



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

INDOPHILES · BIBLIOPHILES · ICONOPHILES

SACONTALÁ

OR, THE FATAL RING

Kālidāsa · translated by Sir William Jones

AN EARLY LONDON EDITION · 1792

From the library of Alfred B. Perlman

www.eyeofthebeholder.ch



Recognition Across Time

Kālidāsa, William Jones and the European discovery of Shakuntala

पातुं न प्रथमं व्यवस्यति जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या
नादत्ते प्रियमण्डनापि भवतां स्नेहेन या पल्लवम् ।
आद्ये वः कुसुमप्रसूतिसमये यस्या भवत्युत्सवः
सेयं याति शकुन्तला पतिगृहं सर्वैरनुज्ञायताम् ॥

pātum na prathamam vyavasyati jalam yuṣmāsv apīteṣu yā
nādatte priyamaṇḍanāpi bhavatām snehena yā pallavam |
ādye vaḥ kusumaprasūti-samaye yasyā bhavaty utsavaḥ
seyaṁ yāti śakuntalā pati-grhaṁ sarvair anujñāyatām ||

“She would not drink before you had drunk; though fond of adornment, out of affection she would not pluck even a leaf from you. Your first flowering was her festival. Now this Shakuntala goes to her husband’s house: let all of you grant her leave.”

— Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Act IV, verse 9 · Kaṇva’s farewell to the trees of the hermitage

A Drama Crossing Civilizations

Few books represent the first European encounter with India's classical imagination more vividly than Sir William Jones's *SacONTALÁ; or, The Fatal Ring*. The translation first appeared at Calcutta in 1789 and made Kālidāsa's celebrated Sanskrit drama available, for the first time, in a Western language. The present copy is the early London edition of 1792, printed for Edwards by J. Cooper: an eighteenth-century witness to the extraordinary speed with which the work travelled from Sanskrit manuscript culture into the libraries, theatres and literary debates of Europe.

This is not the Calcutta first edition of 1789, nor the first London printing of 1790. It should be described accurately as the 1792 London edition—one of the earliest British printings of Jones's epoch-making translation. Its distinction lies in proximity: it belongs to the first moment of discovery, before “*Shakuntala*” had become a familiar name in European comparative literature and before the Romantic reception of Sanskrit had fully unfolded.

The copy is made still more individual by the printed ownership label of Alfred Burr Perlman (1921–2003), the Chicago businessman, educational trustee, cultural patron and noted bibliophile. Perlman's library encompassed incunables, major English literary works and a complete Shakespeare Second Folio of 1632. His ownership places this copy within a demonstrably serious twentieth-century collection and gives it an identifiable passage through the history of American bibliophily.



The present copy · full leather binding

Catalogue Description

KĀLIDĀSA. JONES, SIR WILLIAM, translator. Sacontalá; or, The Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama. London: Printed for Edwards, by J. Cooper, 1792. Octavo. Title page, translator's preface, dramatis personae and the drama in seven acts; 152 pages in the standard bibliographical description of this issue. Finely bound in later full leather, the boards and spine decorated in gilt, with marbled endpapers.

Provenance: Alfred B. Perlman (1921–2003), Chicago, with his printed ownership label applied to the marbled endpaper. Perlman was a businessman, chairman of the board of trustees of Columbia College Chicago, supporter with his wife Annette of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, and a collector whose books have been recorded by Christie's and Bonhams.

Bibliographical status: an early London edition of the first translation of an Indian drama into a Western language. The translation was first printed at Calcutta in 1789; a London edition followed in 1790, the present London edition in 1792, and an Edinburgh printing in 1796.

Price: USD 2,750. A specialist-gallery valuation reflecting the copy's attractive presentation, eighteenth-century date, cultural importance, and distinguished collector provenance. Completeness and the final condition statement should be confirmed by direct collation before sale.



Binding and spine · three-quarter view

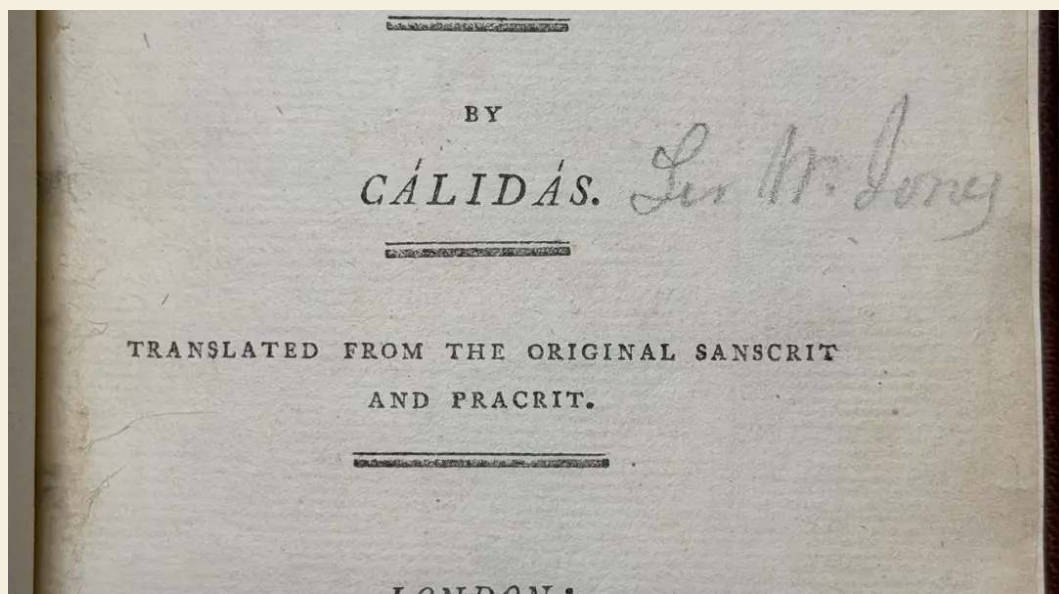
The Present Copy

The photographs show an elegant full-leather binding with gilt decoration, a strong upright spine, marbled endpapers and a clean, legible title page. The binding is later than the publication and should not be represented as contemporary without further physical evidence; nevertheless, it presents the work with dignity and is well suited to a landmark of Sanskrit literature in translation.

The three-quarter view is particularly encouraging. The boards sit squarely, the joints appear visually coherent, the spine retains its compartments and ornament, and the volume has the compact authority of a well-kept eighteenth-century octavo. The title page preserves the characteristic typography and long “s” of the period. No claim concerning every leaf can be made from exterior and title-page photographs alone, so a responsible final catalogue entry should record collation after examination.

What can already be stated with confidence is that this is not an anonymous copy. The Perlman label survives in direct relationship with the marbled endpaper and binding. It is precisely the kind of small material detail that turns an edition into a particular object: this volume was selected, shelved and preserved by a collector whose library ranged from fifteenth-century printing to Shakespeare and major English literary first editions.

The copy’s commercial strength lies in the combination. The edition supplies historical proximity; the binding supplies visual presence; the provenance supplies individuality; and the subject supplies enduring civilizational significance.



