

ABSTRACT FOR KYOTO CONFERENCE

Elements of 'Indo-European' poetry and myth in Vedic and early Sanskrit Literature

When in 1860 Rudolf Westphal compared Vedic and Avestan and Ancient Greek metres and found significant similarities between them, he opened the way for further exploration of a possible link to their pre-history. Antoine Meillet's work in this field published in 1923 provided the impetus for the study of metres used in other Indo-European language groups with the aim of establishing a common source. The metrical evidence has been augmented by examination in more recent times of common elements in mythology and other aspects of poetry, underpinned by the well-known linguistic advances in comparative philology to which Emile Benveniste's *Indo-European Language and Society* (1973) is impressive testimony. Martin West's *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (2007) is the latest and most wide-ranging attempt to bring together the fruits of this research. The starting point is most often found in Sanskrit sources, especially Veda and Epic.

In this paper I shall briefly examine what I believe to be the most cogent comparative evidence that has been evinced for traces of inherited poetry and mythology in Veda and early Sanskrit literature. Special emphasis will be placed on examples where the evidence of vocabulary appears to support an inherited concept such as that of an earlier race of gods (pūrve devāḥ RV 1.164.50 etc., θεοὶ πρότεροι in Hesiod's *Theogony* and the 'former gods' (*karuilies siunes*) found in Hittite texts). In reviewing the evidence I shall attempt to establish the methodology for such comparisons. For example, the Vedic description of Uṣas, urviyā ví bhāti (RV 1.92.9) 'she shines out far and wide', would seem of little significance in this discussion were it not that a uniquely occurring Greek proper name for the mother of the sun, Euryphaessa, contains the same etyma. Further comparative analysis of the Vedic poetry of Dawn reveals the possibility of inheritance from a very early period. I shall deal with cases where the evidence is better explained by 'horizontal transmission' and will conclude with an assessment of the viability of tracing known literature back to a hypothetical origin in the light of what has so far been achieved in this field.

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