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Looking for the Heavenly Casket

Michael Witzel

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Editorial note

To make a start, the editor presents a short article on an interesting topic of Vedic astronomy. The identity of the "Heavenly Bucket" has eluded us so far. Hopefully, the following interpretation will meet with the readers' approval. Any comments are welcome and will be summarized in a column "Discussion" in the next issue. The author then gets a chance to reply.

In this issue, we have used, where necessary for clarity, the Kyoto-Harvard Transcription in quoting Sanskrit words. Again, any comments on this scheme are welcome. The present form is an experiment meant for use in normal e-mail. Once we proceed to publish these articles on the World Wide Web (<http://www.arcadia.polimi.it/~ejvslst/>) as well, we will include full style transcription. We might publish a hardcopy edition in the future.

In this issue, we also include some news and announcements which should be of general interest. Thanks to F. J. Martinez for drawing our attention to his Indo-European WWW homepage. Similar news is welcome.

Michael Witzel

Looking for the Heavenly Casket

Abstract

Throughout Vedic literature, from the Rgveda to the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, reference is occasionally made to a "heavenly casket" (divya kosa), from which water is poured down towards earth. Several attempts have been made to locate this vessel in the sky. In the present article, the relevant materials are presented a new solution is proposed which combines, according to the well tested philological approach, mythological facts with a keen observation of nature.

Note: The following paper is given without diacritics, with the exception of a few Sanskrit passages which follow the Kyoto-Harvard convention of 1990. A list of Sanskrit words is given at the end of the paper, following this particular style of transcription.

Kyoto-Harvard transcription:

a A i I u U R RR L LL e ai o au M H k kh g gh G
c ch j jh J T Th D Dh N t th d dh n p ph b bh m y r l v
z S s h

Anunasika w, Vedic accents are placed after the vowels)

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The Vedic night sky has remained somewhat of a neglected stepchild of cosmological and cosmographical studies. (1) Certain of its properties have escaped the sharp eye of the protagonists of nature mythology at the turn of this century who identified most heavenly bodies with one or the other Vedic god. However, the night sky as such had not been regarded with such detail if we forget, for the moment, the long controversy of the last century about the origin of the Indian, Arabian and Chinese nakshatras.

Even in Kirfel's detailed analysis (2) of the heaven and the stars, an explanation of the nature of the night sky is missing. He reported, of course, two different types of movement of the sun, one -- as we all can see -- from east to south to west, and at night its return towards the east through some underground passage; the other type of movement is based on a more rarefied theory of some Brahmins only in the Brahmana texts, about the sun's movement from east to west in the daytime, and at night its return, with the sun's dark side pointing towards earth, to the east, where the sun disk would flip over again in the morning to point its shining side towards us.

This observation of Speijer and Sieg (3), actually, could have set the stage for some more detailed observations of the night sky. However, the study of Vedic mythology and cosmology has seen advances, since the Twenties, especially though not exclusively in the extensive and seminal work on the Adityas carried out by Paul Thieme, N.W. Brown, F.B.J. Kuiper, and their immediate predecessors such as H. Lueders. It is not surprising therefore that descriptions and interpretations of the phenomena of the night sky and its mythology were virtually absent until Kuiper's articles "The Three Strides of Visnu" and "The Heavenly Bucket" where (4) he pointed out that there also is another type of movement, of the actual turning of the night sky.

As is now well known, at night, the great Vedic god Varuna holds the world tree, in the form of a large Asvattha, up-side-down, its roots pointing upwards and its branches pointing downwards. "In the unfathomable space king Varuna, he of purified intelligence upholds the tree's stupa (RtuftS); they [the branches] stood directed downwards. May their rays be fixed in us" (RV 1.24.7) (4). This has become a familiar image that has occupied the imagination of Vedic seers, mystics, and poets for centuries. It occurs, again, in the Katha Upanisad 6.1, Taittiriya Aranyaka 1.11.5 (a text taken over from the Katha school) and in the Bhagavad Gita 15.1.

What does such an image entail? It means as Kuiper posited, that at night the netherworld is situated above us, in the night sky. The earth thus turns around its horizontal axis or, rather, it slowly shifts its horizon (as "viewed" from the

observer's position at the center of the earth, sky, and netherworld). This might seem a very strange image for us. However, the texts are clear enough and attention may also be drawn to a little known fact: the same idea can be found in a grave in W. Denmark. There, about one hundred years ago, a tomb was excavated in which a tree has been inserted, upside down, in a stone hand mill -- exactly the type of image Kuiper wanted to demonstrate for the Vedic night sky. (5) In fact, we have to distinguish between two types of movement of the night sky. One is the turning over that has just been described and the other one is the familiar movement of the stars in the sky. However, even this movement is not as simple as we might think.

Ancient people were well aware, of course, that the stars, just like the sun and the moon, rise in the east and set in the west. However, they also knew that if one looks northwards, towards the region where the polestar (Polaris) is seen now (6) all stars close to it turn around Polaris in a counter clockwise fashion. The polestar is situated at c. 28° north at Delhi, at 35° at Tokyo, at 42° in Boston, and at 52° north at Frankfurt: its exact position depends on the observer's location (latitude) on earth.

