

The Astronomical and Astrological Chapters in the *Atharvaveda-Pariśiṣṭa*

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The *Atharvaveda-Pariśiṣṭa* (abbr. AVPar) attracted the attention of the great Indologists in the nineteenth century, but partly due to its wide coverage of topics including divination and astrology, it has not been studied sufficiently. In recent years, however, Peter Bisschop and Arlo Griffiths published translations of chapters 36 and 40 (IIJ 46, 2003 and SII 24, 2007 respectively). Thanks to their works, especially that of 2003 which offered a useful table summarizing the past studies on AVPar, it turned out that the chapters which are still waiting for further studies are those which contain astrological and divinatory elements, such as chapter 1 (*Nakṣatralpa*) and chapters 50–57. Thus we began carefully examining these chapters, paying a special attention to their meaning in the context of the history of astronomy and astrology.

Some parts of the *Nakṣatralpa*, which has been frequently referred to as one of the five Atharvanic kalpas, are still difficult to understand, because the poor condition of the transmission of manuscripts prevented establishment of readable texts. In order to establish better texts and to have better understanding of the astronomy and astrology in the *Nakṣatralpa*, we first focused our attention on chapters 50–57 which deal with topics related with astrology.

There are some key words which help us to find the relative date of the texts from the viewpoint of history of the Indian astronomy and astrology. Among them are *grahas*, *rāhu* and *ketu*. As Yano has pointed out,¹ there were five stages of the development of the meaning of the *grahas* besides the demons which possesses children in medical texts — (1) the *graha* as an eclipse demon, (2) the *graha* who is also called *rāhu*, (3) the *grahas* as five planets, (4) the seven *grahas* including the Sun and the Moon (which were originally *grāhya* ‘to be eclipsed’), but without a fixed order, and (5) the seven *grahas* in the fixed order of weekdays.

With this view in mind it became clear that there were several different chronological stages even within the eight consecutive chapters 50 to 57 and that chapter 51 belongs to the latest stage since the seven *grahas* are enumerated in the weekday order. Interestingly, it is in the next chapter 52, that *graha* was used in the widest sense, even beyond the five classes proposed by Yano.

Judging from the astronomical contents we can see obvious similarities between AVPar and Varāhamihira’s *Brhatsamhitā*. In some cases, we find exactly the same verbal expressions in AVPar and Utpala’s commentary on the *Brhatsamhitā*. These similarities also testify that the date of the latest part of AVPar is before the sixth century, namely, the date of the *Brhatsamhitā*.

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¹ Michio Yano, ‘Calendar, Astrology, and Astronomy’, *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. by Gavin Flood, London, 2003, pp. 376–392.