

Meeting 21: Die Vṛtrá-Schlacht

The most famous heroïsm of Índra

Nikhil Surya Dwibhashyam

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Meeting agenda

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

Why a Vēda discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
 - Sāmhita-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?
- Vēda-s vs. Vedānta & Upaniṣād-s
 - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitā)
- 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 of the “messages” or meanings that can be derived from the Vṛtrá myth?
- What parallels does the Vṛtrá myth have within the Sámhitā? within the Vedic religion?
 - in other IE religions? or even outside of them?
- What is the significance of the Vṛtrá myth to Árya history and the conflict with the Dásyu-s?
- What traits of the Vṛtrá myth are still mysterious to us?

Who was Vṛtrá?

- Etym.: \sqrt{vr} “cover” + *-tra* = “coverer”
- Common noun: “enemy”
 - Sometimes translated as “obstacle”
- Certainly some sort of serpent (áhi): good evidence for this within Veda
 - e.g. *āb^hogá*
 - First-born among them (RV 1.32.4)
 - Sometimes translated by westerners as “dragon” in imitation of IE & Chinese motifs
 - Semantics
- Distinct from Áhi Bud^hnyà, the “Dragon of the Deep” (Griffith)

Who/what are the *Vṛtrá*-s?

- A matter of some debate
- Usual interpretation: common noun \approx metaphorical use
 - i.e. our foes are to us as *Vṛtrá* was to *Índra*
 - There are not multiple beings named *Vṛtrá*.
 - *Vṛtrám Vṛtratáram*: “*Vṛtrá* worst of foes” (RV 1.32.5)
 - Similar to *Mitrá*–*mitrá*
- Alternate interpretation: the *Vṛtrá*-s are a class of beings like the *Rudrá*-s
 - Similar to cyclical motifs in later Hinduism

What did Vṛtrá do?

- Story best narrated in præviously cited hymn, RV 1.32
- Association with mountain
 - “Coiled around”
- Held back the “waters” or rivers
 - Sometimes interpreted as drought myth
 - “Freeing” of waters would be rain, in connection with storm-aspect
- Challenged Índra

How was Vṛtrá slain?

- The iconic deed of Índra
 - Epithet *Vṛtrahán*(*tama*) used most commonly for Índra
 - But used for other Gods (Sóma, Agní, &c.): both proper and common
 - Motif found also in Avesta: Vərəθraγna
- Use of sóma by Índra
- Aided by friends/allies (e.g. Víṣṇu)
- Slain by thunder-bolt (vájra) alongside forts
 - Dānu?
- Clear parallel to Vála myth (but separate)
- Aftermath?

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