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Early Vedic

Introduction — Part 3: The Ṛgveda

Roadmap

- The Ṛgveda
  - Structure and Content
  - Poets
  - Setting
  - Form
  - Text Sample

Structure and Content

- Sacred text in verse
    - in archaic language
    - in hieratic style
    - for liturgical use

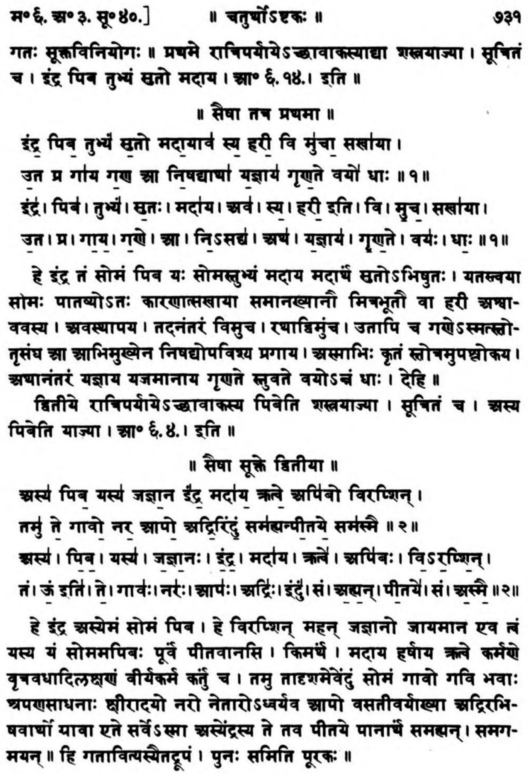
- Consisting of 1028 hymns
    - in different meters
    - of varying length
    - with 10462 stanzas

Performance of Yajña by Nambudiri Brahman, Kerala

Structure and Content

- Divided into 10 books (Maṇḍala)
  - older "family books" 2–8
  - younger books 1, 9–10

- Purpose of hymns
  - to praise gods
  - accompany ritual actions


म॰ ६. अ॰ ३. सू॰ ४०.] ॥ चतुर्थोऽष्टकः ॥ ७३१

गतः सूक्तविनियोगः ॥ प्रथमे रात्रिपर्यायेऽच्छावाकस्याद्या शस्त्रयाज्या । सूचितं च । इंद्र पिब तुभ्यं सुतो मदाय । आ॰ ६.१४.। इति ॥

॥ सैषा तत्र प्रथमा ॥

इंद्र पिब तुभ्यं सुतो मदायाव स्य हरी वि मुंचा सखाया ।
उत प्र गाय गण आ निषद्याथा यज्ञाय गृणते वयो धाः ॥१॥
इंद्र । पिब । तुभ्यं । सुतः । मदाय । अव । स्य । हरी इति । वि । मुच । सखाया ।
उत । प्र । गाय । गणे । आ । निऽसद्य । अथ । यज्ञाय । गृणते । वयः । धाः ॥१॥

हे इंद्र तं सोमं पिब यः सोमस्तुभ्यं मदाय मदार्थं सुतोऽभिषुतः । यतस्त्वया सोमः पातव्योऽतः कारणात्सखाया समानख्यानौ मित्रभूतौ वा हरी अश्वाववस्य । अवस्थापय । तदनंतरं विमुच । रथाद्विमुंच । उतापि च गणेऽस्मत्स्तोतृसंघ आ आभिमुख्येन निषद्योपविश्य प्रगाय । अस्माभिः कृतं स्तोत्रमुपश्लोकय । अथानंतरं यज्ञाय यजमानाय गृणते स्तुवते वयोऽन्नं धाः । देहि ॥
द्वितीये रात्रिपर्यायेऽच्छावाकस्य पिबेति शस्त्रयाज्या । सूचितं च । अस्य पिबेति याज्या । आ॰ ६.४.। इति ॥

॥ सैषा सूक्ते द्वितीया ॥

अस्य पिब यस्य जज्ञान इंद्र मदाय क्रत्वे अपिबो विरप्शिन् ।
तमु ते गावो नर आपो अद्रिरिंदुं समह्यन्पीतये समस्मै ॥२॥
अस्य । पिब । यस्य । जज्ञानः । इंद्र । मदाय । क्रत्वे । अपिबः । विऽरप्शिन् ।
तं । ऊं इति । ते । गावः । नरः । आपः । अद्रिः । इंदुं । सं । अह्यन् । पीतये । सं । अस्मै ॥२॥

