



The Dating of the Indian Tradition

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Abstract. – It is argued here that the religion of the R̥gveda reflects Mesopotamian religion of the 3rd millennium B. C. Even specific epithets and literary allusions can be found to apply to certain of the deities that can be seen to be comparable in the respective traditions. The R̥gveda is seen to end at the time of the first period of doubt in Mesopotamia around 1500 B. C., which coincides with the end of Indus Valley civilization. Roughly 1500 B. C. or shortly thereafter is also the time of the development of monotheism in the Ancient Near East, and this development can be seen in the R̥gveda. In general, it is argued that it is not conceivable that there should be a lapse of roughly 1500, or 1800 years between two comparable religions with comparable developments in areas which it has been demonstrated had trade with one another. Indian religion, though, survived the crises which racked Mesopotamian religion. [*Vedic literature and religion, Mesopotamian civilization, comparative dating of civilizations, monotheism, Hinduism*]

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1 The Background

The present dating of the early Indian tradition goes back to 1859. At that time, F. M. Müller (1860: 35 f., 244 f., 435, 572) suggested that Bud-

dhism is simply a reaction against Brahmanism, and it presupposes the existence of the whole Veda – the Vedic hymns, the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads. The whole of this literature, therefore, is pre-Buddhist, the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* having been in the early part of the 5th c. B. C. The Vedāṅga and Sūtra literature might be of approximately the same date as the origin and first spread of Buddhism. This literature, which necessarily presupposes the Brāhmaṇa literature, was dated to a period of 600 to 200 B. C. Now the Brāhmaṇas, Müller argued, cannot possibly have been composed in less than 200 years. Therefore, these were dated from 800 to 600 B. C. The Brāhmaṇas presuppose the Vedic Saṃhitās, the collections of songs and prayers, and so 200 years, roughly 1000 to 800 B. C., were allowed for these collections to be arranged. Before the compilation of these collections, which were already regarded as sacred sacrificial poetry and authorized prayer books, there must have been a period at which the hymns themselves arose as popular or religious poems. This, he concluded, must have been before 1000 B. C. And as 200 years had already been assumed for the Brāhmaṇas and for the period he called the *mantra* period, 200 years was also now assumed for the arising of the poetry, and this period of 1200 to 1000 B. C. was arrived at as the period of the composition of the Vedic hymns.

Clearly, such dating is purely arbitrary, and even Müller did not wish to say more than at least a period of 200 years would have to be allowed for each period, and that at 1000 B. C. at the latest the R̥gveda Saṃhitā must already have been

completed. He always considered the dating of 1200–1000 B. C. to be a *terminus ad quem*. Müller (1891: 91), in fact, expressed the opinion that “we cannot hope to fix a *terminus a quo*. Whether the Vedic hymns were composed 1000, 1500, or 2000, or 3000 years B. C., no power on earth will ever determine.”

However, this arbitrary dating put an end to all sorts of speculation. L. von Schroeder (1887: 291 f.), for instance, had ventured to take the Veda back as far as 1500 B. C., or even along with W. D. Whitney to 2000 B. C. G. Bühler (1894: 245 f.), arguing that there was evidence that southern India had been Brahmanized by 600 or 700 B. C., suggested that a date of 1200 B. C., or 1500 B. C. for the period in which the Indo-Aryans inhabited the northwestern corner of India was impossible. At least twice as much time was necessary to conquer all the territory between and set up states on the same model. Earlier, A. Weber (1852; 1878: 2, 6 f.) had argued that the Vedic literature was the most ancient literature we possessed at that time, but that any attempt at an exact dating of it would be entirely futile. Nevertheless, it became a habit to say that Müller had proved 1200–1000 B. C. as the date of the *R̥gveda*. This habit already was censured in 1873 by Whitney (1873: 78).

A. B. Keith, in 1925, thinks basically along the same lines as Müller for the dating of the later *Saṃhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas*, and the *Upaniṣads* (1925/I: 19 f., 6). He further adds support to Müller’s dating of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* on internal evidence and on the basis of the closeness of the language to Indo-Iranian. Keith (1925/I: 6 f.) argues that if the traditional date of Zoroaster is accepted (600–583 B. C.), then the *R̥gveda* could not be dated any earlier than 1200 B. C. or 1300 B. C.

With the excavation of Indus Valley civilization starting in the 1920s and 1930s a new element entered into the dating of the early Indian tradition. There is no evidence of this civilization in the *R̥gveda* seemingly. Indus Valley civilization, which seems to have fallen in the middle of the 2nd millennium B. C., must therefore predate the *R̥gveda*. A. L. Basham (1954: 31) wrote:

No real synchronisms are contained in the *R̥g Veda* itself, to give us any certain information on the date of its composition. . . . The discovery of the Indus cities, which have nothing in common with the culture described in the Veda and are evidently pre-Vedic, proves that the hymns cannot have been composed before the end of Harappā. The great development in culture, religion and language which is evident in the later Vedic literature shows that a long period must have elapsed between the

time of the composition of the last hymns of the *R̥g Veda* and the days of the Buddha – perhaps as much as 500 years. It is therefore probable that most of the *R̥g Veda* was composed between 1500 and 1000 B. C., though the composition of some of the most recent hymns and the collation of the whole collection may have taken place a century or two later.

In part on account of Müller’s dating, when H. Jacobi and B. G. Tilak independently of one another attempted to date Vedic literature on the basis of astronomical data in the texts, with Tilak extending the date of the Vedic hymns to 6000 B. C. and Jacobi more conservatively dating Vedic literature back to the 3rd millennium B. C., there was an outcry. Both M. Winternitz, in 1905, and Keith, in 1925, have summarized and discussed Jacobi’s findings. Keith is very critical of them, and Winternitz is more open-minded toward them. Keith’s brief summary of Jacobi’s argument is as follows (1925/I: 4):

He [Jacobi] thinks that the *R̥gveda* shows that the winter solstice took place in the month *Phālguna*, and on the ground of the precession of the equinoxes this must mean that the observation thus recorded was made in the third millennium B. C. This view . . . he supports by the fact that in the *Gr̥hya Sūtras*, or manuals of domestic ritual, of much later date, the ceremonial of the wedding includes an injunction to the wife to look at a star called *Dhruva*, “fixed,” and this can only have originated at a time when α *Draconis* was in the vicinity of the pole, there being no other star which could be called fixed at any period coincident with the probable age of the *R̥gveda*: further he contends that the fact that *Kṛttikās*, the Pleiades, are placed at the head of the list of twenty-seven or twenty-eight *Nakṣatras*, “lunar mansions,” in the *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda Saṃhitās* means that *Kṛttikās* marked the vernal equinox when the list was compiled, and this date fell in the third millennium B. C.¹

More recently, as well, there have been objections against the generally recognized dating of the early Indian tradition.

One objection is that the lists of kings and teachers in the *Purāṇas* and *Brāhmaṇas*, if one allows a standard period of 25 or 30 years for each generation, push the dating of the Indian tradition back into the 3rd, or even 4th and 5th millennium B. C. In accord with this, one scholar has even written a book outlining among other things such dating.²

1 The reader is encouraged to read Keith’s criticisms of these points as well, and to consider Winternitz’s fuller summary and discussion of them (1927–33/I: 294–99).

2 See Devi ([1941?]: 4–7, [72]), who takes the dating of Indic figures back to the end of the 3rd millennium B. C.

A second objection is that the dating is too greatly at variance with traditional dates. Note in this regard that the traditional dating of the war of the Mahābhārata is at the beginning of the Kāliyuga, calculated as 3102 B. C. The traditional dating of Rāma is even earlier.³

Taking for granted the Indus Valley civilization identification with Ṛgvedic civilization, O. P. Bhadraraj (1987) has suggested an identification of the Vedic Sarasvatī River.⁴

A significant group of objections come from scholars who have attempted the decipherment of Indus Valley script, and have arrived at solutions which indicate Sanskrit as having been the language of the inscriptions. Such studies have been done by reputable archeologists often, and take into account the recent rash of "decipherments" that purport to have found the inscriptions to be Dravidian.⁵ B. B. Chakravorty (1978a) provides a general discussion criticizing the present generally accepted academic dating of the early Indian tradition by such a scholar. From a different tack, S. C. Kak (1992) argues that the Sarasvatī River so important in the Ṛgveda can be shown to have dried up around 1900 B. C., and that the settlements on this river's edges before it dried up were Indus Valley civilization sites. He further argues that the frequency of certain signs in Brahmi script matches the frequency of similar signs in Indus Valley script, and therefore an identity of both scripts and of Indo-Aryan language being used in both scripts is demonstrated. These are but two of his main arguments that the Indo-Aryan presence in the area, though the area may have been multilingual, goes back to perhaps 6500 B. C. and the site of Mehrgarh.⁶

It can be noted in addition, with regard to Keith's reasonings for the date of the Ṛgveda, that linguistic change in Dravidian is generally seen

to be much slower than change in Indo-Aryan has been construed to be. Also, see my suggestion elsewhere (Levitt 1995–96: 232) that Avestan *varəθra* glossed as "victory" would seem to rest on material in Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 5.2.3.7.

