakhyāti*, YS IV, 28) of the irreducible difference between the *guna* constituting the *prakṛti* and the *puruşa*.

other possible ones – appears particularly clear by comparing manifestations of Western lyric poetry with comparable Indian manifestations within poetic fields, such as the memory of a place related to a loved one, which in Western culture are inextricably connected with individuality and autobiography.

Read, for example, the first stanza of song CXXVI of Petrarch's Canzoniere6:

Chiare, fresche e dolci acque, ove le belle membra pose colei che sola a me par donna; gentil ramo, ove piacque (con sospir mi rimembra) a lei di fare al bel fianco colonna; erba e fior che la gonna leggiadra ricoverse con l'angelico seno; aer sacro sereno [...]

Clear, fresh, and pleasant water in which she laid her limbs, the only lady ever on my mind; bough where she took her ease (as I recall with sighs) taking it as a column for her side; grass, flowers, all covered over with her light dress, a cover also for her white breast; bright, sacred air, at rest [...]⁷

and compare it with strophe 73 of *Meghadūta*, Kālidāsa's "Messenger Cloud" (4th-5th century), in which an exile grief-stricken with nostalgia describes the garden of the house where before his condemnation he lived with his adored bride:

The tank there has emerald-paved step and is crisscrossed by blooming golden lotuses, their stalks of gleaming beryl. The flamingos that have taken up residence in its water have lost their longing:

⁶ The example already used by Boccali 2000: 437-438 is taken up here, with appropriate modifications; for the advice he received in his elaboration, the author thanks his former student Guido Pellegrini.

⁷ From Petrarch 2000: 128.

even on seeing you

they have no thoughts for nearby Lake Mānasa⁸.

[i.e.: if they see the cloud, to which the exiled is addressing; for its arrival marks the beginning of the season of love for flamingos].

In both compositions, the unique appeal of the place is given by its close relationship to the memory of the beloved. In Petrarch, however, it is transfigured by the punctual correspondence between the elements of the landscape and the image of Laura, that is, by the power of a memory that acts exclusively individually on the poet alone and that, beyond the objective historicity (or otherwise) of the event, is presented in the verses of the song as real autobiography.

In Kālidāsa, on the other hand, the place is described objectively; the images used by the poet are traditional, recurring countless times in classical Indian literature in stanzas devoted to the same theme. The exceptional nature of that place is not expressed by the poet by evoking in their individual concreteness the dwelling of the protagonists and the figure of the exile's beloved, but by inverting a literary *tópos*, equally customary and thus regarded as an objective fact, according to which wild geese at the time of lovemaking are irresistibly drawn toward Lake Mānasa, the elective location for that happy season. The pond that adorns the residence of the separated spouses is so suggestive that the regal birds establish their abode there, forgetting their normally coveted destination during the monsoon period, which coincides with the mating season.

The presence or absence of *pratibhā* in a poet is explained by theorists, according to the Indian view, by the merits accumulated by him in previous lives or even by a particular divine gift. In other words, it is innate. On the other hand, the one acquired through education, which is possible according to some authors (e.g., Dandin and Rudrata, mid-9th century), is thought to be of a lesser quality. While it is the fundamental requirement of the true poet, it is not in itself sufficient to guarantee the excellence of his work. Indeed, the Indian tradition like the Western Greco-Roman one constantly stresses the inescapable necessity of study and exercise, unlike the Romantic conception of poetic genius.

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⁸ From Mallinson 2006: 71.

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