That the Vedic Indians, as well as the Iranians, actually paid a lot of attention to this fact is obvious from the following: The north pole as the single fixed point in the night sky is and was a favorite way to find one's way at night in open country as well as on sea. Now, among the Indo-European peoples who all orientated themselves towards the east, (7) the rising point of the sun, the Indo-Iranians alone exclude the northern direction from the scheme: while the east is "in front", the west "backwards", and the south "on the right", -- the north is "upwards": ut-tara, literally, "on the upper sideS, in Vedic, upara in Avestan (8) and 'brg in Middle Persian. (9)

In this upward region of the night sky, another strange feature can be found - at least, in mythology. Kuiper pointed out some 20 years ago that Varuna as well as some other gods turn over or tip over a heavenly vessel, a casket or bucket (kosa) and empty its contents over the earth down beneath it, as can be seen in passages like the following. RV 5.85.3 "Varuna has poured out the cask, with its rim turned downwards, over heaven, earth, and the interspace. Thereby the king of the whole world sprinkles the soil, as the rain (sprinkles) the barley." (10) RV 8.72.8 "With the ten (fingers) of Vivasvat, Indra has pulled up the heavenly bucket, with a threefold cord." (11) RV 8.72.10 "They (the hotrs) pour out with obeisance the inexhaustible source that goes round(?) with its bottom upwards (and) its rim downwards". (12)

It is interesting to note that the kosa is symbolized in the Mahavrata ritual by kumbha-s carried by young women on their heads. (13) However, the identity of this heavenly casket has escaped us for many years. Some ten years ago, when I wrote on the Vedic and Iranian concepts of the Milky Way and its movement

through the night sky (*Sur le chemin du ciel*, BEI 2, 1984, 213-279), I pointed out that the idea of the inverted netherworld and the inverted world tree can be understood very well if one takes into account the movement of the Milky Way. At that time, I thought that the heavenly bucket must be situated at or near the top of the night sky, near the zenith. More recently my friend Joel Brereton has written on this topic as well. He thought that the kosa was inside a rather close circle around the pole circumscribed each year by the Seven Rsis, the Geat Wain. Ursa Maior. (14) However, I think we both were not correct in our interpretation.

In fact, the matter is so simple that I hesitated to propose it for publication, -- but then, the question of the Vedic night sky as such is interesting enough to point out what kind of work still could be done, in spite of the recent book on the middle Vedic cosmography by K. Klaus.

The steps to be undertaken are clear enough: From the passages quoted above, it is clear that the Heavenly Casket is situated at the top of the sky. This can mean two things: One, the actual top of the sky, that is the zenith (right above the observer). However, this is a region of the sky that seems constantly to move, along with the other stars. (In this case one would have to look out for an asterism which looks like a casket and which would turn over, right on top of the observer in the Panjab. I have found none).

A second possibility is one of which I thought of some ten years ago when I was fascinated by the Milky Way itself, namely the region near the highest point, which the Milky Way reaches once every night (as well as once in the course of the year when observed at the same time every night). This is, as I thought at the time, a location near the highest point of the Milky Way, which might be indicated by the word *naka*.

However, another possibility, which I did not take into account at the time, is the actual highest, but unmovable point in the night sky, the region near the polestar or the polestar itself. As is well known, the star Polaris became our polestar only by c. 500 B.C.E. Before this time, the location of the pole was between three other stars in that region (since the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E.)

Now, the fundamental question to be raised here is whether every item found in mythology actually must have its counterpart in the daytime or the nighttime sky. Certainly, not every item. We do not know what Varuna could be, if he indeed should be represented by a star, a planet, a group of stars, etc. On the other hand, we now know that certain stars represent Vedic mythological figures, for example, Orion (*mrga*) is regarded as a form of Dyaus/Prajapati, shot by the arrow Isu Trikanda of Rudra, when Dyaus/Prajapati, in the form of a deer (*mrga*), pursued his

own daughter Usas. In this myth, Rudra is represented by Sirius (Tisya = Avestan: Tistriia), as Forssman has shown. (15) Yet other mythological items remain altogether invisible, as for example the heavenly tree that is turned upside down by Varuna. In fact, it must be invisible as it can only be situated, as JB and VadhPiS state, (16) at the center of the earth and of the sky. It is represented on earth by the mythical tree Plaksa Prasravana, situated at the source of the mundane river Sarasvati (in the foothills of the Panjab Himalayas) -- while at night, it is the axis that runs right through the pole star and the center of the earth (the observer's position): it is the invisible axis around which the night time sky turns.