Title page · London, printed for Edwards, 1792

Condition, Collation and Responsible Description

Preliminary dealer-standard condition statement. An attractively presented copy in later full leather, gilt, with marbled endpapers. Binding visually sound and handsome in the photographs, with light age-appropriate wear. Title page clean and well preserved. Alfred B. Perlman's printed ownership label on the marbled endpaper. Final statement subject to direct examination and collation.

A rigorous condition report should verify the title and preliminary leaves, pagination through page 152, the gatherings, and the terminal leaf. The bibliographical record commonly gives seven unsigned preliminary leaves followed by B-K in eights and L in four. Any binder's blanks, repairs, washing, pressing or supplied leaves should be noted. These checks are not obstacles to a positive description; they are the evidence on which a confident one rests.

Eighteenth-century books should not be judged against modern manufacture. Gentle toning, isolated spots and minor handling are compatible with an attractive copy. More important are completeness, structural stability, legibility, absence of intrusive restoration, and the survival of copy-specific evidence. Here, the binding and provenance already give the volume considerable shelf presence.

The ideal final wording will remain affirmative while exact: "an attractive, well-presented early London edition in handsome later full leather, from the distinguished library of Alfred B. Perlman." That formulation celebrates what the photographs establish and reserves unverified details for physical examination.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

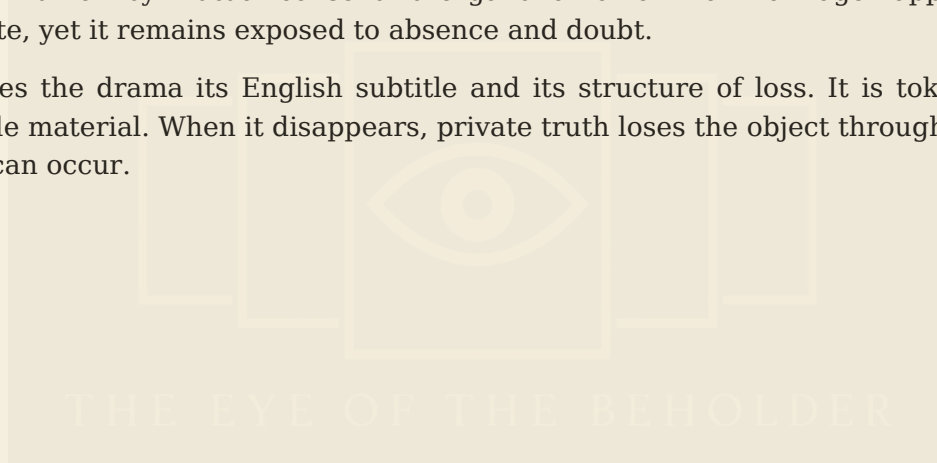
Shakuntala: The Child of the Forest

Shakuntala's story begins before the play. She is the daughter of the sage Viśvāmitra and the celestial nymph Menakā, abandoned at birth and protected by birds—śakuntas—before being found and raised by the ascetic Kaṇva. Her identity therefore holds two worlds together: celestial beauty and human vulnerability, royal destiny and forest nurture.

Kālidāsa's drama opens in the hermitage, a space ordered but not austere. Trees bloom, deer move without fear, ritual and nature coexist, and Shakuntala tends plants with her companions Anasūyā and Priyamvadā. King Dushyanta enters as a hunter pursuing a deer, but the law of the hermitage interrupts violence. He encounters a realm whose moral authority does not depend upon political power.

The meeting of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is one of world literature's great scenes of recognition before recognition. Each observes the other through the conventions of decorum; the companions speak what the lovers cannot; desire enters a landscape already alive with fertility. Their union by mutual consent—the gandharva form of marriage—appears intimate and legitimate, yet it remains exposed to absence and doubt.

The ring gives the drama its English subtitle and its structure of loss. It is token, proof and memory made material. When it disappears, private truth loses the object through which public recognition can occur.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

The Curse and the Lost Ring

While Shakuntala is absorbed in thoughts of her absent husband, the irascible sage Durvāsas arrives at the hermitage. Feeling neglected, he curses her: the person she loves will fail to remember her. Her companions obtain a mitigation—the curse will lift when Dushyanta sees a token of recognition—but Shakuntala herself does not hear the exchange. Dramatic irony enters the love story as unseen fate.

Pregnant and accompanied by elders, Shakuntala travels to the royal court. Dushyanta, under the curse, does not acknowledge her. The ring that could have restored memory has been lost during the journey. The court scene is painful because the king's failure is both culpable and supernaturally determined. Kālidāsa does not reduce the conflict to a villain's betrayal. He makes recognition depend upon the fragile traffic between inward truth and outward evidence.

A fisherman later discovers the ring in the belly of a fish. When it is brought to Dushyanta, memory returns with devastating force. The recovered object does not merely prove identity; it exposes the emotional cost of forgetting. The king's remorse transforms him from a figure of authority into a person who understands what authority has failed to protect.

For a collector, the symbolism is unusually resonant. Like the ring, a book carries recognition through time. Provenance marks—labels, inscriptions, bindings—are small surviving tokens by which an object's past becomes recoverable.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

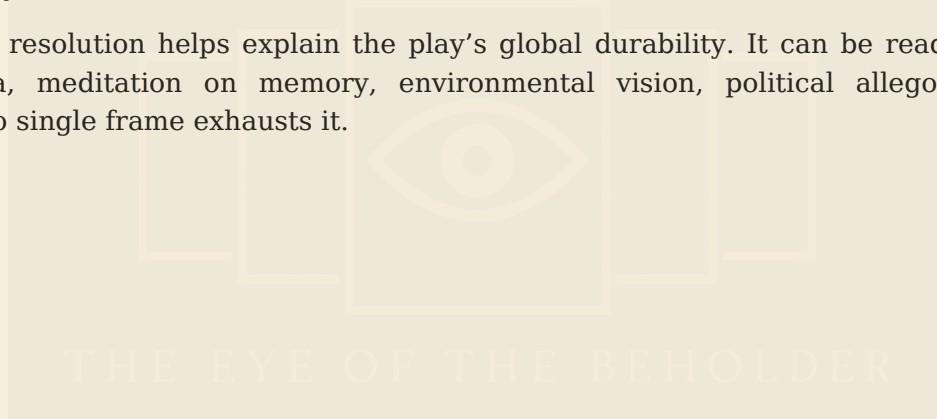
Recognition and Reunion

Kālidāsa does not conclude with the mechanical recovery of the ring. Recognition must become ethical. Dushyanta's regained memory brings grief, not instant reward, and the drama moves beyond the court into a larger sacred geography. Only after heroic service and spiritual maturation does he encounter Shakuntala again, now transformed by suffering and motherhood.

Their son Bharata plays fearlessly with lion cubs. He is the child through whom private love enters dynastic history, the legendary ancestor whose name becomes attached to India itself—Bhārata. The family reunion therefore closes one story while opening the imagination of a civilization. The abandoned child of the forest becomes mother of imperial lineage; the forgetful king learns recognition; the lost ring has completed its circuit.

