

Śaunakīya and Paippalāda: New perspectives on the two Recensions

This volume is based on the results of different research activities promoted by or in dialogue with two projects on the ancient textual tradition of the Atharvaveda [AV], currently underway at the University of Zurich¹ and the University of Cagliari.² A large part of the contributions collected here were first presented within the context of a panel with the same title as the present collection, which took place from 26 to 30 June 2025, held by the Nepal Sanskrit University in Kathmandu, in collaboration with the International Association of Sanskrit Studies, within the programme of the 19th World Sanskrit Conference.

This joint initiative aims to highlight the advantages of having two available recensions, namely the *Śaunakīya-Saṃhitā* [ŚS] and the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā* [PS]. In fact, in light of the most recent AV studies, it is obvious that this field is in urgent need of reconsideration. On the one hand, some Vedic scholars are committed to the study of the PS, especially to ensure its critical edition (on the basis of both the edition of the Kashmirian Manuscript published by L.C. Barret in the Journal of the American Oriental Society from 1905 up to 1940 and on the Odisha manuscripts available on the website of the Department of Comparative Language Science and the Department of Indian Studies of the University of Zurich jointly). These scholars thus need to compare its single stanzas with the ŚS parallels. On the other hand, the general modern-day readership of Indology tends to overlook the ŚS or *vice versa* to take its interpretation for granted, while the only full English annotated translation available (XX book excluded) was authored by William Dwight Whitney (in the Whitney-Roth 1854 edition) and revised and edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman in 1905. It was only in 2021 that Jeong-Soo Kim published a new critical edition (*Atharvavedasaṃhitā der Śaunakaśākhā. Eine neue Edition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Parallelstellen der Paippalādasamhitā*. Ed. by Jeong-Soo Kim. Würzburg 2021. <https://opus.bibliothek.uni-wuerzburg.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/27703>). It is now evident that it is time to relaunch an analysis of all material belonging to the ŚS, especially since the overall interpretation of the Vedic period has radically changed in recent decades.

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For example, scholars now admit that the system of *varṇāśrama* and the classical organisation of the sacrificial arena are the outcome of a long elaboration, carried out secondarily and not before the time of the bearers of the Yajurveda culture (see e.g. Amano 2016, pp. 40; 63; Candotti-Pontillo 2025: pp. 757-762). Moreover several scholars now postulate more than one cultural matrix behind the Vedic sources (see e.g. Parpola 1983; 2015; Witzel 1987; 1989; 1997; 2019; Pontillo and Dore 2016; Pontillo 2023). Moreover, if we take into account e.g. Bahulkar's (2016, p. 723) assertion that the formation of the Atharvaveda spanned an extensive period, it becomes urgent to determine the specific phase or region reflected by the text, and whether this perspective can elucidate its characteristic (though perhaps partial) conservatism. Conversely, if we emphasize its receptiveness to additions and interpolations (see e.g. Renou 1947: 208; Houben 2016: 160), we are forced to be sceptical about the possibility of discerning the boundaries of the several schools or Śākhās. Nowadays, the question to be addressed could be whether it is possible to reconstruct an Atharvanic cultural and social archetype that does not fully coincide with any of the "collections" of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* (see, for example, Parpola 2003, p. 63). Thus, the purely linear diachronic reading of the *Ṛgveda*, Atharvaveda and post-Vedic sources, grounded on the hypothesized periods of their respective canonisations, has been abandoned. Research work is carried out with a difficult but intriguing question in mind, namely whether the AV tradition is a repository of unique cultural and socio-political institutions or rather whether it does contain evidence, as e.g. Parpola (2003, pp. 57; 65) has argued, of an Indo-Aryan migration to South Asia predating the *Ṛgvedic* Aryans. In other words, the underlying research questions are often: what socio-cultural role did the AV play historically and which heritage does it represent? What is the specific phase or geographical area to which this text bears witness?

One of the two main lines of research pursued in the present collection of papers, well tailored to the above mentioned research questions, is namely the reconstruction of beliefs, imagery, and social and political institutions emerging from the Atharvaveda-Saṃhitās. Perhaps unexpectedly, Dharma is at the core of the first four contributions.