If one then were to try to find the heavenly casket in the night-time sky, one cannot immediately discover, in the direct vicinity of the pole star anything that looks like a casket or a bucket. What then, could be this apparently "invisible" vessel? Some texts of the AV and of the Upanisads provide the key for an understanding. AV 10.8.9 (17) runs as follows:

"A bowl (camasa) with orifice downwards, bottom-side up - in it is deposited glory of all forms; there sit together the seven seers, who have become the keepers of it, the great one"

(tiryA'gbilaS camasa' Urdhva'budhnas
 ta'smin ya'zo ni'hitaM vizva'rUpam
 ta'd Asata R'SayaH sapta' sAka'M
 ye' asya' gopA' mahato' babhUvuH)

There is an even clearer version of this AV verse in BAUK 2.2.4 (SB 14.5.2.4)"There is a cup with its mouth below and its bottom up. In it is placed every form of glory. On its rim [tire] sit seven seers. Voice as an eighth is united with prayer (brahman)." [tr. HUME]

(arvA'gbilaS camasa' Urdhva'budhnas
 ta'smin ya'zo ni'hitaM vizva'rUpam
 ta'syAsata R'SayaH sapta' tI're
 vA'g aSTamI' bra'hmaNA saMvidAna')

The "commentary" that is given by the author of the Upanisad on this passage is still more enlightening as it even identifies the very Rsis:

"On its rim sit seven seers ... these two are Gotama and Bharadvaja, ... Visvamitra and Jamadagni, ... Vasistha and Kasyapa, ... and Atri."

From this passage, clearly, it appears that the verse is understood, at least by the Upanisadic thinker, as referring to the asterism sapta rsayah, the seven Rsis, or in our parlance, Ursa Maior, The Great Bear, Wain, or Wagon.

The names given by the Upanisad are, of course, those of the traditional Seven Rsis, but also the names of the actual stars of the Great Wain. (18) Further, the passage actually says that the seven seers sit right on the rim (tire) of the heavenly casket. In fact, we could not wish for a clearer identification -- and it is strange that it has eluded us for so long.

If one actually pays attention to the movement of Ursa Maior one can easily see that this asterism actually turns upside down every night. (Apart from actual observation of nature, I suggest to take a look at such computer programs as Voyager II for the Mac or EZC (Easy Cosmos) for the PC to observe the rotation of the Great Bear, the sapta rsayah, once per night, and similarly, once per year-- Such figures will be included in the WWW version of this paper).

Observation shows that the Great Wain has the form of a big spoon that is emptied out every night: it slowly turns around, scooping up the heavenly waters (19), and then releases them over the earth lying beneath it. (The same is the case at summer solstice but in a different position, so to say, upside down.-- A picture of this movement may be included in the WWW version of this paper.)To conclude: The heavenly casket, the great ladle on which the seven Rsis sit according to BAU, turns round every night, emptying its (mythological) contents, the heavenly waters.

Actually, this image actually is not so rare as we might think. It has its similarities in Japan (Hokuto shichisei, the seven stars of the "northern spoonS). One of the early generations of Japanese gods (coming after Izanagi/Izanami) in the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki also represents a name of this meaning. (20) Also, in North American English, the Great Wain is called "the Big Dipper" - an expression which is close to the Japanese one. In South America where the Incas regarded the Milky Way as a river, (21) the god of thunder, Inti, was seen at night in the asterism of the Great Bear, where he scooped water from the Milky Way, in order to wet the earth. (22) This image is close to the Black North American image of the Great Bear as a "drinking gourd." The slaves who in the 19th century tried to escape to the northern US and to Canada used the code words in their songs: "follow the drinking gourd! S (23) These similarities which go beyond the idea of a Heavenly River and a Big Ladle or Spoon should alert us for more striking similarities in myth, spread all over the American and Eurasian area. (24)

All of this, however, is not our immediate concern here. Rather, I have tried to point out that many features of the Vedic Night Sky still are not understood well --and

this means that we simply do not understand the meaning of some difficult passages of Vedic mythology, especially of those of the RV. In a wider context, this is of importance, too: If we do not pay attention to the counterclockwise motion of the Milky Way, we are not able to understand some complicated images of Vedic eschatology: why is there a path of the gods and a path of the ancestors, why is Yama's realm is both high up in the night sky and down below the earth as well as in the South. (25)

In short, we have to pay close attention to such images in order to grasp a large part of Vedic mythology and cosmography. Even now, after some 150 years of the study of Vedic texts, our understanding of the Vedic night sky still is in its infancy.

End notes

1. K. Klaus, *Die altindische Kosmologie. Nach den Brahmanas dargestellt*, Bonn (Indica et Tibetica Verlag) 1986.
2. W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder, nach den Quellen dargestellt*. repr. Wiesbaden 1967.
3. Speijer, *JBBRAS* 1906, p. 723; Sieg, *Der Nachtweg der Sonne*, *Nachr. d. Kgl. Ges. d. Wiss. Goettingen*, 1923, *Caland WZKM* 26, 1912, 119; see author, *Sur le chemin du ciel*, *BEI* 2, 1984, 213-279, n. 112.
4. Kuiper, *The three strides of Visnu*, *Indological Studies in Honor of W.N. Brown*, New Haven 1962, 137-151; *The heavenly bucket*, *India Maior* (Fs. Gonda), Leiden 1972, 144-156; -- *The bliss of Asa*, *IJJ* 8, 1964, 117; all reprinted in: Kuiper, *Ancient Indian Cosmogony* (ed. J. Irwin). Delhi: Vikas, 1983.
5. Author, *Sur le chemin du ciel*, n. 103; Feddersen, *Aarboger f. nord. Oldkynlighet og Historie*, 1881, 360.
6. Where it could be found, due to precession, since c. 500 B.C.E.
7. See author, *MSS* 30, p. 183, n. 19 and p. 176, n. 5.
8. See *MSS* 30, p. 163 sqq., esp. p. 183, n. 19 where this is explained as indicating the RupperS direction where the Great Bear is visible.
9. Found in Turfan manuscripts, cf. *MSS* 30, p. 191, n. 49.
10. Cf. also RV 5.83.8 "Scoop up the large bucket, pour it out at its proper place (ni), let the rivulets, set free, run forwards!"