The Sanskrit title, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, places recognition at the heart of the work. *Abhijñāna* can denote a token, recollection or recognition. Jones's "The Fatal Ring" heightens the object's role for an English audience, but the drama's true subject is more expansive: how love survives when memory, status and evidence fail.

This layered resolution helps explain the play's global durability. It can be read as romance, court drama, meditation on memory, environmental vision, political allegory or sacred narrative. No single frame exhausts it.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

Kālidāsa and the Sanskrit Canon

Kālidāsa occupies a position in Sanskrit literature comparable, in breadth of prestige, to the greatest canonical poets of other civilizations. The dates of his life remain debated, though he is commonly placed around the fourth or fifth century CE and associated with the cultural world of the Gupta period. The uncertainty has never diminished the authority of the works transmitted under his name.

His surviving corpus encompasses drama, epic and lyric. The plays include *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramorvaśīyam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The great poems include the dynastic epic *Raghuvamśa*, the divine epic *Kumārasambhava*, and the incomparable messenger poem *Meghadūta*. Across genres, Kālidāsa unites formal control with a feeling for emotional transition and natural description.

To call him “the Indian Shakespeare,” as European readers often did, may communicate stature but risks making Sanskrit achievement dependent upon English analogy. Kālidāsa’s dramaturgy arises from its own aesthetic and philosophical tradition. The theory of *rasa*—the distilled emotional flavour savoured by a cultivated spectator—offers a more appropriate approach than modern psychological realism alone.

In *Shakuntala*, erotic love, pathos, wonder and peace are not isolated moods. They are carefully sequenced experiences through which the audience is moved from first attraction to loss and finally to recognition. Nature is not decorative background; it participates in emotion.

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Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

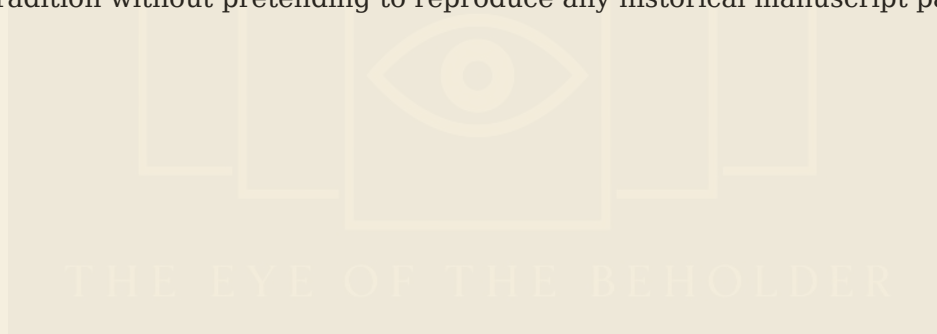
Nature as Character

The hermitage forest is one of the drama's most distinctive achievements. Plants are addressed as companions; deer are protected as members of a moral community; seasonal change registers feeling; departure wounds the landscape itself. Shakuntala's bond with the grove is so intimate that leaving it for the court resembles a second birth.

This ecological sensitivity should not be romanticized into a modern environmental programme, yet it remains striking. The play imagines different forms of sovereignty. Dushyanta's authority is political and martial; Kaṇva's is ascetic and pedagogical; the forest's is relational. The king first becomes worthy of Shakuntala when hunting yields to restraint.

Kālidāsa's similes create bridges between human and non-human worlds. A glance behaves like a startled deer; youth resembles flowering; longing alters heat, shade and rain. Such language is not ornamental surplus. It is the medium through which private emotion becomes cosmically legible.

The visual tradition surrounding Shakuntala has repeatedly returned to this forest. Painters have shown her with companions, writing a letter, feigning the removal of a thorn while looking back at Dushyanta, or lost in contemplation beneath trees. The front cover of this catalogue enters that tradition without pretending to reproduce any historical manuscript painting.



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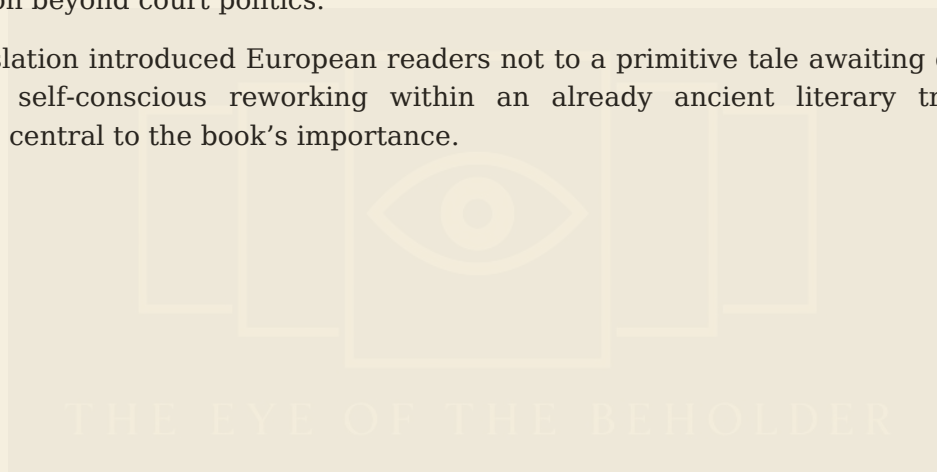
From the Mahābhārata to Kālidāsa

The story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta appears in the Mahābhārata, but Kālidāsa reshaped it profoundly. In the epic account, the conflict turns more directly upon royal recognition, legitimacy and succession. Shakuntala argues forcefully for herself and her son; a heavenly voice confirms her truth. Kālidāsa introduces the curse, the lost ring and an extended psychology of separation.

These changes make Dushyanta less simply deceptive and give memory a material drama. They also deepen Shakuntala's emotional arc. She is not merely claimant to royal acknowledgement but a person transformed by desire, humiliation, absence and motherhood. The play's final reunion acquires a tenderness different from the epic's public vindication.

Adaptation here is an act of classical creation. Kālidāsa assumes a culturally known story and changes its causal architecture. The curse moves blame into the realm of fate without erasing human consequence; the ring turns recognition into an object; the celestial hermitage enlarges the conclusion beyond court politics.

Jones's translation introduced European readers not to a primitive tale awaiting discovery, but to a highly self-conscious reworking within an already ancient literary tradition. That distinction is central to the book's importance.



