

# The Vedas:

## Texts, Language, and Ritual

Report >

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The Vedas form the oldest elaborate corpus of texts (from c. 1500 BC) in an Indo-European language. They are the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, and are connected with a ritual system that has partly survived to the present day. In the almost one-and-a-half century of its history, the study of the Vedas has stimulated major developments in disciplines such as linguistics, the comparative study of religions, and cultural anthropology. The workshop 'The Vedas: Texts, Language, and Ritual' enabled leading scholars and young researchers to take stock of recent developments and explore new directions of research.

By Jan E.M. Houben

The Internet report mentioned below makes an overview of sections and papers superfluous, whereas space does not allow for an elaborate discussion of all major contributions. Hence I will make only a general observation on Vedic studies as presented at the workshop. The workshop again made manifest that three major developments are currently transforming Vedic studies. In the first place the availability of computers allows scholars to work with large corpuses of texts and to search, combine, and link data in novel ways for the sake of linguistic and cultural studies. Jost Gippert (Frankfurt) demonstrated the latest developments in the Titus-project, which aims at establishing a comprehensive electronic thesaurus of Sanskrit and Indo-European text and language materials. Alexander Lubotsky demonstrated how the classical tool of the etymological dictionary is greatly enhanced when dictionaries are computerized and linked for the sake of Sanskrit and Indo-European linguistic studies.

In the second place, major new findings of manuscripts in India make important ancient texts accessible, which were so far only very imperfectly known. They promise to change the picture of the early developments considerably. Families conserving manuscripts of a now discontinued ritual tradition of the *Yajurveda*, viz. the Vaadhuula, have in recent years been found by Yasuke Ikari (Kyoto) after preparatory work by, among others, W. Caland in the early decades of the twentieth century, and later on Michael Witzel and Max Spar-

reboom. While the *Rigveda* is the oldest Vedic text, the songs of praise in this collection presuppose an elaborate ritual system, which is the main subject of the *Yajurveda*. The Vaadhuula is an ancient school of the important branch of the Taittiriyaikas, one of the few branches that are still relatively widely in practice in modern India. Yasuke Ikari's contribution presented important new texts that have become available with the Vaadhuula manuscripts. The other discovery concerns the second oldest Vedic text, the *Atharvaveda*, especially the Oriyan manuscripts of the Paippalaada tradition (Durgamohan Bhattacharyya in the 1950s, and recently Arlo Griffiths). The papers of Dipak Bhattacharya, Arlo Griffiths, and Mieko Kajihara were directly based on the newly available textual data.

In the third place, modern technology allows direct recording of performances of Vedic rituals that are, with all the transformations they have undergone in the course of centuries, still in practice in often quite remote corners of the Indian subcontinent. Apart from the direct anthropological value of their recording they often greatly contribute to the interpretation of ancient ritual texts. A film by Cezary Galewicz (Krakow) made in Kerala showed parts of the tradition of competitive Veda-recitation by Brahmins of Nambudiri and transmitted some of the aesthetic rapture engendered by the rhythmic and melodious patterns of the ancient texts, which the printed editions will always fail to instil.

The workshop was generally experienced as successful and inspiring, and participating scholars are already looking forward to a sequel, which is to take place at the University of Texas in a few years. The proceedings with the elaborated papers and discussions (to be edited by A. Griffiths and J. Houben) are expected to appear towards the end of 2003 or the beginning of 2004. <

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The programme, acknowledgements, a brief report, and a photographic-video report of the International Vedic Workshop in Leiden can be found at:  
[www.jyotistoma.nl/ThirdIVW/default.asp](http://www.jyotistoma.nl/ThirdIVW/default.asp)

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