

Meeting 19: A tale of two faiths

Comparing the Vedá and the Avesta

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Meeting agenda

- (Re)introduction to discussion group
- Today's topic præsentation
- Free discussion

Why a Vedá discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
 - Sámhitā-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?
- Vedá-s vs. Vedánta & Upaniṣad-s
 - Later monism (ádvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitá)
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

What is there to discuss?

- History & linguistics
- Metaphysics of religion
- Exegesis (e.g. countering western narratives)
- Moral principles
- Nuances of Śrāutá ritual

Our plans

- Weekly meetings on Sundays at 1200 EDT
 - Followed by more in-depth literature meeting at 1330 EDT
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every week
- Format:
 - Præsentation
 - Free-form discussion
- Eventually something more

WhatsApp group

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat>

Let's introduce ourselves!

- Name
- School (if student)
- How you found this group
- Briefly: background/interest in Hinduism & Vedic literature

Some questions to consider

- What are some characteristics of the Avestan languages?
- What features do the Vedic and Avestan religions have in common?
- What interactions may have existed between the two?
- To what extent can the Avestan religion help us reconstruct the Vedic?

What is the Vedic religion?

- National faith of the ethno-religious Ārya-s
- Texts: Sāmhitā-s (hymns), Brāhmaṇa-s (exegesis)
- Language: accented Vedic Sanskrit (Indo-Aryan)
- Centered around sacrifice (yajñá) to the Gods (Devá-s) mediated by fire (Agní)
- Significantly different from later Hinduism

What is the Avestan religion?

- National faith of the ethno-religious “Arya-s”
- Texts: Yasna, Vendidad (*Vīdaēvōdāta*)
 - Former divided into various sections (e.g. *Gāθā-s*)
- Languages: unaccented Old and Young Avestan (Indo-Iranian)
- Contains sacrifice (yasna) to god mediated by fire
- Significantly different from later Zoroastrianism

Geography

- Somewhat overlapping regions initially
- Sárasvatī vs. Haraxvaitī?
 - Probably not: cf. etym.
- Aryanəm Vaējah
- When was the split?
- Much closer affinity to Vedic than other Iranian branches have
- Dāsá, Dásyu = Dāha, Dahyu

Language

aibigairiiā daiθē vīspā humatācā hūxtācā huuarštācā
abi-garyā dat^he vīspā hu-matā cā hū-'k^htā cā hv-arštā cā
Mutually intelligible?

Theology

- Monotheism vs. polytheism?
 - Not really: there are many yazata-s
- Good vs. evil
- Ásura, Devá = Ahura, Daēwa
 - Specific Gods too: Násatya-s, Índra, Vərəθrayna, Apām Napāt, Miθra
- Other cognates:
 - Āθrauan, baga, &c.

Cosmology

- Aša (vs. Druj) & R̥tá: cosmic order
 - Binary good vs. evil common to both
 - Light vs. dark
- Creation myths
 - Púruṣa, gav-aēvō.dātā
 - The first mortal: Yamá (Yima)
- Others?

Cultural practices

- Death: cremation & burial vs. daxma (root in Vendidad)
- Incest: Yamá & Yamí vs. Xvāētwadaθa
- Cattle-slaughter
- Role of priesthood

Utility in Vedic reconstruction?

- Morality: not too useful
- Sóma: identity, præparation, ritual
- Form of ritual in general
- Original identity of certain tribes
- Ontology?

Some references

- Witzel, M. "The home of the Aryans." **1998**.
- Witzel, M. "Early Sanskritization." *Elec. Journ. Vedic Stud.*, **1995**.
- Witzel, M. "Autochthonous Aryans?" *Elec. Journ. Vedic Stud.*, **2001**.

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