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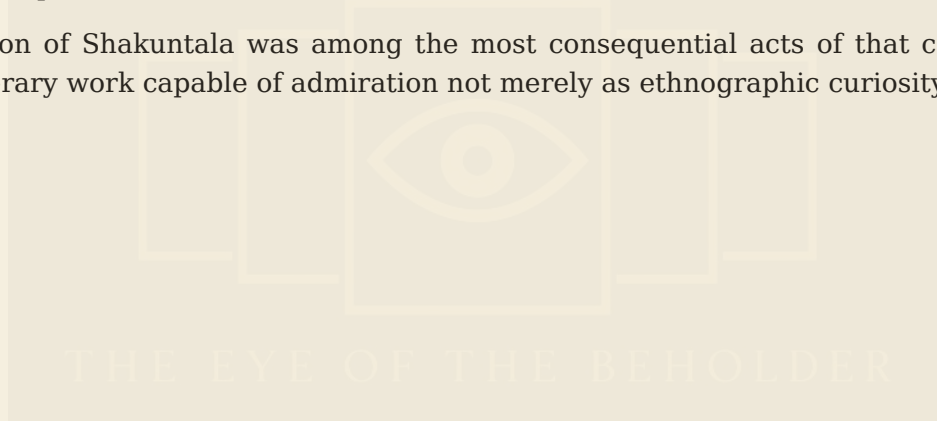
Sir William Jones: A Life of Languages

William Jones was born in London in 1746, educated at Harrow and University College, Oxford, and became one of the most celebrated linguists of his age. He acquired an extraordinary command of languages and literatures, ranging across Greek, Latin, Persian, Arabic and Hebrew before his intensive study of Sanskrit in India. Contemporary admirers sometimes inflated the number of languages he “knew,” but the breadth of his real attainment remains exceptional.

Jones was not only a philologist. He was a poet, translator, legal scholar, judge and institutional founder. Appointed to the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William, he arrived in Calcutta in 1783. In 1784 he founded the Asiatic Society, creating an enduring forum for the study of Asian histories, languages, laws and sciences.

His intellectual career must be understood within the structures of the East India Company and British rule. Scholarship and empire were not separate worlds. Yet Jones’s work also destabilized easy European assumptions by insisting upon the antiquity, sophistication and comparative importance of Indian civilization.

His translation of Shakuntala was among the most consequential acts of that career. It gave Europe a literary work capable of admiration not merely as ethnographic curiosity, but as art.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

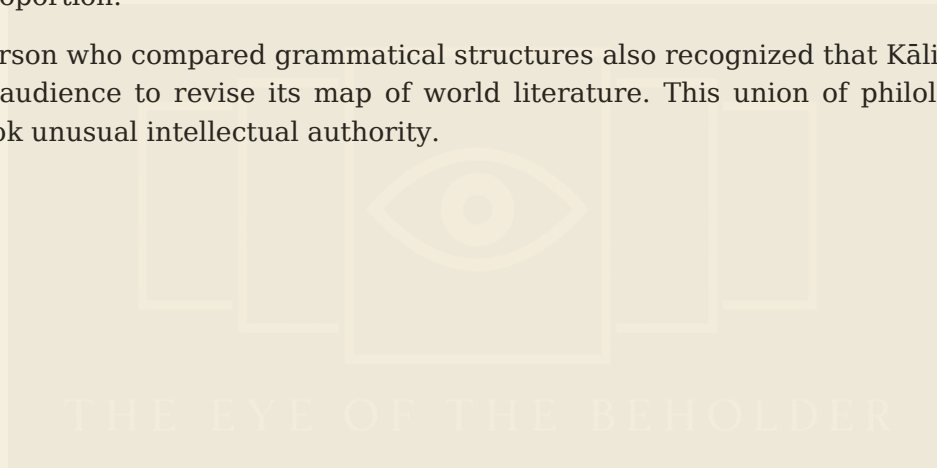
The Famous Philological Proposition

In his 1786 discourse to the Asiatic Society, Jones observed the structural affinities among Sanskrit, Greek and Latin and proposed that they had sprung from a common source. He also connected Gothic and Celtic, and placed Old Persian within the comparison. This insight became foundational to the development of comparative Indo-European linguistics.

Jones did not invent every element of language comparison, nor did modern linguistics emerge fully formed in one speech. His importance lies in the clarity, authority and institutional setting with which he articulated the relationship. Sanskrit ceased to be merely one exotic language among many; it became evidence in a new historical understanding of language itself.

The achievement illuminates his translation practice. Jones approached Sanskrit with both admiration and the classificatory habits of Enlightenment scholarship. He wanted to identify systems, analogies and genealogies. In Sacontalá, however, analysis had to become literary mediation: a play lives not only through lexical equivalence but through tone, movement and emotional proportion.

The same person who compared grammatical structures also recognized that Kālidāsa required a European audience to revise its map of world literature. This union of philology and taste gives the book unusual intellectual authority.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

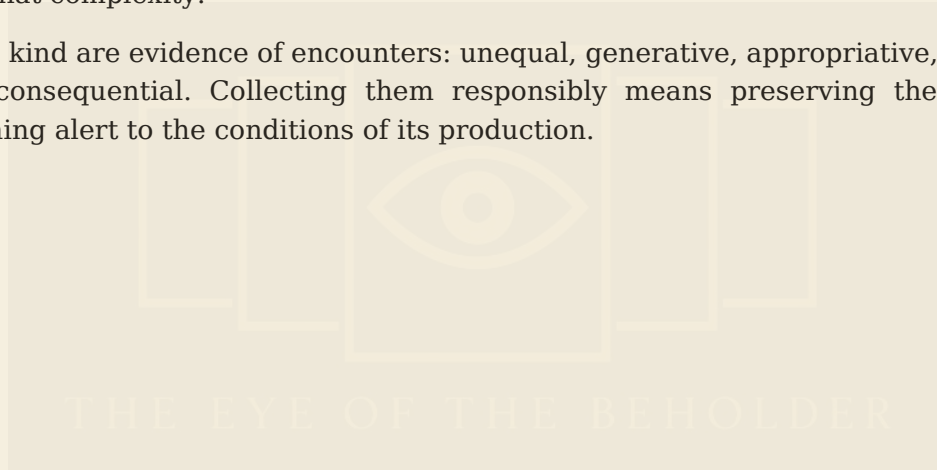
Jones in India: Judge, Scholar, Founder

Jones's years in India were astonishingly productive and physically demanding. Judicial duties occupied him, while mornings and seasonal retreats were devoted to languages, law, botany, music, literature and religion. He worked with Indian pandits and other learned intermediaries whose knowledge made his Sanskrit scholarship possible, even when publication conventions did not adequately foreground their agency.

His projects included Hindu and Islamic legal texts, essays on Indian chronology and music, translations from Persian and Sanskrit, and studies presented to the Asiatic Society. He sought to make Indian traditions legible to European institutions, a project carrying both genuine intellectual respect and the asymmetries of colonial power.

A modern catalogue should hold these truths together. Jones was neither a neutral discoverer nor merely a caricature of Orientalism. His work opened transformative paths of knowledge while operating inside empire. The value of the 1792 Sacontalá lies partly in its ability to materialize that complexity.

Books of this kind are evidence of encounters: unequal, generative, appropriative, admiring and historically consequential. Collecting them responsibly means preserving the achievement while remaining alert to the conditions of its production.