Kristen De Joseph (Leiden University), in her contribution entitled '**People of the sun: Royalty, asceticism and solar metaphor in the Atharvaveda Rohita hymns**', reflects on the versatility of the metaphor of the sun used in the hymns to Rohita. The transfer of meaning deriving from the two perspectives considered, namely the cosmic and the earthly, grounds the status of the solar king. The divine image of the sun, as the ultimate point of orientation in the sky, fades into the human image of a point of reference for good ritual and social conduct.

Carmen S. Spiers (Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS, TDMAM, Aix-en-Provence, France) devotes her philologically oriented article ('**Dharma in the Atharvaveda: Expiation of Murder by Transfer to an "Overslaugher" in Paippalāda Saṃhitā**') to a *trca* in the PS, namely 19.46.13–15, presented in a new critical edition and translated for the first time. These stanzas were plausibly used

in the context of royal intrigues when, to atone for crimes committed against members of one's own family, recourse was made to the figure of the *didhiṣu* who played the role of a scapegoat in the sources on Dharma.

‘What’s Love Got to Do with It? Thoughts on Gāndharva Marriage’ by Robert Leach (University of Zurich) is an essay halfway between an inquiry into a juridical issue and a literary analysis of Vedic and post-Vedic passages on Gāndharva marriage, with particular attention to Atharvavedic documents. The study of these sources also reconstructs the reasons why this institution is often blurred in the text, slipping respectively into *svayamvara* and *rākṣasa* marriages, for the two aspects included in the Gāndharva marriage, namely the choice of partner and the traits of violence that were felt to be intrinsic to a union not arranged by the families.

‘An ‘Ordeal-Related Phenomenon’ in the Śaunakīya recension of the Atharvavedasamhitā (AVŚ 2.12)? A Closer Look Informed by Related Vedic and Dharmasāstra Sources’ by Alessandro Giudice (University of Cagliari) is a reassessment of the long-standing debate on the hypothesis that ŚS 2.12 contains a reference to an ordeal, in light of a careful philological analysis of internal evidence from the AV sources and Vedic parallels as well as from Dharmasāstra literature. The article argues that neither a trial by fire nor a “trial-related phenomenon” can be identified in the hymn.

The second line of research of the present collection concentrates on the language documented by the Atharvaveda-Samhitās, with a special focus on syntax. In fact, starting with Oldenberg (1888:320), the AV, though considered to be the second oldest Indian source (dated after 1000 BCE by archaeological data), has often been dismissed as being less refined than the Ṛgveda and thus less relevant for understanding the linguistic history of ancient India. Since Renou’s (1956: 32 fn.1) complaint about the “lack of a satisfactory linguistic study of the Atharvaveda” is still valid, the main purpose of the articles belonging to this line of research, was to study linguistic variation in the ŚS and PS, particularly within a syntactic perspective. The fresh opportunities offered by the digitization of the data, together with the possibilities opened by data-mining systems and statistical analysis, have made this task more affordable and effective. At the same time, they provide more reliable results than a purely qualitative study of the sources. All participants in the present initiative are persuaded that it is high time to approach the task of describing and analysing the linguistic layer witnessed by the AV sources from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. For instance, they checked the validity of the *communis opinio* which sees the language of the *Atharvaveda-Samhitās* as being later than that of the *Ṛgveda*. This becomes even more important since some recent studies have shown that the AV language is not necessarily later than that of the *Ṛgveda* (Tucker 2019: 3-5) and some predominantly Ṛgvedic linguistic phenomena, such as the rhotacism of the IE *1, the pl. m. nom. ending *-āsas* instead of *-ās*, the use of *viśva-* instead of *sarva-* “all”, might have been purely dialectal features rather than archaic phenomena (Parpola 2003: 57, 62-63; Tucker 2019:15-26; see also Klein et al. 2018: 1878 and Hellwig, Scarlata and Widmer 2021). Thus, the authors of the present

contributions aimed to uncover possible dialectal features of the language of the AV in the several linguistic domains and extend the list of supposedly archaic forms of the AV that e.g. Parpola (2003: 62) already gave us, recording as many features as possible of early registers that differ from those of the hieratic and stylistically elaborate texts of the *Rgveda* (Tucker 2019: 3). They crucially discussed new strategies and scientific methods of studying data offered by quantitative techniques, and considered how to apply these techniques to solve some of the long-lasting problems of Atharvaveda studies.