It is not my intention here to reopen old arguments, but instead to indicate new closure on recent information. In doing this, I have in part utilized Winternitz's method in his "Geschichte der indischen Literatur" (1905–[22]) of dating on the basis of literary themes and usages and on the basis of literary treatment of themes. When the main work was being accomplished on our current generally accepted dating of early Indian tradition, Mesopotamian studies was in its infancy. It was not until 1923 that the first Sumerian grammar appeared. Prior to that many mistakes were made on account of relying on bilingual inscriptions. In the two decades since Poebel's "Grundzüge der sumerischen Grammatik" (1923), and mainly on account of his work, Sumerian grammar was only first put on a scientific basis.⁷ Further, it was not until 1946 that much of the information gathered was first digested in T. Jacobsen's essay in Frankfort, et al. (1946) "The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man."⁸

When Keith (1925/I: 13) wrote that there was no evidence of influence in the religion of the Ṛgveda from the other nations of the East, especially Babylonia, the Mesopotamian material today had not been reported yet.

Vedic religion and Mesopotamian religion of the 3rd millennium B. C., it turns out, are exactly comparable. The deities of both are primarily deified aspects of nature, on the whole transparent. The deities of both are on the whole anthropomorphic, though there is also theriomorphism in both. In Mesopotamia, this can be seen to be residual from the 4th millennium B. C. Further, certain of the deities have the same or exactly comparable epithets. And the development of Mesopotamian religion – and aspects of Ancient

3 See in this regard Chakravorty (1978a: 10 f.), in which he argues from Purāṇic lists that the Mahābhārata war was in the 14th c. B. C., that Rāma can be dated to the 24th c. B. C., and that the date of Ikṣvāku – to whom memory goes back – is the 42nd c. B. C. Devi ([1941?]: 50) dates the war of the Mahābhārata to 1058 B. C.

4 See also Prasher (1988) regarding this identification.

5 See in this regard writings by Ray (1963, 1965, 1966), Chakravorty (1976, 1978b), Rao (1982), and Kak (1987, 1988, 1989, 1990).

6 A 1995 collaborative effort by Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley is more multifaceted in its approach. But it sometimes combines *testimonia* and conjecture to argue a point, as well as at times reads later points such as the *cakras* and *karma* as moral retribution across births into the early Vedas. It contains, though, the same basic argument as Kak (1992) which in the main is well taken.

7 For good discussions of the history of Sumerology and/or Mesopotamian studies in general see Kramer (1944: 1–12, esp. 8–10, and 21–23; 1963: 6–26, esp. 21, 24 f.) and Bottéro (1992: 41 f., 55–66). See also Jastrow (1915: vii–xi, 1–62, 63–119) and Crawford (1991: 1–4, esp. 3).

8 See Jacobsen (1949). This essay, criticized for a time as being prescriptive rather than descriptive, has now been expanded – though not superseded – by a more recent rash of publications by Jacobsen (1976, 1987), Kramer and Maier (1989), and Bottéro (1992). This is not to mention the information contained in other standard sources by Kramer (1944, 1950, 1961, 1963), Frankfort (1948), Lambert (1960), and Oppenheim (1950, 1964; rev. ed. 1977), for instance, also published in the 1940s and since.

Near Eastern religion in general – into the 2nd millennium B.C. has parallels with the development of late Rgvedic religion, the Atharvaveda, etc., and the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas. It is not conceivable that there should be a lapse of roughly 1500 years, or 1800 years between two comparable religions with comparable developments in areas which it has been demonstrated had trade with one another. To be emphasized is that each develops roughly comparable features, with the notable difference that Indian religion survived the periods of doubt which racked ancient Mesopotamian religion, and never brutalized divinity as happened in ancient Mesopotamia in the 1st millennium B.C.

Let us deal with this point by point. I add that in the discussion below from time to time I will sparingly bring in later classical Hindu material which shows continuities that can only be explained by earlier contact with the Mesopotamian tradition. In some instances, the Mesopotamian material would seem to clarify later Hindu material as well. Let us now proceed.

2 Comparison of Vedic and Sumerian Deities

2.1 The Vedic Deities

While some Vedic deities are abstract deities, or in some cases deities the exact origins of which we cannot see clearly, such as Indra, Viṣṇu, Mitra, Varuṇa, and the Aśvins, for example, most are clearly natural phenomena or certain aspects of natural phenomena. A. A. MacDonell (1900: 69) has written,

The higher gods of the *Rgveda* are almost entirely personifications of natural phenomena, such as Sun, Dawn, Fire, Wind. Excepting a few deities surviving from an older period, the gods are, for the most part, more or less clearly connected with their physical foundations. The personifications being therefore but slightly developed, lack definiteness of outline and individuality of character. Moreover, the phenomena themselves which are behind the personifications have few distinctive traits, while they share some attributes with other phenomena belonging to the same domain. Thus Dawn, Sun, Fire have the common features of being luminous, dispelling darkness, appearing in the morning.

Also note,

The universe appeared to the poets of the *Rgveda* to be divided into three domains of earth, air, and heaven, ... This is the favourite triad of the *Rgveda*, constantly mentioned expressly or by implication. The solar phenomena are referred to heaven, while those of lightning,

rain, and wind belong to the air. In the three worlds the various gods perform their actions, though they are supposed to dwell only in the third, the home of light (MacDonell 1900: 68).

Writing about the anthropomorphism of the Vedic deities, Keith (1925/I: 58) writes, "it is seldom difficult to doubt that the anthropomorphic forms but faintly veil phenomena of nature." He notes that the outlines of the Greek gods are hopelessly blurred "in comparison with the much clearer and more transparent figures of the Vedic hymns." Keith (1925/I: 58 f.) continues,

The degree of anthropomorphism exhibited by the Vedic deities is extremely variable. In some cases the active element is constantly present, and the view taken may be set down as almost animistic: the waters are indeed goddesses, but they are also wholesome to drink; the goddess Dawn bares her bosom like a beautiful maiden, but there is comparison here rather than identity, and, if in some cases the goddess seems to be considered as one who appears morn after morn to men, in others each separate dawn is a fresh divinity. Sūrya, the sun, by his rising is born as a child of the sky; the constant presence of the actual deity prevents any real development of anthropomorphism. The same consideration affects Agni, who never appears as a god disconnected from his element of fire: when he is hidden in the waters or in the clouds, it is as fire: as messenger of men he is the fire of the sacrifice flaming up to heaven to bring gods and men together. But the difficulties of this view were clearly felt in connexion with the question of the innumerable fires of earth and their relation to the god. Strictly speaking he must be present in each, and this view is often taken, but there appears also the conception that in some degree the god is free from the element and able to come to it, not merely to be manifested in it when it is produced. The evidence for this view is, however, it is important to note, late: ... The contrast with the figure of Agni in later literature such as the epic is marked: in the epic the gods have long ceased to be nearly as closely connected with their natural bases as in the *Rigveda*, and Agni can figure as the main personage in tales which never had any relation to the fire as an element.

Regarding theriomorphism, Keith (1925/I: 61) notes,

While most Vedic nature deities are normally conceived as anthropomorphic, there did not prevail any rigid exclusion of theriomorphic conceptions of deities. It is often asserted, even by Oldenberg, that in earlier periods of religion theriomorphic conceptions were more frequent than anthropomorphic, but the proof for such a theory seems to be wholly lacking.

In Keith's sequence of chapters, he treats "The Great Gods – Celestial," "The Great Gods – Aerial," "The Great Gods – Terrestrial," "The

Minor Gods of Nature," "Abstract Deities and Sondergötter," "Groups of Deities," "Priests and Heroes," and "The Demons."

Of especial note is that various gods represent the same phenomenon from different aspects. Thus, while "Sūrya represents the concrete aspect of the sun, Savitr, the stimulator or instigator, seems to denote the sun as the motive power which drives men into action" (Keith 1925/I: 105). Of Viṣṇu, too, "the solar nature of the deity is reasonably plain. In the Atharvaveda he is asked to bestow heat: in the Brāhmaṇas his head cut off becomes the sun; in post-Vedic literature his weapon is a rolling-wheel, his vehicle Garuḍa, the sun-bird, and the breast jewel which he wears is clearly the sun. . . ." (Keith 1925/I: 109).

The three most popular deities of the Ṛgveda, in terms of the number of hymns devoted to them, are Indra – the chief god of the Indian pantheon in importance sometimes referred to as Vedic India's national god, Agni – fire, especially sacrificial fire, and Soma – a divine plant which provides an inebriating drink, perhaps to be associated with the mushroom Fly Agaric, but we cannot be sure. To be emphasized is that a structural relationship of these gods is never spelled out. In a late Vedic reduction of the pantheon to three gods, one representing each realm of nature as discussed, we find Sūrya, Indra or Vāyu (wind), and Agni. This develops eventually into the later *trimūrti* of Hinduism, or three aspects of the godhead, Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu. Brahmā here is a development of Agni through his development into the person of the late Ṛgvedic deity Brahmanaspati, "lord of prayer." Viṣṇu clearly takes the place of Sūrya. W. D. O'Flaherty (1973: 83–110) identifies as the Vedic antecedents of Śiva the Vedic god Rudra – a god of storm and destruction, Indra, and Agni. S. Kramrisch (1981) emphasizes the Vedic gods Rudra and Agni as the precursors of the later god Śiva. O'Flaherty (1973: 83) notes that there is perhaps an overemphasis on the identity of Rudra and Śiva in the literature.