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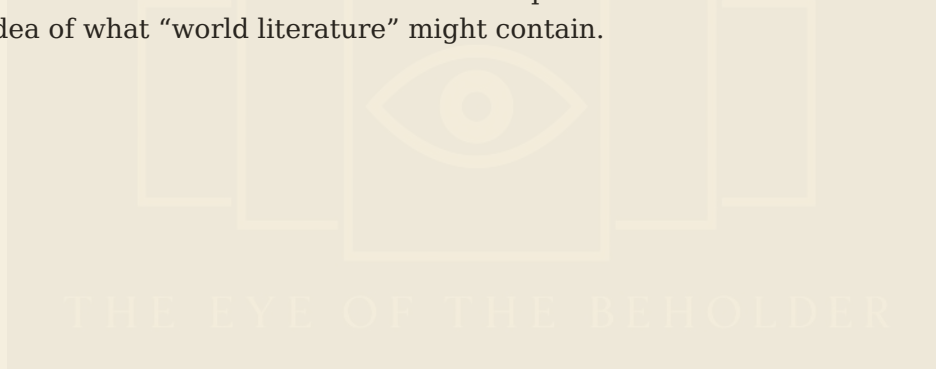
How Jones Translated Shakuntala

Jones initially worked through Sanskrit learning acquired in Bengal and produced a Latin intermediary before shaping the English text. He drew upon a Bengali recension of the play. The result is not a modern critical translation, but it carries the urgency of first encounter and the stylistic choices of an eighteenth-century man of letters.

He rendered dialogue into prose while preserving selected verse passages as elevated poetry. Names and sounds passed through the transliteration conventions he was developing, producing spellings—"Sacontalá," "Cálidás," "Sanscrit"—that now immediately locate the book in the history of European Indology.

Jones's preface framed the work for readers who possessed almost no context for Sanskrit drama. He emphasized antiquity, manners and literary curiosity, and he sought analogies that would make admiration possible. The translation inevitably domesticates and explains; yet it also allows strangeness to remain.

Its enduring significance is historical as much as philological. Later translations may give more exact texts, different recensions or subtler theatrical language. None can repeat the cultural event of 1789: the moment when a Sanskrit masterpiece first entered a Western language and altered the idea of what "world literature" might contain.



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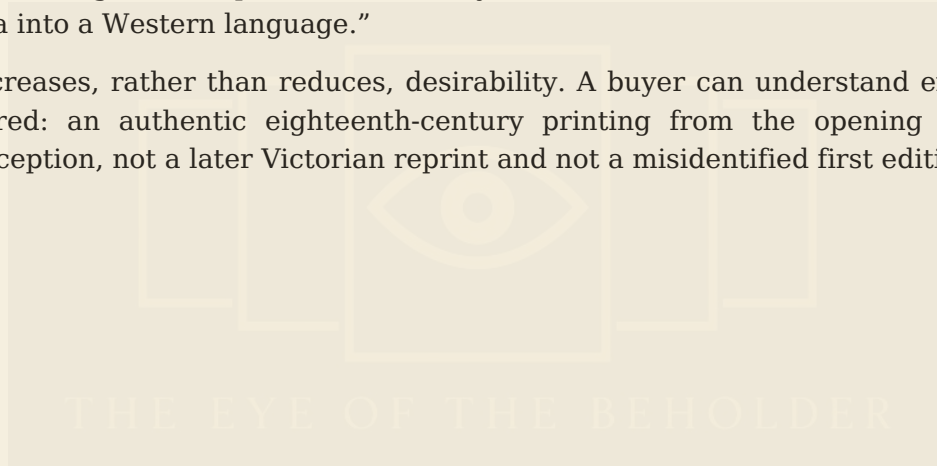
The Bibliographical Sequence: 1789-1796

The first edition was printed in Calcutta in 1789. It is the primary bibliographical landmark and commands the greatest rarity and market value. A London edition followed in 1790, bringing the translation more directly into British circulation. The present London edition appeared in 1792, followed by further British printing, including Edinburgh in 1796.

The title page of this copy reads: “London: Printed for Edwards, by J. Cooper, 1792.” Standard records describe the volume as an octavo of 152 pages, with seven unsigned preliminary leaves, gatherings B through K in eights, and L in four. Those details should be checked against the physical book before a final sales guarantee.

The website’s earlier shorthand “first English edition” should be refined. The 1789 Calcutta printing was already in English, and the 1790 London printing predates the present book. The accurate and stronger description is: “an early London edition of the first translation of an Indian drama into a Western language.”

Precision increases, rather than reduces, desirability. A buyer can understand exactly what is being acquired: an authentic eighteenth-century printing from the opening phase of the European reception, not a later Victorian reprint and not a misidentified first edition.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

Europe Discovers Shakuntala

The translation travelled rapidly. Georg Forster produced a German version from Jones's English in 1791. French and other European versions followed, and within a century the drama had appeared in dozens of translations across numerous languages. Shakuntala became a name through which Europe imagined Indian antiquity, sensibility and nature.

Reception was not uniform. Some readers admired the play's tenderness and natural imagery; others forced it into schemes of "Oriental" difference. The work entered arguments about origins, religion, comparative mythology and the limits of classical rules. Its influence therefore belongs to intellectual history as well as theatre and poetry.

The extraordinary point is chronological. This 1792 volume was printed while the discovery was still happening. Goethe's famous response was recent; Forster's German version had only just appeared; Sanskrit itself was only beginning to reshape European philology. The book is contemporary with the formation of its own reputation.

That proximity is the principal reason the edition deserves serious collecting attention. It is not merely a text of Shakuntala; it is an artefact from the first European Shakuntala moment.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

Goethe and the Romantic Imagination

Goethe's epigram on Shakuntala became the most famous emblem of the play's European reception. He praised it as a work in which the blossoms of spring and fruits of a later season, the earth and heaven, appeared united in one name. The precise pathways of influence should not be simplified, but his enthusiasm gave the drama immense prestige.

German intellectual culture received Indian literature at a moment when writers were questioning inherited classical boundaries and searching for deeper histories of poetry, myth and language. Shakuntala seemed at once ancient and fresh: formally unfamiliar, emotionally legible, and saturated with nature.

Romantic admiration could idealize India, turning a diverse civilization into a spiritual counter-image to Europe. Yet it also expanded the literary canon. Kālidāsa could be discussed alongside Sophocles and Shakespeare; Sanskrit became central to accounts of language ancestry; India was no longer imagined only through travel, trade and conquest.

The 1792 edition belongs materially to that enlargement of consciousness. It is a small book with a very large intellectual horizon.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

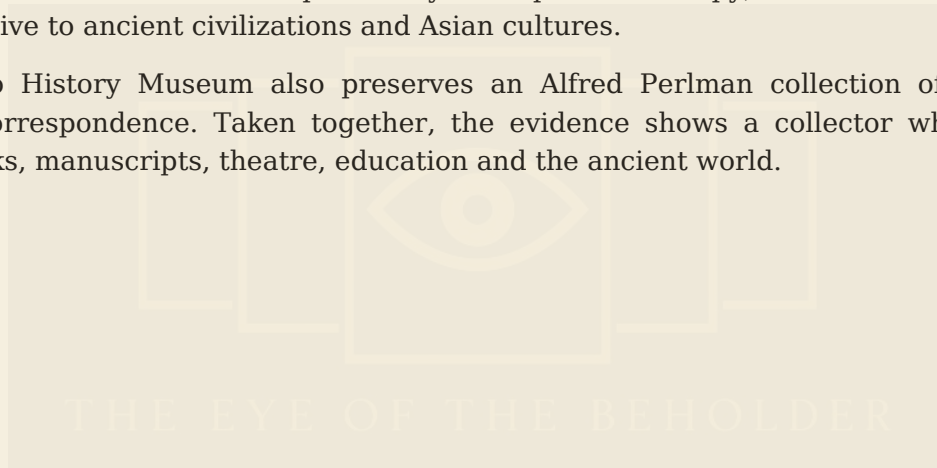
Alfred Burr Perlman: The Correct Identity

The label almost certainly belongs to Alfred Burr Perlman (1921–2003) of Chicago and should not be confused with Alfred E. Perlman, the prominent American railroad executive. Auction records identify Alfred B. Perlman by name and dates, and the same collector is associated with books of demonstrable bibliographical consequence.

