

“The Poetics of Accentuation in the Ṛg Vedic Family Books”

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Accentual melody as a poetic feature has been customarily overlooked due to the observation that accent does not bear on meter; this has borne the misconception, likely extrapolated from the model of Latin meter, that accentuation does not have a poetic dimension of its own. In stress-accented Latin, on the one hand, the cadence of quantitative meter overtakes the normal accentuation; however, in pitch-accented Vedic, it is a fact of performance that the pitch accentuation is audible in recitation (Levy and Staal 1963, Howard 1986), wherefore it must contribute to the aesthetics of the hymnal poetry. Lubotsky (1995) was the first to demonstrate the existence of “accentual contours” as bearers of melody in Vedic, in ṚV. *maṇḍala* II; from the rate of recurrence of accentual melodies in *maṇḍala* II, we can deduce that they represented a means of ornamentation to the Vedic *ṛṣis*, rather than the outcome of frequency probability. We now hope to broaden this line of inquiry by computational corpus analysis of an extended sample, viz. the ṚV. family books (*maṇḍalas* II-VII), divided into subcorpora by *maṇḍala* and further by (metrically restored) syllable count. We first run an algorithm to locate and statistically compare accentual melodies; we then propose a taxonomy of these melodies based on our results. By our conclusions, we hope to untether accentual melody from the yoke of meter and establish it as a new dimension of the poetics of pitch-accented poetry.

References

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