The slight prominence of Dyaus, the sky, in the Veda is in part at least due to the prominence of Mitra and Varuṇa. Varuṇa is often styled king, and he is king of both gods and men, or all that exists. "Occasionally even in the Rigveda Varuṇa appears connected with the waters of the ocean, to which flow the seven rivers, but the ocean is little known in the Rigveda, and his real connexion with the waters is with the waters of the air, But more important than these physical attributes of the god are his moral qualities, his control of the order of the world in its ethical aspect no

less than its physical, . . ." (Keith 1925/I: 97). It is Varuṇa who controls the *ṛta*, or order of the universe and as such he is clearly an important deity. Yet there are not many hymns to him, in large part probably because the collection of Ṛgvedic hymns centers around the Soma sacrifice, and does not take great account of those deities who are not of much consequence to it. This is even more true with regard to Viṣṇu.⁹

Also to be noted is that there exists in the Ṛgveda a conception of seven or eight deities, in the Brāhmaṇas and later standardly twelve, who are forces of expansion and activity in the universe, the *ādityas*.¹⁰ J. P. Brereton (1981: 3–6) argues that their number is never set; that it is either symbolic or not comprehensive. According to Keith (1925/I: 100), "the natural conception which lies at the root of Varuṇa and the group of Ādityas have lost or never had immediate connexion with nature, and have developed their individuality in such a way as to make their original identity uncertain." Varuṇa, it is to be noted, is their chief. Brereton argues that the *ādityas* are primarily gods of social relationships.¹¹

2.2 The Sumerian Deities

For comparison to this brief outlining of the general nature of religion in the Ṛgveda, compare regarding ancient Mesopotamian religion of the 3rd millennium B.C., the following (Jacobsen 1949: 138–140):

Here, in Mesopotamia, Nature stays not her hand; in her full might she cuts across and overrides man's will, makes him feel to the full how slightly he matters.

The mood of Mesopotamian civilization reflects this. Man is not tempted to overrate himself when he contemplates powers in nature such as the thunderstorm and the yearly flood. Of the thunderstorm the Mesopotamian said that its "dreadful flares of light cover the land like a cloth." . . .

Standing amidst such powers man sees how weak he is, realizes with dread that he is caught in an interplay of giant forces. His mood becomes tense; his own lack of power makes him acutely aware of tragic potentialities.

⁹ See Keith (1925/I: 109) and Winternitz (1927–33/I: 80) on this point. For a good discussion of Varuṇa see, aside from Keith, Monier-Williams (1899: 921b).

¹⁰ For their number, see MacDonell (1900: 105). For their significance, see Brown (1966: 20–22, 26–27, 60–61). For the figuring of seven *ādityas* in the Ṛgveda, with the eighth *āditya*, the sun, being mortal, see also Brown (1966: 26 f.).

¹¹ See Brereton (1981: viii, 2 f., 196 f.) regarding different etymologies of Aditi.

The experience of Nature which produced this mood found direct expression in the Mesopotamian's notion of the cosmos in which he lived. He was in no way blind to the great rhythms of the cosmos; he saw the cosmos as order, not anarchy. But to him that order was not nearly so safe and reassuring . . . Through and under it he sensed a multitude of powerful wills, potentially divergent, potentially conflicting, fraught with a possibility of anarchy. He confronted in Nature gigantic and willful individual powers.

To the Mesopotamian, accordingly, cosmic *order* did not appear to be something given; rather it became achieved – achieved through a continual integration of many individual cosmic wills, each so powerful, so frightening. His understanding of the cosmos tended therefore to express itself in terms of integration of wills, that is, in terms of social order such as family, the community, and most particularly, the state. To put it succinctly, he saw the cosmic order as an order of wills – as a state. . . .

The Mesopotamian's understanding of the universe in which he lived seems to have found its characteristic form at about the time when Mesopotamian civilization as a whole took shape, that is, in the Proto-literate period, around the middle of the fourth millennium B. C.

Regarding the legacy of the 4th millennium B. C.,

The fourth millennium, . . . , as far as we can grasp it from contemporary sources and later survivals, informed Mesopotamian religion with its basic character: the worship of forces of nature. These forces were intuited as the life principle in observed phenomena, . . . [We] may posit the selection and cultivation for worship of those powers which were important for human survival – powers central to the early economies – and their progressive humanization arising out of a human need for a meaningful relationship with them. This led for a growing preference for the human form over older nonhuman forms . . . (Jacobsen 1976: 73).

Of theriomorphic forms for divinity,

The earliest . . . images would seem to have shown the gods in their nonhuman forms; later on images in human form became prevalent and the older nonhuman images were considered mere "emblems" though, as we have mentioned, they were still the form under which the gods accompanied the army in battle and the form under which they validated oaths (Jacobsen 1976: 14).

They appear to have had their floruit in Protoliterate or earlier periods, that is to say, during the fourth millennium B. C. . . . [With] the beginning of the third millennium, from Early Dynastic onward, the human form came to dominate almost completely, leaving to the older forms the somewhat ambiguous role of divine "emblems" only (Jacobsen 1976: 9).

For an excellent discussion of how the ancient Mesopotamian construed the elements of nature to

be divinity, see Jacobsen's discussion in "Intellectual Adventure" (= "Before Philosophy") of the divinity behind flint and reeds, and the way in which this was construed. Regarding flint, for instance, Jacobsen writes,

By saying that the phenomena of the world were alive for the Mesopotamian, that they were personified, we have made things simpler than they actually were. We have glossed over a potential distinction which was felt by the Mesopotamian. It is not correct to say that each phenomenon was a person; we must say that there was a will and a personality in each phenomenon – in it and yet somehow behind it, for the single concrete phenomenon did not completely circumscribe and exhaust the will and personality associated with it. For instance, a particular lump of flint had a clearly recognizable personality and will. Dark, heavy, and hard it would show a curious willingness to flake under the craftsman's tool though that tool was only of horn softer than the stone against which it was pressed. Now this characteristic personality which confronts one here, in this particular lump of flint, may meet one also over there, in another lump of flint, which seems to say: "Here I am again – dark, heavy, hard, willing to flake, I, Flint!" Wherever one met, its name was "Flint," and it would suffer itself to flake easily. That was because it had once fought the god Ninurta, and Ninurta has imposed flaking on it as a punishment.¹²

In that the Mesopotamian cosmos is seen as a state, this is different from the organization of divinity in the *R̥gveda*. There are, however, seen to be three spheres, heaven, the atmosphere, and earth, as in the *R̥gveda*.

The deities constituting the pantheon were not all of the same importance or of equal rank. Ranked highest among the gods is An. His name is the Sumerian word for "sky." "An is the numinous power in the sky, the source of rain and the basis for the calendar since it heralds through its changing constellations the times of the year with their different works and celebrations. . . . An is often visualized in bovine form. An's spouse was the earth, Ki, on whom he engendered trees, reeds, and all other vegetation. . . . [He] was the father and ancestor of all the gods, and he likewise fathered innumerable demons and evil spirits" (Jacobsen 1976: 95). As a father he presides over the assembly of the gods, his children. "An was closely associated with the highest authority on earth, that of kingship. It was he who proclaimed the king chosen by the assembly of the gods and he who was, par excellence, the god that conferred kingship" (Jacobsen 1976: 97).

12 See Jacobsen (1949: 143–145) for the full discussion.

"Enlil, the second highest of the gods, was god of the storm. His name means 'Lord Storm,' and he personifies the essence of the storm. No one who has experienced a storm in flat, open Mesopotamia can possibly doubt the might of this cosmic force. The storm, master of all free space under the sky, ranked naturally as the second great component of the cosmos" (Jacobsen 1949: 150). When decisions of the assembly of the gods were cast in their final form by a group of seven "gods of the decrees," the execution of their decision usually fell to Enlil (Jacobsen 1976: 86). "It may be noted that not all of Enlil's activities are beneficent to mankind. He allows the birth goddess to kill at birth, and he is behind the miscarriages of cows and ewes. This aspect of Enlil as potentially hostile corresponds to the two-sided nature of the wind, not only the benign zephyr, but also the destructive storm. In the storm a brooding violence and destructiveness in Enlil finds expression" (Jacobsen 1976: 101).

