

Meeting 4: From Agástya to Vyášva

The bards of the Ṛg-vedá & their families

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WhatsApp group

DM me your phone number in the chat if you want to be added.

Some questions to consider

- How can the bardic assignments of the Ṛg-vedá be helpful in historical reconstruction?
- To what extent do today's Brāhmaṇá-s continue the Vedic bardic tradition?
- What can be done to revive the tradition of poëtic composition?
- We'll return to these at the end!

What is a Brahmin?

- Skt. *Brāhmaṇá*: vṛddhi derivative of *bráhman*
 - not to be confused with *bráhmaṇa*
- What is *bráhman*?
 - Nominalization of $\sqrt{bṛh}$
 - Dual meaning: be strong, increase
 - Aryan expansionism?
 - Triple meaning: prayer, pray-er (priest), pray-ee (god)
 - Not related to Lat. *flāmen*

What is a Brahmin?

- Brāhmaṇá: collective term for priests (ṛtvíj-s)
 - Bráhman
 - Hótr
 - Ad^hvaryú
 - Ud-gātr
 - Each with (3?) assistants
- Profession-based *and* lineage-based
 - Patrilineal (and usually also maternal) descent
 - Patriarchal
- Central to the religious–social order of the Árya-s

What did the Brāhmaṇá-s do?

- Undergo extensive training (under specialty)
- Bless/consecrate the ruling order
 - e.g. coronation, horse sacrifice, battles
 - More on this later!
- Officiate the Śrāutá rituals
- Officiate many home rituals (birth, marriage, &c)
- Memorize & pass down ancient hymns
- But also, more importantly to this meeting: write poëtry!
 - Hymns of prayer
 - Hymns of praise
 - To men
 - To gods

The lineage system of the bardic families

- Gotrá (e.g. Vá^lak^hilya)
 - Pravará (e.g. Ag^hamarṣaṇa–Kuśiká)
 - Vaṁśá (e.g. Ārāma-Drāviḍa-Brāhmaṇá)
 - Kúla (e.g. Dvib^hāṣya)
 - Vīś
- Dvī-gotra?

What was the relationship between bards & hymns?

- Revealed or composed?
 - Straightforward answer: composed.
 - “Newest hymn”
 - Over several centuries
 - *Vedic Metre in Its Historical Development*
 - Arnold, E. V. 1905
- Innovation & inventiveness praised
 - But not *too* innovative!
- Metrical elegance
 - Integral to Śrāutá ritual

Who were the bards of the Ṛg-vedá?

■ Some famous ones:

- Áṅgiras
- Viśvámītra
- Vasiṣṭha
- Bhṛgu

■ How do we know?

- Both inside & outside the Ṛg-vedá
 - e.g. *táv' ét tát satyám Aṅgiraḥ* (1.1.6)

Different bards, different themes

- Different styles
 - Meter, vocabulary, grammar
 - Diachronic!
- Different gods?
 - e.g. Váľak^hilya & his focus on Índra
 - Possible precursor to kula-devá system?
- Different heroes & kings
 - Purūrávas, Kútsa, Dasyavevṛka, &c
 - Ten Kings
 - **Intimate connection between Brāhmaṇá-s and Kṣatriya-s**
- Surprisingly little scholarship
 - “Implicit research”

Indian bards today

- Often non-Brāhmaṇá
 - e.g. Bhāt-s of Rajasthan
 - Nonetheless, attempts at Brahminization
- Similar relationship in some ways
 - Songs of praise to men and gods
- Bhajaná composers

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