हे इंद्र अस्येमं सोमं पिब । हे विरप्शिन् महन् जज्ञानो जायमान एव त्वं यस्य यं सोममपिबः पूर्वं पीतवानसि । किमर्थं । मदाय हर्षाय क्रत्वे कर्मणे वृत्रवधादिलक्षणं वीर्यकर्म कर्तुं च । तमु तादृशमेवेंदुं सोमं गावो गवि भवाः श्रपणसाधनाः क्षीरादयो नरो नेतारोऽध्वर्यव आपो वसतीवर्याख्या अद्रिरभिषवार्थो ग्रावा एते सर्वेऽस्मा अस्येंद्रस्य ते तव पीतये पानार्थं समह्यन् । समगमयन् ॥ हि गतावित्यस्यैतद्रूपं । पुनः समिति पूरकः ॥

Text of Ṛgveda in Devanāgarī with commentary.
Page from edition of Müller (1849–1874)

Structure and Content — “Family Books”

	Ancestor	Hymns
Maṇḍala 2	Gr̥tsamada	43
Maṇḍala 3	Viśvāmitra	62
Maṇḍala 4	Vāmadeva	58
Maṇḍala 5	Atri	87
Maṇḍala 6	Bharadvāja	75
Maṇḍala 7	Vasiṣṭha	104

Poets

- Hymns composed by number of poets (Ṛṣi)
  - whose names and families known
- Poetry of RV ritual craftsmanship
  - employ different stylistic devices
  - “paid” in livestock by patron
- But some poets with literary masterpieces
  - like Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha

Modern depiction of Vaśiṣṭha and his wife Arundhatī performing Yajña
Shri Tulsi Peeth Seva Nyas — CC BY-SA 3.0

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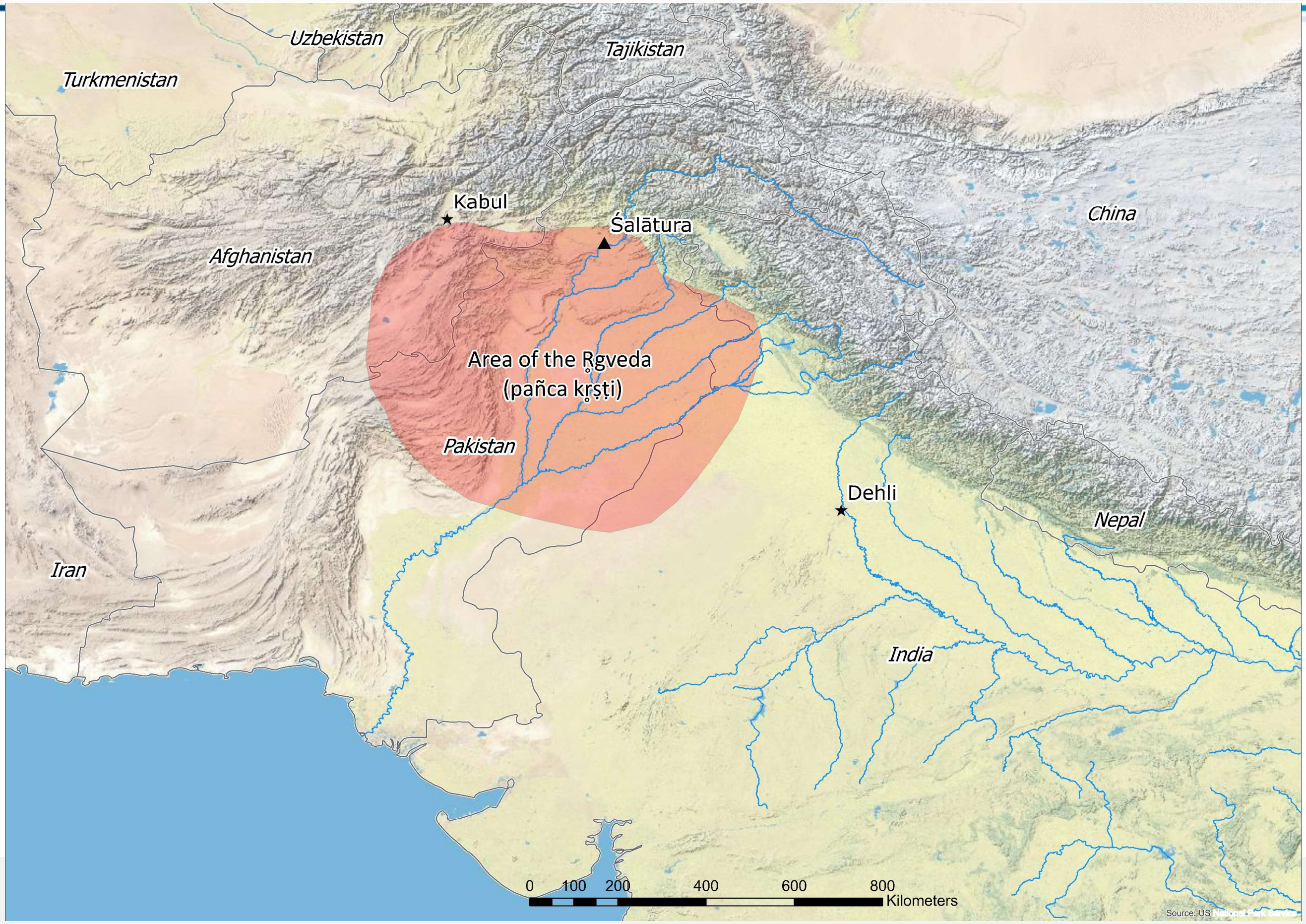