"With An and Enlil stands the third in the triad of the most powerful of deities, the goddess Ninhursaga, also known as Nintur, Ninmenna, Ninmah, ... How many of these names indicate aspects of the goddess that have taken on an identity of their own and how many represent other deities who have merged with Ninhursaga, it is difficult to say. ... Her original aspect is probably as the numinous power in the stony soil that rings the Mesopotamian alluvial ground" (Jacobsen 1976: 104). Her name means "Lady of the Stony Ground" or "Lady of the Foothills." She is at times considered to be the wife of Enlil, at times his sister (Jacobsen 1976: 104 f.). Ninhursaga is usually regarded not only as the mother of wildlife in the foothills and the desert, but also as the mother of herd animals. She is the mother of man and the mother of the gods, and has been called "the mother of all children" (Jacobsen 1976: 106). "Her importance in the general scheme of things as the rocky ground and the power in birth placed her with An and Enlil as a decisive power in the universe and the scheme of things" (Jacobsen 1976: 109).

During the 2nd millennium she lost more and more rank until she seems to have been supplanted by Enki, who was a persistent rival of hers in the triad of the ruling gods. "Enki personifies the numinous powers in the sweet waters in rivers and marshes or rain" (Jacobsen 1976: 110). His name means "Lord Earth," or "Lord of the Soil," and reflects the role of subterranean waters in fructifying the earth. He is the lord of the sweet subterranean waters that bubble up as springs and as wells. He is

the water of rivers which with guile travel around obstacles. As such he is known to be cunning and crafty, sometimes referred to as "wise." W. G. Lambert (1960: 1) notes that the words translated as "wisdom" in Mesopotamian literature generally refer to skill in cult and magic lore.¹³ Enki is lord of craftsmen in that he makes clay plastic when moistened. He is also the god of ritual lustration and of purification from polluting evil (Jacobsen 1976: 11 f.; 1949: 150, 159 f.). And he is as well considered to be the generous benefactor of mankind, for whom he provided everything that is vital for well-being and prosperity. It is he who comes to man's aid when the gods wish to destroy mankind.¹⁴

The most important groups in the assembly of the gods were the seven gods who "decree the fates" and the 50 deities known as "the great gods." Not all the deities were considered to be creative deities or forces of creativity. There was a division between creative and noncreative deities (Kramer 1963: 115, 122 f.). The group of seven gods may have included the four gods noted above, An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaga, and the moon god – Nanna, who is also known as Sin, the sun god – Nanna's son Utu, and Nanna's daughter – the goddess Inanna known to the Semites as Ishtar. We cannot be sure, though (Kramer 1963: 122 f.). Jacobsen (1987: xv) seems to indicate the possibility of an earlier grouping of seven, also including the main four however. S. H. Hooke includes in the group of seven the god Hadad, or Adad, a storm god, with Ishtar according to him being an associated female deity.¹⁵

2.3 Discussion

The grouping of seven gods is perhaps comparable to the grouping of seven *ādityas* or forces of expansion and activity in the universe in the *R̥gveda*. That the *R̥gvedic* *ādityas* are perhaps deities of social relationships perhaps argues for a Mesopotamian connection since the Mesopotamian cosmos was seen to be an integration of wills in terms of social orders such as the family, the community, and the state.

Most obvious from this discussion should be that there are comparable features between Enlil

¹³ See also Kramer and Maier (1989: 5) regarding the significance of the word "wisdom" as applied to Enki.

¹⁴ Kramer and Maier (1989: 2), Jacobsen (1976: 114 f.) and Jastrow (1915: 210 f.).

¹⁵ See Hooke (1953: 24–29) regarding the group of seven deities.

and the most prominent R̥gvedic god, Indra. Just as Enlil, Indra is thunderstorm. "He is an atmospheric god often identified with thunder and wielding a weapon, called *vajra* ('thunderbolt'). As such he destroys the demons of drought and darkness and heralds the approach of the rain so vital to life in India" (Dandekar 1958: 13). I have argued elsewhere that Indra's name goes back to his primary signification as atmospheric fire (Levitt [n. d.]). But I have also argued there that he has accreted characteristics of Enlil and that this is why his character is in part opaque.

The two gods are in part comparable. They share certain features, at least one relationship in the respective pantheons, and literary imagery. Both deities are chief of their respective pantheons. Indra supercedes a higher moral god, Varuṇa, just as Enlil supercedes a higher moral god, An. Indra separated heaven from earth, just as Enlil separated heaven from earth. Indra is a god of storm both literally and figuratively, just as Enlil is a god of storm literally and figuratively. Indra conquers the enemies of the Aryans, just as Enlil similarly conquers enemies.¹⁶ Viṣṇu, who is noted to stride widely to the side in the battle against Vṛtra (RV 4.18.11), is referred to as Indra's younger brother in the Indian epic literature and later, while Enki who represents fresh water and fertile earth, is referred to as the younger brother of Enlil (Jacobsen 1949: 161; 1976: 110). Of especial note, Indra uses a net as a snare (AV 8.8.8), he shakes ripe fruit from trees as if with a hook (RV 3.45.4), and he cannot be stopped by birdcatchers (RV 3.45.1). Enlil catches both birds and fish with nets (Jacobsen 1949: 157). The point here is that similar specific imagery is shared. And in a myth the possible non-Indo-European nature of which has been pointed out, Indra slays the demon Vṛtra (Brown 1961: 286). Similarly, it has been argued by Jacobsen that behind the parallel to this myth in the *Enuma Elish* is an older form in which it was Enlil who fought the monster, though such a myth in which Enlil is the central character has not come to light.¹⁷

Regarding Viṣṇu, note that the etymology and signification of his name are not firm. Böhtlingk

and Roth (1855–75/VI: 1262) give only reference to Uṇādisūtra 3.39.1. This refers to *√viṣ*.¹⁸ Monier-Williams (1899: 999a) notes, also cautiously, "prob. fr. *√viṣh*, 'All-pervader' or 'Worker.'" Keith (1925/I: 109) notes, "The name can be diversely explained as 'the active one' from the root *viṣ*, or as 'crossing the back of the world or the earthly regions' from *vi* and *snu* (akin to *sānu*), but the solar nature of the deity is reasonably plain." Mayrhofer (1956–80 [hence, KEWA] / III: 231 f., 795) supports a derivation from *vi* and the stemform *-snu-* from *sānu*. Mayrhofer (1992–2001 [hence, EWA] / II: 566), however, steps away from this and notes simply that the derivation of the form is "not clear."

It can be suggested here that, in the context of both Viṣṇu and Enki being referred to as "younger brother" of Indra and Enlil respectively, Viṣṇu is perhaps to be identified in part with Enki. His name would be derived from *√viṣ* in its meaning "to run, flow (as water)." Viṣṇu would thus signify flowing water, or simply water (= "flowing stuff"). His association with the sun would be in line with the tradition that the waters released from Vṛtra were pregnant with the sun.¹⁹ A correspondence between Viṣṇu and Enki explains why it is in later Hinduism that it is Viṣṇu who is associated with *avatāras* or "descents" – sometimes understood as incarnations, for the benefit of mankind. It is in line with Enki's position as the helpful benefactor of mankind. The story of Viṣṇu as a dwarf taking three giant steps, first mentioned in *Taittirīyasaṃhitā* and *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, is interpreted by Keith (1925/I: 110 f.) as a cunning device to deceive the *asuras*, or "demons." Viṣṇu being associated with a cunning device is also in line with a correspondence to the character of Enki. Viṣṇu's three steps are perhaps comparable to Enki's tour of the civilized world and setting up of the world order, and the earth's fertility and productiveness, in the story of "Enki and the World Order" (Kramer 1963: 171–174). Of note is that the name Nārāyaṇa is explained by *Mānavadharmasāstra* 1.10 as meaning "moving in the waters," *nāra* being said to mean "waters." The name Nārāyaṇa here is said to refer to Brahmanā, but more standardly it is understood to refer to Viṣṇu.²⁰ The name is said to indicate that the waters were the god's first place of motion. It is

16 Regarding Enlil, see Jacobsen (1949: 153–156) and Kramer (1961: 96).

17 See Jacobsen (1949: 155 f.). For other parallel myths, see Gaster (1961: 137–149). The Sumerian myth which has come to light does not refer to Enlil. Jacobsen (1976: 167 f., 183–191) has therefore for now revised his view. He now argues that the myth never referred to Enlil. See, though, the Indian parallel, which would seem to support his original view.

18 See Chintamani (1933a: 108, 1933b: 61, and 1939: 130).

19 See RV 1.32 and RV 1.31 regarding this. For a good translation of these hymns, see O'Flaherty (1981: 148–156).

20 See Dowson (1879: 360, 120 f.).

also interesting that in Śrī Vaiṣṇava prayers, Viṣṇu at times seems to be associated with the earth. We occasionally get such locutions, for instance, as "Let waters purify the earth; let the world (earth) which is purified make me pure; Nārāyaṇa who is superior (the master of) to the Chaturmukha, let him purify water; ..." (Rangachari 1931: 86).