11. For the meaning of kheda "cord" see A. Wezler, *Zum Verstaendnis von Chandogya-Upanisad* 5.1.12. *StII* 8/9 (1982), 155-188. This could mean that the sun (or here, Indra, the brother of the sun god Vivasvant) pulls up the kosa during its night-time movement, as a sort of counterweight.
12. Thus Kuiper, *The heavenly bucket*, 154; Geldner, *RV transl.*, ad loc., thinks of the Soma vessel.
13. JB 2.404 \$165: the head is the symbol of the sky (*divo rupam yan murdha*). Cf. author, *Sur le chemin du ciel*, n. 97, and Bereton, *Cosmographic images in the Brhadaranyakopanisad*, p.7.
14. J. Brereton, *Cosmographic images in the Brhadaranyako-panisad*, *IIJ* 34, 1991, 1-17.
15. KZ 82, 1968, 37-65. Other, unidentified stars are, e.g., Prajapati's feet. For many other unidentified asterisms, see BEI 2, 238, notes 10-11.
16. See author, *Sur le chemin du ciel*, p.223; to be precise, the center of heaven and earth is exactly "one span north of it".
17. Actually quoted by me in my article on the Milky Way (BEI 2) in 1984.
18. See J. E. Mitchiner, *Traditions of the Seven Rsis*, Delhi 1982.
19. See BAU 3.6, with Gargi's question stating that the earth is woven on water, etc.
20. Ame.no ku-hiza-mochi.no kami 'Heavenlyly water drawing gourd possessor', and as usual in this list, with his mundane counterpart: Kuni.no ku-hiza-mochi.no kami 'Earthly water drawing gourd possessor'.
21. Differently, the dark spots in the Milky Way were regarded by the Incas as certain animals, while actual asterisms, as for example a group of stars in Lyra, symbolize animals such as the llama. See A. F. Aveni, *Sky Watchers of Ancient Mexico*, Austin 1980, A. Metraux, in: Pierre Grimal, *Mythen der Voelker*, Hamburg (Fischer) 1967, Bd. III, p. 200; cf. author, BEI 2, n. 18.
22. A. Metraux, *Mythen der Voelker*, III, p. 201.
23. This was meant as secretly giving the directions (pointing out the North) of the "underground railway", bringing slaves from the south to the northern abolitionist states and into Canada before the Civil War of 1861.
24. See my forthcoming article: *Vala and Iwato: The myth of the hidden sun in India, Japan, and beyond*. (Conf. on Mythology, Hamilton, Ont., 1993).
25. See BEI 2, n. 103: "with the ascent of Varuna to the zenith of the night sky, Yama and his paradise also move"; cf. Kuiper, *Bliss of Asa*, p. 119.

Abbreviations and literature

A. F. Aveni, *Sky Watchers of Ancient Mexico*, Austin 1980

AV Atharvaveda (Saunaka version)

BAU Brhadaranyaka Upanisad

BEI Bulletin des Etudes Indiennes, Paris

J. Brereton, *Cosmographic images in the Brhadaranyakopanisad*,

IJJ 34, 1991, 1-17

B. Forssman, *Apaosa, der Gegner des Tistriia*, KZ 82, 1968, 37-65

IJJ Indo-Iranian Journal, Dordrecht

JB Jaminiya Brahmana

JBBRAS Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic
Society

W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder, nach den Quellen*

dargestellt, repr. Wiesbaden 1967K. Klaus, *Die altindische Kosmologie. Nach
den Brahmanas*

dargestellt, Bonn (Indica et Tibetica Verlag) 1986

F. B. J. Kuiper, *The heavenly bucket*, in: *India Maior* (Fs. Gonda),

Leiden 1972, 144-156. (repr. in: Kuiper, *Ancient Indian*

Cosmogony (ed. J. Irwin). Delhi: Vikas, 1983)

-----, *The Bliss of Asa*, IJJ 8, 1964, 96-129. (repr. in:

Kuiper, *Ancient Indian Cosmogony* (ed. J. Irwin). Delhi:

Vikas, 1983)

-----, *The three strides of Visnu*, *Indological Studies in Honor
of W.N. Brown*, New Haven 1962, 137-151