Setting — Geography

- Greater Punjab
  - from Kabul to Delhi
- High mountain region, piedmont, and plains
- Main Rivers Indus and tributaries
- Moderate inland climate
  - four seasons with cold winters
  - snowmelt more important than monsoon rains

View of Pahalgam Valley, Kashmir and Jammu
KennyOMG — CC BY-SA 3.0

Setting — Historical Background

- Tribal culture (see 1.1)
  - on Bronze Age level
  - half nomadic pastoralism
  - main livestock cattle
- Around 30 tribes or clans
  - rules by chieftains
  - in loose confederacies
  - constantly fighting
- Date of composition
  - later half of 2nd millennium BCE
  - 5 generations of poets

Form — Meter

- Basically organized in
  - hymns (Sūkta)
  - stanzas (R̥c)
  - verses (Pāda)
- Syllable counting meter
  - With tendencies toward quantitative meter

- Most common meters
  - Jāgatī (4×12)
  - Triṣṭubh (4×11)
  - Anuṣṭubh (4×8)
  - Gāyatrī (3×8)

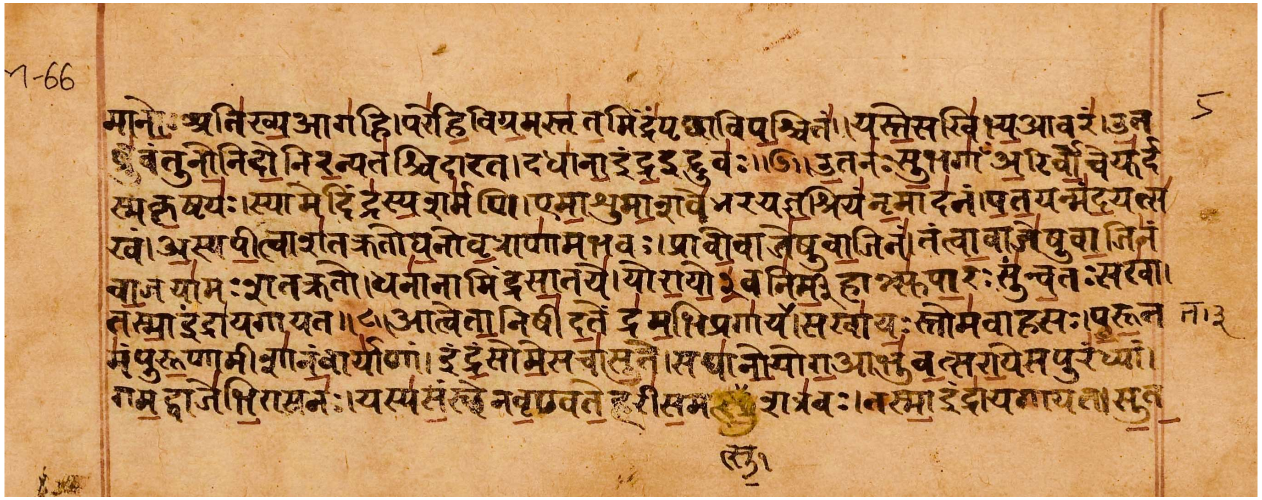
Form — Meter

- 2 types of verse
  - dimeter verses (e.g. Anuṣṭubh, Gāyatrī)
    - opening, cadence
  - trimeter verse (e.g. Jāgatī, Triṣṭubh)
    - opening | break, cadence