See in this regard as well the later imagery of the reclining Viṣṇu at the dissolution of the universe in which Viṣṇu is clearly understood as silt to which the lotus on which the creator god Brahmā is seated drops its root. Also, just as Viṣṇu is associated with a bird, Garuḍa, the sun-bird, so Enki is associated with an eaglelike bird, the thunderbird, Imdugud. To be emphasized is that we cannot tell much about Viṣṇu from the R̥gveda since, as noted above, he is incidental to the purpose of the collection.

It has been commented that it is not obvious that the subterranean waters in Mesopotamia should be referred to as "Lord Earth."²¹ This is comparable, though, in the Indic material to a deity who is more associated with the sun and fertile earth being referred to by a name, or names when we consider Manu's explanation of the name Nārāyaṇa commonly applied to Viṣṇu, which associate him more clearly with the waters. Points such as these may help us understand these deities better in the future. There must be some reason for referring to the deity by the less obvious aspect of his character in the traditions concerned.

An association of Viṣṇu with the character of the Mesopotamian god Enki in addition helps us understand better how it is in the development of the later *trimūrti* that when Viṣṇu replaced Sūrya and Brahmā replaced Agni (through mediation of Agni's development to the late R̥gvedic deity Brahmanaspati) in the late Vedic Nairukta simplification of the pantheon, Agni – the terrestrial form of fire, becomes the heavenly component, Brahmā; and Sūrya – heavenly fire, becomes the terrestrial component, Viṣṇu.

Varuṇa is clearly comparable to the Sumerian deity An. To be suggested is that Vṛtra, whose name comes from the same root as the name Varuṇa and the word *varṇa* "color," which latter word is used as well to refer to the four classes of man, is perhaps a horrific or nonbenign aspect of Varuṇa, and that the name Vṛtra means in its primary signification not only "covering" but also "darkness." Vṛtra would thus be the darkness that covers the primeval waters as in Genesis 1,2,

though from a different vantage. Note that there is indication within historical Dravidian and in Sanskrit loanwords from Dravidian of a connection between Vṛtra, tanks and dammed up water, and between the concept of Vṛtra and a water bag, for instance.²² In such points, Vṛtra is comparable to Varuṇa, who as noted is also connected with the waters. In addition, by one tradition, it is Vṛtra's skin tacked up that serves as the sky. In this sense the connection with Varuṇa would lay in part the foundation for a connection with Dyaus.

An additional point is that Indra is standardly seen as a bull (Winternitz 1927–33/I: 84). The poets, though, sometimes refer to him as a calf (Winternitz 1927–33/I: 65; Keith 1925/I: 125).²³ As a calf the cows – or waters, would be his mother. And Vṛtra described as well in RV 1.32.7 as a bull, though he is usually described from a different aspect as a serpent, would be his father. Note that according to RV 4.18.12, Indra seized his father by the foot and slew him in order to obtain *soma*. We would thus have an act of patricide in the Indra-Vṛtra myth much as we have an act of patricide in the Enuma Elish, and in the slaying of Cronos by Zeus in Greek mythology.²⁴ Generally in the R̥gveda, it is to be emphasized, Indra's birth is seen as mysterious (Keith 1925/I: 125). It can be suggested that in the Indra-Vṛtra myth of the R̥gveda we have the justification for bull-fighting.

Other deities in the R̥gveda are perhaps referred to as bull, too, but Indra is the bull par excellence. This is his *svabhāva*, or "innate nature." As such the later Hindu god Śiva, whose *vāhana*, "vehicle" or "emblem" is seen to be a bull, probably can be considered to be a development of Indra from the late Vedic Nairukta reduction of the Vedic pantheon to three deities, the atmospheric member being seen to be Indra or Vāyu. Note that Skt. *śivā* in the R̥gveda is the characteristic par excellence of friends and friendship, and the friend par excellence of the Vedic Indian was Indra.

Also note that Śiva's consort in classical Hinduism is Pārvatī, whose name relates her to mountainous terrain. In this, she is exactly comparable to the Mesopotamian Ninhursaga figured as Enlil's wife. As Devī, Pārvatī is figured as the "Divine Mother." Again, this is comparable. Other features

21 See Jacobsen (1949: 159), and esp. Kramer and Maier (1989: 3).

22 See Levitt (1989b). Regarding the specific points referred to here, see this source, 42–52.

23 See RV 4.18.10, in addition to the reference cited by Winternitz, for references to Indra referred to as a calf.

24 See Jacobsen (1976: 186 f.) regarding patricide in the Enuma Elish. Note that Jacobsen is here stepping away from this point, however.

of the Hindu deity, however, are not comparable. The two goddesses, while comparable on a number of points, and while in basis perhaps the same, are not identical.

Also possibly comparable in the early material is the Sanskrit concept of *ṛta*, defined by W. N. Brown (1966: 20) as "the body of cosmic law or truth governing the Real, the Sat," and the Sumerian concept of *me*. About *me*, S. N. Kramer (1950: 56) writes "the Sumerian theologians, again no doubt taking their cue from the human world about them, adduced a significant metaphysical inference in answer to the problem as to what keeps the cosmic entities and phenomena, once created, operating continuously and harmoniously, without conflict and confusion; this is the concept designated by the Sumerian word *me*, whose exact rendering is still uncertain. In general it would seem to denote a set of rules and regulations assigned to each cosmic entity and phenomenon for the very purpose of keeping it operating forever in accordance with the plans laid down by the deities creating it."

Further comparable in both traditions is the force of speech. More will be said of this below. Be it sufficient here to note that the Sumerian gods create by saying "*hé-àm*" "so be it" (Jacobsen 1976: 86; 1987: 478 f.). Speech is a creative force (Jacobsen 1976: 172; Kramer 1963: 115). This specific usage is possibly to be related in practice to the later Sanskrit usage of the mystical syllable, *om*. A. Parpola (1981) has argued that Skt. *om* is to be related to the Tamil word for "yes" or assent, Tam. *ām*, from the Tamil root *ā-* or *āku-* "to become, to be," the form Tam. *ām* or Tam. *ākum* being 3rd person neuter (see Fabricius 1933: 47). Monier-Williams (1899: 235c) notes "originally *om=ām*," "a word of solemn affirmation and respectful assent, sometimes translated by 'yes, verily, so be it.'" H. Hock (1989 and 1991) has argued against Parpola's suggestion for a development within Sanskrit. I do not want to enter here into any Sumero-Dravidian hypothesis arguments.

3 Possible Significant Loanwords

Especially significant is that we also seem to have early loanwords between the two traditions.

Sum. *apsū*, the word for the watery deep, represented by the male half of the primordial couple in the Enuma Elish, and referred to with regard to Enki in the earlier myth of "Enki and Ninmah" as well as used in an epithet of Enki, is a word of

unknown origin (Bottéro 1992: 289).²⁵ Compare, however, Vedic Skt. *áp* "water," a feminine form declined in the nominative plural as *āpas* "the waters." The locative form is *apsū*, but on the basis of other loanforms between these traditions, to be mentioned in passing immediately below, evidence is that the borrowing was done from the nominative.

It is not known why the Sumerian cuneiform symbol for deity was a star. The term for deity in neither Sumerian nor Akkadian can in neither language be analyzed into otherwise known semantic elements (Bottéro 1992: 211). The Sanskrit and other Indo-European words for deity, though, such as Skt. *devá* can be related to a root signifying "to shine," Skt. *√div*.

An identification of the Skt. form *devá* (from *√div*, "to shine") with the Sumerian cuneiform symbol for deity, a star, depends in large part on the identification of *apsū* with Skt. *áp* (Nom. pl. f. *āpas*, Loc. pl. f. *apsū*), "water." Without this latter identification, the former would be purely speculative. With it, though, we have clear evidence of early borrowings of Sanskrit words in core attestations.

Further, the Sumerian name An, in Akkadian Anu, used for the sky god, strictly means "(the) above" (Bottéro 1992: 288). This conceivably suggests the Sanskrit indeclinable *ānu*, used as a prefix with verbs and nouns, as a separable preposition with the accusative, and as a separable adverb.²⁶ Verbal prefixes in Vedic Sanskrit, it is to be noted, are separable from the verbs they modify. The significations of the Sanskrit word, though, are various and widely different. As a separable preposition with the accusative, however, its significations do include "above." If there is a correspondence here, it may be on a much deeper linguistic level. Also note that the name Anu does occur in the R̥gveda four times as the name of a non-Aryan man and as the designation of non-Aryan peoples.

Keith (1925/I: 13) has argued that there are only two forms in the R̥gveda which can with any probability be argued as Semitic loanwords – the word *manā́*, apparently meaning "ornament" and described as golden, and the word *paraśú*, "axe." The proposed identification of *ásura* from Aššur he dismisses. He argues the instances cited are too isolated to prove anything. KEWA/II: 574 f. and

²⁵ Regarding occurrences of the word *apsū* see, for instance, Jacobsen (1976: 110, 111, 113, 170–172).

²⁶ See Monier-Williams (1899: 31a) and Grassmann (1873: 58 f.).