Oliver Hellwig and Paul Widmer (University of Zurich) have made a significant contribution to this latter objective with their article entitled “**Drivers of word order variation in Sanskrit nominal expressions**”. Their work has demonstrated that variation in the linearization of noun phrases in Vedic and Post-Vedic language is largely systematic, on the basis of a Bayesian model, developed from the analysis of a large set of structural, information-theoretic, and complexity-related features. Special attention was paid to the Paippalāda Saṃhitā, from which some idiosyncratic word order phenomena emerged.

The article by Massimo Vai (University of Milan), entitled “**The Left Periphery of The Vedic Sentence**” tackles the question of whether the left periphery of Vedic clauses can include more than one constituent, relying on the Split-CP theoretical pattern proposed by Rizzi (1997; 2001). The research is based on the analysis of phenomena such as topicalisation, focalisation and left dislocation, drawing on data from both Vedic prose and poetry, in particular from the *Atharvaveda*- and the *Rgveda-Saṃhitās*.

Two contributions deal with historical linguistics of Indo-European languages applied to Vedic sources. Marina Benedetti (University for Foreigners of Siena) and Beatrice Grieco (‘Sapienza’, University of Rome) focused on a specific formula, attested in both the *Śaunaka*- and in the *Paippalāda-Saṃhitā*, and studied it within the perspective of the Indo-European concept of immortality. The inquiry unquestionably reveals the bipartite nature of death, that is ‘natural’ (due to old age) and ‘premature’, documented in Greek, Old Indian and marginally in the Latin language (A **syntactic collocation in the Atharvaveda and the Indo-European concept of immortality: *nāṣṭrā* (*āti*) *tī-* ‘overpass destructions’**).

Georges-Jean Pinault (École Pratique des Hautes Études - Université Paris Sciences et Lettres) devotes his article (‘**Atharvaveda *savāsīn-***’) to the examination of the noun *savāsīn* that occurs several times in the Atharvaveda (ŚS and PS) and in the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa*. Among other things, he radically changes its etymology, moving from the traditional identification with the Epic Sanskrit *saṃvāsīn* ‘dwelling together’ and advancing an alternative ingenious connection to the root *vas-* ‘to shine’.

Atharvavedic prose is the subject of Shuhei Yamada’s (Kyoto University) article (‘**Brāhmaṇa-Style Phrases in the Prose Passages of the Atharvaveda**’). It compares the Vrātyakāṇḍa style (ŚS 15; PS 18.27–43) with that of the Black Yajur-Veda Saṃhitās, especially the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*, and the

Brāhmaṇas prose, and concludes that the mentioned AV text might date back to the same age and to the same area as the younger layers of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*.

The infinite forms attested in the ŚS and PS, compared with those occurring in the *Ṛgveda* are the object of two contributions. The article entitled ‘**Non-subordinated infinitives in the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda**’ by Althea R.L. Sovani (Oxford University) argues against the theory according to which some Vedic non-subordinated infinitives are syntactically non-finite. Sovani demonstrates that the label of predicative may be assigned to all non-subordinated infinitives both on the synchronic and diachronic point of view.

Within a dense dialogue with Lühr (1997), Keydana (2013), and Pāṇini (IV c. BCE), Davide Mocci and Tiziana Pontillo (University of Cagliari) concentrate on all the dative-marked nominals accompanying the dative-marked infinitives in *-tave/ -tavai* which can be interpreted as agent or patient of the action conveyed by the infinitive (‘**The agent and patient of -tave/ -tavai infinitives in the Atharvaveda tradition: Insights from Pāṇini’s grammar**’). The linguistic corpus is constituted by all the *Ṛgveda*, ŚS and PS occurrences of the infinitive in *-tave/ -tavai*. It is to be noted that no real difference emerged in the way these Vedic infinitives are used in the AV and the *Ṛgveda* language.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to all the authors of the contributions included here and also to the participants in the Panel of the World Sanskrit Conference especially for the interesting discussion they contributed to creating. Our sincere gratitude to Prof. Michael Witzel for hosting the present collection of papers in the Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies.

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