- Meter sensitive for prosodic structure (see 2.3)
  - no Sandhi across Pāda boundaries
  - often no Sandhi across caesura <|>
  - caesura generally coincides with phonological word boundary

Form — Accent

- Text accented throughout
  - pitch accent (see 2.3)
- But accented syllable not marked!
  - वाजिनं *vājínaṃ* (l. 4)



Manuscript copy of Ṛgveda Saṁhitā-Pāṭha (1.4.3c–1.5.5a),
Lalchand Research Library, pre-1400 CE
Ms Sarah Welch — CC BY-SA 4.0

Form — Transmitted Text

- Result of later canonization (Orthoepische Diaskeuase)
  - in Kuru-Realm
  - around 1000 BCE
  - “modernized” by Brahman editors
  - very close to original

➢ But with some deviations from Ur-text

Form — Transmitted Text

- Deviations from original include
  - elimination of hiatus
    - <joṣy ad^{h}varáṃ> *joṣi ad^{h}varáṃ* (RV 4.9.7a)
  - changes in quantity
    - <pāvaká-> *pavākа́*- ‘beloved, desired’
  - removal of epenthetic vowels (see 2.3)
    - <kā́mya-> *kā́miya*- ‘mission’
  - introduction of dialectal features (see 2.1)
    - <ḷ, ḷ^{h}>
- Historical linguistics help to reconstruct Ur-text (see 2.1)

Form — Transmitted Text

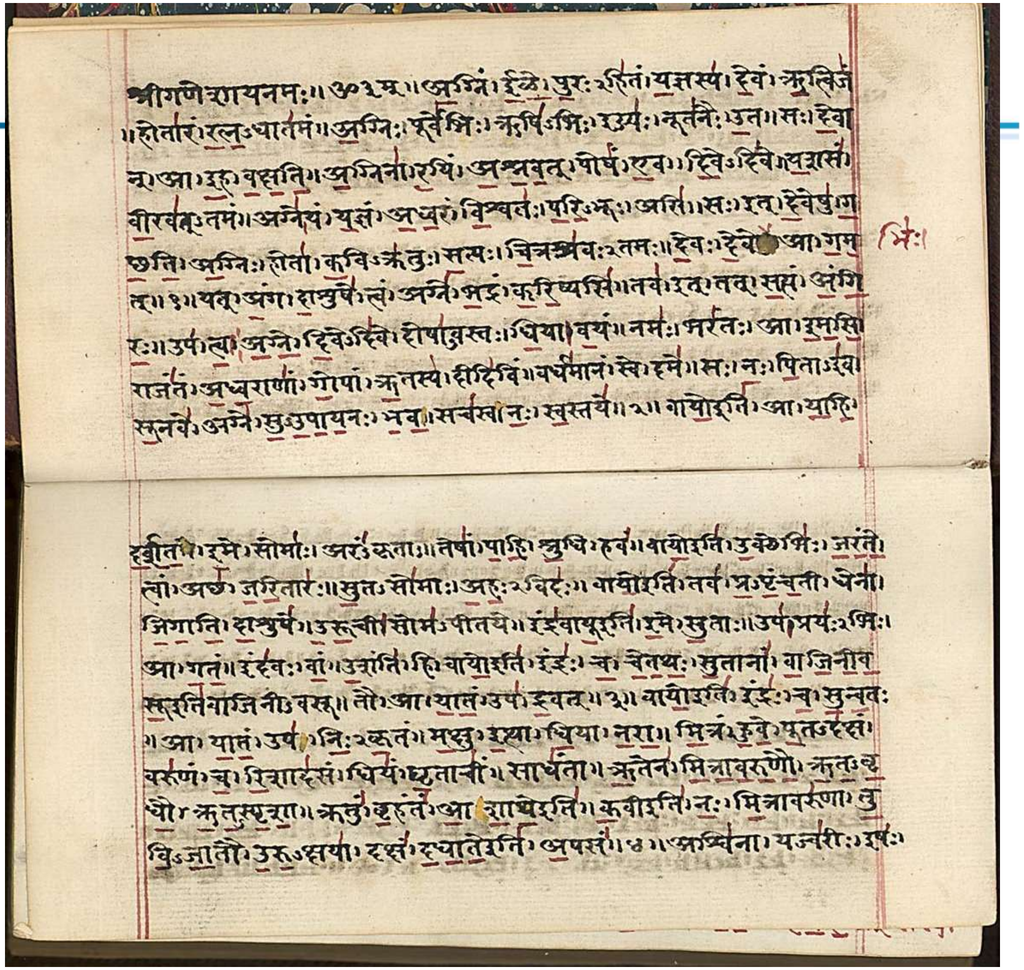
- Deviations mainly due to
  - overgeneralization of Sandhi (see 2.2)
  - from intra-textual influence