556 f., III: 774 does not make reference to *manā* being a borrowing from Semitic, and connects it with *manī* "necklace, pearl, gem, jewel." A Semitic origin for *manī* it notes to be entirely improbable. EWA/II: 308, 293 f. agrees with this, and appears to note **mani* (> Ved. *manī*) as a loan-form in Hurrian and Akkadian *mani-nnu*. KEWA/II: 213 f., III: 752 steps away from *paraśū* being a borrowing from Akkadian. EWA/II: 87 concurs, noting though that the form being a loanword remains conceivable, but just not from Akkadian. Regarding Skt. *āsura*, KEWA/I: 65 f., III: 637 mentions Akkadian influence as a possibility, but does not appear to be convinced. EWA/I: 147 f. mentions this with even less conviction.

I have argued elsewhere (Levitt 1995–96) that Skt. *brāhman* "prayer," etc. is to be equated with Sem. *brk*.

I have also argued elsewhere that Skt. *ēka* (Nom. s. *ēkas*) is to be derived from Semitic words for the number one, Heb. *ehad* [in Bibl. Heb., -d = -ḏ], etc. (Levitt 1989a: 139 and 1995–96: n. 2, erroneously printed on p. 222 instead of p. 236 where it belongs).²⁷ The form occurs in Sanskrit with the suffix *-ka* in Skt. *ekakā* (f. *ā*, *ikā*) "single." In this latter form's earliest occurrence in RV 10.59.9 it appears in context side-by-side with *dvakā* "twofold," the Vedic form comparable to the later Sanskrit form *dvika*, and Skt. *trikā* "threefold." This throws into question a derivation **e-ka*, or derivation from PIE **oi-no-* plus a suffix **-ko-*.

I have as well argued that Skt. *śivā* "well-disposed" is to be derived from the Semitic word for the number seven (Levitt 1995–96: 236). The Semitic form can be seen in such names as the place name Beersheba and the Biblical personal names Bathsheba and Elisheba. As noted above, Skt. *śivā* is in the R̥gveda the characteristic par excellence of friends and friendship, the friend par excellence of the Vedic Indian being Indra. The semantic change from the number seven to the meaning "well-disposed" would revolve around the importance in the Indian tradition of the game of dice, in which game the number seven carries special good import. It is to be noted that in the Hindu tradition, the god Śiva is viewed to be perpetually absorbed in a game of dice (Handelman and Shulman 1997). KEWA/III: 344, 376 connects

the form with Skt. *śeva* "dear, intimate," and the latter's Indo-European connections – Lat. *civis* "citizen, townsman," Goth. *heiwa-frauja* "master of the family, landlord," OE. *hīwan* "family," Lith. *siēva* "wife."²⁸

Going in the other direction, I have argued (Levitt 1995–96: 236 f.) that the Hebrew name for God, Heb. *yhvh*, the etymology of which is a problem in Hebrew, may well be related to the confused situation in Vedic Sanskrit between Skt. *jihvā* (Nom. *jihvā*, *jihvāḥ*) "tongue," used in reference to the god Agni and hence a "tongue (of flame)"; Skt. *√hū/hve* "to call, invoke" (redup. *juhu-ljuh-*, *jihvā=juhū* – by popular etymology according to Grassmann), and Skt. *yahvā* (Nom. *yahvāḥ*) "restless, swift, active," of Agni, Indra and Soma in the R̥gveda, said to be probably from a lost root *√*yah* and appearing in the *padapāṭha* (word-by-word) text of the Maitrāyaṇīsaṃhitā (one of the recensions of the Black Yajurveda) where the *saṃhitā* text has *jihvā*. In this context it is important to note, as mentioned before, that the god Agni, earthly fire, the sacrificial fire, in a sense develops historically into the concepts of Bṛhaspati and Brahmanaspati, which in turn leads into the concept of Brahman.

4 The Social Order and The Structure of the Divine World

A further relationship to be noted between ancient Mesopotamia and Vedic India involves social organization. In both, the divine world is seen to mirror the human world, but the specifics are different. I am not aware, for instance, of a comparable conception in ancient Mesopotamia to the division of the universe into *sat* and *asat*, or "real" and "unreal," or "uncreated," with the *asat* being the realm in which dwell *asuras*, beings who plague mankind and the gods. Also, the universe mirrored the political order in ancient Mesopotamia. In ancient India, as expressed in RV 10.90, the division of society was paralleled by the division of the universe as a cosmic universal man. H. A. Gould (1971: 6–10), however, views caste and the *varṇa* system as espoused in the R̥gveda as a particular manifestation of ascriptive occupational stratification as found in Middle Eastern preindustrial state systems such as ancient Sumeria.

²⁷ Both these articles are marred by large numbers of printing errors. Regarding the standardly accepted etymology of Skt. *ēka*, see Gonda (1953: 75–80). Also see KEWA/I: 126 and EWA/I: 262 f. For a slightly different explanation, see Pokorny (1959: 286).

²⁸ So also EWA/II: 640, 654 f. And see Monier-Williams (1899: 1074a, 1088c) which also gives the traditional etymology, which is different.

5 The Second Millenium B. C.

5.1 The Rise of the Personal Religion, the Development of Monotheism, an Emphasis on Witchcraft and Sorcery, and the First Period of Doubt, and Severe Crisis in Mesopotamian Religion

With the 2nd millenium B. C. the Enlil function passed first to the goddess Nininsina of the city of Isin, and then later to the god Marduk of Babylon, originally a solar and agricultural deity, it would seem (Jacobsen 1949: 208 f., 183).²⁹

In the 2nd millenium B. C. the nature of religion in Mesopotamia changed as well. Lambert (1960: 5–7) has noted three changes: the gods became more amicably disposed toward each other, and learned to act in unison; the gods learned how to be good; a belief arose that a personal god could protect from demons. Regarding the personal god, though he was necessarily a small god, he was able to take his client's case to the greater gods. In general, with the rise of Babylon, Mesopotamia was no longer using the analogy of natural forces. People imagined their gods in their own image, and tried to fit the universe into moral laws springing from the human conscience. Jacobsen stresses just one of these points, a change in the perceived power of the personal god (1949: 228). "Before . . . [the second millenium B. C., the personal god] had been thought to be powerless against demons who attacked his ward and had to appeal to some great god for help. With the advent of the second millenium, however, [and the more centralized, tightly organized state that was effective in controlling robbers and bandits], the demons had lost power, so that the personal god was fully capable of protecting his human ward against them. [The decrease in the power of human robbers and bandits seems to have influenced the evaluation of the cosmic robbers and bandits, the evil demons.] If now . . . [the demons] succeeded in an attack, it was because the personal god had turned away in anger and had left his ward to shift for himself. Offences which would anger a personal god came to include, moreover, almost all serious lapses from ethical and moral standards" (Jacobsen 1949: 228). Jacobsen (1976: 161) further writes, "the certainty of concern for the individual and his fortunes is given with the origin of the concept of a personal god in a personification of

the power which causes luck and success in the individual. This is at the very root of the conception of personal god. Its negative counterpart is the feeling that lack of success and misfortune is due to the power having left the person; that it is angry, so it punishes." Jacobsen sees the rise of a personal religion to be the main aspect of Mesopotamian religion in the 2nd millenium B. C.

In the latter half of the 2nd millenium B. C. and in the 1st millenium B. C., Jacobsen as well sees an emphasis on witchcraft and sorcery. "The need for magic grew as Mesopotamian religion adjusted to new conditions."³⁰

In general, around 1500 B. C., the seams came loose in Mesopotamian religion, and we have a period of doubt and severe crisis. I. Mendelsohn (1955: xix-xxi) sees this as due to the contrast between human ethical and moral codes which had been developed, such as the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1690 B. C.), but there were others as well, and the sharp contrast of this to the arbitrary and often amoral behavior of the gods. Jacobsen (1976: 161 f.) sees this as due to an inherent contradiction in the nature of the personal religion. "Evil and illness, attacks by demons, are no longer considered mere happenings, accidents: the gods, by allowing them to happen, are ultimately responsible, for only when an offence has been committed should the personal god be angered and turn away. . . . in human moral and ethical values man had found a yardstick with which he presumptuously proceeded to measure gods and their deeds. A conflict was immediately apparent. Divine will and human ethics proved incommensurable. *The stinging problem of the righteous sufferer emerged* [italics mine]" (Jacobsen 1949: 228). The two best known Mesopotamian treatments of this problem are the "Ludlul bel nemeqi" (Let me praise the expert), and the "Babylonian Theodicy."

We have as well around 1500 B. C., or 1450 B. C., it must be remembered, the development of monotheism with Moses elsewhere in the Ancient Near East. This is traditional dating based on I Kings 6.1. Modern biblical archeology would place the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt later, at about 1290 B. C., and would place the birth of Moses in the late 14th c. B. C.³¹ Jacobsen (1976: 164) sees the development of monotheism as a unique extension of the personal religion which developed in Mesopotamia.

²⁹ Regarding the original nature of Marduk, see Jacobsen (1949: 183).

³⁰ See Kramer and Maier (1989: 100); Jacobsen (1976: 21).