Perlman worked in Chicago business and real estate, including as a senior figure connected with Arthur Rubloff & Company. He also served as chairman of the board of trustees of Columbia College Chicago in the 1970s. His collecting thus formed part of a broader pattern of civic, educational and cultural engagement.

Alfred and Annette Perlman appear among supporters of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, now the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures. That connection is especially apposite for Sacontalá. It does not prove why he acquired this copy, but it situates him within a milieu attentive to ancient civilizations and Asian cultures.

The Chicago History Museum also preserves an Alfred Perlman collection of literary and theatrical correspondence. Taken together, the evidence shows a collector whose interests crossed books, manuscripts, theatre, education and the ancient world.



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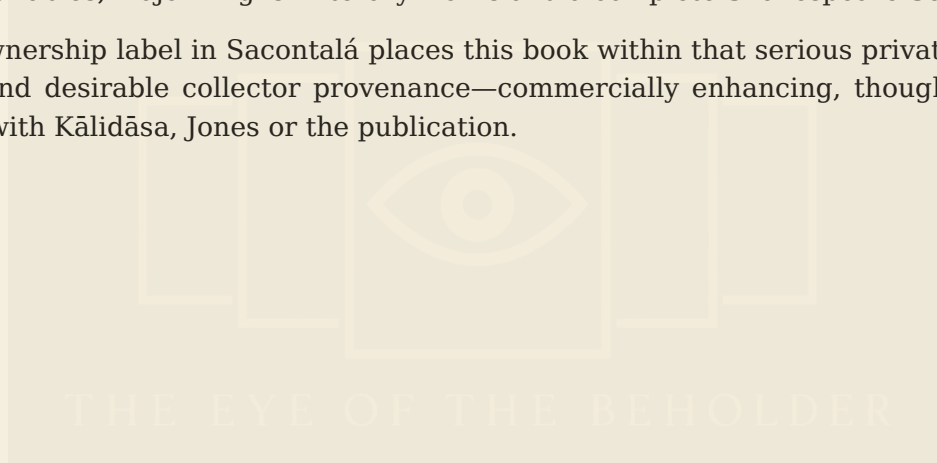
The Calibre of the Perlman Library

The strongest measure of Perlman's bibliophily is the company kept by books bearing his label. Bonhams records his ownership of a complete Shakespeare Second Folio of 1632, one of the monuments of English printing. Christie's records him in the provenance of fifteenth-century books, including a Thomas Aquinas volume with earlier Estelle Doheny provenance and an edition of Johannes Herolt's sermons printed at Strasbourg around 1479.

Other recorded material includes De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, Victorian literary first editions, Coleridge, and books concerning bibliography and the antiquarian trade. This range suggests not accidental accumulation but sustained collecting across high points of printing and literature.

Perlman was not a celebrity collector whose name alone transforms price, and he should not be inflated into "one of America's greatest collectors." The accurate formulation is more persuasive: a noted Chicago bibliophile and cultural patron whose distinguished library included incunables, major English literary works and a complete Shakespeare Second Folio.

The same ownership label in Sacontalá places this book within that serious private library. It is significant and desirable collector provenance—commercially enhancing, though not a direct association with Kālidāsa, Jones or the publication.



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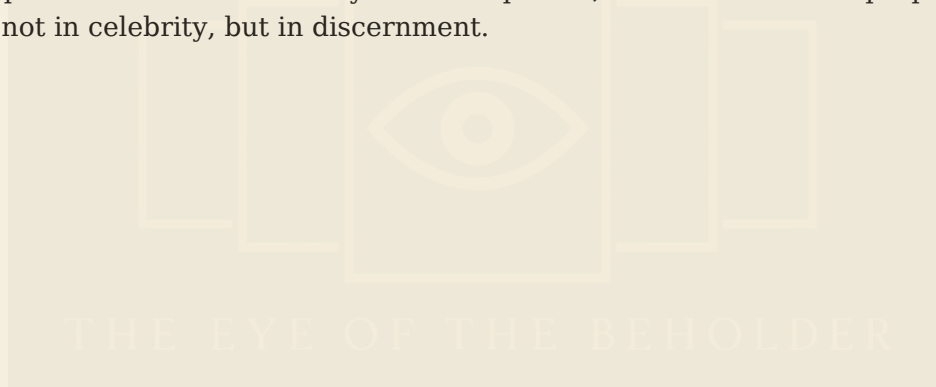
What the Provenance Adds

Provenance adds individuality first. Many eighteenth-century books have passed through unnamed hands. Here, one stage of ownership can be attached to a documented collector, city and cultural environment. That recoverable identity enriches the object even when it does not alter the edition.

It adds validation second. Perlman selected incunables, a Shakespeare Second Folio and major literary first editions. His ownership is consistent with an understanding of Sacontalá as a landmark in comparative literature rather than merely an old Orientalist text.

It adds narrative third. The copy connects Sanskrit drama, Enlightenment translation, European Romanticism and twentieth-century Chicago bibliophily. Perlman's support of the Oriental Institute gives that trajectory an especially sympathetic resonance, while remaining circumstantial rather than causal evidence.

In market terms, such provenance may justify a moderate premium—perhaps five to ten per cent against a truly comparable anonymous copy—but its larger contribution is saleability. It gives a prospective custodian a story that is specific, documented and proportionate. The prestige lies not in celebrity, but in discernment.