KZ Kuhns Zeitschrift = Zeitschrift fuer vergleichende
Sprachforschung

A. Metraux, in: Pierre Grimal, *Mythen der Voelker*, Hamburg

(Fischer) 1967

J. E. Mitchiner, *Traditions of the Seven Rsis*, Delhi 1982

MSS Muenchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft

RV Rgveda

SB Satapatha Brahmana

StII Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik, Reinbek

VadhPiS Vadhula Pitṛmedha Sutra (in Ms. of Vadhula Sutra,
Govt. Library, Madras, see author in StII 1)

M. Witzel, Sur le chemin du ciel, BEI 2, 1984, 213-279

<NB.: Partial English translation available with the author>

WZKM Wiener Zeitschrift zur Kunde des Morgenlandes

A list of sanskrit terms

(according to the Kyoto-Harvard convention)

iSu trikANDa

RSi

KaTha UpaniSad

Kazyapa

koza

tiSya

tiStriia

tIra

TaittirIya AraNyaka

divo rUpam yan mUrdhA

nakSatra

nAka

plakSa prAsravaNa

BharadvAja

MahAvrata

mRga

VaruNa

VizvAmitra

VasiSTha

saptarSayaH

stUpa

hotR

The Kyoto-Harvard Convention (1990)

a A i I u U R RR L LL e ai o au M H

k kh g gh G

c ch j jh J

T Th D Dh N

t th d dh n

p ph b bh m

y r l v

z S s h

Anunasika = w

Vedic accents are placed after the vowel

NEW BOOKS

1. HARVARD ORIENTAL SERIES, vol. 50 has been released a few months ago:

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[NB: the texts are unformatted. The discette is formatted in DOS style which is easily readable by Macintosh computers these days. On request, we may supply a Mac version in the near future.] 1994. Pages, xviii, 667. Royal 8<. Price, \$50.00.

[ISBN 0-674-76971-6]

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FROM THE PREFACE:

This volume completes the fifty volume mark of works published so far, during the more than one hundred years of the existence of this series. Appropriately, this issue is devoted to the oldest Sanskrit text, the Rgveda. In addition, it presents the text,

for the first time, in the form in which we have desired to see it for more than one hundred and twenty years; namely, as a metrical text, and in a phonetic shape that is very close to the form in which it was composed more than 3000 years ago -- which form is different from that of the later redaction of Sakalya cum suis. I thank both authors of this volume for their dedication and perseverance in letting the Rgveda acquire its old shape again.

The publication of this volume also marks the start of a new Vedic program of publication in the HOS. Apart from the Rgveda, the following volumes are in various stages of preparation: Paippalada Atharvaveda, Samaveda Samhita with commentaries, Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, Atharva Pratisakhya. At the same time, we also envisage a significant widening of the series to include other, non-Sanskritic texts...

... I would like to draw the readers' attention to our new sub-series "HOS - Opera Minora", which will be available directly from the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard, 53 Church Street, Cambridge MA 02138, USA (and, probably, from some agents in America, Europe and India; this will be announced separately).

In the new sub-series, we plan to publish, in fairly inexpensive form, conference volumes, such as that of the Harvard symposium of May 1994 on translating from Indian texts, or, finally, those of the the 1989 International Vedic Workshop. Further, we plan to print reports...., a preliminary edition (such as that of the Paippalada Samhita of the Atharvaveda); and we may also publish some reprints of the more expensive HOS volumes for the use of students, such as the long out of print translation of the Rgveda by K.F. Geldner. Finally, I hope to initiate in the new series reprints of the "Opera Minora" of American Indologists. ... Like its German counterpart, the Glasenapp Series of Kleine Schriften, we hope that the new series will not just facilitate our own work, but that it will also stimulate reading and discussion of the often stupendous volume and depth of work that our predecessors have carried out, which work, however, tends to become increasingly overlooked in an academic climate that is increasingly geared to quick, fashionable, and trendy production. M. W.

2. NEW VERSION OF BUEHLER'S "GRUNDRISS":

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The German publisher de Gruyter (Berlin/New York) is ready to release the first volume of a new, greatly enlarged and much more comprehensive version of Buehler's famous Grundriss published around the turn of the century (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Alterthumskunde/ Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research). The new series, to be announced in more detail later on, is edited by Albrecht Wezler (Hamburg University) and Michael Witzel (Harvard University).

The first volume is an update on the interface of archaeology, linguistics, philology and history of early South Asia (ed. G. Erdosy, Toronto conference of 1992). Other volumes in line include: Epic grammar by Th. Oberlies, A Handbook of Pali Literature by O. von Hinueber (with an appendix by H.O. Pint on Grammatical Literature), and a Vedic history.

The first volume has the following contents:

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George Erdosy, ed.

CONTENTS

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K.A.R. Kennedy

Have Aryans been identified in the prehistoric skeletal record from South Asia? Biological anthropology and concepts of ancient races.

M. M. Deshpande

Vedic Aryans, non-Vedic Aryans and non-Aryans: judging the linguistic evidence of the Veda.

M. Witzel

Early Indian history: linguistic and textual parameters.

J.G. Shaffer and D.A. Lichtenstein

The concepts of "cultural tradition" and "palaeoethnicity" in South Asian Archaeology.