³¹ See Lears (1949: 15–19) and Beagle (1997: 361b) for dating.

5.2 The Indian Parallels

In India in the *R̥gveda* we have the development of doubt as well, starting in fact as early as *R̥gveda* 2.12 in which it is stated that some question Indra's existence. This is echoed in the later *R̥gveda*, in *R̥gveda* 8.100, where it is said that some say there is no Indra (Keith 1925/II: 433; Winternitz 1927–33/I: 97 f.). In India, though, doubt impels philosophy to develop along intellectual lines rather than moral lines (Keith 1925/II: 434). Once people began to doubt Indra, they began to doubt the merit of sacrificing to the gods, and they began to doubt the gods themselves. Thus *R̥gveda* 10.121 asks, "which god shall we honor by means of sacrifice?" The skepticism reaches its height in *R̥gveda* 10.129 in which the poet asks,

Who knows it for certain; who can proclaim it here; namely, out of what it was born and wherefrom this creation issued? The gods appeared only later – after the creation of the world. Who knows, then, out of what it has evolved?

Wherefrom this creation has issued, whether he has made it or whether he has not – he who is the superintendent of the world in the highest heaven – he alone knows, or, perhaps, even he does not know (Dandekar 1958: 18).

Hand in hand with this skepticism we have the development of hieratic deities which are in essence monotheistic deities. "In most of the philosophical hymns of the *R̥gveda* the idea certainly comes to the foreground of a creator who is named now *Prajāpati*, now *Brahmaṇaspati*, or *Br̥haspati*, or again *Viśvakarman*, but who is still always thought of as a personal god" (Winternitz 1927–33/I: 100). Keith (1925/II: 434, 435) notes, "the positive side of the tendency of the *Rigveda* to dissatisfaction with the gods of tradition is to be seen in the assertion of the unity of the gods and of the world." In *R̥gveda* 1.164.46, "... [it] is frankly expressed as regards the gods ...: 'They call it *Indra*, *Varuṇa*, *Mitra*, *Agni*, and the winged bird (the sun): the one they call by many names, *Agni*, *Yama*, *Mātariçvan*.'" "In the *Rigveda* itself the ... efforts to attain the conception of the unity of the universe are directed in the main to setting up personal deities, who are credited with the creation and government of the whole universe. Of these the most famous and enduring is *Prajāpati*," "*Brahmaṇaspati* is of interest, since his personality as the god of prayer is closely connected with the mighty power of the prayer to secure the ends of man. This idea finds expression also in the hymn which celebrates *Vāc*, speech, as

the supporter of the world, as the companion of the gods, and the foundation of religious activity and all its advantages: she appears as impelling the father in the beginning of things and again as being born in the waters" (Keith 1925/II: 437 f.). At times, the creator deity is called simply, "the One" (Winternitz 1927–33/I: 98–100).

In the *R̥gveda*, we can thus see a development of monotheism.

The *R̥gveda* ends, we must judge, around 1500 B. C., shortly before the development of monotheism in the Ancient Near East, with the first period of doubt and severe crisis in Mesopotamian religion, and with the end of Indus Valley civilization.

After the end of the composition of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* comes the compilation of the collection of the *R̥gveda*, and the compilation of the liturgical texts of the *Sāmaveda* and the *Yajurveda*. This is what Müller referred to as the *mantra* period.

The development of the *Atharvaveda* coincides with this period, and extends back into the period of the *R̥gveda*, though much of it in the form we have it now probably does not extend much farther back than the late *R̥gveda*, or even to a period after the composition of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* was complete.³² Note that "the *Atharvaveda* knows iron and silver as well as the copper and gold of the *Rigveda*" (Keith 1925/I: 23). The *Atharvaveda* is "a collection of spells for every conceivable end of human life, spells to secure success of every kind, in the assembly, in public life, to restore an exiled king, to procure health and offspring, to defeat rivals in love, to drive away disease in every form, to win wealth and so on. But at the same time, the subject-matter has been thoroughly worked over by the priesthood, ..." (Keith 1925/I: 18).

Following this we have the development of the *Brāhmaṇas*, which are texts which treat the sacrifice. "... [In] the doctrine of the sacrifice they develop a theory which may have been held in germ at least in the age of the *Rigveda*, but which is not expressed there and which doubtless in considerable measure is a new creation. This is indicated by one fundamental fact: the sacrifice in the *Brāhmaṇas* is a piece of magic pure and simple: this is assuredly not the attitude of the average seer of the *Rigveda*" (Keith 1925/II: 454–55).

Winternitz (1927–33/I: 196 f.) notes, "the old gods of the *R̥gveda* still appear in the *Yajurveda-Saṃhitās* and in the *Brāhmaṇas*, just as in

32 See Winternitz (1927–33/I: 123–125, 127) on the date of the *Atharvaveda*.

the Atharvaveda. But their significance has wholly faded, and they owe all the power they possess to the sacrifice alone. . . . Paramount importance now attaches to *Prajāpati*, 'the lord of creatures,' who is regarded as the father of the gods (*devas*) as well as of the demons (*asuras*). . . . in these *Brāhmaṇas* the gods actually have to make sacrifices if they wish to accomplish anything. Nothing is more significant for the *Brāhmaṇas* than the tremendous importance which is ascribed to the sacrifice. The sacrifice is here no longer the means to an end, but it is an aim in itself, indeed the highest aim of existence. The sacrifice is also a power which overwhelms all, indeed, a creative force of Nature. Therefore the sacrifice is identical with *Prajāpati*, the creator. 'Prajāpati is the sacrifice' is an oft-repeated sentence in the *Brāhmaṇas*."

We thus have a growth in the belief in the efficacy of magic at roughly the same time in Mesopotamia and India. With this, India develops toward sacrificialism and sacerdotalism.

6 The First Millennium B. C.

6.1 The Second Period of Severe Crisis in Mesopotamian Religion

With the 1st millennium B. C. in ancient Mesopotamia we have a brutalization of divinity, a morbid fascination with death and, in general, a second more severe crisis in religion from which Mesopotamian religion never recovered. One indication of this is the famous "Dialogue of Pessimism."³³ Other points which indicate this are the composition of the *Erra* epic – *Erra*, originally seemingly an Akkadian god of "scorched earth," raids and riots, was in the 1st millennium B. C. identified with *Nergal*, god of war and sudden death and the ruler of the realm of the dead; and the mechanical addition to the *Gilgamesh* Epic of an Akkadian translation of the latter half of the Sumerian story of "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld," which is a detailed description of how people were treated after death. Jacobsen (1976: 226–229) has argued that only "an intense interest in its subject matter . . . can account for its being appended in this way." Further, Jacobsen (1976: 231 f.) cites ritual in the 1st millennium B. C. being remarkably lacking in sensitivity.

³³ Jacobsen (1949: 231–233), Mendelsohn (1955: 196–199), and Lambert (1960: 17, 139–142). Speiser, though, has argued that the piece is a burlesque or farce, regarding which see Lambert. Bottéro (1992: 251–267) tries to reconcile the two views. Jacobsen (1976) avoids the argument.

6.2 The Indian Developments Which Enabled Her Religion to Survive

In contrast to this development, in India we seem to get the *Upaniṣads*, in part as a reaction to the earlier sacerdotalism. We cannot be completely sure of the dating of the *Upaniṣads*, though, on account of a lack of comparable material in ancient Mesopotamia. The main feature of the *Upaniṣads* is the doctrine of the identity of *ātman*, or "individual soul," and the *brahman*, or "universal soul," of the microcosm with the macrocosm. At the same time we also have an early statement of the transmigration of souls, and of the ethical doctrine of *karma*, "action," which affects one's identity from birth to birth (Winternitz 1927–33/I: 258 f.). In the monism of the *Upaniṣads*, and in the concept of *karma*, or moral retribution due to one's actions from birth to birth, India appears to have found mechanisms which enabled her to avoid the problems which racked ancient Mesopotamian religion, such as the problem of the righteous sufferer for instance, and the inherent contradictions in the nature of the personal god vis à vis human ethical and moral values, and thereby enabled her religion to survive. No lack of credit should also go to the development of a powerful priestly class of preservers of tradition.