Alfred B. Perlman's printed ownership label on the marbled endpaper

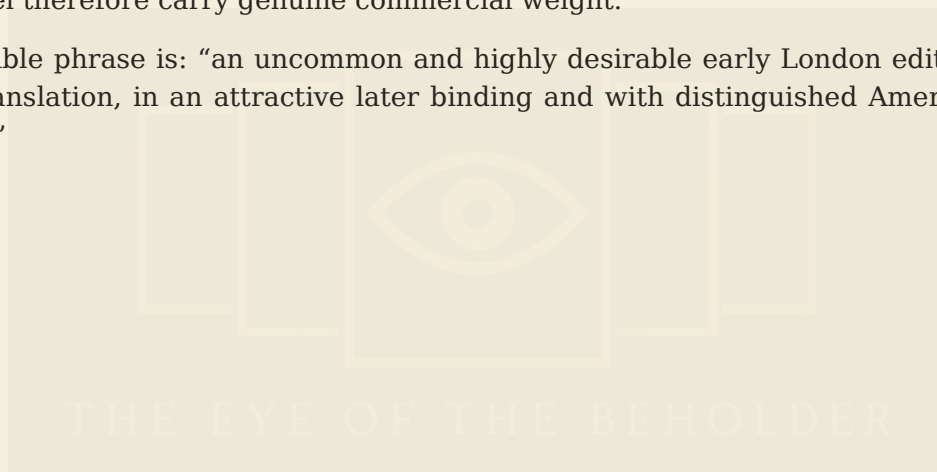
Rarity and Survival

The 1792 London edition is scarce in the meaningful antiquarian sense: it is an eighteenth-century printing of a foundational translation, encountered far less often than nineteenth- and twentieth-century reprints. It is not, however, unique, and rarity should not be asserted through an invented census.

Its desirability arises from a conjunction of date, textual importance, presentation and provenance. The Calcutta first edition of 1789 remains the supreme bibliographical prize. The 1790 London edition has priority among British printings. The 1792 edition occupies an attractive collecting position: early enough to belong to the initial reception, yet sometimes available at a fraction of the cost of the first.

Survival quality matters. Copies may be incomplete, plainly rebound, heavily washed, annotated or structurally compromised. An attractive, coherent copy with a named collector history separates itself from the generic record. The present volume's handsome binding and Perlman label therefore carry genuine commercial weight.

The responsible phrase is: "an uncommon and highly desirable early London edition of Jones's landmark translation, in an attractive later binding and with distinguished American collector provenance."



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

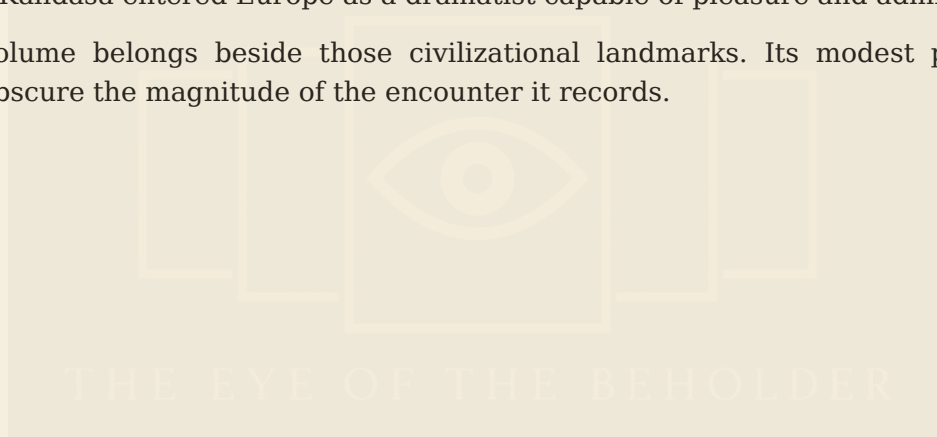
A Landmark Among the Great Books of India

Several eighteenth-century books transformed Europe's knowledge of India. Halhed's Code of Gentoo Laws (1776) presented a mediated vision of Hindu law; Wilkins's Bhagvat-Geeta (1785) opened a foundational philosophical text; Jones's Sacontalá (1789) revealed classical drama; the early Asiatick Researches created a forum through which languages, histories and sciences entered comparative study.

These books differ radically in purpose and method, but together they changed the intellectual geography of Europe. India could no longer be treated solely as a territory of trade and empire. It possessed antiquity, jurisprudence, philosophy, poetics and linguistic evidence capable of reorganizing European accounts of civilization.

Sacotalá has a special place because its power was aesthetic. Readers did not need to accept a doctrine or master a legal code; they could respond to character, longing, landscape and recognition. Kālidāsa entered Europe as a dramatist capable of pleasure and admiration.

The 1792 volume belongs beside those civilizational landmarks. Its modest physical scale should not obscure the magnitude of the encounter it records.



Abhijñāna · memory · recognition

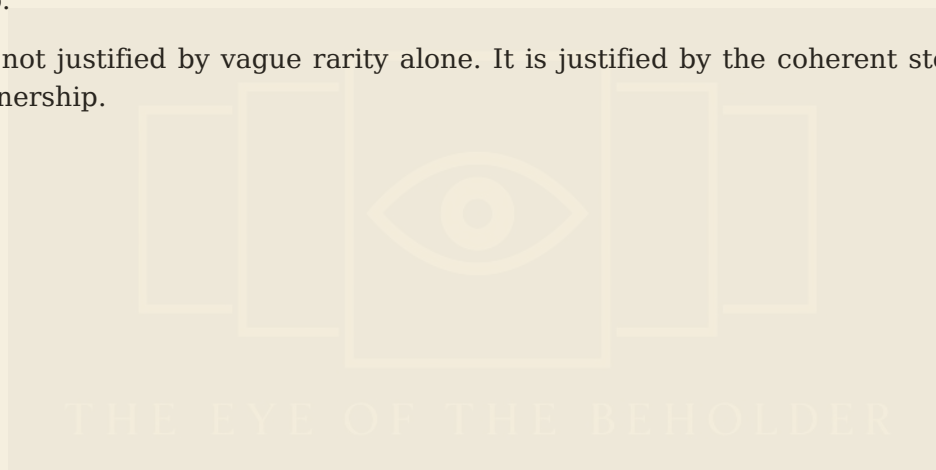
Value and Gallery Positioning

The recommended asking price is USD 2,750. This is a patient specialist-gallery price rather than a quick-sale figure. It recognizes that the book is not the first edition while giving due weight to its eighteenth-century date, attractive presentation, cultural importance and Perlman provenance.

A likely negotiated sale may fall around USD 2,200–2,450, depending upon direct condition and collation. A conservative floor would be approximately USD 1,900. A price materially above USD 3,250 would require further strength—exceptional confirmed condition, a demonstrably distinguished binding, or additional earlier provenance.

The buyer-facing proposition should be framed positively and precisely: an early London edition of the first Western-language translation of an Indian drama; the work that helped ignite Romantic Europe's fascination with Sanskrit literature; and a copy from the library of a documented American bibliophile whose holdings included incunables and Shakespeare's Second Folio.

The price is not justified by vague rarity alone. It is justified by the coherent story of edition, copy and ownership.