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The Avesta as source for the early history of the Iranians

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South Asia from a Central Asian perspective (3500-1750 B.C.)

W.A. Fairervis

Central Asia and the Rigveda - the archaeological evidence

J. M. Kenoyer

Interaction systems, specialized crafts and culture change: the Indus Valley Tradition and the Indo-Gangetic Tradition in South Asia

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Reconstructing social context from language: Indo-Aryan and Dravidian prehistory

K. R. Norman

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R. Salomon

On drawing socio-linguistic distinctions in Old Indo-Aryan: the question of Kshatriya Sanskrit and related problems

M. Witzel

Rigvedic history: poets, chieftains and polities

A. Parpola

The problem of the Aryans and the Soma: the archaeological evidence

H. Nyberg

The problems of the Aryans and the Soma: the botanical evidence

NEWS ON DISSERTATION THESES

A list of current theses in Vedic Studies at Harvard

Ph.D. theses in various stages of completion underway in the field of Vedic studies at Harvard include the following (working titles) :

Maria Green

Paippalada Samhita 17, Edition, translation, study

Carlos Lopez

Paippalada Samhita 13-15, edition, transl., study

Howard Resnick

Vaikhanasa Mantraprasna 5-8, ed., transl., study

Susan Rosenfield

The fragments of the Katha Brahmana, ed., tr., study

Ming-Ling Wang

The medieval coronation rituals of India and Nepal

To be added, in this context, is a former student of M. Witzel at Leiden, Netherlands:

Yasuhiro Tsuchiyama, Hokkaido University,

Paippalada Samhita 10, ed., transl., study

And a completed thesis:

Carlos Perez-Coffie, Harvard U.

Edition and study of Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 2 in the Kanva version, Harvard Ph.D. 1984

Brief descriptions of two theses are added here; more are to follow. You are invited to send similar accounts on Vedic theses (in a wider sense) to the journal.

MARIA GREEN

Work In Progress:

Paippalada Atharvaveda 17.

I am currently preparing, as a doctoral dissertation, a critical edition of the 17th book of the Paippalada Atharvaveda.

The Paippalada represents the "other" of the two surviving Atharvaveda Samhitas, being much less studied than the better-known Vulgate (sometimes erroneously called Saunaka) Samhita. Until relatively recently the Paippalada material was believed by the scholarly world to have survived only in a badly corrupted Kasmiri version, which, although brilliantly and painstakingly reconstructed by Leroy Barret during the early part of this century, remained to a large extent practically unintelligible. During the 1960's, however, a vastly superior Orissa manuscript tradition was brought to the attention of the academic community by D. Bhattacharyya, who proceeded to publish edited versions of Paippalada books 1-4. No other books of the Orissa Paippalada have yet been edited or reproduced in print, and consequently the greater part of the Samhita text remains unavailable and unread.

The Paippalada version differs from the Vulgate in several important aspects, the most important of which is that some 25% of the Paippalada version, the slightly longer of the two, does not appear in the Vulgate. Other differences include occasional variations in vocabulary as well as frequent variations in verse or pada order. Book 17 corresponds to some extent with the 12th kanda of the Vulgate Samhita, although there are hymns that appear in other parts of the Vulgate or in other Vedic texts.

Some 120 stanzas do not seem to have survived outside of the Paippalada tradition itself. The subject matter of the hymns is highly varied and should be discussed at a length greater than is available to me here.

The edition currently relies for its Orissa sources upon a 17th-century manuscript, available in the photographed form, and a modern hand-written copy of that same manuscript. The final work will contain variant readings from the Orissa and Kasmir Paippaladas, from the Vulgate, and from other Vedic texts in which parallel verses appear. It will be accompanied by an introduction focusing on the poetical

aspects of the hymns, by an English translation, and by philological and exegetical annotations.

Maria Green,
Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies,
Harvard University
(Green3@Hulaw1.harvard.edu)

CARLOS LOPEZ

Work in progress:

Paippalada samhita 13-15

I am presently a fourth-year graduate student in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard working with Professor Michael Witzel in the areas of Vedic philology, ritual, and early Indian history.

Note: I have avoided diacritical marks except in the examples which I feel are necessary for the presentation. Below are the equivalences used in the article. Long vowels are marked by doubling the short vowel.

x = palatal s

sh = retroflex

D = retroflex d

N = retroflex n

Like all other Vedic texts, the Atharva Veda (AV) has been transmitted and preserved through its various schools or sakhas. Even though the textual tradition has provided evidence for the existence of several sakhas of the AV, nine in fact, it was not until the 1870s when Rudolph von Roth came upon a MS of another of the AV schools, namely the Paippalada. This highly corrupt birch bark (bhurja) MS written in Sharada script which was found in Kashmir has remained, only until recently, mostly incomprehensible to modern Indologists. Leroy C. Barrett and Raghu Vira's editions have not done much to provide a clear understanding of this text because of their exclusive reliance on the Kashmiri MS and its multiple copies. However, in the 1950s, new light was shed on the study of the PS. D.M. Bhattacharyya, using some sets of MSS of the PS which he had acquired in Orissa,

began to work on an edition of the PS using the the Orissa version (PSO) as a corrective on the Kashmiri one (PSK). However, his efforts until his death and those of his son, Dipak Battacharyya, have not yet yielded the true picture of the PS.