7 Later Parallels between Developments in Indian Religion and Developments in Religion in Areas to Her West

I mention now only a few later points which show a continuation of contact between India and areas to her west. For instance, we have after the death of Jesus an emphasis in Buddhism on the *bodhisattva*, a being of compassion, self-sacrifice, and suffering who postpones Buddhahood in order to work for the welfare of the world (Basham 1958: 155–157; 1954: 274–277). I tend to think that the Christian stimulus here was not only through the northwest of India, as has been suggested, but also through the south of India and the apostleship of St. Thomas the Apostle.³⁴ Further, we get parallels between the historical story of baby Jesus and the early centuries A. D. story of baby *Kṛṣṇa*, and

³⁴ Regarding the career of St. Thomas the Apostle, see Mundadan (1982: 4 f.); Vithayathil (1973); Schurhammer (1973); Podipara (1973: 7b–9a). Regarding the Christian community in India after apostolic times up to the 5th c. A. D., see Mundadan (1982: 6a–8a); Podipara (1973: 10b f.).

indeed the general emphasis on baby Jesus and baby Kṛṣṇa – though in the Indian setting this grew up much more elaborately.³⁵ Another parallel is the description of the second coming of Christ in Christianity, and the later Hindu description of the coming of Kalki, the incarnation of Viṣṇu yet to come. Further, we have the spread of the halo from Indian Buddhism to Christianity in the West, and the probable spread of the rosary from India to Christianity in the West. And the traditional list of *pañcalakṣaṇas*, or “five characteristics” of Purāṇas which we are hard put to find in the Purāṇas, can probably be seen as an adaptation to the Indian tradition of the contents of Genesis and the Old Testament in general through Christian influence.³⁶

Finally, it has been estimated that by the 4th c. A.D. the cow becomes sacred in India, with a number of different sources leading into this (Brown 1978). Also perhaps leading into this, or possibly being affected by it, is the sanctity of Mary as the mother of God which begins in Christianity in the 4th c. A.D. (Black and Lake 1911: 812b). In that Indra in India was considered the calf par excellence in terms of *svabhāva*, or “innate nature,” the cow would be the mother of God. This is comparable to modern Hindu statements which claim the cow to be the mother of us all.

8 Indus Valley Civilization

With regard to Indus Valley civilization, it has generally been said that there is no indication of this civilization in the R̥gveda, and that the R̥gveda must therefore postdate it. Certain recent points, though, suggest that there is identity here. W. A. Fairservice’s recent review article has suggested that Indus Valley cities were not like Mesopotamian cities but rather were distribution centers which grew up, the typical Harappan settlement

consisting of functional nodes bound symbiotically. These lasted for periods of 200 or 250 years only, and then moved on to other locations. “The German-Italian team reassessing the situation at Mohenjo daro has estimated that the site was occupied no more than 250 years and a comparable situation appears to be true at Harappa; ... the wide geographic spread of Harappan sites, their size, and short duration give evidence that a motivational factor requiring rather rapid movement was at work” (Fairservice 1991: 109b-110a). Fairservice (1991: 111a) further suggests that there are at play here Inner or West Asian forces. He sums up,

It is becoming clearer that Harappan emphasis was less on agriculture and more on cattle breeding. The largest number of figurines found at the sites are bovines, the “seal” animals are predominantly bovid, the faunal evidence emphasizes cattle dominance in the diet, and there are, of course, cattle camps – apparently a regular part of Harappan settlement patterns. There is also the fact of the dynamic of short-lived occupancy of sites coupled with a steady movement within and away from the Indus Valley. It is not difficult to interpret this as meaning that new areas for cultivation and pasturage were being sought, owing to the growth of herds and the necessity of balancing that growth with the demands of cultivation – the ancient “farmer and the cowhand” problem. Certainly the opening of grasslands, used jointly by grazing stock and feral ruminants, to agriculture and the need for secure sources of water created a constant problem. If, as seems likely, wealth was counted in number-of-cattle, the demand for grazing land, fodder and secure sources of water would have threatened agriculture. The answer was to move to new areas where a balance might be achieved, at least momentarily (Fairservice 1991: 112b).

This would seem to suggest the Vedic Aryans, and the movement of the Vedic Aryans. The importance of cattle in the R̥gveda has, of course, often been pointed out.³⁷ The spread of the Vedic peoples eastward and south to Gujarat also parallels the spread of Indus Valley civilization, it can be noted. We must keep in mind, though, the dictum of E. Sapir that language and physical culture need not coincide (Sapir 1921: 209 f.; 1949: 34 f., 40–42). Also, we must keep in mind the significant observation of D. M. Srinivasan that Vedic and later Hindu imagery in the main does not seem to correspond to the imagery of Indus Valley seals and artifacts (1975–76: 48b; 1997: 179–184).³⁸ Srinivasan does see similarities,

35 See Basham (1954: 306). Also see, for instance, Sheth (1989–90; 1993) regarding the way this grew up in the Indian setting.

36 For the original signification of the locution *pañcalakṣaṇa*, see Levitt (1976). The listing noted there is a standard list which can be found not only in Amarasinha’s *Nāmalingānuśāsana*, where the locution first occurs, but also elsewhere. The five items may have been construed as a fifth Veda, and the locution *pañcalakṣaṇa* may indicate this as well punningly, much as the fourth Veda was composed of five different things as listed in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* and the *Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra*. See the author’s foldout “Table I” in the article cited.

37 See, for instance, Winternitz (1927–33/I: 64 f.).

38 And compare the discussion of Vedic imagery in Srinivasan (1997: 24–128) with the discussion in 179–184, as well as refer to the entire 1975–76 article.

though, in for instance the emphasis on water, the prevalence of bulls and bull-like figures, and indications of a tree-cult (1997: 183).

I might also note with regard to the mention of aspects of physical culture that we find in the Brāhmaṇas and later a word, Skt. *bad-van*, signifying "causeway" or "highway," which I have related elsewhere, through Dravidian, to words for "crowd" which occur as early as the Atharvaveda (Levitt 1980: 34 f., 57 f.). In that it is the Atharvaveda which is seen to reflect more popular culture, we might expect a form with such connections in this text.

9 Conclusion

G. Slater (1924) has noted that there were points in later Indic tradition which seemed to be related to points in Ancient Near Eastern civilization. He posited, though, a connection between these points and Dravidian through a connection between Sumerian and Dravidian. These points showed a continuity to him with pre-Ṛgvedic civilization in India. At the time Slater wrote, it was before the archeological work on Indus Valley civilization, and before the main work on Sumerian literature.

More recently, S. Parpola has written an article on the similarity between Ancient Near Eastern and Indic material. But Parpola (1993) seems to see many of the possible parallels through a glass darkly, and takes for granted that Indus Valley civilization was Dravidian and that Vedic civilization was later. The main point of the article, though, should be well taken. Parpola rightly points out that scholars of ancient Mesopotamia might profitably study religion in India to gain better focus on religion in ancient Mesopotamia, and visa versa. I hope that the present paper has shown more clearly that Indic religion is in large part a religion of ancient Mesopotamian type.

I note I have pointed out above a few similarities which are more germane to later Indic civilization than Vedic civilization, though their Vedic precursors can at times be seen. Two other points which might be mentioned are firstly, in the mythological realm, that the usage of the concept of the Vedas in the later Hindu story of the churning of the ocean in the battle between the *devas*, or gods, and *asuras*, or demons, during the tortoise *avatāra* of Viṣṇu is comparable to the reference to the "tablets of the decrees" in the *Enuma Elish* (Jacobsen 1976: 174, 178 f.). Further, the way in which local deities merge their identity

with larger more important deities, as described for ancient Mesopotamia by W. W. Hallo and W. K. Simpson (1971: 171), is comparable to the same phenomenon in recent traditional India.

H. Frankfort (1951) argues that what is important are the differences in different civilizations on comparable points, and I will not argue with this. Comparable points figure differently in each civilization. My argument in this paper, though, is that we can date the early Indic tradition on the basis of comparable points in ancient Mesopotamia. By this, the Ṛgveda would date back to the beginning of the 3rd millenium B. C., with some of the earliest hymns perhaps even dating to the end of the 4th millenium B. C. The composition of the Ṛgveda would end at about 1500 B. C. with the end of Indus Valley civilization and with the first period of doubt and severe crisis of faith in Mesopotamian civilization. We then have Müller's *mantra* period, the composition of the Atharvaveda coinciding in the main with this and with the growth of an interest in magic in ancient Mesopotamia in the latter half of the 2nd millenium B. C., and the composition of the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas which texts also indicate this interest in magic as well as the development of monotheism from the late Ṛgveda. The development of monotheistic deities in India can be seen as reflecting the emphasis on personal deities in ancient Mesopotamia in the 2nd millenium B. C. Tentatively, I would date the Upaniṣads to the beginning of the 1st millenium B. C. as coinciding with the second crisis of faith in ancient Mesopotamia.

Keith (1925/I: 13) has noted regarding a connection between religion of the Ṛgveda and Mesopotamia, "the only cogent proof of borrowing of deities by one people from another, in cases where the borrowing is not formally recorded, is afforded by the appropriation of the name and the similarity of character of the gods: mere similarity is wholly insufficient, unless the conception formed of the particular divinity is of so special a kind that parallelism is not a reasonable explanation. In the case of the Rigveda and the later Vedic texts no such instance of borrowing is hinted at, and no case is known in which the similarity of name even suggests that a god has been taken over from another people, so that at most we are left to rely on the argument from similarity of character. Strength would doubtless be given to such arguments if the language of the Rigveda could be proved to contain loanwords from Semitic sources, but the only two which have with any probability been alleged, the word *manā*, apparently meaning 'ornament' and described as golden

... and the word *paraçu*, axe, are too isolated to prove anything at all."

It is hoped that it has been shown here that there is more than "mere similarity" between the religion of ancient Mesopotamia and the religion of early India.

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