- Can be identified and removed because
  - indicated by meter
  - regularly applied
  - more consistent with later usage

Form — Recitations

- Saṁhitā-Pāṭha
  - continuous
  - external Sandhi applied

- Pada-Pāṭha
  - grammatically analyzed
  - external Sandhi undone



Manuscript copy of Ṛgveda Pada-Pāṭha
(1.1–1.3.1a) , ca 1800 CE

Form — Recitation

- Video shows teaching of RV 1.1.1–2
  - in Barsi, Maharashtra
  - February 2002

- Teacher gives traditional introduction
  - stating some information on hymn
  - begins with auspicious words (Maṅgala)

- Then recites text Pāda for Pāda (Pādaśaḥ)
- Students repeat each Pāda twice

- Information on RV 1.1
  - incipit *agním īḷe*
  - hymn to Agni
  - by Madhuchandas Vaiśvamitra
  - in Gāyatrī meter

Text Sample — RV 1.1.1

- Saṁhitā-Pāṭha

अ॒ग्निमी॑ळे पु॒रोहि॑तं य॒ज्ञस्य॑ दे॒वमृ॒त्विजं॑ ।
होता॑रं रत्न॒धात॑मं ॥

agním īḷe puróhitaṃ yajñásya devám r̥tvíjaṃ |
hótāraṃ ratnad^{h}*ā́tamam* ||

_ ᴗ _ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ _   _ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ _ |
_ _ _ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ _ ||

‘Agni do I invoke, the one placed to the fore, god and priest of the sacrifice, the Hotar, most richly conferring treasure.’

Text Sample — RV 1.1.1

- Pada-Pāṭha

अ॒ग्निं । ई॒ळे॒ । पु॒रःऽहि॑तं । य॒ज्ञस्य॑ं । दे॒वं । ऋ॒त्विज॑ं । होता॑रं । र॒त्न॒ऽधात॑मं ॥

agníṃ | īḷe | puráḥ – hitaṃ | yajñasya | devaṃ | ṛtvíjaṃ |
hótāraṃ | ratna – dʰā́tamaṃ ||

- Words (Pada) separated by < | > (Daṇḍa)
  - external Sandhi resolved
- Members of compounds separated by <ऽ> (Avagraha)
- Accentuation basically same as in Saṁhitā-Pāṭha
  - but if Pada not accented <◌॒> (Anudātta) throughout

Text Sample — RV 1.1.2

- Saṁhitā-Pāṭha

अ॒ग्निः पूर्वे॑भि॒र्ऋषि॑भि॒रीड्यो॒ नूत॑नैरु॒त ।
स दे॒वाँ एह व॑क्षति ॥

agníḥ pū́rvebʰir ŕ̥ṣibʰir ī́ḍiyo nū́tanair utá |
sá devā́ṁ éhá vakṣati ||

_ _ _ _ _ ᴗ ᴗ _   _ ᴗ _ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ ᴗ |
ᴗ _ _ _ ᴗ _ ᴗ ᴗ ||

‘Agni, to be invoked by ancient sages and by the present ones,
he will carry the gods here to this place.’

Text Sample — RV 1.1.2

- Pada-Pāṭha

अ॒ग्निः । पूर्वे॑भिः । ऋषि॑ऽभिः । ईड्यः॑ । नूत॑नैः । उ॒त ।
सः । दे॒वान् । आ । इ॒ह । व॒क्ष॒ति॒ ॥
agníḥ | pū́rveb^{h}iḥ | ŕ̥ṣi – b^{h}iḥ | ī́ḍyaḥ | nū́tanaiḥ | utá |
sáḥ | devā́n | ā́ | ihá | vakṣati ||

- Avagraha can separate affixes and endings
  - only if external Sandhi applies at juncture in Saṁhitā-Pāṭha
  - but not if analysis problematic

बहवो धन्यवादाः

Thank you for your attention!