Part of the reason for the difficulty in reading the manuscript is due to the clear lack of understanding of the individual MSS traditions of PSK and PSO. An analysis of the available MSS in the light of local Sanskrit pronunciation and paleographical peculiarities will yield the key to unravelling the often incomprehensible readings of PSK and PSO.

Another great bulk of errors is due to writing mistakes that originated from the copying of the Sharada into Nagari. This was even noticed by Buhler in the last century. In this step, the corruptions have arisen from the difficulty in reading Sharada ligatures. A quick look at the Devanagari MSS of PSK will show that typical Devanagari mistakes such as p/y, c/v, and b/v are not predominant in our MSS. Most writing mistakes are due to the ambiguity in the scribe's mind between two possible choices in cases where the original (either Gupta or older Sharada) ligature is not clear. Some typical writing mistakes when copying from Sharada to Devanagari are: ta/u, m/s, bhy/ty, Cy/Cr (vocalic) and th/s (retroflex).

Another fountain of errors is the influence of local pronunciation on the recitation of Sanskrit. Already, Buhler in his report as Inspector of Education in the Bombay province had remarked on the significant difference of the pronunciation of Sanskrit in Kashmir and in other areas of India. This source of corruptions has gone unnoticed by Barret, Raghu Vira and other scholars working on Kashmiri MSS. One only has to listen to present-day recitation to see the radical influence of local pronunciation. For instance, -v- cannot be pronounced at the beginning of a word, thus we find raatum K: vratam Or. One example may suffice to show the pervasive influence of local pronunciation has had on the transmission of the PSK:

[yixe torze taa.....; atha kuxmaanDe zoyaat yo opotyau manyeta...] = ishe tvorje tvaa...; atha kushmaNDair juhuyaat yo 'puta iva manyeta.

Some typical peculiarities of Kashmiri pronunciation are easily seen from the above example: x~sh, Cva~Cu, z~j, o~u, etc. The above example does not fail to stress that the bhurja mss itself rest on recitation, whether directly or indirectly.

Book 13 consists of 9 hymns. All hymns except 13.9 are in verse. Hymn 9 is in prose. Hymns 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9 have no parallel in the Shaunaka, so they can be considered new for the AV collection. Book 14 similarly consists of 9 hymns in verse. Hymns 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 again have no parallels in Shaunaka. Book 15 consists of 23 hymns all in verse. Hymns 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23 have no parallels in Shaunaka.

The internal arrangement within each book in the PSO collection is quite peculiar. Each book is composed of hymns which in PSK are found in their entirety but in PSO are divided into two hymns of 10 +x. To clarify, PSK 13.12 = PSO 13.1 (10 verses) + PSO 13.2 (6 verses). What emerges from a no so close examination of kanda 13-15 is that the text arrangement of the two traditions seems to be different at the most basic level, the sukta level.

This dissertation will establish a critical edition of kandas 13-15 based on the reading of the MSS from Kashmir and several MSS from Orissa. Particular stress will be placed on clarifying the corruptions found in both branches by making use of paleographic evidence as well as the little-used evidence from the influence of local pronunciation on Vedic recitation. The edition will be accompanied by an introduction that will discuss the methodological issues involved in edition of Vedic texts. Philological and exegetical annotations will be an integral part of the dissertation. Special attention will be paid to cultural and religious items, such as the emerging worship of Rudra.

Carlos Lopez

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PROJECTS

Proposal for a handlist of microfilms and tape recordings of Vedic texts, a list of films and videos of Vedic rituals, and a list of electronic Vedic texts.

It is hereby proposed that we begin to publish lists of microfilms and tape recordings which we have made during our various trips to the subcontinent or to libraries elsewhere.

In the next issue, a list of microfilms (some 40,000 fols.) made in the Seventies in various parts of India and Nepal will be published by M. Witzel. These include some rare Vedic texts which are in need of study - something that cannot always be carried out by just one person or at one location alone. It is hoped that this kind of inventory will stimulate exchange and cooperation which has, of course, always been extended on a personal basis between some scholars in the field.

We should extend this list to films and videotapes of Vedic rituals and, perhaps most importantly, to electronic texts. Over the years the undersigned has collected some 12 MB of Vedic texts, -- to which we may now add the 13 MB of Epic texts, graciously put at our disposal by Prof. Muneo Tokunaga of Kyoto University. The liberality of this magnitude has to be gratefully acknowledged. It is hoped that we can extend this to our various collections of Vedic texts as well. -- MW

WWW & INTERNET NEWS

Sender: Francisco Javier Martinez Garcia <martinez@em.unifrankfurt.d400.de>

Subject: Indo-European WWW-Server

I would like to announce the construction of the Indo-European Homepage located at: http://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/home/ftp/pub/titus/public_html

It will function as a central web site for access to resources of relevance to Comparatists, Indo-Europeanists and other interested scholars.

