

§ 74. A great mass of Mantra-material originated and was handed down by memorial tradition orally from generation to generation long before the existence of any such collections of Mantras as have come down to us.¹ The Mantras fall into several different classes. To one belongs the hymn-stanza (fe); to another, the sacrificial formula (yájus); and to another, the magic charm (bráhmaṇ). From the stock of Mantras of one class—for example, the yájus—a certain collection with definite arrangement became established by popular usage in a certain community, and thus arose a Veda, for example, a Yajurveda—not a certain definite book, but some one of many possible and probable collections of Mantras of a certain definite class. From the same stock of the same class another collection was formed in another community, and thus arose another Veda, for example, another Yajurveda. The period in which the oldest hymns of the Rigveda originated may be set back into the second pre-Christian millennium;² but this only on certain general considerations—not as a matter of precise argumentation. Geographically, the early Vedic Aryans may be referred to Kābul and the Panjāb.³

§ 75. The Mantras have come down to us, for the most part, in several collections, diverse in form and purpose. There was, besides, more or less Mantra-material which was never embodied in any collection,⁴ but of which we find remnants scattered about in various books. The great collections of Mantras are the Rigveda, the Sāmaveda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharvaveda. The text of the Mantras forms what is often called a Saṁhitā. To each Saṁhitā is attached a body of dependent or ancillary works of the Brāhmaṇa and Sūtra groups: so that the oldest Indian books are classed, first, according to the Veda to which they belong; and, secondly, according to their character as Mantra, Brāhmaṇa, or Sūtra. It is to be remembered that “Veda” has a narrower and a broader sense, and that “Rigveda,” for instance, may mean either the Rigveda-saṁhitā or also the entire body of works belonging to that Veda.

§ 76. The Saṁhitā of the Rigveda is a historical⁵ collection. It consists of 1017 hymns, each containing on an average about ten double lines,⁶ so that the text is in volume somewhat less than that of the two Homeric poems together. There is a purely external and mechanical division of the text into ‘Eighths,’ ‘Lessons,’⁷ ‘Groups,’ and ‘Stanzas’ (aṣṭaka, adhyāya, varga, ṛc); but this need not specially concern us now. Of deep historical significance is the other division into ‘Books,’ ‘Chapters,’ ‘Hymns,’ and ‘Stanzas’ (maṇḍala, anuvāka, sūkta, ṛc).

§ 77. There are ten ‘Books’ (literally, ‘Circles’). And of these, books ii. to viii. are the so-called “Family-books”—that is, they contain each the hymns ascribed to a single family or clan, in which they doubtless originated, and by which they were handed down as a sacred inheritance. Thus, book ii. contains the hymns of Gṛtsamada and his clan. Those of Viçvāmitra and his tribe follow in book iii.; and then in order those of Vāmadeva (book iv.), Atri (book v.), Bharadvāja (book vi.), Vasiṣṭha (book vii.), and Kaṇva (book viii.). The ninth book is made up of

¹ See Roth's *Atharvaveda in Kascmir*, p. 9-10.

² See Whitney in *The Century Magazine*, 1887, xxxiii. 921; or Kaegi, note 38. Cf. Ludwig, iii. 178f.

³ See Whitney, l.c., p. 913; Kaegi, note 39; Ludwig, iii. 198f.

⁴ The Hindus say that the Vedas are infinite. See Ludwig, iii. 15; Muir, iii². 17.

⁵ As distinguished from a liturgical collection—see § 86. Respecting the purpose of the RV. collection, see Roth, KZ. xxvi. 56.

⁶ For the number of stanzas, words, and syllables, and for some convenient tabular statements, see Müller, ASL. p. 220f.

⁷ There are eight ‘Lessons’ in each ‘Eighth.’