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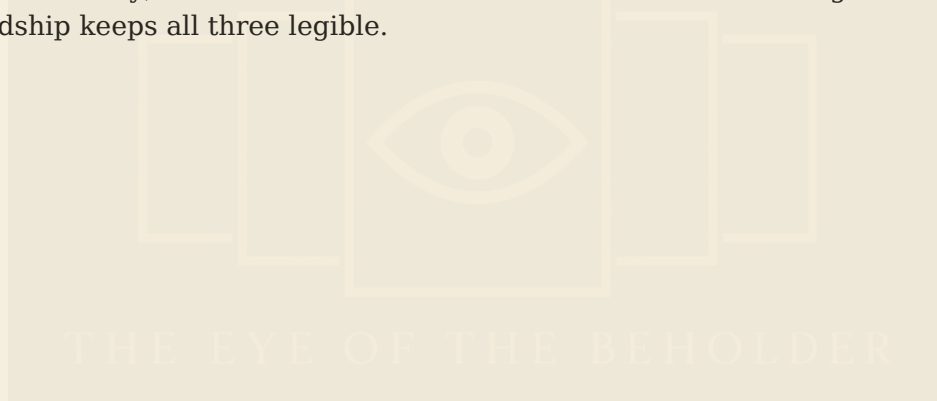
Custodianship and Conservation

The immediate conservation priority is documentation. The volume should be collated leaf by leaf, measured, and photographed at the binding, spine, endpapers, title, representative openings and terminal leaves. The Perlman label should be recorded in situ and never detached.

Leather benefits from stable humidity, moderate temperature and protection from direct light. Dressings should not be applied routinely; they can darken leather and complicate future conservation. The joints and sewing should be examined before repeated opening for photography. A fitted archival box would protect the gilt and board edges while preserving ready access.

Any repair should be minimal and reversible. Washing or aggressive cleaning can erase paper history, alter texture and weaken the relationship between copy and age. The aim is not to make an eighteenth-century book appear new, but to preserve its evidence and usability.

The next custodian receives more than a text. The responsibility includes the edition's bibliographical identity, the binder's intervention and Perlman's surviving claim of ownership. Good stewardship keeps all three legible.



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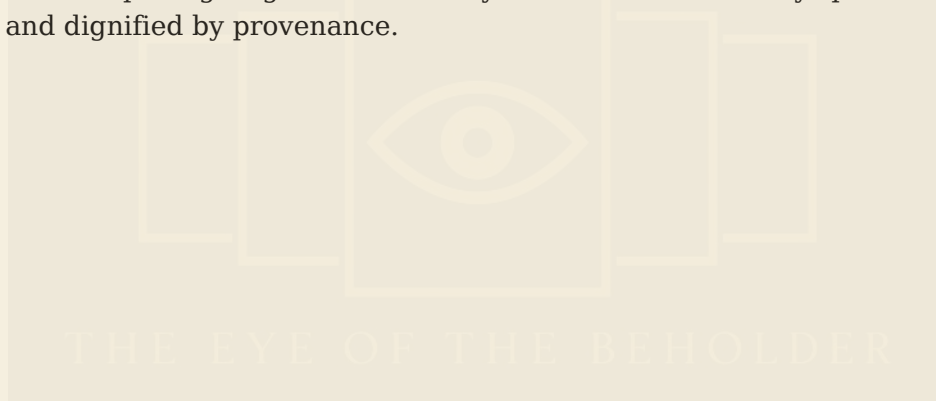
Conclusion: Recognition Across Time

Shakuntala is a drama about the peril and recovery of recognition. A king forgets; a token disappears; a woman's truth is denied; memory returns only after loss has transformed everyone involved. The story has survived because its emotional architecture is at once culturally particular and universally intelligible.

Jones's translation created another act of recognition. Europe encountered a Sanskrit masterpiece and was compelled—however imperfectly—to enlarge its idea of literature. The present 1792 edition belongs to the first years of that transformation. It was printed while Goethe's admiration was new, German translation had only begun, and comparative philology was still altering the map of human language.

Perlman's ownership adds a final circle. A Chicago bibliophile who collected Shakespeare, incunables and literary monuments selected and preserved this early edition. His label now allows the book itself to be recognized as a particular survivor.

For the prospective custodian, that is the attraction: not a falsely proclaimed first edition, but an honest and compelling eighteenth-century witness—handsomely presented, culturally foundational and dignified by provenance.



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Selected References and Further Reading

Garland Cannon, *Sir William Jones: A Biography*, and his bibliographical studies of Jones's works; Arthur J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*; and the memorial scholarship of the Royal Asiatic Society for Jones's intellectual life and influence.

Kālidāsa, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, in modern critical translations; studies of Sanskrit drama and rasa; and scholarship comparing the Mahābhārata narrative with Kālidāsa's dramatic transformation.

The Internet Archive copy of the 1792 London edition, recording publication by Edwards, printing by J. Cooper, and the standard gathering structure. Institutional records in HathiTrust, WorldCat and major research libraries provide comparative descriptions.

Bonhams and Christie's provenance records for books from Alfred B. Perlman's library, including the Shakespeare Second Folio and fifteenth-century printed books; University of Chicago Oriental Institute annual reports; and the Chicago History Museum/Smithsonian survey record of the Alfred Perlman manuscript collection.

All copy-specific conclusions in this monograph are based on the photographs supplied and should be reconciled with direct physical examination before a binding condition guarantee or completeness statement is issued.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

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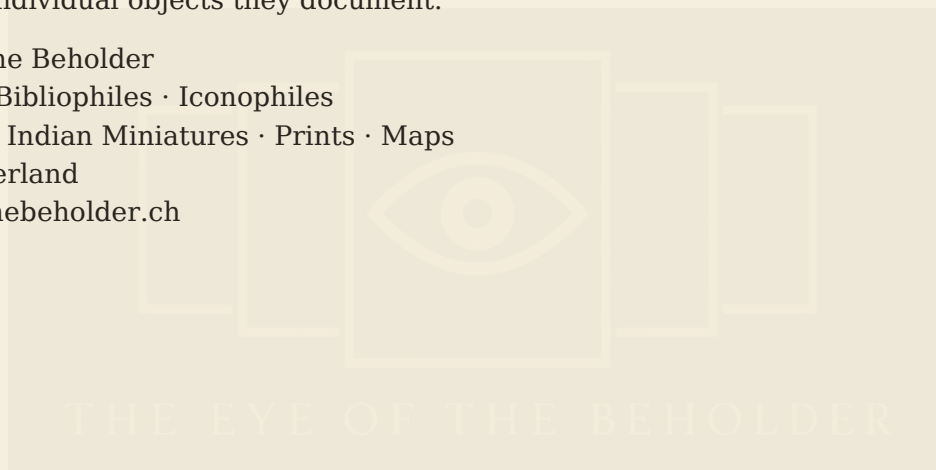
About The Eye of the Beholder

The Eye of the Beholder is a Switzerland-based international antiquarian books and works-on-paper maison devoted exclusively to India. It brings together rare and antiquarian books, first editions, early translations, illustrated volumes, travel narratives, Indian miniature paintings, prints and maps—objects through which India has understood itself and been encountered by the wider world.

Established as a Swiss company in 2022, the maison grew from a private collection developed over more than twenty-five years. Its founders are collectors and neuroscientists by training. Their scientific background informs an approach grounded in close observation, evidence, intellectual curiosity and an understanding that seeing is never a passive act.

Every work is studied with attention to bibliography, provenance, condition, iconography, historical context, printing history and the movement of ideas between cultures. The catalogues and research dossiers are conceived as works of scholarship in their own right—worthy of study beyond the individual objects they document.

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