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http://www.rz.unifrankfurt.de/home/ftp/pub/titus/public_html

Attention should also be drawn to the TITUS project

([http://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/home/ftp/pub/titus/public_html/](http://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/home/ftp/pub/titus/public_html/index.html)

[index.html](http://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/home/ftp/pub/titus/public_html/index.html)) at the University of Frankfurt which already has a number of Vedic texts in its archives. An amalgated list will be published in the next issue of EJVS.

Our own EJVS-home page (<http://www.arcadia.polimi.it/~ejvslist/>) is still under construction. A WWW version of this issue of EJVS -- with diacritics -- will be added there in the near future.

EVENTS

1. Conference on Samaveda, planned for late fall 1995, at Harvard

Organized by: International Foundation for Studies in the Vedas, Rahway, New Jersey
The Department of Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, Finland,
Center for Vedic Studies, Department of Sanskrit, Harvard University,
Akhand Bharatavarsa Vedavidya Parisad in collaboration with: Sri Sarvaraya Pathasala, Kapileswarapuram, East Godavari Dst., Andhra, Valmiki Vidyapeeth, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Prospective date: November/December 1995 (Margasirsa), at Harvard University. Exact time and venue to be announced.

The International Foundation for Studies in the Vedas (formerly International Foundation for Vedic Education) organized an earlier conference on Atharvaveda in the United Nations complex in July 1993. In this meeting, traditional Pandits, Indian and western scholars participated and freely exchanged views on the AV and the subjects traditionally allied with it, such as medicine. This time, deliberations will be restricted to the Samaveda, its music, and links with later musical traditions.

From the original announcement:

The Foundation's aim is to promote Vedic education by continuing the traditional methods of teaching as well as by adopting contemporary methods of education and study with a view to preserving the Vedas. The Foundation also aims to promote research in the Vedas from the traditional perspective to gain a better understanding of the Vedas.

The objective of the Second International Conference on Vedas is to bring together the traditional Vedic scholars from India and Nepal, and the contemporary scholars specializing in Sama Veda and Gandharva Veda from around the world, to discuss present problems and future tasks, such as preservation of those Sakhas which are on the verge of extinction, and to endeavor to find ways of resurrecting those Sakhas which appear to have been lost.

Topics for the 1995 Conference include:

- * The Sama Veda and its ancillary texts;
- * The Gandharva Veda and its current practices;
- * Vedic recitation and performance;
- * Problems of oral versus written traditions;
- * Meaning of Vedic words and translation method;
- * Genesis of the Vedic corpus;
- * Historical development of Sama Veda and Gandharva Veda since Vedic times.

The format of the conference is that of a mutual and general, very open and frank discussion. We all want to learn from each other, especially since some of us have specialized in particular areas that are not usually dealt with by other colleagues. Others have developed particular approaches that we want to discuss in open sessions.

For more information contact:

Mr. Sastry L. Kambhampati, President, International Foundation for Studies in the Vedas,

P.O.B. 318, Rahway, (or 15 Conduit Way, Colonia) New Jersey, NJ 07065,

ph. 908 396 3941, or

Michael Witzel, Chair, Committee on South Asian Studies, Harvard University, 53 Church Street, Cambridge, MA-02138 phone: 617-495-3295, fax: 617-496 8571,

email: Witzel@husc3.harvard.edu.

2. Conference on Dowry and Bride Burning, planned for early October 1995, at Harvard.

Organized by the International Society Against Dowry and Bride Burning in India, Inc. and the Committee on South Asian Studies, Harvard University.

The conference is planned for September 30 - Oct. 2, 1995 at Harvard.

Exact time and location to be announced.

The meeting will deal with the issues of Sati, excessive dowry and its recent development, bride burning, according to Vedic and post-Vedic sources as well as with the gruesome modern outcome of these practices. Participants who have declared their intention to attend include scholars, Indian lawyers, and some surviving victims of bride burning.

From the original announcement:

Extortion of dowry money in contracting marriages has reached a desperate proportion in modern India. Thousands of newly married women are burnt alive every year by their in-laws because their fathers may have failed to pay the outstanding dowry instalment. Already in 1984, 500 young women were burned that year in the Delhi area alone, and from 1988-1990, 11,259 burnings were reported.

The acknowledgment and awareness of dowry and bride-burning should begin at its source: in India. Unfortunately, the social, political, and administrative leaders in India seem uninterested. Characteristically, their first reaction is to deny the tragedy, minimize its gravity, and stereotype it as media propaganda. People seem to feel no guilt when they burn a bride. The root of this strange behaviour is not clearly understood. However, the solution to the problem may be found in the ancient Dharma texts themselves and in the spiritual wisdom of India's own philosophy. Research articles are being invited from scholars on Indian culture and history. They will be published in the souvenir of the Conference. H. B. Thakur

Please contact:

Himendra B. Thakur, Chair, Board of Directors, International Society

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COLOPHON

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<et al., exact composition to follow>

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All inquiries are to be sent to the editors,

Ejvs-list@husc.harvard.edu

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ITI VAARTAM

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